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The Science and the Art of Comparative Politics

THE WORLD OF COMPARATIVE POLITICS

Observe a standard chessboard. The pieces are either lined up neatly at the start of a game, or arrayed in orderly confrontation in later stages of the game. Each piece plays its standard part using the rules that govern its moves, in the various situations that arise in the course of the game. The moves and the rules are in a manner of speaking eternal. If your memory capacity is sufficient, there are no surprises in the standard game of chess. It is a mathematically pure realm.

Now imagine a different chessboard, one that tries to maintain its organization in squares but keeps changing shape, from flat plains into mountains and valleys, while new rivers spring up or old ones overflow. The pieces are no longer orderly but dynamic and self-defined: Some may jump off the official playing field into areas they have just discovered or invented. The king may run off with a pawn to seek a new life in another hemisphere; the bishops may enclose a portion of the board and take up sheep farming; the queen's castle and king's knight may stage a coup d'etat; the pawns may rebel and string up their supposed betters. This is not a mathematical realm but something more difficult—a political one.

The "orderly" chess game is a game, designed to provide escape from daily things. The "disorderly" or self-modifying chess game is reality, designed to keep us on our toes if we hope to rise to its many challenges. In the disorderly case the actors are always changing their purposes, always losing and discovering resources, always working within some rules while trying to escape from others. When all else fails, the "pieces" in the disorderly game get together and revolutionize the system itself, rules,

resources, mountains, and rivers altogether. In this real world, creativity and stupidity are equally evident, and everyone plays his or her own game with all the rules open to modification, either for good or ill. This dynamic reality is the home of comparative politics.

What is comparative politics? It is two things, first a world, second a discipline. As a "world," comparative politics encompasses political behavior and institutions in all parts of the earth, in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, as well as North America. The "world" of comparative politics includes the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the rise of the European Union; includes economic growth in East Asia, and economic stagnation in many parts of Africa; includes war in the former Yugoslavia, and the beginnings of peace in the Middle East; includes democratization in Latin America and militarization in Southeast Asia; includes hope and despair, failure and success, mixed everywhere together in what we know as the contemporary political world.

The "discipline" of comparative politics is a field of study that desperately tries to keep up with, to encompass, to understand, to explain, and perhaps to influence the fascinating and often riotous world of comparative politics. Comparative politics as an area of study goes back to Greek antiquity, and has continued sporadically throughout history, but has achieved a special importance at the close of the twentieth century, when economics, technology, travel, and communications have brought all areas of the world into deep interdependence. Faraway countries are no longer far away; differences of culture can no longer be ignored; the cheerful hope that economic development will occur painlessly has long since faded away; and the desperate hope that national self-interests can be kept under peaceful control seems of questionable validity. The social sciences might be expected to be of assistance in such a period, but rarely fulfill that promise.

Comparative politics is unusual among the social sciences in the degree to which its progress has been driven by a confrontation with hard facts, indeed, recalcitrant facts. Many social science theories survive largely because they cannot be tested; but in comparative politics there are test situations in every direction one looks, and across every border one steps. It is perhaps for this reason that modern comparative politics has, since the 1950s, made real progress in both theory and research. The present work seeks to chart some aspects of that progress.

The study of comparative politics, like the study of the other sciences, has had a logic of its own, a developmental pattern that combined specific questions about the various nations and peoples in the world, specific data, and specific problems, all within a learning process that has taken a specific direction and reached a working synthesis of its own past. One interesting aspect of this developmental process within comparative politics is that it has not always followed the various maps set out for it, but has taken its own course, has been to a large degree self-organizing. Comparative politics, in other words, has learned from its own practical experiences in the field, experiences strongly shaped by the need to cope with the facts of daily political life in an array of very diverse societies.

COMPARATIVE POLITICS AS PRACTICE

The study of comparative politics is particularly appropriate today because it is the study of what we see all around us—the differences in social behavior among people of different cultures, nations, and places. Comparative politics begins where many inquiries stop: with the richness and diversity of human experience, experience that ranges from everyday customs to the deep-seated notions of how the world should be organized—those ideas that we sometimes call justice. Because the study of these human differences extends even to the different ways different people think—the ways they cognitively organize their lives—comparative politics may even be seen as an adjunct of philosophy. The old philosophers sought the meaning of truth; the new comparative politics seeks to understand what different kinds of people define as truth and how that definition influences their lives and interactions with one another. This does not necessarily mean, it should be noted, that there are no universal truths; but it is something that can no longer be taken for granted, and must be subjected to empirical tests.

Comparative political science starts us down this road. It is concerned with trying to understand people from "the other side of the globe," whichever side you happen to be on. But it is equally concerned with understanding neighbors, peoples who live next door but whom one has never gotten to know well enough to understand them in their own terms. Comparative politics in its most general sense is the essence of political science, because comparative politics forces its students to do what all political scientists should do but often do not, to "compare" people and political institutions with an open mind, and to appreciate the relativity of human ways and institutions. If the customs of people in other lands seem alien, comparative politics teaches us to bear in mind that "they" also think "we" are barbarians, "foreigners." The first lesson of comparative politics is that, very often, nobody admires anyone but him- or herself. Remembering this rule "puts us in our place" and allows inquiry to begin with an open mind. If later on, evaluations of different customs and institutions are to be made, much study is necessary before one is entitled to make judgments on which forms of government are desirable, and for whom.

All this is quite different from "multiculturalism" or "political correctness," both of which generally involve adopting determinedly favorable attitudes to people different from oneself, or at least of being very careful not to offend people even though one may think their ways of life are quite dreadful. Whatever one thinks of this approach, it is not science but an ethical program. Science is concerned not with telling people how to run their lives but with studying and comprehending facts. A comparative politics that aspires to be a science is concerned with understanding people, not with judging them. Comparative politics may hope to be relevant to how we feel about other people, but those feelings are not a proper part of comparative politics. Complete neutrality may be beyond the strength of most human beings, but the study of comparative politics at least asks us to make the effort to be objective.

To advocate the "art" of comparative politics many seem inconsistent, for it is a major theme of the present work that political science can be a science, and that comparative politics will continue to play a major role in developing such a science. Any inconsistency between the two terms is however only superficial, stemming from a very narrow interpretation of both the terms science and art. If art is putting oil on canvas in ways intended to be aesthetically interesting, and if science is test tubes and cyclotrons, then art and science are indeed two very different occupations. But if art is seen as the creative approach to reality, and science is seen as the discipline of inquiry into the real world, then the distinction disappears and art becomes an integral part of science.

"COMPARED TO WHAT?"

Comparative politics is a difficult business. All science is, of course, difficult, but comparative politics is difficult in a deeper way. The physical sciences as we encounter them in school are all well developed. The physicists, chemists, biologists of the past set their sciences on their proper course, decades or even centuries ago, by defining basic approaches, concepts, and methods. Finding the appropriate conceptual frameworks is not easy. Apples had been falling on people's heads for years before Newton took the event seriously enough to begin the systematic inquiry into gravity. The chemical elements had existed since about the time of creation, but were only ordered into the periodic table by Mendeleyev in the nineteenth century. The study of social and political institutions has proceeded more slowly, since while physical phenomena have a regularity and stability that invites scientific inquiry, social phenomena are harder to get a grip on. Perhaps more important, in the physical sciences explanations can be falsified more promptly. People can put your ideas into their own test tubes and it may often happen that your results do not happen as predicted.

In the social sciences, however, it is different. So many complex factors are involved in every human event, and it is so difficult to focus inquiry only on specific concepts, that weak explanations or theories are hard to disprove and last longer than they ought. If you think a rain dance will bring rain, and yet rain does not occur after the dance is celebrated, then the "theorist" can always argue, "you didn't do the dance right." Since bad theories are hard to recognize, it is often true that *good* theories are not given the preference they deserve but are lumped promiscuously with approaches that lack either clarity or rigor.

Theories—defined roughly as statements that order, define, and explain the real world—are important because they identify for us what concepts are to be seen as relevant, how the concepts are related, and what processes are at work in whatever it is that we are studying. Good theories are more than important, they are vital to scientific life itself because they give guidance about what are the best concepts, interactions, and processes to study. A bad theory, conversely, can lead investigators widely astray, sometimes for generations.

Tradition has it that once, when Socrates was asked "How's your wife?", he responded "Compared to what?" This exchange has frequently been interpreted as a commentary on Socrates' marriage. But the question is relevant here because it captures in a nutshell the central problem of comparative politics. The French and the English are different . . . "Compared to what?" The Chinese and the Indians are different . . . "Compared to what?" The Venezuelans and the Uruguayans are different . . . "Compared to what?" The Hausa and the Igbo. . . . "Compared to what?"

Tourists and travelers, challenged to say exactly what is different about the nations they have visited, will pick superficial comparisons—what the people eat, how they dress, whether their streets are safe to walk after dark. Media reports are similarly superficial, as commentators select out such momentous events as the Russians' newly discovered enthusiasm for baseball! Even where serious events are reported, the discussion stays firmly on the surface; faced with a civil war somewhere, the emphasis is on "Who is winning?" or "Are Americans in danger?" or "Do civilians need aid?" Very rarely does anyone ask why they are fighting in the first place. Perhaps we assume we already know the answer: The parties are fighting because they are different. And it always therefore comes back to Socrates' question, different "compared to what?"

Faced with this problem, in the past many comparativists have adopted a practice that seems obvious, and yet is vigorously and terribly wrong. They have said in essence, "compared to us." All the diversity of culture, history, and experience has thus been obliterated by the dumb question, How do these people stack up against ourselves—against the most progressive, enlightened, virtuous, indeed most lovable people in the world? This is such a blockheaded approach that once recognized it collapses of its own absurdity. But it has not always been recognized.

THE NEED FOR BASIC PRINCIPLES

What then is the proper way to compare different groups or nations or cultures? That is what we do not know. Comparative politics to date is the history of the search. Ideally, comparative political scientists would have a general outline of "things that are important in defining a political society." They could then begin their study of a given society with the guidance of this general outline. It would tell them what aspects of the society they should study in order to understand how it works, how its various practices fit together, what principles are involved in its operation. Then when some passerby asks, "How's Bangladesh?", one would not have to wonder "compared to what" but would have real theory to work with in explaining how the Bangladeshi system works.

If the theory were a satisfactory one, such explanations might be reasonably compact. One would not have to say "to fully understand the English one must look at their history since 1066," and go on to fill this out in ten or more bulky volumes. Instead one could say, "English society at present operates according to several basic

FACTS AND VALUES IN PERSPECTIVE

Political scientists long have argued among themselves about the great divide between two sorts of questions: questions of fact, *what is,* and questions of value, *what ought to be.* Often this distinction is plain and elementary. To ask whether wealth is distributed equally in the United States is to raise a question of fact, a question that can be addressed through definition and measurement. To ask whether wealth ought to be distributed more equally is to raise a question of value, a question that cannot be answered by empirical analysis. Sometimes, however, the is-ought distinction is not so clear. I might say, for example, that gun ownership is more widespread in the United States than in other countries, and I might assert further that the incidence of gun ownership is connected to gun-related crime. I might therefore offer the opinion that gun ownership ought to be as thoroughly controlled as judicial precedent allows. Fact or value? A bit of both. My opinion about gun regulations is based on assertions about the real world, and these assertions are clearly open to empirical examination. What is the evidence for the connection between guns and crime? Are there plausible alternative explanations? You can see that, to the extent that a value judgment is based on empirical evidence, political analysis can affect opinions by shaping the reasons for holding them. Put another way: Regardless of your personal opinions about political issues, it is important to remain open to new facts and competing perspectives.

Separating one's personal opinion on an issue from objective and open-minded analysis is often easier said than done—and it requires discipline and practice. After all, politics is serious business. And it is compelling *because* it involves differing opinions and the clash of competing values. Consider the discussions and arguments about the tradeoffs between domestic security and civil liberties that you have engaged in or listened to over the past several years. These arguments focus on whether (and in what ways) life in the United States *ought to* change. Many people advocate an emphasis on security—restricting immigration, permitting government authorities more latitude in detaining and arresting suspected terrorists, and relaxing legal protections against electronic surveillance. Others are skeptical of such measures. They argue that the basic civil liberties of all citizens would be endangered, that the government would interpret such powers too broadly and begin to restrict any speech or activity it deemed a security risk.

How can political analysis help resolve this very serious issue? To be sure, the logic and methods you learn in this book will not show you how to "prove" which competing value—a belief in the desire for security or a belief in civil liberties—is "correct." Yet even in this debate, the protocol of political research can guide your search for the empirical bases of opinions and value judgments. What is the distribution of public opinion on security versus civil liberties? What existing laws need stricter enforcement? What new laws may be required? How has the U.S. government behaved toward its citizens during past national crises? Might not this historical data inform our current predictions about what the government will do? These questions, and countless others, are not easily answered. But they are questions of fact, and, at least in principle, they are answerable. This book is designed to help you frame and address such questions.

THE SCIENTIFIC APPROACH

There is one other way that learning about political research can nurture your ability to analyze political relationships and events—and even to elevate the level of your own political

arguments about values. This has to do with an unspoken norm that all scientists follow: *Remain open, but remain skeptical.* All science, political science included, seeks to expand our understanding of the world. To ensure that the pathway to knowledge is not blocked, we must allow entrance to all ideas and theories. Suppose, for example, that I claim that the incidence of property crime is tied to the phases of the moon. According to my "moon theory," crime increases and recedes in a predictable pattern, increasing during the new moon and decreasing during the full moon. Laughable? Maybe. But the "remain open" tenet of scientific inquiry does not permit me to be silenced. So the moon theory gains entrance. Once on the pathway, however, any idea or theory must follow some "be skeptical" rules of the road. There are two sorts of rules. Some rules deal with evaluating questions of fact. These are sometimes called "What?" questions. Other rules deal with evaluating questions of theory. These are sometimes called "Why?" questions.

On questions of fact, scientific knowledge is not based on common sense, mysticism, or intuition. It is based on empirical observation and measurement. These observations and measurements, furthermore, must be described and performed in such a way that any other scientist could repeat them and obtain the same results. Scientific facts are empirical and reproducible. Thus, if I were to claim that the moon theory occurred to me in a dream, my results would be neither empirical nor reproducible. I would fail the fundamental rules for evaluating "What?" questions. If, by contrast, I were to describe an exhaustive examination of crime rate figures, and I could show a strong relationship between these patterns and phases of the moon, then I am still on the scientific path. Another researcher, following in my procedural footsteps, would get the same results.

On questions of theory, scientific knowledge must be explanatory and testable. An idea is explanatory if it describes a causal process that connects one set of facts with another set of facts. In science, explanation involves causation. If I were to propose that moon phases and crime rates go together because criminals are reverse werewolves, coming out only when the moon is new, I would be on shaky ground. I would be relying on a fact that is neither empirical nor reproducible, plus my "explanation" would lack any sense of process or causation. But suppose I said that criminals, like all individuals, seek to minimize the risks associated with their chosen activity. A full-moon situation would represent greater risk, a greater probability of being seen and arrested. A new-moon situation would represent lower risk, a lower probability of being detected. This idea is explanatory. Using plausible assumptions about human behavior, it describes why the two sets of facts go together. One level of the causal process (greater risk) produces one outcome (lower crime rates), whereas a different level of the causal process (lower risk) produces another outcome (higher crime rates).

An idea is testable if the researcher describes a set of conditions under which the idea would be rejected. A researcher with a testable idea is saying, "If I am correct, I will find such and such to be true. If I am incorrect, I will not find such and such to be true." Suppose a skeptical observer (skeptics abound in the scientific world!), upon reading my moon theory, should say: "Your explanation is very interesting. But not all full-moon situations involve higher risk as you have defined it. Sometimes the sky is heavily overcast, creating just as much cover for criminal activity as a new-moon situation. What would the crime rate be in full moon–overcast situations?" This observer is proposing a test, a test I must be willing to accept. If my idea is correct, I should find that full moon–overcast conditions produce crime rates similar to new-moon conditions. If my idea is incorrect, I would not find this similarity. Suppose my idea fails this test. Is that the end of the road for the moon theory? Not necessarily, but I would have to take my failure into account as I rethink the causal process that

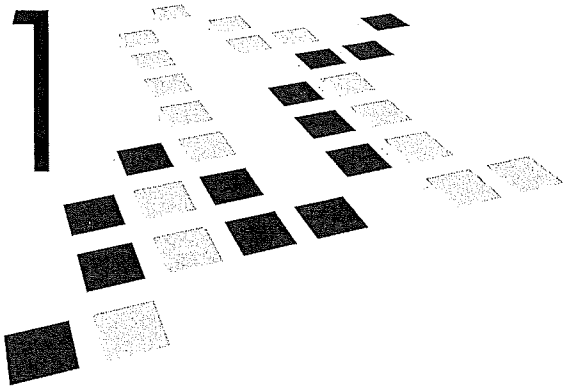
I proposed originally. Suppose my idea passes this test. Would that confirm the correctness of my theory? No, again. There would be legions of skeptics on the pathway to knowledge, offering alternative theories and proposing new tests.

CONCLUSION

As you can see, political research is an ongoing enterprise. Political analysis requires clarity, questioning, intellectual exchange, and discipline. Yet it also involves openness, creativity, and imagination. Compared with politics itself, which is enormously dynamic and frequently controversial, political analysis may seem rather stodgy. The basic logic and methods—measuring and describing variables, coming up with theories, testing hypotheses, understanding statistical inference, and gauging the strength of relationships—have not changed in many years. (For example, one of the techniques you will read about, chi-square, has been in use for more than a century.) This is a comforting thought. The skills you learn here will be durable. They will serve you now and in the future as you read and evaluate political science. You will bring a new critical edge to the many other topics and media you encounter—election or opinion polls, journalistic accounts about the effects of medical treatments, or policy studies released by organizations with an ax to grind. And you will learn to be self-critical, clarifying the concepts you use and supporting your opinions with empirical evidence.

NOTES

1. Maine (since 1972) and Nebraska (since 1996) award two electoral votes by statewide vote and the rest by congressional district.
2. See Neal R. Peirce and Lawrence D. Longley, *The People's President: The Electoral College in American History and the Direct Vote Alternative* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981).



The Definition and Measurement of Concepts

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this chapter you will learn:

- How to clarify the meaning of concepts
- How to identify multidimensional concepts
- How to write a definition for a concept
- How systematic error affects the measurement of a concept
- How random error affects the measurement of a concept
- How to recognize problems of reliability and validity

Think for a moment about all the political variety in the world. People vary in their party affiliation: Some are Democrats, some Republicans, and many (self-described Independents) profess no affiliation at all. Some nations are democracies, whereas others are not. Even among democracies there is variety: parliamentary systems, presidential systems, or a combination. Would-be presidential nominees run the ideological gamut from conservatism to liberalism. Each of the terms just mentioned—*party affiliation, democracy, conservatism, liberalism*—refers to an idea that helps us discuss and describe the world. It is virtually impossible to converse about politics without using ideas such as these. Ideas, of course, are not concrete. You cannot see, taste, hear, touch, or smell "partisanship," "democracy," or "liberalism." Each of these is a **concept**, an idea or mental construct that represents phenomena in the real world. Some concepts are quite complicated: "globalization," "power," "democratization." Others, such as "political participation" or "social status," are somewhat simpler.

Simple or complicated, concepts are everywhere in political debate, in journalistic analysis, in ordinary discussion, and, of course, in political research. How are concepts used? In partisan or ideological debate—debates about values—concepts can evoke powerful symbols with which people easily identify. A political candidate, for example, might claim that his or her agenda will ensure "freedom," create "equality," or foster "self-determination" around the

globe. These are evocative ideas, and they are meant to be. In political research, concepts are not used to stir up value-laden symbols. Quite the opposite. In empirical political science, concepts refer to facts, not values. So when political researchers discuss ideas like "freedom," "equality," or "self-determination," they are using these ideas to summarize and label observable phenomena, characteristics in the real world.

The primary goals of political research are to describe concepts and to analyze the relationships between them. A researcher may want to know, for example, if social trust is declining or increasing in the United States, whether political elites are more tolerant of dissent than are ordinary citizens, or whether economic development causes democracy. The tasks of describing and analyzing concepts—social trust, political elites, tolerance of dissent, economic development, democracy, and any other concepts that interest us—present formidable obstacles. A **conceptual question**, a question expressed using ideas, is frequently unclear and thus is difficult to answer empirically. A **concrete question**, a question expressed using tangible properties, can be answered empirically. In her path-breaking book, *The Concept of Representation,* Hanna Pitkin describes the challenge of defining concepts such as "representation," "power," or "interest." She writes that instances "of representation (or of power, or of interest) . . . can be observed, but the observation always presupposes at least a rudimentary conception of what representation (or power, or interest) *is,* what *counts as* representation, where it leaves off and some other phenomenon begins."[1] We need to somehow transform concepts into concrete terms, to express vague ideas in such a way that they can be described and analyzed.

The same concept can, and often does, refer to a variety of different concrete terms. "Are women more liberal than men?" What is the answer: yes or no? "It depends," you might say, "on what you mean by *liberal.* Do you mean to ask if women are more likely than men to support abortion rights, gun control, government support of education, spending to assist poor people, environmental protection, affirmative action, gay and lesbian rights, funding for drug rehabilitation, or what? Do you mean all these things, some of these things, none of these things, or completely different things?" "Liberal," for some, may mean support for gun control. For others, the concept might refer to support for environmental protection. Still others might think the real meaning of liberalism is support for government spending to assist the poor.

A **conceptual definition** describes clearly the concept's measurable properties and specifies the units of analysis (people, nations, states, and so on) to which the concept applies. For example, consider the following conceptual definition of liberalism: Liberalism is the extent to which individuals support increased government spending for social programs. This statement clarifies a vague idea, liberalism, by making reference to a measurable attribute—support for government spending. Notice the words, "the extent to which." This phrase suggests that the concept's measurable attribute—support for government spending—varies across people. Someone who supports government spending has "more liberalism" than someone who does not support government spending. It is clear, as well, that this particular definition is meant to apply to individuals.[2] As you can see, in thinking about concepts and defining them, we keep an eye trained on the empirical world: What are the concrete, measurable characteristics of this concept? Conceptual definitions are covered in depth in the first part of this chapter.

Having clarified and defined a concept, we must then describe an instrument for measuring the concept in the real world. An **operational definition** describes the instrument to be used in measuring the concept and putting a conceptual definition "into operation." How

might we go about implementing the conceptual definition of liberalism? Imagine crafting a series of ten or twelve survey questions and administering them to a large number of individuals. Each question would name a specific social program: funding for education, assistance to the poor, spending on medical care, support for childcare subsidies, and so on. For each program, individuals would be asked whether government spending should be decreased, kept the same, or increased. Liberalism could then be operationally defined as the number of times a respondent said "increased." Higher scores would denote more liberal attitudes and lower scores would denote less liberal attitudes. As this example suggests, an operational definition provides a procedural blueprint, a measurement strategy. Yet, in describing a measurement strategy, we keep an eye trained on the conceptual world: Does this operational definition accurately reflect the meaning of the concept? In this chapter we consider problems that can emerge when researchers decide on an operational definition. In Chapter 2 we take a closer look at variables, the concrete measurements of concepts.

CONCEPTUAL DEFINITIONS

The first step in defining a concept is to clarify its empirical meaning. To clarify a concept, we begin by making an inventory of the concept's concrete properties. Three problems often arise during the inventory-building process. First, we might think of empirical attributes that refer to a completely different concept. Second, the inventory may include conceptual terms, with attributes that are not measurable. Third, the empirical properties may represent different dimensions of the concept. After settling on a set of properties that best represent the concept, we write down a definition of the concept. This written definition communicates the subjects to which the concept applies and suggests a measurement strategy. Let's illustrate these steps by working through the example introduced earlier: liberalism.

Clarifying a Concept

The properties of a concept must have two characteristics. They must be concrete, and they must vary. Return to the question posed earlier: "Are women more liberal than men?" This is a conceptual question because it uses the intangible term *liberal* and, thus, does not readily admit to an empirical answer. But notice two things. First, the conceptual term *liberal* certainly represents measurable characteristics of people. After all, when we say that a person or group of people is "liberal," we must have some attributes or characteristics in mind. Second, the question asks whether liberalism varies between people. That is, it asks whether some people have more or less of these attributes or characteristics than other people. In clarifying a concept, then, we want to describe characteristics that are concrete and that vary. What, exactly, are these characteristics?

A mental exercise can help you to identify characteristics that are concrete and that vary. Think of two subjects who are polar opposites. In this example, we are interested in defining liberalism among individuals, so we would think of two polar-opposite people. At one pole is a person who has a great deal of the concept's characteristics. At the other pole is a person who has the perfect opposite of the characteristics. What images of a perfectly liberal person do you see in your mind's eye? What images of a perfect opposite, an antiliberal or conservative, do you see?[3] In constructing these images, be open and inclusive. Here is an example of what you might come up with:

A liberal:	A conservative:
Has low income	Has high income
Is younger	Is older
Supports social justice	Opposes social justice
Opposes the free market	Supports the free market
Supports government-funded health care	Opposes government-funded health care
Opposes tax cuts	Supports tax cuts
Opposes restrictions on abortion	Supports restrictions on abortion
Supports same-sex marriage	Opposes same-sex marriage

Brainstorming polar opposites is an open-ended process, and it always produces the raw materials from which a conceptual definition can be built. Once the inventory is made, however, we need to become more critical and discerning. Consider the first two characteristics. According to the list, a liberal "has low income" and "is younger," whereas a conservative "has high income" and "is older." Think about this for a moment. Are people's incomes and ages really a part of the concept of liberalism? Put another way: Can we think about what it means to be liberal or conservative without thinking about income and age? You would probably agree that we could. To be sure, liberalism may be related to demographic factors, such as income and age, but the concept is itself distinct from these characteristics. This is the first problem to look for when clarifying a concept. Some traits seem to fit with the portraits of the polar-opposite subjects, but they are not essential parts of the concept. Let's drop the nonessential traits and reconsider our newly abbreviated inventory:

A liberal:	A conservative:
Supports social justice	Opposes social justice
Opposes the free market	Supports the free market
Supports government-funded health care	Opposes government-funded health care
Opposes tax cuts	Supports tax cuts
Opposes restrictions on abortion	Supports restrictions on abortion
Supports same-sex marriage	Opposes same-sex marriage

According to the list, a liberal "supports social justice" and "opposes the free market." A conservative "opposes social justice" and "supports the free market." Neither of these items should be on the list. Why not? Because neither one is measurable. Both terms are themselves concepts, and we cannot use one concept to define another. When constructing an inventory, imagine that a skeptical observer is looking over your shoulder, pressing you to specify concrete, measurable traits. How, exactly, would you determine whether someone supports free markets? How would you define social justice? If your initial response is, "I can't define it, but I know it when I see it"—to paraphrase an infamous remark about pornography—then you need to dig deeper for concrete elements.[4] This is the second problem to look for when clarifying a concept. Some descriptions seem to fit the portraits of the polar-opposite subjects, but these descriptions are themselves vague, conceptual terms. Let's drop the conceptual terms from the inventory.

A liberal:	A conservative:
Supports government-funded health care	Opposes government-funded health care
Opposes tax cuts	Supports tax cuts
Opposes restrictions on abortion	Supports restrictions on abortion
Supports same-sex marriage	Opposes same-sex marriage

One could reasonably argue that all these traits belong on an empirical inventory of liberalism. One can think of observable phenomena that would offer tangible measurements, including checkmarks on a questionnaire gauging opinion on different government policies, the display of bumper stickers or yard signs, monetary contributions to issue groups, or a number of other overt behaviors. But examine the list carefully. Can the attributes be grouped into different types? Are some items similar to each other and, as a group, different from other items? You may have already noticed that supports/opposes government-funded health care and opposes/supports tax cuts refer to traditional differences between those who favor a larger public sector and more social services (liberals) and those who favor a more limited governmental role (conservatives). The other items, opposes/supports abortion restrictions and supports/opposes same-sex marriage, refer to more recent disputes between those who favor personal freedoms (liberals) and those who support proscriptions on these behaviors (conservatives). This example illustrates the third problem to look for when clarifying a concept. All the traits fit with the portraits of the polar-opposite subjects, but they may describe different dimensions of the concept.

A **conceptual dimension** is defined by a set of concrete traits of similar type. Some concepts, such as liberalism, are multidimensional. A **multidimensional concept** has two or more distinct groups of empirical characteristics. In a multidimensional concept, each group contains empirical traits that are similar to each other. Furthermore, each group of traits is qualitatively distinct from other groups of traits. To avoid confusion, the different dimensions need to be identified, labeled, and measured separately. Thus the traditional dimension of liberalism, often labeled *economic liberalism,* subsumes an array of similar attributes: support for government-funded health care, aid to poor people, funding for education, spending for infrastructure, and so on. The moral dimension, often labeled *social liberalism,* includes policies dealing with gay and lesbian rights, abortion, the legalization of marijuana, the teaching of evolution, and prayer in schools. By grouping similar properties together, the two dimensions can be labeled separately—economic liberalism and social liberalism—and measured separately.[5]

Many ideas in political science are multidimensional concepts. For example, in his seminal work, *Polyarchy,* Robert A. Dahl points to two dimensions of democracy: contestation and inclusiveness.[6] Contestation refers to attributes that describe the competitiveness of political systems—for example, the presence or absence of frequent elections or whether a country has legal guarantees of free speech. Inclusiveness refers to characteristics that measure how many people are allowed to participate, such as the presence or absence of restrictions on the right to vote or conditions on eligibility for public office. Dahl's conceptual analysis has proven to be an influential guide for the empirical study of democracy.[7]

Many political concepts have a single dimension. The venerable social science concept of social status or socioeconomic status (SES), for example, has three concrete attributes that vary across people: income, occupation, and education. Yet it seems reasonable to say that all three are empirical manifestations of one dimension of SES.[8] Similarly, if you sought to clarify the concept of cultural fragmentation, you might end up with a polar-opposite list of varied but dimensionally similar characteristics of polities: many/few major religions practiced, one/

several languages spoken, one/many racial groups, and so on. For each of these concepts, SES and cultural fragmentation, you can arrive at a single measure by determining whether people or polities have a great deal of the concept's characteristics.

A Template for Writing a Conceptual Definition

A conceptual definition must communicate three things:

1. The variation within a measurable characteristic or set of characteristics
2. The subjects or groups to which the concept applies
3. How the characteristic is to be measured

Following is a workable template for stating a conceptual definition that meets all three requirements:

> The concept of _____ is defined as the extent to which _____ exhibit the characteristic of _____.

For a conceptual definition of economic liberalism, we would write the following:

> The concept of economic liberalism is defined as the extent to which individuals exhibit the characteristic of supporting government spending for social programs.

The first term, *economic liberalism,* when combined with the words "the extent to which," restates the concept's label and communicates the polar-opposite variation at the heart of the concept. The second term, *individuals,* states the subjects to whom the concept applies. The third term, *supporting government spending for social programs,* suggests the concept's measurement. Let's consider the template in more detail.

By referring to a subject or group of subjects, a conceptual definition conveys the units of analysis. A **unit of analysis** is the entity (person, city, country, county, university, state, bureaucratic agency, etc.) we want to describe and analyze; it is the entity to which the concept applies. Units of analysis can be either individual level or aggregate level. When a concept describes a phenomenon at its lowest possible level, it is using an **individual-level unit of analysis.** Most polling or survey research deals with concepts that apply to individual persons, which are the most common individual-level units of analysis you will encounter. Individual-level units are not always persons, however. If you were conducting research on the political themes contained in the Democratic and Republican Party platforms over the past several elections, the units of analysis would be the individual platforms from each year. Similarly, if you were interested in finding out whether environmental legislation was a high priority in Congress, you might examine each bill that is introduced as an individual unit of analysis.

Much political science research deals with the **aggregate-level unit of analysis**, which is a collection of individual entities. Neighborhoods or census tracts are aggregate-level units, as are congressional districts, states, and countries. A university administrator who wondered if student satisfaction is affected by class size would gather information on each class, an aggregation of individual students. Someone wanting to know whether states with lenient voter registration laws had higher turnout than states with stricter laws could use legal statistics and voting data from fifty aggregate-level units of analysis, the states. Notice that collections of individual entities, and thus overall aggregate levels, can vary in size. For example, both

congressional districts and states are aggregate-level units of analysis—both are collections of individuals within politically defined geographic areas—but states usually represent a higher level of aggregation because they are composed of more individual entities.

Notice, too, that the same concept often can be defined at both the individual and aggregate levels. Dwell on this point for a moment. Just as economic liberalism can be defined for individual persons, economic liberalism can be defined for states by aggregating the numbers of state residents who support or oppose government spending: The concept of economic liberalism is defined as the extent to which states exhibit the characteristic of having residents who support government spending for social programs. This conceptual definition makes perfect sense. One can imagine comparing states that have a large percentage of pro-spending residents with states having a lower percentage of pro-spending residents. For statistical reasons, however, the relationship between two aggregate-level concepts usually cannot be used to make inferences about the relationship at the individual level. Suppose we find that states with larger percentages of college-educated people have higher levels of economic liberalism than states with fewer college graduates. Based on this finding, we could not conclude that college-educated individuals are more likely to be economic liberals than are individuals without a college degree.

A classic problem, known as the **ecological fallacy**, arises when an aggregate-level phenomenon is used to make inferences at the individual level. W. S. Robinson, who coined the term more than sixty years ago, illustrated the ecological fallacy by pointing to a counterintuitive fact: States with higher percentages of foreign-born residents had higher rates of English-language literacy than states with lower percentages of foreign-born residents. At the individual level, Robinson found the opposite pattern, with foreign-born individuals having lower English literacy than native-born individuals. What accounted for these paradoxical findings? The aggregate-level pattern was produced by the tendency for immigrants to settle in states whose native-born residents had comparatively high levels of language proficiency.[9] The ecological fallacy is not new. Indeed, Emile Durkheim's towering study of religion and suicide, published in 1897, may have suffered from it.[10] The main point here is that a proper conceptual definition needs to specify the units of analysis. Researchers must be careful when drawing conclusions based on the study of aggregate-level units of analysis.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

In suggesting how the concept is to be measured, a conceptual definition points the way to a clear operational definition.[11] An operational definition describes explicitly how the concept is to be measured empirically. Just how would we determine the extent to which people hold opinions that are consistent with economic liberalism? What procedure would produce the truest measure of social liberalism? Suppose we wanted to quantify Dahl's inclusiveness dimension of democracy. We would need to devise a metric that combines the different concrete attributes of inclusiveness. Exactly what form would this metric take? Would it faithfully reflect the conceptual dimension of inclusiveness, or might our measure be flawed in some way? This phase of the measurement process, the step between conceptual definition and operational definition, is often the most difficult to traverse. To introduce some of these difficulties, we describe an example from public opinion research, the study of the concept of political tolerance.

Political tolerance is important to many students of democracy because, arguably, democratic health can be maintained only if people remain open to different ways of thinking and

Conceptualization in Comparative Politics

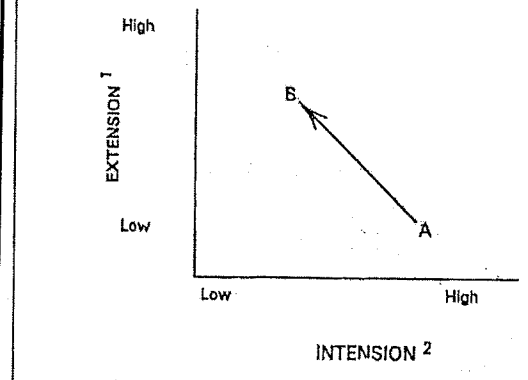
In this part of the course we will cover the following issues:

A. Introduction: On the Need for Concepts, by Richard Rose

B. Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics

FIGURE 1

The Ladder of Generality



A = Initial category
B = Category adapted to more cases

1 Range of cases
2 Number of defining attributes

C. Sartori's Ten Commandments for Concpet Analysis

Richard Rose on

The Need for Concepts

Concepts are necessary as common points of reference for grouping phenomena that are differentiated geographically and often linguistically. **The concept of Prime Minister** makes it possible to group together for comparison the British Prime Minister, the German *Bundeskanzler*, the Italian *Presidente del Consiglio* dei Ministri and the Irish Taoiseach. It also avoids the false nominalism of assuming that because a regime calls itself democratic, for example, the former German Democratic Republic, it actually is democratic. **Without concepts, information about different countries may be assembled together but we have no basis for relating one country to another.** This is the limitation of thousand-page compendia organized geographically, without any thought to categories for comparing data. In order to connect empirical materials horizontally across national boundaries, they must also be connected vertically; that is, capable of being related to concepts that are sufficiently abstract to travel across national boundaries.

In an era in which quantitative methods have gained increasing esteem, it is well to remember that words - that is, concepts - are needed to represent and define nominal categories. As T. R. Gurr, author of *Polimetrics*, has remarked: "All the best variables are nominal". **The stipulation of concepts should precede the collection of quantifiable data, guiding the search for and selection of empirical materials, whether quantitative or qualitative.** To amass materials without regard to concepts is to produce empirical data that will sink under its own weight, lacking ideas that give it meaning. As Giovanni Sartori comments, "the better the concepts, the better the variables that can be derived from them" (Sartori, 1984, 10). Systematic comparison makes use of comparable, or at least **functionally equivalent**, units of analysis. For example, the German Christian Democratic Union is normally treated as the functional equivalent of the British Conservative Party, because both are anti-socialist parties. This is not to claim that they are identical but that they are similar in terms of specified attributes, such as relative position on a left-right scale. Without claiming that the Soviet and American systems are identical, Valeric Bunce has been able to address the question *Do New Leaders Make a Difference?* through a comparison of the consequences of successive American Presidents and General Secretaries of the CPSU entering office. In so far as it can be argued that there is no equivalence between, for example, a continental socialist party and the American Democratic Party, this does not prevent comparison. It merely changes terms, raising the question: why is there no socialist party in the United States?.

Concepts come before theories. As a Nobel laureate in physics, Sir George Thompson, has noted:

> Science depends on its concepts. These are ideas which receive names. They determine the questions one asks, and the answers one gets. They are more fundamental than the theories which are stated in terms of them"

When it is recognized that two countries differ in terms of a given conceptual attribute, this suggests a search for a theory to explain the empirically observed variation. It is naive to assume that political scientists always start by formulating abstract theories from which hypotheses are then logically deduced for formal testing. Doing so has dangers, for it can lead to premature closure of the mind, with anything not specified in the theory being ignored, whatever its palpable significance. In practice, the linkage of countries, concepts and theories is a matching or search process.

In comparative politics concepts are used in a manner not dissimilar to anatomy. The starting point is the development of a generic vocabulary for classifying the 'bare bones' of political systems. Concepts provide the categories into which information about particular countries can be sorted. The use of concepts does not deny the particularity of a national *Gestalt*. After all, an anatomist knows that although the bones of different persons can be classified under the same anatomical headings, it is not possible to treat each bundle of bones (each individual person) as identical.

Concepts can be chosen from many rungs of what Sartori aptly describes as 'a ladder of abstraction', depending upon the purpose of the research.' A student of elections can compare elections with other means of choosing leaders or compare competitive and non-competitive elections. Within the field of competitive elections, comparisons can be made between plurality and proportional representation systems, between different types of proportional representation systems, or, with a given country, with the working of an electoral system at different times or at different levels of government.

The explanation of observed differences between nations requires hypotheses and/or theories. As long as concepts can be operationalized, they provide the critical link between empirical observations and discussions of political systems in the abstract. Comparative analysis can arrive inductively at a theoretical discussion after a lengthy examination of evidence of a particular country. For example, case studies can be surveyed in order to elucidate an inventory of propositions supported by available empirical evidence. Alternatively, a broad theoretical discussion can be presented, followed by an examination of evidence of one or more countries that may or may not support the refutable hypotheses offered. The starting point is less significant than a conclusion that is generalizable because capable of statement in conceptual terms.

Rose Richard, Comparing Forms of Comparative Analysis, *Political Studies*, 1991, Vol. 39, pp. 446-462.

Giovanni Sartori's

Ten Commandments for Concpet Analysis

Rule 1	**Of any empirical concept always, and separately, check (1) whether it is ambiguous, that is, how the meaning relates to the term; and (2) whether it is vague, that is, how the meaning relates to the referent.**
Rule 2a	**Always check (1) whether the key terms (the designator of the concept and the entailed terms) are defined; (2) whether the meaning declared by their definition is unambiguous; and (3) whether the declared meaning remains, throughout the argument, unchanged, (i.e., consistent).**
Rule 2b	**Always check whether the key terms are used univocally and consistently in the declared meaning.**
Rule 3a	**Awaiting contrary proof, no world should be used as a synonym for another word.**
Rule 3b	**With respect to stipulating synonymities, the burden of proof is reserved: what requires demonstration is that by attributing different meanings to different words we create a distinction of no consequence.**
Rule 4	**In reconstructing a concept, first collect a representative set of definitions; second, extract their characteristics; and third, construct matrixes that organize such characteristics meaningfully.**
Rule 5	**With respect to the extension of a concept, always assess (1) its degree of boundlessness, and (2) its degree of denotative discrimination vis-à-vis its membership.**
Rule 6	**The boundlessness of a concept is remedied by increasing the number of its properties; and its discriminating adequacy is improved as additional properties are entered.**
Rule 7	**The connotation and the denotation of a concept are inversely related.**
Rule 8	**In selecting the term that designates the concept, always relate to an control with the semantic field to which the term belongs - that is, the set of associated, neighboring words.**
Rule 9	**If the term that designates the concepts unsettles the semantic field (to which the term belongs), than justify your selection by showing that (1) no field meaning is lost, and that (2) ambiguity is not increased by being transferred**
Rule 10	**Make sure that the definiens of a concept is adequate and parsimonious: adequate in that it contains enough characteristics to identify the referents and their boundaries; parsimonious in that no accompanying property is included among the necessary, defining properties.**

vagueness of the theory has no fit for the specificity of the findings. We are thus left with a body of literature that gives the frustrating feeling of dismantling theoretically whatever it discovers empirically.

It should be noted that it is in the middle level where we are required to perform the whole set of operations that some authors call "definition by analysis". This operation include the process of defining a term by finding the genus to which the object designated by the word belongs, and then specifying the attributes which distinguish such object from all the other species of the same genus. David Apter complains that our "analytical categories are too general when they are theoretical, and too descriptive where they are not". I understand his complaint to apply to our disorderly leaps from observational, findings all the way up to universal categories and vice versa - by-passing the middle-range as it were the stage of definition by analysis.

The low level of abstraction may appear uninteresting to the comparative scholar. He would be wrong, however, on two counts. First, when the comparative scholar is engaged in field work, the more his fact-finding categories are brought down to this level, the better his research. Second, it is the evidence obtained nation by nation, or region-by-region (or whatever the unit of analysis may be) that helps us decide which classification works, or which new criterion of classification should be developed.

While classifying must abide by logical rules, logic has nothing to do with the usefulness of a classificatory system. Botanists, mineralogists and zoologists have not created their texonomical trees as a matter of mere logical unfolding; that is, they have not imposed their "classes" upon their animals, any more than their animals flowers or minerals) have imposed themselves upon their classifiers. Let it be added that the information requirements of such an unsettled science as a science of politics can hardly be satisfied by single-purpose classifications (not to mention single-purpose checklists). As I have stressed, we desperately need standard fact-finding and fact-storing containers (concepts). But this standardization is only possible and fruitful on the basis of "multi-purpose" and, at the limit, all-purpose classifications. Now, whether a classification may serve multiple purposes, and which classification fits this requirement best, this is something we discover inductively, that is, starting from the bottom of the ladder of abstraction.

The overall discussion is recapitulated in Table 1 with respect to its bearing on the problems of comparative politics. A few additional comments are in order. In the first place, reference to three levels of abstraction brings out the in "broad" and "narrow" meanings of a term. For this does not clarify, whenever this is necessary, whether we distinguish, 1) between HL universal and ML general conceptualizations, or 2) between ML genuses and species or, 3) between ML and LL categories, or even 4) between HL universal and LL configurative conceptualizations.

Levels of Abstraction	Major Comparative Scope and Purpose	Logical and Empirical Properties of Concepts
High level Categories Universal conceptualizations	Cross-area comparisons among heterogeneous contexts (global theory)	Maximal extension Minimal intension Definition by negation
Medium Level Categories General conceptualizations and taxonomies	Intra-area comparisons among relatively homogeneous contexts (middle range theory)	Balance of denotation with connotation Definition by analysis, i.e. per genus et differentiam
Low Level Categories Configuration Conceptualizations	Country by country analysis (narrow-gauge theory)	Maximal intension Minimal extension Contextual definition

E

Figure 1. Situating the Comparative Method as of 1971: Lijphart's Scheme

Case Study Method

Merit: Permits intensive examination of cases even with limited resources

Inherent Problem: Contributes less to building theory than studies with more cases

Types of Case Studies:

1. Atheoretical
2. Interpretive
3. Hypothesis-generating
4. Theory-confirming
5. Theory-infirming (i.e., case studies that weaken a theory marginally)
6. Deviant case studies

Comparative Method

Defined as: Systematic analysis of small number of cases ("small-*N*" analysis)

Merit: "Given inevitable scarcity of time, energy, and financial resources, the intensive analysis of a few cases may be more promising than the superficial statistical analysis of many cases" (Lijphart, p. 685)

Inherent Problem: Weak capacity to sort out rival explanations, specifically, the problem of "many variables, few cases"

Potential Solutions:

1. Increase number of cases
2. Focus on comparable cases
3. Reduce number of variables
   a. Combine variables
   b. Employ more parsimonious theory

Experimental Method

Merit: Eliminates rival explanations through experimental control

Inherent Problem: Experimental control is impossible for many or most topics of relevance to field of comparative politics

Statistical Method

Merit: Assesses rival explanations through statistical control

Inherent Problem: Difficult to collect adequate information in a sufficient number of cases, due to limited time and resources

1

RESEARCH TRADITIONS AND THEORY IN COMPARATIVE POLITICS: AN INTRODUCTION

Mark I. Lichbach
Alan S. Zuckerman

THE COMMON HERITAGE OF COMPARATIVE POLITICS

Comparativists inherit their dream of theorizing about politics from the founders of social theory. Their intellectual forebears represent the pantheon of Western thought. In the classic survey of the field's intellectual origins, Harry Eckstein (1963) highlights the past masters.

> Comparative politics ... has a particular right to claim Aristotle as an ancestor because of the primacy that he assigned to politics among the sciences and because the problems he raised and the methods he used are similar to those still current in political studies (Eckstein 1963: 3).

Machiavelli and Montesquieu, Hobbes and Smith are the progenitors who lived during the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. The classic theorists of social science – Karl Marx, Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, Vilfredo Pareto, Gaetano Mosca, and Roberto Michels – established the field's research agenda, mode of analysis, and contrasting theoretical visions. Several seminal theorists of contemporary political science – Harry Eckstein, David Apter, Robert Dahl, Seymour Lipset, Karl Deutsch, Gabriel Almond, and Sidney Verba – drew on this heritage to rebuild and reinvigorate the field of comparative politics. A shared, grand intellectual vision motivates comparativists.

Comparativists want to understand the critical events of the day, a position that ensures that dreams of theory address the political world as it exists, not for-

mal abstractions or utopias. Just as Marx and Weber responded to the fundamental transformations associated with the rise of capitalism, just as Marx developed a general strategy for a socialist revolution and Weber grappled with the theoretical and normative demands of the bureaucratic state, and just as Mosca, Pareto, and Michels strove to understand the possibilities and limits of democratic rule, students of comparative politics examine pressing questions in the context of their immediate political agenda. The contemporary study of comparative politics therefore blossomed in response to the political problems that followed World War II. New forms of conflict emerged: Communist threats; peasant rebellions and revolutions; social movements, urban riots, student upheavals, military coups, and national liberation struggles swept the world. Government decisions replaced markets as foci for economic development. New states followed the disintegration of colonial empires, and the worldwide movement toward democratic rule seemed to resume after the fascist tragedies. The challenges of the current era – domestic conflict, state-building, the political bases of economic growth, and democratization, to note but a few – stand at the center of today's research, indicating that the need to respond to contemporary issues guides the field.

Comparative politics therefore asserts an ambitious scope of inquiry. No political phenomenon is foreign to it; no level of analysis is irrelevant, and no time period beyond its reach. Civil war in Afghanistan; voting decisions in Britain; ethnic conflict in Quebec, Bosnia, and Burundi; policy interactions among the bureaucracies of the European Union in Brussels, government agencies in Rome, regional offices in Basilicata, and local powers in Potenza; the religious bases of political action in Iran, Israel, and the United States; the formation of democracies in Eastern Europe and the collapse of regimes in Africa; and global economic patterns are part of the array of contemporary issues that stand before the field. Questions about the origins of capitalism; the formation of European states; the rise of fascism and the collapse of interwar democracies; and the transition to independence after colonial rule are some of the themes of past eras that still command our attention.

Second, comparativists assert an ambitious intellectual vision in that they approach these substantive concerns with general questions in mind. Anyone who studies the politics of a particular country – whether Germany or Ghana, the United Arab Emirates or the United States of America – so as to address abstract issues, does comparative politics. Anyone who is interested in who comes to power, how, and why – the names, places, and dates of politics in any one place or other – in order to say something about the politics of succession or the determinants of vote choice, is a comparativist. In other words, students of comparative politics examine a case to reveal what it tells us about a larger set of political phenomena, or they relate the particulars of politics to more general theoretical ideas about politics.

Comparativists therefore insist that analysis requires explicit comparisons. Because events of global historical significance affect so many countries in so short a period of time, studies of single countries and abstract theorizing are woefully inadequate to capture epoch-shaping developments. More than three decades ago, when the founders of the contemporary field of comparative politics initiated the most recent effort to merge theory and data in the study of politics, they therefore established another of the field's guiding principles: The proper study of politics requires systematic comparisons.[1]

Finally, comparativists assert a grand intellectual vision in that their generalizations are situated in the context of the Big Questions of social thought: Who rules? How are interests represented? Who wins and who loses? How is authority challenged? Why are some nations "developed"? These questions have produced much contemporary theorizing about the connections among social order, the state, civil society, and social change, especially in democracies. Comparativists engage the basic issues that inform social and political thought.

In sum, comparative politics follows the lead of the grand masters in their approach to substantive issues, to the scope of inquiry, to the nature of theory-building, and to the enduring problems of social thought. As comparativists address politically significant matters, explore a range of political phenomena, propose general explanatory propositions based on systematic evidence from multiple cases, and address Big Questions, they move along a path first marked by the founders of social science.

THE COMPETING TRADITIONS IN COMPARATIVE POLITICS

In spite of this shared dream, long-standing disagreements separated the field's forebears and contrasting research schools characterize current efforts to build theories in comparative politics. When many of today's senior scholars were graduate students, their training included courses that compared psychological and culturalist approaches, institutional studies of political organizations, structural–functional and systems analyses, cybernetics and modes of information theory, pluralist, elitist, and Marxist analyses, modernization theory and its alternatives of dependency and world-systems theories, and rational choice theory, to name the most obvious. Most of these perspectives have disappeared and some have formed new combinations. Today, rational choice theories, culturalist approaches, and structural analyses stand as the principal competing theoretical schools in comparative politics. Rational choice theorists follow a path laid out by Hobbes, Smith, and Pareto; culturalists continue work begun by Montesquieu and developed by Weber and Mosca; and structuralists build on Marx's foundations and add to Weber's edifice. The themes and debates of contemporary comparative politics are therefore rooted in the enduring questions of social thought. They continue to lie at the center of work in all the social sciences.

[1]Classic works that appeared to herald the emergence of comparative politics as a subdiscipline of political science include Almond and Coleman (1960), Almond and Verba (1963), Beer and Ulam (1958), Dahl (1966; 1971), Eckstein and Apter (1963), Holt and Turner (1970), Huntington (1968), La Palombara and Weiner (1966), Lipset and Rokkan (1967), Moore (1966), Przeworski and Teune (1970); Pye and Verba (1965), Riker (1962), and Sartori (1970). At the same time, two journals, *Comparative Politics* and *Comparative Political Studies*, appeared, helping to institutionalize the subfield.

Rationalists begin with assumptions about actors who act deliberately to maximize their advantage. This research school uses the power of mathematical reasoning to elaborate explanations with impressive scope. Analysis begins at the level of the individual and culminates in questions about collective actions, choices, and institutions. Following the path first charted by Downs (1957), Olson (1968), and Riker (1962), rational choice theory has spread to address diverse problems: from electoral choice to revolutionary movements, from coalitions to political economy, and from institution formation to state-building. Here, the clarity of mathematical reasoning takes pride of place; powerful abstract logics facilitate a shared understanding among the members of the research school.

As comparativists engage in fieldwork in diverse societies, they grapple with the need to understand varied ways of life, systems of meaning, and values. As students who cut their teeth on the abstractions of modernization and dependency theory encounter the realities of particular villages, political parties, and legislatures, they seek to ground their observations in the politics that is being analyzed. Following the lead of social and cultural anthropologists, many comparativists adhere to Geertz's (1973) admonition to provide "thick descriptions." Culturalists therefore provide nuanced and detailed readings of particular cases, frequently drawn from fieldwork, as they seek to understand the phenomena being studied. This stance usually joins strong doubts about both the ability to generalize to abstract categories and the ability to provide explanations that apply to more than the case at hand.

Structuralists draw together long-standing interests in political and social institutions. Many emphasize the formal organizations of governments; some retain Marx's concern with class relations; some study political parties and interest groups; some combine these into analyses of how states and societies interact; and some emphasize the themes of political economy. Although these scholars display diverse patterns of reasoning, from mathematical models to verbal arguments, and many modes of organizing empirical evidence, they continue to follow Marx's and Weber's contention that theory and data guide social analysis.

As Alan Zuckerman's essay indicates, these research traditions take strong positions on the methodological issues that divide comparativists.[2] Rational

[2]There is also a long-standing debate in comparative politics about methodology. As comparativists propose explanations that cover sets of cases, perhaps based on causal accounts, they grapple with questions that relate to theory-building, concept formation, and case selection: How do concepts carry across cases? What is the value of treating concepts as variables that are measured by indicators? What is the proper use of case-specific information in theories that cover many cases? How does the choice of cases affect the general propositions offered? Are there requirements that define the number of cases that need to be included in an analysis? What is the relevance of single case studies to the development of theory? How can single case studies be used to speak to general sets of phenomena? Is it possible or desirable to include all relevant instances in the analysis? Is it possible to devise an adequate methodology that permits powerful generalizations based on the observation of a small number of cases? These questions raise problems of external validity, the ability to generalize beyond the case being observed.

Nearly thirty years ago, Sartori (1970) drew attention to fundamental questions of concept formation. At that same time, Lijphart (1971) and Przeworski and Teune (1970) initiated a controversy about the proper methodology of comparative research, in which Eckstein (1975), Ragin (1987), Ragin and Becker (1992), and Skocpol and Somers (1980) have offered significant alternative positions (see Collier 1993 for a review of this literature). Most recently, Collier and Mahon (1993), Collier (1993), and Sartori (1994) illustrate further developments concerning the proper formation of concepts, and King, Keohane, and Verba (1994; 1995) initiated a productive debate over issues of research design in comparative politics. On the latter, see especially Bartels (1995), Brady (1995), Caporaso (1995), Collier (1995), Laitin (1995), Mohr (1996), Rogowski (1995), and Tarrow (1995). There is a natural affinity between studies of research design and comparative method that is frequently overlooked. King, Keohane, and Verba (1994; 1995) argue that there is only one scientific method. Hence, their strictures resemble those proposed by Cook and Campbell (1979).

choice theorists seek to maximize the ability to provide universal laws that may be used in nomothetic explanations. They consider problems of reliability – the concern with the evidence required to support generalizations from the particular to sets of cases – as a challenge to research design. Cultural interpreters maximize the importance of reliability as they describe the constellations of particular cases and minimize the value of generalist research expectations. They interpret particular events, decisions, and patterns, eschewing any need to tie explanations to general principles. Structural analysts who follow Marx offer universal theories that include causal accounts. At the same time, they struggle to tie reliable descriptions into powerful generalizations; they grapple self-consciously with the requirements of case selection and how best to move from the particular analysis to the set of cases about which they seek to theorize. Comparativists' long-standing debates over method thus reappear in the three research traditions.

However, as Mark Lichbach's essay indicates, the dispute among the schools goes beyond the ideographic–nomothetic divide. The traditions differ with respect to ontology: Rationalists study how actors employ reason to satisfy their interests, culturalists study rules that constitute individual and group identities, and structuralists explore relations among actors in an institutional context. Reasons, rules, and relations are the various starting points of inquiry. The traditions also differ with respect to explanatory strategy: Rationalists perform comparative static experiments, culturalists produce interpretive understandings, and structuralists study the historical dynamics of real social types. Positivism, interpretivism, and realism are the possible philosophies of social science.

Moreover, as both Zuckerman and Lichbach indicate, no school displays a rigid and uniform orthodoxy. Rationalists debate the utility of relaxing the core assumption that defines individuals as maximizers of their self-interest. They differ as well over the proper form of explanation, some seeking covering laws and others proposing causal accounts, as they debate the necessity of transforming formal models into accounts of events. Continuing the debate initiated by Marx and Weber, structuralists differ over the ontological status of their concepts: Are social class, ethnicity, state, and other concepts that characterize this research school natural types? Are political processes best seen as determined and closed-ended or probabilistic and open-ended processes? Structuralists differ as well over

the utility of nomothetic and causal explanations. Culturalists disagree over the theoretical importance of generalizations drawn from their fieldwork. May one derive or test general propositions from the analysis of a particular village? Do public opinion surveys provide an adequate picture of people's goals, values, and identities? They differ over the nature of explanation in comparative politics as well. Some culturalists reject any form of covering law or causal accounts, offering only interpretations of political life in particular places; others move toward the mainstream of comparative politics, incorporating values and systems of meaning into theories that adhere to the standard forms of explanation. In short, as Lichbach makes clear in his essay, ideal-type rationalists, culturalists, and structuralists need to be identified so that we may recognize how practicing comparativists employ a battery of ideal-type strategies in their concrete empirical work.

Comparative politics is dominated today by rationalist, culturalist, and structuralist approaches. What explains the imperialist expansion of these schools and the disappearance of earlier approaches? As Lichbach's and Zuckerman's essays in this volume demonstrate, these schools share an ontological and epistemological symmetry. They offer – indeed force – choices along the same dimensions. Furthermore, at a more fundamental level, the themes of the research schools rest at the heart of the human sciences. Reason, rules, and relations are unique to social theory. Focusing on these themes sets research in the social sciences apart from the physical sciences, providing a fundamental basis on which to theorize about political phenomena. Rationalist, culturalist, and structuralist theories are thus embedded in strong research communities, scholarly traditions, and analytical languages.

ADVANCING THEORY IN COMPARATIVE POLITICS: AN OVERVIEW OF THE ESSAYS IN THIS VOLUME

The extraordinary range and importance of the topics examined by comparativists, the powerful and competing research schools that characterize the field, and the scholarly pedigree of its work invite periodic assessments of the state of comparative politics. In the early 1960s, Harry Eckstein and David Apter (1963) edited a collection of essays that established the field's questions. In 1970, Robert Holt and John Turner gathered together a set of contributions that raised the level of theoretical sophistication. Both volumes guided research in comparative politics.[3]

[3]Some other early studies of the relationship between the research schools and theory in comparative politics include Bill and Hardgrave (1973), La Palombara (1974), Mayer (1972), Merkl (1970), and Merritt (1971). Recent works include Almond (1991), Cantori and Ziegler (1988), Chilcote (1994), Crotty (1991), Dogan and Kazancigil (1994), Dogan and Pelassy (1984), Mayer (1989), Rogowski (1993), Rustow and Erickson (1991), Weiner and Huntington (1987), Wiarda (1990), and Zuckerman (1991).

A field advances through explicit dialogue about the relative strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures of the research traditions of which it is composed. Theory is a collective but contentious enterprise. While scholarship is the work of single scholars, knowledge accumulates as competing groups of scholars accept and reject claims about the world. We have therefore organized this volume around the theme of competing research traditions in comparative politics. Because so much analysis in comparative politics is guided by the expectations, assumptions, methods, and principles of rational choice theory, culturalist analyses, and structuralist approaches, assessments of the state of theory and prospects for advancing theory need to focus on these research schools. As the authors of the essays in this volume examine the research traditions in comparative politics, they assess knowledge and advance theory, seeking to direct research in the coming years.

Because research in comparative politics centers around distinctive topics, we have also selected four themes around which to examine the interplay between theory and the three schools: the analysis of mass politics (especially regarding electoral behavior), social movements and revolutions, political economy, and state–society relations. Why did we choose these topics? Taken together, they encompass much of the research done in comparative politics. Each displays a history of sophisticated theoretical and empirical work that stretches over several decades. The comparative study of voting behavior begins in the interwar years. Because most people who engage in political activities do so only at the ballot box, this research examines the political behavior of the largest set of people; here the study of politics moves its focus away from politicians and bureaucrats, government agencies and political parties, and the abstractions of state and society. The systematic analysis of social movements and revolutions descends directly from Marx and Weber. It also links to studies of regime transformations and the bases of stable democracies. Beginning with Adam Smith's theories, the analysis of the political economies of advanced industrial societies has become the focus of the largest segment of research on the political institutions and public policies of established democracies. As comparativists study state–society relations, they follow a path first marked by Marx, Weber, Mosca, Michels, and Pareto. As they study the formation of states, they blend abstract theorization and detailed empirical studies.

A study of these particular topics has the additional virtue of moving the analysis beyond the field of comparative politics. Examining the successes of the research schools with regard to each of these topics also casts light on the utility of various analytic techniques: Electoral analyses typically use quantitative techniques to study survey results and work on state–society relations includes the results of qualitative studies, while research on both social movements and revolutions and political economy varies in the use of quantitative and qualitative modes of analysis. Finally, these research themes also cast light on the relations between theories developed in comparative politics and those that characterize related fields in political science and the other social sciences. The research