Concepts and Methods in Comparative Politics

I. The Comparative Method
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III. Themes for Comparative Politics
   A. A World of States
   B. Governing the Economy
   C. The Democratic Idea
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I. The Comparative Method

- Comparative Politics is both a SUBJECT and a METHOD

- Comparative Politics as a Subject
  - Examines *domestic* politics and government *within* numerous countries, whereas international politics looks at relations *between* different countries.

- Comparative Politics as a Method
  - Comparative political analysis
  - *Rudyard Kipling*: “What should they know of England who only England know”

- Q: Why has American democracy succeeded?
B. The Quest for Theory

- POLITICAL SCIENCE?
- HYPOTHESES TESTING
  - Political PROBLEM ➔ Formulate a HYPOTHESIS
    - Hypothesis: a potential but unproven answer to an important political question.
  - Examine EVIDENCE which either SUPPORTS (develop theory?) or REFUTES hypothesis (start again)
  - (Causal) Theory: a set of concepts and hypotheses which posit cause and effect relationships between various social and political factors

- LIMITATIONS OF POLITICAL THEORIES
  - Multicausality (inability to experiment)
  - Human Free Will
A. A World of States

- **STATE:** Comprises the country’s key political institutions that are responsible for making, implementing, enforcing, and adjudicating important policies for that country.

- **GOVERNMENT:** The leadership in power at a particular moment, roughly akin to an American administration.

- **CONSTITUTION:** Rules that specify the relationship between the state and its citizens and the different parts of the government
  - Formal and Informal Elements
  - Federal v. Unitary
A. A World of States

GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

Legislative:
- Number of Chambers: Unicameral or Bicameral
- Upper House and Lower House

Executive:
- Presidential and Parliamentary
- Head of State v. Head of Government

Judiciary:
- Common Law v. Roman Law
- Judicial Review (or Not)
B. Governing the Economy

- Political Economy refers to how government affect economic performance and how economic performance in turn affects a country’s political processes
  - The interaction of STATES and MARKETS

- Varieties of Capitalism

- Which Model of Capitalism Works Best?

- How to Measure Success?

- What Should Be the Goal?
  - Growth v. Equity
C. The Democratic Idea

- Trends in Democracy
- Political Parties: organizations that seek to place their designated representatives in governmental positions.
  - ‘Catch-all’ v. Particularistic
  - One Party Dominant (Japan, Sweden); Two Party Dominant (US, UK); Multiparty (Germany, Italy, France)
- Responsible Party Model:
  - Parties formulate clear and coherent programs
  - Voters compare and select among competing programs
  - The winning party translates those programs into policies/laws
- This is the ideal against which party system performance is compared.
C. The Democratic Idea

- **Elections:**
  - Single Member District (plurality or majority) versus Proportional Representation

- **(Maurice) Duverger’s Law:**
  - Proportional Representation $\Rightarrow$ Multiparty System
  - Single Member Districts $\Rightarrow$ Two Party System

- **Electoral Behavior**

- **Public Opinion and Legitimacy**
  - **Legitimacy:** A belief by powerful groups and/or the broad citizenry that a state exercises rightful authority.
D. The Politics of Collective Identity

**POLITICAL CULTURE:** the attitudes, beliefs, and symbols that influence political behavior.

- Developed via (a) socialization; (b) national experience (history)
- Varies across countries and within countries
- Political culture v. public opinion
- CAN change over time or with seismic events (i.e., Pearl Harbor, Vietnam, 9-11)
D. The Politics of Collective Identity

- **Nation**: A group of people who are culturally, linguistically, ethnically, historically etc. similar and develop a common bond.

- **Nationalism**: A political movement that emphasizes national distinctiveness and advocates the creation of a separate national state.

- **Ethnicity**: A group of individuals having a distinct culture in common.

- **Race**: Identification based on common biological characteristics.
Nations v. States

The "Kurdish Problem"
D. The Politics of Collective Identity

- **(Socio-Economic) Class**: one’s relative position within the social and economic structure
  - Objective v. Subjective
- **POINT**: Collective identities...
  - Are inherently subjective
  - Both bring people together and drive them apart (double-edged sword)
Polarizing v. Cross-Cutting Cleavages

- Polarizing

- Cross-Cutting