

Comparative Politics Basics

- I. What is Comparative Politics?
- II. Elements of the Political System
 - A. Governmental Institutions
 - B. Political Culture and Identity
 - C. Political Behavior
 - D. Ideology
 - E. Political Economy
- III. Comparative Politics in Europe



I. What is Comparative Politics?

Comparative Politics is both a SUBJECT and a METHOD

- CP as a Subject
 - Examines *domestic* politics and government *within* numerous countries, whereas *international* politics looks at relations *between* different countries.
- CP as a Method
 - Comparative political analysis
 - *Rudyard Kipling*: “What should they know of England who only England know”
- Q: Why has American democracy succeeded?

Concepts, Theories and Hypothesis Testing

- **HYPOTHESIS**: a potential but unproven answer to an important political question.
- **THEORY**: a set of concepts and hypotheses which posit cause and effect relationships between various social and political factors.
- **Pitfalls**: Multicausality, Free Will, Necessary & Sufficient Causes
- **Empirical** (“What is...”) v. **Normative** (“What should be...”)

Politics and Power

- **POLITICS** (Dueling Definitions):
 - Who gets what, when, and how
 - The authoritative allocation of values.
 - The process by which the community makes decisions and establishes values that are binding upon its members.
- Common to ALL definitions: (1) Collective Action; (2) Power
- **POWER:** the ability to get people or groups to do what they would otherwise not

II. Elements of the Political System

A. Governmental Institutions

- **STATE:** All individuals and institutions that exert power and make public policy, whether or not they are in the government or not.
- **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. Government Institutions

LEGISLATIVE:

- 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. Political Culture and Identity

POLITICAL CULTURE: the basic attitudes that people have toward each other, the state, and authority

- Sources: (a) Socialization; (b) National experience (history)
- Widely shared and relatively stable
- CAN change over time or with seismic events (i.e., 9-11)

Identity

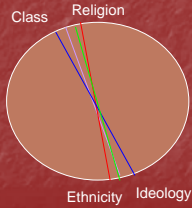
- **Nation:** A group of people who are culturally, linguistically, ethnically, historically etc. similar and develop a common bond.
- **Nationalism:** a political movement that emphasis on the distinctiveness of one's nation and advocates the creation of a separate national state
- **Ethnicity:** A group of individuals having a distinct culture - a subculture- in common.
- **Race:** identification based on common biological characteristics

Class

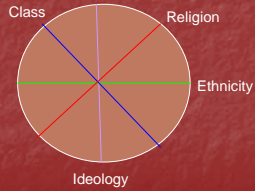
- **(Socio-Economic) Class:** one's relative position within the social and economic structure
- Objective v. Subjective
- Disparate identities create divisions (cleavages) within societies.

Polarizing v. Cross-Cutting Cleavages

■ Polarizing



■ Cross-Cutting



C. Political Behavior: Elections

- **Single Member District** (plurality or majority) versus **Proportional Representation**
- **(Maurice) Duverger's Law:**
 - Proportional Representation → Multiparty System
 - Single Member Districts → Two Party System

Political Parties

- **Political Party:** a broad membership organization designed to win elections and influence government by sponsoring candidates under the organization's name
- 'Catch-all' v. Particularistic
- Party Systems: One Party Dominant (Japan; Sweden); Two Party Dominant (US; UK); Multiparty (Ger; Italy; France)

The 'Responsible Party Model'

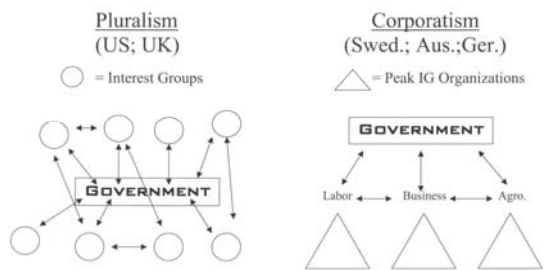
1. Parties should present clear and coherent programs to voters
 2. Voters should choose candidates according to these programs
 3. Winning party should carry out program in office
 4. Voters should hold the government responsible at the next election for executing that program
- This is the *ideal against which party system performance is compared.*

Interest Group Systems

- **Pluralist:** multiple, competing interest groups jockey to influence the government in a fairly open and dynamic system
- **Corporatist:** A system where the major interest groups of society are explicitly integrated into the government decision-making and policy process

Pluralism and Corporatism

Interest Group Systems: Pluralism versus Corporatism



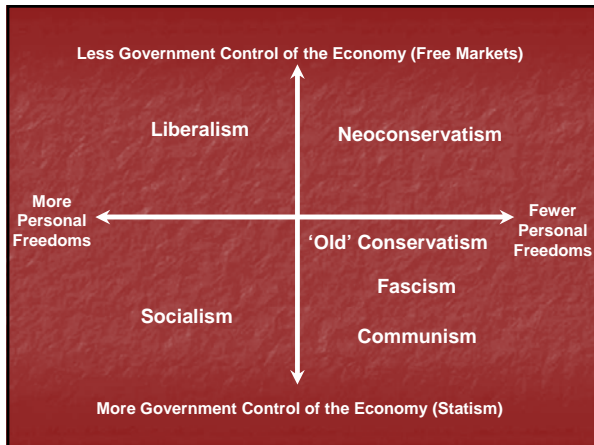
D. Ideology

■ Pro-Democracy “isms”:

- Conservatism
- Liberalism
- Socialism

■ Anti-Democracy “isms”:

- Fascism
- Communism



E. Political Economy

■ Political Economy: the interaction of STATE and MARKET

■ Capitalist economies vary on the:

- Role of the State
- Capital (Business)
- Labor
- Culture

■ Liberal Market Economies (UK)

■ Coordinated Market Economies (Germany)

III. Comparative Politics in Europe

Four Themes (from Kesselman and Krieger)

1. The interaction of states within the international order.

- Q: Are states (and governments) still the basic building blocs of political life?

2. The role of states in economic management

- Q: What policies foster successful economic performance?

III. Comparative Politics in Europe

3. The particular challenges facing European democracy and the pressures for more democracy.

- Q: What does 'democracy' mean and how well have various European polities achieved it?

4. The political impact of diverse sources of social identity, including class, gender, ethnicity, and religion.

- Q: How do states deal with grievances of minorities?