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Introduction

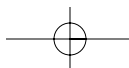
My purpose is to consider if, in political society, there can be any legitimate and sure principle of government, taking men as they are, and laws as they might be. I shall try always to bring together what right permits with what interest prescribes so that justice and utility are in no way divided.

Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*

OVERVIEW

- Political science is the study of politics in a scientific manner. Whereas international politics is the study of politics predominantly between countries, comparative politics is the study of politics predominantly within countries.
- In this chapter, we outline the central questions in comparative politics that we address in the remainder of this book. These questions are all related to the causes and consequences of democracy as well as to the tremendous variety of democratic institutions seen in the world.
- We argue that attempts to engineer democracy, should they occur, should rest on foundations provided by the study of comparative politics.
- We also discuss why we adopt an explicitly cross-national approach to introduce students to the study of comparative politics.

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On February 26, 2003, just a few weeks prior to ordering the invasion of Iraq to remove Iraqi president Saddam Hussein, American president George W. Bush declared that the United States would ensure that “one brutal dictator is not replaced by another.” He asserted that “[a]ll Iraqis must have a voice in the new government, and all citizens must have their rights protected.” He then drew an analogy between his plans for “postwar” Iraq and what had happened in Japan and Germany after World War II. In particular, he highlighted how the United States left behind “constitutions and parliaments” rather than “occupying armies” in Japan and Germany. The result of this was that “in societies that once bred fascism and militarism, liberty found a permanent home” despite the presence of cultures in both countries that “many said . . . were incapable of sustaining democracy.” He went on to state that the “nation of Iraq—with its proud heritage, abundant resources and skilled and educated people—is fully capable of moving toward democracy and living in freedom.” Later in his speech, President Bush tempered this optimistic statement with a warning: “It will be difficult to help freedom take hold in a country that has known three decades of dictatorship, secret police, internal divisions, and war.”¹

This speech came twelve days after the chief United Nations weapons inspector Hans Blix challenged various elements of Secretary of State Colin Powell’s presentation before the UN Security Council, which had claimed that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. Blix accused the U.S. and British governments of dramatizing the threat of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq in order to strengthen the case for toppling Saddam Hussein. In his speech, President Bush was clearly making the case that the desirability and feasibility of encouraging democratization in Iraq (and the broader Middle East) should be taken into account when weighing the pros and cons of invading Iraq. In effect, he was suggesting that the goal of establishing a democracy in the Middle East could legitimately be used to justify overthrowing Saddam Hussein even in the absence of any weapons of mass destruction. Less than a month after this historic speech, the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq was under way; less than a month after that, U.S. forces were involved in toppling a statue of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad’s Firdos Square—this event, captured by the invited media and press, symbolized, more than any other, the toppling of the Iraqi dictator.

Every generation seems to have its own motivation for studying *comparative politics*. The unfortunate truth is that each generation seems beset by a problem that is both devastatingly complex and extraordinarily



American marine watches as Saddam Hussein statue is toppled in Baghdad’s Firdos Square, April 19, 2003.

1. White House, Office of the Press Secretary, February 26, 2003, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/02/20030226-11.html>.

Box 1.1**WHAT IS COMPARATIVE POLITICS?**

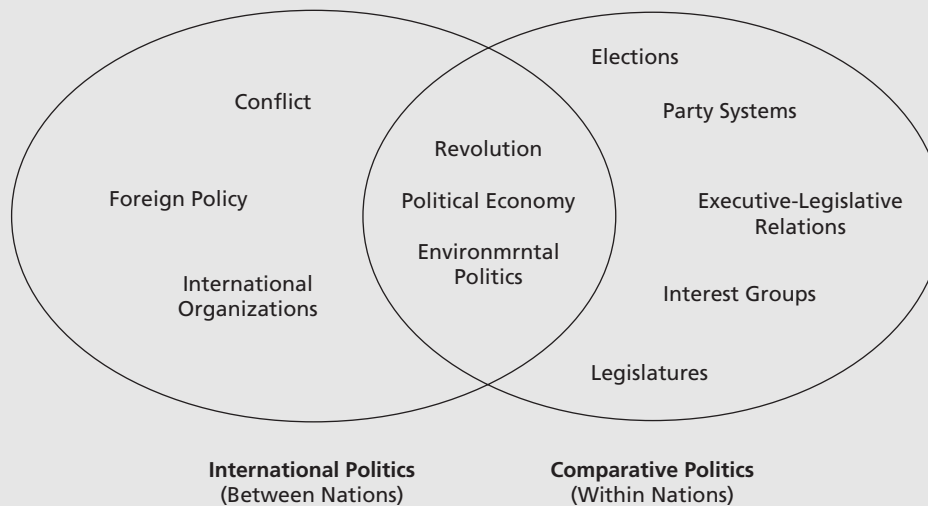
Traditionally, the field of comparative politics has been characterized by many related, but distinct, endeavors. An influential comparative politics textbook by Joseph LaPalombara (1974) was entitled *Politics within Nations*. LaPalombara's title distinguished comparative politics from international politics, which Hans Morgenthau (1948) famously called *Politics among Nations*. This definition of comparative politics, with its complementary definition of international politics, has one of the desirable features of all good scientific typologies in that it is logically exhaustive. By defining comparative and international politics in this way, these scholars have exhausted the logical possibilities involved in the study of politics—political phenomena occur either within countries or between countries.

Still, all good scientific typologies should also be mutually exclusive. Whereas logical exhaustion implies that we have a place to categorize every entity that is observed, mutual exclusivity requires that it not be possible to assign any single case into more than one category. Unfortunately, the typology just presented does not satisfy mutual exclusivity. A quick glance at today's newspapers clearly reveals that many contemporary political issues contain healthy doses of both "within country" and "between country" factors. As a consequence, the line between comparative and international politics is often blurred. This is particularly the case when it comes to studying how politics and economics interact. For example, ask yourself whether it is possible to fully understand American trade policy, say, toward China, without taking account of U.S. domestic politics or to fully understand European Union economic policies without taking into account the domestic policies of its member states. Similarly, many environmental issues involve factors both within and across a country's borders. In addition, because many violent antistate movements receive support from abroad, it is hard to categorize the study of revolutions, terrorism, and civil war as being solely in the domain of either comparative or international politics.

Nonetheless, it is possible to retain the basic insights of LaPalombara and Morgenthau by simply saying that comparative politics is the study of political phenomena that are predominantly "within country" relationships and that international politics is the study of political phenomena that are predominantly "between country" relationships. This view of comparative politics, and political science more generally, is illustrated in Figure 1.1. As you can see, international politics addresses things like conflict, foreign policy, and international organizations that shape the relationships between countries. In contrast, comparative politics focuses on issues such as party systems, elections, identity politics, and interest group relations within countries like Brazil, China, France, and Nigeria. Scholars interested in political economy issues such as trade, central bank independence, and exchange rate policy cross the divide between international and comparative politics.

Students in the United States may wonder where American politics fits into this description. In most political science departments in the United States, American politics is considered a separate subfield. Does the fact that American politics focuses predominantly on politics within the United States mean that it should be considered part of comparative politics? This is a question that, for some reason, generates quite heated debate among political scientists.

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FIGURE 1.1 One View of Political Science

Historically, a second traditional definition of comparative politics has been that it is the study of politics in every country except the one in which the student resides. Thus, according to this definition, comparative politics is the study of what economists often like to call “the rest of the world.” This definition, however, seems rather silly to us because it means that the study of Nigerian politics is part of comparative politics unless one happens to be studying it in Nigeria, in which case it is simply “Nigerian politics.” We leave it up to you to decide whether you think American politics should be considered part of comparative politics or not.

In addition to the two definitions just outlined, comparative politics has sometimes been defined as the study of politics using the method of comparison. In fact, as seen in Chapter 2, scholars of comparative politics who seek to define their subject in this way typically have a particular type of comparative method in mind. This tradition, which dates back at least as far as Aristotle’s attempt to classify constitutional forms, seeks to answer questions about politics by comparing and contrasting attributes of different polities (predominantly city-states in Aristotle’s day but nation-states today). Although this third definition is, to some extent, descriptively accurate, it is not particularly useful. As we show in Chapter 2, comparison is central to any and all scientific endeavor. As a result, defining comparative politics in terms of a “comparative” method would make it synonymous with political science itself. If this is the case, it makes one wonder why there are two phrases—comparative politics and political science—to describe the same thing.

We believe that comparative politics is best understood as the study of politics occurring predominantly within countries. As such, it is a rather vast field of research. For reasons that

Comparative politics is the study of political phenomena that occur predominantly within countries. International politics is the study of political phenomena that occur predominantly between countries.

we explain in this chapter, we choose not to focus on the politics of a single nation or a particular collection of nations in this book. Instead, we try to understand political behavior through the explicit comparison of important

national-level attributes. In other words, we compare domestic political behavior from a cross-national perspective. As an example of our approach, we prefer to ask why some countries have two parties (like the United States) but others have many (like France) rather than examine the party systems in the United States and France separately. By taking this approach, we do not mean to suggest that the study of politics within individual countries should be excluded from the field of comparative politics. Nor do we mean to imply that cross-national comparison is a more worthy endeavor than studying a single country. Having said that, we believe that a comparison of national-level attributes is a reasonable introduction to comparative politics and one that will set a broad framework for the closer study of politics within individual polities at an advanced level.

urgent. For example, the Great Depression and the rise of fascism in Europe compelled comparative politics scholars in the middle of the last century to address two important topics. The first was what governments can and should do to encourage stable economic growth. In other words, what, if anything, can governments do to protect their citizens from the devastating consequences of market instability? The second was how to design electoral institutions in such a way as to reduce the likelihood that political extremists who oppose democracy, like the Nazi Party in Germany's Weimar Republic, might be elected. Both of these topics remain central to the field of comparative politics today.

In the aftermath of World War II, decolonization and the onset of the cold war combined to drive many comparative politics scholars to focus on the question of "political development." What, if anything, could be done to reduce political and economic instability in poor and underdeveloped countries? Research conducted at that time frequently focused on the proper relationship between the government and the market, with the central concerns of the day perhaps being best summarized in the title of Joseph Schumpeter's 1942 classic *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*. The cold war between the United States and the Soviet Union only heightened the urgency with which scholars struggled to understand the causes and consequences of communist revolutions in China and Cuba, as well as the political turmoil in places like Vietnam and Chile.

By the 1970s, economic instability, brought on by the Middle East oil crisis, returned to wealthy industrial countries. As a result, many comparative politics scholars revisited questions raised during the interwar years on their home turf of Western Europe. By now, however, the discussion had been narrowed somewhat because many scholars had come to accept the "postwar settlement," or "class compromise," that had essentially seen workers

accept a capitalist economy and free trade in return for the expansion of the welfare state and other benefits. With the widespread acceptance of capitalist economies across Western Europe, researchers now turned their attention to how the specific variety of capitalism that existed in a particular country might influence that country's capacity to weather economic storms created elsewhere.

In the waning days of the twentieth century, attention turned to the fallout created by the end of the cold war. Suddenly, dozens of countries in eastern and central Europe were negotiating the twin transitions from centrally planned economies to market-based ones and from one-party dictatorships to democracy. Now, in the twenty-first century, attention appears to be turning once again to questions of political and economic development.

President Bush's speech cited earlier is full of statements about the desirability and feasibility of democratization in Iraq. In effect, his speech sought to make the case that invading Iraq was an option that should be seriously considered because an Iraqi democracy was both desirable and achievable. To that end, much of what President Bush had to say was designed to convince people that democratization in Iraq was a realistic possibility, even if it was going to be difficult to achieve. It is worth noting that President Bush did not say that because democracy is a good thing, a democratic Iraq should be pursued no matter what the cost.² By raising the issue of whether it was actually feasible to establish a democracy, he was essentially stating that any decision about whether to invade Iraq would have to involve weighing the purported benefits of successful democratization against the expected costs in light of the probability of success.

President Bush made many claims about the benefits of democracy and the likelihood of successful democratization in Iraq in his speech. But what is the theoretical basis for these claims? What does the empirical evidence say? Exactly how would you begin to evaluate these and other, similar claims? In this book we introduce you to what comparative political scientists have to say about these types of questions. One of the central goals of this book is to provide you with the substantive knowledge and methodological tools to begin evaluating such claims for yourself.

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

Political science is the study of politics in a scientific manner. It is easy to see that, as it stands, this definition of political science is not particularly informative. For example, what is politics? What is science? We explicitly address these questions in Chapters 2 and 3 of Part I. With these preliminaries out of the way, we begin to examine the substantive questions relating to the causes and consequences of democracy that are the book's central focus. In Part II we contrast democracies and dictatorships. Specifically, we explore the origins of the modern state and ask two questions that have been central to the study of comparative politics. First, why are some countries democracies and others dictatorships? And second, does it matter?

2. President Bush could have made such an argument. Arguments to do the right thing, however, quickly encounter the problem of scarce resources. If there is an infinite number of ways that we can "do the right thing," how should we choose to deploy our limited resources?

In Part III we turn our attention to the different types of democracy that exist around the world. In particular, we examine the sometimes dizzying array of institutional forms that democracy can take on. Finally, in Part IV, we investigate how different types of democracy affect government performance and the survival of democracy itself.

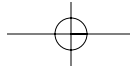
Our goal in writing this book is to provide answers that are relevant to the problems motivating the study of comparative politics today and that are reliable—that is, built on the best practices of contemporary political scientists. In what follows, we highlight some of the questions and issues that we address in the upcoming chapters. These issues have been of long-standing interest to comparative political scientists and remain vitally important for understanding the contemporary world.

State Failure

Although state failure has long been recognized as one of the key sources of political and economic instability around the globe, the horrific events of September 11, 2001, have lent a new urgency to the need to understand the conditions under which states fail and the conditions under which such power vacuums might foster international terrorism. The reason for this is that the September 11 terrorist attacks were planned from Afghanistan—a failed state in which the Taliban provided sanctuary for al-Qaida to train terrorists and plan attacks against various targets around the world. In Chapter 4 we define what political scientists mean when they speak of the “state” and describe what life is like in a failed state by looking in detail at Somalia since 1991. To a large extent, the case of Somalia resembles that of Afghanistan in that an Islamic group, the Supreme Council of Islamic Courts, is attempting to establish an Islamic state and is vying for control of the country against the internationally backed Transitional Federal Government and various other militias and warlords. The fear that Somalia will become a safe haven for terrorist activity as Afghanistan did in the 1990s has led the United States to become increasingly involved in Somali affairs over the past few years. To understand how one might fill the power vacuum that exists in failed states like Somalia and Afghanistan, it is necessary to understand the historical development of the modern state. What distinguishes the modern state from other forms of political organization? What led to its development? The rest of Chapter 4 focuses on addressing these types of questions.

Economic Determinants of Democracy

In October 2001 the United States responded to the September 11 terrorist attacks by invading Afghanistan to overthrow the Taliban. In addition to trying to capture Osama bin Laden and destroy al-Qaida’s terrorist infrastructure, one of the stated goals of this attack was to replace the Taliban with a more democratic form of government. In order to establish democracy intentionally and successfully in countries like Afghanistan and Iraq, however, it is important that we first understand the factors that encourage or discourage the emergence and survival of democracy. In other words, to critically evaluate President Bush’s suggestions about the types of factors that make democracy feasible in places like Iraq, we need to turn both to the facts of the specific case at hand and the considerable body of theoretical and empirical evidence that comparative political scientists have compiled on the determinants of democracy.

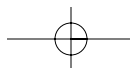


Recall that President Bush pointed to Iraq's "abundant resources" and its "skilled and educated people" as two factors that make democracy feasible in Iraq. Iraq is an oil-rich country (only Saudi Arabia has larger oil reserves) that has, either in spite of or because of this fact, an ailing economy. In 2005 Iraq had a gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of \$3,400 and it derived 95 percent of its foreign exchange earnings (assets denominated in foreign currencies that are needed to purchase imports) from oil. Between 1950 and 1980, the Iraqi economy underwent a rapid modernization process that transformed it from a traditional agricultural economy to the third largest economy in the Middle East. Over the next quarter of a century, however, war, international sanctions, and inefficiencies encouraged by a centrally planned economy undid many of these economic gains. The net effect of these recent developments has been an Iraqi economy that is poor by global standards. Since Iraq gained independence from British colonial rule in 1932, the country has been ruled by a monarchy and a series of dictatorships. It is reasonable to ask whether recent economic conditions such as the ones just described make it more or less likely for democracy to be established in a land in which it has not yet taken root.

In Chapter 6 we explore in great detail whether successful democracies can be created under such circumstances. Specifically, we examine how economic development and the structure of a country's economy influence the likelihood that a country will become and remain democratic. Some scholars have argued that countries are more likely to experience transitions from dictatorship to democracy as their economies become more modern—that is, less reliant on natural resource exports, more productive, more industrial, more highly educated, and so on. Other scholars have argued that such modernization may affect the survival of democracy but does not influence the emergence of democracy. In other words, they argue that modernization helps democracies stay democratic but does not help dictatorships become democratic. Although debate continues over the precise relation between economic modernization and democracy, the fact that Iraq does not fulfill many of the basic requirements of "modernization" means that comparative politics scholars on both sides of the debate would reach essentially the same conclusion regarding the prospects for democracy in Iraq—they are poor. On a related note, many political scientists have argued that democracy is unlikely to arise in countries whose economies are dependent on natural resource extraction, particularly if this extraction is capital intensive and has huge economies of scale, as is the case with oil. If you find such arguments persuasive after reading Chapter 6, then the "abundant resources" that President Bush pointed to in his speech may be a cause for concern, rather than hope, in regard to the attempt to build democracy in Iraq.

Cultural Determinants of Democracy

In the speech that we cited at the beginning of the chapter, President Bush also refers to cultural factors that might influence the process of democratization in Iraq. In doing so, he was responding to arguments that democratization in Iraq may be an uphill battle for cultural reasons. Over the years, many scholars have argued that democracy is incompatible with particular cultures. As President Bush correctly notes, though, precisely which culture is thought to be bad for democracy tends to change from one time period to the next, depending on



which countries in the world are democratic at a particular point in time. For example, Catholicism was seen as inimical to democracy during the 1950s and 1960s, when few Catholic countries in the world were democratic. As Catholic countries in southern Europe and Latin America became democratic in the 1970s and 1980s, the earlier view began to wane. Today, of course, the culture that is deemed most antithetical to democracy is Islam. Again, the basic reason why people commonly view Islam as bad for democracy tends to be that they do not see many contemporary Islamic democracies.

In Chapter 7 we examine the theoretical and empirical evidence behind arguments that some cultures are bad for democracy. In doing so, we suggest that the type of after-the-fact (or post-hoc) theorizing that leads people to conclude, for example, that there must be something about Islam that discourages democracy because there aren't many predominantly Muslim democracies in the contemporary world should be treated with considerable skepticism. If you find the case for such skepticism convincing, then you might be inclined to agree with President Bush's suggestion that Iraq's status as a majority Muslim country does not rule out the possibility of democratization there. Although you might agree with President Bush on this point, we explain in our discussion of the scientific method in Chapter 2 why you should still be suspicious of his claim that because Japan and Germany overcame alleged cultural barriers to democracy, Iraq can too. Such an argument is similar in structure to the claim that because we have two elderly relatives who smoked cigarettes their whole lives and did not develop lung cancer, we can safely do so as well.

If, after reading Chapters 6 and 7, you believe that the economic and cultural factors in Iraq make democratization feasible, you might begin to wonder whether military force is the best way to bring it about. We do not examine the attempts of foreign countries to impose democracy by force in any great detail, but we do examine the process by which countries transition from dictatorship to democracy in Chapter 8. In particular, we look at bottom-up transitions to democracy, in which the people rise up as part of a popular revolution to overthrow the dictator, and top-down transitions, in which authoritarian elites introduce liberalization policies that ultimately lead to democracy. Our discussion in this chapter offers an explanation for why dictatorships frequently appear so stable, why popular revolutions are so rare, and why popular revolutions, when they do occur, nearly always come as a surprise even though they often appear so inevitable in hindsight. By focusing on the strategic interaction of elites and masses involved in top-down transitions, we also emphasize the important role that information, beliefs, and uncertainty can play in these types of democratic transitions. Given that the United States and its allies have already invaded and are actively trying to encourage a democratic transition and consolidation, an understanding of the actual dynamics of democratic transitions as outlined in Chapter 8 should prove useful.

What's So Good about Democracy Anyway?

President Bush suggests that we should support "freedom" and "democracy" in Iraq because the Iraqi people, like people everywhere, want good things for themselves and their children. For example, he says in his speech that "[i]n our desire to care for our children and give them a better life, we are the same." Although difficult to establish scientifically, a combination of

introspection and human empathy would probably lead most of us to accept President Bush's claim that people all over the world want better lives for themselves and their children.³ The claim that democracy actually produces these "good things" is, in contrast, well within the purview of social science. Consequently, in Chapter 9 we examine whether democracy really does make a material difference in people's lives or not. Is it an accident that years of dictatorship have produced war and economic ruin in Iraq, or is this an outcome to be expected from all dictatorships? And, perhaps more important, will changing the type of regime in Iraq reverse these outcomes?

Our time has been referred to as the "age of democracy." Even dictatorships spend a fair amount of time and energy paying lip service to the wonders of democracy. The benefits of democracy that many people speak of may be real, but political scientists like to reach conclusions on the basis of logic and evidence rather than conventional wisdom and ideology. As a result, we devote considerable effort in Chapters 9 and 10 to examining whether or not there is a sound basis for pursuing democracy in the first place. In Chapter 9 we examine what the comparative politics literature has to say about the relative policy performance of democracies and dictatorships. As we demonstrate, the picture that emerges from this literature is significantly more nuanced than the rhetoric that politicians around the world typically employ. Although democracies seldom perform poorly in regard to the level of material well-being that they provide their citizens, they frequently fail to outperform a substantial number of dictatorships. In Chapter 10 we examine whether the actual process of democracy has some inherently attractive properties that would make it morally or normatively attractive over and above any material benefits it might produce. The picture that emerges from the comparative politics literature on this matter may surprise you. The bottom line is that there is no support for the idea that there is an ideal form of political organization—this includes democracy.

Institutional Design

Presumably referring to Germany and Japan, President Bush, in his speech with which we started this chapter, suggests that the United States left behind "constitutions and parliaments, not occupying armies" after World War II. This is not entirely accurate. For example, the U.S. army continued to occupy Japan for seven years after the war; it finally left in 1952. The situation in Germany was slightly more complicated in that the occupying force was an alliance between France, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Although the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) was created in 1949, four years after the end of the war, the occupation by the Allied forces of France, the United Kingdom, and the United States did not officially end until 1955. East Germany was controlled by the Soviet Union, and many would date the end of that occupation as 1990, when East Germany was finally reunited with West Germany. Although the claim that the United States did not leave occupying forces behind in Japan and Germany at the end of World War II is somewhat inaccurate, there is considerable truth in President Bush's broader intimation that the

3. As we note in Chapter 2, this book is devoted to the social scientific route to knowledge, but we accept that this is just one way to know things.

United States played an important role in encouraging the growth of democracy in these two countries. First, the United States gave billions of dollars in economic aid to both countries in an effort to rebuild war-torn economies. Second, U.S. government officials and scholars had a considerable influence over the design of the new constitutions in these countries. Interestingly, the new constitutions in West Germany and Japan were quite different from one another, and both were very different from the U.S. Constitution.

The decision to adopt different constitutions in West Germany and Japan might be explained by the fact that the constitutional designers were aware that the effects and suitability of particular institutions are likely to depend on local conditions, such as a country's social structure, political environment, geography, economy, and history. Although the German, Japanese, and American constitutions exhibit a great deal of variety in regard to the democratic institutions that they establish, they come nowhere close to exhausting the extraordinary number of possible combinations of these institutions seen around the world—there are many, many different ways to structure a democracy. This suggests that if one were convinced that democracy was the best alternative for a country like Iraq (without implying that there is any reason to believe that this decision should be one person's to make), then the next logical question is how one should design such a democracy. Designing a democracy presumes that we know both how various democratic institutions work and what their consequences will be. In Parts III and IV of this book, we examine what the comparative politics literature has to say in these regards.

A comparison of the German, Japanese, and U.S. constitutions might give us some idea of the variety of democratic institutions in the world, but only a systematic examination of the way these institutions work and the broader historical experience with them can give us any sense of the consequences of particular institutional choices. Chapters 11 through 14 in Part III are devoted to explaining how various democratic institutions work. Unlike the United States, which is a presidential democracy, Germany and Japan are parliamentary democracies. In Chapter 11 we explore differences between these types of democracy in detail. In particular, we focus on how governments form and survive in parliamentary and presidential democracies. Germany, Japan, and the United States exhibit even more variety in the electoral systems that they employ. The United States uses a single-member district plurality (SMDP) system for its national-level legislative elections. From 1948 to 1993, Japan used the single non-transferable vote (SNTV) to elect its legislators in multimember districts. The Federal Republic of Germany uses a mixed electoral system that basically combines a proportional representation electoral system with an SMDP one. In Chapter 12 we explore the dizzying variety of electoral systems that have been employed around the world and attempt to understand each of their strengths and weaknesses as regards things like proportionality, ethnic accommodation, accountability, minority representation, and the revelation of sincere preferences.

In Chapter 13 we discuss one of the primary effects of electoral laws: that they help shape a country's political party system. Some countries have many political parties, whereas others have few. Some party systems are divided mainly along ethnic lines, whereas others are divided primarily along class, religious, linguistic, or regional ones. Although the type of government and electoral system in a country is nearly always enshrined in a constitution or some other legal document, this is not the case for the type of party system. Instead, party

systems take their shape from the evolving nature of political competition in a country. In Chapter 13 we examine how the choice of electoral system combines with attributes of a country's social structure to determine both the number and types of parties that are likely to exist. In Iraq, there are substantial divisions between the two largest ethnic identity groups—Arabs (about 75 percent) and Kurds (about 25 percent)—and the two largest religious groups—Shia Muslims (about 60 percent) and Sunni Muslims (about 40 percent). We show in Chapter 13 that under these conditions, the choice of electoral laws is likely to play an important role in determining what types of political parties a democratic Iraq (should it survive its birth) will have and whether there will be many parties or few.

In Chapter 14 we briefly examine other institutional ways in which democracies vary. In particular, we focus on whether democracies are federal or unitary, whether they have a bicameral or unicameral legislature, and the extent to which they exhibit judicial independence. Continuing our comparison from before, Germany—as its name, the Federal Republic of Germany, would suggest—and the United States both employ a federal system, in which the activities of government are constitutionally divided between regional governments and the central government. In contrast, Japan employs a unitary system, in which all political power is constitutionally given to the central government. Germany, Japan, and the United States all have a bicameral legislature, in which legislative power is divided between two houses, but roughly 60% of the world's democracies have a unicameral legislature, in which legislative power is concentrated in a single house. Democracies also differ in the extent to which judges are independent from the influence of other branches of government. It turns out, however, that this is one area in which the written constitution is typically of little help to scholars seeking to understand the actual degree of judicial independence that exists in a country. For example, consider the United States and Japan. Although the U.S. Constitution makes no mention of judicial review—the idea that courts can decide whether a law is unconstitutional or not—judicial review has, nonetheless, developed in the United States. In contrast, the Japanese constitution explicitly states that judges shall be “independent in the exercise of their conscience and bound only by this Constitution and its laws,” but a recent study of Japanese judges suggests that they are, in practice, quite responsive to political pressures (Ramseyer and Rasmusen 2003). In other words, simply looking at a constitution can be quite misleading if one wishes to determine the actual degree of judicial independence in a country. All three of these institutional choices—federal versus unitary, unicameral versus bicameral, and judicial independence—can be thought of as forms of checks and balances that create institutional veto players in a political system. As such, their causes and consequences are closely related, and therefore we consider these different institutions in a single chapter.

As indicated in Chapters 11 through 14, democracies around the world exhibit many different institutional forms. Although President Bush appears to see the consequences of such institutional choices as straightforward, we do not. As a result, we believe that it is important to examine what comparative politics has to say about the expected outcomes associated with these different institutional forms. This is precisely what we do at some length in Chapter 15 (Part IV). In Chapter 15 we begin by examining the normative and material conse-

quences associated with different combinations of democratic institutions. For example, we ask whether all democracies produce equally satisfactory forms of representation. Are governments in some types of democracy more accountable, representative, and responsive than governments in other types of democracy? What are the expected economic consequences associated with different types of democracy?

We then review what the comparative politics literature has to say about how the institutions adopted by a country affect the survival of democracy. Many scholars have argued that the kind of ethnic and religious diversity observed in Iraq is a destabilizing force in democracies. Indeed, the divisions noted in Iraq have produced a history of violence and brutality, including the use of chemical weapons by the Arab-dominated government against the Kurds and sectarian violence between Sunnis and Shias. The decade-long war conducted by Saddam Hussein's Sunni-dominated government against the Shia-dominated government in Iran exacerbated all of this hostility and violence. But do these types of divisions make democratic stability impossible, or are there institutional mechanisms that can be put in place that might mitigate the effects of ethnic and religious differences? In addition to examining how institutions might mitigate the effects of ethnic and religious diversity, we also look at whether a country's choice of government—parliamentary or presidential—influences the prospects for democratic survival. There is considerable evidence that parliamentary democracies survive significantly longer than presidential democracies. But if this is true, one might wonder what explains the persistence of democracy in the United States? Comparative politics scholars have an answer to this question, but to appreciate it, we must be willing to travel through both time and space.

THE APPROACH TAKEN IN THIS BOOK

Many introductory comparative politics texts are organized around a sequence of individual country studies. Typically, one starts with Britain, before moving on to France and Germany. Next it's on to Russia, Japan, India, Brazil, and, nearly always, Nigeria. Occasionally, China and Mexico might make an appearance somewhere along the line. We believe that this approach has some limitations if the goal of an introductory class is to teach something other than descriptive information about a tiny fraction of the world's countries. The eight countries that make up the domain of a typical comparative politics textbook constitute little more than 4 percent of the world's 193 widely recognized independent states. Why should we focus on these countries and not others? The response from the authors of these textbooks might be that these countries are, in some sense, either the most important or the most representative countries in the world. We find the first of these claims—that they are the most important countries—to be displeasing and the second—that they are the most representative countries—to be questionable.

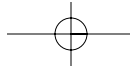
An introductory class in comparative politics has many goals. We believe that it should stimulate students' interest in the particular subject matter and introduce them to the principal concerns and findings of the field. It should also give students an insight into the extent

to which there is consensus or ongoing debate concerning those findings. Consequently, we have endeavored to focus our attention on the questions that comparative politics scholars have historically considered vitally important and those on which there is some growing consensus. It is undeniable that the causes and consequences of democracy are a central issue in comparative politics. It is for this reason that they are a central concern of our book. Less obvious perhaps is a growing consensus regarding the causes and consequences of particular sets of democratic institutions. We endeavor both to make this emerging consensus clearer and to provide the analytical tools required to critically engage it.

In light of the types of research questions that we want to address here, the traditional series of country studies found in most textbooks would not provide the most useful approach. First, very few countries exhibit sufficient variance across time with their experience of democracy to allow questions about democracy's causes and consequences to be answered by a single country study. Similarly, very few countries experience sufficient variation in their institutions across time to give us much leverage in gaining an understanding of their causes and consequences. For example, countries that adopt presidentialism or a particular set of electoral laws tend to retain these choices for long periods of time. In fact, when forced to choose those institutions again (for example, at the end of an authoritarian interruption), countries frequently make the same choice. It is for these reasons that comparisons across countries are important for understanding the research questions that are at the heart of this book—they provide the much-needed variation not often found in any one country.

Second, we—personally—do not possess the required memory and attentiveness to remember the relevant details of particular countries' institutions and cultures across many weeks and we, perhaps incorrectly, do not expect our students to either. Overall, we are not hopeful that we, or our students, can be expected in week ten of the semester when studying the intricacies of the Russian Duma to make comparisons with the Japanese Diet or the British House of Commons studied weeks earlier. Even if we could retain the relevant information across the course of a semester, it is not obvious that eight or ten countries would produce a sufficiently large variety of socioeconomic and institutional experiences to allow us to adequately evaluate the hypotheses that are central to the comparative politics subfield and this book. Given that our primary concern in this textbook surrounds institutional, social, economic, and cultural factors that remain fairly constant across time within countries, the most a comparison of a relatively small number of observations could accomplish is a collection of confirming cases. In Chapter 2 we discuss why such a practice is problematic from the standpoint of the scientific method.

We also believe that the traditional approach adopted by most textbooks has the unfortunate consequence of creating a significant disjuncture between what comparative political scientists teach students and what these scholars actually do for a living. Comparative politics scholars do sometimes engage in descriptive exercises such as detailing how laws are made, how institutions function, or who has power in various countries. This is the traditional subject matter of most textbooks. However, it is much more common for comparative scholars to spend their time constructing and testing theories about political phenomena in the world. In



reality, they are primarily interested in explaining, rather than describing, why politics is organized along ethnic lines in some countries but class lines in others, or why some countries are democracies but others dictatorships. Some textbook authors seem reluctant to present this sort of material to students because they believe it to be too complicated. However, we strongly believe that comparative political science is not rocket science. The fact that it is only relatively recently that the scientific method has begun to be applied to the study of political phenomena suggests to us that students should be able to engage the political science literature with relative ease. Indeed, we believe that, compared with other disciplines such as physics or mathematics, there is unusual room for students actually to make significant contributions to the accumulation of knowledge in comparative political science. As a result, one of the goals of our book is to introduce you to what comparative political scientists spend most of their time doing and to begin to give you the tools to contribute to the debates in our discipline.⁴

KEY CONCEPTS

comparative politics, 5

4. Clark and Reichert (1998) and Brambor, Clark, and Golder (2006, 2007) are examples of original research published in scientific journals in which our own undergraduate students have played significant roles.

