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INTRODUCTION

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Explain the difference between comparative politics and international politics.
2. Describe the purpose of political ideologies and how they differ from scientific theories.
3. Identify the differences between conservatism, liberalism, socialism.

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's both devastatingly complex and extraordinarily urgent. For example, the Great Depression and the rise of fascism in Europe compelled comparative politics scholars in the middle of the past 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 to reduce the likelihood that political extremists who oppose democracy, like the Nazi Party in Germany's Weimar Republic, might be elected. Both 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 book, *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 narrowed somewhat because many scholars had come to accept the "postwar settlement" or "class compromise" that had 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 turned their attention to

how the specific variety of capitalism that existed in a country might influence its 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. Early in the twenty-first century, attention turned to the question of state authority. The Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) proclaimed a worldwide caliphate in June 2014. In effect, it claimed religious, political, and military authority over Muslims wherever they lived in the world. Such a claim was a direct challenge to the primary organizing principle of the international system—sovereign states—that had been operative since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. Prior to 2019, ISIS controlled portions of Iraq and Syria, and had imposed Sharia law on the millions of people living in these regions. The ensuing persecution, chaos, and violence, in combination with the fallout from the Syrian Civil War, led many to flee the region, helping to produce an immigration crisis in Europe that continues to this day.

BOX 1.1 WHAT IS COMPARATIVE POLITICS?

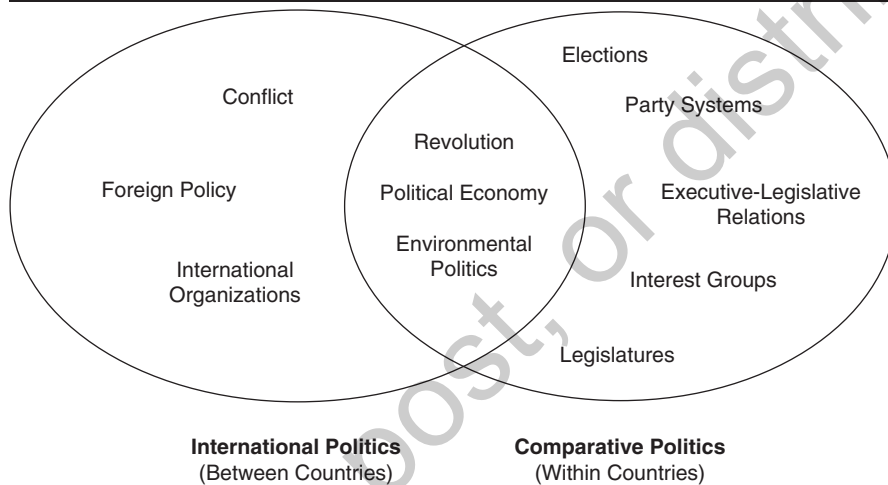
Traditionally, the field of comparative politics has been characterized by many related, but distinct, endeavors. An influential comparative politics textbook by Joseph LaPalombara (1974) is titled *Politics within Nations*. LaPalombara's title distinguishes comparative politics from international politics, which Hans Morgenthau (1948) famously calls *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's logically exhaustive. By defining comparative and international politics in this way, these scholars exhausted the logical possibilities involved in the study of politics. Political phenomena either occur within countries or between countries.

Still, all good scientific typologies should also be mutually exclusive. Whereas logical exhaustion implies that we've a place to categorize every entity that's observed, mutual exclusivity requires that it not be possible to assign any single observation to more than one category. Unfortunately, the typology just presented doesn't satisfy mutual exclusivity. A quick glance at today's newspapers 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's possible to fully understand US trade policy, say, toward China, without taking account of US domestic politics? 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's hard to categorize the study of revolutions, terrorism, and civil war as being solely in the domain of either comparative or international politics. Indeed, many insurgency movements have a separatist component that raises the very question of where the boundary between the "domestic" and "international" should lie.

Nonetheless, it's 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. 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, Egypt, and Nigeria. Scholars interested in political economy issues, such as migration, trade, central bank independence, and exchange rate policy, cross the divide between international and comparative politics.

FIGURE 1.1 ■ One View of Political Science



Students in the United States may wonder where US politics fits into this description. In most political science departments in the United States, US politics is considered a separate subfield. Does the fact that US 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. Historically, a second traditional definition of comparative politics has been that it's the study of politics in every country except the one in which the student resides. According to this definition, comparative politics is the study of what economists like to call "the rest of the world." This definition, however, seems 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's simply "Nigerian politics." We leave it to you to decide whether US 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. 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. Although this third definition is, to some extent, descriptively accurate, it's not particularly useful. As we show in Chapter 2, comparison is central to all scientific endeavors. 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's a rather vast field of research. For reasons we explain later in this chapter, we choose not to focus on the politics of a single country or a particular collection of countries in this book. Instead, we try to understand political behavior through the explicit comparison of important country-level attributes. In other words, we compare domestic politics from a cross-national perspective. As an example of our approach, we prefer to ask why some countries, like the United States, have two parties but others, like the Netherlands, have many rather than examine the party systems in the United States and the Netherlands separately. By taking this approach, we don't 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.

The rise of “populism” is perhaps one of the most striking features of the contemporary political world. On virtually every continent, leaders have risen to power claiming to represent “the people.” They typically argue that some elite has usurped command and is using the reins of power to serve their interests, or the interests of foreigners, rather than the interests of the true people. According to some, populism has contributed to the erosion of democracy around the world. It has also created significant challenges for political actors steeped in traditional ideologies such as liberalism, conservatism, and socialism.

In light of this recent development, we were tempted, while preparing the fourth edition of this textbook, to include a chapter on comparative political ideologies for the first time. Ultimately, we decided not to do this. The main reason for this is that political ideologies don't, in a sense, fit with the emphasis on scientific theories and empirical evidence found in the rest of the book. Comparative politics is a subfield of political science that employs the scientific method to examine the use of power and its consequences within countries. The scientific method involves formulating explanations (theories) that produce conjectures about the world that can be compared with experience. When scientific theories are constructed properly, they yield statements about the world that can, in principle, be tested. This allows us to use observation to determine the truth value of those statements and make inferences about the usefulness of our theories.

Suppose, for example, we're curious about why it appears that the sun comes up every day, and we conjecture that it's the result of a rooster crowing.¹ We shouldn't be comforted very much by the fact that a local rooster crows every morning shortly before the sun appears. After all, correlation doesn't imply causation. It would be helpful if we could manipulate our purported cause and observe the consequence of doing so. Along these lines, we might rouse a rooster in the middle of the night and induce it to crow. If the sun comes up, this observation would lead us to have increased confidence in our theory. If the sun doesn't come

¹ This example was inspired by the excellent children's book, *Little Peep*, by Jack Kent (1981).

up, it would be reasonable to doubt the veracity of our theory. Independent of the result of our experiment, we'd be doing science. We'd have found something we're curious about, we'd have offered an explanation for it that produces testable implications, and we'd have reasoned backward from observation regarding those implications to the soundness of our explanation.

One thing that can break the scientific method is if some people can interpret the sun not coming up after we induce the rooster to crow as evidence *against* our explanation and others can interpret it as evidence *in favor* of our explanation. In other words, the scientific method can break down if people can reach conflicting conclusions about our explanation from the same observation. This can occur for various reasons. Our application of the scientific method might be flawed. Perhaps we've misclassified some other bird as a rooster. Perhaps we're at a particular latitude where the sun doesn't appear to rise on the day we conduct our test. These sorts of problems can easily be addressed within the scientific enterprise through the practices of criticism and replication. Repeated trials with increasing attention to detail should sort them out. Psychologists, however, point to a variety of behaviors, such as motivated reasoning, confirmation bias, wishful thinking, or a desire for cognitive consistency, that might explain why individuals might sometimes resist the implications of evidence.²

People may also draw different inferences about the same theory based on the same observations because there's something wrong with the theory. In the next chapter, we'll see that an argument that ties predicted observations to a theory is valid if and only if the conclusions of the argument must be true when all the premises of the argument are true. Thus, if the expectation that the sun comes up when the rooster crows is validly derived from our theory, then an observation that the rooster crows and the sun didn't come up means that at least one of the premises of our theory must be false. Importantly, this chain of reasoning that lies at the heart of all scientific inquiry requires that the premises of our theory be logically consistent with each other. Logicians have demonstrated that anything can follow from a contradiction. As a consequence, a theory containing contradictions isn't scientifically useful because it's impossible to learn about its veracity by reasoning backward from rigorous observation and experimentation.

And therein lies the problem with political ideologies. Political ideologies such as conservatism, liberalism, and socialism differ from scientific theories because they typically involve contradictory statements. This interferes with our ability to use observation to evaluate the truthfulness of the assertions that a political ideology makes about the world. Unlike with science, it's important to recognize that the purpose of a political ideology isn't to understand the world. Instead, it's to motivate political action, give a specific meaning to the world, and justify a particular system of power. So, while contradictory premises spell disaster for scientific theories, they may just be the thing that progenitors of political ideologies are looking for. This is because they allow them to lead people to accept whatever conclusion they want them to.

Because we believe that action without understanding is irresponsible, the rest of our book will focus on scientific theories about political phenomena rather than political ideology. However, since you'll encounter people who'll use ideological arguments to try to influence your behavior and win your support, it's important for you to be able to recognize ideological arguments and understand a bit about how they work. As a result, we include a brief discussion of political ideology here.

² Steven Pinker (2021) provides an excellent introduction to common pitfalls in human reasoning.

POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

What is a political ideology? There are many answers to this question.³ The one we like best comes from the late historian of political thought, Issac Kramnick. He argues that a political ideology is a set of ideas, values, beliefs, and attitudes that are “put in the service of politicized interests involved in a struggle to affect the distribution of power and the outcomes of public policy” (Kramnick 1990, 30).⁴ This definition is important enough to warrant some attention.

First, a key aspect of an ideology is that it’s a *set* or *collection* of ideas, beliefs, values, and attitudes such that the elements of the set form a pattern in the sense that particular ideas tend to occur alongside certain beliefs (Freeden 1996). These ideas and beliefs are, in turn, associated with some values and attitudes and not others. Ideologies imply that the values and attitudes we hold constrain, in some sense, the ideas we use and the beliefs we hold, and vice versa.

Second, we should say a bit more about what we mean by “ideas,” “beliefs,” “values,” and “attitudes.” Political ideologies emphasize certain ideas and define concepts in particular ways. For example, the concepts of “freedom” and “hierarchy” are defined in different ways and are given varying amounts of emphasis depending on the ideology in question. Political ideologies also make competing claims about the way the world works. These competing claims or beliefs may be about human nature, the consequences of economic competition, the utility of experimentation, or a host of other things. To say that a political ideology involves statements about “value” is to say that it involves judgments about the relative worth of things such as people, institutions, or social and political outcomes like education, economic growth, freedom, or equality. Finally, ideologies both express and shape the opinions, *attitudes* (such as altruism, deference, individualism, or optimism), and emotional dispositions of their adherents.

Third, it’s important to recognize that not all collections of ideas, beliefs, values, and attitudes are *political* ideologies. Religions, as well as more secular philosophies like Confucianism or Scientism, also contain ideas, beliefs, values, and attitudes. As a result, they can also be thought of as ideologies. An ideology becomes a *political* ideology only when it’s used to influence the distribution of power in society.

Fourth, one of the key things that separates scientific ideas and beliefs from the ideas and beliefs in a political ideology is that while scientific ideas and beliefs can and should be used for political purposes, the value of ideas and beliefs in a political ideology often depends on their utility in furthering political action. Many have argued that scientific theories shouldn’t involve statements of value or attitude. The idea that we can clearly delineate statements of “fact” from statements of “value” has been controversial at least since David Hume ([1739] 1986) raised it. It’s uncontroversial, though, to say that while value judgments and attitudinal dispositions are often considered an unavoidable evil in scientific theories, they are central to the very purpose of political ideologies.

Three Political Ideologies: Conservatism, Liberalism, and Socialism

In what follows, we briefly discuss three influential political ideologies: conservatism, liberalism, and socialism. These political ideologies became salient in Western Europe between the

³ For those interested in examining what political ideologies are in more detail, Michael Freeden (1996), Karl Mannheim (1936, chap. 2), and Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels ([1845] 1998, vol. 1, book 1, sec. 3) are good places to start.

⁴ This approach to thinking about political ideologies fits closely with our discussion of culture and the development of distinct political-cultural configurations in Chapter 7 (Acemoglu and Robinson 2022, 2023).

Middle Ages and the middle of the nineteenth century. We focus on these ideologies because they've been influential around the world and continue to be relevant today.

Conservatism

One view of conservatism is that it's the natural ideology of traditional societies. Traditional societies are typically agricultural, religious, hierarchical, and patriarchal. Many have described the ideology of medieval England as being organized around "the great chain of being" that organizes all life in the universe in a single hierarchy with God, the creator of the universe, at the top and the "lowest" forms of life on earth at the bottom.⁵ Below God are other heavenly beings such as angels, which have their own hierarchy, then earthly beings with the monarch at the top, followed by (though this was controversial) leaders of the Church, then the nobility, the gentry, yeomen farmers, and craftsmen, with landless peasants at the bottom of the human hierarchy.

According to this traditional view, God arranged this hierarchy and placed all things in their position. The purpose of life was to glorify God and the best way to do that was to reinforce the hierarchy he created by performing the responsibilities that came with your position in the hierarchy. Men were consistently placed above women in this hierarchy, and a man's place in the hierarchy, with the possible exception of the clergy, was associated with the amount of land they controlled, with the king, who was male and technically owned all the land, at the top. A primary goal of this system of beliefs was the maintenance of the divine order. It's in this sense that it was "conservative." Since the system was divinely ordered, and God was unchanging, any change was seen as a form of harm to the system. According to this view of the world, the goal wasn't individual happiness, but the glorification of God. That said, proponents of conservatism would likely argue that it's God's nature to want those he created to flourish and be fulfilled, but that the path to true fulfillment is found in serving God and one's community by meeting the responsibilities assigned to someone in your position in the hierarchy. If you're king, be the best king you can be, if you're a peasant, be the best peasant you can be. In addition, freedom, in the modern conception of freedom from constraint, wasn't a priority. Proponents of the traditional view, however, would argue that we're truly free—free from worry, avarice, and other temptations—if we accept our position in the hierarchy and develop the desire to do what's right in fulfilling the responsibilities associated with our station in life. We'd find honor and respect in doing so.

Liberalism

While conservatism is associated with traditional society, liberalism is associated with modernity. Its tenets can be traced to ideas that first became prominent during the Protestant Reformation, the Scientific Revolution, and the Age of Enlightenment in Europe. These religious, scientific, and philosophical movements all shared a propensity to question traditional social, religious, and political ideas and found their political expression during the English Civil War and the Glorious Revolution in the seventeenth century and the US American and French Revolutions in the eighteenth century.

While most thinkers who contributed to what would eventually become known as liberalism were religious, they deviated from tradition by arguing for a "freedom of conscience." Religious views should be decided by the individual, rather than be dictated by religious or

⁵ Many other traditional societies have similar sustaining beliefs.

civilian authorities. In seventeenth-century England, this freedom of conscience took the form of what was called “nonconformity.” Nonconformity referred to the rise of religious sects that deviated from the teachings of the Church of England, just as the Church of England had deviated from the Catholic Church in Rome in the sixteenth century. Importantly, these non-conformists often emphasized the religious piety of the individual rather than participation in church rituals and sacraments.

Where traditional society emphasized obligation in a chain of hierarchical relationships and the importance of ceremony, faith, and ritual, the movements that led to liberalism emphasized individualism, rationalism, and freedom. For liberals, “individual human beings, rather than nations, races or classes are the starting point for any theorizing about society, politics, or economics” (Leach 2009, 25). What’s more, liberals tend to see society and its institutions as “purposefully created by individual humans in pursuit of their own self-interest” (25). As a result, individuals are “prior to and more important than society” (Shorten 2014, 25). The liberal commitment to rationality can be traced to the Enlightenment idea that the capacity for reason is perhaps the defining aspect of what it means to be human. Since each of us have the capacity for reason, liberals believed that individuals should be able to decide for themselves what is and isn’t in their own interest.

Given this, liberals tend to value freedom above all else. Individuals should be free from external constraints to decide what’s in their interest. They should also be allowed to pursue those interests without interference. John Stuart Mill famously summarized this view in *On Liberty* ([1859] 2002), where he argued that an individual’s pursuit of their interest was a private matter so long as such pursuit doesn’t directly harm others.

Another important element of liberalism is the right to own property. This right was enshrined by the French National Assembly in the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen* during the Revolution of 1789. John Locke, in his *Second Treatise on Civil Government* ([1689] 1980), defined property as a man’s “life, liberty and estate,” and argued that it’s the chief end of government to protect men’s property “against the injuries and attempts of other men.” In fact, he argued that the protection of property was the reason men enter society in the first place.

Locke defended the right to property, here understood as physical possessions or “goods,” by arguing that because men had a natural right to their own bodies, they also had a right to whatever they produced with their bodies. Consequently, when they manipulated natural resources with their labor, they had a natural right to possess the product of such labor. Liberalism has been used to provide a moral justification for self-interested economic behavior and the benefits of free exchange and competition and, therefore, relatively unregulated markets in goods, labor, and capital, including support for international trade, investment, and migration.

Socialism

Just as liberalism arose as a critique of the traditional order valued by conservatism, socialism can be seen as a critique of liberalism that became salient during the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century. While the role of private property is central to socialism’s critique of liberalism, liberalism’s view of freedom and equality are also targeted. The socialist critique of liberalism’s defense of the right to own property has two main parts. First, arguments such as Locke’s may have made sense when natural resources were abundant and available to all who wished to mix their labor with them. But it’s less defensible once society’s resources have been acquired by a subset of individuals so that there’s little chance for those who come afterward to acquire property (Macpherson 1964). Second, socialists argue that the institution of wage labor in capitalist

societies privileges the property rights of the owners of capital (machinery, raw materials, and so on) over the property rights of workers. This is because capitalists, not workers, take possession of the things produced by the workers' labor. Karl Marx, for example, argued that when labor and capital are mixed, in much the same way that Locke spoke of mixing labor and natural resources, value is created. Capitalists, not workers, though, take possession of this surplus value. Since this surplus didn't exist before production began, socialists view its appropriation by capitalists as fundamentally unjust.

In effect, while socialists might agree with liberalism's critique of traditional society (Marx and Engels [1848] 2014), they argue that there's an inherent contradiction in the *Declaration of the Rights of Man's* assertion that the purpose of government is to protect "life, liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression." If property remains private, they argue, it becomes the chief instrument of oppression. This means that it's difficult, if not impossible, for a government to simultaneously protect private property and preserve the ability to resist oppression. In practice, socialists would argue that liberalism's protection of private property has produced a capitalist society divided between those who own physical property that can be used in the production process (capital) and those who own only their labor. Further, capitalism privileges the interests of capital in such a way that it allows them to accumulate all the surplus that workers create, guaranteeing that workers will remain property-less forever. The socialist solution to this problem is to bring productive capital under the control of the workers, either in worker-owned cooperatives or through state ownership.

The socialist critique of liberalism's view of property leads to a parallel critique of liberalism's view of freedom and equality. Freedom in the classical liberal view of Locke and Mill is a "negative" freedom. It's the freedom to pursue one's life plan without interference from your neighbor or the government. But what good is this freedom if we don't possess the resources to develop our capacities and pursue our life plan? True freedom requires not only freedom *from* constraints but also the capacity to pursue our goals. This view of freedom has been termed "positive" freedom (Berlin 1958).

The positive view of freedom led socialists (and twentieth-century liberals) to place a greater emphasis on equality than classical liberals did. Classical liberals thought it was important that individuals be equal in the rights they possessed, but they argued that innate differences among individuals would lead to differences in outcomes. In light of these natural differences, the fact that some people are rich and some poor isn't a sign of injustice so long as all individuals were free to develop their capacities as best they could. All were free to "run the race" of societal competition. Socialists argue that differential access to the "means of production" means that capitalist society is fundamentally unequal and that the property-less majority didn't stand a chance in a race that was rigged in favor of those who began life with property. Only if wealth were distributed equally would the possibility of human development be a meaningful possibility for all.

Comparing Conservatism, Liberalism, and Socialism

Conservatism, liberalism, and socialism differ in their core ideas, beliefs, values, and attitudes (Kramnick 1990).⁶ Each of these ideologies contain different *ideas* about who makes up society. Conservatives tend to view society as an organic whole. Conservatives may recognize distinct

⁶Note that we'll be using the words "conservatives," "liberals," and "socialists" as they're typically used in Europe. Later, we'll explore the way that these ideologies have changed over time.

groups. For example, the *Ancien Regime* of prerevolutionary France was composed of the clergy (the First Estate), nobles (Second Estate), and commoners (Third Estate). However, these groups tend to be viewed as relevant only to the extent that they sustain the function of society as a whole. In contrast, liberals see society as made up of individuals. Socialists tend to focus on the historic role and welfare of groups, where the relevant groups are classes defined in terms of their relationship to the means of production: landowners versus peasants, owners of capital versus the industrial proletariat, and so on.

Political ideologies contain *beliefs* about human nature. Conservatives tend to focus on man's "fallen" (corrupt and unenlightened) nature. Similarly, classical liberals emphasize the tendency of individuals to pursue their own interests. They also stress the human capacity for self-improvement. Socialists see humans as inherently altruistic and attribute their observed selfishness to the context (such as capitalism) in which they find themselves. Ideologies also differ in their beliefs about the distribution of innate abilities. The respect for hierarchy within conservatism comes in part from the idea that some people are endowed with the capacity to lead and others to follow. Liberals, in contrast, tend to assume that all people are born with essentially the same capacities (they are, in effect, "blank slates") and that the differences we observe between people are the result of differences in education, opportunity, or habit formation. Socialists agree with the blank slate perspective of liberals and emphasize the way power is wielded in market relations to explain differences in outcomes. They believe that in the absence of market relations, all individuals will flourish to their full potential.

Political ideologies also contain *beliefs* about the way that individuals relate to each other in society. Conservatives tend to focus on the interdependence between people of differing social ranks. Those in higher places in the status hierarchy depend on their "underlings" for much of their daily survival with respect to things like the production and preparation of food and the production and upkeep of housing, furniture, and clothing. Similarly, those at the bottom depend on the wisdom, grace, and power of their "betters" to keep society running smoothly and effectively. Liberalism also emphasizes the mutual benefits that result from voluntary exchanges between people. However, it assumes that the position of individuals in society is more fluid. Individuals can experience dramatic changes in fortunes because some take advantage of opportunities to better themselves, while others don't. Socialists believe that the relationship between the classes in a capitalist society isn't voluntary, but is instead exploitative, zero sum, and fundamentally conflictual.

Political ideologies also differ in the *values* they pursue. Conservatives place considerable value on tradition, duty, honor, and respect (Haidt 2013). Liberals place great value on economic growth and freedom. Socialists assign more value to equality and class solidarity than either freedom or economic growth. The organic conception of society associated with conservatism leads them to emphasize the well-being and preservation of the group, understood as a nation, a civilization, or an ethnic, linguistic, or religious group. Liberals and socialists tend to be more cosmopolitan or internationalist in their outlook.⁷

Finally, political ideologies also differ in the *attitudes* of their typical adherents. Conservatives tend to be pessimistic. Because of man's fallen nature, there's only so much we can do. Some will be masters, some slaves. All we can do is make the best of a bad situation. As a result, conservatives tend to be risk averse (Oakeshott 1962). Liberals, in contrast, tend to be

⁷That said, liberalism played an important role in the creation of the idea of the "nation-state" in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe.

optimistic and have a great deal of confidence in the role that education and social reform can play in encouraging human flourishing (Gopnik 2019). While education may not change our fundamentally selfish nature, our selfishness can lead us to engage in exchange and competition that leaves us all better off.

Adherents of the different ideologies also differ in their attitudes toward the past, present, and future, as well as the notion of change. Conservatives tend to resist change and favor the status quo, while liberals and socialists tend to favor change. The embrace of change by liberals leads them to adopt an enthusiastic, but pragmatic, approach to innovation and experimentation (Gopnik 2019), while socialists tend toward one or another orthodox view of the most efficient way to progress toward a socialist future. Conservatives tend to be skeptical of our ability to understand the complexity of social arrangements and are, therefore, apt to defer to the traditional way of doing things and to emphasize the danger and trade-offs involved in any proposed change (Sowell 2007). As products of the scientific and cultural revolutions, liberals (and, perhaps, socialists as well) are more likely to embrace “the idea that human affairs can be improved through the unfettered application of reason” (Shorten 2014, 23).

Ideological Change in Conservatism, Liberalism, and Socialism

Those of you familiar with the modern use of the terms “conservative,” “liberal,” and “socialist,” particularly those in the United States, may have bristled at our description of these three political ideologies so far. This is because these ideologies have experienced considerable change over the past two centuries. While it’s possible and desirable for people to change their minds in light of new experiences, the changes in the way that actors define different political ideologies highlights the fact that ideologies aren’t abstract ideas evaluated by disinterested parties. Instead, they are sets of ideas that are put to use to pursue political interests. Over the course of time, actors disposed to one ideology or the other experience changes in their fortune and may, therefore, come to reevaluate the ideas, beliefs, values, and attitudes they embrace in an attempt to better affect the distribution of power and the outcomes of public policy. In addition, the strategic nature of politics (Chapter 3) means that other changes in the political environment might cause people to adopt new positions even when their underlying values haven’t changed. Further, because ideologies typically contain contradictory premises, it’s relatively easy to use existing beliefs to justify novel policy choices without appearing utterly opportunistic. Consequently, in response to new information or new circumstances, people may change elements of the political ideology to which they’re committed rather than switch to a different ideology. We won’t attempt to explain all these changes, but we’d like to point to a few examples of the evolution of political ideologies to emphasize their fluidity.

Perhaps the biggest change in beliefs has, ironically, occurred among some people who call themselves conservatives. Above, we described conservatism as the natural ideology of traditional societies. In truly traditional societies, though, the “conservative perspective” we’ve described might simply have been taken for granted as an expression of “just the way things are.” As a self-conscious ideology, many scholars date modern conservatism to “the reaction of the feudal-aristocratic-agrarian classes to the French Revolution, liberalism, and the rise of the bourgeoisie at the end of the eighteenth century and during the first half of the nineteenth century” (Huntington 1957, 454).

British member of Parliament Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, written in 1790, is often considered the first self-conscious modern display of conservative ideology.

Samuel Huntington (1957) summarizes the key components of Burke's conservatism as (i) man is basically a religious animal, (ii) existing institutions embody the wisdom of previous generations, (iii) man is a creature of instinct and emotion as well as reason, (iv) the community is superior to the individual, (v) men are unequal, and (vi) efforts to remedy existing evils usually result in even greater ones.

Huntington argues that Burke's own behavior reveals that conservatism is flexible or fluid enough that it can be used to justify quite different policies and institutions in different situations. For example, supporters of tradition and the divine right of kings during the English Civil War in the 1640s and the Restoration of King Charles II in 1660 found a way to reconcile their beliefs with the "Revolutionary Settlement" following the Glorious Revolution of 1688 even though it codified the ouster of King James II and the idea that the monarch must rule alongside parliament. These changes in governance structure were radical when they were adopted. Indeed, those proposing them were referred to as Radicals. Once these changes became inevitable, though, conservatives were able to justify them in terms of precedent by referring to the "great and ancient" constitution going back to before the *Magna Carta* of 1215 that gave the people the right to constrain the king's behavior (Dickinson 1977). Burke himself, the archetypical conservative, was a supporter of these institutions as well as democratic institutions in the United States. He also supported Hindu institutions in India and absolutist monarchy in France (Huntington 1957). Huntington argues that these apparent inconsistencies are understandable if we think of conservatism not as an aristocratic ideology that's defined by a particular moment of reaction against liberalism in the eighteenth century, but as an ideology that's defined in terms of the situation its adherents confront. This doesn't mean that conservatism can be stretched to justify anything its adherents want to do. For Huntington, "the essence of conservatism is the passionate affirmation of the value of existing institutions" (1957, 455).

Understanding conservatism in this way helps us make sense of Burke's simultaneous support of very different types of government in different places. What he's supporting in each instance is the *status quo*. As Michael Oakeshott (1962, 178) writes, "whenever stability is more profitable than improvement, whenever certainty is more valuable than speculation, whenever familiarity is more desirable than perfection, whenever agreed error is superior to controversial truth, whenever the disease is more sufferable than the cure, whenever the satisfaction of expectations is more important than the 'justice' of the expectations themselves, whenever a rule of some sort is better than the risk of having no rule at all, a disposition to be conservative will be more appropriate than any other."

This also helps us understand how in the United States, supporters of a slave-based Southern aristocracy in the middle of the nineteenth century and supporters of free markets and individual rights in the middle of the twentieth century could both think of themselves as conservatives. Both groups were defending institutions they argued were the product of the wisdom of the ages. Importantly, the US example demonstrates that this ideological fluidity is not unique to conservative ideology. The opponents of conservatives in the first period were liberal Northern abolitionists who believed that slavery contradicted the Enlightenment idea that all men were created equal, an idea enshrined in the Declaration of Independence by slave owner Thomas Jefferson. The opponents of the conservatives in the latter case were so-called "New Deal" liberals who argued that unbridled capitalism made it impossible for the "less well off" to exercise the freedoms that were promised at the nation's founding. For these liberals, the "progressive" way forward was to be obtained by regulating capitalism in such a way as to protect society from the market instability experienced during the Great Depression through

public investment, regulation, and an expanding social safety net. These “big state” policies would have been deemed unacceptable infringements on human freedom by nineteenth-century liberals.

Interestingly, similar policies were being advocated at the same time by socialists in many European countries. In the nineteenth century, however, socialists were as likely as not to oppose the expansion of government policies aimed at providing a safety net for the least well off as they were to support them. This is because many socialists believed that such policies were likely to deradicalize workers and make them less likely to support a socialist revolution. The fact that the conservative German Chancellor Otto von Bismark played an important role in the introduction of social insurance in Imperial Germany is often used to argue that the welfare state was designed to preserve, not transform, capitalism. This tendency for conservatives to protect the less advantaged members of society was particularly pronounced in Christian Democratic parties in twentieth-century Europe (Chapter 13). It derived from a sense of obligation known as *noblesse oblige* that can be traced to Christian scripture: “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required” (Luke 12:48). To this day, some socialists criticize policies advocated by liberals as being “*noblesse oblige*” because they—at best—redistribute wealth rather than transform the process of wealth creation.

If you’re having a hard time understanding why the same set of policy recommendations might be seen as liberal in one place and socialist in another, or liberal at one point in time and conservative at the other, we’ve made ourselves understood! Because ideologies are collections of ideas, beliefs, values, and attitudes used for political purposes, ideologies tend to undergo transformation as circumstances change. A particular set of ideals, beliefs, values, and attitudes is what economists would call a form of “capital”—something that doesn’t deteriorate completely with its use. An ideology is a set of tools that can help individuals achieve their political goals. Ideologies are a form of “social” capital because they’re tools that are used by groups who must agree on enough of the core content of the ideology to prevent the coalition supporting, and supported by, the ideology from falling apart. For this reason, while ideologies are subject to change when the interests of their users change, they’re not endlessly elastic and can’t be stretched without cost to cynically justify any position that serves an individual’s interest. One can, therefore, say of ideologies what Marx ([1852] 1926) said of history: People make their own ideologies, but they do not make them as they please.

Conservative, Liberal, and Socialist Ideologies Today

Changes in the global economy such as marked increases in migration, international trade and capital flows, and automation have reduced global inequality while simultaneously increasing inequality within countries (Milanovic 2012). Whatever the potential net benefits of these phenomena, they’ve resulted in large segments of societies around the world who believe that their interests aren’t being served by their governments.

In the early stages of the current period of globalization, parties of varying ideological hues converged on a set of economic policies that supported a liberal economic order. Across the political spectrum, parties seemed to have accepted increases in cross border flows of goods, capital, and people as either necessary evils or the secret to peace and prosperity.⁸ This consen-

⁸ William Clark (2003) argues that, far from a new development, the convergence in economic policy, even while competing parties differ in the things they say about policy, is a hallmark of liberal democracy.

sus, confusingly called the neoliberal consensus, drew support from free market conservatives, such as Ronald Reagan in the United States and Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom, as well as pragmatic members of left-wing parties, such as British *Labour Party* leader Tony Blair, German *Social Democrat* Gerhard Schröder, American *Democrat* Bill Clinton and, more reluctantly, French *Socialist* François Mitterrand. This convergence required both sets of actors to alter their ideological perspective. They all came to espouse policies that were much closer to those associated with classical liberalism than those associated with traditional conservatism or the “welfare Keynesianism” that had dominated the first few decades of the post–World War II era. This convergence, as well as the collapse of the Soviet Union, led many to speculate, as someone seems to do every couple of decades, that we’d reached the “end of ideology” (Bell 1962; Fukuyama 1992).

While ideologues were converging on economic issues, though, they seemed to be moving further apart on so-called social issues such as the role of religion in politics, the protection of minority rights, and sexual politics. Conservatives continued to advocate traditional positions on these social issues. Members of liberal and socialist parties have tended to embrace ideas that valued individual choice on such matters. Over time, however, the left’s protection of the rights of minorities has been transformed from a focus on the protection of *individual* liberties to the protection of *group* rights (Lilla 2017). This has resulted in liberals adopting the conservative perspective that there are “types” of people and that the pursuit of group interests should be thought of in terms of their identity (who they are) rather than their behavior (what they do). At the same time, conservatives have increasingly argued for gender- and color-blind policies, justifying them in terms of the classical liberal principles of individualism and meritocracy.

Against this backdrop, the rise of populism can be seen as a reaction to the perceived lack of responsiveness on the part of “established” parties to the plight of those suffering economic dislocation. Partly in response to the identity politics of the left, right-wing populists have argued that the increased presence of immigrants in many countries is a particularly noxious element of the liberal world order that needs correcting. On the one hand, a concern with determining who is and who isn’t rightfully considered a member of the nation is consistent with traditional conservative values. On the other hand, though, right-wing populists also claim to share a hostility toward existing elites and a willingness to erode, or even actively dismantle, the norms and institutions they perceive as keeping them in place. This is why they’re often referred to as the radical right. If Huntington and Oakeshott are correct that the essence of conservatism is the desire to preserve existing institutions, then right-wing populists may have stretched the concept of what it means to be a conservative to its breaking point. Populists seem less interested in preserving existing institutions than in recapturing a perhaps mythical past where “we” were “one people” and women, racial, and sexual minorities “knew their place.”

In this sense, right-wing populists might be viewed more as reactionaries rather than conservatives (Huntington 1968). But the tug of the past isn’t unique to populists. The free market conservatives of recent decades haven’t been looking to preserve existing institutions either. Instead, they’ve sought a return to (an idealized version of) unfettered capitalism that’s supposed to have existed before the rise of the welfare state. And finally, “progressive” liberals, or perhaps, left-wing populists, like senator and former presidential candidate Bernie Sanders in the United States, often speak glowingly of a time before globalization when a single paycheck could provide a “middle-class lifestyle” for a family of four, not mentioning that women and people of color were systematically excluded from the right to earn such a paycheck.

The way political ideologies have been, and continue to be, transformed over time is consistent with the idea that people generally pursue their own interests and that they use ideologies as a tool to gather individuals into groups to pursue common interests. In democratic societies (Chapters 11–15), it's often necessary to assemble individuals with disparate interests into groups large enough to win office and control a sufficient majority to make policy in pursuit of those interests. Ideologies can be used to mobilize, or perhaps more importantly demobilize, political actors in dictatorships as well (Chapter 9). While you might be able to convince people exactly like yourself that a particular policy change is in their interests, to assemble a broad enough coalition to win the political struggle for power and influence, it might be helpful to convince others that there are principled reasons for a change in policy. Pointing to how the policy you favor is consistent with shared ideological commitments can be very helpful in this task. And, as we noted earlier, doing so convincingly is helped, rather than hurt, by the fact that political ideologies typically contain at least one contradiction among their central assumptions.

Because this book is meant to introduce you to an important subfield of political science and not serve as a guide to changing the distribution of power and outcomes of public policy, we focus on scientific theories as opposed to political ideologies in the remainder of this book. Of course, attempts by political actors to use or strategically manipulate ideologies to mobilize others for political action are certainly things about which we could construct scientific theories. Along these lines, in Chapter 7 we explicitly discuss how political actors can build cultural and ideological configurations to justify and legitimize particular distributions of power. The trade-off between ideological breadth and ideological orthodoxy is likely to depend on how large the groups are that you need to mobilize. And the optimal size of those groups is likely to be connected to the rules used to elect a country's leaders (Chapter 12) and the rules dictating the relationship between the branches of government (Chapter 11). As Chapter 13 suggests, it's not an accident that right-wing populists have formed viable parties in countries with multiparty systems but have largely operated in two-party systems as wings of existing parties such as the Republicans in the United States and Conservatives in the United Kingdom.

Unfortunately, the scientific study of how political ideologies change and how they might be strategically manipulated by political actors isn't sufficiently developed to be easily included in an introductory text. Nevertheless, we hope that the above discussion might help you recognize when ideological (rather than scientific) arguments are being made—perhaps, unintentionally, even in the pages of this book. We also hope that the rest of the book provides you with tools that will allow you to navigate the complex ideological waters of our times both more critically and more effectively.

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

Political science is the study of politics in a scientific manner. It's easy to see that, as it stands, this definition of political science isn't particularly informative. For example, what's politics? What's 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 and dictatorship 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 why some countries are democracies and others dictatorships. In Part III we turn our attention to the different types of democracies and dictatorships that exist around

the world. In particular, we examine the sometimes dizzying array of institutional forms that countries can adopt. 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.

The Approach Taken in the 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're the most important countries—to be displeasing and the second—that they're the most representative countries—to be questionable.

An introductory class in comparative politics has many goals. We believe that it should stimulate the interest of students 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's consensus or ongoing debate concerning those findings. Consequently, we've tried to focus our attention on the questions that comparative politics scholars have historically considered vitally important and those on which there's some growing consensus. It's undeniable that the causes and consequences of democracy and dictatorship are a central issue in comparative politics. It's for this reason that they're a central concern of our book. Less obvious perhaps is a growing consensus regarding the causes and consequences of particular sets of autocratic and democratic institutions. We try to make this emerging consensus clearer as well as provide you with the analytical tools required to critically engage with it.

In light of the types of research questions we want to address here, the traditional series of country studies found in most textbooks wouldn't provide the most useful approach. First, very few countries exhibit sufficient variation 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's 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—don't possess the required memory and attentiveness to remember the relevant details of particular countries' institutions and cultures across many weeks, and

we, perhaps incorrectly, don't expect our students to either. Overall, we're 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's 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 to provide 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's much more common for comparative scholars to spend their time constructing and testing theories about political phenomena in the world. In reality, they're 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 isn't rocket science. The fact that it's 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's unusual room for students to actually 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.

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