



ESSENTIALS OF

# COMPARATIVE POLITICS



SIXTH EDITION



PATRICK H. O'NEIL

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**POLITICS**

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W. W. NORTON & COMPANY  
NEW YORK • LONDON

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Printed in Canada

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Composition: Six Red Marbles

Manufacturing: TC–Transcontinental Printing

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**ISBN 978-0-393-62458-8 (pbk.)**

W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10110-0017

[www.norton.com](http://www.norton.com)

W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., Castle House, 15 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BS

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Patrick H. O'Neil** is Distinguished Professor of Politics and Government at the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington. He received his Ph.D. in political science from Indiana University. Professor O'Neil's teaching and research interests are in the areas of authoritarianism and democratization. His past research focused on Eastern Europe, and his current research deals with the Middle East, particularly Iran. His publications include the books *Revolution from Within: The Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party and the Collapse of Communism* and *Communicating Democracy: The Media and Political Transitions* (editor).





# PREFACE

The past three decades have seen the dramatic transformation of comparative politics: the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the spread of democracy across the globe, the rise of new economic powers in Asia, the deepening of globalization. For a time, many looked upon these changes as unmitigated progress that would bring about a decline in global conflict and produce widespread prosperity. Recently, however, there has been growing doubt, as the uncertainties of the future seem to portend more risk than reward, more inequality than prosperity, more conflict than peace. One can no longer suggest that a country and its citizens can function well without a good understanding of the billions of people who live outside of its borders. Clearly we ignore such uncertainty at our peril.

This textbook is meant to contribute to our understanding of comparative politics (the study of domestic politics around the world) by investigating the central ideas and questions that make up this field. It begins with the most basic struggle in politics—the battle between freedom and equality and the task of reconciling or balancing these ideals. How this struggle has unfolded across place and time represents the core of comparative politics. The text continues by emphasizing the importance of institutions. Human action is fundamentally guided by the institutions that people construct, such as culture, constitutions, and property rights. Once established, these institutions are both influential and persistent—not easily overcome, changed, or removed. How these institutions emerge, and how they affect politics, is central to this work.

With these ideas in place, we tackle the basic institutions of power—states, markets, societies, democracies, and nondemocratic regimes. What are states, how do they emerge, and how can we measure their capacity, autonomy, and efficacy? How do markets function, and what kinds of relationships exist between states and markets? How do societal components like nationalism, ethnicity, and ideology shape political values? And what are the main differences between democratic and non-democratic regimes, and what explains why one or the other predominates in various parts of the world? These are a few of the questions we will attempt to answer.

Once these concepts and questions have been explored, subsequent chapters will apply them directly to various political systems—developed democracies, communist and postcommunist countries, and developing countries. In each of these,

the basic institutions of the state, market, society, and democratic or nondemocratic regime all shape the relationship between freedom and equality. What basic characteristics lead us to group these countries together? How do they compare to one another, and what are their prospects for economic, social, and democratic development? Finally, we will conclude with a discussion of globalization, linking what we have studied at the domestic level to wider international forces.

The format of this text has long differed from that of traditional comparative politics textbooks. In the past, these books were built around a set of country studies, with introductory chapters for the advanced, postcommunist, and less-developed world. While such a textbook can provide a great deal of information on a wide range of cases, the trade-off is often a less thorough consideration of the basic grammar of comparative politics. We might know who the prime minister of Japan is but have less of an understanding of political culture, mercantilism, or state autonomy—all ideas that can help us make sense of politics across time and place. This text strives to fill this gap and can be used alongside traditional case studies to help draw out broader questions and issues. By grasping these concepts, arguments, and questions, students will better understand the political dynamics of the wider world.

This thematic approach to the essential tools and ideas of comparative politics is supported by a strong pedagogy that clarifies and reinforces the most important concepts. Key concepts lists and “Institutions in Action” boxes in every chapter highlight important material that students will want to review. Numerous figures and tables illustrate important concepts and provide real world data related to the topic at hand. Timelines and thematic maps show important political developments over time and around the globe. The importance of institutions is emphasized by the opening and closing discussions in each chapter.

*Essentials of Comparative Politics* is designed to offer instructors flexibility in creating the course that they want to teach. In addition to the core textbook, a corresponding casebook and a reader are also available. *Cases in Comparative Politics*, coauthored by Karl Fields, Donald Share, and myself, applies the concepts from *Essentials of Comparative Politics* to thirteen country studies. An integrated version of both texts, with shorter case studies, *Cases and Concepts in Comparative Politics*, is also available. In *Essential Readings in Comparative Politics*, my coeditor, Ronald Rogowski, and I have selected key readings to accompany each chapter in the textbook. Norton also offers the textbook, casebook, and integrated version in e-book format. Support materials for instructors, including a Test Bank, Power-Point lecture outlines, and a supplementary Image Bank, are also available at <http://www.wwnorton.com/instructors>.

Many people have contributed to this work. The text itself is inspired by Karen Mingst's *Essentials of International Relations*. When Norton released Mingst's book nearly 30 years ago, I was struck by its concision and came to the conclusion that comparative politics would benefit from a similar kind of text. At Norton, Peter Lesser first encouraged me to submit a proposal for this textbook, and Roby Harrington encouraged me to develop the initial chapters, supported its publication, and provided important feedback at many stages. As editor, Ann Shin held me to a high standard of writing argumentation in the first edition. For the second, third, and fourth editions, Peter Lesser, Aaron Javicas, and Jake Schindel took over editorial duties, helping to further improve the work. In the fifth and sixth editions, Peter, who first challenged me to write this text, returned to the helm to guide me through a number of complicated revisions and edits that have improved the content and style. Samantha Held has been indispensable in managing all the details across several texts and ensuring consistency and accuracy. I am grateful to all five of them for their investment in this work.

In addition to the people at Norton, many academics have helped improve this work. Most important have been my colleagues at the University of Puget Sound, in particular Don Share and Karl Fields. Over many years Don, Karl, and I have taught alongside each other, and learning from these two outstanding teachers and scholars helped generate many of the ideas in this book. Don and Karl continue to provide important feedback and numerous suggestions. I am fortunate to have such colleagues.

Many thanks as well to those numerous reviewers who have provided useful critiques and suggestions that have improved this work:

James Allan, Wittenberg University  
David C. Andrus, College of the Canyons  
Oana Armeanu, University of Southern Indiana  
Jason Arnold, Virginia Commonwealth University  
Alan Arwine, University of Kansas  
Alex Avila, Mesa Community College  
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Marni Berg, Colorado State University  
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Joon S. Kil, Irvine Valley College  
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Hootan Shambayati, Florida Gulf Coast University

Steve Sharp, Utah State University, Logan  
Richard Stahler-Sholk, Eastern Michigan University  
Boyka Stefanova, University of Texas at San Antonio  
Aaron Stuvland, George Mason University  
Sandra L. Suarez, Temple University  
Markus Thiel, Florida International University  
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Mark A. Wolfgram, Oklahoma State University  
Stacy Philbrick Yadav, Hobart & William Smith Colleges  
Jeremy Youde, University of Minnesota, Duluth  
Lyubov Zhyznomirska, Saint Mary's University

Finally, I would like to thank the students of the University of Puget Sound for their questions and insights, the university administration for its support of this project, and my family for their patience.

Patrick H. O'Neil  
Tacoma, Washington  
May 2017





## AFRICA





## ASIA



THE MIDDLE EAST



## EUROPE



CENTRAL AND SOUTH AMERICA



**NORTH AMERICA**

ESSENTIALS OF

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**COMPARATIVE**  
**POLITICS**

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SIXTH EDITION



Protesters in Yemen attend a rally to commemorate the anniversary of Mohamed Bouazizi's death. In December 2010, the Tunisian street vendor set himself on fire to protest corruption in his home country, inspiring the Arab Spring that ignited the region in the following year. Members of the crowd hold a banner that reads, "We are all Bouazizi."

# INTRODUCTION

## *What can political science tell us that we don't already know?*

Who would have predicted 10 years ago that the Middle East would change so much in such a short period of time? Dramatic historical events often take scholars, politicians, and even participants by surprise. For example, in the 1980s few people expected that communism would come to a dramatic end in Eastern Europe—if anything, modest reforms in the Soviet Union were expected to give communist institutions a new lease on life. Following the collapse of communism and increased democratization in parts of Asia and Latin America, many scholars expected that regimes in the Middle East would be next. But by the turn of the century, these expectations appeared unfounded; authoritarianism in the region seemed immune to change. Scholars chalked this up to a number of things—the role of oil, Western economic and military aid, lack of civic institutions, or the supposedly undemocratic nature of Islam.

Yet again, history took us by surprise. The opening events of the Arab Spring were disarmingly simple. In December 2010, a young Tunisian man, Mohamed Bouazizi, set himself on fire to protest police corruption and government indifference. Angry protests broke out shortly thereafter, and the long-standing government was overthrown within weeks. New protests then broke out across the region in January and February 2011. In Egypt, President Hosni Mubarak was forced to resign after 30 years in office. In Libya, protests turned to widespread armed conflict and





led to the killing of Muammar Gaddafi after more than 40 years of rule. In Syria, Bashar al-Assad clung to power as peaceful protests eventually turned into a civil war that has devastated the country, killed over 400,000 people, and triggered a migration crisis.

The immediate political future of these and other countries in the region is uncertain. Tunisia has transitioned into a fragile democracy, while Egypt has returned to dictatorship; Libya is plagued by regional and tribal conflict, while Syria has drawn in foreign forces, some bent on establishing an Islamist political system across the region. At the same time, an entire range of countries in the region have faced down public protests or not faced them at all. This is especially true among the monarchies of the Persian Gulf, where one might have imagined that these anachronistic forms of rule would have been the first to fall.

We are thus left with a series of puzzles. Why did the Arab Spring take place? What was the source of these tumultuous changes—revolution, civil war, and one of the largest refugee crises in recent history? Why did these uprisings take different forms and differ in the level of violence from place to place? Finally, why did some countries not see significant public protest to begin with? The hopeful nature of an Arab Spring has since been replaced by a much darker sense of the future politics of the region. Democracy, even political stability, seems further away than ever, and there are serious repercussions for the Middle East and beyond. Can political science help us answer these questions? Can it provide us with the tools to shape our own country's policies in this regard? Or are dramatic political changes, especially regional ones, simply too complex?

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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- Explain the methods political scientists use to understand politics around the world.
  - Discuss whether comparative politics can be more scientific and predict political outcomes.
  - Define the role and importance of institutions in political life.
  - Compare freedom and equality and consider how politics reconciles the two across countries.
-

During the past 25 years, the world has seen an astonishing number of changes: the rise of new economic powers in Asia, the collapse of communism, revolutions across the Middle East, the return of religion to politics, the spread of information technology and social media, and the shifting effects of globalization. Many of the traditional assumptions and beliefs held by scholars, policy makers, and citizens have been overturned. New centers of wealth may reduce poverty, but they may also increase domestic inequality. Democracy, often seen as an inexorable force, can founder on such obstacles as religious or economic conflict. Technological change may create new, shared identities and sources of cooperation, but it can destabilize and fragment communities.

One pertinent example, which we have seen emerge in the civil wars in Syria and Iraq, is the role of ethnic and religious conflict. Why does this form of political violence occur? Is it a response to inequality or political disenfranchisement? Is it a function of cultural differences, a “clash of civilizations”? Is it fostered or tempered by globalization? Perhaps the explanation lies somewhere else entirely, beyond our purview or comprehension. How can we know what is correct? How do we scrutinize a range of explanations and evaluate their merits? Competing assumptions and explanations are at the heart of political debates and policy decisions, yet we are often asked to choose in the absence of reliable evidence or a good understanding of cause and effect. To be better citizens, we should be better students of political science and **comparative politics**—the study and comparison of domestic politics across countries. Comparative politics can be contrasted with another related field in political science, **international relations**. While comparative politics looks at the politics inside countries (such as elections, political parties, revolutions, and judicial systems), international relations concentrates on relations between countries (such as foreign policy, war, trade, and foreign aid). Of course the two overlap in many places, such as in ethnic or religious conflict, which often spills over borders, or political change, which can be shaped by international organizations or military force. For now, however, our discussion will concentrate on political structures and actions within countries.

This chapter lays out some of the most basic vocabulary and structures of political science and comparative politics. These will fall under three basic categories: *analytical concepts* (assumptions and theories that guide our research), *methods* (ways to study and test those theories), and *ideals* (beliefs and values about preferred outcomes). Analytical concepts help us ask questions about cause and effect, methods provide tools to seek out explanations, and ideals help us compare existing politics with what we might prefer.

Our survey will consider some of the most basic questions: What is politics? How does one compare different political systems around the world? We will

spend some time on the methods of comparative politics and how scholars have approached its study. Over the past century, political scientists have struggled with the challenge of analyzing politics and have asked whether such analysis can actually be considered a science. Exploring these issues will give us a better sense of the limitations and possibilities in the study of comparative politics. We will consider comparative politics through the concept of **institutions**—organizations or activities that are self-perpetuating and valued for their own sake. Institutions play an important role in defining and shaping what is possible and probable in political life by laying out the rules, norms, and structures in which we live. Finally, in addition to institutions, we will take up the ideals of freedom and equality. If institutions shape how the game of politics is played, then the goal of the game is the right mix of freedom and equality. Which ideal is more important? Must one come at the expense of the other? Perhaps some other ideal is preferable to both? With the knowledge gained by exploring these questions, we will be ready to take on complex politics around the world.

## What Is Comparative Politics?

First, we must identify what comparative politics is. **Politics** is the struggle in any group for power that will give one or more persons the ability to make decisions for the larger group. This group may range from a small organization to the entire world. Politics occurs wherever there are people and organizations. For example, we may speak of “office politics” when we are talking about power relationships in a business. Political scientists in particular concentrate on the struggle for leadership and power in a political community—a political party, an elected office, a city, a region, or a country. It is therefore hard to separate the idea of politics from the idea of **power**, which is the ability to influence others or impose one’s will on them. Politics is the competition for public power, and power is the ability to extend one’s will.

In political science, comparative politics is a subfield that compares this pursuit of power across countries. The method of comparing countries can help us make arguments about cause and effect by drawing evidence from across space and time. For example, one important puzzle we will return to frequently is why some countries are democratic, while others are not. Why have politics in some countries resulted in power being dispersed among more people, while in others power is concentrated in the hands of a few? Why is South Korea democratic, while North Korea is not? Looking at North Korea alone won’t necessarily help us understand why South Korea went down a different path, or vice versa. A comparison of the

two, perhaps alongside similar cases in Asia, may better yield explanations. As should be clear from our discussion of the Arab Spring, these are not simply academic questions. Democratic countries and pro-democracy organizations actively support the spread of like-minded regimes around the world, but if it is unclear how or why this comes about, democracy becomes difficult or even dangerous to promote. It is therefore important to separate ideals from our concepts and methods and not let the former obscure our use of the latter. Comparative politics can inform and even challenge our ideals, providing alternatives and questioning our assumption that there is one right way to organize political life.

## The Comparative Method

If comparison is an important way to test our assumptions and shape our ideals, how we compare cases is important. If there is no criterion or guide by which we gather information or draw conclusions, our studies become little more than a collection of details. Researchers thus often seek out puzzles—questions about politics with no obvious answer—as a way to guide their research. From there, they rely on some **comparative method**—a way to compare cases and draw conclusions. By comparing countries or subsets within them, scholars seek out conclusions and generalizations that could be valid in other cases.

To return to our earlier question, let us say that we are interested in why democracy has failed to develop in some countries. This question was central to debates in the West over the future of the Middle East and elsewhere. We might approach the puzzle of democracy by looking at North Korea. Why has the North Korean government remained communist and highly repressive even as similar regimes around the world have collapsed?

A convincing answer to this puzzle could tell scholars and policy makers a great deal and even guide our tense relations with North Korea in the future. Examining one country closely may lead us to form hypotheses about why a country operates as it does. We call this approach **inductive reasoning**—the means by which we go from studying a case to generating a hypothesis. But while a study of one country can generate interesting hypotheses, it does not provide enough evidence to test them. Thus we might study North Korea and perhaps conclude that the use of nationalism by those in power has been central to the persistence of nondemocratic rule. In so concluding, we might then suggest that future studies look at the relationship between nationalism and authoritarianism in other countries. Inductive reasoning can therefore be a foundation on which we build greater theories in comparative politics.

Comparative politics can also rely on **deductive reasoning**—starting with a puzzle and from there generating some hypothesis about cause and effect to test against a number of cases. Whereas inductive reasoning starts with the evidence as a way to uncover a hypothesis, deductive reasoning starts with the hypothesis and then seeks out the evidence. In our example of inductive reasoning, we started with a case study of North Korea and ended with some testable generalization about nationalism; in deductive reasoning, we would start with our hypothesis about nationalism and then test that hypothesis by looking at a number of countries. By carrying out such studies, we may find a **correlation**, or apparent association, between certain factors or variables. If we were particularly ambitious, we might claim to have found cause and effect, or a **causal relationship**.<sup>1</sup> Inductive and deductive reasoning can help us to better understand and explain political outcomes and, ideally, could help us predict them.

Unfortunately, inductive and deductive reasoning, or finding correlation and causation, is not easy. Comparativists face seven major challenges in trying to examine political features across countries. Let's move through each of these challenges and show how they complicate the comparative method and comparative politics in general. First, political scientists have difficulty controlling the variables in the cases they study. In other words, in our search for correlations or causal relationships, we are unable to make true comparisons because each of our cases is different. By way of illustration, suppose a researcher wants to determine whether increased exercise by college students leads to higher grades. In studying the students who are her subjects, the researcher can control for a number of variables that might also affect grades, such as the students' diet, the amount of sleep they get, or any factor that might influence the results. By controlling for these differences and making certain that many of these variables are the same across the subjects with the exception of exercise, the researcher can carry out her study with greater confidence.

But political science offers few opportunities to control the variables because the variables are a function of real-world politics. As will become clear, economies, cultures, geography, resources, and political structures are amazingly diverse, and it is difficult to control for these differences. Even in a single case study, variables change over time. At best, we can control as much as possible for variables that might otherwise distort our conclusions. If, for example, we want to understand why gun ownership laws are so much less restrictive in the United States than in most other industrialized countries, we are well served to compare the United States with countries that have similar historical, economic, political, and social experiences, such as Canada and Australia, rather than Japan or South Africa. This approach allows us to control our variables more effectively, but it still leaves many variables uncontrolled and unaccounted for.

A second, related problem concerns the interactions between the variables themselves. Even if we can control our variables in making our comparisons, there is the problem that many of these variables are interconnected and interact. In other words, many variables interact to produce particular outcomes, in what is known as **multicausality**. A single variable like a country's electoral system or the strength of its judicial system is unlikely to explain the variation in countries' gun control laws. The problem of multicausality also reminds us that in the real world there are often no single, easy answers to political problems.

A third problem involves the limits to our information and information gathering. Although the cases we study have many uncontrolled and interconnected variables, we often have too few cases to work with. In the natural sciences, researchers often conduct studies with a huge number of cases—hundreds of stars or thousands of individuals, often studied across time. This breadth allows researchers to select their cases in such a way as to control their variables, and the large number of cases prevents any single unusual case from distorting the findings. But in comparative politics, we are typically limited by the number of countries in the world—fewer than 200 at present, most of which did not exist a few centuries ago. Even if we study some subset of comparative politics (like political parties or acts of terrorism), our total number of cases will remain relatively small. And if we attempt to control for differences by trying to find a number of similar cases (for example, wealthy democracies), our total body of cases will shrink even further.

A fourth problem in comparative politics concerns how we access the few cases we do have. Research is often further hindered by the very factors that make countries interesting to study. Much information that political scientists seek is not easy to acquire, necessitating work in the field—that is, conducting interviews or studying government archives abroad. International travel requires time and money, and researchers may spend months or even years in the field. Interviewees may be unwilling to speak on sensitive issues or may distort information. Libraries and archives may be incomplete, or access to them restricted. Governments may bar research on politically sensitive questions. Confronting these obstacles in more than one country is even more challenging. A researcher may be able to read Russian and travel to Russia frequently, but if he wants to compare authoritarianism in Russia and China, it would be ideal to be able to read Chinese and conduct research in China as well. Few comparativists have the language skills, time, or resources to conduct field research in many countries. There are almost no comparativists in North America or Europe who speak both Russian and Chinese. As a result, comparativists often master knowledge of a single country or language and rely on deductive reasoning. Single-case study can be extremely valuable—it gives the researcher a great deal of case depth and the ability to tease out novel