**WHAT IS COMPARATIVE POLITICS**

**Why are some countries poor and others wealthier?**

**What enables some countries to "make it" in the modern world while others remain locked in poverty?   
  
Why are the poorer countries more inclined to be governed autocratically while the richer countries are democratic?   
  
What accounts for the regional, cultural, and geographic differences that exist?**

**What are the politics of the transition from underdevelopment to development and what helps stimulate and sustain that process?**

**What are the internal social and political conditions as well as the international situations of these various countries that explain the similarities as well as the differences?**

**What are the patterns that help account for the emergence of democratic as distinct from Marxist-Leninist political systems?**

**These are the kinds of questions that lie at the heart of the field of Comparative Politics.**

**COMPARATIVE POLITICS DEFINED**

**Comparative Politics involves the systematic study and comparison of the world's political systems.**

**It seeks to explain differences between as well as similarities among countries.**

**It is particularly interested in exploring patterns, processes, and regularities among political systems.**

**It looks for trends, for changes in patterns; and it tries to develop general propositions or hypotheses that describe and explain these trends.**

**\*\* Comparative Politics covers a broad range of topics.**

**The field has no one single focus. Different scholars have different preferences.**

**There are several different kinds of studies.**

**Among the types of studies that students of Comparative Politics actually do are the following:   
  
1. Studies of one country -- or a particular institution (political parties, militaries, parliaments, interest groups), political process (decision making), or public policy (e.g., labor or welfare policy) in that country.   
  
When we focus on a single country or institution it is necessary to put the study into a larger comparative framework.   
  
That means we should tell why the subject is important and where it fits in a larger context.   
  
2. Studies of two or more countries -- Provides for genuine comparative studies.**

**(usually harder and more expensive in terms of research and travel costs).**

**3. Regional or area studies -- This may include studies of Africa, Latin America, the Middle East, East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Europe, or other subregions.   
Such studies are useful because they involve groups of countries that may have several things in common -- e.g., similar history, cultures, language, religion, colonial backgrounds, an so on.   
  
Regional or area studies allow you to hold common features constant, while examining or testing for certain other features.**

**4. Studies across regions -- Often expensive and difficult to carry out.**

**Such studies might involve comparisons of the role of the military in Africa and the Middle East, or the quite different paths of development of the East Asian countries and Latin America.   
  
5. Global comparisons -- With the improved statistical data collected by the world bank, the UN, and other agencies, it is now possible to do comparisons on a global basis.   
  
6. Thematic studies -- Comparative politics focuses on themes as well as countries and regions.   
  
E.g., themes such as dependency theory, corporatism, role of the state, process of military professionalization.   
  
Thematic studies are often complex and usually carried out by more senior scholars.**

**WHY STUDY COMPARATIVE POLITICS?**

**There are a number of reasons for studying Comparative Politics.**

**1. First, it's fun and interesting, and one learns a lot about other countries, regions, and the world.   
  
2. Second, studying Comparative Politics will help a person overcome ethnocentrism.**

**All peoples and countries are ethnocentric, but Americans seem to be particularly afflicted.   
  
3. Third, we study Comparative Politics because that enables us to understand how nations change and the patterns that exist.**

**4. A fourth reason for studying Comparative Politics is that it is intellectually stimulating.   
  
Consider these questions: Why do some countries modernize and others not? Why are some countries democratic and others not?**

**5. Fifth, Comparative Politics has a rigorous and effective methodology. The comparative method is sophisticated tool of analysis and one that is always open to new approaches.**

**6. Finally, Comparative politics is necessary for a proper understanding of both international relations and foreign policy.**

**Without an intimate knowledge of the other countries with whom we conduct foreign relations, we cannot have an informed, successful foreign policy.**

**HISTORY OF COMPARATIVE POLITICS**

**Comparative politics has a long and very distinguished history dating back to the very origins of systematic political studies in ancient Greece and Rome.**

**Comparative Politics is about 2,500 years old -- and maybe older.**

**One could argue that the study of Comparative Politics goes all the way back to humankind's first recorded history.**

**Even the most ancient of peoples, organized as clans, tribes, or extended families, compared their situations with those of other peoples with whom they came in contact.**

**The Bible is perhaps one of the first written statements of Comparative Politics.**

**Particularly in the Old Testament the prophets are constantly comparing the people of Israel with other peoples: Egyptians, Persians, etc.**

**The earliest systematic comparisons of a more modern, secular sort -- with almost all the ingredients of today's Comparative Politics -- were carried out by the ancient Greeks.**

**The two foremost political scientists in ancient Greece were Plato and Aristotle.**

**Plato's Republic and Aristotle's Politics, are really the beginning of political science as we know it today -- and among the great books of all time.**

**In these two books the authors cover almost all the key issues of politics: the nature of power and leadership, the different forms of government, public policy, and so on.**

**For our purposes, what is important about Aristotle and Plato is their analysis of Comparative Politics.   
  
Aristotle -- more a "scientist" -- collected approximately 150 constitutions of his time, mainly from the Greek city-states but from other areas as well.**

**He studied these constitutions extensively.**

**He wanted to know which form of government was most stable, so he began looking at the causes of instability.   
  
Both he and Plato arrived at a system or scheme for classifying the then known world's political systems.   
  
A modified form of this classification of systems is still used today.**

**Montesquieu, the 18th century French philosopher, is the next great comparativist.**

**Unlike Hobbes and Locke who focused on one country, but assumed it had universal validity, Montesquieu was a true comparativist.**

**In his book The Spirit of the Laws Montesquieu attempted to move beyond the constitutional procedures of a country to examine its true culture and "spirit."**

**His greatest contribution to the field was his model for the separation of powers that influenced the U.S. system.**

**COMPARATIVE POLITICS IN AMERICAN POLITICS: HISTORY AND APPROACHES**

**Although courses on "Foreign Governments" were offered in a few American universities as early as the 1890s, Comparative politics was not a major field in U.S. institutions in the early part of this century.   
  
-- Comparative politics in the early days concentrated on only a handful of countries in Western Europe (Britain, France, and Germany; the Soviet Union was included later.**

**-- The approach was INSTITUTIONAL.**

**-- WW II and the nazi genocidal policies brought about a wave of European emigration to the U.S. --- included among the immigrants were thousands of intellectuals.**

**-- Many of these intellectuals achieved top positions in U.S. universities. They included some top comparativists -- Friedrich, Loewenstein, Franz Neumann, and Hannah Arendt.**

**-- WWII had a profound ethical and moral effect on their writings and teaching, particularly in their efforts to dissect the Nazi system, to analyze the root causes of fascism, to study totalitarianism comparatively.   
  
In the 1960s a combination of factors -- the cold war, the sudden surge of a host of newly independent nations onto the world stage, and the internationalist posture of the kennedy administration, a global preoccupation with "development," availability of federal grants and opportunities for travel -- helped make comparative politics an attractive field.**

**The cold war and the fear of the spread of communism and Soviet totalitarianism was the impetus for some very important works in comparative politics.**

**-- W.W. Rostow's The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto (1960).**

**Another path-breaking book was Almond and Coleman's The Politics of Developing Areas (1960).**

**Many of the new leading scholars in the field began to be strongly critical of the institutional approach. They had been caught up in the broader revolution then sweeping political science, which called for an emphasis on interest group behavior and on the more informal aspects of political behavior.   
  
THE BEHAVIORAL APPROACH**

**Other scholars were strongly influenced by the Parsonian revolution in sociology, particularly Talcott Parson's structural- functionalism, his presumption of a universal social science of development, his notion of a system of social and political life and change, and his "pattern variables," which seemed to offer a convenient way of contrasting developing and developed societies.**

**The view that comparative politics should be nonparochial, nonformalistic, nonlegalistic, analytic, and genuinely comparative became the prevailing position among scholars.**

**Gabriel Almond, influenced by Parson's structural-functionalism and applied it to the study of comparative politics. The approach was strongly represented Almond and Coleman's The Politics of the Developing Areas.**

**THE FUNCTIONAL APPROACH**

**POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT BECAME THE MOST POPULAR AREA IN THE 1960s.**

**New and exciting studies analyzing political development were conducted.**

**Seymour Martin Lipset's Political Man (1959) showed the interrelations between social modernization and political democracy and implying that the two went hand in hand.**

**-- As countries achieved greater literacy, were more strongly mobilized, and acquired more radio and television sets, they would also tend to become more politically developed -- i.e., liberal and democratic, just like the United States.**

**In the 1960s the political development approach was very attractive. It was neat, coherent, intellectually and emotionally satisfying.**

**The problem with this approach was that it presumed that Western institutions and policies both would and ought to be present in developing nations.**

**-- When they were not, it was the local developing nations that were usually thought to be problematic, not the theory of development.**

**-- Because these countries had few and weak parties, trade unions, and similar institutions, they were frequently declared "dysfunctional."**

**-- While they may be dysfunctional in terms of the particular institutional arrangements of the West, they may be quite viable in their own terms.**

**-- Thus political and moral preferences began to distort scholarly analyses.**

**In 1968, in what many have called the last great integrating book in the field, Samuel P. Huntington provided a critical evaluation of the modernization literature and offered an alternative perspective.   
  
Huntington argued that social mobilization and modernization, rather than being supportive of and correlated with democracy and institutional development, in fact served often to undermine them in developing nations.**

**Huntington's critique of the theories of modernization came to be generally accepted in the field, though his alternative proposal for an emphasis on orderly stable institutions such as political parties or armed forces as the key agencies of development was often criticized as a conservative formulation.   
  
By the late 1960s and early 1970s, criticism of the dominant developmentalist paradigm was widespread.   
  
The developmentalist approach was criticized as being biased, ethnocentric, and less than universal. It was accused of ignoring the phenomena of class and class conflict, the play of international market and economic forces, and dependency.**

**As the developmentalist approach began to loose its dominant position in comparative politics, a variety of alternative approaches began to emerge.**

**They included: the corporatist approach; the political economy (which emphasized the economic constraints on politics) and the dependency approach.**

**THE METHODOLOGY OF COMPARATIVE POLITICS:**

**Many studies employ quantitative methods such as opinion surveys and aggregate analysis, and the use of time-series data has also increased.**

**Comparative politics has developed a greater awareness of the usefulness of combining quantitative and nonquantitative materials.**