

**GREAT  
INSTITUTIONS AND  
THEIR WORKING STYLE :  
GOVERNMENTS IN  
UK, USA, FRANCE AND CHINA**

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# ***Introduction***



The new experiments, approaches and new research tools have changed the nature of political inquiries in a significant way in recent years. Such exercises have either expanded the horizons of political studies to include within its frontiers of political investigation a number of new disciplines, subjects and issues or opened up new avenues for political analysis making political studies a distinctive one. The latest addition to this is, particularly in the post-world war era, the study of modern governments. It is basically a study of the formal institutions of government and their functions.

Political scientists and nation builders have accepted the governments of some of the European countries as models or representatives, upon which the newly emerged nations of Asia, Africa and Latin American, which were the colonies of the western nations, would model their national governments and constitutional set ups. The study of modern governments has appeared as a subject of momentous significance on account of this vital reason. This has resulted in the emergence of a new branch of study called comparative governments and politics. Though, it was essentially a post de-colonization development, it was first emphasized by Woodrow Wilson, who stated, “of ourselves, so long as we know only ourselves, we know nothing...we can never learn either our own weaknesses or our own virtues by comparing ourselves with ourselves. It is best on the whole to get entirely away from our own atmosphere and to be most careful in examining such systems as those of France or Germany. Seeing our own institutions through such media, we see ourselves as foreigners might see us, were they to look at us without pre-conceptions”. Comparative

governments and politics can “truly emerge only against a cross-cultural setting”.

## Comparative Politics

Comparative politics is a branch of political science, which basically tries to understand political institutions, political process and political power by comparison. It is characterized by an empirical approach based on the comparative method. It mostly focuses on how to compare and not what to compare, leaving the latter to the choice of the comparer. In a more specific term, comparative politics is defined by the method it applies to the study of political phenomena and not by the object of its study. When narrowly applied to specific fields of political studies, comparative politics may be understood by other names, such as, for instance, comparative governments, comparative constitutions, comparative legislatures, comparative political parties etc. In certain political studies, the term comparative politics is used to imply simply politics of foreign countries. Though, it may be useful to gain knowledge of the working of single or specific field, comparative politics is used in larger connotations.

It is not easy to conclude exactly when did comparative politics first appear in the writings of political science or in political theory. However, Aristotle is said to be the first political theorist to use comparative approach in his treatise ‘Politics’, where he compares different constitutions by introducing new typology based on two criteria: number of people rule (one, few, many) and in whose interest do they rule (good or perverted). He distinguishes six different kinds of constitutions, such as monarchy, aristocracy and polity as good governments and tyranny, oligarchy and democracy as corrupt types of constitutions. Later this method was extensively employed by Machiavelli, Tocqueville, Bryce and Ostrogorski, for the primary purpose of better understanding the working of the political organizations. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the notion of classification was taken up by Max Weber. His three-type description was based on three authority structures, linked to cultural conventions and focused on the notion of stability. Traditional authority is based on custom and practice and associated with non-differentiated, non-modern societies in which rules

often combine roles and functions of political, military and religious leadership. Legal-rational authority is based on rationalist interpretation of office, which is de-linked from religion, custom and practice, and is underpinned by the rule of law. Thus, on the office-holder, rules circumscribe or decide functions, and at a political level through legally constituted elections or other accepted procedures. Charismatic authority is characteristic of a society in a state of crisis or transition, brought about as a result of rapid change or dislocation. These situations required a leader, who will be able to command authority and obedience as a result of his personal qualities or charisma and enable the situation to be transformed and stabilized.

Similarly, based on comparative method, in recent years Ball and Peters recognized four types of regimes such as liberal-democratic, communist, transitional and autocratic systems. Modern scientists, who adopted comparative approach, may be broadly classified into two categories. Samuel Beer, M. Hass, B. Ulam and R.C. Marcridis, who represent the first category, used comparative method to present a more useful study of different political institutions. They applied the instruments of institutional comparisons in a quite rigorous manner to present a better, in a realistic sense, study of the governments what they desired to address as political systems. G.K. Roberts says, “they were concerned with the various strategies of comparison; are studies configurative method, institutional and functional comparisons, a problem-based orientation and with various methodological problems; conceptualization, the establishment of agreed categories for comparison, validity as a problem, cross-cultural difficulties and the availability of data”. David Easton, G.A. Almond, J.C. Coleman, G.B. Powell, Harold Lasswell, Robert Dahl, David Apter, Lucian W. Pye, Sidney Verba and a host of others represent the second category. These writers made use of inter-related set of concepts for the sake of presenting their contributions on the basis of comparative analyses, though they have provided a specialized vocabulary in their own ways such as for example, inputs, outputs, demands, environment, feedback, autonomy, universality etc.

Thus, different political scientists used their own methods of comparison to arrive at their own conclusions. Although, there were no unanimous choice of fields for comparison in their literature, their studies

contributed significantly for the expansive study of comparative politics in more recent years. If Aristotle chose constitutions for comparison, Almond and Verba adopted cross-national survey to determine the role of political culture in preserving democratic regime's stability, still T. Skocpol selected the major revolutions occurred in the modern world, such as French, Russian, and Chinese for comparative study of the reasons, process, and consequences of these revolutions.

## Meaning of Comparative Politics

Comparative politics is a systematic study of the world politics through comparative method. It tries to invalidate traditional method of studying individual systems and institutions separately and independently in an isolated style, without comparison. It argues that, for the fruitful and positive conclusions, one needs to engage more on comparing the political systems working in different environments rather than theorizing by a limited focus on individual system. Its major purpose is to identify similarities and differences among such political organizations, and on the basis of such comparison, to arrive at 'most ideal form' which is acceptable and applicable to all nations irrespective of their structural, functional, cultural and historical differences. According to Judith Bara and Mark Pennington, "comparative politics is concerned with the comparative study and analysis of political systems. It aims to overcome the shortcomings of approaches focused purely on case studies of individual countries and of those that build purely abstract theoretical models of decision-making. Comparing the similarities and differences between political phenomena across countries allow social scientists to judge if and how the experience of some states is similar to that of others and to assess whether theoretical models of how people make decisions are able to claim universal validity". Jean Blondel in his, 'An Introduction to Comparative Government' argues "comparative politics is the study of patterns of national governments in the contemporary world". Similarly, A.E. Freeman states, "it is a comparative analysis of the various forms of governments and diverse political institutions".

It is clear, therefore, that the primary focus of both theoretical and empirical work in comparative politics is on the comparison of institutional practices between states. According to M.G. Smith, “comparative politics is the study of the forms of political organizations, their properties, correlations, variations and modes of change”. It examines how institutions vary between states and the effect that different institutional practices have on the outcomes of the political process in different societies. More important, it aims to develop an understanding of how and why different institutions have the effect on political outcomes that they do. Peter Mair argues that comparative politics is a combination of a substantive focus on the study of country’s political systems and a method of identifying and explaining similarities and dissimilarities between these countries using common concepts. Richard Rose says, “the focus is explicitly or implicitly upon more than one country, thus following familiar political science usage in excluding within-nation comparison. Methodically, comparison is distinguished by its use of concepts that are applicable in more than one country”.

## Nature of Comparative Politics

“Comparative politics is concerned with behaviour, institutions, processes, ideas and values present in more than one country. It searches for those regularities and patterns between more than one nation that help clarify the basic nature, working and belief of regimes. It studies a broader range of political activity, including governments and their institution as well as other forms of organization not directly related to national government”. However, there is no common opinion among the political scientists about the exact nature of the study of comparative politics. Its nature is determined by the areas that the it primarily focuses. The following issues indicate the nature of comparative politics:

- a) Study of political actions: Political actions consist of the efforts by which conditions of conflicts are created and resolved in a way pertaining to the interests of the people, as far as possible, who play their part in the struggle for power. David Easton defines political action as “authoritative allocation of values”. If politics

means the authoritative allocation of values, some measure of conflict is bound to arise between values as desired by the people and values as held by the men in power. Thus, arise conflicts that demand their solution and what leads to efforts in this regard constitutes political activity. Robert Dahl says “it is a special case in the exercise of power”. Oakeshott explains political activity as “an activity in which human beings...think and speak about the arrangements and the conditions of their association from the point of view of their desirability, make proposals about changes in these arrangements and conditions, try to persuade others of the desirability of the proposed changes and act in such a manner as to promote the changes”.

- b) Political Process: Comparative politics studies all those agencies, including ‘non-state’ which involve in decision-making process. As these non-state associations influence the government of the country for the sake of protecting and promoting their specific interests, they naturally attract the attention of the analysts of comparative politics. Samuel E. Finer points out that, non-state agencies or “the private associations existing in a state seek to influence the government, or participate in policy formation by the government or becoming the government, is the ‘Political Process’ ”.
- c) Political Power: The nature of comparative politics is also indicated in its study of political power. It studies ruling class, or the governing and non-governing elites and their respective roles to define political power properly. For example, it compares the rulers in democratic system who try to justify their authority by ‘means of consensus’ and those of totalitarian system who justify their authority by ‘means of force’. Finer says, “where consensus is weak, coercion tends to be strong, and vice-versa”.
- d) Political Institutions: Political institutions have assumed an important place in contemporary comparative politics. Lane and Ersson define an institution as “a rule that has been institutionalized”. It has two divisions. First, ‘hard institutions’ which comprise those formal rules that characterize a political

system such as the rules of the electoral process. Hard institutional practices of a political system are typically enforced by formal laws. Second, 'soft institutions' conversely, include those practices that are institutionalized via informal rules and practices rather than in the letter of the law. Moreover, soft institutional rules are not enforced by formal sanctions but are usually maintained through force of habit and by the exercise of informal sanctions against those who break the rules.

- e) **Political Concepts:** The basic building blocks in comparative political analysis are concepts. These serve three main scientific functions by helping to organize, describe and compare political phenomena in order to assist in the creation of categories. Since the aim of scientific inquiry is to provide understanding and explanation, concepts help by establishing criteria which distinguish between categories. For example, to differentiate between parliamentary and presidential type of executives. With regard to comparison in particular, concepts enable distinctions to be made between themselves and others, which might share certain characteristics or bring about similar outcomes.
- f) **Analytical and Empirical Investigation:** The modern writers of comparative politics have adopted analytical and empirical method in their researches. This has broadened the field of comparative politics. This development within comparative political studies is described by Harry Eckstein as, "in the realm of comparative government, more and more writers turned from a concern for the evaluation of governmental forms to a pure description. By and large they retained the analytical categories developed by their predecessors, but began to shape their meanings to fit descriptive rather than normative purposes. Thus, for example, a pure ideal-type democracy, while it continued to be a tool employed in normative political theory, no longer had utility for specialists in comparative government".
- g) **Study of Infrastructure:** As it was the cases of traditional political scientists, the study of comparative politics is not confined to the formal structures of governments. The comparative politics focuses

crystallized patterns of behaviour, with practice since these are parts of the living structures of government. Thus, for the scientists, the role of political parties and pressure groups becomes as significant as the role of legislatures and executives in the study of modern political system.

- h) Focus on Developing Societies: Recent comparative study focuses more on the politics of developing countries, not developed one. Hence, it is no longer a study of the select European or American governments; it shifted its focus to the governments in the developing countries of the Afro-Asian and Latin American.
- i) Inter-Disciplinary Approach: The comparative politics is characterized by inter-disciplinary study. Writers have made use of tools that are available in the disciplines of economics, sociology, anthropology, biology etc. in their studies in comparative politics.
- j) Empirical Nature: The comparative politics in recent years has lost normative character and assumed empirical dimension. As a result, the value-free political theory has replaced value-laden political theory. Now the comparative politics is not bothered much about what the system ought to be in their ideal form, but with what they are.
- k) Contribution of Jean Blondel: Though there are number of studies that discuss different aspects of comparative politics, they acknowledge that the development of comparative politics both as a sub-discipline of political science and in terms of making progress with genuinely comparative research, owes much to the efforts of one scholar-Jean Blondel. He has made a life's work of studying, applying, developing and promoting comparative method on an international basis, for purposes of both teaching and research.
- l) Comparative Method: Comparative method attempts to make the study of comparative politics more systematic, analytical and scientific, using scientific concepts and variables which are able to be measured effectively. Comparative study may be carried out using qualitative and quantitative methods or a combination of the two. There are a series of comparative approaches from large-scale

comparisons, using many countries and based mainly on aggregate international indices, such as surveys to small numbers of country-based cases or single country-based case studies, often following common framework. There are a number of problems associated with the study of comparative politics but the effects of these can be minimized by having a clearly defined purpose with a rationale, a theoretical model, appropriate methods, transparent data collection techniques and clear evidence-based research.

## Scope of Comparative Politics

Comparative politics is a new subject of study. Although, it has a long history, modern comparative subject deviated itself from normative approach and parochial nature of the traditional comparative government studies to more empirical and analytical study. Today, it covers a wide range of topics within its understanding. The following are the main issues which comparative politics analyses:

- a) **Political Structures:** The modern comparative politics studies both formal and informal and governmental and non-governmental structures. That means, it does not merely confine itself to the study of formal structures such as legislature, executive and judiciary; it also focuses other institutions such as bureaucracy, pressure groups, political parties, elite groups etc. Thus, compared to the traditional study, the modern comparative discipline has widened its scope to include all the institutions working within a political structure.
- b) **Political Function:** Besides, formal and informal structures, it also analyses functions of political structures such as rule-making (legislature), rule-application (executive), rule-adjudication (judiciary), political communication, interest articulation (interest group), interest aggregation (political party), decision-making, policy formulation, socialization etc.
- c) **Political Behaviour:** Modern comparative politics has made pattern of political behaviour as its centre of study. It includes, voting behaviour, political participation, mass politics, leadership,

recruitment, behaviour of elites, and other broad areas. They all form an integral part of the study of comparative politics.

- d) **Political Systems:** Comparative politics covers within its scope the study of the actual behaviour and performance of political systems of both western, non-western and developed and non-developed. They are analyzed and compared in terms of structures, functions, influences, positions, capabilities and performances. If the tradition comparative politics covered only developed models, modern study focuses both developed and backward countries of the third world.
- e) **Broad Environment:** The scope of the study of comparative politics is widened due to the fact that it borrowed necessary tools of study from the other disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, economics etc. For example, the structural-functional method that the comparative politics widely uses has been borrowed from the discipline of biology. As a result, comparative politics has come to have much it looks like political sociology, and political psychology. Other issues which are included in the scope of comparative politics are-political modernization, political acculturation, political change etc.
- f) **Scope According to Almond and Powell:** According to Almond and Powell, comparative politics is engaged itself in search of four elements, broadening its scope of study. They are:
  - a) Search for more comprehensive scope,
  - b) Search for precision,
  - c) Search for realism and,
  - d) Search for new intellectual order.
- g) **Study Individual Country:** Comparative politics studies individual political system and its institutions such as political parties, interest groups, military branches etc. along with its more significant formal organizations such as legislature, executive and judiciary. While doing so it put the study into a larger comparative frame work.
- h) **Study Mass Countries:** It lays emphasis on the study of political institutions of various countries. It also studies major constitutions

of the world. While doing so, it compares the subjects under focus in order to build scientific theories. In other words, the objective of such comparative studies is to develop ideal-type political institutions.

- i) **Similar Political Systems:** Recent study of comparative politics focuses more on regional studies such as Africa, Latin America, Asia etc. Such studies are useful because they involve groups of countries that may have several things in common such as history, language etc.
- j) **Study of Concepts:** The scope of comparative politics has been widened due to its increased interest in such concepts as dependency, corporatism, role of state etc.

## Significance or Why Comparative Politics is Important?

The process of comparison lies at the very heart of analysis. Judith Bara says, “one cannot easily make assertions about the particular characteristics of an event, institution or form of behaviour without making comparisons with another. If we are trying to be scientific as possible, we need to examine situations where the phenomena we are investigating occur and compare these with other situations in which they do not occur. In natural sciences, such experiments generally take place under what we commonly describe as laboratory conditions—that is, situations that are tightly controlled by regulating the environment and which can be recreated in order to test and re-test through experimentation. In a discipline such as political science, we cannot manufacture artificial conditions in this way, so political scientists use comparison as a means of analyzing similarities and differences. Comparative politics also allows us to contextualize our analysis”.

- a) **Relate Present to the Past:** “Most works in comparative politics compare between countries, although there is no reason why we should not compare between levels of political activity, such as how decisions are made at national or macro-political, local or

regional levels of political organization within one country, or indeed, how different political parties undertake specific activities. Comparison between how political activities are carried out in the present with how they operated in the past, often to assess efficiency or impact of a particular change or reform, also represents legitimate foci for comparative study”.

- b) **To Gain Knowledge:** Comparative politics helps us to understand the political exercises in different countries, “which has obvious practical applications in terms of aiding appreciation of how different practices operate. This is also believed to help in understanding our own country”. In other words, it helps us to understand the evolution of countries, discover patterns, and to respond why they evolve in the way they do.
- c) **To Understand Similarities and Differences:** By the study of comparative politics, one may ascertain the similarities and dissimilarities between different political process and functions. This helps to form an ideal type or identify the best practices. Comparative analysis provides us necessary knowledge for structuring political institutions for a country.
- d) **Compare the Good Practices:** Judith Bara points out, “a particular focus in recent years has been for the purpose of seeing whether institutions, policies or processes have been chosen because politicians wish to learn from successes or failures of institutions in other countries and to emulate practices which has worked well”.
- e) **Avoid Ethnocentrism:** The study of comparative politics helps us to look beyond limited perspectives and thereby avoid ethnocentric fallacy and to boost objective approaches. Even the normative analysis and empirical studies have become subject to such criticisms that they are based on western values, and hence, not free of bias. Marsh and Stoker argues that Behaviouralists also encountered such problems when analyzing countries with different cleavages and values.
- f) **Accurate Conclusion:** The study of comparative politics does suggest that in order to make general statements about political processes, we need to compare data from a variety of situations.

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