

TOPIC THREE: POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGE

Comparativists are interested not only in the causes and forms of change, but also in the various impacts that it has on the policymaking process. Profound political and economic changes have characterized the 20th and early 21st centuries, and each of the six core countries of the AP Comparative Government and Politics course illustrate this overall trend toward change. More often than not, political and economic changes occur together and influence one another. If one occurs without the other, tensions are created that have serious consequences. For example, rapid economic changes in China have strongly pressured the government to institute political changes. So far, the authoritarian government has resisted those changes, a situation that leaves us with the question of whether or not authoritarian governments can guide market economies.

TYPES OF CHANGE

Change occurs in many ways, but it may be categorized into three types:

- **Reform** is a type of change that does not advocate the overthrow of basic institutions. Instead, reformers want to change some of the methods that political and economic leaders use to reach goals that the society generally accepts. For example, reformers may want to change business practices in order to preserve real competition in a capitalist country, or they may want the government to become more proactive in preserving the natural environment. In neither case do the reformers advocate the overthrow of basic economic or political institutions.
- **Revolution**, in contrast to reform, implies change at a more basic level, and does involve either a major revision or an overthrow of existing institutions. A revolution usually impacts more than

one area of life. For example, the Industrial Revolution first altered the economies of Europe from feudalism to capitalism, but eventually changed their political systems, transportation, communication, literature, and social classes. Likewise, the French and American Revolutions were directed at the political systems, but they significantly changed the economies and societal practices of both countries, and spread their influence throughout the globe.

- **Coup d'états** generally represent the most limited of the three types of change. Literally “blows to the state,” they replace the leadership of a country with new leaders. Typically coups occur in countries where government institutions are weak and leaders have taken control by force. The leaders are challenged by others who use force to depose them. Often coups are carried out by the military, but the new leaders are always vulnerable to being overthrown by yet another coup.

ATTITUDES TOWARD CHANGE

The types of change that take place are usually strongly influenced by the attitudes of those that promote them. Attitudes toward change include:

- **Radicalism** is a belief that rapid, dramatic changes need to be made in the existing society, often including the political system. Radicals usually think that the current system cannot be saved and must be overturned and replaced with something better. For example, radicalism prevailed in Russia in 1917 when the old tsarist regime was replaced by the communist U.S.S.R. Radicals are often the leaders of revolutions.
- **Liberalism** supports reform and gradual change rather than revolution. Do not confuse a liberal attitude toward change with liberalism as a political ideology. The two may or may not accompany one another. Liberals generally do not believe that the political and/or economic systems are broken, but they do believe that they need to be repaired or improved. They may support the notion that eventual transformation needs to take place, but they almost always believe that gradual change is the best.
- **Conservatism** is much less supportive of change in general than are radicalism and liberalism. Conservatives tend to see change as disruptive, and they emphasize the fact that it sometimes brings unforeseen outcomes. They consider the state and the regime to be very important sources of law and order that might be threatened by making significant changes in the way that they operate. Legitimacy itself might be undermined, as well as the basic values and beliefs of the society.
- **Reactionary beliefs** go further to protect against change than do conservative beliefs. Reactionaries are similar to conservatives in that they oppose both revolution and reform, but they differ in that they also find the status quo unacceptable. Instead, they want to turn back the clock to an earlier era, and reinstate political, social, and economic institutions that once existed. Reactionaries have one thing in common with radicals: both groups are more willing to use violence to reach their goals than are liberals or conservatives.

THREE TRENDS

In comparing political systems, it is important to take notice of overall patterns of development that affect everyone in the contemporary world. Two of these trends – democratization and the move toward market economies – indicate growing **commonalities** among nations, and the third represents **fragmentation** – the revival of ethnic or cultural politics.

1) Democratization

Even though democracy takes many different forms, more and more nations are turning toward some form of popular government. One broad, essential requirement for democracy is the existence of **competitive elections** that are regular, free, and fair. In other words, the election offers a real possibility that the incumbent government may be defeated. By this standard, a number of modern states that call themselves “democracies” fall into a gray area that is neither clearly democratic nor clearly undemocratic. Examples are Russia, Nigeria, and Indonesia. In contrast, **liberal democracies** display other democratic characteristics beyond having competitive elections:

- **Civil liberties**, such as freedom of belief, speech, and assembly
- **Rule of law** that provides for equal treatment of citizens and due process
- **Neutrality of the judiciary** and other checks on the abuse of power
- **Open civil society** that allows citizens to lead private lives and mass media to operate independently from government
- **Civilian control of the military** that restricts the likelihood of the military seizing control of the government

Countries that have regular, free, and fair competitive elections, but are missing these other qualities (civil liberties, rule of law, neutrality of the judiciary, open civil society, and civilian control of the military) are referred to as **illiberal democracies**.

According to political scientist Samuel Huntington, the modern world is now in a “**third wave**” of **democratization** that began during the 1970s. The “first wave” developed gradually over time; the “second wave” occurred after the Allied victory in World War II, and continued until the early 1960s. This second wave was characterized by de-colonization around the globe. The third wave is characterized by the defeat of dictatorial or totalitarian rulers from South America to Eastern Europe to some parts of Africa. The recent political turnover in Mexico may be interpreted as part of this “third wave” of democratization.

Why has democratization occurred? According to Huntington, some factors are:

- The **loss of legitimacy** by both right and left wing authoritarian regimes
- The **expansion of an urban middle class** in developing countries
- A new emphasis on “**human rights**” by the United States and the European Union
- The “**snowball**” effect has been important: when one country in a region becomes democratic, it influences others to do so. An example is Poland’s influence on other nations of Eastern Europe during the 1980s.

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One of the greatest obstacles to democratization is poverty because it blocks citizen participation in government. Huntington gauges democratic stability by this standard: democracy may be declared when a country has had at least two successive peaceful turnovers of power.

2) Movement Toward Market Economies

Many political economists today declare that the economic competition between capitalism and socialism that dominated the 20th century is now a part of the past. The old **command economies**, with socialist principles of centralized planning and state ownership are fading from existence, except in combination with market economies. The issue now is what type of **market economy** will be most successful: one that allows for significant control from the central government - a "**mixed economy**" - or one that does not - a pure market economy. For example, modern Germany has a "social market economy" that is team-oriented and emphasizes cooperation between management and organized labor. In contrast, the United States economy tends to be more individualistic and anti-government control.

Marketization is the term that describes the state's re-creation of a market in which property, labor, goods, and services can all function in a competitive environment to determine their value. **Privatization** is the transfer of state-owned property to private ownership.

3) Revival of Ethnic or Cultural Politics

Until recently, few political scientists predicted that **fragmentation** - divisions based on ethnic or cultural identity - would become increasingly important in world politics. A few years ago **nationalism** - identities based on nationhood - seemed to be declining in favor of increasing globalization. However, nationality questions almost certainly did in Mikhail Gorbachev's attempts to resuscitate the Soviet Union, and national identities remain strong in most parts of the world. Perhaps most dramatically, the **politicization of religion** has dominated world politics of the early 21st century. Most Westerners have been caught off guard by this turn of events, especially in the United States, where separation of church and state has been a basic political principle since the founding of the country.

Samuel Huntington argues that our most important and dangerous future conflicts will be based on clashes of civilizations, not on socioeconomic or even ideological differences. He divides the world into several difference cultural areas that may already be poised to threaten world peace: the West, the Orthodox world (Russia), Islamic countries, Latin American, Africa, the Hindu world, the Confucian world, the Buddhist world, and Japan. Some political scientists criticize Huntington by saying that he distorts cultural divisions and that he underestimates the importance of cultural conflicts within nations. In either case - a world divided into cultural regions or a world organized into multicultural nations - the revival of ethnic or cultural politics tends to emphasize differences among nations rather than commonalities.

TOPIC FOUR: CITIZENS, SOCIETY AND THE STATE

Government and politics are only part of the many facets of a complex society. Religion, ethnic groups, race, social and economic classes - all of these interact with the political system and have a tremendous

impact on policy-making. These divisions – theoretically out of the realm of politics – are called **social cleavages**.

- **Bases of social cleavages** – What mix of social classes, ethnic and racial groups, religions, languages does a country have? How deep are these cleavages, and to what degree do they separate people from one another (form **social boundaries**)? Which of these cleavages appear to have the most significant impact on the political system?
- **Cleavages and political institutions** – How are the cleavages expressed in the political system? For example, is political party membership based on cleavages? Do political elites usually come from one group or another? Do these cleavages block some groups from fully participating in government?

COMPARING CITIZEN/STATE RELATIONSHIPS

Governments connect to their citizens in a variety of ways, but we may successfully compare government-citizen relationships by categorizing, and in turn noting differences and similarities among categories. For example, citizens within democracies generally relate to their governments differently than do citizens that are governed by authoritarian rulers. Or, different countries may be compared by using the categories below:

- **Attitudes and beliefs of citizens** – Do citizens trust their government? Do they believe that the government cares about what they think? Do citizens feel that government affects their lives in significant ways?
- **Political socialization** – How do citizens learn about politics in their country? Does electronic and print media shape their learning? Does the government put forth effort to politically educate their citizens? If so, how much of their effort might you call “propaganda”? How do children learn about politics?
- **Voting behavior** – Do citizens in the country have regular elections? If so, are the elections truly competitive? If not, what is the purpose of the elections? What citizens are eligible to vote, and how many actually vote? Do politicians pay attention to elections, and do elections affect policy-making?
- **Factors that influence political beliefs and behaviors** - Consider the important cleavages in the country. Do they make a difference in citizens’ political beliefs and behaviors? For example, do the lower classes vote for one political party or the other? Are women’s beliefs and behaviors different from those of the men? Are younger people as likely to vote as older people are? Do people in rural areas participate in government?

CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society is a term that refers to organizations outside of the state that help people define and advance their own interests. Civil society is usually strong in liberal democracies where individual

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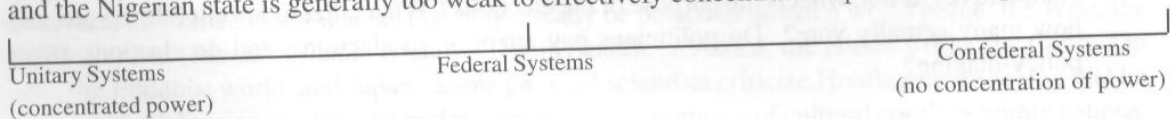
freedoms are valued and protected. The organizations that compose it may represent class, religious, or ethnic interests, or they may cross them, creating a strong bond among people that exists outside of government controls. By their very nature, authoritarian states do not encourage civil society, and they often feel that their power is threatened by it. Advocacy groups, social networks, and the media all may exist within the civil society, and if they are strong enough, they may place considerable pressure on the state to bring about reform. By the early 21st century, a global civil society has emerged, with human rights and environmental groups providing international pressures that have a significant effect on government-citizen relations.

POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

An important part of studying comparative government and politics is developing an understanding of **political institutions**, structures of a political system that carry out the work of governing. Some governments have much more elaborate structures than others, but they often have similarities across cultures. However, just because you see the same type of institution in two different countries, don't assume that they serve the same functions for the political system. For example, a legislature in one country may have a great deal more power than a comparable structure in another country. Only by studying the way that the structures operate and the functions they fill will you be able to compare them accurately. Common structures that exist in most countries are legislatures, executives, judicial systems, bureaucracies, and armies.

LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT

Every state has multiple levels of authority, though the geographic distribution of power varies widely. A unitary system is one that concentrates all policy-making powers in one central geographic place; a **confederal system** spreads the power among many sub-units (such as states), and has a weak central government. A **federal system** divides the power between the central government and the sub-units. All political systems fall on a continuum from the most concentrated amount of power to the least. **Unitary governments** may be placed on the left side, according to the degree of concentration; confederal governments are placed to the right; and federal governments fall in between. Most countries have unitary systems, including all six of the core countries, although Britain is moving toward more federalism and the Nigerian state is generally too weak to effectively concentrate its power in one place.



SUPRANATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

All political systems exist within an environment that is affected by other governments, but more and more they are affected by **supranational organizations** that go beyond national boundaries. Some have more international and/or regional contacts than others, but most countries in the world today must cope with influences from the outside and interactions with others. In the 20th century, many national governments established relationships with regional organizations – such as NATO, the European Union, NAFTA, and OPEC – and with international organizations, such as the United Nations. These

supranational organizations reflect a strong tendency toward **globalization** - an integration of social, environmental, economic, and cultural activities of nations that has resulted from increasing international contacts. On the other hand, many political scientists point out a counter trend – **fragmentation** – a tendency for people to base their loyalty on ethnicity, language, religion, or cultural identity. Although globalization and fragmentation appear to be opposite concepts, they both transcend political boundaries between individual countries.

EXECUTIVES

The executive office carries out the laws and policies of a state. In many countries the executive is split into two distinct roles: **the head of state** and **the head of government**. The head of state is a role that symbolizes and represents the people, both nationally and internationally, and may or may not have any real policymaking power. The head of government deals with the everyday tasks of running the state, and usually directs the activities of other members of the executive branch. The distinction is clearly seen in a country such as Britain, where formerly powerful monarchs reigned over their subjects, but left others (such as prime ministers) in charge of actually running the country. Today Britain still has a monarch that is head of state, but the real power rests with the prime minister, who is head of government. Likewise, the Japanese emperor still symbolically represents the nation, but the prime minister runs the government. In the United States, both roles are combined into one position – the president. However, in other countries, such as Italy and Germany, the president is the head of state with weak powers, and the prime minister is the head of government. In still others, such as Russia and France, the president is head of state with strong powers, and the prime minister is the head of government with subordinate powers.

BUREAUCRACIES

Bureaucracies consist of agencies that generally implement government policy. They usually are a part of the executive branch of government, and their size has generally increased over the course of the 20th and early 21st centuries. This is partly due to government efforts to improve the health, security, and welfare of their populations.

German political philosopher Max Weber created the classic conception of bureaucracy as a well-organized, complex machine that is a “rational” way for a modern society to organize its business. He did not see them as necessary evils, but as the best organizational response to a changing society.

According to Weber, a bureaucracy has several basic characteristics:

- **Hierarchical authority structure** - A chain of command that is hierarchical; the top bureaucrat has ultimate control, and authority flows from the top down.
- **Task specialization** - A clear division of labor in which every individual has a specialized job
- **Extensive rules** - Clearly written, well-established formal rules that all people in the organization follow
- **Clear goals** - A clearly defined set of goals that all people in the organization strive toward
- **The merit principle** - Merit-based hiring and promotion; no granting of jobs to friends or family unless they are the best qualified

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- **Impersonality** - Job performance that is judged by productivity, or how much work the individual gets done

Bureaucracies have acquired great significance in most contemporary societies and often represent an important source of stability for states.

LEGISLATURES

The legislature is the branch of government charged with making laws. Legislatures may be **bicameral**, with two houses, or **unicameral**, or only one. The most usual form is bicameral, and may be traced back to Britain's House of Lords and House of Commons. Despite the fact that one house is referred to as "upper" and the other as "lower," the upper house does not necessarily have more power than the lower house. In the United States, it is debatable which house is more powerful than the other, and in Britain, Russia, and France, the upper house has very little power.

Memberships in the legislature may be determined in different ways, with many houses being elected directly by voters. However, others are selected by government officials, or their membership may be determined by political parties. The six core countries offer a variety of contrasting methods for determining legislative memberships.

JUDICIARIES

Court systems that decide the guilt or innocence of lawbreakers go back to the days of medieval England, but **constitutional courts** that serve to defend democratic principles of a country against infringement by both private citizens and the government are a much more recent phenomenon. **Judicial review**, the mechanism that allows courts to review laws and executive actions for their constitutionality, was well established in the United States during the 19th century, but it has developed over the past decades in other democracies. The growth of judicial power over the past century has been spurred in part by the desire to protect human rights. The judiciary is still a relatively weak branch in most of the six core countries of the comparative government and politics course, but it takes a variety of forms in each of them.

LINKAGE INSTITUTIONS

In many countries we may identify groups that connect the government to its citizens, such as political parties, interest groups, and print and electronic media. Appropriately, these groups are called **linkage institutions**. Their size and development depends partly on the size of the population, and partly on the scope of government activity. The larger the population, and the more complex the government's policy-making activities, the more likely the country is to have well developed linkage institutions.

Political parties perform many functions in democracies. First, they help bring different people and ideas together to establish the means by which the majority can rule. Second, they hold politicians accountable to the electorate and other political elites. Most democracies have multi-party systems, with the two-party system in the United States being a more unusual arrangement. Communist states

have one-party systems that dominate the governments, but non-communist countries have also had one-party systems. An example is Mexico during most of the 20th century as it was dominated by PRI.

ELECTORAL SYSTEMS

Electoral systems are the rules that decide how votes are cast, counted, and translated into seats in a legislature. All democracies divide their populations by electoral boundaries, but they use many different arrangements. The United States, India, and the Great Britain use a system called **first-past-the-post**, in which they divide their constituencies into **single-member districts** in which candidates compete for a single representative's seat. It is also called the **plurality system**, or the **winner-take-all system**, because the winner does not need a majority to win, but simply needs to get more votes than anyone else. In contrast, many countries use **proportional representation** that creates **multi-member districts** in which more than one legislative seat is contested in each district. Under proportional representation, voters cast their ballots for a party rather than for a candidate, and the percentage of votes a party receives determines how many seats the party will gain in the legislature. South Africa and Italy use a system based solely on proportional representation, and many countries, including Germany, Mexico, and Russia, used a **mixed system** that combines first-past-the-post and proportional representation.

POLITICAL ELITES AND RECRUITMENT

All countries have **political elites**, or leaders that have a disproportionate share of policy-making power. In democracies, these people are selected by competitive elections, but they still may be readily identified as political elites. Every country must establish a method of elite **recruitment**, or ways to identify and select people for future leadership positions. Also, countries must be concerned about leadership **succession**, or the process that determines the procedure for replacing leaders when they resign, die, or are no longer effective.

TOPIC SIX: PUBLIC POLICY

All political systems set policy, whether by legislative vote, executive decision, judicial rulings, or a combination of the three. In many countries interest groups and political parties also play large roles in policy-making. Policy is generally directed toward addressing issues and solving problems. Many issues are similar in all countries, such as the needs to improve or stabilize the economy or to provide for a common defense against internal and external threats. However, governments differ in the approaches they take to various issues, as well as the importance they place on solving particular problems.

Common policy issues include:

- **Economic performance** – Governments are often concerned with the economic health/or problems within their borders. Most also participate in international trade, so their economies are deeply affected by their international imports and exports. The six core countries provide a variety of approaches that states may take, as well as an assortment of consequences of both good and poor economic performances.

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- **Social welfare** – Citizens' social welfare needs include health, employment, family assistance, and education. States provide different levels of support in each area, and they display many different attitudes toward government responsibility for social welfare.
- **Civil liberties, rights, and freedoms** – The constitutions of many liberal democracies guarantee civil liberties and rights, and most communist, post-communist, developing, and less developed countries pay lip service to them. **Freedom House**, an organization that studies democracy around the world, ranks countries on a 1 to 7 freedom scale, with countries given a 1 being the most free and those given a 7 being the least free. A number of post communist countries have made significant strides in this area in recent years, but many others remain highly authoritarian.
- **Environment** – Many modern democratic states take a big interest in protecting the environment. European countries in particular have had a surge of interest expressed through the formation of “green” parties that focus on the environment.