

Introduction

Politics is the subset of human behavior that involves the use of power or influence.

Power is involved whenever individuals can't accomplish their goals without either trying to influence the behavior of others or trying to wrestle free from the influence exerted by others.

Political science is the scientific study of power.

Any situation that involves the use of power is a political phenomenon.

If you're interested in power (who has it, where does it come from, when is it used), then political science is for you.

Comparative politics is a subfield of political science.

Three definitions of comparative politics:

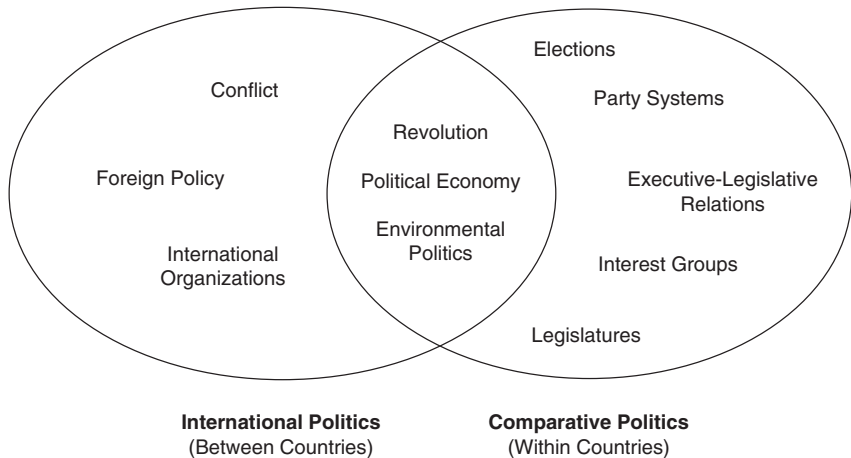
1. The study of political phenomena in every country *except the one in which the student resides*.

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Three definitions of comparative politics:

1. The study of political phenomena in every country *except the one in which the student resides*.
2. The study of political phenomena through the *comparative method*.
3. The study of political phenomena that are predominantly within country relationships.



Traditional Approach

“It's week 10, so it must be Mexico.”

Britain, France, China, Russia, India, Mexico, and Nigeria

Our Approach

- Problem oriented
- Scientific
- Strategic
- Methods

Problem Oriented

- Causes and consequences of democracy and dictatorship
- Causes and consequences of democratic and dictatorial institutions

Problem Oriented

Why does the state exist and where does it come from?

Why are some countries democracies and others dictatorships?

Why do some regimes treat their citizens better than others?

Why do some countries have many parties but others have few?

Problem Oriented

Explanation rather than description.

We're more interested in explaining, rather than describing, why politics is organized along ethnic lines in some countries but class lines in others, or why some countries are democracies but others dictatorships.

Problem Oriented

Common problems

- Credible commitment problems
- Collective action problems
- Principal-agent problems
- Preference aggregation problems
- Coalition formation problems
- Information and monitoring problems

Science

The **scientific method** involves formulating explanations that produce conjectures about the world that can be compared with experience.

When scientific theories are constructed properly, they yield statements about the world that can, in principle, be tested.

This allows us to use observation to determine the truth value of those statements and make inferences about the usefulness of our theories.

Science

Focus on **how to think** rather than **what to think**.

Science

Political ideologies don't fit with the emphasis on scientific theories and empirical evidence.

One way in which political ideologies differ from scientific theories is that they typically involve contradictory statements.

This interferes with our ability to use observation to evaluate the truthfulness of the assertions that a political ideology makes about the world.

Science

The purpose of a political ideology such as conservatism, liberalism, and socialism isn't to understand the world.

Instead, it's to motivate political action, give a specific meaning to the world, and justify a particular system of power.

Science

While contradictory premises spell disaster for scientific theories, they may just be the thing that progenitors of political ideologies are looking for.

This is because they allow them to lead people to accept whatever conclusion they want them to.

We'll focus on scientific theories, not political ideologies.

Strategic

We adopt an explicitly **strategic approach** to studying political phenomena.

Political outcomes result from the interaction of individuals seeking goals in an environment in which goal attainment is constrained by their resources and complicated by the choices of other actors.

Strategic behavior is central to politics.

Methods

You'll be introduced to a variety of **methods** that have become central to the study of comparative politics.

This will allow you to better evaluate the theories and empirical evidence we'll cover for yourself.