

PREFACE

Without comparisons to make, the mind does not know how to proceed.

Alexis de Tocqueville, French author, 1830s

In late 2018, Brazil held presidential elections. More than a dozen candidates competed, all hoping to win the more than 50 per cent of the vote needed to avoid a runoff. One of the leading contenders should have been Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of the left-wing Worker's Party, who had served two earlier terms as Brazil's leader. But Lula, as he is popularly known, was in jail on charges of corruption, so his place was taken by Fernando Haddad, representing a three-party alliance optimistically known as 'The People Happy Again'. The bulk of international headlines, though, were drawn by the major candidate of the political right, a one-time Army general named Jair Bolsonaro. Heading an alliance known as 'Brazil Above Everything, God Above Everyone', he was routinely described as the Brazilian Donald Trump, and was infamous for defending military rule in Brazil, and for his inflammatory comments about women, gays, foreigners, and indigenous communities.

Bolsonaro won the first round, but not by enough to win outright, so a second round was held three weeks later in which he and Haddad ran off against each other. Bolsonaro prevailed by more than ten percentage points, an outcome that was interpreted by many as a comment by voters on Brazil's problems with corruption and crime, and as a reflection of their low levels of trust in government. Clearly, the result had to be understood in terms of the circumstances in Brazil, but it could also be compared with events in several other countries:

- ◆ The ongoing popularity of Vladimir Putin in Russia.
- ◆ The election victory of Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines.
- ◆ The British decision to leave the European Union.
- ◆ The election victory of Donald Trump in the United States.
- ◆ The resurgence or successes of right-wing anti-establishment parties and leaders in several other parts of the world.

What they all had in common was a surge of populism and nationalism in the wake of declining trust in government and political elites, and a widening sense among many voters of being marginalized and of feeling threatened by the forces of globalization. Each event or trend could be analysed on its own terms, but it was only through comparison that their wider significance could be understood.

These examples illustrate the value and importance of comparative politics. To be sure, we can study individual countries in isolation and learn a great deal about their government and politics, but we can never fully understand them without the context that comparison provides. We can never really know if a country's politics is typical or unusual, we can never fully understand its place in the global system, we cannot draw up universal rules about government and politics, and we would find it harder to make political predictions.

In a neat and tidy world, every country would govern itself in approximately the same way: each would have a set of rules about how government works, there would be leaders in place to provide direction, each would have similar sets of governing institutions with approximately similar powers and functions, and there would be similar systems of law and of courts to support the law. There would be elections and other channels through which citizens could express themselves and be politically active, and there would be rules by which citizens were protected from government and from each other. The world, though, is not a neat and tidy place, and while government everywhere has the same basic role of governing, it comes in many different shades and varieties. Superficially, many of the institutions and processes might look the same, but closer study soon reveals that power and authority are defined, established, distributed, and limited in different ways.

Consider these examples:

- ◆ Presidents are far from equal: they might be political leaders with substantial powers, they might have a wide range of constitutional or political limits on their powers, or they might be little more than figureheads. They might be elected for one term, two terms, or for as many terms as they can earn for themselves by manipulating elections.

XII PREFACE

- ◆ Many countries do not have presidents, but instead have prime ministers, whose routes to power and job descriptions are quite different from those of presidents.
- ◆ Political parties come in a variety of forms: some countries have none, others have a single legal party, others have a single dominant party, and yet others may have as many as a dozen or more parties with seats in national and local legislatures.
- ◆ Elections come in many different structural forms: some are run on the basis of winner take all, others are based on dividing seats among parties on the basis of their share of the vote, some require that voters choose only one candidate from their district, others require voters to rank multiple candidates, and yet others are so blatantly manipulated as to make them largely meaningless.
- ◆ While some countries have political systems that are both transparent and responsive, and have leaders who try to consider the desires and hopes of a wide range of their citizens, others are closed and authoritarian, ruled by an elite that cares little about the wider public interest.

Most of the explanations for these differences lie in history: political systems have evolved differently according to different local circumstances and the influence of key leaders, revolutions, or unique needs. There has been much cross-fertilization along the way as countries have learned from one another, or exported political ideals, or have adopted political ideas from others. Even so, the result has been enormous variety, and we would be mistaken to think that all political systems are approximately the same, even if some are more or less democratic than others. Not only are the rules of government often quite different, but the way ordinary people see government is different, the degree to which they can influence government and political decisions varies from one case to another, and the problems they face are often different.

By comparing political systems, we give ourselves the frame of reference that can help us better understand each other. Once we compare presidents and prime ministers, for example, and how authority is divided in presidential and parliamentary systems, we can better understand the roles of executives and legislatures in different countries. Once we compare the structure of elections, we can better understand how political leaders come to power in the first place, and the limitations placed (or not) on those powers. And once we compare political events around the world, such as the election victories of leaders such as Rodrigo Duterte, Donald Trump, and Jair Bolsonaro, we can better understand whether or not those victories are part of wider trends, and what those trends might mean.

In the chapters that follow, we will be looking comparatively at government and politics by taking twelve cases of political systems chosen to provide a taste of the variety in which government can be found around the world. We will be focusing on history, institutions, and processes, asking several core questions along the way:

- ◆ Who governs?
- ◆ How do they govern?
- ◆ How do political systems evolve?
- ◆ What are the prevailing norms and values of those systems?
- ◆ How is power and authority defined, distributed, and limited?
- ◆ How do people participate in government, and with what results?
- ◆ What effect do the differences have on the way different countries are governed?

The twelve cases are carefully chosen to illustrate a variety of political types, to illustrate different levels of political development, and to ensure geographical and cultural diversity. The choice of the cases is based on a combination of two well-known political ranking systems: the Democracy Index maintained by the Economist Intelligence Unit in Britain (related to the news weekly *The Economist*), and the Freedom in the World index maintained by the New York-based think tank Freedom House. Both use a variety of political criteria to rank the countries of the world, and our twelve cases are chosen from a range of positions within those rankings – see Table 0.1. The order of the chapters is based on the order of the ranking, so we will begin with three of the most democratic cases (Britain, Germany, and the United States) and end with three of the most authoritarian (Russia, China, and Iran).

We will not be stopping with government and politics, but will also be looking at the economic and social differences among countries – see Table 0.2. These can tell us much about the efficiency (or inefficiency) of governments, and also about the successes or failures of political systems in responding to the economic needs of citizens, and of responding to (and being shaped by) social pressures, values, and divisions. As a rule, democracy and free markets go hand in hand, as do democracy and high levels of social development. But we will also find that

Table 0.1 The cases – Political rankings

	Democracy Index		Freedom in the World		System type
	Score	Category	Score	Freedom rating	
Norway	9.87	Full democracy	100	Free	Parliamentary
Germany	8.68	Full democracy	94	Free	Parliamentary
UK	8.53	Full democracy	94	Free	Parliamentary
Japan	7.99	Flawed democracy	96	Free	Parliamentary
USA	7.96	Flawed democracy	86	Free	Limited presidential
France	7.80	Flawed democracy	90	Free	Semi-presidential
India	7.23	Flawed democracy	77	Free	Parliamentary
Mexico	6.19	Flawed democracy	62	Partly Free	Limited presidential
Nigeria	4.44	Hybrid regime	50	Partly Free	Limited presidential
Turkey	4.37	Hybrid regime	32	Not Free	Limited presidential
Russia	2.94	Authoritarian	20	Not Free	Semi-presidential
Iran	2.45	Authoritarian	18	Not Free	Unlimited presidential
China	3.32	Authoritarian	14	Not Free	Unlimited presidential
North Korea	1.08	Authoritarian	3	Not Free	Unlimited presidential

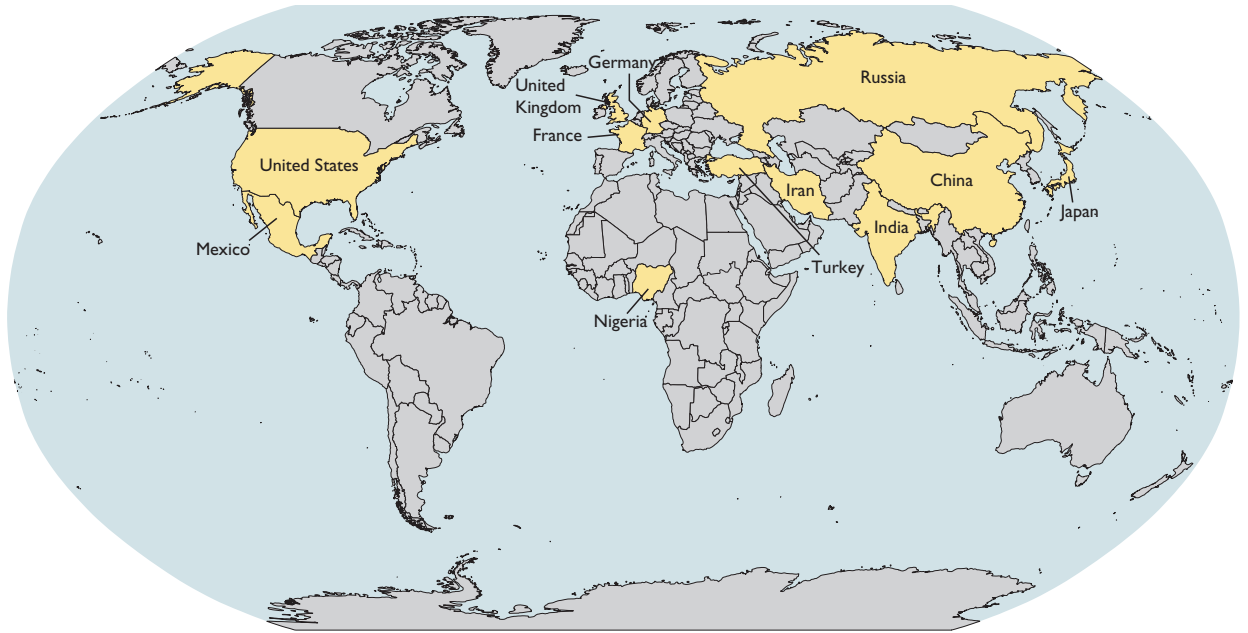
Sources: *Economist Intelligence Unit (2019) and Freedom House (2018b)*.

Note: Norway and North Korea do not appear as cases in this book, but are included in this table for context, as the highest and lowest ranking countries in the world.

Table 0.2 The cases – Economic and social rankings

	Population (millions)	Gross domestic product (\$ billion)	Per capita GDP (\$)	Human Development Index	
				Score	Ranking
UK	66	2,622	39,720	0.909	Very High
Germany	83	3,677	44,469	0.926	Very High
USA	326	19,391	59,531	0.920	Very High
Japan	127	4,872	38,428	0.903	Very High
France	67	2,582	38,476	0.897	Very High
India	1,339	2,597	1,939	0.624	Medium
Mexico	129	1,150	8,902	0.762	High
Nigeria	191	376	1,968	0.527	Low
Turkey	81	851	10,540	0.767	High
Russia	144	1,577	10,743	0.804	Very High
China	1,386	12,238	8,827	0.738	High
Iran	81	440	5,415	0.774	High

Sources: *World Bank (2019) and United Nations Development Programme (2018)*.



Map 0.1 The cases used in this book

countries with poor records on democracy (Russia being a notable example) occasionally perform well on human development, while several democracies (Britain and the United States being notable examples) continue to struggle with deep economic, social, and cultural divisions.

The book opens with two survey chapters designed to set the scene for the cases:

- ◆ Chapter 1 offers a review of the field of comparative politics, outlining its purposes, goals, and methods, and explaining the typology used in this book.
- ◆ Chapter 2 focuses on the structure of political systems, providing a survey of the different aspects of government and politics discussed in the cases, including political development, political culture, key institutions, and political processes.

The remainder of the book is taken up with the case studies, each of them structured around four central topics:

- ◆ **Political development.** We cannot fully understand a political system without understanding where it came from and how it evolved. Much of what we find in the structure of governments, the traditions of politics, the sources and distribution of wealth, and the divisions within societies is based on historical circumstances, such that the present would be hard to understand without at least a brief review of the past. (And as we will see in Chapter 1, the historical method is one of the approaches we can use in making political comparisons.)
- ◆ **Political culture.** The personality of political systems is a key part of comparison, as captured in the values and norms that define different systems, and in patterns of political behaviour that are considered either normal or abnormal. Hence it is important that we look at the political personality and expectations of each of our cases.
- ◆ **Political system.** Understanding how political institutions work is essential to comparison. We need to know how they function, how they relate to each other, from where they derive their authority, the limits that are placed on their powers, and the impact that citizens have on their work. To these ends, this section in each case will describe the institutional ‘rules’ of the political system, and assess the relationships among its elements.
- ◆ **Political processes.** Government consists of a network of systems and processes, with leaders and citizens relating to each other in a large and complex series of games. This section focuses on the inputs into those systems, or the ways in which people take part (or are prevented from taking part) in politics. They may do this through voting, lobbying, demonstrating, or supporting political parties and interest groups, but they may also do it through bribery, intimidation, violence, and murder.

Clearly there is a limit to how much we can address in short chapters, but each will provide a taste of the character of government and politics in contrasting situations, and comparisons are made throughout the cases, tying them to one another and to the two opening chapters. You might think of this book as akin to the experience of visiting a restaurant that serves a cuisine with which you are not familiar, so instead of opting for a single dish, you try a sampler dish that gives you a taste of the different options available further down the menu. The sampler provides context, and on later visits you can try the different main dishes and compare among them.