ONE
WHAT IS POLITICS?

Whether a person likes it or not, virtually no one is completely beyond the reach of some kind of political system. A citizen encounters politics in the government of a country, town, school, church, business firm, trade union, club, political party, civic association, and a host of other organizations. Politics is an unavoidable fact of human existence. Everyone is involved in some fashion at some time in some kind of political system.

If politics is inescapable, so are the consequences of politics. That statement might once have been shrugged off as rhetorical, but today it is a brutal and palpable fact. For whether humankind will be blown to smithereens or will design political arrangements that enable our species to survive is now being determined—by politics and politicians.

The answer to the question, “Why analyze politics?” is obvious then. We cannot really escape politics—though we may try to ignore it. That is a powerful reason for trying to understand it. You may want to understand politics simply in order to satisfy your curiosity, or to feel that you comprehend what is going on around you, or in order to make the best possible choices among the alternatives open to you—that is, in order to act wisely.

Although, for most people, making better choices probably provides the strongest incentive for political analysis, human beings also tend to feel a powerful need to make sense out of their world. To be sure, anyone can
make some sense out of politics; but politics is an exceptionally complex matter, quite likely one of the most complex matters human beings encounter. The danger is that without skill in dealing with its complexities, one will drastically oversimplify politics. It is fair to say, I think, that most people do oversimplify. Of course, because some simplification is unavoidable, this book also simplifies political complexities; but it does not, I believe, do so excessively. As we shall see, trying to acquire the elementary skills necessary for understanding politics is not a simple task.

**NATURE OF THE POLITICAL ASPECT**

What distinguishes the political aspect of human society from other aspects? What are the characteristics of a political system as distinct, say, from an economic system? Although students of politics have never entirely agreed on answers to these questions, they tend to agree on certain key points. Probably no one would quarrel with the notion that a political system is a pattern of political relationships. But what is a political relationship?

On this question, as on many others, an important, though not always entirely clear, place to start is Aristotle's *Politics* (written ca. 335–332 B.C.). In the first book of the *Politics*, Aristotle argues against those who say that all kinds of authority are identical and seeks to distinguish the authority of the political leader in a political association, or polis, from other forms of authority, such as the master over the slave, the husband over the wife, and the parents over the children.

Aristotle takes for granted, however, that at least one aspect of a political association is the existence of authority or rule. Indeed, Aristotle defines the polis, or political association, as the "most sovereign and inclusive association" and a constitution, or polity, as "the organization of a polis, in respect of its offices generally, but especially in respect of that particular office which is sovereign in all issues." One of Aristotle's criteria for classifying constitutions is the portion of the citizen body in which final authority or rule is located.

Ever since Aristotle's time, the notion has been widely shared that a political relationship in some way involves authority, ruling, or power. For example, one of the most influential modern social scientists, the German scholar Max Weber (1864–1920), postulated that an association should be called political "if and in so far as the enforcement of its order is carried out continually within a given territorial area by the application and threat of physical force on the part of the administrative staff." Thus, although Weber emphasized the territorial aspect of a political association, like Aristotle he specified that a relationship of authority or rule was one of its essential characteristics.

To take a final example, a leading modern political scientist, Harold Lasswell, defined, "political science, as an empirical discipline, [as] the study of the shaping and sharing of power," and "[a] political act [as] one performed in power perspectives."

The areas of agreement and disagreement in the positions held by Aristotle, Weber, and Lasswell on the nature of politics are illustrated by Figure 1–1. Aristotle, Weber, and Lasswell, and almost all other political scientists, agree that political relationships are to be found somewhere within circle A, the set of relationships involving power, rule, or authority. Lasswell calls everything in A political, by definition. Aristotle and Weber, on the other hand, define the term political so as to require one or more additional characteristics, indicated by circles B and C. For example, to Weber the domain of the political would not be everything inside A or everything inside B (territoriality) but everything in the area of overlap, AB, involving both rule and territoriality. Although Aristotle is less clear than either Weber or Lasswell on the point, doubtless he would limit the domain of the political even further—to relationships in associations capable of self-

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sufficiency (C). Hence, to Aristotle, “politics” would be found only in the area ABC.

Clearly, everything that Aristotle and Weber would call political, Lasswell would too. But Lasswell would consider as political some things that Weber and Aristotle might not: A business firm or a trade union, for example, would have “political” aspects. Let us therefore boldly define a political system as any persistent pattern of human relationships that involves, to a significant extent, control, influence, power, or authority.

THE UBIQUITY OF POLITICS

Admittedly, this definition is very broad. Indeed, it means that many associations that most people ordinarily do not regard as “political” possess political systems: private clubs, business firms, labor unions, religious organizations, civic groups, primitive tribes, clans, perhaps even families. Three considerations may help clarify the unfamiliar notion that almost every human association has a political aspect:

(1) In common parlance we speak of the “government” of a club, a firm, and so on. In fact, we may even describe such a government as dictatorial, democratic, representative, or authoritarian; and we often hear about “politics” and “politicking” going on in these associations.

(2) A political system is only one aspect of an association. When we say that a person is a doctor, or a teacher, or a farmer, we do not assume that he or she is only a doctor, only a teacher, only a farmer. No human association is exclusively political in all its aspects. People experience many relationships other than power and authority: love, respect, dedication, shared beliefs, and so on.

(3) Our definition says virtually nothing about human motives. It definitely does not imply that in every political system people are driven by powerful inner needs to rule others, that leaders passionately want authority, or that politics is inherently a fierce struggle for power. Conceivably, relationships of authority could exist even among people of whom none had a passion for power, or in situations where people who most ardently thirsted for authority had the least chance of acquiring it. Thus the Zuni Indians of the American Southwest are reported to have had a very strong sense that power-seeking was illicit and power seekers must not be given power.\(^4\) Closer to our own experience is the not uncommon view among members of various American private organizations that those who most intensely to head the organization are least suited to do so, while the

\(^4\) In Chapter 3, words such as control, power, influence, and authority are called influence terms. The concept of influence is defined in that chapter.


most suitable are among those who least want the job. But whatever the evidence from anthropology or folklore may be, the central point is this: Our highly general definition of a political system makes practically no assumption as to the nature of human motives. Despite its breadth, the definition helps us make some critical distinctions that are often blurred in ordinary discussions.

(4) Our definition also deliberately ignores a quality that many political philosophers from Aristotle to the present have attributed to politics: that it is in some sense a public activity that involves public purposes, or public interests, or a public good, or some other distinctly “public” aspect of human life. If politics were so defined, then we should be obliged to add a fourth circle to Figure 1–1, and the domain of politics would shrink even further. But there are good reasons for not including this notion in our definition, for venerable though it may be among political philosophers, it bristles with difficulties. To begin with, this understanding of the meaning of “politics” reflects poorly how the term is used in ordinary language today, where it often refers to the self-seeking and self-promoting activity of ambitious politicians. Likewise, it surely cannot be intended as an empirical account of the motives that drive people engaged in politics. For to determine what motivates people requires empirical inquiry and cannot be settled simply by definition. Yet neither common experience nor systematic research seem to give much support to the hypothesis that people who engage in politics are primarily motivated by a concern for the public good. We return to the question of what motivates people in politics in Chapter 9. If, on the other hand, the notion is not intended to be either a definition or an empirical statement but an assertion of what ought to be the end, aim, or result of political life, then it obviously is a normative statement. But as an assertion about ends or values, it requires examination, and cannot reasonably be smuggled in simply as a way of defining politics. In Chapter 10, we return to the problems of political values.

Politics and Economics

Political analysis deals with power, rule or authority. Economics concerns itself with scarce resources or the production and distribution of goods and services. Politics is one aspect of a great variety of human institutions; economics is another aspect. Hence an economist and a political scientist might both study the same concrete institution—the Federal Reserve system, for example, or the budget. But the economist would be concerned primarily with problems involving scarcity and the use of scarce resources, and the political scientist would deal primarily with problems involving relationships of power, rule, or authority. Like most distinctions between subjects of intellectual inquiry, however, that between politics and economics is not perfectly sharp.
Political Systems and Economic Systems

Many people indiscriminately apply terms like democracy, dictatorship, capitalism, and socialism to both political and economic systems. This tendency to confuse political with economic systems stems from the lack of a standardized set of definitions, from ignorance of the historical origins of these terms, and in some cases from a desire to exploit a highly favorable or unfavorable political term like "democracy" or "dictatorship" in order to influence attitudes toward economic systems.

It follows, however, that the political aspects of an institution are not the same as its economic aspects. Historically, the terms "democracy" and "dictatorship" usually have referred to political systems, whereas "capitalism" and "socialism" have referred to economic institutions. From the way the terms have been used historically, the following definitions are appropriate.

1. A democracy is a political system in which the opportunity to participate in decisions is widely shared among all adult citizens.
2. A dictatorship is a political system in which the opportunity to participate in decisions is restricted to a few.
3. Capitalism is an economic system in which most major economic activities are performed by privately owned and controlled firms.
4. Socialism is an economic system in which most major activities are performed by agencies owned by the government or society.

Each pair of terms, democracy-dictatorship, capitalism-socialism, implies a dichotomy, and dichotomies are often unsatisfactory. In fact, many political systems are neither wholly democratic nor wholly dictatorial; in many countries private and governmental operations are mixed together in all sorts of complex ways. In the real world, politics and economics are profoundly intermixed. These mixtures not only demonstrate the shortcomings of the dichotomy "capitalism-socialism" but also emphasize the fact that some institutions and processes can be viewed as part of the economic system for certain purposes and as part of the political system for others. The point to remember is that in spite of, or even because of, this intermixing, it has proved to be intellectually fruitful to distinguish some aspects of life as "economic" and other aspects as "political."

Systems and Subsystems

Any collection of elements that interact in some way with one another can be considered a system: a galaxy, a football team, a legislature, a political party. 6 In thinking about political systems, it is helpful to keep in mind four points that apply to any system:

6The most extensive attempt to apply systems theory to political science is in two works by David Easton: A Framework for Political Analysis (Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1965) and A Systems Analysis of Political Life (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. 1965).

(1) To call something a system is an abstract way of looking at concrete things. One therefore should be careful not to confuse the concrete thing with the abstract "system." A "system" is an aspect of things in some degree abstracted from reality for purposes of analysis; the circulatory system of a mammal or the personality system of a human being are examples.

(2) In order to determine what lies within a particular system and what lies outside it, we need to specify the boundaries of that system. Sometimes this task is fairly easy, as in the case of the solar system or the United States Supreme Court, but often it requires an arbitrary decision. For example, what would we consider to be the boundaries of our two major parties? Would we include only party officials? Or would we also include all those who register as Democrats or Republicans? Or those who identify themselves as one or the other, even though they do not register? Or those who vote regularly for the one party or the other?

(3) One system can be an element, a subsystem, of another. The earth is a subsystem of our solar system, which is a subsystem of our galaxy, which is a subsystem of the universe. The Foreign Relations Committee is a subsystem of the United States Senate, which is a subsystem of the Congress, and so on.

(4) Something may be a subsystem of two or more different systems that overlap only in part. A college professor might be an active member of the American Association of University Professors, the Democratic party, and the PTA.

It is useful to keep these observations in mind in considering the difference between a political system and a social system.

Political Systems and Social Systems

What is a democratic society? a free society? a socialist society? an authoritarian society? an international society? In what way is a social system distinguished from a political system?

Questions like these are particularly difficult to answer because the terms society and social system are used loosely, even by social scientists. In general, however, the term social is intended to be inclusive; economic and political relations are specific kinds of social relations. Although social system is sometimes given a more specific meaning, it too is a broad concept. Thus, Talcott Parsons, a leading American sociologist, defined a social system by three characteristics: (1) two or more persons interact; (2) in their actions they take account of how the others are likely to act; and (3) sometimes they act together in pursuit of common goals. 7 A social system, then, is a very inclusive kind of order.

According to Parsons's usage, a political system or an economic system

a highly democratic Constitution was reinforced by many other aspects of the society. Hence American society could be called a democratic society.

By contrast, many observers were pessimistic about the prospects of democracy in Germany after World War II because they believed that many aspects of German society were highly authoritarian and tended to undermine democratic political relations. They were mainly concerned with the wide tendency for social institutions of all kinds to take on a strong pattern of dominance and submission—the family, schools, churches, business, and all relations between government officials, whether police or civil servants, and ordinary citizens. The fact that political democracy had to be instituted in a predominantly authoritarian social environment was not particularly auspicious for the future of democracy in Germany. A number of recent observers, on the other hand, now feel optimistic about political democracy in Germany precisely because they see evidence that the authoritarian character of other social institutions has greatly declined.

**Government and State**

In every society, people tend to develop more or less standard expectations about social behavior in various situations. One learns how to behave as a host or a guest, a parent or grandparent, a "good loser," a soldier, a bank clerk, a prosecutor, a judge, and so on. Patterns like these, in which a number of people share roughly similar expectations about behavior in particular situations, are called roles. We all play various roles and frequently shift from one role to another rapidly.

Whenever a political system is complex and stable, political roles develop. Perhaps the most obvious political roles are played by persons who create, interpret, and enforce rules that are binding on members of the political system. These roles are offices, and the collection of offices in a political system constitutes the government of that system. At any given moment, of course, these offices, or roles, are (aside from vacancies) filled by particular individuals, concrete persons—Senator Foghorn, Judge Cranky, Mayor Twimbly. But in many systems the roles remain much the same even when they are played by a succession of individuals. To be sure, different actors may—and usually do—interpret the role of Hamlet or Othello in different ways, sometimes in radically different ways. So, too, with political roles. Jefferson, Jackson, Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, Wilson, and Franklin Roosevelt, for example, each enlarged the role of president beyond what he had inherited from his predecessors by building new expectations in people's minds about what a president should or legitimately could do in office. "There are as many different ways of being President," Nelson Polsby asserts, "as there are men willing to fill the office." Yet expectations as to

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(From *What Is Politics?*, 4th ed. by R. A. Dahl, 1989, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. All rights reserved.)
the proper role of the president also limit the extent to which they can make it what they wish—a fact dramatized by President Johnson’s decision in 1968 not to seek reelection because, in effect, he could no longer play the presidential role in the way that he believed the office required.

But—a reader might ask—in defining government as we have just done, don’t we create a new problem for ourselves? If there is a great variety of political systems—from trade unions and universities to countries and international organizations—what about the government? After all, in the United States, as in most other countries, when you speak of the government everyone seems to know what you mean. Of all the governments in the various associations of a particular territory, generally one is in some way recognized as the government. How does the government differ from other governments? Consider three possible answers:

(1) The government pursues “higher” and “nobler” purposes than other governments. There are least three difficulties with this proposal. First, because people disagree about what the “higher” or “nobler” purposes are, and even whether a given purpose is or is not being pursued at any given moment, this criterion might not be very helpful in trying to decide whether this or that government is the government. Second, despite the fact that people often disagree over how to rank purposes or values and may even hold that the government is pursuing evil ends, they still agree on what is and what is not the government. An anarchist does not doubt that he is being oppressed by the government. Third, what about bad governments? For example, do democratic and totalitarian governments both pursue noble purposes? That point seems logically absurd.

Our first proposed answer, then, confuses the problem of defining government with the more difficult and more important task of deciding on the criteria for a “good” or “just” government. Before we can decide what the best government is, we must know first what the government is.

(2) Aristotle suggested another possibility: The government is distinguished by the character of the association to which it pertains—namely, a political association that is self-sufficient, in the sense that it possesses all the qualities and resources necessary for a good life. This definition suffers from some of the same difficulties as the first. Moreover, if it were strictly applied, we should have to conclude that no governments exist! Aristotle’s idealized interpretation of the city-state was very far from reality even in his day. Athens was not self-sufficient culturally, economically, or militarily. In fact, it was quite unable to guarantee its own peace or independence; without allies, it could not even maintain the freedom of its own citizens. What was true of the Greek city-states is of course equally true today.

(3) The government is any government that successfully upholds a claim to the exclusive regulation of the legitimate use of physical force in enforcing its rules within a given territorial area.10 The political system made up of the residents of that territorial area and the government of the area is a state.11

This definition immediately suggests three questions:

(1) Can’t individuals who aren’t government officials ever legitimately use force? What about parents who spank their children? The answer is, of course, that the government of a state does not necessarily monopolize the use of force, but it has the exclusive authority to set the limits within which force may legitimately be used. The governments of most states permit private individuals to use force in some circumstances. For example, although many governments forbid cruel or excessive punishment of children, most permit parents to spank their own offspring. Boxcar is permitted in many countries.

(2) What about criminals who go uncaught? After all, no country is free of assault, murder, rape, and other forms of violence, and criminals sometimes escape the law. The point is, however, that the claim of the government of the State to regulate violence and force is successfully upheld, in the sense that few people would seriously contest the exclusive right of the State to punish criminals. Although criminal violence exists, it is not legitimate.

(3) What about circumstances of truly widespread violence and force, such as civil war or revolution? In this case no single answer will suffice. During some periods, no state may exist at all, since no government is capable of upholding its claim to the exclusive regulation of the use of physical force. Several governments may contest the privilege over the same territory as was the case in Lebanon following the outbreak of religious wars in 1975. Or what was formerly a territory ruled by the government of one state may now be divided and ruled by the governments of two or more states, with gray areas where they meet.

We can be reasonably sure of one thing: When large numbers of people in a particular territory begin to doubt or deny the claim of the government to regulate force, then the existing state is in peril of dissolution.

10 Adapted from Weber, Theory of Social and Economic Organization, p. 154, by substituting "exclusive regulation" for "monopoly" and "rules" for "its order."

11 Capitalized here to avoid confusion with constituent states in federal systems.
SIX

POLITICAL SYSTEMS: DIFFERENCES

Schemes for classifying political systems into different types are, of course, as old as the study of politics itself. Aristotle, for example, produced a classification based on two criteria: the relative number of citizens entitled to rule, whether one, few, or many; and whether the rulers governed in “the common interest” or in their own selfish interests.1 This famous sixfold classification (Table 6–1) has influenced thinking ever since. But a half century ago, Max Weber offered a classification that has had more influence among

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NO. CITIZENS ENTITLED TO RULE</th>
<th>RULERS RULE IN INTEREST OF THEMSELVES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>Kingship (monarchy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Few</td>
<td>Aristocracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many</td>
<td>Polity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyranny</td>
<td>Oligarchy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democracy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

later social scientists than Aristotle's. Weber restricted his attention to systems in which the government was accepted as legitimate, and he suggested that the leaders of a political system might claim legitimacy for their rule, and members might accept their claims, on three grounds:

(1) **Tradition:** Legitimacy rests "on an established belief in the sanctity of immemorial traditions" and on the need to obey leaders who exercise the authority according to the traditions. Weber held that this was "the most universal and primitive case" of authority.

(2) **Exceptional Personal Qualities:** Legitimacy is based on "devotion to the specific and exceptional sanctity, heroism, or exemplary character of an individual person" and the moral or political order he or she has revealed or ordained.

(3) **Legality:** Legitimacy rests on a belief that power is wielded in a way that is legal; the constitutional rules, the laws, and the powers of officials are accepted as binding because they are legal; what is done legally is regarded as legitimate.²

To each of these three main grounds for legitimacy, then, there corresponds a "pure" form of authority: (1) traditional authority, (2) charismatic authority (from a Greek word used by early Christians meaning "the gift of grace"), and (3) legal authority.

Weber recognized that these pure forms were abstractions or, as he called them, "ideal types." In an actual political system one might encounter all three kinds of legitimate authority.

Weber's and Aristotle's schemes have been all but pushed aside by the typologies that have crowded into political analysis in recent years.³

Is there one best typology? Obviously, no. There are thousands of criteria for classifying political systems. Which ones we find most useful will depend on the aspects of politics in which we are most interested. A geographer might distinguish political systems according to the area they occupy, a demographer by the number of persons who are members, a lawyer according to their legal codes. A philosopher or theologian interested in distinguishing "the best" political system will use ethical or religious criteria. A social scientist interested in determining how revolution is related to economic conditions might classify systems by relative income and frequency of revolutions. Just as there is no one best way of classifying people, so too there is no single way of distinguishing and classifying political systems superior to others for all purposes.

³Some of these, particularly those relevant to democratic systems, are summarized in Arend Lijphart, "Typologies of Democratic Systems," Comparative Political Studies 1 (April 1968), pp. 3-44. For his own typology, see his "Democratic Political Systems: Types, Cases, Causes, and Consequences," Journal of Theoretical Politics 1, no. 1 (January 1989), pp. 33-48.

If there are innumerable differences between political systems, some are associated with such a broad range of important consequences—particularly consequences for popular government—that they are particularly worth stressing. These are: (1) paths to the present, (2) the socioeconomic "level" or degree of "modernity," (3) distribution of political resources and skills, (4) bases of cleavage and cohesion, (5) the magnitude or severity of conflicts, and (6) institutions for sharing and exercising power.

Although in some degree these differences apply to political systems of all sorts, let us focus the discussion by assuming as our frame of reference the political system of a country.

### PATHS TO THE PRESENT

Every political system has had, in some respects, a unique past. This is more than an abstract point, for the inheritance of the past bears heavily on the present and influences the future. Differences in their past mean that the countries of the world do not have exactly the same options. A people that has known nothing but centuries of authoritarian rule is not likely to turn into a stable democracy in a week. And as we shall see in a moment, a country's particular path to the present often makes an all but ineradicable imprint on its conflicts, so powerful that internal peace and stability cannot possibly be brought about by a few months of negotiations.

### DEGREE OF "MODERNITY"

History leaves political systems embedded in societies that are at different stages of "development" or "modernization." These terms, now widely used among political scientists, have a parochial air about them, but their meaning can be made quite specific—enough so, indeed, to allow for measurement. There are, in short, profound differences from one country to another in the amount of income per capita, literacy, education, technical skills, technology, industrialization, urbanization, newspaper and magazine circulation, electronic communications, transportation facilities, and the like. These all tend to be intercorrelated: A country relatively low (less "developed") in one respect will very likely be relatively low in other respects, and the converse is true as well.⁴

In Table 6-2, 149 countries are divided into five categories according to GNP per capita. As the table shows, the higher a country's per capita

Table 6-2 Countries by GNP and Other Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIFTH</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>GNP PER CAP</th>
<th>PERCENT SCHOOL AGE IN SCHOOL</th>
<th>LITERACY RATE</th>
<th>POPULATION PER PHYSICIAN</th>
<th>INFANT MORTALITY RATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>12126</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>645</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3224</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>1392</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1149</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>5731</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>9001</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>24077</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


GNP, the greater the percentage of the school-age population enrolled in school, the higher the literacy rate, the smaller the number of persons per physician, and the lower the infant mortality rate. One could find similar relations with many other variables of the kind mentioned in the previous paragraph. Thus GNP per capita is a useful indicator—but not because of what it signifies standing by itself. We shall see in the next chapter that several of the countries with the highest GNP per capita are ranked much lower than the others in the factors in Table 6-2. As the table suggests, however, for most countries GNP per capita is closely associated with many other important features of the country's society. Generally speaking, the societies of the countries in the top fifth of the table are radically different from those in third, fourth, or lowest categories. It so happens that the societies of countries in the top fifth possess a variety of features particularly favorable to democratic regimes. By contrast, the lower a country stands in the table, the less favorable are the conditions for democracy. We shall return to this important point in the next chapter.

DISTRIBUTION OF POLITICAL RESOURCES AND SKILLS

Political resources and skills are distributed in different ways in different political systems. Although they are distributed unequally in all systems, the degree of inequality varies from one system to the next. For example,

It is worth bearing in mind that data on GNP and other indicators should be treated with some caution. Cross-national comparisons of GNP are risky. Moreover, the bureaucratic capacities for collecting statistics vary greatly. Scholars have reported incidents in some less developed countries of data that were obviously made up by officials. The error in infant mortality rates is probably very high.

Wealth is a political resource, and wealth is distributed unequally everywhere, but the degree of inequality varies. For example, the distribution of land, an important form of wealth in agricultural countries, is markedly unequal in all countries. But the inequality in landholdings was considerably more extreme in Iraq, where half the total acreage was occupied by 0.7 percent of the farms, than in Denmark, where half the acreage was taken up by 21 percent of the farms. (See Figure 6-1.)

The extent to which inequalities are correlated also varies from society to society. Suppose every person in a political system were ranked according to relative standing with respect to the most important political resources in that society: let us say wealth, income, knowledge, popularity, control over communications, and command over police and military forces. If everyone's relative standing were the same, thus resulting in a perfect correlation, inequalities in resources would be completely cumulative. The more

Table 6-3 Literacy Rates of 137 Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LITERACY RATE (%)</th>
<th>NUMBER OF COUNTRIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-99</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-89</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-79</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-89</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 50%</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N:</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Among persons over 15.

Source: Sivard, World Military and Social Expenditures, Table 3, pp. 36ff.

See Charles Lewis Taylor and Michael C. Hudson, World Handbook of Political and Social Indicators (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1972), Tables 4.4 and 5.5.
TABLE 6-4 Percentage of School-Age Children (Ages 5-19) in School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PERCENTAGE</th>
<th>NUMBER OF COUNTRIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-79</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>under 20%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N: 135

Source: Sivard, World Military and Social Expenditures, Table 3, pp. 36ff.

of one resource an individual had, the more that individual would have of the rest. If, however, an individual’s standing on one ranking bore no relationship to other rankings (there is no correlation), inequalities in resources would be dispersed. Dispersion does not mean equality: In a system with completely dispersed inequalities, there could be inequality with respect to every political resource. Nonetheless, the difference between cumulative and dispersed inequalities is a crucial one, for in a society of dispersed inequalities, people lacking one resource might make up for it by having greater control over other resources.

Neither type exists in pure form. There is a strong tendency toward cumulative inequality, yet there appear to be significant differences in the inequalities among political systems. In countries still remaining at one of the three lower levels in Table 6-2, inequalities are usually highly cumulative. In societies undergoing an industrial revolution, however, wealth and income shift away from an older feudal aristocracy or landed oligarchy toward the new leaders—in industry, banking, and commerce. Yet for the bulk of the population, in spite of rising incomes, inequalities are still strongly cumulative. (This is the stage that Marx witnessed in western Europe in the mid-nineteenth century.) Following a period of industrialization, some countries have made a further transition to a new kind of society—modern, dynamic, pluralistic. As incomes and mass consumption continue to increase, there is a further diffusion of technology, literacy, education, affluence, and mass communication. This diffusion also may be accompanied by a marked expansion in interest-group organizations, political skills, and the suffrage. Even in these circumstances inequalities in political resources still persist, but they become less cumulative and more dispersed. Hence it becomes difficult to identify a small, well-defined elite that “runs the country,” for different elites tend to exercise influence over different scopes of activity and their relations become highly complex. For example, information and knowledge become unusually important resources for gaining and maintaining influence, and various “information and knowledge elites” come to play crucial roles in decisions. The influence of a president’s national security advisor, a senator’s administrative assistant, the staff of a congressional committee, and the director of Central Intelligence requires skill in receiving, interpreting, shaping, and transmitting crucial, important information often highly specialized and technical, to other key decision makers. But it is not only at these high levels that the need for information enables specialists to acquire influence on decisions; more and more, decision makers within all the institutions of a modern society depend on them, whether local governments, firms in industry, commerce, and finance, trade unions, political parties, or international organizations.

CLEAVAGE AND COHESION

The patterns of political disagreement, conflict, and coalition have different causes in different systems. This proposition and the following paragraphs should be read with caution: It opposes a widespread view that political conflict can be explained by a single source of cleavage, usually an economic characteristic like “class” or “property.”
POLITICAL SYSTEMS: DIFFERENCES

In spite of an enormous amount of speculation, theory, and research, our understanding of political conflict is still limited. Single-factor explanations simply do not stand up well against the data now available. The kinds of individual and group characteristics that are associated with political conflict in countries include not only differences in social status, economic class, income, wealth, and occupation, but also in education, ideology, religion, language, region, and family origins. This multiplicity of factors creates different patterns of political cleavage and cohesion from one country to another.

In the first place, history has left countries with different legacies of characteristics that foster cleavages and cohesiveness, such as language. Because of our experience, Americans may be accustomed to believing that other countries have only one language, which many do; yet our neighbor, Canada, has two. Or compare the Low Countries: The Netherlands has a single language, yet in neighboring Belgium a lingustic boundary has existed for over a thousand years that runs across modern Belgium and divides Walloons, who speak French, from Flemings who speak Flemish, a Germanic language. In Switzerland the boundary between the French- and German-speaking zones has barely changed since it first evolved in the fifth century A.D. On the other side of the world the Indians have over 15 major languages and 500 minor languages and dialects. In fact, in India many minority languages—English is one—are spoken by more people than there are in all of Sweden.  

In the second place, history has left varying memories of the past treatment of these differences. Take racial differences. In the United States the enslavement of people of African origin created a castelike system of discrimination that survived long after the abolition of slavery, continues with diminishing force to the present day, and has been the source of severe conflict. By contrast, in Brazil, where an even higher proportion of the population were of African origin and where slavery was not fully abolished until a generation after the American Civil War, the dominant population, which was mainly of Portuguese origin, accepted racial intermixing much more readily. Because of this, even though racial discrimination exists in Brazil, it has not been a major source of conflict, unlike in the United States. Or consider language again. The Swiss nation was built upon equality among its languages; as a result, political conflicts and resentments caused by linguistic differences are nearly negligible. In Belgium, on the other hand, after a flourishing period of Flemish prosperity and preeminence (its brilliance is reflected in the great Flemish painters of the time), an economic and cultural decline led to the subordination of the Flemish to the Walloons, a condition that embittered Belgian politics. In recent years, the economic decline of the Flemish areas has been reversed, while the Walloon region has declined, leading to resentment among the Walloons. Or take religion. In the United States, controversy between religious groups has been comparatively mild. But the conflict between the Protestant majority and Catholic minority in Northern Ireland leads to daily violence and frequent killing. In the Middle East, an almost impenetrable tangle of conflicts involve Moslems, Jews, and Christians, Israelis and Arabs, Moslem Arabs in Iraq and Moslem (but non-Arab) Iranians, Sunni Moslems and Shiite Moslems.

Finally, different stages of development tend to generate different forces stimulating cleavages and coalitions. In the nineteenth century, urbanization and industrialization in western European countries were accompanied by the misery and conflict that Marx was confident would finally polarize into a clear-cut conflict between an expanding urban proletariat and a decreasing capitalist bourgeoisie in which the proletariat was bound to win. Yet from the perspective of a later century, it appears that Marx was too hasty in extrapolating the early phases of industrialization into the indefinite future. Marx witnessed western Europe during the Industrial Revolution. He accurately foresaw that political conflicts would take place over demands for transforming the circumstances of the urban working classes. What he did not foresee was that long before the “bourgeoisie” was defeated in a conflict with the proletariat, three things would happen: The Industrial Revolution would begin to be transformed into a stage of high mass consumption; the industrial proletariat would shrink in size and become an increasingly smaller minority of the total working force, and because many demands put forward by leaders of the working classes would be met, the industrial proletariat, a minority, would become increasingly unresponsive to militant appeals for revolutionary change.

Yet in countries now passing through an industrial revolution, conflicts over demands for ameliorating or transforming the situation of urban workers are likely to be a prominent feature of political life. Meanwhile, new social and ideological bases of conflict are emerging in the high mass consumption societies.

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*Something of the range of variation in the historical legacy of differences will be found in Marie R. Haug, "Social and Cultural Pluralism as a Concept in Social System Analysis." American Journal of Sociology 73 (November 1967), pp. 294–304. The author classifies 114 countries according to an Index of Pluralism to reflect the amount of heterogeneity in language, race, religion, sectionalism, and ethnic groups. See also Table 4.15, "Ethnic and Linguistic Fractionalization" (in 136 countries) in Charles Lewis Taylor and Michael C. Hudson, World Handbook of Political and Social Indicators (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1971), pp. 271–74.

*It does not follow, however, that the working classes have become a minority. For a presentation of statistics to the contrary, see Andrew Levison, The Working Class Majority (New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1974).
THE SEVERITY OF CONFLICT

The severity of conflict varies over time within any given system and from one system to another during the same period of time. Whatever difficulties may lurk in this proposition must not be allowed to obscure the fact that on common-sense grounds the proposition is hardly open to doubt. More than a century ago, Americans were engaged in killing one another on a massive scale in a civil war; that obviously was a severe conflict. The coup in Indonesia in 1966 in which the Sukarno regime was overthrown and several hundred thousand people were killed was unquestionably a severe conflict. Armed rebellion, civil war, violent revolution, guerrilla warfare, street battles, mass exile: These are conflicts of extreme severity. Speeches, debates, peaceful assembly, and peaceful elections are not.

Within any particular country, the temperature of political conflict fluctuates. Even the most stable countries are likely to have had a time of great turbulence and violence, a time of uprising, regime, internal war—a "time of troubles." But the temperature of politics also fluctuates over short time periods. The Civil War marks the period of our most extreme conflict, but there has also been a conflict of considerable severity about once a generation throughout our national history, beginning with the Alien and Sedition laws at the end of the first decade under our Constitution.

During any particular period of time, however, some countries are more peaceful than others in their internal politics. While some countries may be passing through their historic Time of Troubles, others are basking in a mood of reconciliation and unity. It is even plausible that national differences in culture and temperament may make people in some countries more prone than those in others to seek peaceful, consensual solutions to their disputes. However that may be, it is clear that in any particular decade, conflict is more severe in some countries than in others.

Naturally, it is not easy to design satisfactory measurements for a concept such as "severity of conflict," nor to gather and interpret the data. More than a half century ago, a pioneering effort of this kind was carried out by a sociologist, Pitirim A. Sorokin. Despite the high level of his work, his findings have been largely neglected. Sorokin applied intelligently designed indicators of "disturbances" in French history from A.D. 526 to 1925, as well as to Ancient Greece, Ancient Rome, Byzantium, Germany and Austria, England, Italy, Spain, the Netherlands, Russia, Poland, and Europe as a whole. From his enormous and painstaking studies, Sorokin concluded:

On the average in most countries studied, for every year with a significant social disturbance there have been only five years free from disturbances.

It is not true that some nations are more orderly than others: all nations are orderly and disorderly, according to the time.

While there are some differences among nations with respect to the violence and intensity of disturbances, these differences are neither great nor consistent.

Only about 5 percent of all the disturbances on record occurred without violence; about a fourth occurred with slight violence, however. The possibilities of a "bloodless revolution," it seems, are slight.

Most disturbances last only a few weeks.

The indicators show no continuous trend either toward bigger and better "orderly progress" or toward ever-increasing disorderliness.

There is no association between internal disturbances and international war.

Disturbances occur not only in periods of decay and decline of society but in periods of blossoming and healthy growth.

What is crucial is the sociocultural network of values and relations: When the network is integrated and strong, disturbances are at a minimum.9

More recently, other social scientists have returned to this important topic. In 1969, in a report to the United States National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, a political scientist compared the amount of conflict in 114 countries. He found that between 1961 and 1965

| TABLE 6-5 Civil Strife in the United States During the Turbulent Sixties, Compared with Other Nations |
|-----------------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|
| Pervasiveness: No. participants per 100,000 population | UNITED STATES | 17 DEMOCRATIC NATIONS | 113 COUNTRIES |
| Rank of the U.S. | 1,116 | 676 | 683 |
| Intensity: Casualties from strife per 10 million population | 477 | 121 | 20,100 |
| Rank of the U.S. | 3rd | 1st | 53rd |
| Duration: Rank of the U.S. | 1st | 1st | 6th |
| Total Magnitude of Civil Strife: | | | |
| Rank of the U.S. | 1st | 24th |
| Rank of the U.S., 1961-1965 | 5th | 41st |

The figures for the United States are for 1963-68, for other countries, 1961-65.


the magnitude of civil strife varied from ravaging civil wars and extensive mass violence in countries like the Congo, Indonesia, and South Vietnam to a total absence of any record of civil conflict in such countries as Sweden, Romania, Norway, and Taiwan. Comparisons with the United States during its exceptionally turbulent years from 1963 to 1968 are shown in Table 5–5.

INSTITUTIONS FOR SHARING AND EXERCISING POWER

Finally, political systems differ in their institutions for sharing and exercising power. Many of us believe a corollary: that political systems also differ in the distribution of power—in the extent to which, in Aristotle's terms, power is distributed to one, few, or many. But given the problems in observing and measuring power discussed in Chapter 3, belief in this corollary must rest almost entirely on indirect evidence. And the most persuasive indirect evidence is the difference in the institutions that provide opportunities for citizens to share in the process of making policies enforced by the Government. These differences are the subject of the next chapter.

Among the differences in political systems that make a difference—indeed a crucial difference—are their institutions for sharing and exercising power. Popular governments provide far greater opportunities than other political systems for people to participate in making the laws they must obey. In ancient Greece, where popular government first appeared around 500 B.C., these systems were called democracies. At about the same time, popular government also arose among the Romans, who called their system a republic. For the moment, I shall simply call such systems popular governments.

For the next two thousand years the ideas and practices of popular government were shaped by the experiences of Greece—mainly in the city of Athens—and Rome. Even after the practice of popular government was superseded in Greece and Rome by hegemonic regimes, ideas about popular government continued to be dominated by Greek and Roman experience. Central to that experience was a belief in the desirability of govern-


19For a more extended treatment of the matter of this chapter, see my Democracy and Its Critics (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989), particularly Chapters 16 and 17.