

PATRICK H. O'NEIL | KARL FIELDS | DON SHARE

CASES *and* CONCEPTS

in Comparative Politics

AN
INTEGRATED
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Preface

The past three decades have seen the dramatic transformation of comparative politics: the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the spread of democracy around the world, the rise of new economic powers in Asia, the emergence of globalization. For a time, many looked upon these changes as unmitigated progress that would bring about a decline in global conflict and produce widespread prosperity. Recently, however, there has been growing doubt, as the uncertainties of the future seem to portend more risk than reward, more conflict than peace. One can no longer suggest that a country and its citizens can function well without a good understanding of the billions of people who live outside of its borders. Consider the Arab Spring and conflict across the Middle East: Will the region face violence and repression for the foreseeable future, or could the current turmoil eventually pave way for greater stability and democracy? Clearly we ignore such questions at our peril.

This textbook is meant to contribute to our understanding of comparative politics (the study of domestic politics around the world) by investigating the central ideas and questions that make up this field. It begins with the most basic struggle in politics—the battle between freedom and equality and the task of reconciling or balancing these ideals. How this struggle has unfolded across place and time represents the core of comparative politics. The text continues by emphasizing the importance of institutions. Human action is fundamentally guided by the institutions that people construct, such as culture, constitutions, and property rights. Once established, these institutions are both influential and persistent—not easily overcome, changed, or removed. How these institutions emerge, and how they affect politics, is central to this work.

With these ideas in place, we tackle the basic institutions of power—states, markets, societies, democracies, and nondemocratic regimes. What are states, how do they emerge, and how can we measure their capacity, autonomy, and efficacy? How do markets function, and what kinds of relationships exist between states and markets? How do societal components like nationalism, ethnicity, and ideology shape political values? And what are the main differences between democratic and nondemocratic regimes, and what explains why one or the other predominates in various parts of the world? These are a few of the questions we will attempt to answer.

Alongside an in-depth exploration of these concepts and questions, we will apply them directly to thirteen political systems (we call them *cases*)—developed democracies, communist and postcommunist countries, and developing countries. Selecting only thirteen cases is, of course, fraught with drawbacks. Nevertheless, we believe that this collection represents countries that are both important in their own right and representative of a broad range of political systems. Each of the 13 cases has special importance in the context of the study of comparative politics. Five of our cases (France, Germany, Japan, the United States, and the United Kingdom) are

advanced industrial democracies, but they represent a wide range of institutions, societies, political-economic models, and relationships with the world. Japan is an important example of a non-Western industrialized democracy and an instructive case of democratization imposed by foreign occupiers. Though the United Kingdom and the United States have been known for political stability, France and Germany have fascinating histories of political turmoil and regime change.

Two of our cases, China and Russia, share a past of Marxist-Leninist totalitarianism. Communism thrived in these two large and culturally distinct nations. Both suffered from the dangerous concentration of power in the hands of communist parties and, at times, despotic leaders. The Soviet Communist regime imploded and led to a troubled transition to an authoritarian regime with a capitalist political economy. China has retained its communist authoritarian political system but has experimented with a remarkable transition to a largely capitalist political economy.

The remaining six cases illustrate the diversity of the developing world. Of the six, India has had the longest history of stable democratic rule, but like most countries in the developing world, it has nevertheless struggled with massive poverty and inequality. The remaining five have experienced various forms of authoritarianism. Brazil and Nigeria endured long periods of military rule. Mexico's history of military rule was ended by an authoritarian political party that ruled for much of the twentieth century through a variety of nonmilitary means. South Africa experienced decades of racially based authoritarianism that excluded the vast majority of its population. Iran experienced a modernizing authoritarian monarchy followed by its current authoritarian regime, a theocracy ruled by Islamic clerics.

Cases and Concepts in Comparative Politics: An Integrated Approach can be traced to a decades-long experiment undertaken by the three comparative political scientists in the Department of Politics and Government at the University of Puget Sound. Over the years we spent much time discussing the challenges of teaching our introductory course in comparative politics. In those discussions we came to realize that each of us taught the course so differently that students completing our different sections of the course did not really share a common conceptual vocabulary. Over several years we fashioned a unified curriculum for Introduction to Comparative Politics, drawing on the strengths of each of our particular approaches.

All three of us now equip our students with a common conceptual vocabulary. All of our students now learn about states, nations, and different models of political economy. All students learn the basics about nondemocratic and democratic regimes, and they become familiar with characteristics of communist systems and advanced democracies. In developing our common curriculum, we became frustrated trying to find country studies that were concise, uniformly organized, sophisticated, and written to address the major concepts of comparative politics.

We also began to introduce students to country studies using pairs of cases (over the years we have varied the pairs) as a way to get students to think comparatively and to hone their understanding of key concepts. We found that teaching Japan and the United Kingdom, for example, was a wonderful way to study the main features and dilemmas of advanced democracies, while teaching students that such systems can thrive in very different political, economic, and cultural settings. Because we almost always assign reading that covers two countries at once, we have produced country studies that are organized identically and written with a common depth and style. Instructors can therefore easily assign the sections on the historical development of the state (to take one example) from any of the 13 case studies, and have students draw meaningful comparisons.

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The three of us have logged over 70 combined years teaching Introduction to Comparative Politics, and we are well aware that there are many ways to approach this challenging course. With that in mind, we have created this first edition of *Cases and Concepts in Comparative Politics: An Integrated Approach* for instructors who prefer a single text containing both conceptual chapters and country studies. While the conceptual chapters reproduce much of the material contained in Patrick O’Neil’s *Essentials of Comparative Politics*, they have been enhanced by the inclusion of comparative examples drawn from our 13 country studies. In Chapter 5, Political Violence, for instance, we include a section that considers whether recent acts of political violence in the United States might be designated as terrorism or as hate crimes. To take another example, in Chapter 8, Nondemocratic Regimes, a special section compares the relative successes and failures of military rule in Brazil and Nigeria. Unlike other texts that ask students to navigate back and forth across the book, we hope that these integrated examples show students more easily how comparative politics concepts apply to real-world situations and institutions. Likewise, although the country studies are based on those found in our co-authored *Cases in Comparative Politics*, we’ve significantly streamlined those chapters, so as to be able to include them with the conceptual chapters in a single volume. Country studies are placed throughout the book after the most relevant conceptual chapters. The Russia and China cases, for example, immediately follow Chapter 8, Nondemocratic Regimes, and Chapter 9, Communism and Postcommunism.

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As we have developed this approach over the years we have incurred numerous debts. First, and foremost, we wish to thank our wonderful colleagues in the Department of Politics and Government at the University of Puget Sound. By encouraging us to develop a common curriculum for our Introduction to Comparative Politics offering, and by allowing us to team-teach the course in different combinations, they allowed us to learn from each other. These cases are much stronger as a result. The university has also been extremely supportive in recognizing that writing for the classroom is as valuable as writing scholarly publications, and in providing course releases and summer stipends toward that end. Student assistants Brett Venn, Jess Box, Liz Kaster, Céad Nardi-Warner, and Tullan Baird proved extremely helpful in conducting research for our various cases; Irene Lim has, as always, supported us with her amazing technical and organizational skills. Our colleagues Bill Haltom, Robin Jacobsen, and David Sousa provided very helpful input throughout the project.

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Patrick H. O'Neil
Karl Fields
Don Share
Tacoma, WA
2017

A note about the data: The data that are presented throughout the text in numerous tables, charts, and other figures are drawn from the CIA World Factbook unless otherwise noted.

	UNITED KINGDOM	UNITED STATES	FRANCE	GERMANY	JAPAN	RUSSIA
Geographic Size Ranking	80	3	43	63	62	1
Population Size Ranking	22	3	21	18	10	9
GDP per Capita at PPP, \$	\$42,600	\$57,500	\$41,500	\$48,700	\$41,500	\$23,200
GDP per Capita at PPP, Ranking (Estimated)	38	20	39	30	43	71
UN Human Development Index Ranking	16	10	21	4	17	49
Freedom House Rating	Free	Free	Free	Free	Free	Not free
Transparency International Corruption Score Ranking	10	18	23	10	20	131
Capital City	London	Washington, D.C.	Paris	Berlin	Tokyo	Moscow
Head of State	Queen Elizabeth II	Donald Trump	Emmanuel Macron	Joachim Gauck	Akihito	Vladimir Putin
Head of Government	Theresa May	Donald Trump	Édouard Philippe	Angela Merkel	Shinzō Abe	Dmitry Medvedev
Legislative–executive System	Parliamentary	Presidential	Semi-Presidential	Parliamentary	Parliamentary	Semi-Presidential
Unitary or Federal?	Unitary	Federal	Unitary	Federal	Unitary	Federal
Electoral System for Lower House of Legislature	Single-member districts with plurality	Single-member districts with plurality	Single-member districts with two rounds of voting	Mixed proportional representation and single-member districts with plurality	Mixed proportional representation and single-member districts with plurality	Proportional representation
Political-economic System	Liberal	Liberal	Social democratic	Social democratic	Mercantilist	Mercantilist

CHINA	INDIA	IRAN	MEXICO	BRAZIL	SOUTH AFRICA	NIGERIA
4	7	18	14	5	25	32
1	2	16	11	5	25	7
\$15,500	\$6,600	\$17,000	\$17,900	\$15,100	\$13,200	\$5,900
111	157	91	89	110	117	162
90	131	69	77	79	119	152
Not free	Free	Not free	Partly free	Free	Free	Partly free
79	79	131	123	79	64	136
Beijing	New Delhi	Tehran	Mexico City	Brasília	Pretoria, Cape Town, Bloemfontein	Abuja
Xi Jinping	Ram Nath Kovind	Ali Khamenei	Enrique Peña Nieto	Michel Temer	Jacob Zuma	Muhammadu Buhari
Li Keqiang	Narendra Modi	Hassan Rouhani	Enrique Peña Nieto	Michel Temer	Jacob Zuma	Muhammadu Buhari
Communist party authoritarian regime	Parliamentary	Semi- presidential theocracy	Presidential	Presidential	Parliamentary	Presidential
Unitary	Federal	Unitary	Federal	Federal	Unitary	Federal
Not applicable	Single-member districts with plurality	Single- and multimember districts	Mixed proportional representation and single-member districts with plurality	Proportional representation	Proportional representation	Single- member districts with plurality
Mercantilist	Liberal	Mercantilist	Liberal	Liberal	Liberal	Liberal



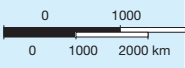
UNITED KINGDOM

FRANCE

UNITED STATES

MEXICO

BRAZIL





CASES *and*
CONCEPTS
in Comparative Politics

AN INTEGRATED APPROACH



Protesters in Yemen attend a rally to commemorate the anniversary of Mohamed Bouazizi's death. In December 2010, the Tunisian street vendor set himself on fire to protest corruption in his home country, inspiring the Arab Spring that ignited the region in the following year. Members of the crowd hold a banner that reads, "We are all Bouazizi."



Introduction

What can political science tell us that we don't already know?

WHO WOULD HAVE PREDICTED 10 years ago that the Middle East would change so much in such a short period of time? Dramatic historical events often take scholars, politicians, and even participants by surprise. For example, in the 1980s few people expected that communism would come to a dramatic end in Eastern Europe—if anything, modest reforms in the Soviet Union were expected to give communist institutions a new lease on life. Following the collapse of communism and increased democratization in parts of Asia and Latin America, many scholars expected that regimes in the Middle East would be next. But by the turn of the century, these expectations appeared unfounded; authoritarianism in the region seemed immune to change. Scholars chalked this up to a number of things—the role of oil, Western economic and military aid, lack of civic institutions, or the supposedly undemocratic nature of Islam.

Yet again, history took us by surprise. The opening events of the Arab Spring were disarmingly simple. In December 2010, a young Tunisian man, Mohamed Bouazizi, set himself on fire to protest police corruption and government indifference. Angry protests broke out shortly thereafter, and the long-standing



government was overthrown within weeks. New protests then broke out across the region in January and February 2011. In Egypt, President Hosni Mubarak was forced to resign after 30 years in office. In Libya, protests turned to widespread armed conflict and led to the killing of Muammar Gaddafi after more than 40 years of rule. In Syria, Bashar al-Assad clung to power as peaceful protests eventually turned into a civil war that has devastated the country, killed over 400,000 people, and triggered a migration crisis.

The immediate political future of these and other countries in the region is uncertain. Tunisia has transitioned into a fragile democracy, while Egypt has returned to dictatorship; Libya is plagued by regional and tribal conflict, while Syria has drawn in foreign forces, some bent on establishing an Islamist political system across the region. At the same time, an entire range of countries in the region have faced down public protests or not faced them at all. This is especially true among the monarchies of the Persian Gulf, where one might have imagined that these anachronistic forms of rule would have been the first to fall.

We are thus left with a series of puzzles. Why did the Arab Spring take place? What was the source of these tumultuous changes—revolution, civil war, and one of the largest refugee crises in recent history? Why did these uprisings take different forms and differ in the level of violence from place to place? Finally, why did some countries not see significant public protest to begin with? The hopeful nature of an Arab Spring has since been replaced by a much darker sense of the future politics of the region. Democracy, even political stability, seems further away than ever, and there are serious repercussions for the Middle East and beyond. Can political science help us answer these questions? Can it provide us with the tools to shape our own country's policies in this regard? Or are dramatic political changes, especially regional ones, simply too complex?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Explain the methods political scientists use to understand politics around the world.
- Discuss whether comparative politics can be more scientific and predict political outcomes.
- Define the role and importance of institutions in political life.
- Compare freedom and equality and consider how politics reconciles the two across countries.

DURING THE PAST 25 YEARS, the world has seen an astonishing number of changes: the rise of new economic powers in Asia, the collapse of communism, revolutions across the Middle East, the return of religion to politics, the spread of information technology and social media, and the shifting effects of globalization. Many of the

traditional assumptions and beliefs held by scholars, policy makers, and citizens have been overturned. New centers of wealth may reduce poverty, but they may also increase domestic inequality. Democracy, often seen as an inexorable force, can founder on such obstacles as religious or economic conflict. Technological change may create new, shared identities and sources of cooperation, but it can destabilize and fragment communities.

One pertinent example, which we have seen emerge in the civil wars in Syria and Iraq, is the role of ethnic and religious conflict. Why does this form of political violence occur? Is it a response to inequality or political disenfranchisement? Is it a function of cultural differences, a “clash of civilizations”? Is it fostered or tempered by globalization? Perhaps the explanation lies somewhere else entirely, beyond our purview or comprehension. How can we know what is correct? How do we scrutinize a range of explanations and evaluate their merits? Competing assumptions and explanations are at the heart of political debates and policy decisions, yet we are often asked to choose in the absence of reliable evidence or a good understanding of cause and effect. To be better citizens, we should be better students of political science and **comparative politics**—the study and comparison of domestic politics across countries. Comparative politics can be contrasted with another related field in political science, **international relations**. While comparative politics looks at the politics inside countries (such as elections, political parties, revolutions, and judicial systems), international relations concentrates on relations between countries (such as foreign policy, war, trade, and foreign aid). Of course the two overlap in many places, such as in ethnic or religious conflict, which often spills over borders, or political change, which can be shaped by international organizations or military force. For now, however, our discussion will concentrate on political structures and actions within countries.

This chapter lays out some of the most basic vocabulary and structures of political science and comparative politics. These will fall under three basic categories: *analytical concepts* (assumptions and theories that guide our research), *methods* (ways to study and test those theories), and *ideals* (beliefs and values about preferred outcomes). Analytical concepts help us ask questions about cause and effect, methods provide tools to seek out explanations, and ideals help us compare existing politics with what we might prefer.

Our survey will consider some of the most basic questions: What is politics? How does one compare different political systems around the world? We will spend some time on the methods of comparative politics and how scholars have approached its study. Over the past century, political scientists have struggled with the challenge of analyzing politics and have asked whether such analysis can actually be considered a science. Exploring these issues will give us a better sense of the limitations and possibilities in the study of comparative politics. We will consider comparative politics through the concept of **institutions**—organizations or activities that are self-perpetuating and valued for their own sake. Institutions play an important role in defining and shaping what is possible and probable in political life by laying out the rules, norms, and structures in which we live. Finally, in addition to institutions, we will take up the ideals of freedom and equality. If institutions shape how the game of politics is played, then the goal of the game is the right mix of freedom and equality. Which ideal is more important? Must one come at the expense of the other? Perhaps some other ideal is preferable to both? With the knowledge gained by exploring these questions, we will be ready to take on complex politics around the world.

comparative politics The study and comparison of domestic politics across countries

international relations A field in political science that concentrates on relations between countries, such as foreign policy, war, trade, and foreign aid

institution An organization or activity that is self-perpetuating and valued for its own sake

What Is Comparative Politics?

politics The struggle in any group for power that will give one or more persons the ability to make decisions for the larger group

power The ability to influence others or impose one's will on them

First, we must identify what comparative politics is. **Politics** is the struggle in any group for power that will give one or more persons the ability to make decisions for the larger group. This group may range from a small organization to the entire world. Politics occurs wherever there are people and organizations. For example, we may speak of “office politics” when we are talking about power relationships in a business. Political scientists in particular concentrate on the struggle for leadership and power in a political community—a political party, an elected office, a city, a region, or a country. It is therefore hard to separate the idea of politics from the idea of **power**, which is the ability to influence others or impose one's will on them. Politics is the competition for public power, and power is the ability to extend one's will.

In political science, comparative politics is a subfield that compares this pursuit of power across countries. The method of comparing countries can help us make arguments about cause and effect by drawing evidence from across space and time. For example, one important puzzle we will return to frequently is why some countries are democratic, while others are not. Why have politics in some countries resulted in power being dispersed among more people, while in others power is concentrated in the hands of a few? Why is South Korea democratic, while North Korea is not? Looking at North Korea alone won't necessarily help us understand why South Korea went down a different path, or vice versa. A comparison of the two, perhaps alongside similar cases in Asia, may better yield explanations. As should be clear from our discussion of the Arab Spring, these are not simply academic questions. Democratic countries and pro-democracy organizations actively support the spread of like-minded regimes around the world, but if it is unclear how or why this comes about, democracy becomes difficult or even dangerous to promote. It is therefore important to separate ideals from our concepts and methods and not let the former obscure our use of the latter. Comparative politics can inform and even challenge our ideals, providing alternatives and questioning our assumption that there is one right way to organize political life.

THE COMPARATIVE METHOD

If comparison is an important way to test our assumptions and shape our ideals, how we compare cases is important. If there is no criterion or guide by which we gather information or draw conclusions, our studies become little more than a collection of details. Researchers thus often seek out puzzles—questions about politics with no obvious answer—as a way to guide their research. From there, they rely on some **comparative method**—a way to compare cases and draw conclusions. By comparing countries or subsets within them, scholars seek out conclusions and generalizations that could be valid in other cases.

To return to our earlier question, let us say that we are interested in why democracy has failed to develop in some countries. This question was central to debates in the West over the future of the Middle East and elsewhere. We might approach the puzzle of democracy by looking at North Korea. Why has the North Korean government remained communist and highly repressive even as similar regimes around the world have collapsed?

comparative method The means by which social scientists make comparisons across cases

A convincing answer to this puzzle could tell scholars and policy makers a great deal and even guide our tense relations with North Korea in the future. Examining one country closely may lead us to form hypotheses about why a country operates as it does. We call this approach **inductive reasoning**—the means by which we go from studying a case to generating a hypothesis. But while a study of one country can generate interesting hypotheses, it does not provide enough evidence to test them. Thus we might study North Korea and perhaps conclude that the use of nationalism by those in power has been central to the persistence of nondemocratic rule. In so concluding, we might then suggest that future studies look at the relationship between nationalism and authoritarianism in other countries. Inductive reasoning can therefore be a foundation on which we build greater theories in comparative politics.

Comparative politics can also rely on **deductive reasoning**—starting with a puzzle and from there generating some hypothesis about cause and effect to test against a number of cases. Whereas inductive reasoning starts with the evidence as a way to uncover a hypothesis, deductive reasoning starts with the hypothesis and then seeks out the evidence. In our example of inductive reasoning, we started with a case study of North Korea and ended with some testable generalization about nationalism; in deductive reasoning, we would start with our hypothesis about nationalism and then test that hypothesis by looking at a number of countries. By carrying out such studies, we may find a **correlation**, or apparent association, between certain factors or variables. If we were particularly ambitious, we might claim to have found cause and effect, or a **causal relationship**.¹ Inductive and deductive reasoning can help us to better understand and explain political outcomes and, ideally, could help us predict them.

Unfortunately, inductive and deductive reasoning, or finding correlation and causation, is not easy. Comparativists face seven major challenges in trying to examine political features across countries. Let's move through each of these challenges and show how they complicate the comparative method and comparative politics in general. First, political scientists have difficulty controlling the variables in the cases they study. In other words, in our search for correlations or causal relationships, we are unable to make true comparisons because each of our cases is different. By way of illustration, suppose a researcher wants to determine whether increased exercise by college students leads to higher grades. In studying the students who are her subjects, the researcher can control for a number of variables that might also affect grades, such as the students' diet, the amount of sleep they get, or any factor that might influence the results. By controlling for these differences and making certain that many of these variables are the same across the subjects with the exception of exercise, the researcher can carry out her study with greater confidence.

But political science offers few opportunities to control the variables because the variables are a function of real-world politics. As will become clear, economies, cultures, geography, resources, and political structures are amazingly diverse, and it is difficult to control for these differences. Even in a single case study, variables change over time. At best, we can control as much as possible for variables that might otherwise distort our conclusions. If, for example, we want to understand why gun ownership laws are so much less restrictive in the United States than in most other industrialized countries, we are well served to compare the United States with countries that have similar historical, economic, political, and social experiences, such as Canada and Australia, rather than Japan or South Africa. This approach allows us to

inductive reasoning

Research that works from case studies in order to generate hypotheses

deductive reasoning

Research that works from a hypothesis that is then tested against data

correlation An apparent relationship between two or more variables

causal relationship Cause and effect; when a change in one variable causes a change in another variable

control our variables more effectively, but it still leaves many variables uncontrolled and unaccounted for.

A second, related problem concerns the interactions between the variables themselves. Even if we can control our variables in making our comparisons, there is the problem that many of these variables are interconnected and interact. In other words, many variables interact to produce particular outcomes, in what is known as **multicausality**. A single variable like a country's electoral system or the strength of its judicial system is unlikely to explain the variation in countries' gun control laws. The problem of multicausality also reminds us that in the real world there are often no single, easy answers to political problems.

multicausality When variables are interconnected and interact together to produce particular outcomes

A third problem involves the limits to our information and information gathering. Although the cases we study have many uncontrolled and interconnected variables, we often have too few cases to work with. In the natural sciences, researchers often conduct studies with a huge number of cases—hundreds of stars or thousands of individuals, often studied across time. This breadth allows researchers to select their cases in such a way as to control their variables, and the large number of cases prevents any single unusual case from distorting the findings. But in comparative politics, we are typically limited by the number of countries in the world—fewer than 200 at present, most of which did not exist a few centuries ago. Even if we study some subset of comparative politics (like political parties or acts of terrorism), our total number of cases will remain relatively small. And if we attempt to control for differences by trying to find a number of similar cases (for example, wealthy democracies), our total body of cases will shrink even further.

A fourth problem in comparative politics concerns how we access the few cases we do have. Research is often further hindered by the very factors that make countries interesting to study. Much information that political scientists seek is not easy to acquire, necessitating work in the field—that is, conducting interviews or studying government archives abroad. International travel requires time and money, and researchers may spend months or even years in the field. Interviewees may be unwilling to speak on sensitive issues or may distort information. Libraries and archives may be incomplete, or access to them restricted. Governments may bar research on politically sensitive questions. Confronting these obstacles in more than one country is even more challenging. A researcher may be able to read Russian and travel to Russia frequently, but if he wants to compare authoritarianism in Russia and China, it would be ideal to be able to read Chinese and conduct research in China as well. Few comparativists have the language skills, time, or resources to conduct field research in many countries. There are almost no comparativists in North America or Europe who speak both Russian and Chinese. As a result, comparativists often master knowledge of a single country or language and rely on deductive reasoning. Single-case study can be extremely valuable—it gives the researcher a great deal of case depth and the ability to tease out novel observations that may come only from close observation. However, such narrow focus can also make it unclear to researchers whether the politics they see in their case study has important similarities to the politics in other cases. In the worst-case scenario, scholars come to believe that the country they study is somehow unique and fail to recognize its similarities with other cases.

Fifth, even where comparativists do widen their range of cases, their focus tends to be limited to a single geographic region. The specialist on communist Cuba is

more likely to study other Latin American countries than to consider China or North Korea, and the specialist on China is more likely to study South Korea than Russia. This isn't necessarily a concern, given our earlier discussion of the need to control variables—it may make more sense to study parts of the world where similar variables are clustered rather than compare countries from different parts of the world. This regional focus, however—often referred to as **area studies**—is distributed unevenly around the world. For decades, the largest share of research tended to focus on Western Europe, despite the increasing role of Asia in the international system.² Why? As mentioned earlier, some of this is a function of language; many scholars in the West are exposed to European languages in primary or secondary school, and in many European countries the use of English is widespread, thus facilitating research. English is also widespread in South Asia, yet scholarship has lagged behind. For example, we find that over the past 50 years one of the top journals in comparative politics published as many articles on Sweden as on India. To be fair, much of this is changing thanks to a new generation of scholars. Yet overall, comparative politics remains slow to redirect its attention when new issues and questions arise.

area studies A regional focus when studying political science, rather than studying parts of the world where similar variables are clustered

Sixth, the problem of bias makes it even harder to control for variables and to select the right cases. This is a question not of political bias, though that can sometimes be a problem, but of how we select our cases. In the natural sciences, investigators randomize case selection as much as possible to avoid choosing cases that support one hypothesis or another. But for the reasons mentioned earlier, such randomization is not possible in political science. Single-case studies are already influenced by the fact that comparativists study a country because they know its language or find it interesting. Yet even if we rely instead on deductive reasoning—beginning with a hypothesis and then seeking out our cases—we can easily fall into the trap of **selection bias**.

selection bias A focus on effects rather than causes, which can lead to inaccurate conclusions about correlation or causation

For example, say we want to understand revolutions, and we hypothesize that the main cause is a rapid growth in inequality. How should we select our cases? Most of us would respond by saying that we should find as many cases of revolution as possible and then see whether an increase in inequality preceded the revolutions. We might focus on revolutions in France, Mexico, Russia, China, and Iran. But this is a mistake—by looking only at cases of revolution, we miss all the cases where inequality grew but revolution did *not* take place. For example, we would overlook Brazil, South Africa, India, and Nigeria, four of the world's most unequal countries that never experienced a revolution. Indeed, there may be many more cases of unequal growth without revolution than with it, disproving our hypothesis. So, we would do better to concentrate on what we think is the cause (growth in inequality) rather than on what we think is the effect. While this may seem the obvious choice, it is a frequent mistake among scholars who are often so drawn to particular outcomes that they start there and then work backward.

A seventh and final concern deals with the heart of political science—the search for cause and effect. Let us for the sake of argument assume that the half-dozen problems we have laid out can be overcome through careful case selection, information gathering, and control of variables. Let us further imagine that with these problems in hand, research finds, for example, that countries with a low rate of female literacy are less likely to be democratic than countries where female literacy is high. Even if we are confident enough to claim that there is a causal relationship between female literacy and democracy—a bold statement indeed—a final and perhaps intractable problem looms. Which variable is cause and which is effect? Do low rates of female literacy