

## THE PAST AND PRESENT OF COMPARATIVE POLITICS

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper focuses on the past and present of comparative politics in the US. The discussion is organized around three issues: the definition of the field's subject matter, the role of theory, and the use of methods. These three issues are the basis for an identification of distinct periods in the history of comparative politics and for assessments of the state of the field. Attention is also given to the link between comparative politics, on the one hand, and other fields of political science and other social sciences, on the other hand, and, more briefly, to political events and the values held by scholars of comparative politics.

The evolution of comparative politics is seen as punctuated by two revolutions: the behavioral revolution, during the immediate post-World War II years until the mid-1960s, and the second scientific revolution, which started around the end of the Cold War and is still ongoing. On both occasions, the impetus for change came from developments in the field of American politics and was justified in the name of science. However, the ideas advanced by these two revolutions differed. The behavioral revolution drew heavily on sociology; in contrast, the second scientific revolution imported many ideas from economics and also put a heavier emphasis on methodology. Though scholars of comparative politics have produced a vast amount of knowledge about politics, divisions within the field continue to hamper progress. Emphasis is placed on the need to recognize the depth of the roots of comparative politics in a humanistic tradition and the vital importance of its scientific aspirations.

## **RESUMEN**

Este artículo se concentra en el pasado y el presente de la política comparada en los Estados Unidos. La discusión se organiza alrededor de tres asuntos: la definición del objeto de estudio de este campo, el rol de la teoría, y el uso de métodos. Basado en estos tres asuntos, se identifican períodos distintivos en la historia de la política comparada y se evalúa el estado del campo. También se presta atención al vínculo entre la política comparada y otros campos de la ciencia política y otras ciencias sociales, y, más brevemente, los eventos políticos y los valores que sostienen los comparativistas.

Se observa a la evolución de la política comparada ha sido marcada por dos revoluciones: la revolución conductista, entre la inmediata post-guerra y mediados de los 60s y la segunda revolución científica, que comenzó alrededor del fin de la Guerra Fría y continúa en curso. En ambas ocasiones, los impulsos hacia el cambio provinieron de desarrollos en el campo de estudios de política norteamericana y fueron justificados en nombre de la ciencia. Sin embargo, estas dos revoluciones avanzaron ideas diferentes. La revolución conductista se apoyó fuertemente en la sociología; en contraste, la segunda revolución científica importó muchas ideas de la economía y puso un acento más fuerte en la metodología. Aunque los comparativistas han producido un vasto cúmulo de conocimientos acerca de la política, las divisiones dentro del campo de estudios continúan impidiendo su progreso. Se enfatiza la necesidad de reconocer la profundidad de las raíces de la política comparada en una tradición humanística y la importancia vital de sus aspiraciones científicas.



Comparative politics emerged as a distinct field of political science in the United States in the late 19th century and the subsequent evolution of the field was driven largely by research associated with US universities. The influence of US academia certainly declined from its high point in the two decades following World War II. Indeed, by the late 20th century, comparative politics was a truly international enterprise. Yet the sway of scholarship produced in the US, by US- and foreign-born scholars, and by US-trained scholars around the world, remained undisputable. The standard for research in comparative politics was set basically in the US. In sum, a large part of the story of comparative politics has been, and continues to be, written by those who work and have been trained within the walls of US academia.<sup>1</sup>

This paper focuses on the past and present of comparative politics in the US. The discussion is organized around three issues: the definition of the field's subject matter, the role of theory, and the use of methods. These three issues are the basis for an identification of distinct periods in the history of comparative politics and for assessments of the state of the field. Attention is also given to the link between comparative politics, on the one hand, and other fields of political science and other social sciences, on the other hand, and, more briefly, to political events and the values held by scholars of comparative politics.

The argument presented here is as follows. Since the institutionalization of political science as an autonomous discipline, a process initiated in the late 19th century, the evolution of comparative politics was punctuated by two revolutions: the behavioral revolution, that had its greatest impact on comparative politics during the immediate post-World War II years until the mid-1960s, and the second scientific revolution, that started around the end of the Cold War and is still ongoing. On both occasions, the impetus for change came from developments in the field of American politics and was justified in the name of science. However, the ideas advanced by, and the impact of, these two revolutions differed. The behavioral revolution drew heavily on sociology; in contrast, the second scientific revolution imported many ideas from economics and also put a heavier emphasis on methodology. Moreover, though each revolution centrally involved a tension between traditionalists and innovators, the current revolution is taking

place in a more densely institutionalized field and is producing, through a process of adaptation, a relatively pluralistic landscape.

Beyond this characterization of the origin and evolution of comparative politics, this paper draws some conclusions about the current state of the field and offers, by way of parting words, a suggestion regarding its future. Concerning the present, it stresses that scholars of comparative politics—comparativists, for short—have accomplished a lot and produced a vast amount of knowledge about politics, but also have fallen short of fulfilling the field’s mission to develop a global science of politics due to some serious shortcomings. Specifically, the lack of a general or unified theory of politics, and the failure to produce robust, broad empirical generalizations about world politics, are highlighted. Concerning the future of comparative politics, this paper suggests that potentially paralyzing or distracting divisions among comparativists, which hamper progress in the field, will only be overcome inasmuch as comparativists appreciate both the depth of the roots of comparative politics in a humanistic tradition and the vital importance of its scientific aspirations.

## **I. THE CONSTITUTION OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AS A DISCIPLINE, 1880–1920**

Political science, which had to be constituted as a discipline before the subfield of comparative politics could be formed, can trace its origin to a number of foundational texts written, in many cases, centuries ago. It can date its birth back to antiquity, and thus claim to be the oldest of the social science disciplines, in light of the work of Greek philosophers Plato (427–347 BC), author of *The Republic* (360 BC), and Aristotle (384–322 BC), author of *Politics* (c. 340 BC). In the modern era, important landmarks include the Italian Renaissance political philosopher Niccolò Machiavelli’s (1469–1527) *The Prince* (1515) and French Enlightenment political thinker Baron de Montesquieu’s (1689–1755) *The Spirit of Laws* (1748). More recently, in the age of industrialism and nationalism, political analysis was further developed by European thinkers who penned the classics of social theory (see Table 1).

TABLE 1

## Classical Social Theory, 1776–1923

Country	Author	Some Major Works
Britain	Adam Smith (1723–90)	<i>The Wealth of Nations</i> (1776)
	David Ricardo (1772–1823)	<i>On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation</i> (1817)
	John Stuart Mill (1806–73)	<i>The Principles of Political Economy</i> (1848) <i>Considerations on Representative Government</i> (1861)
France	Auguste Comte (1798–1857)	<i>Course in Positive Philosophy</i> (1830–42)
	Alexis de Tocqueville (1805–59)	<i>Democracy in America</i> (1835) <i>The Old Regime and the French Revolution</i> (1856)
	Herbert Spencer (1820–1903)	<i>The Principles of Sociology</i> (1876–96)
	Emile Durkheim (1858–1917)	<i>The Division of Labor in Society</i> (1893) <i>Rules of the Sociology Method</i> (1895)
Germany	Karl Marx (1818–83)	<i>The Communist Manifesto</i> (1848) <i>The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte</i> (1852)
	Max Weber (1864–1920)	<i>The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism</i> (1905) <i>Economy and Society</i> (1914) <i>General economic History</i> (1923)
Italy	Vilfredo Pareto (1848–1923)	<i>The Mind and Society: A Treatise on General Sociology</i> (1915–19)
	Gaetano Mosca (1858–1941)	<i>The Ruling Class</i> (1923)
	Robert Michels (1876–1936)*	<i>Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy</i> (1915)

Note: (\*) Though German by birth, Michels is generally seen as an Italian thinker.

Political thought in the United States, a new nation, necessarily lacked the tradition and the breadth of European scholarship. Indeed, significant contributions, from *The Federalist Papers* (1787–88), written by Alexander Hamilton (1755–1804), James Madison (1751–1836) and John Jay (1745–1829), to the writings by German émigré Francis Lieber (1800–72), the first professor of political science in the US, did not match the broad corpus of European work. In addition, the relative backwardness of the US was apparent in higher education. Many teaching colleges existed in the US, the oldest being Harvard, founded in 1636. But the first research university, Johns Hopkins University, was not established until 1876, and a large number of Americans sought training in the social sciences in Europe, and especially in German universities, the most advanced in the world at the time, during the period 1870–1900. Yet, as a result of a series of innovations carried out in US universities, the US broke new ground by constituting political science as a discipline and hence opened the way for the emergence of comparative politics as a field of political science.

The clearest manifestations of the process pioneered by the US were various institutional developments that gave an organizational basis to the autonomization of political science. One new trend was the growing number of independent political science departments. Also critical was the formation of graduate programs, the first one being Columbia University's School of Political Science, founded by John W. Burgess in 1880—the event that opens this period in the history of political science—and hence the expansion of PhDs trained as political scientists in the US. Finally, a key event was the founding of the discipline's professional association, the American Political Science Association (APSA), in 1903. These were important steps that began to give the new discipline a distinctive profile.

This process of autonomization involved a differentiation between political science and history, the discipline most closely associated with US political science in its early years.<sup>2</sup> Many of the departments in which political science was initially taught were joint departments of politics and history, and APSA itself emerged as a splinter group from the American Historical Association (AHA).<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the influence of history, but also the desire to establish a separate identity vis-à-vis history, was evident in the way political scientists defined their subject matter.

Many of the founders of political science had been trained in Germany, where they were exposed to German *Staatswissenschaft* (political science) and historically oriented *Geisteswissenschaft* (social sciences). Thus, it is hardly surprising that, much in line with German thinking at the time, the state would figure prominently in attempts to define the new discipline's subject matter. But since history, as an all-encompassing discipline, also addressed the state, they sought to differentiate political science from history in two ways. First, according to the motto of the time that “History is past Politics and Politics present History,” political scientists would leave the past as the preserve of historians and focus on contemporary history. Second, they would eschew history's aspiration to address all the potential factors that went into the making of politics and focus instead on the more delimited question of government and the formal political institutions associated with government.<sup>4</sup>

**TABLE 2: The Origins and evolution of Comparative Politics in the United States**

Dimensions \ Period		1. The Constitution of Political Science as a Discipline, 1880–1920	2. The Behavioral Revolution, 1921–66	3. The Post-Behavioral Period, 1967–88	4. The Second Scientific Revolution 1989–present
I. Subject matter		Government and formal political institutions	The political system Informal Politics Political Behavior	The state and state-society relations Formal political institutions Political behavior	The state and state-society relations Formal political institutions Political Behavior
II. Theory	i. Metatheories	None	Structural functionalism	Theories of the state	Rational choice and game theory, rational choice institutionalism, historical institutionalism
	ii. Mid-range theories	None	On interest groups, political parties, political culture, bureaucracy, the military, democratization and democratic stability	On state formation, revolutions, varieties of authoritarianism and democracy, democratic breakdowns and transitions, the military, political parties, democratic institutions, political culture, corporatism, social democracy, models of economic	On state collapse, civil conflict, ethnic conflict, varieties of democracy, electoral and other democratic institutions, political parties, electoral behavior, citizen attitudes, political culture, social movements, economics and policy making, varieties of capitalism
III. Methods		Case studies and some small-N comparisons	Case studies and small-N comparisons Cross-national, statistical analysis	Case studies and small-N comparisons Cross-national, statistical analysis	Case studies and small-N comparisons Cross-national, statistical analysis Within-country, statistical analysis Formal theorizing
IV. Assessment	i. Strengths theory	Establishment of a distinctive subject matter for the discipline	Attempt at metatheorizing	Theorizing grounded in case knowledge Growing attention to political processes an change More rigorous comparative analysis Long-term historical analysis	Emphasis on action (actors and choice) and institutions Recognition of the problem of endogeneity More comparative analysis and rigorous testing
	ii. Strength empirics	Emphasis on empirical grounding in observables	More comparative analysis Broadening of empirical scope		
	iii. Weaknesses theory	Formal legal approach as atheoretical and narrow	Lack of integration of mid-range theories The state as a black box and politics as an outcome of non-political factors Overly structural and functionalist analysis	Lack of integration of mid-range theories	Lack of integration of mid-range theories
	IV. Weaknesses empirics	Lack of systematic comparison Narrow empirical scope	Lack of testing of structural functionalism		Lack of testing of formal theories
V. Relationship to other disciplines and fields within political science, and to theories, schools, and approaches	i. Reaction against ...	European grand theorizing and philosophies of history	History	Reductionism  Evolutionism, the view that societies develops in a uniform and progressive manner Functionalism	Area Studies
	ii. Borrowing from ...	History: the German historical school Legal studies	American Politics Parsonian Sociology Anthropology Psychology	Sociology: Historical Sociology Marxism: Western Marxism Latin American Dependency	American Politics Economics
VI. Research context	i. Political events and trends	The “social question” in the US Gilded Age, European democratization and constitutional reform, World War I, the Russian revolution	Great depression, the New Deal, fascism, World War II, independence of African and Asian countries, the Cold War, McCarthyism, the civil rights movement	The Vietnam war, 1969, European social democracy, authoritarian and totalitarian regimes in the South and East, global democratization, the fall of communist systems	Post–Cold War, globalization, market reforms, ethnic conflicts, 9/11, the Iraq wars
	ii. Values of comparativists	Consensus around Whig (antimajoritarian) tradition of limited democracy: conservatives and moderate liberals	Consensus around liberal values	Conflicting values: liberals, conservatives, and radicals	Consensus around democracy, but conflict over neoliberalism and globalization

This way of defining the subject matter of political science bore some instructive similarities and differences with the way two other sister disciplines—economics and sociology—established their identities during roughly the same time.<sup>5</sup> The birth of economics as a discipline was associated with the marginalist revolution and the formation of neoclassical economics, crystallized in Alfred Marshall's (1842–1924) *Principles of Economics* (1890); that is, with a narrowing of the subject matter of Smith's, Ricardo's and Mill's classical political economy. In contrast, sociologists saw themselves establishing a discipline that explicitly represented a continuation of the classical social theory of Comte, Tocqueville, Spencer, Durkheim, Marx, Weber, Pareto, Mosca, and Michels; and, proclaiming an interest in society as a whole, defined sociology as the mother discipline, the synthetic social science. Thus, like economists, and in contrast to sociologists, political scientists defined their discipline by betting on specialization and opting for a delimited subject matter.

But the way in which the subject matter of political science was defined differed fundamentally from both economics and sociology in another key way. These sister disciplines defined themselves through theory-driven choices: economics introducing a reorientation of classical theory, sociology seeking an extension of classical theory. In contrast, the process of differentiation of political science vis-à-vis history was largely a matter of carving out an empirically distinct turf and involved a rejection, rather than a reworking, of European grand theorizing and philosophies of history. In sum, political science was born out of history and as a result of efforts to distinguish the study of politics from the study of history. But the birth of this new discipline also entailed a break with, rather than a reformulation of, the classical tradition.

The way in which political science was born had profound implications for the research conducted during the early years of political science (see Table 2). Most critically, the discipline was essentially bereft of theory, whether in the sense of a metatheory, that sought to articulate how the key aspects of politics worked together, or of mid-range theories, that focused just on one or a few aspects of politics.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the formal-legal approach that was common in the literature of this period was largely atheoretical, in that it did not propose general and testable hypotheses. Research also addressed a fairly narrow agenda. Political scientists studied the formal institutions of

government and presented arguments, that largely reflected the prevailing consensus about the merits of limited democracy, on the institutional questions of the day, such as the reforms adopted in the US after the Civil War and the constitutional changes in Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.<sup>7</sup>

In terms of methods, the US reaction to what was seen as the excessively abstract and even metaphysical aspects of European philosophies of history had the positive effect of grounding discussion in observables, that is, in empirical facts. But most of this work consisted mainly of case studies that offered detailed information about legal aspects of the government, at best presented alongside, but not explicitly connected to, more abstract discussions of political theory.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, it tended to focus on a fairly small set of countries and not to provide systematic comparison across countries.

The limitations of the early research done by political scientists in the US notwithstanding, the establishment of political science as an autonomous discipline was a critical development that prepared the ground for future growth. In Europe and elsewhere, the strength of sociology, an imperialist field by definition, worked against the establishment of a discipline focused on the study of politics.<sup>9</sup> Thus, in breaking with the more advanced European tradition by establishing political science as a distinct discipline with its own organizational basis, the US opened a new path that would allow it to catch up and eventually overtake Europe.<sup>10</sup>

## **II. THE BEHAVIORAL REVOLUTION, 1921–66**

A first turning point in the evolution of US political science can be conveniently dated to the 1921 publication of a manifesto for a new science of politics, which implied a departure from the historical approach embraced by many of the founders of political science in the US, by the University of Chicago professor Charles Merriam (1874–1953) (Merriam 1921).<sup>11</sup> This publication was followed in 1923, 1924, and 1925 by a series of “National Conferences on the Science of Politics,” which were important events for the discipline. It was also followed by the formation of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), the world’s first national organization of all the social sciences, based largely on Merriam’s proposal to develop the infrastructure for research in the social sciences. And it signaled the rise of the Chicago school of political science, an influential source of

scholarship in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>12</sup> However, the impact of Merriam's agenda on the study of comparative politics would not be felt in full force until the behavioral revolution swept through the field in the 1950s and 1960s.

One reason why the impetus for a new approach to political science was temporarily muted was that it was centered in, but also restricted to, the study of American politics. Initially, political science was conceived as practically synonymous with the study of comparative politics or, as it was usually called in those days, comparative government.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, Burgess and other founders of political science were strong proponents of a "historical-comparative" method. But as the boundaries between political science and other disciplines were settled, another process of differentiation, leading to the formation of fields within political science, began to unfold. This secondary, internal process of differentiation reflected the increased weight of US-trained PhDs and cemented the view that the study of American politics was a distinct enterprise within political science. In turn, more by default than by design, comparative politics was initially constituted as a field that covered what was not covered by American politics, that is, the study of government and formal political institutions outside the US. This would be an extremely consequential development, whose effect was noted immediately. Even though Merriam's ideas were embraced by many in the field of American politics, the new structure of fields insulated comparativists from these new ideas.

Another reason why the impact of Merriam's agenda was not felt at once had to do with timing and, specifically, the rise of the Nazis in Germany and the onset of World War II. On the one hand, due to these events, a considerable number of distinguished European and especially German thinkers emigrated to the US and took jobs in US universities.<sup>14</sup> These émigrés reinserted, among other things, a greater emphasis on normative political theory in political science. On the other hand, many Americans who proposed a recasting of political science joined the US government and participated in the war effort. This produced a general hiatus in political science research and put any revolution in the discipline on hold.

This transitional period came to a close with the end of World War II and the ushering in of the behavioral revolution.<sup>15</sup> As in the 1920s, the impetus for change came from the field of American politics and was led by various members of the Chicago

school. But this time around the proponents of change had a more ambitious statement of their agenda and also controlled greater organizational resources, including the Committee on Political Behavior established within the SSRC in 1945.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the calls for change were not be limited, as before, to the field of American politics. Rather, through a number of key events—an SSRC conference at Northwestern University in 1952, several programmatic statements and, most importantly, the creation of the SSRC's Committee on Comparative Politics chaired by Gabriel Almond during 1954–63—behavioralism spread to comparative politics.<sup>17</sup>

Behavioralism in comparative politics, as in other fields of political science, stood for two distinct ideas. One concerned the proper subject matter of comparative politics. In this regard, behavioralists reacted against a definition of the field that restricted its scope to the formal institutions of government and sought to include a range of informal procedures and behaviors—related to interest groups, political parties, mass communication, political culture, and political socialization—that were seen as key to the functioning of the political system. A second key idea was the need for a scientific approach to theory and methods. Behavioralists were opposed to what they saw as vague, rarified theory and atheoretical empirics, and argued for systematic theory and empirical testing.<sup>18</sup> Thus, behavioralists sought to bring about major changes in the established practices of comparative politics. And their impact on the field would be high.

Behavioralism's broadening of the field's scope beyond the government and its formal institutions opened comparative politics to a range of theoretical influences from other disciplines. The strongest influence was clearly that of sociology. Indeed, Weberian-Parsonian concepts played a central role in structural functionalism (Parsons 1951), the dominant metatheory of the time, and some of the most influential contributions to comparative politics were written by scholars trained as sociologists.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, anthropology had some influence on structural functionalism, as did social psychology on the literature on political culture (Almond and Verba 1963). Thus, behavioralists helped political science overcome its earlier isolation from other social sciences and this reconnection to other disciplines was associated with a salutary emphasis on theorizing.

The central role given to theory was counterbalanced, however, by some shortcomings. The redefinition of the field's subject matter instigated by the behavioralists led comparativists to focus on societal actors and parties as intermediary agents between society and the state. Nonetheless, to a large extent, behavioralists focused attention on processes outside of the state and offered reductionist accounts of politics. The state was treated as a black box and, eschewing the possibility that the constitution of actors and the ways in which they interacted might be shaped by the state, politics was cast as a reflection of how social actors performed certain functions or how conflicts about economic interests were resolved politically. In other words, politics was not seen as a causal factor and a sense of the distinctiveness of comparative politics as a field of political science was thus lost.

Another shortcoming of this literature concerned the approach to theorizing as opposed to the substance of theories. The most ambitious theorizing, well represented by Almond and James Coleman's (1960) edited volume *The Politics of the Developing Areas*, sought to develop a general theory of politics. Yet the key fruit of these efforts, structural functionalism,<sup>20</sup> had serious limitations. In particular, for all the talk about science among proponents of structural functionalism, much of the literature that used this metatheory fell short of providing testable propositions and testing hypotheses. Another strand in the literature, more concerned with mid-range theorizing, did generate testable hypotheses and conduct empirical testing. An example was Seymour Lipset's (1960) *Political Man*, which included Lipset's (1959) widely read *American Political Science Review* article on the link between economic development and democracy. But this mode of theorizing lacked precisely what structural functionalism aimed at providing: a framework that would offer a basis for connecting and integrating mid-range theories—that is, for showing how the various parts connected to form the whole. These mid-range theories tended to draw on metatheories other than structural functionalism; for example, a Marxist notion of conflict of interests played a fairly prominent role in the works of political sociologists. Yet these metatheories were less explicitly and fully elaborated than structural functionalism.<sup>21</sup> In sum, though these two literatures were parts of the same modernization school that sought to come to terms with the vast processes of socioeconomic and political change in the post-World War II years, their metatheories

and mid-range theories were not linked together and hence the twin goals of generating general theory and testing hypotheses were not met.

In terms of methods, behavioralism also introduced notable changes. Though the dominant form of empirical analysis continued to be the case study and the small-N comparison, comparative analyses became more common and the scope of empirical research was expanded well beyond the traditional focus on big European countries. More attention was given to small European countries. Interest blossomed in the Third World, as comparativists turned their attention to newly independent countries in Asia and Africa and the long-independent countries of Latin America.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, comparativists studied the United States and thus broke down the arbitrary exclusion of the US from the scope of comparative politics.<sup>23</sup> Another key methodological novelty was the introduction of statistical research. Such research included fairly rudimentary cross-national statistical analyses, as offered in the pioneering survey-based study *The Civic Culture*, by Almond and Sidney Verba (1963).<sup>24</sup> And such research was associated with efforts to develop large-N cross-national data sets on institutional and macro variables, a key input for quantitative research, through initiatives such as the Yale Political Data Program set up by Karl Deutsch (1912–92).<sup>25</sup> Comparativists could rightly claim to be engaged in an enterprise of truly global empirical scope.

All in all, the stature of US comparative politics grew considerably in the two decades after World War II. Despite its shortcomings, the field had become more theoretically oriented and more methodologically sophisticated. Moreover, the identity and institutional basis of the field was bolstered by developments such as the expansion of SSRC support for fieldwork and research, the creation of an area studies infrastructure at many research universities,<sup>26</sup> and the launching of journals specializing in comparative politics and area studies.<sup>27</sup> Comparative politics in the US was maturing rapidly. And its new stature was evident in the new relationship established between comparativists working in the US and scholars in Europe. In the 1960s, comparativists in the US began reconnecting with classical social theory,<sup>28</sup> and collaborating with European scholars.<sup>29</sup> But now, unlike before, the US had a model of comparative politics to export.

### III. THE POST-BEHAVIORAL PERIOD, 1967–88

The ascendancy of behavioralism in comparative politics came to an end in the mid-1960s or, more precisely, in 1966. Critiques of behavioralism started earlier, in the mid-1950s, and behavioral work continued after 1966. Moreover, elaborate metatheoretical formulations by leading voices of the behavioral revolution were published in 1965 and 1966 (Easton 1965a; 1965b; Almond and Powell 1966). But these works signaled the culmination and decline of a research program rather than serving as a spur to further research. Indeed, the initiative quickly shifted away from the system builders who had taken the lead in elaborating structural functionalism as a general theory of politics. The publication one year later of Lipset and Stein Rokkan's (1967) "Cleavage Structures, Party Systems, and Voter Alignments" marked the onset of a new intellectual agenda.<sup>30</sup>

The authors who contributed to the new scholarship were diverse in many regards. Some were members of the generation, born in the 1910s and 1920s, which had brought behavioralism to comparative politics. Indeed, some of the most visible indications of change were publications authored by members of that generation, such as Lipset's collaborative work with Rokkan, Samuel Huntington's (1968) *Political Order in Changing Societies* and, later, Giovanni Sartori's (1976) *Parties and Party Systems*.<sup>31</sup> But rapidly the early works of the next generation began to reshape the field with their analyses of consociationalism (Lijphart 1968), corporatism (Schmitter 1971), the military (Stepan 1971), authoritarianism (O'Donnell 1973) and revolution (Scott 1976; Skocpol 1979). Thus, the new literature was spawned both by members of an established generation and a generation that was just entering the field.

These authors were also diverse in terms of their national origin and the values they held. The shapers of the new agenda included several foreign-born scholars working in the United States and, for the first time, these were not only Europeans primarily from Germany.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, the political values of many of these authors departed in a variety of ways from the broadly shared liberal outlook of the previous period.<sup>33</sup> The experience of fascism and World War II continued to weigh heavily on the minds of many scholars. But the US civil rights movement (1955–65) and the Vietnam War (1959–75) had given

rise to conservative and radical positions concerning democracy in the US and US foreign policy. And, outside the US, the urgency of questions about political order and development made democracy seem like a luxury to some.

This diversity makes it hard to pinpoint the novelty and coherence of the new period in the evolution of comparative politics. On the one hand, though the emergence of a new generation was in part behind the move beyond behavioralism, the shift did not coincide solely with a generational change. Part of the new literature was authored by members of the generation born in the 1910s and 1920s and some authors, such as Lipset, had even been closely associated with the behavioral literature. Moreover, many of the younger generation had been trained by behavioralists.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the new literature evolved out of, and through a dialogue with, the established literature, and not through a clean break. On the other hand, the decline in consensus around liberal values was not replaced by a new consensus but rather by the coexistence of liberal, conservative, and radical values. This lack of consensus did introduce an element of novelty, in that many of the key debates in the literature confronted authors with different values and in that the link between values and research thus became more apparent than it had been before. But these debates were not organized as a confrontation between a liberal and a new agenda. Indeed, the difference between conservatives and radicals was larger than between either of them and the liberals. Hence, the new literature cannot be characterized by a unified position regarding values.

Yet the novelty and coherence of the body of literature produced starting in 1967 can be identified in terms of the critiques it made of the modernization school and the alternatives it proposed. The most widely shared critique focused on the behavioralists' reductionism, that is, the idea that politics can be reduced to, and explained in terms of, more fundamental social or economic underpinnings. In turn, the alternative consisted of a reinvigoration of politics as an autonomous practice and an emphasis on the importance of political determinants.<sup>35</sup> The new literature, it bears noting, was not authored by system builders but rather by scholars who rejected the work done by the system builders of the behavioral period. Indeed, the new literature did not propose an equally elaborate and ambitious alternative framework for the study of comparative politics and hence it is most appropriate to label the new period in the evolution of the field as "post-

behavioral.”<sup>36</sup> But the changes introduced by the new literature were extremely significant.

The centrality given to distinctly political questions implied a redefinition of the subject matter of comparative politics. This shift did not entail a rejection of standard concerns of behavioralists, such as the study of political behavior and interest groups. But issues such as interest groups were addressed, in the literature on corporatism for example, from the perspective of the state.<sup>37</sup> What was new, as Theda Skocpol (1985) put it, was the attempt to “bring the state back in” as an autonomous actor and thus to see state-society relations in a new light. The new literature also brought back the formal institutions that had been cast aside by behavioralists. After all, if politics was to be seen as a causal factor, it made sense to address the eminently manipulable instruments of politics, such as the rules regulating elections, the formation of parties, and the relationship among the branches of government.<sup>38</sup> In short, the critique of behavioralism led to a refocusing of comparative politics on the state, state-society relations, and political institutions.

The approach to theorizing also underwent change. Theorizing during this period was less geared to building a new metatheory that would replace structural functionalism, as mentioned, than to developing mid-range theories. Metatheoretical questions were debated, and a large literature on theories of the state was produced. But the frustrations with the adaptation of Parsonian categories to the study of politics led to a certain aversion to top-heavy grand theorizing that precluded the elaboration of ambitious and encompassing frameworks, and certainly no metatheory was as dominant as structural functionalism had been in the previous period.<sup>39</sup> Hence, efforts at theorizing were not seen as part of an attempt to generate an integrated, unified theory and thus produced unconnected “islands of theory” (Guetzkow 1950). But the freedom from what was seen, by many, as a theoretical straightjacket opened up a period of great fertility and creativity. Old questions, about interest groups, political culture, and the military, continued to be studied. New questions, on matters such as state formation and revolution, varieties of authoritarianism and democracy, democratic breakdowns and transitions, democratic institutions, social democracy, and models of economic development, garnered much attention. Moreover, research on these questions did much

to advance theories and concepts that brought political processes to life and to address the question of political change, a feat particularly well attained in Juan Linz's (1978) *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes* and Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter's (1986) *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*. In sum, the knowledge base of comparative politics was rapidly expanded and was increasingly shorn of reductionist connotations.<sup>40</sup>

The story regarding methods is more complicated. To a large extent, research during this period relied on case studies and small-N comparisons. These were the staples of area studies research, which sought to capitalize on in-depth country knowledge gained usually while conducting fieldwork. In addition, the use of statistics, introduced in the previous period, continued. As before, attention was given to survey research and the generation of data sets.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, a quantitative literature started to develop on issues such as electoral behavior, public opinion, and democracy.<sup>42</sup> Thus, even as structural functionalism as a metatheory was largely abandoned when the field of comparative politics altered course in the mid-1960s, the methodological dimension of behavioralism—its emphasis on systematic empirical testing—lived on.

But a methodological schism was also starting to take root. Indeed, during this period, quantitative research was not at the center of the agenda of comparative politics and, to a large extent, was ignored by scholars working within the dominant qualitative tradition. Hence, though comparativists began to take an interest in quantitative analysis in the 1960s, in tandem with political science as a whole, thereafter they started to fall behind other political scientists and especially Americanists in this regard. Precisely at a time when a concerted push to develop quantitative methods suitable for political science, and to expand training in these methods, was taking off,<sup>43</sup> comparativists followed a different path.

The relatively low impact of the quantitative literature that went by the label of “cross-national” research during this period was not due to a lack of emphasis on methods in comparative politics. In the first half of the 1970s, comparativists produced and discussed a series of methodological texts about case studies and small-N comparisons.<sup>44</sup> This was, relatively speaking, a period of heightened methodological awareness in comparative politics. Rather, the standing of quantitative research was due to certain limitations of this literature. As the debate on the political culture literature

based on survey data shows, comparativists frequently had serious reservations about the theoretical underpinnings of much of the quantitative research.<sup>45</sup> In addition, the quantitative literature did not speak to some of the most pressing or theoretically relevant issues of the day. Largely due to the lack of data on many countries, quantitative research was most advanced in the study of functioning democracies, precisely at a time when most of the countries in the world were not democracies and issues such as elections, democratic institutions, and even citizen attitudes were simply not germane.<sup>46</sup>

The rationale for this segregation of quantitative research from the mainstream of the field notwithstanding, it had important consequences for the field's evolution. Within comparative politics, this situation led to the development of two quite distinct research traditions—quantitative and qualitative—that did not talk to each other.<sup>47</sup> In turn, within political science, it led to a growing divide between comparativists and Americanists. Comparativists were largely aloof of advances spurred primarily by scholars in the neighboring field of American politics, where the sophistication of quantitative methods was steadily developing (Achen 1983; King 1991; Bartels and Brady 1993). Indeed, comparativists were not only not contributing to this emerging literature on quantitative methodology; they hardly could be counted among its consumers. The question of common methodological standards across fields of political science was becoming a source of irrepressible tension.

#### **IV. THE SECOND SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTION, 1989–PRESENT**

A new phase in the evolution of comparative politics began with a push to make the field more scientific, propelled in great part by the APSA section on Comparative Politics, constituted in 1989 with the aim of counteracting the fragmentation of the field induced by the area studies focus of much research. This emphasis on science, of course, was reminiscent of the behavioral revolution and statements about the limitations of area studies research even echoed calls made by behavioralists.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, as had been the case with the behavioral revolution, this second scientific revolution in comparative politics was not homegrown but, rather, the product of the importation of ideas that had already been hatched and elaborated in the field of American politics. Nonetheless, there were some significant differences in terms of the content and impact of the behavioral

revolution that swept through comparative politics in the 1950s and 1960s and the new revolution that began to alter the field in the 1990s.

The advocates of this new revolution shared the ambition of the behavioralists who aspired to construct a general, unified theory. But they also diverged from earlier theoretical attempts to advance a science of politics in two basic ways. First, the proposed metatheories drew heavily on economics as opposed to sociology, which had been the main source of the old, structural functionalist metatheory. This was the case of the game theoretic version of rational choice theory, as well as of rational choice institutionalism, a related but distinct metatheory that introduced, in a highly consequential move, institutions as constraints.<sup>49</sup> Second, the new metatheories did not lead to a redefinition of the subject matter of comparative politics, as had been the case with behavioralism. That is, while behavioralists proposed a general theory of politics, which had direct implications for what should be studied by comparativists, rational choice theorists advanced what was, at its core, a general theory of action.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, rational choice theory offers certain elements to study decision making under constraints, but these elements do not identify what is distinctive about political action in contrast to economic or social action. In effect, rational choice theory is seen as a unifying theory, which can integrate theories about action in different domains, precisely because it is not held to apply to any specific domain of action.

In turn, with regard to methods, the drive to be more scientific took two forms. One, closely linked with rational choice theorizing, was the emphasis on logical rigor in theorizing, which was taken much further than had been the case before with the advocacy of formal theorizing or formal modeling as a method of theorizing.<sup>51</sup> The other, much more of an outgrowth of the methodological aspirations of behavioralists and the maturation of political methodology, centered on the use of quantitative, statistical methods of empirical testing.<sup>52</sup>

The impact of this new agenda with three prongs—rational choice, formal theory, and quantitative methods—has been notable. Some rational choice analyses in comparative politics had been produced in earlier years.<sup>53</sup> But after 1989 the work gradually became more formalized and addressed a growing number of issues, such as democratization (Przeworski 1991, 2005), ethnic conflict and civil war (Fearon and

Laitin 1996), voting (Cox 1997), government formation (Laver 1998) and economic policy (Bates 1997). An even more formidable shift took place regarding quantitative research. Political events, especially the global wave of democratization, made the questions and methods that had been standard in the field of American politics more relevant to students of comparative politics. Moreover, there was a great expansion of available data sets. New cross-national time series were produced on various economic concepts, on broad political concepts such as democracy and governance, and on a variety of political institutions.<sup>54</sup> There was also a huge growth of survey data, whether of the type pioneered by Angus Campbell, Philip Converse, Warren Miller, and Donald Stokes' (1960) *The American Voter*—the national election studies model—or the broader and explicitly cross-national surveys such as the regional barometers and the World Values Survey.<sup>55</sup> And, as the infrastructure for quantitative research in comparative politics was strengthened, the number and the sophistication of statistical works increased rapidly.

Some of this statistical research, such as Adam Przeworski et al.'s (2000) *Democracy and Development*, revisited old debates about the determinants and effects of democracy. Yet other works focused on electoral behavior and citizen attitudes, and the legislative and executive branches of government, issues that had long been concerns within American politics. Also, going beyond the kind of cross-national, statistical analysis familiar to comparativists since the 1960s, this quantitative research began to use within-country, statistical analysis, a standard practice in the field of American politics. Moreover, though much of this work was not linked or at best poorly linked with formal theorizing, even this gap was gradually overcome, especially in the work of economists who began to work on standard questions of comparative politics (Persson and Tabellini 2000, 2003).

However, in spite of the significant change brought about in the field of comparative politics by this new literature, the agenda of the second scientific revolution did not bring about as profound a transformation of comparative politics as the behavioral revolution did in the 1950s and early 1960s. The effect of this agenda was limited due to opposition from the so-called Perestroika movement, a discipline-wide reaction to the renewed emphasis on scientific approaches to the study of politics.<sup>56</sup> But another key

factor was the existence of other well-established approaches to theory and methods. Indeed, the post-1989 period has lacked anything as dominant as structural functionalism or the modernization school had been during the behavioral period, and is best characterized as a period of pluralism. The new revolution in comparative politics triggered a heightened awareness about issues of theory and methods among a broad range of comparativists, which has led to real diversity and a relatively healthy interaction among scholars holding different views.

The most polarizing issue has been the status of rational choice theory. There is undeniably something to claims that many comparativists have blindly rejected the ideas of rational choice theorists and, likewise, there is a basis for the worries expressed by some regarding the hegemonic aspirations of rational choice theorists (Lichbach 2003). But the polemics surrounding rational choice theory have actually diverted attention away from a core problem. The introduction of rational choice theory in the field has had a salutary effect, because it has forced scholars to sharpen their proposals of alternative views and helped to structure theoretical debates. Indeed, the contrast between rational choice theory and structural approaches, and between institutional and cultural approaches, has helped to frame some of the thorniest theoretical issues faced in the field. Nonetheless, as rational choice theorists began to include institutions in their analysis, and as debate centered on rational choice institutionalism (Weingast 2002) and historical institutionalism (Thelen 1999; Pierson and Skocpol 2002) as the two main alternatives, it became hard to detect precisely what was distinctive about these metatheories.<sup>57</sup>

The convergence on institutions has served to highlight that rational choice institutionalism and historical institutionalism face a common issue, the fact that the institutions seen as constraints on politicians are themselves routinely changed by politicians or, in other words, that institutions are endogenous to the political process. But these different metatheories have not proposed well-defined solutions to this core issue in the analysis of political action, failing to distinguish clearly and to link theories of statics and dynamics. Moreover, these metatheories fail even to differentiate appropriately among issues related to a general theory of action as opposed to a general theory of politics. Hence, despite much talk about paradigms, the basis for either a debate among, or an attempt at synthesis of, these different metatheories remains rather clouded.

A different situation developed concerning methodology. Along with the increased use of quantitative methods mentioned above, there was a reinvigoration of qualitative methodology. This process was initiated practically single-handedly by David Collier with a critical assessment of the state of the literature (Collier 1991; 1993).<sup>58</sup> His work was fueled by Gary King, Robert Keohane, and Verba's (1994) influential *Designing Social Inquiry* and various critiques of small-N research.<sup>59</sup> And it was consolidated with important new statements about qualitative methodology (Brady and Collier 2004; George and Bennett 2005).<sup>60</sup> In addition, this revival of interest in qualitative methodology was associated with various efforts to build bridges among different methodologies, whether through an exploration of the link between statistical, large-N methods and qualitative, small-N research (Brady and Collier 2004); the use of case studies as a tool to test formal theories, a proposal advanced by advocates of "analytical narratives" (Bates et al. 1998; Rodrik 2003); and the possibility of "a tripartite methodology, including statistics, formalization, and narrative," an option articulated by David Laitin (2002, 630–31; 2003). Thus, the debate about methods, in contrast to the debate about theory, has led to a clear sense of the potential contributions of different methods and hence to the identification of a basis for synthesis.

Finally, in terms of substantive research, the influence of rational choice theory has no doubt increased the influence of ideas from economics in comparative politics and this has opened new avenues of research (Miller 1997). But unlike in the 1950s, the new scientific revolution of the 1990s did not bring a major shift in the focus of empirical research. Rather, there is a great degree of continuity with regard to the mid-range theorizing that had been done during the previous fifteen to twenty years. And it is noteworthy that, at this level of theorizing, cross-fertilization among researchers from different traditions is not uncommon. Thus, though charges of economic imperialism have been made and in some instances might be justifiable, the relationship between economics and comparative politics has been a two-way street. Some economists have taken comparative politics seriously, drawing in particular on the insights about political institutions offered by comparativists. The work of economists has been used by comparativists to revitalize research on central issues such as the state and citizenship (Przeworski 2003). And economists have revisited debates launched by classics of

comparative historical analysis, such as Barrington Moore's (1966) *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, and of area studies research, such as Fernando Cardoso and Enzo Faletto's (1979) *Dependency and Development in Latin America*.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, when it comes to substantive research, the cleavage lines between rational choice theorists and the rest, between formal and verbal theorists, and between quantitative and qualitative researchers, lose a large degree of their force.

This disjuncture between the programmatic statements that, since 1989, have so often emphasized divisions regarding issues of theory and methods, and the actual practices of comparativists, is attributable to many factors. The lack of clarity regarding the differences among metatheories, and the fact that methods are after all only tools, are surely contributing factors. But this disjuncture is also probably associated with the values held by comparativists. Since 1989, consensus among comparativists concerning democracy as a core value has been high enough to override divisions rooted in contentious issues such as neoliberalism and globalization. And, given this consensus, passions usually inflamed by conflicts over political values, a feature of the previous period in the history of comparative politics, have been channeled instead into debates about theory and methods. As a consequence, research in comparative politics has lost something, due to a relative lack of value-driven engagement of comparativists with politics. But the field has also gained something, as attested by the production of a rich and rigorous literature, many times drawing on different traditions, on big and pressing questions.<sup>62</sup>

## V. CONCLUSION

This retrospective of comparative politics suggests that the field has made significant progress. Metatheories have come and gone. The relationship with other fields of political science and with sister disciplines has changed repeatedly. Yet, despite this instability, a focus on a distinctively political subject matter has become largely the norm, mid-range theorizing on a range of important questions has grown steadily, and the methods used in the field have become increasingly sophisticated. Comparativists have accomplished a lot and produced a vast amount of knowledge about politics around the world.

But the assessment offered in this paper also serves to identify some shortcomings. A first concerns theory. The proliferation of mid-range theorizing has yielded valuable insights about politics but also fragmentary knowledge. Yet, comparativists have largely abandoned the aspiration of the system builders who sought to elaborate an explicit metatheory of politics in the 1950s and 1960s. In turn, despite some recent attempts to integrate theories of statics and dynamics, there is a strong tendency to segregate the study of statics, which takes key parameters of the analysis as given and fixed, from the study of dynamics, which is concerned precisely with the change of these parameters and thus does not take them as given. Thus, a key challenge facing comparativists is the development of a general or unified theory of politics, one which integrates both mid-range theories of various substantive issues and theories of statics and dynamics.

The second shortcoming concerns empirics. Despite major advances in recent times, comparativists lack good measures for many of the concepts used in their theories. Likewise, despite significant improvements, comparativists still rarely use methods that would subject their hypotheses to rigorous testing. A telltale sign of the magnitude of the challenge concerning empirical analysis is that much research that is given the label of comparative politics is not even strictly speaking comparative—that is, it does not compare at the very least two political systems. Taken together, these limitations seriously weaken comparativists' ability to produce strong findings. Thus, another challenge facing comparativists is the establishment of robust, broad empirical generalizations about world politics.

How comparativists might fruitfully go about tackling these challenges is a complex question, which goes beyond the scope of this paper. But some broad lessons can be drawn from the history of the field. Comparative politics has been and remains a diverse field and many times comparativists have shown that this diversity can be a source of strength. But comparativists have also shown a tendency to accentuate paralyzing or distracting divisions. Thus, if the field is going to contribute further to its mission to develop a global science of politics, it is imperative that comparativists work with a greater sense of common purpose. And this will only be possible inasmuch as comparativists recognize two fundamental points. One is that the study of politics is

inextricably linked with normative concerns and that, in the absence of an explicit consideration of the values involved in politics, the stakes and rationale of research will be obscured. A second point is that, to answer normatively important questions, researchers must not only be passionate about their subject matter; in addition, they must use appropriate scientific methods.

What is required, in short, is an appreciation of both the depth of the roots of comparative politics in a humanistic tradition and the vital importance of its scientific aspirations. The souls of comparativists are not stirred solely by a substantive interest in global politics and, even less so, by the methods used to learn about this subject matter. Hence the future of comparative politics is likely to hinge on the ability of comparativists to overcome weakening divisions and to blend their concerns with substance and method, politics and science.









































