How Do We Study Politics?

I. There are two approaches to the study of comparative politics.
   A. The normative approach focuses upon philosophies, norms, or “should.”
      1. For example, the normative approach would ask, “What is justice?”
      2. “Should there be free education?”
   B. The empirical approach relies on measurement and observation rather than norms.
      1. The empirical approach is not to ask what should be but what is.
      2. Does everyone in a society have equal access to education?

II. Arend Lijphart’s four basic methods of discovering and establishing empirical propositions.
   A. The case study method involves an intensive study of an individual subject.
      1. Micro-level analysis might focus on individuals
      2. Macro-level analysis might focus on groups or institutions.
      3. In this approach the researcher develops expertise, albeit limited in scope.
   B. The statistical method involves sophisticated forms of measurement and observation.
   C. The comparative method involves looking for similarities and differences in two or more cases.
      1. Diachronic comparison is a comparison of one subject across time (e.g. comparing the British House of Commons in 1952 with the one in 1902)
      2. Synchronic comparison compares subjects across national borders (e.g. examining the British prime minister with the Japanese prime minister)
   D. The experimental approach involves the manipulation of variables.
      1. The case study, the statistical, and the comparative methods are based exclusively on observation and measurement not manipulation of variables.
      2. In the experimental approach one manipulates one variable to observe the effect upon another variable.
      3. This approach has its limitations.
         a. One problem is the complexity of the subject.
            1. The real world of politics “consists of an endless number of variables.” (Kesselman, et al)
            2. Unlike physics or chemistry (the “hard sciences”), variables in political science (a “soft science”) are difficult to isolate and manipulate
         b. The second problem is that humans have free will.
            1. Even if one assumes humans can be rational, their choice, attitudes, and behavior cannot be fully explained or predicted.
   E. Causation: “If X happens, then Y is the result.”
      1. Variables: X (the independent variable) is manipulated to see how, if at all, it causes (influences) Y (the dependent variable)
      2. Example: What causes conflict (Y) to intensify among various groups in a particular country?
         a. Hypothesis: If a country’s economic pie (X) decreases, conflict (Y) intensifies.
         b. This might be tested by statistical analysis of a very large number of cases or by focusing on one country, or several, to analyze how X and Y relationships have varied over time and with what effect.
I. Key Concepts
   A. Comparative politics relies on a *comparative method* to construct and test hypotheses.
   B. The question is can comparative politics be made more *scientific*?

II. Assumptions and Explanations of Political Phenomena
   A. There have been many changes in and explanations for politics in the last 20 years.
      1. Examples of changes are: the rise of Asian economic power, the retreat of communism, the return of religion to politics, and the spread of globalization.
      2. Examples of explanations are a clash of civilizations, political and economic inequality, and the effects of globalization.
   B. The problem is what is the true explanation in the absence of reliable evidence or a clear understanding of cause and effect?
   C. The basic categories used for studying comparative politics are:
      1. *analytical concepts*: assumptions and theories about politics
      2. *methods*: ways to study and test those theories
      3. *ideals*: values and beliefs about preferred outcomes

III. What is *comparative politics*?
   A. *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.
   B. Comparative politics is a subfield that compares this struggle across countries.
   C. The *comparative method* involves:
      1. comparing countries or subsets within them, and
      2. drawing conclusions (generalizations) that are valid
   D. The *single case approach* is a method of inductive reasoning.
      1. The study of one country alone can generate interesting *hypotheses*
      2. Alone, however, it is not enough to test those hypotheses.
      3. Still, it can be a “building block” to greater theories.
   E. Starting with a hypothesis is a method of deductive reasoning.
      1. Beginning with a hypothesis we hope to find a *correlation* (apparent association) between certain factors or variables.
      2. For example, begin with a hypothesis about nationalism and then test this by looking at a number of countries.
   F. The *problems* with inductive and deductive reasoning in comparative politics.
      1. The variables cannot be controlled.
         a. In the *real world of politics* the variables of each case is different
            (countries are diverse in economics, culture, geography, resources, and political institutions)
         b. Even in *single case* studies, variable change over time.
      2. Political scientists are hampered by a *limited number of cases* (fewer than 200 countries at present).
      3. *Access to cases* is hindered by the barriers that make countries unique.
         a. Information is not easy to acquire and requires “work in the field”.
         b. International travel takes time and money.
c. Interviewees may be unwilling to speak or may be intentionally or unintentionally deceptive.

d. Language skills are limited to a single country or group of countries (e.g. European).

4. Selective bias prevents the randomization essential to test the validity of a hypothesis.
   a. Single case studies are influenced by the researcher’s knowledge or preferences.
   b. Deductive reasoning can easily fall into the trap by beginning with the hypothesis and then purposely seeking out the cases to validate it (e.g. "revolutions are caused by inequality," then look for cases where inequality may have preceded revolution, neglecting cases where inequality did not result in revolution).

5. Endogeneity or which is the cause and which is the effect?
   a. Even if one is confident that a cause and effect has been found, one can’t be certain that it is true.
   b. For example, can it be said that countries with a low rate of female literacy are less likely to be democracies than countries where female literacy is high?

G. Can comparative politics be a science?
   1. Science is an approach (method) not restricted to any one subject.
   2. Political science has had a long history as a field of study.
      a. Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E.) was the first to conduct empirical research on existing political systems (158 Greek city-states) with the practical purpose of studying statecraft or how to govern (The Politics).
      b. Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527), cited as the first modern political scientist, analyzed different political systems to be applied by statesmen (The Prince).
      c. Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) advocated a strong state based on empirical observation and analyses (The Leviathan).
      d. John Locke (1632-1704) advocated individual freedom and property (Two Treatises of Government).
      e. Montesquieu (1689-1755) studied the separation of power (The Spirit of Laws).
      f. Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) argued that rights are inalienable (The Social Contract).
      g. Karl Marx (1818-1883) analyzed the nature of economic development and inequality (Das Kapital).
      h. Max Weber (1864-1920) wrote on bureaucracy, authority and the impact of culture (Economy and Society).

3. Since the 20th century there have been several trends in comparative politics.
   a. At the turn of the century, the traditional approach resembled a kind of "political journalism" describing political systems and their various institutions, atheoretical, and concentrating on European countries.
   b. The two world wars and the rise of the Cold War created a "behavioral revolution" shifting away from a descriptive study to one emphasizing causality, explanation, and prediction.
      (1) Behavioralism placed greater emphasis on the political behavior of individuals rather than larger political structures.
(2) Behavioralism also emphasized quantitative analysis over qualitative methodology.

(3) The reasons for this were several:
   (a) the movement toward more rigorous methods of studying human behavior;
   (b) the skepticism that scholars could meaningfully contribute to an understanding of world affairs;
   (c) the threat of nuclear war with the USSR made understanding comparative politics a matter of survival
   (d) the wave of technological innovation generated the belief that social problems could be solved by science

   c. Modernization theory took the view that capitalism and democracy is the ideal and influenced comparative politics in the 1950s and 1960s.
      (1) Modernization theory and behavioralism were different.
         (a) Modernization theory advocated a set of hypotheses for political and economic development.
         (b) Behavioralism advocated a set of methods with which to approach politics.
      (2) But modernization theory and behavioralism were linked together as both wanted a more scientific approach to achieve policies

d. By the late 1970s, resistance and significant obstacles to behavioralism had developed.
   (1) Postbehavioralism rejected the notion of a grand theory of politics.
   (2) New theories and sophisticated methods of analysis may have increased academic knowledge about comparative politics, “but this knowledge did not lead to the expected breakthroughs” (O’Neil, Essentials of Comparative Politics, p. 31).
   (3) The theories, such as modernization theory, failed to match the real world.
   (4) Some critics charged that obsession with appearing scientific had emphasized methodology over knowledge and technical jargon over clarity.
   (5) Others criticized comparativists for their ideological bias, saying that they weren’t so much interested in understanding the world but in prescribing the Western model of modernization.

e. Today, comparative politics, like all political science, has become fragmented with no consensus as to methods or analytical concepts.

4. Methodological debates wage over how best to gather and analyze data.
   a. Traditional “area studies” scholars continue to emphasize the importance of deep, long-term investigations of particular countries
      (1) The qualitative method involves the mastery of a limited number of cases through detailed study of history, language, and culture.
      (2) This method emphasizes depth rather than breadth.
      (3) Traditionalists criticize behavioralists for oversimplifying a complex and culturally diverse world.
   b. Behavioralists, by contrast, favor a quantitative method.
(1) The quantitative method requires gathering statistical data across a large number of countries and mathematical models in order to look for correlations and test hypotheses about cause and effect.
(2) This method emphasizes breadth rather than depth.
(3) Behavioralists reject the qualitative method as failing to add knowledge beyond mere description.

5. A second related debate concerns rationality.
   a. Those who believe humans behave in some generally understandable way argue that humans are rational.
      (1) These advocates believe rational choice or game theory can not only explain but predict behavior.
      (2) Such models can be used to study voter preferences or support for a revolution.
   b. Traditionalists argue that humans are essentially unpredictable and that the emphasis on individual rationality discounts the importance of historical complexity or idiosyncratic behavior.

H. Does any of this really matter?
1. Whatever their persuasion, political scientists have failed to foresee many of the changes that have happened in the world and have great difficulty explaining the issues that currently confront the world today.
   a. The end of the Cold War was something neither traditionalists nor behavioralists anticipated.
   b. Religion as a force in politics has reemerged, contrary to modernization theory.
   c. New economic powers emerged in Asia, coinciding with democracy in some but not in others.
   d. International terrorism has resurfaced, and neither traditionalists nor behavioralists appear able to provide answers.

2. Still, there has been progress toward relevance and rigor.
   a. Both quantitative and qualitative scholars have recently come to recognize the value in each other’s approaches.
      (1) Quantitative scholars now recognize that expressing information in numbers does not make it “scientific” or that information in purely qualitative form is necessarily without rigor.
      (2) Similarly, qualitative scholars are making more use of statistics and ensuring that their research is more than simply descriptive.
   b. Finally, all sides have recognized the need to reconnect political science to central policy questions (real world concerns) and to reengage political ideals (previously considered “unscientific” by behavioralists).

3. Relevance and rigor are central to a meaningful political science.
Chapter 1 The Concept of Country

I. A Question of Subject Matter
A. “Nation”
   1. People with a sense of “identity”
   2. Same language, culture, or religion
B. “State”
   1. Government institutions and laws
   2. States historically have preceded nations
C. “Country”
   1. Originally a rural area where people shared the same dialect and traditions
   2. Now synonymous with “nation” or “state”
D. “Nation-State”
   1. Territory: defined boundaries (conflicting claims are a problem, e.g., French/German over Alsace, Israeli/Palestinian over lands)
   2. Population: definite citizenry (problem: multi-nationalities, e.g., Russia, the Balkans, Sri Lanka)
   3. Independence: self-governing (problem: dependent on major powers such as the U.S.)
   4. Government: civil institutions (yet governments often precede, i.e., the U.S. or are “in exile”)

II. The Modern State
A. Five hundred years old
   1. 1648 the Thirty Years War ends
   2. The beginning of the end for Europe’s feudal monarchies
B. Feudalism: power sharing between the King and the nobility declines
   1. Not tolerant of strong centralized government
   2. Not oriented to change or expansion
C. Absolutism: on the ascendancy
   1. Concentrated power using new economics, new administrative techniques, new military weapons
   2. Celebrated the concept of “nationality”

III. The Development of “Nationalism”
A. The French Revolution
   1. The “masses” rally to defend France from German invaders
   2. The Tri-color flag, La Marseeille stir French emotions
B. Nationalism spreads to the rest of Europe, Latin America, Asia, Africa

IV. The five areas in studying nation-states
A. Impact of the Past: the struggle to unify/consolidate
   1. Geography and history
   2. Industrialization, urbanization, education, and communications
   3. Religion
Unit 1 Assignment
How to Study Politics and the Concept of Country

True or False (mark T for true or F for false)

01. An example of the empirical approach is to ask, “Should capital punishment be abolished?”

02. Most countries are natural entities.

03. An example of synchronic comparison is comparing the American president to the Russian president.

04. The founding of nations usually involves bloodshed.

05. A single case approach to studying politics is an example of inductive reasoning.

06. Unitary systems need bicameral legislatures

07. Pragmatic is the opposite of ideological.

08. Purposefully looking for evidence to validate one’s hypothesis is an example of endogeneity.

09. Behavioralism emphasizes quantitative analysis over qualitative analysis.

10. Industrialization is always a painful process.

Bonus Question:

11. Traditionalists believe that human beings are essentially unpredictable.