

example, would like us to differentiate politics from “corporate decisions”; the latter, he asserted, “affect only a specific corporation” (p. 2). Certainly, there are myriad decisions made within a corporation (or within a family, factory, church, or other social institution) with a very limited public or societal impact; yet, it is also true that a vast number of “private” decisions have a clear and sometimes profound public dimension. By their very nature, in fact, many corporate decisions have a deep influence on how resources are obtained, used, produced, and distributed. Moreover, in an era of “mega-corporations”—where the largest firms are bigger, and often immensely bigger, than many countries in terms of command over economic resources—the suggestion that corporate decisions do not have a far-reaching public impact is difficult to maintain. Consider, in this regard, Wal-Mart. In the 2008 fiscal year, Wal-Mart’s total sales (domestic plus international) amounted to \$374.5 billion (*Wal-Mart 2008 Annual Report*), which was more than three times bigger than New Zealand’s **gross domestic product** (GDP) of \$115.7 billion (2008 estimate), in terms of **purchasing power parity** (PPP), and vastly more than the GDP of most of the world’s smaller countries. Haiti’s GDP, to cite just one example, was a paltry \$11.5 billion in 2008, or about 3.1 percent of Wal-Mart’s total sales. (See Figure 1.5 for additional details.) It is not hard to assert that Wal-Mart’s decisions, in general, have a much greater political impact than decisions made in Haiti. Where, then, do we draw the line between public and private decisions? Is it even possible to do so? I would argue that the line, in some respects, has simply become too blurred to be of major significance today.

At the same time, it would be a mistake for politics to be defined as “everything-including-the-kitchen-sink.” Indeed, as I discuss in subsequent chapters (and as I suggested earlier), it is often necessary to provide clear-cut, precise definitions. This is especially true when trying to develop an argument or when trying to support a specific hypothesis or claim. After all, if you cannot precisely or adequately define what it is you are studying—say “democracy” or “terrorism”—how can you possibly claim to say anything meaningful about that subject? In defining an entire field of study, precision is less important, but not irrelevant. The trick, then, is to develop a definition that is neither too narrow nor too unfocused. One solution, albeit a pragmatic one, is to acknowledge that the politics about which comparativists (and other political scientists) are most concerned, according to Stoker and Marsh (2002), (1) is primarily *collective* as opposed to interpersonal and (2) involves interaction *within* the public arena—that is, in the government or state—or *between* the public arena and social actors or institutions (p. 10). No doubt, this qualification will still be unsatisfactory to many political scientists, but it is also one upon which a large number of comparativists have chosen to base their research and analysis.

With all this in mind, let us now turn to the other major aspect of comparative politics, namely, comparing. To begin this discussion, let me pose a simple question: what does it mean to compare?



Figure 1.5 Wal-Mart vs. the World (2008 estimates)

The table below provides some simple (maybe simplistic) comparisons of Wal-Mart (one of the world's largest companies in terms of sales) and a few selected countries. Traditional definitions of politics suggest that countries, no matter how small, have greater relevance to "politics" than corporate actors. These figures, although hardly definitive, suggest otherwise.

	Wal-Mart	Saudi Arabia	New Zealand	Haiti
Employees/ population	1.4 million	28.7 million	4.2 million	9.0 million
Sales/GDP-PPP (in billions US\$)	\$374.5 ^a	\$593.4	\$115.7	\$11.5
Per capita sales/ GDP (in US\$)	\$267,500	\$23,834	\$27,060	\$1,316
Growth rate (3-year average, 2006–2008)	10.03%	3.6%	1.75%	2.6%
International sales/ exports (in billions US\$)	\$90.6 ^b	\$311.1	\$29.5	\$0.49
Imports (in billions US\$)	N/A	\$92.4	\$31.1	\$2.1

Sources: Figures for Wal-Mart are all based on the 2008 fiscal year ("Wal-Mart 2008 Annual Report," <http://walmartstores.com/sites/AnnualReport/2008/>). GDP-PPP figures for Saudi Arabia, New Zealand, and Haiti are from the International Monetary Fund, *World Economic Outlook Database* (April 2009), www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2009/01/weodata/index.aspx. All other data are from the *CIA World Factbook*, www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook.

Notes: GDP = gross domestic product; PPP = purchasing power parity; N/A = figures not available.

a. Includes sales from Sam's Club and Wal-Mart International. Sales for Wal-Mart only were \$239.5 billion.

b. Figure is included in total sales.

What Does It Mean to Compare? What Is a Comparativist?

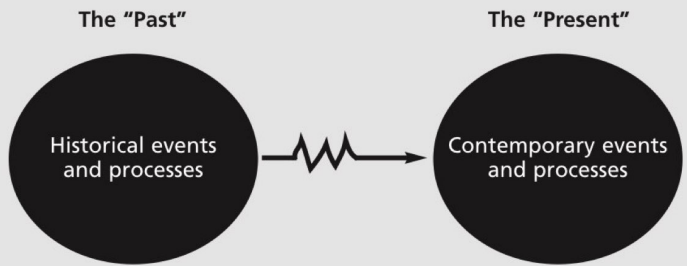
In thinking about what it means to compare, let's first consider what one researcher has to say: "Thinking without comparison is unthinkable. And, in the absence of comparison, so is all scientific thought and scientific research" (Swanson 1971, p. 141; cited in Ragin 1987, p. 1). This scholar is telling us that in *all* social sciences, researchers, scholars, and students are invariably engaged in making some sort of comparison. If this is so (and it is fair to say that it is), then there is very little that sets comparative politics apart—on the surface, at least—from other fields of study. This is to say that the comparative

strategies used by “comparativists” are not, *in principle*, different from the comparative strategies used by other political scientists or by sociologists, economists, and so on. But it does not mean that no differences exist: arguably, one practice that sets comparative politics apart from other fields is the explicit and direct focus on the comparative method—as opposed to simply “comparing.”⁷⁷

The comparative method, as I will discuss in detail in the following chapter, is a distinctive mode of comparative analysis. According to Ragin (1987), it entails two main predispositions. First, it involves a bias toward (although certainly not an exclusive focus on) **qualitative analysis**, which means that comparativists tend to look at *cases as wholes* and to compare whole cases with each other. Thus the tendency for comparativists is to talk of comparing Germany to Japan or the United States to Canada. This may not seem to be an important point, but it has significant implications, one of which is that comparativists tend to eschew—or at least, put less priority on—**quantitative analysis**, also known as **statistical** or **variable-centered analysis** (Ragin 1987, pp. 2–3). In the social sciences, especially over the past few years, this orientation away from quantitative and toward qualitative analysis definitely sets comparativists apart from other social scientists. Even within comparative politics, however, this is beginning to change. The second predisposition among comparativists is to value *interpretation* and *context* (pp. 2–3). This means, in part, that comparativists (of all theoretical orientations, I might add) begin with the assumption that “history matters.” Saying that history matters, I should caution, is much more than pointing out a few significant historical events or figures in an analysis; instead, it involves showing exactly how historical processes and practices, as well as long-established institutional arrangements, impact and shape the *contemporary* environment in which decisions are made, events unfold, and struggles for power occur. It means, in other words, demonstrating a meaningful continuity between the past and the present. This is not easy to do, but for a comparativist using “history,” it is often an essential task. (See Figure 1.6.)

Although understanding the predisposition of comparativists is important, this still doesn’t tell us what it means to compare—a question that may seem easy to answer, but in fact is not. Just pointing out or describing differences and similarities between any two countries, for example, is not by any account the be-all and end-all of comparative analysis. Indeed, if you stay strictly at the level of superficial description—for example, China has a **Confucian** heritage, whereas the United States does not; both France and Russia experienced **social revolutions**—you will never genuinely engage in comparative *analysis*, no matter how accurate your observations may be. And you’re even less likely to tell your audience anything meaningful or insightful about political phenomena. Comparing, then, involves much more than making observations about two or more entities. Just what else is involved in comparative analysis is the topic of our next chapter, so I will reserve the re-

Figure 1.6 The Importance of History



Good historical analysis must show how past events and processes connect with and shape contemporary events and processes. Just “talking about” history is never enough.

mainder of my discussion on this topic until then. In the meantime, we need to address another basic and essential question: why compare?

Why Compare?

To be good comparativists, we need to know *why* we compare. In other words, what is the purpose of comparing? On this question, Giovanni Sartori (1994) offered us a very simple answer, namely, we compare to **control**. By control, Sartori means to say—albeit in a very loose way—that we use comparisons as a way to check (verify or falsify) whether our claims or assertions about certain phenomena are valid by controlling for, or holding constant, certain variables. Take the statements “poverty causes corruption” or, conversely, “corruption causes poverty”; “authoritarianism is more conducive to high levels of economic growth than democracy”; and “social revolutions are caused by relative deprivation.” How do we know, Sartori asked, whether any of these statements is true, false, or something else? “We know,” Sartori answered, “by looking around, that is, by *comparative checking*” (emphasis added; p. 16). It is important to understand that, in most comparative analyses, actual **control variables** are not used. This issue may not be very clear right now and, for our purposes, is not critical. The main point is this: different types of comparisons allow a researcher to treat a wide variety of similarities or differences as if they are control variables. In so doing, the researcher can safely eliminate a whole range of potentially significant factors and, instead, concentrate on those variables he deems most important.

Unfortunately, comparative checking usually cannot (indeed, can almost never) provide definitive answers. This is true, in part, because comparative checking is an imperfect mode of analysis, at least when comparing real-world cases. It is also true, in more substantive terms, because comparison—although one method of control—is not the best. There are much better methods of control, such as the **experimental method** and statistical control. “But,” as Sartori also noted, “the experimental method has limited applicability in the social sciences, and the statistical one requires many cases” (1994, p. 16), something that research in comparative politics generally lacks (this is referred to as the **small-N** problem). Like it or not, therefore, comparison often represents only a “second-best” method of control in the social sciences and comparative politics.

Despite its second-best status, comparing to control is an undeniably important purpose of comparative analysis. Yet many comparativists, especially those with a strong predisposition toward qualitative and historical analysis, are not always, or even mostly, involved in “testing” hypotheses through their comparisons (Ragin 1987, p. 11). Instead, as Ragin noted, “[many comparativists] . . . *apply* theory to cases in order to interpret them” (emphasis in original; p. 11). We will see examples of this in subsequent chapters, but what Ragin meant, in part, is that comparativists recognize that countries or other types of macrosocial units all, in important ways, have a unique story to tell. Ragin suggested, therefore, that some researchers are often most interested in using comparative analysis to get a better grasp of these individual “stories,” rather than primarily using them as a way to verify or falsify specific arguments. In other words, for these researchers, in-depth **understanding** is the goal of comparative analysis. Comparing to understand, to put it in slightly different terms, means that researchers use comparison to see what other cases can tell them about the specific case or country in which they have the most interest.

In a similar vein, some comparativists assume that the sheer complexity of real-world cases makes control a worthwhile but difficult, if not impossible, goal to achieve. Instead, they advocate a more pragmatic approach that attempts to build theoretical generalization—or **explanation**—through an accumulation of case-based knowledge (this is sometimes referred to as **analytical induction**). In this view, it is understood that no case, by itself, or no comparison of a small number of cases is sufficient to test a theory or general claim. This is largely because the overwhelming complexity of any given case makes any test problematic and highly contingent. Instead, each case or each small-N comparison provides comparativists another piece (albeit often a very complicated piece in and of itself) to work into a much larger puzzle. I will come back to this issue—and specifically the issue of **complex causality**—below.

Even though the foregoing discussion may be a little confusing, the key point is simply that, although researchers use comparisons for different rea-

sons, doing comparative politics requires that you be aware of *your* reason and rationale for making a comparison. Figure 1.7 provides a summary of the three general purposes of comparing.

Figure 1.7 Three Purposes of Comparing: A Summary

	General Purpose		
	Comparing to <i>Control</i>	Comparing to <i>Understand</i>	Comparing to <i>Explain</i>
Basic strategy or purpose	Comparative checking	Interpretation	Analytical induction
Logic or approach to comparative analysis	Researcher uses a range of cases as a way to “test” (verify or falsify) a specific claim, hypothesis, or theory.	Researcher is primarily interested in a single case and uses different cases or general theories as a way to learn more about the case he/she is studying.	Researcher uses cases as a way to build a stronger theoretical explanation. Cases are used in a “step-by-step” manner, with each case contributing to the development of a general theory.
Basic example	(1) Begin with a claim: “A high level of gun ownership will lead to a high level of gun-related homicide.” (2) “Test” the claim: Researcher examines a range of countries in order to “control for” gun ownership; if countries with the highest rates of gun ownership have low rates of gun-related homicides (and vice versa), the claim is falsified and must be rejected.	(1) Begin with a case (and issue): The high level of homicides in South Africa. (2) Use existing theories and/or other cases to better understand case: Researcher uses a range of theories on gun violence to better understand why South Africa is the most violent country in the world. Researcher also uses other cases to see what those cases can tell her about South Africa.	(1) Begin with a general theory: “Structural theory of democratization.” (2) Use various cases to strengthen the theory: Researcher begins by looking at the democratization process in Mexico. This examination may lead researcher to “tweak” or revise elements of theory; he then looks at Taiwan, Poland, and Ukraine. Each case is used as a stepping-stone in developing or strengthening original theory.

What Is Comparable?

Another important question about comparing involves the issue of exactly what one can compare. What, to put it simply, is *comparable*? Again, the answer may seem obvious at first blush (especially in the context of comparative politics). For instance, it certainly seems reasonable to assert that countries, governments, societies, or similar entities are comparable. Yet, why should this be the case? What makes “countries” (or other units of analysis) comparable? One easy answer to this question is simply that all countries share at least some common attributes—for example, they all occupy a territory defined by political boundaries, they all represent the interests of a political community, they are all recognized (albeit not always “officially” as in the case of Taiwan) by other countries or states, and so on. At the same time, they each differ in some meaningful way. Indeed, differences are crucially important in any type of comparative analysis. After all, if all countries were exactly alike, there would be no reason to compare, because what we say about one case would necessarily be the same in any other case. In this respect, we might say that comparing apples to oranges generally makes more sense than comparing oranges to oranges or apples to apples.

Thus, to determine what we can compare, we can begin by saying that we can compare “entities whose attributes are in part shared (similar) and in part non-shared (and thus, we say, incomparable)” (Sartori 1994, p. 17). Saying this, however, still doesn’t tell us all we need to know. Is it appropriate, for instance, to compare the United States, Côte d’Ivoire, Japan, Indonesia, Guinea-Bissau, and New Zealand? Well, the answer is, *it depends*. That is, it depends on what the researcher is hoping to accomplish, and it depends on the particular research design the researcher plans to use. This is an obvious point; still, it is one worth making because when phrased as a question—“on what does our comparison depend?”—it forces us to think more carefully about the design of our analyses. It forces us, as well, to *justify* the comparisons we ultimately end up making.

Comparing Cases

What we can compare, I should stress, is definitely not limited to countries (more on this in Chapter 2). Nor is it necessarily limited to comparable data from *two or more* countries. Such a restriction, for example, would automatically exclude comparatively oriented but single-country (or single-unit) **case studies**, including such classic comparative studies as Alexis de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* ([1835] 1998) and Emile Durkheim’s *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* ([1915] 1961) (both cited in Ragin [1987, p. 4]). As Ragin explained it, “Many area specialists [i.e., researchers who concen-

trate on a single country] are thoroughly comparative because they implicitly compare their chosen case to their own country or to an imaginary or theoretically decisive ideal-typic case” (p. 4). Others, including Sartori, would disagree, or at least would be quite skeptical of the claim that single-country case studies can be genuinely comparative. Sartori wrote, for example, “It is often held that comparisons can be ‘implicit.’ . . . I certainly grant that a scholar *can be* implicitly comparative without comparing, that is, provided that his one-country or one-unit study *is* embedded in a comparative context and that his concepts, his analytic tools, are *comparable*. But how often is this really the case?” (emphasis in original; 1994, p. 15).⁸ Sartori made a good point, but so too did Ragin. My own view is that single-case studies can be genuinely comparative if the researcher is clear about the “comparative context.” But, this is far less difficult than Sartori implies. (I will return to a discussion of this point in the following chapter.)

The Importance of Logic

We are not going to resolve the debate here. Suffice it to say, then, that doing comparative analysis requires far more than just looking at a “foreign country” or just randomly or arbitrarily picking two or more countries to study in the context of a single paper or study. It is, instead, based on a general “logic” and on particular strategies that guide (but do not necessarily) determine the comparative choices we make. Understanding the logic of comparative analysis, in fact, is essential to doing comparative politics. Needless to say, this will be an important topic of discussion in Chapter 2. To conclude our general discussion of comparing for now, however, it would be useful to consider some of the advantages of the comparative method (a number of disadvantages are discussed in Chapter 2).

What Are the Advantages of the Comparative Method?

Earlier I noted that comparativists tend to look at *cases as wholes* and to compare whole cases with each other. There are important advantages to this practice, the first and most important of which, perhaps, is that it enables researchers to deal with **complex causality** (or **causal complexity**). At one level, complex causality is an easy-to-grasp concept. After all, there is little doubt that much of what happens in the “real world” is an amalgam of economic, cultural, institutional, political, social, and even psychological processes and forces. Not only do all these processes and forces exist independently (at least to some extent), but they *interact* in complicated, difficult-

to-discern, and sometimes unpredictable (or contingent) ways. Thus, in studying a particular phenomenon—say, political violence—it is likely that several or even dozens of factors are at play. Some factors may be primarily “economic,” such as poverty, unemployment, and unequal income distribution. Other factors may be “cultural” (for example, specific religious values and practices, community norms, etc.), “political” (for example, lack of democracy or a skewed distribution of political power, which itself could be based on religious or ethnic differences), “socioeconomic” (for example, strong class-based divisions), and so on. An adequate understanding of political violence may have to take all these factors into account and will likely have to specify their interrelationship and interaction within certain contexts. Ragin (1987) provided a very useful, three-point summary of complex causality:

First, rarely does an outcome of interest to social scientists have a single cause. The conditions conducive for strikes, for example, are many; there is no single condition that is universally capable of causing a strike. Second, causes rarely operate in isolation. Usually, it is *the combined effect* of various conditions, their intersection in time and space, that produces a certain outcome. Thus, social causation is often both multiple and conjectural, involving different combinations of causal conditions. Third, a specific cause may have opposite effects *depending on context*. For example, changes in living conditions may increase or decrease the probability of strikes, depending on other social and political conditions. . . . The fact that some conditions have contradictory effects depending on context further complicates the identification of empirical regularities because it may appear that a condition is irrelevant when in fact it is an essential part of several causal combinations in both its presence and absence state. (emphasis added; p. 27)

The point to remember is that other methods of inquiry (such as the experimental method and statistical analysis) cannot, in general, adequately deal with complex causality. Comparative (case-oriented) analysis, by contrast, is especially—perhaps uniquely—suited for dealing with the peculiar complexity of social phenomena (Rueschemeyer 1991). Why? Quite simply because comparative analysis, to repeat a point made above, can and often does deal with cases *as a whole*—meaning that a full range of factors can be considered at once within particular historical contexts (which themselves vary over time). This is especially apparent with regard to “deviant” or anomalous cases. Comparative analysis can help explain why, for example, some relatively poor countries—such as India, Mauritania, and Costa Rica—are democratic, when statistically based studies would predict just the opposite.⁹ To account for such anomalous cases (as many comparativists might argue), we need to look very closely at the particular configuration of social, cultural, and political forces in these individual countries and understand how, from a historical perspective, these configurations emerged and developed. We also

need to understand how external forces and relationships interacted with the domestic environment to produce the specific results that they did. None of this is likely to be achieved, to repeat, without considering the whole context of each individual case.

A second, strongly related advantage is that comparative analysis (especially when carried out in a qualitative as opposed to quantitative manner) allows the researcher to better understand or explain the relationship between and among factors. Quantitative or statistical research, by contrast, does a very good job in showing that relationships *exist* (for example, that capitalist development is related to democratization) but does not generally do a good job at telling us what the nature or underlying dynamic of this relationship is. To use a metaphor from aviation, we might say that quantitative analysis shows a strong **correlation** between engine failure and plane crashes, but it typically does not tell us the exact reasons (or the chain of causal events leading to the crash—since not all engine problems, even very similar ones, lead to the same outcome, and vice versa). To find out the reasons planes crash, therefore, investigators almost always have to look inside the black box or flight data recorder (see Figure 1.8).¹⁰ They have to analyze the myriad factors—some of which will undoubtedly be unique to individual flights—to determine the cause of any particular crash. Even this may not be enough: quite frequently, investigators have to literally re-assemble the fragments of the destroyed plane to determine the chain of causal events. To be sure, the cause is sometimes obvious and does not require intensive investigation, but more often than not, the *incident as a whole* needs to be examined in order to develop a complete explanation.

Figure 1.8 The Black Box of Explanation



Statistical or quantitative analysis does a very good job of showing a correlation between *X* and *Y* but typically does not explain why this correlation exists in the first place. Getting inside the black box of explanation may be possible with statistical analysis, but qualitative analysis—and especially qualitative comparative analysis—is usually much better suited for this task.

By Way of a Conclusion: Method and Theory in Comparative Politics

The metaphor of the black box is instructive, but we should be careful not to take it too far, for comparative analysis is more than just opening up the black box and analyzing its contents. It also involves—as might already be apparent from my discussion of the two types of comparative research strategies—a process of a priori conceptualization. At the most basic level, this simply means that the selection of cases to investigate should not be purely random or arbitrary but should be guided by certain criteria, some of which derive from the particular research design we choose. Yet before we even get to the research design, important choices have to be made regarding the factors (or variables) we consider significant in the first place. These choices are guided by **theory**. In Chapter 3, I talk much more about theory. For now, then, let me highlight one general point: theory has a bad reputation among students. Part of the blame, I think, falls on professors who do not help students understand why theory is not only important but is something none of us can do without (whether in an academic discipline or in everyday life). As I will make clear, we all theorize about the world, all the time. Yet just because we all theorize does not mean we all do it equally well—this is especially true for those of you who operate on the assumption that theories have nothing to do with the “real world,” or that one can explain or understand anything simply by appealing to the “facts.” One way to rectify this problem is to simply become more self-conscious and explicit about theory/theorizing; this has the added benefit, I might add, of helping you become a more disciplined, critical, and analytic thinker. Thinking theoretically about comparative politics, in this regard, has value well beyond the confines of this particular subfield. The same can be said about thinking comparatively, which is the topic of our next chapter.

To sum up, *doing comparative politics* requires, minimally, a clear-eyed understanding of what comparative politics is, of what it means to compare, and of the importance and necessity of theory. There is, of course, more to doing comparative politics than just these three requirements, but they constitute an essential foundation upon which everything else will stand.

Questions

1. How do we know if an argument—especially one that deals with complex social, political, or economic phenomena—is valid or even plausible? How does knowledge of comparative politics help us answer this question?
2. Consider the early development of comparative politics in the United States. How was the field defined or understood by scholars in the United

States? What were the problems that characterized the early development of comparative politics as a field of study?

3. Why did the scope and definition of comparative politics change after World War II? Did these changes lead to a “better” or more objective definition of comparative politics?

4. What are the differences between international relations and comparative politics as fields of study? Why is it important to be aware of and understand these differences?

5. What does it mean to say that international relations, in general, has adopted an “outside-in” approach, while comparative politics, in general, has adopted an “inside-out” approach? Is one approach better than the other?

6. What definition of comparative politics is recommended in the chapter? How does it differ from other definitions of the field?

7. What are the key implications of a process-oriented definition of politics in terms of (1) *whom* we see as significant actors; (2) *what* we consider to be a political issue; and (3) *where* we understand politics to occur?

8. Does the economic size of a corporation such as Wal-Mart make it a significant “political” actor? Do the decisions made and implemented by Wal-Mart have important political consequences and implications?

9. What are the three goals of comparing? How do these goals differ in terms of doing comparative analysis?

10. Are “apples and oranges” comparable? More generally, are units of analysis that appear quite different from one another—say, Haiti and Japan—comparable? Or, is it *only* permissible to compare units that are essentially similar to one another?

11. What are the key advantages of the comparative method?

12. What is the “black box of explanation” and how does it relate to comparative analysis?

Notes

1. Terms that appear in boldface type are defined in the Glossary (see p. 311).

2. This seems an obvious point about which most scholars would agree. Yet the distinction between American and comparative politics still exists in the United States. There are, of course, plenty of reasons for this, one of which is that it is “natural” for people to see their own country or society as separate and distinct from other places. Nonetheless, there is no solid justification for the distinction. As Sigelman and Gadbois (1983) nicely put it, “the traditional distinction between American and comparative politics is . . . intellectually indefensible. . . . Comparison presupposes multiple objects of analysis . . . one compares something to or with something else” (cited in Sartori 1994, p. 14).

3. For an interesting discussion of the relationship between US government support and the development of area studies (specifically in relation to Asia) in the United States, see Selden (1997).

4. Most researchers in the field, I should emphasize, can probably agree on a basic, but very general, definition of comparative politics (such as the ones listed in Figure 1.4). There is far less agreement, however, on how the field should be constituted in terms of a particular theoretical or even methodological approach. In a wide-ranging discussion on the role of theory in comparative politics, for example, some of the leading names in comparative politics and comparative analysis fail to achieve a consensus on what is or should be the theoretical core of the field (see Kohli et al. 1995).

5. I should note, however, that there has never been unanimous agreement on this point. Indeed, one of the main areas of controversy in international relations theory today revolves around the “democratic peace thesis” (Doyle 1995). The crux of this argument is that liberal (or democratic) states do not go to war with other liberal states. In essence, advocates of the democratic peace thesis argue that there is something unique about the *internal* constitution of liberal states that changes their behavior in relation to other liberal states.

6. For obvious reasons, I cannot provide a detailed and nuanced discussion of international relations theory here. Fortunately, there are a number of very good introductory texts that do just this. See, for example, *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations* (2008), edited by John Baylis, Steve Smith, and Patricia Owens. Chapters 5 through 10 in that book cover both mainstream and alternative theories in some depth and detail. Another useful textbook is Jill Steans and Lloyd Pettiford’s *International Relations: Perspectives and Themes* (2001).

7. Despite the fact that the field is defined in terms of a particular method—that is, comparison—there are many scholars in the field of comparative politics who, according to Giovanni Sartori, “have no interest, no notion, no training, in comparing” (1994, p. 15). The reason, I might note, may have more to do with the ethnocentric way the field has been defined than with the scholars themselves. To understand this point, consider the fact that comparative politics (in the United States) has been defined, most simplistically, as “studying other countries.” Thus, as Sartori put it, “a scholar who studies only American presidents is an Americanist, whereas a scholar who studies only French presidents is not” (Sartori 1994, p. 14). The US-based scholar who decides to study only France, in other words, is only classified as a comparativist by dint of his or her interest in a country other than the United States.

8. Later, Sartori (1994) stated his case more strongly. “I must insist,” he contended, “that as a ‘one-case’ investigation the case study cannot be subsumed under the comparative *method* (though it may have comparative merit)” (p. 23).

9. Costa Rican democracy, especially, has been an issue of special interest to comparativists, since it constitutes, according to Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens (1992), “the real exception to the pattern [of authoritarianism] prevailing in Central America” (p. 234).

10. Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens (1992) made a very strong argument on this point. They noted that, although cross-national statistical work has shown an undeniable and very strong link (correlation) between capitalist development and democracy, this correlation, by itself (and no matter how many times it is replicated), “does not carry its own explanation.” “It does not,” they continued, “identify the causal sequences accounting for the persistent relation, not to mention the reason why many cases are at odds with it. Nor can it account for how the same end can be reached by different historical routes. The repeated statistical finding has a peculiar ‘black box’ character that can be overcome only by theoretically well grounded empirical analysis” (p. 4).