

COMPARATIVE POLITICS

IR 155: Comparative Politics

Wheaton College

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“Pure conflict is war. Pure cooperation is true love. Politics is a mixture of both.”

- Laver, 1983

I. GOALS IN COMPARATIVE POLITICS

- Comparative politics seeks to understand how political institutions and behavior operate across countries
- Understanding processes promotes good governance
- Predicting political outcomes
 - Understanding processes may allow for prediction

SHOULD WE TRUST POLLS?

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY

- Political polls use historical indicators to predict future outcomes
- But sometimes they are incorrect
 - e.g. [Brexit](#)
- Polls can be very close or far
 - e.g. [Austria 2016 presidential race](#); U.S. 2016 presidential race ([polls](#)) ([map](#))
- With a partner discuss:
 - How much trust do you place in them?
 - How much trust should you place in them?

II. CONCEPTS IN COMPARATIVE POLITICS

GOVERNMENT VS. GOVERNANCE

- Government: institutions and offices that make and enforce collective decisions
 - e.g. President, legislators, IRS, mayors, judges, police, etc.
 - Political system is the broader scope of influences upon government
 - In democracies... interest groups, political parties, media, etc.
- Governance: the process and quality of collective decision-making
 - Concept of “good governance” is a growing research topic
 - EU as example of government vs. governance

SPOTLIGHT

NIGERIA



Brief Profile: Although Nigeria has been independent since 1960, it was not until 2015 that it experienced a presidential election in which the incumbent was defeated by an opposition opponent. This makes an important point about the challenges faced by Africa's largest country by population, and one of the continent's major regional powers, in developing a stable political form. Nigeria is currently enjoying its longest spell of civilian government since independence, but the military continues to play an important role, the economy is dominated by oil, corruption is rife at every level of society, security concerns and poor infrastructure discourage foreign investment, and a combination of ethnic and religious divisions pose worrying threats to stability. Incursions and numerous attacks since 2002 by the Islamist group Boko Haram, an al-Qaeda ally which controls parts of northern Nigeria, have added to the country's problems.

Form of government ⇒ Federal presidential republic consisting of 36 states and a Federal Capital Territory. State formed 1960, and most recent constitution adopted 1999.

Legislature ⇒ Bicameral National Assembly: lower House of Representatives (360 members) and upper Senate (109 members), both elected for fixed and renewable four-year terms.

Executive ⇒ Presidential. A president elected for a maximum of two four-year terms, supported by a vice president and cabinet of ministers, with one from each of Nigeria's states.

Judiciary ⇒ Federal Supreme Court, with 14 members nominated by the president, and either confirmed by the Senate or approved by a judicial commission.

Electoral system ⇒ President elected in national contest, and must win a majority of all votes cast and at least 25 per cent of the vote in at least two-thirds of Nigeria's states. Possibility of two runoffs. National Assembly elected using single-member plurality.

Parties ⇒ Multi-party, led by the centrist People's Democratic Party and the conservative All Nigeria People's Party.

Population (178.5 million)



Gross National Income (\$522 billion)



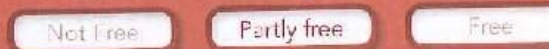
Per capita GNI (\$2,710)



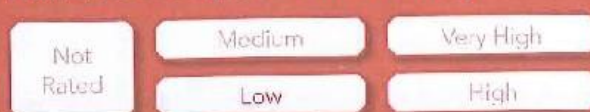
Democracy Index rating



Freedom House rating



Human Development Index rating



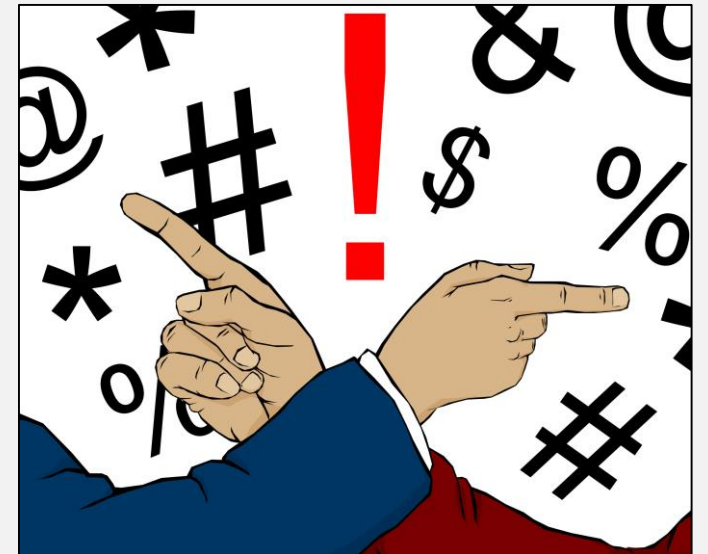
DO WE NEED GOVERNMENT?

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY

- What is the most basic function of governments?
- What happens when governments fail to protect and turn on their citizens?
- Should Christians ever join in revolution?
 - If yes, at what point is revolt justified?

II. CONCEPTS IN COMPARATIVE POLITICS POLITICS

- Politics: process of making and executing collective decisions
 - It is a social process
 - Ideally: search for solutions that reach common interest of group
 - Realistically: competition for power between people/group seeking their own interests
- Politics results in winners and losers
 - e.g. narrow vs. collective interests



II. CONCEPTS IN COMPARATIVE POLITICS

POWER

- Power: the capacity to bring about intended effects
 - i.e. ability to get someone to do what they do not want to do
 - Three dimensions of power:
 - 1) Who prevails when preferences conflict?
 - Material (hard power)
 - 2) Who controls whether preferences are expressed?
 - Agenda setting
 - 3) Who shapes preferences?
 - Idea formation (soft power)

II. CONCEPTS IN COMPARATIVE POLITICS

THE STATE AND LEGITIMACY

- State: provides legal mandate for the work of governments
 - When is a state a state?
- Legitimacy: the authority of the government is accepted
 - Internal and external legitimacy
 - Are both needed?

II. CONCEPTS IN COMPARATIVE POLITICS

IDEOLOGY

- Ideology: system of thought on human nature, state and society, or individual's position in the existing order
- Governments are influenced by ideology
 - e.g. anarchism, Marxism, liberalism, conservatism, etc.
- Left and right may have different meanings across issues
 - e.g. conservative and liberal
- Political ideology matters
 - Polarization of ideology influences governments

COMPARATIVE POLITICS QUESTIONS

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY

- On your own: Write down a research question that answers a question within comparative politics.
 - e.g. elections, political economy, dictatorships, development, corruption, civil war, etc.
- In small groups of 2-3 discuss the following:
 - Each student reads his/her question.
 - Does the question fit well within comparative politics? How/why?
- Return to your small groups again...
 - To what extent is the research question Christian?