

## COMPARATIVE POLITICS IN THE 1970s

James A. Bill and Robert L. Hardgrave, Jr. **Comparative Politics: The Quest for Theory**. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1973, 261 pages, and selected bibliography.

Peter H. Merkl. **Modern Comparative Politics**. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1970, 516 pages and selected bibliography.

Richard L. Merritt. **Systematic Approaches to Comparative Politics**. Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1971, 264 pages.

The «Comparative Politics Movement», which emerged during the early 1950s and gained momentum in the 1960s, was a response to the dissatisfaction with the traditional-descriptive study of comparative government. The reasons for dissatisfaction are well put together by Waldo:<sup>(1)</sup>

«...it (comparative government) was culture-bound, limiting itself for the most part to countries of Western Europe or to areas affected by Western political institutions; that it was legalistic and formalistic, limiting itself to examination of documents...; that it was preponderantly descriptive rather than problem-solving, explanatory or analytic; ... and that it was not genuinely comparative - - ie., that its basic descriptive categories were inadequate and confusing, that most students dealt with only one country (or at best proceeded country-by-country), and that there were really no concepts or techniques for determining either similarity or difference, especially if study moved beyond a strict Western orbit».

The inadequacies of traditional comparative government were further highlighted when the era of colonialism was shattered after the Second World War. As competition developed between the two rival blocks (American and Soviet) to influence these former colonies, and as bilateral and multilateral technical assistance programs

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(1) Dwight Waldo, **Political Science in the United States of America: A Trend Report** United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Paris, 1956, p. 63. As quoted by William J. Siffin (ed), «Toward the Comparative Study of Public Administration» in **Toward the Comparative Study of Public Administration** (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1957), p. 2

came into the picture, Western scholars began to study problems of political development, modernization, and social change in the underdeveloped countries. However, soon, they found out that traditional comparative government could not provide a meaningful framework to study the politics of the less-developed countries. A new approach, a new theory based on a truly comparative method were needed. Comparative Politics Movement emerged and developed under these circumstances. Although far from being free of theoretical problems, today comparative politics has been able to establish itself as a respectable field within political science.

The three books, which I shall attempt to review, deal with different aspects and problems of comparative politics. The Bill and Hardgrave volume provides a critical guide to the literature by identifying and studying the strengths and weaknesses of five basic theoretical approaches in the field of comparative politics. Merkl, on the other hand, attempts to review the field by examining the main topics of comparative politics, such as political socialization, participation, and recruitment, political culture, political parties, policy-making institutions, and the political system. The third book differs from the above two in that it is not a discussion of comparative politics per se. Merritt's book is about the uses and limitations of research strategies and techniques in cross-national political research.

The authors of **Comparative Politics** hope that their book will «enable students of politics in general and students of comparative politics in particular to recognize and evaluate the basic theoretical approaches to comparative political analysis» (p.vi). Bill and Hardgrave identify five major theoretical approaches: the political culture approach, the group approach, the political elite approach, the class approach, and the functional and systems approaches. The authors attempt to examine the major conceptual equipment of each approach and to assess each approach vis-a-vis its utility and relevance to the study of Third World political process. The authors, furthermore, try to relate «each approach to each other approach, to the theory-building process, to the discipline of political science, and to the fundamental issues of modernization and political development» (p.vi). The five major approaches are very well presented in chapters three through seven. The first two chapters are of introductory nature. The first chapter traces the emergence of the «new comparative politics». It also examines the elements of scientific inquiry and research, such as approach, conceptual framework,

typology, model, theory, hypothesis, paradigm and the like, in order to show the nature and process of theory building. The second chapter is devoted to studying the concepts of modernization and political development. As the first chapter, the second is also concise and well-presented.

After examining the five main theoretical approaches, Bill and Hardgrave, in the last chapter, try to assess the general state of theory building in comparative politics. According to them, «although certain approaches may reflect slightly more progress in some arenas..., no single approach.. possesses a marked advantage in the overall process of theory construction» (p. 229). Moreover, they find that each of the approaches examined suffer from conceptual weaknesses. The concepts basic to each approach are either left undefined or are defined vaguely. Consequently, weak conceptual frameworks have rarely yielded meaningful empirical tests. The authors think that the keen rivalry among the proponents of each approach perpetuates the introduction of competing conceptualizations which, unfortunately, cripples communication among them. According to them, comparative politics would benefit a great deal if these theoretical approaches were to be fused and integrated in a consistent and systematic manner, and the gap between theory building and theory testing were to be narrowed (pp. 231-238). If future studies will be in the same caliber as Bill and Hardgrave's volume, these hopes can be soon realized.

Merkel's book, **Modern Comparative Politics**, is «a comprehensive introduction to comparative politics for undergraduate and beginning graduate students» (p.ix). Merkel's writing is lucid and unpretentious, yet elaborate. As the author claims, it can be used as a textbook for introductory courses on comparative politics. The book consists of an introduction and ten chapters. In the introduction, Merkel examines the comparative method and the recent trends in comparative politics. Chapter one is devoted to the study of the meaning and models of development. In chapters two through nine, Merkel attempts to study comparative politics in terms of main topics, such as political socialization, participation and recruitment, political cultures, local-national relationships, political parties and party systems, groups, interests, and cleavages, policy-making institutions and processes, legal systems and judicial processes. The final chapter examines the political system vis-a-vis the international system. In dealing with these topics Merkel not only discusses the theoretical works of several scholars, but also gives numerous examples from the experi-

ences of the developed and underdeveloped countries. In the final analysis, the book proves that it is what it claims to be -- a textbook for introductory courses on comparative politics -- which is something that several books have failed on by creating false hopes and expectations.

Merritt's book, **Systematic Approaches to Comparative Politics**, is not a discussion of comparative politics nor a discussion of statistical techniques of analysis per se. It is «about the use of quantitative data in cross-national political research». It «focuses on the uses, limitations and outcomes of alternative research strategies stemming from this quantitative orientation» (p.vii). The research strategies, which Merritt devotes a chapter to each, are the use of aggregate data, content analysis, systematic means to analyze the characteristics of elites and their behavior, survey research, and other approaches stemming from the behavioral sciences. These strategies are discussed with respect to the purposes of political research and with respect to problems facing the analyst who uses them. Merritt also outlines some of the findings of major studies which have utilized the above-mentioned strategies.

In the first chapter, Merritt briefly writes on the nature of scientific inquiry and comparative method (eg., data, proposition-building, indicators, measurement, validity, fallacy). In the second chapter, he presents the types of aggregate data, such as census data, governmental or quasi-official statistics, and event statistics, and the types of analysis of aggregate data, such as univariate, bivariate, and multivariate analysis. Content analysis is examined in the third chapter. Merritt attempts to deal with problems related to sample selection (what body of material should be subjected to content analysis), selection of the unit of analysis (whether to focus on the space devoted, or the symbols and concepts used, or the themes appearing in the material analyzed), translation, processing the data, and making inferences from content analysis. In the fourth chapter, the author examines the systematic means to analyze the biographical and social background characteristics, behavioral patterns, values and personality attributes of political elites. In the next chapter, Merritt discusses the formulation of hypothesis, the selection of a sample, the preparation of a questionnaire, the field techniques, and the analysis of data in cross-national survey research. He is rather successful in examining the issue of functional equivalence in comparative research, especially in cross-cultural research. The sixth chapter is devoted to

presenting some of the important research methodologies stemming from behavioral sciences such as social psychology, anthropology, and psychology. In the last chapter, Merritt discusses the future of systematic comparative research. He emphasizes the importance of «organization» of political research, and examines the types and roles of national and international research and data institutes. Merritt also looks at the use of computers in political research and finds gaming and simulation to be the most exciting computerized techniques for the generation and analysis of data in comparative politics. The chapter, if not the whole book, must be read by students of comparative politics.

On the whole, all three books are quite successful in what they attempt to deliver. Merkl's book is a commendable introduction to comparative politics. Bill and Hardgrave's and Merritt's books are complementary in that the former deals with theoretical approaches and the latter with research strategies and techniques in comparative politics. The two can be profitably used as basic materials for graduate students in the field. Despite all the limitations and deficiencies in the study of comparative politics, a reading of these three books will indicate that, significant progress has been made in theory-building, data-gathering techniques, and techniques of analysis. Although Comparative Politics has yet to travel vast distances along the road of science, it cannot be denied that it has come a long way since the 1950s.

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