

Comparative Politics: Nature & Approaches

Day 27 — the one sub-discipline defined by its method, not its subject. Every approach, scholar and debate from the Foundation & OGP class, compressed for fast recall. **Revise → write a little → don't break the chain.**

PYQs from this unit (UPSC 2016–2025): **10 × 10-markers** · **1 × 20-marker**. High-frequency: political economy; the comparative method and its limits.

1 Nature & Meaning — the sub-discipline defined by its method

Comparison is the central analytical tool of comparative politics. Unlike branches fixed by subject matter, it is defined by its **method**, not its substance.

"Comparative politics is the only field of sub-disciplines among the several into which the discipline of political science is usually divided that carries a methodological instead of a substantive level." — **Arend Lijphart**

Alexis de Tocqueville: "without comparisons to make, the mind does not know how to proceed" — the discipline's founding spirit.

Why compare (Kenneth Newton & Jan Van Deth)

- Deeper understanding of one's own country by studying others.
- Detailed knowledge of other countries — their background, institutions and history.
- Valid generalisations about government and politics.

Definitions

Scholar	Definition
Jean Blondel	"The study of patterns of national governments in the contemporary world"
M. G. Smith	"The study of forms of political organization, their properties, correlations, variations and modes of change"
E. A. Freeman	"Comparative analysis of the various forms of government and diverse political institutions"
M. Curtis	"Concerned with significant regularities, similarities and differences in the working of political institutions and political behaviour"
Ronald Chilcote	Comparative politics (unlike comparative government, fixed on structures) covers all political activity — governmental and non-governmental

Comparison as control

- **Giovanni Sartori**: comparison is a form of control, akin to experiment; since social science cannot run laboratories, comparison verifies propositions.
- **Emile Durkheim**: comparison keeps research from being merely descriptive. **James Coleman**: comparison is vital for scientific inquiry in the social sciences.

Todd Landman (*Issues and Methods in Comparative Politics*, 2000) — four purposes: **contextual description**, **classification**, **hypothesis-testing**, **prediction**.

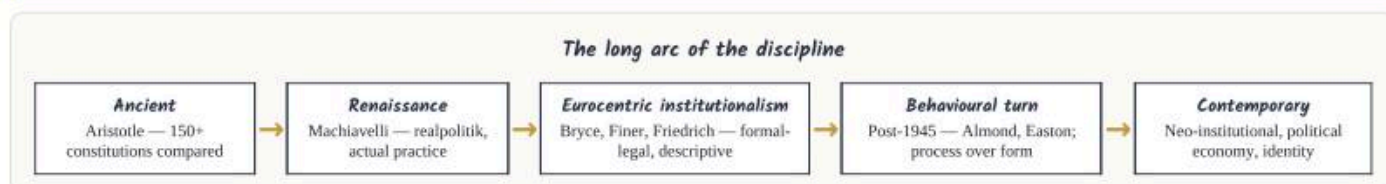
UPSC 2020 · 10m Discuss the subject matter of comparative politics. Outline the limitations of comparative political analysis.

2 Approach · Method · Technique — keep the three distinct

Tier	What it is	Van Dyke
Approach	Broad framework guiding how a phenomenon is viewed and explained; fixes scope and perspective	"a set of criteria used to select problems and data"
Method	Systematic way of organising and applying an approach to data; procedural steps to test hypotheses	methods are the procedural counterparts to approaches
Technique	Specific tool that turns a method into activity — observation, sampling, regression, scaling	—

The ladder: approach = comparative analysis of political systems → method = historical / configurational → technique = regression or interviews.

3 Historical Evolution — from Aristotle to globalisation



Foundations

- **Aristotle** (384–322 BCE): father of comparative politics; typology by **who rules** (one / few / many) and **in whose interest**. Good forms — monarchy, aristocracy, polity; corrupt — tyranny, oligarchy, democracy. Empirical observation fused with normative judgement.
- **Polybius** and **Cicero**: built on Aristotle; focus on formal-legal structures.
- **Niccolo Machiavelli** (1469–1527): compared principalities and republics; realpolitik over idealism.

Late 19th – early 20th c.: Eurocentric institutionalism

European focus; formal structures; descriptive not analytical; the non-West excluded. **James Bryce** (*Modern Democracies*, 1921), **Herman Finer** (*Theory and Practice of Modern Governments*, 1932), **Carl J. Friedrich** (1937), **Roberto Michels** (1915), **Maurice Duverger** (1950).

Post-1945 to the present

Period	The turn
Post-WWII	Decolonisation; bipolar order; critique of institutionalism (Roy Macridis , Harry Eckstein) → behaviouralism. Gabriel Almond : the “political system”; David Easton : systems theory.
1960s	Developmentalism and modernisation — Apter, Lipset, Pye, Almond, Verba. Critique: ethnocentrism, oversimplification.
1970s	Dependency and corporatism — Andre Gunder Frank (1967), Walter Rodney (1972), Malcolm Caldwell (1977).
1980s	Return of the state — O'Donnell; Miliband (1969); Poulantzas (1978); Evans & Skocpol, <i>Bringing the State Back In</i> (1985).
Late 20th c.	Grand theory → contextual studies; Fukuyama (1992); identity politics, social movements, transnational civil society (Zapatistas).

Two periodisations

Jean Blondel	Klaus von Beyme
Phase 1: till mid-18th c.	Pre-Modern — normative, speculative, ethnocentric
Phase 2: mid-18th c. to 1914	Modern — scientific temper; legal-constitutional (Bryce, Duverger, Wheare)
Phase 3: 1914 to present	Postmodern / contemporary — neo-institutionalism (March & Olsen); interdisciplinary

UPSC 2018 - 10m Describe the changing nature of Comparative Politics. Briefly explain the Political Economy approach to the study of Comparative Politics.

4 Methods of Comparison

Method	Core idea & example
Experimental	Manipulate an independent variable to observe the effect; hard to control in social settings, ethical limits. E.g. socio-economic background and children's communication skills.
Case study	In-depth single case; cases then compared for patterns. Tocqueville, <i>Democracy in America</i> (1835) and <i>The Old Regime and the French Revolution</i> (1856).
Statistical	Quantifiable data across many variables; precise but may miss complexity. E.g. voter turnout across age, class, country.
Focused comparison	Few cases (often two): implicit binary (own country as reference) or explicit paired. E.g. population policy in India and China.
Historical	Historically grounded causal explanation. Skocpol separates “comparative history” from “comparative historical analysis”; <i>States and Social Revolutions</i> (1979). Eric Wolf, <i>Europe and the People Without History</i> (1982).

Mill's Methods

- **Method of Agreement**: the common factor across cases where the same phenomenon occurs.
- **Method of Difference**: compare cases where the phenomenon does and does not occur, to isolate the cause.

Critique — **Harry Eckstein**: small-N reduces scientific rigour; sound generalisation needs a larger N.

5 Traditional Approaches

Rooted in early philosophical and legal analysis — formal institutions, normative questions, historical context.

Approach	Focus	Key scholars
Philosophical	Normative; the nature and purpose of politics — equality, liberty, justice, common good	Aristotle (<i>Politics</i>), Plato (<i>Republic</i>), Rousseau, Locke, Kant, T. H. Green, Leo Strauss, Nettleship
Historical	Historical context; evolutionary paths; the role of individuals and their motives	Charles Beard, George H. Sabine, Tocqueville, W. A. Dunning, Barrington Moore Jr., Thomas Carlyle
Institutional	Formal institutions — legislatures, executives, judiciaries, party systems	James Bryce, Duverger, Herman Finer, Bernard Crick, Giovanni Sartori, V. O. Key Jr., David Truman
Legal	Legal systems; the law–politics interplay; constitutions, statutes, judicial interpretation	A. V. Dicey, Hobbes (<i>Leviathan</i>), Grotius, Austin, Bentham, Maine, Hans Kelsen

Shared weakness: speculative or descriptive; thin on empirical grounding; neglects informal processes, individuals and culture.

6 Limitations of Traditional Approaches

Roy Macridis — five charges

Traditional comparative politics is **non-comparative**, **descriptive** (not analytical), **parochial** (single-culture, Eurocentric), **static**, and **monographic**.

Almond and Powell — five premises of criticism: parochialism and ethnocentrism; configurative analysis; formalism; static and Eurocentric (status quoism); lack of scientific vigour.

UPSC 2022 · 10m Discuss the main limitations of the comparative method to the study of Political Science.

7 Modern Approaches — the turn to process, behaviour and the non-West

“Look beyond description to more theoretically relevant problems; look beyond the formal institutions of government to political processes and political functions; and look beyond the countries of Western Europe to the new nations of Asia, Africa and Latin America.” — **Sidney Verba**

Approach	Focus & scholars	Critique
Behavioural	Observable behaviour over abstract ideas; empirical patterns. Charles Merriam (architect); David Easton (behaviouralism vs behaviourism)	Only observable facts treated as real; neglects values; fact–value separation is problematic
Sociological	Class, ethnicity, religion, culture on politics. Lipset (<i>Political Man</i>), Barrington Moore, Almond (<i>Civic Culture</i>), Merton, MacIver	Overplays social determinants; underplays agency; hard to quantify
Psychological	Cognition, motive, emotion. Lasswell (<i>Power and Personality</i>), Freud, Fromm, Lane, Graham Wallas	Reductionist; measurement difficult; weak cross-cultural transfer
Quantitative	Statistics for patterns and causal claims. Dahl (<i>Polyarchy</i>), Przeworski, Almond & Verba	Oversimplifies; data-bound; misses qualitative nuance
Economic	Decision-makers as utility maximisers; cost–benefit. Downs (1957), Mancur Olson, Friedman	Reduces politics to self-interest; ignores ideology and culture
Simulation	Models replicating system behaviour; cybernetics and mathematics. Karl Deutsch	Abstract; assumes a predictability and rationality that may not hold

Psychological approach — named contributions

James David Barber: typology of presidential character. **Herbert Simon**: **bounded rationality**. **Henri Tajfel**: social identity theory. **Gabriel Almond** and **Sidney Verba**: political socialisation and civic culture.

UPSC 2025 · 10m Discuss the psychological approach to the study of comparative politics.

8 Systems Approach — Easton's input-output model

Developed by **David Easton**; drawn from biology and sociology (**Talcott Parsons**).

What a “system” is

Ludwig von Bertalanffy (General Systems Theory): “a set of elements standing in interaction.” **O. R. Young**: “a set of objects, together with relationships between the objects and between their attributes.”

The political system is “that behavior or set of interactions through which authoritative allocations are made and implemented for society.” — **David Easton**, *A Systems Analysis of Political Life* (1965)

The political system as a converter of demands into decisions



Criticisms of Easton

- **S. P. Verma**: abstraction cut off from empirical politics. **Eugene Meehan**: conceptual framework over explanatory theory.
- **Status quo bias** (persistence over breakdown); Western-centric; present-centric (thin on history).

Merits

Strengthens comparative analysis; groundwork for a general functional theory. **Davies and Lewis**: “an original set of concepts for arranging at the level of theory and interpreting political phenomena in a new and helpful way.”

9 Three Derivatives of Systems Theory

A · Structural-functionalism (Gabriel Almond)

Almond's political system

“The system of interactions to be found in all independent societies which perform the functions of integration and adaptation by means of the employment or threat of employment of more or less legitimate order-maintaining or transforming systems in the society.”

Input functions	Output functions
Political socialisation & recruitment	Rule-making (legislature)
Interest articulation	Rule-application (executive)
Interest aggregation	Rule-adjudication (judiciary)
Political communication	—

Critique: neglects interactions among structures; Western / American bias; input-heavy; status-quo. **Giovanni Sartori**: structural-functionalism is “a lame scholar that claims to walk on two feet, but actually on one foot and a bad foot at that.”

B · Cybernetics (Karl Deutsch)

Karl Deutsch, *The Nerves of Government* (1966): politics as communication and control (the term coined by **Norbert Wiener**). Core ideas — **information**, **communication**, **channels**, **feedback** (with load, lag, gain, lead). Deutsch studies the “nerves,” not the “bones or muscles,” of the body politic. Critique: over-mechanical; quantity over quality.

C · Morton Kaplan's six models of the international system

- **Balance of power** — five or six essential actors; six rules of behaviour.
- **Loose bipolar** and **tight bipolar** — two superpowers; non-aligned states shrink in the tight form.
- **Universal** — a universal actor (e.g. the UN) integrates functions.
- **Hierarchical** — the universal actor absorbs the rest; directive or non-directive.
- **Unit veto** — every actor can destroy others; inherently unstable.

Later four: very loose bipolar, détente, unstable bloc, incomplete nuclear diffusion. Critique: assumes a linear loose → tight → universal → hierarchical drift; regional systems (OAU, Arab League) and non-alignment cut against it.

10 Systems Theory — the balance-sheet

Criticisms	Strengths
Over-reliance on organic analogies	Comprehensive framework; phenomena read as interconnected units
Status quo bias; ignores decline and breakdown	Pervasive influence in comparative research
“State” merely relabelled “political system”	Addresses system–environment relations, persistence, structure–function
Present-centric; thin on historical evolution	Fuses micro and macro analysis; interdisciplinary reach

S. N. Ray: systems theory “gives us an excellent opportunity for fusing micro-analytical studies with macro-analytical ones.”

11 Institutional Approach — old and new

Classical institutionalism

Subject: institutions and the distribution of power. Vocabulary: legalistic, normative. Marks: **ethnocentrism** (Western liberal democracies), **normativity** (liberal democracy as the universal ideal), **exclusivity** (the non-West left out). Lineage: Aristotle (158 constitutions) → Machiavelli → Montesquieu (separation of powers) → Tocqueville → Bryce → A. Lawrence Lowell → Moisei Ostrogorski.

Critical evaluation

David Easton (*The Political System*, 1953): “mere factualism,” thin theory. **Roy C. Macridis** (1955): non-comparative, parochial, static. **Jean Blondel** (defence): the factualism charge was misplaced given scarce data; institutions and legal frameworks remain essential.

New institutionalism (March & Olsen, 1984)

Institutions are not just structures but embody norms, values and power; they both constrain and are shaped by action; the relative autonomy of institutions; drawn from economics, sociology and organisational theory.

Six strands:

Normative

Rational choice

Historical — path dependency

Sociological

Discursive

Feminist

12 Political Economy Approach — meaning and the two strands

What it studies

Karl Marx: political economy is “an interdisciplinary study drawing upon economics, law and political science.” Oxford Handbook: “the study of economic policies of the state and its political and economic processes.”

Evolution: Kautilya’s Arthashastra → mercantilism → **Adam Smith** (*Wealth of Nations*, 1776 — modern political economy begins) → **David Ricardo** (comparative advantage) → **Marx** (*Capital*; surplus value) → **Keynes** (welfare) → **Lenin** (*Imperialism*) → **Hayek** and **Friedman** (neoliberalism).

The fault line inside political economy

LIBERAL

Private property & markets; laissez-faire; the “invisible hand”; minimal state

Locke · Smith · Ricardo · Malthus · Hayek · Friedman



MARXIST

Class struggle; surplus value; historical materialism; the state as an instrument of the bourgeoisie

Marx · Engels · Lenin · Frank · Wallerstein · Mandel

13 Political Economy — the development debate

Modernisation theory

Liberal political economy feeds modernisation; prominent post-WWII (the Marshall Plan). A traditional → modern dichotomy (particularism / ascription → universalism / achievement). Scholars: Weber, Parsons, Rostow, Apter, Lipset, Pye, Almond, Verba.

Rostow — five stages	Organski — four stages	C. E. Black — phases
Traditional society; preconditions for take-off; take-off; drive to maturity; high mass consumption	Primitive unification; industrialisation; national welfare; abundance & mass consumption	Challenge of modernity; consolidation of leadership; transformation; integration of society

Assumptions: homogenising, irreversible, progressive, lengthy. Critique: Eurocentric; a Cold-War motive (Rostow’s subtitle — “A Non-Communist Manifesto”); determinism.

Dependency theory

Underdevelopment is produced by exploitative ties, not by backwardness. **Paul Baran** (wealth extraction); **Andre Gunder Frank** (1967) — a **metropole-satellite** chain, wealth flowing periphery → core; **Walter Rodney** (1972); **Malcolm Caldwell** (1977). Critique: over-weights external factors; treats the periphery as homogenous; cannot explain peripheral success stories.

World-systems analysis (Immanuel Wallerstein)

A single capitalist world-economy since the 16th c., built on a division of labour: **core** (strong states) — **semi-periphery** — **periphery** (raw-material exporters). Strong core states extract surplus; multilateral, not merely bilateral. Critique: system determinism; neglects agency; over-centres market over production.

Recent turns: Christopher Chase-Dunn (the inter-state system); Andre Gunder Frank (a system older than the 16th c., with Asian origins); Janet Abu-Lughod (the medieval Middle East as centre; Europe peripheral).

Modes of production & the state-centred school

- Modes of production**: relations of production (slave-master, serf-lord, wage-labour-capitalist); a **social formation** combines modes; capitalism restructures but does not erase pre-capitalist modes (**articulation**).
- State-centred** (Poulantzas, Miliband, Hamza Alavi, Pranab Bardhan, Issa Shivji): the **relative autonomy** of the state; the state as an arena of class struggle; Alavi’s **overdeveloped post-colonial state** (Pakistan, Bangladesh). Instrumentalist (Miliband) vs structuralist (Poulantzas).

Neoliberal approach

Minimal state, free markets, privatisation; **Structural Adjustment Programmes** (World Bank, IMF); good governance as a development precondition. Critique: one-size-fits-all SAPs; inequality and social cost; prioritising market freedom may crowd out democracy.

14 Political Economy — significance and limits

Harold Lasswell's “who gets what, when and how” makes the economics–politics partnership unavoidable. Political economy reads state macro-policy, tariff structures and the domestic–global interface; it is at once qualitative and quantitative, empirical and prescriptive, with a mathematical bent that yields more testable theory.

Three contributions in comparative politics (Schumpeter)

(1) an analytical lens prioritising regularities and causal mechanisms; (2) insight into the corporation–government interaction — why policy differs across autocracies and democracies; (3) how global economic integration alters government decisions. Schumpeter: “an exposition of a comprehensive set of economic politics on the strength of certain unifying normative principles.”

Limits: economic determinism; neglect of normative and constitutional questions; ideological colouring (e.g. Piketty); **Lane Kenworthy** — ignores historical, political and cultural context; the modes-of-production comparison takes a functional twist that erases human agency.

UPSC 2016 · 10m Critically examine the Marxist aspect of political economy approach to the study of comparative politics.

UPSC 2021 · 10m Discuss the political economy approach to the comparative analysis of politics.

15 Political Sociology Approach — state and society

What it is

A. K. Mukhopadhyay: “a marriage of political science and sociology, wherein the child contains features of both disciplines, but is also different from its parents.” **S. M. Lipset**: political science starts with the state and asks how it affects society; political sociology starts with society and asks how it affects the state.

- **Robert Dowse** and **John Hughes**: “the study of political behaviour within a sociological perspective or framework.”
- **Michael Rush** and **Philip Althoff**: the linkages between social structure and political structure, social and political behaviour.
- **N. J. Smelser**: the interrelationship between society and polity, social structures and political institutions.

Origins: the mid-19th c., under the Industrial Revolution (Lipset and Runciman). **Karl Marx** lays the foundation of modern political sociology — grasp the basic structure of society to grasp politics; caste–class ties shape politics; the political superstructure rests on the economic base.

Marxian	Weberian	Behaviouralist
Marx — father of political sociology; the propertied class sets the agenda and wields power	Weber — foundation of modern sociology; faults Marx as monocausal; a middle class rises rather than two-class polarisation	Scientific methods — quantification, statistics, regression, surveys, field studies
Politics understood through the structure of society	Three legitimate authority types: traditional, rational-legal, charismatic	—

Early critics of Marxism turned to elites, parties and voting: **Vilfredo Pareto** (circulation of elites), **Gaetano Mosca** (the ruling class), **Robert Michels** (the “iron law of oligarchy”), **Max Weber** (bureaucracy, authority). Within Marxism: instrumentalist (Miliband), structuralist / relative-autonomy (Poulantzas), and **Gramsci's** “integral state.”

UPSC 2017 · 10m Explain the Political-Sociological Approach in the field of comparative politics and discuss its limitations.

16 Political Sociology — India, significance and the return of the state

Indian scholarship

Rajni Kothari (caste and the party system), **Andre Beteille** (social structure, class, inequality), **Paul Brass** (parties), **Yogendra Yadav** (OBC politics), **Christophe Jaffrelot** (caste and religion).

Significance

Best fit for the developing world, where social structure drives politics; **Maurice Duverger** — the approach seeks the political within the wider social, affirming the unity of the sciences; empirical rather than philosophical; explains how castes, religions, linguistic groups and social movements wield power.

Criticism — social reductionism

Privileging society over the state disperses the state's autonomous character. **Samuel P. Huntington**: the “social stratification” reading of politics is a form of “sociological reductionism” that ignores institutions and culture. Behaviouralism deepened the decline by sidelining the state.

Bringing the state back in

Theda Skocpol: a return to the state as an entity apart from social forces, with its own interests and capacities; **Guillermo O'Donnell's** bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes depoliticised society to drive modernisation. This fed **neo-institutionalism** (March and Olsen, *Bringing Institutions Back*, 1985): institutions as norms and practices, not just structures.

Contemporary political sociology

Close to “cultural politics” — what events mean to those who act on them. **Lipset** and **Rokkan** (1967): historical shocks (the Reformation, national revolutions, industrialisation) created durable **cleavages** that froze European party systems. **Almond** and **Verba** (1965): political culture is the distribution of individual attitudes; short-run stability needs a compatible culture.

17 Political Culture Approach

Political culture = the values, symbols and attitudes shaping how a society views politics (American liberty and patriotism; Japanese deference; French protest).

Almond and Verba — *The Civic Culture* (1963)

A five-country study (USA, UK, Germany, Italy, Mexico). Political culture: “a set of orientations toward political systems, the role of the self, and political processes.” Orientations: **cognitive** (knowledge), **affective** (feeling), **evaluative** (judgement).

Type	Feature	Examples
Parochial	Minimal awareness of or interest in politics; little expectation of influence	Mexico
Subject	Accepts authority but does not participate; a passive recipient of decisions	Germany, Italy
Participant	Active involvement; makes demands; affects inputs and outputs	UK, USA

Civic culture: a blend of all three — rational, informed and engaged citizens, allegiance tempered by tradition; a runaway participant culture risks tipping democracy into mobocracy.

Key scholars

- **Lucian W. Pye:** political culture as “a set of attitudes, beliefs, and sentiments that give order and meaning to a political process” — a bridge between micro behaviour and macro institutions.
- **Ronald Inglehart** (World Values Survey; *The Silent Revolution*, 1977): post-materialist values; a cultural shift precedes institutional change.
- **Robert Putnam** (*Making Democracy Work*, 1993): social capital and civic engagement decide the efficacy of institutions.

Criticisms

Ethnocentric and culturally deterministic (Western democracies as the model); neglects class, material conditions and institutional design (Marxist critics); static and ahistorical; and methodologically thin — **Arend Lijphart** on unreliable survey data, and the **ecological fallacy** of reading individuals off aggregates.

18 Political Socialisation — open and closed societies

Political socialisation is the process by which individuals acquire political norms, values and orientations. **Easton** and **Dennis**: “those developmental processes by which a person acquires political orientations and patterns of behaviour.” **Allan R. Ball**: the “establishment and development of attitudes and beliefs about the political system.”

Agents — **primary**: family, peer group, school; **secondary**: mass media, parties, voluntary bodies, government. **Parsons** (structural-functional): socialisation promotes cohesion and stability; **Almond** and **Verba** (behavioural): it shapes the extent of political involvement.

Open societies	Closed (authoritarian) societies
Pluralistic; many competing agents	State-controlled; a single regime-defined ideology
Critical thinking, debate and dissent permitted	Media controlled; education serves the state narrative
Civic culture fosters active participation	Indoctrination; limited critical engagement

Contemporary shift: social media reshapes socialisation even inside closed societies — the Arab Spring and the Zapatista movement.

UPSC 2025 - 10m Discuss the political socialization of open and closed societies.

19 Interpretive Approach

Reads political life through **meaning, culture and interpretation** rather than purely empirical or structural factors. **Clifford Geertz** and **Charles Taylor**: culture and ideas shape political action; Geertz’s **thick description** situates behaviour in its cultural context.

- **Constructivism**: actors are shaped by their social constructions of reality.
- **Peter Hall** and **Mark Blyth**: ideas, beliefs and ideologies drive policy and political development.
- **Richard Snyder**: **contextualised comparisons** — events read within their own cultural, historical and ideological frames; well suited to non-Western societies.

Against rational choice’s self-interested actor, the interpretive approach sees behaviour driven by belief, emotion and norm. Post-structuralist influences: **Jacques Derrida**, **Michel Foucault**, **Jacques Lacan**, **Jean-Francois Lyotard**, **Richard Rorty**, **Hayden White**. Limits: hard to generalise; a risk of cultural relativism; cross-cultural interpretation is methodologically demanding.

UPSC 2024 - 10m Discuss the interpretive approach to the study of comparative politics.

20 Empirical Political Theory in Comparative Politics

Empirical political theory (EPT) abstracts political facts, generalises, states relationships between concepts, and tests hypotheses. **Karl Popper**: EPT sits on the deductive side — a theoretical proposition is tested against facts. **Lijphart** and **Dahl**: EPT is essential to understanding political systems and behaviour.

Functions

Prediction of trends Cross-country comparison Policy evaluation Strengthening democracy Method development Empirical testing

King, Keohane and Verba (1994): the qualitative and quantitative traditions share one goal — logical inference. EPT's replication power — comparing many cases across countries builds and enriches theory (e.g. the median voter theorem tested for real-world fit).

UPSC 2023 - 10m What are the crucial functions of empirical political theory in Comparative Politics?

21 Significance of the Comparative Method

- **Theory-building and testing:** comparison develops and tests theory — e.g. **Adam Przeworski** on democratic consolidation in post-colonial states.
- **Understanding diversity:** separates what is unique to a context from what is common across contexts.
- **Policy learning:** surfaces best practice (e.g. comparing healthcare systems).
- **Historical and cultural depth:** shows how culture, history and social structure shape institutions.
- **Wider horizon:** **Peter Mair** — comparison widens the horizon of political science; **Greenleaf** sought a "moral criterion of political conduct."

Landman's functions — contextual description, classification, hypothesis-testing, prediction. **Judith Bara:** comparison lets researchers state characteristics with conviction and reach objectivity.

UPSC 2019 - 20m Examine the significance of the comparative method in political analysis. Discuss its limitations.

22 Limitations of the Comparative Method

Source of difficulty	The problem
Selection bias	Cases chosen to fit the hypothesis; a researcher may pick systems to confirm a prior view
Controlling variables	Political systems are shaped by a multitude of variables; weights are hard to assign
Equivalence	The same concept means different things in different contexts — Sartori's "conceptual stretching"
Historical / cultural specificity	Context-blind comparison yields inaccurate generalisation
Data availability	Reliable, comparable data is scarce for less-studied systems and non-state actors
Scientific method	Political behaviour is not purely rational; individuals and institutions follow no uniform rule

Specific challenges: **Todd Landman** — steer between extreme universalism and extreme relativism; the **ecological fallacy** (individual behaviour inferred from aggregate culture); **Neera Chandhoke** — the loss of certainties troubles a comparative politics built on grand theory. Even so, the method has widened political science well beyond the Western state and driven theory-building.

23 Two Challenges — Eurocentrism and Globalisation

Eurocentrism

Sujata Patel: the claim that all knowledge originated in Europe, tied to European modernity — a linear view of time. Two pillars: **evolutionism** (the West as more advanced — survival of the fittest applied to cultures) and **dualism** (the West as the epicentre of knowledge; the non-West as backward — a "self vs other" binary). Consequence: colonialism justified as delivering modernity; **James Mill's** Hindu-Muslim-British periodisation of Indian history; European concepts like the nation-state imposed on the non-West. **Amitav Acharya** and **Barry Buzan:** Eurocentrism cast liberalism, individualism and the market as universal and absolute.

Globalisation (Jeff Haynes)

Five far-reaching changes: many new states; waves of political change (decolonisation, the collapse of the USSR, new democratisation); transnational corporations as non-state actors; regional entities (the European Union); and a transnational civil society. **Webber** and **Smith:** "one of the most common descriptive labels of world politics in recent years has been that of transformation." By the 1990s, Sorensen's expansion and intensification of cross-border relations had redrawn the old categories of comparative politics.

24 Power Quotes

Comparative politics "carries a methodological instead of a substantive level." — **Arend Lijphart**

"Without comparisons to make, the mind does not know how to proceed." — **Alexis de Tocqueville**

The political system is "that behavior or set of interactions through which authoritative allocations are made and implemented for society." — **David Easton**

Structural-functionalism is "a lame scholar that claims to walk on two feet, but actually on one foot and a bad foot at that." — **Giovanni Sartori**

Political sociology is "a marriage of political science and sociology... but is also different from its parents." — **A. K. Mukhopadhyay**

25 Scholar Index

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26 How UPSC Asks It — the last decade, mapped

Theme	Years & marks
Political economy approach (esp. the Marxist strand)	2016 / 10m · 2021 / 10m
Political-sociological approach & its limits	2017 / 10m
Changing nature of comparative politics + political economy	2018 / 10m
Comparative method — significance & limitations	2019 / 20m
Subject matter + limitations of comparative analysis	2020 / 10m
Limitations of the comparative method	2022 / 10m
Empirical political theory — functions	2023 / 10m
Interpretive approach	2024 / 10m
Psychological approach	2025 / 10m
Political socialisation — open & closed societies	2025 / 10m

27 Today's Practice — write before the evening

1. Examine the significance of the comparative method in political analysis. Discuss its limitations. (UPSC 2019, 20m)
2. Critically examine the Marxist aspect of political economy approach to the study of comparative politics. (UPSC 2016, 10m)
3. Discuss the political socialization of open and closed societies. (UPSC 2025, 10m)

Model answers to these drop tonight on the Telegram channel — [@psirbyamitpratap](#). Where a point above is stated in a single line, it is developed in full in your Foundation & OGP class notes and handouts — revise it there, then write.

See you tomorrow with Day 28 — State in Comparative Perspective.