CRITICAL NOTES

COMPARATIVE POLITICS: LIBERTY AND POLICY AS VARIABLES

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Political science has been greatly stimulated in recent years by the invention of new designs for the comparative analysis of political systems. The diversity of these designs, however, risks creating a situation in which it may be difficult to derive agreed conceptual tools. Any points of convergence which can be found, therefore, and particularly in contrasting comparative designs, need to be emphasized. The purpose of this note is to show that in two recent designs for comparative analysis which are divergent in purpose, method and universe of application, there is a convergence on two fundamental points. The first is that liberty, taken to mean freedom of criticism and of discussion, is a major variable for comparative analysis. The second is that once liberty has been employed as a variable, it is necessary to employ policy as a secondary variable in order to discriminate among those political systems in which freedom of discussion does not exist or is severely limited.

Neither of the systems of comparative analysis which I will discuss, one constructed by Raymond Aron[1] and the other by Gabriel Almond,[2] explicitly employs either liberty or policy as variables. In fact, Aron makes a deliberate effort to avoid using liberty as a variable, and policy is implicitly ruled out of Almond's design by his reliance on functional categories. Yet both authors implicitly take freedom of discussion as a major variable, and when they discuss totalitarian regimes they both employ additional variables which can be subsumed under the heading of policy. If my argument be valid, it is necessary to restore liberty and add policy to the vocabulary of comparative political analysis, and doubt is cast upon the adequacy of a purely functional approach to discriminate fully among all political systems.

I

Almond and Aron both rest the possibility of comparative analysis on the performance of a common function by the political systems compared, although their interpretations of function differ widely. Aron regards the function of the political system in its broadest, formal sense: the conduct of public affairs.[3] Almond, on the other hand, distinguishes among seven functions: what he calls the four input or political functions of socialization and recruitment, interest articulation, interest aggregation and political communication, and what he calls the three output or governmental functions of rulemaking, rule application and rule adjudication.[4]

The basic purposes of the two analysts are different. Almond's design is a systematization of descriptive categories which he hopes may be employed to contribute toward "a probabilistic theory of the polity."[5] By this he appears to mean a theory which would enable us to predict the probabilities of any presently underdeveloped nation developing politically in the direction of the western democratic system. Accordingly, his design contains a preliminary model of that system, and his main variables relate to this model. Aron is also interested in the problem of political development, but he reviews several historical perspectives—unilateral development toward western democracy or toward communism, the Weberian scheme relating economic development and political probabilities, radical diversity and the cycle— without opting for any of them,[6] and his system of comparative analysis does not depend on any of them. Aron's purpose is to try to discriminate among industrialized societies on the basis of an essential variable. He seeks to make political systems intelligible on as economic a basis as possible. This assumes that political systems are intelligible, that they are not accidental structures, that they have some "minimum of

[1] Raymond Aron, *Sociologie des Sociétés Industrielles, Esquisse d'une théorie des régimes politiques* (Paris: Cours de Sorbonne, 1957–58). These are lectures which represent work in progress and not conclusions, and they should be interpreted in this light only.

[2] Gabriel A. Almond, "Introduction: A Functional Approach to Comparative Politics," in Gabriel A. Almond and James S. Coleman, *The Politics of the Developing Areas* (Princeton University Press, 1960), pp. 3–64. This work will hereinafter be cited as Almond (1960).

[3] Aron, *loc. cit.*, p. 36.

[4] Almond (1960), p. 17.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 58.

[6] Aron, *loc. cit.*, pp. 230–36.

unity" which can be extracted from their operational characteristics.[7] Aron is less concerned with establishing descriptive categories than he is with finding "the major characteristics on the basis of which the internal logic of each system can be understood."[8]

There is some ambiguity as to the universe of application of each design, but here too the emphasis of the two systems is different. Aron is primarily concerned with industrial societies, although he also discusses the less developed nations. Almond's design was deliberately constructed to permit comparison of the political systems of the developing nations with those of the Western democracies, but he also discusses political systems, like those of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, which fall outside his main universe. We will see that Aron produces a system of classification only for single-party systems, while Almond's system of classification is unsatisfactory precisely for single-party systems. Despite all these differences, the convergence of the two designs appears to be more important than their divergence.

II

The major variable which Aron selects for discriminating among political systems is the party system: whether there is only one legal party or more than one legal party. Almond, in an article published several years before he produced his more fully developed comparative design, rejected using the party system as a major variable: "Thus the commonly used distinctions between one-party, two-party, and multi-party systems simply get nowhere in distinguishing the essential properties of the totalitarian, the Anglo-American, and the Continental European political systems."[9] Aron agrees with Almond with respect to the distinction between two-party and multi-party systems, but not with respect to the distinction between the single-party system (which Aron calls the monopolistic-party system) and the plural party system (which he calls the constitutional-pluralist system), whether there are two or more than two legal parties. For Aron believes that one *can* deduce from the party system the essential properties of each system.

From the existence of more than one legal party, Aron deduces five characteristics of the constitutional-pluralist system: (1) that there is competition for the exercise of political power; (2) that there are rules governing the competition; (3) that opposition to the rulers is legal; (4) that the regime is legal, in the sense of conforming to certain rules as to legitimate behavior; and (5) that the regime tends to be (although is not necessarily) moderate.[10] Therefore, Aron deduces from the existence of more than one legal party the existence of a political system in which there is a "constitutional organization of peaceful competition for the exercise of power."[11]

Where there is only one legal party the implications are different.[12] Where a single party holds a monopoly of legal power there is an identification of the party with the state. The party must justify its monopoly of power and this implies some kind of ideology and a limitation on political discussion. It is conceivable that the exercise of power could be moderate, but the degree of moderation depends upon the ideology of the party. Single party ideology, however, is likely to be revolutionary in that it seeks to justify the party's rule not by what the party has done but by what it will do.[13] Competition for power could conceivably follow rules, but this is not in the logic of the system for it raises the possibility of more than one legal party developing.[14] The monopolistic-party system, therefore, is characterized by one party holding a monopoly of legal power, animated by an ideology and seeking to transform society in order to bring it into conformity with some ideal. One can, according to Aron, therefore distinguish among monopolistic-party systems according to "the nature of their doctrine, the ambition of their projects, the violence of their procedures and the ideal representation of the society that they want to create."[15]

While Aron's design makes it possible to compare monopolistic-party systems, he doubts whether it is possible to produce a satisfactory classification of constitutional-pluralist systems. He passes in review the customary variables employed by political scientists to analyze political systems and finds them all inadequate for distinguishing species, however necessary it

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 25.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 36.

[9] Gabriel A. Almond, "Comparative Political Systems," *Journal of Politics*, Vol, 18 (August, 1956), p. 397.

[10] Aron, *loc. cit.*, pp. 37–8.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 38.

[12] *Ibid.*, pp. 40–43.

[13] Claims to leadership based on past service are also customary, however, especially among leaders who have led national revolutionary movements. That is one reason why charges of colonialism will endure longer than colonialism itself. On backward-oriented dictatorial justifications, see Alfred Cobban, *Dictatorship* (London, 1939), p. 273.

[14] Aron, *loc. cit.*, p. 57.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 49.

may be to employ all of them in order to analyze any particular system. He examines all the components of the political system—the constitution, parties, elections, formal and informal parliamentary norms, legislative-executive relations, pressure groups and political elites—the class basis of the society, the bureaucracy and the historical environment; but he does not believe it is possible to derive any synthetic principle from them which might be the basis for a system of classification of constitutional-pluralist regimes.[16]

What Aron has done by making the party system the major variable is essentially to employ the criterion of freedom of criticism and of discussion in the classification of political systems. This is surely what is involved in the distinction between party pluralism and party monopoly. By emphasizing the institution of party he has given structural form to the presence or absence of freedom of discussion. And he has done this, paradoxically, because of an explicit desire to avoid using liberty as a variable.

Aron rejects the use of liberty as a variable for several reasons. In the first place, he finds the notion equivocal[17]—and it is, but it can still be employed as a variable if it is carefully defined. Secondly, Aron argues that the political sociologist should emphasize institutions rather than ideals or justifications. "Sociological theory rests on reality and not on ideas."[18] This is an unusual statement for him, as he ordinarily maintains that ideas are part of reality,[19] and he employs ideas as a variable when he suggests that one can distinguish among monopolistic-party systems on the basis of their ideologies and ideals.

Probably the main reason for Aron's reluctance to use liberty explicitly as a variable is that he treats it exclusively as an ideal or a justification. Liberty is an ideal, but it is also a functional concept. Freedom of criticism is a way of doing things, as the phrase "government by discussion"[20] indicates. One can evaluate a

political system according to whether, or to the extent, it permits liberty of discussion (or any other kind of liberty); this would be to treat liberty as an ideal or a justification. But one can also employ liberty of discussion as a category of comparative analysis and remain as value-free as one wishes. It is, of course, necessary to make liberty of discussion operational for empirical research. Aron does so by translating it into partisan terms. Almond goes even farther than Aron in making liberty of discussion operational for research.

III

Almond's comparative design is intended to relate functions, structures and styles of performance of function.[21] We have seen that he distinguishes seven functions. Throughout his analysis, he designates the structures which perform each function in the modern democratic system and suggests those structures which perform the same function in the developing countries. He employs sociological variables to distinguish between "traditional" and "modern" or "rational" styles of performance. He is convinced that all political structures are multi-functional and that all political systems are culturally mixed in that more than one style of performance is almost always present; but his model of the Western democratic system is characterized by greater structural specialization and more consistently modern or rational styles of performance than exist in the political systems of the developing countries. The structures of the Western democratic system are multi-functional, but in the case of each function there is one structure (or form of structure) which, while it does not monopolize the performance of the function, predominates in its performance in the sense that it regulates the performance of the same function by other structures.[22] The Western democratic political system is also culturally mixed, but there is a "penetration of the 'traditional' styles [of performance of function] of diffuseness, particularism, ascriptiveness, and affectivity, by the 'rational' styles of specificity, universalism, achievement, and affective neutrality."[23] The whole modern democratic system is characterized by well-maintained boundaries between political structures and between those structures and the society at large,[24] which ensures

[16] *Ibid.*, pp. 59–70. Aron goes on to analyze constitutional-pluralist systems by treating the problems inherent in giving institutional expression to democratic principles. The analysis is extremely interesting, but it is not relevant to the argument here.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 27.

[18] *Ibid.*

[19] For example, *ibid.*, p. 22.

[20] The phrase is associated particularly with Ernest Barker's analysis of parliamentary government. See his *Reflections on Government* (Oxford University Press, 1942), ch. 2.

[21] Almond (1960), p. 59.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 63. Other stylistic variables which Almond uses are: latent and manifest, covert and overt, formal and informal, and intermittent.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

an orderly processing of social demands by the political structures.[25]

Almond does not make any attempt to establish a hierarchy among the seven functions on which his design is based—and all of which, of course, he regards as essential—but he treats the communications function in a way which indicates that he attributes particular importance to it.

We have seen how much significance Almond attaches to boundary maintenance between the polity and the society, in his model of a modern democracy. He designates two functions as being particularly relevant to good boundary maintenance. One is interest articulation. This "is of crucial importance since it occurs at the boundary of the political system. The particular structures which perform the articulation function and the style of their performance determine the character of the boundary between polity and society."[26] The interest articulation function, therefore, determines what kind of boundary exists. But the communication function determines whether any boundary exists at all. "Just because of the fact that all the political functions are performed by means of communications, political communication is the crucial boundary-maintenance function."[27]

Secondly, in the conclusion of his study, Almond says that "throughout this chapter we have been suggesting that political systems may be compared with one another in terms of the frequency and style of the performance of the political *functions* by *political* structures."[28] The communication function, however, bears a special relationship to political structures. In all the functions to which this summary statement applies, except the communication function, the mark of a democratic political system is their performance by a political structure; in the case of the communication function, it is its performance by a non-political structure. All political structures perform a communication function, of course, but according to Almond's design, in the democratic system the communications function is performed by "neutral" and "autonomous" structures.[29] The neutrality and autonomy of the communication structure are essential because they are vital to freedom. "An autonomous communications system 'regulates the regulators' and thereby preserves the autonomies and freedoms of the

democratic polity."[30] Moreover, it may be, according to Almond, the nature of the communication function which distinguishes democracy from totalitarianism. "One might even argue," he says, "that the crucial control in the totalitarian political system is not coercion—although it is essential—but the monopoly of the media of communication."[31] Almond, therefore, goes almost as far as Aron in making freedom of discussion the major variable for comparative purposes. And, like Aron, he gives it operational form.

Almond's two main variables are structure and style of performance, the latter expressed in sociological terms. When he discusses the communication function, he relates it to his stylistic pattern variables, but he also introduces a new set of variables of a different order. These variables are the homogeneity, mobility, volume and direction of flow of information.[32] To the extent that these are researchable categories, they increase the possibility of measuring the extent of free discussion in a society. They are not, however, enough to distinguish fully among political systems. It is conceivable that two political systems could appear identical on each of the four dimensions and still be significantly different. This is particularly so in the case of systems where informational homogeneity is high, volume is great, mobility is great and flow is unidirectional from the polity to the society or, in other words, in the modern dictatorship. A fifth variable would be helpful here: content.[33] The content of information is related to policy.

IV

Almond's main variables—structural differentiation and style of performance—were devised in order to compare the developing nations with the Western democracies, and they are in general highly effective when employed for this purpose. They lose in discriminatory power, however, when totalitarian regimes become part of the universe of application, because the political structures of totalitarian regimes are neither differentiated like those of the Western democracies nor undifferentiated like those of the developing nations, and

[25] *Ibid.*, pp. 35–36.
[26] *Ibid.*, p. 33.
[27] *Ibid.*, p. 46.
[28] *Ibid.*, p. 61. Italics in original.
[29] *Ibid.*, pp. 46–47.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 47.
[31] *Ibid.*
[32] *Ibid.*, p. 50.
[33] Almond does not add it, but he does say: "One may liken the communication function to the circulation of the blood. It is not the blood but what it contains that nourishes the system." *Ibid.*, p. 47.

totalitarianism can be introduced into either a developing or a modern society. Almond compensates for this reduction in the power of his principal variables by introducing new variables when he discusses totalitarian systems. This occurs particularly in his discussion of the "output" or governmental functions: rule-making, rule application and rule adjudication and, to a lesser extent, in his discussion of parties, which he treats under the function of interest aggregation.

In his discussion of the governmental functions, Almond follows a classification of political systems suggested by Edward Shils: political democracies, tutelary democracies, modernizing oligarchies, totalitarian oligarchies and traditional oligarchies. Almond succeeds in characterizing all of these systems except one with his structural and stylistic variables. When he discusses totalitarian oligarchies among the developing nations, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, however, he employs different variables. These are strikingly similar to the variables employed by Aron when he suggests the basis for a classification of monopolistic-party systems.

We have seen that Aron distinguishes among monopolistic-party systems "according to the nature of their doctrine, the ambition of their projects, the violence of their procedures and the ideal representation of the society that they want to create." Almond employs as variables the "degree of concentration of power in the ruling elite," the "degree of penetration of the society by the polity," the "tempo of social mobilization" and the goals of the ruling groups.[34] These are neither structural nor stylistic variables. With the exception of the degree of concentration of power, which is a venerable concept that probably refers to a significant phenomenon, but which has always posed difficult problems of measurement (how does one compare the degree of concentration of power in the English cabinet with the degree of concentration of power in, say, the Burmese cabinet?), each of Almond's variables has its counterpart or counterparts in Aron's system. Where Almond speaks of goals, Aron speaks of doctrine (or ideology)[35] and ideal representa-

tions of a future society; where Almond speaks of penetration of the society by the polity, Aron speaks of the ambitiousness of projects; where Almond speaks of the tempo of social mobilization, Aron speaks of the violence of procedures.[36]

What Aron and Almond have each done, Aron systematically through his conceptual framework and Almond intuitively through departures from his conceptual framework, is to suggest that single-party systems can be classified according to what they do and why they do it. Terms like social penetration, ambitiousness of projects, social mobilization, tempo and violence are categories of what is done. Doctrine, ideology, ideals and goals are categories of why things are done. We are no longer in the realm of function; we are now in the realm of that combination of intention and action which can be called policy.

The reason for this is that beyond a certain point there is no significant difference in the way in which single-party systems carry out Almond's input and output functions. It may be that the rulers of a single-party system are serious about democratizing the society. In this case, there will be evidence of this intention in the political system, and Almond's variables can reveal them. But when there are no structural or stylistic differences between systems, as in the case of totalitarian oligarchies (and probably modernizing oligarchies), the only significant differences between systems lie in their policies. That is why there is so much dispute over whether totalitarian political systems are essentially alike or different.[37] Their structures and styles of performance, to employ Almond's variables, are alike, but the rulers may do different things or cite different reasons for doing similar things.

The general criterion of discrimination to which both Aron's and Almond's variables relate is policy, because policy denotes the combination of intention and action which those variables express. A policy is neither purpose (with or without systematic ideological foundations) without acts nor acts that are gratuitous or automatic. Policy is purpose in practice or practice with a purpose. Just as Aron and Almond have made liberty of discussion operational for empirical research, so have they made policy operational for empirical re-

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[34] *Ibid.*, pp. 53–54.

[35] The choice of terminology is entirely appropriate. Aron is concerned mainly with the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, the regimes most generally regarded as being ideologically based. Almond is concerned mainly with the developing nations, many of which are not governed by ideologically oriented leaders, although their leaders surely have goals.

[36] "What is true of totalitarian systems is that they are characterized by a high rate of *coercive* social mobilization." Almond (1960), p. 41. Italics mine.

[37] Aron discusses this point carefully. *Loc. cit.*, pp. 182–90.

search, and they have done so in this case in almost identical terms.

V

The designs for comparative analysis of political systems produced by Raymond Aron and Gabriel Almond contain three features in common, despite their several divergences. They employ the existence of liberty of discussion as a major variable; they employ policy as a variable in the discrimination of single-party systems; and they make policy operational for empirical research in almost identical terms. Several implications for political science follow.

In the first place, it is demonstrated that liberty of discussion can be effectively used as a comparative variable, because it is a social fact and a functional category as well as a criterion of evaluation. The moralist and the scientist need not argue over the utility of this concept, at least. The presence of liberty may be relative, but it is a fact of functional importance and, with the aid of Almond's refinement of the communications function, the degree of its presence may be measurable.

Secondly, the persistence with which policy shows up as a discriminatory variable for single-party systems raises doubts of the utility of a purely functional approach for the comparison of all political systems. Where there is liberty of discussion there is no problem: we turn our attention to trying to discover how opinions are formed, expressed and converted into policy, but we do not classify these systems on the basis of policy. Where there is no liberty of discussion, or where it is severely limited, we turn our attention to the policies of the regimes, because structural and stylistic variables do not adequately discriminate between systems. Policy is not a functional category.

Thirdly, the use of liberty and policy as variables suggests that there is a radical distinction between two kinds of political system, at least

as between ideal types (as constructed by Aron) or as between the opposite ends of a continuum (as suggested by Almond). This notion, of course, is not new. Carl Friedrich has argued "that totalitarianism is not only, nor even primarily, a form of government."[38] Robert MacIver has suggested a dichotomy between democracy and dictatorship based on the existence of fundamentally different relationships between the state and the community in each case.[39] Aron's and Almond's designs (as well as Almond's departures from his design) provide evidence to support the proposition that the concept of a political system, universally applicable, is significant only on a very high level of generality. As soon as one introduces liberty of discussion as a variable, whether in the form of the party system, as Aron uses it, or in the form of a communications function, as Almond uses it, different species appear at the limits which do not appear to be amenable to further classification by the application of identical variables. Where two systems cannot be adequately classified by means of the same variables, the systems are not coherent.

Lastly, there is the significance of liberty and policy as variables. That Aron and Almond both employ them does not by itself prove that these are the most significant variables that can be found for comparative political analysis, and the search for new ones must go on. But given the efforts of Aron to avoid using liberty and the efforts of Almond to avoid using policy, there is strong reason to conclude that the significance of liberty and policy as variables is inherent in the subject matter of comparison itself.

[38] Carl J. Friedrich, ed., *Totalitarianism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), p. 4.

[39] R. M. MacIver, *The Web of Government* (New York, 1947), pp. 196, 225.