Politics in Western Europe

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SECOND EDITION

An Introduction to the Politics of the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, and the European Union.

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Contents

List of Tables	vii
List of Figures	xi
Preface	xiii
Introduction	xv

Part One: The United Kingdom B. Guy Peters

1. The Context of British Politics	5
2. Where Is the Power?	26
3. Who Has the Power and How Did They Get It?	54
4. How Is Power Used?	83
5. What Is the Future of British Politics?	102

Part Two: France William Safran

6. The Context of French Politics	117
7. Where Is the Power?	130
8. Who Has the Power and How Did They Get It?	154
9. How Is Power Used?	188
10. What Is the Future of French Politics?	201

Part Three: Germany David P. Conradt

11. The Context of German Politics	215
12. Where Is the Power?	247
13. Who Has the Power and How Did They Get It?	264
14. How Is Power Used?	293
15. What Is the Future of German Politics?	308

Part Four: Italy	Raphael Zariski	
16. The Context of Italian Politics		327
17. Where Is the Power?		346
18. Who Has the Power and How Did They Get It?		372
19. How Is Power Used?		411
20. What Is the Future of Italian Politics?		419
Part Five: Sweden	M. Donald Hancock	
21. The Context of Swedish Politics		433
22. Where Is the Power?		446
23. Who Has the Power and How Did They Get It?		459
24. How Is Power Used?		477
25. What Is the Future of Swedish Politics?		489
Part Six: The European Union	M. Donald Hancock and B. Guy Peters	
26. The European Union: Development and the Primacy of Bureaucratic Politics		507
27. The Institutions of European Government		522
28. Political Processes in the European Union		540
29. Institutional Analysis		557
Appendix		578
Index		602

List of Tables

Part One: The United Kingdom

1.1	Unemployment levels by region	10
3.1	Citizens per parliamentary seat	58
3.2	Class voting	69

Part Two: France

6.1	France: some changes in forty-nine years	122
6.2	Political cycles and regimes	123
7.1	Political composition of selected Fifth Republic governments before 1981	137
7.2	Political composition of selected Fifth Republic governments, 1981–1988	138
7.3	Political composition of selected Fifth Republic governments since 1991	139
8.1	Parliamentary and presidential elections	160–61
8.2	Composition of the National Assembly	162
8.3	Recent cantonal elections: number of general councilors elected	180
8.4	Composition of the Senate	181

Part Three: Germany

11.1	German unity: a chronology	226
11.2	Average yearly net wages of employees	227
11.3	The states of the Federal Republic	229–31
11.4	The ten largest firms in the Federal Republic by gross sales	237
11.5	Income by occupation	238
11.6	Satisfaction with democracy: Germany, Britain, France, Italy	243
12.1	Chancellors and governing coalitions	254
13.1	Seat distribution in the 1994 election	283
15.1	Catching up: East vs. West, economic indicators	314

Part Four: Italy

18.1	Percentages of the total vote polled by Italian parties in elections for the Chamber of Deputies	374–75
18.2	Seats won by the various Italian parties in elections for the Chamber of Deputies	376

Part Five: Sweden

21.1	Comparative tax payments	444
23.1	Election results	461
23.2	Bloc alignments	474
23.3	Government formation	475
24.1	Per capita gross domestic product	478
24.2	Unemployment rates	480
24.3	Measures of commitment to public welfare	484
25.1	Annual percentage increase in consumer prices	493

Part Six: The European Union

27.1	Number of votes in qualified majority voting	527
27.2	Distribution of seats in the European Parliament	533
27.3	Elections to the European Parliament	535
28.1	European Union budget: sources of revenue	541
28.2	European Union expenditures	544
28.3	Council outcomes	551

Appendix		
A.1	National election outcomes: percentage of popular support	578–82
A.2	Distribution of seats in national legislatures	583–86
A.3	Postwar executive leadership	587–89
A.4	Per capita gross national product	590
A.5	Growth of real gross domestic product	591
A.6	Consumer prices	592
A.7	Average unemployment rates	593
A.8	Annual unemployment rates	594
A.9	General government total outlays as a percentage of nominal gross domestic product	595
A.10	General government total receipts as a percentage of gross domestic product	596
A.11	Industrial conflict: per capita working days lost based on total civilian employment	597–98
A.12	Infant mortality rate	599
A.13	Life expectancy at birth	599
A.14	Percentage of age groups enrolled in education	600
A.15	Religious adherents by denomination	600

List of Figures

1.1	Population	16
2.1	Population density	39
3.1	Annual immigration	70
4.1	Percentage of population aged 65 and older	90
5.1	Gross domestic product per capita	106
6.1	Average annual growth rate of gross domestic product	124
7.1	Unemployment rates	142
8.1	Females in workforce	165
9.1	Average balance of trade	191
10.1	Voter turnout	203
11.1	Vote for socialist and communist parties	233
12.1	Vote for center-right parties	255
13.1	Vote for radical right	279
13.2	Party vote in federal elections, second ballot	286
14.1	European parliamentary elections	297
15.1	Number of post-1945 cabinets	311
16.1	Total government expenditures as a percentage of nominal gross domestic product	337
17.1	Defense expenditures as a percentage of gross domestic product	352

Politics in Western Europe

18.1 Social services expenditures as a percentage of total government expenditures	389
19.1 Health expenditures as a percentage of gross domestic product	415
20.1 Public expenditures on education as a percentage of gross domestic product	422
21.1 Trade union membership	440
22.1 Strike activity	451
23.1 Inequality index	466
24.1 School-age population in secondary and higher education	482
25.1 Infant mortality rate	494
27.1 Decision-making procedures in the European Union	537

Preface

This new edition of *Politics in Western Europe* incorporates discussions of recent events that have partially transformed the European political landscape since the publication of the first edition. Among them are a succession of national elections, the fundamental transformation of the Italian party system, the continuing challenge of economic reconstruction and social integration in the reunified Germany, the ratification and implementation of the Treaty on European Union, and the expansion of the European Union from twelve to fifteen members.

In a rapidly changing political and economic world, Western Europe continues to command the attention of students, informed citizens, scholars, and other professionals. Democratic principles and the postwar economic performance of the West European nations helped inspire the dramatic events during the late 1980s and early 1990s that transformed the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union into fledgling market economies and democratic political systems. Domestically, national politics have assumed new and, in some cases, unsettling dimensions in response to internationalization, increased electoral volatility, and an ever-evolving political agenda. Continued movement toward economic and political union among the members of the European Union underscores the EU's importance as an increasingly powerful actor in regional and global affairs.

The emergent "new Europe" encompasses both continuity and change. Democratic constitutional principles and institutional arrangements—well-established on the basis of historical experience in the United Kingdom, France, and Sweden and the product of postwar consensus in countries such as Germany and Italy—remain firmly entrenched as the basis of parliamentary government throughout Western Europe. Traditional political parties and organized interest groups continue to occupy center political stage. At the same time, resurgent social-political movements—ranging from the Greens on the non-Marxist left

to right-wing parties in France, Germany, and Italy—have emerged in recent years to challenge the established order. Familiar conflicts over economic management and social welfare dominate national electoral campaigns, yet new issues have arisen concerning immigrants and the rights of women and various social minorities. National political debates over welfare entitlements and their costs have intensified throughout Western Europe as governments seek to meet stringent “convergence criteria” required to implement common monetary and economic policies and achieve a single currency within the boundaries of the European Union. Germany’s unification means that the expanded Federal Republic has assumed new economic and military obligations within NATO and across the former East-West European divide.

Contributors to this book address these disparate themes of contemporary West European politics with an empirical focus on the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, and the European Union. The volume is organized to facilitate both single-country analysis and cross-national comparison of key political variables: the historical and cultural context of national politics, important institutional and political actors, the exercise of power, and prospective political change. Twenty-five figures dispersed throughout the text display cross-national comparisons among the five West European nations, the United States, and Canada at given points in time. Their purpose is to present visually useful “snapshots” of salient demographic, political, economic, and social characteristics of each country. In addition, detailed statistical tables on postwar elections, executive leadership, and socioeconomic performance are included in the appendix to make possible systematic comparisons among the various countries over time. The data in these tables also serve as a basis for generating hypotheses and conducting preliminary research.

This volume is dedicated to students of comparative politics who seek enhanced knowledge of the new Europe at a time when all Western democracies confront the challenge of adaptive economic, social, and political response to changing international conditions. We would like to thank our students, colleagues, and others who have contributed to our own understanding of European affairs. A special note of appreciation is due Larry Romans at Vanderbilt University for his assistance in compiling the statistical data contained in the figures and tables.

—M. Donald Hancock
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Introduction

The study of comparative politics serves multiple purposes. They include acquiring greater knowledge about similarities and differences among nations and their subsystems, testing various scientific propositions, and deriving political lessons from the experience of others that might usefully be applied or studiously avoided in one's own place and time.¹ Throughout the evolution of comparative politics as a core field within political science, this endeavor has involved varying degrees of empirical, normative, and theoretical analysis.² Traditionally, Western scholars concentrated on constitutional norms and institutional arrangements in the established democratic systems of the United Kingdom, the United States, France, and, for a time, Weimar Germany. After World War II, many of the most creative comparative scholars turned their attention to problems of modernization, leadership, and revolution in the Third World countries of Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, and Africa in an effort to devise more rigorous concepts and methods of comparative political analysis.³ Among them were Gabriel A. Almond, Daniel Lerner, Karl Deutsch, Samuel Huntington, C.E. Black, and Dankwart A. Rustow.⁴ Recently, scholars such as Ronald Inglehart, Philippe Schmitter, Peter Katzenstein, Arnold Heidenheimer, and others have reincorporated West European politics into the mainstream of comparative politics as they have sought to extend and refine basic concepts of the field.⁵ This volume of country surveys is testimony to the renewed relevance of the West European political experience for comparative purposes.

A compelling justification for the comparative analysis of West European politics lies in the historical contributions of nations such as Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and Sweden to basic philosophical, cultural, and institutional tenets of Western civilization. Immigrants from throughout Europe have helped create new nations in the United States,

Canada, Israel, and elsewhere. Many of their descendants understandably look to Europe to comprehend the significance of their national origins and the European roots of their own countries' constitutional and political development.

From a historical perspective, Western Europe also offers important insights for the comparative study of different "paths to modernity." The striking contrast between British and Scandinavian successes in sustaining evolutionary patterns of political change and the more revolutionary political changes in France, Germany, and Italy during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries illuminates underlying factors of system stability and political effectiveness.⁶ In the contemporary world of nations, Europe's postwar political and economic achievements—including its democratic convergence and unprecedented material growth—constitute a series of "most similar cases" broadly comparable to other advanced industrial democracies in North America, Japan, and parts of the British Commonwealth. As such, Western Europe provides a rich laboratory for the comparative study of political parties and organized interest groups, political culture, institutional arrangements, economic management, social services, and public policy.⁷

A Common Analytical Framework

Consistent with these multiple purposes of comparative political inquiry, this volume addresses fundamental features of modern European politics on the basis of a common analytical framework designed to facilitate both single-country and cross-national analysis. Various country specialists address five important European nations according to the following criteria: (1) the context of national politics (including basic geographic and demographic factors, history, and political culture); (2) formal decision making and implementation structures; (3) political parties, organized interest groups, and electoral behavior; (4) the uses of political power; and (5) the future of politics under changing domestic and international conditions. Accompanying the country sections are tables, graphs, and a set of statistical appendixes containing empirical comparative data on elections, government formation, and economic and social performance.

The choice of country studies is based on a variety of considerations. One is the traditional inclusion of the United Kingdom and France in most comparative courses on European politics. Both countries have provided major contributions to the emergence of Western democracy and continue to play important political and economic roles in regional

and world affairs. A second consideration is the significance of Germany as a compelling instance of fundamental system change. Theoretically and empirically, Germany offers crucial insights into processes of socio-economic and political development under successive historical conditions of regime discontinuity, postwar stability in the West, the failure of communism in the east, and the unification of the Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic. Third, the inclusion of Italy and Sweden provides important systemic contrasts to more familiar case studies with respect to their distinctive patterns of postwar political dominance—long-term Christian Democratic versus Social Democratic governance, respectively—and the central role of civil servants and organized interest groups in the policymaking process. Moreover, Sweden's status as one of the world's most comprehensive welfare states and its innovative experiments in the area of workplace reform raise challenging questions about future directions of social and economic change in advanced industrial democracies.

The sixth section of this volume deals with the European Union (EU). Since the early 1950s, institutionalized economic cooperation among principal West European nations has resulted in the emergence of the EU as an increasingly important regional political system. The completion of an integrated market for both goods and services and the projected attainment of economic, monetary, and political union among the EU's fifteen member states by the end of the 1990s underscore the Union's importance as a key economic and political actor in its own right.⁸ The distinctive features of the EU as a regional political system compel the authors to depart from the analytical framework used in the country studies elsewhere in the volume. Instead, they concentrate on institutional actors, decision-making processes, and policy outcomes.

Contrasting System Types

While each of the contributors concentrates on a single country, their analysis illuminates contrasting features of three basic democratic polities that transcend national boundaries: (1) *pluralist* (the United Kingdom and the EU), (2) *étatist* (France and, with qualifications, Italy), and (3) *democratic corporatist* (Sweden and, to a lesser extent, Germany).⁹ The first of these types—pluralist systems—is characterized by dispersed political authority and a multiplicity of autonomous organized interest groups representing employers, farmers, labor, and other special interests vis-à-vis the state. In such systems competitive economic and electoral relations dominate intergroup relations, with most groups oriented

more toward short-term material and social gains than intermediate or long-term goals of system transformation. A dominant feature of pluralist systems is group reliance on coalition formation—often with respect to specific policy issues—as a means to maximize a group’s economic or political influence or both. Policymaking in pluralist systems tends to be incremental and tentative, with successful outcomes dependent on the strength (or fragility) of winning coalitions. These decision-making features characterize both the United Kingdom and the European Union, as well as non-European polities such as the United States and Canada.

In contrast, *étatist* systems are political regimes that embody more centralized authority structures and policymaking processes. A chief feature of *étatist* regimes is the concentration of bureaucratic or economic power, or both, at the apex of the political system, as is the case with centrally directed public corporations in Italy. If accompanied by a parallel concentration of executive power (as in the Fifth Republic of France), the likely result is a high degree of institutional efficacy in the political process. Thus, forceful policies can be more efficiently decided and implemented than is typically the case in pluralist systems, but for that very reason they can also be more readily reversed by an incumbent or successor government.

Democratic corporatist systems, finally, encompass institutionalized arrangements whereby government officials, business groups, and organized labor jointly participate on a sustained basis in making (and in some cases implementing) economic and social policies. Such decisions are subsequently enacted through executive decree, legislative endorsement, or both.¹⁰ Democratic corporatism is more highly developed in Sweden, the other Scandinavian countries, and Austria than in other West European countries; yet, primarily in the sphere of national economic policymaking, corporatist linkages exist in Germany as well.¹¹ By facilitating institutionalized participation by organized interest groups in the political process, democratic corporatism encourages majoritarian government and a consensual style of politics. Critics, however, fault corporatist arrangements because they tend to bypass legislative channels of representation, impede leadership accountability, and discourage democratic participation on the part of rank-and-file members of trade unions and other mass organizations.¹²

These different system types are relevant for explaining contrasting patterns of socioeconomic and political performance on the part of modern democracies. Without question, many aspects of system performance—including those measured by basic indicators such as annual rates of economic growth, inflation, and unemployment levels—are influenced

by external economic and other factors beyond the direct control of national policy actors. Nonetheless, national policymaking institutions and processes mediate the domestic economic and social consequences of exogenous trends and events. As Hugh Heclo has observed, in commenting on different national responses to the international crisis of stagflation during the 1970s and early 1980s: "Each nation has embarked on a search for innovations in economic policymaking, although each has done so in its own way. This recent agitation for economic policy innovation in the midst of constraints provides a good example of what [has been] termed 'structured variation' in public policy."¹³ As contemporary European politics demonstrates, "structured variations" among nations with respect to policy choices and their effects on socioeconomic performance are products of contrasting patterns of institutionalized power, different ideological preferences on the part of governing political parties, and varying degrees of access by the principal organized interest groups to national policy counsels.

The central questions of comparative political analysis remain, in short, who governs, on behalf of what values, with the collaboration of what groups, and with what socioeconomic and political consequences. The experience of the five European democracies included in this volume and the European Union reveals illuminating answers.

Notes

1. This definition of comparative politics is based on Robert Dahl, *Modern Political Analysis*, 4th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1984); and Lawrence C. Mayer, *Comparative Political Inquiry: A Methodological Survey* (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey, 1972).

2. Dahl, *Modern Political Analysis*.

3. For a summary overview of innovation in postwar approaches to comparative political analysis, see Ronald H. Chilcote, *Theories of Comparative Politics: The Search for a Paradigm* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1981). A critical assessment of the failure of the behavioral revolution to live up to many of its promises can be found in Lawrence C. Mayer, *Redefining Comparative Politics: Promise Versus Performance* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Library of Social Research, 1989). Standard sources on the methodology of comparative research include Mattei Dogan and Dominique Pelassy, *How to Compare Nations: Strategies in Comparative Politics*, 2d ed. (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House, 1990); Adam Przeworski and Henry Teune, *The Logic of Comparative Social Inquiry* (New York: Wiley-Interscience, 1970); and Robert Holt and John Turner, eds., *The Methodology of Comparative Research* (New York: Free Press, 1970).

4. Important early contributions on political change in comparative and his-

torical perspectives include Gabriel A. Almond and James S. Coleman, eds., *The Politics of the Developing Areas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960); Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society* (New York: Free Press, 1958); Karl Deutsch, "Social Mobilization and Political Development," *American Political Science Review* 55 (September 1961): 493–514; Leonard Binder et al., *Crisis and Sequence in Political Development* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971); Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968); C.E. Black, *The Dynamics of Modernization* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966); and Dankwart A. Rustow, *A World of Nations* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1967).

5. See Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles among Western Publics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977); idem, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Gerhard Lehmbruch and Philippe Schmitter, eds., *Patterns of Corporatist Policy-Making* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1982); Peter Katzenstein, *Small States in World Markets* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985); Arnold J. Heidenheimer, Hugh Hecló, and Carolyn Teich Adams, *Comparative Public Policy: The Politics of Social Choice in America, Europe, and Japan*, 3d ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990).

6. See Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966); and Charles Tilly, ed., *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

7. Important examples of comparative studies incorporating European data include Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Francis G. Castles, *The Impact of Parties: Politics and Policies in Democratic Capitalist Society* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1982); Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976); Russell Dalton et al., *Electoral Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies: Alignment or Realignment?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Peter H. Merkl, ed., *West European Party Systems* (New York: Free Press, 1979); Kay Lawson, *Comparative Study of Political Parties* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1976); Suzanne Berger, ed., *Organizing Interests in Western Europe: Pluralism, Corporatism, and the Transformation of Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1963, 1988); Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, eds., *The Civic Culture Revisited* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1990); Inglehart, *Silent Revolution*; idem, *Culture Shift*; Robert Dahl, *Dilemmas of Pluralist Democracy: Autonomy vs. Control* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982); Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979); Peter Hall, *Governing the Economy: The Politics of State Intervention in Britain and France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Douglas A. Hibbs, Jr., *The Political Economy of Industrial Democracies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987); and Gösta

Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

8. The original signatories of treaties establishing the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951 and the European Economic Community in 1957 included France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. The United Kingdom, Denmark, and Ireland joined the community in 1972 and were followed by Greece in 1981 and Spain and Portugal in 1987. Austria, Finland, and Sweden became members in January 1995.

9. The distinction between étatist, pluralist, and democratic corporatist regimes is utilized to help explain contrasting patterns of economic policy management in M. Donald Hancock, John Logue, and Bernt Schiller, eds., *Managing Modern Capitalism: Industrial Renewal and Workplace Democracy in the United States and Western Europe* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood-Praeger, 1991).

10. Excellent compilations of reprinted articles and original research on varieties of democratic corporatism can be found in Philippe Schmitter and Gerhard Lehmbruch, eds., *Trends toward Corporatist Intermediation* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1979); and in Lehmbruch and Schmitter, *Patterns of Corporatist Policy-Making*. Also see Reginald J. Harrison, *Pluralism and Corporatism: The Political Evolution of Modern Democracies* (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1980).

11. Democratic corporatism was most fully institutionalized in former West Germany in the form of “concerted action,” which involved high-level consultations focusing on economic policy among government officials and representatives of employer associations and trade unions from 1967 to 1977. Since then, formal trilateral policy sessions have been replaced by much more informal policy discussions among key economic actors that are periodically convened at the behest of the federal chancellor. See M. Donald Hancock, *West Germany: The Politics of Democratic Corporatism* (Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House, 1989).

12. From a critical ideological perspective, Leo Panitch argues that corporatism in liberal democracies promotes the “cooptation” of workers into the capitalist economic order and thus impedes efforts to achieve greater industrial and economic democracy. Panitch, “The Development of Corporatism in Liberal Democracies,” *Comparative Political Studies* 10 (1977): 61–90.

13. Heidenheimer, Hecló, and Adams, *Comparative Public Policy*, 136.

Politics in Western Europe