

Chapter 1



# INTRODUCING POLITICS OF THE DEVELOPING WORLD

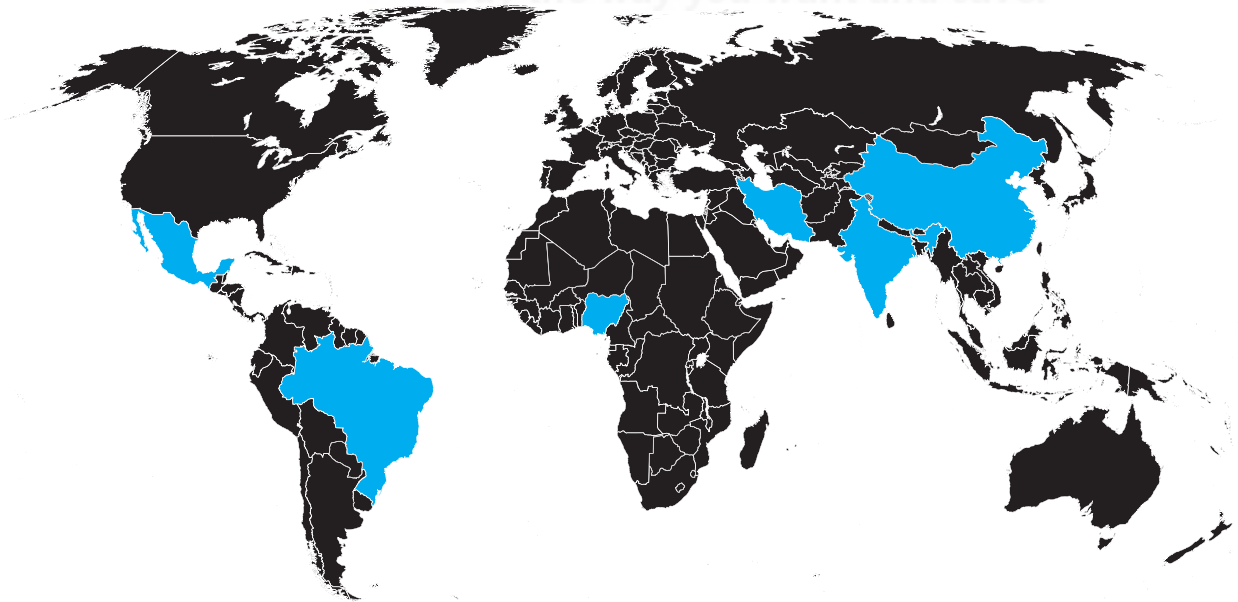
**Section 1** The Global Challenge of Politics in the Developing World

**Section 2** What—and How—Comparative Politics Compares

**Section 3** Developing Nations in a World of Transition

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## SECTION 3 Developing Nations in a World of Transition

Most textbooks and courses in comparative politics were traditionally organized according to categories that distinguished between the industrial (and primarily Western) democracies, which were referred to as the “First World”; communist party-states in the “Second World”; and the less developed countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America of the “Third World.” This categorization was based, in part, on distinctive economic features that helped characterize different political systems. Economic organization and performance both affected and reflected the realities of politics in these different political systems: the capitalist (or market) economies and high standard of living in North America, Western Europe, Japan, and a few other countries; the socialist (or planned) economies of countries ruled by a communist party, such as the Soviet Union and China; and the low level of

economic development and extensive poverty characteristic of the Third World.

Democracy was another dividing line in this way of looking at the nations of the world. The capitalist industrialized countries were not only wealthy but also stable and democratic; Communist systems were unquestionably authoritarian, and most Third World nations had personal dictatorships, one-party rule, military regimes, or—at best—democracies marred by high levels of social conflict and political violence.

One of the consequences of the many profound political and economic changes in the world in recent decades, such as the end of the cold war, is that the old categories of First, Second, and Third World have lost or changed meaning. For example, following the collapse of the Soviet “bloc,” there are only

a handful of communist party-states—China, Cuba, Vietnam, Laos, and North Korea. Even most of these (particularly China and Vietnam) are adopting market-based economic policies and forging close ties with capitalist nations. Obviously a “Second World” made up of communist party-states is no longer a useful category with which to classify countries.

Furthermore, sharp differences in growth rates among developing countries in recent decades make it difficult to generalize with confidence about the “Third World” on the basis on their shared poverty or other economic characteristics. For example, in the three decades between 1977 and 2007, China’s economy grew at an annual average *per capita* rate of 8.5 percent, whereas India’s *per capita* growth rate was less than half that (3.7 percent per year), and Nigeria experienced almost no *per capita* growth during that period (0.2 percent per year).

The Third World has changed a lot politically, too. In 1975, most Third World countries had some kind of authoritarian government; by the early twenty-first century, scores of developing nations, from Argentina to Zambia, have become democratic, or moved in that direction. This remarkable transition toward democracy is discussed in more detail below. The view that what Third World countries have in common is poverty and dictatorship is certainly not valid today, if it ever was.

So should the term “Third World” be jettisoned altogether as a category for scholarly analysis? Recent trends have profoundly challenged and complicated the way that comparativists classify the world’s countries. But we believe that despite major political and economic differences, the countries included in this book continue to share many distinct characteristics that allow us to group and study them together as part of the developing world and, indeed, that a good case can be made for the validity of “Third World” as an analytical category.

## Third World or Developing World?

The term *Third World* was coined by French authors in the 1950s to draw attention to the plight of the world’s poorer nations, which they believed

to be as important as the then headline-grabbing cold war and its superpower adversaries. To make their point, these authors adapted terminology from the French Revolution of the eighteenth century to dramatize the global inequalities of the mid-twentieth century: a long-neglected and oppressed *Third World*, they noted, was struggling against the *First World* (the industrial democracies) and the *Second World* (the Soviet Union and other Communist countries) for recognition and power just as the *Third Estate* of the common people in France had done against the privileged and powerful clergy (the *First Estate*) and the nobility (the *Second Estate*) in the 1780s.

Some people criticize the label as suggesting a numerical order in which the Third World ranks behind the First World and the Second World in a cultural sense. But its creators intended the term *Third World* to embody the struggle of poor nations for empowerment in the international system and a fairer share of global wealth. For many, the term *Third World* remains a powerful symbol of common purpose and determination and is still widely used by scholars, government officials, diplomats, and others to describe the developing countries of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.<sup>19</sup>

This book uses the terms *developing world* and *Third World* interchangeably to refer to the economically poorer (“less developed”) nations. Many people also use the term *South* or “global South” as a way of referring collectively to developing nations in contrast to the developed nations of the “North.”<sup>20</sup> Like *Third World*, *South* has achieved a certain symbolic importance by conveying the fact that there are enormous differences between the richer and poorer nations of the world. Granted, *South* is geographically somewhat misleading since there are developed nations in the Southern Hemisphere (like Australia) and less developed nations in the northern part of the globe (like Afghanistan).

But, whatever term you prefer, it is very important to recognize that the developing countries (which contain about 84 percent of the world’s population) are enormously diverse geographically, economically, politically, and culturally. Some observers have asserted that there is such great diversity among developing

nations that they question whether it is still valid to use such a catchall category as *Third World* because it implies too much similarity in the challenges facing the developing nations and too much unity in their international policies. They point to the huge differences in levels of economic development among countries usually considered part of the Third World. They question whether a country like the Democratic Republic of the Congo with its extreme poverty (\$300 *per capita* average annual income) and overwhelmingly rural population (66 percent) has much in common with Mexico, which is much more prosperous (\$12,400 *per capita* average annual income) and highly urbanized (75 percent). Others argue not for abandoning the categories like developing countries or Third World, but for taking account of the differences among developing countries by adding more nuanced distinctions such as “low income,” “least developed,” or even “Fourth World” to refer to the poorest countries.

This book acknowledges the rich diversity of the developing world. In fact, the countries examined here were chosen, in part, to reflect this variety, as well as to illustrate important issues in the study of comparative politics. Table 1.1 indicates some of the important differences that mark the developing nations that are covered in this text.

## The Development Gap

If there are such extensive differences among developing nations, what gives coherence to the concept of the Third World? Simply put, Third World nations are poorer, their peoples have a lower standard of living, and their economies are not as modernized as the industrialized countries: In other words, they are less developed. A few examples should make the realities of this development gap between the Third World and the industrialized countries clearer.<sup>21</sup>

The **World Bank**, one of the major international organizations that provides financial assistance to the Third World, divides developing countries according to their annual **gross national income (GNI)** per capita (a general measure of the total output of an economy divided by the total population) into four broad groups: low income, \$935 or less; lower middle income, \$936–3,705; upper middle income, \$3,706–11,455; and high income, \$11,456 or more. The *most* developed countries are in the high income category (above \$11,456) but these countries, in fact, have an average GNI per capita of over \$37,500 per year. For more about the meaning of these statistics and alternative approaches, see “Global Connection: How Is Development Measured?”

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**Table 1.1**

### Diversity in the Developing World

Country	Location	Political System	Economy
Brazil	South America	Transitional democracy (from military rule)	Upper-middle income; low growth
China	East Asia	Communist party-state	Lower-middle income, high growth
India	South Asia	Consolidated democracy	Lower-middle income; moderate-to-high growth
Iran	Middle East (Western Asia)	Islamic republic; theocracy	Lower-middle income, moderate growth; heavily dependent on oil exports
Mexico	Northern Central America	Transitional democracy (from one-party dominant to competitive democracy)	Upper-middle income; low growth
Nigeria	West Africa	Transitional democracy (from military rule)	Low income; low growth; heavily dependent on oil exports



## Global Connection

As we have noted, we put particular importance on understanding the relationship between the political system and the economy in the study of the politics of the developing world and in our overall approach to comparative politics. Each of the country case studies describes and analyzes the role of the government in making economic policy. They also take special note of the impact of the global economy on national politics.

This book makes frequent reference to three commonly used measures of the overall strength or power of a country's economy:

- **Gross domestic product (GDP)**, which is a calculation of the total goods and services produced by the country during a given year
- **Gross national product (GNP)**, which is GDP plus income earned abroad by the country's residents
- **Gross national income (GNI)**, which is a new name for GNP that has been adopted by the World Bank

The numbers generated by GDP or GNP/GNI are, of course, different, but not hugely so. As conventionally measured by GDP or GNP/GNI—in other words, in terms of total output—the United States has, by far, the world's largest economy, followed by Japan, Germany, China, Britain, and France.

A better way to measure the level of economic development and the standard of living in different countries is to look at GDP/GNP/GNI *per capita*, in other words, total economic output divided by total population. From the perspective of GNI *per capita*, Norway ranked first (\$76,500) in 2007, while the U.S. was fifteenth (\$46,040), and China was number 132 (\$2,320) out of 209 countries measured.

But these figures use a calculation based on the American dollar and **official international currency exchange rates**, which would, for example, tell you how many Mexican pesos or Russian rubles you could get for US\$1. Many economists believe this approach does not give a very accurate sense of the real standards of living in different countries because it does not tell what goods and services

## How Is Development Measured?

(such as housing, food, and transportation) people can actually buy with their local currencies.

An alternative and increasingly popular means of comparing levels of economic development across countries is called **purchasing power parity (PPP)**. PPP takes into account the actual costs of living in a particular country by figuring the purchasing price of the same “basket of goods” in different countries. For example, how many dollars in the U.S., pesos in Mexico, or rubles in Russia does it take to buy a certain amount of food or to pay for housing? Many analysts think that PPP provides a more reliable (and revealing) tool for comparing standards of living among countries.

As you will see, the differences between the two calculations can be quite dramatic, especially for developing countries. When PPP is used to measure GDP, China is the world's second largest economy behind the United States, followed by Japan and India. Per capita GDP income in China according to PPP rises from \$2,320 to \$5,400. Simply put, PPP takes into account that the cost of living in China is much lower than in the United States, so smaller incomes go further when it comes to purchasing things. We will specifically note when purchasing power parity is used to present an economic statistic in this book.

The data boxes also give information about other ways to measure a country's development. The most important of these is the **Human Development Index (HDI)**, which the United Nations introduced as a way to evaluate a country's level of development that considers more than just economic factors. The formula used to calculate a country's HDI takes into account *longevity* (life expectancy at birth), *knowledge* (literacy and average years of schooling), as well as *income* (according to PPP). Based on this formula, each country of the world for which there are enough data is assigned an HDI decimal number between 0 and 1; the closer a country is to 1, the *better* is its level of human development.

Out of 177 countries ranked according to HDI in the 2008 United Nations Human Development Report, Iceland (0.968) was at the top and Sierra Leone (0.336) was last. Countries such as Canada

(4<sup>th</sup>), Japan (8<sup>th</sup>), France (10<sup>th</sup>), the United States (12<sup>th</sup>), Britain (16<sup>th</sup>), South Korea (26<sup>th</sup>), Cuba (37<sup>th</sup>), Mexico (52<sup>nd</sup>), Russia (67<sup>th</sup>), and Brazil (70<sup>th</sup>) were classified as having “high human development”; China (81<sup>st</sup>), Iran (94<sup>th</sup>), and India (128<sup>th</sup>) were in the “medium human development” category; twenty-two

countries—all in Africa—were scored as having “low human development.” As you read the case studies in this book, be on the lookout for particular aspects of history, politics, and policy that might help you understand a country’s human development index ranking.

Generally speaking, a country’s GNI *per capita* reflects its level of economic development and modernization. But it also tells us a lot about the capacity of a government or an economy to meet the material needs of the people of a country. Thus, low GNI per capita figures reflect the low average standard of living and greater poverty that distinguish less developed from more developed nations.

Many of the world’s poorest nations have very low and sometimes even negative economic growth rates, and for many of their citizens, the physical quality of life is hardly improving and may even be deteriorating. Life expectancy in sub-Saharan Africa in 1990 was an already low fifty years; in 2008 it was forty-seven (largely a reflection of the toll taken by HIV/AIDS). Some countries may be experiencing increases in production, but their swelling populations are swallowing up the gains of increased output, making real economic expansion impossible. The economy of Guatemala, for example, grew by an average of 3.6 percent per year in the period 2000–2007; but its population grew 2.5 percent per year during the same period. The result? Per capita income in Guatemala hardly grew at all.

The stark contrasts among countries in statistics used to measure some of the important noneconomic aspects of development can give you a sense of just what low GNI per capita means in terms of people’s lives:

- **Life expectancy** in the forty-nine countries the World Bank classifies as low-income averages only fifty-seven years; in the 95 middle-income developing countries, it is sixty-nine years, and in the sixty-five high-income developed countries,

a person can expect to live seventy-nine years on average. In the poorest countries, such as Afghanistan, life expectancy is only about forty-four; in Angola, it is thirty-eight.

- **The child mortality rate** (which measures how many children die between birth and age five) in low-income countries is 135 per 1,000 live births, and in the very poorest countries it reaches well over 250 per 1,000; in the middle-income countries, the average child mortality rate is 49 per 1,000; in the world’s richest countries, the child mortality rate drops to 7 per 1,000 live births.
- Two of the leading causes of death for the approximately 10 million children under age five who die annually in developing countries are malnutrition and diarrhea, the latter a disease that people in developed countries consider to be at most an uncomfortable nuisance usually associated with foreign travel and dealt with by popping a Pepto Bismol tablet. For nearly two million children in Third World countries each year, diarrhea contracted from unsafe water means death from severe dehydration. The solution to this killer of kids is simple and cheap: oral rehydration therapy (ORT), which involves giving the stricken child a solution of sugar and salt that allows the body to retain fluids. The solution can

be easily mixed at home, *if* there is access to the ingredients; premixed packets cost about \$0.20 each—that’s 20 *cents*.

- **Illiteracy** (people over age fifteen who cannot read or write) averages 39 percent in the low-income countries (and up to 70 to 80 percent in some) and about 10 percent in the middle-income countries. In the developed countries, almost all adults can read, although there is some debate about how functionally literate a sizable part of the population of these countries really is.

It is very important to recognize that there are vast differences in the noneconomic quality of life statistics among Third World countries. Take a look at the statistics presented for each of the countries in this book in the charts and tables at the end of this chapter. Note, for example, the variations in life expectancy, infant mortality, and literacy. The case studies in this book analyze how such differences reveal important contrasts in the historical experiences and government policies of various developing nations.

We also need to be aware that national averages tend to mask class, gender, racial, and regional inequalities *within* countries. Although this is true in all countries, developing or developed, these types of disparities are particularly acute in the Third World. A couple of examples: Pakistan has an overall adult literacy rate of 49.9 percent, but among women it is only 36 percent; for males, it is 63 percent. Some people have even suggested that poor women in the least developed “Fourth World” countries should be called the “Fifth World” because they are, indeed, the poorest of the poor.

And consider what the jaw-dropping statistics that tell the story of China’s spectacular economic growth over the last three decades don’t reveal. Overall, the country’s gross domestic product (GDP) is sixty times the size it was in 1978; per capita incomes have risen from \$50 to about \$2,400 per year, and foreign investment has zoomed from near zero to nearly \$75 billion in capital from abroad injected into the Chinese economy in 2007, from thirty-second place to second among the world’s trading nations (after Germany and *before* the United States). But these numbers only tell

us part of the story of the China “miracle”; they don’t tell us that the benefits of the country’s rapid development have been spread *very* unequally, with the coastal areas doing much better than the interior, and urban living standards rising much faster than those in the countryside. In fact, over the last few decades, China has gone from being one of the world’s most egalitarian (if poor) countries to being one of the most unequal in terms of the distribution of income and wealth.

We shouldn’t fail to acknowledge that there has been significant economic and social progress in many parts of the developing world in recent decades. Quite a few have experienced impressive economic growth (of those included in this book, China and India stand out), and the under-five child mortality rates in the developing world as a whole have dropped by 60 percent in the last 40 years, due largely to a reduction in diarrhea-related deaths through ORT (although, as noted above, there’s a long way to go). Similar positive trends are apparent in some of the other figures that are used to measure poverty in the less developed countries.

One of the most important steps taken by the international community to face the challenge of global poverty and inequality was the setting by the United Nations and several other organizations in 2000 of eight **Millennium Development Goals** (MDGs) to be achieved by the year 2015. The eight goals are:

- Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
- Achieve universal primary education
- Promote gender equality and empower women
- Reduce child mortality
- Improve maternal health
- Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases
- Ensure environmental sustainability
- Develop a global partnership for development

These are certainly noble and ambitious objectives.<sup>22</sup> Progress toward achieving the goals will depend on a combination of concrete actions taken by international organizations and financial institutions, non-governmental organizations, the most developed (high-income) countries, the governments of the developing

nations, and some parts of the private sector, especially those with large investments in the developing world. Promoting this kind of multifaceted action is the essence of the eighth MDG: Develop a global partnership for development. As a step in this direction, in June 2005, the G8 (the **Group of 8**, an informal coalition of the world's most developed nations) announced a plan that would erase the nearly \$40 billion in debt that the world's poorest countries (mostly in Africa) owe to international lenders. Nevertheless, the enormous development gap that separates most of the Third World from the industrialized nations remains one of the most important ways of categorizing the world's countries (see Figure 1.1).

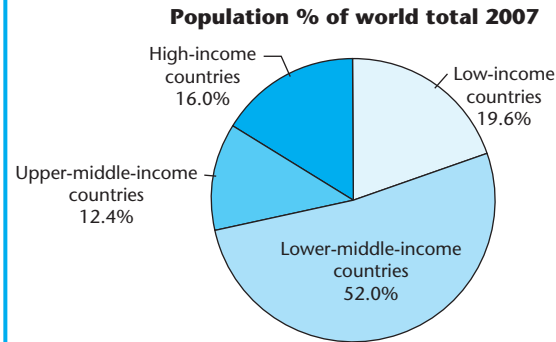
### Third World States

There are many types of political systems in the Third World. As Table 1.1 indicates, the countries presented in this book include a well-established democracy (India); a country that had been a single-party-dominant democracy for decades but has in recent years moved toward multiparty competition (Mexico); two nations that can be categorized as transitional democracies, but one of which (Brazil) is fairly far along in the transition from a military dictatorship, while the other (Nigeria) started its rocky democratic transition only a decade ago; a communist party-state (China), and a theocracy (Iran), in which supreme political power is held by the religious elite. Analyzing the differences among such varied types of political systems is one of the most important and interesting tasks in the study of comparative politics. But it is also important to note some of the political characteristics shared by Third World states in general that distinguish them politically from the developed nations.

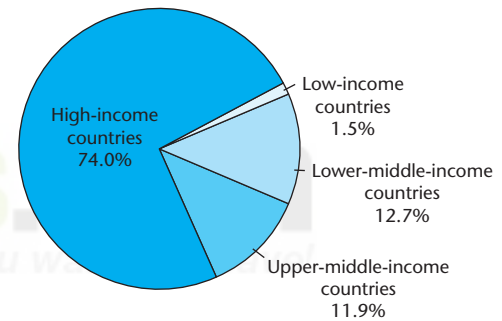
First, politics and government in most developing countries are shaped by the basic facts of scarce economic resources, extensive poverty and inequality, and a relatively weak position in the international system. Government leaders in less developed countries simply have fewer options available in resolving problems or responding to demands from various groups for a bigger piece of the national economic pie. Economic conflicts therefore are more likely to lead to violence or repression in Third World states; for example, peasants may rebel in their quest for more

**FIGURE 1.1**

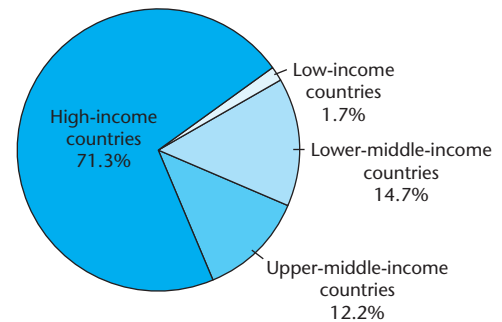
These charts show graphically just how unequally the world's wealth is divided between the developed (high-income) and developing (lower middle-, upper-middle-, and low-income) countries.



**Gross Domestic Product (GDP) % of world total 2007**



**World Trade % of world total 2007**



Source: World Development Report 2009



land, or the government may actively suppress labor unions striking for higher wages. Corruption, a recurrent theme in the case studies in this book, is a very serious problem in much of the Third World because public officials personally profit from the state's control over various kinds of economic transactions and the weakness of mechanisms for holding those with political power accountable to the law. Resistance to democratization in the Third World has often come—as it also did during earlier stages in the political development of Europe and North America—from elites who fear that greater popular control of the government will jeopardize their economic privileges as well as their political power. But, as we will discuss later, there has been a significant spread of democracy in many parts of the developing world.

Second, the political legitimacy of many Third World states is very weak. Citizens often lack faith in their political leaders or perhaps even in the basic structure and values of the political system of their country. They may obey the law, and they may even vote. But they do not see the government as being very relevant to their lives or as being able to do anything about their most serious concerns; they may even regard the national government as having an adverse impact on their lives if their only contact with the authorities comes through experiences like tax collection, bribe taking, or police brutality. Membership in a religious or ethnic group is often a much more important source of political identity in the Third World than formal citizenship in a particular country. For example, many Tibetans feel only loosely (and perhaps negatively) connected to the Chinese government even though Tibet is formally part of the People's Republic of China.

There are various causes of weak state legitimacy in the Third World. The government may be seen as

favoring one ethnic, religious, or economic group or even actively discriminating against some groups. Economic failure, political repression, extreme corruption, and military defeat may cause people to lose faith in the government. New democracies, which are quite common in the developing world, simply have not had enough time to establish legitimacy in the eyes of their citizens. Whatever the cause, states with weak legitimacy are prone to political violence, radical and sudden changes (such as a military *coup d'état*), and government paralysis. And such chronic instability only further erodes the legitimacy of governments.

Third, the effective power of governments in the less developed countries is often very limited. The state may have little ability to exert its authority much beyond the capital city and a few large urban centers. In the rural areas and small towns where much or most of the population lives, political life is frequently based more on traditional relationships that comparativists call **patron–client politics**. This involves a situation in which locally powerful and usually wealthy individuals (“patrons”) exercise control over and ensure the loyalty of poorer citizens (“clients”) by dispensing favors or instilling fear. As you will see in the case studies that follow, in much of the Third World, the formal aspects of government such as laws, political parties, and elections are less important to most people than is informal politics based on personal relationships.

There are substantial variations in how governments in the developing countries face the political struggle over scarce resources, weak legitimacy, and the influence of patron–client politics. But to one degree or another, they all experience these problems in ways that make the Third World state a distinctive and important entity in the study of comparative politics.

