This section describes the four themes we use to organize the information on institutions and processes in the country chapters in *Introduction to Politics of the Developing World*. These themes help explain continuities and contrasts among the six countries included in this book and demonstrate what patterns are specific to a particular country. We also suggest a way that each theme highlights some puzzle in Third World politics.

Before we introduce the themes, a couple of warnings are necessary. First, our four themes cannot possibly capture the infinitely varied experience of politics throughout the developing world. Our framework is built on four core themes and provides a guide to understanding many political features of the contemporary Third World. But we urge students (and rely on instructors!) to challenge and expand on our interpretations. Second, we want to note that a textbook builds from existing theory but does not construct or test new hypotheses. That task is the goal of original scholarly studies. The themes are intended to distill some of the most significant findings in the field of contemporary comparative politics as they apply to developing countries.

Theme 1: The Democratic Idea

The spread of democracy throughout much of the world has, without doubt, been one of the most important and dramatic political developments of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. At the close of 1981, there were 50 electoral democracies among the world’s 123 independent nations; by the end of 2001, there were 121 democracies out of 192 nations. Many of these new democracies are in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, a fact that has fundamentally transformed politics in the developing world.

What do we mean by democracy? For a regime to qualify as democratic, it must include the following characteristics:

- **Political accountability.** There must be formal procedures by which those who hold political power are chosen and held accountable to the people of the country. The key mechanism for such accountability is regular, free, and fair elections in which all citizens are eligible to cast ballots to elect candidates for office.

- **Political competition.** Political parties must be free to organize, present candidates for office, express their ideas, and compete in fair elections. The winning party must be allowed to take office, and the losing party must relinquish power through legal and peaceful means.

- **Political freedom.** All citizens must possess political rights and civil liberties. These include the right to participate in the political process, free of government reprisals; freedom of assembly, organization, and political expression (including the right to criticize the government); equality before the law; and protection against arbitrary state intrusion into citizens’ private lives. A judiciary not subject to direct political control is a common institutional means for safeguarding these freedoms.

- **Political equality.** All citizens must be legally entitled to participate in politics (by voting, running for office, and joining an interest group), and their votes must have equal weight in the political process. Men and women of political, ethnic, religious, or other minority groups must have equal rights as citizens.

By these measures, the countries in this book fall in the following categories: established democracy (India), developing (or transitional) democracy (Brazil, Mexico, Nigeria), and nondemocracy (China, Iran). This is probably a fair approximation of the distribution of regime types in the developing world in general and reflects the trend toward democratization.

But our comparative case studies reveal a surprising level of complexity in the seemingly simple fact of the rapid increase in the number of Third World democracies. First, they show the strong appeal of the democratic idea, by which we mean the claim by citizens that they should in some way exercise substantial control over the decisions made by their states and governments. As authoritarian rulers have recently
learned in the former Soviet Union, Brazil, Iran, South Africa, Nigeria, and China, once persistent and widespread pressures for democratic participation develop, they are hard (although not impossible) to resist. As the Nobel Prize–winning economist and comparative public policy analyst Amartya Sen puts it, “While democracy is not yet uniformly practiced, nor indeed uniformly accepted, in the general climate of world opinion, democratic governance has now achieved the status of being taken to be generally right.” A good indication of the near-universal appeal of the democratic idea is that even authoritarian regimes proclaim their attachment to democracy, usually asserting that they embody a superior form to that prevailing elsewhere. For example, leaders of the People’s Republic of China claim that their brand of “socialist democracy” represents the interests of the vast majority of citizens more effectively than do the “bourgeois democracies” of capitalist societies.

Second, the case studies draw attention to diverse sources of support for democracy. Democracy has proved appealing throughout the developing world for many reasons. In some historical settings, it may represent a standoff or equilibrium among political contenders for power, in which no one group can gain sufficient strength to control outcomes alone. Democracy may appeal to citizens in authoritarian settings because democratic regimes often rank among the world’s most stable, affluent, and cohesive countries. Another important pressure for democracy is born of the human desire for dignity and equality. Even when dictatorial regimes appear to benefit their countries—for example, by promoting economic development or nationalist goals—citizens are still likely to demand democracy. Although authoritarian governments can suppress demands for democratic participation, the domestic and (in recent years) international costs of doing so are high.

Third, the country studies show that democracies in the Third World vary widely in concrete historical, institutional, and cultural dimensions. We pay close attention to different electoral and party systems, to the distinction between parliamentary and presidential systems, and to differences in the values and expectations that shape citizens’ demands in different countries.

Fourth, many of the country studies illustrate the potential fragility of democratic transitions in the developing nations. The fact that popular movements or leaders of moderate factions often displace authoritarian regimes and then hold elections does not mean that democratic institutions will prevail or endure: a wide gulf exists between a transition to democracy and the consolidation of democracy. Historically, powerful groups have often opposed democratic institutions because they fear that democracy will threaten their privilege. On the other hand, disadvantaged groups may oppose the democratic process because they see it as unresponsive to their deeply felt grievances. As a result, reversals of democratic regimes have occurred in the past and will doubtless occur in the future. Our case studies and country studies do not support a philosophy of history or theory of political development that identifies a single (democratic) end point toward which all countries will eventually converge. One important work, published in the early phase of the most recent democratic wave, captured the tenuous process of democratization in its title: Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions About Uncertain Democracies. Some suggest that it is far easier for a country to hold its first democratic election than its second or third. Hence, the fact that the democratic idea is so powerful does not mean that all countries will adopt or preserve democratic institutions.

A puzzle: democracy and stability. Comparativists have intensely debated whether democratic institutions contribute to political stability or, on the contrary, to political disorder. On the one hand, democracy by its very nature permits political opposition: one of its defining characteristics is competition among those who aspire to gain high political office. Political life in democracies is turbulent and unpredictable. On the other hand, the fact that political opposition and competition are legitimate in democracies appears to deepen support for the state even among opponents of a particular government. History reveals far more cases of durable democratic regimes than durable authoritarian regimes in the modern world. In your country-by-country studies, look for the stabilizing and destabilizing consequences of recent democratic transitions in Brazil, Mexico, and Nigeria; the pressures (or lack of pressures) for democratization in China and Iran; and the challenges faced by even India’s established democracy.
Theme 2: A World of States

The theme that we call a world of states reflects the fact that since the beginning of the modern era about 500 years ago, states have been the primary actors on the world stage. Although international organizations and private actors like transnational corporations play a crucial role, for the most part it is the rulers of states who send armies to conquer other states and territories. It is the legal codes of states that make it possible for businesses to operate within their borders and beyond. States provide for the social protection of citizens through the provision—in one way or another—of health care, old age pensions, aid to dependent children, and assistance to the unemployed. It is states that try to regulate the movement of people across borders through immigration law. And even the most influential contemporary international organizations in large part reflect the balance of power among member states.

That said, there is no longer as sharp a distinction between courses in international relations that focus primarily on interaction among states or on cross-border processes and courses in comparative politics that analyze what goes on within a country’s borders. Therefore, in Introduction to Politics of the Developing World, we emphasize the interactive effects of domestic politics and international forces.

No state, even the most powerful, such as the United States, is unaffected by influences originating outside its borders. Today, a host of processes associated with globalization underscore the heightened importance of various cross-national influences. A wide array of international organizations and treaties, including the United Nations, the European Union, the World Trade Organization, and the North American Free Trade Agreement, challenge the sovereign control of national governments. Transnational corporations, international banks, and currency traders in New York, London, Hong Kong, and Tokyo affect countries and people throughout the world. A country’s political borders do not protect its citizens from global warming, environmental pollution, or infectious diseases that come from abroad. More broadly, developments linked to technology transfer, the growth of an international information society, immigration, and cultural diffusion have a varying but undeniable impact on the domestic politics of all countries. For example, as a result of the global diffusion of radio, television, and the Internet, people in nearly every part of the world are remarkably informed about international developments. This knowledge may fuel popular local demands that governments intervene in faraway Kosovo, Rwanda, East Timor, or elsewhere. And heightened global awareness may make citizens readier to hold their own government to internationally recognized standards of human rights.

In the first decade of this new century, all nations-states are experiencing intense pressures from an expanding and increasingly complex mix of external influences. But international political and economic influences do not have the same impact in all countries, and all states do not equally shape the institutional form and policy of international organizations in which they participate. It is likely that the more advantaged a state is, as measured by its level of economic development, military power, and resource base, the more it will shape global influences. Conversely, the policies of less advantaged countries are more extensively molded by other states, international organizations, and broader international constraints. With the world of states theme, we emphasize one key feature of the international arena: the impact on the domestic political institutions and processes of developing states on its relative success or failure in competing economically and politically with other states, particularly those that are wealthier and more powerful. What sphere of maneuver is left to states in the developing world by imperious global economic and geopolitical forces? How do CNN, the Internet, McDonald’s, television, and films (whether produced in Hollywood or in “Bollywood,” that is, Bombay, by India’s thriving film industry) shape local cultures and values, influence citizen perceptions of and demands of government, and affect political outcomes? Today, post 9/11 global security concerns influence both the domestic and international politics of Third World states. The events and aftermath of September 11 have also exerted a ripple effect on conflicts long predating the attacks on the United States, such as the Kashmir dispute that bitterly divides predominantly Hindu India and mostly Muslim Pakistan.

The theme we identify as a world of states includes a second important focus: similarities and contrasts among developing countries in state formation. Here we consider the effects of the global order long before
the contemporary era of globalization. We study the ways that states have developed historically, the impact of international forces on state formation, diverse patterns in the organization of political institutions, the processes and limits of democratization, the ability of the state to control social groups and sustain power, and the state’s economic management strategies and capacities. For example, why did China and India, both of which mark the formation of their modern state in the late 1940s, take such divergent paths, and what role did international forces play in that divergence? It is particularly important to note how the experiences of colonialism and imperialism shaped the formation of Third World states. In India, for example, the British established a professional civil service staffed by Indians to help run the colony, a legacy that greatly influenced the shape of independent India’s government and has contributed to the durability of Indian democracy. By contrast, in Iran, Britain and the United States supported a despotic monarchy because it protected Western oil interests; the end result was the revolution that produced that country’s contemporary Islamic Republic.

A puzzle: To what extent do states in the developing world still remain the basic building blocks of political life? Increasingly, the politics and policies of such states are shaped by diverse external factors often lumped together under the category of globalization. At the same time, many Third World states face increasingly restive constituencies who challenge the power and legitimacy of central governments. In reading our country case studies, try to assess what impact pressures from both above and below—outside and inside—have had on the role of the state in carrying out its basic functions and sustaining the political attachment of its citizens. Can weaker (in terms of economic and military power) states pursue and defend their interests in a world where some great powers, particularly the United States, are trying to define the global agenda in terms of its perceived national security needs? More broadly, is there a significant degree of national autonomy and policy innovation for the states of the developing world compatible with globalization? For the countries in this book, try to assess their relative position in the international system, particularly their relationship with the more developed nations. How do you account for the similarities and differences in the ways various developing countries fit into the world of states in the early twenty-first century?

Theme 3: Governing the Economy

The success of all states in maintaining their authority and sovereign control is greatly affected by their ability to ensure that an adequate volume of goods and services is produced to satisfy the needs of their populations. Certainly, the inadequate performance of the Soviet economic system was an important reason for the rejection of communism and the disintegration of the Soviet Union. In contrast, the economic achievements of China’s Communist Party are a major factor in explaining why Communist rule has survived in that country.

An important goal of all countries in the contemporary world is to achieve durable economic development. In fact, effective economic performance is near the top of every state’s political agenda. The term political economy refers to how governments affect economic performance and how economic performance in turn affects a country’s political processes. We accord great importance to political economy in Introduction to Politics of the Developing World because we believe that politics in all countries is deeply influenced by the relationship between government and the economy in both domestic and international dimensions. However, the term economic performance conveys the impression that there is a single standard by which to measure performance. In fact, the matter is far more complex. Should economic performance be measured solely by how rapidly a country’s economy grows? By how equitably it distributes the fruits of economic growth? By the quality of life of its citizenry, as measured by such criteria as life expectancy, level of education, and unemployment rates? (For additional analysis of this point, see “Global Connection: How Is Development Measured?”) We invite you to consider this question as you study the political economies of the six developing countries analyzed in this book.

How a country “governs the economy”—how it organizes production and intervenes to manage the economy—is one of the key elements in its overall pattern of political as well as economic development. It is important to analyze, for example, how countries
Two frequently used measures of a country’s level of economic development are its gross domestic product (GDP) and gross national income (GNI) per capita. These figures are slightly different ways to estimate a country’s total economic output divided by its total population. Such estimates are made in a country’s own currency, such as pesos in Mexico or rupees in India.

In order to make comparisons of GDP or GNI per capita across countries, it is necessary to convert the estimates to a common currency, usually the U.S. dollar. This is done using official international currency exchange rates, which, for example, would tell you how many pesos or rupees it takes to buy U.S.$1. But many economists believe that an estimate of GDP/GNI per capita in dollars based on such exchange rates does not give an accurate sense of the real standards of living in different countries because it does not tell what goods and services (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 to calculate exchange rates based on purchasing power parity (PPP). PPP-based exchange rates take into account the actual cost of living in a particular country by figuring what it costs to buy the same bundle of goods in different countries. For example, how many pesos does it take to buy a certain amount of food in Mexico or rupees to pay for housing in India? Many analysts think that PPP provides a more reliable (and revealing) tool for comparing standards of living among countries.

The data boxes at the start of each country chapter in this book show GDP per capita (the measure favored by the United Nations) at both the official exchange rates and purchasing power parity. As you will see, the differences between the two calculations can be quite dramatic. However, income comparisons based on either method do not provide a complete picture of a country’s level of development, since these measurements do not necessarily capture what might be considered better ways of measuring the quality of life for the citizen of that country. As a result, the United Nations has introduced another concept that is useful in making socioeconomic comparisons among nations: the Human Development Index (HDI). Based on a formula that takes into account the three factors of longevity (life expectancy at birth), knowledge (literacy and average years of schooling), and income (according to PPP), the United Nations assigns each country of the world, for which there are enough data, an HDI decimal number between 0 and 1; the closer a country is to 1, the better is its level of human development.

Of 173 countries ranked according to HDI by the United Nations Development Programme in 2002, Norway (.942) was at the top and Sierra Leone (.275) was ranked last. Countries such as the United States (6), Japan (9), France (12), Britain (13), Israel (22), Singapore (25), and the Republic of (South) Korea (27) scored as having “high human development”; Mexico (54), Brazil (73), China (96), Iran (98), India (124), and Kenya (134) had “medium human development”; and Pakistan (138) and Nigeria (148) were ranked as having “low human development.”

differ in the balance between agricultural and industrial production in their economies, how successful they are in competing with other countries that offer similar products in international markets, and the relative importance of market forces versus government control of the economy.

Most developing countries are taking steps to reduce the state’s role in regulating the economy and are increasing the nation’s involvement in the international economy by expanding exports and seeking foreign investment. The collapse of communism and the discrediting of the socialist model of extensive government control of the economy have vastly increased the global economic influence of the world’s great capitalist powers, including the United States, Japan, and Germany. Furthermore, the World Bank and the
International Monetary Fund (another major source of economic aid and advice for developing countries) are taking the lead—sometimes quite forcefully—in steering developing countries toward economic liberalization. Some observers see the emphasis on free markets and international competition that are at the heart of economic liberalization as a blueprint for development and modernization. Others see the pressures on developing countries to liberalize their economies as an example of neo-imperialism, in which the powerful capitalist countries are once again dictating policies to the Third World. In either case, the trend toward economic liberalization—which, in one way or another, affects every country included in this book—demonstrates how a state’s approach to governing its economy is strongly shaped by its position in the world of states.

A puzzle: What is the relationship between economic development and political democracy? There are several aspects of this puzzle that you should ponder while reading this book.

First, are democratic states more or less able to pursue effective developmental strategies? Although all economies, even the most powerful, experience ups and downs, the United States, Canada, and the countries of the European Union—all democracies—have been notable economic success stories. Yet until the East Asian economic crisis that began in 1997, several countries with authoritarian regimes had also achieved remarkable records of development. The Republic of Korea (South Korea), Taiwan, and Singapore surged economically in the 1960s and 1970s, and Malaysia and Thailand followed suit in the 1980s and 1990s. Much of East Asia remains in the throes of an economic downturn and loss of international confidence by investors and international financial organizations such as the International Monetary Fund, which question whether the nondemocratic elements of political regimes will allow them to reform institutions effectively and stabilize their economies. But Amartya Sen has argued recently, “There is no clear relation between economic growth and democracy in either direction.” Indeed, as the case of India shows, it is possible to have democracy without development—or at least with only very limited development. Democracy may give the poor a voice in government, but it can also allow the economic elite to use their political power to block needed changes (such as land reform or poverty alleviation). In contrast, China, an authoritarian communist party-state that has enjoyed the highest growth rate in the world since the early 1990s, provides a vivid example of development without democracy. As you read the country studies, think about how democracy may help or hinder the state in its task to govern the economy.

Second, what special burdens do the difficult economic conditions typical of the developing world impose on a country that is trying to establish or sustain democracy? Many social scientists have argued that for democracy to take root and flourish, a certain level of economic development—one characterized, for example, by a decent average standard of living, extensive urbanization, a large middle class, and high literacy rates—is necessary. Yet democratization has recently spread to some of the world’s poorest countries (such as Mozambique and Nepal), which do not meet any of these socioeconomic prerequisites. What chance does democracy have to flourish in such circumstances? In this book, another very poor nation, Nigeria, is the clearest case of a country in the early stages of the transition from authoritarianism to democracy. Its struggle to establish democracy must be understood within the context of the special economic challenges it faces as a low-income developing nation. Do these challenges make it harder for Nigeria to build the kind of basic national consensus and spirit of compromise on which a healthy democracy depends? Economic failure was one of the principal causes of the collapse of many dictatorial regimes in recent decades. The political fate of the new democracies of the Third World will also depend largely on their economic records.

Third, in what ways, and with what effects, do economic development and modernization create pressures for further democratization in the Third World? Social scientists have also observed that as an economy and society become more modern and complex, as incomes and educational levels rise, and as a country becomes more connected economically and in other ways to the outside world, the pressures on a state to democratize tend to grow. These pressures may come from within the government itself, from the society below, or from abroad. In what ways has the modernizing economy and society influenced the
process of democratization in countries such as Brazil and Mexico? How has successful economic development in China generated powerful pressures for political change that confront an authoritarian government with fundamental challenges?

Theme 4: The Politics of Collective Identity

How do individuals understand who they are in political terms, and on what basis do groups of people come together to advance common political aims? In other words, what are the sources of collective political identity? At one point, social scientists thought they knew the answer. Observers argued that the age-old loyalties of ethnicity, religious affiliation, race, gender, and locality were being dissolved and displaced by economic, political, and cultural modernization. Comparativists thought that social class—solidarities based on the shared experience of work or, more broadly, economic position—had become the most important source of collective identity. They believed that most of the time, groups would pragmatically pursue their interests in ways that were not politically destabilizing. We now know that the formation of group attachments and the interplay of politically relevant collective identities are far more complex and uncertain.

In many industrial democracies, such as the United States and Canada, the importance of identities based on class membership has declined, although class and material sources of collective political identity remain significant in political competition and economic organization. But in much of the Third World, class remains a very potent source of identity and political conflict because of the extreme socioeconomic inequalities and barriers to social mobility that are found in these countries. By contrast, contrary to earlier predictions, in many developed and developing countries, nonclass identities have assumed growing, not diminishing, significance. These affiliations develop from a sense of belonging to particular groups based on language, region, religion, ethnicity, race, nationality, or gender. Conflict based on such affiliations is often particularly intense in postcolonial countries like Nigeria, where colonial authorities drew borders with little regard to preexisting collective identities. This process of state formation by the imposition of external power sowed seeds for future ethnic conflict in Nigeria and elsewhere and threatens the prospects for democracy in many postcolonial countries.

The politics of collective political identity involves struggles to define which groups are full participants in the political community and which are marginalized or even ostracized. It also involves a constant tug of war over relative power and influence, both symbolic and substantive, among groups. And there are questions of representation: Who is included in an ethnic minority community, for example, or who speaks for the community or negotiates with a governmental authority on its behalf? One reason that conflict around these questions can be so intense is that political leaders in the state and in opposition movements often seek to mobilize support by exploiting ethnic, religious, racial, or regional rivalries and manipulating the issue of representation. Every country in this book is, in one way or another, challenged by intense and sometimes violent identity-based conflicts that involve issues of inclusion, political recognition, and priority.

A puzzle: collective identity and distributional politics. Once identity demands are placed on the political agenda, can governments resolve them by distributing political, economic, and other resources in ways that redress the grievances of the minority or politically weaker identity groups? Collective identities operate at the level of symbols, attitudes, values, and beliefs and at the level of material resources. However, the contrast between material- and nonmaterial-based identities and demands should not be exaggerated. In practice, most groups are animated by both feelings of attachment and solidarity and the desire to obtain material benefits and political influence for their members. But the analytical distinction between material and nonmaterial demands remains useful, and it is worth considering whether the nonmaterial aspects of the politics of collective identities make political disputes over ethnicity or religion or language or nationality especially divisive and difficult to resolve.

In a situation of extreme scarcity, as is found in much of the developing world, it may prove nearly impossible to reach any compromise among groups with conflicting material demands. But if an adequate level of material resources is available, such conflicts may be easier to resolve because groups can negotiate
at least a minimally satisfying share of resources. This process of determining who gets what or how resources are distributed is called distributional politics. However, the demands of ethnic, religious, and nationalist movements may be difficult to satisfy by a distributional style of politics. The distributional style may be quite ineffective when, for example, a religious group demands that the government require all citizens to conform to its social practices, or a dominant linguistic group insists that a single language be used in education and government throughout the country. In such cases, political conflict tends to move from the distributive realm to the cultural realm, where compromises cannot be achieved by simply dividing the pie of material resources. The country studies examine a wide range of distributional conflicts involving collective identities. It will be interesting (and possibly troubling) to ponder whether and under what conditions they are subject to the normal give-and-take of political bargaining—and when, instead, they lead to the fury and blood of political violence.

Section 5 Organization of the Text

The core of this book consists of six case studies selected for their significance in terms of our comparative themes and ability to provide a reasonable cross-section of types of political regimes and geographic regions in the developing world. Although each of the country studies makes important comparative references, the studies are primarily intended to provide detailed descriptions and analyses of the politics of individual countries. At the same time, the country studies have common section and subsection headings to help you make comparisons and explore similar themes across the various cases. Following are brief summaries of the main issues and questions covered in the country studies.

1: The Making of the Modern State

Section 1 in each chapter provides an overview of the forces that have shaped the particular character of the state. We believe that an understanding of the contemporary politics of any country requires some familiarity with the historical process by which its current political system was formed. “Politics in Action” uses a specific event to illustrate an important political moment in the country’s recent history and to highlight some of the critical political issues it faces. “Geographic Setting” locates the country in its regional context and discusses the political implications of its geographic setting. “Critical Junctures” looks at some of the major stages and decisive turning points in state development. This discussion should give you an idea of how the country assumed its current political order and a sense of how relations between state and society have developed over time. “Themes and Implications” shows how the past pattern of state development continues to shape the country’s current political agenda. “Historical Junctures and Political Themes” applies the text’s core themes to the making of the modern state: How was the country’s political development affected by its place in the world of states? What are the political implications of the state’s approach to economic management? What has been the country’s experience with the democratic idea? What are the important bases of collective identity in the country, and how do these relate to the people’s image of themselves as citizens of the state? “Implications for Comparative Politics” discusses the broader significance of the country for the study of comparative politics.

2: Political Economy and Development

Section 2 in each chapter traces the country’s recent and contemporary economic development. It explores the issues raised by the core theme of governing the