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Introducing Comparative Politics: Concepts and Cases In Context

Orvis S, Drogus C

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Have you been tempted to teach your intro course thematically, but are afraid that your students will be unable to see how concepts relate to actual countries? Yet sticking with a country by-country approach means never being able to fully address the questions that really engage comparativists. But that has its drawbacks as well. Is there an ideal middle ground between the current text approaches to the field? Carol Ann Drogus and Stephen Orvis, a Latin Americanist and an Africanist by training, offer an innovative hybrid approach to the field. The book is organized thematically around important concepts in comparative politics; in turn, each chapter is framed by the questions of who rules?, what motivates political behavior?, and where and why? Then, within each chapter, the authors have integrated a set of extended case studies based on a selection of ten "core" countries. Serving as consistent geographic touchstones, students get to know these countries as they accumulate conceptual knowledge. The cases are placed in chapters where they make the most sense substantively-not separated from theory or in a separate volume-and vividly illustrate issues in cross-national context. An array of thematic features extends the book's analysis and effectively integrates case material: -Case Studies Forming the backbone of country coverage, these "baseline" cases are substantial enough for students to build foundational knowledge about the ten core countries of Brazil, China, Germany, India, Iran, Japan, Nigeria, Russia, the UK, and the U.S. Because each case is tied to an analytic question or idea, students aren't lost in a sea of detail, but rather see country coverage in real thematic context. -Mini-cases Because no group of core countries can illustrate the full scope of issues in comparative politics, the authors include "mini-cases" throughout the book. These briefer cases focus on topics such as state failure, ethnic violence, and economic differences and feature countries about which most other texts say very little: Afghanistan, Chile, Cuba, Guatemala, Kenya, the Philippines, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Sierra Leone, Vietnam, Zimbabwe, and others. -In Context These short fact lists-like those students might find in an opinion-leader periodical such as Harper's-take simple data and put them into interesting, often provocative context. The number of military coups in Africa versus Latin America or the change over time in the number of one-party states might surprise students and offer enlightening perspective for thinking through an issue. -Where and Why? In these boxes, students explore why certain events and developments happen in some countries and not in others. Why have some countries been able to develop enduring democratic governments, while others remain or become authoritarian? Or, why do some states have women in powerful political positions while others do not? -Country and Concept The majority of chapters include a table that shows key indicators for the core countries. For instance, in the chapter on the modern state, the authors include such data as each state's year of establishment, its failed state ranking, its government revenue as percentage of GDP, and its rating on the corruption perception index-all important measures of each state's size and nature. Helping students critically read as well as review and study: * Chapter-opener questions * Bolded key terms and glossary * Data-rich tables and figures * Substantive maps * Compelling and instructive photos * End-of-chapter lists that include key concepts, work cited, seminal books and articles, and important online databases

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