Magruder’s
American Government

CHAPTER 22
Comparative Political Systems
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SECTION 1  Great Britain

SECTION 2  Japan

SECTION 3  Mexico

SECTION 4  Russia

SECTION 5  China
Great Britain

- What elements make up Britain’s unwritten constitution?
- What is the role of the English monarchy?
- What is the role of Parliament?
- How have changes affected regional and local government in Britain?
- How can we describe the British court system?
Unwritten Constitution

• The British constitution is not entirely unwritten. The written parts are called the law of the constitution, and the unwritten parts are called the conventions of the constitution.

The Law of the Constitution

• Many historic documents figure in the written parts of Britain’s constitution, such as the Magna Carta, the Petition of Right, and the Bill of Rights. A body of legal rules has also been recorded in centuries of court decisions.

The Conventions of the Constitution

• The customs and practices of British politics make up the bulk of the unwritten constitution. The system is flexible, but provides no absolute safeguards for people’s rights.
The Monarchy

In contrast to republics such as the United States and France, Britain is a **monarchy**, with a hereditary ruler.

- In formal terms, all acts of the British government are performed in the name of the queen.

- The queen, however, has very little influence on the daily running of the British government.

- One of the queen’s responsibilities is to appoint the prime minister, but the appointment is still subject to approval of the House of Commons.

- It can be said that the British monarch reigns but does not rule.
Parliament is divided into two houses: the House of Lords and the House of Commons.

**The House of Lords**

- The upper house, the House of Lords, consists of members appointed by the queen on the advice of the prime minister.
- The House of Lords has limited power. Lords can delay, but not block, passage of bills passed in the House of Commons, and they serve as the final court of appeals in the British court system.

**The House of Commons**

- The lower house, the House of Commons, consists of 659 elected officials.
- The Commons is responsible for initial passage of British legislation.
- The majority party in the Commons largely controls the work that body undertakes.
• **The Prime Minister**

  The prime minister is chosen by the queen and subject to the approval of the Commons.

• **The Cabinet**

  Ministers, or cabinet members, are chosen by the prime minister. The cabinet, along with the prime minister, provides political leadership. Cabinet members also head the various executive departments.

• **Calling Elections**

  There is no fixed date for parliamentary elections. Instead, under normal conditions, a prime minister announces the date of the next election (at least once every five years). Elections can also be called if the government loses a vote of confidence.

• **Political Parties**

  High levels of party loyalty and party discipline characterize the British party system.
Regional and Local Government

As in the American federal system, there is no constitutional division of power between the national and regional and local governments in Britain.

Devolution

- The UK has recently undergone a process of devolution, or the delegation of authority from the central government to the regional governments.

- In 1998, the British Parliament passed three acts; each respectively creating a Scottish Parliament, a National Assembly for Wales, and a Northern Ireland Assembly. Each has limited powers over legislation affecting their respective nations.

Local Government

- Today, there are 468 local authorities of varying types in the United Kingdom.

- Similar to local governments in the U.S., British local government bodies are responsible for such functions as running local schools and libraries to collecting trash and maintaining roads.
The Courts

- The UK has three separate court systems—one in England and Wales, one in Scotland, and one in Northern Ireland.

- In England and Wales, most civil cases are tried in county courts. Serious (indictable) criminal offenses are tried in the Crown Court, and less serious criminal offenses in the magistrates’ courts. The House of Lords is the final court of appeal for cases tried in the Crown Court.

- The Scottish courts are completely different from the rest of the UK’s courts, having maintained separate courts after its union with the UK in 1707.

- Courts in the UK decide cases based primarily on parliamentary legislation and common law, or on the standards established by judicial precedent.
Section 1 Review

1. What two powers do Parliament hold?
   (a) judicial and legislative
   (b) legislative and executive
   (c) constitutional and judicial
   (d) executive and judicial

2. In the United Kingdom, general elections are held
   (a) once every four years.
   (b) once every eight years.
   (c) once every five years, at the prime minister’s discretion.
   (d) at the prime minister’s discretion.

Want to connect to the Magruder’s link for this chapter? Click Here!
• What are characteristics of early Japanese government and the Japanese constitution?

• What is the structure and what are functions of the National Diet?

• How do the prime minister and the cabinet perform the nation’s executive functions?

• What roles do the Japanese bureaucracy, political parties, and courts fulfill?

• How are regional and local government carried out in Japan?
Early Japanese Government

• The political system of early Japan resembled that of medieval Europe’s feudal system. It remained that way in part due to its geographic and political isolation from the rest of the world.

• Dutch and Portuguese traders began contacting the Japanese in the 16th and 17th centuries. Significant Western contacts began with the visitation of a U.S. naval fleet to Japan in 1853.

• Japan began to modernize during the second half of the 19th century. Soon thereafter, it became an imperial power and aimed to dominate all of East Asia.

• However, Japan was dealt a crushing defeat in World War II, leading to the formation of the current government.
The Constitution

- Japan’s current constitution, adopted in 1947, was written under the watchful eye of American authorities.
- The current Japanese constitution places the right to govern in the hands of the people, instead of in the hands of the emperor.
- Basic freedoms, paralleling many of the freedoms guaranteed in the U.S. Bill of Rights, are granted in the Japanese constitution.
- A unique anti-military clause is also part of the Japanese constitution, stating that the Japanese people “forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation.”
The National Diet

The National Diet is Japan’s Parliament. It is divided into two houses:

House of Councillors

• Consisting of 252 members who are elected every six years, the House of Councillors holds much prestige, but has little real governing power.

• The House of Councillors votes on all bills, although it can be overridden by a two-thirds vote by the House of Representatives.

House of Representatives

• The House of Representatives consists of 500 members, 300 of which are elected from single-member districts, and 200 from 11 larger multi-seat districts.

• The powers of the House of Representatives include the right to call for a vote of no confidence, to make treaties, to raise funds, and to make appropriations.

Japanese society places great emphasis on avoiding confrontation. Therefore, politicians seek to reach consensus, or broad agreement on issues.
### Executive Functions

- The prime minister and the cabinet perform the executive functions of government in Japan.
- The prime minister is elected by the House of Representatives. The prime minister picks the cabinet members.
- The prime minister has the power to dissolve the House of Representatives. If she/he calls for a **dissolution**, a general election takes place to elect and fill all 500 seats in the lower house.

### Bureaucracy

- The Japanese bureaucracy, or civil service, is unusually well-respected and powerful in Japanese society.
- Even though civil service jobs don’t pay well, positions are still sought after and can lead to cabinet appointments.
Political Parties

- Until the 1990s, one party, the Liberal Democrats, dominated Japan’s political system. Beginning in 1993, new parties emerged and have since combined with each other and the Liberal Democrats to bring some variety to Japan’s political scene.

Courts

- Japan’s judicial system is patterned on the American model. It is independent from the legislative and executive branches. Unlike Britain’s courts, judges are given the power of judicial review, although they have seldom declared a law unconstitutional.
Regional and Local Government

Regional Government

- At the regional level, Japan is divided into 47 political subdivisions called **prefectures**, each with an elected governor and legislature.
- Prefectures can levy taxes to pay for roads, hospitals, and police protection.
- The bulk of funding for prefectures comes from the central government, which makes them weaker than States.

Local Government

- There are 3,200 municipalities in Japan.
- Municipalities elect mayors. They can elect an assembly or appoint a council to help the mayor.
- Municipalities are responsible for fire protection, trash collection, local roads and water.
Section 2 Review

1. The Japanese government is a
   (a) monarchy.
   (b) dictatorship.
   (c) parliamentary democracy.
   (d) republican democracy.

2. The dominant party in Japanese politics for a long time was
   (a) the Liberal Democrat Party.
   (b) the Japan Socialist Party.
   (c) the Japan Communist Party.
   (d) the Japan Democratic Party.

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Mexico

• What characterized Mexico’s early political history?

• What are the three branches of the Mexican government?

• What changes have happened recently in Mexico’s national politics?

• How are Mexico’s regional and local government structured?
Mexico’s Early Political History

• Mexico won independence from Spain in 1821 and adopted its first constitution in 1824.

• A revised constitution was written during a reform movement in 1857, amidst a century of governmental upheaval.

• Finally, in 1917, a reform movement called the Regeneration Group overthrew the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz and produced the Constitution of 1917.
Three Branches of Mexican Government

Executive
- The President
  Elected for a single six-year term

Legislative
- Senate
  64 senators are elected to six-year terms
- Chamber of Deputies
  500 deputies elected to single three-year terms

National Judiciary
- State
  Headed by a state Supreme Court of Justice
- Federal
  Headed by the Supreme Court

Three Branches of the Mexican Government
The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI)

- As in Japan, Mexican politics in the 20th century have been dominated by one party, the PRI. From 1929 to 2000, the PRI’s presidential candidate won every election. In the 1980s and 1990s, acceptance of the PRI began to wane.

The 2000 Election

- By election time in 2000, the PRI had lost its stranglehold on the legislature. Federal elections in Mexico are well-protected from fraud (which the PRI had been accused of in local elections), and when the votes were tallied, Vicente Fox of the Nation Action Party (PAN) had won an historic victory.
2006 Presidential Election

- In 2006, the PAN party candidate Felipe Calderon won a close victory over PRD candidate Lopez Obrador in Mexico’s presidential election.

Mexico’s president elect Felipe Calderon.
Current President

Enrique Peña Nieto took office in December of 2012 and is a member of the PRI.
Regional and Local Government

- Mexico is divided into 31 states and one Federal District (which is similar to the District of Columbia).
- Each of the 31 states has a constitution that provides for:
  - A governor who is elected to a single six-year term
  - A unicameral legislature whose members are elected to three-year terms
  - State courts with governor appointed judges
- States have the power to legislate local matters and levy taxes, but most of their funding comes from the national level.
1. Mexico was originally a _____ colony.
   (a) French
   (b) Spanish
   (c) Dutch
   (d) Portuguese

2. What party dominated Mexican politics for more than 65 years?
   (a) the National Action Party (PAN)
   (b) the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD)
   (c) Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI)
   (d) Mexican Social Party (PSM)

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Russia

• What has been Russia’s political history since the Bolshevik Revolution?

• How was the Soviet government structured?

• How did Mikhail Gorbachev reform Soviet government?

• What events led to the fall of the Soviet Union?

• How is the Russian government structured today?
Political History of Russia

1721–1917
Tyrannical czars in the line of Peter the Great rule Russia

1917
The Bolshevik Revolution causes Czar Nicholas II to abdicate

1917–1924
Communist Leader V.I. Lenin creates the Soviet Union

1926–1953
Stalin rules the Soviet Union under the guise of Communism but in a tyrannical manner
Soviet Government Structure

• **The Soviet Constitution:** 1) did not embody fundamental law, 2) was not a charter intended to limit government power, and 3) did not guarantee Soviet citizens freedom of speech, press, or association.

• **The Legislature:** under communist control, the Supreme Soviet assembled a few days each year to rubber stamp the decrees of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). Citizens voted for members of the legislature, but usually only one candidate ran for each office.

• **The Communist Party:** from 1917 to 1990, the only political party in the Soviet Union. About nine percent of the population was a part of the elite party. On top of a pyramid-like structure was the Central Committee, the Politburo, and the general secretary.

• **The Central Committee** assembled every six months to elect the Politburo, which ran the party. The general secretary headed the Politburo.
Gorbachev’s Reforms

• In 1985, Soviet general secretary Mikhail Gorbachev undertook a reform program that rested on the principles of *perestroika*, the restructuring of political and economic life, and *glasnost*, the policy of openness that increased tolerance of dissent and freedom of expression.

• To accomplish his reforms, Gorbachev:
  • Created a legislature where a large Congress of People’s Deputies, elected by the people in competitive, multi-candidate elections, in turn elected the smaller legislative body of the Supreme Soviet.
  • Created the office of president of the Soviet Union. This official was distinct from the head of the Communist Party.
  • Reduced the Communist Party’s power and allowed other political parties to exist.
Fall of the Soviet Union

• Starting in 1989, a wave of democratization rolled across Eastern Europe and the Soviet Republics.

• In 1991, Communist Party leaders staged a last-ditch coup which failed quickly. In the months that followed all of the former Soviet Republics left the Union.

• Realizing that Boris Yeltsin, as the president of the Russian Republic, held more power than he did, Gorbachev resigned on December 25, 1991.
Russian Government Today

• A new constitution was approved by the Russian Federation in 1993. It sets out a new government structure and contains an extensive list of individuals rights—guarantees of freedom of speech, press, association, religious belief, movement within the federation, housing and free medical care and education.

• The new constitution set up a government with three branches. The Executive branch is led by a popularly elected president, who appoints a prime minister and other ministers to head departments of government. The legislature is bicameral, with the larger State Duma having more power, including confirmation of the president’s choice of prime minister. A 19-member Constitutional Court rules on the constitutionality of laws. Its judges are elected to 12-year terms.
1. Until 1917, the Russian Empire was ruled by
   (a) Kings and Queens.
   (b) Czars and Czarinas.
   (c) an elected dictator.
   (d) a constitutional monarch.

2. What rights does the Russian Federation’s constitution guarantee?
   (a) freedom of speech
   (b) freedom of press
   (c) freedom to receive free health care and education
   (d) all of the above

Want to connect to the Magruder’s link for this section? Click Here!
• What are key events in China’s political history?

• How is China governed today?

Chinese president Xi Jinping
March 2013
The People’s Republic of China was established in 1949 when Mao Zedong’s Red Army finally vanquished Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalists after decades of civil war. Nationalists fled to Taiwan.

To increase agricultural and industrial production in China, Mao instituted a series of drastic Five-Year Plans. Frequent and extreme changes in policy had the opposite of their intended effect.
Political Background

• In the mid-1960s, Mao tried to purge China of old thoughts, old culture, old customs, and old habits to strengthen the Communist philosophy. His plan was called the **Cultural Revolution**, and led to much violence and many atrocities committed by Mao’s overzealous Red Guard.

• Mao abandoned the Cultural Revolution in 1968. In 1976, Deng Xiaoping came to power after Mao’s death. Deng’s reforms loosened government control of the economy, but did not grant the people more human rights. A dramatic example of this was the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989.
China’s Communist Party

- The Chinese Communist Party has 58 million members in China.
- It is organized in a similar way to the government of the former Soviet Union. A 1,900 member National Party Congress elects a smaller Central Committee, which in turn elects the 20-member Politburo. The Politburo makes party policy and organizes the Secretariat.

China’s Government

- The government of China is composed of two main bodies, the National People’s Congress and the State Council. Nominally, the National People’s Council is the highest authority in the land. In reality, it passes policy decisions made by the State Council and the Party onto lower levels of government.
- The State Council is headed by the premier, who is chosen by the Party.
Other Aspects of China’s Government

• China’s constitution is not meant to be fundamental law. Instead, it reflects current governmental policies. China has had four constitutions since 1949—in 1954, 1975, 1978, and 1982.

• China has a system of “people’s courts” that handles criminal and civil cases. The highest judicial authority is the Supreme People’s Court.

• China has 22 provinces and 5 autonomous regions. The central government exerts direct control over these subdivisions.

• Hong Kong is a special administrative region. Taiwan continues to have an independent government and claims China as one of its provinces. China, in turn, behaves as if Taiwan is one of its provinces.
1. _______ was the leader who helped establish Communism in China.
   (a) Chiang Kai-shek
   (b) Deng Xiaoping
   (c) Mao Zedong
   (d) Jiang Zemin

2. China has had _____ constitutions since 1949.
   (a) two.
   (b) four
   (c) six
   (d) eight

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