



Article

## Without Comparison True Knowledge Is Hanging: Exploring the Relevance of Comparative Politics

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### Abstract

This paper explores the relevance of comparison in establishing true knowledge. The paper identifies comparison as an explanatory approach that is well-established in comparative politics than in most disciplines. Justifying that comparative politics is central to political science because it employs comparison as a major instrument to study global politics, it expounds that the use of comparison assists comparativists in examining political issues to see how they are similar or different from one another thereby establishing true knowledge. Certain questions emerge: what are the roles of comparison in comparative politics? Are there limits to what we can know and compare? To what extent can comparison assist in establishing true knowledge? Drawing from secondary data and comparative analytical technique, the paper argues that all comparative studies involve the use of comparison and all comparisons are driven by a desire to identify similarities and dissimilarities between social phenomena otherwise true knowledge is hanging.

### Keywords

Comparison, True Knowledge, Comparative Method, Comparative Politics, Political Analysis

### Introduction

*“Without comparison to make, the mind does not know how to proceed”. –  
Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-59)*

Comparison or the act of comparing has been a major instrument of evaluating the similarities and dissimilarities between two or more things. The importance of comparison across different culture, social groups and disciplines cannot be over-emphasized. In most fields of studies, acquisition of knowledge or understanding in learning is acquired largely through a process of comparison. In political science, comparing various forms of governments has been one of the principal concerns of political analysis through the ages. Scholars such as Hague and Harrop (2010) and Johari (2013) have traced the process of comparison back to the fourth Century BCE, when Aristotle made the first recorded attempt to compare and describe the political regimes then in existence, using terms such as ‘democracy’, ‘oligarchy’ and ‘tyranny’ that are still commonly employed today. The interest in comparing political systems stems largely from the fact that comparison is an essential aid to the understanding of politics and government.

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Comparative politics is central to political science because it first apply comparison to study global issues. Comparative politics tries to clarify whether certain behavioural patterns are characteristics of a certain political group or a certain culture or whether they are valid for all political systems (Kalleberg, 1966, Johari, 2013). According to Kalleberg “comparison has been a major analytical tool that facilitates systematic evaluation across cultures, permits more abstract analysis so as to avoid mere description and ambiguous usage of terms within and across political systems”.

Johari (2013) acknowledged the contributions made to the study of comparative politics by great figures like Aristotle, Machiavelli, de Tocqueville, Bryce, Ostrogorski and Weber as the first generation of scholars who utilized the comparative method or the act of comparison for the primary purpose of having better understanding of the working of political organizations. These scholars employed the instrument of comparison or what is called, the comparative method to study the existing polities or those which had existed in the past to discover the ideal types of government and progressive forces of political history. Beer and Ulam (1968) and Macridis (1955) cited in Johari (2013) are some of the writers in the second phase of the development of comparative politics who made use of the comparative method as a deliberate tool to present a more useful study of different political institutions. According to Johari, this category of scholars employed the instruments of institutional comparisons in a more rigorous manner to present a better study of ‘political systems’ or what could be referred to as study of the governments. In other words, the writers in this era were concerned with the various strategies of comparison such as area studies, institutional and functional comparisons, a problem-based study, conceptualization, validity issue, cross-cultural difficulties and the availability of data (Johari, 2013).

In the same vein, Hague and Harrop (2010) and Johari (2013) identified the contributions of David Easton, Gabriel A. Almond, James C. Coleman, Karl Deutsch, G. B. Powell, Harold Lasswell, Robert A. Dahl, Edward Shils, Harry Eckstein, David Apter, Lucian W. Pye, Sidney Verba, Myron Weiner as some of the important recent writers who made use of the comparative method to present a more useful study of different political institutions and systems. As a matter of fact, these scholars may rightly be described as the pathfinders of an increasingly sophisticated phase in the growth and development of comparative politics. No doubt, many of these scholars have made useful contributions towards the development of the comparative methods of analysis in comparative politics. Their contributions have advanced the relevance of the concept of comparison as an analytical and explanatory tool commonly applicable to any political analysis.

In the attempt to give a clear and unambiguous explanation of the relevance of comparison to true knowledge, the following research questions emerge: what are the roles of comparison in comparative politics? Are there limits to what we can know and compare? To what extent can comparison assist in establishing true knowledge?

## **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION**

### **Concept of Comparison**

The concept of comparison has generated myriads of intellectual postulations and serious attentions across disciplines. Comparison as an explanatory and analytical concept is well-established in comparative politics more than in most disciplines (Hague & Harrop, 2010; Andrea & Nicholas, 2019; Johari, 2006; 2013; Heywood, 2007; Kennedy, 2014; and Wellwood, 2015). According to Andrea and Nicholas, comparison in comparative politics involves the comparative study of other countries, citizens, different political units either in whole or in parts, and analyses of the similarities and differences between those political units. The import of this conceptualization is that comparison is the act of examining political issues to see how they are similar or different from one another. For example, comparative federalism helps in the effort to identify similarities and differences between federations across the globe.

It helps to evaluate characteristics that distinguish one federal system from another or democratic countries from those that are not democratic. Through the use of comparison, Lijphart (2009) was able to distinguish majoritarian from consensus democracies. To all intent and purposes, comparison as an analytical term in comparative politics broadens our understanding of the political world. It helps us to understand politics and government obtainable in different political systems.

Kennedy (2014) described comparison as the ability to establish orderings among objects and compare between them according to the amount or degree to which they possess some properties. He argued that comparison takes place in all natural languages. What this means is that the use of comparison transcends the realm of politics to include all human languages. According to him, “all languages have syntactic categories that express gradable concepts, and all languages have designated comparative constructions, which are used to express orderings between two objects with respect to the degree or amount, to which they possess some properties”. This largely explains why elders in Yoruba, for instance, often say that “Epo epa ko jo posi eleri” (ohun to jora la fi nwera). What this connotes is that to compare things, they must have characteristics that are similar enough in relevant ways to merit comparison.

Wellwood (2015) referred to comparison as the act of evaluating properties that appears to distinguish one thing from another. Hague and Harrop (2010: p.46) conceptualized comparison as a term employed in comparative politics to broaden our understanding of the political world, leading to improved classification and giving potential for explanation and even prediction. Johari (2006: p.41) sees comparison as a method in comparative politics. This method, according to him, consists in drawing generalizations through comparisons. Kalleberg (1966) reinforced this viewpoint when he described comparison as a basic methodological concept. That is, a form of measurement, and a method. According to him, “comparison is a major analytical tool that facilitates systematic evaluation across cultures, permits more abstract analysis such that will avoid mere description and ambiguous usage of terms within and across political systems”.

Heywood (2007: p.26) postulated that comparison is a process of classifying political systems in order to aid the understanding of politics and government. According to him, understanding in politics, as in most social sciences, is acquired largely through a process of comparison as experimental methods are generally problematic.

Hague and Harrop (2010: p.50-51) argued that comparison could be made in qualitative and quantitative forms. According to them, qualitative comparisons fall between case studies and statistical analysis. These are forms of comparisons consisting of small-N studies that concentrate on intensive comparison of an aspect of politics in two or three countries. They argued that in qualitative comparisons, a few countries are compared over time, examining how they vary in responding to common problems or arriving at distinct outcomes. Quantitative comparisons on the other hand, described as statistical analysis is based on variables rather than cases. The import of their argument is that statistical researches (whether qualitative or quantitative) are inherently comparative because its focus is to explore the extent to which variables allow comparativists to make predictions. Variables like revolution, peace, compliance, authority, poverty etc. when conceptualized could amount to different things.

From the foregoing analysis, there is one line of agreement among the scholars. The various authors' conceptual perspectives showed that students of political science arrive at certain conclusions by comparing different political systems, political institutions or political ideas thereby establishing true knowledge on subject matters under discussion. In their general views, the authors agreed that a process of comparison is required to establish true knowledge in political science and in most social sciences. Comparison, therefore, is a fundamental human way of knowing (Hague & Harrop, 2010; Andrea & Nichola, 2019; Johari, 2006; 2013; Heywood, 2007; Kalleberg, 1966; Kennedy, 2014 and Wellwood, 2015). They agreed that comparison is a process by which we practically build our community of

knowing, apprehending our shared uncertainties. They showed the usefulness of comparison across different cultures, social groups and disciplines.

In consequence, comparison is the primary tool that helps comparativists to establish true knowledge in political science. It is the act of evaluating two or more political phenomena by determining the relevant comparable characteristics of each, and then determining which characteristics are similar to the other, which are different, and to what degree. In other words, comparison assists in bringing two or more things together (physically or in contemplation) and to examine them systematically with the primary aim of identifying similarities and differences among them. By highlighting similarities and differences between two or more things or collections of facts, comparison helps us to distinguish between what is significant and meaningful, and what is not. Suffice therefore to argue that comparison improves comprehension making abstract ideas more concrete and determining the relevant, comparable characteristics of each political system, and then determining which characteristics are similar to others, which are different, and to what degree. What is important here is that to compare things, they must have characteristics that are similar enough in relevant ways to merit comparison. Where characteristics are different, the differences may then be evaluated to determine which thing is best suited for a purpose. Comparison is not only a scientific method; it is an everyday social practice. People do compare on a daily basis. All comparisons are driven by an interest to establish true knowledge. Through comparison we are able to develop theories, hypotheses and concepts, and to some extent, to test them (Heywood, 2007; Johari, 2006; and 2013). Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-59) cited in Heywood (2007) gave credence to this viewpoint when he posited that “without comparison to make, the mind does not know how to proceed”.

### **Concept of True Knowledge**

Knowledge as a concept has attracted an extensive and controversial debates from the Greek philosophers up to the contemporary scholars in epistemology (the study of knowledge in philosophy). Scholars through the ages have tried to define knowledge but the attempt to provide a universally accepted definition of the concept had remained elusive and problematic (Bewaji, 2007; Bolisani & Bratianu, 2018; Denning, 2002; and Craighead 2001). Bewaji (2007:14) has shown that attaining knowledge has always been a great human desire and because of this, understanding knowledge as a concept and as an instrument has been a serious pre-occupation of the reflective members of all civilized societies from time immemorial.

In the attempt by scholars to give an account or acceptable definition of knowledge, various theories of knowledge such as correspondence, coherence, pragmatic and semantic theories of truth were developed to meet the needs for understanding the concept. Unfortunately, these theories, deriving from various origins and motives, have evolved in often paradoxical ways, leading at times to seemingly self-evidently contradictory conclusions (Bewaji, 2007). What this connotes is that various theories of knowledge have been developed to meet diverse needs for understanding and establishing true knowledge. However, our concern in this paper essentially is not to examine the various theories but to situate knowledge as an activity that is connected with “what we know, how we come to know it, and what it means to know something”. The term “knowledge” therefore has been described as a theoretical or practical understanding of a subject (Craighead, 2001; and Denning, 2002). Craighead posited that “all valid knowledge must be practical, i.e. it must relate to real things, and it must be theoretical, i.e. it must relate to concepts”. This definition links knowledge with reality. What this connotes is that knowledge does not exist in a vacuum. Knowledge is knowing about something by someone. Suffice therefore to say that there is nothing to know about something that does not exist. Bolisani and Bratianu (2018) give credence to this viewpoint when they argued that knowledge can be practical or theoretical understanding of a subject; formal or informal, objective or subjective. Perhaps this was what informed the opinion of Bewaji (2007:31) when he argued that “knowledge is the crucial element in all domains of life - be it practical or theoretical”.

Denning (2021) defined knowledge in terms of facts or ideas acquired by study, investigation, observation or experience. This is what epistemologists refer to as empirical knowledge. That is knowledge that is gained through experience, observation and pure reason. From the foregoing analysis, knowledge can be described as the sum of all the information created by the human race and acquired by man. It is the general awareness or possession of information, facts, ideas, truths or principles. Knowledge has been identified by philosophers with language, logic and human beliefs (Craighead, 2001; Vaughn, 2014 and Bolisani & Bratianu, 2018). They showed that philosophers have identified knowledge with statements or propositions that can be logically analyzed and validated.

An understanding of true knowledge, therefore, requires some grasp of its relationship to something that is believed that is true and that is verifiable (reliable). It goes to say that what makes the true condition of knowledge is establishing the existence of a phenomenon or a reality. By most accounts (Bewaji, 2007; Craighead, 2001; Vaughn, 2014; Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2020; and Bolisani & Bratianu, 2018), true knowledge can be acquired in many different ways and from many sources such as perception, reason, memory, testimony, scientific inquiry, education and practice. So, from all indications, the right way to establish true knowledge is epistemology, the philosophy or study of knowledge. This provides answers to the most basic questions raised in the quest to attain knowledge. Hence comparativists try to attain true knowledge through the use of comparison. Comparison assists in bringing two or more things together, physically or in contemplation, and to examine them systematically, identifying similarities and dissimilarities among them. By highlighting similarities and dissimilarities between two or more things or collections of facts, comparison improves comprehension, making abstract ideas more concrete, and helping to distinguish between what is significant and meaningful, and what is not. Such understanding forms the fact that provides for sound and true knowledge in comparative politics.

## **THEORETICAL ANALYSIS**

Comparative Analytical Technique serves as a theoretical analysis for this paper. In Political Science, the Comparative Analytical Technique as acknowledged by Hague and Harrop (2010), Heywood (2007), Johari (2013) and Andrea and Nicholas (2019) is largely associated with the works of Plato, Aristotle and Polybius. However, the classification of Aristotle is emphasized because it offers a scientific explanation of the organization and the difference between states and government. Essentially, the comparative theory assumes that similarities and differences are examined to assess the relationships of variants between two or more separate phenomena. It is this nature of the theory (analysis) that makes it comparative. The importance and theoretical value of comparative analysis to political science can be seen in its role and benefits it brings to the political field of research. It helps researchers to be able to isolate the independent variables of each study case. If the independent variables of “X” and “Y” exist, their relationship to dependent variable “Z” can be hypothesized, tested and established (Alexander, 2013).

The Comparative Analysis is a theoretical framework within political science that is largely employed in the study and analysis of political institutions and processes. It is by studying institutions and political processes of different countries through the use of an empirical methodological framework, that researchers are able to generate inferences without the ambiguity of generalization (Alexander 2013). Comparative theory assumes that researchers are at vintage position to ask questions of various political concerns such as the connection, if any, between capitalism and democratization or the nexus between federal and unitary states and electoral participation. Political analysis carried out through comparative methodology can be on either a single country or group of countries. It can be done across a local, regional, national and international scale. The Comparative Technique is well grounded upon empirical evidence, gathered through classification and systematic analysis of real-life political phenomena. That

is, the comparative theory is a method where researchers collect data about different political phenomena or social groups and then compare one with another to identify what is evident in one but not in another.

Consequently, the comparative theory is very helpful because of its explanation of and focus on the examination and assessment of the relationships of variants between two or more separate political phenomena thereby establishing true knowledge of the similarities and dissimilarities between or among them.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study relies on secondary source of data gathering and comparative analysis. Library and internet materials including scholarly books and journal articles were used to extract relevant information that assists the researchers to draw conclusions on the subject. The secondary materials used are adequate as it provide answers to the research questions raised in this study, and interpretative technique was used in presenting the data.

## **METHODS OF MAKING COMPARISON IN POLITICAL SCIENCE**

Traditionally, the methods of comparison in Political Science have been traced back to the fourth Century BCE, when Aristotle made the first recorded attempt to compare and describe the political regimes then in existence, using terms such as ‘monarchy versus tyranny’, ‘aristocracy versus oligarchy’ and ‘polity versus democracy’ that are still commonly used today (Hague & Harrop, 2010; Johari, 2013: and Heywood, 2007). Aristotle classified the political organizations of the ancient Greeks and presented an analytical comparison of their relevance to political development. The classification of Aristotle is emphasized because it offers a scientific explanation of political organizations and the distinction between state and government. The Aristotle’s six fold classification of states which is based on the number of persons in whose hand the authority of the state is vested and the quality of their rule in its pure versus perverted forms is essentially meant to justify the essence of forms of governments. Comparatively he argued that the ruling power may reside in the hands of one, or few, or many persons, while the nature of the exercise of their authority may be either good or bad. By the good or true form of state he means a kind of rule in which ruling power is exercised in the common interest of the people, while the perverted form is one where the ruling power is exercised in the self-interest of the ruling persons. According to Aristotle, the forms of states in the normal order include monarchy, aristocracy and polity, while their three corresponding forms; tyranny, oligarchy and democracy are in the perverted order. This classification is regarded as the first recorded attempt to engage the use of comparative method in political science (Hague & Harrop, 2010 and Johari, 2013).

Conversely, Johari (2013) acknowledged the contributions made to the study of comparative politics by other great figures like Machiavelli, de Tocqueville, Bryce, Ostrogorski and Weber as the first generation of scholars who utilized the comparative method or the act of comparison for the primary purpose of understanding better the working of political organizations. These scholars employed the instrument of comparison or what is called comparative analytical technique to study the existing polities or those which had existed in the past to discover the ideal types of government and progressive forces of political history. Their interest in comparing political systems stems from the fact that comparison is an essential aid to the understanding of politics and government. In political science and as in most social sciences, knowledge or understanding of politics is acquired largely through a process of comparison.

In the contemporary time, political scientists in their large number have developed different approaches or methods of comparative analysis. Some of these methods include: studies of one country, two or more countries, regional and area studies, studies across regions, global comparison, “most different systems” and “most similar systems” design, etc. These methods have largely enriched the development of comparative politics intellectually. One thing that is unique and common to these methods, irrespective

of their strength and weaknesses, is the fact that they all engage the use of comparison. This is because it is in knowing and writing about two or more countries that students can begin to make genuine comparison in order to establish true knowledge. The primary goal of these methods is to establish true knowledge in political studies.

Meckstroth (1975) identified the conceptual languages called the “Most Different Systems” and “Most Similar Systems” designed by Lijphart (1971) and Przeworski and Teune (1970) as predominant analyses among social scientists on the meaning of the term comparative method. He described the “Most Similar Systems Design” as a familiar procedure among social scientists developed to provide comparative explanation for identified attributes of most similar systems. He posited that the most similar system method is primarily designed to select attributes of “systems” that are similar for comparative analysis. The understanding derivable from the foregoing analysis is that “Most Similar Systems Design” enables comparativists or social scientists to identify and select attributes or factors that are common to political systems (countries) and differentiates these systems in a manner corresponding to the observed differences in their behaviour. This naturally means that the primary goal of the comparative method or the use of comparison is nothing but to establish true knowledge.

Again, Meckstroth (1975) observed that the “Most Different Systems Design” was conceived by Przeworski and Teune (1970) to help researchers to avoid drawing inappropriate conclusions often employed in comparative research. He showed that in the “Most Different Systems Design” differences in systems are the variables used to determine whether or not there is an established relationship between or among systems. According to him, if there is no variation among systems, that is, if subgroups of the population derived from different systems do not differ (with regard to the dependent variable), the differences among systems are not important in explaining the relationship among them. He argued that the “Most Different Systems Design” as developed by Przeworski and Teune remains one of the most important contributions to the methodology of comparative inquiry as it stimulates theoretical idea and promote further development of knowledge. What this connotes is that this method of comparison is essentially designed to assist comparativists in drawing valid and verifiable conclusions thereby establishing true knowledge.

In the attempt to differentiate between comparative method and other related concepts, Teune (1975) examined the concepts of Comparative Research, Experimental Design, and the Comparative Method. He did an evaluation of the standard meanings of these concepts, drawing conclusions from the efforts of professionals and scholars in analyzing the term “comparative method”. He noted that the various definitions offered by scholars on the meaning of the term comparative method rest heavily on the comparative tradition as espoused in the work of J. S. Mill: “Studies of Parallel Phenomena within Different Societies”. According to him, there has been a noticeable increase in the sensitivity to method despite the uneven record of comparative research in providing general knowledge. He emphasized the need to stretch the use of data as much as possible to make research studies conform to the criteria of experimental design. He opined that experimental design encompasses the use of statistical data and observational skills which are supportive of generalization from a few numbers of cases. He argued that it would be easy to choose effective strategies if we have the knowledge that would enable us to select cases, variables, and measurement instrument etc. for comparison. He defined comparative method as cross-level analysis where variation within the unit could be explained by the characteristics of the unit. He posited that one of the major goals of comparative inquiry is to find the unit that explained the most variance. This intellectual effort largely emphasizes the usefulness and strength of comparison in establishing true knowledge.

Kalleberg (1966) in his effort to establish the relevance of comparative method based his analysis on the “logic of comparison”. He sees comparison as a basic methodological concept. That is, a form of measurement, and a method. His primary concern was on how to clarify the basic logical requirements

of classification and comparison. He showed that this is important because clarity and simplicity of abstraction can further develop the comparative methodology in general. Thus, he examined the various logical requirements and their relationship with comparison. According to him, comparison is directly related to scientific method, and observation. Science, he argued essentially seeks to know what exists and the relationship among the innumerable elements of what exists. He opined that this process involves certain procedures of empirical classification based on observation. He sees classification as a basic type of concept–formation in science. He argued that no comparison can take place without classification. He posited that Almond’s analytical efforts where he took up the problem of classification and some specific criteria of comparison gives credence to this viewpoint.

Mayer (1989) holds the view that comparison or comparative analysis should be considered as a method that plays a central role in the effort to build explanatory theory in political science. He opines that political science is an academic field with the goal of developing theories that explain and predict the phenomena with which it is concerned. Mayer showed largely that to pursue the goal of theory building, all scientific disciplines employ certain criteria in the justification of true claims. The application of these criteria in analysis is what he called “scientific method”. Analysis therefore becomes comparative when explanatory theory is framed in such a way that it could be applied to data in two or more distinct context. This viewpoint reinforced the conclusion of Teune (1975) and Lijphart (1975) when they emphasized the need to employ the use of statistical data and observational skills which are supportive of generalization in comparative research studies. Thus, the function of comparative analysis as a method is to ensure building a body of explanatory theory about political outcome. Such theory is essentially meant to advance the course of establishing true knowledge in comparative political studies.

Again, Lijphart (2009) comparatively examined reasons why some democracies emphasize representation while others emphasize ruling. According to him, “all democracies possess certain characteristics that distinguish their politics from those countries that are not democratic”. He shows that democracies are institutionally different from one culture to another in terms of the institutions they employ in their respective practices of governing. He used the tool of comparison as a method of differentiating between what he termed majoritarian and consensus democracies. He divided the world’s democratic nations into these two general categories. He identified the institutional and procedural features that distinguish majoritarian from consensus democracies. He elaborates on the differences between these two types of democracies by identifying the institutional patterns in each democracy and offers examples of country that typify each type. He described majoritarian democracy which he termed as west-minister model of democracy as such in which the prevailing values involve the ability of a political party to form a majority in the House of Common and form a Cabinet that can govern the country. Consensus model of democracy on the other hand is described as such that exist in plural societies like the United States and Nigeria. That is, societies that are socially divided along religious, ideological, linguistic, cultural, ethnic, or racial lines so as to keep such countries away from aggravating existing social divisions. Essentially, democratic nations of the world adopt majoritarian or consensus democracy based on their several considerations of socio-cultural, economic, religious, linguistic and geographical factors as well as the institutions they employ in their respective practice of governance.

However, Hall (2004) addresses the limitations to the comparative method. He showed that when generalizing about the attributes of whole systems, researchers are faced with limitations that center on small–N problem: too many variables drawn from too few cases. This small number of cases, according to him, limits the validity of mathematical research techniques that presume a large number of cases. He noted that there are, for example, only a few cases of a particular constitutional type in a given cultural setting. This small number of cases, according to him, limits the validity of mathematical research techniques (as emphasized by Teune (1975); Lijphart (1975) and Mayer (1989) that presume a large number of cases. What this logically connotes is that statistical research method emphasizes large number of cases while small numbers of cases are common to comparative research method. His argument is that



with few cases, it is difficult to secure wide ranges of variation on all potentially relevant variables. He noted that for many years, the problem of “too many variables, too few cases” have been confronting the field of comparative politics. He emphasizes the need for researchers to seek alternative to a strict adherence to the comparative method as well as increasing the number of cases analyzed or seeking more data from each case. Notwithstanding the short comings of the comparative method as identified by Hall (the issue of small number of cases which distinguishes it from the statistical method), the use of comparison has largely advanced the course of establishing true knowledge in comparative politics. All comparative studies involve the use of comparison.

From the foregoing analysis, it is observed that there are some general-lines of agreement among scholars about methods of making comparison. Lijphart (1971, 1975, 2009), Przeworski and Teune (1970), Teune (1975), Kalleberg (1966), Meckstroth (1975), Mayer (1989), Heywood (2007), Hague and Harrop (2010) and Johari (2013) affirmed the distinctiveness of Comparative Politics as a substantive field of study. Their emphasis on “methods of comparison” on how and why political phenomena might be compared marks out Comparative Politics as a special area within the field of Political Science. Their argument on the origin of comparative politics from the period when Aristotle examined the differences in the structures of states and constitutions and sought to develop a classification of regime types as well as the comparativists of the late 1950s, 1960s and those of the current generation show that comparative politics is a methodological revolution (Kalleberg, 1966; Mair 1998). Mair showed that the development of the discipline of comparative politics grew from the study of foreign countries in isolation from one another to theory building and theory testing to method of research.

The understanding derivable from the foregoing is that, traditionally, the study of foreign countries was principally based on domestic politics of individual countries with little or no real comparison. Systematic comparison between countries with the intention of identifying and explaining the similarities or differences between them began as another stage in the development of methods of comparison in the discipline of comparative politics. This development largely led to theory building, theory testing and scientific rigour and research method in political science. Research method is primarily concerned with developing rules and standards about how comparative research should be carried out including the levels of analysis. What this connotes is that through comparison, comparativists over the years were able to develop methods, theories, hypotheses and concepts, and to a large extent, test them. Suffice therefore to argue that, in political science, all comparative studies involve the use of comparison, and all comparisons are driven by an interest to establish true knowledge.

**Table 1. Comparative Analysis of Features of Established Federations**

S/N	Structural aspect of the Federation	United States	Switzerland	Germany	Canada	India	Nigeria
1.	Political Head	President  (Similar nomenclature)	President  (Similar nomenclature)	The president acts in a mainly ceremonial capacity  The Federal Chancellor is the head of Government  (dissimilar in nomenclature)	Prime Minister  (dissimilar in nomenclature but with disposition towards accommodative and transparent rule)	President  (Similar nomenclature)	President  (Similar nomenclature but functionally differentiated from others because of disposition towards totalitarianism)

				but with disposition towards accommodative and transparent rule)			
2.	Constitution	Written/rigid	Written/rigid	Written/rigid	Written/rigid	Written/rigid	Written/rigid
3.	Legislature	Bicameral	Bicameral	Bicameral	Bicameral	Only 7 Indian States have a bicameral state legislature	Bicameral
4.	Party System	Multi-party State	Multi-party State	Multi-party State	Multi-party State	Multi-party State	Multi-party State
5.	Political power	Decentralized	Highly Decentralized	Decentralized	Decentralized	Quasi-Decentralized	Quasi-Decentralized
6.	Democratic Structure/ System	Federal Representative Democracy	Semi-direct Democracy	Federal Parliamentary Democracy	Federal Parliamentary Democracy	Federal Parliamentary Democracy	Federal Representative Democracy
7.	Civil liberties and political rights observance	High 100%	Highest 100%  (Ranked because of a conscious effort to accommodate individuals and groups despite obvious diversities that find expression in consociational political	High 100%	High 100%	High 100%	Low 40%

			arrangement (Liphart 2012)				
8.	Separation of Power /check and balance	Highest 100%  (Strict in the sense of separation of functions as contained in the constitution done for national interest)	High 100%  (Slightly strict in the sense of separation of functions as contained in the constitution done for national interest)	High 100%  (Slightly strict in the sense of separation of functions as contained in the constitution done for national interest)	High 100%  (Slightly strict in the sense of separation of functions as contained in the constitution done for national interest)	Low 80%  (Low not in the sense of erosion of functions that are performed by one agency by another. Therefore, we can rank the separation as high as 80%)	Low 40%  (Low in the sense of erosion of functions that are performed by one agency that are eroded in an authoritarian manner by another. Therefore, we can rank the separation of power as low as 40%)
9.	Presidential Election	President elected through Electoral College	President elected through federal Council for a term of one year	President elected through electoral college comprising both houses of parliaments	Appointed by the Monarch	President elected through electoral college of both houses of parliament	President elected through popular vote

**Source: Authors’ Compilation, 2023**

The analysis of the table above shows that though similar nomenclature could comparatively be found in different states but its functionalities may be different. As found in number one in the table, Nigeria is included in countries that have presidents as its political head but in functionality the president draws more from executive fiat than established process contained in the document establishing rule of law. The countries listed in the table for example operates multiparty system but comparative assessment of the government basing its authority on the sovereignty and will of the people resulted in some countries classified as developed democracies such as USA, Canada, Germany but Nigeria classified under electoral democracy that oscillates between liberal democracy and authoritarian rule. Looking at the civil liberties and political rights in number seven in the table shows Switzerland as ranking the highest among developed countries because of its conscious effort to accommodate individuals and groups despite obvious diversities that find expression in consociational political arrangement (Liphart 2012). However, classifying India and Nigeria as low does not in any way place both in the same strand using interval

ranking because Nigeria scored low in the sense of erosion of functions that are performed by one agency that are eroded in an authoritarian manner by another. Therefore, we can rank the separation of power as low as 40% while allocating 80% to India. The minute variables that account for the similarities and dissimilarities can only be established through comparative politics or else generalization based on mere nomenclature will not produce true knowledge.

Our attempt to summarize information about the comparative features of established federations of the United States, Switzerland, Germany, Canada, India and Nigeria is therefore to show that mere classifications using similar conceptual categories are not enough for theory building if important variables that account for differences are identified. Literally, a federation is a constitutional arrangement in which the totality of governmental power is divided and distributed between a central government and the governments of the federating units. The content of the constitutional arrangement is the division of functions among tiers of governments. Constitutionally, federations embody shared sovereignty, written constitution, bicameral legislature and intergovernmental institutions. Beyond these criteria, the use of comparison helps in the efforts to evaluate similarities and dissimilarities in the structural and operational features of federal systems. A critical examination of the above table shows that federalism provides a system of decentralized and limited government for pluralist societies with multiple interests and geographically challenged differences. This has characterized the United States, Switzerland, Germany and Canada federations. The Swiss federation is the most decentralized in securing the powers of the Cantons (States) in order to protect their linguistic diversity.

Through the use of comparison, comparativists are able to identify quasi-federations or what Brian (2006) described as hybrids that are predominantly federations in their constitutions and operations but which have some overriding federal government powers more typical of a unitary system. Examples are India and Nigeria. These federations exercise overriding central emergency powers.

Comparing federal systems helps to deepen our understanding of the politics of particular federal countries and the complexity in the working of federalism. Comparative studies help to show that successful federations require robust democracy in which citizens share membership of two political communities and participate politically in both. Comparison helps to understand the complex interactions of multiple political and institutional factors as well as the strength and weaknesses of different institutions in a federation.

## **THE RELEVANCE OF COMPARATIVE POLITICS IN ESTABLISHING TRUE KNOWLEDGE**

The relevance of Comparative Politics in establishing true knowledge cannot be over-emphasized. Comparison as an analytical method gives the discipline of comparative politics the value of comparing politics in different countries (Lijphart, 1971; 1975; and 2009; Przeworski & Teune, 1970; Teune, 1975; Kalleberg, 1966; Meckstroth, 1975; Mayer, 1989; Hague & Harrop, 2010; Andrea & Nicholas, 2019; Johari, 2006; 2013; Heywood, 2007; Kennedy, 2014; and Wellwood, 2015). Comparativists, down the ages, employ the tool of comparison in drawing similarities or differences among or between polities, governments and other socio-political issues in order to broaden our understanding of the political world, thereby establishing true knowledge about the reality of the existence of political phenomena. In other words, comparativists in their large number have reached consensus that comparison improves comprehension by highlighting important details, making abstract ideas more concrete and determining the relevant, comparable characteristics of each political system, and then determining which characteristics are similar to others, which are different, and to what degree. Scholars such as Hague and Harrop (2010), Andrea and Nicholas (2019), Johari (2006), (2013), Heywood (2007), Kellberg (1966), Kennedy (2014), and Wellwood (2015) reached a line of agreement that comparison is a fundamental human way of knowing. That is, comparative politics enables us to find out more about the places and

things we know least about. They agreed that comparison is a process by which we practically build our community of knowing, apprehending our shared uncertainties. This point was well articulated by Hague and Harrop (2010: p.46) when they argued that comparative politics aids the comprehension of political news from abroad. Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-59) cited in Heywood (2007: p.27) gave credence to this viewpoint when he posited that “without comparison to make, the mind does not know how to proceed”. The foregoing show the fact that the relevance of Comparative Politics in establishing true knowledge can be seen in the following ways:

One, the comparative method or the act of comparing politics in different systems does not only help us to interpret developments in those systems but also assists in establishing true knowledge about the practical political relationships between or among different systems. What this connotes is that comparison broadens our horizons, helps to interpret socio-political phenomena across cultures, grows in importance the relevance of comparative politics as a field of study as the world becomes more interdependent. The main point here is that comparative politics helps us to learn about other polities, broaden our understanding, casting fresh light on our home nation. Perhaps that was what informed the opinion of Heywood (2007: p.27) when he posited that through comparison (comparative politics) we discover our own ethnocentrism and the means to overcome them.

Two, the relevance of comparative politics in establishing true knowledge can be seen in the fact that it enables us to classify political systems and constitutions as did by Aristotle (Johari, 2006 and 2013), and government structures and political processes (Hague & Harrop, 2010) with a view to establishing their similarities and differences in different polities. Through comparison we can distinguish between majoritarian and consensus democracies and contrast both with authoritarian regimes. We can classify constitution into written and unwritten, and electoral systems into direct and indirect elections. Kellberg (1966) reinforced this viewpoint when he posited that no comparison can take place without classification. He sees classification as a basic requirement for comparison. He showed that this is important because clarity and simplicity of abstraction can only be established through the process of classification and comparison. In the same vein, Mair (1998) posited that classification and comparison help comparativists to raise questions such as how political regimes might be distinguished from one another? What accounts for regime change? Which is the “best” form of government?” and many other social and political issues relating to transitions to democracy, constitutional engineering and institutional design. What the foregoing connotes is that classification as a process is inherently comparative and its aim is to establish true knowledge. Suffice to say that classification provides the raw material from which explanatory venture can be launched in comparative studies to establish certainty of the existence of a phenomenon.

Three, comparative researchers seek to understand a variety of political systems not just for their own sake but also to formulate and test hypotheses in order to establish true knowledge (Hague & Harrop, 2010, p.47). Scholars such as Teune (1975), Lijphart (1975), Mayer (1989), Przeworski and Teune (1970), Mair (1998), Heywood (2007), Kalleberg (1966), Kennedy (2014), and Wellwood (2015) also see hypotheses formulation and testing as the corollary of comparative researches. Wellwood observed that hypotheses are essential for explaining a certain political phenomena. Comparison or comparative research enables us to formulate and test hypotheses about politics. The understanding derivable from the foregoing is that, scientifically, hypotheses need to be confirmed comparatively in order to establish true knowledge.

Four, the relevance of comparative politics in establishing true knowledge can also be seen in the fact that it helps in making generalization and prediction (Hague & Harrop, 2010; Teune, 1975; Lijphart, 1975; Mayer, 1989; Przeworski & Teune, 1970; Mair, 1998; Heywood, 2007; Kennedy, 2014; and Wellwood, 2015). Hague and Harrop (2010: p.47) emphasized this point when they posited that generalizations, once validated have potential for prediction. Teune (1975) and Lijphart (1975) reinforced this viewpoint in their conclusions when they emphasized the need to employ the use of statistical data

and observational skills which are supportive of generalization in comparative research studies. In the same vein, Mayer (1989) holds the view that comparison or comparative analysis should be considered as a method that plays a central role in the effort to build explanatory theory and generalizations in political science. He opines that political science is an academic field with the goal of developing theories that explain and predict the phenomena with which it is concerned. Thus, the relevance of comparative analysis as a method is to ensure building a body of explanatory theories about political outcomes thereby making generalizations and establishing true knowledge.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper has examined comparison as an explanatory and analytical concept that is well-established in comparative politics more than in most disciplines. It posited that comparison in comparative politics involves the comparative study of other countries, citizens, political systems, socio-cultural, economic, wars, conflicts, strategic and political issues either in whole or in parts, and the analyses of the similarities and dissimilarities between them. The paper has appraised and discussed the relevance of comparison and comparative politics in establishing true knowledge. The study revealed that comparison assists in bringing two or more things together (physically or in contemplation) and to examine them systematically, identifying similarities and dissimilarities among them. The study established that comparison is a fundamental human way of knowing that practically builds and improves our understanding of the realities around us.

The study recommends that:

- i. All political analysis should involve some degree of comparison because comparison improves comprehension and helps us to learn about other governments, classify political structures and processes and broadens our understanding about political phenomena and things we know least about.
- ii. There is the obvious need to acknowledge the fact that “without comparisons to make, the mind does not know how to proceed” and true knowledge is hanging.
- iii. Finally, and more importantly, more emphasis must be placed on the need to deepen conceptualization of socio-cultural, economic and political issues in the efforts to build a body of explanatory theories about political phenomena thereby making generalization and establishing true knowledge. Therefore, the main focus of comparison is to identify multiple variables that are often embedded in one concept that is often not accounted for in other academic fields for theory building.

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