

Advanced Placement

Comparative Government and Politics

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Curriculum Unit Author

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Lesson 2

Classifying Countries

Objectives

- To develop a more thorough understanding of labels commonly used in comparative politics
- To recognize the value and the limitations of commonly used labels

Notes to the Teacher

Textbooks, teachers, journalists, and students regularly use the term *Third World*. Because the term is common and has been used for a long time, the textbooks, teachers, and journalists usually assume that their audiences understand the label and thus do not offer much explanation. Students often pick up a meaning for the term from the context in which it is used, but that meaning is not always well informed. For instance, Third World implies a First World and a Second World, but many students have no idea what those labels refer to. And when introduced to the idea of Fourth World countries, they are often left guessing.

The Third World category of countries was first used by comparative political scientists in the post-World War II period. Early in the Cold War, First World was a category that included the mostly-democratic and industrialized nations of Western Europe and North America. Second World countries were the nondemocratic members of the Soviet bloc. As Tito led Yugoslavia slightly away from Soviet orthodoxy and Indonesian President Sukarno hosted a meeting of nonaligned nations at the 1955 Bandung Conference, it became obvious that there was a group of Third World countries as well. The number of Third World countries grew in the 1960s as many African nations achieved independence. The classification system became more complex in the 1970s as it became evident that not all Third World countries were alike. Some, like Nigeria, appeared to have human and natural resources that could lead to economic and political progress. Others, like Chad, suffered from such dire poverty and lack of resources that they seemed to be doomed. Some writers began calling these poorest of countries the Fourth World. The collapse of the Soviet bloc and the Soviet Union in the 1980s and

1990s also affected the usefulness of this classification system. Today, it is quite obvious that this set of categories is too simplistic to describe the real world. Nonetheless, many people still use the term *Third World*. Because it is so common, students need to examine its meaning and usage as they begin their study of comparative politics.

Categorization of countries and political systems is one of the first steps in comparative politics. Anyone practicing that discipline needs to be knowledgeable about the process and the validity of the labels they use. This exercise should supplement the information in students' textbooks.

In this lesson, students use what they know—often vague and stereotyped impressions—to begin sorting countries into categories. They then compare their results with those of their classmates and begin to recognize the limits of their knowledge. This experience helps make them more receptive to the new information presented.

Procedure

1. Ask students to write down on scratch paper the first thing they think of when you say "African animal." (*Most of them will probably write down the name of a large, wild animal—probably a carnivorous one.*) List responses on the board or an overhead transparency, and ask students about the accuracy of the list; i.e., whether the list accurately represents the animal life in Africa. (*It probably does not because dogs, cattle, and goats are probably the most common nonhuman animals. If anyone wrote tiger, mention that tigers are Asian, not African, animals.*) Have students speculate on how this misperception affects their thinking about Africa. (*They should realize that the impressions that are part of their frames of reference make it more difficult to think of Africans as farmers, office workers, and condo owners.*) Tell students that they are about to begin making comparisons between political, economic, and social systems that are unfamiliar and about which they probably have misconceptions.

2. Review the history of the classification system and the meanings the categories originally had. Share information from Notes to the Teacher.
3. Distribute **Handout 2**. Have students, individually or in pairs, complete it as directed.
4. Have students or pairs of students share their results with the class and explain the definitions they used in sorting countries into the categories. (*Students are likely to sort countries into two groups—us and them—or into groups based on their perceptions of relative affluence. They are likely to have problems using Second World since the original meaning was for a type of international political/economic system that no longer exists. Some students will recognize that there is a great diversity among those countries labeled Third World and Fourth World and that the diversity is a significant limitation on the usefulness of the categories.*) Encourage students to evaluate the definitions that were used. Encourage discussion about differing standards used to classify countries. Point out the need to use agreed-upon standards and definitions for comparing political systems.
5. Ask students to identify limitations in the use of the classification system today. Have students hypothesize reasons for the continued use of the labels in spite of their limitations. (*Putting countries like Singapore and Malaysia in the same category with countries like Mali and Somalia doesn't give us much useful information about those countries because they are so different. If categorizing things doesn't give us useful information, then the process is flawed. People continue to use the labels because they are familiar with them and assume they are still useful and descriptive.*)
6. Distribute **Handout 3** for students to complete. Review responses. Record, or have a student record, the main ideas identified on the board or on an overhead transparency.

Suggested Responses:

1. *It is difficult to imagine meaningful similarities between Cambodia and the Walt Disney company. Differences include the idea of sovereignty, the control of territory, and the primary purposes of the organizations.*
2. *In a country-to-country comparison, China is richer. However, on a per capita basis, the people in Germany are much better off than the Chinese. China's population is approximately twenty times larger than Germany's, so the total German GDP is shared with fewer people.*
3. *The primary implication is that the power of actors on the international stage is not exclusively in the hands of countries. Many privately owned corporations produce more wealth than most countries and have more influence on people's lives than countries do. Studying comparative government and politics without recognizing the economic power and influence of private companies and international organizations reduces the significance of the comparisons.*
7. Ask students to identify some implications of the main ideas derived from **Handout 3**. Discuss how these affect classifying and comparing countries and their political systems.

Suggested Responses:

- *We usually assume that countries that are placed in categories have similarities beyond those we recognized in order to classify them.*
- *We usually expect to recognize a progression or evolution of countries or political systems from one category to another and we expect countries to move "up" in the set of categories.*
- *We tend to assume that the category we place our own country in is in some ways superior to the other categories.*
- *We usually assume that our system of categories is objective and universal; i.e., that everyone would agree on the use of the system.*

8. To conclude, ask students to brainstorm ways they can mitigate the problems of classifying and comparing that were identified in this lesson. Have students keep a list of the best ideas in their notebooks for future reference.

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 Lesson 2
 Handout 2

Name _____

Date _____

A Common Classification System

Directions: Scholars regularly put countries into groups that are presumably more homogeneous than geographic or random groups. One classification system that is commonly used labels countries as First World, Second World, Third World, and Fourth World. Place each country listed below into one of those groups. If you are unsure of the exact meaning of the labels, use your best impressions. Be prepared to explain your standards for classifying the countries to your classmates.

Afghanistan	Germany	Malaysia	Russia
Albania	Haiti	Mexico	Saudi Arabia
Argentina	India	Netherlands	Slovakia
Belgium	Iran	New Zealand	Somalia
Cambodia	Ivory Coast	Nigeria	South Africa
Canada	Japan	People's Republic of China	United Kingdom
Denmark	Kuwait	Poland	Vanuatu
Egypt	Lithuania		

First World	Second World	Third World	Fourth World

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 Lesson 2
 Handout 3 (page 1)

Name _____

Date _____

Economic Comparisons

Directions: Study the following information about the gross domestic product (GDP) of selected countries and the gross sales (GS) of selected multinational corporations. Then answer the questions that follow.

Country/Corporation	2004 GDP/GS	Country/Corporation	2004 GDP/GS
People's Republic of China	\$7,262 million	ING	\$103 million
Japan	\$3,745 million	Citigroup Inc.	\$95 million
India	\$3,319 million	New Zealand	\$93 million
Germany	\$2,362 million	IBM Corp.	\$89 million
United Kingdom	\$1,782 million	Slovakia	\$79 million
Russia	\$1,408 million	Nestle	\$71 million
Canada	\$1,023 million	Verizon Communications Inc.	\$68 million
Mexico	\$1,006 million	The Home Depot Inc.	\$63 million
Iran	\$517 million	Kuwait	\$41 million
South Africa	\$491 million	Lithuania	\$45 million
Argentina	\$484 million	Dell Computer	\$48 million
Netherlands	\$481 million	Time Warner Inc.	\$40 million
Poland	\$463 million	Microsoft Corp.	\$37 million
Belgium	\$316 million	United Parcel Service	\$33 million
Egypt	\$316 million	Wells Fargo	\$32 million
Saudi Arabia	\$310 million	Walt Disney	\$27 million
Wal-Mart Stores Inc.	\$256 million	Cambodia	\$27 million
Exxon Mobil Corp.	\$247 million	Cote d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast)	\$25 million
BP (British Petroleum)	\$233 million	Afghanistan	\$22 million
Malaysia	\$229 million	Coca Cola	\$21 million
Denmark	\$174 million	Albania	\$17 million
Toyota Motor	\$161 million	Haiti	\$12 million
General Electric Co.	\$134 million	Somalia	\$6 million
Nigeria	\$126 million	eBay	\$2 million
Nippon Tel. and Tel.	\$103 million	Vanuatu	\$0.6 million

Sources: "Rank Order—GDP," *The CIA World Factbook*, 14 June 2005, <<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/rankorder/2001rank.html>> (7 July 2005) and "The World's 100 Largest Public Companies," *Global Policy Forum*, 31 August 2004, <<http://www.globalpolicy.org/soecon/tncs/2004/biggestcorp.pdf>> (18 November 2004).

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