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The Comparative Study of Political Elites

This study was undertaken in the belief that in a world of continuous conflict and crisis, there exist few subjects more worthy of systematic scrutiny than the phenomenon of leadership. In view of the destinal impact that national-level leaders often have, it is surprising that intellectually sound studies of elites are not more abundant. Indeed, leaders are often the most talked about and least known component of a polity. Although highly visible by virtue of their leadership positions, their backgrounds, behavior, and attitudes are often shrouded in secrecy—a possible reason why many scholars prefer to study parties, pressure groups, or the mass base rather than elites.

Nevertheless, negligence of the study of political leadership might well be to our peril. One need only consider the ramifications of the irresponsible exercise of executive power particularly in the Vietnamese conflict and in the Watergate affair. It is significant that American political science has traditionally been more concerned with Congress, political parties, voting behavior, interest groups, and the Supreme Court, than with the presidency and the executive branch. With few exceptions, little social background analysis has been done of the White House staff, much less the cabinet itself.¹ It is interesting to note that the recent spurt of psychological and psychohistorical analyses of presidents (e.g., Barber, Mazlish, Wills) only came after the manifestation of unrestrained presidential power at home and abroad.

Still fewer are genuinely comparative, empirical studies of leaders—either as individuals or in groups. By far the best known cross-national analyses of elite groups are the two by Lasswell and his associates.² Another collective effort under Edinger focuses on elites in selected industrialized polities.³ A more recent study,

edited by R. Barry Farrell,⁴ is devoted to the comparative analysis of communist elites. Equally noteworthy are Quandt's methodological, empirical monograph⁵ and studies of Marvick,⁶ Wilkinson,⁷ Lipset and Solari,⁸ and Huntington and Brzezinski.⁹ In the area of comparative elite attitudes, there are the works of Moskos and Bell,¹⁰ not to mention the major collective undertakings of Lerner and Gorden,¹¹ and Karl Deutsch and his colleagues,¹² which focus on West European leaders. Comparative single-leader studies are even fewer; these include Wolfenstein's study of Lenin, Trotsky, and Gandhi,¹³ Barber's study of US presidents,¹⁴ and the distinguished effort under Dankwart Rustow's editorship.¹⁵

Macroequivalence: Universality of the Leadership Function

Students of comparative social inquiry have used a variety of units of analysis ranging from decision-making to political socialization, from political parties and legislatures to elites. However, there are distinct advantages to the use of political elites as an unit of comparative analysis.

The most overwhelming consideration is the universality of leaders and the leadership phenomenon. While each societal unit has its own particular authority structure, leaders and leadership have constituted an inescapable part of human social existence at all levels of society; indeed, "in any organization of any size, leadership becomes necessary to its success and survival."¹⁶ A closely related consideration is the relative ease with which one may identify a national-level political leadership group, although the boundary problem remains, i.e., at what point does one draw the line between the top leadership and the next level.¹⁷

One can only wonder what comparative analysis would be like had it proceeded from Eastern to Western cultures rather than vice versa. It is quite possible that neither parties, nor pressure groups, nor, say, interest aggregation would occupy the center stage of comparative inquiry. Indeed, the bane of American social science has been a pervasive ideological compulsion to view the world through our own *Weltanschauung*, which results in the choice of

analytical categories that proceed from our own American-Western political experience. How else can one explain our often abortive quest for political parties and legislatures in places where these do not really exist. Even if it is granted that the interest articulation and aggregation functions of western parties are universal, clearly they are not a central function in most traditional autocracies or modern dictatorships. In contrast, the leadership function is not only universal but is a central facet of virtually all political systems both at the national and subnational levels.

Among the other characteristics which contribute to the attractiveness of leadership as a unit of analysis are its precision and elegance, particularly in quantitative research. Finally, if politics is defined in terms of power, nothing can be more central to it than the study of those who hold power—the political elite.¹⁸ This is particularly true of the new states where the frequent absence of institutionalized power not only makes leadership decisive, it makes effective leadership imperative to systemic survival.¹⁹

The present study deals with cabinet elites of three countries primarily in terms of social background characteristics, recruitment, and circulation, and only secondarily with their attitudes and behavior. This is mainly due to the easy availability of recruitment data, in contrast to difficulties in obtaining reliable information on elite attitudes and behavior. Whenever possible the interaction of background characteristics and performance is analyzed in some detail, mostly through longitudinal analysis. The three countries are Lebanon (1943–1973), Israel (1948–1973), and Egypt (1952–1973).

The identification of cross-nationally comparable leadership groups constitutes a most basic methodological problem.²⁰ Actually two related tasks need to be performed: first, one must identify the group in each polity which possesses the critical mass of political power; second, one must consider the comparability of these politically powerful groups. At the most general level it is possible to enumerate at least five characteristics which may be useful in identifying a national-level political elite group. These are

1. The possession of a disproportionate amount of political power relative to all other groups and individuals in society.
2. The sharing of a private political culture, distinct from the mass

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culture, in which the leaders have more in common with each other than with their constituents.

3. The possession of significant mutual ties—economic, political, matrimonial, familial, socializational—all of which bring together the elite in a network of interrelations uncharacteristic of most members of society.
4. The possession of a self-view which emphasizes the uniqueness, exclusiveness, and political centrality of the group, i.e., the self-view of the group that it *is* an elite.
5. The existence of a widespread popular view that the group *is* an elite.

These characteristics have been utilized in various degrees throughout this study. The last two have been considered only indirectly to the extent that the data permits. Clearly, the first characteristic is the most important identifying feature of an elite. If power is considered a concomitant of political leadership, then the problem is to find the locus of power and to identify the individuals who exercise it. For each of the three countries under study, the cabinet constitutes the most important institutional power collectivity. While the validity of this judgment will gradually appear in subsequent chapters, the initial choice of the cabinet as the focus was based on direct observation as well as on expert opinions found in studies of the three polities.²¹ This should not be taken to mean that the acquisition of any cabinet office automatically endows one with power, although this occurs frequently. Yet it seems that politically powerful people somehow end up in the cabinet in the three polities in question. One can venture to hypothesize that the quest for cabinet office by those possessing power is attributable to the natural desire of leaders to gain visibility and prestige. Perhaps more important, by entering the cabinet, the powerful legitimize their power.

Of course the three cabinets cannot be considered equally powerful or important. Indeed, there is some variation between them. As presidential-type systems, Egypt and Lebanon possess weaker cabinets than Israel, which has a cabinet-type government. Thus, in terms of relative systemic power, Israel's cabinet should be ranked first, followed by those of Lebanon and finally Egypt. These variations, however, are not significant enough to make a

qualitative difference, thus while the three cabinets are not equal, they are comparable.

In establishing the general conditions of equivalency, additional components of the political system need to be considered. The three elite groups function within the context of substantially different party systems. Israel's multiparty system stands in sharp contrast to Egypt's single party, the Arab Socialist Union (ASU). And both are a far cry from Lebanon's small and confessionally based political parties and groups. Indeed, in Lebanon the country's sects and ethnic groups are more politically significant than are the parties, since elections to the chamber take place from lists based on confessional quotas in each electoral district. Israel's list-type electoral system is equally important to its political process and contrasts with Egypt's relatively constricting one-party framework for elections to the National Assembly and the ASU.

Despite these differences, ministers serving within the cabinet framework occupy the highest posts in each country's political structure and therefore conditions of structural as well as nominal equivalence exist. To the extent that cabinet members function as the responsible heads of various ministries, there is substantial equivalence among the three elites. In cases where ministers also act as party leaders, the area of functional equivalence becomes restricted. This is because Lebanese and Egyptian ministers do not function as party leaders to the extent that Israeli ministers are accustomed to doing.

It should also be noted that the three elite groups function within distinct political cultures. On the one hand, there is the free-wheeling, thoroughly capitalistic, heterogeneous, and pluralistic culture of Lebanon, which stands in stark contrast to the more disciplined and centralized societies of Egypt and Israel. The latter two cultures remain substantially ideological, while the Lebanese tends to manifest a more materialistic *Weltanschauung* that suggests an "end of ideology" milieu. Other factors in the individual political milieux include dissimilar imperial experiences, differing popular expectations and demands upon each leadership group, as well as variations in national wealth, size of country, and population. Finally, all three countries can be classified as new nations in different phases of development. These are some of the

main factors that determine the broad context in which the three leadership groups operate, and as such they receive due consideration in the subsequent cross-national analysis.

This study sets out to accomplish two specific aims. It attempts to present in-depth studies of the cabinet leadership groups of Lebanon, Israel, and Egypt. A composite profile of each group is systematically presented in separate chapters providing a wealth of hard data for the area specialist. It then strives in the concluding chapter to utilize this data to test a number of hypotheses cross-nationally. Throughout, social background data is analyzed aggregately and longitudinally.

An eclectic methodology is employed combining historical analysis with empirical and quantitative approaches²² to achieve a high degree of analytical depth. The historical method permits consideration of elite socialization over time, as well as the analysis of background material on the three political systems. On the other hand, the empirical-quantitative method assures precision and certainty, and as such is more suitable in inductive analysis that aims to arrive at more general hypotheses, principles, or theories.²³ Because of its rich detail, the generation and scrutiny of aggregate-type data tends to reduce journalistic impressionism in political analysis and contributes to overall accuracy.

Despite an inductive-empirical approach, several basic theoretical assumptions are necessary to provide a starting point. Most students of leadership assume that the elite is a reflection of society.²⁴ This is a valid assumption, given a sufficient time lag for adjustments to take place as changes in social forces change elite composition and/or vice versa. Implied is a close relationship between elite recruitment and social and political change, or as Seligman states, recruitment patterns both reflect and affect society.²⁵ Thus, recruitment is both a dependent and an independent variable. As a dependent variable, recruitment patterns will reflect a society's political culture, structures, and values; as an independent variable recruitment patterns manifest the pathways to power and status, and thus influence stability.²⁶ Closely related are the key concepts of elite legitimation and representativeness. In contrast to traditional societies, most contemporary polities regard elite representativeness as a major determinant of elite legitimacy, the other factor being elite performance, both actual and symbolic. There-

fore, representativeness and effective performance vary directly with elite legitimacy, which is treated as a dependent variable.²⁷ However, this study makes no attempt to explore systematically the influence of social background variables on elite attitudes and behavior—a topic of lively controversy in political research.²⁸ Rather, an attempt will be made to show the coincidence of several social background variables with certain broad elite behavior patterns.

Microequivalence

Based on these theoretical assumptions, the framework is designed to generate and analyze social background data under basic categories common to the three elite groups and environments. Here inquiry should focus on microequivalence, i.e., comparison of specific elite attributes in differing political cultures. Although the use of a common framework cross-nationally will sharpen comparability, it also can mute or deemphasize unique characteristics. Therefore, care must be taken to use the framework flexibly, even modify it, to bring out the peculiar in each case study.

However, in considering microlevel attributes of leaders in each polity, the problem of equivalence once again emerges since variables such as age and education may have different meanings in each political culture, or their meanings may have changed over time. Thus, in establishing microequivalence one has to account for the peculiar influences of each milieu upon these variables. For instance, it is not enough to know that elite X is older than elite Y, but one must ascertain the meaning of these findings in each culture. What might be considered “old” in one polity may be regarded as “young” in another. Nevertheless, the use of a single methodological framework can contribute to the integration of comparative studies and thus avoid the problem of many edited anthologies on elites, where disparate chapters by several authors employ diverse theories and methods. Clearly, in such cases integration is sacrificed and so is comparative analysis.

Fundamentally we seek to answer several basic questions: where do cabinet leaders come from in each of the three political systems; what leadership techniques do they use; how much coopera-

tion and conflict is there among them; and what happens to them after they leave their leadership positions. In short, inquiry will center on the sources, recruitment patterns, cohesion, strategies, tenure, and disposition of Lebanese, Israeli and Egyptian leaders—factors which determine what has been called since Pareto, the “circulation of elites.” The following specific categories of variables were used to classify detailed biographical data on each minister.

- A. Age: (1) at first political office; (2) at first cabinet office; and (3) at leaving cabinet office.
- B. Occupation: (1) positions held before first political office; (2) before first cabinet office; and (3) after leaving cabinet office.
- C. Education: (1) level of achievement; (2) area(s) of specialization; and (3) name of educational institution(s).
- D. Family identification and class by birth and by marriage.
- E. Religion.
- F. Geographical affiliation.
- G. Political career: (1) first office held and tenure; (2) sequence of offices including tenure in each, from first to last office in government.
- H. Political identification with (1) party; (2) group; (3) class; (4) ideology.

The foregoing approach enables one to acquire two types of research dividends. It accords the scholar an in-depth understanding of the ruling elements in each country and it renders possible the identification of certain differences and similarities between the three elite groups. This, in turn, can provide clues to explain more basic questions about contrasting political cultures, rates and levels of modernization, direction of social change, and the likelihood of stability or instability. Another promising aspect of this approach is its ability to shed much needed light on the protracted conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbors, of which Egypt is the most important. In view of the leading roles that elites have played on both sides of the conflict, a comparative study should illuminate some of the basic reasons behind the disparity of Israeli and Arab power. Different leadership styles, recruitment patterns, and educational backgrounds are likely to emerge, not to

mention significant contrasts in the respective elite cultures. Ultimately, it should be possible to test various hypotheses by relating rate of circulation, elite disposition, and political risk to systemic stability. Finally, in the context of the Arab-Israeli confrontation, the study will focus on two central questions of elite effectiveness: ²⁹ how successfully did the three systems recruit and prepare future leaders for their leadership roles and to what extent did the prevailing elite selection system in each country contribute to social integration by allocating roles in ways satisfactory to citizens, groups, and society as a whole.

A major source of distortion in the aggregate method is the implicit assumption that leaders are equally powerful, i.e., since each is counted once without weighing, a prime minister can be equated with an inconsequential minister of posts or sports. In order to compensate for this distortion, an attempt is made to identify the more powerful ministers. Moreover, both presidents and prime ministers are studied separately as two elite groups distinct from the cabinets.

The foregoing variables can also reveal the attributes of each elite collectivity and the political system itself. Age is an indicator of political generations; it can serve as the demarcation between elite generations, each of which may also be distinguished by unique experiences, including the collective socialization of a great event which members of one generation may have either witnessed or participated in. Age can also measure elite homogeneity as well as demarcate generational gaps between the rulers and the ruled. Education and occupation are primarily determinants of socialization that help shape the elites' *Weltanschauung* and, to an extent, behavior. Moreover they are also related to the class origins and class aspirations (social mobility) of elites and provide important clues about the predominant values, priorities, and structure of a society. In the determination of the elite-mass gap, education and occupation are fundamental, as they are in the analysis of elite homogeneity. Place of birth and family background reveal something about elite origins, class background, and/or various types of group identification, as do ethnic and religious affiliation, both of which also influence attitudes. Finally, all the variables in combination provide the entire progression from birth to elitehood—the so-called *cursus honorum*, or the pathways to power.

Sources of Data

The accumulation of detailed, reliable, biographical information on a large number of political leaders is a laborious task that demands an inordinate amount of time, patience, and financial resource. The problem is especially acute in many non-Western states, where biographical directories and related data on elites do not abound and available information is often replete with errors. The quest for data therefore, must be pursued through other means, notably the press, both domestic and Western, and must often go back several decades. Because the various sources frequently diverge, it is necessary to collate information on each minister from multiple sources in order to achieve a high degree of reliability and completeness. The author gathered supplementary material through native contacts in the course of a research visit to the Middle East. As a final step, six knowledgeable individuals from the Middle East and the United States were used as judges (two for each country) to provide a general check on the data and to advise in instances of grossly conflicting data. In this fashion, it was possible, with few exceptions, to collect information on about 400 ministers, which was then utilized to construct a composite picture of the three elite groups.