



Chapter Two

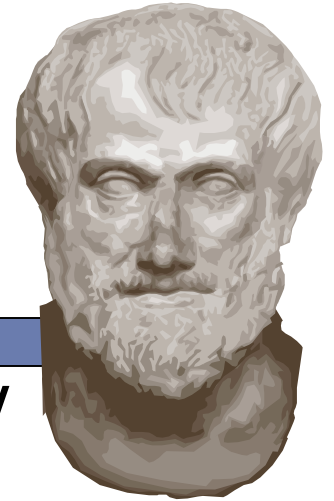
Comparing Political Systems

Comparative Politics Today, 9/e

Almond, Powell, Dalton & Strøm

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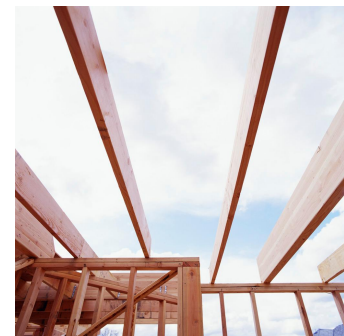
Why We Compare



- *“Without comparisons to make, the mind does not know how to proceed.”*
----Tocqueville
- Benefits of comparison
- Methodological core of the scientific study of politics
 - Aristotle
 - Contemporary political scientists
 - Try to explain differences between the processes and performances of political systems

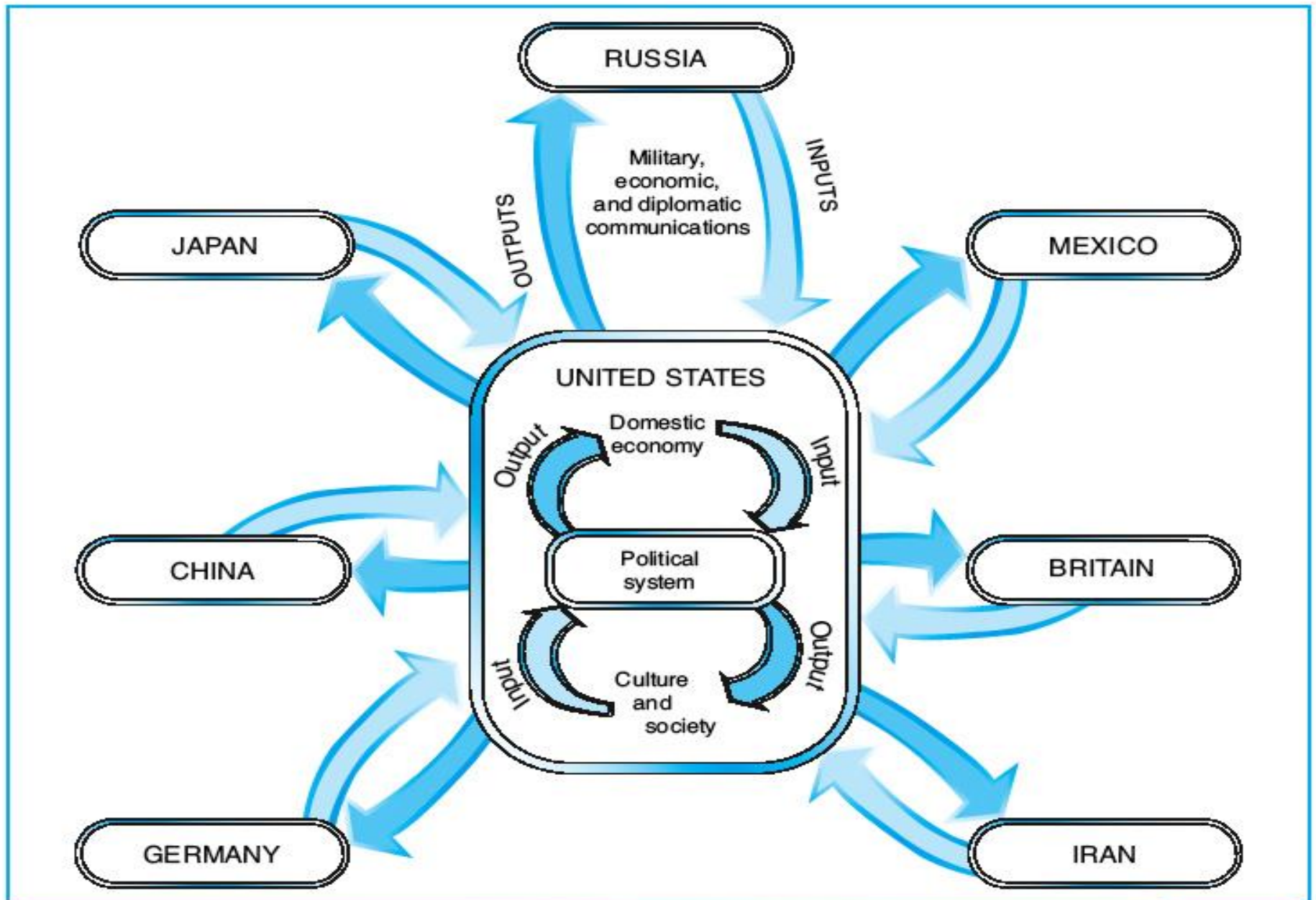
How We Compare

- First stage in the study of politics is description.
- To describe it we need a set of concepts that are clearly defined and well understood.
 - Conceptual framework
 - Easier this set of concepts is to understand and the more generally it can be applied, the more helpful it is to the study of politics.



Political Systems: Environment and Interdependence

- To utilize a structural-functional systems framework to compare political systems we need to discuss three general concepts:
 - System: suggests an object having interdependent parts, acting within a setting or an environment
 - Structure
 - Function
- Political system: a set of institutions and agencies concerned with formulating and implementing the collective goals of a society or of groups within it



The Political System and Its Environments

FIGURE 2.1

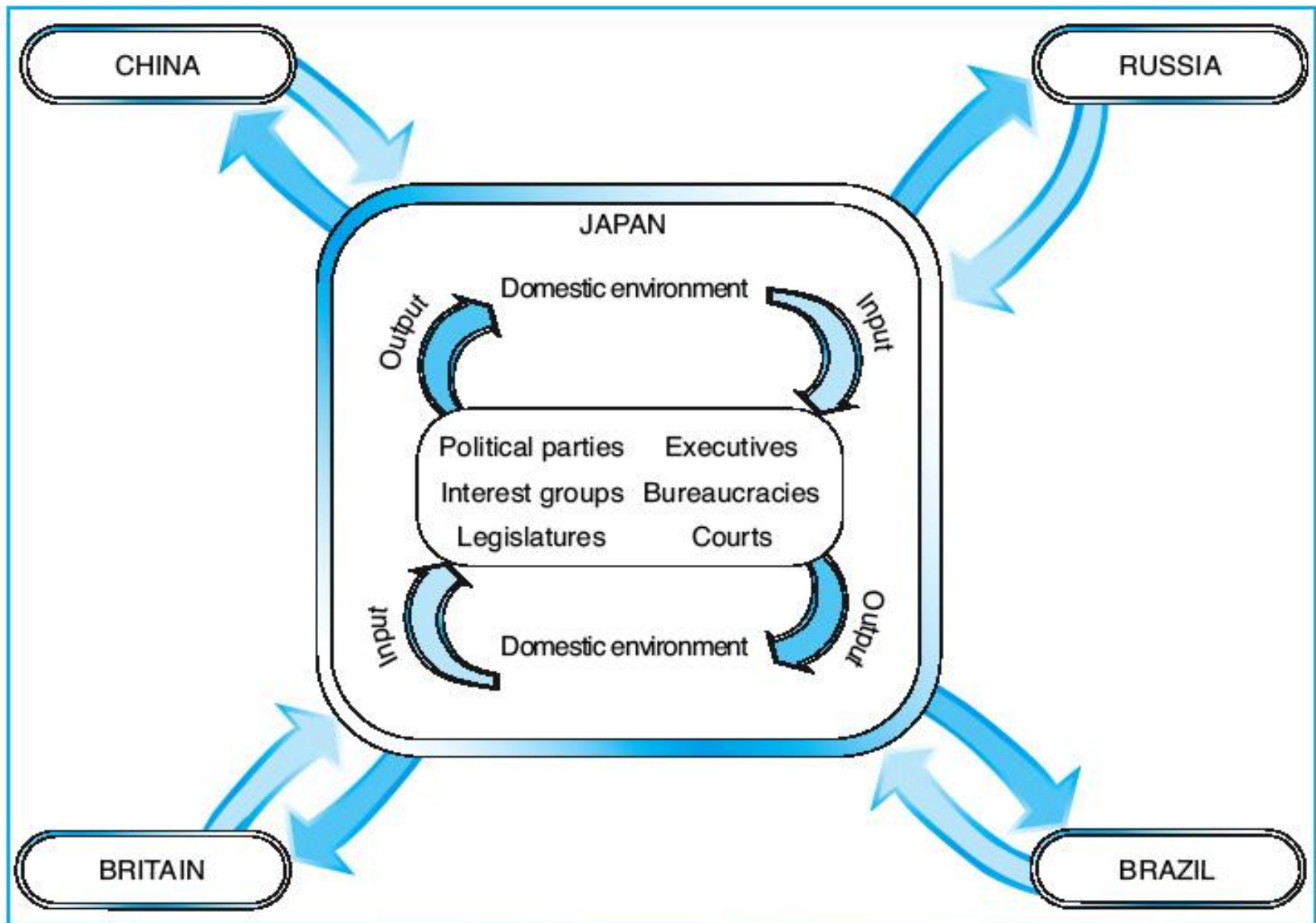
Political Systems: Environment and Interdependence

- Governments are the policymaking parts of political systems.
 - Decisions of governments are normally backed up by legitimate coercion; obedience may be compelled.
- A political system exists in both an international environment and a domestic environment.
- A system receives inputs from these environments.
 - International
 - Exchanges among countries may vary in many ways: small to great.
 - Interdependence has increased enormously in the last decades.
 - Globalization
 - Domestic
 - Economic and social systems
 - Political culture of its citizens



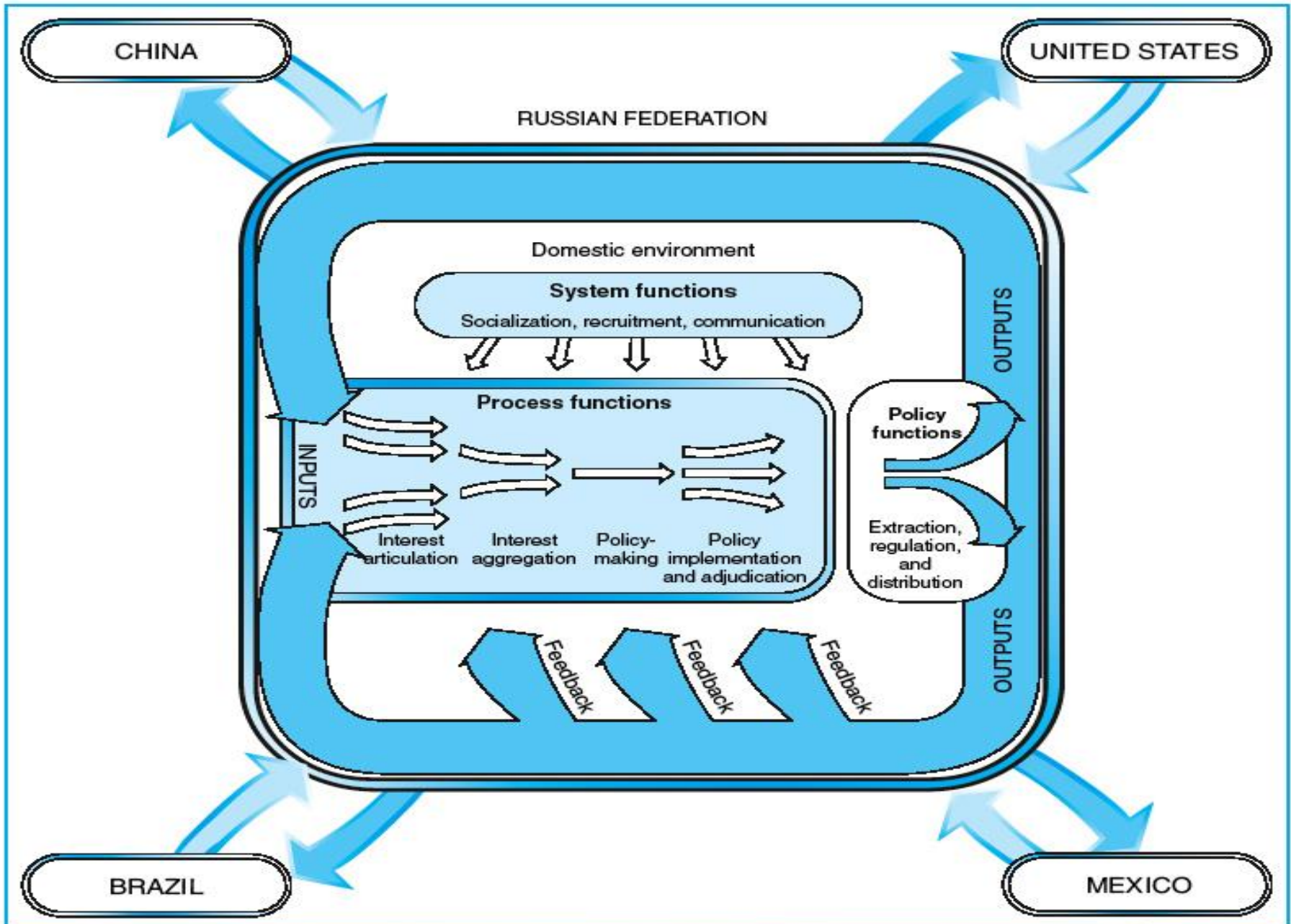
Political Systems: Structures and Functions

- Structures: parliaments, bureaucracies, administrative agencies, and courts
- Structures perform functions, which in turn enable the government to formulate, implement, and enforce its policies.
 - Policies reflect the goals; the agencies provide the means.
 - Six types of political structures: political parties, interest groups, legislatures, executives, bureaucracies, and courts.
 - Formal organizations engaged in political activities.
 - Some structures, such as ruling military councils or governing royal families, are found in only a few countries.
 - Similar structures may have very different functions across political systems.
 - Ex: China and Britain



Political Systems: Structures and Functions

- **Process functions:** distinctive activities necessary for policy to be made and implemented in any kind of political system
 - Interest articulation
 - Involves individuals and groups expressing their needs and demands
 - Interest aggregation
 - Combines different demands into policy proposals backed by significant political resources
 - Policymaking
 - Decides which policy proposals are to become authoritative rules
 - Policy implementation
 - Carries out and enforces public policies; policy adjudication settles disputes about their application



The Political System and Its Functions

FIGURE 2.3

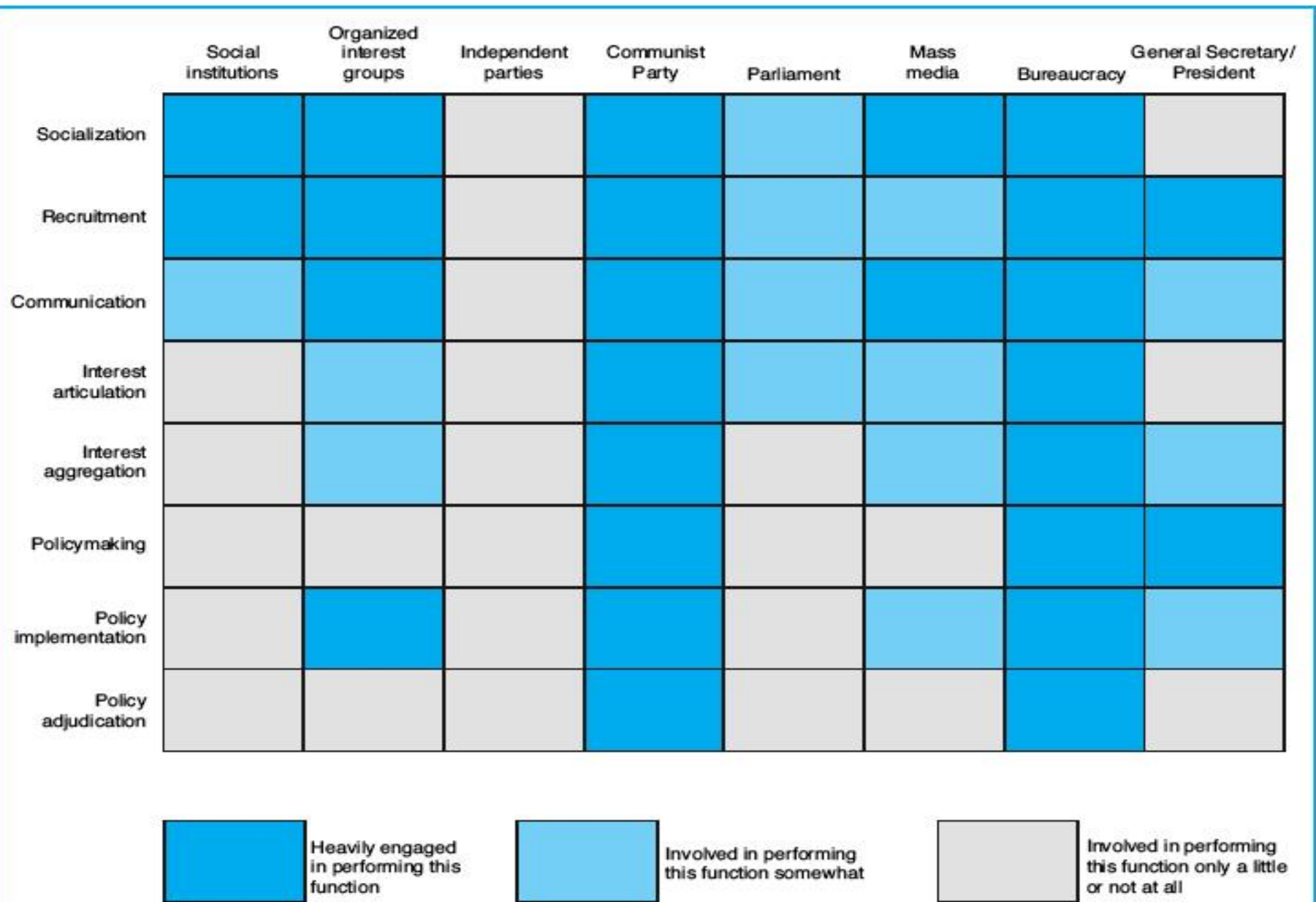
Political Systems: Structures and Functions

- Three additional functions which are not directly involved in making and implementing public policy - socialization, recruitment, and communication, are fundamentally important.
- These are **SYSTEM** functions.
 - They determine whether or not the system will be maintained or changed.
 - Political socialization: involves families, schools, communications media, churches, and all the various political structures that develop, reinforce and transform the political culture, the attitudes of political significance in the society
 - Political recruitment: refers to the selection of people for political activity and government offices
 - Political communication: refers to the flow of information through the society and through the various structures that make up the political system



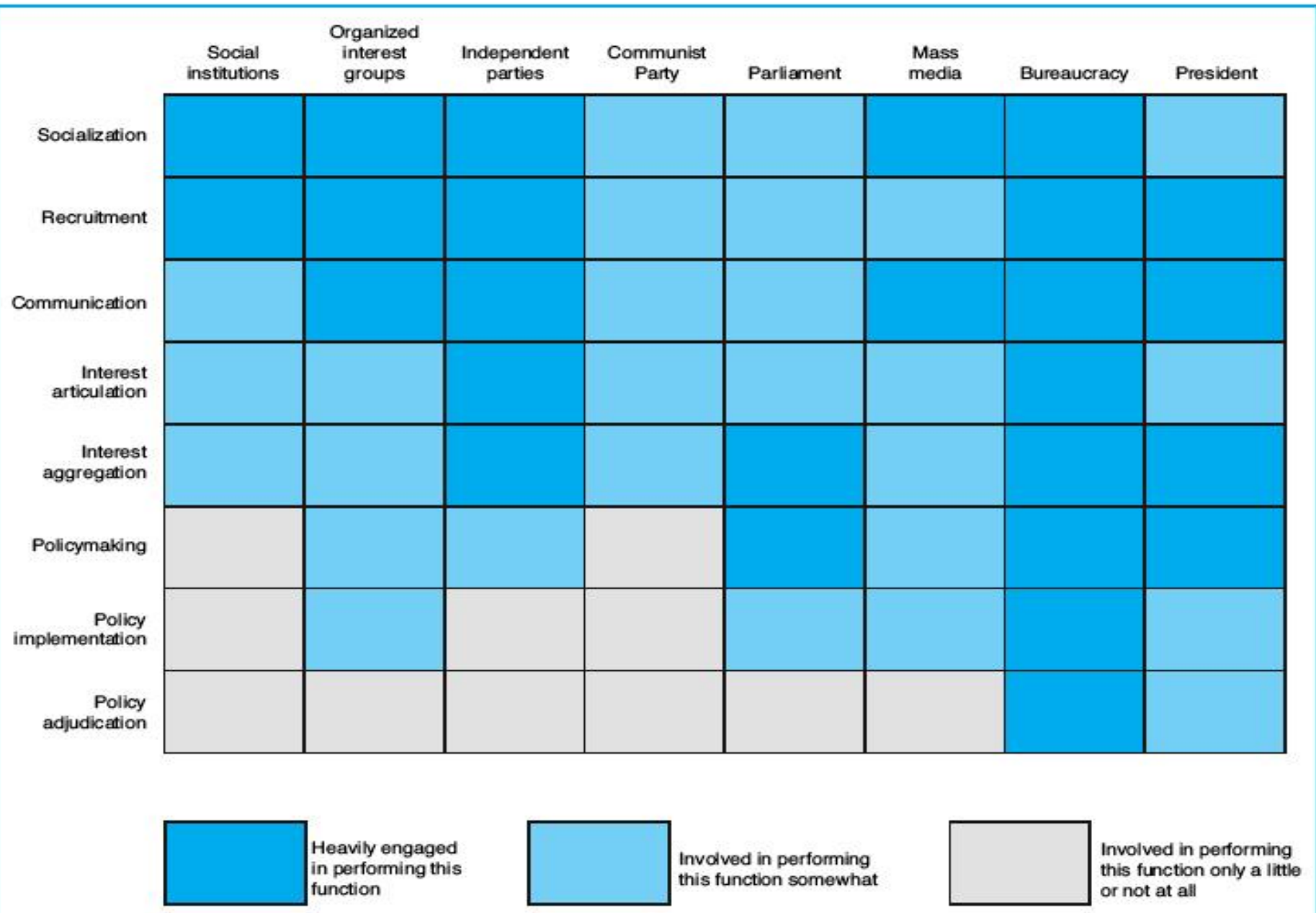
Political Systems: Structures and Functions

- Outputs = the implementations of the political process.
 - Substantive impacts on the society, the economy, and the culture
 - Regulation of behavior; extraction of resources; distribution of benefits and services
 - Reflect the way way the policies interact with the domestic and international environments
- Example of structures and functions in Russia before and after the breakdown of communist rule in the Soviet Union
 - Approach - structural functional comparison
 - Allows us to examine how the same functions are performed in different countries, or in the same country at two different points in time



The Soviet Political System in 1985

FIGURE 2.4



The Russian Political System in 2000

FIGURE 2.5

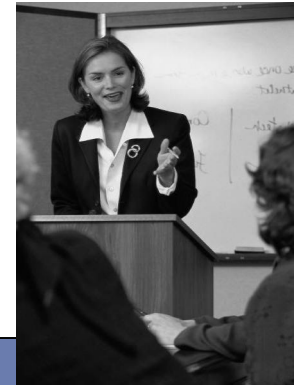
Political Systems: Structures and Functions

- Process functions are performed by political structures.
- The structural-functional approach stresses two points:
 - In different countries, the same structure may perform different functions.
 - While a particular institution may have a special relationship to a particular function, institutions often do not have a monopoly on any one function.
 - Ex: Presidents and governors may share in the policy-making function (veto powers), as do the higher courts (judicial review).

The Policy Level: Performance, Outcome, and Evaluation

- Important question: What do the differences in structure and function do for the interests, needs, and aspirations of people?
 - This is the **policy level** of the political system.
- We call the outputs of a political system- its extractions, distributions, regulations, and symbolic acts- its policy performance.
- Ex: Input: American spending on education; more than any other people in the world. Output: U.S. children perform less well in subjects such as mathematics than do children in some other countries that spend substantially less.
- Outcome of public policy is never wholly in the hands of the people and their leaders.
 - Other forces: conditions in the internal environment, conditions in the larger external world, and simple chance may frustrate the most thoughtfully crafted programs and plans
- Evaluation
 - Assessing performance and outcomes

How We Explain



- Once we describe politics with the help of a conceptual framework, we then must explain it.
 - Identifying the relationships between political phenomena
 - Ideally we want to put many political relationships in causal terms.
- Theories are statements about causal relationships between general classes of events.
 - Ex: What causes democracy, war, or welfare policies?
 - Scientific theories are always tentative; always subject to modification or falsification as our knowledge improves.
 - Theories need to be testable.
 - Good theory holds up after many trials.

How We Explain

- Studies:
 - Large “n”/statistical and small “n”/case studies
 - Variables: the features on which our cases differ
 - Statistical analysis enables us to consider possible alternative causes at the same time, accepting some and rejecting others.
 - Case studies permit us to go deeply into a case.
 - These methods are complementary.
 - Large “n” statistical studies allow us to be more certain and precise in our explanations.
 - Case studies provide depth - encourage us to formulate insightful hypotheses for statistical testing; allow us to trace the nature of cause-and-effect relations better than large “n” studies.

How We Explain

- Comparative analysis is a powerful and versatile tool.
- Enhances our ability to:
 - Describe and understand political processes and change in a country by offering concepts and reference points from a broader perspective
 - Also stimulates us to form general theories of political relationships
 - Encourages and enables us to test our political theories by confronting them with the experience of many institutions and settings

