



# Comparative politics and political violence

By JFCCH, January 2026

## 1. Comparative politics

Each country, nation, empire, city state, or any other political entity can be compared to each other. Of course it was Aristotle who first did so when he studied the constitutions of Ancient Greece. By also outlining the different kind of political systems, he perfected the way to understand and classify how men govern themselves. **Monarchy or tyranny, where one governs and others are ruled either in their own interest or in the interest of the tyrant. Oligarchy and aristocracy, where many govern and others are ruled in their own interest or in the interest of the rulers.** And finally polity or democracy, where many govern either in the interest of the people or according to the mob. It does not get much better than that. As Heidegger pointed out, the Greeks came up with almost everything and we have been getting worse ever since.

Still, standard manuals to this day have been elaborating on how to compare political systems, electoral processes of participation, separation of powers, their checks and balances, the rights of the governed, the rules to limit power, the autocratic or tyrannical necessities of empires or on the ideological twists of fate in either the Western World or the many others.

Furthermore, authors have endeavored to develop their intellectual prowess in explaining to the last detail each and everyone of these problems of political science in order to find the secret keys of organized state and to promote the advancement of the political entities history has discovered. **Machiavelli, Rousseau, Montesquieu, Hobbes, Locke, Tocqueville, Aron, Arendt, and countless others have provided powerful insights on raw power, social contract, separation of powers, peaceful coexistence, individual rights, democracy, the liberal state or the reasons for the totalitarianism of the 20th Century.**

To a large extent this body of knowledge has been of use to reveal the ways humankind, but specifically the West, has organized itself politically. This West that was defined by Paul Valéry: "I call European any society that has been successively romanized, christianized and subject to the spirit and discipline of the Greek". So, in short: Athens, Rome and Jerusalem. In chronological order.

So as in Jerusalem, it is a matter of revelation. **By observing the processes of history, several ways were found here and there to give formal and theoretical reality to St. Thomas Aquinas formulation**, whereby: "All authority comes from God but through the people". Or in more modern times, as Lincoln put it after the battle of Gettysburg: "...so that government of the people, by the people and for the people should not perish from the Earth". Or even in Antiquity when Pericles in his Funeral Oration described the main features of Athenian democracy. That is, we have been looking for what should we do to structure things to govern ourselves.

And so it has been that through these meanders of history the English invented the rule of law and subjected King John in Magna Carta to respect some liberties and fulfill some duties. **So it has been that even before that in the Cortes of León, the Spanish convened Cortes, Parliament, to solve the public problems** of the day. And so has it been also that the present French Constitution sought to restore, albeit only for a while, the stability of the ancient Monarchy by infusing some order (Cartesianism, the rationality of Descartes) in the revolutionary Republic. Finally, the very same thing was done by Thomas Jefferson when, by acknowledging the spirit of the times, he stated that the Americans could hold some truths to be self evident (revealed through history for the benefit of the present) such as the equality of men, God given rights (Aquinas) and the right to pursue happiness (liberty also known as property, according to Locke).

From this political science stemmed different ways to organize the state, which was historically the instrument nations used to operate politically, and the rights of their people.

The study of those ways and rights is what we call comparative politics.

But of course **neither this studious endeavor nor the overcomplicated organization of these days or the upholding of certain areas of personal freedom here and there, resulted in the happiness of all realms**. In fact, if anything, the advanced study and knowledge of comparative politics and political philosophy gave the world the ideological disasters of the 20th Century (marxism-communism and nazism) ending in the explosion of the most politically violent period of all human history (by death count).

For, as Clausewitz once stated, while giving a side look at Napoleon, war is, indeed, the continuation of politics by other means. And so it was to be that men started to think anew about how to improve their, more than ever, “lacrimarum valle”.

## 2. Political violence

Certainly political violence has its place in the study of comparative politics and political science at large. An aside place. It is the side car of political philosophy.

Yes, sure, Hobbes was obsessed by the “homo homini lupus” thing but again, Rousseau upheld the opposite principle. So a medium term solution to avoid conflicting persuasions was, and has been ever since, to consider political violence a possible occurrence that systems are supposed to prevent and remediate once it presents itself. By applying this measure, political violence was just another chapter to be considered along with subjects such as political economy, electoral participation or public policies.

However, as we mentioned, **since that 20th Century progress had provided such an orgy of violence, a new approach could be warranted.** Then two things happened: for some, as the West had been to blame for the ideologies that destroyed the World, it would follow, as night the day, that the West had to be abrogated, annihilated, obliterated. It had to leave the scene. But yet for others it had to be something else: what if the pervasiveness of violence was the starting and substantial point of organized society (politics) rather than just something that from time to time came to disrupt it?

### *The first approach: the “deconstruction” of the West*

The dismissal of the West came from odd quarters. The very heart of where St. Thomas Aquinas taught. **Three French thinkers between Sorbonne lectures and Quartier Latin’s cafes started to question the foundations of the West: Truth, inherited from the Greek, Law, inherited from the Romans, and Love and Transcendence, inherited from the Biblical story.**

They did so by impugning all the assumptions of traditional philosophy. For instance, **Foucault**, the most influential of the group, attempted to show that man was so dependent on its background that no matter the efforts, he would eventually end up thinking with his upbringing. And that could not be, for such a breeding, the targeted West, had brought about calamity and disaster. A new, not unconsciously oppressing West had to emerge.

**Then there was Derrida who wanted to “deconstruct” the language so as to make it more pure and meaningful.** He confused things even further by advocating for the rejection of all the adherences that shaped up Western culture.

**The less talented Deleuze**, final component of this trio, intended to challenge essential tenets of the logic of the history of philosophy from the Greeks up to Leibniz.

In essence, they deliberately placed themselves after Modernity, hence postmodernists, but from a point of view of the structures, hence, post-structuralists, and since most of the structuralists were also marxists hence again, post-structuralist marxists. Call them what you want, they were about to make a real mess. Obscure as they were, they nevertheless happened to be taken up by American universities. They were there rehashed, across the spacious skies and the amber waves of grain, so as to make them palatable to any Western ears and not just their parochial and narrow Parisian streets.

Reduced to easy bits and pieces and catchy anti establishment slogans, **their ideas proceeded to shape a narrative. It disputed everything Western, the totality of culture indeed, as a manifestation of oppression, repression, bigotry, racism and hypocrisy intended to lure the World, specially all those subject or influenced by Western culture, into an unwarranted submission.** Lo and behold, they succeeded. Although certainly neither of the three would ever admit wanting to be acknowledged as the founders of Wokism, as they, perhaps unwillingly, were.

So, to sum up, **a bunch of French intellectuals on the fringe of the lunatic fringe of an already pretty disturbed crowd, made a round trip across the Atlantic that resulted in overturning the West and driving it towards a new “zeitgeist”.** They erased all we thought valuable the day before we heard from them.

Let's leave aside the question of what were we doing while this was going on, and have a look at a parallel story, wherein, hangs a tale.

### *Enter René Girard*

René Noël Théophile Girard was born on Christmas Day of 1923 to his proud parents in the papal city of Avignon. After the II World War, seeing the sorry state of France, he took a job teaching French literature in the University of Bloomington, Indiana.

The striking thing here being that another Frenchman, albeit provincial, was to make another round trip to America, yet with an entirely different intellectual result. What would his journey be?

Not to bore his students or to even make them interested, his words, he started teaching them about French “romans” or novels in a creative way. **Rather than to insist in the individuality of each art work, he endeavored to find what was similar across the tales they told. He found this pattern in what he called “mimetic desire”,** as in one tends to want what others want. He developed this theory in a book called: “Desire, Deceit and the Novel” written in French under the more poetic name of “Mensonge romantique et verité romanesque”: romantic lie and novelistic truth. Well, the truth of the novel happened to be a truth in life with astonishing political and sociological consequences.

If men wanted in fact the same object, it was only natural that a rivalry should emerge in order to obtain it, and from that rivalry violence would inevitably ensue. It took him ten years to develop his ideas, but **by 1972 he was ready to write “Violence and the sacred”, where this concept of political violence was used to explain the founding element of political entities.**

That founding is the sacrifice of a victim, a scapegoat, that takes the blame for the ills of the society - endless violence caused by mimetic rivalry - and therefore allows, after the deed is done, a period of peace and reconciliation. In fact anything sacred and anything cultural stem from that killing, which explains the myths of Antiquity. And any myth, for that matter.

Then came, in 1978, “Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World”. A title borrowed from Matthew 13:35. Whereas the tales of Ancient times told **the story of a scapegoat murder as a way to reconcile the community, the Biblical narrative replaced the scapegoat with the lamb of God, i.e. the victim was innocent. Such a novelty no one seemed to have noticed before, for it was hidden in plain sight.** But you see, the victim is innocent! One can almost hear Girard claiming. Indeed, this is the particularity. All myths proclaim the same idea, that a victim is needed in order to restore the peace. Once harmony is regained, people realize who made it possible, turning the scapegoat into a sort of God also, for he is the source of the relief. However, whereas the murder was justified in all the Ancient times, for the victim was guilty; in the Passion, the victim, Christ, is innocent and his murder the greatest injustice. So it is just like in a myth, except it is completely the opposite.

So shocking was this revelation that when Girard made the tour of the Parisian circles to promote his long book of conversations with a couple of French psychiatrists, he was dismissed as an nutcase and an outsider. He was, well, scapegoated. Notwithstanding that, “Things Hidden” was rather successful. It was also much more than that, it was a turning point.

Therefore it could not come as a surprise that years later such important figures of American culture, business life and politics as Peter Thiel or J.D. Vance were influenced by it.

**J.D. Vance, in a famous article under the suggestive title “How I Joined the Resistance”, meaning the Catholic Church,** published in “The Lamp Magazine” wrote this, worth quoting at length: “But Peter (Thiel) left me with one more thing: he was possibly the smartest person I’d ever met, but he was also a Christian. He defied the social template I had constructed—that dumb people were Christians and smart ones atheists. I began to wonder where his religious belief came from, which led me to René Girard, the French philosopher whom he apparently studied under at Stanford. Girard’s thought is rich enough that any effort to summarize will fail to do the man justice. His theory of mimetic rivalry—that we tend to compete over the things that other people want—spoke directly to some of the pressures I experienced at Yale. But it was his related theory of the scapegoat—and what it revealed about Christianity—that made me reconsider my faith.

**One of Girard’s central insights is that human civilizations are often, perhaps even always, founded on a “scapegoat myth”—an act of violence committed against someone who has wronged the broader community, retold as a sort of origin story for the community.**

Girard points out that Romulus and Remus are, like Christ, divine children, and, like Moses, placed in a river basket to save them from a jealous king. There was a time when I bristled at such comparisons, worried that any seeming lack of originality on the part of Scripture meant that it couldn’t be true. This is a common rhetorical device of the New Atheists: point to some creation story—like the flood narrative in the Epic of Gilgamesh—as evidence that the sacred authors have plagiarized their story from some earlier civilization. It reasonably follows that if the biblical story is lifted from somewhere else, the version in the Bible may not be the Word of God after all.

But Girard rejects this inference, and leans into the similarities between biblical stories and those from other civilizations. **To Girard, the Christian story contains a crucial**

**difference—a difference that reveals something “hidden since the foundation of the world.” In the Christian telling, the ultimate scapegoat has not wronged the civilization; the civilization has wronged him.** The victim of the madness of crowds is, as Christ was, infinitely powerful—able to prevent his own murder—and perfectly innocent—undeserving of the rage and violence of the crowd. In Christ, we see our efforts to shift blame and our own inadequacies onto a victim for what they are: a moral failing, projected violently upon someone else. Christ is the scapegoat who reveals our imperfections, and forces us to look at our own flaws rather than blame our society’s chosen victims.

People come to truth in different ways, and I’m sure some will find this account unsatisfying. But in 2013, it captured so well the psychology of my generation, especially its most privileged inhabitants. **Mired in the swamp of social media, we identified a scapegoat and digitally pounced. We were keyboard warriors, unloading on people via Facebook and Twitter, blind to our own problems. We fought over jobs we didn’t actually want while pretending we didn’t fight for them at all. And the end result for me, at least, was that I had lost the language of virtue.** I felt more shame over failing in a law school exam than I did about losing my temper with my girlfriend. That all had to change. It was time to stop scapegoating and focus on what I could do to improve things.

These very personal reflections on faith, conformity, and virtue coincided with a writing project that would eventually become a very public success: *Hillbilly Elegy*, the hybrid book of memoir and social commentary I published in 2016.”

Now, how did this happen? **That the book that best described the revolt of the masses (the deplorables, in Hillary Clinton’s words) that led Trump to the presidency had its roots in a French philosopher that reversed the post modernist wave.** What an astonishing turn of Providence!

But there is more to the story. One of the leading drives of the deplorables was their rejection of the “forever wars”, started in the wake of 9/11 and ended in the tragic retreat from Afghanistan under Joe Biden’s watch. And it was precisely political violence that had occupied Girard’s life.

**Which brings us to Girard’s last book, “Battling to the End”, again more specifically titled in French: “Ending Clausewitz”.** For this was indeed the goal. In other words, ending the continuation of politics through war. If the “zeitgeist” of the present no longer could resort to myths to explain away violence and reconcile society,

nor did it believe in Jesus Christ either, therefore there was no way on earth it could stop violence. Violence would eventually “escalate to the extremes”, that is Clausewitz speaking, and end with us all in an Apocalyptic final. To which Girard had an easy way out, what could we do to avoid it? “Behave like Christians”.

**And was it not “ending Clausewitz” what Trump had been doing half the time in the dizzying ten months of his second term? Stop the war in the Middle East, return the hostages, halt the killings in Ukraine, sign a myriad of peace agreements, return to a Westphalian world order...**

Amazing as it sounds, it is not yet all, for there were other forms of political violence. At least one attempt on the life of Donald Trump, that left one dead, during the 2024 campaign, and Charlie Kirk’s murder.

In these cases, the distorted mindsets of the shooters reflected a worldview, let’s call it that, not dissimilar to what one could describe as wokism or post-modernism, thereby proving the radical opposition between one set of French thinkers who overwhelmed American, and through them, Western thought, against another French intellectual who was, perhaps not shaping, but definitely describing the political turn of American culture.

As for what is to prevail, as always, the jury is still out. For what Girard was standing for, in the end, was a return to sanity. The sanity of Westerners, thinking as such, that is, subject to the idea of truth inherited from the Greek, the rule of Law, invented by the Romans and the Judeo-Christian heritage of love, forgiveness and hope.

**What is going however can only be shown by Scripture. Here is Luke 12:54-57: “He also said to the crowds. When you see a cloud rising in the west, you say at once, ‘A shower is coming’. And so it happens. And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, ‘There will be scorching heat’, and it happens. You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?”**

What is there then? **In Girard’s terms, a continuation of political violence, also known as war, in the Eastern flank of Europe, preserved for the purposes of sustaining a set of political institutions that have aged badly after their inception to solve the aftermath of the II World War and the Cold War.** And a rejection of the political changes that may challenge the “civilizational erasure” we are embarked upon.

So, to sum up and conclude, **there are two parallel lines in the contemporary history of ideas. Both start somewhere in France and after having been recycled in the**

**United States of America have made the return trip to the rest of the West.** Now one of them is still predominant but the other one has raised its claims. At the core of this last one is the fundamental concern to stop, prevent and limit political violence as the essence of comparative politics, political science and in fact just about everything. At the core of the other one is the idea that political violence has already been dealt with and anyone disagreeing will be made responsible for its resurgence. That is, will be scapegoated for its resurgence. What is it going to be? It is up to us.