THE RAPID GROWTH in the field of Comparative Politics in the past decade and a half has not only resulted in a major increase in the amount of comparative data available, but, perhaps more significantly, it has also produced a growing concern with and attention to the methodology of comparative political analysis (see, for example, Scarrow, 1969; Holt and Turner, 1970; Przeworski and Teune, 1970; Mayer, 1972). Unfortunately, the connection between these two elements has not always been immediate. While we would agree with Blondel (1972: 5) that "any analysis of government is, in the deepest reality, either implicitly or explicitly comparative," much of what passes for comparative research seems to be of the implicit genre. This criticism is particularly true, we feel, of the literature which purports to compare various segments of the Canadian and American political systems. While the comparative literature on these two systems spans three decades, it appears that few definitive answers are supported by empirical research (Arnold and Tigert, 1974: 68).

Such a perspective is particularly evident in relation to the possible comparative studies between Canada and the United States in the political socialization area. To this point such research is almost nonexistent. While several research collections on the political socialization process in Canada are now becoming available (Zureik and Pike, 1975; Whittington and Pammett, 1976), the only article that seeks to provide a comparative analysis of the process in Canada and the United States is the work of Jon Pammett (1971). However, even this article could be classified in the implicit genre in that the focus of Pammett’s (1967: 12) study of Kingston, Ontario was an attempt to discover "the effect the factor of religion has in producing differential patterns of political socialization in children." His original purpose (Pammett, 1967: 21) was not to make a comparative study of Canadian and American children, although in his later article (Pammett, 1971: 139–140) he does suggest some interesting, speculative hypotheses about the similarities and differences between the United States and Canada in the political socialization area.

Thus, the following article is a brief summary of some of the major findings from the first explicitly comparative study of the political socialization process in Canada and the United States (Landes, 1973). Using a purposive sample of approximately 600 children in grades four through eight in both Belleville,
Ontario and Watertown, New York, the following areas will be investigated in this comparative analysis: the child’s affective response to government, the child’s cognitive perception of the political structure, the development of political knowledge, the acquisition of partisan orientations, and the perception of similarity between Canadians and Americans.

The Child’s Affective Response to Government

In considering the child’s developing perception of the political system, one of the first problems encountered by the analyst is the focus of the child’s attention on the political world. In an early and important article in the political socialization field, David Easton and Jack Dennis (1965: 42) suggested that it is “through the idea of government itself that the child seems able to reach out and at a very early age to establish contact both with the authorities and with certain aspects of the regime.” In investigating the child’s developing affective image of the polity in the American system, Easton and Dennis (1965: 55) came to the conclusion that the child “begins with deep sympathy for government, and this early aura of approval is likely to remain at the base of his acceptance of the government . . .”

In reviewing the comparative literature on Canada and the United States, several major themes of their respective political cultures led us to expect that the level of political affect expressed for government in Canada would be higher than that found in the United States (Lipset, 1967; Hartz, 1955; Presthus, 1973). In particular the significance of the factor of elitism, among others, was the basis for John Meisel’s (1975: 244–245) conclusion that “the total effect . . . has been to make Canadians less deferential than the British, and more so than the Americans.” In a significant comparative study of interest groups in Canada and the United States, Robert Presthus (1974: 3–39) also suggests that certain elements of Canada’s political culture (i.e. the mosaic philosophy of acculturation, a corporatist theory of society, deferential patterns of authority, and a quasi-participative politics) may help to explain the “differential perceptions of legitimacy regarding government in each society.” Particularly the greater role of government in the economic sphere in Canada than in the United States,

1 The assumption underlying the city selection process for this comparative analysis was the idea of choosing two cities which were reasonably similar on a number of important economic and social characteristics. In other words, we followed the “most similar systems” method of comparison which seeks to minimize the effects of such variables as town size, geographical setting, occupational makeup, and ethnic-racial composition in our data. Using general classification schemes and census data comparisons, Belleville, Ontario and Watertown, New York were viewed as appropriate cities for such a comparison. The sample utilized can be described as one of “purposive” design selected from the children in grades four through eight in Belleville and Watertown. In consultation with the schoolboards and principals we chose schools which were “representative” of each city and comparable between cities. Schools from several sections of each town and from both the separate and public school systems were included. Approximately 600 questionnaires were administered in each city in late 1971 and early 1972.