Synopsis

The course surveys four, broadly focused topics.

I. The Comparative Method

The class begins with a survey of the basic methodological orientations that distinguish various modes of analysis in the social sciences. The lectures and discussions in this section provide a general introduction to the logic of causal analysis, explore the comparative strengths and weaknesses of differing methodological approaches to understanding social phenomena, and specifically, consider in greater detail the distinctive blend of theoretical, methodological, and empirical concerns that inform comparative-historical social science.

II. The Nature and Historical Origins of the Modern State

The second section of the course bears witness to social scientists’ efforts to define the nature of state sovereignty. What is distinctive about the organization, jurisdiction, and ideology of modern states relative to political systems that preceded them in human history? A second, interrelated focus of this section concerns the specific historical contexts in which states were called into existence. How do we explain the appearance of state systems in modern times? What cultural, social, and economic forces unique to Europe prefigured the emergence of a community of states there? A schematic overview of these incipient efforts at state building provides the backdrop for a comparative analysis of political modernization outside the confines of Europe.

III. The Sociology of Democracy and Authoritarianism

Beyond advancing interpretations of when and how state-building occurs, this portion of the course addresses the important, related question: how and why do the outcomes of political modernization differ? Why does state-building lead to the institutionalization of parliamentary democracies in some nations, in others, right-wing dictatorships, and in others still, left-wing variants of authoritarian government?
IV. The Sociology of Revolution

The fourth topical focus of the class explores the sudden and dramatic transformations of political institutions so frequently essential to the historical process of state building: revolutions. How have more general changes in the global political, social, and economic order combined with immediate historical events to precipitate revolutionary conflict over the ends, ways and means of government from one nation to another? The section of the course begs an understanding of the transformative role of violence in shaping the destiny of modern polities: how geopolitical confrontation between warring regimes progressively expanded the institutional capacities of reconstituted governments to finance and organize military campaigns, to secure national borders, and to police their citizenry; and how revolutionary insurgencies -- violent conflict within polities among competing factions over control of the state -- also propelled the reconstruction of state sovereignty in modern times.

V. The Rise of the Welfare State

Taking the coercive dimensions of state sovereignty as read, the last set of assigned readings turn our attention to the apparently more benign, civil aspects of state development in the last two centuries. Through the late nineteenth century into the Cold War era, the governments of the advanced industrial democracies progressively extended the public fisc to accommodate demands for guaranteeing a social minimum to their citizenry. The idea of citizenship -- at first confined to specific property, civil, and political rights -- assumed a much more expansive definition, now including rights to such necessaries as food, housing, health care, education and other protective services. The costs of social rights are high. Social policies -- policies countervailing economic and market inequalities and alleviating abject poverty -- now account for most public spending among the advanced industrial democracies. What common ground do we witness among these countries in the development of the welfare state? What are the key differences between them? This concluding section seeks to conceptualize and explain the varied trajectories of social policy development from one nation to another in Western Europe and North America.

Required Texts Available for Purchase


Skocpol, Theda. 1979. *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press. HM283 S5.6
Assignments/Grading

Class attendance and participation count for 20% of your grade.

Six short assignments (5 pages) represent another 60% of your grade. These essays require that you answer questions on the readings for weeks 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10. You have the option of writing an essay for either week 4 or 5. Each short assignment equals 10% of your final grade. Asterisks in the syllabi remind you of the readings for which assignments are due.

One class presentation and term paper, due on the last day of class, accounts for the remaining 20% of your grade. This paper should not exceed 15 pages. Your choice of a major comparative-historical study in sociology, political science, or any other field of social science of contemporary significance will be the subject of your class presentation in the final weeks of the course. In your term paper, you will present a more detailed written summary and analysis of your chosen study.

Readings and Assignments

I. Methodological Foundations of Comparative Sociology

Week 1. The Epistemology of the Social Sciences

September 7

No readings.

Week 2. Variable-Oriented Social Science

September 12, 14

No readings.

Week 3. Case-Oriented Social Science and the Comparative Method

September 19, 21

**Theoretical Building Blocks: The Nature of Social Power**


**Part II. The Great Transformation: The Rise of Capitalism, Industrialism and the Modern State in Europe**

*Week 4. Social Power in Pre-Industrial Societies*

September 26, 28

**The Primacy of Political Power in Agrarian Societies**


**European Feudalism**


**The Investiture Conflict and the Beginnings of the Modern European State**


Answer the first two questions, and one of the following two questions.

1. Poggi recognizes three distinct and (potentially) independent sources of social power. The capacity of some people to dominate others has multiple origins: political, economic, and ideological. In Lenski’s writings he observes that political power, economic power and ideological power are not very much differentiated from each other in agrarian societies. They fuse in the monarchy and the landed aristocracy. Moreover, political power subsumes and subordinates economic and ideological power, and not vice versa. Identify and synthesize the arguments and evidence in *Power and Privilege* that substantiate this thesis.

2. Lenski shows that political power did not wholly dominate the economic and ideological realms of agrarian societies. To demonstrate this point, compare and contrast relations between the peasants and the landed aristocracy to the relations between the urban classes (merchants and guilds) and the landed aristocracy. How does the former represent an amalgamation of the means of coercion with economic domination? How
does the latter demonstrate limits to the warrior caste’s monopoly over economic resources?

And further, briefly describe the apparently conflicted position of the Roman Catholic Church in European feudal society. How was the Church both subject to political power and supportive of it, but as the same time, attempt to limit the exploitative power of the monarch and the landed aristocracy?

3. European feudalism constituted one manifestation of agrarian rule. The extreme fragmentation of political power among the landed aristocracy distinguished European feudalism from other agrarian societies. What was responsible, according to Poggi in his writing on feudalism, for the pronounced anarchic tendencies of European feudalism?

4. Strayer offers an interpretation of the origins of the modern state emphasizing the growing importance of the separation of church and state in Europe, beginning with the Investiture Conflict. In his estimation the differentiation of political power from other forms of social power begins with the administration of justice and the securing of domestic order and peace. Briefly recapitulate Strayer’s central arguments about how this historical process unfolded. Pay attention to how the separation of church and state changed the legitimating ideology of monarchy. Why was the administration of justice a likely starting point of the origins of the state insofar as it was consistent with “the proprietary theory of the state”, as described in Lenski?

*Week 5. From Feudalism to Liberalism*

October 3, 5

Standestaat, and Absolutism


War-Making and the Rise of the Absolutist State


The Liberal-Constitutional State


A Comparative Interpretation of the Rise of the Capitalist-State in Europe


Answer any three questions.

The rise of the modern state attended the collapse of the landed aristocracy. The aristocracy lost its political role as European monarchs progressively established a monopoly over the means of violence. Monarchs gathered unto themselves the exclusive prerogatives of political power: the undivided capacity to wage war; to collect taxes; and to establish courts and other legal instruments to maintain domestic order. The political disenfranchisement of the aristocracy paralleled their economic demise. The economic dominance of the nobles rested upon their power to extract rents from peasants working the land within their fiefs. As lands were the principal source of wealth in the feudal age, landlordism underpinned the political power of the nobility. With the commercialization and urbanization of the European economy, the bourgeoisie eclipsed the aristocracy as the dominant economic force. The rise of capitalism and of the modern state occurred simultaneously.

1. Poggi describes the growing importance of towns in the feudal polity and in the polity of estates. With the growing economic strength of capitalist entrepreneurs within the urban economy, the bourgeoisie began to redefine its social identity from that of an estate to that of a class and then sought to undermine the polity of estates and to endorse the growth of the absolutist state. Why did the towns at first seek a corporate form of self-government within the feudal polity? What distinguishes a class from an estate in Poggi’s estimation? Why did the capitalist class lose its interests in directly possessing powers of self-government in favor of vesting political rule in a unitary state that stood “apart and above” class in a distinctive “public sphere.”

2. The bourgeoisie had vested interests in expanding the sovereignty of absolutist monarchs. But monarchs also had a reciprocal interest in expanding trade and commerce according to Charles Tilly. The financing of war prompted a close alliance between monarchs and the bourgeoisie. What changes in military technology rendered the landed aristocracy relatively useless to the crown in prosecuting wars? And why did these changes increase the dependence of monarchs on capitalists, and as such, witness absolutist states encourage to the greatest extent the growth of monetarized economies? How did war making within the context of commercial economies progressively expand and reform the administrative apparatus of newly emerging states?

3. The development of the modern state in England diverged from the pattern evident in continental Europe. What was different about the English experience of state building? And how did it culminate in liberal-constitutionalism, and subsequently, liberal democracy? The political thought of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau mirror the evolution
of the modern state from absolutism, to constitutional liberalism, to liberal democracy. Recapitulate briefly how these political theorists arrived at different interpretations of the legitimacy of state power. (Or, to put it another way, what does each political theorist say the state should and must do to preserve the good society?) How do these different accounts of state power correspond to the evolutionary stages mentioned above?

4. Peter Hall and John Ikenberry attempt to identify the unique causes of European state development through comparison with other agrarian societies. In their estimation, what was distinctive about the political and cultural contexts of Europe that allowed for the rise of capitalism and the modern state there as compared to Chinese, Indian and Islamic civilizations?

III. The Sociology of Democracy and Authoritarianism

*Week 6. The Social Origins of Democracy

October 10, 12


Answer both questions.

1. English and French paths to capitalist democracy differed greatly. Recapitulate the key differences between English and French landed aristocracies and explain why England progressed to political democracy without the benefit of peasant revolutions from below while France required a violent, bloody revolution to clear away the impediments to a democratic polity.

2. As Moore notes, the plantation economy of the South and the industrial economy of the Northeast United States complemented one another in the first century of the new republic. The American Civil War need not have taken place. A specific set of political circumstances precipitated the war, namely, Southern politicians’ intransigence over granting Northern capitalists favorable economic policies, which only the federal government had the power to enact. What was the essence of the conflict between the South and the North over national economic policy? Why was it that the North could see no way out of the impasse other than to conquer and then reform the Southern economy and society? Or, in other words, what was different about the United States, as compared to Japan and Germany, which prevented a compromise solution between the Northern bourgeoisie and Southern plantation elites (reliant on labor-repressive agriculture) culminating in fascism?
*Week 7. The Social Origins of Communism and Fascism*

October 17, 19


Answer one of the two questions.

Japanese and Chinese societies modernized without the benefit of autonomous, self-governing cities that emerged in late feudal Europe. The Japanese and Chinese bourgeoisie did not initially become the dominant economic class in these societies. No (dominant) bourgeoisie, no democracy, as Moore observes. Nevertheless, the reach and power of European states forced upon these Asian societies a reactive program of state building if they were to establish and defend successfully their sovereignty. Japan and China eventually found very different solutions to the problems of national unification, military security, and economic modernization.

**China**

1. Imperial China did not develop vassalage along European lines, i.e. grants of land in return for military service. What then provided bonds of loyalty between the landed gentry and the Emperor under the Manchu dynasty? Why did the Imperial system breakdown in the early twentieth century and usher in an era of anarchic warlordism?

The failure of Kuomintang’s regime efforts at national unification provided an opportunity for the Communists to harness the revolutionary potential of the Chinese peasantry in their bid for power. Why were peasant rebellions so endemic to China? Account for the relationship between the peasants and the upper classes in your answer as well as various factors which united and divided peasants. Why did such anarchy express itself in terms of gangsterism as opposed to a coherent political program for restructuring political power in China?

How did the communists forge peasant solidarity and convert it into a political and economic base for their eventual triumph? How did the Japanese occupation advance the fortunes of communist leadership?

**Japan**

2. Tokugawa Shogunate effectively tamed the turbulence of Japanese warlords during its long reign (1600-1868). How did the relationship between the Shogunate and the major warlords (daimyo) parallel in many respects the relationship between the French monarchy and the land aristocracy under Louis XIV? How did this relationship weaken
the position of the samurai and daimyo and permit the emergence of a vigorous merchant class in Japan?

The Meiji Restoration eventually completed the work (first begun under the Tokugawa Shogunate) of erecting a centralized state, and further embarked upon an aggressive campaign of economic modernization. How did the Meiji government successfully promote capitalist development without undermining important elements of the old order?

The Japanese political elite squeezed ever greater surpluses out of the peasantry to modernize the economy. Why did the state, in concert with the rural landlords, consistently expropriate more rice from the peasantry without ever risking peasant uprisings and rebellions akin to that of China? Identify the key aspects of social and political control over the peasantry operating in the Japanese countryside, which prevented peasant insurrection. Also discuss the contributions of Japanese riziculture to lessening the deprivations of the peasantry in spite of their shouldering the economic burden of industrialization.

IV. Sociology of Revolutions

*Week 8. The Causes of French, Russian, and Chinese Revolutions

October 24


Answer both questions.

1. Why does Skocpol find inadequate these three approaches to understanding revolution: aggregate-psychological theories; systems/value consensus theories; the political conflict perspective.

2. Skocpol identifies three specific causes of state breakdown in modernizing agrarian bureaucracies: breakdown of social control; peasant revolts from below; and radical political movements. Briefly summarize why agrarian bureaucracies were prone to collapse while seeking to modernize their political and social orders. How did foreign pressures trigger revolutionary situations in France, Russia and China? What was it about peasant communities in each of these societies which made them vulnerable to mass insurrections?

Midterm Break, October 26-29
Week 9. The Causes of French, Russian, and Chinese Revolutions (cont.)

October 31, November 2

*Week 10. Revolutionary Outcomes

November 7, 9


What was common about the social origins of the radical elites which lead these three revolutions, and therefore, common about the outcomes of each revolution? How does Skocpol explain the key difference between French, Russian and Chinese revolutions, namely, democracy in the first instance, and communism in latter cases?

V. Sociology of the Welfare State

*Week 11. Liberal Democratic, Social Democratic, and Corporatist Welfare States

November 14, 16


Answer both questions.

1. Esping-Andersen presents a typology of welfare states: liberal; corporatist; and social democratic. Briefly describe the key differences between these types with respect to decommodification and stratification. Esping-Andersen also identifies three causal variables that account for why some countries espouse liberal social policies, others, corporatist, and others still, social democratic. The three variables are historical legacies of state formation; working class mobilization; and class coalitions. Describe how these factors vary (or do not vary) among the three types of welfare states in their historical development.

2. What three factors have distinguished American welfare state development from other countries according to Jill Quadagno? What areas of agreement do you see between Quadagno and Esping-Andersen in her explanation of America's laggard status among the advanced industrial democracies in establishing comprehensive and coherent social policies?
Week 12. Sociology of the Welfare State (cont.)

November 21


Week 13. Class Presentations

November 28, 30

Week 14. Class Presentations

December 5, 7

Week 15. Class Presentations

December 12, 14

Fall Term Ends

Last day to submit course work: December 14th
Guide to Writing the Term Paper
Comparative and Historical Sociology

Your choice of a major comparative-historical study in sociology, political science, or any other field of social science is the subject of a detailed analysis that encompasses four principal discussions: the object(s) of explanation, theoretical frameworks, method, and case selection.

1. Object(s) of Explanation

Define as specifically as possible the phenomenon that the author seeks to explain. For example, Moore accounts for the emergence of three paths to political modernization: democracy, fascist/right-wing authoritarian regimes, and communist/left-wing authoritarian regimes. Skocpol endeavors to explain the absence or presence of state and social revolutions in the course of state building among modernizing agrarian bureaucracies. Esping-Andersen identifies three types of welfare state among capitalist nations as objects of explanation: the liberal democratic variant, the social democratic variant, and the conservative or corporatism variant. Evaluate the degree to which the author of your chosen study renders explicit, precise descriptions of the dependent variables, or outcomes, under consideration. For example, Moore is least precise in defining his outcomes, relying on our common understanding of regime types as a point of departure. Skocpol is more precise in her description of the difference between a state and social revolution as opposed to a political revolution. And, Esping-Andersen is quite exact in his use of the concepts of decommodification and stratification as defining attributes of these three kinds of welfare state.

2. Theoretical Frameworks

Theoretical statements present the main causal augments of the study. In terms of the comparative method, theories are clusters of propositions that specify a range of causal factors (independent variables) presumed to explain the outcomes under study (dependent variables) and what combinations of causal forces produce these outcomes.

Theories entail abstract models of social processes that guide empirical study and description of research findings. Understanding the total complexity of social phenomenon far exceeds the unaided faculties of human cognition. Theories are parsimonious. They offer elegant (that is, simple and precise) accounts of social behavior that reduce its complexity to intellectually manageable proportions. Theories focus our attention on fewest possible causal influences presumably most relevant to understanding any given set of outcomes, and as such, allow us to concentrate our powers of observation and description on more discrete social phenomenon. Theory presents highly selective and partial (not exhaustive) accounts of the social world.
For Moore, economic classes, class interests, and class coalitions are the focal points of his theoretical approach to explaining the emergence of political regimes. For Skocpol, international contexts, mass insurrections, and relationship between political elites and dominant economic classes are the key elements of her theoretical account of state breakdown. For Esping-Andersen, legacies of state formation, working class mobilization, and cross-class alliances are the central explanatory variables in his explanation of the differences between welfare states.

3. Method

We examined four major approaches to substantiating causal arguments that stem from the distinctions between interpretive and explanatory social science and between idiographic and nomothetic forms of explanation: Mill’s method of agreement, Mill’s method of difference, particularizing comparisons, and single case studies (N=1).

More pronounced emphasis on scientific modes of analysis:

Nomothetic Explanations

i. Method of Agreement

The method of agreement seeks to identify the various combinations of relatively few causal factors that produce the same outcome across a range of cases.

ii. Method of Difference

The method of difference seeks to identify the various combinations of relatively few causal factors that produce differing outcomes across a range of cases.

More pronounced emphasis on descriptive modes of analysis:

Interpretive/Descriptive Comparisons

Particularizing comparisons examine a few cases where the author’s objectives are less concerned with testing theory – that is, identifying and examining a select few causal variables that presumably account for differing outcomes among the chosen cases. Rather, the author is more interested in presenting a ‘thick description”, or, sustained focus on detailed contrasts that emphasize complexity and reveal the peculiarities or distinctiveness of each case.

Idiographic Explanations (N=1)

Idiographic explanations approximate historical modes of explanation of single cases or events. Where the outcome is, by definition, invariant or unique because it occurs only once, idiographic explanation is an acceptable choice. Overarching historical processes
that transcend societal/national boundaries and are global in their reach may fall into this category. For example, the development of the world economy, the Cold War, the rise of international forms of political governance, and the evolution of the world state system would all qualify as unique, invariant processes that might arguably be explained historically, but not scientifically.

4. Appropriate Case Selection

Choosing cases for comparison can conform to a number of rationales closely associated with the methods listed above.

For single case studies, unique historical events or historical processes make the idiographic mode of explanation the only possible approach. Nevertheless, you must arrive at your own judgment about whether the objects of explanation of your chosen case study are unique or invariant. Substantiate your reasoning whatever you decide. If you do not believe this to be true, specify what other kinds of cases that you imagine could be studied to produce instructive comparisons with the original one.

Select cases in particularizing comparisons commonly focus on extremely rare phenomenon in social contexts that vary dramatically. Descriptive comparisons suggest that too few cases appear in tandem with so many causal influences of potential significance to render the task of elaborating a convincing theoretical account problematic. As with single case studies, you must come to a reasoned opinion as to whether or not the possible set of applicable cases necessarily precludes the construction of a causal explanation in favor of an interpretive one. You may also reflect on whether or not an explanatory account, as opposed to a descriptive one, is warranted given the arguments presented in the study. Does it appear that a few variables explain the outcomes under consideration? Or, does the complexity of the cases render a theoretical approach impossible?

In studies that use the method of agreement to generate causal arguments about similar outcomes, discussing the question of sampling cases revolves around whether or not you imagine the author has a compelling argument about the equivalence of the outcomes in every case. Further, you may also suggest the addition or substitution of other cases that you imagine would strengthen or qualify the theoretical arguments of the study.

In studies that use the method of difference to generate causal arguments about dissimilar outcomes, discussing the question of sampling cases revolves around whether or not you imagine the author has a compelling argument about the variance of the outcomes in every case. And as with the method of agreement, you may also suggest the addition or substitution of other cases that you imagine would strengthen or qualify the theoretical arguments of the study.
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