# Comparative Historical Analysis

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## The CHA Tradition

Comparative historical analysis (CHA) is a venerable research tradition in comparative politics, international relations, and American politics (whose practitioners are more likely to call it "American political development" and there is a whole journal devoted to publishing work of this nature).[1] It also has a presence in sociology and some practitioners among historians.

Lichbach and Zuckerman (1997), in their influential graduate-level introduction to comparative politics, argue that the subfield is composed of three research traditions that take distinct and original approaches to problems of inquiry: the structural, the rational, and the cultural.[2] If we consider the origins of these three bundles of epistemology, theory, and method for understanding political life, like many things in our contemporary world they began to cohere not in the abstract but when they were actually deployed to solve the problems provoked by a concrete political event, in this case World War II. In the intellectual development of political science, the challenges of World War II provided a critical juncture that allowed us to move away from the sterile institutional formalism of the formative period of our discipline. It is daunting to think that, if not for the outcome of the war, the discipline that we know as political science today would probably have withered on the vine after what can only be labeled a tainted and mediocre formative period in the first half of the twentieth century (Hanchard 2018).

What Lichbach and Zuckerman call the cultural, at least in its subjective incarnation (Ross 1997)—which many of us call the study of political behavior and political culture—can be traced to the occupation of Germany by the US Army.[3] Already by the interwar period, opinion polling was commonly used by marketing professionals to anticipate consumer behavior and to predict the outcome of presidential elections (Converse 1987; Lears 1995). Despite early setbacks like the *Literary Digest* poll that predicted the victory of Alf Landon over Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1936 (Squire 1988), the US Occupation Military Government in Germany tracked attitudes in Germany in order to maintain political order following the defeat of Nazism (Merritt and Merritt 1970).

During that time, a young American intelligence officer who had finished his PhD in political science at the University of Chicago, Gabriel Almond, was working on the Strategic Bombing Survey project, trying to assess the effectiveness of the allied air campaign against Germany ex post facto. He also researched the strength of internal German resistance to the Nazi regime (Almond and Krauss 1999). During that time, he "came to be in contact with American social scientists, especially the scholars who were experimenting with and applying probability sampling in survey research" (Eulau, Pye, and Verba 2003, 467–68). This is where Almond, the coauthor of *The Civic Culture* (1963), received his "postdoctoral training" in the scientific study of values and attitudes.

While Almond was studying the effects of bombing, Robert McNamara was making it more effective. The future chairman of Ford, Vietnam-era secretary of defense, and chair of the World Bank, McNamara moved from being a newly minted instructor at the Harvard Business School to a statistical control officer in the US Army Airforce in Europe and later to the staff of XXI Bomber Command in the Pacific Theater under General Curtis LeMay[4]—the architect of the destructive firebombing of Japan who also famously suggested that the United States was going to bomb the North Vietnamese "back into the Stone Age" (LeMay 1965, 565). Statistical control officers worked at collecting data and analyzed it with the goal of improving operations and planning for future contingencies. There McNamara applied principles of economic management and measurement to problems of logistics and strategy (Rej 2016; Watson and Wolk 2003).

While LeMay was demonstrating the power of incendiaries, another young academic, John von Neumann (born Neumann János Lajos in Budapest), who like many other interwar Central European scientists found safety in the United States, was working on the Manhattan Project. Von Neumann, while engaged in the mathematical modeling of thermonuclear reactions, published his classic *Theory of Games and Economic Behavior* with another émigré genius from the wreckage of the Habsburg Empire, Oskar Morgenstern (Neumann and Morgenstern 1944). The innovations of von Neumann and Morgenstern and

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others led to the broad application of mathematical models of strategic interaction between rational actors to problems of social choice. When McNamara became the secretary of defense, he brought with him a large number of operations analysts and game theorists from the RAND Corporation, including Charles Hitch, the director of its economics department (Freedman 2000, 45). Over time, game-theoretic approaches have become influential and widespread in many of the social sciences, including ours.

The origins of the structural approach to comparative politics lie more in the concerns of the Treasury Department than the Department of War. Henry Morgenthau, FDR's secretary of the treasury, devised a plan to end German militarism by imposing postwar deindustrialization, an idea quickly cast aside during the Cold War (Morgenthau 1945). At the same Alexander Gerschenkron, another refugee intellectual, was working as an economist at the Research and Statistics Department of the Federal Reserve Board. Gerschenkron, who would go on to have an academic career at Harvard where he is famous for his contribution on the ramifications of late development, had left his native Russia after the Revolution of 1917 and then left Austria after the Anschluss. He, too, was concerned with the problem of German militarism and explores its roots in his book *Bread and Democracy in Germany* (1943). He lays the blame for it at the feet of the Junkers, the large-estate aristocrats from the area east of the Elbe, who undermined democracy in their quest to protect domestic grain production from overseas competition. Gerschenkron advocated radical land reform as the way to solve Germany's dictatorship problem.

Herein lies the origins of the rich literature that outlined the latifundia problem, a perpetual theme in comparative historical analysis (Moore 1966; Paige 1975; Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens, 1992). The relationship between Junker "rye" and the "iron" of the heavy industrial faction of the German bourgeoisie underlies the fascist path to modernity through revolution from above in Moore's (1966) *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy.* When combined with his explanations of the liberal democratic (England, France, United States) and communist (Russia, China) paths, Moore's magnum opus became the foundational work of CHA and inspired a number of other influential studies of state formation and regime outcomes (Ceteno 2002; Downing 1992; Ertman 1997; Hui 2005; O'Donnell 1973; Skocpol 1978; Tilly 1990).

For Mark Lichbach (2013), Moore is the most consequential figure of modern political science for two reasons. First, his subject matter "effectively captured the problem situation of contemporary comparative politics: in competitive international environments, contending social formations (with preferences, beliefs, endowments, and strategies) construct state institutions that produce policy regimes that, in turn, influence economic development" (4). And although few of us ever produce work of this scope, we often toil on one or several of these problems. Second, because Moore joined together a theory of democracy with causal methodology, he framed our ongoing struggle to effectively link theory and method. For Lichbach, this leads to a problematic trade-off: the more external our causal theory, the thinner our democratic theory becomes. Or, in other words, we "inevitably slight concerns about how… prescriptive theories and descriptive methods adhere" (1). Ultimately, he argues for as full as possible a reintegration of human agency, both individual and collective, into our theory and methods to overcome this problem.

CHA's first generation led to a second round of works that responded to the wave of democratization of the 1980s and 1990s (Capoccia and Ziblatt 2010; Collier and Collier 1991; Luebbert 1991; Mahoney 2002; Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992; Tilly 2007). It also gave rise to an important literature on patterns of economic development (Evans 1995; Haggard 1990; Kohli 2004). Comparative historical analysis also spurred its own form of historical institutionalism that confronted problems of structure and agency in social science in new and interesting ways through the concepts of critical juncture and path dependence (Collier and Collier 1991; Steinmo, Thelen, and Longstreth 1992). Whereas the original version of historical institutionalism was much more focused on punctuated forms of change, recently the work has become more evolutionary in nature, looking at incremental change within established orders (Mahoney and Thelen 2010). The structural school has also given rise to an extensive literature on methods (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003; Mahoney and Thelen 2015; Pierson 2004; Skocpol and Somers 1980). Historical institutionalism has become so established in the field that it rated its own *Oxford Handbook* (Fioretos, Falleti, and Sheingate 2016) that includes contributions in American, comparative, and international relations.

This issue's special section brings together a set of articles in comparative politics and international relations in the long tradition of CHA, now far removed from its roots in the World War II era. There were, unfortunately, no articles submitted in this time frame in the American political development tradition. Over the course of our editorship, however, we have published several articles in this vein that would have fit nicely in this section, such as Skowronek and Orren (2020), Shafer and Wagner (2019), Jacobs, King, and Milkis (2019), Lieberman et al. (2019), and Weir and Schirmer (2018).

## The Special Issue Articles

As CHA has moved from its geographic origins, which focused strongly but not exclusively on Europe, it has had to take into account an increasingly complex set of issues. In our first piece, Maya Tudor and Dan Slater tackle the



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relationship between nationalism and regime type in ethnically divided societies. "Nationalism, Authoritarianism, and Democracy: Historical Lessons from South and Southeast Asia" attempts to draw lessons from the cases of successful democratization in India and durable authoritarianism in Malaysia. The authors argue that different definitions of the nation provide resources to contestants for power. In India, the notion of national community was much more inclusive in ethnic, class, and religious terms, whereas in Malaysia the notion was much narrower and exclusive. The authors argue that the definition of the nation at the point of state foundation has critical ramifications for subsequent developments through the formation of cleavages that continue to have an impact in our current age of national aggrandizement and democratic backsliding.

The widespread adoption of quantitative methods in the discipline has also affected scholars working in the CHA tradition. In "The Diffusion of Urban Medieval Representation: The Dominican Order as an Engine of Regime Change," Jonathan Doucette brings techniques of causal identification to bear on the question of how ecclesiastical notions of representation diffused into the lay realm. He examines how contact between the Dominican Order of the Catholic Church and urban elites helped introduce representation into urban government. Like Weber (2002 [1905]), he finds that, when the practices and mentalities of religious institutions and doctrines are secularized, they can have a powerful impact on society at large.

The problem of latifundia agriculture, with its repressive labor practices and aristocratic reaction, has long vexed attempts to democratize. It is central to Moore's argument and has been amended in productive ways by Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens (1992). Other recent work has pointed to war and changes to the international system that followed World War II as having an important impact on transforming democratization from a lost cause to a tractable problem in Central and Eastern Europe (Bernhard 2001, 2016). In this issue, David Samuels and Henry Thomson point to another important but less disjunctive and violent way by which the agricultural barriers to democratization are overcome. In "Lord, Peasant…and Tractor? Agricultural Mechanization and Moore's Thesis," they suggest that the mechanization of agriculture plays an important role in diminishing both the demand for agricultural workers and the need of landowners to rely on repression to keep the wages of agricultural labor low. Using cross-national statistical analysis, they present evidence that suggests that increasing mechanization makes it easier for democracy to emerge and survive.

The last two articles in the special section come from the field of international political economy, where historical institutionalism has been highly productive in understanding the evolution of international financial institutions. In "The Fate of International Monetary Regimes: How and Why They Fail," Jack Seddon moves beyond the well-trodden case of Bretton Woods, which has been depicted as a classic instance of an institutional order that quickly collapsed under the weight of a powerful external shock. Instead, he examines other monetary regimes, such as the Sterling Area and Latin Union, that disintegrated slowly over time. Seddon argues for an alternative endogenous pattern based on the strategic choices of hegemonic powers, choices that are in turn governed by the historical-structural foundations of regimes. When such shifts in leadership strategies result in visibly unequal collective arrangements, the system becomes vulnerable to overt internal resistance and sudden breakdown. Or these shifts may undermine collective arrangements, discriminating against some members, undermining the intentions of the institution, and driving members away, thereby slowly building dysfunction into a system and leading to its gradual abandonment by members and subsequent institutional decline.

Nikhil Kalyanpur and Abraham Newman explore how the international financial regime was turned into an opportunity for investment in "The Financialization of International Law." They discuss how financiers came to back claims filed against countries by firms in exchange for a share of the settlement. This was an unanticipated consequence of the interaction of individuals from different fields. When the financial crisis of 2008 unsettled international financial institutions, hedge fund managers and international lawyers began to interact in the process of remaking the system: they joined forces to develop new procedures combining practices from their own spheres and created a new means for settling grievances between states and investors. Using an approach drawn from the sociology of professions, the authors show how timely interactions between different sets of actors led to the evolution of the practices of international finance.

## Other Articles

In "Representation, Bicameralism, Political Equality, and Sortition: Reconstituting the Second Chamber as a Randomly Selected Assembly," Arash Abizadeh argues for a form of bicameralism with one elected chamber and the second selected by lot, or sortition. Whereas the two traditional justifications for bicameralism initially grew out of anti-egalitarian premises (about the need for elite wisdom and to protect the elite few against the many), the justification advanced by Abizadeh is grounded in egalitarian premises about the need to protect state institutions from capture by the powerful few and to treat all subjects as political equals. He embeds this general argument within the institutional context of Canadian parliamentary federalism, arguing that Canada's Senate ought to be reconstituted as a randomly selected citizen assembly.



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Tali Mendelberg, Vittorio Merola, Tanika Raychaudhuri, and Adam Thal examine the impact of educational mobility on political engagement in "When Poor Students Attend Rich Schools: Do Affluent Social Environments Increase or Decrease Participation?" Like all spheres of American life, universities have become more unequal, with a subset of elite campuses becoming predominantly more accessible to affluent students. At the same time, college plays an important role in socializing students, especially those from low-income backgrounds, into active political participation. The authors study whether low-income students on predominantly affluent campuses become more participatory or whether "affluenza" serves to depress their participation. Using a large panel survey of 201,011 students, they find that on affluent campuses all income groups experience an increase in political participation, leaving the gap between low-income and affluent populations unchanged.

Using an open-ended survey Katherine Krimmel and Kelly Rader look at the meaning that participants attribute to answers on government spending in public opinion research. In "Substantive Divergence: The Meaning of Public Opinion on Government Spending in Red and Blue," they challenge the finding that attitudes toward spending are reducible to views on social welfare spending. They find that partisans attribute different meanings to spending, and so when Republicans and Democrats evaluate spending, they have different bundles of goods and services in mind.

In "From Pathology to 'Born Perfect': Science, Law, and Citizenship in American LGBTQ+ Advocacy," Joanna Wuest explores the explosion of legislative and legal campaigns to ban conversion therapy for sexual orientation and gender identity. In doing so, the LGBTQ+ advocacy movement has relied on allies in the scientific and medical field to help formulate its legal, legislative, and public discourse campaigns. This article brings together a range of literatures—identity politics, social movements, American political development, and public opinion research—with the study of science and technology to show how biomedical and scientific knowledge have become foundational to the character of the contemporary American LGBTQ+ movement.

Benjamin Lessing explores systems of extralegal rule common in many urban areas worldwide in "Conceptualizing Criminal Governance." When the state monopoly on the legitimate use of force does not hold, local criminal organizations often step into the breech. He explores how the state and criminal governance come to exist side by side. While criminal gangs may be more present in the lives of inhabitants, they may well continue to pay taxes, vote, and engage with the state in a myriad of ways. The presence of the state may be low in comparison to other localities, but it often retains the capability to intervene in such areas. Lessing shows that criminal governance is often embedded in systems of state authority and develops a conceptual framework centered around the who, what, and how of criminal governance. In the "how" dimension he uses Weberian concepts to demarcate the difference between charismatic and rational-bureaucratic authority.

In our final article in this issue, we welcome back Jim Johnson, the second editor of *Perspectives on Politics* (2005–8). In the piece "Models-as-Fables: An Alternative to the Standard Rationale for Using Formal Models in Political Science," he challenges the use of formal models to deduce predictions that can be tested with "real-world" data. Instead, he argues that the real and substantial utility of formal models lies in how they are most often used, as fables that help us conceptualize the questions we ask and answer.

We also have three reflections in this issue. Benjamin Smith and David Waldner raise important and novel issues of bias in cross-national statistical research in "Endogenous Sovereignty and Survivorship Bias in Comparative Politics." In this critique they bring a bit of the critical spirit of CHA into the discussion by arguing that statistical models need to be cognizant of context-specific knowledge and qualitative strategies of inference. They raise the issue of whether the assumption holds that "all country" samples typically avoid sample bias. They argue that if existing units are subject to differential survival rates, and if the factors determining survival constitute a causal structure, we should have concerns about whether the sampling strategy biases the results. The authors provide a concrete example by developing a causal model of postcolonial sovereignty and show how it affects the results of a regression analysis of the resource curse. When they correct for endogenous selection bias, the effect of oil on autocratic survival is shown to be negligible.

In "Can We Do Better? Replication and Online Appendices in Political Science," Jonathan Grossman and Ami Pedahzur think about how we can improve the replicability of research. Despite greater attention to research transparency, they argue that the practice of publishing replication materials online is in need of improvement. Often appendices devoted to replication are inaccessible, compartmentalized, and difficult to understand. They make several constructive suggestions on how to remedy this situation.

Last but not least, Charli Carpenter, Alexander Montgomery, and Alexandria Nylen raise thorny moral issues concerning the conduct of research in "Manufacturing Complicity: How Survey Experiments Prime Americans for War Crimes." They test whether survey experiments can push participants toward embracing certain attitudes, in this case the bombing of civilians in contravention of international law, thus contributing to war crimes. Using an augmented replication of a famous survey experiment, they show that survey questions can magnify preferences for courses of action that constitute war crimes, having a



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negative effect on how citizens understand our legal and ethical obligations during war.

## Final Thoughts

This issue marks the start of our fifth year at the helm of the journal. The last year was a difficult one. We want to thank all those who found time to submit work to the journal, as well as those who continued to review manuscripts and books for us despite the adverse conditions under which we all worked. During the pandemic, we experienced disruptions in the delivery of books by publishers, and many reviewers were beset by the complexities of daily life under pandemic conditions. It was also harder to find reviewers, and some colleagues had understandable problems in meeting deadlines. Fortunately, supply chains are functioning again, and inoculation is bringing a slow return to more normal life.

Our commitment to providing the discipline with a book review of record is unchanged, and we are proud to have done so despite the challenges of COVID-19. The book review section is one of the central rationales for the journal and is essential to the intellectual life of our discipline. In 2022, we will again expand the number of articles and reflections we publish by one or two per issue to meet an increased page-count allocation, but this will not affect the size of the book review side of the journal.

## Notes

1 *Studies in American Political Developmen*, https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/studies-in-american-political-development.
2 One could make the case that the same general divisions exist in the subfield of American politics in the distinct profiles of behavioral research, rational choice institutionalism, and American political development. It is harder to make the case that this divide is as strong as that in political theory or international relations. Although these approaches have had influence in these subfields, their mix of approaches is more complex.
3 Of course, subjective approaches are only one important facet of the study of culture. Intersubjective approaches focus on how the interaction of human subjects with diverse systems of belief constitutes culture. This school includes a wide variety of prominent practitioners, including David Laitin, Lisa Wedeen, James Scott, and Lee Ann Fujii.
4 LeMay apparently provided the inspiration for the character of Buck Turgidson in Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove.* He also ran as George Wallace's running mate in the 1968 presidential elections.

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