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NEWSLETTER STAFF

Johns Hopkins University
School of Advanced
International Studies

Lead Editor

Eugene Finkel
efinkel4@jhu.edu

Editors

Adria Lawrence
adria.lawrence@jhu.edu
Andrew Mertha
amertha1@jhu.edu

Editorial Board

Lisel Hintz
Sarah Parkinson
Pavithra Suryanarayan

Editorial Assistant

Maya Camargo-Vemuri

CONTACT

Johns Hopkins University
School of Advanced
International Studies
1740 Massachusetts Ave
NW
Washington, DC 20036





Letter from the Editors

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THE US IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

by Eugene Finkel, Adria Lawrence, and Andrew Mertha



Eugene Finkel

is Associate Professor of
International Affairs, Johns
Hopkins SAIS. His email is
efinkel4@jhu.edu.



Adria Lawrence

is the Aronson Associate
Professor of International
Studies and Political
Science, Johns Hopkins
University. Her email is
adria.lawrence@jhu.edu.

In fall 2018, a Johns Hopkins SAIS-based team became the Newsletter's new editors; this is our first issue. We are grateful to the Comparative Politics Section leadership for this opportunity. We also want to thank our predecessors, Matt and Sona Golder and the rest of the Penn State team for the incredible job they did. We are stepping into very big shoes. In line with the spirit of the Section's business meeting at 2018 APSA we aim to introduce several innovations to the Newsletter. The first and the most visible change is the new design. An additional new feature is the *Big Questions, Short Answers* section. Subsequent issues will have additional new features.

We decided to open our tenure by tackling one of the biggest issues of our discipline and subfield: The relationship between the Comparative and American Politics subfields. We were not the first Newsletter editors interested in this question. In 2004, six leading voices in the discipline – Robert Dahl, Paul Pierson, Gary Cox, Mathew McCubbins, Melissa Nobles, and Daniel Levine – also analyzed the relationship between the subfields of American and Comparative politics (APSA-CP Vol 15, No. 1), including the extent to which these two sub-disciplines have shaped each other's research agendas, as well as the

degree to which comparative politics had become subordinated to American politics, or, alternatively, whether American politics represents "the last case study." This rich intellectual exercise came nowhere near to reaching a consensus. Instead, it provided what the APSA-CP Newsletter editors called "four models of convergence." These include "Dahl's cordial division of labor, the Gramscian-American near hegemony that Cox and McCubbins describe in studies of legislative organization, Pierson's and Levine's wariness of exclusively US-inspired approaches, and Nobles's portrait of harmoniously merging subfields in the study of racial politics."

The decade-and-a-half since then has seen both an evolution both of our discipline and, more profoundly, a troubling global trend in the art and practice of governance. The relative resilience of authoritarian regimes in places like China and the Middle East is being augmented by illiberal tendencies among mature democracies, democratic-leaning states, and parties and social movements within them. One of the most worrisome trends is what many see as the authoritarian turn in the United States that has culminated in the 2016 election of Donald Trump. And these global developments raise



Andrew Mertha

is George and Sadie Hyman
Professor of China Studies,
Johns Hopkins SAIS. His
email is amertha1@jhu.edu.

new questions about the relationship between American and comparative politics.¹

The contributors to this issue differ from their colleagues of fifteen years ago. They tend to be at earlier stages of their careers, they represent a more diverse group of scholarship in terms of background, methods and approaches, and their engagement with these larger disciplinary questions is animated by an urgency that speaks to the immediacy of the political developments they are analyzing. Rather than speaking from the commanding heights of a symposium, these scholars draw directly from their own, ongoing micro- and meso-level work, which is as self-consciously inductive as it is theory-driven. Yet they also demonstrate the absence of subfield-constraining limits in scoping their comparative inquiry. The authors focus on several main themes in which the discussion on the “comparative politics of the US” is especially promising and beneficial: relations between the subfields; polarization and political activism; institutions; political economy; teaching and learning; and historical political analysis. This is neither final nor a complete list of mutually exclusive lines of inquiry; indeed, many authors touch upon several themes in their contributions. Yet this categorization is useful for starting a more comprehensive conversation across subfields.

Relations between the Subfields. We open the Newsletter with two contributions offering somewhat different perspective on relations between the subfields. David Bateman sees the convergence between American and comparative politics research as beneficial for the dis-

cipline. Furthermore, he argues that in the past, the intellectual cost of separation has been borne mostly on Americanists’ overspecialization, which left them bereft of the analytical tools their comparativist colleagues could deploy to more fully understand the phenomena unfolding in real time before our eyes. Bateman also points to some important exceptions: voices that are usually relegated to the periphery of the American subfield, such as Race as Ethnic Politics (REP) and American Political Development (APD), that have long argued that “American democracy might be less robust than commonly believed.”

Dawn Teele looks at the relations between American and comparative politics from a perspective of a comparativist interested in big but inherently messy social phenomena, and laments the increasing Americanization of the CP subfield that manifests itself in “the unreflexive importation of hypotheses from the American context into comparative studies without an explicit comparative lens; second, the burgeoning of experimental research designs (both field and survey) that are “behavioral” instead of institutionally focused; and third, the publication arms race that begins ever earlier and which has shifted the intellectual medium in which younger comparative cohorts present their research.” The solution, argues Teele, is to “push comparativists to be more comparative, and, even better, to insist America deserves a place as one case among many.” Her contribution also demonstrates the ways in which gender politics research can help achieve these goals.

1. See, for instance Robert C. Lieberman, Suzanne Mettler, Thomas B. Pepinsky, Kenneth M. Roberts and Richard Valelly, “The Trump Presidency and American Democracy: A Historical and Comparative Analysis,” *Perspectives on Politics*, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592718003286>, Published online: 29 October 2018

Polarization and Political Activism. The contributions by McCoy and Gidron, Adams, and Horne place political polarization in the US in a larger comparative context. Noam Gidron, James Adams, and Will Horne identify the concept of “affective polarization,” that is, “mass-level animosity across party lines,” as largely limited to the purview of American politics scholars. They seek to examine this phenomenon along a more comparative line of inquiry using a set of cross-national surveys. They find that affective polarization in the US is not particularly robust compared to other Western countries. Their analytical conclusions point to the particular utility of employing American affective polarization in a wider, comparative context in order to identify causal processes in the US as well as to draw prescriptive conclusions from those countries that experience lower levels of affective polarization.

Jennifer McCoy takes a somewhat less sanguine view than those of her colleagues. She argues that polarization causes the normal array of cross-cutting interests to “bunch up” into a binary “us vs. them” environment that has been the handmaiden to democratic erosion and potentially, democratic collapse. Indeed, she finds that certain institutions – elections and political parties – act as facilitators for such polarization. In the case of the US, subnational decentralized voting rights exacerbate these tendencies. And although the US appears to be doing better in general than other countries included in the study of democratic erosion, the simple inclusion of Bangladesh, Hungary, the Philippines, Turkey, and Venezuela as comparative cases is somewhat sobering.

Kanisha Bond focuses on the Antifa movement in the US and compares it to its counterparts in

Canada and Europe along several dimensions: origins, motivations, mobilization and modes of activism. She argues that while Antifa mobilization in the US was shaped by the country’s racial and ethnic politics, a comparative lens “is critically important to both scholars and activists interested in understanding antifa’s multiple functions as a political ideology, an activist praxis, *and* a set of institutions that closely approximate a transnational social movement industry.”

Institutions. The institutional focus is continued and made more explicit by Dardanelli and Kincaid and Jiménez. Paolo Dardanelli and John Kincaid’s contribution focuses on federalism, a concept with historical roots in the US, as a node for comparative inquiry. Placing the United States within a set of federal states – Australia, Canada, Germany, India, and Switzerland – they find a long-term trend toward legislative centralization (far ahead of administrative and fiscal centralization) that is primarily the outcome of structural socio-economic and socio-cultural forces. That said, certain features distinguish the US, including a presidential system, the powerful role of judicial review, and the absence of fiscal equalization, all of which result from a particularly rigid constitutional framework.

Luis Jiménez zooms in on a single, politically salient issue in the US: immigration policy. Through comparative inquiry into the gap between the specific contours of law and enforcement, he is able not only to get at the complicated question as to why American citizens often feel like the state has lost control over its borders, but also to explain Donald Trump’s false assertions that no country has as permissive immigration policies as those of the US. His argument rests on the near-impossibility of arriving at a universal

consensus among actors charged with enforcing the policy along three divergent and often inconsistent dimensions: initial access, rights in the host country, and removal procedures – which pushes the calculus away from “what is best for the country?” to “how do I deport immigrants that do not contribute to society?” He concludes that, in comparative perspective, the US has a relatively restrictive immigration regime.

Political Economy. The contributions by Lynch and Reisenbichler focus on key issues of American political economy and social policy: healthcare and housing. Julia Lynch seeks to explain why the US is a “staggering outlier” when it comes to health care: it spends much more than any other country, yet its life expectancy is 78.8 years, “below countries that spend one third as much on health care.” While it might be tempting to view the US health care as exceptional and treat it as such, Lynch shows that a comparative focus points to more general issues of state-society relations and political economy writ large. She argues that “the real reason we have such poor health compared to other rich democracies has much more to do with our politics than our hospitals: we are sick because we are unequal, and we are unequal because our political system is unusually unresponsive to the needs of the bottom 99%.”

Alexander Reisenbichler focuses on another socially and economically important issue – housing finance – as a node through which to explore the comparability of the US and other comparative capitalist states. He finds that although American victims of predatory lending might see things differently, in fact, the US is “an outlier when it comes to the magnitude of government support.” Utilizing a comparative his-

torical perspective, Reisenbichler finds that US macroeconomic policy fosters credit and consumption which dovetails with mortgage-debt subsidy policy, while German mortgage subsidies run in the face of a growth strategy based on stable house prices, credit, and consumption.

Teaching and Learning. Baron et al. and Clancy and Bauer focus on integrating US and comparative politics in (mainly undergraduate) teaching and learning across a diverse set of educational institutions and settings. Hannah Baron, Robert Blair, Jessica Gottlieb, and Shelby Grossman start from the perspective that the increasingly desperate rhetoric calling for a circling of the wagons in the US may be a bit premature. When recent political developments in the US are analyzed in the political science classroom comparatively within the framework of the cross-national consortium on Democratic Erosion, students continue to express optimism about the US as a democracy. The authors find that “assessing the Trump presidency through a historical and comparative lens appears to have increased students’ confidence in the strength and longevity of democratic norms and institutions in the US.” The worldwide results of the Democratic Erosion Event Dataset (DEED) show that on this troublesome trend line, the US remains a significant outlier.

Kelly Clancy and Kelly Bauer approach this question from the perspective of pedagogy, finding that “centering diversity as a strategy for de-exceptionalizing the US case resonates in different ways across geography, types of universities, and student demographic groups.” Yet this is the very strength of the approach, as they utilize students’ own experiences within the US “to build on students’ local expertise and, using global examples, to complicate their



understanding of familiar worlds” and to “relax or collapse artificial boundaries.” They find that diversity and – by extension, the multiple complications embedded in a “global world” – are inherently useful tools for understanding political phenomena, within which the study of the US within a comparative politics context is a key element.

Historical Political Analysis. Murtazashvili and Murtazashvili and Suryanarayan and White use America’s historical experience in the 19th and early 20th centuries to better understand important political processes in the contemporary developing world from property rights in Afghanistan to status driven voting behavior in India. Jennifer Murtazashvili and Ilia Murtazashvili warn that erroneous conclusions from the US experience can hurt comparative scholarly (and potentially, prescriptive policy) analyses regarding the developing world. They focus on de Soto’s (2000) claim that legal titling of squatter’s rights in the opening of the frontier accounts for America’s wealth. They argue that in the absence of a “property-protecting state” – which contains robust institutions, sufficient state capacity, and political constraints – such titling is without force, as is the case in Afghanistan.

Suryanarayan and White focus on the puzzle of poor voters’ support for right-wing, anti-tax and anti-redistribution parties. By comparing poor Brahmans in India with Reconstruction-era poor Southern whites in the US, they show that poor voters might be driven more by status considerations than by redistribution or economic concerns. The authors also argue that “placing the United States in comparative perspective is especially fruitful for understanding cross-class support for lower taxes and the weakening of fis-

cal and bureaucratic institutions” and that such a comparison is especially fruitful when the US is compared “to other countries with historical status distinctions that cut across class lines—like the caste system in India and apartheid in South Africa—rather than more conventional comparisons to countries like Canada and the United Kingdom.”

What conclusions are we to draw from these analyses? The overall take-away appears to be of the good news/bad news variety. The good news is that while the democratized West appears to be following a somewhat worrisome trajectory, the US is far from the worst off in this regard. The bad news is that this is a far more troubling global trend among mature democracies than the case of the US would suggest. What these articles illuminate for us more broadly, however, are the various ways in which a comparative perspective can provide considerable heft in leveraging our understanding of the US, while the deep and data-rich study of the US can also provide analytical frameworks from which to examine these political trends in other democracies. And this group of mostly younger scholars are more invested in traversing and transcending the American and comparative subfields than allowing themselves to be constrained by them. These developments are important, not simply to satisfy our intellectual curiosities, but also because they point to prescriptive analyses to address an unwelcome global trend.

Finally, we want to thank Anne-Marie Arel for designing the new graphics for the Newsletter and Maya Camargo-Vemuri, our editorial assistant, for helping to produce this issue and for creating a new Newsletter website: <https://www.comparativepoliticsnewsletter.org>. ●

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IF YOU HAVE COMMENTS, SUGGESTIONS,
OR IDEAS

for future issues and new features please contact

Eugene Finkel:
efinkel4@jhu.edu





THE COMPARATIVE TURN IN AMERICAN POLITICS

by David A. Bateman



David A. Bateman

is an Assistant Professor,
Department of Government,
Cornell University. His email
is dab465@cornell.edu.

*Comparativists seemed
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Since the 2016 election of Donald J. Trump, students of American Politics have been turning more and more toward their colleagues in Comparative Politics for insights into the state and future prospects of American democracy (Mickey, Levitsky, and Way 2017; Lieberman et al. 2019; Meyer and Tarrow 2019; Weyland and Madrid 2019; Callen and Rocco n.d.). The work Trump's elections inspired has added to what was already a growing body of scholarship that connects the concepts and theories of Comparative Politics with the study of American politics and political development (Ahmed 2012; Mickey 2015; Frymer 2017; Jusko 2017; Kuo 2018; Teele 2018; Bateman 2018).

This turn towards Comparative Politics, and, more unevenly, towards comparison, is entirely for the good. For too long, the subfield of American Politics has shown a limited interest in producing work that treated elements of US politics as potential cases of broader phenomena and deliberately drew upon the extensive insights produced by its adjacent subfield. This division had not always been present (Kuo forthcoming), and was never so rigid as to render the subfields mutually incomprehensible. Still, the subfields' respective developments have had less in the way of mutual influence than most of us would be willing to defend.

As someone whose research and appointment places them in the American Politics camp, let me be clear: the *intellectual* costs of this separation have fallen heaviest on us Americanists, limiting our imagination and constraining our horizons. There was a time when we had the better data. The hyper-sub-specialization of the AP subfield has on occasion provided an opportunity for theoretical flourishing. But structural limitations out in the end, and the greater diversity of empirical patterns that comparativists were forced to confront as a matter of daily practice helped encourage a healthier balance between research and theories attentive to broad cross-national phenomena and those which were more grounded in understanding the specific features of particular places or regimes.

Perhaps it was because of this that comparativists seemed better equipped to handle the last five years or so of American politics. They could draw on the extensive insights gained in the study of regime types, of populism, of party weakening, and of democratic backsliding and say, "we've seen this before." And, with important exceptions, most Americanists could not.

The exceptions, however, are illuminating, and suggestive of how scholars of American Politics and Comparative Politics might constructively integrate their respective research agendas.



The notion that American democracy might be less robust than commonly believed came as no great news to scholars of Race and Ethnic Politics (REP)¹ or to students of democratization working within the broad framework of American Political Development (APD).² REP scholars knew that despite considerable change in our collective narratives of race, structures of racial hierarchy and differentiation continue to fundamentally shape Americans' political identities and choices. And among both REP and APD scholars, there has long been a deep awareness of the unevenness of the country's democratic institutions and the degree to which these had co-existed alongside openly anti-democratic practices and institutions.

My own research aims to understand the ways in which American "democratic" institutions had been rendered compatible—and at times even complementary—with white supremacist and authoritarian regimes (Bateman 2018; Bateman, Katznelson, and Lapinski 2018). In researching America's particular concatenation of authoritarian and democratic practices, I have benefited immensely from the insights produced by CP scholarship. I have also developed a deeper appreciation of the hurdles to "placing" America in comparative perspective, and come to believe that while AP scholars have much to learn from their comparativist colleagues the potential goes both ways: many of the themes and patterns that have historically made the United States a difficult case to integrate into the comparative study of democratization, and to which

students of American political development pay regular attention, could usefully reframe some of our assumptions and approaches in studying democratization elsewhere.

Democratization in America

Often touted as the world's first modern democracy, the conditions that facilitated a partial democratization in 19th century America have long made the country a poor guide for its occurrence elsewhere. The democratizations confronting Europe during the late 19th and early 20th centuries seemed to require an accounting for the interests and organization of economically defined classes; what had mattered in America, by contrast, was the supposed muting of class antagonisms. Moreover, if the attenuated class antagonisms and early timing of democratization marked the United States as an outlier along one dimension, having a racial rather than class cleavage seemed to mark it as an outlier along another. As Richard Valelly has astutely observed, "the key to grasping American distinctiveness on the race and gender dimensions [to the suffrage] is fully appreciating the unprecedented marriage of slavery and political democracy. This is the *only* such conjuncture in Western history" (2016, 463).

Not only was democratization in America primarily a story of dismantling racial hierarchy, but democratic reversals—a well-established phenomenon elsewhere—have, in the United States, taken the distinctive form of mass disenfranchisement. Most strikingly, the national re-

1. Race and Ethnic Politics research is by no means exclusively Americanist, and the still young *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics* publishes work on other countries as well as work that places the US into comparative perspective. REP is an area Kuo highlights as ripe for integrating comparative and Americanist perspectives (Kuo forthcoming).
2. Since its inception, APD has rejected a tendency toward narrow sub-specialization and shown an interest in comparative analyses. Too often, however, the field has "started with comparatively framed questions, but then analyzed the US case on its own terms" (Morgan 2016, 169). This is less true in research areas such as public policy and urban politics (Weaver 2015).



gime reconstituted after the Civil War endured, but an entire class of its citizenry was disenfranchised: as Valelly has noted, “no major social group in Western history, other than African Americans, ever entered the electorate of an established democracy and then was extruded by nominally democratic means [...], forcing that social group to start all over again” (2004, 1). At the subnational level there were regime changes, and as Robert Mickey (2015) has detailed, the local authoritarian regimes established would endure for seventy-five years. While the United States is not exceptional in this regard, and Mickey draws extensively on CP insights into subnational authoritarianism, the relative distance between the severely undemocratic character of southern states and the *generally* democratic character of the “rest” of the country makes the country a comparative outlier.

While the study of American democratization had much to gain from engaging with comparative analyses and the insights of CP research—and numerous APD scholars have done just this³—the reverse was not as clear: given its many particularities, it was not obvious what lessons the United States could impart to the rest of the world. And with important exceptions, most researchers on historical democratizations turned their focus elsewhere, dropping the US from their comparative cases and leaving the significance of American patterns unexplored.

What is there to learn from American Democratization?

My own efforts to study the relationship between disenfranchisement and democracy in the United States was inspired by, among others,

Teri Caraway’s insistence (2004) that we could not fully understand democratizations without attending to their exclusions. This provided a foundation for re-thinking what our comparative theories might have missed, and further opened up potential comparisons with the US.

I began with a defining characteristic of many democratizing reforms in the US: their occurrence has often coincided with new instances of disenfranchisement. I was particularly interested in how the once canonical American democratization – the removal of property qualifications for voting rights – had occurred alongside the simultaneous disenfranchisement of free African American men, a removal from voting rights that preceded the expansions and reverses of Reconstruction that had been more extensively explored. Relying on both CP and APD theories, and based on an in-depth study of the American case, I argued that this pattern was produced by the choices made by a national political coalition that saw an electoral advantage in mobilizing property-less white men into politics and yet which was responsive, given the incentives of the US Constitution, to the organized demands of slaveholders, who perceived any recognition of black citizenship as a fundamental threat.

This aspect of the research was case-centric, aiming to develop a convincing explanation of America’s disenfranchising democratization that was rooted in historical experience, but which drew on existing theories from comparative and American politics. But the goal of the research was not simply to offer a better explanation for a particular feature of the US case; rather, I hoped to follow Caraway’s suggestion that by studying the intersection of inclusion

3. See, for instance, González and King (2004), King, Lieberman, Ritter, and Whitehead (2009), and Mickey (2015).

and exclusion we might be able to revise our understanding and theories of democratization more generally. Having worked out a plausible argument in the American case, I reframed my question as a more general one, asking about the conditions under which democratization and exclusion might occur in conjunction with each other. I then re-examined well-established cases of democratizing reforms in Europe—the United Kingdom in 1832 and France after 1870—from this lens. Drawing again on recent work in comparative politics, I suggested that the patterns evidenced in the US case gave further support for thinking of democratization not as a sliding scale of inclusion, pitting a “mass” against an “elite,” but rather as a political contest between varying diverse coalitions over which assemblage of individuals and groups would be given greater weight in deciding questions of collective allocation and in the social and civic prestige ascribed by the state.

I retold the story of the first Reform Act in the UK by connecting it explicitly to efforts to redefine the sectarian character of the state, highlighting the connection between democratizing reforms—including Catholic emancipation and the repeal of the Test Act—and the disenfranchisement of Irish peasants in 1829 and the largely working-class “ancient right” franchise holders in English boroughs in 1832. These conjunctions of enfranchisement and disenfranchisement reflected the compromises and choices of a reformist coalition that wanted to recreate the electorate as a more firmly middle-class body, without the religious distinctions that had long marked civil status in the UK but also without many of the electors whose votes formed the basis for the pre-1832 political regime. I similarly re-examined the sustained efforts to disenfranchise working class voters at the founding of the

Third Republic France, as well as the role played by republicans in re-affirming the exclusion of women from politics. Again, I drew to the fore how distinctive experiences with religion and religiosity, as well as ongoing processes of colonialism, shaped divergent perspectives on the proper composition of the electorate. Despite early doubts, and in the face of substantial opposition, French republicans reaffirmed their commitment to manhood suffrage. But this rested on a firm conviction that they needed to remake the country’s population in their own image, in part through deliberate engineering of the right to vote, enfranchising select colonial populations, opposing women’s suffrage, and altering electoral units as needed, all in order to buttress the republican regime from a potentially hostile population. While far from dispositive, the micro-observations of the UK and French cases provided supporting evidence for the more general form of the argument distilled from the American site of theory-building.

By integrating the US into the comparative process, I was also able to cast a useful new light on more familiar European cases. Because my research question was not how did these countries democratize, but under what conditions do countries at times pair enfranchisement with disenfranchisement, I could put into relief features of the democratizing process that were similar across all three countries but which were often obscured in our standard accounts. Most important, it allowed me to reframe democratization in the United Kingdom and France in terms of conflict along lines of nationality, religion, and religiosity, in ways that intersected but were not reducible to struggles between economic classes. That is, rather than treating the non-class cleavages central to the US case as an impediment to comparison, I treated them



as an opportunity to recover dynamics that had often been overlooked in studying historical democratizations elsewhere. Indeed, my own findings complement recent works by Daniel Ziblatt (2017) and Pavithra Suryanarayan (2018), who have drawn our attention to how national, religious, or caste cleavages can disrupt expected patterns.

An APD perspective also informed the book's attention to narratives of political community. I argued that debates over the composition of the electorate would be likely to occur in at least two registers, one concerned with who is instrumentally desirable as an elector, and the other with how a particular "people" ought to be defined and represented. This second register could be rejected as epiphenomenal, and yet I argued that it serves as an important means by which coalitions cultivate mass support and anchor their projects in collective identities. Democratizing coalitions often promise to reform the institutions and iconography of the state, and they invite listeners to recognize their own experiences, interests, and aspirations in the construct of political community that they advance. Accordingly, democratization can be seen as a conflict over the terms of *people-making*, occurring not only in institutions but on the level of discourse. This likewise dovetails with recent work in CP, such as Maya Tudor's elaboration of how distinct nationalistic ideologies useful for particular reasons during a democratizing moment might have durable consequences for democratic consolidation (2013; Tudor and Slater 2016). Developing these lines of research further, I believe, are necessary to understand what is perhaps one of the most paradoxical features of contemporary democratic backslidings, i.e., that for some portion of the citizenry they have been experienced as instances of democratization, as empowering particular col-

lectivities and constructs of popular belonging in the offices of the state.

Building the Comparative Turn

My work is a very small part of a growing body of literature that studies democratization in the United States as a complex and disjointed phenomenon that needs to be comparatively situated (Weaver 2019; Teele 2018; Kuo 2018; Suryanarayan 2018; Frymer 2017; Mickey 2015). Ongoing collaborations between the subfields, I expect, will put into relief phenomena that might otherwise have been overlooked, just as the 2016 election helped raise the "regime question" in America (Roberts 2019).

In turning to comparison, however, scholars of American political development should not limit themselves, as I did, to the Western European cases with which they are most familiar. For APD scholars, this might be one of the most durable and important contributions of Mickey's work, which jolted our sense of the appropriate countries with which the United States should be compared. For those of us concerned with historical democratizations and de-democratizations, our focus should perhaps instead turn toward the settler states of southern Africa, the former enslaving states of Brazil or the Caribbean, or other countries whose democratic institutions are fragmented and partial. The work that is being produced by CP scholars in these areas has the potential to further revise our understanding of American democratizations and exclusions, and represents perhaps a promising avenue for cross-subfield integration. After all, American democracy has always been partial, and never been as robust as many Americanists presumed it to be. And it is this partiality that requires us to turn to comparison and comparative politics for insights. ●

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RESISTING THE AMERICANIZATION OF COMPARATIVE POLITICS

by Dawn Langan Teele



Dawn Langan Teele
is the Janice and Julian
Bers Assistant Professor
in the Social Sciences,
University of Pennsylvania.
Her email is
teele@sas.upenn.edu.

In what is almost required reading for graduate students in political science, Barbara Geddes (2003) implores scholars in comparative politics to think both big and small in her book, *Paradigms and Sand Castles*. Our questions, guided by our passions, should be ambitious, but the evidence we mount in the service of answering them should be precise. In this way, comparativists can both have their eyes on the prize of understanding long term social and political transformations that have been of major importance to generations of people, and also slice off manageable pieces of these questions for microscopic scrutiny, thereby contributing incrementally to our understanding of important political phenomena.

Seen from the vantage of the early 2000s, this advice was undoubtedly sound. But soon thereafter, several forces – both methodological and economic – were simultaneously set into motion that made small questions, and small answers, appear to be the only safe strategy for junior scholars. These forces are driving what I see as the Americanization of comparative politics, a phenomenon that has three broad attributes. First, the unreflexive importation of hypotheses from the American context into comparative studies without an explicit comparative lens; second, the burgeoning of experimental re-

search designs (both field and survey) that are “behavioral” instead of institutionally focused; and third, the publication arms race that begins ever earlier and which has shifted the intellectual medium in which younger comparative cohorts present their research.

This essay provides a rough sketch (a “practitioner” history in the admittedly incomplete sense in which Vitalis (2016) uses the term) of the intellectual and methodological trajectory of political science. I then argue that the one of the fields with which I am most familiar, gender and politics, is well poised to help us resist the Americanization of our field. I provide an example from my recent book wherein the similarities of franchise extension are revealed when America is explicitly theorized as one case among many. In closing I articulate a political economy understanding of the Americanization of Comparative Politics that is currently afoot.

Inter-American and Comparative Relations

In an essay on the intellectual linkages between American and Comparative Politics Kimberly Morgan (2016, 168) argues that over time the two fields have cross-pollinated, but that the increasing pull of behavioral and electoral re-



search draws scholars of American politics in their own, parochial, direction. Although political scientists have always been concerned to some degree with elections in a broad array of countries, a lack of individual level survey data, and growing understanding of the methodological problems of ecological inference, meant that behavioral research did not truly blossom until Gallup conquered the continents sometime after the Second World War (see Igo 2007 and Achen and Schively 1995, Chapter 1).¹ Looking back, one can surely argue that the 1960s was an extremely fertile time in political science, but EE Schattschneider (1969, 8) warned that the behavioral revolution threatened to produce a “mountain of data surrounding a vacuum” (1969, 8).

From the 1970s through the late 1990s, as computing power increased and local and international institutions made new data series widely available, scholarly ability to analyze large-scale datasets improved. At the same time, the growing prominence of Economics in both the real and academic worlds heralded the arrival of rational choice as a new theoretical apparatus to guide investigation. The fascination with formal theoretical models (and precise microfoundations) was, for some, a welcome change. But for others, formal theoretical models threatened the dominance of “theory driven” research as opposed to research agendas driven by “problems” (Green and Shapiro 1996).

The turn of the century resistance to quantitative methods brought forth two massive changes in the discipline: First, the “Perestroika” movement of the early 2000s, which led both to the founding of *Perspectives on Politics*

and to an increasing push within APSA and top grad programs for qualitative (if not interpretative) methods courses, pushed back against the rising dominance of researching involving mathematics (Yanow and Schwarz-Shea 2010). Second, an extremely productive literature on historical institutionalism was born. The writings of Hall and Taylor, Pierson, Thelen, Steinmo, and Mahoney, to name a few, allowed for a return to big questions and a concern with processes, junctures, and shifts. The institutionalist surge has had lasting effects, demarcating what Capoccia and Ziblatt (2010) called the “historical turn” in comparative politics, trickling down into the study of politics and gender (Krook and Mackay 2010; McBride and Mazur 2010) and to be increasingly influential field of comparative political theory (Simon 2014).

Publication Driven Research

And yet, in spite of all of this counter-hegemonic momentum, from where I sit as one of the discipline’s junior (if no longer young) members, progress seems to have stalled.

Put simply, instead of problems or theories driving our research, it feels as if our research has become publication driven. That is, the questions we ask are guided by our beliefs about whether (and even more cynically *where*) research on that type of question is publishable.

It is in the realm of publication-driven research that the Americanization of the field is taking place. At the crudest level, it involves projects that take a novel method or minor finding developed in the American context and applying it without augmentation to a different country. This type of project, which takes the form “does

1. Let it be noted that one of the first questions that behavioralists were concerned with was understanding the gender vote gap in a period when women had just won suffrage rights, and that one of the first scholars to pioneer ecological methods in political science was a lady social scientist, Inez Goltra (see Ogburn and Goltra 1999; Achen and Shively 1995, 7).

X cause Y” does not require any country-specific knowledge nor any real discussion about why a causal process found in one place may, or may not, be activated in a different institutional or social context.

Instead of letting American politics colonize our field, I think we should push comparativists to be more comparative.

Another slightly more self-aware variant on this theme comes with statements like the following: “I want to do the American Politics of X country.” What doing the American Politics of X country means is to apply the set of questions that the scholars of congress, the courts, or elections have studied in the United States to a different country setting, but without any explicit comparison to the U.S. The desire to do American politics somewhere else is surprisingly common among entering graduate students, who sometimes express confusion about why, then, they should be labeled as comparativists.²

To be fair, the state of our knowledge of typical subject areas in American Politics – legislatures, courts, of the pathways to political office, and even of public opinion – is less developed outside the global north, even today. But my concern is that the lack of an explicit comparative frame (with other countries in the same region, or even with the U.S.) portends Schattschneider’s vision of tons of data in a theoretical vacuum.

America as part of the conversation

Instead of letting American politics colonize our field, I think we should push comparativists to be more comparative, and, even better, to insist America deserves a place as one case among many. Luckily, the explicit comparison of other countries with the U.S. is already present in several enclaves within comparative politics, including in my home turf in gender and politics.³

Much of the earliest work on gender and politics was related to women’s ascension to positions of power in the United States. The work of Virginia Sapiro, Wilma Rule, and others, was foundational for thinking about how status and gender ideology impacted when and where women could become political actors. For a time, comparative scholars of gender were less interested in legislative attainment than they were in understanding the role of women’s movements in promoting women’s rights and in the processes of democratization, and the way that different regimes could produce different legacies of gender equality (e.g. the work of Lisa Baldez, Georgina Waylen, Mala Htun, Lee Ann Banaszak, Laurel Weldon, to name a few).

As both survey research and parliamentary data collection became easier, and as gender quotas blossomed onto the international scene, comparativists turned their attention to trying to understand the institutional differences that

2. Many Americanists might argue that they do compare, but just across states in the US. I’m in favor of sub-national comparisons (and agree with many of Richard Snyder and Isabela Mares’s separate writings on the subject) but think they are particularly apt when embedded in a larger, explicitly comparative framework. See too Kuo (in press).

3. America has always been an important case in the welfare state literature, but America-as-a-case is also thriving in historical political economy. Several recent books delve into the specific historical and institutional differences that have driven variation in electoral systems, representation, clientelism, and women’s rights. These include a book by Ahmed (2013) on the origins of electoral institutions, by Jusko (2017) on electoral geography and representation of the poor, Bateman (2018) on how disenfranchisement was critical to democratic projects, Kuo (2018) on when business interests work against state institutions and when do they work for them, a recent dissertation by Perera (2018) on public unions and mental health care, and Teele (2018) on the interaction between social movements and electoral politics in the quest for women’s suffrage. Newer research on political development primarily compares the U.S. to Europe, but older studies on long-term developmental consequences of different imperial experiences (such as Acemoglu and Robinson, and Engerman and Sokoloff, and Hartz) compared the U.S. with Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

promoted women in leadership positions, citizens' tastes or distastes for supporting female candidates, and the efficacy of quotas for getting more women into politics.⁴ More recently, there has been an extremely rich literature detailing the strategic bases of quota expansion (see Bush 2011; Weeks 2018; O'Brien and Rickne 2016; Clayton and Zetterberg 2018).

Many comparative scholars of gender have found it difficult *not* to engage with the U.S. scholarship, even though it appears that the U.S. literature is oblivious to the fact that there are other countries in the world where women have made considerably more progress in politics. This pressure to engage with the U.S. literature has, however, made the institutional insights from gender and comparative politics richer (e.g. Piscopo 2019; Barnes and Beaulieu 2019). And many important works show that attention to gender enhances our understanding of comparative politics writ large. An example from my book is instructive.

Forging the Franchise: The Political Origins of the Women's Vote, which compares women's enfranchisement in the U.S. with the trajectories in France and the UK, gives an implicit demonstration of how a rich literature dedicated to the United States missed the theoretical forest for the trees. For many decades, the U.S. literature has focused on the singularity of racial politics for creating chasms within the suffrage movement and for halting the progress in the various states. While the racial cleavage was instructive for U.S. suffrage politics, I argue that at a higher level of relief it operated in a very similar way to the religious cleavage in France, and to views about the "Irish Question" in the U.K. In

other words, placing the U.S. as one case among many revealed that the mechanics of franchise reform were similar across countries.

In each country, suffragists considering whether to build a large coalition or a small one thought about the size of the already extant male franchise, and determined which type of reform to fight for (whether limited to the wealthy or white, or unlimited universal rights) depending on their ideas about how the rest of women, who may not share their political beliefs or economic status, would vote. Politicians voting on suffrage bills were informed by similar calculations, weighing the potential benefits available to their party against the risk involved in expanding the franchise to such a diverse group of people.

If I had taken my cues only from the U.S. literature, I would probably have shied away from any explicitly comparative frame. There are so many interesting state level twists and turns that one could easily focus on just that. Moreover, had I realized how difficult it is for a non-Americanist to try to publish on the United States, becoming an area specialist on the U.S. might have seemed like the safest strategy. But a theory of suffrage politics that emerges from an understanding only of the American case would have gotten bogged down by thinking primarily about how minor differences in procedural rules (such as what type of majority was required for electoral reform, or how many bills could be put to referendum per year) impacted suffragists' chances. Instead, working first on the U.K. case, I returned to the U.S. with more macro level ideas in mind: people cared about whether Ireland should be free, and they had ideas about how women would vote on the Irish question. Divisive politi-

4. The work of Mona Krook, Susan Franceschet, Sarah Childs, Rosie Campbell, Leslie Schwindt-Bayer, Aili Tripp, Michelle Taylor-Robinson, and Alice Kang can get you started.

cal issues like this informed not only what legislators did, but also how suffragists formed their own coalitions. Similar logics appeared in the U.S., where smaller movements with narrower demands were the purview of the South, worried as the Southern women were that white supremacy would be threatened should the black women vote.

Studying a major historical moment, and one of the best organized social movements of all time, required going deep in the weeds. Once I began to grasp the complexity of the cases, it was clear that any hope of testing an abstract theory of politics could only be folly. Although there is a cool small-N natural experiment in the UK chapter, and a clever proxy for religious entrenchment in the chapter on France, nothing in my book is particularly well identified. Thus, many aspects of the project felt risky, like permanently swimming against the current.

Yet there were some rewards for the risk. I gathered enough original data on things like political machines in the U.S., and the spread of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, to be able to contribute to others' research on comparative political development. In addition, my book provides a modular theoretical apparatus that should apply to many other movements for and instances of franchise reform.

Finally, and in the spirit of more comparison, the book contends that taking the case of women seriously adds to our understanding of comparative political development in substantive ways. In the conclusion, I argue that by focusing only on a handful of cases of male franchise reform, the democratization literature has failed to understand that groups can get credit for their own emancipation even if they do not take up arms against the state. Abandoning this (highly gendered) notion of agency opens up new ways

of thinking about how overlapping inequalities and deep-seated social cleavages impact the formation of social movements and the opportunities for equality around the world.

A Political Economy Account of Americanization

There are two forces that, I believe, have undergirded the Americanization of our field, one methodological and one economic. On the methodological side the so-called causal inference "revolution" emerged, taking first development economics and then American politics by storm. In the most brazen (and my favorite) statement on the subject, Green and Gerber (2014) pronounce that learning from observational research is illusory: without setting into motion the phenomenon that we seek to study, we have no hopes of understanding causal relationships. Sweeping a century of research under the rug, the "randomistas" also hoped to get rid of the last vestiges of area studies, and in so doing to remake comparative politics in the image of the increasingly technical American Politics field.

The causal inference juggernaut fed off of the economic lull of the second half of the aughts. In 2008, the onslaught of the financial crisis and the beginnings of the Great Recession reverberated throughout academic institutions. Universities tightened their ladder lines and moved towards increasing casualization (i.e. adjunctification) of their teaching portfolios (Thelen 2019), leaving the number of good jobs to appear vanishingly small. (One even heard horrifying tales of offers rescinded due to budgetary changes.)

The pressure of a contracting labor market (made more acute by the growing reserve army of political scientists stationed in multi-year



postdocs) brings with it the temptation to seek out quick fixes and to follow prophets. It has also led to the relentless professionalization of PhD candidates and an increasing emphasis on publication during graduate school. Since job market candidates now need to demonstrate not only the *potential* for academic excellence, but also *evidence* of “productivity”, the result is a near arms race among graduate students and junior faculty who, in their individually rational attempts to diversify their own portfolios, have now collectively lost the prisoner’s dilemma.

The pressure to perform productivity has led to a sense in many corners that we are asking small-

er and smaller questions. As someone once said to me in conversation: We are teaching students to count, but have they learned to think? Instead of letting comparative politics be Americanized, and to avoid the trivialization of our profession (Falleti 2016), we should push for comparative frames to be brought to America. This requires thinking through the ways that specific institutional contexts shape and bind political behavior, affect electoral and legislative outcomes, and constrain the possibilities for equality, both gendered and otherwise. Ultimately, this means a blurring of the subfield lines. The answers may not all be small, but messiness is a price I’m willing to pay for asking bigger questions. ●

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PERNICIOUS POLARIZATION'S THREAT TO DEMOCRACY: *Lessons for The U.S. From Abroad*

by Jennifer McCoy



Jennifer McCoy

is Professor of Political Science, Georgia State University. Her email is jmccoy@gsu.edu.

Anxiety about democracy's status worldwide is rampant today. In the U.S., scholars debate whether an exceptional institutional strength will prove resilient to the democratic backsliding predicted by the rise of nationalism, populism and intensified polarization (Bermeo 2019; Lieberman et al. 2018; Mickey, Levitsky, and Way 2017; Weyland and Madrid 2019; Kaufman and Haggard 2018). In this essay, I examine the U.S. in light of lessons learned from my recent collaborative research and conclude that the U.S. is indeed suffering an erosion in the quality of democracy as a result of severe polarization, and is vulnerable to democratic backsliding (McCoy and Somer 2018, 2019a).

This essay departs from a conventional conceptualization of polarization as ideological distance between political parties, leaders and/or voters. Instead, it considers polarization as a process in which people's normally cross-cutting identities and interests increasingly line up along a single divide, and people increasingly perceive and describe politics and society in terms of "us" versus "them." As this process deepens, the electorate is divided into mutually distrustful camps and political polarization extends into social relations and becomes a social identity. Each side views the other political camp and their supporters as a threat to the nation or their way of life. The conse-

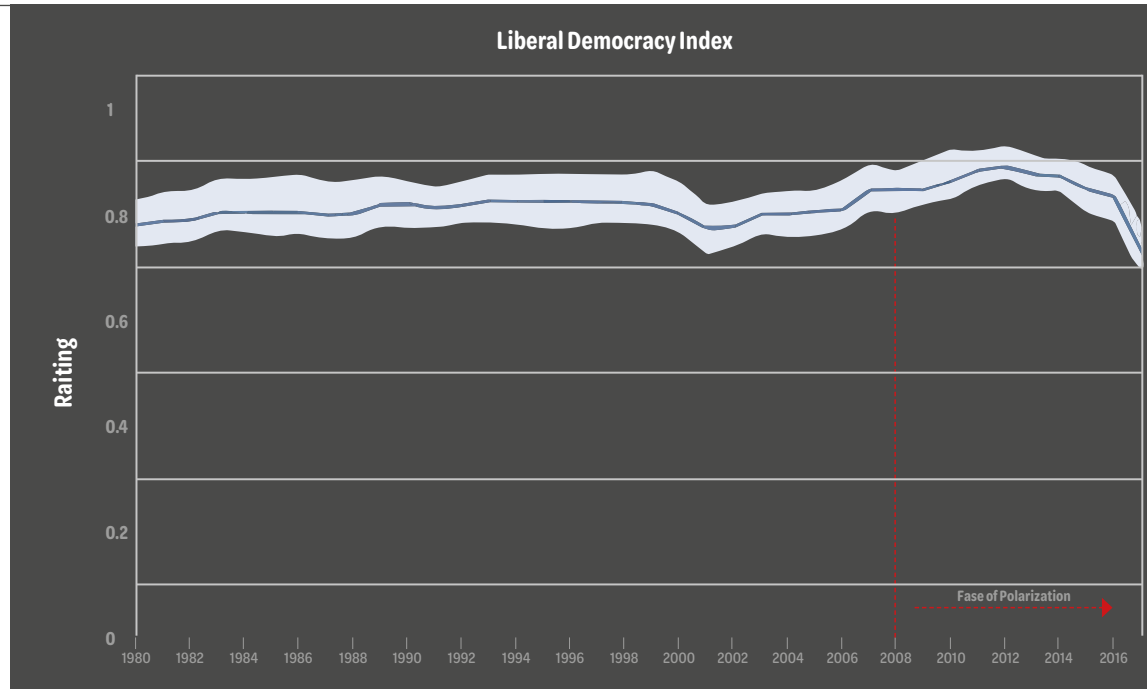
quences for democracy can be severe – ranging from gridlock and paralysis to democratic erosion and even outright collapse (McCoy, Rahman, and Somer 2018).

Consequences for Democracy

In a comparative study of eleven very different polarized polities around the world, including Bangladesh, Hungary, Philippines, Turkey, Venezuela and the United States, every country experienced a decline in V-Dem's Liberal Democracy index during, or immediately following, a period of severe polarization (McCoy and Somer 2019b). The U.S. remains at a relatively high score on liberal democracy, but *Figure 1* shows a worrisome continuous decline beginning in 2012.

Rising mistrust, hostility and, at times, hatred of the opposing party and its leaders may be some of the most dangerous consequences of growing mass partisan polarization. As supporters of each party come to see the leaders and supporters of the other party not just as political rivals but as enemies out to harm the nation, they are more likely to grow intolerant toward political opponents and be willing to accept illiberal measures to restrict dissenting voices and votes. The incumbent's followers tolerate increasingly authoritarian behavior to stay in

Figure 1:
United States' Liberal
Democracy Index:
1980-2017



Source: Varieties of Democracy database, V.7

power, while the opponents are more and more willing to resort to undemocratic means to remove them from power.

We see warning signs of such democratic backsliding in the U.S. Expert surveys, primarily political scientists, have noted an increase in the risk of democratic erosion (Bright Line Watch Survey Report: Wave 6 | Bright Line Watch 2018; Authoritarian Warning Survey 2018). Diminished tolerance of opposing views among political elites is reflected in another measure in V-Dem: the degradation of respect for counter-arguments as indicated in a scale of 1–5 in which the United States fell from 4 to 3 (acknowledge but not value counterarguments) in 2013 and then to 2 (elites acknowledge the counterarguments only to degrade them and debase the individuals and groups who make such arguments) in 2016 (Coppedge et al. 2018).

We are currently seeing an ominous polarization in the public over their very assessment of democracy. In a July 2018 survey, for the first time, Trump approvers saw an improvement in the quality of U.S. democracy, while Trump disapprovers saw a continuing deterioration,

producing a new divergence in public opinion (Brightline Watch 2018). The lack of agreement on whether there is even an erosion of democratic quality constitutes a significant obstacle to providing the bulwarks to contain the threat of such an erosion.

Another warning sign comes from a national online survey experiment with 2000 participants that my colleagues and I conducted just after the November 2018 midterm elections in the U.S. We tested hypotheses that emotions of resentment and anger triggered by perceptions of relative deprivation – themselves deepened by populist rhetoric – would contribute to the tribal characteristics of pernicious polarization: antipathy toward the opposing part(ies), unwillingness to compromise, and perceiving the out-party as a threat. Further, we expected that these indicators of tribalism would contribute to lowered tolerance for the rights of political opponents, and support for violations of democratic norms (McCoy, Bowen, and Demas 2019).

We found that a sense of injustice and unfairness does indeed fuel tribal characteristics of Us vs Them and tolerance of executive violation

of democratic norms, but with an important caveat: it seems to be driven by partisan identification. Overall, Republicans experiencing the Unfair treatments were more likely to favor executive democratic norm erosion and limiting the voice and vote of the opposition, while Democrats were not. The treatments did not change Republican views of their opponents (how favorably they viewed them and how much of a threat they perceived from their policies).

In contrast, Democrats were more susceptible to the Unfair treatments worsening their views of opponents (both favorability and as a threat). But the more threatened Democrats felt by Republicans, the more they *avored* democracy and minority protections, rather than democratic norm erosion. We plan to investigate different hypotheses to explain this outcome – whether it has to do with which party is in power at the moment, or more to do with the characteristics, values and/or ideology of party members.¹

Four factors of pernicious polarization

Murat Somer and I have identified four risk factors that facilitate a shift from the normal polarizing dynamics inherent in democratic politics to a severe form of polarization with pernicious consequences for democracy (McCoy and Somer 2019b). The first two factors highlight agency in either containing or creating pernicious polarization: its use as an intentional political strategy and discourse by political entrepreneurs and its reciprocation by opposition political forces. The third and fourth factors

- institutions as constraints or facilitating conditions, and the rifts over which the society polarizes - help predict how enduring and democracy-eroding the various types of polarization are likely to be.

Agency and Discourse. Political entrepreneurs choose a polarizing strategy to serve political ends – to transform a democracy or economic structures, to gain power or to retain power. Polarization as a political strategy can thus be aimed at democratizing a polity or addressing an injustice through a disruptive process, and not just an instrumental means to gain or hold power. The risk, however, is that the process, if not contained, will devolve into a more destructive and self-sustaining form.

The political use of polarization does not emerge in a vacuum. As I have argued in a recent collaborative paper, “it emerges from the interaction of grievances around representation deficits, economic inequities, or cultural clashes, and the politicization of those grievances by elites using polarizing strategies for their own purposes. As societies change by growing more racially or religiously diverse, more wealthy or unequal, or suffer crises of the economy or corruption, then perceptions of inequity or changing social status can fuel public demands for change and spur the supply of polarizing leaders and parties, often by bundling populist rhetoric together with other polarizing strategies” (McCoy and Somer 2019b, 267).

Pernicious polarization is most commonly activated when political entrepreneurs use

1. Brightline Watch and Pew Research Center surveys also find partisan differences in Trump approvers and disapprovers, and Republican and Democrat valuations of liberal democratic norms, with Trump approvers less committed to the importance of legislative and judicial constraints on the president, freedom of the press, and freedom from foreign influence (“Bright Line Watch Survey Report: Wave 6 | Bright Line Watch” 2018) and Republicans viewing as less important than Democrats the right of people to protest peacefully (Doherty, Kiley, and Johnson 2018).

Manichean polarizing discourse, casting their opponents as immoral or corrupt, to exacerbate existing social cleavages or grievances, or even manufacture divisions, by choosing and highlighting specific issues that appeal to fears, anxieties, and grievances of sectors of the population. In other words, what a leader says is as important as what s/he does. While common to populist polarizers, we argue that Manichean polarizing discourse is used by non-populist polarizers as well.

Institutional factors neither explain nor definitively resolve pernicious polarization.

This discursive dimension does not always match an underlying social or political cleavage. Both Viktor Orbán in Hungary and Donald Trump in the U.S. chose to create the perception of an immigrant threat as a central component of their discursive divide between globalists and nationalists, when the underlying grievance may be the threat of a social status loss for white American males or ethnic Hungarians unrelated to immigration. Similarly populist rhetoric dividing the “people” from the “elites” is actually an empty signifier where the audience can fill in their notion of the good or “real” people and the “conniving elites”, be it the establishment political parties, Wall Street bankers, EU technocrats, or “deep state” intelligence agencies.

The labeling of internal and external “enemies” aims to discredit critics and delegitimize political opponents. But they also trigger the psychological dynamics of polarized politics by reinforcing the notion of Us versus Them and inter-group conflict within the society. By June 2017, 81% of Republicans and Republican-leaningers had negative views of Democrats, with an equal number of Democrats and Democratic-

leaners viewing Republicans negatively. This was a dramatic increase compared with the mid-1990s, when about 20 percent of each party had unfavorable views of the other party.²

Opposition Response. The response of the political opposition is another crucial factor contributing to pernicious polarization, and constitutes the relational aspect of polarization. Opposition actors have a choice to reciprocate polarizing discourse and tactics, locking the polity into a downward spiral of pernicious polarization; to repolarize around a non-pernicious cleavage - such as presenting choices over how to address injustice or democratic deficits; or to depolarize - such as by promoting democratizing reforms and electoral mobilizations, more pluralist representation options for various cleavages to participate in the party system, or internal democratizing reforms of a dominant party.

When a political opposition reciprocates with similar constitutional hardball and demonizing rhetoric used by a polarizing incumbent, a perceived political win may in fact be a Pyrrhic victory. The tit-for-tat tactics between Senate Democrats and Republicans over lifetime judicial appointments under Obama and Trump illustrates such a losing game: the parties have now eliminated the norms intended to create bipartisan agreement through a supermajority on such important decisions. The resulting winner-take-all perception among the electorate increases the stakes of elections and lends itself to a dynamic of electoral majoritarianism in which the dominant party changes electoral rules to entrench its electoral advantages, to which I turn below.

Institutions as Guard Rails? In general, our research found that institutional factors neither

2. <http://www.people-press.org/2017/10/05/8-partisan-animosity-personal-politics-views-of-trump/>



explain nor definitively resolve pernicious polarization. Two institutions, however, serve as important facilitating conditions – electoral systems and political parties. Whether they start out as an elected minority or with the majority, polarizing actors, including non-populist ones, almost always attempt to engineer the electoral system to their advantage to build or keep their majority status. The most extreme cases of polarization among our countries resulted in contexts of majoritarian electoral systems that gave widely disproportionate representation to the majority party (as opposed to purer PR systems). Once in power, leaders like Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, Viktor Orbán in Hungary, Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey, and the Awami League in Bangladesh, among others, engineered additional constitutional and legal changes to further enhance their electoral advantage. In Venezuela, this strategy eventually backfired when the opposition gained the plurality of the legislative vote in 2015, but because of the disproportionate rules set up by Chavismo, the opposition won a supermajority of 66% of the seats.

The extreme decentralization of the U.S. electoral process creates inconsistent voting rights across states at best, and vulnerability to partisan abuse at worst. Its strongly majoritarian system with single-member district legislative elections is complemented by an electoral college indirectly electing the president through disproportionate representation to less populous (small and rural) states. Given the difficulty of amending the U.S. constitution, we do not see the same resort to constitutional change to engineer electoral rules or extend term limits so prevalent in our other cases. Nevertheless, recent Supreme Court decisions privileging corporate actors in campaign finance, gutting the

Voting Rights Act and upholding partisan gerrymandering and restrictive voter identification laws have helped to enhance Republican electoral advantages at a time when Republicans dominate the state legislatures who make many of these decisions.

The implications of the majoritarian electoral systems are critical: the winner-take-all logic produced by institutional rules in disproportionate systems, combined with the psychological elements of the “us-versus-them” discourse employed in severely polarized party systems, provide perverse incentives in favor of de-democratization. The resulting electoral immobilism entrenched with institutional disproportionate rules contributes to the extension of political polarization to the societal level, and makes polarization even more difficult to overcome (Vegetti 2019).

Many have argued that the independent judiciary in the U.S. serves as an effective constraint against executive overreach. Indeed, in our study we found that even when oppositions could not match the electoral mobilization capacity of a charismatic polarizing leader, they used their clout in institutional accountability mechanisms including the bureaucracy, judiciary and security forces as well as legislative impeachment to constrain the executive. This strategy, though, can play a democratizing or autocratizing role. For example, in Turkey, Venezuela and Thailand, anti-populist forces dominated military, courts and bureaucracies sufficiently to restrain populist leaders in the early years, but they also resorted to coup attempts, and in the case of Thailand, a definitive military coup in 2014 to oust the populist leaders. In Turkey and Venezuela, the polarizing populist incumbents transformed those very institutions over time, populating them with

loyalists and then turning them on challengers and dissenters. Democrats will be tempted to use their Congressional majority after the 2018 midterms to initiate impeachment proceedings to alleviate frustration among their base, even while facing a clear roadblock in the Senate.

President Trump has worked hard to discredit other accountability mechanisms, including the special counsel, the FBI, the media, and even his own intelligence agencies when their assessments conflict with his foreign policy agenda. As our research shows, when accountability institutions become politicized, they lose their capacity to contain pernicious polarization. Indeed, independent judicial and bureaucratic accountability mechanisms can help prevent pernicious polarization, but they are unlikely to reverse it once in place precisely because views of the accountability mechanisms themselves become polarized. Half the population loses faith in those very mechanisms in polarized contexts, and the mechanisms themselves become politicized through a partisan appointment process.

Polarizing Around Formative Rifts. The fourth factor, and perhaps the most difficult to manage is what our research found about the underlying basis of polarization. When countries polarize around formative rifts that reflect unresolved debates over citizenship rights and national identity at the country's formation, then that polarization is most likely to be enduring and pernicious (Somer and McCoy 2019). For example, competing foundational myths about the nation and the state's purpose from countries experiencing national liberation wars centered on the actors uniquely claiming its legacy: ZANU and ZAPU in Zimbabwe, the ANC in South Africa, and Awami League in Bangladesh (LeBas and Munemo 2019; Southall 2019; Rahman 2019).

Formative rifts in the U.S. have derived from its founding on unequal citizenship rights for African-Americans, native Americans, and women (Lieberman et al. 2018; Lepore 2018). As these rights were re-asserted in the 1960s civil rights movement, the 1970s women's movement, and the growing diversity of religion, gender, and race in the workplace and society from the 1980s to the present, polarization around these rights and perceived threats to the dominant group status grew. Donald Trump's presidency is thus the product of the racial, cultural, and ideological realignment that has transformed the American party system and the American electorate since the 1960s. His candidacy reinforced, but did not create, some of the deepest social and cultural divisions within the American electorate—those based on race and religion (Abramowitz and McCoy 2019, 138).

This type of polarization is particularly pernicious because it revolves around debates over who is a legitimate citizen and who can legitimately represent them. The ultimate solution to depolarize the contentiousness around national identity and citizenship rights that polarizes the United States thus requires addressing these debates and learning how to coexist and flourish in a multi-racial and multi-cultural society.

Reversing pernicious polarization

New attempts to comparatively measure affective or political polarization, as opposed to issue-based or ideological polarization, at the mass level find that the U.S. ranges from the middle of the pack toward the high end in the last decade, depending on the specific measure (Lauka, McCoy, and Firat 2018; Gidron, Adams, and Horne 2019). If political polarization is not contained, it can lock a polity into a dangerous



political dynamic with pernicious consequences for democracy.

The U.S. retains a strong judiciary and bureaucracy, but its electoral institutions are weak and parties are held hostage to a centrifugal primary system. The logic of polarization in this context, combined with the abdication of the Republican party to serve its legislative oversight role, incentivizes attempts to politicize ac-

countability mechanisms and damages social cohesion and trust. Escaping the trap of polarization will require a cohesive opposition party willing to resist reciprocating polarizing tactics, defense of the integrity of the electoral system and voting rights, an alert citizenry ready to resist attempts to foment distrust in institutions and information, and a society willing to learn to coexist across races and cultures. ●

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TOWARD A COMPARATIVE RESEARCH AGENDA ON AFFECTIVE POLARIZATION IN MASS PUBLICS

by Noam Gidron, James Adams, and Will Horne



Noam Gidron

is Assistant Professor
(Lecturer) at the
Department of Political
Science and the Joint
Program in Politics,
Philosophy and Economics
(PPE) at the Hebrew
University of Jerusalem.
His email is [Noam.Gidron@
mail.huji.ac.il](mailto:Noam.Gidron@mail.huji.ac.il).

Western politics seems increasingly characterized by hostility, distrust, and incivility across partisan lines. As noted in the *Guardian*, British politics is currently shaped by raw anger across the partisan divide (Beckett 2018). In Germany, according to the *Washington Post*, politics has become more spiteful in recent years (Witte and Beck 2018). And the *New York Times* reported that Americans feel “angry and afraid of the other side” (Peters 2018).

Heads of states – and even royalty – have commented on the angry politics of our time. On the background of heated divisions between Remainers and Leavers in the Brexit debate, Queen Elizabeth II stated in her 2018 Christmas message: “Even with the most deeply held differences, treating the other person with respect and as a fellow human being is always a good first step towards greater understanding.” The German President Frank Walter Steinmeier made a related point in his 2018 Christmas address: “Wherever you look – especially on social media – we see hate; there is shouting and daily outrage. I feel that we Germans are spending less and less time talking to each other.” These examples suggest that concerns over partisan and ideological hostility extend across advanced democracies.

This mass-level animosity across party lines is commonly defined as *affective polarization* (Hetherington et al. 2016; Iyengar et al. 2012; Iyengar et al. 2019; Levendusky 2018). There is an ongoing debate among American politics scholars about the relationship between affective polarization and other forms of polarization (Lelkes forthcoming). Some argue that affective polarization is rooted in overlapping social identities, whereby American partisans have sorted into socially homogenous parties (for instance, in terms of religion and race), which in turn increased hostility between partisan groups (Mason 2016; Mason 2018). Others argue that intensifying hostility towards partisan opponents is driven by growing policy differences between the parties (Abramowitz and Webster 2017).

While inter-party policy disagreements provide voters with clear policy choices (Levendusky 2010) and have been shown to strengthen citizens’ attachments to established parties (Lupu 2015; Lupu 2016), mass-level affective polarization is disconcerting. Affective polarization prompts preferential treatment of co-partisans (Lelkes and Westwood 2017), and there is evidence that more polarized partisans tend to discriminate against out-partisans in economic



James Adams

is Professor of Political Science, University of California at Davis. His email is jfadams@ucdavis.edu.



Will Horne

is a PhD Candidate at the Politics Department, Princeton University. His email is rhorne@princeton.edu.

transactions (McConnell et al. 2018; Carlin and Love 2018). Affective polarization thus contributes to democratic dysfunction and may undermine liberal, pluralist democratic norms and institutions (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; Somer and McCoy 2018).

While affective polarization has attracted academic and public interest, nearly all we know about this topic is based on the well-developed American literature (see Huddy et al. 2018; Reiljan forthcoming; Wagner 2017; Westwood et al. 2018). As Iyenger et al. (2019) note in a recent literature review, “more work is needed to build bridges between Americanists and comparativists” interested in affective polarization. This note is one step in this direction.

We address two issues. First, we report descriptive statistics based on analyses of survey data from twenty western democracies, which suggest that affective polarization in the United States is not especially intense compared to other Western polities. This finding may be welcomed by Americans (who may be glad that they are not extremely affectively polarized in comparative perspective), while it may dismay citizens of many other western democracies (who may be disappointed that they are as intensely polarized as the US). In either case we find this comparison instructive. Second, and related, we argue for the advantages of analyzing American affective polarization within a comparative context.

Affective polarization in America is not high in comparative perspective

As noted above, research on affective polarization is almost exclusively US-centered. Does

this American focus reflect exceptionally strong partisan dislike in American society, compared to other Western polities? Perhaps, since affective polarization has intensified in the United States over time. American partisans’ evaluations of out-parties, based on the like-dislike scales included in the American National Election Studies, have increased sharply across the past few decades—and the proportion of Americans who state that they would be displeased if their child married someone from the other party had increased from 5% in the 1960s to more than 40% by 2010 (Iyengar et al. 2012). This prompted Sunstein (2015, 2) to declare that American “partyism is now worse than racism” (see also Westwood et al. 2018). But how do contemporary levels of American affective polarization compare with other western polities?

To explore this question, we analyzed survey data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES), which has compiled national election studies since 1996. We focus on 20 Western democracies, for which we have 76 election surveys across the 1996–2015 period, while excluding East European and other non-Western democracies.¹ A common module of all CSES surveys elicits respondents’ ratings of the political parties in their country on a 0–10 thermometer scale, where higher numbers denote more positive evaluations. These scales are commonly used to measure affective polarization in American politics. To simplify the interpretation of our results, we reversed this scale so that 10 denotes the most negative party evaluation and 0 the most positive. The CSES surveys also asks respondents which party they feel the closest to. We consider respondents who named a party to be the partisans of that party.

1. For more on comparative polarization outside Western democracies, see McCoy and Somer 2019.

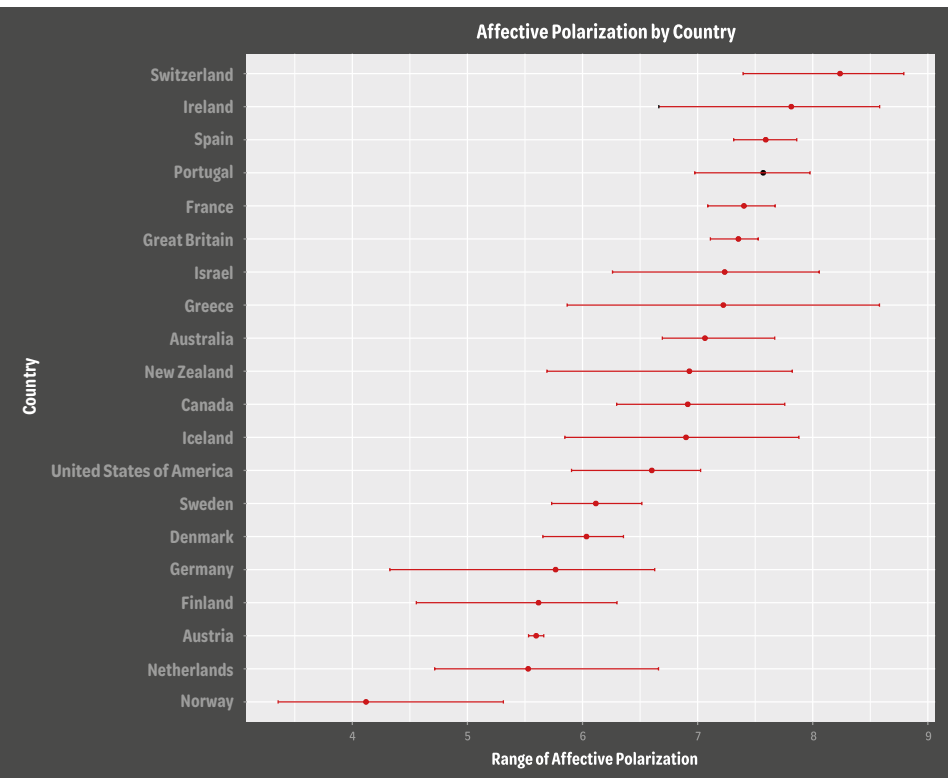


Figure 1:
Affective Polarization in
Comparative Perspective

*Affective polarization
United States is not
high in comparative
perspective.*

For each country/election year, we compute the average thermometer rating that supporters of the largest left-wing party expressed towards the largest right-wing party, and vice-versa – a measure that arguably provides the most relevant comparison between affective polarization in the American two-party system versus the multiparty systems in other western democracies. For instance, for Britain we analyze Labour partisans' thermometer ratings of the right-of-center Conservative Party, and Conservative partisans' ratings of the leftist Labour Party. We weight these averages by the relative sizes of these parties to obtain a national-level measure of affective polarization.² We classified parties into left and right based on expert surveys. On the left, these are mostly social democratic/labour parties; on the right, most

large parties are either conservative or Christian democrat.

Figure 1 displays the two-party affective polarization scores for the aforementioned 20 western polities, computed over the 76 national election surveys for these polities compiled by the CSES between 1996 and 2015. The dots represent the mean affective polarization score for each country averaged across the available surveys; the bars represent the range between the minimum and maximum computed values in each country. We observe significant differences *between countries* in terms of their averages, and in some cases also *within countries* in different election years.

The figure shows that affective polarization United States is not high in comparative perspective. Put differently, the US is not unusual in the degree to which partisans of the largest left- and right-wing parties dislike their opponents: By this criterion the mean level of affective polarization in the US public (6.60) is actually below the mean of what we find across the 20 western polities in our study (6.68). Moreover, in several countries including Spain, France, the UK, and Switzerland, supporters of the largest left- and right-wing parties expressed more intense mutual dislike in *every* CSES election survey we analyzed than did the American Republican and Democratic supporters in *any* of the CSES surveys.

We identify less intense affective polarization in several European countries—including Sweden, Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, and Finland—which feature consensual institutions, including proportional electoral laws,

2. For instance, in the 2015 CSES British Election Survey, Labour supporters' mean evaluation of the Conservative Party was 7.12, and Conservative supporters' mean evaluation of Labour was 7.19.

multiparty governments, and provisions for opposition parties' policy influence that promote power-sharing between parties. Lijphart (2010) argues that these types of institutions promote "kinder, gentler" politics, and the empirical patterns displayed in *Figure 1* largely support his arguments.³ And in light of recent emphasis on the relationship between economic inequality and intensifying affective polarization in the United States (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018), we note that these consensual democracies also display relatively low levels of economic inequality (a pattern that Lijphart has documented).

Switzerland is a surprising exception to the above rules in that affective polarization between partisans of the largest left- and right-wing parties is intense even though Switzerland is a textbook consensual democracy that features only modest income inequality. This anomaly reflects the fact that – unlike most western party systems where the largest parties advocate mainstream policies – the largest Swiss party is the Swiss People's Party (SVP), an anti-immigration, radical right populist party that is intensely disliked by the left (and whose supporters in turn dislike leftist parties). We have conducted additional analyses showing that dislike directed towards radical right parties is on average far more intense than dislike toward all other party families. This suggests that in multi-party systems, the rise of radical right parties may directly shape not only mainstream parties' policy positions (e.g., Abou-Chadi and Krause 2019) but also mainstream partisans' affective evaluations of political opponents.

The descriptive statistics presented in *Figure 1* are intended to begin the conversation about

comparative affective polarization, not close it down. In particular, we confront challenges in developing cross-nationally comparable measures of this concept. Can we safely assume – as we have implicitly done here – that the thermometer scale ratings we use to measure out-party dislike are cross-nationally comparable? And when making comparisons to the American two-party system, is it valid to construct an affective polarization measure for other western multiparty systems that considers only the dominant left and right-wing party, as we have done here? Finally, it would be promising to consider other mass political attitudes that may (or may not) be connected to affective polarization, including the phenomenon of partisan dealignment, i.e., the notable declines in rates of party identification across many western democracies (Dalton 2013, Chapter 9). That being said, a host of additional research, which uses diverse measures of affective polarization (including measures that consider *all* the parties in the system), converge towards a similar conclusion: *Affective polarization in the United States is not an outlier in comparative perspective* (Gidron, Adams and Horne 2018, Lauka et al. 2018; Reiljan forthcoming; Wagner 2017).

When analyzing over-time changes in dislike of partisan opponents, we did not find clear-cut evidence for a surge in affective polarization across Western democracies in recent years. Aggregating data across the 20 western polities in our sample, we find only a small and statistically insignificant increase in out-party dislike over the last two decades. However we caution against reading too much into this non-finding which may reflect data limitations (for some countries, we only have 2 election surveys in-

3. But see Boix 1999 for arguments that political institutions may be endogenous to societal cleavages.

cluded in our data). In addition, while we have focused on dislike among the two largest parties, dislike of out-parties may mostly be channeled toward smaller, more radical parties—an issue which remains outside the scope of our analyses but offers fertile ground for future research.

The case for a comparative research agenda on polarization

We conclude by advocating for cross-national analyses of affective polarization. The United States is – by far – the most studied case of polarization yet *Figure 1* suggests that it is not affectively polarized in comparative perspective. If we are alarmed about partisan dislike and hostility in the United States, then we should arguably be concerned about these phenomena in many other western democracies. Yet to date there is relatively little cross-national research on this topic.

More specifically, we highlight two benefits of cross-national research on affective polarization. First, this comparative perspective may illuminate causal processes in the United States. The rise of partisan hostility in American politics has been linked to several factors, including increased elite-level ideological polarization, rising economic inequality, the rise of partisan media, and more general patterns of social isolation (see, e.g., McCarty et al. 2006; Levendusky 2013; Putnam 2001; on inequality and polarization from a comparative perspective see Iversen and Soskice 2015). Yet the American case in isolation is over-determined, since these variables have tended to move in tandem. We can gain

traction in understanding America's growing affective polarization by analyzing comparative cases that display different levels (and different over-time trends) of these possible causal factors. For instance, comparative analyses can advance the debate about the relationship between affective and ideological polarization (Abramowitz and Webster 2017; Lelkes forthcoming), thereby illuminating whether affective polarization is more intense in countries where elite ideological polarization is stronger, and whether, within countries, *changes* in elite ideological polarization are followed by *changes* in mass affective polarization (Reiljan forthcoming). Cross-national analyses could also explore whether, outside the United States, parties have become more socially homogenous over time (Mason 2016; Mason 2018)—and whether social sorting predicts intensified partisan dislike across Western democracies.

Second, and related, a comparative perspective can identify polities that display markedly low levels of affective polarization, and consideration of the characteristics of these “low partisan affect” polities may suggest possible remedies to policy-makers who are concerned about affective polarization in their home country. Thus, to the extent that cross-national analyses uncover strong associations between income inequality and affective polarization, these patterns might prompt policy-makers to devote additional resources to alleviating income inequality. Both Americanists and comparativists may benefit from greater engagements across sub-disciplinary boundaries. ●



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MILITANT ANTI-FASCIST ACTIVISM IN THE UNITED STATES: A Comparative Perspective

by *Kanisha D. Bond*



Kanisha D. Bond

is an Assistant Professor of
Government and Politics,
University of Maryland. Her
email is kanisha@umd.edu.

Introduction

The resurgence of open conflict between racist, ultra-nationalistic political groups and their opposing counterparts around the world has galvanized attention to the global phenomenon of militant anti-fascism, commonly shorthand-ed by many as “antifa.” The United States has been, historically, no stranger to a wide variety of mass action, protest, and organization. However, discourse and debate over this particular brand of activism reflects much of the current volatility in American politics. For example, all four of the popularity spikes in U.S.-based searches for “antifa” that Google recorded during 2017 correspond to concerns or instances of political violence. In time, they index roughly to (1) a series of clashes between pro-Trump/right-wing conservative demonstrators and counter-demonstrators in Berkeley, California (April), (2) the numerous episodes of collective and individual violence between white supremacist activists and counter-demonstrators before, during, and after a rally dubbed ‘Unite the Right’ in Charlottesville, Virginia (August), and (3) an internet conspiracy theory that falsely alleged an impending ‘Antifa-planned civil war’ (October and November).

Despite such proliferating public scrutiny, scholarly investigation into the long and distinctive history of American antifa activism remains rare. The scant academic work on antifa in the U.S. largely wonders whether it is best to label it as a “terrorist organization” (LaFree 2018) or a “street gang” (Pyrooz and Densley 2017); the even smaller body of work that situates American antifa in global context largely views it as a “tendency” with firm roots in European politics and culture (Bray 2017). These approaches unfortunately flatten out this complex construct and preclude a nuanced understanding of whether, how, or why the social bases, organization, repertoires, and outcomes of antifa activism relate across various contexts.

Comparative research on antifa is critically important to both scholars and activists interested in understanding antifa’s multiple functions as a political ideology, an activist praxis, and a set of institutions that closely approximate a transnational social movement industry. All of these are profoundly impacted by cross-national differences in the political, cultural, and organizational opportunities that activists face (Kitschelt 1986; Tarrow 1994; Keck and Sikkink 1998). The self-organization of transnational contention regularly varies not only across



countries but also over time (Zydravomyslova 1996) and among the different institutional settings nested within a single national context (Walker, et al. 2005). A comparative perspective on antifa in the United States is particularly appropriate for systematically unpacking the role that mainstream and militant American politics has played in constructing the global antifa imagination across these sites, and vice versa.

Argument & Methods

In this brief essay, I explore the distinctive ideological, institutional, and practical nature of American militant anti-fascist activism in comparative context. I focus specifically on how racial and ethnic politics in the U.S. have historically shaped antifa mobilization, both at home and abroad. I contend that this dynamic is evident not only through individual activists' participation paths, but also in their framing of the core problems both to be solved and illuminated through their activism. I illustrate these claims with insights I have gathered through long-term, ongoing research on the role of intersectionality in antifa mobilization, action, and organization in the United States and Canada. My methodological approach centers the experiences of current and former activists in articulating the comparative politics of North American antifa; I refer to these individuals in what follows with the level of descriptive specificity that they have chosen for themselves during the consent process. My methods of data collection include secondary data analysis, archival research, ethnographic interviewing, and participant-observation during crowd events and other related gatherings in both countries. Informed by my own positionality, each of these methods present two particular partisanship

challenges related to access and interpretation (Drury and Stott 2001): my appearance as a non-white woman has made me a target of threatened and actual physical violence from anti- and counter-antifa activists in a variety of field settings; the influence of my self-identification as a Black American on any insider/outside benefits or challenges tends to vary with the national, racial, ethnic, and gender identifications of my interlocutors.

Fascist States & Fascist Politics

Throughout the early 20th century, European anti-fascists deliberately offered their activism as a straightforwardly democratic alternative to the reactionary and exclusionary policies promoted by state-based fascism (Eley 1996). This is perhaps unsurprising, as most 'classical' interpretations of fascism as a system of governance date its emergence around the end of the First World War and locate it squarely in Europe (Linz 1976, 10). Canonical definitions often cast fascism as a tool for structurally and normatively revolutionizing societies (de Felice 1977, 78, 92-94) through the consolidation of state institutions predicated upon a "hypernationalist, often pan-nationalist, anti-parliamentary, anti-liberal, anti-communist, populist, and therefore anti-proletarian, partly anti-capitalist and anti-bourgeois, anti-clerical, or at least non-clerical movement, with the aim of national social integration through single party and corporative representation not always equally emphasized...reli[ant] on activist cadres ready for violent action combined with electoral participation to gain power with totalitarian goals by a combination of legal and violent tactics" (Linz 1976, 12-13). If the confrontational nature of efforts to consolidate state fascism constituted an "anti-movement" (Linz 1976, 15-16), early



European anti-fascists intended to counter it with broad inclusivity (Bray 2017).

The basic trajectory of militant anti-fascist activism in the United States, in contrast, began with activists' historical positioning vis-a-vis *fascist politics* rather than against the consolidated fascist state alone, primarily, and *sui generis*. American antifa was initially forged in the context of institutional democracy, where expressions of fascist politics can be not only more easily recast as (tolerable) contentious public political performances but also more readily used for accessing social power without authoritarian state capture (Tilly 2006, 76). Fascist politics encapsulate the specific tactics and attitudes that support the pursuit of political power through encouraging a romantic nationalism fueled by the dehumanization of others (Linz 1976; Stanley 2018). The United States of the early 1900's offered a unique (at the time) combination of fascist politics and democratic institutions. As Jason Stanley (2018, xviii) notes, it has in fact borne "a legacy of the best liberal democracy as well as the roots of fascist thought (indeed, Hitler was inspired by the Confederacy and Jim Crow laws)."

Stanley's parenthetical in particular highlights two key macro-historical dynamics. First, it underscores the importance of 'everyday' and state-consolidated fascist politics to American democracy, even as the latter two need not be coterminous (Stanley 2018, xiv). Furthermore, Stanley places racial and ethnic oppression at the core of what the United States offered to the global diffusion of fascism during the interwar period. In other words, even as racism normalized uniquely in the U.S. to sustain the experiential and institutional legacies of chattel slavery and settler colonialism (Olsen 2004), it

also helped to buoy the war- and peace-time atrocities committed not only by Nazi Germany (Peukert 1987; Whitman 2017) but also much of fascist Europe (Gillette 2002; Kennedy 2015).

Antifa activism in Canada also emerged to challenge the proliferation of fascist politics by way of racial and ethnic oppression in the context of institutionalized democracy. However, its domestic racial and ethnic politics seem to have enjoyed less idealized global attractiveness than the American version. Its unique history of fascist politics steeped in anti-Black and anti-indigenous racism notwithstanding, Canadian political culture has also absorbed at least two prominent American politico-cultural features with enduring resonance: the Ku Klux Klan, following its northward expansion in 1924 (Jewish Daily Bulletin 1926) and citizens' flying of the Confederate flag. Among Canadians, the latter has been cast alternately as a symbol of ignorance (The New York Times 1861), a display of rebellious pride (Hopper 2015), and/or a source of "sh-ts [*sic*] and giggles" at the idea of that this symbol of racial oppression might "piss a few people off along the way" (Carter 2017). As these examples suggest, the American politics of race is deeply implicated in the quotidian and institutionalized fascist politics of many Western societies.

Race, Anti-Racism, and Antifa Mobilization

Anti-fascism has long been an orienting frame for American activists working in the Black radical tradition to mobilize grassroots challenges against the institutionalization of fascist politics in U.S. culture and institutions (Spencer 2017). The Revolutionary Conference for a United Front Against Fascism organized by the Black Panther



Party (BPP) in 1969 exemplifies this richly. Various promotion and registration materials for the event explicitly invoked a link between the promotion/protection of racist ideals, the practical divisiveness of fascist politics, and the incorporation of both into national politics (Bloom and Martin 2013; Spencer 2017). While some ads and flyers included images of American police officers and National Guardsmen assaulting activists (Bloom and Martin 2013, 299-300), others featured the call: "People! Organizations! Groups! Yippies! Political Parties! Workers! Students! Peasant-Farmers! You the Lumpen! Poor People, Black People, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Chinese, Etc. Etc. We Must Develop a United Front Against Fascism" (Black Panther Party 1969).

Even in light of such history, multiple activists representing different racial and ethnic backgrounds, age cohorts, and participation styles have described the contemporary landscape of American antifa activism as multicultural yet mainly "pretty White." One racialized American interviewee, when summing up their "natural skepticism of White activists," mused: "They look alright, but can we trust them? It is a persistent question."¹ Such concerns are neither unique to the contemporary U.S. context nor unusual, in light of the fact that antifa activism writ large has not demonstrated any particular immunity from reproducing dominant cultures' exclusionary racial and ethnic hierarchies. For example, Núñez Seixas (2016) notes that in the interwar period, cooperation among anti-fascist and minority/exiled ethno-nationalist activists throughout Europe was most often characterized by opportunistic and unstable alliances:

actors from both camps attempted to split the difference between well-resourced anti-fascist activists' racist-yet-liberal "altruism" and ethno-nationalists' need for "strategic allies who embraced their cause, regardless of their political orientation and strategic aims" (600).

When asked to describe their paths into antifa activism, more than a few of my interviewees in both the U.S. and Canada recall a marriage between their personal *observations* of racism and some international context in their early interpretations of how state fascism and common fascist politics might relate. One long-time American adherent remembers that though they considered themselves to be fairly politically aware in their youth, it was upon reading *The Diary of Anne Frank* that:

[T]he Holocaust, World War 2, the whole Hitler... to me that was like the first time in my life that that was introduced to me and I became quite interested, actually a little bit obsessed with the idea that could happen again and we needed to not have that sort of thing happen again. Throughout high school I'd been more involved in things like Amnesty International and stuff cause I wasn't aware in my hometown of any kind of groups or places where you could get involved in something a little more meaningful. Not that Amnesty International isn't meaningful but I think at least at that point in my life it was 'Very bad things are happening to foreign people that are far away, and let's help them,' and it's like, 'Okay that's great but it's not necessarily anyone I would ever know that may be in my neighborhood environment'...²

1. Phone interview by author, 2017.

2. Interview by author, 2018.



By comparison, one of my Canadian interlocutors focused on feeling called to protect their non-White friends—and others like them—through a similar, though differently personal, process of sense-making:

I grew up in a really multicultural neighborhood where my best friends were Asian or Black...I had a real kind of multiracial thing as a kid. And you know other kids were racist towards my friends. They would make stupid racist jokes and stuff, and that always stuck to me...and then I got involved in the anti-apartheid movement in high school pretty heavily. I just always felt like racism was a really bad vile wrong thing. And I think it just really brushed against my feelings of fairness and justice and I realized that I had a lot of resources and things that other people might not have that I should be putting to use...to act in a constructive way.³

For others, personal *experiences* with racial or ethnic oppression set the stage for their activism. One Brown activist from the U.S. recalled that while his earliest political leanings were “very libertarian,” he noticed many of his White friends developing a political consciousness over time that “went from Pinochet lovers to fascists.” As someone who had been “stopped and frisked since [he] was old enough to be stopped and frisked,” he found that being “not White”—and also not very trusting of the cops—pushed him “in the other direction,” away from his friend group and toward what he called “anti-colonial politics.” The change in his voice as he recalled the experience of being repeatedly detained on the street by police indicated a fatigue that I recognized as familiar. It was quickly

countered, however, by his strong declaration that anti-fascist activism for him means: “I side with the Black and Brown people.”⁴

Reconstructing Antifa History in Comparative Context

Many contemporary U.S. and Canada-based antifa activists’ anti-racist leanings are couched in a common intent to “expose, oppose, and confront organized racism and hatred through education, mass action, and support of broader anti-racist action,” collectively comprising a meta-strategy intended to allow “no platform” for fascist political action or rhetoric (Torch Network 2019). I have encountered concern among a number of activists, however, about whether the myth, epic, and public accounting of American antifa activism tends to reinforce anti-Black, heteropatriarchal, and colonialist perspectives that celebrate the militancy of White men in conflict with other White men as uniquely heroic. For example, the 1980s-era punk music scene in Milwaukee, Wisconsin is a storied point at which many commentators begin the history of antifa in the Americas, indexing antifa to a boom in political organizing among mostly White, anti-racist skinheads opposing neo-Nazi recruiting, ideas, and practice at shows throughout the U.S. An important downstream product of these efforts was the Anti-Racist Action (ARA) Network, which represented broad coordination among a collection of militant groups that had begun to proliferate around the U.S. in response to growing mobilization among American neo-Nazi, Ku Klux Klan, and other white nationalist movement organizations (Torch Network 2019). Confronting

3. In-person interview by author, 2018.

4. Phone interview by author, 2018.



neo-Nazism in punk music culture has provided, however, a common point of entry into antifa activism throughout the post-WW2 Americas, Europe, and Asia (Czech Anti-Fascist Action 2016; Saefullah 2018) that goes largely unaddressed in many popular retellings. As one multi-ethnic American activist put it to me: “Even when we do shit, we don’t get credit.”⁵

Interestingly in light of these concerns, at least one White activist expressed a marked eagerness to tell me that “a lot of [contemporary] anti-fascist work is better equipped to deal with racism on the street” than with “systemic racism...in existing institutions like the legal system, or the education system.”⁶ This same individual, who followed the ‘punk pathway’ into antifa activism, adamantly recounted the consequence of Blackness to punk culture, and by extension, preserving the culture as a multiracial space as motivating their actions. As they explained:

[T]he reason the neo-Nazis were able to piggyback on the skinheads was because when skinhead first arrived in North America it was unclear what skinheads were...But then the media immediately jumped on ‘Oh they’re racist Nazis,’ and then...all these liberal institutions that knew nothing about skinhead culture or the punk subculture jumped in and reified them as the authentic skinheads, a real skinhead is a neo-Nazi. But if they hadn’t done that, if they said these people are fucking imposters, real skinheads were Jamaicans...how much would that have changed things? If they had reified skinhead as a multiracial, anti-racist youth subculture, how attractive would that have been to the Nazis and then what would the Nazis have done?⁷

The history of antifa activism among oppressed racial and ethnic groups in the U.S. has been occasionally distorted in European context as well, even while invoked as inspiration. For example, the all-Black militant Black Dragons collective that organized in 80’s-era France explicitly modeled their group after the Black Panther Party itself (Lonoh 2014; Bray 2017). Even still, Patrick Lonoh (a Black Dragons co-founder) acknowledges that while his group “shared the same basic ambitions [as the BPP]...our story wasn’t the same. In France, we didn’t look at slavery in the same way; we also didn’t face the same kind of repression. We weren’t at war with the police—our enemies were [racist] skinheads” (Shalmani and Papin 2015). Despite the intended solidarity, it appears that at least this activist’s interpretation of the BPP’s stance misses the key point that the whole of fascist politics in the U.S.—whether embodied in state or social institutions—was the target of their struggle. In another contemporaneous French example, the *Section Carrement Anti-Le Pen* (SCALP) committed early to framing their anti-fascist activism in “the rebellious image of Geronimo and Native American resistance” (Bray 2017, 50). However, a significant component of this framing involved disseminating organizational propaganda that included virulently racist cartoon depictions of indigenous Americans and images of Geronimo uncontextualized by any reference to the impact of French imperialism on anti-indigenous racism in the United States. One poster advertising a protest action by the group translates to: “March 10 in Toulouse: on foot, on horseback, on the subway...Geronimo will march on Le Pen’s meeting...SCALPers, on your marks!” (SCALP 2005, 9).

5. Phone interview by author, 2018.

6. In-person interview by author, 2018.

7. *Ibid.*



Race, Anti-Racism, and Antifa Action

While the intentional and self-reflexive militancy of many antifa activists is often on display in crowd settings, neither militancy nor antifa is defined by the production of physical violence. During participant-observation during direct confrontations involving individuals assembled to counter demonstrators endorsing fascist politics, I have recorded displays of comradery and cooperation much more frequently

Neither militancy nor antifa is defined by the production of physical violence.

than conflict among them. During my participant-observation at the Unite the Right counter-demonstration in Charlottesville, VA I overheard a group of four or five White demonstrators strategizing on how best to shield a group of Black and brown activists holding Black Lives Matter signs from the brunt of shoving at the steps of Emancipation Park. I offered care and companionship to the counter-demonstrator I helped away from the intersection of 4th and Water Streets after James Fields rammed his car into our crowd near the gathering's end; her travel mates provided the same for me. I watched street medics treat and form human barriers around those who were unable to exit the immediate area seemingly with regard only for their injuries. In other public counter-demonstrations, I have observed American antifa activists devote significant time to a variety of non-violent activities, ranging from public education and leafletting to legal observation and opposition research.

Nonetheless, I have also observed a variety of individual, collective, narrative, strategic, offensive and defensive uses of force during violent

encounters involving crowds of antifa activists. Violent slogans (e.g., "Bash the Fash") appear with great regularity as well. When asked to explain their take on the role of physical violence in American antifa activism, one of my White interviewees both characterized "much of it" as "White male macho bullshit" and noted that "a lot of the focus on violence on our side is preparing for the violence that is inevitable when you are dealing with racist extremists. I mean fascists fetishize violence...they don't see violence as a tactic, as a politically legitimate tactic, they see it as the politically legitimate tactic." They went on to say:

You know, we're not really excited about having to use violence--I wouldn't call it violence I would call it self-defense of ourselves and our communities. And we're fucking scared. It's scary to go to that level. People have been killed. So it's scary to have to go to that level. Fortunately it rarely does.⁸

Conclusion

My research provides preliminary evidence that a comparative approach to studying the transnational nature of militant anti-fascism can uncover not only complex dynamics across countries, but also within a single domestic context. By this option, scholars and activists alike can better engage antifa activism as not just a set of internet-searchable events, but as a collection of shared, lived experiences that can simultaneously support and frustrate the political agency and visibility of marginalized peoples (Bond 2019). ●

8. In-person interview by author, 2018.



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US FEDERALISM IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

by *Paolo Dardanelli and John Kincaid*



Paolo Dardanelli

is Reader in Comparative
Politics, University of Kent.
His email is p.dardanelli@kent.ac.uk.



John Kincaid

is the Robert B. and Helen
S. Meyner Professor of
Government and Public
Service, Lafayette College.
His email is kincaidj@lafayette.edu.

The United States is often considered exceptional (Shafer 1999). One of the defining features of its political system is its federal architecture. To what extent, though, can the US federal experience be considered exceptional from a comparative perspective? Of all the characteristics of the US political system, federalism appears to lend itself particularly well to comparative analysis. On one hand, the United States was the first modern federation, and its primogeniture set a template that influenced all subsequent federations. On the other hand, no other federation matches the US model exactly; most operate in remarkably different ways to the United States (Stepan 1999). Assessing how the US federal experience compares to that of other countries requires an ability to measure key aspects of the operation of a federation across systems and over time. Vital to this concern is how the “federal balance” between the central government and the constituent units evolves, which we refer to as “dynamic de/centralization.”

Here, we briefly describe the results of a recent project that sheds new light on this question. We show that the United States matched the experience of most other continuously democratic federations in becoming more centralized in the legislative sphere but less so in the administrative and fiscal spheres. While institutional

features affect the instruments of dynamic de/centralization, its direction and magnitude appear to be determined primarily by structural socio-economic and socio-cultural forces.

Studying De/Centralization in Federations Comparatively

Concerns about how the balance of power between the federal government and the states would evolve were widespread at the birth of the US federal system. Madison sought to address these concerns in *The Federalist* ([1788] 2000, esp. 236). Scholars have since frequently touched upon them. According to Livingston (1956, 10), “that the real key to the nature of the federation is in the distribution of powers seems to be agreed upon by nearly every writer who addresses himself to the question.” Half a century later, how to preserve a healthy federal balance was at the heart of Bednar’s (2008) search for a formula for a “robust” federation. Observers of US federalism started to detect a centralizing trend as early as the late 19th century, and predicted it would accelerate in the future (e.g., Bryce [1887] 1995a, 1541, 1565; Bryce [1888] 1995b, 1500). By the turn of the 20th century, some wondered whether US federalism could adapt to modernity (e.g., Leacock 1909), while later scholars argued that federations have a

general tendency to become more centralized over time (Wheare 1946, 252-3).

Yet, assessing de/centralization trends comparatively has long been hindered by conceptualization and measurement problems. Riker (1975, 140) remarked that developing an index of centralization “would make possible a truly comparative study of federalism for the first time”. From the 1970s onwards, scholars have sought to measure de/centralization using fiscal data, such as the proportion of revenues or expenditures accounted for by sub-central governments (Pommerehne 1977). More recently, the Regional Authority Index (Hooghe et al. 2016) measures the authority regional governments – including the constituent units of federations – possess in terms of “self rule” (i.e., the powers they exercise vis-à-vis their own population) and “shared rule” (i.e., their power to influence national policies). These efforts marked important scholarly advances but fell short of providing measures able to fully capture the complexity of de/centralization across systems and over time (Dardanelli et al. 2019a: 2-5). In a recent project, we sought to make progress in this endeavor by addressing some of the limitations of previous measures.

Conceptualizing and Theorizing De/Centralization

We distinguish between static and dynamic de/centralization. Static de/centralization is the distribution of powers between the central and constituent governments of a federation at any given time. From the perspective of each constituent unit, such distribution is characterized by the autonomy it has to take binding decisions on public policy vis-à-vis the federal government and other constituent units. We prefer

“de/centralization” to decentralization because it does not imply a presumption in favor of one end of the spectrum. Dynamic de/centralization is the change in the distribution over time, toward either centralization or decentralization. We conceptualize constituent-unit autonomy in continuously democratic federations as having two main dimensions: policy, itself divided into legislative and administrative, and fiscal autonomy. Legislative autonomy refers to a constituent unit’s control of primary legislative powers in a policy field. Administrative autonomy concerns the degree to which a constituent unit implements central government, as well as its own, legislation. Fiscal autonomy relates to its ability to obtain financial resources through its own tax and borrowing powers, and to allocate such resources as it pleases (Dardanelli et al. 2019a, 7-10).

We conceptualize dynamic de/centralization as having five main properties: (1) direction: whether change is toward centralization or decentralization; (2) magnitude: the magnitude of the change; (3) tempo: the frequency, pace, timing and sequence of change; (4) form: whether change occurs in the legislative, administrative or fiscal dimensions; and (5) instruments: the instruments through which change occurs, such as constitutional amendment, court rulings or conditional grants (Dardanelli et al. 2019a, 10-13).

Drawing from several strands of the literature, we theorize that dynamic de/centralization is shaped by seven categories of causal factors operating at different levels and points in time: (1) antecedents: factors that determine the initial distribution of powers in a federation, such as whether the federation was the product of a ‘federal bargain’; (2) socio-economic trends:



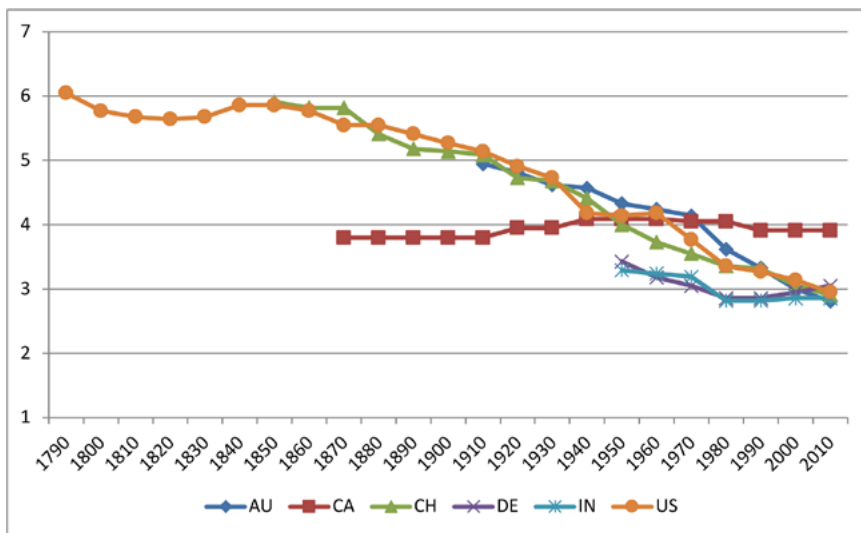


Figure 1:
Mean static legislative
de/centralization

long-term developments in the economy and society such as rising market integration and factor mobility; (3) socio-cultural trends: patterns of change in collective identification and expectations vis-à-vis government; (4) economic and security shocks such as wars and economic crises; (5) collective attitudes toward the federal balance by citizens, interest groups, and the media; (6) political variables such as the degree of nationalization of the party system and ideology; and (7) the institutional properties of each federation (Dardanelli et al. 2019a, 14-22).

US's trajectory matches closely that of other long-established federations.

The De/Centralisation Dataset (DcD)

The De/Centralisation Dataset (Dardanelli et al. 2019c) measures legislative and administrative de/centralization in 22 policy fields and fiscal de/centralization in five categories in Australia, Canada, Germany, India, Switzerland, and the United States for each decade from their foundation to 2010.

Policy de/centralization is measured on 7-point scales, ranging from 7 (exclusive control by each constituent unit) to 1 (exclusive control by the federal government). Fiscal de/centralization is

measured on 7-point scales based on numerical indicators or qualitative assessment, ranging from 7 (maximal autonomy for each constituent unit) to 1 (minimal autonomy).

Compared to other datasets, the DcD offers three main advantages: (a) detailed measures of legislative and administrative de/centralization for 22 public policy fields, ranging from agriculture to transportation; (b) measures that capture the fiscal autonomy of the constituent units as opposed to their fiscal capacity; and (c) measures for the entire life of each federation.

The US Experience in Comparative Perspective

From the DcD data, we can assess how the experience of the United States compares to that of Australia, Canada, Germany, India and Switzerland (see Dardanelli et al. 2019b for details). *Figure 1* maps the evolution of legislative de/centralization averaged across the 22 policy fields. It shows that the US's trajectory matches closely that of other long-established federations such as Switzerland and Australia. Starting from a high level, the degree to which the US states have primary legislative control over public policy declined almost continuously, particularly during the federation's second century, and converged by 2010 with that of Australia, Germany, India, and Switzerland, around a score of 3. This indicates that legislative powers across policy fields came predominantly under the federal government's control, confirming earlier qualitative assessments (Sandalow 1982).

From this perspective, it is Canada's trajectory that is exceptional. Having started from a much higher level of static centralization than the United States or Switzerland, Canada experi-

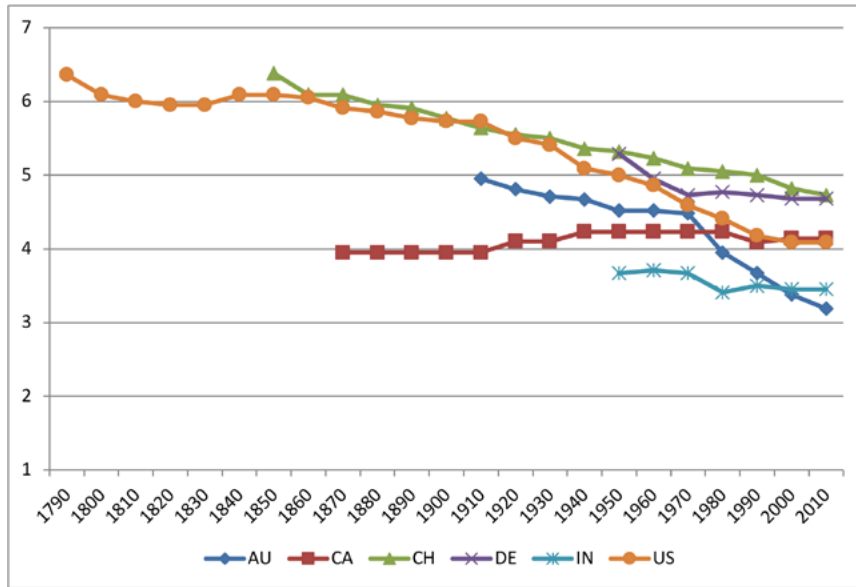


Figure 2: Mean static administrative de/centralization

enced a mix of centralizing and decentralizing steps, ending up as the most decentralized federation in the legislative sphere by 2010. The 1960s 'Quiet Revolution' in French-speaking

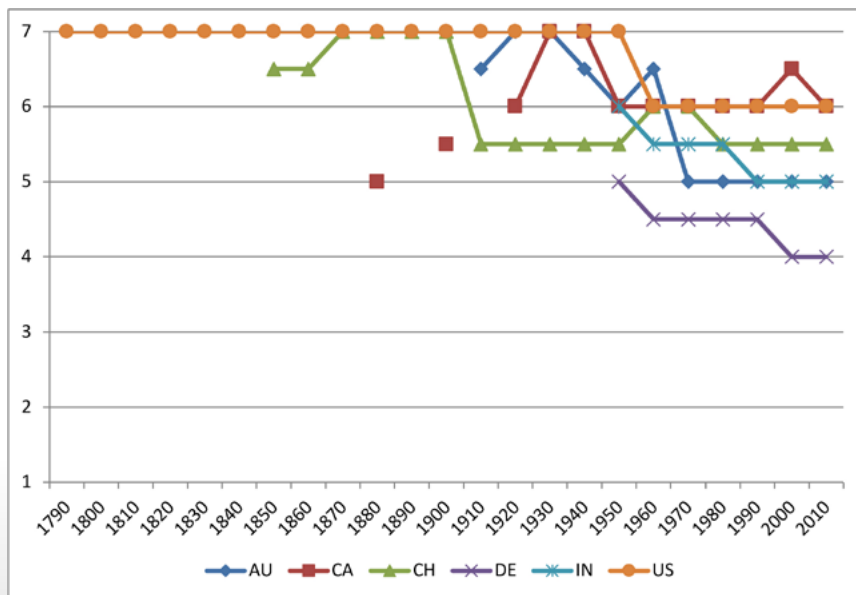


Figure 3: Mean static fiscal de/centralization

Quebec was crucial in producing a countervailing force against centralization at the very time other federations embarked on markedly steeper centralizing paths. In contrast to its peers, Canada also experienced growing asymmetry whereby some but not all provinc-

es (Quebec, in particular) developed their own policies in several fields, ranging from pensions to immigration.

We found dynamic centralization to have generally been less deep in the administrative sphere, in the United States as well as in most other cases. By 2010, the United States displayed a medium level of static administrative centralization, higher than the level in Germany and Switzerland, but lower than that of Australia and India (*Figure 2*). If the US experience is unexceptional in this respect, it is worth noting that the different pace of centralization in the legislative compared to the administrative sphere has meant that the states have progressively taken on the task of administering federally designed policies. In other words, the United States has moved away from the dualism of its original federal design rather significantly (Kincaid 2019, 178).

As *Figure 3* shows, de/centralization trends in the fiscal sphere were notably different. In most cases – the United States included – there was much less dynamic centralization in the fiscal than in the legislative sphere. The United States also scored comparatively low in terms of static fiscal centralization in 2010. The much-discussed growth of grants-in-aid – numbering 1,319 in 2017 funded at \$749 billion in 2019 (Dilger 2017; USOMB 2019: 241) – although in itself another important aspect of the departure from dual federalism, should thus be put into perspective.

The data suggest that dynamic centralization is, in most cases, cumulative and slow-moving, proceeding in largely linear fashion through numerous small steps. Its magnitude is, to an extent, a function of static de/centralization at the outset. Federations, such as the United States,

that started from a very low level of static centralization experienced the deepest process of dynamic centralization. If direction and magnitude tend to be consistent across most cases, the instruments through which the process unfolds are more peculiar to each federation.

We found that dynamic de/centralization is determined by a complex interaction of factors operating in a manner reminiscent of a “funnel of causality” (Campbell et al. 1960, 24-32). Broadly, socio-economic and socio-cultural change, occasionally reinforced by economic and security shocks, produce pressures in most federations to expand the scope and reach of the central government at the expense of the autonomy of the constituent units. These largely common forces interact, however, with the widely different structural features of each federation and are thus refracted in different ways in different contexts. Prominent among those structural features are the degree of economic integration and the relative strength of citizen identification with the constituent units compared with the federation as a whole. These interactions shape collective attitudes towards the federal balance and generate incentives and/or constraints on political actors. High economic integration and strong identification with the federation tend to foster centralization; where these conditions are weaker, public attitudes tend to resist centralization and even favor decentralization. Political actors react to these incentives and/or constraints within the institutional framework of each federation (Dardanelli et al. 2019b, 16).

The United States conforms to this general picture in several respects. First, it experienced high centralization in the legislative sphere but less centralization in the other two spheres. Second, despite its strongly “dual” model at the

outset, the system turned markedly more “administrative” over time as the states became, in many respects, administrative arms of the federal government. Third, economic integration and the evolution of citizen identification were important drivers. Fourth, collective attitudes, especially those fostered and disseminated by interest groups, acted as key intervening variables.

The specific US path was more distinctive, however. Formal constitutional amendment played a minor role, whereas congressional activism, changing Supreme Court orientations, and the use of conditional grants took center stage. These distinctive traits can be accounted for primarily by some key institutional features of the US political system:

- (a) the federal Constitution’s rigidity made formal amendment arduous, hence channeling pressure for change through other instruments;
- (b) the presidential system (the United States being the only presidential federation among our six cases) gave Congress greater scope for activism compared to legislatures in parliamentary systems;
- (c) the powerful role played by judicial review lent a crucial refereeing role to the Supreme Court, but the Court’s alignment with the prevailing preferences of the elected institutions meant that this role had different effects at different times; and
- (d) the absence of fiscal equalization facilitated the growth of grants-in-aid as a tool to achieve a degree of uniformity in policy outcomes across the states in many fields.

Congress initiated the earliest federal-power expansions in fields where it possessed clear



constitutional authority, such as bankruptcy, commerce, and defense. Later, with increasing nationalization of the party system and the 1960s' demise of the bi-communalism engendered by the Old South – which had long defended states' prerogatives from federal encroachments (Gibson 2012) – Congress and the Court extended federal power into historically state policy responsibilities, such as education, health care, policing, and welfare. These were previously deemed beyond the federal government's constitutional reach. Even in these fields, though, the earliest power expansions were linked to federal constitutional duties, as in health, welfare, and education programs for merchant seamen and US military personnel. Hence, the steepest overall increase in centralization occurred after the 1950s (Kincaid 2019).

Preliminary data since 2010 suggest that centralization continued under President Barack Obama, although at a moderate pace, due partly to Republican control of the House after 2010 and also of the Senate after 2014. Centralization might plateau under President Donald Trump because of his deregulation initiatives and continued Republican control of the Senate, although, to date, many of Trump's executive regulation-rollbacks have been blocked by courts. His long-term impact is likely to be modestly decentralizing, however, because his U.S. Supreme Court appointees will support state-friendly rulings on some policy matters.

Conclusions

Measuring changes in the distribution of powers between the central government and the constituent governments of a federation over time is crucial to the comparative study of federalism. It was long hampered, however, by problems of conceptualization and methodology. With a recent project culminating in the De/Centralisation Dataset, we sought to make progress by developing a conceptual and methodological framework for studying dynamic de/centralization, and measuring its extent across 22 policy and five fiscal categories across six major federations from 1790 to 2010. The data we collected reveal broad similarities across cases but also some stark differences. Against this backdrop, the United States broadly fits the generally prevailing pattern. Its dynamic de/centralization trajectory closely matched that of other pre-World War I federations, such as Switzerland and Australia. In terms of static centralization in 2010, the United States displayed a comparatively high score – though clustered together with the other federations except Canada – in legislation, a medium-level score in administration, and a low score in the fiscal sphere. In its federal system, at least, the United States is thus a mainstream case whose study can shed much light on the evolution of federalism globally. ●



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THE US IMMIGRATION REGIME IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

by *Luis F. Jiménez*



Luis F. Jiménez

is an Assistant Professor of
Political Science, University
of Massachusetts Boston.
His email is [Luis.Jimenez@
umb.edu](mailto:Luis.Jimenez@umb.edu).

Introduction

President Trump often complains that the United States has shackled itself with permissive immigration laws that no other country has, let alone tolerates. That is not true, of course. Exactly how open the American immigration regime is vis à vis other countries is an empirical question, however. In this paper I place the US in comparative perspective and analyze how immigration rules are created in similar wealthy democracies. I also explore why a policy gap usually develops as enforcement tends to diverge from the specifics outlined in law. This latter point is the main reason that even as immigration restrictiveness increases and the number of immigrants drop, often the public *feels* like the state has lost control over its own borders. This, in turn, leads to an exacerbation of both aspects of the practice—an ever tightening in the selectiveness of those allowed in, and an ever-expanding policy gap. To understand why, I shall first consider the purpose of immigration policy.

The Purpose of Immigration Policy

Suppose there were number of people in the world that wanted to migrate to the country in question and would do so if there were no restrictions. Assume further that policymakers would prefer to let in those who would provide a net benefit to the country so that, instead of number of people we would have . The problem with this simple equation is that unfortunately, is fundamentally unknowable. This is not only because officials lack full information and can only infer people's motivations, but even worse, much of the necessary information lies in the future.¹ Given this built-in uncertainty, by definition, policymakers must create an *imagined optimal immigrant*—their conception of what they deduce to be beneficial to the country. Although lawmakers, in theory, aim to create an admission process built closely around , in fact, it is inevitable that they will deviate from that and instead will design a legal framework that permits , a group far smaller than . The reason is simple. Even in a neutral deliberation, it is easier to conceive in the abstract the potential risks

1. That is the case in obvious ways such as whether the person will create the jobs she claims, adequately provide the work she is contracted to, and so on, but also in less overt ways, such as whether her labor might become superfluous because of an economic downturn, or whether she future illnesses cripple her potential contributions.



migrants might bring rather than the benefits. This is both because that is the normal tendency when thinking about *the other*, but also because should lawmakers not be so risk-averse, anti-immigrant constituencies would pressure them to be. In addition, parts of the electorate will never be able to see any benefit at all from immigration, and thus, politically it is easier to err on the restrictive side.

These decisions are not without cost. It is not simply a matter of losing out on the benefit of the individuals that fall within , but outside . It is worse, because in order to maintain , the state must use force to deter those who would cross illegally, or to remove those who have already done so. This is especially costly in liberal democracies because the state must employ tactics that will often not be able to distinguish between citizens and non-citizens. The host society must tolerate increased policing, check points, raids and so on—in effect a kind of security tax on the population at large. Still, imposing these costs on actual people shifts the political calculus and introduces the dynamics that lead to a policy gap.

The Unique Political Problem Inherent in Deportation

All policies that depend on some type of delegation can suffer from a principal-agent problem—a situation where the latter either refuses or is incapable of carrying out the orders of the former. Because the removal of migrants is a coercive social regulation, the process differs slightly. As Ellerman explains “[when] policy moves from legislation to implementation, public attention changes its focus from the benefits of deportation to its costs...[shifting] the incentives of [the principal]” (2009, 14). Furthermore,

given the very high and concentrated costs of deportation, once a policy of removal has been implemented it is likely that pro-immigrant groups will surface to try and prevent the eviction of individuals creating clear political incentives for elected officials to gain casework credit. Thus, only when the agency tasked with deportation is insulated from political shifts in preferences, will it be able to carry out removal as written in law.

The other issue that complicates deportation in liberal democracies is that, in order for a coercive social regulation to be implemented, by definition, the state must employ force. This act is hardly ever limited to physically removing people from the country, but instead comprises long-term detention. This means that the line between migrants and criminals is often erased entirely, as jail treatment does not distinguish between those awaiting deportation and anyone else who has been incarcerated. Given these conditions, courts are often drawn in to rule on the constitutional power states have in holding or deporting people, especially in ambiguous cases. In turn, this can contribute to an even larger policy gap depending on the rate the judiciary block deportations. In the United States, this is particularly pronounced both as a result of robust judicial review and the existence of specific immigration courts.

Thus, the American system’s structure makes it almost inevitable that a large policy gap will surface. Trying to close this gap, however, is not simple, both given its underpinnings and the fact that it is politically costly to maintain an inflexible policy. Even if the public agreed to set an immigration process that lets only in, invariably they would be unable to agree on the details. Some would prefer a equal to zero, and others a



that was as close as possible to . Nor would the distribution of preferences be static even when encountering legally identical cases given that people have to reconcile their imagined with specific individuals and that conceptualization might or might not conform to whatever legal parameters were established. Actors who can adroitly navigate through this are sure to benefit politically as they balance the public's inconsistent and contradictory preferences and also likely to expand the policy gap even more.

Having outlined the purpose of immigration policy and the dynamics inherent in immigration control, we can now place the United States within a comparative framework. There are three aspects of this process the state may restrict, including initial access to the country, the rights they have once inside and how swiftly unauthorized migrants are removed. In theory, lawmakers would set up all of these policies with a consistent in mind, but in reality, each component would have different costs if the state got it wrong and therefore each segment's imaginary would be distinct. Thus, when the last stage is reached, the question in policymakers' minds is not: *Would removing this person be best for the country?* but rather an unspoken assumption that if unauthorized people exist, the reason must be that they are not part of the and therefore must be deported.

Initial access

As already mentioned, all countries allow foreigners to enter their territory. What distinguishes a state's policy instead is the identity of those allowed to come in and the time length under which is permitted. On this score, the US ranks rather low. There are few countries in

the world with more initial restrictions than the United States; these tend to be closed dictatorships, such as Saudi Arabia and North Korea, which require visas from nearly all foreigners. Even Russia and China let allow visa-free entry from a greater number of countries than the US, although in the case of the China these are limited to very short periods of time. Among wealthy democracies, only Australia could be said to be more restrictive, as it only has reciprocal free movement with New Zealand and its electronic authorization visa is much more limited than the American version.

If short-term visitors that can sustain a country's tourist industry face hurdles, others face much higher obstacles. In contrast to Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, Poland and even the closed dictatorships of the Gulf Countries, the United States offers few options to low-skilled workers. The largest path is for agricultural workers, who may come for a total of three years, only after their employer has shown that there are no available American workers and hiring foreign ones will not lower the wages of locals. Visas for non-agricultural workers exist but the cap is so small—66,000 per year—that it makes it extremely difficult to get one. High-skilled visas are not much better.² Demand is such that it outstripped supply for fiscal year 2018 in less than a week (Trautwein 2017). The Trump administration has aimed to make this even more difficult by increasing the cost to apply and denying applications at a higher rate. Meanwhile multiple European countries such as France and Germany have liberalized their policies for high skilled migrants (Cerna 2014), so that Europe and Canada are now increasingly seen as more attractive destinations than the US.

2. The cap is technically smaller at 65000, but there is an exception of 20000 for foreigners with a degree from a US university.



Perhaps the least restrictive aspects of US immigration policy are its citizenship requirements.

Historically, the United States has been a major destination for asylees and refugees. Even after the Trump administration crackdowns, it still ranks in the top 10 settlement countries in absolute numbers. This does not mean this is a readily accessible path for people. For one thing, the ceiling for refugees has been dramatically lowered in the last two years averaging roughly half what it was in the previous administration. For another, its intake of refugees is quite low as a per capita basis; indeed, according to UNHCR data, there are at least 50 countries more generous using this measure. The situation for asylees is similar. Before Trump, the acceptance rate already hovered around 30%, lower than large parts of Europe with the exception of France and the UK as well as Canada and New Zealand. Likewise, when considered on a per-capita basis, the US ranks 52 in the world.

Rights in the Host Country

In the 19th century there was not much of a distinction between citizens and non-citizens in the US, but this began to change in the early 20th century so that, compared to other wealthy democracies, current long-term residents have certain fewer rights. The most obvious one is the right to vote in national elections, which non-citizens enjoy in a number of countries around the world including Ireland, New Zealand and Uruguay, but not in the United States.³ Most importantly, legal immigrants in the US can become deportable if they commit aggravated felonies, no matter their age, their length of residence or their connections to the country. Indeed, the law is so expansive that it

has led to a significant number of *citizens* being accidentally deported (Stevens 2011).

Perhaps the least restrictive aspects of US immigration policy are its citizenship requirements. For one thing, it has a strong *just soli* component which means anyone born in the country is automatically a citizen—something that is not the norm except in the Americas—and because this is explicitly outlined in the Constitution, it is not something that is likely to be modified, despite calls for change. For another, one only has to wait five years after becoming a permanent resident to be able to apply—a period of time surpassed only by Australia among rich democracies. Thus, it has a fairly high-level naturalization rate (Boucher and Gest 2018: 126), and generally speaking, not a status that can be easily lost. Still, the Trump administration has sought to weaken this as well. It has created a task force that has been aggressively stripping citizenship from *naturalized* citizens whenever it can find any inconsistencies in their application process.

Of course, this only includes individuals with authorized immigration status. Those who lack the proper documents have little to no rights in the US, have long been criminalized, and face little to no avenues of legalization. In comparison, places like Mexico, Ecuador and Spain - among others - offer unauthorized migrants more options. However, given the lack of coordination between authorities and a weak deportation regime, the odds of any one undocumented individual in the US being able to remain in the country is relatively high as explained below in more detail.

3. Most of Europe permits non-citizens with EU passports to vote in local and European elections.

Removal

The deportation capacity of the US would rank highly under most measures; billions have been spent in the past two decades on immigration enforcement and border security. This does not mean it is particularly efficient, however, especially in removing those far from the US-Mexico borderlands. This is as a result of the policy gap described above, but also because the necessary level of coordination among different government agencies and local enforcement is extremely patchy. Instead, from the perspective of would-be deportees, the system, particularly as constructed after 9/11, operates rather capriciously. A person with the same profile would have widely different odds of removal depending where they lived, what kind of work they did, and what kind of relationship they had with their neighbors. This can be contrasted to a number of European countries whose immigration enforcement agencies are much smaller but have fewer structural obstacles and more efficient ways of tracking unauthorized migrants (Ellerman 2009).

Today all major wealthy democracies engage in the confinement of immigrants in detention centers.⁴ These vary in conditions, average length immigrants remain in custody, and whether they are under the direct management of the state or outsourced to private companies. In the US, for instance, migrants, including asylum seekers, wear color-coded prison-style uniforms; are forced to live in overcrowded, freezing conditions; sometimes forced to work; are rarely, if ever, notified of their rights; are of-

ten denied the right to communicate with those outside; and sometimes are relocated without informing even their lawyers. Dozens have died in the custody of immigration authorities in the past decade, while on any given day there are tens of thousands of people detained including children, some of whom have been sexually abused by immigration authorities. In contrast, Sweden and France provide free legal help and have strict guidelines on maximum length of detention. Australia, on the other hand, has a particularly draconian detention policy on asylum seekers who arrive by boat. The country changed the law in the early 2000s so that surrounding islands would not be considered Australian territory for asylum seeking purposes. It also created mandatory detention measures offshore so that today there are over 8000 asylum seekers including children in detention camps—corporation run centers as far as Nauru and Manus Island in Papua New Guinea—a policy that runs in the billions of Australian dollars annually.

A comparative view summarizing the various immigration regimes previously described is offered below.⁵ As can be seen, in the aggregate, the United States is far from being open. Its front door, so to speak, has far more locks than nearly every country in the world, including places like China and Russia. And while it is true that – comparatively speaking – it offers a relatively robust battery of rights to those who successfully migrate to the country, it is by no means the most generous in the world. Likewise, while in the aggregate the US deportation regime is arbitrary, cruel and even inhumane at times, its re-

4. For specific country profiles see The Global Detention Project at <http://www.globaldetentionproject.org>

5. This is meant strictly as a relative measure. Because of the complexity of immigration policies, the same person with slightly different profile might face completely different circumstances and would face a “softer” or “harder” immigration regime across different countries depending on multiple factors that are hard to capture in a single table.



	Initial Access	Rights in the Host Country	Removal
Higher Restrictions/Fewer Rights Worse Deportation Conditions	North Korea	Saudi Arabia/Gulf Countries	
		China/Russia	
	United States	Japan/South Korea	Australia/Japan
	China/Russia		South Korea
	Japan/South Korea		United States
Lower Restrictions/Higher Rights Better Deportation Conditions		Most of Europe	
	Most of Western Europe		
			Canada
			Mexico
	Canada/New Zealand	United States	France/Sweden
	Australia	New Zealand/Uruguay/Ecuador	
	Caribbean/Most of Latin America	Australia	

verse principal-agent problem described above makes it so that who ultimately suffers the brunt of its wrath is more or less random, making it appear more generous than it actually is.

Conclusion

This paper placed the US immigration system in comparative perspective. Contrary to common misconception, the country does not have a weak immigration regime. Its initial access is one of the most tightly closed in the world. Instead, what people perceive to be permissiveness is actually a policy gap that stems from structural issues, particularly a modified principal-agent problem, but also the difficulty inherent in designing an immigration policy built around as close as possible. In the past two

years, the Trump administration has engaged in a systematic attempt to restrict all aspects of the American immigration regime flaunting asylum laws, banning whole groups of nationals, taking far fewer refugees than its predecessors, denying the expansion of temporary status to long-term residents, and targeting people for deportation that had heretofore not been considered a priority for removal. As the Trump administration continues to try to close the policy gap, it will discover that even if it can ignore the human rights costs, the political ones will not be so easily put aside. In fact, it has made some of the abuses so visible that it might have actually contributed to making the gap even larger than it already is. ●



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THE COMPARATIVE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF AMERICAN HEALTHCARE

by *Julia Lynch*



Julia Lynch

is Associate Professor of
Political Science, University
of Pennsylvania. Her email
is jflynch@sas.upenn.edu.

Each year, when I deliver my guest lecture on comparative health systems for a colleague's class on US health policy, I begin with an iconic chart. First produced for National Geographic based on OECD data in 2009, the chart shows the relationship between health care spending, ranked on the left axis, and life expectancy at birth on the right axis (see Figure 1).¹ The U.S. is a clear outlier. We spend nearly forty percent more on health care than runner-up Switzerland, yet our life expectancy of 78.8 years falls below countries that spend one third as much on health care.

The chart is useful because, although it presents only one indicator of population health, it forces us to confront a larger issue that would also be visible if we looked at many other measures of population health and well-being: Why is the US such a staggering outlier when it comes to health? But the chart is also misleading in suggesting that real puzzle is our poor health compared to the level of health care spending.

Comparative politics researchers who want to understand the drivers of differences in popu-

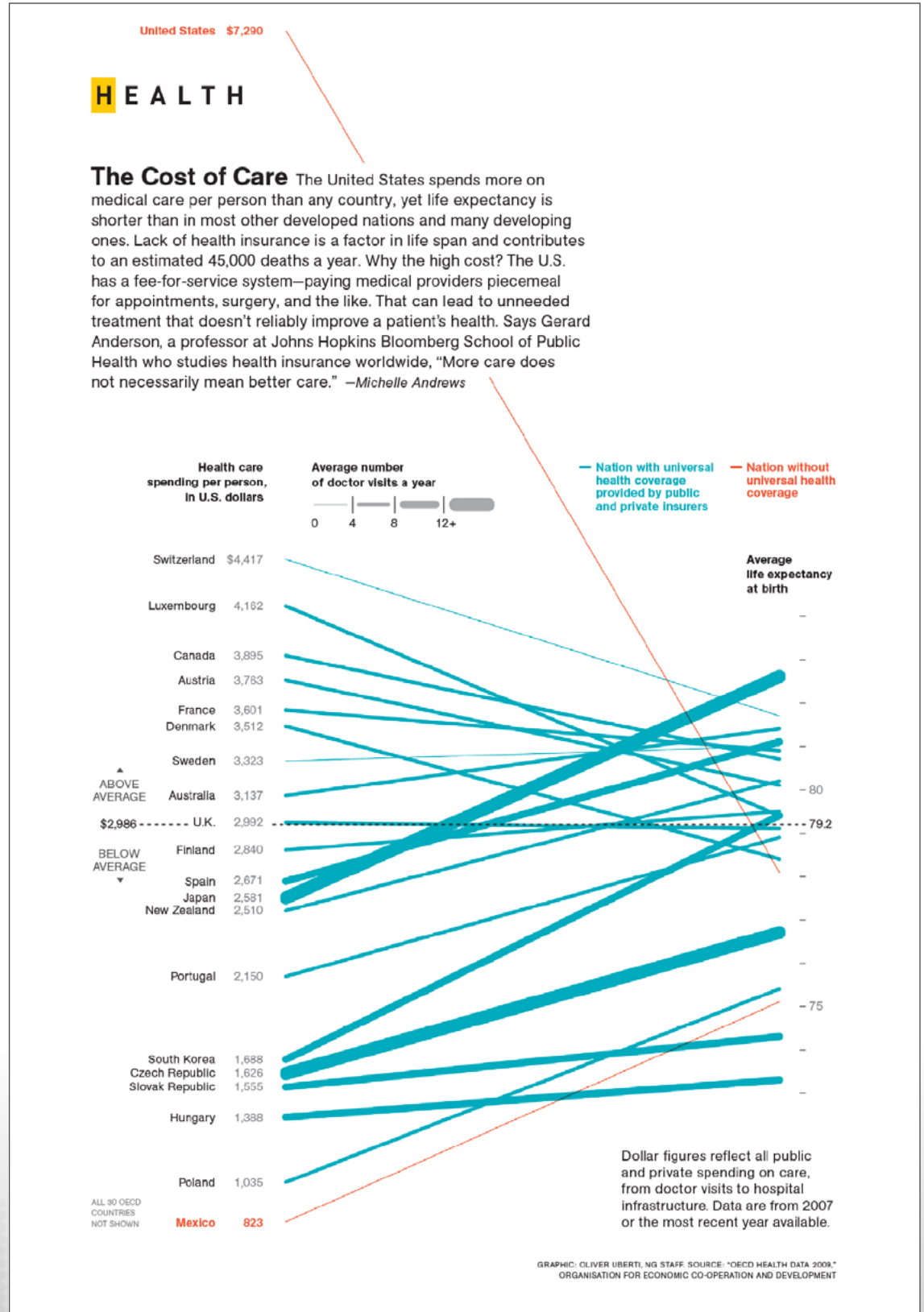
lation health and well-being need to go beyond equating the problem of poor health with poorly performing health care systems, or even with inequitable access to health care. The real reason we have such poor health compared to other rich democracies has much more to do with our politics than our hospitals: We are sick because we are unequal, and we are unequal because our political system is unusually unresponsive to the needs of the bottom 99%.²

Curative medical care consumes the vast majority of resources within the health policy sector, with public health and primary prevention (e.g. cancer screenings, immunizations, well visits) together making up only a small slice of health budgets. So it is perhaps not surprising that most political science research in the area of "health" policy is really research on the politics and policy surrounding medical care. However, medical care is not the most important determinant of health in most rich, industrialized countries. Researchers have found only limited associations between measures of health care supply and avoidable mortality (Kunst et

1. The chart received widespread attention, and some scrutiny, for its effective visualization of the U.S. as an extreme outlier (see e.g. Ebersole 2011; Norén 2011; Gelman and Unwin 2013).
2. On the link between socioeconomic inequality and population health, see e.g. Pickett and Wilkinson (2015); Bergh, Nilsson, and Waldenstrom (2016); Truesdale and Jencks (2016). On inequalities in political representation, see e.g. Erikson (2015); Franko, Kelly, and Witko (2016); Houle (2018).



Figure 1:
Uberti's "Cost of Care"
infographic



al. 1998; Mackenbach et al. 1988) and recent estimates suggest that no more than one-fifth of the variation in population health is due to medical prevention and treatment (McGinnis, Williams-Russo, and Knickman 2002, 83; House 2016, 607).

This is because medical care comes into play relatively late in the causal process that links politics to health and well-being. Medical care can determine whether and when an illness is detected, how it is treated (if it is treatable), and, within limits, a patient's prognosis. However, with the exception of population-level interventions like vaccination campaigns, medical care does not generally determine either whether a person is exposed to a particular risk factor for disease to begin with, or their vulnerability or resilience in the face of that risk. And the major killers of people living in rich, industrialized countries in the twenty-first century are not vaccine-preventable infectious diseases, but accidents and non-communicable illnesses including cardiovascular disease and cancers. Timely medical treatment can help slow the progression of some of these conditions, but it does not prevent their onset.

Individual lifestyle choices have typically been the next target of both social reformers and social scientists when it comes to tackling the causes of poor population health. Sure, the story goes, individual people may be more or less prone to fall ill and die young by virtue of their genetic makeup - but on average if we could just get people to vaccinate their kids, have yearly checkups, stop smoking and drinking and start exercising and eating more vegetables, we would be home free. But this image of population health as resulting mainly from the success or failure of preventive health and health pro-

motion activities is at least as partial and misleading as the image that links health mainly to medical care. The problem here is that health behaviors are very strongly shaped by the material and social conditions in which people live and work, as well as by the more distal factors like income, wealth, education, and political power that in turn determine those conditions.

Epidemiologists refer to these material and social conditions and their political and economic causes as "social determinants of health" (SDOH). The phrase came into widespread usage in the late 1990s, and has been deployed differently by different policy actors. Some focus on relatively proximate, "downstream" determinants of health, such as the availability in a neighborhood of spaces for recreation, or the level of particulate matter in the air. Others, like the final report of the World Health Organization's (WHO) Commission on the Social Determinants of Health (WHO 2008), assign primary causal power to upstream structural determinants of these material and social resources, such as income, occupation, and education. Still others, like the British Black Report (Townsend, Whitehead, and Davidson 1992), the Norwegian Plan of Action to Reduce Social Inequalities in Health (Norwegian Directorate for Health and Social Affairs 2005), or the Lancet-University of Oslo Commission on Global Governance for Health (Ottersen et al. 2014) assign ultimate causality to the political and power context that produces structural inequalities in socioeconomic status.

In fact, socioeconomic inequality has been described as "the mother of underlying causes" of health (Dorling 2015) because the financial resources over which individuals have command have such a large impact on the environmental

conditions that they experience. People with more resources have greater choice over things like where and with whom to live, or what kind of work and how much of it to do, which can have profound health impacts. Apart from the direct effect of individuals' command over resources on their health, income and wealth inequalities may also have indirect effects on health that operate by way of the political process (see e.g. Daniels, Kennedy, and Kawachi 2000). Where income inequality is high, there tends to be less investment in public education, which leads to gaps in cognitive resources and knowledge, which in turn leads to a steeper social gradient in health. Economic inequality can erode social cohesion, leading to inequalities in political participation, and to governments that are more responsiveness to the wealthier than to the worse-off. High levels of income inequality can also result in spatial segregation by socioeconomic status, with less-well-resourced communities experiencing more crime and violence, a lower quality of public services, and less social cohesion—all of which are associated with worse health (Kawachi et al. 1997; Miller and Chen 2013).^{plainCitation": "(Kawachi et al. 1997; Miller and Chen 2013.}

The living and working environments that are the “causes of the causes” of health inequalities are also strongly influenced by public policies, which are in turn influenced by political processes. So how politics is organized, and in particular how responsive politicians are to lower- versus higher-SES constituencies, can also affect health. If income inequality is the mother of underlying causes of health inequalities, then politics is the grandmother; to understand why socioeconomic inequalities in health occur, creating both more inequity and worse health overall in the U.S. compared to other rich de-

mocracies, we need to understand the politics behind the distribution of economic resources. Comparative politics clearly has much to say about health policy, then, that goes beyond the health care system.

At this juncture American Exceptionalism generally comes knocking. Ah yes, here it is: Surely the U.S. is different, because our large disparities in access to health care and the unequal treatment of racial and ethnic minorities within the health care system! Of course, there is some truth to the idea of American exceptionalism in health, as in so many other areas: There is more scope for understanding U.S. health outcomes as resulting from the health system and its lacunae than there would be in countries with near-universal access to health care. And unequal treatment within health care setting clearly plays an important role in generating the U.S.'s poor health outcomes (Smedley, Stith, and Nelson 2002). In fact, researchers and policy elites in the U.S. are quite attuned to this issue. They tend to frame the problem of health equity in racial terms, and in terms of health care, far more frequently than is the case in other national contexts (Docteur and Berenson 2014; Lynch and Perera 2017; Reed and Chowkwanyun 2012).

However, we run risks in focusing too much on racial discrimination and on health care as the key drivers of poor health in the U.S. Racism *outside of the health care system* has effects on health that are orders of magnitude larger for most people than the effects of unequal treatment within the system. The stress of subordinate social status leads to weathering and early death, and institutionalized forms of racism (e.g. redlining, intensive policing) have led to substantially worse health outcomes for minorities because of the way they structure access

to key social and economic determinants of health like housing, education, and jobs (see e.g. Brondolo, Gallo, and Myers 2009; Williams and Mohammed 2013). Race and ethnicity intersect with poverty and economic inequality in the U.S. in especially intense and problematic ways. But that amplifies, rather than substituting for, the negative effects of economic inequality on health. Difficulties in accessing medical care, and disparities in treatment within the health care system are not minor issues, especially in the U.S. But when we medicalize health by conceptualizing it primarily as an outcome of medical treatment, we not only underestimate the importance of underlying social and structural causes of health and illness; we also truncate the range of potential policy solutions to the problem of poor population health.

When we understand population health as resulting from the kinds of things that comparative politics scholars routinely study – economic inequality, social policy positions, democratic responsiveness – we create space for political science to play an important part in health policy conversations. But what are the policies that would lead to improved population health, in the U.S. or elsewhere?

The WHO offers one prescription for population health that, since the mid-2000s, has spurred policy developments in Europe (see e.g. Whitehead and Dahlgren 2006; Judge et al. 2006; WHO 2008; M. G. Marmot 2013). This prescription emphasizes acting simultaneously across multiple policy sectors and multiple levels of government to reduce inequalities in the social determinants of health. On the face of it, this seems like a reasonable policy solution. It aligns with our understanding of the causes of poor population health, and can be enacted even in polities where subnational govern-

ments control many levers of social policy that ultimately affect health. Indeed, the “Health in All Policies” (HiAP) approach has gained considerable attention from U.S. policy experts in recent years (Rudolph et al. 2013; Gase, Pennotti, and Smith 2013; Berenson et al. 2017). However, lessons from comparative politics can sensitize us to the perils of relying on cross-sectoral policy coordination to reduce inequalities in health and improve population health overall.

As I argue in my forthcoming book (see also Lynch 2017) attempting to solve *either* the problem of poor population health *or* the underlying problem of socioeconomic inequality by focusing on reducing health is very often self-defeating. One reason is that policy coordination across multiple sectors is complex at the best of times, but even more difficult in the area of health, where the medical care sector often dominates policy-making even when the issue is health, not medicine. Moreover, critical decisions affecting the distribution of upstream social determinants of health are often made by finance and economy ministries, who may not be subjected to the discipline of HiAP mandates. In the cases I researched for my book (England, France, and Finland), coordination across levels of government also proved difficult, due to a lack of effective steering from the national level and devolution of responsibility for securing better health outcomes without adequate financing.

Another reason that efforts to solve the problem of poor population health by working on the social determinants of health may backfire is if public appetite for government action to reduce health inequalities is weak. Despite some philosophers’ and bioethicists’ attachment to the idea of health as a “special” good deserving of heightened moral value (Walzer 1984;



U.S.'s exceptionally poor health outcomes are not due to our unusually weak health care system nor to our unique racial political dynamics.

Daniels 1983; Sen 2002), health equity may simply not generate much excitement among voters. Survey research in a variety of national contexts suggests that the mass public views health inequities in ways that are very similar to how they view underlying inequalities in income or education (Blaxter 1997; Rigby et al. 2009; Gollust and Lynch 2011; Kneesebeck, Vonneilich, and Kim 2016), and are less concerned about inequalities in health than in health care (Lynch and Gollust 2010).

Moreover, there is evidence that detaching the issue of inequality from the traditional policy instruments with which it is associated depresses public support for reducing inequality overall (Evans and Tilley 2012a, 2012b, 2017; Touzet 2018). These findings imply that if governments want to reduce inequality and improve population health, they may well be better off framing the problem as an issue of socioeconomic, rather than health, inequity. But while all of the governments I studied easily made the link between poverty and poor health, none of them managed to use the problem of health to justify reducing inequalities in income or wealth – despite accepting the international consensus that “social inequality is killing people on a grand scale” (WHO 2008).³ A major reason for this is that health equity became a salient public problem only when politicians perceived that it provided a way for them to talk about the problem of inequality *without* having to discuss uncomfortable topics like redistribution, expanded public spending, or re-regulating markets for goods and services. Sadly, even then, the focus on

health led governments to attempt to engage complex, unfamiliar policy levers requiring a great deal of coordination and patience to bear fruit, while foregoing the relatively simple and familiar policy tools that could have been used to act directly on socioeconomic inequality.

I have argued that the U.S.'s exceptionally poor health outcomes are not due to our unusually weak health care system nor to our unique racial political dynamics, but to more prosaic weaknesses in our political economy that have ready analogs elsewhere. Poverty and inequality are the main drivers of poor population health in the U.S., just as they are throughout the world. And in a neoliberal era, politicians everywhere have been loath to address directly the socioeconomic inequality that underlies poor population health. But even if the policies that would be needed to substantially reduce socioeconomic inequality are a bitter pill for many politicians to swallow, there are remedies that could offer some relief. First, while health behaviors are so strongly conditioned by social environments that it makes little sense to address them via exhortations to change, more stringent regulation of alcohol and tobacco (including smokeless delivery devices) could alter the choice environment in ways that enable healthier choices. Compared to the countries that participate in the European Union's single market, the U.S. has a much greater ability to unilaterally regulate these product if we choose to do so. Second, our extraordinarily high poverty rate creates opportunities to significantly improve population health even without substantially reducing inequality within the top 80 percent of the

3. In fact, to my knowledge the only government in Europe that has responded specifically to the problem of health inequalities with an explicit commitment to reduce income inequality was the Norwegian Labour–Socialist Left–Center party coalition elected in 2005 (Norwegian Directorate for Health and Social Affairs 2005). Progress on reducing health inequalities stalled, however, when the successor center-right government devolved responsibility and reduced funding for social services at the local level.



income distribution. Compared to European countries where the largest gains to population health are likely to occur by flattening the social gradient as a whole, the fact that there are so many poor Americans means that even a small amount of redistribution to the very bottom of our income distribution could yield important improvements in average health. Even so, reforming politics to make it more responsive to the needs of the bottom 99 percent is, in the U.S. as elsewhere, the *sine qua non* for both reducing socioeconomic inequality and improving population health. ●

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AMERICAN CAPITALISM IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE: Insights from Housing Finance Markets

by *Alexander Reisenbichler*



Alexander Reisenbichler
is Assistant Professor of
Political Science, University
of Toronto. His email is
[a.reisenbichler@
utoronto.ca](mailto:a.reisenbichler@utoronto.ca).

One important theme in Kathleen Thelen's (2019) recent APSA presidential address was the lack of dialogue between scholarship in American and comparative capitalism. Much research on comparative political economy has focused mainly on Western Europe and sidelined the United States. And, as Thelen notes, the study of American capitalism has rarely focused on themes prominent in "other rich democracies – labor unions, finance, organized business, wages, working time, skills, education and training" (2019, 6).

My research places the American political economy in comparative perspective by focusing on another important and underexplored area in contemporary capitalism: housing finance. As the source of the financial crisis of 2008–09, housing finance has recently entered the academic spotlight. But existing scholarship has tended to overlook the outsized role played by the American state in subsidizing mortgage debt when compared to other rich democracies. We might easily take for granted that the American state is extending billions of dollars in tax breaks on mortgages, underwriting trillions of dollars in mortgage debt, and supporting mortgages through monetary stimulus. Yet, the comparison with other economic powerhouses,

such as Germany, shows that the United States is an outlier when it comes to the magnitude of government support.

This short essay draws on my research on the politics of housing finance and mortgage debt in the United States and Germany, analyzing the different levels of public support for mortgage debt in the two countries. I explore the topic in two related areas: fiscal and monetary policy. First, I compare the differences in major fiscal and off-budget policies in the two countries. Second, I analyze central bank support for mortgage debt as part of quantitative easing (QE) programs since the Great Recession.

The central argument of this piece is that different macroeconomic growth regimes shape the politics of mortgage debt in the two countries. In the credit- and consumption-led United States, mortgage-debt subsidies reinforce the growth regime by stimulating housing demand, credit, and consumption. As a result, both political parties, central bankers, and major interest groups have viewed, promoted or adopted mortgage subsidies as growth strategies, which has made housing finance a "national champion." In export-oriented Germany, mortgage subsidies run counter to the priorities of the growth

regime, which is based on restraining (house) prices, credit, and consumption. German political parties, central bankers, and interest groups therefore do not view mortgage subsidies as growth strategies, which has produced weaker support for such subsidies.

The comparative perspective reveals that macroeconomic contexts shape the preferences of policymakers and power of interest groups. When studying the United States as a single case, we might not question the prominence of mortgage subsidies, treating interest group power and bipartisan preferences in favor of mortgage support as given. Yet, the experience of other rich democracies shows that there is no inherent reason why both American parties would favor such actions and why interest groups would get their way. Focusing on growth regimes contributes to our understanding of the different housing finance policy trajectories in the two countries.

Growth, Welfare, and the Politics of Mortgage Debt in the United States and Germany

In a working paper based on a larger book project (Reisenbichler 2019), I investigate the politics of mortgage debt in the United States and Germany from a comparative, historical perspective. Despite the economic and social importance of mortgage debt – the largest component of household debt – little research in political science has focused on how and why wealthy democracies have subsidized this asset class. This raises a number of questions: What explains the variation in public support for private mortgage debt, such as tax breaks and

public guarantees on home mortgages? Why have some governments provided significantly more support than others? And what accounts for the durability or fragility of these policies? The answers to these questions have far-reaching implications, as mortgage-debt markets have not only brought the world economy to the brink of collapse (Schwartz 2009; McCarty, Poole, and Rosenthal 2013). But they also assist households in obtaining homeownership (Ansell 2014; Ahlquist and Ansell 2017) and are major on- and off-budget policies in advanced economies (Johnston and Kurzer forthcoming).

Comparing the United States to another economic powerhouse – Germany – reveals a puzzling picture. The United States, a quintessential free-market market economy, has developed a state-based, high-subsidy mortgage-debt regime that currently includes around USD 100 billion in tax breaks on mortgages and USD 6.7 trillion in public underwriting of mortgage debt through the quasi-public mortgage giants, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.¹ As a result, *The Economist* labeled the American mortgage market “comradely capitalism.”² This apparent paradox is even more surprising when compared to Germany, a social-market economy, which currently provides only marginal mortgage subsidies, without major tax breaks for homeowners or public underwriting of mortgage debt. Why?

To address this question, I combine insights from a growing body of work in comparative political economy (Baccaro and Pontusson 2016; Thelen 2019; Hassel and Palier forthcoming) and feedback effects in American political development (Campbell 2012; Thurston 2018). My

1. Sources: Housing Finance Policy Center; Joint Committee on Taxation.

2. *The Economist*, “Comradely Capitalism: How America Accidentally Nationalised Its Mortgage Market,” (August 20, 2016).

argument is that different institutional linkages between mortgage-debt programs and growth regimes unleash distinct feedback effects, which then shape the opposing policy outcomes. In the US credit- and consumption-led growth regime, mortgage-debt policies tend to stimulate housing demand, mortgage credit, and consumption in the economy. The high degree of complementarity between mortgage policies and the growth regime generates a bipartisan consensus of retaining or expanding mortgage-debt subsidies as growth and welfare strategies to boost the economy and household wealth. This arrangement also places housing interest groups in a structural position of influence. The result is a strong coalition that brings together both major parties with powerful interest groups, all of which have an interest in promoting policy expansion and entrenchment.

In contrast, the effects of mortgage subsidies – increasing credit, house prices, and consumption – run counter to the priorities of the German export regime, which privileges restraining (house) prices, credit, and consumption. Such macroeconomic friction generates conflict between the left and right over the question of mortgage-debt subsidies because they do not serve as growth strategies in the eyes of policymakers across the political spectrum. Parties on the German left tend to oppose such subsidies, given that their core constituencies usually consist of renters. The German right, however, views mortgage-debt subsidies more favorably, as they appeal to affluent constituencies and promote conservative ideas of asset-based welfare and traditional family life. Concomitantly, housing groups are not in a structural position of power, as the sector they represent is not

considered a national champion. This produces lower public support for mortgages and policy fragility.

To illustrate these dynamics, I adopt a comparative, historical perspective – with evidence from archives, elite interviews, and government records – in order to delve into the deeper, long-term policy trajectories that have unfolded since the early twentieth century and culminated in the financial crisis of 2008–09. In the United States, many of today's mortgage-debt subsidies originated during the Great Depression – including those offered by Fannie Mae – when policymakers adopted them to revive housing markets and recognized their potential for stimulating consumption and growth. Over time, these synergies fostered a lasting bipartisan consensus and resulted in repeated decisions to reinforce and expand state support for housing as a growth strategy. One result of these cumulative political decisions was that the government-sponsored agencies, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, became the heart of the American mortgage market. By the 1990s and early 2000s, the two mortgage giants were providing 60 percent of the country's mortgage funding and thus emerged as the engine of the “financialized,” credit- and consumption-based US economy.³

In the postwar years, German policymakers also adopted moderate mortgage subsidies (along with large-scale subsidies for rental housing) in order to overcome housing shortages. Initially, they helped increase the housing supply, suppress house prices and living costs, and avoid a wage-cost spiral, all of which produced temporary synergies with the German export model.

3. Source: Federal Reserve Flow of Funds.



The severe housing shortages subsided by the 1970s, however, and the macroeconomic justification for maintaining mortgage subsidies faded as well. As a result, partisan conflicts emerged around the issue: center-left parties started opposing these subsidies, while center-right parties continued to defend them. Whereas the consensus among US policymakers on mortgage subsidies produced policy entrenchment, their German counterparts experienced greater partisan conflict and policy volatility.

The financial crisis of 2008–09 represented the culmination of these longstanding policy trajectories. While US policymakers closed ranks around the high-subsidy mortgage model, their German counterparts retrenched support for mortgage debt. One important finding of this research is that the US bipartisan consensus in support of mortgage-debt subsidies survived the “stress test” (Starr forthcoming) of the crisis. When the crisis hit, policymakers across the political spectrum deemed Fannie and Freddie “too big to fail” and placed them in the hands of the US government via a USD 188 billion bailout. After the crisis, Democrats and Republicans agreed that any comprehensive housing-finance reform should retain an important role for the US government in the mortgage market, a bipartisan consensus that even the most hawkish, free-market Republicans, such as Jeb Hensarling (R-TX), grudgingly accepted. Yet, the Obama and Trump administrations have not invested much political capital in attempts at reform. Ten years after the crisis, the two enterprises remain in the hands of the government.

Around the same time, German policymakers did the opposite by rolling back mortgage-debt

subsidies as part of structural economic reforms. When Germany was the sick man of Europe in the early 2000s, a major tax subsidy for homeowners (i.e., *Eigenheimzulage*) – the largest tax break in postwar Germany, amounting to EUR 11 billion in 2004 – was on the chopping block.⁴ Not only did the tax break contribute to exploding deficits and debt, but it also channeled investments away from the productive “national champions” in manufacturing and entailed unwanted price-inflating housing momentum. As a result, the Social Democrats (SPD) attacked the tax break as part of austerity measures and structural reforms, and they demanded that some of these funds be redirected towards research, innovation, and education. The Christian Democrats (CDU) opposed retrenchment, owing to their longstanding ownership ideology, home-owning core constituency, and preference for asset-based welfare. Nonetheless, the center-left parties compelled the center right to reform the tax break just prior to the financial crisis of 2008–09.

These findings have implications for the study of American and comparative capitalism. Growth regimes are determinants of the welfare state. They shape the preferences of political parties and power resources of interest groups, both of which are often treated as given. The growth-regime perspective can account for why Democrats continuously favored the expansion of mortgage-debt subsidies in the United States, while the German Social Democrats were calling to roll them back. Furthermore, growth regimes are an important source of policy feedback. The interconnectedness of social policies with macroeconomic features matter for subsequent policymaking, which might explain why similar

4. Source: German Federal Ministry of Finance.



policies become entrenched in one country and retrenched in another. Finally, mortgage-debt subsidies are often part of the public-private welfare state (Thurston 2018), as these policies not only support private markets but even constitute them in the case of the United States.

Another implication of this article is that mortgage-debt subsidies contribute to wealth inequality in advanced economies. Subsidizing mortgage debt – and its attendant effects on boosting housing prices and wealth – favors those able to climb the property ladder over those who are priced out of unaffordable property markets. Consequently, these policies might reinforce the widening wealth gap in advanced economies, particularly in the United States, where mortgage support is vast and rental support is low.

Mortgage-debt subsidies contribute to wealth inequality in advanced economies.

The Politics of QE: Monetary Support for Housing by the Federal Reserve (Fed) and European Central Bank (ECB)

In a related and forthcoming article in *West European Politics*, I compare monetary support for housing by the US Federal Reserve (Fed) and European Central Bank (ECB) since the Great Recession. Much of the existing literature has convincingly explained how elected politicians have responded to the crisis by arguing that initially expansionary fiscal policies quickly gave way to austerity-led policies (Farrell and Quiggin 2017). Little is known, however, about why central banks have offered continuously expansionary monetary policies, such as quantitative easing (QE). As part of QE, central banks purchased large amounts of government and private-sector bonds, including mortgage debt, to boost their economies. In the article, I inves-

tigate the politics of QE, with a particular focus on why the Fed and ECB supported housing to different degrees.

It is true that both central banks have expanded their balance sheets to a whopping USD 4.5 trillion each (Mandelkern 2016), but they have done so in very different areas. One important aspect of QE programs is the variation in purchases of mortgage debt, which is one of the largest asset classes in capital markets. As *Figure 1* shows, the Fed has bought around USD 1.7 trillion in mortgage debt, whereas the ECB has bought only EUR 290 billion in housing assets in the open market. It is not only the sheer size of these interventions that renders these actions important. The distributive implications of such interventions are significant, because they subsidize mortgage debt and property markets, which favors asset owners over those without assets, casting doubt over the notion of central bank “neutrality” (Adolph 2013).

Why has the Fed expanded its balance sheet by buying massive amounts of mortgage debt to support housing markets, whereas the ECB has not? The decision of whether central banks will intervene in economic sectors depends on the degree to which these sectors are key to the broader economy. The Fed targeted housing finance as a monetary transmission strategy to produce economic growth. The idea was to lower mortgage rates, which would stimulate mortgage credit and, ultimately, consumption. In contrast, the ECB did little with respect to housing given the Eurozone’s fragmented housing finance markets and the macroeconomic frictions between Eurozone growth models. Although stimulating mortgage credit, demand, and consumption might appeal to some Eurozone economies – e.g., demand- and cred-



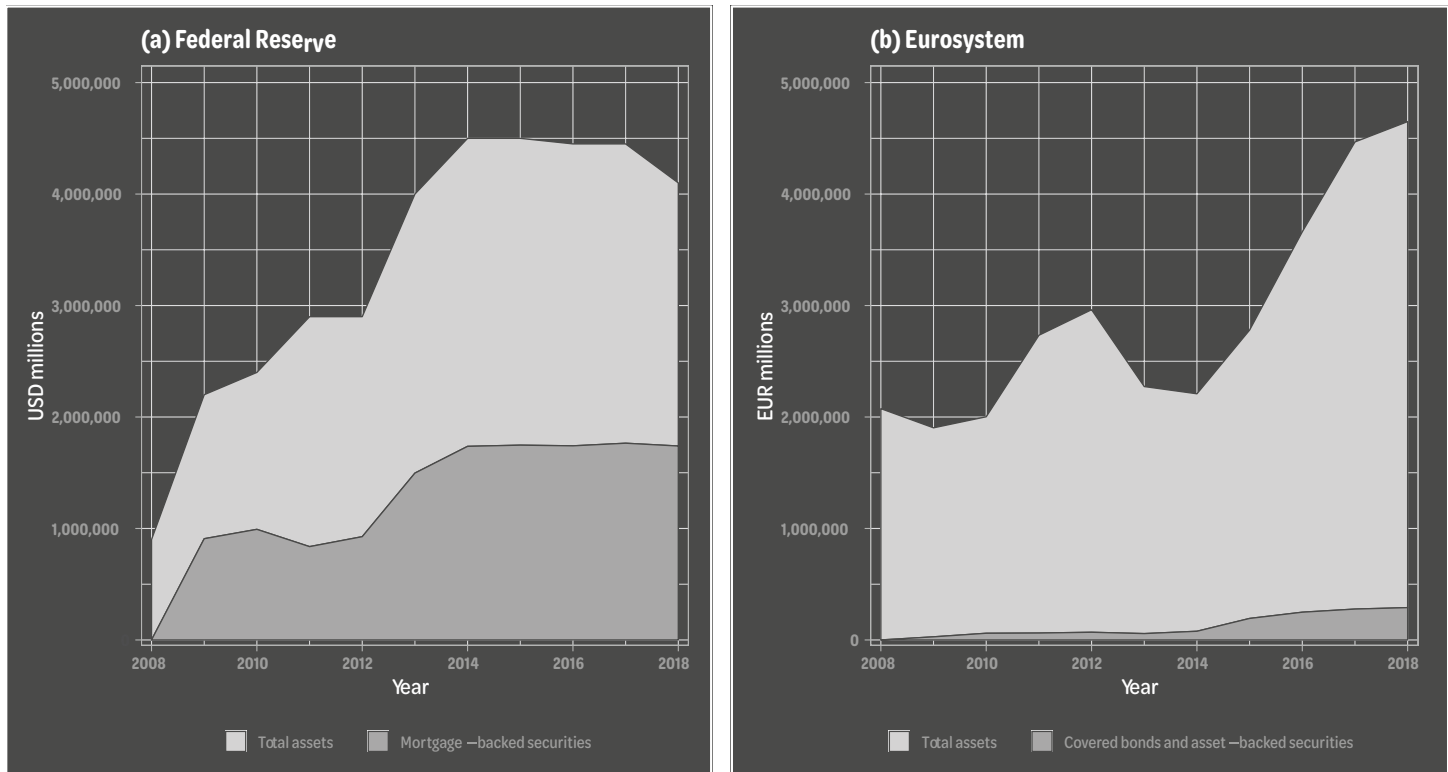


Figure 1:
Housing-related asset
purchases by the Fed and
ECB, 2008–2018⁵

it-led economies such as Spain – that is not the case in powerful export-led economies, particularly Germany, where the focus is on price stability, including in the housing market.

The empirical sections of the article analyze archival material, official minutes and transcripts, and interviews with central bankers. One finding is that, in stimulating housing, the Fed wanted to kill two birds with one stone: initially curing “patient zero” of the financial crisis (i.e., housing) and, later on, stimulating consumption and growth through housing. Some regional central bankers in the United States voiced concern that these policies would privilege housing over other sectors. Yet, these potentially adverse outcomes were seen as a necessary evil to stimulate growth through housing, which points to the key role that housing plays in American capitalism.

In contrast, the ECB supported housing only to a marginal degree in order to repair Eurozone housing finance markets, but not as a growth strategy. Economies with strong housing sectors, such as Spain and Ireland, favored large-scale asset purchase programs as part of QE, whereas powerful export-oriented economies, such as Germany and the Netherlands, opposed such moves. The former group argued that QE was a plus for their economies and housing markets. The latter group, however, promoted a conservative approach to large-scale asset purchases in order to maintain price stability, market discipline, and financial stability. The German Bundesbank, in particular, viewed such policies as dangerous, as they would fuel asset bubbles, overheat property markets, and hurt savers. As a result, Eurozone asset purchases in housing were more limited.

5. Sources: ECB; Fed; own calculations.

One implication of this article is that, although central banks are often considered to be “neutral” agents, the boundary between monetary and fiscal policies has blurred since the Great Recession. When central banks buy mortgage debt, these actions are functional equivalents to fiscal policy – such as tax breaks – that can lower the cost of mortgage debt for households and boost house and asset prices. On one hand, the Fed helped homeowners obtain cheaper mortgages, refinance at better rates, and stabilize and boost housing wealth and prices. On the other, it did very little for those without assets, who are priced out of the housing market, thereby exacerbating wealth inequality in the United States (Jacobs and King 2016). For these and other reasons, central banks have been sharply criticized by politicians, even calling into question their independence and blaming them for the rise of populism (Jones and Matthijs forthcoming; Binder and Spindel 2016).

Conclusion

Studying housing finance from a comparative perspective casts a spotlight on the privileged position that housing enjoys in the American political economy when compared to other advanced economies. Indeed, the degree of support for mortgage debt in the United States through monetary and fiscal policy is unprecedented among rich democracies. One theoretical insight is that the positioning of economic sectors within growth regimes matters greatly for policymaking because it shapes the preferences of politicians and central bankers as well as the power resources of interest groups. Finally, the politics of asset markets has wide-ranging implications for wealth inequality, a dimension often overlooked in the study of political economy, which has predominantly focused on labor-market inequality. ●

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DEMOCRATIC EROSION IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE: Lessons from a Multi-University Consortium

by Hannah Baron, Robert A. Blair, Jessica Gottlieb, and Shelby Grossman



Hannah Baron

is a PhD candidate,
Department of Political
Science, Brown University.
Her email is Hannah_Baron@Brown.edu.



Robert A. Blair

is an Assistant Professor,
Department of Political
Science and Watson
Institute for International
and Public Affairs, Brown
University. His email is
robert_blair@brown.edu.

Recent years have witnessed a deluge of commentary warning of imminent threats to democracy in the US, the West, and the world. In the US, this rhetoric has become especially heated with the rise of Donald Trump. Commentators have warned that “Trump is a threat to liberal democracy” (Nexon 2017); that the US has “never been so ripe for tyranny” (Sullivan 2016); and that “this is how fascism comes to America” (Kagan 2016). Marine Le Pen of France and Geert Wilders of the Netherlands have been similarly described as “threats to democracy” (DutchNews.nl 2016; Hamad 2017). Hungary and Poland are already experiencing significant democratic “hollowing” and “backsliding” (Schepple 2013). Beyond the US and Europe as well, some believe the danger signs for democracy are now “flashing red” (Taub 2016).

How worried should we be? Is American democracy really at risk? What about democracy in the West, or the world? And if it is at risk, what can we do about it? To help students and faculty answer these questions, we are currently participating in a consortium on Democratic Erosion that spans over three dozen universities in the US, UK, Israel, and the Philippines.¹ The consortium

combines teaching, research, and civic engagement, exploiting economies of scale to pursue avenues of inquiry that might not be accessible through a more conventional class or project. The goal is to help participants more critically and systematically identify potential threats to democracy and mechanisms of resistance, using the lens of theory, history, and social science.

In this essay we begin by describing the structure of the Democratic Erosion consortium, then show how the project has—somewhat surprisingly—increased student optimism about the state of democracy in the US. We conclude by discussing preliminary insights from the Democratic Erosion Event Dataset, a dataset based on hundreds of student case studies written as part of the collaboration.

Structure of the consortium

Trump’s apparently weak commitment to democratic norms and institutions² has elicited an unusual outpouring of concern from social scientists and civil society writ large. The Democratic Erosion consortium is designed to harness the intense but generally uncoordinated

1. More information on the consortium is available at our website, www.democratic-erosion.com.

2. Many observers have made this point, but for two especially thorough treatments, see Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018 and Lieberman et al. 2017.





Jessica Gottlieb
is an Assistant Professor,
Bush School of Government
and Public Service, Texas
A&M University. Her email is
jgottlieb@tamu.edu.



Shelby Grossman
is an Assistant Professor,
Department of Political
Science, University of
Memphis. Her email is
sgrossman@memphis.edu.

ed interest in understanding the unique political moment that Trump's election has provoked. Most participating faculty are not experts on democratic erosion or even American politics, thus the project is as much for our benefit as for the benefit of our students. Importantly, the consortium is *not* intended as a partisan critique of Trump, or of any other politician or political party. Our aim is to treat the threat of democratic erosion as an empirical question, rather than merely a political one. More broadly, our goal is to help mitigate the feelings of alienation that we perceived among many of our students during and after the election, encouraging them to see themselves as part of a larger and more critical conversation being held simultaneously on campuses across the country.

The consortium is structured around a semester-long course on democratic erosion that has been taught at over 35 institutions since Fall 2017. Some faculty teach identical syllabi; others incorporate material from our shared syllabus into courses on related topics. Faculty collaborate on lesson planning, and students collaborate on assignments. Participating universities span five countries and 18 US states plus Washington, DC, creating opportunities for students to engage with each other across both geographical and political boundaries. The course is being taught at virtually all levels and in virtually all formats, from introductory lecture courses for first-year undergraduates to seminars for Master's and PhD students. A version of the course is also being offered for inmates at the Correctional Treatment Facility in Washington, DC.

In lieu of reading responses, students write posts for our publicly-accessible blog, using ma-

terial from the course to analyze current events in the US or elsewhere. We encourage students to engage with one another's work, and some write posts explicitly addressing arguments made by their peers. For at least one post, students are required to attend a political event in the area around their university, then write a piece reflecting on their experience. For example, one student attended a Republican gubernatorial debate in Connecticut and analyzed the extent to which the candidates exhibited populist attributes, drawing on readings and course discussions about populism in Hungary and Venezuela.³ While the course has an international focus, we incorporate US-focused readings and reflections throughout, helping students assess whether arguments and analyses developed in disparate contexts are applicable to the US.

For their final papers, students write case studies on a country that has recently experienced observable signs of democratic decay. Students select from 92 country cases that we coded as experiencing a nontrivial year-on-year decline between 2000 and 2018 in VDem's Liberal Democracy Index (v2x_libdem), which places special weight on constraints on executive power. The format of the case studies is standardized to facilitate collaboration and allow for more direct comparisons across countries. Importantly, our method of identifying cases captures countries that are experiencing severe erosion (e.g. Hungary), as well as those that are not (e.g. Chile), thus encouraging students to think about counterfactual trajectories of erosion or consolidation through a comparative lens.

The original case study assignment was developed in collaboration with USAID's Center of

3. See <http://democratic-erosion.com/2018/04/04/populism-resurgent-evaluating-the-rise-of-american-populism-through-the-2018-gop-race-for-connecticut-governor-by-christopher-taylor-yale-university/>.



Comparative lens appears to have increased students' confidence in the strength and longevity of democratic norms and institutions in the US.

Excellence on Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance. Master's students at the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University coded the 2017-18 case studies to generate an event dataset capturing the precursors and symptoms of democratic erosion across 65 countries, as well as the mechanisms of resistance operating in each country. These data were meant to provide USAID and its partners with a more nuanced and systematic picture of how democratic erosion manifests across time and space. Descriptive patterns emerging from these data were presented to USAID, the US State Department, and a consortium of NGOs working on democracy promotion worldwide in May 2018, with all students listed as contributors.

Over spring 2019, Master's students at the Bush School will work with the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor and the Fundamental Freedom Fund consortium (FFF) to respond to "action forcing events," e.g. crackdowns on fundamental freedoms of association, expression, and religion, as well as opportunities to expand these rights. Students will use the event dataset to support the FFF in their mission to define theories of change, develop a Research, Evaluation, & Learning agenda, and begin to generate a body of research that speaks to this unique area of programming. We discuss the dataset in more detail below.

Placing the US in historical and comparative perspective

How does studying democratic erosion and resilience abroad shape student perspectives on

the state of democracy in the US? We explore this question in an article in *PS: Political Science and Politics* (Baron, Blair, and Grossman 2019). For the article, we analyzed student survey data from the start and end of the course, which we combined with open-ended questionnaires and content analysis of blog posts. We then interviewed 14 students who took the course and 12 similar students who did not, including some who wanted to enroll but could not due to size caps. Contrary to our expectations, we found that after a full semester of studying democratic erosion, students felt more optimistic about the trajectory of American democracy in the Trump era. While students' views of US democracy in the survey were generally dim, they became noticeably (and statistically significantly) less so over the course of the semester.

Our interviews corroborated these patterns and suggested that the improvement we observed in the survey was due – at least in part – to the course. Assessing the Trump presidency through a historical and comparative lens appears to have increased students' confidence in the strength and longevity of democratic norms and institutions in the US. One student said the course helped show that "the US has more preventative measures than most countries to stop [erosion] from happening."⁴ Another explained, "Before the course, I didn't give those [institutional and societal] bulwarks against democratic erosion enough credit. But after learning of the lack thereof in countries around the world, I have a renewed confidence in our own."⁵ Knowing that they would be asked to compare the US to other countries also increased students' enthusiasm for learning about these other countries in the first place.

4. Interview with Student M on February 9, 2018.

5. Student II exit questionnaire on December 7, 2017.

Comparative analysis helped us and our students think about familiar aspects of US politics in new ways. For example, while we often discuss partisanship in the US in terms of ideological differences, current partisan attachments often function much more like ethnic identities that are divorced from ideology, and that instead reflect membership in social groups (Mason 2018). Thinking about partisan identity in this way can shed new light on polarization, motivated reasoning, and related dynamics.

More broadly, we often privilege formal institutions and actors in the study of American politics, and assume that informal rules and brokers are far more important in the developing world than they are in the US. By comparing the US across developmental divides we can begin to think more carefully about how informal institutions and practices affect the quality of democracy at home as well (Helmke and Levitsky 2004).

Of course, there are limits to what we can learn from these comparisons. For example, one “fundamental facet of American exceptionalism” is the intensity of racism and racial resentment in US politics (Parker 2018, 1100). While racial and ethnic differences are defining features of democracy elsewhere as well, the legacies of slavery and state-sanctioned racial terror in the US complicate comparative analysis. More practically, comparative analysis can also sometimes elicit unproductive expressions of partisanship, such as when students debate whether Trump is a populist by comparing him to authoritarian leaders in Latin America. Still, overall, both we and our students found a comparative and historical perspective both illuminating and reassuring, especially when we forced ourselves not to jump to the most alarmist comparisons first.

Lessons from the Democratic Erosion Event Dataset

With hundreds of students writing country case studies each semester, the Democratic Erosion consortium is generating a considerable amount of raw data that we can use for purposes of research. In the years since Linz and Stepan’s seminal contributions beginning in the 1970s (Linz and Stepan 1978, 1996), there has been surprisingly little systematic empirical research on the determinants of democratic erosion worldwide. More recent studies have produced valuable theoretical insights, but the accompanying empirics are generally impressionistic, using historical cases and simple descriptive statistics to illustrate theoretical mechanisms at work (Bermeo 2016; Foa and Mounk 2017; Lust and Waldner 2015).

This is in part a result of data limitations: while existing datasets such as Polity and VDem track trends in the quality of democracy on a country-year basis, they cannot capture the specific events that contribute to democratic consolidation or decay, and they are generally too coarse to reflect the slow, subtle processes that tend to characterize democratic erosion today. The Democratic Erosion Event Dataset (DEED) is designed to help fill this gap. It also serves as proof of concept for a unique approach to data collection, using students’ work to create data that can be used for analysis and engaging them more directly in the process of generating knowledge.

An important initial contribution of the dataset is a classification of event types that others can use to categorize phenomena related to democratic erosion within a theory-driven framework. Using a random sample of case studies and intuitions from the syllabus, we first developed an

inventory of events that captured the universe of phenomena we would expect to observe in three categories: precursors to erosion (events that often lead to democratic decay but would not qualify as such), symptoms of erosion, and

resistance to erosion. *Table 1* summarizes our classification scheme. Corruption (precursor), media repression (symptom), and non-violent protest (resistance) are the three most common events within their respective categories.

Precursor	Symptom	Resistance
<i>Civic</i> Lack of legitimacy Media bias Polarization Increasing control of civil society <i>Economic</i> Corruption Economic inequality Economic shocks <i>Political</i> Cooptation of the opposition Extremist/populist parties Malapportionment Party weakness Electoral fraud <i>Institutional</i> Delegitimizing or weakening judiciary Coup or regime collapse State restructuring Manipulation of civil service Constitutional reforms <i>Violence/security</i> Non-state violence State-sponsored violence or abuse Electoral violence <i>Other</i> Refugee crisis External realignment Prior failed attempts at erosion Other	<i>Reduction in horizontal accountability</i> Suspension of rules/constitution Relaxing of term limits Circumventing the rule of law Reducing judicial independence Reducing legislative oversight Weakening integrity institutions <i>Reduction in vertical accountability</i> Media repression Repression of opposition parties Systemic reduction in electoral freedom/fairness Curtailed civil liberties <i>Changing societal norms</i> Lack of confidence/public disillusionment Threats and intimidation Other	<i>Increase in horizontal accountability</i> Check on central power by subnational government Check on executive by judiciary Check on executive by legislature <i>Increase in vertical accountability</i> Nonviolent protest Violent protest Increase in civic capacity Coalitions or elite pacts <i>Other</i> Pressure from outside actors Exit of people or money State attempts to prevent backsliding Other

Table 1:
DEED Classification
of Precursors, Symptoms,
and Resistance to
Democratic Erosion.

One way we can compare the extent of democratic erosion across countries is simply to count the number of events that qualify as “symptoms.” As an additional measure, we asked graduate student coders to rate the severity of erosion in each country on a 5-point scale. Both

of these measures are negatively and significantly correlated with Polity scores, Freedom House ratings, and VDem’s Liberal Democracy Index. This confirms the intuition that erosion is more likely to occur in the weakest democracies, and provides a validation of our measures.

But while DEED is consistent with these more commonly used measures of democracy, it is more detailed with respect to the distribution of event types within eroding countries and highlights countries that might be on the same path as eroding countries (because they have many of the same precursors) but haven't eroded yet, e.g. the US. Initial inductive exercises with DEED have identified several analytically useful patterns that would not have been detectable with existing data. For example, countries that experience horizontal erosion, e.g. attacks on the legislature and judiciary, are more likely to experience resistance than countries that experience vertical erosion, e.g. repression of the media and restrictions on civil liberties.

DEED also helps illuminate distinctions between different types of democratic erosion. Some types of erosion are calculated: they are intentional and systematic, occur over multiple years, and generally involve the same actor or political party, as in Hungary or Poland. Other types of erosion might be described as "opportunistic:" threats to democracy arise in response to crises, and typically recede after the crisis ends. This was the case with Sierra Leone during the Ebola epidemic, for example. Still other types are "pluralistic:" they involve lots of actors, and are more indicative of institutional weakness than of concerted attacks on democratic norms from within the government. This is the case with Mexico, for example.

Finally, like the Democratic Erosion consortium more generally, DEED can help us place potential threats to US democracy in comparative perspective. The share of events classified as "precursors" of democratic erosion is much greater in the US relative to most other regions (except Northern and Western Europe), suggesting that even if American democracy is at risk, much of that risk has yet to materialize.

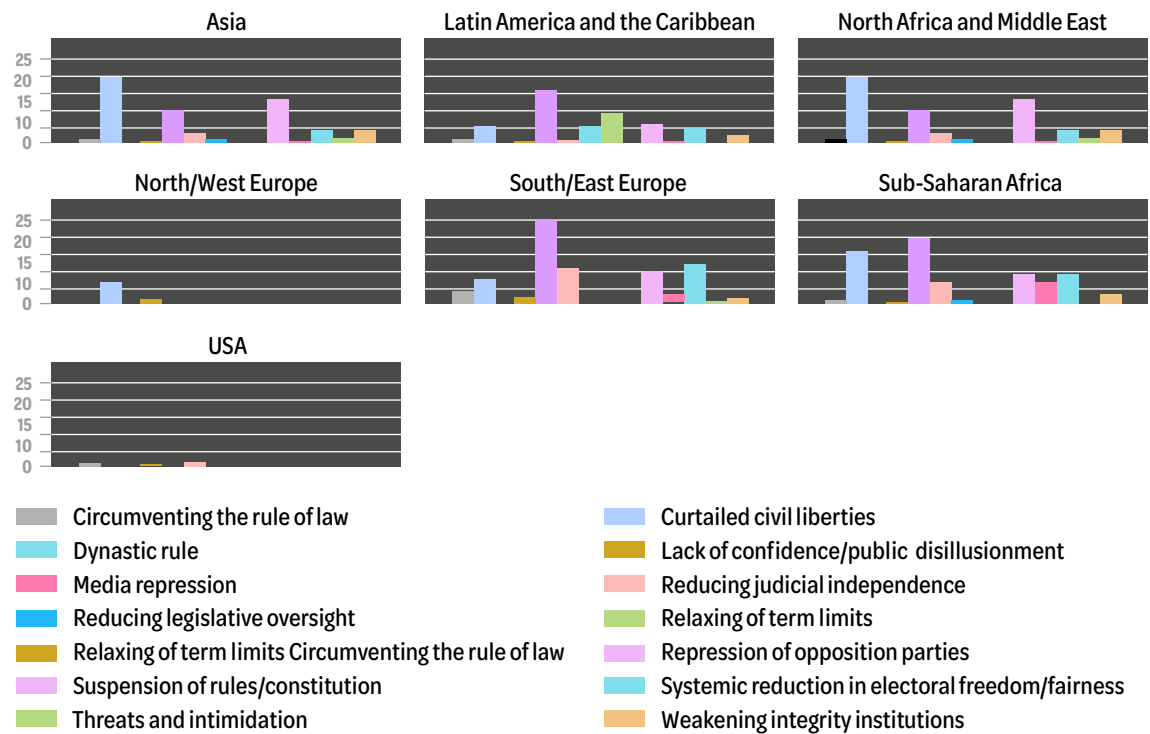
Equally important, the share of events classified as "resistance" is larger in the US than any other region of the world. In the US, most of these acts of resistance originate either in the judiciary or with civil society in the form of non-violent protest, rather than, say, from the legislature or international third parties. The fact that the share of resistance events in the US is so large relative to the share of erosion events should be cause for some optimism.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of "symptoms" of democratic erosion across regions. While DEED can only capture events contained in the student case studies, it nonetheless reveals some instructive patterns. First, despite widespread concern about Trump's commitment to democracy, the US continues to exhibit far fewer symptoms of democratic erosion than most other regions. Second, some types of symptoms remain rare or non-existent in the US: media repression, restrictions on civil liberties, suppression of opposition parties, and systemic reductions in electoral freedom and fairness. While the US may be increasingly susceptible to attacks on the judiciary and threats to the rule of law, it has thus far avoided some of the symptoms that have proven so problematic in other settings.

DEED is still in its first (beta) version. We will continue developing it as the consortium grows. We are currently expanding the set of country cases and years. To improve data quality, we now ask students to record sources for each event they describe. Future coders will be asked to validate these sources and judge their reliability. As the quality of the data increases, we will begin using DEED to generate original research, engaging our students as collaborators and including them in the production of knowledge about democratic erosion around the world. ●



Figure 1:
Share of Symptom Types
by Region, 2007-2016



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RECONCEPTUALIZING DIVERSITY AND DIFFERENCE: Teaching US and Comparative Politics in Conversation

by Kelly Clancy and Kelly Bauer



Kelly Clancy

is an Assistant Professor
of Political Science at
Nebraska Wesleyan
University. Her email is
kclancy@nebrwesleyan.edu.



Kelly Bauer

is an Assistant Professor
of Political Science at
Nebraska Wesleyan
University. Her email is
kbauer@nebrwesleyan.edu.

"A great democracy cannot be content to provide a horizon-expanding education for some and work skills, taught in isolation from the larger societal context, for everyone else....It should not be liberal education for some and narrow or illiberal education for others."—The Quality Imperative (AAC&U Board of Directors 2010)

"Education," the AAC&U notes, "is only liberating when it prepares students to thrive and contribute in the world they inherit. In the twenty-first century, that wider world is diverse, contested, and still disfigured by the persistence of deep inequities. To contribute in that context, our students must deepen their engagement with... difficult difference" (Schneider 2016). The work of teachers and scholars of comparative politics is to help students figure out how to engage in the wider world. In this article, we advocate complicating how scholars teach both comparative and US politics by situating the US as a comparative case to build on students' local expertise and using global examples to complicate their understanding of familiar worlds.¹ We argue that comparative politics, at its most useful, is an exercise in interrogating diversi-

ty—which we define as creating conditions for cultural and social heterogeneity, and purposeful attention to structures and institutions that reinforce marginalization of specific groups based on difference – through teaching and scholarship. Indeed, much of the most interesting research in the field challenges the artificial divisions that many scholars nonetheless take for granted – borders, racial groups, identity categories, discrete economies – as constructions or myths, and so we aim to interrogate how these myths shape how societies construct themselves. In short, we make three claims:

1. Diversity shifts based on place, and so political science should focus on establishing a common language and set of practices that interrogate difference and the way that institutional structures reify hegemonic practices;
2. A focus on difference can become a way to relax or collapse artificial boundaries between political science subfields and neighboring disciplines;
3. The classroom is an ideal laboratory for experimenting with this work.

1. Most departments call the subfield American politics. However, we use US politics in this paper to note that America is, in fact, larger than just the United States and is a contested term in the literature.



Inspiring students to be active citizens and recognize “difference” as socially constructed through institutions and power structures requires faculty to actively place the US in a comparative context. This move insists that students understand that the US is not a state of exception, but rather one country in the wider world. In the scholarship of teaching and learning, this perspective provides a particularly valuable opening that both allows students to develop a critical view of US politics, and a way to leverage their own experiences with US politics in order to better understand the complexity of international politics. Our previous research has pursued this line of inquiry; we developed theoretical models and practical strategies of implementing empathic scaffolding (Bauer and Clancy 2018) and discourse instruction (Clancy and Bauer 2018) based on qualitative data collected from our classrooms. As we argue below, an analytically eclectic approach to teaching can orient our classes around topics of power, privilege and oppression, and how these are embedded in political and social structures.

Recognizing this potential, the APSA Task Force on Political Science in the 21st Century positioned the classroom as the vehicle for discourse on citizenship, concluding:

The classroom is, perhaps, the arena in which political science has the greatest opportunity to demonstrate what it can contribute to make all citizens and residents more informed participants in defining their own futures” (“Political Science in the 21st Century,” 2011, p. 38).

Yet, they also found the discipline “often ill-equipped” to “embrace and incorporate the changing demographics, increasing multicultural diversity, and ever-growing disparities in

the concentration of wealth present in many nation-states” (“Political Science in the 21st Century,” 2011, p. 1). For example, as the remarkable comparativist Lee Ann Fujii noted, the discipline engages in a practice of “whitesplaining, academic-style” to justify its failure to diversify, evident in classrooms, curriculum, scholarship, and faculty. As Fujii (2017) describes:

... lack of diversity maintains a racialized ways of seeing the world. This lens of default whiteness is assumed to be neutral, unraced, and ungendered, and therefore “scientifically” sound. But whiteness is anything but. It operates from a base of unseen and unquestioned power to dictate not only what is worthy of study, but also what the standards for excellence should be across *all* studies.

Problematically, scholarship that addresses the way in which whiteness and other hegemonic forces operate within the classroom is “still perceived by many within the profession to be largely marginalized and often tokenized” (“Political Science in the 21st Century,” 2011, p. 9). Scholarship of teaching and learning is often considered a venue for teaching times and strategies, rather than a lens for critically examining the way the discipline organizes itself and understands the field. Using a framework of diversity can provide a means by which students and faculty can understand the importance of concepts of privilege, power, and oppression within the field.

Part 1. In the discipline: Using diversity as a through line between subfields

Putting comparative and US politics in conversation with each other, with diversity as a common lens, holds radical potential to challenge



A sense of place – and an understanding of specific ways that diversity manifests itself – might be key to successfully persuading students to engage in study of unfamiliar political concepts.

homogeneous ways of seeing the world that eclipse difference. Diversity matters across subfields: interrogations of the manifestation of power and privilege are indisputably germane to all political science work. Yet centering diversity

as a strategy for de-exceptionalizing the US case resonates in different ways across geography, types of universities, and student demographic groups, requiring faculty carefully observe the salience of different types of diversity in their university. As comparative politics faculty at Nebraska Wesleyan University, a small liberal arts university in the 350,000-person town of Lincoln, we had to dramatically reshape our teaching for

classrooms that were very different from the visually diverse East Coast communities where we had started teaching. In Nebraska, diversity looks and operates along different trajectories: identities are formed around religions, political ideologies, and rural vs. urban geographies. Many rural students are first generation college students, meaning that they are adapting to a more urban life, a lack of familial knowledge about higher education, and experiencing more visible forms of difference for the first time. Although our students are excited to learn about politics, many have never met anyone from another country, and so need a broad foundation in order for international politics to become relevant to them. The relative homogeneity of their upbringings means that they struggle equally to deconstruct the familiarity of domestic politics, believing that, for example, discussing race “[is], in itself, racist” (McClain 2008). In many ways, the subfield distinctions of political science hinder our students’ learning about both US and comparative politics not simply because of

the exceptionalism placed on the US, but also because of the limited extent to which the subfields interrogate diversity. Although each university will have a different experience, with students bringing different life experiences from food insecurity to incarceration to homelessness to worry over documentation status, we want not to write about Nebraska or Nebraska Wesleyan in particular. Rather, we use these examples to suggest that a sense of place – and an understanding of specific ways that diversity manifests itself – might be key to successfully persuading students to engage in study of unfamiliar political concepts.

Teaching complex aspects of political science that intersected with diversity and difference, particularly at a predominantly white university in the Midwest, required a more holistic approach that relaxed the distinction between subfields and levels of analysis. Much of our thinking and research is motivated by the intellectual orientations of analytic eclecticism (Sil and Katzenstein 2010) or contextual holism (Kubik 2013); both orientations invite scholars to situate themselves within the “complexity and messiness of particular real-world situations” and “forgo parsimony in order to capture the interactions among different types of causal mechanisms normally analyzed in isolation from each other within separate research traditions” (Sil and Katzenstein 2010, 412). This orientation allows teachers and scholars to articulate “the systemic (holistic) quality of the socio-political phenomena under discussion and their dependence on the contexts within which they emerge, develop, or collapse” (Kubik 2010). This lens is particularly valuable in more (at least on the surface level) homogenous places, where conversations about diversity, and attendant critiques of privilege and oppres-



sion, are less likely to organically evolve, challenging faculty to consider how to use teaching to infuse these conversations in the classroom. By thinking about course material through a holistic lens scaffolded around difference, we can more mindfully integrate those discussions into classes.

Transdisciplinary curricular structures facilitate this holistic approach. For example, our university structures general education around multidisciplinary “threads,” which require students to take courses in multiple departments organized into themes such as Democracy or Justice. Courses in these threads aim to teach students to think in an eclectic, holistic way outside of traditional disciplinary boundaries.² Students also take courses that are designated “diversity instructive.” This challenge of using interdisciplinary and diversity lenses to understand the curriculum pushed us to similarly interrogate political science, thinking through the way that different subfields frame and discuss subjects. For example, comparative political scientists often adapt a predominantly institutionalist focus on the welfare state, state building, or election structures; political theorists focus on citizenship; and Americanists work centers more on behavioralism and voting. These distinctions elude the fact that all of these concepts are inherently comparative, and could benefit from a study of how other people live – an institutionalist perspective that also interrogates American politics, comparative concepts of citizenship, a study of differences in behavior. Adopting holistic approaches in both our curricula allowed us to breaking down these constrictive and artificial subfield divisions, facilitating more nuanced understandings of how institutions

function in a broader political world. Below, we document two ways we attained these goals.

Part 2. In the classroom: The interplay of local and international

In this section, we offer a few examples of how to think through the ideas presented in this article on the classroom. Our concept of empathic scaffolding (Bauer and Clancy 2018) facilitates learning about the unfamiliar by first illuminating course concepts with the familiar. Specifically, it structures “content and pedagogy in a way that strategically expands students’ zones of comfort, starting with very personal experiences with the material and expanding to include broader groups of people and course concepts” (Bauer and Clancy 2018). In her class on Immigration Politics, Bauer asks students to use their experiences with migration within their communities to construct and deconstruct relevant course concepts and debates. Students form groups based on the size of their home communities to document and analyze in-out groups, the formation of those groups within and between places, and if/how migration intersects with those dynamics. After each group shares their findings, the class analyzes variation in the group identity construction by place, then extrapolates these conclusions to the construction of immigration and citizenship policy over time. The concept can be extended to other topics, as well. In political economy or international politics courses, instructors can ask students to draw on experiences with development in their own communities in order to underpin a lesson on Import Substitution Industrialization and Export Oriented Industrialization. This move can also bring oft-ignored sources of diversity to

2. Minority Politics and Democratization, for instance, are both in the Democracy Thread, which provides democracy as an analytic lens for both courses, although one is focused on domestic politics and one on comparative politics.



the fore; for example, students from rural areas often have nuanced understandings of agricultural subsidies that prove invaluable to conversation and provide opportunities for them to teach urban students.

This exercise points to two pedagogical tools. First, when students see themselves in the course content, it legitimizes their lived experiences as valuable ways of engaging with broader conversations about comparative politics (Thomas 2018). Often, students are able to critique existing theories and models as they map their data on to scholarly debates. Second, faculty can draw on this expertise to scale up student learning to more challenging course content. Underpinning these exercises is a challenge for faculty to, first, understand variation in students' exposure and relationship to the course material, and second, cautiously situate conversations of the familiar within the unfamiliar.³

Just as the personal and local help students to contextualize and understand the unfamiliar, the inverse can also be true; that is, distant or international cases can help to de-familiarize and destabilize student understanding of US politics. For example, Clancy teaches a class on race relations in the United States. Given the class's overwhelmingly white demographic, she first has to problematize whiteness – have students think of being white as something to study so that racial politics can be put into a comparative lens. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Ted Talk "The Danger of the Single Story" is a remarkable, use-

ful example of this (Adichie 2009). She uses narrative to explain how power and privilege help to illustrate the narrow narratives of race of which we avail ourselves. She talks about how her early stories featured exclusively white children discussing snow (despite growing up in Nigeria) because there were no stories about African children, and how upon her arrival in the United States, well-meaning Americans were surprised that she could speak English, use a stove, and write about "normal" topics. Students used this talk to gain distance on their own lives, and their experiences with racial politics ("It is weird," one student mused, "that none of the shows I watch have African American protagonists"). Others began to question why their school districts were segregated (noting that their parents would say things like black people just liked to live together). Putting these into comparative perspective allowed students to use discourse to recognize patterns in other countries, and project those patterns on their own lives (Clancy and Bauer 2018).

We have also found it useful to draw on familiar cases, but to present those cases in unfamiliar contexts. This kind of framing challenges students to see human rights demands, for example, as ongoing, local, and strategic. For example, in Bauer's Human Rights course, students read WEB Du Bois' "An Appeal to the World," in order to encourage students to think about when and how activists internationalize human rights demands (Du Bois 1947). Students also read international responses to human rights demands

3. It is crucial that faculty do not solely rely on empathy. Doing so risks putting emotional work on students of color. Accountability and critique of power embedded in structures needs to accompany any serious discussion of diversity. For further discussion of the limits of empathy, see, e.g., (Brooks 2011; Hollan & Throop 2011; Poland, 2007; Smajdor, Stöckl, & Salter, 2011). Additionally, new research has explored the risk that empathy 'backfires' by decreasing concern for people on "the other side," and thus "empathy starts to look more like tribalism - a way to keep reinforcing your own point of view and blocking out any others" (Rosin 2019).

such as political rights of Puerto Ricans or family separation at the US border. Students are surprised, and often uncomfortable, to confront examples of US civil rights abuses as part of an international conversation.

As another example, Clancy teaches a class on social justice, which is interdisciplinary (and not exclusively US Politics) by designation. When students were asked to define justice, they agreed on a narrow definition of justice equating it with legality. She then asked the left half of the room to brainstorm examples of events that were just but not legal, and the right half events that were legal but not just. After some protesting, they began to tentatively interrogate the idea that the law was not always a perfect arbiter of justice. The breakthrough came when someone on the left side said, "Wait! What about Nelson Mandela? Can we even use international examples?" and someone on the right responded, "Oh wow – like the Nazis – the Holocaust was legal under German law." As they came up with international examples, they started applying the pattern to the US. Martin Luther King, Jr, is a clear example of just but not legal, at least with the benefit of hindsight – but where does Malcolm X fit? Cyntoia Brown? The shooting of Michael Brown? This activity encouraged students to use the less familiar to help interrogate the more familiar, and to realize the limitations of the state (and US government culpability).

One of the roles of political science is to help students interrogate their social and political worlds. Doing so requires destabilizing their sense of what is "normal." Providing an international context to help analyze (rather than just describe) US politics means that they can see the way that similarity and difference emerge in their political lives. (Students are always surprised to learn that the US is one of the few "ad-

vanced" democracies with a presidential system – this fact helps them to systematically analyze the shortcomings of our institutions). However, this strategy implies a sufficient level of familiarity with international cases, which relies on a good international/comparative education.

Part 3. Implications for the discipline

Our research highlights three reasons why readers of the comparative politics newsletter should care about how the US functions within a comparative perspective in the classroom. First, diversity helps everyone. As Fujii (2017) reminds us: "You should care about diversity because in the long run, it helps you. It helps you intellectually and socially. It can expose you to ways of looking at the world that may be unfamiliar or foreign to your own thinking. It can help you to see and question things you take for granted. It can help you to think about the world in more critical and nuanced ways."

Second, we should all be thinking about preparing our students for citizenship in a complicated, global world – and this means being able to articulate the way in which the United States is part of a global conversation, and not a state of exception. Diversity becomes a bridge between those conversations. As Sensoy and DiAngelo (2017) write in the context of hiring a diverse faculty, "We are not advocating that diversity be put ahead of subject-matter expertise. We are advocating for an understanding that *one cannot be considered to have subject-matter expertise if one cannot position their field within a sociopolitical context*...Especially as schools become increasingly separate and unequal, we much consider this ability as integral to all positions, rather than as optional, desired, but not really weighted" (emphasis in the original). This is doubly true in the classroom.



Third, situating the US as a comparative case will make comparative scholarship better. Understanding the through lines between comparative and US will help to tackle messy, real world problems without the sometimes-inconvenient restriction of studying states. Sometimes states matter – but maybe they should matter more as variables than as limiting factors. This more complicated way of framing the processes that political science tries to analyze lends itself to a less parsimonious, more contingent and complex, form of analysis that benefits scholarship and our students.

Thus, we offer the following questions to the discipline:

1. As the AACU quotation at the beginning of the article challenges, how can we make our teaching “horizon-expanding,” by encouraging students to connect course content to fundamental problems or challenges that societies face? Are we preparing them to understand and exercise their citizenship?
2. How can we present comparative politics as a lens through which students can view the United States and the communities in which they live? For example, how can a class on Political Economy help them to understand inequality in the US? How can a class on Latin American Politics help students interrogate personalistic politics in the United States?
3. How can we use student understanding of local situations to better help them understand the global environment? Without assuming homogeneity of lived experiences, how can we encourage students to draw on their expertise to learn about and interrogate disciplinary conversations?
4. As scholars, how do the questions above help us to critically interrogate the often-artificial boundaries we erect between subfields (not to mention other disciplines)? How can we embrace a holistic, eclectic view of the field to interrogate and circumvent those boundaries?
5. Finally, how does thinking eclectically about our scholarship make the subfield and the discipline more accepting to diverse points of view, perspectives, and voices? How can we help students from a variety of backgrounds and perspectives see themselves in the work we do?

To be sure, these are not easy questions, but we believe that they might hold the key to imagining the impact that comparative politics can have on the discipline of political science in the 21st century. ●



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WHAT ARE THE LESSONS OF THE AMERICAN FRONTIER FOR THE DEVELOPING WORLD?

by Jennifer Murtazashvili and Ilia Murtazashvili



Jennifer Murtazashvili
is an Associate Professor,
Graduate School of Public
and International Affairs,
University of Pittsburgh.
Her email is jmurtaz@pitt.edu.



Ilia Murtazashvili
is an Associate Professor,
Graduate School of Public
and International Affairs,
University of Pittsburgh. His
email is ilia.murtazashvili@gmail.com.

Private property rights are associated with long-run economic growth (Acemoglu and Johnson 2005). However, these allegedly wealth-maximizing institutions have eluded much of the world. One of the themes of our research is that thinking about American political economy and political development in comparative perspective helps explain the origins and consequences of private property rights.

In many ways, our perspective is inspired by but eventually diverged from, Hernando de Soto's *Mystery of Capital* (2000). According to de Soto, legal recognition of the de facto rights asserted by "squatters" is what made America wealthy. A policy implication is that governments in the developing world, with support from the international community, ought to recognize the de facto rights of squatters to unleash capitalism.

The reason why we question the libertarian case for legal titling is our view that what made private property rights work in the US was not that the government issued legal documents, but that the US had what we call a "property-protecting state" one characterized by substantial political

stability, a good amount of administrative and enforcement capacity (even in the nineteenth century), constraints on political decision-makers, and inclusive political and legal institutions. The problem with recommending legal titling as

a cure-all to many developing countries is that most do not have a property-protecting state.

To make this more precise, we developed a theory of property rights. It has three

goals: to explain the origins of legal private property rights, to understand why self-governance works in some cases but not others, and explore when legal titling can improve the plight of the poor. We think each question can be answered with a single framework. To test it out, we use big, structured comparisons that have conventionally formed the core of comparative political economy. Here, we sketch out our theory, and show how comparisons of the U.S. with Afghanistan shed light on the origins of legal and informal private property rights.

I. A theory of property

Hobbes believed that self-governance was an impossibility and that a Leviathan would pro-

*Comparisons of the
U.S. with Afghanistan
shed light on the origins
of legal and informal
private property rights.*



vide the public goods of security and property protection. Others argued instead that rulers are unlikely to provide public goods unless individuals devise institutions of collective action to limit the reach of political decision-makers prior to giving up their freedom to a specialist in coercion (Barzel 2002; Brennan and Buchanan 1985). This predatory view sees rulers as caring more about revenue than improving social welfare (Levi 1988; Scott 2017). It views politics as a struggle among groups to dominate one another rather than some sort of hypothetical contract among individuals and a sovereign (Holcombe 2018; Vahabi 2015).

Our theory first asks when predatory rulers establish private property rights, which we believe depends on a number of circumstances. One is political stability, which creates incentives for rulers to establish institutions that are in society's interests (Olson 1993). Another is state capacity, including capacity to record ownership and to provide cadastral surveys (D'Arcy and Nistotskaya 2016). Capacity, however, can destroy property rights unless it is accompanied by political constraints (Boettke and Candela 2019; Johnson and Koyama 2017). Political constraints influence the prospects for legal property rights by influencing the extent to which people believe the state's promise to respect private property rights. Political and legal institutions should also be inclusive. One reason why inclusive institutions are important is because it improves the prospects economic institutions fit with the local context (Leeson and Harris 2018). Access to legal institutions also help people resolve land disputes without fighting, thereby improving security of property rights (Blattman, Hartman, and Blair 2014).

Our theory also extends the literature which finds that self-governing organizations are often

effective (Leeson 2014; Shortland 2019; Skarbek 2014). According to our perspective on self-governance, the ability of any informal organization—a gang, tribe, or customary organization, to name a few—depends on the features outlined above. One is stability, such as the extent the organization enjoys a local monopoly (Hajj 2016; Shortland and Varese 2016). Informal organizations also vary in their capacity, such as whether they can record who owns what land, as well as to enforce property rights. Constraints are also important, including on informal rulers, including traditional and customary ones (Baldwin 2015; Palagashvili 2018). Also, informal institutions should be inclusive for the property system to be effective.

Legal titling can also be understood within this framework. It is clear that in many contexts, land property rights are a source of political conflict and violence (2013; Klaus and Mitchell 2015; Steele 2011). But is legal titling recommended? De Soto's (2002) *The Other Path* explicitly argued that market-oriented economic institutions, including private property rights, are an economic answer to terrorism. We think otherwise.

We know that in many contexts, legal titling leads to dismantling of customary institutions and distributive fights (Berry 2002; Tripp 2004). Part of the problem is that legal institutions are also often biased against poor in communities (Alden Wily 2011). Alisha Holland (2017) contends that not enforcing law can be a source of freedom in developing countries because of these biases in law. Informality can also serve important functions, such as providing workers with cheaper housing options in a context in which there are few formal options to rent (Ho 2017).



Of course, in some instances, legal titling does work. Our framework helps to explain why. Legal titling projects are likely to improve land tenure security when in the context of political stability, political capacity, constraints on political decision-makers, and inclusive political and legal institutions (I. Murtazashvili and Murtazashvili 2019). Otherwise, the investment of the development community and domestic governments is unlikely to improve the lot of the poor.

II. Property rights on the American Frontier

During the nineteenth century, the U.S. government dismantled communal property rights of Native Americans for redistribution to white settlers. According to Vahabi (2016), the U.S. state during this period was a “predatory developmental” state that extracted land to promote development. The state was active in providing opportunities for territorial expansion (Frymer 2017). Once the state cleared land, settlers allocated the best land to themselves (Allen 1991).

In many areas of the frontier, however, the initial property rights were implemented by associations known as claim clubs. Farmers, miners, ranchers, and loggers each formed powerful associations that allowed them to allocate land. These associations were not government but they had features similar to them, including institutions of collective action, oftentimes written constitutions, and forums for adjudication (I. Murtazashvili 2013).

Claim clubs were effective in governing property relations because they had local monopolies (everyone in the region had to join), had basic administrative capacity, and its representatives faced constraints, such as removal by popular consent. The clubs were also inclusive, such as among the mining camps in California, where

most members of the club could call together a meeting. They were not perfect systems of order: miners, for example, allowed claim jumping to acquire rights, which basically meant you had to stand guard over what you own (Clay and Wright 2005). However, they were still remarkable in that they could implement property rights without the state.

What is perhaps more remarkable is that squatters did not have to rely on their claim clubs for long. The reasons have to do with certain features of politics. The first feature was political stability. Although the government was not especially powerful, it was a Leviathan vis-à-vis other groups it confronted, including Native American groups. The government also may not have had much capacity, but it created a rational system to demarcate land that enabled settlement of the frontier. Political constraints allowed a credible commitment of private property rights, including separation of powers, federalism, and democracy (for whites, during the nineteenth century). Inclusive political institutions provided further opportunities for the expansion of legal property ownership. According to Lemke (2016), women’s property rights emerged from polycentric competition in the US in the nineteenth century. Thus, the U.S. government, while not able to keep squatters off the land, was still able to specify and enforce legal property rights and was constrained from expropriating those legal rights once squatters secured them.

III. Property rights in Afghanistan

Beginning in the mid-eighteenth century, Afghan rulers exchanged land use rights for men they could conscript into the army. Local customary leaders interfaced with the government to facilitate this exchange. This qua-



si-feudal conscription system resulted in the origins of property rights (I. Murtazashvili and Murtazashvili 2016c). However, rulers for much of Afghan history still used land repopulation campaigns—moving groups and communities from one part of the country to another—to assert control over people. In the 1970s, Afghan communists decried what they saw as a feudal system in the country, viewing the property system as exploitative. They underestimated support for private property in the countryside (Edwards 2002). The Taliban did little to protect property rights. According to our research, no more than a fifth of people have legal deeds in rural parts of the country (I. Murtazashvili and Murtazashvili 2016b).

What we did find is that nearly all rural Afghans have customary deeds to land. These customary deeds, which are recognized within a community but do not have legal rights attached to them, are often enough for people to assert ownership. Village representatives, often referred to as *maliks* or *arbabs*, may hold these deeds. They can resolve disputes, using them as evidence. Community members can also call upon community councils to resolve disputes. Disputes among communities can also be solved by convening these customary councils, although resolving such disputes may be more challenging (I. Murtazashvili and Murtazashvili 2016b).

The reason why customary deeds are credible and legal property rights are hollow reflects the comparative institutional features of customary governance and the state. The state suffers from instability, very little capacity, few constraints on decision-makers, exclusionary political institutions, and corrupt courts. Hence, legal titles hold little weight. However, customary governance has capacity to provide public goods lo-

cally, its decision-makers face constraints, and its political institutions are inclusive of most households (J. Murtazashvili 2016). In short, customary governance is closer to satisfying the features of a property-protecting state than the Afghan state.

Our research on legal titling in Afghanistan provides additional evidence that policy to implement legal titles have not worked well (I. Murtazashvili and Murtazashvili 2015, 2016a). Several legal titling policies have been attempted. Even when given the option, most residents did not use the option to formalize their claims, because they do not view the state as credible. However, development practitioners prefer what we call community-based land adjudication and registration. These efforts record ownership at the community level, without any expectation of legal registration. However, they are often effective in improving land tenure security. They also suggest that the international development community recognizes some of the challenges with legal titling, but also that uncontrolled state predation is a fundamental challenge to the success of legal titling initiatives.

IV. Conclusion

The U.S. has economic institutions that promote creation of wealth, but to understand why requires comparative work. Indeed, more work is necessary. One important issue we have begun to address is that property enforcement can be provided selectively to more powerful groups in society. In China, there is a dual land use property system: business but not for the poor (Cai 2016, 2017; Cai and Sun 2018). Our view is that the U.S. is the “ideal” case of private property rights provided as a public good. The Afghan case exemplifies the absence of legal rights. China is a “between” case, one where property rights of



business are more protected than those of peasants (Chuang 2015; Sargeson 2013). Our next phase of research, already underway, extends these frameworks to consider the political basis for alternative private property regimes (Cai, Murtazashvili, and Murtazashvili 2019). ●

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SOCIAL STATUS AND REDISTRIBUTIVE POLITICS: Lessons from India and the American South

by Pavithra Suryanarayan and Steven White



Pavithra Suryanarayan
is an Assistant Professor
of International Political
Economy, Johns Hopkins
SAIS. Her email is
psuryani1@jhu.edu.



Steven White
is an Assistant Professor of
Political Science, Syracuse
University. His email is
swhite10@maxwell.syr.edu.

Right-wing parties have made remarkable electoral gains worldwide with substantial support from low-income voters. In the United States, the election of Donald Trump was made possible in part due to support from white voters without a college degree. The popularity of such parties and candidates among poorer voters is surprising because right-wing parties often run on anti-redistributive platforms. From a strictly economic perspective, then, the support of poorer voters for anti-tax candidates and parties is surprising because it seems to be against their material interests. But in many contexts, poorer voters care not only about economic redistribution from the state but also social integration. When voters, both rich and poor, care about their social rank -- arising from forms of status that are orthogonal to class -- their support for right-wing parties is less puzzling.

In this essay, we draw on findings from our research on India and the 19th century United States to provide both historical and comparative context for these contemporary trends. We argue that placing the United States in compar-

ative perspective is especially fruitful for understanding cross-class support for lower taxes and the weakening of fiscal and bureaucratic institutions that at first glance seem to benefit only economic elites. This is particularly true

Placing the United States in comparative perspective is especially fruitful for understanding cross-class support for lower taxes and the weakening of fiscal and bureaucratic institutions.

when the United States is compared to other countries with historical status distinctions that cut across class lines -- like the caste system in India and apartheid in South Africa -- rather than more conventional comparisons to countries like Canada and the United Kingdom. Such comparisons

can push scholars to consider the extent to which the politics of racial hierarchy in the United States are exceptional or instead follow more general trends that play out in a range of cases where status distinctions complicate traditional economic explanations of political outcomes.

Recent research by Suryanarayan (2016, 2019) -- one of the two authors in this collaboration -- argues that cross-class support for right-wing parties emerges when there are challenges to the social status of groups in ranked societies.



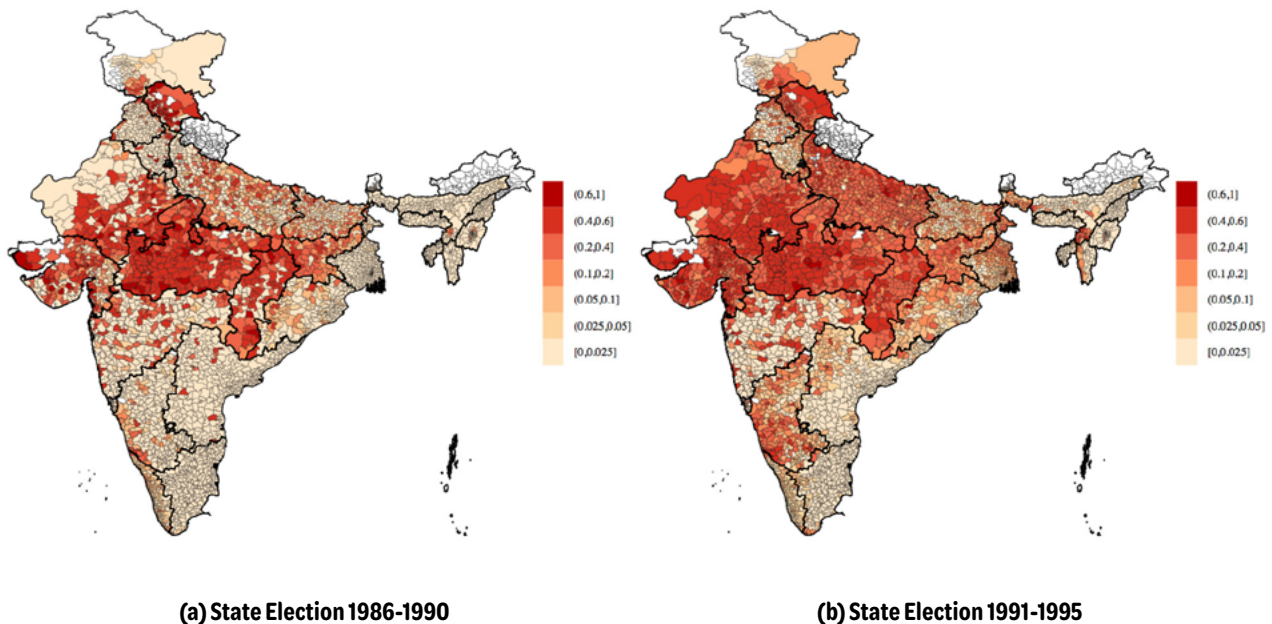
We see examples of ranked systems across the world due to the legacies of slavery, caste, apartheid, colonialism, and aristocracy. In these societies, individuals are born into high or low status groups. “High-status” individuals derive both *psychic* benefits from their rank, as well as *material* benefits from access to segregated goods and services. When “low-status” groups start to compete for access to institutions viewed as instrumental to maintaining group social rank, high-ranked groups face threats to their status. Importantly, both wealthy and poor members of high-ranked groups fear social integration. In such an event, status identity gains greater electoral salience, making poor voters from high-status groups more susceptible to appeals by right-wing parties.

to lower castes in central government jobs and higher education – domains that had long been dominated by upper-caste Brahmins. *Figure 1* shows a dramatic rise in the vote share for the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) before and after the announcement. The possibility of social integration following the “Mandal” announcement galvanized upper-caste support for the BJP, a peripheral player in Indian politics up to that point.

Using newly digitized data from the 1931 census, *Figure 2* shows that the increase in support for the BJP was greater in places where upper-caste Brahmins had historically enjoyed greater status dominance. Individual-level survey data from the 2004 national elections corroborates these electoral district-level findings. The individual-level regressions show that poor Brahmins were more likely to vote for the BJP, and held even more anti-redistribution

Figure 1:
Right-wing vote share
before and after Mandal
announcement

Suryanarayan (2019) examines the impact of an announcement by the Prime Minister of India in 1990 to introduce affirmative action



Notes: Right-wing vote share was calculated using the vote for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in state legislative elections held before and after the announcement. The BJP vote share was calculated using the votes received by the top 15 candidates / parties in an electoral constituency. The source data is available at www.eci.nic.in. The map was originally published in Suryanarayan (2019).

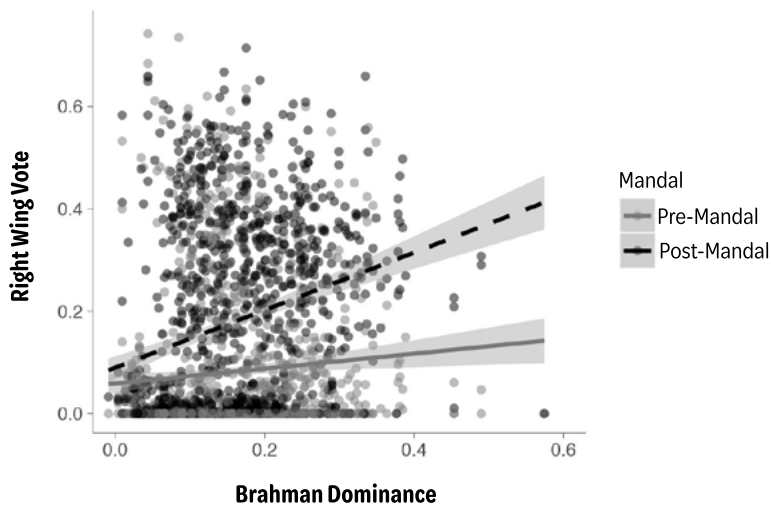


Figure 2:
Right-wing vote share and
Brahman Dominance

Notes:
Brahman Dominance is measured as the overrepresentation of Brahmans amongst the literate population in the electoral district over their actual population in 1931. This measure relies on the intuition that places where Brahmans were more dominant in education were places with greater caste-based status distinctions.

views compared to even wealthy Brahmans, in constituencies with higher levels of Brahman dominance in 1931. These results provide direct evidence for the claim that anti-redistributive support emerges among poor upper-status voters in places with high status inequality.

The relevance of these empirical findings is not limited to the Indian case, but rather sheds light on why we observe cross-class coalitions in contexts as varied as the United States, India, and South Africa. A shared social status rank creates both psychic bonds as well as material incentives to protect segregated goods that benefit both wealthy and poor voters in these places. One implication of this research is that we should expect lower taxation and lower support for government-led redistribution than political economy models might predict in places when high-status groups are challenged.

What does this look like in the U.S. case? In a new working paper (Suryanarayan and White 2019), we examine how social status politics have shaped taxation and bureaucratic capacity in the American South. We examine the period after the Civil War, which resulted in the demise of slavery in the southern states, looking at two

distinct time periods. The first, Reconstruction, saw federal oversight of the region, the protection of political rights for southern black men, and the rise of new forms of taxation that funded a range of new social expenditures, fitting with the expectations of canonical political economy models (Meltzer and Richard 1981). This was followed, though, by “Redemption,” when southern white elites returned to power, reducing not just taxation but the capacity to tax in the future, as part of their effort to return the region to something resembling the antebellum status quo.

A major question in this period was whether poorer whites would join black southerners in a class-based, interracial alliance, or whether they would join wealthier whites in a cross-class, race-based coalition. Although there were compelling glimpses of the former in certain places, the latter largely came to be the case. The “white laborer joined the white landholder,” Du Bois writes, and the democratizing moment of Reconstruction came to an end (1935, 670). Whites were united “despite divergent economic interests” by “the shibboleth of race” (Ibid., 680). We argue that poorer whites joined wealthier whites because of not only the psychic benefits but also the material benefits (access to segregated public goods like schools).

Because of this, we expect that in places where threats to racial status were stronger, we will find evidence of greater weakening of tax policy and a more concerted effort to weaken the capacity of the bureaucracy to limit tax collections in the future. We expect this to vary over time, however. During Reconstruction, when there was substantial federal oversight of the southern states, we expect to find a positive relationship between racial status threat and taxation levels. After Reconstruction ends, by contrast, we

expect to find a negative relationship between racial status threat and taxation levels as well as overall bureaucratic capacity, because the southern white elite began to return to power and pursue their material interests.

A few examples illustrate our findings. Perhaps the clearest example is taxation. During Reconstruction, southern states implemented extensive programs of progressive taxation that likely seemed unimaginable before the war (Foner 1988). Early “Dunning School” historiography, which was intensely critical of Reconstruction, is filled with complaints about this. The school’s namesake, William Archibald Dunning, was most explicit in connecting this to electoral politics “[T]he Democratic whites, constituting the main body of tax-payers, watched with deepest alarm the mounting debt and tax-rate in every state,” Dunning wrote. He claimed, “They were carrying most of the burden which radical extravagance and corruption were creating, and they had small chance of success in any election against the compact mass of negroes” (1905, 210).

Figure 3:

Log county tax per capita
and proportion of slaves in
1870 and 1880

Historians have since rejected this school of thought and now tend to emphasize the ne-

cessity of this revenue. Reconstruction-era taxation funded social expenditures like public schools and hospitals (Foner 1988, 364), as well as infrastructure spending to rebuild after the war (Beale 1940, 823). After Reconstruction’s demise, though, white elites largely rolled back Reconstruction-era taxation. Logan (2018) notes that this included removing black politicians from state and local offices and amending state constitutions to limit the amount of taxation that could be collected for funding public schools (2018, 11-12).

To what extent does this over-time variation in taxation levels correlate with status hierarchies? *Figure 3* shows that per capita county taxes were positively correlated with the percentage of a county that was enslaved in 1860 during Reconstruction. These same places then saw a decline in the period after (and that the decrease in taxes was correlated with the percentage of the county that was enslaved in 1860). The map in *Figure 4* highlights that this is concentrated in places like Louisiana, Mississippi, and Arkansas. In regression models controlling for a range of other variables, the initial bivariate finding persists. In these models, we find that a



Source: Suryanarayan and White (2019)

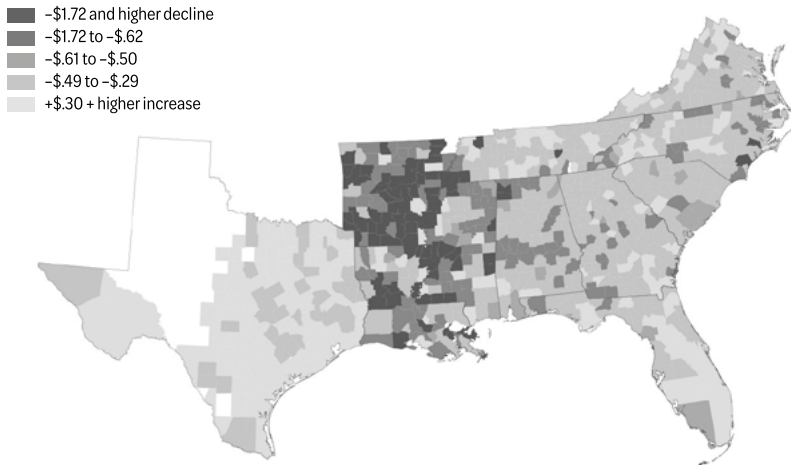


Figure 4:
County taxes decline

Note:
Map shows the change in
per capita taxes between 1870
and 1880 using county-level
Census data.

one standard deviation increase in the 1860 proportion of slaves in a county was associated with a 12 percent increase in per capita county taxation in 1870. In 1880, by contrast, there is no statistical relationship between slavery and per capita taxation. When measuring the difference between these two years, we find that a one standard deviation increase in 1860 proportion of slaves in a county is associated with a 10.1 percent decrease in taxation from 1870 to 1880.

Does this extend beyond just fiscal policy to the underlying bureaucratic capacity of the state to tax? We examine capacity in two ways. First, we use age heaping among white respondents in full population 1880 census as a measure of bureaucratic quality (Lee and Zhang 2016, Driscoll and Naidu 2012). An effective state bureaucracy should be able to extract accurate information about its citizenry. To the extent that information about white southerners was faulty, this suggests an underlying weakness of the bureaucracy. In the contemporary world, age heaping in censuses is correlated with a range of other indicators of state capacity (Lee and Zhang 2016, 125-26), which suggests its applicability to historical contexts where other metrics are unavailable. Second, to examine local bureaucratic presence we calculate per capita bureaucrats

in a county using the 1880 census occupational categories.

While taxation in this era was primarily state and local, the census enumeration process was a mix of federal policymaking and local discretion during the actual enumeration process. Primary sources from this era suggest that the federal government was interested in accurate information, but that this was often challenging on the ground. For example, some residents believed that census enumerators were gathering information in order to levy taxes, which naturally presented certain challenges for enumerators. Johnson J. Hooper, a nineteenth century humorist who worked as a census enumerator in Alabama, reported a story about his efforts at ascertaining the age, sex, and race of a woman's household. After initially refusing to answer, she eventually offered that the five members of her household were "all between five and a hundred years old; they are all a plaguy sight whiter than you, and whether they are he or she, is none of your consarns [sic]" (Merritt 2017, 342).

Census instructions provided to enumerators included explicit information for recording age, but the instructions notably allowed for some discretion when the exact age could not be determined, telling enumerators to provide a rough estimate when the exact age was unknown. We take advantage of the tendency for estimates to end in "5" or "0," whereas accurate age figures should be more evenly divided across a fuller range of numbers.

Figure 5 shows that in areas that had higher enslaved populations in 1860, age heaping (measured using the Whipple index) among whites was higher in the first post-Reconstruction census in 1880. In a regression model controlling for a range of other variables, we find that a one

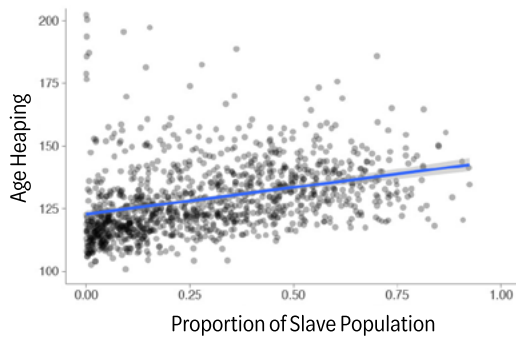


Figure 5:
Age heaping and proportion
of slaves (whites only)

Source:
Suryanarayan and White (2019)

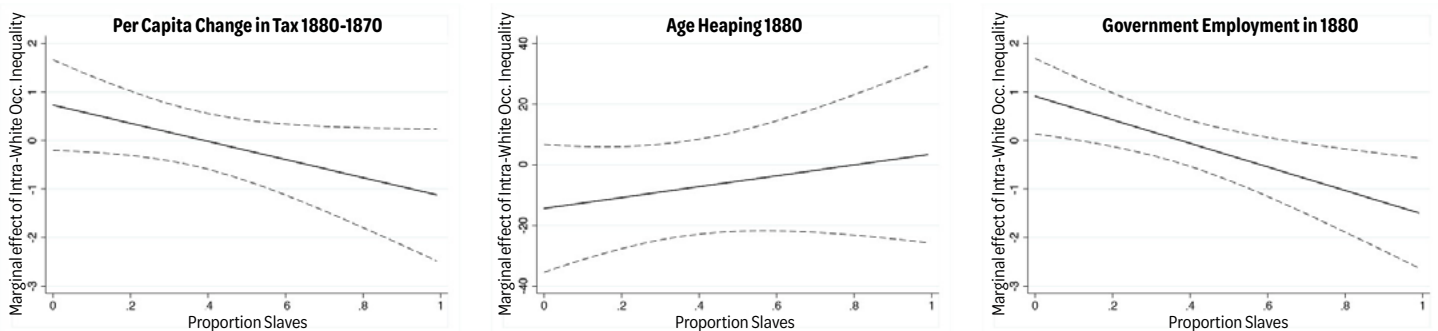
standard deviation increase in 1860 slavery levels corresponds with approximately a 1.8 percentage point increase in the Whipple index measuring age heaping. Absent federal oversight, in other words, the state's ability to accurately measure the high-status population was weaker in areas that had been more previously defined by slavery. We also find that higher enslaved population counties had fewer bureaucrats per capita in 1880.

Finally, we examine the interaction between racial status hierarchies and intra-white inequality. Slavery likely made many poor whites worse off economically due to suppressed wages and high levels of illiteracy in the region (Merritt 2017). In purely economic terms, expanding the franchise to black men could have benefit-

ed poor whites if it resulted in higher taxation on the wealthy and better public goods. We argue, though, that this was less likely to be the case in counties where slavery had been more extensive. In such places, poor whites might have valued their higher status relative to black southerners for both the psychic and material reasons described earlier. We therefore expect that places with higher racial-status threat and higher intra-white inequality were actually more likely to experience tax decreases and bureaucratic weakening in the Redemption era.

Figure 6 plots the interactive relationships that we find. On the left, we see that as the 1860 level of slavery in a county increases, the marginal effect of intra-white occupational inequality on the change in per capita taxes collected between 1870 to 1880 actually moves from positive to negative. We find similar patterns for age heaping (in this case, the relationship moves from negative to positive, where positive indicates increases in errors) and the number of government employees in a county. These findings are supportive of our claim that cross-class coalitions emerge within upper-status groups in places with greater status distinctions between groups.

Figure 6:
Marginal effect of intra-
white inequality on taxation
and bureaucratic quality



Source: Suryanarayan and White (2019)

One of the key implications of our paper is that while democratization can lead to redistribution, even in cases where this does occur, the case of Reconstruction in the United States shows that such a democratization-redistribution linkage can also be fleeting if elites successfully act to reverse it and work to prevent it from happening again. Although we think that these findings make an important contribution to the study of American political development, we also believe that they have lessons for contemporary American politics, particularly the politics of tax enforcement and the political nature of the U.S. census enumeration process.

The investigative journalist David Cay Johnston, for example, describes how combining “demonization of the tax collector with mind-numbing complexity” has provided wealthy Americans with the “perfect political prescription for massive tax evasion with little risk of detection while gathering votes from disaffected ordinary taxpayers.” In line with some of the state and local-level trends we observe in the nineteenth century American South, Johnston notes the decline in IRS investigators and other examples of bureaucratic weakening designed to make it difficult to enforce tax compliance among the wealthy (Johnston 2018). Since individual tax burdens are now primarily federal rather than state, contemporary American politics is not a perfect parallel to nineteenth century patterns. We suspect, however, that the relationship between status hierarchies and tax resistance among lower-income whites persists, particu-

larly given the racially polarized nature of party politics in the Trump era.

Beyond just the IRS, the present-day politicization of the census also has certain resemblances to the nineteenth century. Although the specifics are different – current debates center around the addition of a citizenship question and suggestive evidence that at least some in the Department of Justice are open to sharing normally anonymized census data with law enforcement officials – an editorial in the *Washington Post* declared that “[t]he Trump administration seems to be doing everything it can to bias the 2020 count” (Editorial Board 2018). The goal, in this case, would be to reduce population counts in cities and other Democratic-leaning communities with large numbers of immigrants. As the editorial suggests, “If undocumented or documented immigrants – or even naturalized U.S. citizens who understandably fear what this administration might do to them – refuse to cooperate with the census, then areas with many immigrants will seem less populated than they are. Those areas tend to be in places that vote for Democrats. Depressing the count in blue areas means they get less federal money and less congressional representation” (Editorial Board 2018). As in the nineteenth century, while the census is constitutionally required for redistricting, fights over its implementation have always been fraught with political conflict, something that is again true in contemporary American politics. ●

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BIG QUESTIONS, SHORT ANSWERS: Structure or Agency?

“No structure, no agency (only madness). No agency, no structure (only blankness).”

– Andreas Schedler, CIDE, Mexico City

“The driver is agency, of course, but structure specifies the scope conditions, making them both essential for prediction and explanation and together laying a foundation for multi-level analyses.”

– Mark Tessler, University of Michigan

“Both, duh.”

– Julia Lynch, University of Pennsylvania

“Even dyed-in-the-wool structuralists have to admit that there are circumstances when agency plays an outsized role. Transitions from authoritarian rule are a prime example of an environment where many of the most meaningful outcomes are often a function of strategic interactions.”

– Youssef Chouhoud, Christopher Newport University





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SCIENCE ASSOCIATION

American Political Science Association
1527 New Hampshire Ave, NW Washington, DC 20036-1206



(202) 483-2512



(202) 483-2657



apsa@apsanet.org