

THE POLITICAL ECONOMIST

NEWSLETTER OF THE SECTION ON POLITICAL ECONOMY, AMERICAN POLITICAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION

Co-Editors:

WILLIAM ROBERTS CLARK & MARK DINCECCO, UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

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FROM THE EDITORS

Welcome! First and foremost, please join us in thanking Scott Gehlbach and Lisa Martin on behalf of the Section for their excellent editorship of the *Political Economist* over the past three years. We will do our best to follow the sterling precedent that they have set.

For our first issue as editors, we asked three prominent scholars to provide their unique perspectives on the relationship between history and politics. What, if any, is the proper role of history in political science research? Should political history be a recognized subfield of political science? Are there distinct skills associated with political history research that should be a regular part of graduate training in political science?

What follows is a short introduction to our distinguished contributors, all of whom we thank wholeheartedly for their generous and thoughtful essays. Steven Pincus is the Bradford Durfee Professor of History and Co-Director of the Center for Historical Enquiry and the Social Sciences (CHESS) at Yale University. His most recent book is *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (2009, Yale University Press). We asked Professor Pincus to write the lead essay from his vantage point as a historian who actively engages with other social scientists. We then asked two scholars from diverse academic backgrounds to reflect on Professor Pincus' essay. Jean-Laurent Rosenthal is the Rea A. and Lela G. Axline Professor of Business Economics at the California Institute of Technology and Editor of the *Journal of Economic History*. He is an economic historian who works across the social sciences. His most recent book is *Before and Beyond Divergence: Institutions and Prosperity in China and Europe, 1000-1800* (2011, Harvard University Press), co-authored with R. Bin Wong of the Department of History at UCLA. David Stasavage is

Professor and Chair of the Department of Politics at New York University. As many of you know, a distinct feature of Professor Stasavage's work is the long-run historical perspective that he takes. His most recent book is *States of Credit: Size, Power, and the Development of European Politics* (2011, Princeton University Press).

We hope that you will not only enjoy the content of this issue, but gain new insights from it.

With best wishes for 2014,

William Roberts Clark
wrclark@umich.edu

Mark Dincecco
dincecco@umich.edu



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FEATURE ESSAY History and Political Science: A Productive Interchange

Steven Pincus, Yale University

In recent years there has been a converging of the disciplines of history and political science. A converging, not a convergence. The so-called new social history and then the cultural turn – developments within history departments of the 1980s and 1990s – led historians to move away from questions involving politics and institutions. Economic history retreated to economics departments. Indeed, in some cases, historians turned away from asking causal questions. At the same time political scientists turned to ever more sophisticated measuring techniques borrowed in large part from economics. The two disciplines shared very few questions and fewer methodological techniques. In the last twenty years or so, there has been a gradual shift. Institutionalism brought a renewed interest in history among political scientists. Historians, even those with a profoundly cultural bent, expressed a renewed interest in political institutions. Nevertheless the disciplinary mistrust built up in the previous decades remained. Only in the field of American Political Development, and at institutions like the California Institute of Technology, the London School of Economics, and Stanford was there a robust dialogue.

The debt crisis of 2008, it seems to me, might accelerate the convergence. While the crisis certainly had local and immediate causes, it is clear that it was another instance of the kind of crisis that has beset states since the creation of massive government borrowing in the early modern period. This raises a whole series of questions that have interested political scientists and historians separately. When and why did modern states emerge? Why did debt crises happen and happen periodically? Why did some states emerge from fiscal crises stronger while others suffered long-term economic downturns? Why were some states able to borrow large sums of money while others were not? What

is the relationship between early modern state formation and the development of modern economic growth?

Until recently these have been questions that historians have been reticent to address. Historians whatever their methodological predispositions have tended to focus on relatively delimited spaces and chronological periods over which they have developed expertise over a lifetime of study. Social scientists by and large have wanted to focus on very recent history which can be analyzed using robust datasets that are susceptible to analysis and comparison. Only a very few scholars – David Stasavage, Jim Robinson and Daron Acemoglu, Charles Boix, Ian Morris, Jean-Laurent Rosenthal and Philip Hoffman, along with a handful of others – have been willing to look farther into the past.

Historians, too, have begun to be interested in larger questions again. In the last two decades of the twentieth century and the first decade of this century historians overwhelmingly turned to cultural anthropology as their cognate social science. When historians did engage more broadly it tended to be at the level of microhistory, allowing historians to deploy their archival prowess to raise questions about social scientific macro-narratives. This kind of skepticism seemed somehow all too appropriate in the closing decades of the Cold War and its immediate aftermath. Recently a new generation of historians has wanted to move beyond skepticism. Instead they have begun to ask, if the old grand narratives were insufficient, what can we put in their place and how can we devise these narratives? Big history has returned with a vengeance.

But after two decades of neglect historians by and large do not have the quantitative training to construct and analyze large datasets. Historians have a good deal to learn from economists, political

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FEATURE ESSAY

A Few Good Dates

Jean-Laurent Rosenthal, California Institute of Technology

To answer the queries of the editors, it seems worthwhile to distinguish between the contributions of history (the record of the past) and those of history as a discipline. One may think that the historical record provides a useful source of evidence for political science inquiry without necessarily delegating such inquiry to another discipline. Moreover, beyond the tautology that all empirical evidence is historical (of recent or the distant past) and thus that history is the laboratory of the social sciences, the question of the relevance of the "distant" past to current social debates remains. For many social scientists, recent data are more accurate and generated in a context more similar to the one for which they wish to draw lessons. Yet for an economic historian like myself interested in long-term economic change and the evolution of institutions, recent data is simply insufficient and the contributions of a single discipline inadequate. Research must be historical and interdisciplinary because long-term institutional change is fundamentally a problem of political economy.

The view has some long-standing proponents in economic history, but it also has deep roots in political economy. Suffice it to mention nineteenth-century political economists for whom institutions and history were of central importance as well as the early developers of national income accounts in many countries for whom large quantitative efforts went hand in hand with trying to understand economic policy. It was only in the early phases of the Cliometric (or, "Econometric") revolution that economic historians set politics aside in favor of relative price and efficiency (i.e., transaction costs) approaches to institutions. Lance Davis and Douglass North's *Institutional Change and American Economic Growth* (1971) and North's more famous but far less disciplined *Structure and Change in Economic History* (1981) put politics back in the forefront. These

two scholars, more than any other, articulated a vision of research in economic history that was interdisciplinary in that good work *required* a dialogue among economists, political scientists, and historians. Lance Davis and Robert Huttenback's monumental *Mammon and the Pursuit of Empire* (1988) stands as remarkable effort by an economist (Davis) and a historian (Huttenback) to digest the political and economic facets of the nineteenth-century British Empire. The questions and approaches remain current, as the recent spate of articles in *African Economic History* attest.

All is not well in economic history, however. While there is excellent work done in each discipline that is bringing new and fundamental knowledge of the process of institutional change, the disciplines rarely talk to each other and the methodological chasm between history on one side and economics and political science on the other grows ever wider. The epidemic of single-discipline conferences has made it less important or valuable for anyone to make the effort to engage other scholars who speak in different tongues. Moreover, the natural experiment turn in economic history, while a valuable addition to the research tool kit, has allowed many young scholars to avoid the critical (but more qualitative) issue of institutional change. On the one hand, it is certainly safer career-wise to focus on the current concerns of one's discipline (in this case using some sort of random variation to show that the institution under study has a causal impact) than to take the risk to chart the rise and fall of a set of institutions and try to understand the contribution of social context, political structure, and economic forces to the evolution of these institutions or to their economic impact. On the other hand, economic historians will only be relevant to economics departments if they have strengths and can make contributions that their other

colleagues cannot. Using the tool kit of the empirical economist to answer short-term questions reneges on our roots and it is a sure-fire way to make economics departments think that economic historians are dispensable. Only if we maintain our focus on long-run change and political economy will our sub-discipline thrive.

Returning to political science, it seems much the same issues are in place, but the historical dimension is perhaps less controversial: successful political systems evolve slowly, unlike economic entities. Moreover, political science has seen the rise of some long-run data sets that speak both to the evolution of the political process and the evolution of the economic rules of the game in the relevant countries. These include the Correlates of War data set that David Stasavage refers to, but also the data sets coming out of the British History of Parliament Trust, as well as the US roll-call voting history that underpins the Poole-Rosenthal spatial voting data, to mention just a few examples. If we consider these data sets it is not clear that one needs to possess particular historical skills to assemble them. In fact, assembling long-term data series – initially, at least – forces the research to be ahistorical and assume that an action in 1770 or 1870 can be assembled (and grouped) in a data set with an action from 1970 or 2012. Too much sensitivity to context and circumstances make the enterprise worthless. One might say much the same thing about the analysis of such data. Indeed when faced with a digitized version of the complete set of debates in the British Parliament over the second half of the nineteenth century, a scholar will probably want to lean heavily on statistical techniques. Hence it is only in the framing of the questions and in the interpretation that historical skills matter; these are, of course, the two most important stages of

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FEATURE ESSAY

The Return of History in Political Science?

David Stasavage, New York University

By and large I agree with the insightful review by Steven Pincus. After a period of divergence, increasingly useful interchanges have taken place between historians and political scientists. Yet if there has been a convergence of sorts, the skills and methods required for each field are sufficiently distinct that an exchange between disciplines, rather than truly interdisciplinary work, may be the best way forward. In what follows I will present my view of how and why the use of history by political scientists has changed over recent decades. I will suggest that political scientists may well make increased use of history in the future, but the bulk of them will do so using techniques that differ very significantly from those used by historians.

Thirty years ago it was common for political scientists to venture well back into the past when developing and testing their theories. In the field of comparative politics even as late as 1997 a historical work such as Tom Ertman's *Birth of the Leviathan* could appear and not seem like an outlier. Why did political scientists subsequently turn away from historical cases in the manner that Steve Pincus describes? I believe the foremost reason was technological rather than intellectual, or rather one might say that it was technological change driving intellectual trends. Developments in computing made it dramatically easier for scholars in comparative politics and political economy to test their theories using statistical methods. But as they did so these same scholars found the time frame for analysis to be limited by the availability of existing datasets, such as 1960 in the case of the World Development Indicators. The result, I believe, was that for a time history was given less attention simply because scholars lacked the necessary data. There were of course exceptions. As Pincus notes, specialists in the field of American Political Development have maintained a continuous interest in

history, and APSA has long had a Politics and History section. The Correlates of War dataset has existed for some time. Finally, in the 1990s other scholars combined game theoretic insights with historical analysis. By and large though, I think it is fair to say that as technical change in the form of personal computing led to a quantitative revolution in political science, this for a time implied less reference to history by political scientists outside of these specific pockets.

The trend today is for a renewed interest in using history to think about problems in comparative politics and political economy. What has driven this development, and where will it go from here? My sense is that after the advent of the quantitative revolution, it was only a matter of time before some scholars attempted to venture further back in time by constructing new data sets as well as by drawing increasingly on the work of economic historians. Though it is often difficult, it is possible to go back in time, and doing so can often give important leverage on the main questions we ask in political science. As the number of scholars who have done this has increased, there has of course been a network effect operating that has made it easier for knowledge to advance.

Should these new developments be sanctioned by creating a separate subfield of political history? I tend to think not. Historical work by political scientists will be best recognized, and have its biggest impact, if political scientists pursuing this approach continue to address broad audiences in comparative politics and political economy. Will the current trend lead to a more complete convergence between political scientists and historians? Like Steve Pincus, I think this is unlikely, but I find the idea of increased interchange between scholars in the two disciplines to be very exciting. For political scientists it is now possible to go back in time, but

only in rare cases will this be done by scholars who simultaneously possess the archival and interpretive skills, as well as the knowledge, of a historian. To see the reason for this, think only of the time constraints for younger scholars. A standard political science PhD program today requires that substantially more time be spent on methods training than was the case twenty-five years ago.

So what should be the role of history in political science research? Though I do not think that political history should be a separate subfield, I do think that political scientists should continue to venture into the past. Given the advantages of specialization, I also think it should be the case that some should do this as the principal, or a principal, component of their work. With time it is even possible that historical work will regain the position it once held in the discipline.



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GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS SECTION AWARDS: CITATIONS

FIONA MCGILLIVRAY AWARD

(GIVEN FOR THE BEST PAPER ON POLITICAL ECONOMY PRESENTED AT THE APSA MEETING)

“Causes of Non-Compliance with International Law: Evidence from a Field Experiment on Financial Transparency,” Michael Findley (University of Texas, Austin), Daniel Nielson (Brigham Young University), and Jason Sharman (Griffith University)

Committee: Elizabeth Maggie Penn (Washington University in St. Louis), Edmund Malesky (Duke University), and Stephanie Rickard (London School of Economics)

MANCUR OLSON AWARD

(GIVEN FOR THE BEST DISSERTATION ON POLITICAL ECONOMY COMPLETED AND ACCEPTED IN THE PREVIOUS TWO YEARS)

“When Governments Break Contracts: Foreign Firms in Emerging Economies,” Rachel Wellhausen (University of Texas)

Committee: Christina Davis (Princeton University), Jowei Chen (University of Michigan), and Monika Nalepa (Notre Dame University)

WILLIAM H. RIKER AWARD

(GIVEN FOR THE BEST BOOK ON POLITICAL ECONOMY)

Learning While Governing: Expertise and Accountability in the Executive Branch, University of Chicago Press, Sean Gailmard (University of California, Berkeley) and John Patty (Washington University)

Committee: Jeffrey Lax (Columbia University), Karen Jusko (Stanford University), and Jens Hainmueller (MIT)

MICHAEL WALLERSTEIN AWARD

(GIVEN FOR THE BEST PUBLISHED ARTICLE ON POLITICAL ECONOMY IN THE PREVIOUS CALENDAR YEAR)

"The Economic Origins of Democracy Reconsidered," (American Political Science Review 106 (1), February 2012, pp. 58-80), John Freeman (University of Minnesota, Twin Cities) and Dennis Quinn (Georgetown University)

Honorable Mention: "The Missionary Roots of Liberal Democracy," (American Political Science Review 106 (2): 244-74), Robert Woodberry (National University of Singapore)

Committee: Shanker Satyanath (New York University), Leslie Johns (University of California-Los Angeles), and Cliff Carrubba (Emory University)

THE POLITICAL ECONOMIST

GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

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The **Fiona McGillivray Award** is given for the best paper in political economy presented at the previous year's APSA annual meeting.

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London School of Economics
t.dewan@lse.ac.uk

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Oeindrila Dube
New York University
odube@nyu.edu

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Pincus Feature Essay...continued from page 2

scientists, sociologists, and statisticians. It is also the case that the divergence of the disciplines has hindered social scientists. Very few social scientists have had the rigorous historiographical or archival training that have allowed historians to ask very precise questions about change over time. So for example some social scientists have analyzed democratization in terms of parliamentary activity in a number of European settings over very long periods. Yet, in fact, parliaments until quite recently were judicial rather than legislative institutions. Others have famously explained the emergence of efficient sovereign borrowing by point-

ing to ostensibly seismic constitutional changes, without carefully analyzing what those constitutional changes actually entailed (in this case merely a reaffirmation of established law).

I was asked by the editors whether political history should be required in political science departments. My basic answer is no. Why not? I think there is a role for disciplinary specialization. Scholars can only learn so much in graduate school. It is far better for them to master techniques necessary for their respective disciplines. Instead I would recommend creating cross-disciplinary spaces where scholars can identify ques-

tions of common concern. These scholars can then work together to construct answers to questions drawing on their collective disciplinary trainings. In other words I think there is a lot of room for social scientists and historians to work together on collective concerns. I also think there is a good deal of interest in doing so. But rather than seek to create some sort of interdisciplinary space which inevitably privileges one discipline or one set of methods, I think the best possibility for exciting new work lies in cross-disciplinary collaboration.

Rosenthal Feature Essay...continued from page 3

research, but they are not the only ones.

We must now confront the interaction between the social sciences and history as a discipline. As Steven Pincus noted, the financial crisis of 2008 has rekindled an interest in things financial in history departments. Much of the new work falls under the banner of the history of capitalism. This is clearly a problem of political economy. Beyond the problem of definition (which in more than one occurrence I have found histo-

rians reluctant to tackle), the scholars who work in this area have three choices (each of which has some pragmatic merit at least). The first, of course, is to ignore the contributions of the last thirty years of social science work—this handily avoids confronting the tragedy that historical training allows nearly all PhDs to be quantitatively and statistically illiterate. The second is to become informed but not to engage the disciplines—this would require many lonely hours learn-

ing the other disciplines' languages and methods. The third, which I favor, of course, is for historians to embrace the dialogue, but that implies creating the conditions for it. The payoffs would be immense and it is necessary if history is going to regain its lost relevance to social science. The alternative (and one favored by my mentor Lance Davis) is for each social science to acquire its own long-term change sub-discipline: economic history or political history.

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