

## Introduction

### *New Directions in Political Sociology*

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In 2029, the US is engaged in a bloodless world war that will wipe out the savings of millions of American families. Overnight, on the international currency exchange, the “almighty dollar” plummets in value, to be replaced by the new global currency, the bancor. In retaliation, the President declares that America will default on its loans. The government prints money to cover its bills. What little real currency remains for savers is rapidly eaten away by runaway inflation.

*The Mandibles, A Family, 2026–2047*, Lionel Shriver, 2016

Writing in 2016, Lionel Shriver described a future in which the decline of the American Empire would come at the hands of a global economic catastrophe. Her fictional account is not far from some social scientific predictions. More than a few scholars have projected that the United States will lose its hegemonic position by 2025 (IMF 2016) or 2034 (Mann 2012b) leaving a tri-polar world of the United States, the European Union, and China sharing 50 to 60 percent of world GDP (IMF 2018: 14; Erin and Chase-Dunn, this volume).<sup>1</sup> On the military front, US defense expenditures adjusted for inflation may decrease over the next three decades, while China’s will surely continue to grow (Mann 2012b). The world faces multiple related crises. Economic inequality is increasing rapidly within many societies. The global climate is warming and bringing more extreme weather events. Floods of refugees are fleeing failed states and civil wars. Since the last edition of this handbook, the wave of revolutions known as the Arab Spring has come and gone, formerly democratic European governments have

<sup>1</sup> These percentages are based on GDP in 2017 with the United States having 24.25 percent of world GDP, China having 15 percent, and Western Europe 20.4 percent. These percentages will change for the countries over time as China’s rate of growth is 6.3–6.9 percent a year, the United States’ is 2.6–2.7 percent, and Europe’s 2.0–2.8 percent (IMF 2018; OECD 2018). However, the total of the three countries will stay in this range for the next decade or so. However, Hung (2017) sees reason to expect lower growth rates for China in the future.

fallen prey to antidemocratic regimes (e.g., Hungary and Poland), and powerful state and nonstate actors have actively sought to sabotage democratic elections around the world.

How will political sociology help us discern and analyze such changes now and in the next few decades? The future of politics is as uncertain as ever, but a brief overview of the history of political sociology may offer some clues to the theoretical challenges and opportunities ahead. For convenience, we divide the recent history of political sociology into three periods, suggesting that the field is now entering a fourth period with an expanding focus.

In the first period, from the 1950s to mid-1970s, mainstream political sociology was preoccupied with social class in the context of the Cold War. Political sociologists focused on the struggles of social groups – mostly classes, followed to a lesser extent by gender, racial, and ethnic groups – to influence the institutions of government through political parties, lobbies, voluntary associations, and social movements. In *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics* (1963, 1981), arguably the canonical work of this era, Seymour Martin Lipset viewed political sociology as addressing the social struggle to win elections – what he called “the democratic class struggle.”<sup>2</sup> What made sociology distinctive from political science, he held, was its attention to the “social bases” of politics, especially social classes (e.g., de Leon 2014).

Some scholars in this period, such as Floyd Hunter (1953) and C. Wright Mills (1959), sought to document the common class positions and overlapping social group memberships of elite decision-makers in the public and private sectors. Other scholars used survey methods to describe the complex processes by which status and class affected mass opinion. For example, Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld, in *Personal Influence* (1955) showed how opinion leaders propagated opinion in small groups, such as families and unions, that were largely segregated by class (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1986 [1954]). By the 1960s, the sociological approach to voting and public opinion was supplanted by the more individualistic Michigan School, which emphasized party identification as the prime mover of political behavior (Campbell et al. 1960).

In the second period, many political sociologists shifted their attention from studies of the sources of political behavior to studies of the transformations of states and other political structures. A particularly influential early work in this vein was Barrington Moore’s magisterial *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (1966), which transformed Lipset’s question about the social class bases of democratic behavior into a historical question about the social class struggles that first led to the creation of democratic regimes. From the 1970s to

<sup>2</sup> Despite Lipset’s sexist title, women played a critical role in this era. For instance, in survey research studies the interviewers and interviewees were most often women, which was acknowledged not so much by Lipset but by Katz and Lazarsfeld in *Personal Influence* (1955; Douglas 2006).

the mid-1990s, political sociologists influenced by Moore's approach turned their attention to explaining other kinds of revolutions and transformations of the state.<sup>3</sup> Some sought to explain the socialist and anticolonial revolutions of the mid-twentieth century with reference to relations of production and class power (e.g., Paige 1978). Others aimed to explain the emergence of welfare states in advanced industrial economies.

Gøsta Esping-Andersen's *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (1990) set an influential agenda for work in this vein by identifying three welfare regime types – liberal, conservative, and social democratic – associated with different patterns of allocating social rights. Whereas some scholars influenced by Moore retained his emphasis on class struggle, other political sociologists, influenced by the Weberian tradition, began to emphasize the independent contribution of state organizations themselves to the outcome of political processes. Theda Skocpol (1979) famously explained differences among revolutions as the result of variation in the state's interactions with local and international actors. This was followed by Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol's comprehensive approach to the state in *Bringing the State Back In* (1985). Postcolonial, gendered and racial perspectives, influenced by earlier works of postcolonial theory (e.g., Fanon 1961), also became more influential in political sociology during this period (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991; Blauner 1972; Boserup 1970; Frank 1967; Wilson 1977; Zweigenhaft and Domhoff 1998). Methodological innovation in political sociology in this period emphasized methods for comparison over large sweeps of time and space, including large-scale historical analyses, qualitative comparative analysis (Ragin 1987), and cross-sectional and time series regression modeling.

The third period, which we may date roughly from the 1990s to about 2010, coincided with a tumultuous period in world history, including the fall of communism, the neoliberalization of China, and the spread of formally democratic institutions around the world. Some political sociologists reconfigured class models to address these new realities. Others turned to cultural models of politics to explain enduring continuities in the face of these sweeping changes. Rogers Brubaker's *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (1992), to take one influential example, traced differences in French and German citizenship policy to long-standing differences in understandings of national belonging. This was also the period in which feminist political sociology came into its own, building on earlier work by Ester Boserup (1970) and Elizabeth Wilson (1977). Ann Orloff (1993) and Ruth Lister (2003 [1998]), for example, criticized Esping-Andersen for ignoring the ways in which different welfare regimes commodify and decommodify men and women differently (Orloff 1993: 303).

<sup>3</sup> One major exception is Craig Reinerman's *American States of Mind* (1987), an excellent qualitative study of why some private delivery workers and public welfare employees voted for Ronald Reagan.

A particularly important synthesis was arguably Julia Adams, Elisabeth Clemens, and Ann Orloff's edited volume, *Remaking Modernity* (2005), which held that comparative historical sociology had shifted from social structural to cultural explanations. There were many influences in this cultural turn. The French influence was particularly palpable, with scholars drawing increasingly on such theorists as Foucault and Bourdieu. In addition, some scholars embraced a neo-Gramscian cultural approach. Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau's collaboration drew on Gramsci's theoretical works to move beyond the Marxist preoccupation with class and to center the discursive dynamics of politics in an agonistic democracy (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Mouffe 2013). Discourse analysis challenged the dominance of comparative and quantitative methods. Research on the public sphere shifted to identity processes, social movements, and global power structures (see Kate Nash 2010 for a good overview). Scholars influenced by Foucault began to place increasing emphasis on surveillance and governmentality.

In each period, the domain of political sociology expanded to encompass a broader range of political phenomena. The first *Handbook of Political Sociology* was written in the early 2000s, toward the end of this third period. Twenty years later, political sociology is on the cusp of a fourth period, in which political sociology is expanding yet again. Before addressing this new period in the conclusion, we pause to examine the definition of political sociology that will both encompass our precursors and speak to the cutting edge.

#### WHAT IS POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY?

In *What Is Political Sociology?* Elisabeth Clemens defines the purpose of the subfield as the explanation of “the emergence, reproduction, and transformation of different forms of political ordering” (2016: 7–15). Implicit within Clemens' synthetic view are two competing approaches to political sociology. Lewis Coser in *Political Sociology* expressed the first, institutional definition of political sociology as

[the] branch of sociology which is concerned with the social causes and consequences of given power distributions within or between societies, and with the social and political conflicts that lead to changes in the allocation of power. *All study of political processes focuses attention on the state.* (1966: 1, emphasis added)

This focus on the state, understood as an institutional form, finds its way into much of political sociology (e.g., for a recent statement see Dobratz, Waldner, and Buzzell 2016 [2012]: 5). In Coser's account, the connection to the state, defined in institutional terms, is the core of what is considered “political.”

The second view follows Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault, and other analysts who saw all of society as suffused with power relations. In contrast to Weber, who defined the state as a particular organization that monopolized the legitimate means of coercion, Gramsci (2011) expanded the definition of the

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state, and with it the social scientific study of politics, to encompass *all* relations of class domination within society, even those that take place outside of governmental institutions, and even if they do not appear coercive on their face. As he wrote in his *Prison Notebooks*:

If political science means the science of the State, and the State is the entire complex of practical and theoretical activities with which the ruling class not only justifies and maintains its dominance, but manages to win the active consent of those over whom it rules, then it is obvious that all the essential questions of sociology are nothing other than the questions of political science. (2011: 504)

Later theorists relaxed Gramsci's focus on class, and began to see all social relations as potentially implicated in relations of domination – and, therefore, as belonging to the proper domain of political sociology. As Claire Blencowe suggests, in a recent chapter on Foucault and political sociology, that “madness, psychiatric care and the ‘psy-disciplines,’ the human and the human sciences, criminality and its treatment, sexuality, public health, race and eugenics, liberal governance, ethics and political philosophy” are all proper objects of political sociology, because all of these domains involve relations of power (2017; Foucault 1980; Hindess 1996: 98–113). This broad definition of the domain of political sociology implicitly argues against fetishizing “the state” (Mitchell 1991) as a particular institution or set of institutions, and instead identifies relations of power anywhere that knowledge (and presumably suppressed knowledge) exists.

The strength of the first definition is that it focuses on what people generally consider to be politics: namely, those institutions of government that we commonly call “political.” This definition may be critiqued for its neglect of what Gramsci might call hegemonic power. The strength of the second definition is that it can focus on hegemonic relations wherever they occur. It may be critiqued in its turn for losing sight of what is most particular to state institutions, namely, their relationship to institutionalized coercion and violence.

In most contemporary research called “political sociology,” and in this *New Handbook*, there is some direct or indirect focus on the state and the concomitant attempts to maintain, change, or resist it. Jeff Manza (2011), for example, defines political sociology as “the study of power and the relationship between societies, states, and political conflict. It is a broad subfield that straddles political science and sociology, with ‘macro’ and ‘micro’ components.” The macro-focus here refers to “nation-states, political institutions and their development, and the sources of social and political change (especially those involving large-scale social movements and other forms of collective action).” The micro-focus “examines how social identities and groups influence individual political behavior, such as voting, attitudes, and political participation.” Though they differ in emphasis, many influential

attempts to define political sociology today would focus on the connection between the state and civil society.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, most contemporary political sociology – and many of the authors of this volume – bridge these traditions by emphasizing that the “state” comprises heterogenous, permeable, and sometimes partly incoherent congeries of organizations and arrangements rather than a single organization. The state has many faces or “many hands” (Morgan and Orloff 2017). It may take contradictory stances, as when state development agencies fund micro-enterprise at the same time that state security services sweep vendors off the streets (Karides 2005). Its precise contours are often unclear and constructed interactively. The boundaries between state and civil society are increasingly blurred.

The same may be said of the boundary between political sociology and political science. There is no hard and fast dividing line, and many scholars belong to both disciplines. To be sure, political sociologists and political scientists may exhibit some differences in their typical practice.<sup>5</sup> A significant portion of research in political science, for example, tends to be anchored in individualistic traditions, whether psychological or rational choice perspectives, while political sociology more commonly focuses on the social bases of politics in groups, organizations with formal boundaries, and informal institutions.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, a large subset of political science overlaps with political sociology and vice versa. For our purposes, trying to erect a clear boundary between sociology and political science is less useful than delineating the contours of the current movement in political sociology. Though this is easier to do in hindsight than in real time, it is evident, as we look forward from this moment, that there are major theoretical and substantive changes afoot.

We group contemporary political sociology into six topic areas that correspond to the sections of this handbook. Within each, we identify new directions. First, in the domain of theory, political sociologists have made increasing use of Bourdieu’s field theory, and along with it a definite reemphasis on the power of class. We also find increasing theoretical

<sup>4</sup> Cultural politics as formulated by Kate Nash (2010, 2017) takes this a step further and finds that cultural hegemonies determine power and that behavioral politics is superfluous; hence, there is almost no need for the subfield of political sociology. Often this approach is highly theoretical or polemic, and avoids empirical studies.

<sup>5</sup> The 1960s differentiation of the two disciplines focused on how sociology looked at the influence of society on politics, while political science examined the impact of politics on society. The state-centric approach in sociology negates this distinction. Another view saw political science looking more directly at the state than political sociology. However, in practice political sociology and political science do both.

<sup>6</sup> Textbooks and introductions to political sociology include: Clemens 2016; Dobratz et al. 2012; Domhoff 2013; Glasberg and Shannon 2011; Nash 2010; Neuman 2004; Orum and Dale 2008; and Faulks 2000.

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emphasis on culture, empire, gender, and race and ethnicity. Second, theories of political sociology have become more alert to the politics of knowledge production, and the study of the politics of knowledge has exploded. We devote a whole section to the political sociology of knowledge, information, and expertise. Third, political sociology retains its focus on the state, but approaches to the state increasingly focus on disaggregating states. We review several recent bodies of literature on types of states and their transformations in Part III. Fourth, scholarship on civil society has taken a turn toward the study of global and transnational processes. Recent scholarship has renewed an older literature on political parties and populism, but has also drawn attention to fluid forms of civic and political engagement that are not always well bounded within national states. Fifth, political sociologists have continued to investigate the politics of particular policy domains, with especially active literatures on the political sociology of economic policy, migration, sexuality and gender, environment, and terrorism and securitization. Sixth, studies of globalization have continued, but have become more focused on race, populism, financialization, trade, and transnational movements. We review these sections in turn.

PART I: THEORIES OF POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY

Theories of political sociology have undergone considerable change. In the first section of this handbook, a comprehensive set of theoretical chapters show the complexity and new directions that theory in political sociology has taken. Prominent among these statements are Pierre Bourdieu's theory of fields that is taken up by a number of chapters but especially so in three of them. Some chapters see a convergence of cultural and political economy approaches, while the chapters on race and gender have theoretical bases quite distinct from the other chapters but commonality with postcoloniality. The last chapter in this section provides us with a vision of where political sociology may be going in the next decade. These sometimes controversial statements about theory reflect the changes in it since the turn of the century, and also challenge us with the new directions that political sociology may take in the future.

In Chapter 1, Cedric de Leon and Andy Clarno address changes in conceptions of power, with particular attention to the influence of Foucault and Bourdieu. These thinkers drew attention to the pervasiveness of hegemonic or "soft" forms of power based on consent. However, de Leon and Clarno argue that theories of race recently have begun to renew our attention on the interdependence of hegemonic power with violence and domination in political life. Many of these new developments are influenced by postcolonial theory, which evolved in the context of countries subjected to empire in the past and present. De Leon and Clarno emphasize the contribution that studies of settler colonialism and racial domination can make to the sociology of power more



generally. In this way, postcolonial theories involving gender and race present major challenges for the next generation of political sociologists.

In Chapter 2 on class, elite, and conflict theories, Harland Prechel and Linzi Berkowitz defend the theoretical importance of class in the field of politics. Their focus is on the upper-class elites who, they argue, control the lower and middle classes quite effectively through financialization and neoliberalism. Capitalist class fractions mobilized through social networks in both the political and global economic arenas in the late twentieth century to overcome constraints on their power. Prechel and Berkowitz's review focuses on the social networks of corporate and political leaders who sought to deregulate markets, and, they argue, created a hegemonic culture that is in firm control of working- and lower-class citizens. The result is increasing inequality within nation-states in the Western world, and a set of policies that keep developing countries subordinated. In effect, they argue, upper-class domination through processes of political economy persists in most nation-states.

In Chapter 3, Caleb Scoville and Neil Fligstein review field theory in political sociology. They use a spatial and relational approach to understanding how political actors negotiate, coalesce, or conflict with each other in a field of power. Actors "jockey" for position with shared and disputed meanings, rules, norms, and interpretive frames that guide their relationships. Scoville and Fligstein review several field theoretic approaches, including Bourdieu's theory, institutional theory, and Fligstein and McAdam's theory of strategic action fields. The latter, they argue, has the most to teach us about the emergence and transformation of field dynamics. While some change may come from internal field dynamics, the more common forces for change come from invading groups, large-scale macro-events, and interfield linkages; and these changes are often nested. Stable or settled fields are easier to examine but still challenging. They then apply field theory to environmental change and governance in Germany, China, and globally through international institutions.

In Chapter 4, Mabel Berezin, Emily Sandusky, and Thomas Davidson examine recent developments in the cultural sociology of politics. The cultural turn in political sociology is now several decades old, and Berezin, Sandusky, and Davidson argue that culture now merits a central place in any treatment of core questions in political sociology. The nation-state, they argue, is defined in terms of a putative national culture, and the attribution of meaning to the nation is central to ordinary political life. They also identify cultural processes implicit in sociological accounts of political participation – including studies of voting, civic associationalism, political discourse, and social movements. Finally, they argue for a turn toward cultural processes that transcend the boundaries of nation-states. Religion, understood as a set of discourses and practices, has tremendous political salience – and yet the most contentious political questions about religion in our time clearly concern transnational religious affiliations and cultural movements.



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In Chapter 5, Julian Go discusses postcolonial theorizing as a multiplicity of perspectives rather than as a causal explanation. He emphasizes the importance of recognizing that knowledge, culture, and politics are all shaped by a history of global hierarchy and power. Moreover, throughout most of modern history, empire and colonialism matter for almost all phenomena of interest to present-day political sociology (i.e., immigration, terrorism, populism, etc.). Examining political sociology through a postcolonial lens allows scholars to identify biased assumptions and metrocentric theories that lead to misrecognition of the nature of politics both in the non-West or Global South, and in the Global North. Go presents postcolonial theory as an important lens for any working sociologist who wishes to study political processes on a transnational or global scale. Postcolonial relationalism would transform how we look at a wide variety of political issues.

In Chapter 6, Jeff Hearn and Barbara Hobson discuss the challenges of feminist theorizing in political sociology, with a particular focus on citizenship and intersectionality. Feminist theorizing attends to how gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, nationality, citizenship, and other statuses intersect to shape politics. Starting with T. H. Marshall, Hearn and Hobson consider how varied approaches to analyzing “citizenships” give political sociologists a deeper understanding of the differing relationships between society and the state. Hearn and Hobson widen understanding of participatory citizenship, to include a broader range of practices than are usually considered political. They also explore how discourses of difference, equality, and pluralism have framed debates about women’s citizenship claims. The chapter explores the varied terrain of feminist political theorizing around men and masculinities; postcolonial, decolonial, and critical race theories; migration; and transnational processes and actors. They close the chapter with a discussion of current challenges regarding nationalism, the undermining of gender/sexual citizenship, global and marketized citizenship, and growing inequalities.

In Chapter 7, Joe Feagin and Sean Elias consider the persistence of racial and ethnic discrimination and violence in the United States. The authors argue that the USA is a systematically racist state, by which they mean that the state plays a substantial role in reinforcing and even creating racism. While the hyperracist Jim Crow state ended in the mid-1970s, they argue, the modern racist state has maintained elements of institutionalized racism. Feagin and Elias argue that apparent advances in racial equality are subject to a “time-limitation principle”: such advances predictably produce a white backlash that restores American society to its default or equilibrium condition of racist oppression. Feagin and Elias argue that postracial optimism and the small effects of ameliorative policies pale in comparison to the continuous backlash tendencies of the dominant white order. It is most illuminating to conceptualize the United States as a constitutively racist state.

In Chapter 8, Thomas Janoski argues that the era of division between cultural and structural approaches to political sociology is over. Although this

division long marked the field – with “cultural” theories emphasizing the power of meanings, ideas, and symbols, while “structural” theories emphasized the power of coercion and economic incentives – political sociologists today are more likely to find culture *in* structure and vice versa. As evidence for this convergence, Janoski presents a side-by-side reading of Michael Mann’s four-volume *The Sources of Social Power* and a selection of late-career works by Pierre Bourdieu, including his lectures collected in the volume *On the State*. Despite their different starting points, these theorists converge on multicausal theories that recognize the independent influence of economic, military, cultural, and political power – and that treat the interplay of these types of power as a central problem for political sociology. Janoski concludes that even where Bourdieu and Mann differ, their macro-political theories point the way toward a promising synthetic approach to the field.

Finally, John Levi Martin and Nick Judd in Chapter 9 argue that the future of theory in political sociology is likely to require us to abandon an old-fashioned theory of action inherited from Talcott Parsons. They argue that it is no longer plausible to regard human action as the result of people deliberately applying means–ends reasoning to work out the course of action that will best reach their goals (or that will best comply with their normative commitments). Cognition relies on heuristics and is deeply imbricated with the social environment. For this reason, Martin and Judd argue that a key problem for political sociology is understanding the relationship between contexts or fields in which actors are embedded. A legislator acts in relation to her colleagues in the legislature, for example, but also in relation to a broader field – replete with interest groups, voting publics, and parties in the electorate. Political sociology needs a theory that addresses these dynamic relationships.

## PART II: MEDIA EXPLOSION, KNOWLEDGE AS POWER, AND DEMOGRAPHIC REVERSALS

Political sociologists have focused increasingly on the politics of knowledge, broadly construed to include the production and circulation of information about the world. Although Karl Mannheim’s *Ideology and Utopia* (1936) was a founding document of political sociology and the sociology of knowledge, the two fields developed apart in the second half of the twentieth century. Their convergence today may result, in part, from renewed interest in transformations in the world of political communication – and in particular from the political salience of the Internet and communication technologies in our time. It also may result from the perceived politicization of claims to science and expertise. Moreover, the politically motivated contestation of journalistic expertise – associated with the slur “fake news” – raises afresh some very old questions about the place of information in political life. Nevertheless, the new cacophony of media from websites to expanding