

State-Centered and Political Institutional Theory: Retrospect and Prospect¹

Edwin Amenta

A generation ago few political sociologists placed states and other large-scale political institutions at the center of politics and understood states as sets of organizations. But now we do, transforming the way that political sociologists think about states and political processes. This alternative conceptualization of the field of study has opened up numerous questions and empirical terrains. If states and power are the central subjects of political sociology (Orum, 1988), in our understanding of these key concepts we political sociologists are now all "institutionalists."

The rise of self-consciously state-centered scholarship was motivated in part by perceived inadequacies in Marxist, elitist, and pluralist theories and behaviorist approaches to politics, including their conceptions of states and their research programs. State-centered and political institutional scholars confronted these theoretical programs by contesting both what was worth explaining in political sociology and the dominant explanations for political sociological

phenomena. Unlike the others, state-centered analysts tended to view states, in the manner of Weber, as a set of organizations, but with unique functions and missions. Thinking about states in this Weberian way shifted what was important to explain in political life, and this approach to politics opened up new research questions and agendas. This has especially been the case for analyses of revolutions and social movements, welfare states and social policy, and the development of states generally. Some of these new questions and research agendas promoted by state-centered scholars employing Weberian understandings of states have been taken up by proponents of varying theoretical persuasions, including Marxists and pluralists, who have provided explanatory answers different from those of state-centered scholars and political institutionalists.

What is more, few social scientists had placed states and political institutions explicitly on what might be called the independent-variable side of causal arguments until the 1980s. Since then there has been much work that gives states and political institutions the primacy of place in explaining political phenomena. These theoretical moves toward statist and political institutional explanations were in part due to pluralist and Marxist explanations of politics. State-centered scholars tended to see state structures and actors as having central influence over politics and states. On the one hand, structural aspects of states shaped the political identities, interests,

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and strategies of groups that other perspectives took as given. On the other hand, state actors were deemed important players in politics, who depending on their autonomy and capacities might matter more than class or interest group actors in determining political outcomes. The political institutionalists that followed tended to focus more on the systemic and structural aspects of states and the manner of their organization in constructing causal arguments. These institutionalists also sometimes expanded their focus to political party systems in shaping the political identities, interests, and strategies of politically mobilized groups. Nowadays many more political sociologists employ political institutional arguments, even those whose theoretical allegiances are mainly elsewhere. If political sociologists are not all proponents of political institutional theories, we certainly pay far more attention to the potential causal impact of political institutions than 25 years ago.

In what follows I discuss the rise and the distinctiveness of state-centered and political institutional theories, including early proponents and what later scholars were reacting against. From there I address the evolution from state-centered theory to political institutional theory. Along the way I discuss its promise and address some of its achievements through exemplars of this sort of analysis, for it has made profound contributions to political sociology, as well as some of its shortcomings. This critical appreciation, however, is not intended to be comprehensive. In my illustrations I draw especially on work in the area of social policy, which mainly concerns interactions within states but also the literatures on revolutions, social movements, and state building. I argue that the theoretical project has advanced far, but not as far as it might have, because scholars working with these ideas have had countervailing analytical and research aims, based in comparative and historical analyses. I conclude with some ideas about how to advance the theoretical project, within the framework of the comparative and historical analyses that scholars using political institutional ideas most frequently employ.

THE RISK AND SIGNIFICANCE OF EXPLICITLY STATE-CENTERED THEORY

There has always been political institutional and statist-centered work in political science and sociology. In European social science and history at the turn of the century, the centrality of states to politics and political life was posited especially among German scholars, notably Max Weber and Otto Hintze. In American social science, many political scientists, working from the so-called old institutionalist school, placed states and political institutions at the center of their analyses as a matter of course, though not always referring explicitly to them (see Almond, 1990). In the postwar period, however, this older institutional view was mainly abandoned for other perspectives, with pluralists and elitists dominating in U.S. domestic political analysis and with a political cultural approach that placed "political development" and "modernization" at the center of analyses in comparative politics (see review in Hall, 2003).

In the first 30 years after the end of the Second World War, scholars sometimes placed states near the center of their analyses. Pluralist scholars were interested in legislative decisions made by political actors, especially elected officials. Usually they referred to "governments," saw U.S. government processes as largely similar, and focused frequently on the political influence of groups other than political parties, as in the work of David Truman (1951) and Robert Dahl (1961). By contrast, Marxist scholars, who in the 1960s began to contest pluralist images of political processes as inclusive, began to refer explicitly to "the state." But this was typically done in an undifferentiated way and with states remaining conceptually and especially theoretically peripheral to their analyses. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Marxist scholars in political science and sociology explicitly discussed "the state," though they usually understood it in a singular way, as "the capitalist state," and tended to see states at best as "relatively autonomous" and their actions mainly influenced by class-based determinants, such as economic elites and the needs of capitalism, as in

the famous debate between Ralph Miliband and Nicos Poulantzas. Among scholars of American politics, some scholars in international relations field of political science (e.g., Krasner, 1978) also addressed states as such, but worked largely at the geopolitical level and were not concerned with state and society relationships.

Perhaps more important, other scholars more centrally addressed state actors, structures, and state building in a more macrosociological manner. Comparative sociologists and political scientists, notably Reinhard Bendix, Barrington Moore, Samuel Huntington, Seymour Martin Lipset, Stein Rokkan, Juan Linz, Shmuel Eisenstadt, and Charles Tilly, paid close attention to state processes and provided analyses that might be deemed nowadays as state-centered but often viewed and referred to states through the conceptual tools of dominant perspectives. Working from a highly abstract set of social systems concepts pioneered by Talcott Parsons, Lipset, and Rokkan (1968), for instance, argued that to understand long-standing differences in political party systems one had to focus on "nation builders," the situations and crises they faced, and the choices they made (see also Lipset, 1963). The nation builders in their account could also be viewed as "state builders," because their projects were perhaps more institutional than cultural. Huntington (1968) addressed variations in forms of "political modernization" in a manner that focused on characteristics and development of state institutions. Tilly (1975) made the greatest break with previous understandings, explicitly addressing state building rather than political modernization or nation building. In a volume that stood out from in a series largely devoted to nation building, Tilly asked why "national states" came to predominate in Europe rather than other statelike and protostate political organizations. He also made breakthroughs on the explanatory side, arguing that state-led processes of war making in part led to the expansion of states and victory the form. Theda Skocpol (1979) found accounts relying on societal causes of the major revolutions to be unconvincing and argued that states, understood in the Weberian way, were crucial in explaining revolutions.

A Self-Conscious Conceptual Shift to "States"

In American political sociology, however, self-consciously statist and state-centered analyses were developed mainly in the late 1970s and 1980s, largely in reaction to other conceptual constructions and theoretical arguments. A focal point of this shift in attention was the volume by Peter Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol (1985), *Bringing the State Back In*, which brought together a number of scholars working in political sociology as well as related fields. At around the same time many other scholars gave serious theoretical attention to states (see review in Orum, 1988). Skocpol (1985) wrote an introduction that is worth discussing because it was a kind of self-conscious statist manifesto that drew a great deal of critical attention. Many of these ideas were already current, but she harnessed them to a theoretical and research program and call to academic action that placed states at the center of political analysis. To show the distinctiveness of this perspective, Skocpol criticized pluralists and Marxists. Although there were many scholars from each tradition with relatively subtle understandings of states, she argued that these perspectives treated states chiefly as arenas in which political conflicts took place. Pluralists tended to see this arena as largely neutral, one in which all manner of interest groups and citizens could participate and contend but with some advantages being held by elected officials. Marxists tended to see the arena as one in which classes battled, with a tremendous home-field advantage for capitalists, or, alternatively, Marxists saw the state as serving the function of reproducing and legitimating capitalism. Marxists tended to refer to "the state," especially the "capitalist state," rather than to "states," suggesting little variation among them and little importance of states before extensive capitalism. In short, neither set of scholars saw states as complex organizations that were different from other organizations in their political centrality and missions, nor did these scholars see that the way that states were structured or state actors as highly consequential in political life.

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Conceptually speaking Skocpol's call was even for scholars of American politics, where executive bureaucracies were relatively weak and lacking in political power, to embrace a Weberian understanding of states — as sets of political organizations that exerted control over territory and people and engaged in legislative, executive, military, and policing activities. Within these territories states held a monopoly on legitimate violence and sought to maintain order, extracting resources from their populations and often seeking territorial expansion in competition with other states. All states engaged in lines of action that could be understood as state policy. States were sets of organizations in some ways like other organizations but with unique political functions, missions, responsibilities, and roles. In their bids to maintain order and exert legitimate authority they structure relationships between political authority and citizens or subjects and social relations among different groups of citizens or subjects; they also interact and compete with other states. Historically states have been structured in ways other than the today's prominent nation-state, have operated in economic contexts other than industrial capitalist ones, and have been only variably subject to democratic forces.

This conceptual shift in thinking about states highlighted aspects of politics ignored by much of pluralist and Marxist scholarship and opened up a series of research questions. Not surprisingly given its Weberian origins, the statist research program was often comparative and historical but could also be employed in quantitative research. The organizational conceptualization of states criticized the empirical focus of pluralism, which centered on who participated and prevailed in various episodes of decision making in American politics, as well as to elite theorists, such as William Domhoff, who also studied these decisions but with a focus on the influence of elite groups. The statist research program also criticized the empirical approach of Marxists with functionalist conceptualizations of the capitalist state; the latter suggested somewhat ahistorically that all states in capitalist societies acted in similar ways and whose research often sought merely to provide empirical

illustrations (e.g., O'Connor, 1973) rather than causal analyses. The organizational turn in conceptualizing states implied wider examinations to explore larger differences in patterns of politics and political outcomes across places and times. Issues such as state building, democratization, and revolutions became more central subjects of political sociology. Issues such as social policy that were already examined by political sociologists could be reconceptualized beyond examination of relative spending on programs. All in all, the change in outlook about what was important to understand and worth explaining suggested that political sociologists turn to their attention to addressing major differences in patterns of politics across places and times. Scholars studying one country or even focusing on post-war American politics were encouraged to situate the subject comparatively and historically.

State-centered scholars, however, went beyond the conceptual shift about the subject matter to political analysis to claim that states were crucial causal forces in politics as well. The widest break with other theoretical perspectives concerned the causal influence of state institutions on political life — what Skocpol (1985) calls a "Tocquevillian" conception of states or what Goodwin (2001) recently calls a "state-constructionist" conception. State institutions might be configured in different ways for any number of reasons, including historical accidents of geography, results of wars, constitutional conventions, or uneven processes of political, economic, bureaucratic, and intellectual development. But whatever the reason for their adoption or genesis, if these political arrangements were for long stretches of time impervious to change they would have fundamental influence on political patterns and processes over new issues that might emerge, particularly those concerning industrial capitalism. Invoking the impact of political institutions had been explicitly addressed in a comparative fashion by Huntington (1968) and in American politics by E. E. Schattschneider (1960) and Theodore Lowi (1972) among others, but the new discussions of causal role of state institutions on politics gave the idea a boost among scholars who were dissatisfied with previously dominant

approaches. This line of argumentation was in line with criticisms of standard views of power, which concerned decision making or decisions to keep issues off political agendas (Bacharach and Baratz, 1970). Instead it suggested the possibility that political power was structurally determined, in that the basic construction of states would influence which political battles were likely to take place as well as which groups might win political battles.

Arguments about the causal role of state political institutions also implied more fundamental difference with other theories of politics, in that state political institutions were posited to have key impacts on the political identities, interests, preferences, and strategies of groups. Political identities, organization, and action were not things that could be read off market or other relationships but were influenced by political situations. Even if political identities were largely similar for a category of people across different places, political institutional arrangements might encourage some lines of political action and organization by this group across politics or time and discourage others and thus shape political group formation. In short, the political institutional theory rejected arguments that landowners or workers or experts or ethnic minorities would take similar forms and make similar demands in all capitalist societies; instead their political identities and organization would depend on political institutional situations. A signal contribution along these lines was Ira Katznelson's (1981) *City Trenches*, in which he addressed why American workers were organized around their jobs economically, but politically around their neighborhoods and in political parties along ethnic and religious lines, in comparison with workers in other capitalist democracies who were organized consistently in one manner or another.

Leaving aside the geopolitical level, many macro-level political institutional conditions might shape broad patterns of politics. Overall authority in state political institutions might be centralized or decentralized. Political authority might be centralized or spread among localized political authorities in the manner of the United States. The legislative, executive, judicial, polic-

ing, and other governmental functions within given political authorities might be located within set of organizations or spread among different ones, each with their own autonomy and operating procedures. Politics might differ greatly in type, depending on the degree to which state rulers had "despotic power," to use Michael Mann's (1986) distinction. State political institutions were subject to different levels and paces of democratization and political rights among citizens. Once democratized they were subject to all manner of electoral rules governing the selection of political officials. States executive organizations were also subject to different levels and paces of bureaucratization and professionalization. Each of these processes might fundamentally influence political life.

The other main line of argumentation, first in the order treated but second in ultimate importance, was that states mattered as actors, an idea already current in the "bureaucratic politics" literature in political science (e.g., Allison, 1971). State actors were understood organizationally, largely in a resource-dependence way. As organizations, different parts of states might have greater or lesser degrees of autonomy and capacity. The autonomy of states or parts thereof was defined as their ability to define independently lines of action. State capacities were defined as the ability to carry out lines of action, however they were devised. These differences in state autonomy and capacity, mainly understood as those in executive bureaucracies, were argued as being important in explaining in political outcomes across times and places. The roles of these actors were deemed both central and variable – and thus likely important in political outcomes and in need of greater investigation, theoretical and empirical, than provided by other perspectives on politics. The idea of states' capacities was sometimes understood in a wider way, with Mann (1986) referring to states' "infrastructural power." The ideas of state autonomy and capacity brought into the discussion the "power to" do something, as in Parsons's treatment of the subject, without neglecting "power over," on which political scientists and sociologists previously had focused (Lukes, 1974).

Sometimes state autonomy and capacity, the importance of state actors, might mean that state actors matter in any particular case. (Friedland, 1988). Instead, state actors matter as potentially key actors in given their function in state policy. They depend partly on political actors and resources, knowledge captured or shared by social groups and are necessarily being used. In addition, they devise autonomous action influenced in turn by institutions and other actors.

The state-actor perspective at first work and concept, however, is a natural aspect of the study of state building indirectly. In some ways rather, it would influence the meso level of state building. States were structured among these local battles and state structures. Relationships between mobilized groups and macrostructure vary substantially in these conditions. The standing pattern of argumentation about state actors on politics is deemed to be potentially major outcomes. Even be captured by prominently focused as political power.

Sometimes claims by statist theorists about state autonomy and capacity and the importance of state actors have been understood to mean that state actors were more likely to prevail in any particular political decision (Alford and Friedland, 1985), a kind of specific elitist argument. Instead statist theorists posed state actors as potentially key players in political outcomes, given their functions and mandate to carry out state policy. Their role and effectiveness would depend partly on characteristics that made other political actors effective—strategies of action, resources, knowledge, and so on. They might be captured or staffed by politically organized or social groups as well, but the groups might not necessarily be representing capitalists or workers. In addition, the ability of state actors to devise autonomous lines of action might be influenced in turn by the structure of state institutions and other political institutional arrangements.

The state-centered arguments proposed by Skocpol at first were more theoretical framework and conceptional development than theory, however. They suggested that macrostructural aspects of states and large-scale processes of state building influenced politics directly and indirectly. In channeling political activities in some ways rather than others, state structures would influence the identities and actors at this meso level of organized political actors. The way states were structured would also influence who among these organized actors might win political battles and which ones they might win. Thus state structures would also influence the relationships between the actions of politically mobilized groups and political outcomes. Because macrostructural aspects of states were likely to vary substantially across polities and over time, these conditions might be likely to explain longstanding patterns of politics. A second line of argumentation concerned the impact of state actors on political outcomes. State actors were deemed to be potentially autonomous and thus potentially major players in influencing political outcomes. Even if not autonomous, they might be captured by different groups other than those prominently figuring in Marxist theory, such as political parties or non-class-related interest

groups. It would not constitute much of a theory, though, until state-centered scholars specified causal claims employing this framework.

State-Centered Theory: An Example and Model

In a 1984 article, Ann Orloff and Skocpol introduced explicitly state-centered theory and applied it to a central problem in political sociology and politics, the development of social policy. The new approach was signaled by the sort of question they asked. They wanted to know why social insurance programs were adopted much sooner in Britain than in the United States, despite the many similarities between these countries. This comparative question also homed in important historical episodes in policy making for each country. The answers they proposed were different, too. They asserted the two means of state causation suggested by Skocpol and used the framework to construct specific causal claims. Most fundamentally they argued that processes of state formation influence how state and political organizations operate; these organizations in turn would have an impact on policy proposals directly and indirectly, by influencing what politically active groups would propose. Behind the processes of state formation were sequences of democratization and bureaucratization. Notably, if a polity had been democratized before it had been bureaucratized, it would produce a state with low bureaucratic capacities and orient political parties toward patronage rather than programs, as they used state positions as sources of employment for their operatives. Patronage-oriented parties would eschew social programs and the underdeveloped states they led would have fewer capacities to run them (see Shefter, 1978). The way that polities were structured in turn had effects on politically organized groups. Despite similarities in backgrounds and goals and contacts across borders, social reformers in different polities, for instance, would have a different orientation toward social politics. They also argued that state bureaucracies and the officials in them might also be sites of autonomous action, employing

their capacities and location in struggles with other groups. State domestic bureaucratic capacities were argued to influence political officials, whose proposals would be shaped by the availability of specific capacities to engage in policy (Finegold and Skocpol, 1995), an argument that was later dismissed by some scholars synthesizing class-struggle arguments from a neo-Marxist perspective and political institutionalism (cf. Huber and Stephens, 2001). These capacities, however, were also likely to be constrained at the political institutional level.

The article suggested both the promise of the outlook provided by a wider understanding of states and the potential for political institutional theorizing, as well as the issues raised by them. They were asking questions that few others were asking, given their limited conceptualization of states and their focus on behavioral concepts, such as who made decisions, who voted for which parties, or how much was being spent for a state function. In addressing important differences in these policies across countries, the question went beyond what would have been addressed by functionalist Marxists, who would have seen the issue as a similar matters of accumulation and legitimation. Their research project moved the discussion away from comparative spending on social policy to its adoption, an issue overlooked given previous conceptualizations of states and techniques of analyzing data. The comparative approach also helped to address the issue of why an issue did not reach the political agenda, without anyone needing to make a decision about keeping it off (Lukes, 1974). At the same time, this issue was going to prove useful to theorize about only so long as other scholars felt it was important, perhaps depending on the degree to which state power was involved. In this case, scholars tended to agree about the importance of the adoption of social policy and attempted to explain it (see review in Amenta, 2003). Also, it was somewhat difficult to appraise the importance of these particular episodes of policy making – which is similar to the problem of addressing what constituted “important decisions” for those studying power in communities (Polsby, 1980).

The theoretical explanation combined aspects of macro-level structural and systemic argumentation with meso- or organizational-level argumentation in a novel way that fundamentally contested both Marxist and pluralist claims about the likely actors in the political process and their importance. Orloff and Skocpol (1984) argued that broad processes of social change, democratization, and bureaucratization configured the U.S. polity and party system against the adoption of modern social spending policy and Britain's in favor of it. The macro-level configuration of polities was deemed to influence processes of politics, including how key political actors identified themselves at lower levels and what these actors wanted. Although worker and capitalist political actors, predominant in Marxist theory, would likely matter in all polities, they might see their interests and identities diverge according to the incentives provided for them by political institutions, including the nature of the political party system. Like the pluralists, they argued that a wide group of actors might matter, though the possibilities of organizing interests would be influenced by the political structure and the broad processes that lay behind it.

Left undertheorized, though, were a number of issues. Among them were the fundamental relationships between the large-scale processes and the structure of other polities subject to these processes. Although state capacities were claimed to be important in influencing political officials and these capacities were argued to be constrained by political institutional patterns, it was not clear under what conditions state capacities might vary and matter. The interaction of politically organized groups was largely left undertheorized, with the presumption, though, that those favored by the structure of a given polity would prevail disproportionately in political decision making. Political actors at the meso level were viewed as rational for the most part, as rational choice theorists would expect, shifting the best they could under the circumstances. But as organizations, these actors also might be constrained by the conditions of their founding, as some “old institutional” organizational theorists would have it (see review in Stinchcombe, 1997), or by understandings of

their missions that in rationality and constraints and schemas, as “new” institutional theorists would have it (Clemens and Cook, 1999).

TOWARD POLITICAL-

The initial state-centered treating states as impolitic – has evolved in one over the last decade in important ways. It has employed the Tocqueville states in an explanatory rather argumentative construction of other large-scale including political power of some theorists, the structural and systemic political institutions influencing having major influence. In the hands of other political liberalism has become more on historical processes to argue that political institutions influence political attention on the institutional medium-systemic, intermediate level. These actors are institutional constraints on resources, constraints on resources, and attempting to change in state policy. Changes in state policy motion that influence policies of actors that will programs will feed back into the program or underpin to changes at a later time. The framework is that macro conditions shape politics and under constraints that impact on states and political institutions in the process.

Before I discuss this theoretical project, I will distinguishing it from institutionalism among

their missions that might result from bounded rationality and constraining scripts, templates, and schemas, as "new institutional" organizational theorists would suggest (see review in Clemens and Cook, 1999).

TOWARD POLITICAL-INSTITUTIONAL THEORY

The initial state-centered theoretical program – treating states as important causal forces in politics – has evolved into a political-institutional one over the last decade or so, altering the program in important ways. Scholars have generally employed the Tocquevillian argument about states in an explanatory way and have added further argumentation concerning the construction of other large-scale political institutions, including political party systems. In the hands of some theorists, the arguments became more structural and systemic, with long-standing political institutions influencing all groups and having major influence over outcomes of interest. In the hands of others, political institutionalism has become more historical and focused on historical processes. Here scholars continue to argue that political institutions fundamentally influence political life but focus theoretical attention on the interaction of actors at a medium-systemic, interorganizational, or meso level. These actors are seen as working within institutional constraints, as well as with constraints on resources and other means of action, and attempting to influence state policy. Changes in state policies in turn set processes in motion that influence the interests and strategies of actors that will determine whether programs will feed back in a way that strengthens the program or undermines it or leaves it open to changes at a later time. The main theoretical framework is that macro-level political institutions shape politics and political actors, who act under constraints that may influence their impact on states and policies, refashioning political institutions in the process, and so on.

Before I discuss this political institutionalist theoretical project, I want to say a few words distinguishing it from other uses of the term *institutionalism* among sociologists and political

scientists. It is now conventional to say that there are three groups of institutionalists: "new institutionalists" in the sociology of organizations (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991), "institutionalists" employing rational choice theory in political science (Moe, 1987), and "historical institutionalists," political scientists who are distinctive for their comparative and historical methodology (Thelen, 1999; Thelen and Steinmo, 1992; see review in Hall and Taylor, 1996). The new institutionalism is a species of organizational theory, which sees organizations in a particular way and treats states largely like other organizations. For this group, political sociology involves organizations, and thus new institutional theory is expected to be relevant; mainly, however, this theory provides a broad cultural perspective on politics (e.g., Meyer, 2001). By contrast, the rational choice institutionalists in political science employ a style of theorizing based on micro-level foundations; they emphasize deductive theorizing itself as being central to social scientific progress and are concerned less with sustained empirical appraisals of theoretical arguments. They are roughly aligned with economic institutionalists (e.g., North, 1990).

Finally, historical institutionalism is a way of engaging in the social scientific enterprise that places less emphasis on general theorizing in which scholars pose macropolitical or – sociological empirical puzzles and employ comparative and historical analytical research strategies to address them (cf. Immergut, 1998). Institutional structures of all sorts usually matter in these explanations. There is an elective affinity between the approach of the historical institutionalists, who now form a self-conscious academic grouping, and political institutional theorizing, but the overlap is far from complete. Historical institutionalists tend to see political institutions as being distinctive and influential and more than new institutionalists are concerned with issues of power. Those who call themselves historical institutionalists, including Skocpol, often rely on political institutional theorizing. Indeed, that so much of political institutional theoretical argumentation has been developed and appraised by comparative and historical research has strongly influenced the

evolution of the political institutional theoretical project. But there is no necessary connection between the historical institutionalist approach, where causation is often presumed to be multiple, conjunctural, and path-dependent, and any given theory or even style of theorizing. Historical institutionalists may not ascribe central causal roles to political institutions in any given analysis and could instead rely on economic or social institutions in their theoretical argumentation. By contrast political institutional argumentation relies on the structure of state and other major political institutions, including electoral systems and political party systems, and processes of state and party building, in the construction of causal political arguments and explanations for macropolitical phenomena.

Developments in political institutional theorizing since the early 1990s have continued to focus more on the impact of political contexts on politics more so than on the role of bureaucratic state actors. Scholars working in this mode have often followed some of the same structural guidelines of Orloff and Skocpol, but focusing on other political institutions and hypothesizing different empirical implications. One line of argument is that political institutions influence the types of actors in a polity, including the form, identities, and interests of political actors, and from there to important processes and outcomes. The second is that political institutions provide distinctive contexts that influence causal relationships at a meso level of political organization and action. Third, there have been attempts to theoretically model the process over time, in which state institutions influence political actors, who maneuver within constraints to influence states, which are altered in turn and then influence real and potential political actors. The theorizing here focuses not structural political institutions and large-scale processes, but smaller scale processes.

Structural Political Institutionalism

An example of the highly structural political institutionalism is the state-centered theory of

Third World revolution posed by Jeff Goodwin (2001). He asked why revolutions were peculiarly modern phenomena, why some Third World countries rather than others were beset by revolutionary mobilizations, and why some regimes rather than others were vulnerable to revolutionary overthrow. The answer was neither poverty nor mere authoritarianism, as there were many examples of each throughout history without significant revolutionary movements. Instead there were no revolutions until there were states. From there he found that closed authoritarian regimes provided motivation and a focus for revolutionary groups, whereas even limited inclusionary regimes tended to siphon off opposition. From there he asked which regimes were vulnerable to overthrow by revolutionary movements, that is, contexts in which revolutionary action and actors were likely to succeed. The answer was that there were two different sorts of regimes that tended to be impervious to reform and unable to respond effectively to revolutionary movements: neopatrimonial dictatorships and colonial regimes based on direct rule.

Structural and systemic, this line of argumentation was more elegant and encompassing than the previous state-centered arguments, which involved a variety of processes and a profusion of actors, and provides an example of a strictly political institutionalist argument. The type of regime influenced strongly the interests and identities of potential political actors. In a patrimonial regime, involving personal control by dictators allowing no stable group prerogatives in the policy, businesspeople, landlords, and professionals were likely to go into opposition, reading their interests off political institutional situations, not economic class positions. The type of regime also shaped state repressive capacities, promoting unprofessional and incompetent military forces and making it difficult for them to resist armed revolutionaries, if they were to appear. The argument is not strictly determined, in that these were powerful tendencies, not necessarily leading to armed struggle by revolutionaries, and not ensuring its success once they had formed. There was room for maneuver by these regimes, and room for

agency of revolution. The line of argument helped to separate subject to revolution succumb from under authority left somewhat. Institutional argumentary movement tip these situations required supplement the political action.

Another example of institutionalism addressing different polities, is *Sweden's Democracy*. Steinmo's argument systems of taxation had varied over time in unexpected ways. Taxation has been regressive, imposing Swedish taxatic revenue. He also discussed taxation for most comparatively compared Swedish taxation and yields high tax rates. The system stood out in character. He asked questions in taxation for redistribution and redistributive practices.

Steinmo's explanation of a polity? American political institutions were mented and was constitutional. The century created a proportional representation less responsive to the people. It had no constitutional upper chamber. According to Steinmo, institutions engendered in America, by Sweden, corporate government. The

agency of revolutionaries as well, but the main line of argument was political institutional and helped to separate which states would be subject to revolutionary movements and likely to succumb from those of poor countries suffering under authoritarian regimes that did not. This left somewhat undertheorized, at least by institutional argumentation, the activities of revolutionary movements and other groups that might tip these situations one way or another and required supplementation especially on the side of the political actors.

Another example of structural political institutionalism at the macrosocial level, but addressing differences in policy in democratized polities, is Sven Steinmo's (1993) *Taxation and Democracy*. Steinmo demonstrates that the taxation systems of America, Britain, and Sweden had varied over the past century greatly and often in unexpected ways. American and British taxation has been more redistributive and progressive, imposing stiffer taxes on the rich than Swedish taxation, which generates more revenue. He also demonstrates that American taxation for most of the postwar period was comparatively complex and inefficient, whereas the Swedish taxation system was stable, efficient, and yields high revenues. The British tax system stood out chiefly for its unstable and erratic character. He asks why these comparative differences in taxation policy – given that they matter for redistribution in themselves as well as for all redistributive programs that might be funded by states.

Steinmo's explanation focuses on the structure of a polity's decision-making institutions. American political authority was born fragmented and was never unified. In Sweden, a constitutional convention at the turn of the century created a Lower Chamber elected by proportional representation and an Upper Chamber less responsive to the will of the people. Britain had no constitutional convention and restrained its upper chamber, the House of Lords. According to Steinmo, each set of democratic institutions engendered a specific form of governing: in America, by congressional committee; in Sweden, corporatism; in Britain, strong party government. These forms of government influ-

enced the views and activities of the main actors involved and in turn account for key taxation outcomes. Committee government in America, with its decentralization of power, brought with it low revenues and high tax expenditures, low efficiency, and high complexity. Providing great power but only limited time to exercise it, party government in Britain produced extreme instability in taxation policy. Corporatism in Sweden, based on the continuing power of the Social Democratic party, created a deep and abiding trust between that party and the permanent bureaucracy and produced a stable taxation system in which corporate actors traded off higher taxes for other benefits. In this model the broad patterns of taxation policy over a century are explained by large political institutional differences in electoral systems that translate into differences in the processes by which politics takes place. Corporatism as a mode of state-led interest intermediation has its own influence on social politics (see also Hicks, 1999) but is explained in turn by prior political institutional arrangements. The argumentation is elegant, with large patterns of politics and major differences in important political outcomes explained with few moving structural and systemic political institutional parts.

As with Goodwin's state-centered theory of revolution, Steinmo's institutional argument by design leaves a fair amount unexplained. The structural line of argumentation does not attempt to explain political change or specific outcomes within a given case, especially those resulting from the mobilization and action of groups at the organizational level. Perhaps more important, though, the question is framed with respect to the three countries and not more generally and the implications of the argumentation are not drawn out for other polities. Also, the broad institutional differences among the polities identified by Steinmo are different from the ones that Orloff and Skocpol suggested as being crucial for social politics. Although both pay causal attention to the role of political institutions, Orloff and Skocpol focus on the long-term processes of democratization and bureaucratization in state formation, whereas Steinmo discusses the impact of electoral and political

decision-making institutions based on differing constitutional arrangements. This difference in outlook suggests that there are many possibilities for structural political institutional arguments, even in democratized polities and regarding similar objects of explanation.

Toward More Elaborated Institutional Argumentation

Within state-centered and political institutional scholarship there has been something of a shift from comparative theoretical argumentation to explain differences in large outcomes to historical argumentation explaining processes. This theoretical shift addresses the issue of explaining political changes and tries to fill in some of the explanatory gaps in the initial theoretical program. These theoretical moves take the form of claiming that changes in state policies have the potential to reconfigure political contexts and with them political identities, interests, and activity.

A key example of this movement, to stay with the social policy example, was in Theda Skocpol's *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers* (1992). In it she seeks to specify more fully the impact of macro-level political institutions on political actors and action, but she also allows increasing autonomy among meso-level political actors in battling over issues and adds reciprocal argumentation about the impact of state policies on politics. Skocpol drops the state-centered label and instead employs what she calls a "structured polity model," which she uses to explain specific historically and comparatively situated questions regarding U.S. social policy. These include why the United States created in the late nineteenth century a system of veterans' benefits when other countries did not and why the United States did not replace this system of benefits in the early twentieth century with social insurance for male wage-earners, when many other countries did, and instead creating programs for women. As before, she seeks to explain why U.S. social policy diverged from that of countries elsewhere subject to broadly similar economic processes.

As before, too, Skocpol's theoretical model gives primacy of causal place to the structure and formation of political institutions. The state-formation process leads to political organizations with given capacities and operating needs. Early democratization and late bureaucratic development within the U.S. state meant among other things that political parties tended to pursue patronage policies and avoid programmatic social policy (see also Mayhew, 1986:292-4; Amenta, 1998:chapter 1). Skocpol also argues that political institutions strongly influence social identities in politics. State and party structures and the scope of the electorate contribute to the formation of political identities and group political orientations, along with socioeconomic relations and cultural patterns. In this vein she argues, for instance, that U.S. workers did not have to mobilize along class lines to gain the vote and thus did not act as class-conscious actors. By contrast women in the United States reacted as a group against their exclusion from the polity—a process intensified by the fact that elite women in America were more highly educated than their counterparts in other countries.

Yet the argumentation goes beyond these structural and systemic claims to indicate other institutional reasons behind the making of social policy. For according to the logic of the structural, institutional argumentation, there would be no impulse toward modern social policy in America. To address this, Skocpol makes linkages between the macrostructural level and the organizational level in making claims about the causes of change in social policy. She suggests that to be effective in any polity political actors, however organized and with whatever identities, have to construct a good "fit" between their capabilities and the given political institutions. In a U.S. polity in which elected members to Congress and state legislatures are not constrained by the party discipline imposed by parliamentary political systems and are chosen by way of geographic representation, she argues that the groups likely to gain the greatest leverage are "widespread federated interests." From here she claims that U.S. reformist professionals were likely to succeed in political struggles only

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when they were allied with groups with popular constituencies organized across many legislative districts. She points to groups such as the Grand Army of the Republic, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, and the Federal Order of Eagles as being exemplars of such organization and effectiveness in policy. Although the argumentation deals with general aspects of politics, these combinations of characteristics is specific to the U.S. polity, whose early policy developments and lack of development in modern social insurance programs she is attempting to explain.

In her final theoretical claim, Skocpol opens the way to see state building and policy making as a reciprocal and path-dependent process. Following Lowi (1972), she argues similarly that once adopted new policies can transform state capacities and produce changes in social groups and their political goals and capabilities. The new state actors can employ these capacities in further political struggles. Political groups may be strengthened by having states sanction them and reward them through policies. New groups may be encouraged by policies. Both of these influence policy at a later point in time. In short, the initial configuration of social policy influences its future; the structure of social policy has important impacts on the politics of social policy and thus the future of it and other policies. In this way the political institutional theory is made "historical" (Abrams, 1984).

Other scholars have argued similarly that the process of social spending policy is path-dependent in this matter. The main line of argumentation is that the form a program assumes may influence its political future by determining whether groups will mobilize around it in support. It has been argued notably that programs whose recipients are confined to the poor tend to gain little support (Weir et al., 1988), because the coalitions that can potentially form behind them are likely to be small and politically weak; programs with larger beneficiary groups, including middle classes, will have a better chance to grow. Pierson (1994) argues further that mature programs have "lock-in" effects that counter bids to cut them, because people have organized their lives around these programs and in many cases interest groups have already

formed explicitly around beneficiary categories created by programs. In short, policy changes can cause positive feedback loops that lead to their reinforcement.

Others have extended the project is by supplementing it with other perspectives (Amenta, 1998; Orloff and Skocpol, 1986; see also Janoski, 1998). Although the political institutional argument points to influence on the formation of political interests and identities, it still leaves a great deal of autonomy at this level. New policies often are claimed inadvertently to create new groups and identities, making the arguments compatible with some pluralist and Marxist arguments at the meso level of politics. Many have combined institutional argumentation with Marxist arguments, especially those regarding class struggle (Hicks, 1999; Huber and Stephens, 2001) or class coalitions (Esping-Andersen, 1990), which are more compatible with political institutional theorizing than others. However, these arguments largely see class factors as the driving force behind state development and political change and thus remain located in that camp. Others have similar employed political institutional theorizing with different forms of cultural analysis (Clemens, 1998; Hattam, 1993), including the new institutionalism in the sociology of organizations.

Some Issues in Political Institutional Theoretical Projects

Despite advances and syntheses, many issues remain to be addressed at the each of the three main levels of theorizing in political institutional arguments. Political institutional argumentation has been most coherent in its structural and systemic form. Even here, though, the implications that scholars have drawn for political processes and outcomes are delimited, both in the degree to which they explain outcomes or processes under study and in terms of the situations to which they might apply. Also, there have been divergent claims about the impact of political institutions on politics and these differences need to be addressed by theorists. The opening of this program by scholars specifying linkages

between the macro and meso levels of analysis, indicating macrocontextual factors that influence relationships at the organizational level has addressed some issues, but these theoretical linkages need to be traced further. The theoretical argumentation concerning state building as a path-dependent process has opened the theoretical program further and facilitates theorizing processes and change. Yet with the greater the openness of the project, political institutional theorizing runs the danger of returning to a framework for analysis rather than a set of theoretical claims that can provide explicit empirical expectations in different situations.

On the structural and systemic side, scholars in this camp have specified characteristics at the political systemic level of argumentation and given reasons for their likely influences on political processes. Many scholars studying social policy, for instance, now agree that the centralization of the polity promotes the development of redistributive social policy and fragmentation hinders it, because fragmentation facilitates the ability of opponents of social policy to deflect initiatives (Immergut, 1992; Maioni, 1998). Skocpol (1992) argues similarly that the fragmented U.S. polity limits what is possible in social policy. But the argument is multidimensional. Political authority in the United States has never been horizontally or vertically integrated. At the national level of government, the United States has a presidential and nonparliamentary system that allows intramural conflict. Members of Congress from the same party can defect from the president's legislative program without risking loss of office and can initiate competing programs. There are two legislative bodies, and legislators represent geographical districts, not parties. Any laws that make it through this maze can be declared unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court. Scholars have not, however, theoretically sorted out which of these forms of fragmentation matter most and how with regard to social policy making (Amenta, Caren, and Bonastia, 2001). By contrast, Steinmo makes claims about the role of electoral institutions on political processes and makes plausible claims for his three cases but does not follow through with the implications of

general theorizing for other cases. Also, Steinmo and Skocpol are making political institutional arguments at the same level but are claiming that different sorts of political institutions matter. These differences in systemic argumentation need to be acknowledged and their implications addressed.

As for the links between the macrostructural level and the meso-organizational level, the political institutionalist line is that the former influences the latter and from there the fundamental course of politics. In the social policy literature, for instance, scholars have made arguments that sequences of democratization and bureaucratization have influenced whether political parties will appeal by way of patronage or programs. Similarly, scholars have made arguments about the impact of the pace and character of democratization on group formation (Amenta and Young, 1999). But for scholars making institutional arguments about social policy, it is important to make further theoretical connections from macro-level conditions to the political organizational level. Skocpol (1992), for instance, argues that the particular way that democratization took place in the United States had an impact on the political group formation and identities. The argument is set out in a general way but is not conceptualized or extended beyond the case at hand to see how applicable it might be to others.

Policy feedback claims similarly have advanced, but need further specification to be transformed into systematic theoretical arguments. To return to the social policy case again, despite the incentives to organize around new categories and benefits created by state programs, groups sometimes form in support of programs and identify themselves with them and sometimes not. Those groups that supported the adoption of mothers' pensions programs in 1910, for instance, had lost interest in them by 1930. Although need-based programs tend not to be supported, they sometimes have been politically popular, as work programs were during the Depression and is Medicaid nowadays (Amenta, 1998; Howard, 1999). The nature of policy feedback arguments been conceptualized in ways that would

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it possible to construct theoretically coherent path-dependent arguments (see Abbott, 1992; Griffin, 1992; Mahoney, 2000; Pierson, 2000a). Scholars making these claims, however, need to provide more specific expectations linking aspects of policy to the processes that influence their fate. That is to say, they need to identify aspects of social policies that induce the formation of groups around them or that are expected to influence their politics and fates in other ways. It would fit with the political institutional project that the policies that would matter the most in reconfiguring political life would be those that influence systemic aspects of politics.

RESEARCH PRACTICE AND THE NEXT STEPS

Political institutional projects have gone great distances since the early 1980s, but the type of progress made and the lack of progress in some areas has been due chiefly to how political institutionalists typically engage in social scientific inquiry. Although not all historical institutionalists are political institutionalists, most political institutionalists mainly employ comparative and historical methods, which in turn influence the strengths and weaknesses in the political institutional mode of theorizing. The style is bold in some ways (in asking questions) and reticent in others (in extending theoretical claims beyond cases of interest). Together these characteristics have led to many new and promising political institutional hypotheses and theoretical argumentation, buttressed by compelling historical and comparative research, but the theoretical claims have not been carried through as far as they might be.

Boldness and Reticence in Comparative and Historical Analyses

Comparative and historical scholars are not afraid of big questions – empirically at least (for discussions, see Amenta, 2003; Goldstone, 2003; Mahoney and Rueschemeyer, 2003). These analysts often seek to explain differences in major patterns of political development and

readily ask why some countries had revolutions, democracies, and welfare states, whereas others did not. These bold comparative questions and research projects have an affinity to structural and systemic explanation. For political institutionalists explaining the differences in large patterns usually involves showing that some structural and systemic political conditions or circumstances hindered a major development in one place and either aided or allowed the development in another. In addition, these scholars use comparisons or trace processes to cast empirical doubt on other possible explanations and to provide further support for their own. This sort of questioning calls attention to large-scale contexts and processes, which are sometimes not noticed in approaches to data analysis that focus on events surrounding specific changes under study and do not look at the big picture.

Usually the impulse is even bolder, however, for comparative and historical scholars are not often content to explain a large part of the variance in their cases, as quantitative investigators are content to do, but often want to explain all of it (see Ragin, 1987). And so after explaining broad patterns, these scholars attempt to trace the processes which helped cases to show change, whether the adoption of a policy or its retrenchment or the development of a revolutionary movement or an issue of state building. This task usually involves some theorizing at the meso level of political organization, often involving with the interaction of politically active groups with state bureaucrats and other actors, or some combination of theorizing at the macro and meso levels. The causal argumentation sometimes gets quite detailed at the organizational level. In the bid to explain all the variance sometimes elements from other theoretical perspectives are added, and sometimes strictly contingent elements are brought into the account.

Bold as they are in their questions and explanatory goals, comparative and historical scholars are often reticent theoretically. They do not frequently bid to theorize beyond the cases and time periods of interest. Often these cases are states, subnational units, and policies or

groups within a country or across a few countries, and the studies are limited to a specific period, often lengthy, of time. It is only in rare instances that comparative and historical scholars address populations of theoretically relevant cases in their research. Mainly this gap is due the steep research requirements of doing comparative and historical work, as one needs to gain a deep understanding of the cases involved. Yet there is no reason not to draw out the theoretical implications for other cases that we know less about.

As we have seen, Steinmo (1993) compares across his three countries and is willing to explain major differences in policy-making processes and taxation outcomes over long periods of time but does not follow through with the implications for other democratic states with relatively advanced capitalist economies – the population from which his three cases form a subset. But because his theorizing involves specific countries and their electoral institutions, he leaves it open as to how the process from electoral rules to taxation policy patterns might play out in countries with different electoral laws. Without his specifying the argument further, one might presume that there would be as many different patterns in taxation policies as there were electoral laws and countries to examine. It would also be possible and more theoretically valuable to construct a somewhat more general argument to explain the policy-making processes of other countries, but he stops short of drawing out the implications.

Skocpol (1992) wants to explain developments over a somewhat shorter period than Steinmo and provides more detailed theorizing, as she is hopeful to answer numerous questions about U.S. social policy and explain all the variance she addresses. She makes meso-level arguments about the forms of organization that are likely to work in a polity structured like that of the American one and traces the activities of these organizations over time. She goes on to explain variation in broad patterns of policy – such as why some maternalist programs passed and why ones for male workers did not – as well as the specifics of individual programs. Her theorizing is explicitly situated in the American

political context and possibly that context in the decades surrounding 1900. Yet it would be consistent with her argumentation that to make an impact organized groups have to fit political contexts whatever they happen to be – and to specify what that might mean across cases. The form of the argument is that certain combinations of variables or conditions are deemed to have specific effects within a given overarching context, and it seems worth attempting to speculate theoretically about these relationships beyond the her case and time period. This theorizing would mean thinking through the impact of the contexts and whether the combination of variables or conditions would be likely to have implications in many situations or few and what they might be. It would also make it possible for other scholars with deep understandings of other cases to appraise the arguments.

Political institutional scholars do occasionally theorize and examine the relevant cases in a population of interest. In Ertman's (1996) analysis of state formation in early modern Europe, he stands out in placing all cases into four groupings of types of state formation. These are groupings are based on whether the character of the state's infrastructure was patrimonial or bureaucratic and whether the political regime was absolutist or constitutional – more or less along the lines of Mann's (1986) ideas of infrastructural and despotic power. This rephrasing of the question is a major contribution in itself, as he reworks previous concepts of absolutism to show variation in state types where others had seen uniformity and blurred important distinctions. From there he presents a theoretical model that involves initial conditions and processes that combine to order the cases into different patterns. Territorial-based assemblies were more likely than estates-based ones to hold out against the blandishments of would-be absolutist rulers. But early geopolitical conflict, rather than building the state infrastructurally, meant that states could not take advantage of new techniques of administration and finance and the explosion of administrative expertise after 1450. His argument includes path-dependent claims that alter the workings of long-term processes, with states becoming subject to military pressures altering

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the paths they were set down by initial conditions. As a result he is able to explain all the cases. This sort of theorizing is an exception, however, and is not necessarily due to a difference in attitude about the proper role of theory in comparative and historical research but to one scholar's ability to master many cases. This seems less likely to be possible for most scholars, especially those studying processes over the last centuries, as secondary literatures on individual countries and political issues have exploded, as well as the availability of primary documents.

Findings of comparative and historical analysts are sometimes held suspect because they possibly select on the dependent variable, leading to biased results (King, Keohane, and Verba, 1994; cf. Ragin, 1987, 2000). The theoretical problem resulting from small-N comparative studies is, however, that scholars frequently do not theorize beyond their cases. And so I am calling for scholars to apply some of the same boldness to take on the big questions and explain all relevant variance in research projects to political institutional theorizing. Scholars need to think further about the range of variation across the likely population for which claims can be made and need, too, to take into account the likely result of a lack of diversity in the population (Ragin, 2000). Theoretical programs can advance through a scholarly process in which one person studies three countries and another studies two others and each makes theoretical claims particular to those cases and time periods, but the progress would likely come faster if the comparative and historical analysts would think through the implications of their theoretical arguments and provide some empirical expectations for some relevant cases they do not study.

Extending the Political Institutional Theoretical Project

To advance the theoretical project, the next steps for political institutional scholars are to go beyond preliminary or highly bounded theoretical statements and general orienting concepts to make more extensive theoretical claims. I am

not calling for general laws designed to apply everywhere, but middle-range theoretical argumentation in the Mertonian tradition that has implications beyond the cases or times at hand with well-thought-out scope conditions. At the most general level, the theoretical claims could be of the sort that Lipset and Rokkan (1967) did for political parties or Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens (1996) have done for democratic breakthroughs. Even if scholars develop their theoretical argumentation by way of paired or implicit comparisons as standard in comparative and historical and historical institutional analyses, it is always possible and worthwhile to think through the similarities with other cases and work through the theoretical implications for those cases even if one cannot carry through with the research needed to appraise these arguments.

Let me suggest a few ways to propel this process. One way to develop political institutional theory further would be to modify some of the largely methodological precepts of Przeworski and Teune (1970). They implored comparative scholars to replace proper names of countries as far as possible with variables in their causal analyses. Do not theorize about Sweden or America and Britain or Latin American countries, was their injunction, but instead capitalist democracies, liberal welfare states, or Third World countries. Also, their view of comparative analysis was multilevel, with an emphasis on macro and contextual theoretical argumentation. A comparative argument was one in which differences in theoretical variables at the political systemic level resulted in differences in individual-level causal relationships. Thus the nature of the party system might be argued to influence the relationship between an individual's class position and their political affiliation or voting behavior. In short, they suggested that whenever possible analysts should think more generally and to think about the impact of contexts at one level to influence causal relationships at another.

It would be worth extending these insights, but altering some of the precepts to fit the circumstances faced by political institutional theorists, who usually engage in comparative and historical studies. My call is for them to provide

theoretical argumentation with applicability to all capitalist democracies or to all liberal welfare states or to some larger population, perhaps bounded by a time period or process, rather than limiting theoretical discussion to the few cases or time periods being closely studied. Other scholars might try to extend the argumentation to these other cases to see whether they are supported or, if not, whether the initial argumentation would need to be modified and how. This might help as well to separate what is general from what is specific in the explanation of any given phenomena. The injunction to remove proper names when possible might also be applied to historical contexts, as different periods of time may in themselves stand in for combinations of variables or particular processes that could be conceptualized more generally. The goal would be to theorize about the conditions behind the period in question rather than the specific time itself.

This sort of theoretical development and accumulation can be seen in the literature on revolutions and the retrenchment of the welfare state. Wickham-Crowley (1992) provides a theory of revolution in Latin America, a conjunctural argument with five main conditions that include both political institutional circumstances as well as issues applicable to Latin American countries only. Together the five conditions explain each of the countries that had revolutions in that region. He argues that his explanation applies only to Latin America and does not try to extend it outward. Going further, Goodwin (2001) pitches his argumentation to all Third World countries and sees the different continents as providing different sorts of contextual conditions that can be employed in theoretical argumentation with implications for empirical differences. In his examination of social policy in the United States and Britain in the 1980s Pierson (1994) argues that forces for retrenchment were general across capitalist democracies in the last quarter of the twentieth century (see also Huber and Stephens, 2001; Swank, 2001). By this time most systems of social spending had been completed and expanded — had become “institutionalized” — and bids to cut them back were taken up in force by

many political regimes. Later Pierson (2000b) situates some of his arguments in institutional settings. He argues that retrenchment processes are likely to be dependent on the nature of the previous welfare state, whether it is liberal, conservative corporatist, or social democratic, according to Esping-Andersen's (1990) institutional models.

A way to go beyond theorizing about specific historical periods would be for political institutional theorists to make theoretical claims about phases of processes. In the literature on social policy, for instance, scholars have taken seriously the possibility that different phases of development of social policy had different determinants (Flora and Alber, 1981). From this point of view, because they differ as processes, the adoption of social policy may be determined by different causes than its expansion or its retrenchment (see review in Amenta, 2003). This conceptualization can be employed to reflect back on theory and improve it. By breaking social policy into different processes, scholars can theorize that conditions and variables will have a different impact across them. It has been argued with regard to the Marxist- and class-based social democratic explanation of social policy that a period of social democratic rule after the establishment of social policy may have less impact or a different sort of impact than when social policies were being adopted or changed in form (see, e.g., Hicks, 1999). Similarly, it may be useful to consider retrenchment as a recurrent possibility throughout the history of social policy with different determinants when once social policy has been established as compared to when it is at an early stage of institutionalization.

Spelling out as far as possible with concepts the scope conditions of theoretical argumentation in general terms would aid progress in both theory and research. Even if one's theoretical argument provides implications that eventually are not borne out in research — perhaps the largest drawback to theorizing beyond one's cases — the claims will give others something with which to begin their own empirical work and lead to the creation of better theories. This would be true whether one employs the conjunctural sort of theory in which combinations

of conditions lead to outcomes (Ragin, 1997; Ragin, 1987; sort in which events open in a certain way (Griffin, 1992). All that scholars making arguments need to do is have these arguments in hand. In short, one should be able to identify the conditions and implications of claims for processes and outcomes at hand.

Another analog to one's methodological approach is to extend contextual conditions to the macro level of political organization. A main line of argument in the theory is that political organization influences the identity of politically active groups and also constitutes content of the political organization. Politically mobilized groups in these contexts may have different level relationships, individual's class position, preferences. The task is to systematically how relationships at these levels and outcomes.

One way to sort out the conditions for theorists to theorize is to employ Boolean qualitative analysis (Ragin, 1987; see also Ragin, 1987). In a Boolean analysis one typically examines the conditions — all or none — and employs them as a dependent variable. All the combinations of conditions are tested with the outcomes for institutional change. This manner by a systematically analyzed the connections between meso-level development and the macro- and meso-levels to explain outcomes.

of conditions lead to outcomes (Katznelson, 1997; Ragin, 1987) or the time-order sequence sort in which events or processes must happen in a certain order to produce outcomes (Griffin, 1992). Abbott (1992) notably suggests that scholars making time-order or narrative arguments need to address populations rather than have these arguments always tied to case studies. In short, one should think through that applicability and implications of even path-dependent claims for processes in other settings than the ones at hand.

Another analogy from Przeworski and Teune's methodological precepts would be to extend contextual theorizing concerning the macro level of political institutions on meso-level relationships regarding interactions of political organizations and outcomes of interest. A main line of argumentation of institutional theory is that political institutions not only influence the identities and modes organization of politically active groups; political institutions also constitute contexts that alter relationships at the political organizational level between politically mobilized groups and outcomes of interest. These contexts may alter as well individual-level relationships, such as whether an individual's class position will influence political preferences. The task here would be to address systematically how these contexts influence the relationships at these lower levels between organizations and outcomes or processes.

One way to sort this out is for institutionalists to theorize if they were going to employ Boolean qualitative comparative analysis (Ragin, 1987; see also 2000) to appraise their claims. In a Boolean analysis, an investigator typically examines a set of five or fewer categorical – all or nothing – independent variables and employs them to explain a categorical dependent variable. A set of algorithms indicate the combinations of conditions that are associated with the outcome in question. But the task for institutional scholars would be to theorize in this manner by a stepwise process that first analyzed the connections between macro-level and meso-level developments and then combined the macro- and meso-level elements in an analysis to explain outcomes, using the macro-level

elements as contextual factors for the meso-level ones. One would start from theoretical arguments made on a few cases in a specific time period and extend the thinking outward as far as one would think it plausible.

The theorizing process would thus begin by addressing the impact of higher-level institutional conditions or processes on meso-level organizational conditions or processes. In the first step one would theorize about the interaction of macroinstitutional conditions that would be likely to lead to the prevalence of actors at a meso level, including perhaps the existence of certain state bureaus and agencies. The elements of the argument at the either level might include processes and issues of timing, such as whether a polity was democratized before it was bureaucratized. From these one would make claims about the relationship between different meso-level actors and their forms of activity or lines of action within different macrosocial contexts and the outcomes or processes to be explained. In thinking through the different combinations expected to lead to the outcomes in question, one could theorize that multiple combinations might lead to the same outcome. In this way it would be possible to make claims, for instance, about the adoption of major social spending programs across all interwar capitalist democracies or a successful revolutions in post-World War II Third World countries. One would be able to think through which combinations of explanatory circumstances and variables would be impossible or unlikely to appear empirically and tighten theoretical thinking (Stinchcombe, 1968).

In my own work on the development of social policy (Amenta, 1998), I argue along these lines. One claim is that the democratization of the polity, a systemic condition, influences relationships at the meso level between political actors and social policy. For instance, it is generally held among statist scholars that autonomous and resourceful domestic bureaucracies will spur social spending policy. I argue instead that this relationship depends crucially on whether and the degree to which the larger polity is democratized, with autonomous domestic bureaucracies largely uninfluential in underdemocratized

after Pierson (2000b) agents in institutional enrichment processes. It is on the nature of whether it is liberal, or social democratic, or Pierson's (1990) institu-

theorizing about should be for political institutional theoretical claims. In the literature on scholars have taken different phases of theory had different developments (Ragin, 1981). From this they differ as processes, may be determined expansion or its remnants (Amenta, 2003). This is employed to reflect on it. By breaking social processes, scholars can variables will have a. It has been argued and class-based social policy that rule after the establishment have less impact or when social policy changed in form (see, it may be useful to current possibility of social policy with difficulty social policy has to when it is at an ion.

able with concepts theoretical arguments would aid progress in if one's theoretical claims that even research – perhaps theorizing beyond one's others something in empirical work other theories. This employs the combination

politics. I argue as well that the relationship depends in part on the partisan nature of the political regime in power. The larger argument also extends to the influence of other politically mobilized groups on social policy. An underdemocratized polity not only discourages the mobilization of social movements but also attenuates the relationship between their collective action and advances in social policy. Although the theoretical claims are appraised on the development of U.S. social policy, in comparison with that of Britain, the claims are general enough in nature that they could be applied to other cases.

CONCLUSION

The turn toward political institutionalism in political sociology, thinking about states in a Weberian and organizational manner, has opened up a number of questions for research, breaking through the barriers imposed by other perspectives. These questions, such as the development of states, the appearance of revolutions and other social movements, and the development of social policies are of key interest to those who study issues of political power and have helped to transform the subject matter of political sociology.

What is more, scholars have proposed political institutional theories of politics and states to explain these and other social processes and outcomes. These arguments have been mainly structural and systemic but also address relationships at lower levels of organization. Macro-level structures constitute political contexts that influence the politics at the organizational level and the relationship between the forms and lines of action of these organizations and political outcomes of interest. In addition, institutional theories have been opened up to become historical in nature, with the political process modeled as states influencing political

action, which influences states at a later point in time.

These advances and evolutions in the theoretical project have also brought with them important theoretical challenges for its proponents. Institutional theories do well in explaining the broad lines on which political contention takes place and the limits on political activity, but less well in explaining changes. Also, the way that political institutional thinking has progressed has depended on groups of researchers mainly making arguments about a few cases in historical periods about which they have detailed knowledge. They have not often extended their theoretical thinking to the relevant populations of cases and processes. This has slowed the development of political institutional theory and the accumulation of research findings in particular areas of study.

To make greater contributions theoretically and to avoid degenerating into a framework or an outlook, political institutionalism needs to be able to make greater portable theoretical claims about the likely consequences of different configurations of political institutions and actors on outcomes and processes of importance. The task here is to develop configurational theoretical claims in which connect political institutions at the systemic level to actors and relationships between them at the meso level to processes and outcomes, such as revolutions or social policy and the like. This theorizing should be done in ways that go beyond the specific cases at hand. Institutional scholars also need to better theorize path-dependent argumentation, in which timing and sequence matter in the explanation of outcomes. This important thing is for this reciprocal process to be modeled and applied more systematically to key comparative and historical questions. These issues, which amount to in essence a call for more middle-range theory with greater historical sophistication built in, are both challenges and opportunities for the next generation of scholars.

In the last thirty years, culture has been taken more seriously as an analytical tool than ever before. A generation of scholars has demonstrated the cultural dimensions of social processes they have shown the political dimensions of childrearing to insurrection, shows to presidential inaugurations, to the gardens of Versailles, to fashion. Across many disciplines, culture today is about the power of the rhetorical legitimations, the social determinants of the reproduction of hierarchies, of cultural capital, the negotiation of the individual self. To show that culture is socially constructed — culture as intellectual pastimes — is not to show its political purposes hidden (Hall 1999).

Political sociology shows that thanks to the "cultural turn," culture and politics have become inseparable lenses for viewing all social life. The opposite has happened: politics is entering its domain as the clash of wills, the construction of social and institutions, wherever they are, words, making politics, making the world — politics has defined its terrain more nations of the nation-state citizenship and boundaries.