

Introduction

Political sociology is 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 macrofocus has centered on questions about 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). Here, researchers have asked “big” questions about how and why political institutions take the form that they do, and how and when they undergo significant change. The micro orientation, by contrast, examines how social identities and groups influence individual political behavior, such as voting, attitudes, and political participation. While both the macro- and micro-areas of political sociology overlap with political science, the distinctive focus of political sociologists is less on the internal workings or mechanics of the political system and more on the underlying social forces that shape the political system. Political sociology can trace its origins to the writings of Alexis de Tocqueville, Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, and Max Weber, among others, but it only emerged as a separate subfield within sociology after World War II. Many of the

landmark works of the 1950s and 1960s centered on microquestions about the impact of class, religion, race/ethnicity, or education on individual and group-based political behavior. Beginning in the 1970s, political sociologists increasingly turned toward macrotopics, such as understanding the sources and consequences of revolutions, the role of political institutions in shaping political outcomes, and large-scale comparative-historical studies of state development. Today both micro- and macroscholarship can be found in political sociology.

Textbooks

For beginning students, several introductory political sociology textbooks provide a more basic entrée to the field. While covering much of the same ground, these also vary somewhat in topics emphasized or covered. The most comprehensive introductory work, rare for giving significant attention to both micro- and macrotraditions in political sociology while still providing a discussion of theoretical classics, is that of [Orum and Dale 2009](#). [Neuman 2008](#) provides a comprehensive introduction to the field in terms of topics treated (although giving relatively little attention to microquestions). [Nash 2007](#) focuses on globalization, gender dynamics, and political change. [Lachmann \(2010\)](#) provides a historically grounded

introduction to the rise of states and the relationship between states and domestic power structures.