

A COMPARATIVE HISTORICAL  
AND TYPOLOGICAL APPROACH TO  
THE MIDDLE EASTERN STATE  
SYSTEM

# COMPARATIVE SOCIAL RESEARCH

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COMPARATIVE SOCIAL RESEARCH VOLUME 36

**A COMPARATIVE  
HISTORICAL AND  
TYPOLOGICAL APPROACH  
TO THE MIDDLE EASTERN  
STATE SYSTEM: TAKING  
STEIN ROKKAN'S  
AMBITIONS BEYOND  
EUROPE**

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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# PREFACE

Lars Mjøset, Nils Butenschøn and Kristian Berg Harpviken

Editing this volume, our inspiration has been Stein Rokkan's (1921–1979) work on state formation and nation building.

Presently, this research field is hampered by a gap between the single-case historical orientation of area studies (mostly in humanities faculties) and the generalizing studies based on large datasets pursued in social science (political science, sociology). Discussions across that gap seem trapped in a vicious cycle where each side is preoccupied with identifying the shortcomings of the other rather than engaging in constructive interchange of ideas. The 'state of the art' is divided: several country-related research frontiers on the humanities side are countered on the social science side by a plethora of formal conceptual frameworks that are insufficiently grounded in historical case studies.

At the time of his death in 1979, Stein Rokkan had developed the skeleton of a methodology that promises to bridge this gap. Chapter 1 in this volume contains the first English translation of Rokkan's 1976 Paris lecture, the broadest and most popular overview he ever gave of his approach to comparative history. Rokkan spoke up for a particular type of comparative historical macro-sociology, which is solidly rooted in case studies, but still employs lists of explanatory factors that can be combined in conceptual-typological maps which account for the variation in patterns of state formation both within specific historical periods and over time.

Commentators on Rokkan's work have not been sufficiently aware of the inherent promise of this methodology. They have dealt with Rokkan's latest work (in the 1970s) as a contribution to the comparative history of state formation and nation building in Western Europe only. In our view, Rokkan did more than that: he contributed a set of methodological tools that allow for the construction of typologies, models and maps that can aid the comparative study of state formation and nation building in any world region. In this perspective, Rokkan's work on Western Europe can be seen as the calibration – or regional specification – of such a set of methodological tools, using empirical material on Western European historical developments over the long term. His key insight was that relevant models and maps cannot be developed by means of formal concepts alone; concepts must be grounded in knowledge about the specific history of the region and its components.

Since Rokkan's main innovation was regional models, methodological improvements must be linked to both theoretical and empirical efforts. Rokkan's argument matches the insight that middle range or grounded theories dominate in any branch of social science that aims at explaining specified outcomes. Since

states are huge and complex units, workable models and maps of state formation and nation building must be grounded in thorough studies of the regional historical context. Regional models and maps can only be developed by moving back and forth between a conceptual framework and sketches of historical explanations that employ comparisons of empirical processes leading to the outcomes under study. By reconstructing and upgrading Rokkan's methodology, we hope to show how the unfortunate gap in our fields can be mended.

Lars Mjøset's Chapter 2 situates Rokkan's approach in the framework of recent methodological contributions on the differences between variables- and case-oriented social science. Chapter 4, by Mjøset, Butenschøn, Harpviken and Meijer, tries to pursue Rokkan's research program, given the qualifications in Chapter 2, in a comparative analysis of 20 Middle Eastern states in the period between the 1870s and the 1920s.

The rest of the papers in this volume relate to Rokkan's work in different ways, even if they are not directly based on the framework presented in Chapters 2 and 4. In Chapter 3, Knut Vikør compares two pairs of Maghreb states, adding three Mashreq cases (Egypt, Iraq and Syria). He does not explicitly relate to Rokkan's methodology, but the seven-case comparisons he presents – grounded in deep knowledge of the relevant historical literature – have many elements that are parallel to Rokkan-style comparisons. In Chapter 5, Rania Maktabi analyzes citizenship and divorce laws in four Maghreb states (Algeria, Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia), relating Rokkan's early work with R. Bendix to more recent conceptual frameworks. In Chapter 6, Julia Palik analyzes the roles played by Iran and Saudi Arabia in the Yemen conflict in line with George and Bennett's method of structured, focused comparison, a procedure that has many parallels to Rokkan's approach.

Chapters 7–10 make up a book symposium devoted to Ahmet Kuru's *Islam, Authoritarianism, and Underdevelopment* (2019), a study that emphasizes common traits in all Muslim countries. Two review articles, by Knut Vikør and Roel Meijer, raise questions about the absence of comparative perspectives and suggest alternative explanatory strategies. In his rejoinder, Kuru replies to his critics.

All the papers in this volume pursue qualitative, case-based analysis, often using tables to systematically explicate conceptual specifications, summarize strategies of comparative analysis, draw up typological maps, list dates of historical events and/or provide compilations of relevant indicators and facts. It should be noted that unless otherwise specified, these tables are not copied from other sources, but represent the original work of the authors, published here for the first time.

The contributions to this volume came out of two workshops entitled 'The Transformation of the State System in the Middle East'. The first was hosted at the Department of Sociology and Human Geography, University of Oslo, 3–4 December 2018. The second was hosted at the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), 28–29 November 2019. All contributions are based on presentations at the workshops. All but two of the article authors were workshop presenters. All articles, with the exception of the Rokkan lecture, have been peer reviewed.

The editors are grateful to their host institutions for supporting this endeavor, to all who contributed to the workshops (also the many whose papers are not part of this volume), to the reviewers for contributing greatly to the quality of the works as they appear here and to the staff at Emerald publishers who tolerated a series of last-minute delays on the part of the editors.