

Comparative Sociology of Information Societies

27-31 July 2004

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INTRODUCTION

This course on the comparative sociology of information societies will critically assess theories of international development from across the social sciences. From political science, theories of modernization, dependency, underdevelopment help explain both surges of economic wealth from high tech sectors and the persistence of international institutions for extracting wealth from poor countries. From sociology, world systems theory puts the development of new economic systems into deep historical perspective, and the new institutionalism highlights systems of institutional isomorphism, competitive mimicry, normative emulation, and coercion that might explain how hardware and software systems become global standards. Communication offers theories of technology diffusion, cultural production and consumption online, and topical expertise on how engineering standards and telecommunications policy become tools of social control.

Many social scientists are studying the impact of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) on our economic, political and cultural lives. The range of phenomena studied across the disciplines is impressive: the global economy, the organizational behavior of firms, and the dot-com boom; the structure of the world system, the bureaucratic efficiency of states, the international politics of technical standards; cultural production and consumption, intercultural communication, and ownership diversity of digital media systems. The use of new ICTs, such as mobile phones and the internet, is also being studied in different contexts, from small and local organizational field sites such as work places, households, and schools, to large institutions such as states, firms, social movements and justice systems. In addition, there are new social forms of organization in cyberspace, forms of organization that help define and indeed constitute information societies. The goals of this class are

- to understand the role of information and communication technology in international development;
- to understand the theoretical perspectives on technology and development from different disciplines by exploring their use in cross case comparisons;
- to critically assess these theories, applying them in a personal research project or case study of interest to the student.

What is an information society? How do well do these theories—proposed to help explain transitions from agrarian to industrial society and the evolution of late industrial capitalism—help explain the network society, open society or information society? Is e-government a straightforward means of building state capacity and further rationalizing public bureaucracies, or are there signs of a deeper transformation in the institution of the state? What is the role of blogs, wikis and other digital media systems in the culture and news diets of people living in authoritarian regimes? While the role of mobile phones and the internet in democratic movements has been feted from Iqaluit to Indonesia, no political revolution has occurred because of the internet. But today, are democratic transitions possible without it? How has the international high tech sector been structured to limit the types of technology production and consumption in different countries? If there are persistent international institutions for extracting

natural resource wealth from poor countries, do these institutions have a similar role in extracting information, innovation, or ingenuity from poor countries?

We will critically explore the concepts often used in discussions of contemporary international political economy, including “network society”, “digital divide,” and “information society”. We will also review the theories of modernization, dependency, and underdevelopment that have been used to understand the problems and prospects of development. Case studies from around the world will be used wherever possible. Students will have significant freedom to develop their own research interests through a paper on a topic of their own choosing. Through diverse readings, students will also learn about the various methodologies for studying technology and society.

Although this course has no formal prerequisites, students with at least one substantive course and one methods course in the political, social or communication sciences will be best prepared for the pace and expectations of this course.

OUTLINE

All the required readings are provided in PDF form in advance, or are found online at the URLs below. Students are encouraged to do the additional reading on topics they are particularly interested before the course begins. Please buy these books:

Gilpin, R, and J Gilpin. *Global Political Economy: Understanding the International Economic Order*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001.

AND

Marx, Karl. *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*. New York: Penguin, 1993.

AND

Benkler, Yochai. *The Wealth of Networks : How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006.

OR

Castells, Manuel. *The Rise of the Network Society*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996.

July 27, Day 1

Lecture 1: Introduction to the Course

At this first meeting, we will review the course outline, and outline the comparative sociological approach to studying information societies.

Gilpin, R, and J Gilpin. *Global Political Economy: Understanding the International Economic Order*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001. Read Chapter 1, 4, 5, 6 and others as of interest to the student.

Lecture 2: Modernization

One of the core concepts in international political economy is that of “modernization”: What are the intellectual roots of the concept that all countries advance in development? How might theories of modernization succeed or fail in explaining the development of information societies?

Marx, Karl. *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*. New York: Penguin, 1993. Read the Forward by Nicolaus (pp. 7-63), the Chapter On Money (pp. 116-238) and the section on community (pp. 472-501).

July 28, Day 2

Lecture 3: Dependency and Underdevelopment

In response to the paradigm of modernization, two rival theories arose to explain the peculiar patterns in international political economy: countries that do not develop at all, or seem to develop in limited ways. Why are theories of dependency and underdevelopment still largely unrefuted? How might they be useful for explaining patterns in the development of information societies?

Galtung, J. "A Structural Theory of Imperialism." *Journal of Peace Research* 8 (1971): 81-117.

Howard, P. N. "Testing the Leap-Frog Hypothesis: Assessing the Impact of Extant Infrastructure and Telecommunication Policy on the Global Digital Divide." *Information, Communication & Society* 10, no. 2 (2007): 133-57.

Palma, G. "Dependency: A Formal Theory of Underdevelopment or a Methodology for the Analysis of Concrete Situations of Underdevelopment?" *World Development* 6 (1978): 881-924.

Lecture 4: Metaphors—Network Societies

One of the most powerful metaphors we have in the comparative sociology of information societies is that of the "network society". What are the origins of the concept, and in what ways is it useful? How has the concept evolved over time, and what are its limitations? Note choice of reading one of these two books.

Benkler, Yochai. *The Wealth of Networks : How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006. Read Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 7 and others of interest.

OR

Castells, Manuel. *The Rise of the Network Society*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996. Read Chapters 1, 3, 4, 6 and others of interest.

Additional Reading: Podolny, J, and K. Page. "Network Forms of Organization." *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998): 57-76.

July 29, Day 3

Lecture 5: Metaphors—Open Societies

The "open society" metaphor is also used to identify forms of social organization in which information flows can be radically egalitarian, with important implications for the public sphere. How does the open society analytical frame define political, economic and cultural life?

Calhoun, Craig. "Community without Propinquity Revisited: Communications Technology and the Transformation of the Urban Public Sphere." *Sociological Inquiry* 68, no. 3 (1998): 373-97.

Dányi, Endre. "Xerox Project: Photocopy Machines as a Metaphor for An "Open Society." *Information Society* 22, no. 2 (2006): 111-15.

Lecture 6: Metaphors—Knowledge Societies

Information alone may not make a “knowledge society” in which pressing social problems are solved in timely ways with positive outcomes. Moreover, some social groups function more like knowledge networks than others. What does it mean to be in a knowledge network, and how do these differ from other forms of social organization?

Haas, Peter. “Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination” in International Organization Special Issue Knowledge, Power and International Policy Coordination “ *International Organization* 46, no. 1 (1992): 1-35.

Mitchell, Ronald. “Sources of Transparency: Information Systems in International Regimes.” *International Studies Quarterly* 42, no. 1 (1998): 109-30.

Powell, W. W., and K. Snellman. “The Knowledge Economy.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 30 (2004): 199-220.

July 30, Day 4

Lecture 7: Metaphors—Digital Divides

What are the primary bases of social inequality in information societies? How are such “digital divides” manifest within and between countries? What kinds of telecommunications policies, education reforms, and development goals exacerbate or mitigate such divides?

Dijk, Jan van. “Digital Divide Research, Achievements and Shortcomings.” *Poetics* 34 (2006): 221-35.

Henisz, Witold J., Bennet A. Zelner, and Mauro F. Guillén. “The Worldwide Diffusion of Market-Oriented Infrastructure Reform, 1977-1999.” *American Sociological Review* 70, no. 6: 871-97.

Milner, Helen V. “The Digital Divide: The Role of Political Institutions in Technology Diffusion.” *Comparative Political Studies* 39, no. 2 (2006): 176-99.

Lecture 8: Modernization and Civil Society Revisited?

The rubric of using information technologies for social development in poor countries is often called “ICT4D” by practitioners and policy makers. Do information technologies have a role in contemporary democratization? How are ICTs used by states, political parties, journalists, and civil society actors in authoritarian regimes? Is ICT4D a way of resuscitating the old development model of modernization? Note choice of reading on Eritrea or Iran.

Leye, Veva. “Unesco, ICT Corporations and the Passion of ICT for Development: Modernization Resurrected.” *Media Culture Society* 29 (2007): 972-93.

McLaughlin, W. S. “The Use of the Internet for Political Action by Non-State Dissident Actors in the Middle East.” *First Monday* 8, no. 11 (2003). Online: http://www.firstmonday.org/ISSUES/issue8_11/mclaughlin/.

Sorenson, John, and Atsuko Matsuoka. “Phantom Wars and Cyberwars: Abyssinian Fundamentalism and Catastrophe in Eritrea.” *Dialectical Anthropology* 26, no. 1 (2001): 37-63.

OR

Doostdar, Alireza. ““The Vulgar Spirit of Blogging”: On Language, Culture, and Power in Persian Weblogistan.” *American Anthropologist* 106, no. 4 (2004): 651-62.

July 31, Day 5

Lecture 9: Crime and Deviance Online

While there are many examples of how information technologies are used to support democratization movements, enable collaborative learning processes and built knowledge societies, there is a dark side as well. How do ICTs support networks of criminals and terrorists? When do elite strategies for managing culture through censorship software overcome the public benefits of information access online?

Cronin, Blaise, and Elisabeth Davenport. "E-Rogenous Zones: Positioning Pornography in the Digital Economy." *The Information Society* 17, no. 1 (2001): 33 - 48.

Erickson, Kris, and Philip N. Howard. "A Case of Mistaken Identity? News Accounts of Hacker and Organizational Responsibility for Compromised Digital Records." *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication* 12, no. 4 (2007). Online: <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol12/issue4/>

Shields, Peter. "When the 'Information Revolution' and the US Security State Collide: Money Laundering and the Proliferation of Surveillance." *New Media Society* 7, no. 4 (2005): 483-512.

Additional Reading: Denning, David. "Activism, Hacktivism, and Cyberterrorism." In *Networks and Netwars*, edited by John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt. Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2001.

Williams, P. "Transnational Criminal Networks." In *Networks and Netwars*, edited by John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt. Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2001.

Lecture 10: ICTs, Social Movements and Culture Jamming

Information technologies have been used to help overcome some of the most pernicious collective action problems. Zapatistas used the internet to project their agenda onto the international stage, and activists in countries around the world use the internet and mobile phones to organize their movements into agile, effective forces for political change. When are such strategies most effective, and how should we think of the informationalization of our political lives?

Bennett, W. Lance, and Amoshaun Toft. "Identity, Technology, and Narratives: Transnational Activism and Social Networks." In *Handbook of Internet Politics*, edited by Andrew Chadwick and Philip Howard, 246-60. London, UK: Routledge, 2009.

Bimber, Bruce, Cynthia Stohl, and Andrew Flanagin. "Technological Change and the Shifting Nature of Political Organization." In *Handbook of Internet Politics*, edited by Andrew Chadwick and Philip Howard, 72-85. London, UK: Routledge, 2009.

Kahn, Richard, and Douglas Kellner. "New Media and Internet Activism: From the 'Battle of Seattle' to Blogging." *New Media & Society* 6, no. 1 (2004): 87-95.

THE COMPLETE READING LIST

- Benkler, Yochai. *The Wealth of Networks : How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006.
- Bennett, W. Lance, and Amoshaun Toft. "Identity, Technology, and Narratives: Transnational Activism and Social Networks." In *Handbook of Internet Politics*, edited by Andrew Chadwick and Philip Howard, 246-60. London, UK: Routledge, 2009.
- Bimber, Bruce, Cynthia Stohl, and Andrew Flanagin. "Technological Change and the Shifting Nature of Political Organization." In *Handbook of Internet Politics*, edited by Andrew Chadwick and Philip Howard, 72-85. London, UK: Routledge, 2009.
- Calhoun, Craig. "Community without Propinquity Revisited: Communications Technology and the Transformation of the Urban Public Sphere." *Sociological Inquiry* 68, no. 3 (1998): 373-97.
- Castells, Manuel. *The Rise of the Network Society*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996.
- Cronin, Blaise, and Elisabeth Davenport. "E-Rogenous Zones: Positioning Pornography in the Digital Economy." *The Information Society* 17, no. 1 (2001): 33 - 48.
- Dányi, Endre. "Xerox Project: Photocopy Machines as a Metaphor for An "Open Society." *Information Society* 22, no. 2 (2006): 111-15.
- Dijk, Jan van. "Digital Divide Research, Achievements and Shortcomings." *Poetics* 34 (2006): 221-35.
- Doostdar, Alireza. "'the Vulgar Spirit of Blogging': On Language, Culture, and Power in Persian Weblogestan." *American Anthropologist* 106, no. 4 (2004): 651-62.
- Erickson, Kris, and Philip N. Howard. "A Case of Mistaken Identity? News Accounts of Hacker and Organizational Responsibility for Compromised Digital Records." *Journal of Computer Mediated Communication* 12, no. 4 (2007).
- Galtung, Johan. "A Structural Theory of Imperialism." *Journal of Peace Research* 8, no. 2 (1971): 81-117.
- Gilpin, R, and J Gilpin. *Global Political Economy: Understanding the International Economic Order*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Haas, Peter. "Introduction: Epistemic Communities and International Policy Coordination" in International Organization Special Issue Knowledge, Power and International Policy Coordination " *International Organization* 46, no. 1 (1992): 1-35.
- Henisz, Witold J., Bennet A. Zelner, and Mauro F. Guillén. "The Worldwide Diffusion of Market-Oriented Infrastructure Reform, 1977-1999." *American Sociological Review* 70, no. 6: 871-97.
- Howard, P. N. "Testing the Leap-Frog Hypothesis: Assessing the Impact of Extant Infrastructure and Telecommunication Policy on the Global Digital Divide." *Information, Communication & Society* 10, no. 2 (2007): 133-57.
- Kahn, Richard, and Douglas Kellner. "New Media and Internet Activism: From the 'Battle of Seattle' to Blogging." *New Media & Society* 6, no. 1 (2004): 87-95.
- Leye, Veva. "Unesco, ICT Corporations and the Passion of ICT for Development: Modernization Resurrected." *Media Culture Society* 29 (2007): 972-93.
- Marx, Karl. *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*. New York: Penguin, 1993.
- McLaughlin, W. S. "The Use of the Internet for Political Action by Non-State Dissident Actors in the Middle East." *First Monday* 8, no. 11 (2003).
- Milner, Helen V. "The Digital Divide: The Role of Political Institutions in Technology Diffusion." *Comparative Political Studies* 39, no. 2 (2006): 176-99.

- Mitchell, Ronald. "Sources of Transparency: Information Systems in International Regimes." *International Studies Quarterly* 42, no. 1 (1998): 109-30.
- Palma, Gabriel. "Dependency: A Formal Theory of Underdevelopment or a Methodology for the Analysis of Concrete Situations of Underdevelopment?" *World Development* 6, no. 7-8 (1978): 881-924.
- Powell, W. W., and K. Snellman. "The Knowledge Economy." *Annual Review of Sociology* 30 (2004): 199-220.
- Shields, Peter. "When the 'Information Revolution' and the US Security State Collide: Money Laundering and the Proliferation of Surveillance." *New Media Society* 7, no. 4 (2005): 483-512.
- Sorenson, John, and Atsuko Matsuoka. "Phantom Wars and Cyberwars: Abyssinian Fundamentalism and Catastrophe in Eritrea." *Dialectical Anthropology* 26, no. 1 (2001): 37-63.

INSTRUCTOR

Philip N. Howard (BA [Toronto](#), MSc [London School of Economics](#), PhD [Northwestern](#)) is an associate professor in the [Department of Communication](#) at the [University of Washington](#). His current research and teaching interests include the role of new information technologies in the political communication systems of advanced democracies, and the role of new information technologies in the social development of poor countries. He is the author of *New Media Campaigns and the Managed Citizen* ([New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006](#)), about how information technology is by political elites to structure public opinion and political culture in the United States. This book was awarded the 2007 CITASA Best Book prize from the American Sociological Association and the 2008 Best Book prize from the International Communication Association. He has edited *Society Online: The Internet in Context* ([Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004, with Steve Jones](#)) and the *Handbook of Internet Politics* ([London: Routledge, 2008, with Andrew Chadwick](#)). He has authored numerous journal articles examining the role of new information and communication technologies in politics and social development, including pieces in the [American Behavioral Scientist](#), the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, and *New Media & Society*. He has worked on several National Science Foundation projects, serving on the advisory board of the [Survey2000](#) and [Survey2001 Projects](#), co-managing a project about [Information and Communication Technologies in Central Asia](#), and directing the [World Information Access Project](#). This latest research project—supported by both the NSF and [Intel's People and Practices Group](#)—investigates patterns of technology diffusion between and within developing countries. He teaches courses on [research methods](#), [politics online](#), and [international development](#). Howard has been a Fellow at the [Pew Internet & American Life Project](#) in Washington D.C., the [Stanhope Centre for Communications Policy Research](#) in London, and the [Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences](#) in Palo Alto.