

Suggested ASR Reviewer Guidelines for Comparative Historical Papers

November 2015

At ASR we are committed to showcasing the full range of work produced by sociologists today. This includes papers that rely on historical data (using either primary or secondary sources) as empirical evidence. We realize that, for some readers, these papers can pose some challenges to evaluation. The potential danger is that reviewers might hold comparative historical work to inappropriate standards that are more applicable to papers that follow more conventional regression modelling strategies. To that end, we are providing you with a set of optional guidelines that reflect the particular points to cover in your evaluation that would be most helpful for us in our job as editors.

1. *Clarity of Statement of Significance.* Comparative historical sociology (CHS) papers should make a claim to significance either with reference to the causes and/or mechanisms of a class of social phenomena of long-standing substantive or theoretical interest (e.g. revolutions, social movements, state formation, or historical transitions) or with reference to genuine historical puzzles of broad significance. Please comment on the extent to which the paper makes clear the significance of the particular question(s) or historical episode(s) analyzed and/or how it could be revised to reach this goal more effectively.
2. *Appropriateness of Case Selection.* The problem of case selection is of key importance in comparative historical work, and we expect authors to offer convincing answers to the issue of case selection. Authors should provide clear answers to the following questions: Why is a particular case (or set of cases) the most appropriate setting in which to explore the theoretical problem at hand? What universe of cases is possible, and how have these particular cases been drawn from that larger universe? If cases are indeed singular in some important ways, authors should specify this uniqueness and make clear what comparative lessons may be garnered from the case-specific analysis. Please comment on the extent to which the author has been successful in explicitly articulating the logic of case-selection, case-availability and case-singularity, and/or how the paper can be revised to do this more effectively.
3. *Appropriateness of the Logic of Comparative Analysis.* If the research is explicitly comparative, authors need to be clear regarding the key dimensions of variation across cases especially as these motivate the proposed comparison. Authors also need to be explicit as to how this variation provides explanatory leverage on the problem that the paper seeks to resolve. Because comparative historical analysis seeks to understand cases as wholes (rather than as cluster of “variables”), authors should aim to unpack the configuration of processes that combine to produce a particular outcome. In all cases, authors need to make explicit the questions they are posing and the analytic assumptions of their analyses. Please comment on the extent to which the author has been successful in explicitly laying out the logic of comparison underlying the key substantive claims the paper, and/or how the paper can be revised to do this more effectively.
4. *Appropriateness of Methods and Data Sources.* CHS papers should be judged on whether the authors’ chosen methods are appropriate for the problem they have set for themselves. Data may be qualitative or quantitative, or may consist of a reanalysis secondary sources or primary documents. Whatever the sources used in comparative historical research, the original interpretation of primary or secondary materials is a hallmark of the method. Your review should comment on the extent to which the author was successful in leveraging the

evidentiary sources at hand and of linking the data sources to the substantive questions posed in the theoretical introduction. Please be explicit in your evaluation if you feel that the author requires a different evidentiary source than the one used in the paper to answer the relevant research questions.

5. *Length.* Comparative historical papers will tend to be longer -- in some cases, significantly longer -- than papers written using other methods. This is not license to be undisciplined in writing; comparative historical research, like other methods, should attempt to include only data necessary to carry the argument, not every possible detail relevant to a particular historical event. But it is important to recognize that the compression that quantitative methods allow is not feasible -- nor desirable -- in the writing of comparative historical sociology. Please comment on the extent to which the paper is efficient and clear in its writing, whether the paper requires more elaboration in its exposition, or whether it contains excessive material that could be shortened or relegated to a supplementary document.
6. *Temporal Scope.* The term "history" in comparative historical sociology generally refers to an attentiveness to social processes that unfold through time, and not necessarily to events that occurred in any particular period, at some necessary remoteness from the present, or over any particular time span. An account of something that happened in the recent past over the course of one day (or even smaller time increments) may be "historical" research if the account is attentive to temporality, sequence, and contingency. Please comment on the extent to which the paper leverages temporality and sequentiality of the phenomena under consideration for purposes of elucidation, explanation, and theory-building.
7. *Validation.* CHS papers should be attentive to issues of validation. This may involve the use of negative cases, strategic comparisons, counterfactual analysis, process-tracing, narrative analysis, set-theoretic strategies, event-structure analysis, or triangulation across different data sources. We are interested in your evaluation of the extent to which the paper succeeds in providing the reader with sufficient indication that the findings are robust, reliable, and trustworthy. We are also interested in the extent to which you see the basic conclusions of the research as emerging and connecting to the findings reported in the paper.