
In Memoriam

Douglass C. North

Few social scientists have equaled the impact on political science of Douglass C. North, co-winner of the Nobel Laureate in Economics in 1993. His extraordinary influence emanated from his ideas but was also a result of his vast social network of collaborators, students, and friendly critics.

North was at the forefront of four revolutions in economics and political economy¹: (1) The New Economic History (NEH), (2) the “property rights” revolution, (3) the New Institutional Economics, and (4) cognitive science.

Even so, this list understates his influence. Doug began his career as an economist, and his first book, *The Economic Growth of the United States, 1790–1860* (North 1961), was part of the NEH revolution. This book is among the first to bring massive amounts of data to questions of history. Doug’s subsequent works all involved understanding the choices made by states, most of which failed to produce growth while a very small number did produce growth.

Doug became a major leader in historical and comparative political science, and in the study of institutions more generally. His work proved particularly relevant for those interested in questions of state-building, state variation, and long-term secular change.

Doug’s curiosity about issues of politics and governments began early, but it became salient with the publication of *The Rise of the Western World* (North and Thomas 1973) and was fully realized in *Structure and Change* (North 1981). Doug’s involvement with political scientists began with the conception and writing of *Structure and Change*; teaching a seminar with Levi for many years at the University of Washington, Seattle; and then moving to Washington University, St. Louis, in 1983 where he was influenced by—and influenced—such scholars as Jim Alt, Jean Enslinger, Jack Knight, Norman Schofield, Ken Shepsle, and Barry Weingast.

NORTH AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

Doug’s interest in political science reflected the same motivation that led him, earlier, to explorations of analyses of property rights and transaction costs and, later, of cognitive science. He had a puzzle, and he needed more pieces to complete it. John Wallis (2016), in his review of Doug’s work and life in the *EHR*, captures this exactly when he argues that, after mightily trying to stay within the confines of neo-classical economic theory to account for long-term institutional change in the books with Thomas (North and Thomas 1973) and Davis, *Institutional Change and American Economic Growth* (Davis and North 1971), Doug recognized the need to search for complements to and revisions of standard premises. That search led him back to Marx, then on to political science, and then to Margaret Levi.

Almost all of his closest friends and collaborators have a story to tell of their initial interactions with Doug. Margaret’s began with a phone call when she was just beginning as an assistant professor at the University of Washington. Doug, who—again, as Wallis notes and to which we both attest—had a reputation as a curmudgeon, called Margaret to ask her to lunch. The economist Sam Bowles had told him that Margaret knew something about Marxism, which offered

perhaps a way to begin thinking about what he wanted to contemplate. Doug had studied Marx at Berkeley but needed a refresher. His conversations with Margaret soon morphed into their teaching a joint undergraduate seminar annually for almost a decade. Among the results were *Structure and Change in Economic History* by Doug (North 1981) and *Of Rule and Revenue* by Margaret (Levi 1988).

Simultaneously, Doug was gleaming all he could from economics colleagues about new ideas in industrial organization, contracting, property rights, and transaction costs, especially from Yoram Barzel and Steve Cheung, among others. Indeed, one of Doug’s hallmarks was to value a university environment for what it offered in ideas. He spent his academic career at places where he could best gather new tools and new concepts. The emblems of status parking spaces, or offices, or money were far from his highest priority. When the recognition of having gotten nearly all he could from his colleagues at the University of Washington, he moved to Washington University where the political scientists would give him what he needed next as he continued, tirelessly, to find the pieces for his puzzle. His focus on asking the big questions and his willingness to explore multiple disciplines to help him find clues to their solutions were Doug’s defining characteristics; they made him one of the most exciting intellects of his day.

Of equal importance was his extraordinary capacity as an organizer and a galvanizer. He built teams, groups of scholars with whom he interacted, learned from, and inspired. These teams promoted participant’s work as well as his own; he got others excited about ideas he was exploring and made them recognize the value of their contributions to solving key puzzles. He was also a great friend, solicitous, caring, and kind. He combined the two sides of his personality in his team-building. He believed all team members, and not least he, would benefit from the knowledge shared and the arguments about what we really know (or even can know). He asked questions, he challenged, he spared no feelings, but in the end all became smarter.

ELISABETH CASE

An understanding of Doug, especially in the second half of his career, requires an understanding of the important role of Elisabeth Case, his second wife and partner until he died. They married in 1972.

In partnership with Elisabeth, Doug grew as a person and a scholar. Elisabeth had been an editor at Michigan University Press and then at Cambridge University Press, which is where they met. As a result of her influence, indeed direct intervention, Doug’s writing improved significantly. So, too, did his team-building skills. She enhanced his emotional intelligence, and she intervened when he became too curmudgeonly. He came to understand how teams did better when the partners were cooperative. Perhaps, as significantly, Elisabeth made Doug realize the importance of norms and ideology in understanding human behavior.

MODELING ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

Doug was, for most of his research life, concerned with understanding the sources of economic growth and development, and he increasingly became interested in political development as well. With each book and project, he discovered new pieces of

the puzzle—and discovered as well the pieces he once thought fit that really did not.

THE THEORY OF THE STATE

According to North, “The existence of the state is essential for economic growth; the state, however, is the source of manmade economic failure” (1981, 20). North, unlike most economists, recognized that government had a positive influence on human interactions. He accepted that rules and regulations could at times represent a dead weight loss for society, but he wanted to know how often, under what conditions, and in what kinds of context that was true.² Nor was Smith’s invisible hand enough of the story: one had to do more than assume a set of institutions that provided property rights and security, a good explanation of the variation—in place and time—of the wealth of nations required an actual theory of the state.

Doug’s first effort was “a neo-classical theory of the state,” which focused on the state as the provider and enforcer of property rights. The state North described was predatory but fairly bloodless. He recognized that maintaining rule was often costly and involved coercion, especially against those groups who use violence to enhance bargaining power, the only form of power North acknowledged at this point. Later, in *Institutions, Institutional Change, and Economic Performance*, he introduced a more nuanced view: “If the state has coercive force, then those who run the state will use that force in their own interest at the expense of the rest of the society” (North 1990, 59).³ But it was not until his work with Wallis and Weingast (NWW) that he resolved the contradiction inherent in *Structure and Change*: The state is simultaneously the propagator and the subject of violence, and such insufficiently controlled violence (and power) contributes to inefficient institutions and affects the dynamics of change.

Nor were violence, ideas, and class conflict featured in his explanation of institutional change. The principal exogenous variables remained changes in relative prices, including technological and demographic factors.

North learned—as he always did. The limits of the neoclassical approach to the state became apparent to Doug even as he wrote the book. While he had touched on norms, beliefs, and culture in *Structure and Change* and introduced a first stab at the concept of ideology that might resolve free rider problems, he began to seek a framework that would encompass all those elements. That led him in several directions in the 1990s: first to refine his model of institutions, the next book (North 1990), and then to cognitive science as a way to understand the sources of knowledge, beliefs, and ideology (Denzau and North 1994; North 1996 [1993], 2005).

Doug also began focusing on dynamics: how and why politics and economies change over time. In the mid-1990s, Doug set out his agenda by proposing “five propositions of institutional change” (North 1995):

1. The continuous interaction between institutions and organizations in the economic setting of scarcity and hence competition is the key to institutional change.
2. Competition forces organizations to continually invest in skills and knowledge to survive. The kinds of skills and knowledge individuals and their organizations acquire will shape evolving perceptions about opportunities and hence choices that will incrementally alter institutions.
3. The institutional framework provides the incentives that dictate the kinds of skills and knowledge perceived to have the maximum pay-off.

4. Perceptions are derived from the mental constructs of the players.
5. The economies of scope, complementarities, and network externalities of an institutional matrix make institutional change overwhelmingly incremental and path dependent.

In this work, Doug sought to integrate organizations, institutions, competition, incentives, mental models of the players, and change over time.

Doug reported that after he got the Nobel Prize, governments would invite him to “play God,” as he called it; that is, to tell these governments how they could introduce new policies and institutions to create economic growth. He would advocate institutional improvements but also make clear that institutions require a set of supportive norms and beliefs. And that process was not a matter of a simple tweak or regulatory shift; a generation and its norms might have to die off. Another feature of these conversations, as Doug reported them, is that rulers and officials of the countries would invariably explain why Doug’s recommendations could not be implemented in their country!

THE GLORIOUS REVOLUTION: CONSTITUTIONALISM IN SEVENTEENTH CENTURY ENGLAND

In the 1970s and 1980s, in part due to the dominance of the Public Choice School, most rational choice models of politics focused on inefficiency (see, for example, Brennan and Buchanan 1980, Stigler 1971, Tollison 1981, Tullock 1976). Interest groups and rent-seeking biased public policy away from efficient outcomes toward inefficient ones. This approach raises a major problem. If politics produced inefficient outcomes, how did markets arise in the first place so that politics could slowly but ineffably erode them? No one knew. Indeed, almost no one raised this question (but see Wittman 1986).

North, in collaboration with Weingast, proposed an answer. To foster markets and prevent government predation, the state had to make credible commitments to restrict its behavior, honoring both the procedures of government (such as Parliament having exclusive control over taxation) and citizen rights (such as the right of *Habeas Corpus*).

Throughout the seventeenth century, the Stuart kings made a series of unilateral decisions without consulting Parliament, including raising taxes and ignoring laws passed by Parliament. Government predation was a major problem. When King James II ignored laws involving parliamentary elections (and his wife bore him a Catholic son) a large portion of the political nation rose against him, forcing him out in the Glorious Revolution of 1688–1689. As part of the revolution, Parliament announced a set of rules that, if violated by the King, would cause another revolution. These rules included honoring laws of Parliament and not imposing new taxes without the consent of Parliament. North and Weingast argued that these small changes in the de facto rules had massive implications.

To see this, consider sovereign debt. Prior to the Glorious Revolution, loans were personal to the king. He could unilaterally alter the terms, and lenders had no recourse to courts. Being rationally wary, lenders were reluctant to supply loans to the king; hence the king was credit constrained.

After the Glorious Revolution, this changed. Loans became acts of Parliament, implying that the terms could be revised only by another act of Parliament. A king who attempted to alter the terms of a loan unilaterally would violate parliamentary legislation and, by the terms of the Revolution, risk a coup.⁴ This risk prevented

kings after the Glorious Revolution from violating laws of Parliament. The government could now credibly commit to honoring loan agreements; no longer could the king unilaterally alter laws and debt agreements.⁵

The new ability to credibly commit produced striking results. Government debt rose by nearly an order of magnitude in nine years, from approximately £1 million at the Revolution to £16.7 million. Clearly, lenders believed their funds were far more secure following the Glorious Revolution than before.

COGNITIVE FACTORS

As Doug brought political and normative factors to bear, he began to recognize the existence of earlier unnoted incentives and cognitions that sometimes inhibited change and sometimes facilitated it. Institutional and structural change reflected not only of changes in relative prices, as economists had conceived them. These changes were also an effect of embedded relationships that gave some greater bargaining power than others. Also important were worldviews or “mental models,” as he and Denzau called them. As people’s experience changed, so too did their mental models (Denzau and North 1994), in turn having the power to make new options viable and some older options no longer viable. So, Doug became obsessed with the conditions that made certain incentives, norms, and cognitions salient and with the relationships that subsequently enabled successful reorganization of societies. This work culminated in North (2005).

DYNAMICS OF REGIME TRANSFORMATION: “VIOLENCE AND SOCIAL ORDERS”

The question of what leads to regime change was a focus of *Structure and Change* (with seeds in earlier work) but culminated in his work with Wallis and Weingast (NWW), *Violence and Social Orders* (North et al. 2009).

Returning to the questions, why are so many countries poor and why is development so difficult, North and his coauthors built a new approach based on the concept of violence. Violence is one of the biggest factors missing from economic development; although political scientists study violence, they tend to do so in specific contexts, such as coups, ethnic conflict, or civil wars, and do not generalize the implications of the different types of violence to a general theory of violence.

All societies must solve the problem of violence in order to prosper. NWW theorize that most developing countries address violence in a particular manner; they create rents and dispense privileges to those individuals and groups with violence potential in a way that makes these groups better off than fighting. Failing to do so risks violence. But rents and privileges require manipulating the economy in a way that inhibits markets. In particular, rents require limits on access to organizations, hence limits on competition in both economics and politics. NWW therefore call these states *limited access orders*.

Economists studying limited access orders correctly observe the symptoms: manipulation of markets to create rents, creation of monopolies and other privileges, and, generally, “market-intervention.” Economists misdiagnose the problem, however. The problem is not unproductive political intervention in markets that makes everyone worse off. Instead, the problem is violence; and rents and privileges serve a useful purpose, reducing violence. So-called market reform offered by economists and aid agencies typically fails because this reform necessarily involves dismantling the policies and institutions that prevent violence. Because disorder is much worse

than a stagnant developing country, most people resist economic reform.

The path to development lies elsewhere. It involves movement to what NWW call the “doorstep conditions” and then into the transition from a limited access order to an “open access order,” a state that allows every citizen access to organizations.⁶

CONCLUSION

Transaction costs, institutions, credible commitments, beliefs, and cognitive illusions were all part of the picture, but he knew he was still missing an important piece. This came with the recognition of violence (and the power struggles on which it rests—although not a terminology he would use) as a problem successful states and economies must resolve. Doug was never satisfied with his existing framework; he restlessly searched for better and fuller explanations that would encompass the issues raised by his latest attempt. He wanted the next insight. Nonetheless, the big question was always the same, the one Adam Smith introduced in *The Wealth of Nations* (Smith 1976 [1776]): Why are some countries rich while most are poor?

Douglass North will long remain famous for his contributions to the new economic institutionalism, but here we are emphasizing his equally important contributions to understanding the dynamics of political change. In the process, North transformed our thinking of how norms, beliefs, and violence sustain the privileges, advantages, and power of some groups over others. He led the way in pointing to the forces and factors that produce new political, social, and economic relationships.

—Margaret Levi, Stanford University
—Barry R. Weingast, Stanford University

NOTES

1. We expand on this point in Levi and Weingast (2015).
2. Along with his coauthor, John Wallis, North pioneered the measurement of transactions cost (Wallis and North 1986).
3. For a critique of North’s view of power, especially in his earlier works, see Moe 2005.
4. Locke, Montesquieu, and Adam Smith called this the “right of resistance”; the American founders built this principle into the Declaration of Independence: “People are endowed “by their Creator with certain unalienable rights. ... That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. . . . That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government.”
5. Pincus and Robinson (2014) observe that these rules were always official; hence they were not new per se. Reflecting the new credible commitment, their holding in practice was new.
6. NWW explore these topics in chapters 4–6.

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Barbara Sinclair

Last March we lost a great political scientist when Barbara Sinclair passed away. She was a renowned congressional scholar who contributed as both a researcher and a public intellectual. Over the course of a renowned career, she explained the inner workings of congressional party leaders, the evolution of the Senate, and the ability of Congress to enact major legislation.

Barbara was born in Germany in 1940 and grew up in Houston, Texas, where her father Thornton Sinclair was a professor of political science at the University of Houston. She attended Rice University and graduated in 1962.

ROCHESTER

Barbara Sinclair was an early entrant in the University of Rochester's innovative new PhD program. She studied with renowned political economist William H. Riker and congressional scholar Richard Fenno. As Nathaniel Beck notes, she was interested in the study of Congress from early on: "Many of us were more Riker and she was more Fenno, though everyone at Rochester then combined both." Richard Fenno remembers, "Barbara was special ... as a challenging student and, later, as a helpful friend." She graduated in 1970 and took a job at the University of California, Riverside, where she would work for the next 26 years. Soon after arriving at UC Riverside, she met her lifelong partner, Howard Sherman.

EARLY WORK

Like any assistant professor, Barbara Sinclair worked to develop well-organized classes while converting her dissertation into published research. Her teaching and interest in led to the development of a book on the women's movement while her dissertation led to

several articles and a book, *Congressional Realignment 1925–1978*, analyzing patterns of party support in congressional voting. This work contributed to a relatively new body of empirical research on Congress and established her as a respected scholar.

INTO THE HALLS OF CONGRESS

Her career took a profound turn soon after this first book. She accepted a Congressional Fellowship from the American Political Science Association which paid for her to work on Capitol Hill for a year so that she could observe the inner workings of Congress while working in a legislator's office. She obtained a prize placement in the office of Jim Wright, who hailed from her home state of Texas and was then the Majority Leader of the House. Using her own experiences and interviews with congressional staff and members, she gained an inside view of the majority party of the US House just as it was becoming a dominant organization in the legislative branch. In doing so, she applied the elite interviewing methods used so effectively by her mentor, Richard Fenno. This research led to the publication of *Majority Leadership in the US House* in 1983, which paved the way for dozens of scholars doing research on congressional parties and agenda setting.

In 1989, Barbara Sinclair published another seminal work, *The Transformation of the US Senate*. This book updated Donald Matthews's 1960 study, *US Senators and Their World*. In the book, she used a combination of interviews and statistics to explain how the tightly knit, socially constrained Senate of the 1950s became the freewheeling, individualistic Senate of the 1980s. Fittingly, this book won the APSA award for the best book on legislative politics, which was named in honor of Richard Fenno. Soon afterward, she was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

When Jim Wright became Speaker he asked Barbara Sinclair to return, so she was present for the extraordinary 100th Congress (1987–1988) when Wright led his party in passing a set of bills that demonstrated the priorities of the Democratic Party. She combined this experience with ever more interviews and a new dataset of major congressional legislation to write an updated account of House parties, *Legislators, Leaders, and Lawmaking*.

By the 1990s, the study of Congress had become a "hot" topic in political science, with scholars applying ever more sophisticated theoretical models and statistical methods to explain legislative behavior. Barbara Sinclair, both in her research and her personal efforts, helped to bridge the gap between scholars and practitioners. As a well-established scholar, she was a frequent media commentator, wrote numerous book chapters and short essays, and testified before Congress on its rules and practice. She continued to be a very active scholar while returning again and again to Capitol Hill to keep a finger on the pulse of the first branch by interviewing members and staff.

Barbara Sinclair applied her talents to writing a book about how Congress had changed immensely since the first textbooks on the institution were written. The result, *Unorthodox Lawmaking*, educated both scholars and students on the ever evolving political and legislative environment of Congress. As Bruce Oppenheimer explains,

I have used the book since the first edition was published. To say it's first rate would be an understatement. Not only does Barbara provide an understanding of the intricacies of rules and procedures as they work in the contemporary Congress, but through her case studies she also demonstrates the policy impact that they have had in a range of critical areas. Finally, Barbara takes time to discuss the normative implications of unorthodox lawmaking.

UCLA AND RETIREMENT

In 1996, Barbara Sinclair moved to the University of California, Los Angeles to accept an endowed chair. This is where I met her in the Spring of 1997 when I visited to decide if I wanted to attend the PhD program in political science. I had applied to study international relations, but after meeting Barbara I began to think more seriously about studying Congress. That summer, she came to Capitol Hill, and we met as scholar and staffer. In the fall, I arrived in Los Angeles to begin years of training with the first of many meetings as PhD student and advisor.

As a mentor, Barbara was extraordinarily generous with her time, support, and patience. As a teaching assistant for her Congress class, I observed her knack for making legislative politics interesting with a combination of data, “war stories,” pictures, and policy. Every student had to write a paper tracing the path of a bill in Congress, and in doing so learned how Congress deals with important issues in the modern age.

Before retiring in 2007, she published *Party Wars*, which traced and explained the emergence of the hyperpartisan Congress of today. In truth, though, she only retired from teaching while maintaining an active travel and research life for many years.

LEGACY

In 2000, I received a Dirksen grant to go to Congress and spend a week interviewing legislators to understand why they cosponsor each other’s bills. Naturally, I asked Barbara for advice, and we talked about the fine points of getting interviews and taking notes. Then we turned to the critical question of questions: What should I ask to get real answers? “I always start with, ‘What are you working on?’” she said. “That is what their minds are focused on and it gets people talking about their jobs in ways that you cannot expect.”

Throughout her career, “What are you working on?” was a question she was always ready to answer. From her early days at Riverside to (literally) the last weeks of her life, she was a model of tireless energy because she found joy in her work.

Clearly, though, she also had an answer to the question, “What are working for?” Throughout her career she worked to promote the systematic study of the US Congress. But, like many such scholars, she cared passionately about the Congress itself: celebrating its purpose, lamenting its deficiencies, and encouraging its progress.

She also worked to promote gender equality. As her contemporary Larry Dodd noted, “she pushed forward the boundaries of women as scholars and teachers within political science and was a pioneer during the 1970s, in particular, in fostering the systematic study of the role of women in American politics.” Lynn Vavreck explained,

Barbara first became special to me as a fellow PhD student of Dick Fenno’s at the University of Rochester...At UCLA, I watched Barbara ... as she listened actively in department seminars, asked productive but not pedantic questions, and always tied politics to political science. She was elegant—and smart—and she showed me and many other women in the academy how to be confident, how to be heard, and how to take a seat at the table and do the job.

UCLA colleague Kathleen Bawn noted,

Her lesson to me was to demonstrate the value of being an oddball—a qualitative scholar making an important impact in a field dominated by formal models and statistical evidence; a polite and moderate presence in a profession with bravado to spare. Her calm, clear-headed self-confidence makes her a lasting model to all of us who knew her.

As demonstrated by the legacy of the institutions she studied, the knowledge she bestowed, and the people she influenced, with the passing of Barbara Sinclair, political science has lost a leader and inherited a legacy.

—Gregory Koger, *University of Miami*

Don Urquhart

Don Urquhart, a member of the California State University, Long Beach (CSULB) political science teaching faculty and subsequently of its political science department, where he taught until his retirement in 1982, passed away on July 21, 2016, in Vista, California. He was 95 years old and at the time of his passing had the distinction of being the oldest retired member of the CSULB faculty.

Urquhart was born on June 11, 1921 in Miami, Arizona. Raised in the state of Washington, he served in the US Navy during the World War II and then completed work for an MA from the University of Washington. He received his PhD degree from University of California, Los Angeles in 1957 with a dissertation on “Adjudication and Rule Making in Los Angeles Municipal Administration.”

A pioneer member of the faculty at what was then Long Beach State College, Don’s tenure began before the present political science department was formed. He began teaching on a part-time basis in the spring of 1953 before he received his PhD, and taught full time beginning in the fall of 1954.

In academic year 1954–1955 he served as “Area Representative” to the College’s division of social sciences, which then included the political science faculty.

Don was among the faculty who strongly opposed the authoritarian style of the first president of the College, P. Victor Peterson, leading to Peterson’s resignation. He also played a significant role in development of the political science department, chairing the department from 1966 to 1968, and he was present when Long Beach State College later evolved into CSULB.

Originally hired to teach public administration, Don soon came to specialize in classical and modern political theory. He was a dedicated teacher and took pride in inspiring a number of his students to become university professors. It was his dedication to teaching that led him to give up the department chairmanship and return to the classroom.

Even tempered and thoughtful, Urquhart contributed to continuity among his peers by mentoring new department faculty members.

—Barry H. Steiner, *California State University, Long Beach*
—Robert Delorme, *California State University, Long Beach*

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