



## A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN SOCIAL SECURITY STUDIES

Huang, Guan\* 

Quqiubai School of Government  
Changzhou University, Middle Road of Gehu, Changzhou City, 213159  
China  
[huangguan@cczu.edu.cn](mailto:huangguan@cczu.edu.cn)

\*Corresponding Author email: [huangguan@cczu.edu.cn](mailto:huangguan@cczu.edu.cn)

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Office # 6, First Floor, A & K Plaza, Near D Watson, F-10 Markaz, Islamabad, Pakistan,

[editor@readersinsight.net](mailto:editor@readersinsight.net)

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## ABSTRACT

Though a country's social security system is closely related to its economy and society, it is directly designed and operated by its politics (Hicks 1999; Stephens et al. 1999). Unlike social security studies from other academic perspectives, political science always tries to identify the essential political mechanism creating a country's social security system. By focusing on political factors' impact on social security development, the structure and the qualitative development of a social security system, in addition to the political results of the running of social security system, existing studies usually start from a macro and supply perspective, preferring to use official statistical data on macro supply to support their arguments. Compared with political science studies, economic studies on social security usually identify the correlation between the economy and social security by testing their mutual effects and paying attention to the economic efficiency of the running of social security system, preferring quantitative methods and statistical data to evaluate national social security development and test the hypothesis on the correlation. Sociologists focus on 'how a society modifies its social security, and what social security does to the society'. They also test mutual interactions between their independent and dependent variables, as do scholars from the other two schools, but prefer using data obtained through surveys and usually start from a micro and demand perspective. This review will examine the general nature and value of the development of existing studies from a political perspective. The fact that studies with the same arguments may adopt different methods, or studies may use similar methods to support very different arguments, seriously undermines the reliability of arguments put forward by existing reviews, especially in the case of individual countries. To eliminate that problem, a proper review, comparison and evaluation of the major aspects of existing studies is necessary to identify the main arguments of previous studies on social security system, as well as their limitations, from a political science perspective.

**Keywords:** *Social Security; Convergence; Divergence*

## RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

After completing this review, comments on existing studies and points for further research are presented as a conclusion, and the significance of the existing study for improving the overall state of research and scholarship in understanding the development of social security has also been pointed out.

This literature review has been designed around the three basic questions (How to categorize a social security system? How to study and explain the modification of a social security system? How to comment on and predict the development of a social security system?), one or all of which existing studies try to answer.

Generally speaking, studies mainly focused on a particular country's social security are more likely to generate a convergence prediction; Conversely, studies focused worldwide or on a general area reach a divergence conclusion, since they have to stress the differences between each system.

## GRAPHICAL ABSTRACT

**Table 1.** The structure of the literature review

<b>Research questions</b>	<b>Ideological</b>	<b>Institutionalism</b>	<b>Re- arrangement</b>
<b>Measure schools</b> How to categorise a social security system?	Typology	Universal Level, Benefits, Market Relationships	
How to study and explain the modification of a social security system?	Industrialisation, globalisation Communist, Productivist	Political institutionalism	Cross-class alliances
How to comment on and predict the development of a social security system?	Convergence vs. Divergence		

## Research Objectives

In order to figure out the main points and limits of current studies on social security from a political science perspective, we have composed this literature review. Current studies on social security have been reviewed in a comparatively systematic way to figure out differences of the measures scholars adopt to answer the basic questions for understanding social security. To do so, a new comprehensive system has been designed, so that the studies of each school can be compared from different perspectives and constructed around the three basic questions of social security studies. After present the measures scholars adopt to recognise social security systems, we find studies indicate that scholars tend to use political factors to explain social security system modifications, but describing and testing the decisive correlation between them meet some difficulties. The predicts on the development of the way to secure the social sustainability gather in two dimensions, the cause of the appearances of these opposite two dimensions has been figured out by comparison. Then, comments on existing studies and the missions need to be completed by further studies have been give in conclusion.

## Methodology

This study designs a new and comprehensive system through which to compare the studies of each school from different perspectives. To achieve this, extant studies are unpacked and categorised according to the following three questions dominating social security literature. The literature developed from Western capitalist cases indicates that scholars tend to use political factors to explain social security system modifications, but experience difficulties when attempting to use quantitative methods to identify and demonstrate the determining impacts of political factors on social security development.

## Results

A number of main empirical conclusions stand out quite sharply, as we review the existing studies on social security from the perspective of political science. Scholars always want to find more exact and reliable ways to show a comprehensive image of a country's social

security, to facilitate categorisation and comparison. Though new factors like culture and kinship have been added to the methods of categorising social security, de-commodification and de-stratification are still the fundamental dimensions. Since quantitative methods have been introduced to categorise different types of social security, the calculable aspects, like correlation with market, benefits and universal levels, are being used as standards. Some scholars wish to re-arrange the content of social security and highlight the regulatory ability. Studies on categorising social security systems more and more adopt empirical and quantitative approaches to improve the reliability of their arguments. However, a method by which we can evaluate all aspects of a social security system and properly categories it is still being sought. Meanwhile, scholars also find that the periodic major changes in economics and politics are not sufficient to explain the development of social security as a whole, though they can be used as independent variables for some modifications of social security systems. The impact correlations of economic development, demographic changes and social security development have been explored, and the decisive underlying impact of politics on those correlations has also been detected. However, the kinds of social security that will be adopted by a country's polity is still in question. While the role of political ideologies in social security development is accepted, the impacts of different forms of government and electoral systems are still being debated. Besides that, cross-class alliances are generally applicable independent variables, but the theories relating to them need serious testing. The arguments on the description and future of social security development are more likely to be built on the particular selection of aspects by a researcher and their own perspectives (macro or micro).

## Findings

After completing this review, comments on existing studies and points for further research are presented as a conclusion, and the significance of the existing study for improving the overall state of research and scholarship in understanding the development of social security has also been pointed out. Though the studies are getting abundant, the understanding of social security development is still in progressing, and the future social security development also presents a mixture of convergence in functions and divergence in designing of programmes.

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### Author's Biography



**Huang, Guan.** Professor, Quqiubai School of Government, Changzhou University; Tutor of Ph.D. Students, City University of Macau. A director of Youth Committee of Chinese Social Security Study Association. Major in Political Science and study topic is Chinese social security and welfare.