Letter

Introducing HiSCoD: A New Gateway for the Study of Historical Social Conflict

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*T*he Historical Social Conflict Database (HiSCoD) is an ongoing project designed to provide to scholars and society at large with a set of resources for analyzing social conflict from the Middle Ages to the second half of the nineteenth century (c. 1000–c. 1870). Based on original archival research and existing repositories, the aim is to provide a global database of social conflict in past societies by collecting, aggregating, documenting, and harmonizing instances of conflict. As of today, the database contains data on more than twenty thousand events, from fiscal scuffles to urban revolts involving thousands of individuals. For every event, we provide information on the date, location, type of conflict, and, when possible, number of participants, participation of women, and a summary of events.*

INTRODUCTION

Over centuries, social conflict has been at the center of human relations, fulfilling a number of functions essential to the development and transformation of societies (Cohn 2006; Tilly 1986). As an expression of tensions relating to values, interests, and power between or within groups, they shed light on critical issues such as the nature of sovereignty and the power of state, the scope for popular resistance, and the expression of distress. On many occasions, they precipitated major social change by generating new values, new norms, and new institutions or by contributing to the formation of new group identities (Thompson 1964).

Since the nineteenth century, social conflict has been a major feature of social and political research. Historians and social scientists have used it to analyze a wide range of topics such as the construction of modern states (Mousnier 1958), economic crises and the politics of provisioning (Bohstedt 2010; Tilly 1975), the use and the meaning of collective violence (Tilly 2003), and the development of political consciousness (Porchnev 1963; Thompson 1971). Several large-scale projects have indexed information on conflict by time and geography during the twentieth century and their data are readily available online. For instance, the *Social Conflict Analysis Database* (SCAD) focuses on non-armed conflict and includes various forms of protest and riots in Central America and Africa between 1990 and 2017 (Salehyan et al. 2012). To the best of our knowledge, however, no such large-scale resource has been developed for social conflict before the nineteenth century despite several historical researches.[1]

The debate between Porchnev (1963) and Mousnier (1958) on the origins of rebellions during the seventeenth century, and later the groundbreaking work of Thompson (1971), generated a large number of monographs, articles and theses on disorder and revolts in Europe and elsewhere (e.g., Bercé 1974; Gailus 1990; Hobsbawm and Rudé 1968).[2] However, datasets describing these events are sparse and rarely accessible since they were generally put together before the 2000s. The *Historical Social Conflict Database* (HiSCoD) is designed to fill this gap by providing an online tool with a set of resources for analyzing social conflict on a global scale from the European High Middle Ages to the second half of the nineteenth century (c. 1000–c. 1870).[3] As of June 2023, it contains information on more than twenty thousand episodes of social conflict.[4]

The project brings together three strands of research: the previous consolidation of historical social conflict by scholars; the collection of new instances of conflict

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[1] Recently, Miller and Bakar (2023) released the Historical Conflict Event Dataset, an attempt to "to produce a fully comprehensive dataset of worldwide military conflict" since 1486BC (523).

[2] For a recent overview of this literature, see Ruff (2020). For an overview of the literature on uprisings and revolts during the Middle Age, see Firnhaber-Baker and Schoenaers (2017).

[3] We use the expression "European High Middle Ages" as a generic term for periodization purpose to describe the period beginning at the turn of the eleventh century. Similarly, we ended the data collection around 1870 to focus on social conflict occurring before the diffusion of the Industrial Revolution across the globe.

[4] https://www.unicaen.fr/hiscod

TABLE 1.   Overview of the Main Existing Datasets Included in HiSCoD

Geographic area	Date range	Threshold	No. of obs.	References
France	1661–1789	4 participants	8,528	Nicolas (2002)
France	1800–59	3 participants	3,791	Lignereux (2008)
England	1830–2	None	2,205	Holland (2005)
Italy, France, Flanders	1090–1435	None	1,112	Cohn (2006)
England	1347–1819	50 participants	1,008	Bohstedt (2010)
Normandy	1709–1817	4 participants	916	Maneuvrier-Hervieu (2020)
Glasgow, Liverpool, Manchester	1800–90	20 participants	299	Tiratelli (2019)

Note: Bohstedt (2010) provides lists of food riots for various years between 1347 and 1819. For more information on the content of each dataset, see Section B of the Supplementary Material.

from primary sources; and the long-term preservation of data to avoid the loss of knowledge.[5] We hope that this ongoing project will facilitate new research through the provision of reliable data on historical social conflict.

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

The first step of the project was to collect and align several large-scale, unpublished datasets (Table 1). We further drew on secondary sources to improve the geographical coverage of the database. In some cases, we assembled data directly from lists and tables in the paper/book in question, whereas in other cases, we carefully transcribed information on the events mentioned within the pages. In addition, we occasionally undertook detailed searches for social conflict in archival sources.

Events recorded in the HiSCoD database come from a wide range of primary documents. For instance, information on medieval and early modern social conflict is found in chronicles, annals, journals, judicial records, and diaries, whereas information from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are retrieved from administrative correspondence, judicial records, municipal council records, private papers, and/or local newspapers.[6] Therefore, the level of information available on individual instances of social conflict is heterogeneous and disparate. It is sometimes possible to identify the composition of the crowd and to follow the course of events hour by hour through police reports and trial records, while in other cases evidence identifies only the location of the event. To address this

imbalance, we use a simple form to standardize existing databases and collect new data. We also chose to rely on a broad definition to qualify an event as a social conflict in order to grasp the infinitesimal episodes of discontent and include most of the works previously carried out by historians.

Definition

The issue of what comprises a social conflict is one of the most highly debated topics among historians who used different metrics and definitions to establish their datasets. It is difficult to reach a consensus on the characteristics and criteria required to define an event as a social conflict because they differ vastly in form and scale. In his study on food riots in England, Bohstedt (2010, 17) doubted that "anyone will ever compile a complete record of all the riots in a period" because it is "impossible 'by definition' for two lists to agree if they did not agree on a definition of the events they were collecting in the first place." This was precisely the task we set ourselves: to merge and combine these disparate datasets into a unified, analysis-friendly format within a database.[7]

We used the expression "social conflict" as a generic category to encompass all the expressions used by scholars and/or mentioned in the sources. We followed Nicolas (2002, 75) and considered social conflict to be any event involving a group of at least three individuals belonging to different families and which either perpetuates violence or threatens violence against one or more members of a different group or against representatives of political, religious, and economic power; or any event involving an attack on property, buildings, furniture, papers, or other signs symbolizing such powers. We chose to use a low threshold on the number of participants not only to grasp infinitesimal episodes of discontent, but also to allow for the inclusion of other datasets that used different thresholds. For instance, Bohstedt (2010) only considers events with more than 50 participants, whereas Bercé (1974) listed events with

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[5] We use the XML-EAD standard, a machine-readable format and an international archival standard, which allows information to be standardized within and across repositories, to ensure the interoperability and sustainability of researchers' work while making data easily accessible.

[6] For an extensive description of the sources available and their limitations for the Middle Ages, see Cohn (2006, 13–21). For the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Fletcher and Steveson (1985, 26–31) and Nicolas (2002).

[7] In this regard, the HiSCoD project closely follows the objectives put forward by the *xSub* project for contemporary conflict (Zhukov, Davenport, and Kostyuk 2019).

TABLE 2. Classification Used in the HiSCoD Database

Category	Numeric values	Description	No. of obs.
Food riot	1	Includes riots protesting against high prices, popular taxation, interception of food transport, and food looting	4,226
Tax riot	2	Includes smuggling-related events, and riots protesting against taxes (local, feudal, or national)	4,301
Religious conflict	3	Includes conflict relating to the practicing of religion	649
Conflict with local or national authorities	4	Includes conflict with the military (including deserters and draft dodgers), police, marshals, parliaments, municipal authorities, militias or any conflict protesting against a decision taken by authorities	3,550
Feudal conflict	5	Includes attacks on castles and conflicts concerning the abolition of feudal rights	940
Slave revolt	6	Includes slave revolts either on boats, at gatherings, and/or maroons	3
Political conflict	7	Includes all conflicts protesting against a political regime during a revolutionary or transitional period, and any opposition to a political regime aiming to change it	1,088
Labor conflict	8	Includes strikes, collective bargaining, conflict against guilds or between different guilds, wage riots, etc.	1,403
Banditry	9	Includes robberies by a group of individuals or events related to organized crime	0
Other forms of conflict	0	Includes all conflicts which do not fit in previous categories	4,458

Note: We categorized events related to seigneurial taxes as tax riots rather than feudal conflict. In 333 instances, the lack of information in the sources pre-empted the attribution to an exact category.

more than 20 participants.[8] In Section B of the Supplementary Material, we report the definition and threshold used by scholars to assemble their database in order to guide the user and ease the assessment of comparability of data across time and space.

Typology

The main objective of the HiSCoD project is to act as gateway for the study of historical social conflict by gathering existing information from many studies and sources. Pre-industrial popular disturbances included a broad spectrum of events from grain and bread riots to crafts revolts, tax riots, religious conflicts, and many more. They also involved a variety of participants, often with a range of different motives, with riots against high crop prices occasionally leading to further protests about wages or taxation, for instance, and/or conflict with local authorities about setting arrested rioters free. Tilly (1976, 375) insists that "to categorize is a first step on the way to identifying what there is to explain, and therefore on the way to explaining it." Every historian who has conducted a large-scale survey of historical social conflict has thus been confronted with the challenge of classifying the diverse events she has identified. This means that the literature includes dozens of typologies, sometimes involving very

different categories depending on the social and historical context.[9]

We addressed this issue by creating a simplified classification based on 10 categories to encompass a wide range of geographic areas and a long-time span (Table 2). We assigned each event to one category based on the information available and, when relevant, on the researchers' original typology—which is also included in the database. We would highlight here that our classification is first and foremost intended as a tool to guide users through the myriad of events reported. One can used the various information included in the database to establish her own typology and/or assign several categories to an event.

Structure of the Database

Whenever possible, we created one entry for any social conflict on a specific day in a given location.[10] To situate each event in space and time, we recorded time units (year, month, and day), historical and contemporary location, and geographic coordinates (longitude and latitude), along with an indicator for geographic preci-

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[8] For a discussion of what constituted a popular revolt as opposed to actions to be taken isolated individuals or families against outsiders, see Cohn (2006, 5–13).

[9] For instance, both Cohn (2006) and Nicolas (2002) identified no less than 70 different types of conflict in their data. For a discussion on the creation of typology and the changing patterns of social conflict, see, for example, Cohn (2006, 76–107), Shoemaker (1987, 77–80), and Tilly (1976).

[10] If several sources and/or researchers reported the same event, we merged all information to create a unique entry.

TABLE 3. **Overview of Information Available in the HiSCoD Database**

	Each event corresponds whenever possible to one day and one place	
Time period	- Year	
	- Month	
	- Day	
	- Day of the week	
Location	- City/Region	
	- City code	
	- Geographic coordinates	Coordinates are based on the city left of the closest municipality where the event took place
	- Country	
	- Administrative unit	
	- Historical political entity	Political entity where the event took place
	- Historical administrative unit	
	- Spatial precision	
Type of social conflict	- HiSCoD classification	10-type classification
	- Original classification	Original typology used by the researcher recording the event
Description of event	- Number of participants	Either a number or a quantitative assessment
	- Participation of women	Indication of whether women took an active part in the event
	- Summary of the course of events	Either a quote from sources or a description written by the researcher in English or any other language
Bibliographical information	- Primary sources	Archival signatures to retrieve information on the event
	- Secondary sources	Bibliography to retrieve information on the event
Authors and contributors	- Names of author(s)	
	- Names of contributor(s)	

sion.[11] In addition to the summary of the course of events, we added two variables: the number of participants and an indicator for the participation of women. Although some scholars have reported evidence on the characteristics of participants, such as age, occupation, and social status, this information is often incomplete and could suffer from reporting biases. Therefore, we chose not to create such variables and report existing information on participants in the description of the event. We made this choice to keep the structure of the database user-friendly. For all events from an existing dataset, we included the unique identifier of the original database to allow easy matching of HiSCoD entries with the original ones. Table 3 provides an overview of information available for each entry.[12]

THE HiSCoD DATABASE

Data Preservation

We designed the HiSCoD project with the aim of creating a platform to ensure that data on historical

social conflict were preserved and to make sure that such data can be easily located, accessed, and reused. We chose to encode the database using the EAD standard. The *Encoded Archival Description* standard is a public domain XML schema created and used by archivists for encoding archival finding aids. Its markup structure makes it a machine-readable format, enabling data to be shared easily across platforms. This solution guarantees interoperability and that data will be preserved and accessible.

Data Accessibility

Users can access data in one of three ways. First, they can navigate the interactive map on the project website to identify events of interest and access individual forms, which can be manually downloaded as pdf files in both English and French.[13] Second, they can access a user-friendly semantic repository, based on the EAD standard, to either search for keywords or explore data by interacting with a data access system. Finally, the most up-to-date version of the dataset can be download as a csv file from the project's GitHub repository.[14] A detailed description of the variables included in the dataset is available in Table A.1 in the Supplementary Material.

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[11] In few instances, we were not able to identify the location of the event. We kept the observations in the database, but left the geographic coordinates empty. For more details on the procedure to add coordinates to any event, see Section A.1 of the Supplementary Material.

[12] Table A.1 in the Supplementary Material provides a detailed list of variables contained in the database.

[13] https://www.unicaen.fr/hiscod.

[14] https://github.com/hiscod/hiscod-project.

FIGURE 1. Geographical Distribution of Social Conflict in HiSCoD
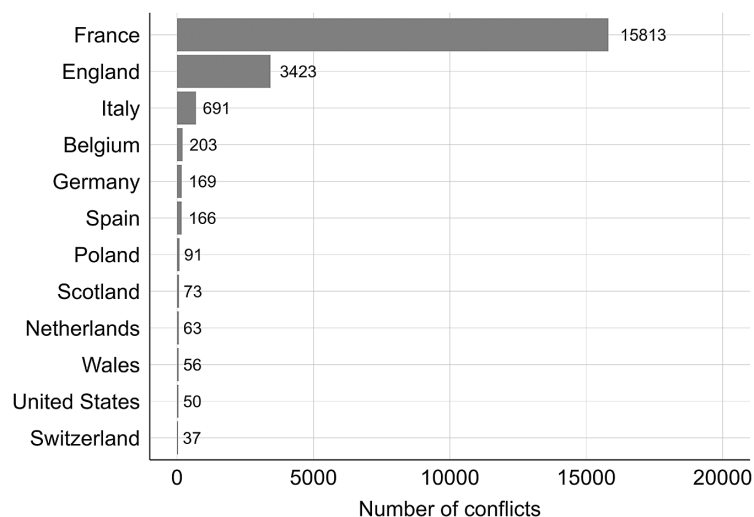
Note: Only countries with at least 25 entries are displayed.

Data Contribution

In Section D of the Supplementary Material, we provide detailed explanations on how to contribute to the HiSCoD project.

Data Overview

Figure 1 shows the distribution of historical social conflict across countries from the European High Middle Ages to the second half of the nineteenth century (c. 1000–c. 1870). As of June 2023, most events are located in Europe, and in particular, France and England (about 92%).[15] This bias is due to the fact that we first gathered events from existing databases that were not previously published or easily accessible (e.g., Bohstedt 2010; Lignereux 2008; Nicolas 2002). The absence of recordings of social conflict for a country should not, however, necessarily be interpreted as resulting from missing data. It might also be the result of the historical context particular to a country. For instance, whereas food riots were endemic in France and England during the eighteenth century, they were relatively uncommon in Spain before 1766 (Rodríguez 1973, 145).

Figure 2 shows the temporal distribution of the events recorded in the database. The unequal distribution of social conflict originates both from survival bias in relation to sources and available data, and from the fact that the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries witnessed evolution and transformation in the forms of popular disturbance (Tilly 1976). Overall, users should be cautious before using data for comparisons across time and space. While it is possible to run quantitative

analysis on various subsets of data, the HiSCoD project is first and foremost conceived as a gateway to preserve and access information on historical social conflict, and does not provide a perfectly comparable worldwide dataset. Each dataset has its specific characteristics and its own bias as they are all based on the definition and categorization established by individual scholars who collected and classified events (see Section B of the Supplementary Material).

Figure 3 provides an overview of the number of entries for which we were able to document the main variables included in the database: number of participants, participation of women, summary of the course of events, archival signatures, and bibliographic references. More than twelve thousand entries (58%) contain a description of more than five words in length in either English or another language. Unfortunately, in most cases, it is impossible to document the number of participants and/or the participation of women with any certitude due to the paucity of information in the sources.

Data Use Cases

A number of scholars have already used historical data on social conflict to study a wide range of questions in economics, history, and/or political science. For instance, Aidt and Franck (2015) investigate the effect of exposure to violent social conflict on voting behavior during the 1830s in England. They use data on the Swing riots to show that voters' and patrons' fear of rioters in the immediate neighborhood of their constituency shifted their allegiance toward the reform-friendly Whigs during the 1831 election. In another paper, Aidt, Leon-Ablan, and Satchell (2021) use the same dataset to analyze information flows and the impact of news about repression on participation in riotous events. They also document the role of local

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[15] We did not deliberately focus on these two countries. For instance, on the lack of survey for on pre-industrial Germany, see Gailus (1990, 160).

FIGURE 2. Number of Social Conflicts per Quarter Century
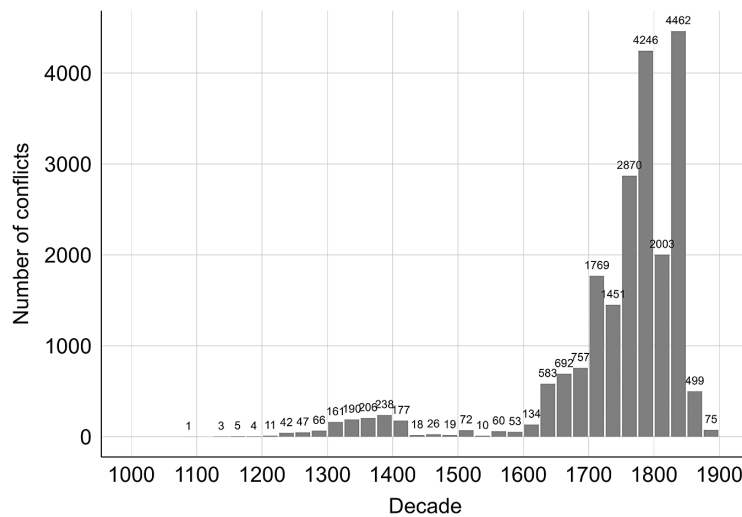
FIGURE 3. Available Information for Individual Social Conflicts
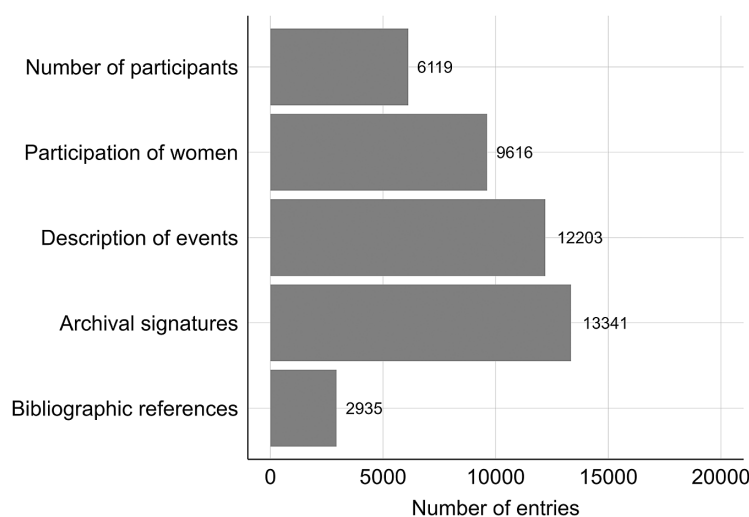
Note: The database includes 9,616 entries for which we can ascertain the involvement of women. The database includes 12,203 entries with a description of more than five words in length. The database includes 2,935 entries with at least two bibliographic references.

organizers and personal and trade networks in the geographic distribution of these riots.

Although replication is now a relatively common practice in social sciences, replication materials rarely include raw data, which makes it difficult to reuse them beyond the scope of the publication. We hope that this ongoing project will facilitate new research on social conflict during the pre-industrial era by improving access to original data.

CONCLUSION

This article presents a new gateway for the study of worldwide historical social conflict from the European High Middle Ages to the second half of the nineteenth century (c. 1000–c. 1870). One of the main objectives of the HiSCoD project is to create a tool for ensuring that knowledge is not lost and that data are preserved in the long term. To meet this goal, we created standardized forms containing the essential information on more than twenty thousand events and encoded them using the EAD standard, a public domain XML schema created by archivists.

It should be noted that HiSCoD is an ongoing project with limitations and avenues for improvement. Despite the efforts devoted to the collection of data, the heterogeneity of the surviving archives and previous large-scale surveys on historical social conflict means that there are significant disparities in the database's

geographic coverage.[16] This caveat arose from the aggregation of the works of different scholars in different times and places. To circumvent this issue, we continuously update existing entries with additional information and add new episodes of social conflict. The existence of several repertoires of historical social conflict in countries such as China (Yang 1975), England (Griffin 2001), Germany (Gailus 1990), Japan (Aoki 1971), and Nordic countries (see Mikkelsen, Kjeldstadli, and Nyzell 2018) provides many avenues for further development. One of the main challenges will be nonetheless the inclusion of geographic areas for which the historiography and archives on historical social conflict are limited. We would like to call on users, researchers, and citizen scientists who are interested in expanding knowledge of social conflict in past societies to contribute to this ongoing project by sharing any relevant information.[17]

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

To view supplementary material for this article, please visit http://doi.org/10.1017/S000305542300076X.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research documentation and data that support the findings of this study are openly available at the American Political Science Review Dataverse: https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/HGFLGK.

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[16] Cohn (2006, 22) reminds that one should not forget the existence of bias because "it comes as little surprise that the cities with the strongest chronicle traditions are often those with the greatest number of [medieval] revolts." For a recent attempt at comparative history, see Cohn (2019).

[17] For more information on how to contribute to the HiSCoD project, see Section D of the Supplementary Material.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

ETHICAL STANDARDS

The authors affirm this research did not involve human subjects.

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