

STATES AND STATE FORMATION OUTLINE

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STATES AND STATE FORMATION IN EUROPE

Max Weber, “Politics as Vocation” (1946)

1. What is a state?

- a. States cannot be defined by their ends, but by the means which they use to achieve some open set of ends: States cannot be defined by their ends. For there are few political and public policy objectives that have not been taken up by other forms of political organization. Rather, we should define a state by the means that are particular to it, that other political organizations lack.
- b. Definition of the state: “The state is a human community that successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.” It is a relation of men dominating men through the use of violence considered to be legitimate
- c. What legitimized violence:
 - i. Traditional domination: By the recognition of the authority of tradition, such as the authority of princes or patriarchs
 - ii. Charismatic domination: By the charisma of the individual leader, as we see in the authority of a prophet
 - iii. Legal-rational domination: By legality, or by rationally created rules that are recognized by others as bestowing the monopoly of violence with a particular individual or institution

Charles Tilly: Coercion, Capital, and European States (1990)

2. Beyond existing approaches

- a. Statist approaches: They treat “political change as proceeding in partial independence of economic change, and presents it [state form] chiefly as a consequence of events within particular states”
 - i. Problem: This account ignores the interplay of states on the international stage.

- b. World-system approaches: They “ground the explanation of diverse paths of state formation in a characterization of the world economy.”
 - i. Problem: Such accounts ignore or otherwise fail to explain the emergence of particular state structures.
- c. Geopolitical approaches: They claim “that interstate relations have a logic and influence of their own, and that state formation therefore responds strongly to the current system of relations among states.”
 - i. Problem: Such accounts do not convincingly link state form to the state’s position within the international community of states.
- d. Mode of production approaches: Such analyses, often ground in Marxist thought, “typically spell out the logic of feudalism, capitalism, or some other organization of production, then derive the state and its changes almost entirely from that logic”
 - i. Problem: Such approaches fail to explain differences in state form across states with similar modes of production.

3. The research question

- a. What accounts for the historical variation in European state form, and convergence on the national state?
 - i. National states vs. nation-states:
 - 1. National states are defined as “states governing multiple contiguous regions and their cities by means of centralized, differentiated, and autonomous structures”
 - 2. Nation-states are defined as states that share a strong linguistic, religious, and symbolic identity

4. The factors shaping state form: capital and coercion

- i. Capital: “Tangible mobile resources, and enforceable claims on such resources
- ii. Coercion: “Concerted application, threatened or actual, of action that commonly causes loss or damage to the persons or possessions of individuals or groups who are aware of both the action and the potential damage”
- iii. Summary of argument:
 - 1. Variance in the concentration and accumulation of capital and coercion explains the emergence of divergent state forms
 - 2. The inter-state waging of war spurred the eventual convergence around the national state model

5. Three trajectories of state formation

- a. Capital-intensive trajectory: Where capital accumulation was significant but coercive authority was diffuse (as in the Italian city states of Genoa and

Venice), rulers were forced to rely on compacts with capitalists to rent or purchase military force, or contract out their defense to mercenaries

- i. The internal dynamics: “the interaction between substantial, increasing concentrations of capital and weak, fragmented concentrations of coercion; the profound influence of capitalists over any attempt to create autonomous coercive power; the emergence of sleek, efficient, rapacious, protection-oriented seafaring state”
- b. Coercion-intensive trajectory: where capital was diffuse, rulers had to squeeze the means of war from their own population via coercion, as in Brandenburg and Russia
 - i. The internal dynamics: “All of Europe’s areas of high coercion began with some combination of two conditions: (1) a major effort to expel a tribute-taking power, and (2) few cities and little concentrated capital”
- c. Capital-coercive trajectory: In areas where a more balanced level of both capital and coercion accumulation occurred (as in France and England), rulers were able to “play one against the other” by using purchased force to check the holders of private armies and using national armies to persuade the holders of private capital
 - i. Example of British state: “It was built “on a conjunction of capital and coercion that from very early on gave any monarch access to immense war-making, but only at the price of large concessions to the country’s merchants and bankers. The uneasy alliance between landlords and merchants constrained royal autonomy, but fortified state power”

6. **Why convergence around the national state? War-making**

- a. National states emerged out of the capital-coercive route: This balance of capital and coercion supported the creation and maintenance of large standing armies
- b. National states were militarily superior: With time, the military superiority of war-waging capital-coercive states produced convergence towards their model of the territorial national state.

Charles Tilly: “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime” (1985)

1. **State-building as organized crime**

- a. State-building as a protection racket: If protection rackets represent organized crime in its clearest form, then war-making and state-making,

which are protection rackets with the advantage of legitimacy, qualify as the largest examples of organized crime.

- i. To the extent that the threats against which a given government protects its citizens are imaginary or are consequences of its own activities, the government has organized a protection racket. And governments often organize these threats
- b. State-builders as coercive and self-seeking: While not all European state-builders were murderers or thieves, this analogy has utility. For European history, a portrait of war makers and state makers as coercive and self-seeking entrepreneurs bears a far greater resemblance to the facts than do its chief alternatives.

2. **The story of state-formation via competitive war-making and extraction**

- a. Overcoming other war-lords: Power-holders sought to check or overcome their competitors and enjoy the advantages of power over an expanding territory. They did not engage in war-making initially with the intention of creating national states (centralized, differentiated, autonomous, extensive political organizations)
- b. Seeking more capital to wage war: Power-holders sought more capital to wage more effective war.
 - i. In the short-run, they extracted it via conquest
 - ii. In the long-run, this required regular access to capitalist who could supply credit and impose regular taxation on the people. Here, popular resistance made a difference: Vigorous resistance led to concessions – guarantees of rights, representative institutions, and courts of appeal (ex. Britain)
- c. Reducing reliance on indirect rule: Power-holders reduced their reliance on indirect rule via two expensive but effective means:
 - i. Extending their officialdom to the local community
 - ii. Encouraging the creation of police forces subordinate to the central government rather than local patrons
- d. The development of bureaucracy: A bureaucracy developed as a side-effect of more expensive and expansive war-making and extraction
 - i. The general rule was this: the more costly the activity, the greater the organizational residue. To the extent that a government invested in standing armies, the bureaucracy (tax collection agencies, police forces, courts, exchequers, account keepers) created to service the army

3. **Variation in state form was due to several factors:**

- a. Variation in the difficulty of collecting taxes (due to variation in the distribution of capital)

- b. Variation in the expense of the particular kind of armed forces adopted
- c. Variation in the amount of war-making required to hold off competitors

Mancur Olson: *Power and Prosperity* (1985)

1. The Logic of Coercive Power

- a. Beyond voluntary exchange to understand state formation: To understand state formation, it is not enough to understand the theory of voluntary exchange; we must also understand the logic of force
- b. Benevolent despots are rare: It is difficult to find examples of benevolent despots- the stationary bandit model fits the facts far better than the hypothesis that autocrats are altruistic

2. State-builders as stationary bandits

- a. Stationary bandits with an encompassing interests: Because of his monopoly on crime and taxation, the stationary bandit an encompassing interest in his domain that makes him limit his predations because he bears a substantial share of the social losses resulting from these predations
 - i. Taxing yourself into oblivion: There is much evidence of autocrats who spend so much that even though they took as much in taxes as they could, they ended up short. The Roman empire was taxed until it was destroyed.
 - ii. The stationary bandit's time horizons horizons:
 - 1. An autocrat taking a long-run view will seek to convince his subjects that their capital will be permanently protected; if the subjects fear expropriation, they will invest less, and his tax collections will be reduced
 - 2. At the limit, when an autocrat has no reason to consider the future output of society, his incentives are those of a roving bandit.
- b. Why the victims of extraction prefer stationary to roving bandits: Roving banditry means anarchy. The subjects of a stationary bandit obtain the proportion of the increase in income that is not taken in taxes. The logic of the matter suggests that the continuing extractions of a stationary bandit are far better than anarchy
- c. When states will develop democratically rather than autocratically:
 - i. We can deduce that autocracy is prevented, and democracy permitted, when historical accidents leave an equally distributed balance of power among a small number of leaders, groups, or

- families, so that it is imprudent for any one leader to attempt to overpower others
- ii. This balance of power incentivizes instituting a system of checks and balances, court independence, and property rights enforcement. This, in turn, minimizes the likelihood of a tyranny

Margaret Levi, *Of Rule and Revenue* (1988)

1. Revenue production policies and predatory rulers

- a. The importance of revenue production: The “history of state revenue production is the history of the evolution of the state”
- b. All rulers are predatory rulers: Rulers are not benevolent common-interest maximizers: all rulers are predatory, “in that they try to extract as much revenue as they can from the population.” Their motives may well be diverse - “They may use the funds to line their own pockets... they may use the funds to support social or personal ends... they may have ideological ends...they may be altruistic;” but “whatever the rulers ends, revenue is necessary to attain them”

2. The constraints upon revenue production

- a. The distribution of bargaining power: “Rulers will have more bargaining power the more they monopolize coercive, economic, and political resources...When others possess resources that the ruler needs or when they can successfully resist the rulers demands, their bargaining power is increased.” The only resources that matter here are material resources
- b. The presence of transaction costs: “These are the costs of implementing and enforcing policies. More specifically, they are the costs of measuring [the distribution of resources], monitoring [citizens and agents of the state], creating [institutional rules and contracts with social actors], and enforcing compliance [by operating a coercive apparatus]...An increasing stock of knowledge about efficacious administrative practice...reduces transaction costs.”
- c. The predatory rulers’ discount rates/time horizons: “the extent to which they value the future relative to the present. The higher the discount rates, the less concern with the future... Low discount rates accompany security of rule. High discount rates follow from insecurity and intense rivalries”

3. Structural factors shaping the balance of constraints upon revenue production

- a. The economic structure: These, by in large, constitute the classical Marxist notion of the means of production, including “the instruments and raw materials of production” as well as “labor power”

- b. The international context: “The bargaining power of the rulers will be reduced to the extent that subjects can make a better deal with an alternative ruler and to the extent that powerful constituents control external sources of revenue”
- c. The form of government: For example, representative institutions, such as parliaments, enhance the monitoring of rulers and taxpayers, reduce the bargaining costs inherent in contracting between the rulers and the ruled, and permit the formulation of acceptable sanctions for non-compliance, paradoxically facilitating revenue-extraction

4. **The Concept of Quasi-Voluntary Compliance**

- a. Quasi-voluntary compliance – voluntary contributions in the shadow of coercion: Some citizens may be willing to pay taxes and contribute to the state’s revenue-generating mechanisms, but they are unlikely to do so if others free-ride and make them look like fools. To mitigate this fear and induce prospective voluntary compliers to actually comply, the state sanctions non-compliers. In this logic, compliance “is voluntary in that constituents pay because they choose to. It is quasi-voluntary because they will be punished if they do not and are caught”

Hendrik Spruyt: “Institutional Selection in International Relations: State Anarchy as Order” (1994)

5. **Research Question, Approach, and Answer**

- a. What explains the triumph of the territorial state? Why did city-states and city-leagues fall by the wayside and were replaced by territorial states?
- b. Approach: New Institutional History:
 - i. Institutions are contractual agreements among rational actors.
 - ii. Institutions are meant to prevent free-riding and to allow parties to credibly commit to one another
 - iii. Hierarchical forms arise when transaction and information costs are non-zero (following Coase Theorem)
- c. Answer: the territorial state was more efficient: Sovereign territorial state prevailed because it was more effective and curtailing internal defection, reducing internal transaction costs, and making credible commitments to other units.

6. **Historical interlude: From feudal times to the modern territorial state system**

- a. Feudalism was unsuitable to a pre-capitalist environment: Lack of fully developed written codes, the importance of local custom, lack of

instrumentally rational features, and cross-cutting jurisdictions (variation in coinage and weights) meant that transaction costs were high

- b. The rise of city states, city leagues, and territorial states: After the 1300s, the feudal system, a centralized empire, and theocracy waned; what took over was the city league (in Germany), the city state (in Italy), and the sovereign territorial state (in England and France)

7. **The superiority of the territorial state**

- a. City leagues were very inefficient, and they did not last long: They lacked a clear internal hierarchy and had no territorial borders to mark their jurisdiction.
 - i. They often failed to standardize coinage
 - ii. They often failed to standardize legal codes, and legal enforcement was inefficient and decentralized
 - iii. There was always a danger of individual cities refusing to fulfill their war-making obligations
 - iv. They lacked sovereign authority and hence the ability to credibly commit to other states, either because it was not clear that the negotiating party spoke on behalf of all members of the organization or because the rulers of such organizations could not prevent free-riding by their constituents
- b. City states were fairly efficient, and they lasted longer:
 - i. Internally, city states looked like city leagues in that they lacked a clear internal hierarchy. Legal codes remained diverse. Yet currency standardization did occur.
 - ii. Externally, city states behaved much like territorial states. They recognized territorial limits to their jurisdiction, and routinized their diplomatic repression
- c. The economic efficiency of sovereign territorial states: The territorial state proved to have long-term advantages in that it created more certitude in the domestic economic environment.
 - i. Internally, it reduced free riding and transaction costs more efficiently than the alternatives.
 - 1. It reduced the number of cross-cutting rival jurisdictions
 - 2. It centralized justice and authority
 - 3. It instituted an internal hierarchy that reduced the number of legal codes
 - 4. It centralized coinage and standardized weights and measures
 - ii. Externally, territorial states became focal points to conduct international affairs.

8. **Convergence around the territorial state**

- a. Territorial states began to annex city leagues
- b. Towns within city leagues began to voluntarily defect to territorial states for protection and more integrated markets
- c. City-states died a slow death in part because they were accepted as legitimate members of the international community
- d. Mimickry: Political elites had an incentive to mimic those successful institutions of the territorial state

9. Critique of Tillian, war-making approaches

- a. It is not all about military might/size: Most accounts imply that military superiority was largely a function of size, and in so doing, they neglect the consequences of institutional characteristics.
 - i. The decline of several city states and city leagues was not premised on any particular military defeat.
- b. It cannot explain the city-state's initial survival and prosperity: City states were at one point more powerful and wealthy than emerging territorial sovereign states; how can a war account explain the sovereign state's initial survival?
 - i. Genoa was at one point able to raise an army larger than that of France. Institutional efficiency might matter considerably more than size at some periods of time
 - ii. City-states were recognized in the international system, whereas city-leagues were not

STATE FORMATION IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD

Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa* (2002)

1. State-building in Africa and the challenge of geography

- a. The fundamental problem confronting all African state-builders: how to project authority over inhospitable territories that contain relatively low densities of people? The challenges of political geography, especially low pop density, could not be ignored by any leader.
- b. How African leaders responded: Rulers in Africa created a particular type of state system to help them confront their difficulties in exercising authority across their territories; Cooperation, rather than continual conflict, has characterized Africa during the last century of state-making. Political control had to be earned through
 - i. The construction of loyalties

- ii. The use of coercion
- iii. The creation of an infrastructure

2. **Why was state-building in Africa different from Europe?**

- a. On population density: In Europe, population increases and density placed increase pressure on states to build the capacity to fight wars. In Africa, many of the current states were created before their capital cities had even reached maturity, and population was sparse
- b. On control over land vs. people: In Europe, state-formation was a competitive process over the control of land. In Africa, state-formation was aimed at capturing people – women, cattle, slaves - rather than territory. Wars of territorial conquest have been rare in African history
 - i. Property rights over people were extraordinarily well developed in Africa compared to Europe. Africans separated notions of ownership from those of land
- c. On the availability of the “exit” option: In Europe, it became impossible to escape the reach of territorial states with time. In Africa, control over territory was not contested because it was easier to escape from rulers than to fight them.
- d. On the projection of power and cultural homogenization: In Europe, the projection of power by a stable state apparatus lead to cultural homogenization within state territories. In Africa, states were much more dynamic and ephemeral, and their inability to consistently project power meant that there is much more cultural diversity.

3. **A Typology of African States**

- a. States with exceptionally difficult political geographies: These countries are large and have several dispersed areas of high pop density. African states with difficult geographies face the continual problem of a relatively large number of outlying groups that are not only spatially distinct but that also can be mobilized around ethnic and cultural symbols.
- b. Hinterland states: These countries, although exceptionally large by African standards, do not have dispersed areas of high population density. Rather, areas of high and medium population density are in relatively small areas of the country and then there are vast hinterlands where few people live.
- c. Countries with favorable political geographies: The highest concentration of power is found in one area, usually the capital, and disperse with distance. Distance between areas of high population density is not large.

1. What is the state and what is social control/state capacity?

- a. An ideal-typical definition of the state: “An organization composed of numerous agencies led and coordinated by the state’s leadership that has the ability or authority to make and implement the binding rules for all the people as well as the parameters of rule making for other social organizations in a given territory, using force.”
- b. The triad of the modern state:
 - i. A standing army
 - ii. A vastly improved tax-collecting mechanism
 - iii. An expanded set of judicial courts
- c. Social control/state capacity is the currency over which organizations compete. It can be measured with three indicators:
 - i. Compliance with state laws
 - ii. Participation by the population in state programs
 - iii. Legitimation of the state’s authority

2. Why have states in the developing world lacked capacity to shape society?

- a. The starting point of state formation is conflict: there is a struggle between state leaders, who seek to mobilize people and resources and impose a single set of rules, and other social organizations applying different rules in parts of society.
- b. States emerge when social control is tremendously concentrated. The distribution of social control in a society may be distributed among numerous, fairly autonomous groups rather than concentrated largely in the state. The overall sum of authority may be high, but its exercise may be fragmented. Social control must be extremely concentrated for a state to form.
- c. Strongmen – impediments to state formation in the developing world: Strongmen are not mere anachronisms; they have carved out protective niches for themselves, invigorated by the dilemma of state leaders.

3. Necessary & Sufficient Conditions for state formation in fragmented societies

- a. Necessary condition – a catastrophe/social upheaval: Major catastrophic forces have been a necessary but not sufficient condition for the emergence of strong states. Social dislocations, not administrative tinkering, are required for strong states to emerge in societies with fragmented social control.
- b. Sufficient condition 1 – world historical timing: The dislocation is more likely to lead to creating a strong state if it occurs at a world historical

- moment in which exogenous political forces favor concentrated social control.
- c. Sufficient condition 2 – the existence of a military threat: The possibility of political demise from external sources rises if leaders fail to mobilize the resources now garnered by strongmen.
 - d. Sufficient condition 3 – the basis for an independent bureaucracy: We need a social grouping with people sufficiently independent of existing bases of social control and skillful enough to execute the grand designs of state leaders.
 - e. Sufficient condition 4 – skillful leadership: Rulers must be competent in the ways they select bureaucrats, they must be sensitive to the changing risk calculus, they must know when to move and against whom, and they must be pragmatic.

Robert Jackson and Carl Rosberg, “Why Africa’s Weak States Persist: The Empirical and the Juridical in Statehood” (1982)

1. Explaining the empirical weakness of African states

- a. The empirical weakness of African states: Empirical statehood has often been compromised in Africa; in the sense that their central gov'ts lost control of important areas in their jurisdiction during struggles with rival political organizations. Yet the serious empirical weaknesses of some African states have not led to enforced jurisdictional change.
 - i. In Europe, empirical statehood → juridical statehood
 - ii. In Africa, juridical statehood → empirical statehood
- b. The impact of international society: While international society has bolstered and “frozen” juridical statehood in Africa, it is ill-equipped and limited in enhancing empirical statehood in Africa

2. Juridical Statehood

- a. Definition of the state in international law (Based on Montevideo Convention on Rights and Duties of States):
 - i. A defined territory
 - ii. A permanent population
 - iii. An effective government
 - iv. Independence, or the right to enter relations with other states
- b. Juridical statehood is a product of the international society of states, and its properties are defined in international terms. Sovereignty is the key doctrine of international society.
- c. Why has the juridical statehood been maintained in Africa?

- i. The ideology of Pan-Africanism, which limits inter-state warmaking or competition to challenge weak juridical boundaries
- ii. The vulnerability of states and the consequent insecurity of statesmen
- iii. The support of the larger international society for the juridical boundaries inherited from colonialism
- iv. The reluctance of non-African powers to intervene in the affairs of African states without being invited

3. Empirical Statehood

- a. Empirical statehood: The ability to exercise control over its territory and peoples
- b. The weaknesses of empirical statehood in Africa:
 - i. Political authority tends to personal rather than institutional
 - ii. The prevalence of military coups indicates elite alienation and disloyalty
 - iii. The state bureaucracies are inefficient, corrupt, and disorderly

James Scott, *Seeing Like a State* (1998)

1. When State Formation Goes Wrong: High Modernism

- a. State formation fails most miserably when three conditions combine:
 - i. The aspiration/ideology of the administrative ordering of nature and society (“high modernism”)
 - ii. The unrestrained use of the power of the modern state as an instrument for achieving those designs
 - iii. A weakened or prostrate civil society that lacks the capacity to resist these plans
- b. In short: The ideology of high modernism provides the desire; the modern state provides the means to act on it; and the incapacitated civil society provides the leveled terrain on which to build disutopias.

2. The Ideology of High Modernism

- a. The core ideology: A strong version of the belief in scientific and technical progress stemming from industrialization in Europe and North America from 1830 through WWI. It was supremely confident in continued linear progress. High modernism is a sweeping vision of how the benefits of technical and scientific progress could be applied by the state in every field of human activity. The troubling thing with high modernism is that it speaks with the authority of scientific knowledge.

- b. High modernists are usually progressive leaders: it is typically they who have come to power with a comprehensive critique of existing society and a popular mandate to transform it.
- c. What factors allowed resistance to high modernism emerge?
 - i. The existence of a private sphere of activity in which the state cannot interfere
 - ii. Liberal political economy, based on the free market and absent of an economic sovereignty
 - iii. The existence of working, representative institutions through which a resistant society could make its influence felt

3. **High Modernism Channeled via the State Apparatus: Making Society Legible**

- a. Legibility: Legibility is a condition of manipulation. Any substantial state intervention in society requires the invention of units that are visible. Whatever the units being manipulated, they must be organized in a manner that permits them to be identified, observed, recorded, counted, aggregated, and monitored.
 - i. The degree of knowledge is roughly commensurate with the depth of the intervention- the greater the manipulation, the greater the required legibility.

James Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia* (2009)

1. **State and Non-State Spaces in the History of Southeast Asia**

- a. The “exit” option: In Southeast Asia, the first states began to appear around 500AD. The main, long-run threat of the ungoverned periphery was that it represented a constant temptation, a constant alternative life within the state.
- b. A nonstate space – the standard human condition for most of history: A non-state space points to locations where, owing largely to geographic obstacles, the state has particular difficulty in establishing and maintaining its authority. We must remember that, historically speaking, living in the absence of state structures has been the standard human condition.
 - i. For all their fluidity, nonstate places are relatively constant features of the SE Asian historical landscape, while the successful dynastic state is rare and ephemeral. We can thus speak of a contingency of “state.”

- c. The drive to eliminate nonstate spaces: In the late 19th and 20th centuries, the last stage of modern state formation has occurred: the drive to eliminate all nonstate spaces.
 - i. This is an imperial project, achievable only with distance-demolishing technologies (roads, bridges, modern weapons, telegraph, telephone, GPS, railroads).

2. **Stateless Hill People as Active Resisters: the Case of “Zomia”**

- a. Zomia: A sparsely populated area the size of Europe in the mountainous region between China, SE Asia, and Bangladesh, qualifying as a region in the strong sense of the term, and is essential to understand state formation in SE Asia.
- b. Not primitive people, but active resisters: Most of what we consider to be primitive about hill people, far from being the mark of primitives left behind by civilization, are better seen on a long view as adaptations designed to evade both state capture and state formation. They are political adaptations of nonstate peoples to a world of states that are both attractive and threatening.
 - i. These are “barbarians by design”
 - ii. They practice “escape agriculture” – forms of cultivation designed to thwart state appropriation
 - iii. They have an “escape social structure” – Because it was designed to aid dispersal and autonomy and ward off political subordination
- c. Zomia peoples resisting state incorporation in the 20th century: During WW II, it was the site of secessionist movements, rebellions, and armed opposition. Earlier, it refused the culture of the lowlands, and lowlanders who were alienated sought refuge in the hills of Zomia.