

# FORMATION OF THE MODERN STATES

Comparative Perspectives on Democracy and  
Development

Conflict and Democracy Studies Program

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## WHY STUDY THE STATE?

- state weakness undermines government performance, which can easily fuel public discontent
- if essential services (public security, education, healthcare, infrastructure, etc.) are underprovided or distributed unevenly, there arises a broad perception of government ineffectiveness, corruption, unfairness, and neglect
- in democracies, poor governmental performance erodes public trust in politicians, parties, and, eventually, democratic institutions themselves

## WHERE DOES THE STATE COME FROM?

- The historical rise of the state matters as a way of understanding both how our contemporary polities are organized and how they function
- fundamental to our understanding of economic growth, good governance, regime stability, and democratic success
- Two related answers: war between rival rulers and contracts between rulers and the ruled

## THE EUROPEAN PROTOTYPE?

- why did the state, particularly European states, become the most important political center of power over the last four hundred years?
- **Tilly:** all European states went through the transition towards bureaucratization and absolutism due to the pressure of warfare
- the state is like an outsized mafia that runs a protection racket, it needs money to protect itself from other similar organizations (competing states)

## THE EUROPEAN PROTOTYPE?

- modern states are a technological and logistical byproduct of war-making effort
- war --> extraction of resources --> repression --> state formation
- building and sustaining a modern army required a permanent bureaucratic infrastructure capable of extracting resources from the society, that in turn led to bureaucratic centralization





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## MULTIPLICITY OF STATE TYPES IN EUROPE

- How to explain various forms of states found in Europe that over the last thousand years (empires, city-states, nation-states)?
- the war-makes-states relationship is general, while Tilly's theory of coercion and capital is specifically European
- in highly commercialized countries with readily taxable resources (ENG & NETH) the drive towards bureaucratization and absolutism was weaker than in less modernized contexts (FRA, Prussia, Eastern Europe)

## PATHS OF STATE FORMATION

- 1) **coercion-intensive**: often empires such as Russia plus Sweden and all Eastern Europe
- 2) **capital-intensive**: Italian, German, and Swiss city states and the Netherlands
- 3) **capitalized coercion**: territorial states or nation-states, particularly France, Great Britain, Spain and Prussia
- eventually, all had to follow the third track which was militarily superior, particularly in its ability to organize and sustain a standing army



## PATHS OF STATE FORMATION

- coercion and capital vary across the European space
- coercion is best understood from a top-down perspective as consolidation of the state from above,
- while capital requires a bottom-up perspective on the groups in society and their resources
- coercion vs. capital -----> timing of certain forms of states (empire, city-state, nation-state)
- (preparation for war and bargaining over taxes as

## THE IMPORTANCE OF CAPITAL/CITIES

- even after the convergence to nation-state, the states retained characteristics from previous paths, such as the character of the representative institutions
- No monarch could obtain assets without the compliance of at least some of the wealthy (and armed) elites: kings entered into explicit agreements with nobles, merchants, and clergy
- representative assemblies limited the discretion of rulers in exchange for the income to fight wars, build states, and thus promote growth and state development

## HOW WELL DOES THE MODEL TRAVEL?

- from the Middle Ages, Europe constituted an international system in which the threat of war was ubiquitous
- state-builders had to strengthen the center to survive ruthless competition
- Outside Europe, the situation looks quite different, especially after the World War II: geopolitical pressures were considerably less important
- many states are ineffective, plagued with corruption, and the absence of public services; some are even failed states

## A FEW EXCEPTIONS

- Japan, and South Korea, Taiwan and later China have developed powerful states
- Southeast Asia also provides several examples of strong states such as Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand and to some extent Indonesia
- individual success stories across South America and Africa, including Botswana, Chile and Uruguay - all developed relatively effective states while they were still poor







## THEORETICAL CHALLENGES

- The need to understand the consequences of different conditions outside Europe, and to explain why effective states have nevertheless been established in some places
- East Asia is the major exception after 1945 in that geopolitical pressures were strong: located between Japan/US and China, they were forced to enlist their own citizens in state-building project
- unable to maintain a credible defence without a flow of tax revenue

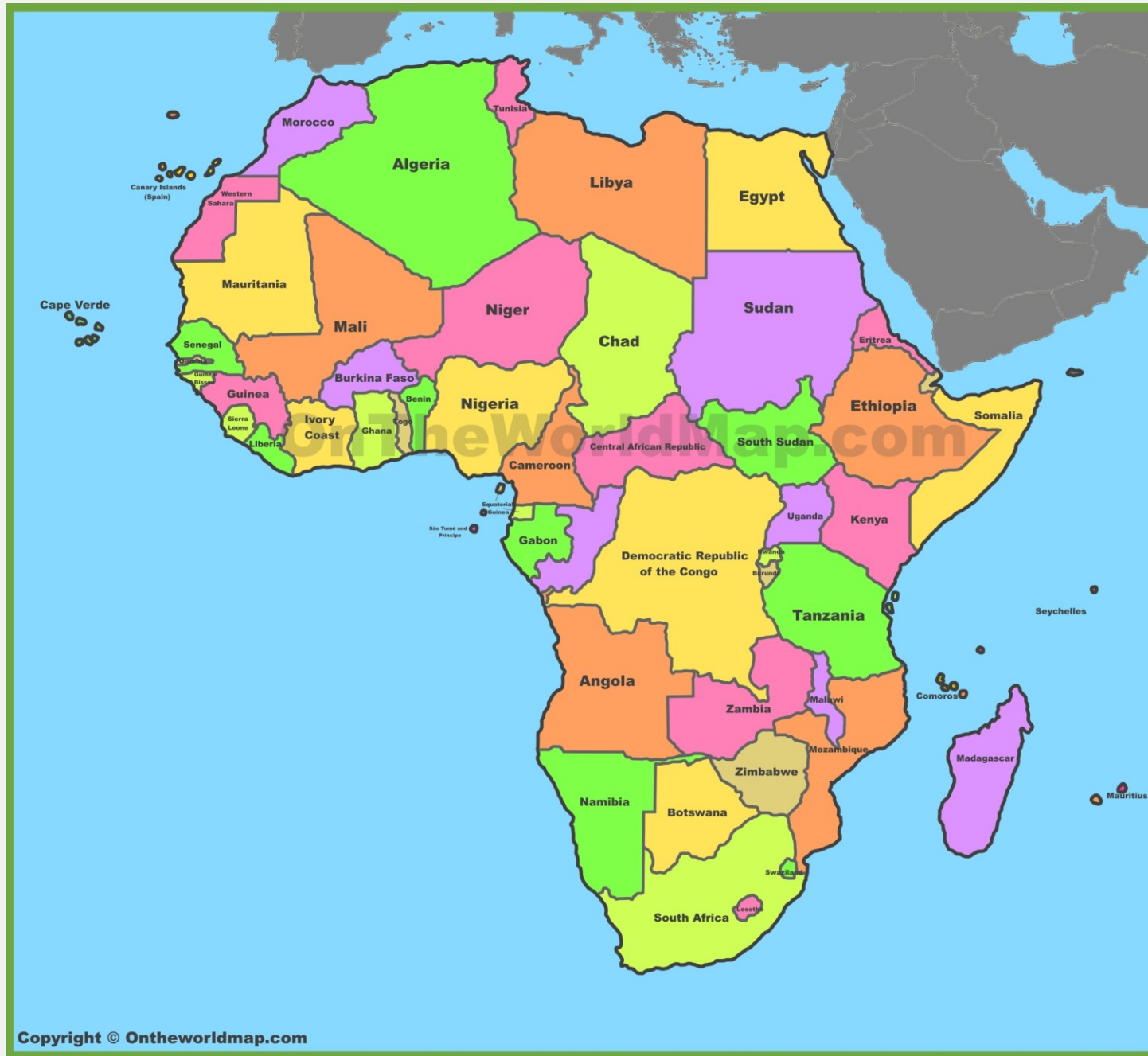


## **SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA**

- most African states are unable to complete even basic tasks like enforcing laws, building roads, and giving population universal access to education
- state apparatus is riddled with corruption and nepotism, the state is absent in rural areas, and is unable to tax their residents systematically
- it finances its operation via indirect taxes on trade and via development aid (plus income from natural resources)

## **SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA**

- compared to Western Europe, population density in Africa has always been very low
- just a hundred years ago there were no cities and no transport infrastructure
- war was aimed at capturing people (enslave them and trade them) rather than conquering territory
- a secondary goal was to make neighboring tribes to pay tribute, preferably in the form of slaves



## HERBST'S (2000) ARGUMENT ABOUT AFRICA

- the power in Africa was non-territorial
- Europeans were long reluctant to become engaged in Africa: they merely established coastal strongholds from which they could purchase slaves and precious goods such as metal and ivory
- Only in the 1880s, at the Berlin Conference, European powers drew lines on the map of Africa and divided among themselves the new colonies

## HERBST'S (2000) ARGUMENT ABOUT AFRICA

- Europeans were not interested in waging wars over rather worthless African territory: their peaceful colonial coexistence was secured through treaties and agreements
- French, British, Portuguese, Belgians and Germans were able to conquer very large territories without major effort to control them
- concentrated on building a capital where they were present, while rural areas were ruled indirectly, often through cooperation with tribal chiefs

## HERBST'S (2000) ARGUMENT ABOUT AFRICA

- without the need to protect the population against external enemies, the African states have struggled to be recognized **internally**
- the lack of external pressure has undermined two of the most important state functions, namely, to create legitimacy and to collect taxes
- nevertheless, state capacity among African states vary



## HERBST'S (2000) ARGUMENT ABOUT AFRICA

- geography: the least favorable is the situation of large countries with population centers separated by great distances (Sudan, Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo,
- the most favorable situation is in countries of a manageable size with a single population center (Botswana, Eritrea),
- states with favorable geography, also have better citizenship policies and protection of property rights

# LATIN AMERICA

- mostly composed of states that never won institutional autonomy for themselves: low legitimacy and a limited institutional capacity
- a remarkably peaceful place with respect to inter-state conflicts: generally brief, involved limited number of troops, caused minor changes to national borders (the borders of 1840 roughly correspond to the borders of today)
- why have Latin American states been so weak and why has the continent been so peaceful?



## **CENTENO'S (2003) ARGUMENT ABOUT LATIN AMERICA**

- The states too weak to wage war and therefore are also weak to maintain law and order
- the military too often occupied with fighting domestic rather than foreign enemies - civil wars more common than inter-state wars
- with a single exception, most wars during the last two hundred years were limited, in contrast to Europe's total wars (as well as the US civil war)



## CENTENO'S (2003) ARGUMENT ABOUT LATIN AMERICA

- limited wars have not fostered a broader and more efficient taxation of the population, but were financed by printing money (an inflation tax), via taxes on international trade, and by borrowing (in Europe)
- war sparks taxation only under specific conditions, notably strong political institutions which can be realized only if the elites agree on boosting the state capacity
- the first real states in Latin America emerged later, in early 20th century, and their creation

## WHY WAS LATIN AMERICA DIFFERENT?

- The states were internally divided, and both masses and elites were unable to find common ground
- regional fragmentation, portions of the country controlled by local bosses, racial segregation, and ideological conservative-liberal division within the elite
- wars did not contribute to national sentiment: the elites not interested in creating a sense of inclusive nationalism which would lead to granting



# Indigenous Peoples in Latin America

By the year 2010, an estimated 45 million indigenous people lived in Latin America, accounting for 8.3 % of the region's population. The United Nations has championed the promotion of their rights through the use of different resources and special regulations for this purpose.



## ECLAC encourages the region's countries to put public policies in practice which:

1) are based on standards of indigenous peoples' rights

2) include their perspectives and contributions to the region's development

3) consolidate improvements in their well-being and living conditions, political participation and territorial rights

4) promote the construction of multicultural societies that benefit us all

## LATIN AMERICAN EXCEPTIONS

- the total War of the Triple Alliance (1864-1870) where a thoroughly mobilized Paraguay lost half of its population in conflict with Argentina and Brazil
- Paraguay emerged victorious from one of the few other serious wars (against Bolivia in 1932-1935)
- the clearest exception is Chile, with an early emergence of an efficient state and with a consensus between the elites and the masses - war facilitated both

## LATIN AMERICAN EXCEPTIONS

- Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Mexico have similarly undergone periods in which warfare had favorable effects on state building, fostering a sense of national unity
- the original war-makes-states relationship is based on a number of scope conditions:
- an administrative core exists before the geopolitical pressures, at least part of the elite sees the development of state capacity as being in its interest, and that there is a general agreement as to who is included in the nation

## DEFINITIONAL AND METHODOLOGICAL QUESTIONS

- the most important is the distinction between minimalist and maximalist definitions of the state
- the minimalist definition makes it possible to trace the first states six thousand years back in time: the state is any organization of society that is more sophisticated than a tribe

## TILLY VS. WEBER

- **Tilly** defined states as "coercion-wielding organizations that are distinct from households and kinship groups and exercise priority in some respect over all other organizations within substantial territories"
- **Weber** offered a more maximalist definition of the state as an entity that possesses a monopoly on the legitimate use of force within a specific territory
- the legitimate monopoly on force implies modern organs such as the military, the bureaucracy, the courts, and the police

## LEGITIMACY AS A MODERN PHENOMENON

- **legitimacy** means that the citizenry normally follows the state's rules, partly because they are embedded in a rule-of-law mind-set and partly due to the presence of a common political community
- this kind of apparatus has not existed in most of the states that fit the minimalist definition
- its internal power monopoly is couched in international competition with other states

## LEGITIMACY AS AN INDISPENSABLE CONDITION

- minimalist post-Weberian definitions of the state avoid the concepts of legitimacy and monopoly, because they do not understand them as constants:
- not all (modern) states are legitimate, and many do not have a monopoly of (legitimate) violence on their territory
- however, if we do not include "legitimacy" into understanding modern states, the concept of the state becomes too materialist



## LEGITIMACY AS AN INDISPENSABLE CONDITION

- Without legitimacy, the state is reduced to military power and bureaucracy that enforce material order
- no state is based solely on a physical and material bases: ideas, values and norms play a wider role than producing physical coercion, they legitimate the state power
- the state best understood as an object of analysis that exists simultaneously as material force and as a non-materialistic construct

## WHAT IS STATE CAPACITY

- some definitional disagreements but consensus that it has to do with the ability of the state to **execute policies**
- Additionally, some scholars see the ability of the state to
- penetrate society, provide public goods, extract revenues, deliver well-being, and control economic resources
- Some add impartiality, efficiency and absence of corruption as fundamental features of state capacity

## HOW TO MEASURE STATE CAPACITY?

- A number of comparative indices, both subjective and objective data:
- Quality of Government Index (Quality of Government Institute, <https://www.gu.se/en/quality-government>)
- Government Effectiveness Index (World Bank, [www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org))
- Failed States Index (<https://fragilestatesindex.org/>)
- Corruption Perceptions Index (Transparency International, [www.transparency.org](http://www.transparency.org))
- the composite indices are based on a combination of several sub-indicators