

# FORMATION OF THE MODERN STATES

Comparative Perspectives on Democracy and  
Development

Conflict and Democracy Studies Program

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## **Consider two Latin American countries:**

“The first is one of the region’s oldest and strongest democracies. It boasts a stronger social safety net than any of its neighbors and is making progress on its promise to deliver free health care and higher education to all its citizens. It is a model of social mobility and a magnet for immigrants from across Latin America and Europe. The press is free, and the political system is open; opposing parties compete fiercely in elections and regularly alternate power peacefully. It sidestepped the wave of military juntas that mired some Latin American countries in dictatorship. Thanks to a long political alliance and deep trade and investment ties with the United States, it serves as the Latin American headquarters for a slew of multinational corporations. It has the best infrastructure in South America. It is still unmistakably a developing country, with its share of corruption, injustice, and dysfunction, but it is well ahead of other poor countries by almost any measure.”

“The second country is one of Latin America’s most impoverished nations and its newest dictatorship. Its schools lie half deserted. The health system has been devastated by decades of underinvestment, corruption, and neglect; long-vanquished diseases, such as malaria and measles, have returned. Only a tiny elite can afford enough to eat. An epidemic of violence has made it one of the most murderous countries in the world. It is the source of Latin America’s largest refugee migration in a generation, with millions of citizens fleeing in the last few years alone. Hardly anyone (aside from other autocratic governments) recognizes its sham elections, and the small portion of the media not under direct state control still follows the official line for fear of reprisals. By the end of 2020, its economy will have shrunk by about half in the last five years. It is a major cocaine-trafficking hub, and key power brokers in its political elite have been indicted in the United States on drug charges. Prices double every 25 days.”

([www.foreignaffairs.com](http://www.foreignaffairs.com))

## 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

## WHY STUDY THE STATE?

- 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

## 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)



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## THREE 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**: over time 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

## THREE 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
- European uniqueness - that made the advent of the nation-state possible - rests in capital
- its presence or absence, typically in a form of rich cities, determined which of the three paths materialized, once coercion was put to use

## 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

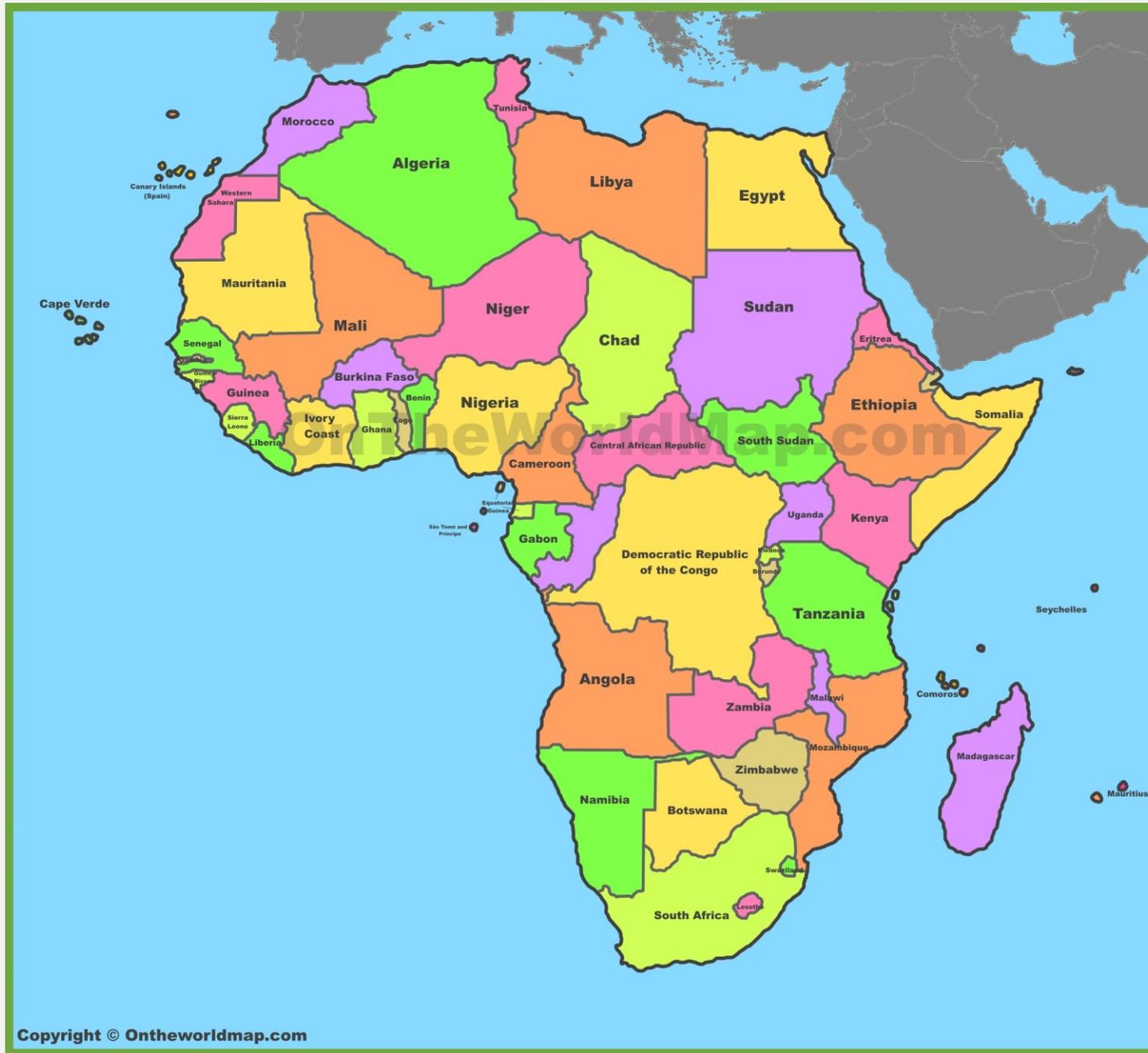
- The need to understand the consequences of different conditions outside Europe, and to explain why effective states have nevertheless been established in some places
- East Asia is the major exception after 1945 in that geopolitical pressures were strong: located between Japan/US and China, they were 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 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
- many African states are empty shells, entities created 150 years ago with little prospects of becoming efficient entities

# 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