

States and State Formation

Convenor: Roberto Stefan Foa

Michaelmas Term 2021

General Course Outline

This course offers an in-depth assessment of the state. Over the course of these seminars, we will ask: how and why did fiefdoms unite into relatively large and stable political units during the early modern era? Why were some states able to develop bureaucratic institutions, while others remained patrimonial? How do patterns of state formation affect contemporary variation in economic development, rule of law, and political accountability? And under what circumstances have political institutions “decayed”?

The course will cover basic definitions in the science of the state, covering core concepts such as bureaucracy, patrimonialism, prebendalism, the rule of law, legitimacy, corruption, informal vs. formal institutions, and institutions vs. organisations, as well as cover historical case studies from across Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas. Students are expected to have a strong knowledge of or interest in world history and a willingness to debate key topics.

Teaching

The course comprises 7 seminars. Students are expected to read the set texts for each session and to participate actively in the discussion. Students will be asked to volunteer for short presentations throughout the term. The questions on each week of the reading list indicate what students may wish to present on.

Assessment

The course will be assessed by a 3,000-word essay that explores a question of relevance to the core themes and topics of the course.

Course Structure

- Week 1 Conceptualising the State
 - Week 2 The Historical Origins of State Formation
 - Week 3 Surveillance and Governmentality
 - Week 4 State Failure and Political Decay
 - Week 5 Democracy vs. State Formation: The Sequencing Debate
 - Week 6 The State and Economic Development
 - Week 7 A Society of the State?
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Core Readings

Weber, M. [1921-22] *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*.
- “Bureaucracy” (pp. 956-983)
- “Domination and Legitimacy” (pp. 941-955)
- “The Types of Legitimate Domination” (pp. 212-301)

Foucault, M. (1973) *Discipline and Punish*. New York: Pantheon.

Fukuyama, F. (2014) *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Huntington, S. (1968) *Political Order in Changing Societies*.

Tilly, C. (1990) *Coercion, Capital, and European States: AD 990-1990*.

Scott, J. (1998) *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Seminar Programme

Week 1: Conceptualising the State

Core question: What is “the state”?

Since 1,000 BC, the number of polities in the world has shrunk from around 600,000 to just 194 today, while there has also been a great increase in the capacity of such entities to regulate social behaviour, tax, and coerce individuals to follow defined norms and conventions. The purpose of the introductory seminar is to acquaint students with definitional issues around the state, as well as demonstrate the importance of the state as a terrain of sociological enquiry.

In this first week, we will lay the basic terminological groundwork, such as the Weberian definition of the state, the different forms of authority, the distinction between bureaucratic and patrimonial modes of governance, and the distinction between institutions and organisations. We will then begin to explore how modern states differ from the earlier forms of political organisation which have existed in history.

Set readings

- Weber, M. [1921-22] *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*.
- “Bureaucracy” (pp. 956-983)
- “Domination and Legitimacy” (pp. 941-955)
- “The Types of Legitimate Domination” (pp. 212-301)

- Huntington, S. (1968) *Political Order in Changing Societies*.
- “The Political Gap” (pp 1-8)

Further readings

Fukuyama, F. (2014) *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and

Giroux.
- Chapters 1-2

Week 2: The Historical Origins of State Formation

Core question: Why do states exist?

The “state” has not been the normal condition for most people throughout history. Acephalous societies existed in much of Africa until the age of European colonialism, and even in medieval Europe, many groups, such as the Cossacks, lived voluntarily outside of the state. In modern times, there remain many parts of the world in which the state plays only a marginal role in peoples lives, such as failing states like Somalia or Afghanistan. How then did the state become the dominant mode of social organisation? In this week, we will examine the process by which the modern state arose, looking at historical texts on feudalism in Europe and studies of state formation in Asia.

Set readings

Charles Tilly, “War Making and State Making as Organized Crime,” in Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, eds., *Bringing the State Back In* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 169-191.

Diamond, Jared. 1999. “From Egalitarianism to Kleptocracy”, in *Guns, Germs and Steel*.

Further readings

Carneiro, Robert (1970) “A Theory of the Origin of the State”, *Science*.

Foa, R. S. (2017) “Reversal or Persistence of Fortune?”, *Politics and Society*.

Week 3: Surveillance and Governmentality

Core question: Is it possible to be “free” of the state?

In this week, we will examine how the rise of the modern state has reshaped

human behaviour, including how states have sought to introduce systems of classification, regulate social action, and ensure compliance with authority. In particular, we will examine the role of the state in producing the “self-policing” citizen, and ask - is it possible to be free of the state?

Set readings

Foucault, M. (1973) *Discipline and Punish*. New York: Pantheon.
- “The body of the Condemned” (pp. 3-31)
- “Panopticism” (pp. 195-231)

Freud, Sigmund (1930) *Civilisation and Its Discontents*.

Further readings

Scott, J. (1998) *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- “Social facts: Raw and Cooked” in Part 1 (p.22-33)
- “Conclusion” in Part 1: Legibility and Simplification (p. 76-83)

Wittfogel, K. (1957) *Oriental Despotism*, Introduction.

Week 4: State Failure and Political Decay

Core question: Why do state institutions erode?

In this week, we examine how political systems can deteriorate, away from bureaucracy and towards patrimonial forms of authority. First we ask: What is state failure, and why does it matter? And if we turn our attention to countries in the world today, is it true that western countries such as the United States are experiencing “political decay”?

Set readings

Francis Fukuyama, “The Imperative of State-Building,” *Journal of Democracy* 15, No. 2 (April 2004): 17-31.

Fukuyama, F. “Political Decay”, from *The Origins of Political Order: From*

Prehuman Times to the French Revolution (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011).

Further readings

Lise Morjé Howard, “The Ethnocracy Trap,” *Journal of Democracy* 23: 4 (October 2012): 155-169.

Foa, R. S. (2021) “Why Strongmen Win in Weak States”, *Journal of Democracy*.

Week 5: The Sequencing Debate – Democracy vs. State Formation

Core question: Does democratisation undermine the state?

In this week, we discuss one of the biggest debates in political science - the “sequencing debate”, or, do countries need to undergo state formation before they democratise, or can state-building and democratic transition can occur simultaneously?

Set readings

“The Sequencing Debate” (3 articles) in the *Journal of Democracy*.

Further readings

Foa, R.S. (2018) “Authoritarianism and Modernization”, *Journal of Democracy*.

Week 6: The State and Economic Development

Core question: does a “strong” state help or hinder economic development?

Another core debate surrounds the effect of political institutions as a driver of economic development: Do states hinder economic growth, or can there be “developmental” states that succeed in promoting catch-up growth in developing countries?

Set readings

Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2012). Ch. 1 (pp. 7-9, 40-44), Ch. 2 (all), Ch. 3 (pp. 70-87, 91-95), Ch. 4 (pp. 102-104, 113-118, 122-123), Ch. 10 (pp. 274-282, 298-301), Ch. 15 (pp. 429-434).

Chalmers Johnson, "The Developmental State: Odyssey of a Concept," in Meredith Woo-Cumings, ed. *The Developmental State* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 32-40.

Further readings

Peter Evans, *Embedded Autonomy: States and Industrial Transformation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). Ch. 1 (3-13; read only first three lines of p. 13), Ch. 3 (all).

Atul Kohli, *State-Directed Development: Political Power and Industrialization in the Global Periphery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Intro (pp. 1-8, 16-20), Ch. 3 (all).

Week 7: A Society of the State?

Core question: What is the legacy of the state for social institutions?

In this week, we debate the legacy of the state for the health of the societies in which we live. Does the legacy of a strong historical state entail social atomisation, dependency, and anomie? Or do states create the conditions for peace, social cooperation, social trust, and collective action?

Set readings

Putnam, Robert D., "Explaining Performance", in *Making Democracy Work*.

Eisner, M. 2004. 'Long-Term Historical Trends of Violent Crime', *Crime and Justice*, 30, pp. 83-142.

Further readings

Gerner, H.G. (2012) "The Autocratic Legacy of Early Statehood", *American Political Science Review*.

Putnam, Robert D., "What Makes Democracy Work?" *National Civic Review* 82, No. 2 (Spring 1993): 101-107.