**Instructor’s Manual**

*Comparative Politics*, Fourth Edition

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Chapter 3: The State

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

* Explain how political scientists think about and define the state.
* Explain the basic roles and activities of modern states.
* Describe the major theories of state formation produced by comparative analysts.
* Practice an understanding of how hypotheses can be developed using case studies in comparative politics.

**CASES IN CONTEXT**

* Mexico
* France
* United Kingdom
* Nigeria

**CHAPTER OUTLINE**

# Concepts

## The Modern State

### This section focuses on basic features of modern states, leaning on Weber’s classic definition, which is developed and modified in the types section that follows.

## State Capacity

### States vary notably in their ability to realize the ends set for them.

### States with “high capacity” are those that can do things like taxing and policing.

### States with “low capacity” have trouble forming their basic functions.

## Fragile States

### Fragile states are states with notably low capacity, and state failure links to a host of problems like poor development outcomes and the absence of the rule of law.

## The State–Society Relationship

### Students are briefly introduced to the idea that the state exists as part of society, and that politics is not reducible to the state. Indeed, scholars debate about the relationship between the state and society.

# Types

## Characteristics of Modern States

### This section expands on the definition of the modern state, adding three basic characteristics.

#### Bureaucracy

##### Modern states are bureaucratically organized.

##### Even though “bureaucracies” are often experienced as inefficient and unpleasant, they are often the most efficient way to organize collective action.

#### Impersonality

##### Modern states are typically not viewed as identifiable with individual persons, though there are cases like personalistic dictatorships that get close to this.

#### Sovereignty

##### Modern states claim and try to enforce sovereignty, i.e., the state is responsible for policing and ultimately controlling activity in the territory that corresponds to it.

## Traditional Functions of States

### This section briefly discusses key functions exercised by modern states.

#### Defense

##### Modern states, with very few exceptions, have standing armies.

##### States often justify themselves as providing protection to their citizens.

#### Policing

##### Modern states assume the responsibility for enforcing laws through policing their societies.

#### Taxation

##### Modern states could not do all the things that they do without successfully extracting funds from their societies.

##### States that do not tax effectively tend to be weak and unstable.

#### Order, Administration, and “Legibility”

##### Modern states do many things to learn about, organize, and govern their citizens.

# Causes and Effects: Why Did States Emerge and Expand?

## Political or Conflict Theories

### Political or conflict theories claim states emerge mostly as outcomes of processes of political conflict.

#### This section focuses mostly on “bellicist” theories of state formation associated with the work of Charles Tilly and others.

## Economic Theories

### Economic theories say that states emerge mostly because of related, economic processes.

#### We mention both Marxist and non-Marxist versions of this argument.

## Cultural Theories

### Cultural theories say that changes in beliefs and values cause the emergence of modern states.

## Diffusion Theories

### Diffusion theories take a different explanatory strategy, trying to explain the spread of the state system. We consider several distinct versions of this theory.

# Thinking Comparatively: Great Britain, the United Kingdom, or Neither? State and Nation in England and Scotland

## This section focuses on the uses of single case studies.

## A schematic overview is given of the changing patterns of statehood and nationhood over the last several centuries.

### The state is never “finalized” and that both identities and political institutions change over time.

## A single case cannot prove or disprove a general theory, but it can help in several ways.

**LECTURE SUGGESTIONS**

Chapter 3 covers a lot of ground, and the material it provides may be worth spending several days of class time. The authors suggest that it can be covered minimally in a week and maximally in two weeks.

There are a number of ways in which one might proceed in covering this material. One could divide lecture and discussion coverage into two main sessions: the first focusing on the concept of the state and the main functions of the modern state, and the second on the comparative-historical theories of the rise of the modern state. It is worth spending the time to really clarify the meaning of the Weberian “monopoly on the legitimate use of force” (which some students grasp intuitively but which others struggle with), but also to emphasize the limitations of an approach that focuses on the state only, or even predominantly, in terms of its military and policing functions.

If you choose to focus on methodology in your lecture, you might link the chapter’s discussion of the uses of case studies back to what students read in previous weeks/chapters.

**CLASS ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS**

* Ask students to imagine life in the absence of a modern state. What would life be like? In discussion, some may gravitate towards “Hollywood”-style understandings of a struggle for survival in the absence of a clear rule of law (see “Video Resources” below). This intuition can be helpful in developing an understanding of the origins of modern states and the Weberian idea of the monopoly on the legitimate use of force.
* Ask students to analyze the *Fund for Peace* [Fragile States Index](http://fundforpeace.org/fsi/) and the latest rankings. First, ask them to note the sorts of factors that might predict the placement of any given state in the rankings. Then, ask them to consider the implications of the evidence they find there for theories of state formation and state strength. If classroom conditions permit, groups of students can present their thoughts to the class, “testing” theories against this evidence.
  + As a bonus activity, ask students to analyze the components of the index based on which countries are ranked, and to link this analysis to the conceptual materials in the chapter. Are the measures of state strength/failure conceptually tightly linked to what the literature says a modern state does? Do students agree with the relative weighting of different elements of the index?

**ISSUES FOR DISCUSSION**

One potential discussion involves helping students better understand the bureaucratic character of the state. As the text discusses, all of us have had unpleasant experiences with “bureaucracies.” Given that the everyday usage of the word carries connotations of inefficiency and perhaps even corruption, it can sometimes take some work to get students to see the imperative of bureaucratic organization for the modern state to perform its key functions (as stressed by Weber and many others). Conduct a thought experiment in class, asking students to figure out how we could organize various forms of state action *without* bureaucracy. Or, ask students to recount their worst experiences with bureaucratic offices, and determine which aspects of those experiences might have been due to avoidable inefficiency and poor organizational performance, and which might have simply unwanted side effects of necessary bureaucratic organization.

Students also often struggle with making comparative claims about the relative performance of different state organizations. Many students have stereotypes about poor performance of states in developing countries. What complicates this is that such stereotypes sometimes partially map on to real differences, and sometimes not. Pointing to examples of state weakness in U.S. history (e.g., the Whiskey Rebellion, the Civil War, the failure of reconstruction and the withdrawal of Union troops from the South) can serve as a useful corrective. It is also important to highlight cases in which developing states have relatively high capacity in comparative terms (e.g., Botswana, Chile, and so forth), and asking students to think about the implications of such cases.

**VIDEO RESOURCES**

[“What Have the Romans Ever Done For Us”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qc7HmhrgTuQ), from Monty Python’s *Life of Brian*

Several films show the problems of either a totalitarian state or the context of failed states:

*1984* (1984)

*Goodbye Lenin* (2003)

*The Dark Ages* (2007), History Channel

*Black Hawk Down* (2001)

*Restrepo* (2010)

*Armadillo* (2010)

*No End in Sight* (2007)

*Manda Bala* (2007)

*City of God* (2002), supplemental DVD footage

Other films offer fictionalized accounts of some of the same ideas, such as:

*The Road* (2009)

*The Hunger Games* (2012)

*Lord of the Flies* (1990)

*Mad Max* (1979)

**INTERNET RESOURCES**

[Fragile States Index](http://fundforpeace.org/fsi/) (Fund for Peace)

[UNDP Human Development Reports](http://hdr.undp.org/en/) (scroll to the bottom of the page)

[World Happiness Report 2022](https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2022/)