

Theories of State

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A sudden upsurge of interest in "the state" has occurred in comparative social science in the past decade. Whether as an object of investigation or as something invoked to explain outcomes of interest, the state as an actor or an institution has been highlighted in an extraordinary outpouring of studies by scholars of diverse theories from all of the major disciplines. Students of Latin America, Africa, and Asia have examined the roles of states in instituting comprehensive political reforms, helping to shape national economic development, and bargaining with multinational corporations. Scholars interested in the advanced industrial democracies of Europe, North America, and Japan have probed the involvements of states in developing social programs and in managing domestic and international economic problems.

In the wake of the "Keynesian revolution" of the 1930s to the 1950s national macroeconomic management became the norm and public social expenditures burgeoned across all of the advanced industrial capitalist democracies, even in the United States. The dismantlement of colonial empires gave birth to dozens of "new nations," which before long revealed that they would not simply recapitulate Western liberal democratic patterns in their political organization or policy choices.

"Government" was viewed primarily as an arena within which economic interest groups or normative social movements contended or allied with one another to shape the making of public policy decisions. Neo-Marxists have, above all, debated alternative understandings of the socioeconomic functions performed by the capitalist state. Some see it as an instrument of class rule, others as an objective guarantor of production relations or economic accumulation, and still others as an arena for political class struggles.

Max Weber argued that states are compulsory associations claiming control over territories and the people within them. Administrative, legal, extractive, and coercive organizations are the core of any state. These organizations are variably structured in different countries, and

they may be embedded in some sort of constitutional-representative system of parliamentary decision making and electoral contests for key executive and legislative posts.

States conceived as organizations claiming control over territories and people may formulate and pursue goals that are not simply reflective of the demands or interests of social groups, classes, or society. This is what is usually meant by "state autonomy."

There are various theories by various scholars regarding the framework of the state. Stepan and Trimberger deal in somewhat different, though overlapping, terms with extraordinary instances of state autonomy - instances in which non-constitutionally ruling officials attempt to use the state as a whole to direct and restructure society and politics. According to Hecl's comparative history, civil service administrators in both Britain and Sweden have consistently made more important contributions to social policy development than political parties or interest groups.

What authority and organizational means does a state have to deploy whatever financial resources it does enjoy? All of these sorts of questions must be asked in any study of state capacities. Many studies of the capacities of states to realize particular kinds of goals use the concept of "policy instrument" to refer to the relevant means that a state may have at its disposal. Cross-national comparisons are necessary to determine the nature and range of institutional mechanisms that state officials may conceivably be able to bring to bear on a given set of issues. For example, Susan and Norman Fainstein compare the urban policies of northwest European nations with those of the United States.

Accordingly, they are able to conclude that the U.S. national state lacks certain instruments for dealing with urban crises that are available to European states, instruments such as central planning agencies, state-controlled pools of investment capital, and directly administered national welfare programs. Katzenstein argues that the definition and implementation of foreign economic policies grow out of the nexus of state and society. Hence both state goals and the interests of powerful classes may influence national policy orientations.

And the implementation of policies is shaped not only by the policy instruments available to the state, but also by the organized support it receives from key societal groups. Thus, policy

objectives such as industrial reorganization might be effectively implemented because a central state administration controls credit and can intervene in industrial sectors. Yet it may be of equal importance that industries are organized into disciplined associations willing to cooperate with state officials.

In the essay titled, "The State as a Conceptual Variable," J. P. Nettl delineated a series of institutional and cultural differences in the "stateness" of the United States, Britain, and the continental European nations. Some of his most telling contrasts referred to dimensions of political culture, that is, widely held ideas about the nature and locus of political power and notions about what can be attained in politics and how. Owing to the different historical paths their governmental systems have traversed, argued Nettl, continental Europeans think of "sovereignty" as residing in centralized administrative institutions; Britons focus on political parties in Parliament; and U.S. citizens refuse to designate any concrete body as sovereign, but instead attribute sovereignty to the law and the Constitution. This essay has ranged widely - although, inevitably, selectively – over current research on states as actors and as institutional structures with effects in politics.

Hence one can say that though complementary, analytical strategies have been discussed for bringing the state back in to a prominent place in comparative and historical studies of social change, politics, and policy making. On the one hand, states may be viewed as organizations through which official collectivities may pursue distinctive goals, realizing them more or less effectively given the available state resources in relation to social settings. On the other hand, states may be viewed more macroscopically as configurations of organization and action that influence the meanings and methods of politics for all groups and classes in society.

We do not need a new or refurbished grand theory of "The State" rather we need solidly grounded and analytically sharp understandings of the causal regularities that underlie the histories of states, social structures, and transnational relations in the modern world.