

The State: Past, Present, Future

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Abstract

This article is concerned with the past, present, and future of the state. It begins with a fundamental task for any state theorist: how can one define the state? The answer offered here draws on general state theory but adds some further theoretical reflections. On this basis, the article considers primary state formation, i.e., those multiple cases around the world where the state originated for the first time. It then addresses some major changes in the modern state and suggests how one might study both the variety of present states and their common basis, despite this variety. The last main section of the article speculates on the near-term future of the state as it currently exists.

Keywords: state crisis; state formation; history of the state; the modern state; the capitalist state; the future of the state

Dedicated to the Memory of Professor SHINODA Takeshi

This lecture asks: what is the state? Without a clear answer, it is hard to examine state formation, transformation, and possible futures. Thus I discuss six issues: (1) how to define the state; (2) primary state formation, i.e., cases where the state originated in pristine conditions without a prior history of state formation in the same terrestrial field; (3) some major changes in the nature of the modern state; (4) the variety of present states and their common basis, enabling us to speak of the 'present state'; (5) the 'present future' of the present state; and (6) general conclusions.

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1. What is the State?

For many purposes the best way to define the state is the tradition of general state theory (*allgemeine Staatstheorie*). This identifies three main elements of the state: (1) a clearly demarcated core territory under the more or less uncontested and continuous control of a state apparatus; (2) a politically organized coercive, administrative, and symbolic apparatus with both general and specific powers; and (3) a permanent or stable population on which the state's political authority and decisions are regarded, at least by that apparatus, if not those subject to it, as binding. As well as individual states, general state theory deals with the world of states, especially the recognition of state sovereignty and legitimate governments and the challenges posed domestically and/or externally by failed, collapsed, shadow, or rogue states.

Sovereignty involves more than police and/or military power. A German sociologist, Helmut Willke (1992) distinguished four general means that can be used to underpin specific acts of state power. These are violence, law, money, and knowledge (Table 1). While the first three are intuitively plausible, the fourth merits some explanation. Knowledge has been a major aspect of state power for millennia and involves many forms of information gathering, political calculation, and surveillance. Indeed 'statistics' initially referred to the collection by states of population and economic data for their own purposes. The more general power/knowledge link has been investigated in many studies, including, famously, by Foucault (1980).

The state apparatus is also highly varied. While some political scientists may focus on the 'internal state', scholars of international law and international relations also examine its external dimension. As recent work on the global economy and global governance indicates, state sovereignty is being challenged externally as well as internally. This is linked to the 'rescaling of state authority' as well as the 'blurring of public- private boundaries' as powers that were previously exercised by national sovereign states are now delegated downwards, moved sideways to cross-border arrangements, pooled, or transferred to supranational institutions.

Fourth, population is not just the aggregate of the individuals residing in or passing through a state's territory but is construed, constituted, and governed as a complex object of state policy that varies across historical periods, types of state, and political regimes. The state has obvious interests in how its territory is populated and in the quantity and quality of its population. As Foucault noted, this has two main dimensions: anatomo-politics

and bio-politics, that is, efforts to discipline individual bodies and to govern populations respectively (2008a, 2008b). We should also note that the population governed by states is subject to nationalizing, gendering, ‘racializing’, and other identity-based divisions; and that this is associated with different patterns of inclusion and exclusion both within and at the borders of a state.

Table 1. State Resources (based on Willke 1992)

Willke on basic state resources		
Resource	State Form	Role in State Formation, State Form, State Functions
Force (<i>Zwang</i>)	Territorial state	Claim to monopoly of organized coercion in given territorial area to secure frontiers and create conditions for peace within national territory’
Law (<i>Recht</i>)	Constitutional state	Create constitution, establish conditions for peaceful transfer of executive authority, institute property rights, extend legal, political, social and economic rights
Money (<i>Geld</i>)	Interventionist state	Establish bourgeois tax state with state revenues based on compulsory general taxation for legitimate purposes (and as basis for repaying loans) and use control over growing state budget to extend state’s ‘infrastructural power’
Knowledge (<i>Wissen</i>)	Supervision/ ‘super-vision’ state	State seeks <i>relative</i> monopoly of organized intelligence (information, knowledge, expertise) as basis for its powers of guidance (governance and meta-governance, e.g., open method of coordination as practiced in the European Union) and for surveillance of the population and other social forces within (and beyond) state’s frontiers

Table 2 presents the defining features of the three elements, notes their external dimensions and links them to three basic dimensions of state crisis and three modalities of ‘state failure’. Different forms of state rest on different forms of territorialization, are associated with different forms of state apparatus, and have different kinds of population. There are major forms of political power that are non-territorial and this poses several challenges to the state and state power today.

On this basis, I suggest the following four element definition of the state – the new element being the state idea. This definition can be extended by elaborating aspects of each of the key terms, theoretically and/or historically.

The core of the state apparatus comprises a relatively unified ensemble of socially embedded, socially regularized, and strategically selective institutions and organizations (*Staatsapparat*) whose socially accepted function is to define and enforce collectively binding decisions on the members of a society (*Staatsvolk*) in a given territorial area (*Staatsgebiet*) in the name of the common interest or general will of an imagined political community identified with that territory (*Staatsidee*).

Table 2: The Three Element Approach to the State

	State Territory	State Apparatus	Population
Defining Features	Bordered territory subject to control by state authority	Special staff with division of labour and specific state capacities.	Population of state
External Aspect	Exclaves, colonies claims to extra-territoriality	Recognition of sovereignty by other states	Aliens, refugees, stateless persons
State Crisis	Insecure borders, occupation,	Loss of state capacity, crisis of legitimacy Government-in-exile	Demographic decline, emigration
State Failure	Military defeat Loss of territorial sovereignty	Administrative failure, loss of legitimacy	Forcible removal, genocide, civil war, dual power, or divided loyalties.

I now identify six aspects of the state. Three refer to inputs, withinputs, and outputs; and three to some discursive and social features that give the state a specific content and, perhaps, endow it with a certain coherence (see Table 3).

Table 3: Six Dimensions of the State and State Power

Dimension	Definition	Significance	Crisis Aspects
Three formal dimensions			
Modes of Representation	These give social forces access to state apparatus and power	Unequal access to state Unequal ability to resist at distance from state	Crisis of representation
Modes of Articulation	Institutional architecture of levels and branches of state	Unequal capacity to shape, make, and implement decisions	Crisis of institutional integration
Modes of Intervention	Modes of intervention inside state and beyond it	Different sites and mechanisms of intervention	Rationality crisis
Three substantive dimensions			
Social Basis of State	Institutionalized social compromise	Uneven material and symbolic concessions to 'population' to win support for state projects, specific policy sets, and hegemonic visions	Crisis of power bloc Disaffection with parties and state
State Project	Secures apparatus unity of state and its capacity to act	Overcomes improbability of a unified state system by giving orientation to state agencies and agents	Legitimacy crisis
Hegemonic Vision	Defines nature and purposes of state for wider social formation	Provides external legitimacy for state, defined in terms of promoting common good, etc.	Crisis of hegemony

The six basic modes of crisis linked to these dimensions are (1) the breakdown of established channels of representation; (2) a loss of coherence as the state breaks into competing branches, departments, and tiers; (3) a loss of effectiveness of past and present modes of intervention; (4) a crisis in the social bases of the state, reflected in the disunity of ruling elites and/or in breakdown of the institutionalized compromise that sustained state power; (5) the loss of legitimacy, perhaps because the state fails in a project on which it had staked its reputation, such as a war or the promise of economic prosperity; and (6) a

crisis of hegemony (on the first, fourth, and sixth, see Gramsci 1975; on the third and fifth, see Habermas 1976; on state crisis, see also Poulantzas 1979; and on state failure more generally, Taylor 2013).

2. Primary State Formation

I now examine *primary* state formation, i.e., cases where a 'state' emerged for the first time. Examples include Mesoamerica, Peru, Egypt, Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley, and China. The many independent origins of such states and the subsequent diffusion of state formation across the globe caution against Eurocentric analyses of statehood. The same caution is justified by the varieties of ancient state traditions and their survival into the modern period. Here we can cite the Chinese state tradition with its Confucian state project and hegemonic vision and its interactions with nomadic empires and other states; a distinct Indian state tradition dating from the first Mauryan empire [c 300 BC] in which the emperor implemented Brahman law and promoted pragmatic realism among local rulers; and the Islamic world, which blurs the line, drawn in the Westphalian epoch in Europe, between state and religion.

The key to primary state formation is logistical capacities to extend control over a territory and its population and to govern the expanded territory through a multi-level administrative apparatus with internal specialization of tasks. Diverse studies indicate that political evolution has passed through three broad stages.

- (1) Relatively egalitarian societies with segmentary forms of social organization based on kinship ties and/or village settlements, a limited surplus allocated on the basis of household membership and reciprocity, and a wide distribution of relatively simple (often dual-use) tools of combat. Political leadership is decentralized and relatively ephemeral, based on unusual personal qualities, rather than inheritance, and decision-making tends to be collective and linked to periodic gatherings tied to natural cycles, specific rituals, or emergencies.
- (2) Socially stratified societies with a primitive division of political labour based on institutionalized forms of political authority, such as a chief with a chiefly administrative retinue. There is no formal administrative apparatus or monopoly of coercion and surplus is allocated through reciprocity and redistribution rather than market forces. Centralized authority produces faster decision-making than the intermittent pattern in stage one. But this depends on the 'infrastructural

power' (Mann 1984) to mobilize resources to support chiefly retinues. Although chiefdoms may engage in exchange and/or raiding to boost chiefly prestige, they rarely seek to conquer distant territories, let alone seek to control them for extended periods. There were two important constraints on such conquest and control. One is the spatio-temporal challenge to expanded control from a single centre when a half-day's travel was limited to 25-30km by foot. The other is problem of delegating chiefly authority without risks of insubordination, diversion of crucial resources into the hands of subordinates, insurrection, or fission.

- (3) The emergence of states based on centralized bureaucratic administration that can overcome these spatio-temporal and administrative limits by developing an extended, specialized, multi-level administrative apparatus. Warfare is important in the formation of empires and development of absolute monarchies, with their standing armies, permanent bureaucracy, national taxation, codified law, clear frontiers, and beginnings of a unified market.

Overall, research indicates that primary state formation cannot be explained in terms of (1) a surplus produced through intensive agriculture; (2) warfare and the conquest of territory and peoples; or (3) the rise of towns and cities. Even if these factors do facilitate the *further* development of the state and/or the subsequent formation of empires, they long pre-date primary state formation (Service 1975; Spencer 2003). These are enabling factors but cannot trigger state formation. The key issue in *state* formation is not just the territorialization of political power – which also occurs in *chiefdoms* – but the capacity to extend territorial control through the logistics of space-time distantiation and the bureaucratization of central authority. Thus the main triggers are expanded capacities for economic and political control over areas that lie further than a day's round trip from the political centre or capital. This is enabled by a virtuous circle among bureaucratic governance, resource extraction through tribute, and further territorial expansion. This was easier when neighbouring states were smaller and weaker. Like chiefdoms, states usually form networks of states based on alliances but, unlike chiefdoms, these networks are periodically centralized into a single political unit incorporating several polities – these may be termed 'empires'. In addition, expansion in the levels of decision-making and range of delegated tasks requires improvements in record-keeping to link past, present, and future and other capacities to gather, process, and use information in decision-making.

The typical form of state rule throughout 5000 years is monocratic, autocratic rule

vested in a single individual and his or her court. Empires can develop from federations of states or the imposition of rule from one central state on others and/or on newly conquered territories or stateless societies. Imperial projects have different motives. State insiders – for centuries, the court, the oligarchs, and the key councillors – decide whether to pursue imperial projects, where, with what instruments, and to what ends. With the development of capitalism, however, there is an inherent tendency for the capital relation to extend throughout the globe. The development of the world market gives a new impetus to imperialism but this can take different forms. It does not always a rigid division of the world market in to distinct territorial blocs each controlled and exploited by a given great power.

3. Capital and the Present State

The separation between the economy and politics, the market and the state, is part of a bigger picture. Structurally, this separation is the condition for trade in free markets and the rational organization of production and finance as well as the existence of a constitutional state based on the rule of law. Strategically, differential accumulation depends on the use of economic *and extra-economic* resources to create the conditions of profitable accumulation and/or to socialize losses. Despite their variable institutional separation, the 'market' and the state' are reciprocally interdependent complementary moments in the reproduction of the capital relation. Thus the state is never absent from the process of capital accumulation, whether in stability or crisis. It not only provides general external conditions of production, allocates money, credit, and resources to different economic activities, and helps to frame and steer production, distribution, and trade; it is also involved in organizing and reorganizing class alliances among dominant class fractions and disorganizing subordinate classes and forces, whether through divide-and-rule tactics or through articulating a national-popular interest that transcends particular class interests.

The combination of world market integration and the continuing plurality of the world of states affects accumulation on a world scale and the territorial and temporal sovereignty of states. First, the world market constitutes *both* the ultimate strategic horizon for individual capitals and capital fractions in the competition for differential accumulation *and* the actually existing point of intersection of these capitals. The resulting interaction within the world market framework limits the scope for success of any particular strategy and is one reason why states take great interest in the organization of the world market and the rules that govern it. Second, there is a 'motley diversity' of states that are often

rivals, if not deadly enemies. These vary in size, resources, commitments and abilities to promote and govern accumulation, whether on behalf of their respective domestic capitals operating at home and abroad and/or for foreign or transnational capitals whose activities impinge on domestic economic and political interests. Plurinational blocs, strategic alliances, and temporary coalitions, oriented to geo-economic and/or geopolitical advantage, operate here and are likely to change along with the changing bases of competition and competitiveness. Thus the 'reconfiguration of the global political economy' at various scales derives from the interaction of the world market and world of states.

4. The Reference Point for Challenges

For most work in policy studies, political science, political economy, and governance studies that is concerned with the advanced economies and/or liberal democratic regimes, the reference point for assessing changes has shifted in the last 40 years from (1) the post-war Keynesian welfare national state to (2) the changing nature of neo-liberal regimes and/or neo-liberal policies and, most recently, the symptoms of crisis *in* and/or *of* neo-liberalism. The 'Keynesian welfare national state' refers to the states that developed in the post-war circuits of North Atlantic Fordism – an accumulation regime characterized by a virtuous national or, in some cases, transatlantic circle of mass production and mass consumption. They sought to manage relatively closed national economies on behalf of their respective national populations in a world of national states (Jessop 2002). This state project was based on a class compromise between profit-producing (or industrial) capital and the organized working class. It was undermined by internationalization. This made it harder to continue treating the wage and social wage (welfare spending) as sources of domestic demand rather than as costs of international production; and treating money as a national currency controlled by national states rather than as a tradeable asset in world markets.

At least two other kinds of national state that developed in this period have also provided benchmarks for discussion of challenges to the state: dependent states oriented to import-substitution industrialization; and developmental states oriented to catch-up competitiveness based on neo-mercantilist export-led growth. These types were also challenged in their own way (albeit at different times and with important national specificities) by the growing internationalization of economic relations, which has weakened national states' capacities to use their extant powers and resources to deliver economic growth and to maintain, let alone extend, social welfare.

An initial set of responses to these challenges was identified in the academic literature and lay discourse as: (1) the *hollowing out* of the national state, involving the transfer of powers upwards, downwards, and sideways; (2) a shift from *government* to *governance*, that is, from hierarchical command to reliance on networks and partnerships; and (3) a shift from a world of sovereign states to a global polity characterized by the internationalization of policy regimes and the increasing role of these regimes as sources of domestic policy. These trends were often described one-sidedly, however, leading to neglect of counter-trends. The latter comprised: (1) efforts by national states to influence which powers were shifted and how they were applied in local and national contexts; (2) efforts to engage in meta-governance or collibration, that is, to organize the conditions of self-organization; and (3) interstate struggles to shape international regimes and global governance and/or to control their local or national implementation (for elaboration, see Jessop 2002).

More recently, the key challenges originate from neoliberalization. Despite significant differences, this process has six common features with different weights and sequencing depending on initial starting points. These features comprise the ideal typical neo-liberal policy set: (1) liberalization, (2) deregulation, (3) privatization, (4) market proxies in the residual public sector, (5) internationalization, and (6) reductions in direct taxation. These forms of neoliberalization and their common features are clearly related to the reframing and recalibration of the welfare state, the blurring of public-private boundaries, managing large-scale public reforms; and also clearly related, in the wake of the North Atlantic Financial Crisis (NAFC) and its uneven global contagion effects, to the volatility and uncertainty of global finance and institutions, redesign of the global political economy, and a diverse crises that affect individual states and the world of states. This explains the rise up the political agenda of challenges posed by crises, crisis-management, and post-crisis recovery.

6. From Liberal Democracy to Post-Democracy?

There are sound formal and historical reasons to support the claim that there is an isomorphic complementarity between the market economy and liberal democracy. There are also many examples of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes that have presided over capitalist development and/or emerged in economic and political crisis conjunctures in consolidated capitalist social formations. This has prompted regular concern with the conditions in which one or other kind of capitalism can co-exist with and/or sustain liberal democracy, and vice versa. The regular introduction of states of martial, political and

economic emergency indicates that this isomorphism and mutual reinforcement cannot be guaranteed.

Since the 1970s, we have seen a trend towards authoritarian statism. This involves 'intensified state control over every sphere of socio-economic life combined with radical decline of institutions of political democracy and with draconian and multiform curtailment of so-called "formal" liberties' (Poulantzas 1978: 203-4). Its key features include: (1) the transfer of power from the legislative to executive branch and the growing concentration of power within the executive; (2) decline in the rule of law as conventionally understood plus greater resort to soft law, pre-emptive surveillance and policing, and emergency measures; (3) a transformation of political parties from transmission belts that represent public opinion to the administration and, relatedly, from major forces in organizing hegemony into vehicles for relaying state ideology and justifying policies to the population; (4) the rise of parallel power networks that cross-cut the formal organization of the state, involving links among industrial and financial elites, powerful lobby groups, politicians from the 'natural' governing parties, top bureaucrats, and media magnates, with a major share in shaping its activities, (Poulantzas 1979; Crouch 2004; Elsner 2013).

This can be seen as a secular trend, with reversals that never return politics to its prior state but have a ratchet-effect that means that the next authoritarian step starts from a higher point. In turn, security, economic, and political crises are important drivers of each new step. So too is the loss of temporal sovereignty as space-time compression and distantiation make it harder for states to operate according to their own political rhythms and decision-making cycles. For example, as the rhythms of the economy at different scales accelerate relative to those of states at different scales, state apparatuses have less time to determine and co-ordinate political responses to economic events, shocks, and crises – whether these responses are formulated by a state or states, public-private partnerships, or international regimes. This reinforces conflicts between the time(s) of the market and the time(s) of state policy-making and implementation and, *a fortiori*, of inter-state coordination.

One response has been withdrawal from areas where states are actually or allegedly too slow to make a difference or would become overloaded if they tried to keep pace. This *laissez-faire* response frees up the movement of superfast and/or hypermobile capital – increasing the chances of crises generated by relatively unregulated activities with potentially global contagion effects. A second option is to compress decision-making cycles through the shortening of policy development cycles, fast-tracking decision-making, and

engaging in rapid policy implementation to enable more timely and appropriate interventions. But this means that decisions could be made on the basis of unreliable information, insufficient consultation, lack of participation, etc., even as state managers continue to believe that policy is taking too long to negotiate, formulate, enact, adjudicate, determine, and implement. It thereby privileges the executive over the legislature and the judiciary, finance over industrial capital, consumption over long-term investment. It is also undermines the routines and cycles of democratic politics more generally. A third option is not to compress absolute political time but to create relative political time by slowing the circuits of capital. A well-known recommendation here is a modest tax on financial transactions (the 'Tobin tax'), which would decelerate the flow of superfast and hypermobile financial capital and limit its distorting impact on the real economy. The continued success of financial capital in blocking the Tobin tax (most recently in the European Union) illustrates the limits of this strategy.

7. The Future of the State

Given the many member states of the United Nations, ranging from Tuvalu and the Vatican to China, India, Japan, Russia, and the USA, speculating on the state's long-term future is a fool's game. Nonetheless it is feasible to think about the future of capitalist types of state in consolidated capitalist societies. This involves thinking about *present futures* rather than *future futures*. At stake is what exists in potentia in today's state system as currently organized in the shadow of finance-dominated accumulation and the logic of (national) security in an increasingly turbulent and crisis-prone world order. A guideline for thinking about present futures was given 140 years ago by Marx, in his critique of German Workers' Party's *Gotha Programme*. This often referred to present-day society and the present state. Marx commented:

Present-day society' is capitalist society, which exists in all civilized countries, more or less free from medieval admixture, more or less modified by the particular historical development of each country, more or less developed. On the other hand, the 'present-day state' changes with a country's frontier. It differs in the Prusso-German Empire from Switzerland, and different in England from the United States. The 'present-day state' is therefore a fiction. Nevertheless, the different states of the different civilized countries ... all have this in common: that they are based on modern bourgeois society, only one more or less capitalistically developed. They have, therefore, also certain essential characteristics in common (Marx 1875: 94-95).

In this light we can reflect on the relation between present-day society (that is, an emerging world society organized under the dominance of the logic of profit-oriented, market-mediated accumulation, with all its contradictions, antagonisms, and crisis-tendencies) and the 'present-day' state (that is, the forms of 'government + governance' organized in the shadow of hierarchy). In regard to the former, we need to consider big macro-trends and, for the latter, we should focus on the four elements and six dimensions of the state that are constitutive of the *polity* rather than the more contingent and changing nature of *politics* or the fine details of policy, with all the scope that exists in politics and policy for random events, the vagaries of party politics and social movements on the political scene, political and policy errors, trial-and-error experimentation, and so on.

In these terms, there are four major macro-trends that will constrain the development of the leading capitalist states: (1) the intensification of global, regional, and local environmental crises due to the primacy of capital accumulation, rivalries between national states and/or fractions of capital over how to address it, and North-South conflicts, with repercussions for environmental security, resource wars, failed states, civil unrest, climate refugees, and so forth; (2) the intensification of the contradictions, crisis-tendencies, and antagonisms in the world economy, including growing polarization of wealth and incomes, surplus population, and increasing precarity for subordinate classes; (3) a continuing relative economic and political decline of the US as a global hegemon, which will lead to increasing efforts to secure 'full spectrum dominance' through an expansion of the national security apparatus and homeland security apparatus, increasing interventions abroad and paramilitary policing at home, and all manner of blowback, especially as China pursues its own long war of geopolitical and geo-economic position regionally and globally; and (4) the strengthening of international, transnational, and supranational governmental arrangements and governance regimes that serve the interests of transnational capital and marginalize civil society.

On this basis, the present future of statehood does not entail the end of the state as a distinctive form of the territorialization of political power but there will be more complicated forms of multispatial metagovernance organized in the shadow of national and regional states. The growing tensions between the logic of differential accumulation, especially in the shadow of neoliberal finance-dominated institutions and strategies at a global scale, and the conflicting, multi-dimensional, and often zero-sum demands of 'security' will lead to a further erosion of formal democratic institutions and substantive democratic practices accompanied by a further intensification of the tendencies towards authoritarian statism, with a much intensified turn to militarization and para-militarization and a greatly enhanced 'super-vision' state. There will be a further move from national

welfare states to more post-national workfare regimes in advanced capitalist states and reinforcement of current tendencies towards enduring states of austerity (Jessop 2002, 2015). Stable states in the semi-periphery may see tendencies towards workfare regimes to respond to the expansion of 'middle class' consumption and compensate for growing precarity among subaltern classes, including the displaced rural population. There will also be further pressure from transnational capital to safeguard its interests at all levels or scales of government + governance as the new constitutionalism is rolled out further and there is greater integration of military, police and cybersecurity apparatuses. But this is not to concede ground to the mantra of 'there is no alternative'. It is to highlight the fractures and frictions that create the space for alternatives and the need to intervene to realize more humane, democratic, and sustainable alternatives rather than submit to the logic of neo-liberalism.

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