

Comparative Politics: A Practical Guide for a Globalizing World

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The most important shrine in Sikhism, in Amritsar, India¹

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Land Acknowledgement

Adapted from Sadie Kelley's land acknowledgment statement for the CMU Campus

The region served by Colorado Mesa University and the land upon which this book was written occupies the ancestral home of the Ute Nation, who have persisted in Western Colorado from before recorded history to the present day. The Colorado Mesa University campus exists upon lands ceded from the Northern Ute/Southern Ute Tribe. We acknowledge this land we stand upon today as sacred, historical, and significant to the Northern Ute. This brief statement is a way of remembering the lives, culture and history lost while giving visibility to the Indigenous people who continue to live and thrive today.

Preface

Comparative Politics: A Practical Guide for a Globalizing World is perhaps the first to be written with an emphasis on case studies from the Global South and other alternative perspectives in comparative politics. It was inspired by my own experience as a student and professor who had the privilege to live, learn, and work in places as diverse as Bangladesh, Egypt, and Germany. My experience in each country provided an important contribution to my own understanding of political science, perhaps in more important ways than my formal political science education. It was written with the belief that political science has focused too heavily on developing theories and models based primarily on the “Western” world to the detriment of both the discipline as well as students. 21st century students are learning and living in an increasingly globalized world in which traditional notions of statehood, development, elections, and more are rapidly changing and facing deep contestation. Following the calls to “decolonize” its sister discipline, International Relations, it is both timely and imperative that comparative politics follows suit (Jones, 2006). While traditional approaches offer important lessons about the nature of government and political processes, this text believes that the Global South has much to offer in the way of what politics looks like in the face of social unrest, increasing inequality, disputed legitimacy, climate change and other 21st century challenges that the Global North can no longer ignore. This text focuses on themes and case studies that are often missing in more traditional comparative politics textbooks, and thus is best accompanied by other resources to give students a foundation in the fundamentals. In fact, in the spirit of the Open Education Resource (OER) movement, several traditional chapters have been included from other OER textbooks which is noted. Because this book was written using a creative commons license, individual chapters can be adopted or adapted to suit individual needs and interests.

Another unique aspect of this textbook is that it contains contributions from students from Colorado Mesa University, a rural institution in Western Colorado primarily focused on undergraduate and first-generation education, with edits and additions from myself. Therefore, this book is written both by and for students of first-generation and minority-serving institutions. Sections that were authored by students are noted and each has been vetted for accuracy. These contributions can also be used as a point of critical thinking for weaknesses in their arguments. Students were asked to choose topics that held relevance to their understanding of the promise and challenges of contemporary politics in their own lives; thus, these sections may prove particularly useful or engaging. While undergraduate students often do not contribute to faculty research much less textbook publication, I believe that this is gradually changing as higher education responds to a dynamic student population that rightly demands a more active role in their own learning, as well as the progressively more popular “teacher-scholar” model of research (Ruscio, 2013). Furthermore, student contributions can be used as an example of high-quality student work (albeit not flawless) produced from outside the established institutions of higher education, as well as examples of students *adding* to knowledge in political science, rather than being simply recipients. I hope that these case studies encourage and inspire your own students to believe in their abilities to contribute as well as to disrupt the discipline.

Holly Oberle, Ph.D.

June 2023



About the Authors (in order of appearance)

Dr. Holly Oberle

Dr. Holly Oberle is an Assistant Professor at Colorado Mesa University in Grand Junction, Colorado. She holds a Ph.D. in International Relations from the Freie Universität in Berlin, Germany. She teaches courses in the fields of International Relations, Comparative Politics, Foreign Policy Analysis, Gender and Politics and International Studies. She has lived and worked in Germany, Hungary, Spain, Bangladesh, Israel, Egypt, and China and speaks German.

Dr. Oberle's research interests are in the areas of gender and foreign policy as well as the intersection of sports and foreign policy. She is working on a book investigating all-female American football leagues (not soccer!) throughout the world.

Sadie Kelley

Sadie Kelley, or Yewelahawi ("she brings the wind" in Oneida), comes from the people of the Oneida, Kiowa, Comanche, Muscogee Creek, Shoshone-Paiute, Cherokee, and Absentee Shawnee. Sadie was born and raised on the Oneida Reservation in Oneida, Wisconsin, but has always practiced and stayed connected to her other tribes' traditions. She currently is a rising senior at Colorado Mesa University studying Political Science and Sports Management. Sadie serves as the Head Coordinator of the CMU Native American Student Association and is the captain and social media coordinator of the CMU women's golf team. In her junior year, Sadie finished a leadership program with Native Americans in Philanthropy Native Youth Grantmakers, which is an indigenous values-based leadership program working to build networking skills and to advocate for tribal communities within the philanthropic sector. Post –

graduation, she hopes to attend graduate school for public policy, then apply for law school to study Native American law.

Juston Robson

Juston R. Robson graduated Magna Cum Laude from Colorado Mesa University in 2023, with a bachelor's degree in computer science and a minor in political science. He knew he'd pursue a tech related field even as early as elementary school, as he has always had a fascination with computers and a knack for debugging them. His interest in politics largely grew from the understanding that politics is the greatest avenue for creating tangible change in the world; the fact that the CMU political science program and faculty were extremely welcoming helped, too. He plans to work in a tech related position for the state department or privately, then later return to academia to research AI's effect on political discourse.

Trevor Cook

Trevor W. Cook is a class of 2023 graduate from Colorado Mesa University with a bachelor's degree in political science and plans to attend the University of Kansas' dual program of law and public administration. Growing up in a particularly small town in rural Kansas, (roughly 900 people), federal politics have persisted as his primary interest given the limitations of politics he has experienced at the local level. Coming from a place where everyone shares a vastly similar set of political views, Trevor has never been one to shy away from political debate given his strong will to help people understand and consider conflicting perspectives. Although still unsure as to which field of law he would like to practice, he has always maintained a particular level of interest in politics regarding conservation, renewable energies, and the health and security of the planet; in which he someday hopes to write environmental legislation at the federal level.

Lauren Pepin

Lauren Pepin is a senior at Colorado Mesa University studying Political Science with a minor in history. Before attending Colorado Mesa University, Lauren had hopes of becoming an elementary school teacher, that was until she was placed in American Government 101 upon her arrival to her four-year program. Throughout her exposure to varying political ideologies and courses, Lauren formed a true passion for understanding how and why political systems operate in the way that they do. She plans on studying public policy after the completion of her undergraduate degree, with hopes of one day creating legislation that betters American society.

Molly Brimhall

Molly Brimhall is a sophomore at Colorado Mesa University pursuing a bachelor's in political science with a minor in mass communications. She hopes to use her degree to help the people around her as a journalist. She plans to work in political media with the purpose of educating the public on political issues. Molly plans to attend graduate school and continue her education after receiving her bachelor's. Her passion for education and desire for change pushes her to continue her goals.

Kyle Patten

Kyle T. Patten is a junior majoring in Political Science at Colorado Mesa University. His interests are comparative politics, international relations, history, philosophy, and public administration. He is a graduate of Rocky Mountain High School in Fort Collins, Colorado and in the future hopes to have a career in public service where he makes a difference and contributes to society in a positive way. Kyle is also a family representative on the Advisory Consortium for the Bert and Phyllis Lamb Prize in Political Science. He is addicted to political discussion both

inside and outside the classroom and enjoys the company of anyone who wants to talk about politics.

Joe Williams

Joseph Williams is a sophomore majoring in Political Science and minoring in Spanish at Colorado Mesa University. His passions for travel, foreign languages, and different cultures have made him keen on pursuing a career in diplomacy following graduation. In doing so, he hopes to become more familiar with the world's countries and people so that he may know how to best bridge relations between his home and theirs. Eventually, he would like to use this knowledge and experience to create a charitable organization that prioritizes the stories and struggles of individuals throughout the world.

Addison Chambers

Addison Chambers is a history major at Colorado Mesa University.

Chapter 1: Why Study Comparative Politics²

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- DEFINE KEY CONCEPTS WITHIN THE DISCIPLINE OF COMPARATIVE POLITICS
- UNDERSTAND THE SCOPE OF COMPARATIVE POLITICS AND ITS PLACE WITHIN THE DISCIPLINE OF POLITICAL SCIENCE



Figure 1: Putin, President of Russia, Rouhani, former President of Iran, and Erdogan, President of Turkey, meeting in 2017 to discuss the war in Syria³

Introduction

Have you ever read the news and wondered,

“Why is this country at war with another country?” or

“Why did that world leader say or do that?” or

² This chapter adapted from [1.1 What is Comparative Politics](#) in *Introduction to Comparative Government and Politics*, by [Dino Bozonelos](#), [Julia Wendt](#), [Charlotte Lee](#), [Jessica Scarffe](#), [Masahiro Omae](#), [Josh Franco](#), [Byran Martin](#), & [Stefan Veldhuis](#), licensed under [CC BY-NC 4.0](#).

³ Source: [Vladimir Putin, Hassan Rouhani, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Russia, 2017](#), by Kremlin.ru By Kremlin.ru, licensed under [CC BY 4.0](#).

“Why doesn’t this country trade with that country?” or maybe, very simply,

“Why can’t all these countries just get along?”

If you have, you’ve already begun asking a few of the many questions scholars within the field of comparative politics ask when practicing their craft. Many of the questions and concerns within the realm of comparative politics are centered on a wide spectrum of social, political, cultural, and economic circumstances and outcomes, which provide students and scholars alike with robust and diverse opportunities for inquiry and discussion. The field of comparative politics is broad enough to enable provocative conversations about the nature of violence, the future of democracy, why some democracies fail, and why vast disparities in wealth can persist both globally and within certain countries. Whether a student watches or reads the news or expresses any outward concern for global and current events, many of the problems and issues within comparative politics inevitably affect every single person on the planet.

So, what exactly is comparative politics? What differentiates comparative politics from other subfields within political science? What can be gained from studying comparative politics? The following sections introduce the field, outlook, and topics within comparative politics that will be further explored in this book.

Overview

When defining and describing the scope of comparative politics, it is useful to back up and recall the purpose of political science from a broad perspective. Political science is a field of social and scientific inquiry which seeks to advance knowledge of political institutions, behavior, activities, and outcomes using systematic and logical research methods in order to test and refine theories about how the political world operates. Since the field of political science is so broad, it has a number of subfields within it that enable students and scholars to focus on various phenomena

from different analytical lenses and perspectives. Although there are many topics that can be addressed within political science, there are five subfields that tend to garner the most attention; these include: (1) Comparative Politics, (2) American Politics, (3) International Relations (sometimes referred to as World Politics, International affairs, or International Studies), (4) Political Philosophy, and (5) Research Methods and Models. All of these subfields, to varying degrees, are able to leverage findings and approaches from a diversity of disciplines, including sociology, history, philosophy, psychology, anthropology, economics, and law. All of these, however, tend to be very centered around Western history, government, and philosophy. This book will attempt to correct for this by providing examples from the Global South. Given the vast scope of political science, and in order to understand where comparative politics fits within the discipline, it is useful to briefly consider these subfields side-by-side.

Comparative Politics

This subfield of study within political science seeks to advance the understanding of political structures from around the world in an organized, methodological, and clear way. Scholars can, for instance, analyze countries, in part or in whole, in order to consider similarities and differences between and among countries. While the name of the field itself suggests a methodology of comparing and contrasting, there is ample room for debate over the best way to analyze political units side-by-side. In following chapters, we show different ways to prepare a comparison, whether one focuses on area studies, cross-national studies, or subnational studies. Comparative politics involves looking first within countries and then across designated countries. This contrasts with International Relations (which is described below). Throughout this book, we discuss many of the themes for analysis that comparative politics tends to focus on, such as “the state,” or democracy and democratization, or authoritarian persistence, and so forth. After briefly

considering the other subfields within political science, we will revisit the question of the ultimate definition and scope of comparative politics today.



Figure 2: From left to right, the White House, Seimon Ishibashi Bridge in Tokyo Japan, Royal Palace of Madrid in Spain, Number 10 Downing Street in London, England, and the Bessastaðir (House of the President) in Reykjavik, Iceland⁴

Comparativists have a number of interesting areas they research and will look within countries and then also examine across designated countries to compare and contrast factors of interest. As an example, one theme may be considering the different types of leadership in countries along with associated regime types. For that, student researchers might ask “Who are the heads of state and where do they conduct their official government work?”

American Politics

This subfield of political science focuses on political institutions and behaviors within the United States. Those interested in American politics will focus on questions like: What is the role of elections in American democracy? How do interest groups affect legislation in the U.S.? What is the role of public opinion and the media in the U.S., and what are the implications for democracy? What is the future of the two-party system? Do political parties delay important political action? Those who decide to specialize in American politics could find themselves a

⁴ Source: From left to right, [White House](#) by Matt Wade is licensed under [CC-BY-SA 3.0](#); [Tokyo, Japan, Seimon Ishibashi Bridge](#) by Kakidai is licensed under [CC-BY-SA 3.0](#); [Madrid, Spain, Royal Palace of Madrid](#) by Bernard Gagnon is licensed under [CC BY-SA 3.0](#); [London, Britain, Number 10 Downing Street](#) by Sergeant Tom Robinson RLC is licensed under [Open Government License version 1.0](#); [Reykjavik, Iceland, Bessastaðir, Wohnsitz der . Präsidenten](#) by Balou46 is licensed under [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

variety of career opportunities, spanning from teaching, journalism, working for government think-tanks, working for federal, state or local governmental institutions, or even running for office.

International Relations

Sometimes called world politics, international affairs or international studies, international relations is a subfield of political science which focuses on how countries and/or international organizations or bodies interact with each other. Those interested in international relations consider questions like: What causes war between states? How does international trade affect relationships between states? How do international bodies, like non-governmental organizations, work with various states? What is globalization and how does it affect peace and conflict? What is the best balance of power for the global system? Individuals interested in this field of political science may be looking for careers with teaching, non-governmental organizations, the United Nations, and governmental think-tanks focused on U.S. foreign policy.

International relations, the closest subfield to comparative politics, is rather eclectic in its methodology, adopting everything from ethnography to surveys and focus groups, to textual analysis. The study of international relations is distinct both in content as well as method from comparative politics. International relations, often abbreviated as IR, is the study of how states relate to each other through processes such as diplomacy, war, and trade. Comparative politics, on the other hand, is the study of how different states govern themselves, and using comparisons to build theories and draw conclusions regarding the merits of different approaches to governing. Thus, IR focuses on the *international* level of analysis, while comparative politics focuses on the *state* level of analysis. Figure 3 is a visual depiction of the differences between the two.

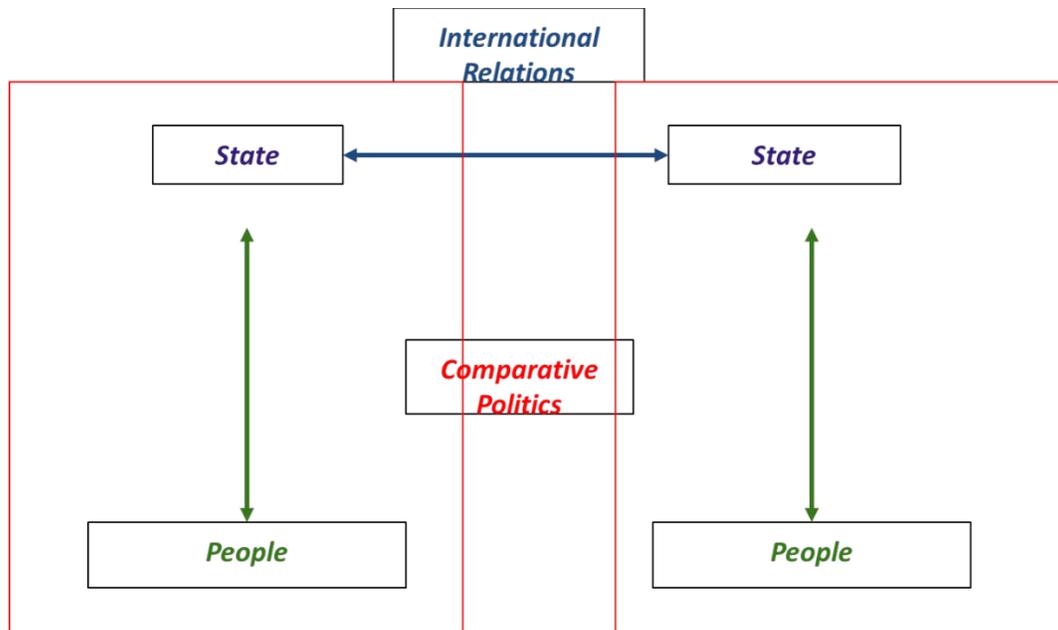


Figure 3: International Relations versus Comparative Politics⁵

Political Philosophy

Sometimes called political theory, political philosophy is a subfield of political science which reflects on the philosophical origins of politics, the state, government, fairness, equality, equity, authority, and legitimacy. This field can consider themes in broad or narrow terms, considering the origins of political principles, as well as implications for these principles as they relate to issues of political identity, culture, the environment, ethics, distribution of wealth, as well as other societal phenomena. Those interested in political philosophy may ask questions like:

Where did the concept of “the state” arise? What were the different ancient beliefs regarding the formation of states and cooperation within societies? How is power derived within systems, and what are the best theories to explain power dynamics? Individuals who are interested in political philosophy may find careers in teaching, research, journalism as well as consulting.

⁵ Source: By Holly Oberle, licensed under [CC-BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

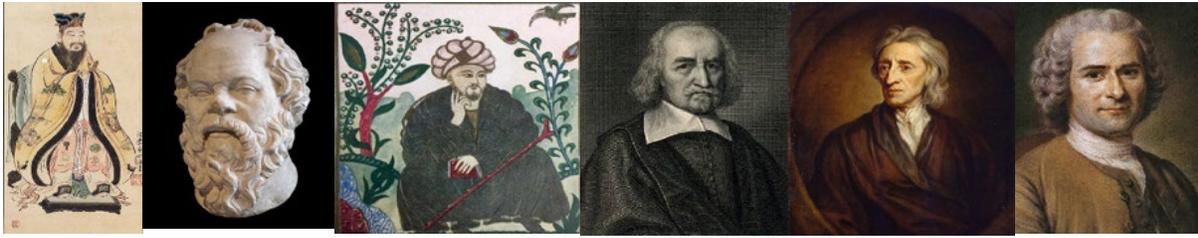


Figure 4: From left to right: Confucius, Socrates, Al Farabi, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau.⁶

Research Methods and Models

Research methods and models can sometimes be considered a subfield of political science in itself, as it seeks to consider the best practices for analyzing themes within political science through discussion, testing and critical analysis of how research is constructed and implemented. This subfield is concerned with finding techniques for testing theories and hypotheses related to political science. An ongoing and heated debate often arises out of the proper or applicable usage of quantitative versus qualitative research designs, though each inevitably can be appropriate for various research scenarios.

Quantitative research centers on testing a theory or hypothesis, usually through mathematical and statistical means, using data from a large sample size. Quantitative research can be beneficial in situations where a scholar or student is looking to test the validity of a theory, or general statement, while looking at a large sample size of data that is diverse and representative of the subjects being studied. International Relations, American Politics, Public Policy and Comparative politics can, depending on the subject they are considering, find practical applicable

⁶ Source: [Confucius](#) by Kanō Sansetsu is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](#) ; [Socrates](#), by Eric Gaba is licensed under [CC BY-SA 2.5](#); [Al Farabi](#), by Unknown Author is [CC01 - Universal Public Domain](#); [Thomas Hobbes](#), Line engraving by W. Humphrys is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](#); [John Locke](#), by Godfrey Kneller is licensed under [CC01 - Universal Public Domain](#); [Jean-Jacques Rousseau](#) by Maurice Quentin de La Tour is licensed under [CC01 - Universal Public Domain](#)).

for quantitative research methods. Someone interested in International Relations may want to test, for instance, the influence of global trade on conflict between states. For this, the sample size of the study may be 172 states engaged in international trade over a period of 10, 20, or even 50 years. Perhaps the theory being tested would be this: trade improves relations between states, making conflict unlikely. The person testing this would need to find ways to quantify conflict over time, to measure alongside, perhaps, trade volume between states. Overall, some of the methods for quantitative research may involve conducting surveys, conducting bi- or multivariate regression analysis (time-series, cross-sectional), or carrying out observations to test a hypothesis.

Qualitative research centers on exploring ideas and phenomena, potentially with the goal of consolidating information or developing evidence to form a theory or hypothesis to test. Qualitative research involves categorizing, summarizing, and analyzing cases more thoroughly, and possibly individually, to gain greater understanding. Often, given the need for more description, qualitative research will have a small sample size, perhaps only comparing a couple states at a time, or even a state individually based on the theme of interest. Some of the methods for qualitative research involve conducting interviews, constructing literature reviews, or preparing an ethnography. Regardless of a quantitative or qualitative approach, topics of interest within the subfield of Research Methods and Models focuses on advancing discussions of best practices in research design and methodology, understanding causal relationships between events or outcomes, identifying best practices in quantitative and qualitative research methods, consideration of how to measure social, economic, cultural and political trends (focusing on validity and reliability), and reducing errors or poor output due to selection bias, omitted variable bias, and other factors related to poor research design. In many ways, this subfield is critical to almost all others within political science, and this book will spend a chapter looking closer at

appropriate research methods and models to provide students with a greater understanding in order to test or develop theories within political science.

Conclusion

This chapter has briefly explored five of the main subdisciplines in political science, with an emphasis on what comparative politics is why it is important, and what information it provides that other subdisciplines do not. With a firm understanding of what comparative politics is, we will move on to how comparative politics is studied in the following chapter.

Chapter 2: How to Study Comparative Politics⁷

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- CONSIDER THE FACTORS WHICH MAKE POLITICAL SCIENCE, AND THEREBY COMPARATIVE POLITICS, A SCIENCE.
- IDENTIFY AND BE ABLE TO DESCRIBE THE STEPS AND KEY TERMS USED IN THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD.
- COMPARE AND CONTRAST DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO RESEARCH
- IDENTIFY BEST PRACTICES FOR WHEN AND HOW TO USE CASE STUDIES AS WELL AS THE COMPARATIVE METHOD.

Introduction

When many people consider the field of science, they may think of laboratories filled with clinicians in white lab coats, chemical experiments with bubbling vials, or vast chalkboards of mathematical equations. Many times, the word ‘science’ will conjure images of what are called the hard sciences. Hard sciences, such as chemistry, mathematics, and physics, work to advance scientific understanding in the natural or physical sciences. In contrast, soft sciences, like psychology, sociology, anthropology and political science, work to advance scientific understanding of human behavior, institutions, society, government, decision making, and power. Based on their interests and scope of inquiry, the soft sciences are interested in the social sciences, which are the fields of inquiry that scientifically study human society and relationships. Both hard and soft sciences provide significant contributions to the world of scientific inquiry,

⁷ This chapter adapted from [2: How to Study Comparative Politics - Using Comparative Methods](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Dino Bozonelos, Julia Wendt, Masahiro Omae, & Masahiro Omae](#).

though soft sciences are often misunderstood and underappreciated for their contributions, largely based on lack of understanding of how these sciences engage the scientific method. In considering the different challenges facing hard and soft sciences, Physicist Heinz Pagels called the social sciences the “sciences of complexity,” and said further, “the nations and people who master the new sciences of complexity will become the economic, cultural, and political superpowers of the 21st century” (Pagels, 1988). To this end, the advancements made by the soft sciences, like political science, should not be undercut or diminished, but sought to be understood and further pursued. Indeed, as science is defined as the systematic and organized approach to any area of inquiry and utilizes scientific methods to acquire and build a body of knowledge, political science, as well as comparative politics as a subfield of political science, embody the essence of the scientific method and possess deep foundations for the scientific tools and theory formation which align with their areas of inquiry.

Recall from Chapter 1: Why Study Comparative Politics, “Comparative politics is a subfield of study within political science that seeks to advance understanding of political structures from around the world in an organized, methodological, and clear way”. The scholars of comparative politics are interested in understanding how particular incentives, patterns and institutions may prompt people to behave in certain ways. This understanding takes place in countries that are both similar in their outlook, but also different as well (Later, in relation to case selection, we will broach Mill’s approaches of Most Similar Systems Approach, and Most Different Systems Approach). In observing countries and their similarities and differences, we need to be able to distinguish between actions or decisions that are happening systematically from actions or decisions that may happen randomly. To this end, political scientists follow and rely on the rules of scientific inquiry to conduct their research. Yet, as in all social sciences, political science must also recognize its inherent limitations that cannot perfectly mimic the so-called hard sciences. In

the sections below, we introduce characteristics which affirm political science as a science, followed by the principles of scientific methods and the process of scientific inquiry as it is applicable to comparative politics. We will discuss some of the limitations of the scientific method in the next chapter.

Is political science a science?

The nature of human behavior within political relationships has been studied and considered for centuries but has not always operated under a strictly scientific scope. Thucydides, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle all provided observations on their political worlds and ideas about why states and political actors may behave the way they do. The contributions of many famous philosophers and political thinkers over time has lent greatly to the field of politics, but the modern conception of Political Science is one that, like other social sciences, follows the scientific method and is based on a large depth of philosophy tradition regarding the nature of inquiry. Beginning in the late 1800s, scholars began attempting to treat political science, and indeed most of the social sciences, as a hard science that could utilize the scientific method. Through decades of debate, some level of consensus was met through scholastic political science communities as to defining the characteristics of research in political science and how research could best be conducted.

A seminal work in the field of political science that sought to describe the features of scientific research within the field came from Gary King, Robert Keohane and Sidney Verba, who wrote, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* in 1994 (King et al., 1994). Although the book was discussing political science in relation to qualitative research

methods, which will be discussed later, they also spent a generous amount of time considering what scientific research in political science looks like.

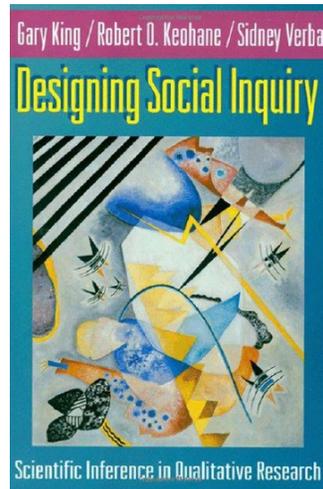


Figure 5: Book Cover from *Designing Social Inquiry*⁸

According to King, Keohane, and Verba (1994), scientific research has four main characteristics. First, one of the primary purposes of scientific research is to make descriptive or causal inferences. An inference is a process of drawing a conclusion about an unobserved phenomenon, based on observed (empirical) information. It is important to note that accumulation of facts, by itself, does not make such an effort scientific. This is true no matter how systematically one is collecting the facts or the types of information being collected. In order for a study to be scientific, it requires the additional step of going beyond the immediately observable information in an effort to learn about something broader that is not directly observable. The process of making inferences can help us learn about the unobserved facts by describing it based on empirical information. For example, while we cannot directly observe democracy, political

⁸ Source: Book cover of *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*, by Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. (Source: King G., & Keohane, R.O., & Verba, S. (1994). *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton University Press.)

scientists have identified various tenets and characteristics of democratic nations, to the extent where we can describe such a concept. We can also learn the causal effects from the observed information. For example, political scientists have been studying and attempting to identify the cause of war and the process of a successful war termination.

Second, the procedures of scientific research must be public. Scientific research relies on “explicit, codified, and public methods” so that the reliability of a study can be assessed effectively. It is critical that the process of gathering and analyzing information/data are reliable for the above-described process of making inferences. As a condition for publication, it is often required for the authors of a published work to share data files or survey questionnaires to ensure that anyone could possibly replicate the work to assess its reliability as well as to evaluate the appropriateness of the method being used in such work.

Third, because of the fact that the process of making inferences is imperfect, the conclusions of scientific research are uncertain as well. Researchers must be aware of a reasonable estimate of uncertainty in their work to ensure that they can effectively interpret their conclusions. By definition, inferences without some level of uncertainty are not scientific. This idea relates to one of the most critical characteristics of a good theory, that is a theory must be falsifiable (discussed more in the sections below).

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the content of scientific research is the method. It means that whether one’s research is scientific or not is determined by the way it is conducted as opposed to the subject matter of what is being studied. Scientific research must adhere to a set of rules of inference because its validity is dependent on how closely one follows such rules and procedures. Simply put, one can virtually study anything in a scientific manner as long as the researcher follows the rules of inference and scientific methods.

The Scientific Method

If you have ever enrolled in a science course, you have likely encountered the scientific method. The scientific method is a process by which knowledge is acquired through a sequence of steps, which generally include the following components: question, observation, hypothesis, testing of the hypothesis, analysis of the outcomes, and reporting of the findings. Ideally, use of the scientific method will build a body of knowledge and culminate in the formation of inferences and potentially theories for why/how phenomena exist or occur. It is useful to briefly consider each of these components in deconstructing how political scientists approach their areas of interest.

Broadly speaking the scientific method within political science will involve the following steps (each of these steps will be explored in-depth in this section):

1. **The research question:** Develop a clear, focused and relevant research question. Although this sounds like a simple step, the following section will lay out, in detail, the complexity of forming a sound research question.
2. **Literature review:** Research the context and background information and previous research regarding this research question. This part becomes the political scientist's literature review. A literature review becomes a section of your research paper or research process which collects key sources and previous research on your research question and discusses the findings in synthesis with each other. From this work, you are able to have a full scope of understanding of all previous work performed on your topic, which will enhance knowledge in the field.
3. **Theory and hypothesis development:** Develop a theory that explains a potential answer to your research question. A theory is a statement that explains how the world works based on experience and observation. From the theory, you will construct hypotheses to test the theory. A

hypothesis is a specific and testable prediction of what you think will happen; a hypothesis, or set of hypotheses, will describe, in very clear terms, what you expect will happen given the circumstances. Within the hypothesis, variables will be identified. A variable is a factor or object that can vary or change. As political scientists are concerned with cause-and-effect relationships, they will divide the variables into two categories: independent variables (explanatory variables) are the cause, and these variables are independent of other variables under consideration in a study. Dependent variables (outcome variables) are the assumed effect, their values will (presumably) depend on the changes in the independent variables.

4. **Testing:** A political scientist, at this stage, will test the hypothesis, or hypotheses, through observation of the relationship between the designated variables.

5. **Analysis:** When the testing is complete, political scientists will need to review their results and draw conclusions about the findings. Was the hypothesis correct? If so, they will be able to report the success of their findings. Was the hypothesis incorrect? That's okay! A famous quip in this field is, 'no finding is still a finding.' If the hypothesis was not proven true, or fully true, then it is back to the drawing board to rethink a new hypothesis and do the testing again.

6. **Reporting of findings:** Reporting results, whether the hypothesis is true, partially true, or outright false, is critical to the advancement of the overall field. Typically, researchers will attempt to publish their findings so the findings are public and transparent, and so others may continue research in that area.

The Scientific Method as an Ongoing Process

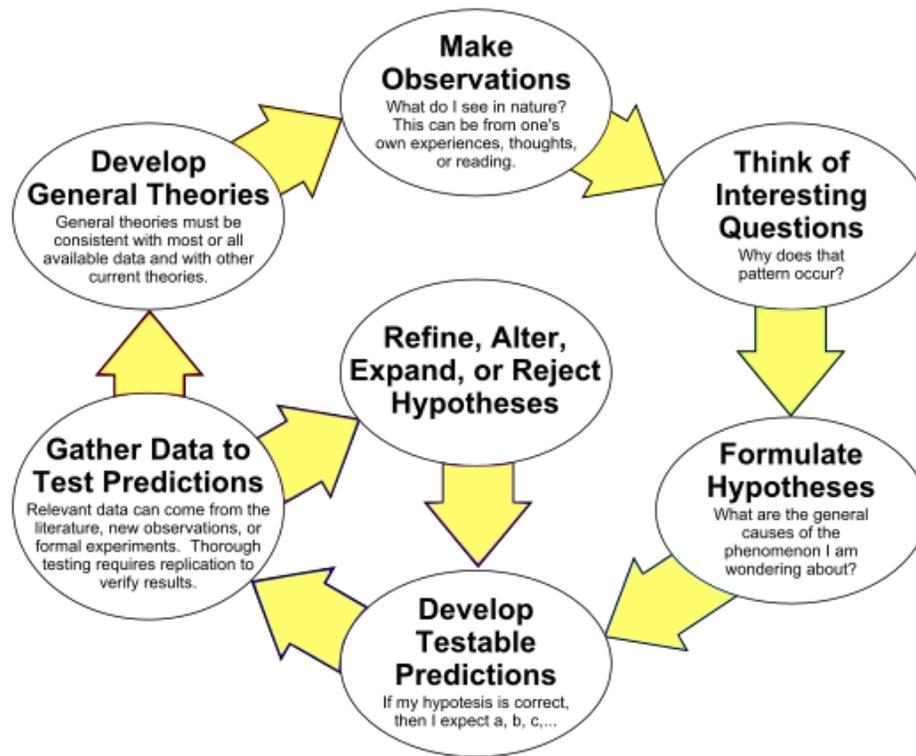


Figure 6: The Scientific Method as an Ongoing Process⁹

Step One: Make Observations

This is perhaps the most important but frequently forgotten steps in the research process, and it is especially relevant for the study of comparative politics. We cannot ask important or interesting questions (the next step) without simply observing the world around this. While this may sound simple enough, this is actually quite challenging when it comes to observing the focus of the study of comparative politics: namely, other countries. In order to be a student of comparative politics, one must have an interest in the developments and events of countries, people, and movements around the world. In the best of worlds, we would have the means and resources to

⁹ Source: [The Scientific Method as a cyclic/iterative process of continuous improvement](#). This image is an SVG adaptation of the original JPEG image by Whatiguana, by ArchonMagnus, licensed under [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

actually go and observe the everyday lives of people in places we are interested in. If your school has a study abroad program, this is a wonderful opportunity to do just that. But in the absence of these opportunities, the best way to “observe” the world is simply to consume reliable news that focuses on the international. Unfortunately, most news sources in the United States tend to focus, for obvious reasons, on the United States.

Therefore, getting access to easily digestible and dependable news is a challenge but not impossible. A great source for the daily happenings in places across the globe is [Al Jazeera](#). It should be noted that this source is funded by the Qatari government, and is therefore subjective and its reporting on Qatar is rarely critical. However, despite this weakness, Al Jazeera reports from some of the places on the ground that rarely get the attention of Western news sources. In addition to reporting, they also produce rich documentaries that go into great depth about an issue or event in the Global South. For example, here is a sample of the stories on the front page of the Al Jazeera at the time of publication.

- [*Belarus will not hesitate to use nukes if aggressed*](#)
- [*Investigating El Salvador's crackdown on gangs*](#)
- [*Eritrea rejoins East Africa bloc after exist 16 years ago*](#)
- [*As a woman is jailed, UK urged to reform “outdated” abortion laws*](#)
- [*How do Sierra Leonean elections work? A basic guide*](#)

Regardless of the source, students of comparative politics must spend some time simply witnessing, to the extent that is possible, the rest of the world. The next steps in the research process allow us to take our causal observations and approach in a more scientific way in order to produce more general theories about the way politics works in a comparative perspective.

Step Two: The Research Question

After taking the time to really absorb the major events and their historical and cultural roots, this should lead a researcher to ask a good question or questions. Indeed, it would be nearly impossible not to have questions after genuinely absorbing the world's news for even a short period of time. Some immediate questions that come to mind after perusing the above headlines might be:

- *Why can Russia put nuclear weapons in Belarus? Are there other countries that host nuclear weapons owned by another country?*
- *Who are the gangs in El Salvador and what are/were their goals? Are there other countries that face similar challenges and how does their handling of gang violence compare to El Salvador?*
- *What is the Intergovernmental Authority on Development in Eastern Africa and why did Eritrea leave it? Are there other countries that have left this organization and why?*
- *What are the laws surrounding abortion in the United Kingdom and how are they different from the laws in the United States?*
- *How do elections work in Sierra Leone and why? Are they similar to elections in other countries?*

Before a researcher can start thinking about describing or explaining a general phenomenon like elections, nuclear weapons, or gang violence, one must start with refining the question about one's phenomenon of interest. After all, political science research is about solving a puzzle, so we must identify a question to be answered through rigorous research. So how do you determine what characteristics define a good political research question?

First, a substantive and quality political science question needs to be relevant to the real political world. It does not mean that the research questions must only address current political affairs, although current affairs are certainly a good place to start thinking about a general trend. If you review the sample questions above, you can see that there are questions about the individual event or country, followed by a more general question that the one current event might teach us more about. But current events are not the only observations that can lead to good research questions. In fact, many political scientists study historical events and past political behaviors. However, the results of political science research are often relevant to the current political environment and may come with policy implications. A political research question that is highly hypothetical may be interesting and important on its own.

Second, as an academic discipline, political science research is a means through which the discipline grows in terms of its knowledge about the political realm. As such, good political science research needs to contribute to the field. Overall, a political science research question must be a question, and this is an important point. A question in this context must be something that the answer to such a statement has a chance of being wrong. In other words, a research question has to be falsifiable. **Falsifiability** is a word coined by Karl Popper (2008), a philosopher of science, and is defined as the ability for a statement to be logically contradicted through empirical testing. (Empirical analysis is defined as being based on experiment, experience or observation; we will consider empiricism in more detail in subsequent chapters).

Importantly, some questions are inherently **non-falsifiable**, meaning the question cannot be proven true or false under present circumstances, particularly questions which are subjective (e.g. Are oranges better than lemons?) or technical limitations (Do angry ninja-robots live in Alpha Centauri?). Consider the subjective example in political science, a question like: Which

one is better, North Dakota or South Dakota? This question is subjective and may ultimately, if not further described or delineated, result in nothing more than a matter of one's taste. If the question was more refined and not simply a case of some abstract definition of 'better than,' perhaps the researcher is actually trying to ask something that can be proven: Which state is more economically productive, North or South Dakota? From here, the researcher could lay out metrics for what constitutes economically productive, and try to build from there. Consider now a technical limitations problem in political science, for instance, what if someone tried to ask: Does investing in a country's education system always mean they will eventually become democratic? There is two problems with this question. First, making a blanket statement that investing in education *always* leads to democracy can lend itself to problems. Will you be able to test every situation and circumstance where education systems are invested in and democracy happens? Second, there's an issue with the word 'eventually.' A country that invests heavily in education could become democratic 700 years from now. If the time span ends up being 700 years, we cannot truly infer that it was the initial investment in education that was the cause of that county's democratic transition.

Step Three: The Literature Review

This step doesn't appear in the graphic in Figure 6 above, but it is an essential step in the research process. Once you've found a potential research question, it's important to consider how much you actually know about the topic, and to do a search about any relevant previous research that has ever been done on the topic. To this end, creating a literature review is vital to any research study. A literature review is a section of your research paper or research process which collects key sources and previous research on your research question and discusses the findings in synthesis with each other. The literature review can raise both previous research that

has been done on a topic, as well as best practices regarding research methodologies given the question you've chosen. In most cases, the literature review itself will have its own introduction, body and conclusion. The introduction will explain the context of the research question and a thesis which will tie together the research you've collected. The body will summarize and synthesize all the research, ideally in either chronological, thematic, methodological or theoretical order.

Creating a literature review depends on finding *academic, peer-reviewed* sources on the general trend you are interested in learning more about. *Academic* simply means that the research has been carried out in a scientific and verifiable way, often, but not always, by a member of an academic institution. *Peer-reviewed* simply means that the research has been reviewed by other experts on the topic to be sure that the research was conducted ethically, and the results are reliable. (Important: reliable doesn't mean "final" or the "uncontested truth." Good research is often challenged and sometimes found to be inaccurate). Here are some sample peer-reviewed articles that might help us start a literature review concerning the topics/questions above:

- *On nuclear host states*: Kütt, M., & Mian, Z. (2022). Setting the deadline for nuclear weapon removal from host states under the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament*, 5(1), 148-161.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/25751654.2022.2046405>
- *On street gang violence*: Klein, M. W. (2011). Who can you believe? Complexities of international street gang research. *International Criminal Justice Review*, 21(3), 197–207.
- *On regional organizations and their members*: Coe, B., & Nash, K. (2020). Peace process protagonism: the role of regional organisations in Africa in conflict management. *Global Change, Peace & Security*, 32(2), 157-177.

- *On international abortion laws*: Chavkin, W., Stifani, B. M., Bridgman-Packer, D., Greenberg, J. M., & Favier, M. (2018). Implementing and expanding safe abortion care: An international comparative case study of six countries. *International Journal of Gynecology & Obstetrics*, 143, 3-11. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ijgo.12671>
- *On elections in West Africa*: Harris, D. (2011). *Civil war and democracy in West Africa: Conflict resolution, elections and justice in Sierra Leone and Liberia*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

The literature review starts by simply collecting sources, reading them and trying to absorb as much information as possible about the topic and the research question. Through this process, you may find that your research question needs revising or in some cases, complete rewriting.

Once you feel you have a good handle on the most important sources on your research question, you must write the review in a way that brings the sources together in a way that not only provides background information on the subject, but also justifies the research question, why it is important, and what we can learn from investigating the question further. For instance, maybe it makes the most sense to arrange the research you've looked at in chronological order, beginning with the early research and culminating in the most recent research on a topic. Or, maybe your research contains a number of interrelated themes, in which case, it may be ideal to introduce previous research as it is categorized based on its theme. Finally, it's possible that the literature review may be best organized by considering previous theories that have existed in relation to your research question. In this case, introducing the existing theories in order would be most helpful to your reader and to your understanding of the research context. In general, it's important to consider the best way to showcase, summarize and synthesize previous research so it is clear to the readers and other scholars interested in the topic.

Step Four: Hypothesis Development

Given the research question and your exploration of previous research that has been organized in the literature review, it is now time to consider the theories and hypothesis that you will be using. Usually, the theory helps build your hypotheses for the study. Recall, a theory is a statement that explains how the world works based on experience as an observation.

A scientific theory consists of a set of assumptions, hypotheses, and independent (explanatory) and dependent (outcome) variables. First, **assumptions** are statements that are taken for granted. These statements are necessary for the researchers to proceed with their research so they are not usually challenged, although other research may use different assumptions. For example, many international relations scholars assume that the world is anarchic, meaning that there is no meaningful central authority at the global level. In other words, there is no world government. Again, we typically do not challenge a set of assumptions in scientific research, but they need to be clearly stated.

Political science research involves both generating and testing hypotheses. Researchers may start with observing many cases that relate to a topic of inquiry. There are several methods. First, through inductive reasoning, scientists look at specific situations and attempt to form a hypothesis. For example, by looking specifically at the gang problem in El Salvador, we might form a hypothesis about the general phenomenon of gang violence. Second, political scientists may also rely on deductive reasoning, which occurs when you start with a general theory and use a specific case to test that theory. For example, we might be familiar with a general theory that nuclear weapons produce a stability known as Mutually Assured Destruction. In order to test that theory, we might use a specific case, such as the placing of nuclear weapons in Belarus, to add knowledge to that theory.

Recall, a hypothesis is a specific and testable prediction of what you think will happen; a hypothesis, or set of hypotheses, will describe, in very clear terms, what you expect will happen given the circumstances. Within the hypothesis, variables will be identified. Remember, a variable is a factor or object that can vary or change. Again, as political scientists are concerned with cause-and-effect relationships, they will divide the variables into two categories:

independent variables (explanatory variables) are the cause, and these variables are independent of other variables under consideration in a study. **Dependent variables (outcome variables)** are the assumed effect, their values will (presumably) depend on the changes in the independent variables.

Step Five: Testing with Data

The testing of a theory and set of hypotheses will depend on the research method you decide to employ. For our purposes, the basic research approaches of interest will be the single case study methods and the comparative method. Each one of these methods involves research questions, use of theories to inform our understanding of the research problem, hypothesis testing and/or theory generation.

Step Six: Reporting of Findings

A critical feature of the scientific method is to report your research findings. Granted, not all research will result in publication, though publication is often the goal of research that hopes to extend the political science field. Sometimes research, if not published, is shared through research conferences, books, articles, or digital media. Overall, the sharing of information helps lend others to further research into your topic or helps spawn new and interesting directions of research. Interestingly, one can compare a world where research is shared versus where it was not shared. During the flu pandemic of 1918, many of the countries of the world did not have

freedom of the press, including the United States, which had implemented Sedition Acts in the midst of World War I. Amid a hindered press and the lack of freedom of speech, many doctors around the world were not able to communicate their ideas or treatment plans for handling the flu pandemic at that time. Inundated with swarms of patients, flummoxed by the nature of a flu that was killing young, healthy adults, but largely sparing older individuals, doctors were trying all sorts of treatment methods, but were unable to broadly share their results of what worked and didn't work well for treatment.

Contrast this with the COVID-19 pandemic, many doctors were working on treatment plans worldwide, and were able to share their ideas on how to best treat COVID. Initially, there was a heavy reliance on ventilators. In time, some doctors found that repositioning patients on their stomachs may be one way to avoid a ventilator and bide time for the patient to recover without having to resort to a ventilator right away. All told, the sharing of results is critical to learning about a research area or question. If scientists, as well as political scientists, are unable to share what they've learned, it can stall the advancement of knowledge altogether. Thus, this book, and others openly published, is part of a broader effort to bring science to as many people as possible without barriers.

The Comparative Method

In empirical research, there are four basic approaches: the experimental method, the statistical method, case study methods, and the comparative method. Each one of these methods involves research questions, use of theories to inform our understanding of the research problem, hypothesis testing and/or hypothesis generation. Each method is an attempt to understand the relationship between two or more variables, whether that relation is correlational or causal. The study of comparative politics can involve all four; however, the most common methods are case

studies and comparative methods. Therefore, we will focus on these two alone, and the next chapter will go into more detail on the limitations and difficulties of each.

What is the Comparative Method? The comparative method is often considered one of the oldest approaches in the study of politics. Ancient Greek philosophers, such as Plato, the author of *The Republic*, Aristotle, the author of *Politics*, and Thucydides, the author of the *History of the Peloponnesian War* wrote about politics in their times in a comparative manner. Most scientific experiments or statistical analyses will have a control or reference group. The reason is so that we can compare the results of our current experiment and/or analysis to some baseline group. This is how knowledge develops; by grafting new insights through comparison.

Likewise, comparison is more than just description. We are not only analyzing the differences and/or similarities, we are conceptualizing. We cannot overstate the importance of concepts in political science. A concept is defined as “an abstract or generic idea generalized from particular instances” (Merriam-Webster). For political scientists, concepts are “generally seen as nonmathematical and deal with substantive issues” (Goertz, 2020). For example, if we want to compare democracies, we must first define what exactly constitutes a democracy. This text will largely deal the concepts of the state, democracy, and authoritarianism.

Even in quantitative analyses, concepts are always understood in verbal terms. Given that there are quite a few ways to formulate quantitative measurements, conceptualization is key.

Developing the right scales, indicators, or reliability measures is predicated on having one’s concepts right. A good example is the simple, yet complicated concept of democracy. Again, what exactly constitutes a democracy? We are sure that it must include elections, but not all elections are the same. An election in the U.S. is not the same as an election in North Korea.

Clearly, if we want to determine how democratic a country is, and develop good indicators from which to measure, then concepts matter.

Comparative methods occupy an interesting space in methodology. Comparative methods involve “the analysis of a small number of cases, entailing at least two observations”. Yet it also involves “too few [cases] to permit the application of conventional statistical analysis” (Collier, 1991, p. 106; Lijphart, 1971). This means that the comparative method involves more than a case study, or single-N research (discussed in detail below), but less than a statistical analysis, or large-N study. It is for this reason that comparative politics is so closely intertwined with the comparative method. As we tend to compare countries in comparative politics, the numbers end up somewhere in between, anywhere from a few to sometimes over fifty. Cross-case analysis through the comparison of key characteristics, are the preferred methods in comparative politics scholarship. We will investigate this method in more detail in the next chapter.

Case Studies

Why would we want to use a case study? Case studies are one of the major techniques used by comparativists to study phenomena. Cases provide for in-depth traditional research. Many times there is a gap in knowledge, or a research question that necessitates a certain level of detail.

Naumes and Naumes (1999) write that case studies involve storytelling, and that there is power in the story’s message. Clearly, these are stories that are based in fact, rather than in fiction, but nevertheless, are important as they describe situations, characters, and the mechanisms for why things happen. For example, the exact cause of how the SARS-CoV-2 virus, more commonly referred to as COVID-19, will involve telling that story.

A case is defined as a “spatially delimited phenomenon (a unit) observed at a single point in time, or over some period of time” (Gerring, 2006). Others define a case as “factual description

of events that happened at some point in the past” (Naumes & Naumes, 1999). Therefore, a case can be broadly defined. A case could be a person, a family household, a group or community, or an institution, such as a hospital. The key question in any research study is to clarify the cases that belong and the cases that do not belong (Flick, 2018). If we are researching COVID-19, at what level should we research? This is referred to as case selection, which we discuss in detail in subsequent sections.

For many comparativists in political science, the unit (case) that is often observed is a country, or a nation-state. A case study then is an intensive look into that single case, often with the intent that this single case may help us better understand a particular variable of interest. For example, we could research a country that experienced lower levels of COVID-19 infections. This case study could consist of a single observation within the country, with each observation having several dimensions. For example, if we want to observe the country’s successful COVID-19 response, that observation could include the country’s level of health readiness, their government’s response, and the buy-in from their citizens. Each of these could be considered a dimension of the single observation - the successful response.

This description listed above is considered the traditional understanding of case study research - the in-depth analysis of one case, in our example of that one country, to find out how a particular phenomenon took place, a successful COVID-19 response. Once we research and discover the internal processes that led to the successful response, we naturally want to compare it to other countries (cases). When this happens, shifting the analysis from just one country (case) to other countries (cases), we refer to this as a comparative case study. A comparative case study is defined as a study that is structured on the comparison of two or more cases. Again, for comparative political scientists, we often compare countries and/or their actions.

Finally, there can also exist subnational case study research. This is when subnational governments, such as provincial governments, regional governments, and other local governments often referred to as municipalities, are the cases that are compared. This can happen entirely within a country (case), such as comparing COVID-19 response rates among states in Mexico. Or it can happen between countries, where subnational governments are compared. This often occurs in studies of European and/or European Union policy. There are quite a few subnational governments with significant amounts of political power. Examples include fully autonomous regions, such as Catalonia in Spain, partially autonomous regions, such as Flanders and Walloons in Belgium, and regions where power was devolved, such as Scotland within the UK.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have considered the scientific method and how it applies, however imperfectly, to the study of comparative politics. We have focused on the two main methods for studying how the governments of the world work—the case study method and the comparative case study. In the following chapter we will think about the problems and blind spots that exist in these traditional approaches in comparative politics.

Chapter 3: The Promise and Pitfalls of the Comparative Method

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- CRITICALLY ANALYZE THE EUROCENTRIC BIAS IN COMPARATIVE POLITICS
- CONSIDER THE VALUE OF COMPARING THE GLOBAL NORTH AND THE GLOBAL SOUTH
- IDENTIFY THE TYPES OF CASE STUDIES AND COMPARISONS USED IN COMPARATIVE POLITICS

Introduction

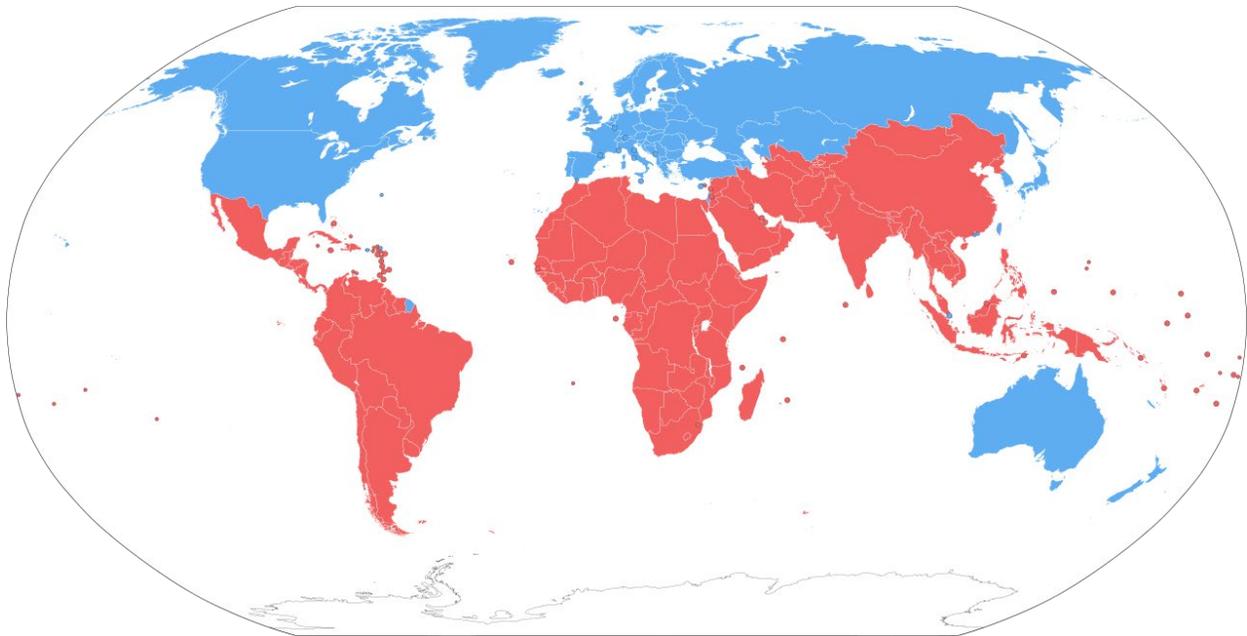


Figure 7: Global North and the Global South.¹⁰

At its heart, the study of comparative politics is two-fold: first, to understand how the varieties of governing models around the world; and second, to use comparisons to build theories and draw

¹⁰ Source: [Global North and Global South](#) by Kingj123 - Own work based on: BlankMap-World6.svg, licensed under [Public Domain](#).

lessons about the advantages and weaknesses of different political systems. The promise of these goals is not only to better understand how other countries' politics works, but to be better critical thinkers about our own government. The approach taken in this book is to use the comparative method to better understand the variety as well as the striking consistencies of governing systems around the world, focusing especially on the experiences from the Global South and other entities that often don't make their way into comparative politics case studies. The hope is that by widening the focus of comparative politics that students not only develop an appreciation of and curiosity about the world outside their own immediate communities, but they also learn about alternative governing strategies that might benefit their own countries.

Traditional comparative politics texts tend to focus on key states seen as "ideal types" of a particular phenomenon, such as statehood, democracy, or authoritarianism (Weber, 2011). These models are overwhelmingly from the Global North. As noted in the preface, while this book doesn't wish to detract from the lessons that can be drawn from these states, it also wishes to decenter the discipline of comparative politics from the Global North, and challenge some of the Eurocentrism that has plagued not only comparative politics but political science as a whole.

The reasons for this go beyond mere inclusiveness. The goal of comparative politics at its most basic level is to give students an understanding of how other countries govern themselves, as well as the historical and cultural logic for those choices. This goal is undermined if the comparisons are consistently between societies with which students are least vaguely familiar. However, to decenter comparative politics away from the Global North, this text requires a brief background on what is meant by the Global South.

Global South and Global North

If we are to approach comparative politics with a focus on the Global South, we should make note of what that means. As you will find as you study comparative politics, this discipline is in the habit of making typologies, and then grouping states (see Chapter 4: States and Regimes for more on what we mean when we say “state”) based on these typologies. There is value to this approach as it is the first step in making a comparison; we can say that states that are all grouped as the same type have some basic characteristics in common, while those that aren’t in the same group must be different in important ways. Most comparativists start with grouping states by regime type, such as monarchies, dictatorships, and democracies. However, it might be best to zoom out even further to start, by considering the map in Figure 7).

Today, we use the term *Global South* and *Global North* as a somewhat simplistic but useful depiction of countries divided by socio-economic and political attributes. While there is a striking geographical divide between these two categories, it is important to note that the terms *North* and *South* are meant to depict much more than geography, since Australia and New Zealand are part of the Global North. Global South countries tend to be less economically developed, have higher population densities, and weak political institutions (Arbab, 2019). Importantly, most of them were the subjects of colonial rule.

These terms have replaced other global typologies you might be more familiar with such as East versus West (although we still use these in this volume consciously knowing their limitations), and the “First,” “Second,” and “Third” World. These terms came under criticism as being rooted in a self-serving narrative of Western superiority during the Cold War. Global South countries have rarely if ever referred to themselves as “Third” World, preferring terms like “non-aligned” to refer to their attempt at neutrality during the Cold War, and efforts to build solidarity among

themselves as “South-South” cooperation (Gray & Gills, 2016). Therefore, if the goal of this text is to decenter comparative politics away from treating the “First” World as a model for understanding the “Third World,” we might begin by using terminology that is more preferred by those we are trying to understand.

However, another reason to adopt the Global South/North typology is that the world has changed since the days of the Cold War. The Middle East and Asia are more affluent, former Soviet states (those that were referred to as “Second World”) are in varying stages of development, and there is some evidence that the former “First World” is on a decline (Hoge, 2004). Thus, it is time to update the terms upon which comparative politics is based.

The central themes and reoccurring questions to be considered when reading this book are:

- *Why are there such stark differences politically, socially, and economically between the Global North and the Global South?*
- *What similarities can also be uncovered?*
- *Finally, are there differences in how these broad regions are changing, transitioning, and adapting to the new realities of a globalized world?*

The Comparative Method Revisited

These questions posed above are inherently comparative. Comparative politics is both a subfield in political science as well as a *method* of studying politics, which sets it apart from many of the other subfields. (See Chapter 1: Why Study Comparative Politics for an overview of these subfields).

Single Case Studies in more depth

There are two main methodological approaches in comparative politics: the single case study and the comparative case study. A “case” is an observation or an example of a more general phenomenon you wish to understand. For example, you may wish to study Saudi Arabia as a *case* of modern monarchies. In comparative politics, the case that is most often used is that of a state (or country) but could be “any spatially bounded phenomenon...observed at a single point in time or over some delimited period of time” (Gerring, 2004, p. 342). As we saw above, this can include macro-regions such as the Global South and the Global North, or sub-national governments such as the California and the Colorado state legislatures, or within-case studies such as the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the 2009 Green Movement. (See for example Rahaghi, 2012). We will consider a within-case study comparing two regions of Pakistan in the section entitled Comparative Within-Case Study: FATA and Karachi in Pakistan on page 169.



Figure 8: Iranian Revolution and the Green Movement¹¹

¹¹ Source: From left to right, [the 1979 Iranian Revolution](#), by unknown author is licensed under [Public Domain](#); the [2009 Green Movement](#), by Hamed Saber - originally posted to Flickr as 5th Day - 3V, licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#).

The single case study involves, unsurprisingly, one case and relies on what social scientists call “thick description” (Geertz, 2017). Thick description was developed by anthropologists to go beyond mere description of foreign cultures but contextualizes cultures and actors, so they are more accessible to outsiders. While many question the value of a single case study, since it is difficult (although not impossible, as we shall see below) to build a general explanation that could be applied to other cases based solely on one example, it can be important to new students of comparative politics as it gives students access to a foreign governing system in an approachable but contextualized fashion. One could even argue that despite deep criticism of the single case study, many American political scientists consider themselves specialists in a sub-discipline defined by a single case study—American politics.¹² Thus, if the primary goal of studying comparative politics is to give students an authentic picture of how another country has designed its government, both deliberately and sub-consciously, focusing on one important aspect of that government such as its party system or rates of youth participation, a single case study is well positioned to achieve this goal.

The *comparative* part of comparative politics is necessary but also a secondary goal especially for students who are new to the discipline. While a single case study may not appear to be *comparative* at first glance, one can argue that there is a comparative element because you are comparing one case to a larger population of cases. Therefore, several case studies that appear in this text are single cases, using one of the logics of case selection discussed below.

¹² For a thorough defense of single case studies, see Culpepper (2005).

Types of Single Case Studies

There are some important strategies for choosing a single case that isn't simply random and can add to our knowledge of political science. The main types of single case studies are *representative, prototypical, exemplary, deviant, and crucial*.

Representative	Prototypical	Exemplary	Deviant	Crucial
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Typical of the phenomenon</i>• Ex: Equatorial Guinea as a case of authoritarian persistence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Expected to become typical</i>• Ex: European Union as a case of regional integration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Generated the phenomenon</i>• Ex: The UK as a case of the parliamentary system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Exception that proves the rule</i>• Ex: Norway as a case of an oil-rich democratic state.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Success under unlikely circumstances</i>• Ex: US as a crucial case of democratic breakdown

Figure 9: Types of Single Case Studies¹³

A *representative* case is thought to be a typical case of the larger phenomenon. Many comparative politics texts treat the United States as a representative case of democracy, and in fact, American political science has often treated American democracy as the working definition of democracy. This text approaches this issue with the view that democracy in the United States is unique, and therefore worthy of study, but not necessarily as a representative case or a working definition. Following a similar critique by Paul Musgrave (2021) who said, “[w]hen the implicit definition of democracy is democracy with American characteristics,¹⁴ the exceptions don’t even register as exceptions....” This text responds to that critique by looking at the United States as a *crucial* case of democratic *backsliding*. (See below on crucial cases; see Student Feature: United

¹³ Source: By Holly Oberle, licensed under [CC-BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

¹⁴ This phrase is a nod to a phrase often invoked by Chinese nationalists in an attempt demonstrate its democratic features but is also uniquely Chinese rather than a facsimile of Western models. While many political scientists consider China to be the antithesis of democracy, and rightly so, the critique of Western superiority should be taken seriously. For more on what this phrase means in China, and how China conceives of itself as a democratic state, see Li (2022).

States of America, page 318 for this case study). An example of a representative case study in this book is the case of Equatorial Guinea as an example of authoritarian persistence. (See Student Feature: Equatorial Guinea, page 308).

While it may be tempting to use your own country of origin as a representative case study, this should be done with caution, as it can be rather difficult to remain unbiased about the merits of your own government. While pure objectivity in social research may be elusive, comparative politics can be, if done well, a useful space to reconsider nationalist narratives that typically insist on its own superiority. Still, taken together, a collection of representative case studies can help us understand the larger phenomenon in question (such as democracy), and may also alert us to the fact that what we might have thought of as representative may not be when compared to others.

A *prototypical* case is one that is expected to become the norm. In other words, a precursor to a future representative study. This can be problematic because it involves a prediction that a trend will become more typical, which may not materialize. Again, the United States is frequently used as a prototypical case study of democracy before democracy spread in popularity, citing Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (Tocqueville, 1835). *Democracy in America* has a lot to offer students of comparative politics as an early and groundbreaking use of thick description of *the United States*, but the extent to which it is a good case study of *democracy* can be questioned given the historically unique circumstances under which American democracy came to be as well as how democratic early America really was, given its exclusion of women and people of color. Perhaps a better and more recent example of a prototypical case study would be the establishment of the European Union, if one expects regional organizations such as

the African Union to become more normal and gain more power. (This case study will be considered in future editions of this text).

Exemplary cases are those that are considered to have generated the phenomenon in question.

This type is once again susceptible to cultural bias as it is easy to assume that a country we are familiar with must be exemplary, which blinds us to earlier or culturally unfamiliar cases.

Traditionalists will often point to the US as an exemplary case of the presidential system, as well as the UK as exemplary of the parliamentary system. While there are good arguments for these choices, it has the potential to assume that these systems should be or have been mimicked by other states that fall into the broad category of “presidential” or “parliamentary” system. This may lead us to conclude that the US and UK systems are indeed models of each system respectively, when in fact, there are distinctive features to both that have not been adopted by many other presidential and parliamentary systems (such as the Electoral College in the US and the first-past-the-post electoral system in the UK).

Deviant case studies can be summarized as the “exception that proves the rule.” These cases can be powerful because they can add to our knowledge about representative cases. For example, if we believe that there is a link between democracy and economic development, a link first postulated by Lipset (1959), studying the case of India can shed light on why this link exists in most cases but not in India (Lijphart, 1996). Similarly, one might question why some rich countries (especially oil-exporting countries) are not democracies, such as Singapore and the United Arab Emirates (Roylance, 2015). In this volume, Ethiopia is treated as a deviant case of an African state that didn’t experience prolonged colonization, and yet still experiences many of the effects of colonization. Deviant cases not only add to our knowledge of the so-called “rule” but also about the distinctiveness of the case itself.

Yet, caution is warranted when choosing to study a deviant case. First, we shouldn't stretch our conclusions too far when studying a deviant case because we can't be sure how truly abnormal it is. Second, it is very easy to assume that a culture that feels particularly foreign to the observer must be "deviant" and one's own culture is not. Thus, the justification for why a case is considered deviant must be clear and based on a thorough review of representative studies.

Finally, a *crucial* (or *critical*) case is when the scholar chooses a case in which a particular phenomenon seems especially unlikely. By studying the conditions for its success despite the circumstances, we can conclude that the occurrence is likely to succeed in more favorable circumstances. In short, if it is true in the critical case, then it is likely true in (most) other cases. An example of a critical case that doesn't focus on the state as the unit of analysis would be Whyte's 1943 study of Italian street gangs in a Boston slum, which he described as having a high degree of social organization, despite desperate poverty and lack of basic services such as education and work (Whyte, 2012). This study changed how social scientists view social behavior in societies that operate outside of formal governing structures.

Crucial case studies are difficult to identify, but if done well, can yield a high pay-off: studying one case can allow us to make some level of generalization to many others. Of course, one study cannot confirm or disprove a theory entirely, and any good crucial case study should be followed by other studies of other "unlikely" cases. Therefore, like deviant cases, crucial cases should not be stretched too far in their conclusions.

Comparative Case Studies

If single case studies give us a window into the logic and context of some aspect of different governing systems outside of your own, then comparing *between different* cases gives us more generalizable theories about the nature of political systems. Indeed, utilizing single case studies

exclusively is a bit like buying a car while only considering one make and model. Adding the comparison ingredient to the recipe of political science is important since it is better equipped to produce more reliable and generalizable knowledge. Therefore, comparisons attempt to satisfy the *scientific* method requirement of political *science*.

Problems with the Comparative Method

Still, there are several pitfalls associated with the comparative method as well. First, because the comparative method is meant to follow, at least to some degree, the scientific method, comparative research is by definition *empirical*. Empirical simply refers to that which can be observed with evidence. Empirical research is often associated with a philosophy of research called *positivism*. This is not a problem in and of itself, but what it does mean is that a comparative case study alone is not *normative*. Normative means making value judgements, such as asking whether democracy is the best form of government. This book believes that one of the important goals of studying comparative politics is to develop well-informed opinions concerning effective governing strategies, but the comparative method alone cannot do this.

Second, despite being a heavily empirical method, it often suffers from a lack of evidence. The contributions in this book were encouraged to make use of the vast number of databases available on the web (also listed in Appendix 1: Weblinks and Databases), but these databases are far from perfect. First, many countries, such as Cuba, Venezuela, and North Korea, are notoriously difficult to obtain data from. Data is heavily biased towards the Global North as well as measurements from more recent years. A more philosophical critique can be made of the way many data points are measured. Most of the databases are *indexes*, which take a number of measurements and package them all together to create one number to quantify something that is rather complex.

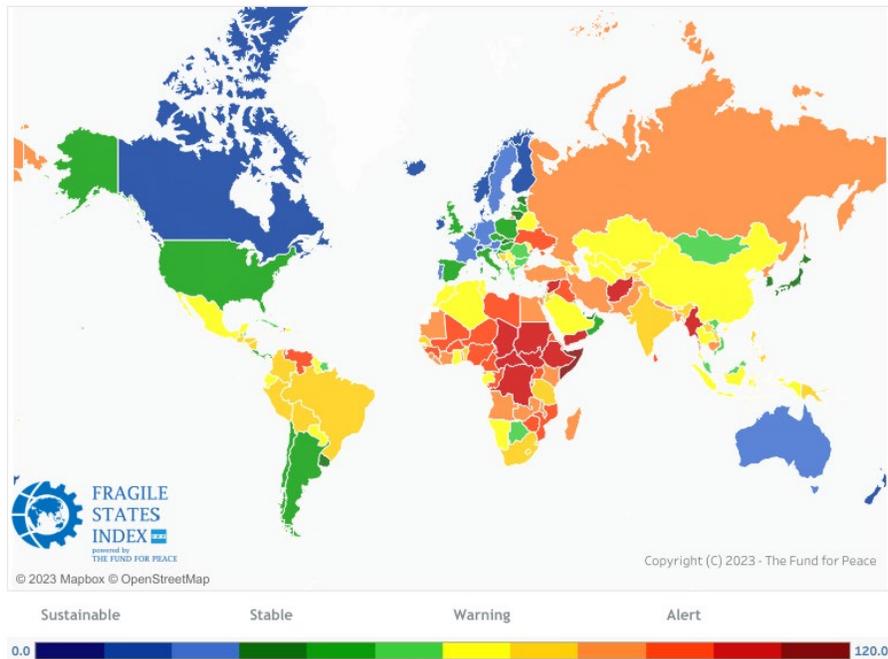


Figure 10: Heat Map Showing Measurements of State Fragility in 2023.¹⁵ You might compare this map, where “warmer” colors represent more fragile states, to the map of the Global North and Global South in Figure 1.

For example, the [Fragile State Index](#), which we will explore in more detail in the section State Capacity, page 164, attempts to create a measurement of the stability of countries using five indicators, each of which includes several variables.¹⁶ Similarly, the [Human Development Index](#) provides an alternative measure of development that focuses on health, education and standard of living rather than economic growth measured by Gross Domestic Product.

While assigning one number on a scale to measure state stability or human development can be incredibly illuminating, researchers from the *postpositivist* tradition may rightly critique this emphasis on quantitative measurements, and whether a number can really capture the complexities of the problems associated with state fragility and development. Postpositivism

¹⁵ Source: [Fragile State Index Global Heat Map](#), by The Fund for Peace, licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

¹⁶ For a critique of the FSI and the way it has been used by policy-makers, see Leigh (2012).

refers to a philosophy of science that believes that a researcher cannot be an independent observer of the world and are thus often skeptical of databases and their attempt to objectively quantify the social world.

Third, unlike natural experiments in the so-called “hard” sciences, most disciplines in the social sciences are not able to put their subjects of study into a lab and manipulate and isolate variables. Therefore, we are not able to come to *causal* conclusions but rather speak in terms of probabilities and likelihoods. This is a constant difficulty in the social sciences but not necessarily a weakness. In fact, plenty of other natural sciences also face this problem such as geology, which cannot do experiments on mountain ranges or isolate a volcano to make causal predictions. And yet, the fields of geology and comparative politics have been able to make important contributions by finding patterns and trends.

Finally, the comparative method brings up important ethical considerations in the way that knowledge is produced. A positivist would suggest that as long as the scientific method is followed, researchers can make observations of the world with some degree of objectivity. Postpositivist researchers, especially those with a postcolonial perspective, which we will discuss in more detail in subsequent chapters, critique the idea that knowledge is somehow neutral. They believe that there is an intersection of knowledge and power such that those with power get to define what counts as objective knowledge. This begs the question of whether it is practical, or ethical, for researchers to conduct studies on cultures and societies as an outsider. Indeed, as many postcolonial scholars suggest, “scientific research” was one of many tools used by colonial empires to justify their subjugation of native peoples and overseas territory. (See for example Chandra, 2013). On the other hand, as has been suggested previously, it begs the question of

whether an *insider* can produce reliable knowledge about their own society in which they have been embedded and socialized.

Standpoint theorists take the position that the unprivileged are able to generate more wholistic knowledge about the social world than those in a position of power (Harding, 1998; Rolin, 2009). The corollary to this is that those in a position of privilege will produce partial knowledge—knowledge that is likely to justify or maintain their position of power, even if unintentionally. For students of comparative politics in the Global North, particularly those in the US, there is no easy solution to this dilemma. Indeed, this discussion may seem awkward or even hypocritical in a volume in which American students have contributed research on Global South states. I have simply asked the contributors to be aware of these debates and approach other countries authentically and seriously, while acknowledging their privilege in the world, and doing their best to critically interrogate their own societies rather than reproducing it as an ideal. Furthermore, students can benefit from supplementary materials beyond a textbook such as blogs and articles written by analysts from the Global South.¹⁷ Perhaps the best way forward is just to recognize that no society or country can or should be treated as an ideal for comparison’s sake. Luckily, we have some checks against this temptation if utilized properly.

History of the Comparative Method

Comparative politics usually traces its methodology back to Aristotle, although it is likely he wasn’t the first to attempt a scientific study of political organizations based on developing classification systems. Aristotle used a simple typology based two simple questions: who rules and for whom do they rule? Interestingly, Aristotle defined a democracy as a system in which

¹⁷ A recent example of this sort of article is “Nigeria’s Last General Departs the Political Stage,” by Kólá Túbòsún (2023), a Nigerian writer. [Foreign Policy](#) and [Foreign Affairs](#) are excellent sources of both authentic Global South perspectives as well as the view from the elite intelligentsia of the Global North.

many rule but only for the benefit of themselves. Does this match your view of how democracy works today? What do you think of Aristotle’s definition of a *polity*? (See Figure 11: Aristotle's Classification System).

Who Benefits?	Who Rules?		
		One Person	The Few
Rulers	Tyranny	Oligarchy	Democracy
All	Monarchy	Aristocracy	Polity

Figure 11: Aristotle's Classification System¹⁸

Most Similar System Design

Aristotle’s work was built upon by a more recent political theorist, John Stuart Mill (1843), who developed two methods of comparison: the method of difference and method of agreement. The method of difference involves comparing two different outcomes, such as regime type or level of economic development. The method of agreement is comparing two similar outcomes. In contemporary comparative politics, we have adapted these approaches and we call them the Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD) and Most Different Systems Design (MDSD). The MSSD is equivalent to Mill’s method of difference. Here, we compare similar cases where the outcome (or the phenomenon we are interested in understanding) is different.

¹⁸ By Holly Oberle, licensed under [CC-BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

For example, if a scholar is interested in trying to understand why the overthrow of a government is sometimes accompanied by genocide and other times it is not, they should start by finding two different instances of revolution, one that entailed genocide and one that didn't. However, to make a valid comparison, these cases should be similar on a number of other possible measurements, such as religion, type of revolution, geography, and levels of development.

Outcome under investigation: Genocide and Revolution

<i>Possible causes</i>	Case 1: Egypt (no genocide)	Case 2: Sudan (genocide present)	Similar or different?	Included or excluded?
<i>Geography</i>	N. Africa	N. Africa	Similar	<i>Excluded</i>
<i>Religion</i>	Mostly Islam	Mostly Islam	Similar	<i>Excluded</i>
<i>Poverty (GDP per capita)¹⁹</i>	\$11,600 as of 2023	\$3,700 as of 2023	Different	<i>Included</i>
<i>Regime Change post revolution</i>	Dictator ousted; replaced with dictator	Dictator ousted; replaced with dictator	Similar	<i>Excluded</i>
<i>Income Inequality (Gini coefficient)²⁰</i>	0.28 at the time of 2011 revolution	0.34 as of 2014 (no data available in 2019).	Similar	<i>Likely excluded</i>
<i>Colonial Empire</i>	British	British	Similar	<i>Excluded</i>
<i>Ethnic Diversity</i>	Homogenous	Very diverse	Different	<i>Included</i>

Figure 12: A sample Most Similar Systems Design

By comparing two cases that are similar, we can exclude possible explanations for the difference in question. Comparing Sudan and Egypt might be useful for this topic, since there are many similarities between these two states. Each experienced a government overthrow, but Egypt's revolution didn't feature genocide while Sudan's did. The similarities between the two cases

¹⁹ (CIA Factbook, n.d.-a, n.d.-b).

²⁰ (Roser & Ortiz-Ospina, 2013).

cannot explain the outcome. But if we conduct a detailed analysis of each country and find another difference, such as different levels of ethnic diversity, we might have a useful explanation for our question.

Using the MSSD model above, possible explanations for the lack of genocide connected to Egypt's 2011 revolution and the presence of genocide in Sudan's 2019 revolution could be poverty as well as ethnic diversity. This insight might lead to develop a theory: *the more diverse and the poorer a country is, the more likely it is to experience genocide during a revolution.*

Further testing with more case studies would need to be conducted to improve the confidence we have in this theory.

Most Different Systems Design

Mills' method of agreement demands that the cases studied have similar outcomes. We call this the Most Different Systems Design. Here, we find two cases that are vastly different, but the phenomenon we are interested in is the same. For example, we might be interested in understanding the adoption of Marxist-Leninist ideology, using two cases that are different on a variety of other measurements. A comparison might be Cuba and Vietnam.

Using this MDSD model, a promising explanation has been identified, which is a strong charismatic leader that utilizes Marxist-Leninist ideology to mobilize the population during the revolution, with clear ties to the Soviet Union. This is a possible explanation because it is a similarity between two otherwise discrete examples. It is important to note that when using either an MSSD or MDSD model, if a possible explanation is identified by virtue of it fitting the

Outcome under investigation: Adoption of Marxist-Leninist Ideology

<i>Possible causes</i>	Case 1: Cuba (Marxist-Leninist Ideology)	Case 2: Vietnam (Marxist-Leninist Ideology)	Similar or different?	Included or excluded?
<i>Geography</i>	Caribbean	Southeast Asia	Different	<i>Excluded</i>
<i>Population</i>	7 million at time of Marxist revolution	25 million at start of revolution	Different	<i>Excluded</i>
<i>Income Inequality (Gini coefficient)²¹</i>	No data available	No data available at time of revolution; 0.36 in 2018.	?	<i>Not enough information; cannot be included in theory</i>
<i>Colonial Empire</i>	Spain/United States	French	Different	<i>Excluded</i>
<i>Charismatic Revolutionary Leaders</i>	Castro	Ho Chi Minh	Similar	<i>Included</i>
<i>Influence of the Soviet Union</i>	Strong	Strong	Similar	<i>Included</i>

Figure 13: A sample Most Different Systems Design

model, it still may not be the explanation of the outcome we are trying to explain—it is merely a *possible* explanation worth further interrogation. We have also identified another possible explanation—inequality—but we cannot include that in a theory yet with the available information. Still, this might warrant additional digging to see if we can find information on

²¹(Roser & Ortiz-Ospina, 2013).

inequality in Cuba and Vietnam at the birth of their revolutions. Just like our previous example of an MSSD comparison, we would need to further refine and test this theory to increase our confidence that it is applicable to more cases.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have identified the most important ways in which comparative politics is studied: through case studies and comparative methods such as the MSSD and the MDSD framework. More importantly, however, we have also thought about the problems associated with these methods and their potential for bias and harm to the communities we are trying to understand. By engaging in this philosophical discussion of how science is conducted and how knowledge is produced, we are attempting to move comparative politics in a direction that is more authentic and a more reliable source of knowledge of the Global South.

Chapter 4: States and Regimes²²

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- *DEFINE, AND DISTINGUISH BETWEEN, KEY TERMS INCLUDING STATE, REGIME, AND NATION.*
- *RECALL THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE STATE FROM ITS ORIGINS*
- *IDENTIFY COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF MODERN STATES*
- *DEFINE AND IDENTIFY DIFFERENT REGIME TYPES*

Introduction

What is government? Is government necessary? Why do governments exist?

At some point in your life, you may have asked some of these questions. Many times, the fact that people live under a government or in a country that has rules and societal norms, can be difficult to grasp. To this end, this chapter considers important aspects of political power within countries, the important terminology we use in the field of comparative politics to understand the world around us, and important problems and issues related to states and regimes.

The Social Contract and Social Order

A society without government or central leadership is one that lives in anarchy. Anarchy is defined as a lack of societal structure and order where there is no established hierarchy of power. Many scholars and political scientists have considered, at great length, the phenomenon and applicability of anarchy, though anarchy has not been a norm within the communities of humans

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living over the past 15,000 years. Even prior to the establishment of formal governments and formalized institutions, human beings were organizing themselves for various reasons. One of the first things that compelled human beings to organize themselves was the pursuit of survival. Over the course of human history, humans began to understand that survival seemed more feasible when they cooperated with one another. While they didn't have established, written laws, early humans did begin to have informal rules and norms for how they handled themselves in society.

Early humans often existed as small groups composed mostly of family members. For example, think of your own family. Are there certain rules your family followed while you were growing up? Who was in charge? Who told you what to do and when to do it? Consider this and consider how the existence or non-existence of rules in your family contributed to how your family worked and lived. Did rules help your family? Did you think the leaders, parental guardians, in your family were legitimate? Did you follow their rules? In time, families banded together into tribes, which in turn, formed their own rules and norms for how their group should act, usually with the common goal of surviving. Also, in time, circumstances changed for humans, particularly in terms of how they were able to survive. Initially, there was a hunter-gatherer approach, where humans hunted for their food and gathered fruits, berries, and other available plant life in order to survive.



Figure 14: A mosaic of hunger gatherers²³

About twelve thousand years ago, society was able to shift its approach. Humans found a way to stay in one place for longer through the agricultural revolution. Humans were now able to till the land for crops and begin early irrigation methods to enable the watering of their crops. With the ability to stay in one place for longer, rather than moving around constantly to hunt and gather, human groups began to aggregate in common locations. The agricultural revolution also led to human population growth. This population growth, combined with more people living closer together, also led to the need for formal societal organization. Humans, now living closer to each other, were forced to develop some sort of order to ensure survival. In looking back on this

²³ Source: [A mosaic illustration of hunter gatherers taken from William MacKenzie's National Encyclopaedia \(1891\). Digitally enhanced from our own original plate.](#) by Rawpixel – Own work, licensed under [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

period of human history, the main takeaway is that humans chose not to live in anarchy instead of a living in a chaotic world without rules. Humans calculated that their status quo would be improved with a strong set of rules. In addition, both individual and societal goals could be accomplished through mutual cooperation in a rules-based society. Out of this would come what Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Rousseau called the *social contract*.

A social contract is defined as either a formal or informal agreement between the rulers and those ruled in a society. Those who are ruled submit to the laws of the rulers in exchange for certain benefits. Sometimes, the benefits are as simple as military protection. In the United States, citizens are expected to obey the laws of the land, as expressed through the Constitution. This is in exchange for protection of their “life, liberty and pursuit of happiness.” Social contracts can be voluntary or involuntary and can be observed in almost every type of political system, democratic or otherwise. Sometimes, a social contract involves those who are ruled to pledge fealty, as well as their livelihoods and productivity, to the ruling class.

There are two types of social contracts. The first is a voluntary social contract. This is where the people agree to submit to the ruling class. Keep in mind that even though this agreement is voluntary, it does not always mean that those who are ruled are entitled to certain privileges, such as freedom of speech. In this situation, the people may simply need protection from outside threats. An involuntary social contract is when the ruling class dominates in a given territory and demands obedience from the people. In this case, those being ruled are simply pushed into a social contract. In some instances, disagreement has led to banishment or death.

There are also implicit social contracts as well. For example, most US citizens are born into their social contract. This is why some Americans often take their social contract for granted. By being born into citizenship, Americans may never need to actualize, or act upon, their citizenship. They

benefit from a system that protects their rights and liberties, even when they choose not to obey the law. In contrast, there are other US citizens that are not born into this social contract, and instead go through a formal process to become US citizens. This process is referred to as naturalization. Naturalization is the process by which noncitizens formally become citizens of the country they reside in. Naturalization is a long process that requires multiple steps, including but not limited to background checks, oral examinations, paperwork, and finally pledging allegiance to your host country in a formal ceremony. The process of naturalization is a good example of a voluntary and formal social contract where a citizen pledges obedience and allegiance in exchange for the benefits of being a citizen.



Figure 15: Naturalization Ceremony at Harriet Tubman National Historical Park on August 8, 2019²⁴

Social contract theory is often credited to certain philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Hobbes was the earliest of these thinkers, living between

²⁴ Source: [Naturalization Ceremony at Harriet Tubman National Historical Park](#) by Mary O'Neill is licensed under [Public Domain - US](#).

1588 and 1679, the time in which the modern European state is often said to have been founded with the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 (more on this below). While Hobbes was known for many scholastic contributions to history, politics, math, and physics, he contributed greatly to political science, most notably the concept of a social contract. Hobbes acknowledged that all people act within their own self-interest, and in acting in their own self-interest, will make calculations to ensure their survival. Hobbes inherently saw human beings as selfish. For him, the state of nature was unstable and dangerous. Hobbes wrote that life was, “nasty, brutish and short”.

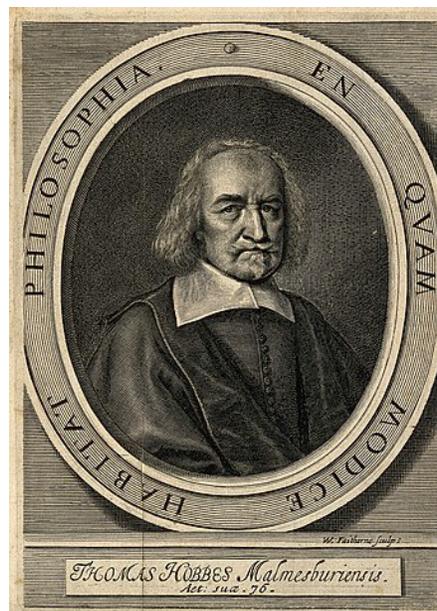


Figure 16: Thomas Hobbes engraving²⁵

Locke lived between 1632 to 1704 in the UK and is considered one of the primary Enlightenment thinkers of his time. Locke contributed to social contract theory in his masterpiece, *Two Treatises of Government*. Locke set out the principles of natural rights, where he believed that all people were born with “certain, unalienable” rights. These rights should be

²⁵ Source: [Thomas Hobbes](#) by William Faithorne, licensed under [CC BY 4.0](#).

recognized by states. Governments are expected to protect these natural rights through their political institutions and structures. In contrast to Hobbes, Locke thought positively about humankind. But like Hobbes, he believed in the power of the state, which did a better job of protecting its citizens. Again, Hobbes favored a more authoritarian government, believing that the state needed to control the masses, for their own good. Whereas, Locke believed humans were perfectly capable of living peacefully with each other, with no need for an authoritarian state. Even though Locke's work did not gain widespread attention during his lifetime, it heavily influenced the US founding fathers. Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and Thomas Jefferson borrowed heavily from Locke, with certain phrases in the US Constitution taken directly from Locke's writings.

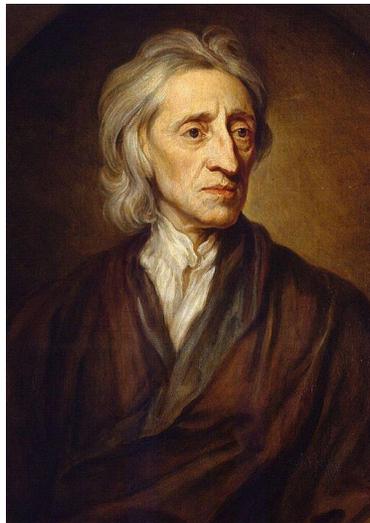


Figure 17: John Locke²⁶

“Men are born free, yet everywhere are in chains,” remarked Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the opening lines of his 1762 work, *Du Contrat social*, or The Social Contract. In this publication,

²⁶ Source: [John Locke](#), by Godfrey Kneller - 1. Unknown source2. derivate work of File:Godfrey Kneller - Portrait of John Locke (Hermitage).jpg (from arthermitage.org), licensed under [Public Domain](#).

Rousseau continues the discourse on social contract theory and argues that society does not lend itself to equal and equitable treatment of those within society. Instead, society imprisons people with various “chains” and suppresses their natural born rights and liberties. To Rousseau, the only type of authority is only legitimate in society if it comes from the consent of all people. All people must agree to a government in order to protect their interests, but in this contract, there must be a “unified will” which takes into consideration the interests of the people for the common good.

Taking this logic of the social contract back to the historical context, an early version of social contract can also be observed in ancient Greece, which is also credited with the first democratic state (although this will be problematized in Chapter 5: Theories of State Emergence). In Ancient Greece, a system was established wherein elite men could participate in government and representatives could work on behalf of the people. Democracy comes from the Greek words, *demo* and *kratos*, meaning rule by the people. Broadly defined, democracy is a political system wherein government is dictated by the power of the people. A direct democracy is where every single citizen is able to be involved in the legal process and able to have some amount of power over the laws of society. A **representative democracy** is one where the people elect representatives to serve on their behalf to make the laws and rules of society. Ancient Greece did not have a perfect democracy as many members of the population were excluded from decision-making processes, like slaves (both male and female) and women were excluded from political processes. Nevertheless, the social contract here, in hindsight, was that the people of Ancient Greece submitted to the ruling class, through somewhat representative leadership, for protection from the political system.

Following the fall of the Roman Empire in 489 ACE, Western Europe fell into chaos. No longer were the citizens of these areas protected by the former social contract. Northern hordes came down and would attack territories, leaving most of the regions of the former Roman Empire in disarray. The circumstances were not ideal and most people during this time lived under constant duress with no protection of their person or property. Around 900 ACE, the system of feudalism arose. Feudalism was a system or social order that arose out of the middle ages, particularly in Europe, wherein peasants (sometimes called Serfs) were forced to provide members of the upper class with their crops, produce, goods as well as their services, fealty and loyalty. The upper class, usually Nobles, would provide some level of protection to the Serfs in exchange for their products and services. Consider feudalism in light of the social contract. Though not necessarily ideal, the Serfs were able to exchange their goods, services, and fealty in exchange for some level of protection of their lives and property.

Overall, the story of government comes from this historical reckoning of the social contract and the drive for social order. From this, we can talk more directly about the formation of states, which is a common theme throughout political science field.

Defining Terms

One of the most frequently used words in the study of comparative politics is the word *state*. At first glance, many students will see or hear the word state and think of, perhaps, subnational governments, like states in the United States like Montana, Wisconsin, New York, and so forth. This is not the way the word is interpreted within the field of comparative politics. Instead, a **state** is defined as a national-level group, organization or body which administers its own legal and governmental policies within a designated region or territory. Outside of the comparative discipline, many people tend to use the terms state, country, government, regime, and nation

interchangeably. Within comparative politics, each of these terms is distinct, and have different implications when attempting to observe the political landscapes around the world. Since states tend to be the major political actors in the global arena, it is vital to have a firm grounding in understanding what states are, how the term state relates to other concepts and terms within comparative politics field, and how comparativists set out to study states and their actions. Using the correct terms in the right context will empower you to be able to interpret comparativist literature and research, and perhaps add your own contributions to the field someday.

If a state is a national-level organization which administers its own legal and governmental policies within a designated region or territory, what are nations and countries and how are they different or similar? State tends to have a narrower meaning than both a nation and a country and relates more specifically to how a designated territory operates politically. A **nation** can be broadly defined as a population of people joined by common culture, history, language, ancestry within a designated region of territory. A **country** is similar but tends to encompass aspects of both the nation and the state. A country is a nation, which may have one or more states within it, or may change state-type over time. For instance, consider the country, Russia. Russian history tends to be credited with its onset in the 9th century with the Rus' people. The Rus' state was established in 862 ACE, and encompassed much of modern day Russia as well as parts of Scandinavia. The Kievan Rus' state followed the Rus' state, but eventually fell apart during the Mongol invasions between 1237 and 1240. While Moscow grew to be a significant hub for business, politics, and society, the Russian region at this time was largely stateless and operated under the system of feudalism.

As mentioned above, feudalism was a system or social order that arose out of the middle ages, particularly in Europe, wherein peasants (sometimes called Serfs) were forced to provide

members of the upper class with their crops, produce, goods as well as their services, fealty and loyalty. The upper class, usually Nobles, would provide some level of protection to the Serfs in exchange for their products and services. Eventually, Rus' became a unified country Grand Duchy of Moscow, and became a major force within the region. Over time, the way Russia was ruled varied greatly, whether ruling came from a noble class, a royal bloodline, installment of a leader, or election of leadership. Let's say a country, being a nation with shared values and heritage, is the hardware needed for a state within the world, then the regime is the software which tells the country or nation how to operate. The hardware, in this case, tends to last longer and be bound by similar history and values whereas a country or nation's regime type can vary based on shifting values and challenges of the time period. Therefore, Russia has a common territory, history, language, ancestry, but has been led by different states over time.

One of the important characteristics of a state is its ability to independently organize its own policies and goals. As defined in more detail in Chapter 5: Theories of State Emergence, this is *sovereignty*—fundamental governmental power, where the government has the power to coerce those to do things they may not want to do. Sovereignty also involves the ability to manage the country's affairs independently from outside powers and internal resistance. If a state does not have the ability to manage its own affairs and issues, it will not be able to maintain its power over what happens. **Power**, broadly defined, is the ability to get others to do what you want them to do. **Soft power** means being able to get others to do what you want them to do using the methods of persuasion or manipulation. **Hard power**, in contrast, is the ability to get others to do what you want using physical and potentially aggressive measures, for instance, like fighting, attacking or through war. Both types of power hold critical places in the world of politics. It is critical to be able to convince others of a course of action from the perspective of a state, sometimes this ability to convince will come from simple persuasion or discussion of the merits

of a certain course of action. Other times, there may be heavy resistance to an idea or plan, and some have chosen to use physical violence to get their policy goals achieved. Physical power is important in cases where a state must still defend itself from outside powers. If a state is unable to defend itself physically, even the most benevolent policy goals and objectives would be rendered meaningless because the state could cease to exist if attacked. For example, negotiating through an international organization like the United Nations is soft power, while displaying military might is hard power.



Figure 18: From left to right: The United Nations General Assembly Hall; a test launch of an Intercontinental Ballistic Missile in 1975 United States²⁷

States must have both **authority** and **legitimacy** in order to operate effectively, or at the very least, to exist for some period of time. **Legitimacy** can be defined as the state's ability to establish itself as a valid power over its citizens. **Authority** is another important piece of a state's existence. Authority is defined as having the power to get things done. If we put these two terms together, a state is legitimate in its operations if it has the authority to make decisions and carry

²⁷ Source: From left to right, [United Nations General Assembly Hall](#) by Patrick Gruban is licensed under [CC BY-SA 2.0](#); [An LGM-25C Titan II missile is launched at Vandenberg Air Force Base](#) by the U.S. Air Force is licensed under [Public Domain - US](#).

out its policy goals if it is seen as valid by the citizens. **Traditional legitimacy** occurs when states have the authority to lead based on historical precedent. For instance, there are states in the political system where there is a legitimate authority to lead, but no defined or operationalized constitution, or set of rules and laws. A second type of legitimacy is called **charismatic legitimacy**, and it means that citizens follow the rules of a state based on the charisma and personality of the current leader. Legitimacy, in this scenario, also does not come from a written constitution accepted by the representatives or leaders of a country. This type of legitimacy can be flimsy as it is contingent on the charisma of a particular leader. When that leader dies or gets removed from office, will the state continue to stand, or will citizens no longer see legitimacy of authority from the government in the absence of that charismatic leader? For example, although it is very difficult to get access to reliable information about North Korea, it is often speculated that due to Kim Jong Un's charismatic leadership, in which his personality has become nearly synonymous with the state of North Korea, many speculate how the state will continue to exist as it does today in his absence.



Figure 19: Kim Jong Un, Supreme Leader of North Korea since 2011²⁸

²⁸ Source: [Chairman Kim Jong Un](#), by The White House from Washington, DC, licensed under [Public Domain](#).

The last type of legitimacy is called rational-legal legitimacy, and it occurs when states derive their authority through firmly established, often written and adopted, laws, rules, regulations, procedures through a constitution. A constitution can be understood as a state's described laws of the land. Authority and legitimacy can be consolidated and, if accepted by the people, it becomes the operating manual and handbook for how society should run. Each of these forms of legitimacy, especially when taken together, can enhance a state's ability to function. If, for instance, there is a written and adopted constitution, and it has been transparently drafted and considered by representatives of a state, individuals will know what the rights and rules are of their given society. In time, as laws and norms are followed and accepted, there also becomes a historical precedent that individuals are more likely to accept (traditional legitimacy). Finally, if there does happen to be a charismatic leader, they may be able to garner further support from the people to deepen a state's legitimacy and potentially grow the political agenda to meet further needs of society.

Federal, Unitary, and Confederate States

There are three main types of states, based on the way in which power is distributed. A **federal** state is one which power is shared or balanced between the national government and other subunits such as provinces or cities. A **unitary** state is one in which most power rests with the national government. While there may be subunits, these units only operate with the permission of the national government. The final type, which is quite uncommon in today's world, is a **confederate** state. This state is one in which the power mostly lies with the subunits, with a weak national government. Confederate states are thought to not have strong sovereignty and that makes them rare in a world based on sovereignty. The first government of the US after the Revolution under the Articles of Confederation was a confederacy, but that quickly failed and

required a new constitution. The only modern state that uses a confederate system is Switzerland, where the cantons (like provinces) enjoy more power than the Swiss national government. Yet, there are many examples of confederacies before the birth of modern sovereignty. We will explore a case study of such a government in Student Feature Study: Sovereignty in the Iroquois Confederacy on page 121).

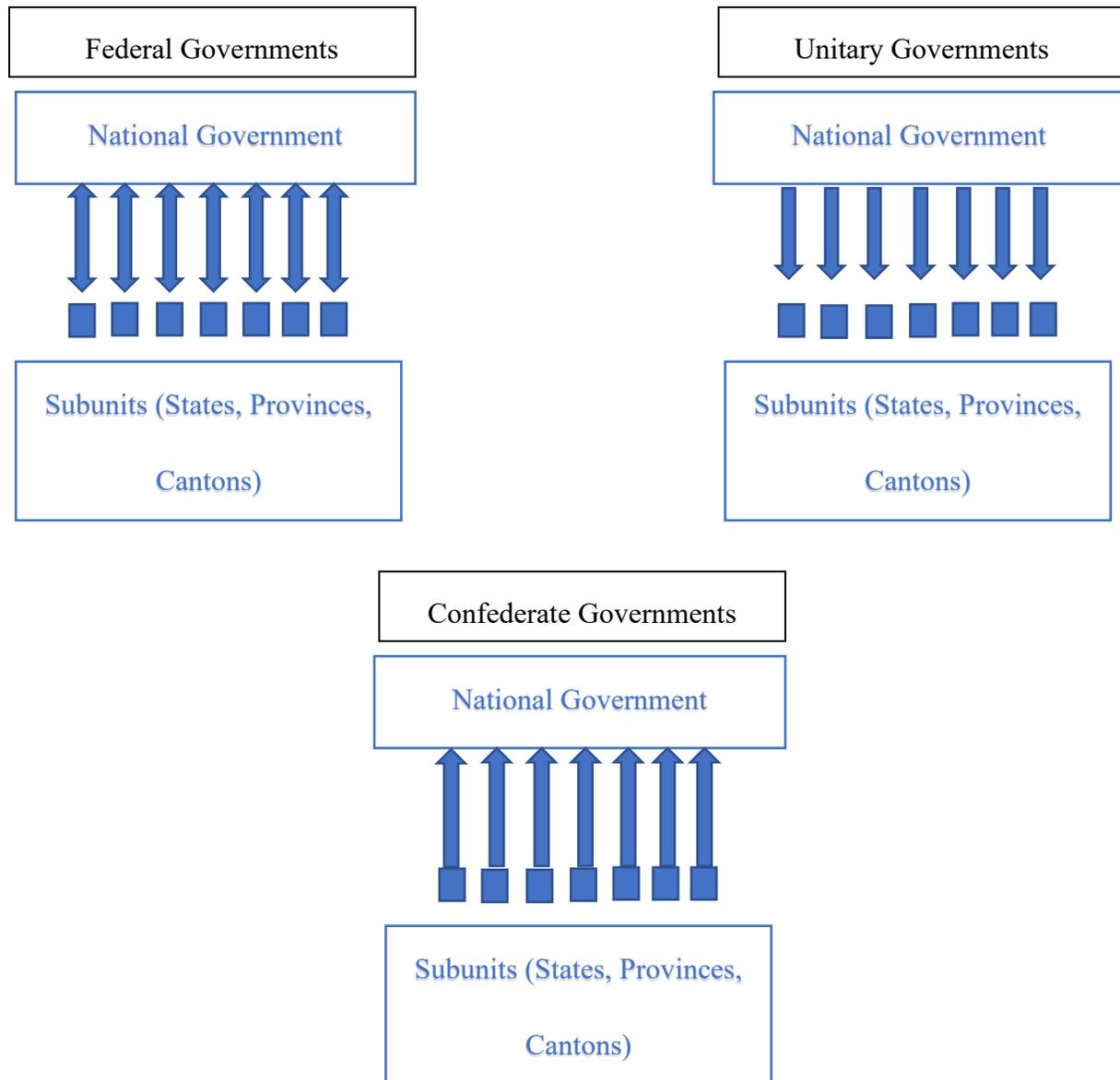


Figure 20: Federal, Unitary and Confederate Government Models²⁹

²⁹ Source: Holly Oberle, licensed under [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

With these important terms considered, we can now more formally consider the many types of state and regimes that exist today, as well as the ways in which regimes may shift in form and function over time to either serve the needs or the people or the desires of the ruling classes.

Regime Types

The rise of the so-called modern state is usually attributed to the end of the European Middle Ages, wherein states were critical to the organization and survival of certain societies. Being a member of a state brought benefits to those included. Having a recognized state meant there was a recognized authority by which states could trade and do business with each other. Trade prompted economic development, which further solidified trading relationships. With economic development, states were also able to pursue technological innovations. The advent of trade enabled states to improve the way ordinary day-to-day activities were run, and it enabled states to build further military power. Advances in technology helped European states invent, or improve, the use of gunpowder, weapons, mapmaking, as well as mathematics and engineering (although many of these technological advancements were found in other parts of the world such as China and the Islamic Empires). A final benefit for European states coming out of the Middle Ages was some semblance of political stability for its inhabitants. When protected by a recognized, and somewhat unified, state, ordinary people had greater chances for survival.

States can vary not only in their strength, legitimacy, and authority, but in the mechanisms they use to achieve political agendas. To this end, there are a number of different government types that states have chosen to achieve their political ends. Here, too, there can be much variation in how states choose to exercise their power. One way to look at regime types is to consider, broadly speaking, the range in types. Some of the main regime types and their characteristics are

represented below in Figure 21 below. It might be worth comparing this typology to Aristotle’s, as represented in Figure 11, page 71.

Regime Type	Number of People in Charge	Examples
Anarchy	No one	The international system – no world government
Monarchy	One by birth, divine intervention, or bloodline	Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Medieval England
Dictatorship	One	Russia, North Korea
Aristocracy	A few	Ancient Sparta
Oligarchy	A few wealthy elite	Soviet Russia
Junta	A few military officers	Chad, Guinea
Democracy	Many	Germany

Figure 21: Regime Types

We can first look at a type of regime called a **monarchy**. A monarchy is a form of government where a single person leads the country under the authority of royalty, bloodlines, or some other factor of symbolic significance. The word monarchy derives from ancient Greek word, μονάρχης (monárkhēs), where μόνος or mónos means “one” or “single” and ἄρχων or árkhōn means “ruler” or “chief.” Monarchies are thought to descend from more ancient forms of tribal leadership, where tribes appointed a special or sacred individual to lead their interests. Over time, modern monarchies evolved where leadership was generally vested with a King or Queen. Even within the regime type of monarchy, there is variation in how the leader may exercise their power. There are two primary types of monarchy that have been identified throughout history. In an **absolute monarchy**, the monarch is wholly responsible for all decisions, and rules the state

with absolute power over all political, economic, and social matters. In a **constitutional monarchy**, a monarch must abide by a state-adopted constitution, which dictates the scope and depth of its power in all state-related activities. In most modern constitutional monarchies, the power of the monarch is severely curtailed, limited to only symbolic or ceremonial roles.

A **dictatorship** is a form of government where one person, or sometimes a single group, has sole and absolute power over the state. While dictatorships can range in the extent to which the state intervenes in the private lives of citizens, most dictatorships do not permit free media, freedom of speech, or personal rights and freedoms. A common form of dictatorship in the 20th and 21st centuries have been personalist dictatorships, where power lies with a single, charismatic and all-powerful person who drives all actions of the state. Current examples of these types of dictators could be Kim Jong-Un of North Korea and Xi Jinping of China. Kim Jong-Un is currently the Supreme Leader of North Korea, and has served since 2011 when his father, Kim Jong-il, who was Supreme Leader, passed away. Like his father, Kim Jong-Un has operated under a cult of personality. A cult of personality occurs when a state leverages all aspects of a leader's real and exaggerated traits to solidify the leader's power.

In the case of North Korea, the state uses its media to promote propaganda which endows its leaders with near or equal to God or Godly status. Xi Jinping of China also has been characterized as a dictator, as he controls all actions and activities of the state along with elites, whom he personally selects, who assist him in carrying out all state activities.

An **aristocracy** is a form of government where a group of social elites rule the state. Often, leaders of an aristocracy are nobles, wealthy, or somehow identified as superior to and/or above the class that is being ruled. Aristocracy tends to be associated with ancient Sparta because the form of government deliberately vested power with those who were seen as elite and capable of

ruling. In modern terms, oligarchies seem to be a more present-day embodiment of aristocracy. Oligarchy is similarly defined as a form of government where elites rule, though there is not necessarily an assumption of nobility.

A **junta** is a regime type where there is a small, military group of elites who rule state activities. The term junta derives from its use during the Spanish resistance to Napoleon's attempted invasion of Spain in 1808, wherein military groups within Spain assembled and attempted to stop Napoleon's attack. Junta means "meeting" or "committee" in Spanish, though its current affiliations within political science characterize it as akin to a military oligarchy. Often, juntas tend to form as resistance or rebellion, and are used in coup d'états. **Coup d'états** are attempts by elites to overthrow the current government of a state through abrupt seizure of power and removal of the government's leadership.

Regime Transitions

One key area of concern in comparative politics is the phenomenon of regime transition. **Regime transitions** occur when a formal government changes to a different government leadership, structure or system. Sometimes, a regime will change from a dictatorship to a democracy through the mobilization of citizens demanding change from their state operations. Other times, a democracy may backslide into a dictatorship. While democracies have become the most common and generally accepted form of government, there have been dozens of examples of a democracy backsliding into a dictatorship.

Consider the example of the rise of Adolf Hitler in Germany during the 1920s. Following World War I, a weak democracy was installed in Germany. The Weimar Republic was Germany's democracy following World War I, but it suffered a number of problems which eventually suppressed the regime and caused it to form into an oppressive dictatorship. The terms of the

Treaty of Versailles, which ended World War I, put Germany into social and economic straits.

The terms of the agreement forced Germany to pay high reparations to the Allies, which left the German people impoverished. High unemployment, high inflation, and general discontent caused the Weimar Republic difficulty in enforcing its political agenda. In the midst of dire circumstances, Adolf Hitler was able to use a cult of personality to rally many Germans against the Weimar Republic. Through his use of manipulation and incendiary speech, Hitler was able to get appointed as the Chancellor of Germany. He abolished the Constitution, and year after year, eroded the rights and liberties of the German people until Germany was a fully authoritarian regime led by a single dictator. At the end of World War II, Germany again experienced a regime transition back towards democracy.

Overall, observing cases of regime transition can be important to learning the causes and consequences of changing regimes.

Comparative Case Study: Botswana and Somalia

Introduction

Why compare and contrast Botswana and Somalia? Why select these two countries for consideration when discussing the main focal point of “the state?” The selection of Botswana and Somalia is interesting to consider when evaluating the relevance of the state, and in terms of methods for selecting case studies, this selection could be categorized as falling into Most Similar Systems Design. The Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD) asks comparativists to consider at least two cases where the cases are similar, but the outcomes from these cases are different. Botswana and Somalia have a number of geographic and historical circumstances in common, and yet the resulting political outcomes have been very different. The primary difference between these two countries are their forms of legitimate authority. This case study is

also a perfect transition into the next chapter, which is a deeper consideration of the state as well as theories of why the state emerged. Comparing two countries that were colonized will be particularly relevant when we consider post-colonial theories of the state in the following chapter.

Botswana



Figure 22: Detailed map of Botswana and the location of Botswana on the African continent³⁰

Full Country Name: Republic of Botswana

Head of State: President Mokgweetsi Eric Masisi

Head of Government: President Mokgweetsi Eric Masisi

Government: Parliamentary Republic

Official Language: Setswana, English

Economic System: Market-Oriented Economy

Location: Southern Africa

³⁰ Source: From left to right: [Map of Botswana](#) by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#); [Locator Map](#), by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#).

Capital: Gaborone

Total land size: 581,737 sq km; 224,610 sq. miles

Population: 2,254,069

GDP: \$18.726 billion

GDP per capita: \$7,817

Currency: Pula

The Republic of Botswana is located in southern Africa and is a landlocked country. Botswana is bordered by South Africa to the south, Namibia to the northwest, and Zimbabwe to the northeast. Botswana has a long history and is credited with perhaps being the “birthplace” of all modern humans dating back over 200,000 years ago. Much of what is known about the ancient Botswana region is derived from archeological and anthropological research, which has traced evidence of human civilization through ancient tools, cave drawings and evidence of farming practices that existed through the region over time. Although there is robust evidence of the region’s population adopting agricultural practices and having tribal norms and values that were followed, the first actual written records of life in Botswana were not noted until around the 1820s.

Botswana was one of many African countries affected by the **Scramble for Africa**, sometimes also called the conquest of Africa, wherein Western European powers attempted to control and colonize all parts of Africa. The Scramble for Africa occurred between the years of 1880 to 1914, with countries like Britain, France, Belgium, Portugal, Spain, and Italy invading and colonizing much of Africa. Botswana was dominated by Britain. Under British rule, the region of Botswana was called the Bechuanaland Protectorate.

Part of the reason the region was called a protectorate was that Britain **annexed**, or took over, the region on the basis that they were “protecting” the main tribes from the Boers. The Boers were descendants of Dutch colonists in Southern Africa and would frequently attempt to take over the territory of Botswanan tribes. To protect their economic, military and moral interests in Botswana, Britain permitted the Bechuanaland Protectorate to operate under its own leadership and rules but supplied resources to protect the region from the Boers. Beyond this, allowing for any encroachment of the Boers in the region may have compromised British interests in ensuring that German, Dutch and in some ways, some have emphasized the distinction that the Bechuanaland Protectorate was not a colony, but an area protected by the British government for various reasons. A **protectorate** is defined as an area or nation that is managed, possessed, controlled and protected by a different state. The area or nation is dependent in that it relies on the security provided by another state, but is still allowed, to some extent, to dictate its own local politics and activities.

At the beginning of the 20th century, more and more power was being shared with the various tribes and councils within Southern Africa. Various proclamations enabled tribal powers to have some level of power over how they conducted themselves. Nevertheless, it was not until 1964 that the United Kingdom allowed Botswana to declare its independence. Botswana was able to hold its first elections in 1966, following the creation of their own Constitution in 1965.

Today, Botswana is considered Africa’s oldest and most stable democracies, though it is not without some number of issues (which will be discussed below). Botswana’s constitution provides the supreme law of the law and basis for rule. There are components of Botswana’s constitution that seek to protect the citizens of Botswana and, like the U.S. the Constitution, provides for certain civil liberties. **Civil liberties** are defined as individual rights that are

protected by law to ensure the government does not unreasonably interfere with certain specific individual rights (e.g. like freedom of speech, religion, assembly, etc.) Botswana is a parliamentary republic, which is a system of government where the executive branch is given its powers by the legislative branch, in this case, the parliament. In Botswana's case, the president serves as both the head of state and head of government, and is elected by, and held accountable by Botswana's Parliament.

Although Botswana's government has three branches of government with defined powers according to their constitution, and even though free elections do occur, there is some question as to how free Botswana actually is. The Freedom in the World Index categorizes Botswana's democracy as free, but a number of global indexes for democracy, including the Democracy Index, have categorized Botswana as having a flawed democracy. Chapter 6: Democracy will discuss the various manifestations of democracy worldwide, but it is worth noting that not all democracies are categorized as fully democratic. Instead, there are characteristics which are considered, and democracy is measured on more of a spectrum, with some characteristics being cause for caution.

For instance, ideally, a democracy has more than one political power that is able to vie for power. One area of concern is Botswana's party system. Botswana has been dominated by single party rule since independence. In the case of Botswana, it tends to be a red flag of sorts that only one political party has held power time and time again. This could be an indication of a lack of fair competition. Another area of concern is Botswana's freedom of speech. Botswana is said to not have full freedom of speech, and freedom of the media is constantly under threat. Another cautionary issue is how Botswana's government treats migrants, refugees, and the LGBTQIA+ community. All of these groups face constant discrimination under the law.

Botswana's current situation is a mixed bag. On the one hand, Botswana does have the oldest and one of the most stable democracies in Africa. According to most indexes, Botswana is also one of the least corrupt democracies in Africa. All this being acknowledged, it bears noting that many of the countries in Africa have struggled with government authority, the basis of legitimacy of leadership, and the practice of democracy. Compared to other countries in Africa, Botswana does seem to be a leader. In comparing Botswana globally, its flawed democracy does rank it lower in terms of democracies worldwide.

An interesting question to pose, considering the current state of Botswana's democracy, is why has Botswana's government been reasonably successful in light of the many failed or failing governments in Africa? Indeed, Botswana is often called the "African Exception." One of the answers to this question is often attributed to culture, and to some extent, luck. At the time of Botswana's independence in the mid-1960s, life for Botswanans was fairly traditional and undisturbed. There was a clear changing of the seasons, which led to predictable crops and management of agriculture. As agriculture was the dominant economic activity of the time, life in Botswana was pretty stable. In addition, prior to the move to formal independence and the creation and adoption of a constitution, the protectorates and the loose agreements with the United Kingdom, seemed to have prepared the people of Botswana for a hierarchical power dynamic where tribal decisions were based on the consensus and agreement of the tribes. From this, there was already sort of an informal democracy in place. The combined hierarchy of power, combined with the tradition of gathering consent of the people, may have made a difference for overall adoption of a democratic form of government. A saying in Setswana seems to capture this sentiment prior to the adoption of a constitution: "Kgosi ke Kgosi ka batho": A chief is a chief by the will of the people (Lewis, 2020). Within this sentiment, the leadership that was in place at the

time of independence was forward-thinking. Many of the chiefs that had been in place were open to change.

In some ways, one of the final issues that likely benefited Botswana's political outcomes was the lack of British interests in their geographical resources. The United Kingdom had been interested in other locations within Africa, so many other countries in Africa became exploited.

Interestingly, Botswana was largely left alone, and was not victims of exploitation on account of their geographical resources. Instead, many in Botswana actually felt abandoned by the government of the United Kingdom. It's been said that a government official in Botswana quipped, "The British left us with nothing!" He then paused, thoughtfully, and added, "On the other hand, the British left us with nothing" (Lewis, 2020). To this end, it may have been helpful that the British left Botswana alone instead of becoming heavily invested in trying to take from Botswana. In this way, Botswana was largely left to fend for itself, developing its own institutions and governmental practices, which were able to transition from previous practices with, relative to other countries, a level of ease.

Somalia

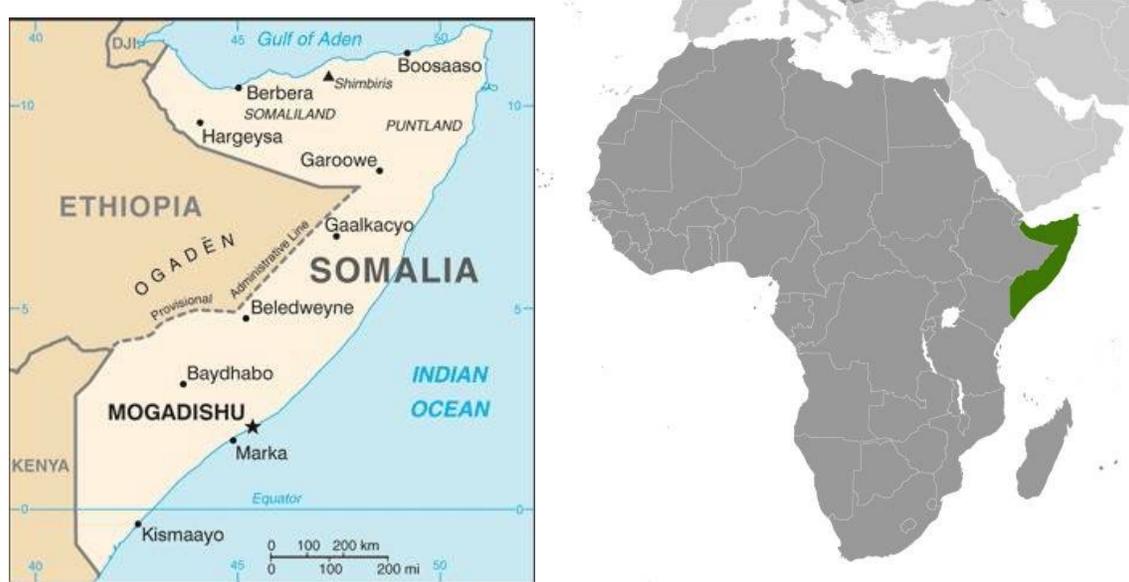


Figure 23: A detailed map of Somalia and a map showing the location of Somalia on the African continent³¹

Full Country Name: Federal Republic of Somalia

Head of State: President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud

Head of Government: Prime Minister Hamza Abdi Barre

Government: Parliamentary Republic

Official Language: Somali, Arabic

Economic System: Informal

Location: Eastern Africa

Capital: Mogadishu

Total land size: 637657 sq km; 246,201 sq. miles

Population: 15,893,219

³¹ Source: From left to right: [Map of Somalia](#) by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#); [Locator Map](#), by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#)

GDP: \$5.218 billion

GDP per capita: \$348

Currency: Somali Shilling

Somalia is a country located in Eastern Africa, the Horn of Africa, and bordered by Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti. Like Botswana, Somalia has a long history. In fact, Somalia is thought to be settled by the first human beings (homo sapiens) on the planet, who are thought to have emerged roughly 300,000 years ago. Archeological digs have unearthed pyramids, tombs, ancient cities as well as tools, burial grounds and homes and walls. Over time, the land that is now Somalia was affected by various civilizations and outside influences given its location for trade. Somalia was a stopping point that enabled profitable trade to occur between what is now the Middle East, connecting trading pathways with India and China. In the 9th century, Islam was introduced to the region of present-day Somalia. Muslims fleeing persecution came to Somalia and introduced the Islamic faith. Over time, Islam grew to be the main religion of Somalia.

Somalia, like Botswana, was a target within the Scramble for Africa, though the influence of colonial powers differed in Somalia. Botswana had been under British control, while Somalia was partially dominated by Britain, and partially dominated by Italy. The two colonial powers fought for control over Somali territory, to the detriment of the Somalians. In World War I, Italy, which had turned fascist under the rule of Benito Mussolini, sought to annex Ethiopia. Italian troops, along with some Somali troops, were able to take back parts of Somalia formerly dominated by the British. Years later, during World War II, Britain was able to successfully take back its former Somali territory, as well as those parts that were held by Italian forces. The battle

between Britain and Italy to dominate Somalia often put the Somalians in difficult positions where they had to side with one or the other.

After years of dispute in the international community, including between Britain and Italy, Somalia formed the Somali Republic in 1961. A referendum was put forth for the people to accept a constitution, which would set the foundations for their own government. Unfortunately, most Somalians were not allowed to participate in the adoption and formal voting in for the new constitution. A president and prime minister were put into place, but their positions were not the product of voting. In 1969, President Abdirashid Ali Shermarke was assassinated during a military coup d'état. The leader of the military at that time, Major General Mohamed Siad Barre, initiated the coup, became the leader of the Supreme Revolutionary Council (SRC) and controlled the country. The country fell to an authoritarian dictatorship, and the SRC dissolved the legislature and the judiciary, and suspended the constitution. For a time under this control, the SRC renamed Somalia, the Somali Democratic Republic, though there was no constitution nor any democratic institutions. In 1976, Mohamed Siad Barre disbanded the SRC and formed the Somali Revolutionary Socialist Party. Barre's administration was a communist regime that attempted to wed the Islamic traditions of the region with socialist ideas of equality.

Regardless of the lofty goals of Major General Barre, decades of military rule left the Somalian people restless and disillusioned. In 1991, in the face of increasingly authoritarian rules, Barre's rule came to an end through the combined efforts of different clans who opposed Barre's rule. Together, the clans were able to oust Barre from rule. The northern part of the country, previously occupied by Britain, declared independence from the rest of Somalia, though it has never been recognized as independent from the global community to this day. The rest of Somalia became a power vacuum and a civil war began in which the clans which had ousted

Barre now fought for dominance. At this time, many political scientists began calling Somalia a “failed state.” Somalia was seen as a failed state because there was no dominant authority able to reign supreme. Instead, the region was dominated by many groups vying for authority, but none of these powers were able to gain any long-standing legitimacy or form any kind of durable government structures.

In 2000, the Transitional National Government (TNG) was established, and Abdiqasim Salad Hassan was selected to be the president. Ideally, this government was put in place to help Somalia transition to a formal and legitimate government authority, but this time period was not stable. For example, the prime minister’s office turned over four times within the first three years of the TNG’s establishment. Finally, in 2012, the Federal Government of Somalia was formed, which has been the most permanent central government authority in place since 1991. This government utilizes a federal parliamentary republic, though it is not a democracy and Freedom House categorizes Somalia as “not free.” The civil war that began in 1991 has not ended, and internal disputes still wreak disastrous consequences on the Somalian people. The federal government lacks widespread support, there is constant political infighting, massive corruption as well as continuing drought conditions and the displacement of millions of Somalians. The government is also inefficient, unable to collect taxes, unable to stimulate economic productivity, and operates on an insufficient government budget.



Figure 24: A mother and daughter stand with their herd of goats in El Baraf, Somalia, on March 5. El Baraf was liberated from the terrorist group Al Shabab by the Burundian contingent of African Union Mission in Somalia on February 23, 2016.³²

In the cases of Botswana and Somalia, it can be interesting to consider the similarities and differences that led to present-day outcomes. Although both countries were deeply affected by the Scramble for Africa, one of the key differences may have been the way in which the colonial governments left the respective regions. While the British largely left Botswana to its own devices, Somalia did not have the same luck. Instead, Somalia had been initially dominated partly by Italy and partly by Britain. In time, Somalia was also affected by World War I and World War II in ways Botswana was not. The persistence disruptions and foreign interventions faced by Somalia left it fragile and more difficult to breakaway. Lacking the pre-existing conditions that Botswana benefited from, i.e. its relatively seamless transition to democratic institutions and the benefit of Britain leaving without further exploitation, and having suffering from a number of internal and external issues (e.g. turbulent history, frequently disputed territories, climatic shows disrupting agriculture, disease, and poverty), Somalia is still

³² Source: [ANISOM Photo](#) by Tobin Jones, licensed under [Public Domain](#).

struggling. In many ways, the latter half of the twentieth century was disastrous for Somalia because the area was considered to be of geo-political importance, particularly during the World Wars and the resulting cold War. The future of Somalia is uncertain, as the region is currently suffering from intense drought conditions in the midst of the ongoing civil war which began in the 1980s.

Conclusion

Our first case study is a good transition into a more nuanced discussion of why states emerged. While the state is supposed to be an effective and efficient form of government, it has clearly done better in Botswana than in Somalia. This begs the question of why states emerged, what preceded them, and whether statehood itself is an apt description of modern governing.

Chapter 5: Theories of State Emergence

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- CONSIDER VARIOUS THEORIES OF WHY THE STATE EMERGED
- CRITICALLY ANALYZE THE MAIN INGREDIENTS OF THE STATE SUCH AS SOVEREIGNTY
- CONSIDER NON-EUROPEAN EVIDENCE OF STATEHOOD AND SOVEREIGNTY
- COMPARE STATES BASED ON THEIR STRENGTH AND CAPACITIES

The State Revisited



Figure 25: World Map as of January 2023.³³

³³ Source: [World Map](#), by Janitoalevic, Original map by: CIA World Factbook, licensed under [Public Domain](#).

We begin with the state because we consider the state to be the most important center of *sovereign legitimate authority* in the world today, and therefore, the state is the most natural

political structure to begin a study of comparative politics. In 2023, there are roughly 193 independent states in the world. In 1945, at the end of World War II, there were only 51. The quick spread of statehood from centuries of feudal and colonial empires to the entire globe is not something that should be taken for granted. Today, nearly every piece of land is under the control of a state, and

One of the problems of a world map is that gives the impression that states are static and settled, but this is far from the case. According to the [CIA World Factbook](#), nearly two-thirds of the world's states have some sort of territorial dispute. Can you think of a territory or a border that is disputed? What does a territorial dispute tell you about the legitimacy of the governments involved?

nearly every person is subject to the rules of a state government, as you can clearly see in the map in Figure 26.³⁴ The study of comparative politics reveals the vast differences between how states govern themselves, but the fact that statehood as a general model has become the exclusive political institution all over the world is completely remarkable and not at all inevitable.

Therefore, it is extremely important to understand in detail what we mean by *sovereign legitimate authority*, and how that is different from previous forms of political organization.

Legitimacy is generally defined as the subjective belief that a rule or an institution should be obeyed or followed. (Hurd, 1999). It is important to distinguish a belief in the right of an

³⁴ Antarctica is the largest piece of land that is not considered a state, although several states have made claims to it, as shown on the map. Bir Tawil is a small piece of land between Egypt and Sudan that is not claimed by either state. It cannot be considered a state however, because it does not have a permanent population. It should also be noted that according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, there are approximately 12 million stateless people in the world. A stateless person is not considered a citizen or national of any state. (Manly & Persaud, 2009). However, stateless people are still often subject to the laws and control of the government of the state in which they live.

institution to make rules with believing that the rules are right or good. In fact, by disagreeing with an institutional rule and demanding that it change, one inherently accepts, at least to some degree, that the institution has the right to make rules.

Any social institution requires some sort of legitimacy to exist and to function. This includes things like families, athletic teams, universities, and religions. Institutions create and maintain legitimacy in both symbolic and strategic ways. Strategically, institutions often attempt to be transparent about their rule-making process and allow for some sort of participation by most members. Symbolically, institutions often have traditions, songs, and flags that foster a sense of belonging and loyalty among members. When an institution begins to lose legitimacy, even if it still maintains the physical elements of the institution such as buildings, money, or members, it will find it difficult to continue to rule.

Legitimacy is particularly important to states because it is through legitimacy that states derive their power in a way that their citizens will accept (Gilley, 2006). It is the reason that the social contract works (see Bozonelos et al., 2022, section 3.1). People will only give up some of their freedoms and submit to the laws of their state if they believe the state is legitimate. [The Montevideo Convention of 1933](#) defines the state as requiring (a) a government; (b) a permanent population; (c) defined territory; and (d) the capacity to enter into relations with other states.

These are the tangible elements that a state must have at a minimum, but a state will not be able function without some sort of legitimacy.

Legitimacy is also important to understanding what a state is because of another important feature of modern states: the monopoly on the use of force. Max Weber, one of the most important political theorists, defined the state as a political institution that exerts a “monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory” (Weber, 1948, p. 78). Essentially,

the state is the only entity (hence, a *monopoly*) within a territory that has the right to use physical force (this can include lethal force such as the death penalty) legally to maintain order and the social contract, but this use of force must be seen as generally justified by members of the state (hence, legitimate). This is

Because sovereignty is the single most important organizing principle of the modern political world, it is at the root of nearly every major international conflict. Most conflicts are either about a state trying to maintain its sovereignty, or a territory or people fighting to get sovereignty. Can you think of a territory or a people that want sovereignty, but they claim they do not have it?

what distinguishes the state as a legitimate institution from others within the state. Other institutions can use force but can only do so illegally without the blessing of the state and will therefore be punished by the state, or legally with the blessing of the state.³⁵ The concept of legitimacy will also be particularly important to a comparative analysis of revolution and social movements.

All states call themselves *sovereign*. This simply means that they claim the *exclusive* right to govern themselves. Sovereignty is perhaps the most important distinguishing factor between

³⁵ For example, domestic violence was treated as a legitimate use of force by many states until somewhat recently. It wasn't until 1993 that the United Nations recognized domestic violence as a human rights issue and 1994 that the United States passed the Violence Against Women Act. (Columbia University, 2018). According to WomenStats, several states still do not have comprehensive domestic violence laws, such as Myanmar, Mali, and Russia.

modern states and empires. Political scientists trace the origins of sovereignty to the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648, which ended the Thirty Years' War in Europe.

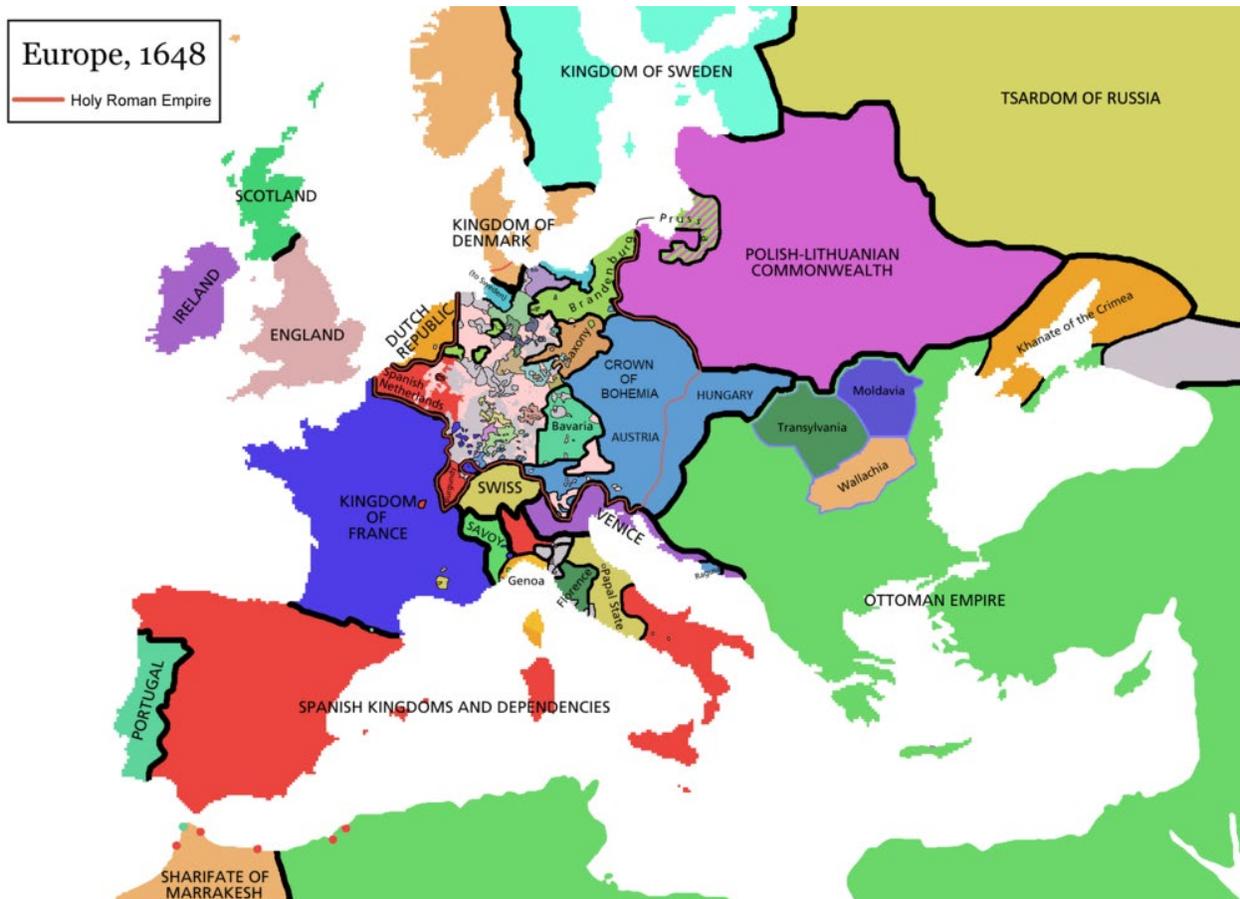


Figure 26: A map of Europe pre-sovereignty³⁶

Prior to this, the map of Europe consisted of several intersecting territories with claims by kings and princes as well as the Catholic Church, especially within the Holy Roman Empire (see Figure 26 above). This treaty recognized the exclusive right of princes to establish authority within their own territory, while also recognizing equality among states; essentially that states should respect the right of other states to control their own territory.

³⁶ Source: [Europe map 1648](#) by unknown author is licensed by [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

The first concept is known as *internal sovereignty* while the second is known as *external sovereignty*. These two concepts are two sides of the same coin: a state cannot maintain internal sovereignty without the expectation of external sovereignty from other states. Furthermore, sovereignty is an integral element of statehood because it is seen as the *source* of legitimate authority. (Strayer, 1973). A state cannot establish or maintain legitimacy without sovereignty. If there are competing sources of authority within a territory, neither one can easily claim they are the legitimate.

To maintain both internal and external sovereignty, states needed to know where their territory started and where it ended. Thus, as sovereignty began to slowly take hold, defined borders began to take shape. This is another important distinction between states and empires: established versus permeable borders.

Sovereignty is also directly related to the monopoly on the use of force and the social contract. Sovereignty gives states the right to use force within their own territory, while demanding that they refrain from doing so outside their own territory. When states do use force outside their own territory, it is often referred to as a *violation of sovereignty*. While states do violate each other's external sovereignty frequently, it is seen as rule-breaking behavior. Without the concept of sovereignty, it wouldn't be seen as breaking any rule.

Sovereignty is also the source of the social contract in that states have an exclusive right to design the terms of the contract. The balance between freedom and security will look differently in different states, and that is due to sovereignty. Therefore, while all modern states have some claim to sovereignty, each one exercises and defines it differently within their own recognized territory. On the other hand, a rather consistent feature of most modern states is that they will

vehemently defend what they perceive as their sovereign territory, resulting at times in some awkward confrontations.

For example, the Spratly Islands make up around 750 atolls and rocks in the South China Sea. While mostly uninhabited and without much in the way of natural resources, China, Taiwan, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Brunei have made claims to them, mostly as an assertion of sovereignty, an extension of territory, and access to more sea for fishing. This has led the Philippines to artificially extend one of the islands in order to fit a small runway. Even more strangely, the People's Republic of China has erected a large metal frame with the Chinese flag on top in the Gaven Reefs, which is merely a six-foot tall sand dune in the middle of the ocean.



Figure 27: An island in the Spratlys³⁷

³⁷ Source: [Spratly Island](#), by Tadashi Mori – originally posted to Flickr as Spratly islands 6, licensed under [CC BY-SA 2.0](#).

Sovereignty Revisited

This is the traditional story of how we went from empires to states: European leaders were looking for a solution to constant warfare as Europe emerged out of the dark ages and started to participate in previously established global trade routes by African, Chinese, and Indian traders. Sovereignty also allowed for kings to rule more effectively and efficiently, since their independence allowed for the creation of standing armies, bureaucracies, and a taxation system. All three of these elements are considered features of almost all modern states today and each can be traced back to the notion of sovereignty. Yet, it would be too glib to assume that the ingredients of sovereignty simply came into being in 1648; surely, the seeds that eventually led to Westphalia were planted long before and outside of Europe, which we will explore a bit below. The story of how this model of governing spread from Europe to the rest of the world is told largely through a vast shift in wealth from Asia and the Indian sub-continent to Europe through conquest, slavery, and colonialism. The implication of this story is that sovereignty was a privilege only for the Western world until the European colonial empires were forced to finally give up their overseas territory, a process that wasn't complete until at least the 1970's.

However, it also bears the question of what societies looked like before the onset of sovereignty, as well as what sovereignty looks like for those states that gained sovereignty later than the Global North. This section will briefly consider this question because it can help us understand the problems experienced by many contemporary states as well as societies within sovereign states.

Snapshot Case Study: Qing Dynasty in modern-day China



Figure 28: Detailed map of China, location of China in East Asia³⁸

Full Country Name: People's Republic of China

Head of State: President Xi Jinping

Head of Government: Premier Li Qiang

Government: Unitary Single-party state

Official Language: Mandarin, Cantonese

Economic System: State-Oriented Economy

Location: East Asia

Capital: Beijing

Total land size: 9,596,960 sq km; 224,610 sq. miles

Population: 1,413,142,846

GDP: \$24.861 trillion

³⁸ Source: Source: From left to right: [Map of China](#) by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#); [Locator Map](#), by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#).

GDP per capita: \$17,600

Currency: Chinese Yuan

As a major player in the world today, with a GDP that might surpass the US in the coming decades, and one of a handful of nuclear-armed states, a consideration of statehood and sovereignty would be incomplete without a discussion of China and its understanding of itself as a sovereign state. China can be treated as a representative case of non-European statehood.

China has existed as a political community for many centuries, long before many of the most prominent European political philosophers such as Thucydides, Hobbes, and Locke. The philosophical tradition of China is rooted in the works of Confucius, whose writing in the sixth century BC reflect his experience living in a chaotic political atmosphere, commonly called the “Warring States Era.” It was during this time that authority was being challenged and the result was a breakup of the Chou dynasty into smaller feudal states like city-states in what is now Italy. While Confucius’ political philosophy is quite different than many of the founding philosophers of the European tradition, emphasizing harmony and rule by moral example, the map of China during his lifetime was not unlike the map of pre-Westphalian Europe (see Figure 26 on page 112) (Bloodworth & Bloodworth, 2004). The feeling of being part of an ancient and culturally consistent society informs much of current Chinese state behavior today, viewing many Western states as newcomers in the world without the knowledge and experience of a more established society.

The Qing Empire was established around the same time as Westphalia, around 1636 and lasted until 1912, when the Republic of China was established, which will eventually lead to the Chinese state we know today. The formation of the modern Chinese state also happens to be a

moment of crisis in the European experiment with sovereignty as World War I was on the horizon. The Qing Empire is considered an empire because it did not have fixed territorial borders, as one can see in Figure 29: Qing Empire circa 1820 but it can hardly be said that European state borders remained fixed after 1648. It contained many features of modern states such as a hierarchical governing structure in which the empire was the highest legitimate authority, a formal education system, a sort of taxation system in the form of “tribute” to the emperor, a state army, and a social contract in which the empire provided military protection to its subjects (Fairbank & Goldman, 2006).



Figure 29: Qing Empire circa 1820³⁹

³⁹ Source: [Qing Empire](#) by Philg88: [Attribution Wikimedia Foundation](#), - Own work - incorporates modified version of File:Empire of the Great Qing (orthographic projection). Note that the map excludes Tawang from Tibet., licensed under [CC BY 4.0](#).

A possibly unique feature of the Qing Empire, which is still central to China's view of itself today, is its belief that the Empire was the "Middle Kingdom," and the emperor was the king of the universe. This is distinctive in the sense that it is contrary to a more horizontal political community in which all sovereign states are legally equal. Yet, it cannot be denied that while this may have been the way European sovereignty was supposed to work in theory, the practice was rather different. European people and leaders often thought of themselves as morally and politically superior to others, resulting in many wars after 1648, as well as vast colonial empires built on a belief that non-European people needed "civilizing" (Yancy, 2008).

Indeed, it was the colonial expansion of European powers that ultimately led to the end of Chinese dynasties. While China is famous for the Silk Road, which connected Asia, the Middle East and Europe, it also followed a fairly isolationist foreign policy until European and American expansion forced them to change course in the 1830's. The British brought opium and when China tried to outlaw it due to widespread addiction, this triggered two wars, both of which led to China's defeat. It was here that Hong Kong was ceded to the British, which remained a crown colony until 1997.

The final blow was the Boxer Rebellion, which was a series of anti-colonial uprisings, resulting in the invasion of China by an international force of European, American, and Japanese soldiers that suppressed the protestors and led to the overthrow of the Qing dynasty. The series of unequal treaties and attempts at colonization are central in the collective memory of Chinese citizens and policymakers, and avoiding and rectifying these series of events is an important goal of contemporary Chinese foreign policy. For example, the Belt and Road Initiative is a massive foreign investment project in over 150 countries which is not only meant to develop the target economies, but to increase China's power in the world as a counter to Western hegemony. (Yan,

2019). At the same time, China takes great pride in the fact that colonial efforts largely failed in the Chinese mainland, as do several other states that weren't fully colonized. (See Student Feature: Ethiopia as a deviant case of post-colonial state-building, page 157).



Figure 30: An attack on the Beijing Castle during the Boxer Rebellion⁴⁰

This brief study of China reveals an important addendum to the traditional story of the origins of sovereignty: elements of modern statehood predate the consolidation of European sovereignty and took place far from the European continent. Furthermore, we can learn some important lessons about the origins of statehood outside in the Global South. This includes the role of colonialism and anti-colonial movements, subsequent suspicion of Western powers and the need for counterweights to Northern hegemony, and the birth of a multilayered identity including an ancient civilization, a precolonial culture, as well as the continuing legacy of contact with

⁴⁰ Source: [An attack on Beijing Castle](#) by Kasai Torajirō - This image is available from the United States Library of Congress #039, Prints and Photographs division under the digital ID jpd.02541, licensed under [Public Domain](#).

colonial empires and how best to assert one's sovereignty in a post-colonial environment. This general experience is a pattern that applies to many ex-colonies, as we will see throughout this text.

The next case study also demonstrates that certain features of the sovereign state existed not just in China, but also in the Americas.

Student Feature Study: Sovereignty in the Iroquois Confederacy

By Sadie Kelley, edited by Holly Oberle

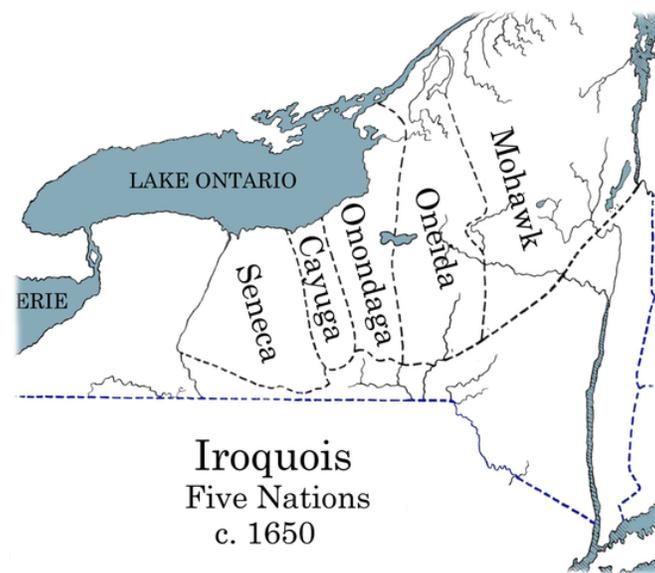


Figure 31: Map of the Iroquois Confederacy⁴¹

Full Name: Iroquois Confederacy or the Haudensaunee (The People of the Longhouse)

Government: Participatory Democracy

Official Languages: Oneida, Cayuga, Mohawk, Onondaga, Seneca and Tuscarora

⁴¹ Source: [Iroquois Five-Nations Map circa 1650](#), by R. A. Nonenmacher, licensed under [Public Domain](#).

Location: Upstate New York, Wisconsin, Oklahoma, Eastern Canada

Introduction

The Iroquois Confederacy challenges the traditional notions of sovereignty having emerged out of Europe and also demonstrates a form of government that is rare in today's world: a confederacy. This was defined in Federal, Unitary, and Confederate States on page 89. The Iroquois Confederacy was composed of five different nations originally: the Oneida, Cayuga, Seneca, Mohawk, and Onondaga. The Tuscarora joined in the 18th century (Graymont, 1993). Today, the confederacy is still composed of the six different nations, all located between Upstate New York, Wisconsin, Oklahoma, and in parts of Ontario, Canada.

Structure of the Confederacy

Within these nations there are clans assigned to each different tribe. A clan is described as a group of people that are named after an animal or bird, which all have different responsibilities for taking care of the Iroquois Confederacy throughout their life. Each clan has their own Clanmother, whose duties are to honor the Iroquois nations, make decisions that affect each clan, assign individuals their Haudnesuane name, and elect and ensure the wellbeing of each clan member. Each nation has different meanings to describe their responsibilities. The Oneida, The People of the Standing Stone; the Cayuga, People of the Great Swamp; the Seneca people come from the People of the Great Hill or Keepers of the Western Door; the Mohawk people are known as the Keepers of the Flint or sometimes named Keepers of the Eastern Door; the Onondaga are known as the Keepers of the Flame; and lastly, the nation of Tuscarora, who are known as People of the Shirt (Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian, n.d.).

This confederation consisted of many features of "modern" states, such as kinship (what today we refer to as nationalism) within the six nations due to their military, economic and political

power from the 1400s to the 1600s. We see nationalism in states today through similar processes—people feel united under a state due to military, economic and political power of their state. The name they call themselves, before the French gave them the name “Iroquois,” is the Haudenosaune. This translates in English to the people of the longhouse. This means that all six nations live with each other and are united with peace. The Longhouses are homes that are divided by clan within each nation. They are multigenerational as everyone lives under one roof together. The Iroquois thought of the Longhouses as a symbol of their territories being one Longhouse from the West to the East of Upstate New York.

The Iroquois Confederacy is one of the first and longest running participatory democracies (discussed in more detail in Chapter 6: Democracy) (Vecsey, 1986). The creation of the Iroquois Confederacy can be traced back to 1142, when the Deganawi:dah, the Peacemaker, brought together the disgruntled nations in order to create peace between them. This created the longest running democracy in what is now the United States (Johansen, 1995). Although there were frequent battles between the five nations, through the Peacemaker teachings, the nations were able to exist in relative peace (Fenton, 1998).

The Peacemaker symbolically tied together five arrows to resemble the unity and strength of the original five nations. Each nation governed themselves and had differences that separated them due to where their location in what is now New York state. This is the classic model of a confederacy in which the subunits maintain a high degree of sovereignty but are united under a federal agreement. (Refer to Figure 20 on page 90 for a visual representation of confederate governments). Still to this day the Iroquois communities use the principles of the Great Law of peace, power, and righteousness to live and govern their sovereign nations. The Great Law was created to respect the rights of people within the Iroquois Confederacy. It was an oral agreement

as the Iroquois don't follow written laws. The only written agreements are treaties and agreements with Wampum Belts (see Figure 33), which are made from shell. Agreements were made with Europeans as they arrived in Native territory and were only made through oral agreements or physically with Wampum Belts. (Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian, n.d.). The Wampum belts were never worn as clothing. They are purely symbols of agreements between nations or colonists as a way of holding each side to their end of the agreement.

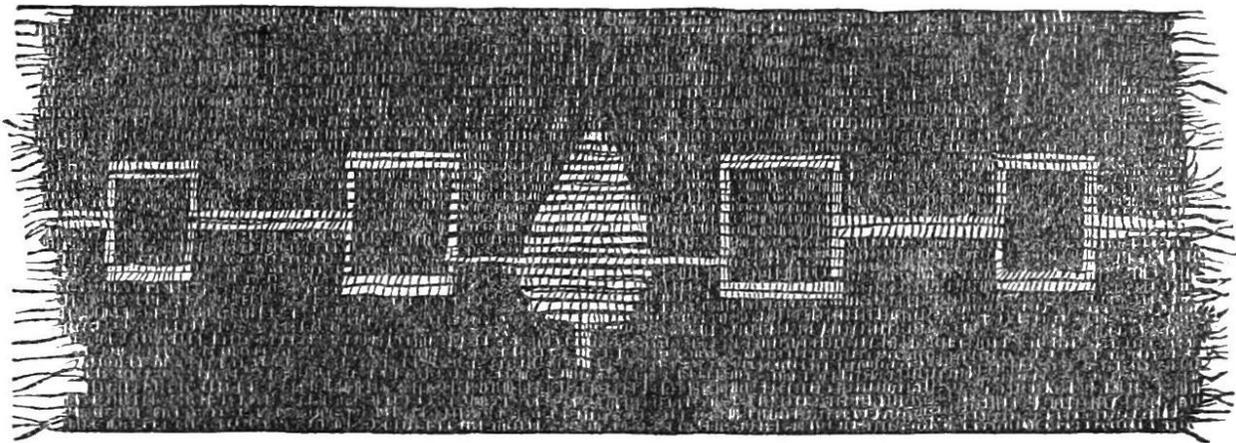


Figure 32: Wampum Belt used in treaty making by the Iroquois Confederacy⁴²

Comparison to the US Government

The Iroquois Confederacy heavily influenced the creation of US democracy through the making of the Constitution and the subsequent evolution of the American political system. The comparison between the Iroquois Confederacy and the modern-day United States government can be shown through the Grand Council. The Onondaga Nation was known as the heart of the Confederacy with 14 elected officials that were appointed by Clanmothers. Clanmothers hold the

⁴² Source: [Wampum belt commemorating the Iroquois Confederacy](#), by Unknown author - Popular Science Monthly Volume 28, licensed under [Public Domain](#).

highest power within the Iroquois Confederacy because they can appoint men in leadership roles, but also dismiss them of their role and power. That is how the checks and power system was created within the Iroquois Confederacy. The Elders Brothers job is to use their honorable qualities to preserve the Confederacy, and nine Seneca and Mohawk serve on the Grand Council for life. The representatives from the Oneida and Cayuga are called the younger brothers of the Confederacy. They have the same job and ethical concerns as the elder brothers, but there are ten Cayuga and nine Oneida men that serve and represent their nation on the Grand Council.

<p>As the Iroquois Confederacy and the Great Law of Peace state that there are designated two branches of legislature with procedures for passing laws, as would be the Elder and Younger brothers and the Heart of the Confederacy which would be the Onondaga Nation of the Grand Council.</p>	<p>The United States Constitution in Article I, Section 1 or the Vesting Clauses reads as “All Legislative Powers herein granted shall be vested in Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and House of Representatives,” the Constitution lays out the powers within the two branches of decision making, the same as the Iroquois Confederacy.</p>
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Figure 33: Comparing the Great Law of the Iroquois with the United States Constitution⁴³

The United States Constitution was greatly influenced by the symbolism and the description of the Great Law of peace. The founding fathers adopted the representation of the bundle of 13 arrows indicating the newly formed colonies as a unified government (Hansen, 2018). It wasn't

⁴³ Source: Sadie Kelley, licensed under [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

until 1987 that the United States Senate formally acknowledged this fact in a special resolution (Johansen, 1995).



Figure 34: Obverse of the Great Seal of the United States, with the eagle carrying 13 arrows⁴⁴

Conclusion

In conclusion, a brief case study of the Qing Dynasty in China and the Six Nations in colonial America demonstrate how elements of modern statehood and sovereignty existed outside of Europe and prior to the Treaty of Westphalia. These cases should be juxtaposed against the traditional story of sovereignty being birthed during the Thirty Year's War in Europe and demonstrates that comparative politics has too often focused on Western theories and Western histories. It is the hope that future generations of comparative politics scholars will continue this line of critique, perhaps focusing on such case studies as the Islamic Empires and pre-colonial African and Latin American civilizations. Another useful line of inquiry could be a comparative

⁴⁴ Source: [Great Seal of the United States \(obverse\)](#), by U.S. Government, licensed under [Public Domain](#).

analysis of territories and/or communities that do not enjoy statehood or sovereignty, such as Taiwan, Palestine, or the Kurds.

Theories of Statehood

Now that we have explored the definition of modern statehood, as well as some of the ingredients that, at least theoretically, distinguish states from previous forms of political organization, we must now ask *how did the state emerge and become the dominant source of legitimate authority today?* To answer this question, scholars have developed several theories, which we will explore below.

Bellicist Theory

Perhaps the most popular set of theories for the emergence of the modern state is that

“war made the state, and the state made war” (Tilly, 1985, p. 170). This is a famous quote from the foremost scholar from this tradition, Charles Tilly. The argument is incredibly simple: warfare created states and the state continues because it is an effective coercive tool due to its claims to sovereignty and legitimacy. More specifically, Tilly argues that warfare creates the desire for a ruler to establish control over a specific territory and the people within that territory, which leads him to extract resources from his opponents as well as repress his opponents.

Successful extraction and repression of opponents leads to legitimation by his supporters, which then leads to strong states. This is called the bellicist theory since the main explanatory variable

*Recall what we mean by a **theory** in political science: a general explanation concerning a particular phenomenon based on evidence and observation. A **hypothesis** is an expectation of **why** a phenomenon occurs. A hypothesis is more specific than a theory and consists of an independent variable (the explanation or cause) and the dependent variable (the outcome of the effect). Recall also that a theory in political science must be **falsifiable**.*

is bellicosity, or warfare. Clearly, this is rooted in the traditional story of the thirty-year stalemate in 17th century Europe. Bellicist theorists have an answer to the puzzle discussed above that questions whether the state is truly a European phenomenon: China and other societies such as those in Latin America and Africa did not experience as much external conflict with other empires (Centeno, 2002; Herbst, 1990; Hui, 2005). Therefore, European powers had the need to consolidate their societies into more efficient war-fighting machines. Fighting wars meant rulers needed a more sophisticated bureaucracy, a more streamlined taxation system, and a consistent source of willing fighters. The state, specifically the European state, solves these problems. Furthermore, it means that the state is likely to win wars over other types of communities which explains not only the emergence of the state, but also the spread of the state and the dissolution of empires.

Yet, as a testable theory of statehood it remains questionable: did war make the state, or did the state make war? What exactly is the dependent and independent variable? A neglected ingredient for successful state-building in the bellicist theory is the nation, and whether nationalism is necessary for a state to emerge. Furthermore, in order to shield itself from charges of Eurocentrism, one would have to show how the European wars of the 17th century were sufficiently unique from most of the previous wars as well as those outside of Europe to have led to state creation that centuries of other wars did not have. Indeed, to make this claim, one would have to be clear about what constitutes an “external conflict.”

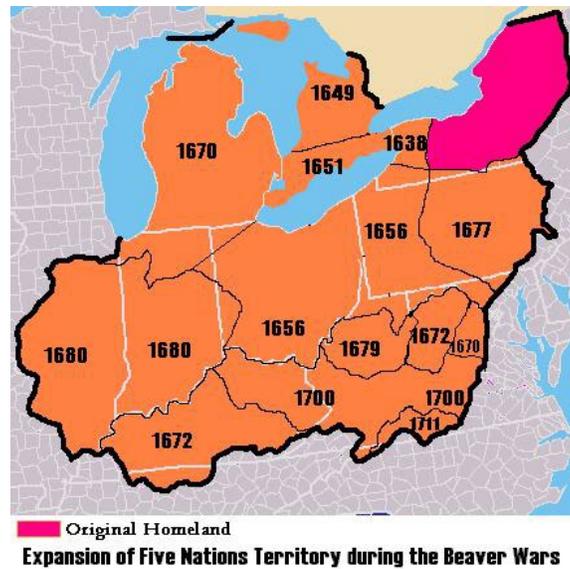


Figure 35: Iroquois expansion during the Beaver Wars by year⁴⁵

The Iroquois Confederacy arguably fought several external wars not only with neighboring Indigenous peoples of North America but also with further-flung foes such as the Dutch and the French. Known colloquially as the “Beaver Wars,” this series of conflicts also took place during the same period as the so-called birth of sovereignty in Europe and resulted in the defeat of several rival communities such as the Hurons and the Mahicans (Starna & Brandao, 2004). In fact, one could argue that “external warfare” presupposes sovereignty and depends upon a relatively clear understanding of who and what “internal” and “external” is.

In order to be falsifiable, we would need to be able to show how a state can emerge *without* war, especially interstate “total” wars. Few examples of this seemingly exist. Similarly, it fails to acknowledge the variety of states that have been weakened due to war, rather than strengthened.

Therefore, it is prudent to briefly explore two peculiar cases of state-building in the Global

⁴⁵ Source: [A map of Iroquois expansion during the war](#) by Codex Sinaiticus - map is Own work; data taken from Jesuit Relations and English colonial records, licensed under [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

South: Lesotho and Afghanistan. In both cases, war certainly played a central role, but other factors also point to the weaknesses of the bellicist position.

Snapshot Case Study: Afghanistan



Figure 36: A detailed map of Afghanistan and the local of Afghanistan in South Asia⁴⁶

Full Country Name: Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan

Head of State: Hibatullah Akhundzada

Government: Theocracy

Official Language: Afghan Persian or Dari

Economic System: Informal

Location: South Asia

Capital: Kabul

Total land size: 652,230 sq km; 251,827 sq miles

⁴⁶ Source: From left to right, [Map of Afghanistan](#) by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#); [Locator Map](#) by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#).

Population: 39,232,003

GDP: \$20.24 billion

GDP per capita: \$1,500

Currency: Afghani

Rubin (2002, p. 19) describes Afghanistan as “a borderland between empires.” Indeed, it has been the subject of invasion and division by Arab, Persian and Moghuls empires over several centuries, before being caught between the British and the Russian empires in the 19th century. It achieved full independence after World War I but had the basic vestiges of a state prior to this. Already, the thesis that non-European civilizations didn’t evolve into states due to a lack of external warfare should be called into question considering this case. Thus, Afghanistan could be considered a representative case in the Global South of warfare weakening the state.

During the Soviet occupation from 1979-1989, despite having a common enemy, the government was unable to unify the various linguistic, ethnic, and religious groups into a centralized bureaucracy capable of efficiently extracting resources and oppressing the enemy. The withdraw of the Soviets left a power vacuum that, combined with support from the United States and Pakistan, allowed what would become the Taliban to take over. However, despite having juridical control over most of Afghan territory, the Taliban was unable to accomplish the basic functions of a state required by the bellicist tradition: centralization, taxation, and mobilization (Korishetti, 2022).

After September 11th, 2001, the US demanded that the Taliban surrender Osama bin Laden. When the Taliban refused, the US led an invasion along with NATO which quickly toppled the Taliban government; but the Taliban continued an insurgency against the US-backed government

from Pakistan during which they consolidated power perhaps more considerably than when they controlled the government directly. From 2001-2021, the United States, despite considerable economic, political, and military resources, also struggled to establish the basic elements of statehood, most significantly the monopoly on the use of force and legitimacy.

When the US abruptly left Afghanistan in August of 2021, once again the Taliban found it rather easy to take over the country, perhaps because of the war-fighting and bureaucratic experience it gained while running a shadow government during the US occupation. They provided basic services in places NATO couldn't or wouldn't reach such as administering education and taxing the transport of goods. They also began to recognize the benefits of external sovereignty by declaring "positive relations with all neighbors based on mutual respect..." (Hummel, 2021). However, as of publication, not one other state has recognized the legitimacy of the Taliban government. Further, the country is now enduring a humanitarian and economic catastrophe due to the sudden withdraw of billions of dollars of foreign aid upon the Taliban's takeover.



Figure 37: The author in front of the Karte Sakhi shrine in Kabul in 2015⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Source: By Holly Oberle, licensed under [CC BY-ND 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/).

While there is some evidence that the Taliban may be trying to be more “state like” now than they were prior to 2001, it is still far from a strong state, despite having the so-called advantages of interstate warfare throughout much of its history. In fact, war has had the opposite effect: war has made Afghanistan weaker. On the one hand, this case serves as a counter point to Tilly’s original hypothesis; on the other hand, it might bolster his hypothesis by teaching us lessons about the struggles that failed European states experienced, such as the incompatibility between statehood and religious authority and the challenges of an ethnically and linguistically diverse population (Taylor & Botea, 2008). Ultimately, war did not make Afghanistan a strong state, and could have even been state-destroying.

Student Feature: Lesotho

By Juston Robson, edited by Holly Oberle

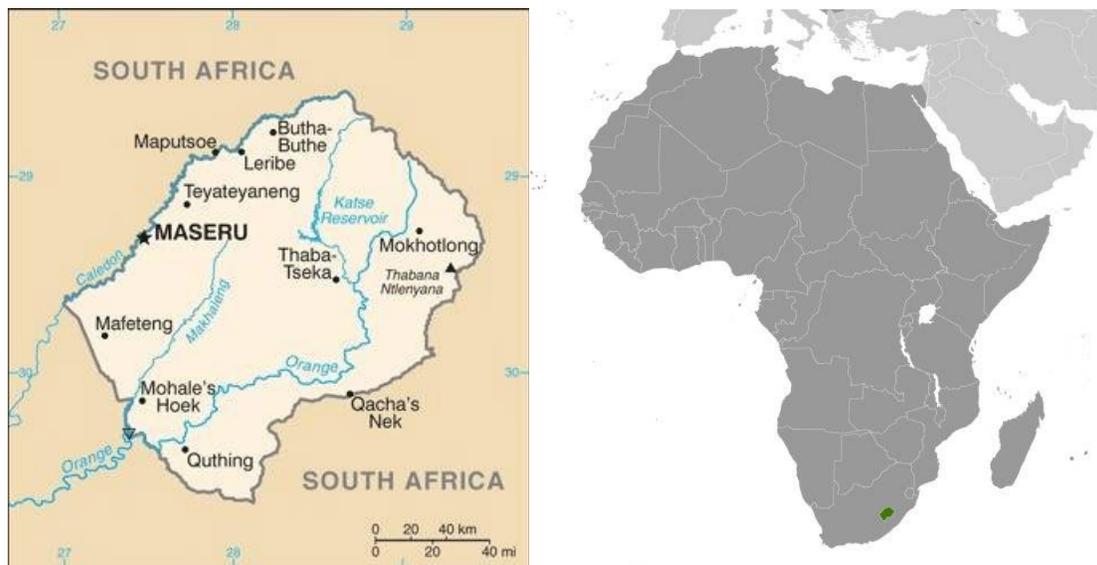


Figure 38: Detailed map of Lesotho and the location of Lesotho on the African continent⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Source: From left to right: [Map of Lesotho](#), by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#); [Locator Map](#), by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#).

Full Country Name: The Kingdom of Lesotho

Head of State: King Letsie III

Head of Government: Prime Minister Samuel Matekane

Official Language: Sesotho, English

Government: Parliamentary Constitutional Monarchy

Economic System: Informal

Location: Southern Africa

Capital: Maseru

Total land size: 30,355 sq km; 11,720 sq miles

Population: 2,210,646

GDP: \$5.236 billion

GDP per capita: \$2,300

Currency: Loti

Lesotho is an extremely peculiar case in international politics. At the time of writing, it is the only country on Earth that is both enclaved (fully enclosed by another state's territory) and formally recognized as a state by the United Nations. This deviant case in state formation has some elements that support bellicose theory, but it also shows that this theory tends to fall short in the Global South. It also can be aptly used as an argument for why the vast majority of modern states aren't enclaves; the circumstances that led to Lesotho's formation are difficult to replicate and some aspects are very specific to the era of colonialism.

What would eventually become the Kingdom of Lesotho was originally known as Basuto, born out of the Mfecane in the 1820s. Moshoeshoe, the first king of Basuto, was able to consolidate many neighboring chiefdoms into his nation-state during this period of mass unrest, famine, and

war (Mofuoa, 2016). This was in large part due to the mountainous and defensible geography Basuto was founded upon, and willingness to adapt to the times; Moshoeshoe eventually acquired what is thought to be “more horses and firearms than any other chief in South Africa,” with guns becoming a critical and reoccurring part of their history (Atmore & Sanders, 1971, p. 536). After a series of wars with the Boers in the late 1850s and 1860s, most of the Basuto territory was annexed by the Orange Free State. The remaining territory then received colonial protection from the British in 1868 with the goal of preventing further Boer annexation (Eldredge, 2007). Now known as Basutoland, the territory was annexed into Cape Colony until the Gun War of 1880 led to its eventual dis-annexation (a rare occurrence since it is believed that states are inclined to hold on defend their territory vehemently, especially annexed territory). In 1884 it was completely separated from what would eventually become the Republic of South Africa and would be a separately administered Crown Colony until its independence in 1966. For a state to exist, it must have the sufficient means to maintain its internal as well as external sovereignty. Otherwise, it simply won’t be seen as legitimate by the people within its borders or other entities abroad. Bellicist theory provides a simple explanation as to how states were able to come upon said means; conflict fueled the need for a more organized state as it was more effective at maintaining and preserving itself than older empires.

Parts of this theory do match with Lesotho’s history well; the gun culture of Lesotho was absolutely born out of its long history of conflict in the region. As Eldredge (2007, p. 71) points out, in reference to the eventual Gun War: “Guns had determined the outcomes of battles over land, cattle, and people in southern Africa for fifty years; the BaSotho [sic] insistence on the retention of their arms derived not from the hours of labor and the capital they invested to obtain them but from the desire to protect their land, property, and freedom.” Guns became linked to the

national identity as they were the tools that facilitated the defense of their sovereignty and interests; the rise of Basuto nationalism is inseparable from their history of conflict. This history of conflict simultaneously worked as an incentive to fight when the Cape Colony attempted to enforce the Peace Preservation Act (with the goal of disarming the general public), and as a means to fight, as their inclination and procurement of firearms obviously aided them during the Gun War.

The problem, however, is that warfare theories don't adequately explain the persistence of the Lesotho state and its enclaved nature. To be fair, it had the means and some notable geographical advantages, but it was almost completely annexed by the Boers in the 1860s. It also would make sense that Lesotho, as it didn't expand, would have likely been reintegrated into the Cape Colony especially after the Cape Colony's successes against the Boers and the creation of the Union of South Africa. At that point it would have been a much weaker state by comparison and having a unified territory would be a strong incentive for South Africa.



Figure 39: Map of what would eventually become the Union of South Africa⁴⁹

An enclaved state like Lesotho only exists due to the unique interplay of colonial forces in the region, and this is likely a major reason as to why enclaved states aren't a widespread

⁴⁹ Source: [File:South Africa late19thC map.png](#) by [JasonAQuest](#) is licensed under [CC BY-SA 2.5](#).

phenomenon. The colonial powers had weak internal sovereignty due to the strong communities they were attempting to subjugate. This weakness allowed Lesotho to separate. The Cape Colony was largely struggling to maintain rule of its territory during the 1880s. It was spread thin and relied on indirect rule over chiefs as it couldn't afford to send more colonial magistrates. After the British loss at Isandlwana, there was also a fear of a mass loss of confidence in British rule and open, organized rebellion. The Peace Preservation Act of 1878 enabled the "preemptive disarmament of any group where rebellion had occurred or was feared"; it was a last-ditch effort to maintain internal sovereignty in the region as indirect rule failed and the threat of rebellions grew (Eldredge, 2007, p. 55). This weak, indirect rule echoes the problems empires had in general, and was the perfect stage for Lesotho independence.

The most important factor, though, and one that's extremely difficult to replicate, is the fact that Lesotho (Or then, Basutoland) remained a British colony after its dis-annexation. It was, for all intents and purposes, still British territory, which provided defense against the Boers, but also gave it a form of defense against being merged back into the Union of South Africa. After all, forcible reintegration would be an attack not just on the Basuto people, but on a fellow dominion of the British Empire. Sharing the same colonizer was, strangely, a moderating force in the region.

It was the interaction of geography, effectiveness in conflict, and its diplomacy with colonial powers that allowed Lesotho to become an enclave and persist as one. While some of these factors may not be inherently unique, their combination is rare; Lesotho is an extremely rare state that is largely a relic of its colonial past. Thus, while bellicist theories help to explain the curious case of Lesotho, other factors such as culture, economy, nationalism, and colonization are also important. We will consider these in subsequent sections.

Economic Theories

Economic theories of the state largely follow a similar logic as bellicist theories: the state “won” over other forms of political organization because the state was more efficient at solving imperial governing problems. While bellicist theories focus on the efficiency of war, economic theorists focus on the efficiency of economic modernization. The state arose because, due to familiar innovations such as centralization, legitimation, and mobilization, it was better able to control capital.

There are two versions of this main idea: Marxism and what we might call “elite coalitions.” The argument, however, is mostly the same: the state served as a convenient means for elites to consolidate their wealth. The Marxist version, however, takes a pessimistic view in that this consolidation of wealth largely took place within the *bourgeoisie* (owners of money), leaving the proletariat, or the workers, subjects of a new exploitative system with few substantial differences from feudalism (Marx & Engels, 1978). It is worth pointing out that Charles Tilly was also a bit pessimistic about the rise of the state, often calling it “organized crime with the advantage of legitimacy” (Tilly, 1985). The elite coalition argument is less pessimistic and sees the state as empowering local landowners to seek protection, rights, and more control over their own capital (North et al., 2013). Another version of this theory is that the state found a way to provide public goods more effectively through a better system of coordination (Hardin, 1997).

The critiques of these perspectives are also not unlike those leveled at the bellicists. First, it is not clear whether capitalism caused the state, or the state caused capitalism. Second, the economic theories do not seem to pay much attention to the effect of nationalism on the development of the state. Third, these theories may be myopic in that they are based almost entirely on observations of the emergence of statehood in Europe. Even Marx, whose incisive

critique of capitalism has become essential to understanding the experience of the Global South under global capitalism, based his theory primarily by witnessing the effects of the Industrial Revolution in 19th century Europe.

Regardless of whether the birth of capitalism prefaced the state or vice versa, economic theories need to content with the fact that “pre-sovereign” societies also found ways to amass great wealth and control the flow of capital. Several “pre-state” empires were not only fantastically wealthy, but they were also the cultural and economic centers of the globe at the time.

These include the Mughal Dynasty in modern India (1526-1857), most famous for the Taj Mahal. During its reign, it was politically and economically dominant, as they controlled trade routes connecting China to Europe and produced the world’s most popular product, black pepper. The Mughals were at least nominally sovereign in that the emperor was the highest legitimate authority. The empire also displayed an unusual degree of religious tolerance, as a Muslim-run empire over a majority Hindu population. It is also notable for its civil administration and taxation policies. Thus, not only did this empire display some elements of modern statehood, but it was also able to control the flow of goods and wealth both domestically and internationally for more than 300 years (Fisher, 2015).

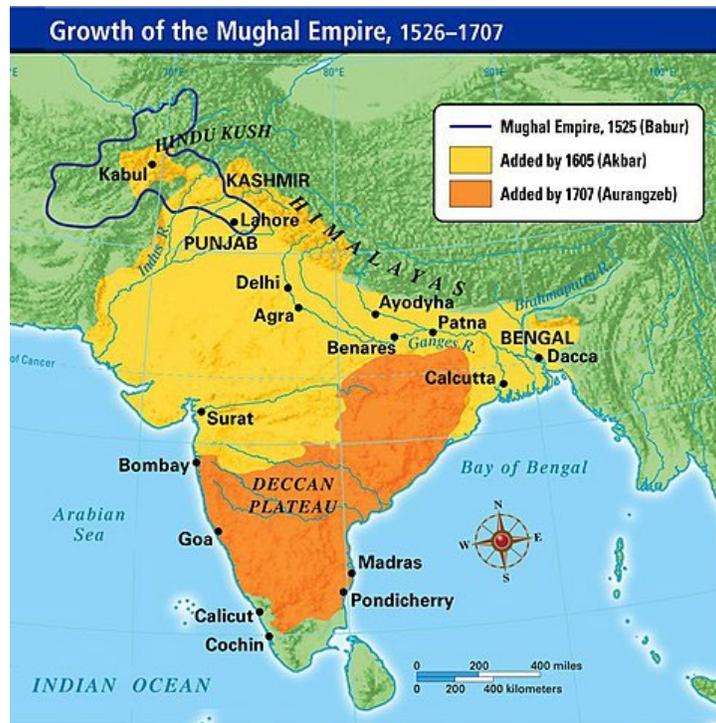


Figure 40: Growth of the Mughal Empire⁵⁰

Feminist Theories

Feminist theories of the state are rarely mentioned in introductory textbooks of comparative politics, but it is important to at least consider these perspectives before we compare states based on gender equality, a popular topic. The most prominent feminist theorist of the state is MacKinnon (1991). She starts with a Marxist conception of the state as described above, but not only discusses the ability of the state to concentrate wealth in the elite nexus of capitalists and state officials, but also considers the consistent ability of the state to concentrate power in the hands of men. Therefore, for a feminist (especially a Marxist feminist), the state became a more efficient regulator of both capital and women, which led to its rise and dominance. Indeed, most states have historically gone to great lengths to keep women (and other underrepresented groups)

⁵⁰ Source: [Mughal Empire Map](#) by Santosh mbahrm - own work, licensed under [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

out of positions of power within the state apparatus by making it illegal for women to vote, run for office, attain a certain level of education, or participating in the military. Many of these laws have only recently been undone, and many states still have not had a female head of state or government.

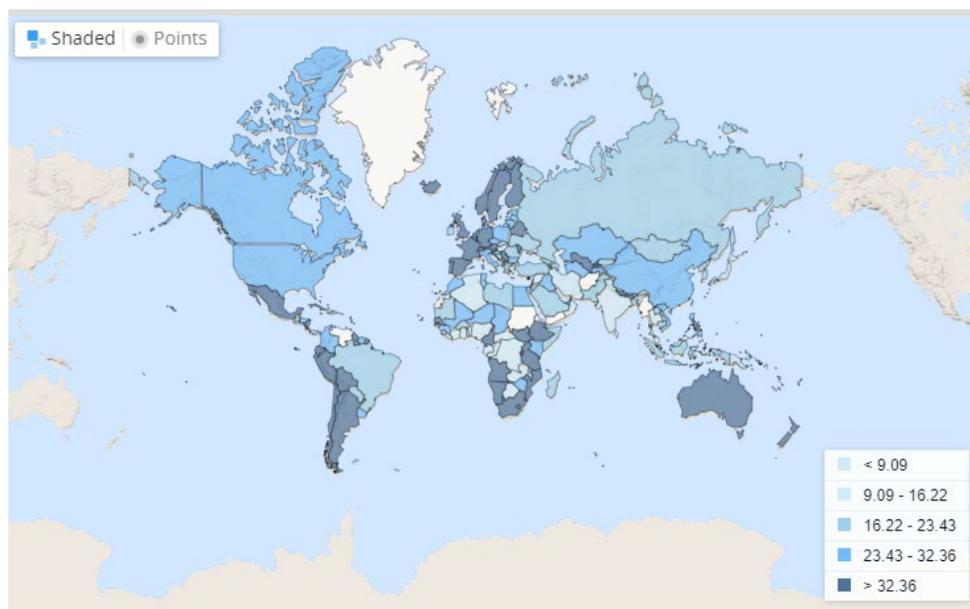


Figure 41: Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments by percentage in 2022⁵¹

More philosophically, feminists critique the idea of the modern state as embodying stereotypical “masculine” qualities such as rationality, aggression and self-reliance (often called the principle of “self-help”). Those people within the state that display these qualities are given higher status than others, hence why most states somewhere along their development tended to value the activities of men over those of women. The creation of the state, especially through internal and external sovereignty, also creates a split between the public and the private. The state is concerned with public life, and society with private life. This split also becomes gendered in that

⁵¹ Source: [Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments \(%\)](#) by the World Bank, licensed under [CC BY-4.0](#).

men occupy the public and women in the private. The consequence of this is that women are rendered unsuitable for public life. Hoffman (2001) contends that one of the main causes of the state was men attempting to gain more power over other men as well as women and their reproductive capacity. Patriarchy therefore is both a cause and an effect of state sovereignty, according to feminist theories.

It is unclear whether patriarchy, however, is truly intertwined with the emergence of the state or if patriarchy existed well before. Exhaustive reviews of societies across cultures and across time have uncovered a great variety of gender roles and hierarchies, some deeply patriarchal and others surprisingly egalitarian. For example, in ancient Egypt, women had equal status before the law and they worshipped both male and female gods. Women had the right to own property as well as inherit land equally with male counterparts, implying a great deal of economic power. Women participated in public professions such as money lending. There were several female Pharaohs. Still, women's rights existed through their relationship to men and men held most of the power and privilege (Roth, 2020).

At the same time, there is also a wealth of evidence that the gender roles of Indigenous communities were often completely upended in favor of a much stricter gender hierarchy during the process of colonization. This includes the Incas, whose patriarchal society held some complementary roles for women and the ability for women to serve in politically important roles. After the Spanish conquest, most women were relegated to second-class citizens, and a complex hierarchy of ethnicity, religion, and gender resulted, some of which is still in existence in modern Peru (Bakewell et al., 2010).



Figure 42: Egyptian man and woman harvesting crops together⁵²

While there is much to be gained from feminist critiques of modern statehood and sovereignty, it remains, like many other theories, a weak account for why the state *emerged*. Certainly, patriarchy existed prior to the state. Yet, there is also evidence that the European state model did, for many centuries, depend on a particularly strict gender hierarchy that was imposed on non-European societies, and many modern states have continued that hierarchy in various capacities. It could also be argued that this gender hierarchy wasn't dependent on the European *state* per se, but rather on the capitalist economic model instead. Still, one could argue that it has also been through the state, however with great resistance, that women have *gained* more rights than they have ever enjoyed in human history. Therefore, it can be said that the European state model was indeed deeply patriarchal, and institutionalizing existing gender roles may have been one of many reasons for the consolidation of power in a state. But gender roles and patriarchy vary

⁵² Source: [Couple harvesting crops](#), by Anonymous Egyptian tomb artist(s) - Scanned from The Oxford encyclopedia of ancient Egypt ISBN 0-19-510234-7, licensed under [Public Domain](#).

greatly by culture and were profoundly altered by colonization. Therefore, we should consider theories of the state that consider both culture and colonization.

Cultural Theories

This text has questioned two traditional notions of the state: first, that the state arose primarily in Europe; and second, that states are substantially different than the empires that preceded them. However, if even some of the above propositions hold weight, then a theory of state emergence must account for exclusive elements of both states as well as of European life that were not present in empires or in other parts of the world. While economic, bellicist, and feminist theories offer some arguments that might explain the uniqueness of European statehood, cultural theories might go further. We have shown that elements of statehood certainly existed in non-European empires, but that at least two innovations distinguish themselves from empires: an *expectation* of external sovereignty, and thus more solidified borders, and the internal monopoly on the use of force. If these are truly unique, then perhaps the differences are rooted in European culture, or more specifically, a shift in the culture that precipitated the emergence of the state.

Cultural theories are the first to consider the role of nationalism. A nation is a group of people that feel unified in some way, whether it is by language, religion, heritage, or some other connection. This concept was discussed in Student Feature Study: Sovereignty in the Iroquois Confederacy above. In everyday usage, people often conflate the state and the nation, but in political science these are very distinct concepts. While the state is the government and the land, the nation is an identity. People have formed communities based on a common identity since time immemorial. What is new, perhaps, is the marriage of the state with the nation. Referring to Figure 26 and Figure 29 above, it is apparent that there were often several nations within an empire, but as the state began to form, people began to identify with their states, in addition to

other identities such as religion and ethnicity (although as we will see below, other identities were expected to become less prominent). This unification of the nation and the state helped reinforce the state's legitimacy and allowed the state to increase its policing and taxation powers. This new nationalism required a shift in culture which was previously more tied to the local rather than the state. Many theorists in this school of thought cite the French Revolution as the culmination of this cultural shift (Greenfeld, 1996). If there was a significant cultural shift that led to the formation of modern states in Europe specifically, European culture and the change that occurred through events such as the French Revolution might help explain both the timing as well as the geography of state emergence.

Another strand of cultural theories focuses on the role of religion, specifically Protestant Christianity in 17th century Europe. The main idea here is that this new form of Christianity emphasized discipline and orderliness, which allowed for easier and more efficient governing (Gorski, 2003). This is not unlike Max Weber's (2002) hypothesis (who we learned about above for his insight on the importance of monopoly on the use of force) that Protestantism also paved the way for modern capitalism. Once again, a potential problem of this argument is that it ignores other religious practices that are similarly disciplined such as Islam.

Yet, other scholars focus on the effect of secularization in the establishment of the state. Sovereignty requires that the state be the highest form of legitimate authority, and religion is at odds with that concept. Thus, the process of detaching religion from governing bodies and placing it into the hands of civil society instead aided the development of the modern state. This helps explain the outcome of strong states in Europe (and later North America), at least to some extent. When religion became separated from the burgeoning state, several things occurred in Europe (particularly post-revolutionary France) that did not take place in, for example, the

Islamic world (although we will explore some exceptions to this in later chapters). First, Catholicism in France was able to survive due to the presence and hierarchy of the Catholic Church. Islam has no similar central social institution and therefore Islam fell into the hands of many actors. Second, the increasingly secular European state utilized its significant cultural and educational resources into fomenting nationalism, while most Islamic states did not have as many effective institutions. Therefore, Islamic identity was not as easily supplanted with nationalism. Exploring the deviant case of Turkey (Türkiye) might help to elucidate these nuances.⁵³

Snapshot Case Study: Secularism and Sovereignty in Türkiye



Figure 43: Detailed map of Türkiye and location of Turkey in Eurasia⁵⁴

Full Country Name: Republic of Turkey / Türkiye (English), Türkiye Cumhuriyeti (Turkish)

⁵³ Turkey has been known officially as the Republic of Turkey in the English-speaking world since 1923. In 2021 however, the country requested the name be changed via the United Nations to Türkiye, which better reflects the official name of the country in the Turkish language. In 2023, the United States government released a statement that it will continue to refer to the country as Turkey informally but in formal diplomatic contexts, it will refer to it as Türkiye. In respecting the wishes of the country itself, this text will also refer to the country as Türkiye.

⁵⁴ Source: From left to right: [Map of Türkiye](#) by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#); [Locator Map](#) by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#).

Head of State and Government: Recep Tayyip Erdogan

Government: Presidential Republic

Official Languages: Turkish

Economic System: Market-Oriented Economy

Location: Southeastern Europe and Southwestern Asia

Capital: Ankara

Total land size: 783,562 sq km; 302,534 sq miles

Population: 83,593,483

GDP: \$2.668 trillion

GDP per capita: \$31,500

Currency: Lira

Türkiye is one of the few Muslim-majority states that has managed to retain its Islamic identity while also building a secular state. The state that we know today was born out of the Ottoman Empire (1300-1922), perhaps the most powerful Islamic empire as well as the last empire to collapse as the sovereign state became dominant in the aftermath of World War I. The Republic of Turkey was declared by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, a military commander, and the first Turkish president. Türkiye was one of the few states to become independent after World War I; most of the former Ottoman Empire was carved up by the victors of the war.

Kemal purged Islam from the newly founded state, but also didn't allow it to have an independent life in society. He established the Directorate of Religious Affairs, which acted as a quasi-state "church," overseeing religious activities and absorbing potential competition for the teaching of Islam. Therefore, Islamic fundamentalism didn't take hold in Türkiye as much as it did in many other Islamic states as they formed such as Egypt and Iran (Toprak, 1993).

Therefore, Türkiye is a deviant case of Islamic state secularization that displays the challenges that many other Muslim-majority states faced in their state-building efforts.

In addition to this balancing act between state, society and Islam, Türkiye managed to also mobilize considerable educational and cultural resources, mostly vestiges of the Ottomans, in creating a new national identity that superseded Islam but didn't replace it. Furthermore, a secular legal code was institutionalized rather quickly, as well as relative economic prosperity, which legitimized the new nation-state (Yilmaz, 2007). Some of Türkiye's success in these state-building capacities can be attributed to a cultural revolution instituted by Kemal as well as its wealth of religious tolerance and cultural diversity it contained during the Ottoman period.

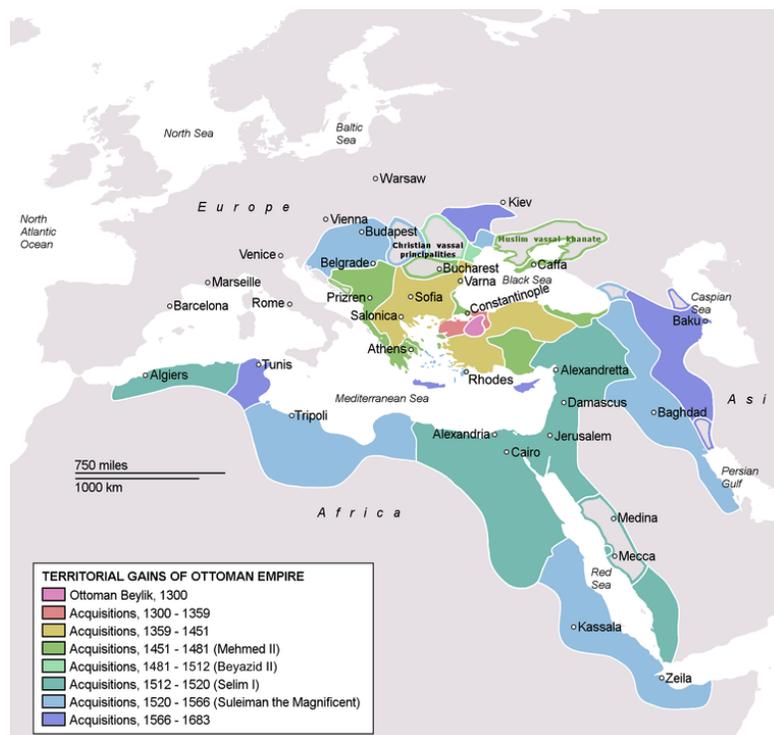


Figure 44: Ottoman Empire at its greatest extent in 1683⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Source: [Map depicting the Ottoman Empire at its greatest extent in 1683](#), by Atilim Gunes Baydin - Self drawn, mainly based on Robert Mantran (ed.), *Histoire de Empire Ottoman*, Paris: Fayard (1989), also List of Ottoman Empire dominated territories, Image:Ottoman 1683.png, [1], and [2]. Background map modified from Image:A large blank world map with oceans marked in blue.svg., licensed under [Public Domain](#).

However, a case study of Türkiye wouldn't be complete without consideration of some recent developments. The AKP, or the Justice and Development Party, came into power in 2002, which was co-founded by the current President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The AKP has since dominated Turkish politics. Erdogan was reelected in 2023 for a third term. His party members are known to lean more heavily on Islam than other more secular parties, and are also more skeptical of the West. Still, the party initially supported Türkiye's bid to join the European Union, to shore up support from Muslim conservatives as well as those wishing to see the country modernize. The AKP was therefore an impressive coalition between liberalism and conservatism.

In subsequent years, however, particularly around the attempted coup in 2016, the AKP and Erdogan himself have taken a decisively more authoritarian turn. A new political system was instituted in 2017 via referendum. The new system dissolves the old parliamentary system for a presidential one as well as the office of the Prime Minister. (We will consider the differences between a presidential and parliamentary system in subsequent chapters). These reforms concentrated a great deal of power in the president. It was argued that these reforms were necessary in light of the coup and runs counter to the prior ideology of the AKP (Ağar, 2022).



Figure 45: Pro-Erdogan Demonstrations after the 2016 Coup Attempt in Türkiye⁵⁶

While cultural theories may give us a slightly more convincing case for the rise of the state in Europe, a few caveats bear mentioning. First, any cultural theory must define exactly what we mean by culture, which has proven rather challenging even for more culture-oriented disciplines such as anthropology (Williams, 2014). Second, like the previous two approaches, we would need to be clear about whether a cultural shift predated the state or whether the state itself preceded a cultural shift. To be fair, many cultural theorists see these two things as *mutually constituted* in that culture

Mutual constitution is a concept from the sociological theory of constructivism that simply means that structures (such as culture or the economic environment) and agents (such as states and people) reinforce each other, and neither one exists prior to the other. As stated in Chapter 1, this is a consistent challenge in the social sciences and that is why it is nearly impossible to find definitive causes.

⁵⁶ Source: [After coup nightly demonstration of president Erdogan supporters](#) by Mstyslav Chernov - Own work, licensed under [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

guided the formation of the state, but the state also comes to both reflect and inform culture. Third, we would also need to contend with culturally diverse states (Laitin, 1999). Fourth, we need to question whether the cultural elements that theoretically played a role in state formation are indeed particular to 17th century Europe or whether we can detect those elements elsewhere. Finally, any theory using culture and/or nationalism as its primary explanatory variable is particularly vulnerable to ethnocentrism. Weber himself acknowledged that other cultures contained features amendable to statehood. He wrote a whole volume on China and the mutually reinforcing relationship between the state and Confucianism (Weber, 1951). A similar argument follows his volume on India and Hinduism (Weber, 1958). However, he dismisses these two states as being “patrimonial” rather than following a more “rational” logic of the Western states (Weber, 2019). Therefore, any cultural argument must be careful to treat foreign nations fairly and not to assume that one’s own culture is superior just because it is more familiar.

Post-Colonial Theories

Postcolonial theories have not penetrated comparative politics in the same way that they have in its sister discipline of International Relations (Jones, 2006). Yet, it should be clear through the previous discussions of other theories of the state that colonialism has played an important role, if not the central role, in the development of most modern states, even those in Western Europe. Indeed, if the primary characteristics of the modern state is sovereignty and the monopoly on the use of force, colonies by definition had neither. Furthermore, by definition, independence movements were the attempt to gain both. Therefore, the absence of these approaches is not only remarkable, but it is also irresponsible. Without an appreciation for European colonization, and the various patterns this phenomenon took on in different locations, it is nearly impossible to truly recognize the realities of most of the world’s states and people today.

Postcolonialism refers to a large body of literature that is broadly anti-colonial and critiques the variety of ways that five centuries of European colonization has deeply affected the politics, social system, economies, identity and even knowledge of the non-European world (Gandhi, 2019). The roots of this perspective can be traced to anti-colonial independence struggles themselves and some of the prominent intellectuals that led these movements. Franz Fanon is one of these early thinkers. A black psychologist born in the French colony of Martinique, he joined the Algerian National Liberation Front in their struggle to overthrow French rule.

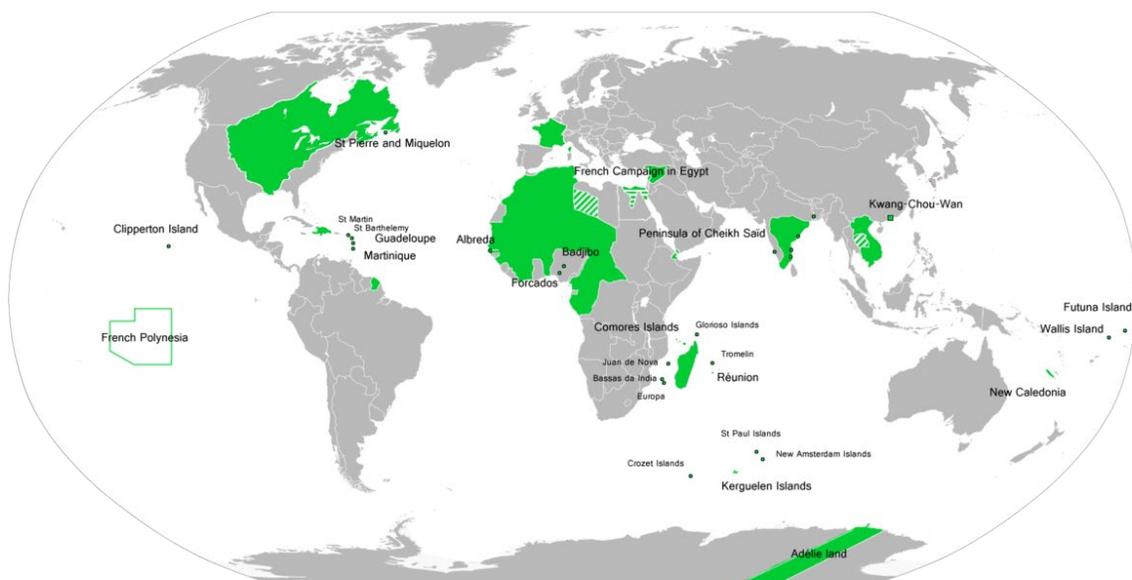


Figure 46: Map of entire French colonial empire between 1534-1977. Martinique is located in the Caribbean and remains a French department today.⁵⁷

As a psychologist, he emphasized the cultural and psychological processes that allowed European empires to justify their dominance, as well as the psychological impacts on colonized populations as they internalized their subordination. His most famous work in this vein was

⁵⁷ Source: [Map of all French Empire \(1534-1977\)](#) by Picaballo – Own work, licensed under [Public Domain](#).

Wretched of the Earth, a book that continues to inspire liberation movements (Farrington & Fanon, 2002).

The state has remained a subject of great interest and critique even after the era of colonization came to a formal end. Postcolonial theorists believe that while mainstream political scientists find the origins of sovereignty in Westphalia, “modern” European sovereignty wasn’t really solidified until it could violate the sovereignty of the Global South. The reason that states like Netherlands, France, and the United Kingdom are often modeled as the ideal cases of “strong” states in the study of comparative politics is that these states were the largest extractors of wealth, resources, labor, and power from most of the rest of the world for several centuries. This gave their state-building enterprises a clear advantage. Postcolonial theorists would also point out that it is no accident that statehood rose in Europe around the same time that colonization was taking off in earnest. Finally, others astutely argue that the barometer by which we measure statehood, namely legitimacy and sovereignty, is not a fair measurement for much of the Global South. *Subaltern realism*, a strand of postcolonialism, argues that “[m]ost states that have emerged into formal independence within the past fifty years are currently struggling to approximate the idea of the Westphalian state by acquiring effectiveness and legitimacy within a drastically shortened timeframe and in highly unfavorable normative and practical circumstances” (Ayoob, 2002, p. 40). The central dilemma for Global South states, according to subaltern realism, is they are trying to assert themselves as sovereign in a post-sovereign world. Furthermore, postcolonialists also offer a strong critique of social sciences themselves and the way in which these disciplines study the postcolonial world. The origins of this critique can be found in Edward Said’s famous work *Orientalism* (Said, 1979). Here, he shows that what the Western world counts as “objective” truth discovered through “scientific” methods about the

Orient are often couched in Eurocentrism and therefore can hardly be counted as impartial knowledge. This echoes a similar critique leveled by feminists, in that claims of objective knowledge about the social world are often produced by male-dominated circles about their own experience that doesn't accurately reflect women's experiences.

The implication for this critique in the study of comparative politics, which attempts to follow the scientific method and strives for objectivity, is profound. We have already discussed these difficulties, which have no easy answer, in some detail in Chapter 3: The Promise and Pitfalls of the Comparative Method. At the very least, a postcolonial approach to comparative politics demands that students be aware of their potential biases due to lack of experience in the Global South, as well as their position of privilege as a member of the Global North and how that might shape their views of the Global South, seek out knowledge of these cultures from insiders when possible, and finally do their best to question any claims that their own countries are ideal cases of any particular phenomenon.

To be fair, most postcolonial theories take Western European colonization as *the* colonization without much consideration of other sources of colonial empire. In particular, the 27 states of the former Soviet Union often are not considered "postcolonial" in the literature (Moore, 2001). Some of these states have emerged from Soviet rule as model Westphalian institutions in the traditional sense of the term (such as Latvia and Estonia), while others have either completely disintegrated (such as the former Yugoslavia), and others are caught in the more familiar Global South trap of spiraling poverty, conflict, and authoritarianism (such as Azerbaijan).



Figure 47: Map of the Soviet Union Administrative Divisions 1989⁵⁸

Furthermore, one could argue that colonization in some form has been going on for most of human history. A review of Figure 29, Figure 40, and Figure 44 indicates that empires were in the habit of massive expansion over previously independent territory. Imperial expansion certainly left similar cultural, political, and economic imprints on the subjugated populations as theorized by postcolonialism. However, postcolonial theorists would counter by indicating that European colonization is different than imperial expansion in that empires generally expanded in ways that kept the empire at least marginally territorially contiguous, while colonization was different in that it managed to subjugate and absorb land and people in a way that was decidedly *dis*-contiguous.

While no theory in the social sciences is flawless, this text approaches the study of comparative politics with a postcolonial lens. It contends that postcolonialism can take some of the best

⁵⁸ Source: [An American map of Soviet Union Administrative Divisions c.1989](#). This image is a copy or a derivative work of `soviet_union_admin_1989.jpg`, from the map collection of the Perry–Castañeda Library (PCL) of the University of Texas at Austin. Licensed under [Public Domain](#).



insights of all the previous approaches, while also accounting for their weaknesses, and is able to deftly integrate them into a unified theory of state formation. A postcolonial perspective does not specifically reject war, capitalism, culture, or gender as powerful explanations of the state, but they argue that colonization is the unifying process under which all these other variables come to play a role in the building of a state. Postcolonialism not only offers a convincing account for state formation that takes both the European and non-European world into consideration, and corrects for the Eurocentrism of traditional approaches, it also offers a clear explanation of how the state diffused globally. Finally, it also explains the continued challenges that plagues the Global South such as poverty, political upheaval, and authoritarianism (which we will explore in further chapters) that isn't rooted in cultural or political superiority. While some of these things are very real challenges faced by Global South states, a postcolonial theorist would point out that the cause of these problems is largely in the history of colonization and the legacy left by the process of decolonization. In short, they would make the case that colonization caused the European state, and decolonization caused the state in the Global South.

To explore postcolonialism in more detail, we turn to a deviant case study of one of the few Global South states that wasn't colonized on a sustained basis: Ethiopia.

Student Feature: Ethiopia as a deviant case of post-colonial state-building

By Trevor Cook, edited by Holly Oberle

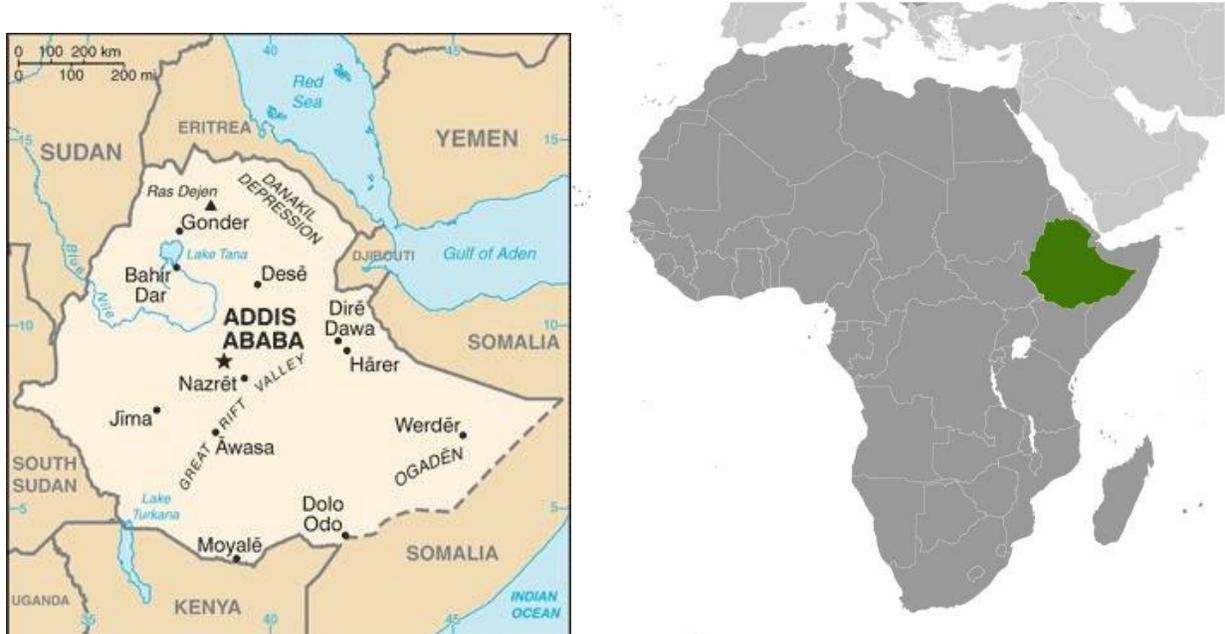


Figure 48: Detailed map of Ethiopia and the location of Ethiopia on the African continent⁵⁹

Full Country Name: The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

Head of State: President Sahle-Work Zewde (the first female president of the country)

Head of Government: Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed

Government: Parliamentary Republic

Official Language: Amharic

Economic System: Transition Economy

Location: Northeastern Africa

Capital: Addis Ababa

⁵⁹ Source: from left to right: [Map of Ethiopia](#), by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#); [Locator Map](#), by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#).

Total land size: 1,112,000 sq km; 429,345 sq miles

Population: 116,462,712

GDP: \$278.945 billion

GDP per capita: \$2,300

Currency: Ethiopian Birr

Ethiopia displays a particularly unique, deviant case of sovereignty despite colonialism, in that it is the only country within the continent of Africa to never endure European colonization.

Furthermore, it is unique in that it gained individual state recognition considerably earlier and through vastly different mechanisms than the other countries within Africa.

We have considered the effect of the so-called “Scramble for Africa” in the Comparative Case Study: Botswana and Somalia, and despite Ethiopia’s resistance to colonial rule, the scramble no less affected it. The Scramble for Africa is the most conspicuous series of events that contributed to the shaping of Africa as we know it today. Seeing as though most land across Asia and the Americas had already come under colonial rule, European countries raced to occupy and claim the continent of Africa beginning in the early 1860s. In less than 40 years, most of the African continent was controlled by a European state, as depicted in Figure 49 below. This process was driven largely by hunger for natural resources as the industrial revolution was in full force in Europe, but also by an unapologetic sense of cultural, religious, and racial superiority.

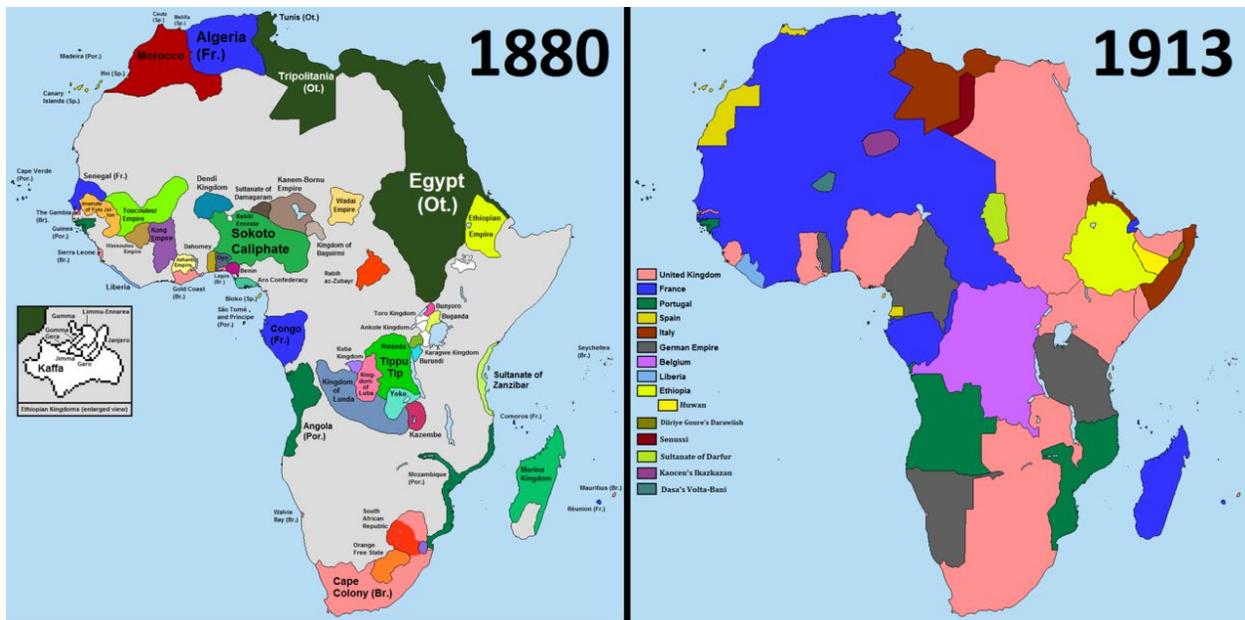


Figure 49: Two maps of Africa, one in 1880 and the other in 1913. In 1880 only few territories are under European control, by 1913 nearly the entire continent is under European control.⁶⁰

By 1913, the only two countries that had not fallen victim to European colonization were Ethiopia and Liberia, though Liberia had just overcome early American colonization. This period of colonization heavily influenced the ways in which these countries developed, through the partitioning of several ethnicities and tribes across newly created colonial states, and visible European influence and control over religion, currency, and language and more.

Ethiopia is known as the oldest independent country in Africa with the emergence of civilization dating back to over 3,000 years. The survival of Ethiopia as an independent state throughout colonization is taken as a point of pride by the people. Throughout most of its history, and up until 1975, Ethiopia functioned as a monarchy with a variety of distinctive advantages that helped it retain its independence despite the odds. These include its geographical position, the

⁶⁰ Source: [Comparison of Africa in the years 1880 and 1913](#), by davidj1123 / Somebody500 - Own work, licensed under [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

country's economic and political strength, the national consciousness of its people, and the quality of leadership. Ethiopia is in Northeast Africa in a region referred to as the Horn of Africa. While prosperous, the country's unchartered climates and harsh terrains were especially rough for foreigners, and therefore had a significant advantage for Ethiopian armies. The deserts of Somali and Afar, as well as the swamps of the Sobat River, form natural borders protecting the highlands from every direction (Seger, 2018). As well, Ethiopia had a major agricultural potential given its fertile land, diverse climate, and generally adequate rainfall. This fostered economic success through trade with the Middle East, Asia and Europe (Seger, 2018).

Religion was also a considerable factor as to how Ethiopia was able to retain its independence. French catholic missionaries were deployed in Ethiopia sporadically from the 1840s to the 1870s with the intention of serving as the initial establishment of European influence in the region (Ram, 1977). The best explanation for the failure of these missionaries to introduce European influence in the country was the vigilance of the Ethiopian Coptic church, which remained opposed to foreign missionary activity given its determination to preserve the national faith of Ethiopia (Ram, 1977). Had the Coptic church been less vigilant, or furthermore, less nationalistic, it is likely that Ethiopia would have endured the same colonial experiences as its neighboring countries.



Figure 50: A Coptic priest in Lalibela, Ethiopia⁶¹

However, it is important to note that the country gained European recognition as a sovereign state in 1896, following the Battle of Adwa, an Italian attempt to seize control of the country. Ethiopian victory over Italy was decisive, as it brought an Italian war of conquest to an end in the age of relentless European expansion. The Adwa victory guaranteed the political independence of Ethiopia through a series of treaties between Ethiopia, neighboring colonial powers, and European legislators. This contrasts with most other African states which did not achieve independence from their respective European powers until around the 1960s. In fact, Zimbabwe didn't achieve its independence from Great Britain until 1980.

⁶¹ Source: [A Coptic priest in Ethiopia](#), By A. Davey from Where I Live Now: Pacific Northwest - Priest with Large Canvas at the Church of the Monastery of Na'akuto La'abUploaded by Elitre, licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#).

Despite a brief period of Italian occupation from 1936-1941, in which no lasting colonial infrastructure developed, Ethiopia deviates from postcolonial theory of the state because it consistently maintained and achieved recognition of its independence apart from similarly structured African countries. Italy's intentions of invading Ethiopia were motivated by increasing Italian national prestige following their former defeat in 1896, in addition to countering the effects of the Great Depression (Berhe, 2003). Furthermore, Mussolini claimed that his policies pertaining to Italian expansion were no different from that of the other colonial powers remaining in Africa.

Although Ethiopia deviates from the rest of Africa as it only briefly experienced colonization, nonetheless, the country continues to face adversities that can be linked to colonization throughout the rest of Africa. Since 1941, Ethiopia has been plagued by political instability and civil war. What was once considered to be the most noble nation in Africa is now one of the poorest nations in the world (Hallee, 2020). Even though they were only there for a short period of time, Italians destroyed prominent villages, committed a variety of war crimes, and killed an estimated 760,000 people from a prewar population of 12 million (Duncanson, 1970).

Reparations from Italy to Ethiopia were intended to rebuild the country, however, Ethiopia has since faced numerous difficulties in rebuilding the state, as the destruction removed almost every relevant pre-occupation community leader, as well as limited the number of competent individuals in post-war government, business, and scholarship (Hallee, 2020). Ethiopia has since suffered from ethnic tensions, corruption, instability, and violence, largely as a condition of the irreversible damage brought forth by the Italian occupation.

Perhaps the most important lesson we can learn about the connection between colonization and statehood is the role of borders and identity. By disrupting preexisting ethnic communities and

drawing borders to suit *European* sovereign claims, European colonies directly contributed to long-lasting ethnic civil conflict and discrimination making it difficult for these new states to establish both internal and external sovereignty upon independence. The colonial shaping of geographic boundaries has significantly affected many African nations access to the global market, particularly through the large quantity of land-locked countries distributed throughout the continent. As a condition of the protectorate design used to shape European colonies, many African countries are noticeably dissimilar in size and maintain vastly irregular shapes, which has also spurred challenges regarding the enforcement of law. The portioning of numerous ethnic groups into more than one country, in addition to the forcible separation of communities along new borders, contributed to competition for recognition and favor from the European powers as well as the breakdown of tribal identities, languages, and belief systems. The ethnic hierarchies established by colonial powers within their states can also be directly linked to genocide (Mamdani, 2020). One reason that Ethiopia was able to resist colonial rule was that the existing kingdom was multiethnic, but Emperor Menilek II was able to successfully integrate various identities into a strong nation in which no group enjoyed particular privilege over the others (Yates, 2021). Therefore, while having juridical sovereignty, much of Africa has struggled to institutionalize formal sovereignty as well as a monopoly on the use of force given the imposed and inorganic way borders were drawn.

State Capacity

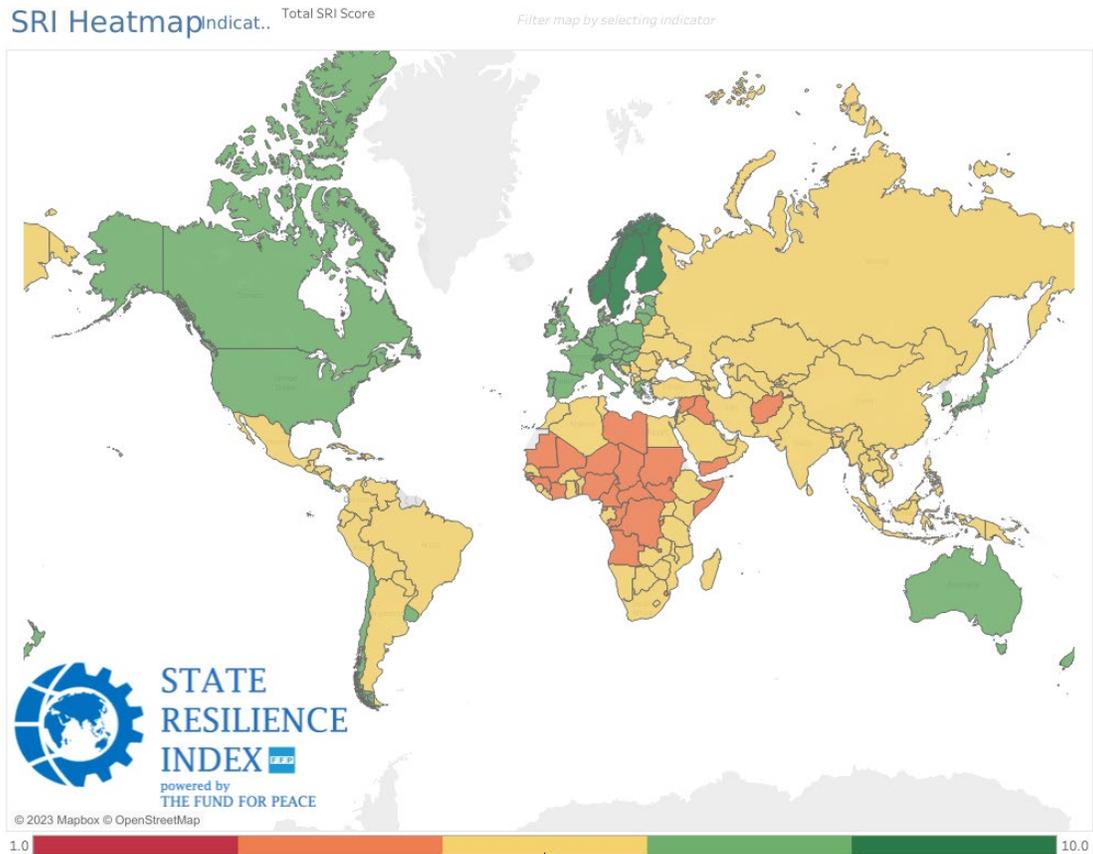


Figure 51: State Resiliency Index 2023⁶²

One of the key concerns of political scientists as well as policymakers is why some states seem to perform more effectively than others. Fragile states are generally defined as “states that lack the capacity to discharge their normal functions and drive forward development...” (Osaghae, 2007, p. 691). The concern is that states that exhibit these characteristics are at risk of famine, economic meltdown and even violence, and these issues may spillover into neighboring states or

⁶² Source: [State Resilience Global Heat Map](#), by The Fund for Peace, licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#).

impact the entire international system through the proliferation of terrorism, drug or sex trafficking, or mass migrations.

The discussion of state *failure* (as supposed to fragility) began in the early 1990s and took on more relevance in the aftermath of September 11th. This moment was important in world politics because it was the end of the Cold War. The collapse of the Soviet Union changed the landscape of the globe in that a major economic and political alliance suddenly ceased to exist, leaving only the so-called “West” as the center of power. Therefore, at least from the perspective of many American policymakers, it became important for the US to understand weak states in order to mitigate risks to international stability. After September 11th, risk mitigation took on more urgency. Several institutions began to study and measure weak or failed states including the World Bank, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and later, the Fund for Peace. Fragile states have remained a concern of the US government. In 2019, the US government passed the Global Fragility Act, which identifies countries at risk and mandates that a 10-year stabilization plan be implemented in partnership with the target state (Graff, 2023).

Of course, in order to measure the weakness of states, one needs to first understand what a state is as well as the main functions a state should be performing. This is why we spent considerable time in the previous sections defining the state and outlining the theories by which the state came to be. The most minimal definition requires a social contract, which implies that the most basic function of a state is to provide security to its people. A slightly more robust definition requires the monopoly on the use of force, which implies not only that the state is providing security, but it is the only and the most legitimate source of security. As the state become more global and more legitimized, it also started to provide more functions beyond security and law, such as infrastructure, education, and health.

Therefore, some measurements of state failure rely on purely instrumentalist definitions. For example, the World Bank focused on what they called “low-income countries under stress” (LICUS) characterized by weak policies, institutions, and governance. Even more simplistic, the State Failure Task Force, a project of the US government, defined state failure as the presence of a civil war. Later, this definition was expanded to include revolutionary wars, ethnic wars, “adverse” regime changes, and genocides. The USAID approach tried to go further and emphasized legitimacy. (See Chapter 5: Theories of State Emergence for a full discussion on legitimacy). However, as discussed above, legitimacy is incredibly difficult to measure especially as outsiders looking in. Furthermore, there might be a state that is externally strong but internally weak; meaning, the state itself is unlikely to fail due to a high security apparatus but internally the state fails to provide basic needs like food. An example might be North Korea. Finally, the Fund for Peace is a non-profit organization that maintains two different databases: the Fragile State Index (FSI) and the State Resilience Index (SRI). The FSI measures fragility along four indicators: cohesion, economic, political, and social, taking into consideration many more functions than security. Within each of these indicators are more specific variables as depicted in Figure 46 below.



Figure 52: Fragile State Indicators and Sub-Indicators⁶³

⁶³ Source: The Fund for Peace, <https://fragilestatesindex.org/>, licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

These indicators, as well as the shift in focus from “failure” to “fragility,” was a response to several criticisms aimed not only at the Fund for Peace specifically, but the idea of failed states more generally. Among these criticisms include the idea of ranking states according to their perceived “failures,” a perception that is largely rooted in Western experiences of stable statehood (Leigh, 2012). Also, since many of these databases are sourced by the US government, there is skepticism that the rankings are fair or rather simply a reflection of US geopolitical interests. For example, the State Failure Taskforce defined China as a “failed state” as late as 1998. While China was certainly struggling with poverty at the time, it is questionable that it was on the brink of failure in 1998, especially since it was able to withstand the most significant challenge to its legitimacy—the Tiananmen Square protests—just nine years earlier. Finally, the most robust criticism of the idea of state failure was that these measurements lack historical memory; in other words, they bear no reflection of the past that might contextualize the perceived failures of the state, especially the history of colonization.



Figure 53: Chinese Tanks in Beijing 1989⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Source: [Chinese tanks in Beijing, July 1989](#), by Pete Campolongo, licensed under [Public Domain](#).

Therefore, the Fund for Peace responded not only by including more indicators, changing the name of the index from the *Failed* State Index to the *Fragile* State Index, but it also started a new project called the State Resilience Index (see Figure 51 above). The indicators in this index include civic space, economy, environment, inclusion, individual capabilities, social cohesion, and state capacity. The goal of this database is to measure the extent to which a state can recover from a crisis. Used alongside the FSI, the SRI provides a positive measure of state capacity, rather than simply focusing on the negative challenges a state is facing.

Taking into consideration the important criticisms of capacity measurements, using both the FSI and RSI can give us quite a lot of useful information about the character of an individual state, as well as a basis for a robust comparison between two or more states. It is important to recognize that these measurements are based on a *positivist* approach (see section titled The Comparative Method Revisited) which demands a purely scientific method with quantitative measures that can be easily replicated. A postcolonial theorist would question the value of this data and would prefer a more postpositivist approach using qualitative data, collected from the experiences of everyday people and their own perspectives on their state. It is also important to recognize that a state is almost never totally failing or totally resilient (although see Student Feature: Haiti for a discussion on a collapsed state). Rather, there can be areas of both, and a state might be particularly resilient in one sector and particularly vulnerable in another sector (Bizhan, 2022). This text encourages the new student of comparative politics to balance both types of data when trying to get a better hold on the capacities as well as pressures different states across the world are experiencing at any given time. A sample case study of this approach follows.

Comparative Within-Case Study: FATA and Karachi in Pakistan

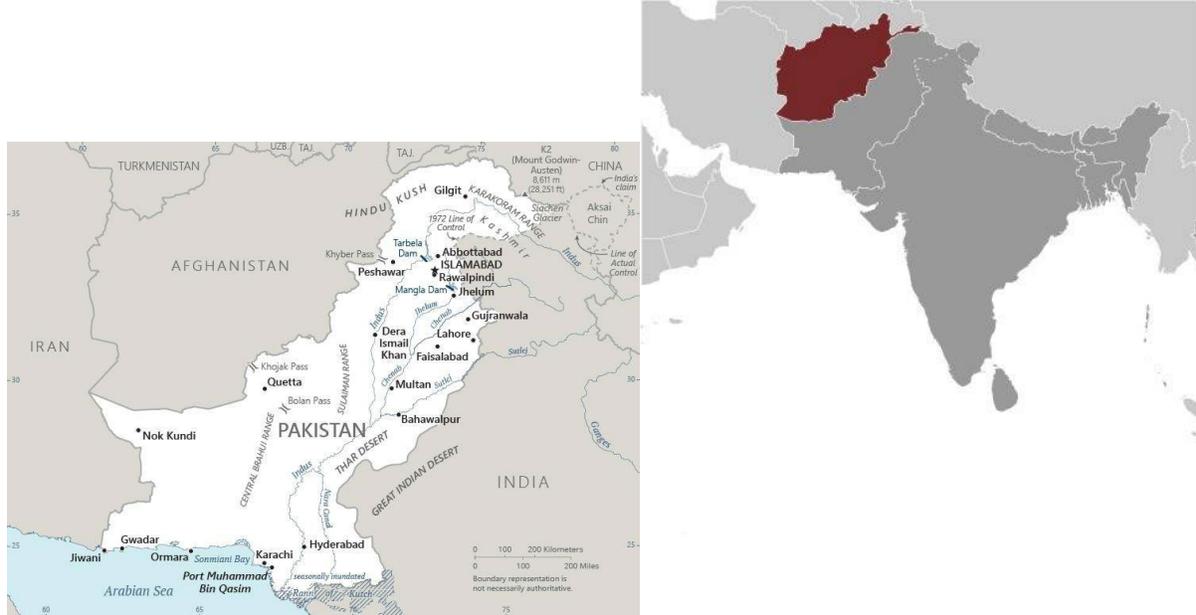


Figure 54: Detailed map of Pakistan and the location of Pakistan in South Asia⁶⁵

Full Country Name: Islamic Republic of Pakistan

Head of State: President Arif Alvi

Head of Government: Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif

Government: Federal Parliamentary Republic

Official Language: Punjabi, Pashto, Urdu, others

Economic System: Market oriented economy

Location: South Asia

Capital: Islamabad

Total land size: 796,095 sq km; 307,373 sq miles

Population: 247,653,551

⁶⁵ Source: From left to right: [Map of Pakistan](#) by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#); [Locator Map](#) by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#).

GDP: \$1.211 trillion

GDP per capita: \$5,200

Currency: Pakistani Rupee

Introduction

If you read any recent headlines concerning Pakistan, you might be tempted to say that Pakistan is a decidedly fragile state on the brink of collapse. Facing dire economic straits, Pakistan took out a loan with the International Monetary Fund in 2019 in the amount of \$7 billion and its annual loan payment, should it take out more loans, is expected to be \$20 billion. As of publication, Pakistan has less than \$4.3 billion in federal reserves. It faces default. A new round of negotiations with the IMF has been tense. The IMF has demanded certain reforms in exchange for a new loan, such as increasing energy prices, and this has resulted in massive country-wide protests. In 2022, the country suffered from massive flooding, leaving many homeless and causing damages estimated to be worth \$30 billion. The economy, like most, suffered greatly also because of COVID-19.

Furthermore, the country is also facing a political crisis. In 2022, former Prime Minister Imran Khan lost a no-confidence vote (see Removal of the Executive, page 208) the National Assembly, Pakistan's legislature, resulting in his removal from office. His removal has completely divided Pakistanis along partisan lines. Khan is a former international cricket star. His stardom, along with his message of being an outsider able to break the grip of power between two warring parties, launched his successful bid for Prime Minister in 2018. The election was contentious, and Khan's party was accused of fraud. His campaign was also aided by the support of the military.

Since Pakistan gained independence in 1947, after being part of the British Indian Empire for most the 19th century, the government of Pakistan has been characterized by series of civilian governments followed by military coups. Even civilian governments have usually required military support to function. Khan's government, however, was expected to end the military's grip on power, but instead, he relied on the tacit support of the military to maintain his legitimacy. His governing style was brash, and he arrested many former members of government in what he described as an anti-corruption campaign. The military began shifting their support for other parties, resulting in the no-confidence vote.



Figure 55: Imran Khan, former Prime Minister of Pakistan⁶⁶

Since leaving office, he has alleged that his removal was either a Western conspiracy or a conspiracy of Pakistani rivals. Elections are set for October 2023, and Khan's campaign has resulted in an alleged assassination attempt, as well as a mountain of legal battles he believes are attempts to keep him from running. When he was arrested in May of 2023, violent protests erupted.

⁶⁶ Source: [Imran Khan, December 2007](#), By Jawad Zakariya, licensed under [CC BY-SA 3.0](#),

Yet, Pakistan displays some features that can also be found in states considered more stable by the FSI and the SRI. At the state level, Pakistan scores 4.7/10 (where 10 represents the most resilient) on the SRI scale and 89.9/120 (where 120 represents the most fragile) on the FSI scale as of 2023. The FSI rating represents a decline since 2006, indicating that Pakistan's capacity has increased in that period. Risk of terrorism has gone down and per capita poverty fell between 2002-2014 (World Bank, 2017). Furthermore, Pakistan has robust institutions, such as the central bank, the military, the civil service, the telecommunications infrastructure, and an extensive irrigation network. In the case of the first two sectors, these are indeed strong institutions at little risk of failing, despite the problems that both have created for the economy and the functioning of more legitimate elections (Javed & Nabi, 2022).

Still, fragility is still persistent in other sectors such as legitimacy and effectiveness, security, and overall resilience. But these issues vary considerably in different parts of the country, especially between its urban centers like Karachi and the more distant rural regions such as the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). Many of these regional challenges can be traced back to the original conditions of Pakistan's statehood.

As mentioned above, Pakistan was formerly part of the British Indian Empire. In the aftermath of World War II, the British faced increasing pressure in its colonial empire as well as an intense Indian independence movement. As the British began to withdraw, some demanded that a new Muslim-majority state be formed, while others argued for a unified independent India.

Eventually, a two-state solution was agreed upon, resulting in the creation of Pakistan. But the newly formed state had a major disadvantage: it had two separate pieces of discontinuous land separated by newly independent India, a much larger and more powerful state. This led to mass migrations of Hindus and Muslims to and from the Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority

East and West Pakistan, as well as deep animosity between each state. While Pakistan remains 96% Muslim, there is considerable diversity in terms of language and ethnicity. Provinces under the British were mostly ethnically homogenous, but this was completely upended during partition and the resulting migrations. Because government was centered in West Pakistan, this territory grew economically more quickly than East Pakistan. This, combined with the fact that East Pakistan did not speak a common language with the West, led to a nationalist movement in the East, resulting the succession and independence of Bangladesh. Therefore, Pakistan was formed in an atmosphere of heightened insecurity as a breakaway state during a very hasty process of decolonization. As a result, most of the governing resources were quickly consolidated in the military and national security (Javed & Nabi, 2022).

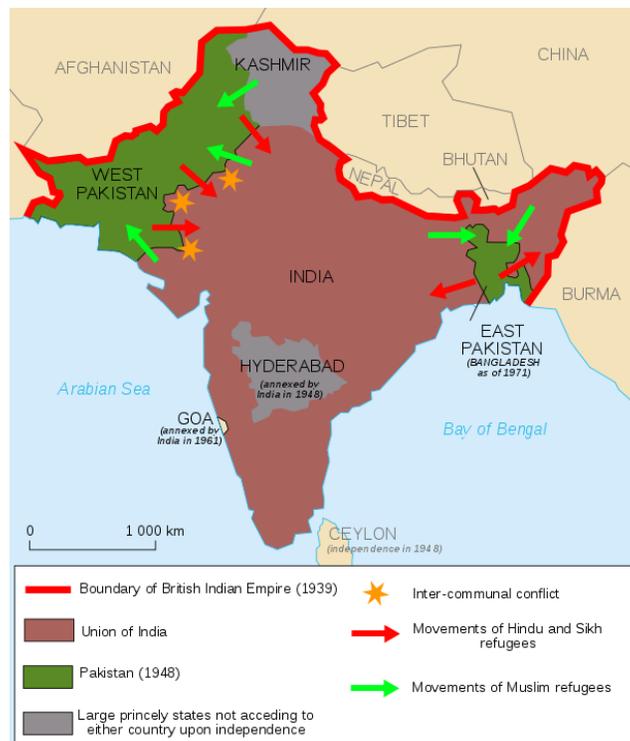


Figure 56: The partition of India following the withdrawal of the British⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Source: [The partition of India \(1947\)](#) by Partage_de_l#039;Inde.svg: historicair 17:15, derivative work: Themightyquill (talk) - Partage_de_l#039;Inde.svg, licensed under [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

Comparing legitimacy in ex-FATA and Karachi gives us a window into the varying degrees of state capacity within a sovereign state.

Ex-FATA

The former Federally Administered Tribal Areas was a semi-autonomous province in the west bordering Afghanistan. The area operated under a separate legal code than the rest of the state. However, this changed in 2018 when the region was combined with the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province through a constitutional amendment with the goal of integrating the people of this region more formally and increase state legitimacy in the eyes of the people. The main challenge facing the ex-FATA are the continued insurgencies of Islamist organizations.



Figure 57: Picture of North Waziristan, a region in the ex-FATA⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Source: [North Waziristan](#), by Mushtaqbq, licensed under [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

While it remains to be seen whether integrating the ex-FATA into a neighboring province will increase legitimacy, it is haunted by a colonial law known as the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR), which was designed to create a buffer zone as well as regulate the affairs of tribal communities. The law meant that political parties could not operate. A failing economy and a lack of formal governance means that there are opportunities for Islamic extremists to fill those gaps, further decreasing legitimacy of the Pakistan state in the eyes of residents. With the integration, new local councils have been established, but reforms have frequently been disrupted by militants and army operations (Rumi, 2015).

Karachi

Karachi is Pakistan's most populous city and one of the fastest growing cities in the world. Karachi experienced its first initial growth during the migration from India during partition, and since then people relocate here in search of better economic opportunities. This means that the country is extremely diverse.

Despite the economic opportunities created by its urban environment and its location as a port city, state legitimacy is also weak in Karachi. This is due to intense competition by the various ethnic and linguistic groups for resources, as well as a perceived lack of political representation. The city is located in a province dominated by Sindhi speakers, but few residents of the city speak this language. This situation has been exacerbated by political elites that favor their own ethnic group over others. The federal government has frequently usurped power from local institutions in the city (Javed & Nabi, 2022).

Conclusion

The main drivers that decrease legitimacy in both Karachi and ex-FATA are largely rooted in the history of colonization and partition, and the resulting mosaic of ethnic and language groups,

some of which have more access to resources and representation than others. This is not only reflected in the evidence discussed above, but also in the FSI data. Pakistan scores high on the variables “group grievance” and “factionalized elites.” Yet there are other indicators of state strength such as “human flight and brain drain” and “security apparatus.” The government has made a number of attempts to address these issues, with varying degrees of success. This case not only demonstrates the power of a within-case comparison, but also shows that behind state capacity measures that analyze fragility and resilience at the state level, are varying patterns of capacity by region. While comparative politics as well as policy-makers often takes the state as the most important unit of analysis, this can be deceptive since state borders are arbitrary and often drawn by a former colonial power. Effective interventions to increase state capacity must take local and regional nuances into consideration.

Collapsed States

A collapsed state can be thought of as an extreme case of a fragile state. Essentially, a collapsed state is one in which there is no effective governing structures and public goods are obtained through private or ad hoc associations such as warlords, gangs, churches, NGOs (non-governmental organizations) or other informal networks of community members. Thus, collapsed states are examples of *anarchy*. As discussed in the section The Social Contract and Social Order, few examples of anarchic communities exist, but in a collapsed state, no legitimate form of authority exists.

This doesn't mean, however, that the *nation* ceases to exist. Prior to the normalization of sovereignty, a collapse of a government would often lead to division of the territory and people into smaller units, or conquest by a neighbor, such as the former Ottoman Empire or the Qing Dynasty discussed earlier. But in the era of sovereign nation-states, the country remains at least

an area on a map with nominal external sovereignty, but internally there is no monopoly on the use of force. The social contract is weak at best and security is provided not through a mutual exchange between a government and the people, but often through extortion or loyalty to whatever informal network comes to fill the gap left by the absence of government. It is also important to note that a collapsed state can recover, and in fact, this is usually the expectation of the international community. Collapsed states are often given aid or other interventions in an attempt to rebuild and regain legitimacy (Ottaway, 2002).

Finally, a collapsed state is different than a state that “can’t form a government.” As we will learn about in Chapter 6, many parliamentary democracies require a coalition, or an agreement between multiple parties, to “form a government.” If no agreement is reached, there is no government, at least in the formal sense. Belgium has gone through several long periods in which no coalition could be formed amongst its many parties, the longest of which lasted over 600 days. In this case, few new laws were passed but everyday governing functions continue such as the administration of education and security. Sometimes, what is called a “caretaker” government is appointed to do minimal governmental functions until an agreement can be reached or new elections are called. We wouldn’t consider Belgium a collapsed state. Its FSI rating is 31/120 (remember 120 is at the most risk of failing). But we would consider Belgium a state without a government (as of publication, there is a coalition government in office).

So most collapsed states once had a government, but suffer from prolonged periods of weakness. Most often, on top of this prolonged period of weakness, an external shock finally brings it to collapse. The following considers the case of Haiti, which is a representative example of this process.

Student Feature: Haiti

By Lauren Pepin, edited by Holly Oberle



Figure 58: A detailed map of Haiti as well as its location in the Caribbean⁶⁹

Full Country Name: Republic of Haiti

Head of State: None

Head of Government: Prime Minister Ariel Henry

Government: Semi-Presidential Republic

Official Language: French, Creole

Economic System: Informal

Location: Caribbean

Capital: Port-au-Prince

Total land size: 27,750 sq km; 10,714 sq miles

⁶⁹ Source: From left to right: [Map of Haiti](#) by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#); [Locator Map](#) by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#).

Population: 11,470,261

GDP: \$32.856 billion

GDP per capita: \$2,900

Currency: Haitian Gourde, US dollar

The country of Haiti has had an unfortunate history of both catastrophe and corruption, which has ultimately led the stability of the state to crumble, leaving citizens to fend for themselves. Haiti does not currently have a head of state and has not had one since the state's former President, Jovenel Moise, was assassinated in summer of 2021. After his assassination, Prime Minister Ariel Henry served as acting President, although he was never officially sworn in. However, the mandate establishing him as the state's de facto ruler expired more than a year ago. As of January, Haiti "no longer has any democratically elected government officials, after the terms for the remaining senators in government expired" (Duwaji, 2023). Prior to this failure of the government, Haiti was already struggling with the presence of almost 200 gangs. Without the rule of law, any form of monopoly on the use of force the government previously held has been completely abdicated to the gangs. A recent report from ABC News shows that farmers are unable to bring their goods to the market to be sold, because the territory between the rural farms and the city markets are controlled by gangs who either extort bribes from the farmers or threaten to kill them. This is typical of other collapsed states such as Somalia , Sudan, and Sierra Leone (Widner, 1995). Therefore, Haiti can be considered a representative case of state collapse, although Haiti does display some unique qualities of a collapsed state, which we will explore below (Gélin-Adams & Malone, 2003).

Haiti has been plagued by weak governing institutions since its statehood. Haiti as a state came into being through a successful slave rebellion, which led to the overthrow of French rule in

1804. Thus, Haiti achieved independence much earlier than many other states that would eventually collapse. Upon independence from France, Haiti descended, much like many decolonized states, into civil war. When France agreed to finally recognize Haiti's independence in 1825, King Charles X demanded that the former colony pay the equivalent of \$21 billion in today's dollars in reparations for lost slave revenue (Sperling, 2017). The newly independent state had to take out high interest loans from countries like the United States to pay this debt. Given this colonial history, it is perhaps no surprise that it has experienced weak institutions, low GDP, a series of despotic leaders, and low levels of community trust since its establishment.

A series of natural disasters is the beginning of its more recent challenges. Between 2004-2008, hurricanes and tropical storms destroyed farmlands and access to natural resources, ultimately dismantling 25% of the state's economy. In the weeks following each instance of natural, economic, and political disasters, "sporadic violence, looting, and gang-related gunfire broke out across the country" (Concern Worldwide US, 2023). Without much time to rebuild from the storms four years prior, on January 1st, 2010, a 7.0 magnitude earthquake struck Haiti, claiming the lives of roughly 250,000, injuring over 300,000, and overall affecting approximately 3 million individuals (Bolton, 2011). The earthquake demolished much of the country's infrastructure, leaving many homeless without any access to clean water or food. Lack of resources led many to live in harshly unsanitary conditions, leading to the state's largest cholera outbreak, which took the lives of more than 10,000 more Haitians.



Figure 59: Haitians wait for supplies following the 2010 earthquake⁷⁰

Considering these disasters, the international community pledged roughly \$5 billion in aid, however many states fell short of their monetary promises (Concern Worldwide US, 2023). On top of the lack of aid received, corruption plagued Haitian governments, often resulting in funds intended for the restoration being used elsewhere. In the absence of any effective governance, gangs created an improvised political community, brokering relationships between businessmen, politicians, and NGO workers to secure resources. Therefore, gangs became the primary source of security (Kivland, 2020).

Bringing no mercy to the country that has experienced so much suffering, Hurricane Matthew hit in October 2016, destroying the majority of the country's crops just before harvest time. The

⁷⁰ Source: [Haitians wait for the distribution of emergency supplies following the 2010 earthquake](#), by Daniel Barker, licensed under [Public Domain](#).

disaster not only exacerbated the infrastructure crisis, but it also worsened the previously mentioned cholera epidemic, leaving more than 200,000 without housing and thousands without proper medical care.

Between 2020-2022, the crisis in Haiti reached new heights. Starting with the COVID-19 shut down, large populations experienced both heavy income loss and food insecurity. Political corruption did not ease up during the two-year period, as former President Moïse exceeded his term limit and refused to leave office. Fuel shortages have remained a prominent issue within the last year, as the country's supply has dwindled due to their inability to pay for the resource on time, leaving the state with little to no available fuel (Bolivar, 2022). This chain reaction of catastrophes made it increasingly easy for violent gangs to infiltrate not only entire towns, but also varying levels of government. The gangs have been able to maintain their power by recruiting the most vulnerable of populations.

In 2003, Rotberg argued that while Haiti was one of the weakest states in the world, it is “condemned to remain weak, but without failing” (Rotberg, 2003, p. 19). The reason for this, according to his argument, was the absence of ethnic, religious, or linguistic divisions, which drive so many other states to collapse into conflict. It seems that while Haiti was able to remain on the precipice of collapse, the final straw was indeed the assassination of its president and the inability of his successor to call for new elections.

This is also reflected in FSI and SRI data. According to the Fragile State Index, as of 2023 Haiti is ranked 10th most “fragile” out of 179 countries, receiving an overall fragility score of 102.9 out of the maximum possible 120. This rating is why Haiti has been designated by the US government under the Global Fragility Act as one of several states considered a priority for stabilization efforts. In 2009, the state was ranked 12th out of 179 on the FSI, just one spot lower

than the present day. The organization notes that a fragile state may encompass many, all, or few of the attributes used to measure state fragility such as: the loss of physical control of territory, the erosion of legitimate authority to make collective decisions, an inability to provide reasonable public services, and the inability to act as a full member of the international community. Not surprisingly, Haiti scores particularly high on measures of state legitimacy and public services. However, notably, it scores low on group grievances. Therefore, divisions within society are not a primary source of its breakdown.

Its SRI data offers few surprises. On nearly all indicators, Haiti scores below 5/10, where 10 is most resilient. Three indicators—diversification, climate stability, and information access—are the only variables in which Haiti scores above a 5. It received a score of only 1 for “dynamism” which measures innovation in the economy.

Haiti

HTI

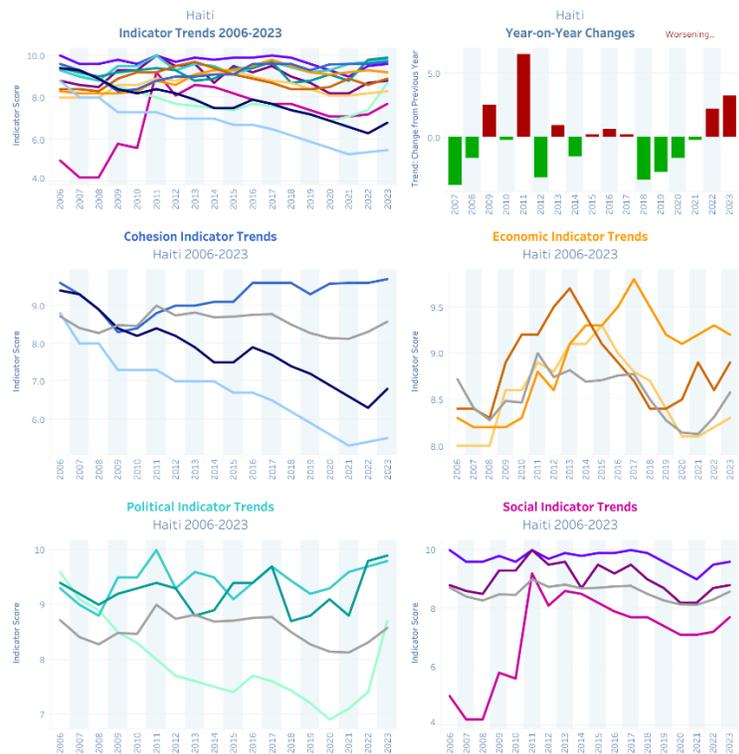
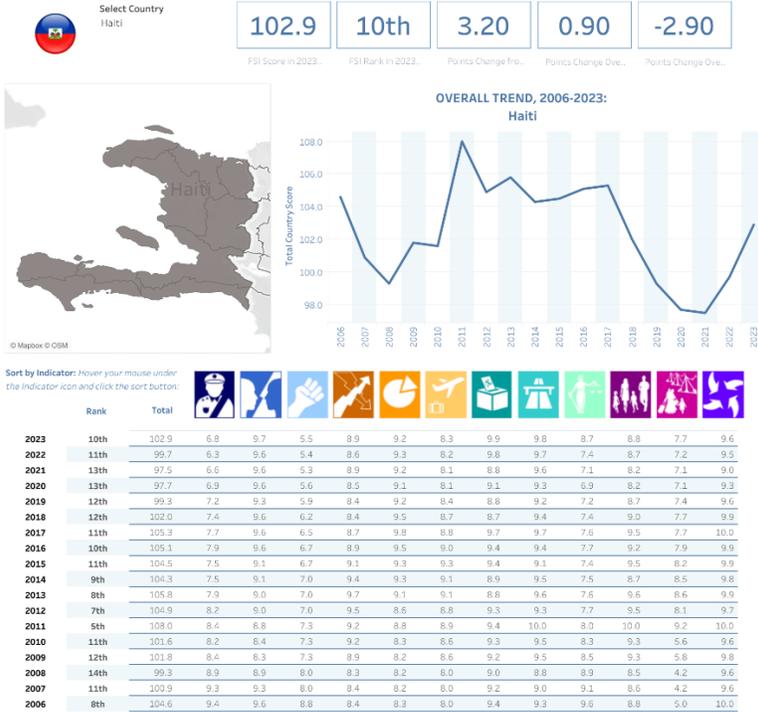


Figure 60: Fragile State Data for Haiti from 2006-2023⁷¹

⁷¹ Source: [Country Dashboard Haiti](#), by Fund for Peace, licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](#)



Thus, Haiti is a representative case of state collapse and can teach us lessons about what we can expect in the wake of the disappearance of government, the roots of which can often be traced back to a colonial past. When natural disasters hit and tanked both food production and economic stability in the country, gangs took moments of weakness not only to rise to power but also to gain control over the very limited resources available. After the assassination of the former President, one of the first initiatives of gangs in the country was to take control of the fuel port, as they knew how limited the supply was, which is just one example of how non-state groups fill gaps left by a collapsed government. Since its founding, Haiti has been in a constant state of poverty, debt, violence, and natural disasters. They have never fully recovered from most of these challenges.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the most common theories of how and why the state emerged, focusing particularly on the ability of each of these theories to explain the emergence of the state in the 17th century Europe. We have also endeavored to show that the classic narrative of state emergence may be rooted too heavily in Eurocentric views of non-European societies, and that elements of statehood likely preceded 17th century Europe. This discussion is not meant to dismiss the importance of this time and place in the development of modern statehood, but rather to consider other explanations and other perspectives more fully. Further, the postcolonial perspective takes all other accounts into consideration, while still managing to maintain a level of parsimony. We concluded with a thorough discussion of state capacity, which can tell us how and why a state is ineffective across several measurements.

Now that we have established the dominant explanations for why the state emerged and the major challenges states face, we will now turn to a more in-depth discussion of regime types,

focusing first on democracy. Regime type is thought to be directly linked to state capacity, but the ability of a state to democratize is largely dependent on historical context.

Chapter 6: Democracy⁷²

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- *DEFINE DEMOCRACY*
- *RECOGNIZE THE ORIGINS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF DEMOCRACIES*
- *DISTINGUISH BETWEEN TYPES OF DEMOCRACY*
- *DISTINGUISH BETWEEN FUNCTIONS OF LEGISLATIVE, EXECUTIVE AND JUDICIAL BRANCHES.*
- *COMPARE ELECTORAL SYSTEMS AND PARTY SYSTEMS*

Introduction

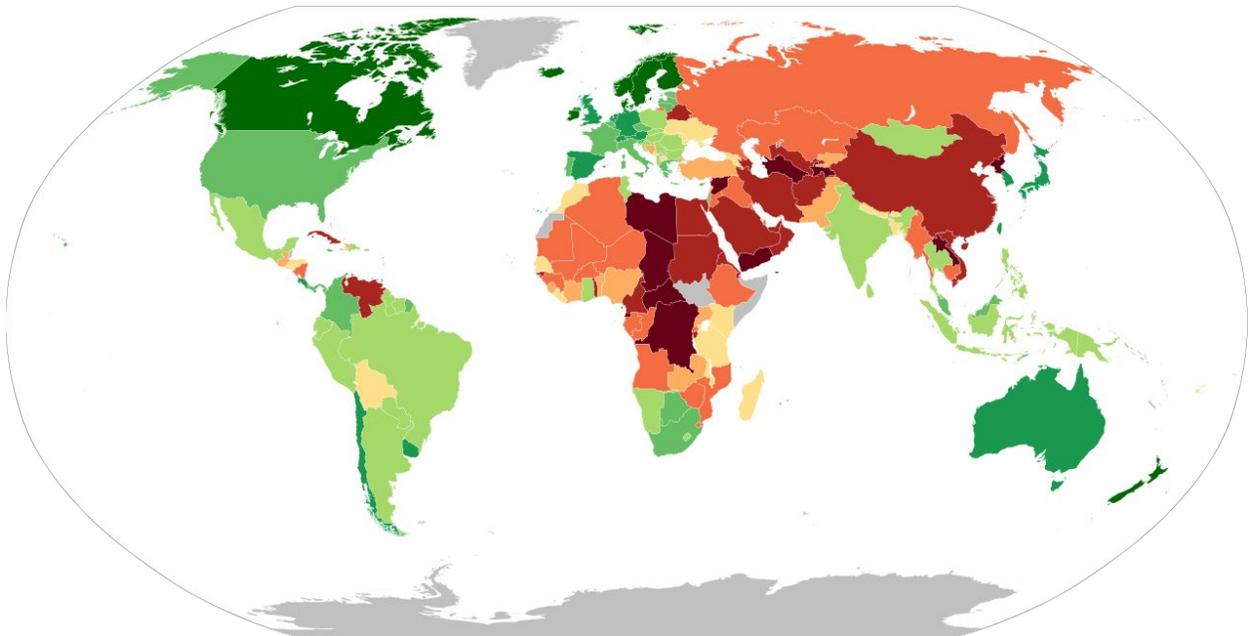


Figure 61: Map of the world by Democracy Index according to data from the Economist Intelligence Unit. Dark green represents the most democratic states, while yellow are “hybrid regimes” and red are non-democracies.⁷³

⁷² This chapter adapted from [4: Democracies and Democratization](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Dino Bozonelos, Julia Wendt, Charlotte Lee, Jessica Scarffe, Masahiro Omae, Josh Franco, Byran Martin, & Stefan Veldhuis](#).

⁷³ Source: [Map showing countries/territories by Democracy Index score according to 2020 report](#), by Wikipedia - File:BlankMap-World-Microstates.svg, licensed under [Public Domain](#).

More than half of the governments currently in existence operate under some variation of democracy, as depicted in Figure 61 above. Again, you might compare this map of democracies to the map of Global North and Global South states in Figure 7 on page 57. While many states have democratized in recent years, authoritarianism persists in large portions of the Global South. In this chapter, we will focus on simply defining democracy and exploring varieties of democracies in the world. In the next chapter, we will consider theories of democracy with a focus on the Global South and why democracies do not take hold as often in the Global South.

The global trends towards democratization worldwide during the twentieth century prompted some to conclude that democracy is simply the best, or most ideal, form of government. Indeed, near the end of the twentieth century, political scientist Francis Fukuyama (1992) wrote a book entitled, *The End of History and the Last Man*, where he argued humanity had reached the end of history because many countries had adopted forms of liberal democracy. His book was a best-seller which energized many about the prospects of a world which embraces democracy and will not again suffer the likes of major World Wars and conflicts. Twenty years after this publication, however, and in light of events like the September 11th attacks on the United States, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the rise of China, the backsliding of Russia, the COVID-19 pandemic and the eventual fall of Afghanistan back to authoritarian rule, Fukuyama mostly retracted his conclusion that the world had accepted democracy as the standard. Instead, he now asserts that issues related to political identity now threaten the security of geopolitical stability. The many challenges facing democracy, democratization, and democratic backsliding (discussed in Chapter 8), prompts us to take a hard look at democracy, its types, its institutions and models, and various manifestations throughout the world. Is democracy the best form of government? What are its advantages and disadvantages?

Francis Fukuyama is an American political scientist, economist, and author of books and journal articles. From left to right, his 1992 book, *The End of History and the Last Man*, prompted discussion over whether the world had reached the end of history because so many countries had been adopting liberal democracy as their form of government. One of his more recent books, *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment*, came out in 2018, and his conclusions began veering away from the belief that the world had accepted liberal democracy. Instead, political identity and the weight of historical disputes potentially impede global geopolitical potential for long-term peace.

Origins, Definitions and Types of Democracy

Although there is evidence of what anthropologists have designated “primitive democracy,” wherein small communities have face-to-face discussions in order to make decisions, as far back as 2,500 years ago, the first formal application of democratic institutions and processes is generally attributed to ancient Greece. Athens, Greece is generally credited with being the birthplace of democracy. In its simplest terms, **democracy** is a government system in which the supreme power of government is vested in the people. Democracy comes from the Greek word, *dēmokratiā*, where “demos” means “people”, and “kratos” meaning “power” or “rule.” Prior to the formation of legal reforms, Athens had operated as an aristocracy.

An **aristocracy** is a form of government where power is held by nobility or those concerned to be of the highest classes within a society. Aristocracy proved troublesome for Athens, and the people eventually rallied under an Athenian leader named Solon (circa 640 - 560 B.C.E.). In trying to meet the demands of the people, Solon attempted to satisfy all classes of the Athenian population, rich and poor alike, to devise a form of government which satisfied all. To this end, in 594 B.C.E., Solon created legal reforms and a constitution, which provided the foundations for

citizen participation in government affairs, and abolished slavery of Athenian citizens. Under this construct, adult males who had completed their military training were given the right to vote, and as much as 20% of the population was active in making laws. Eventually, democracy in Athens failed, due to both internal and external factors. Internally, there was heavy criticism that the aristocracy was still in force, and able to pervert and manipulate legal outcomes to their own benefit. Further, the works of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, all of whom were critical of the merits and feasibility of democracy, led to the erosion of trust in democracy in Athens. Generally, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, though they had their own unique critiques of democracy, (recall Figure 11: Aristotle's Classification System on page 71) tended to value political stability over the potential of “rule of the mob.” Externally, and tied to the prospect of political stability, Athens faced frequent challenges to its democracy from the outside. The Peloponnesian War, the changes in leadership from King Phillip II of Macedon and Alexander the Great, and finally, the rise of the Roman Empire, all are also attributed to the eventual decline of democracy in ancient Greece. After the fall of democracy in Greece, the prospect of democracy did not re-emerge as a feasible, or even desired, option until the early modern era in the 1600s. Full democracy, however, probably didn't emerge until the 20th Century.

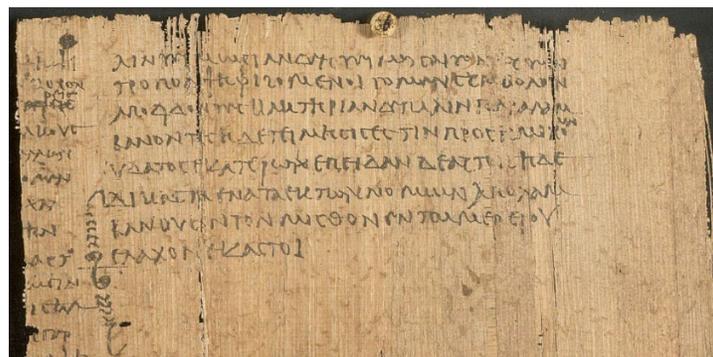


Figure 62: *The Constitution of Athens* written by Aristotle⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Source: [The Constitution of Athens by Aristotle that details the constitution of Classical Athens](https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Papyrus_131), by Anonymous - https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Papyrus_131, licensed under [Public Domain](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

Ancient concepts and manifestations of democracy differ greatly from modern conceptualization and applications of democracy. One of the key differences is in the way power from the people is channeled; the difference becomes apparent in comparing a direct democracy versus an indirect democracy. A **direct democracy** enables citizens to vote directly, or participate directly, in the formation of laws, public policy and government decisions. In this system, citizens personally get involved in all aspects of politics, and are able to change constitutional laws, recommend referendums and make suggestions for laws, and mandate the activities and actions of government officials. To some extent, Athens exercised a direct democracy in that adult male citizens, who had completed their military training, could participate directly in the making of laws. It was not a 'perfect' democracy in that not all citizens, male and female, rich and poor, could participate, but it did have a mechanism for a certain class of citizen participating, i.e. males. In contrast, **indirect democracy** channels the power of the people through representation, where citizens elect representatives to make laws and government decisions on their behalf. In this scenario, citizens of the country are granted **suffrage**, which is the right to vote in political elections and propose referendums. In a healthy democracy, elections are both **free and fair**. **Free elections** are those where all citizens are able to vote for the candidate of their choice. The election is free if all citizens who meet the requirements to vote (e.g. are of lawful age and meet the citizenship requirements, if they exist), are not prevented from participating in the election process. **Fair elections** are those in which all votes carry equal weight, are counted accurately, and the election results are able to be accepted by parties. Ideally, the following standards are met to ensure elections are free and fair:

Before the Election

- Eligible citizens are able to register to vote;

- Voters are given access to reliable information about the ballot and the elections;
- Citizens are able to run for office.

During the Election

- All voters have access to a polling station or some method of casting their vote;
- Voters are able to vote free from intimidation;
- The voting process is free of fraud and tampering.

After the Election

- Ballots are accurately counted and the results are announced;
- The results of the election are accepted / respected / honored.

The integrity of the election is of paramount importance in democracies, for if the process is not found to be free or fair, it violates the core principles of what constitutes a democracy: by the people, for the people.

Indirect democracy is what most democratic countries today practice, partly because of logistics (In the U.S., how would every single adult citizen directly participate in the making of laws? Would requiring a vote for every decision be time efficient?), and to another extent, a question over whether voting is always the best option for determining just, equitable or ideal outcomes.

In a **representative democracy**, citizens, to some extent, outsource the power of lawmaking to those who, ideally, either have expertise in making laws or who may be granted a greater depth of information in order to make decisions. In this sense, not every citizen necessarily wants to be involved in every government decision but would prefer selecting a representative to getting political work done. Further, although most democratic countries do practice indirect democracy, there are often some mechanisms that align with some characteristics of a direct democracy. For

instance, the U.S. has a representative democracy, but voters in some states have the ability to put forth initiatives and referendums, also referred to as Ballot Propositions. This is called **participatory** democracy, in which citizens can directly vote on certain laws, but most of the law-making continues through representatives. Finally, **deliberative** democracy is a model where consensus-building is the primary mechanism for decision-making, rather than an adversarial model based largely on voting between rival parties or factions. Recall our discussion of the Iroquois confederacy on page 121. This system was based largely on a participatory democracy model. The differences between these types of democracy can be summarized by thinking about the types of democracy that are most appropriate according to the size of the population and the complexity of the problem being addressed.

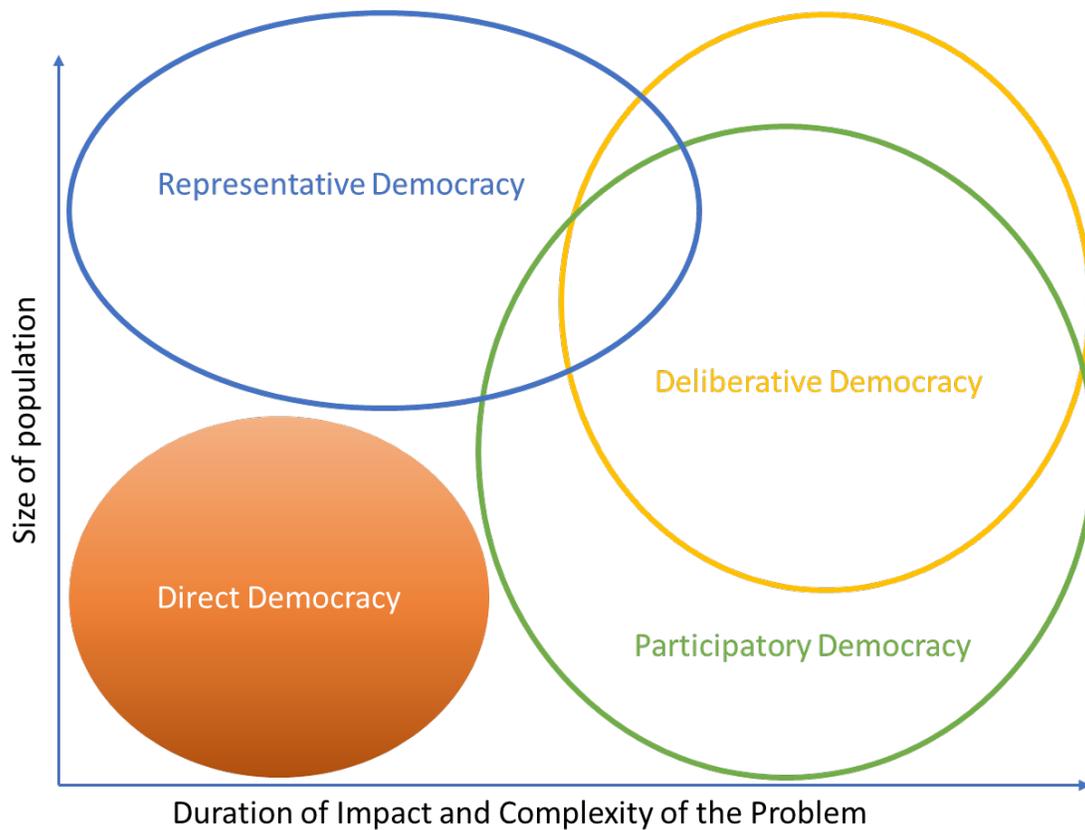


Figure 63: Types of Democracy by Population and Complexity⁷⁵

Importantly, democracy has a number of characteristics which can be central to understanding the variation in democracies that exist worldwide today. These differences also highlight the difference between concepts of ancient democracy versus contemporary democracy. Ancient democracy had no concept or foundations for widespread suffrage or the protection of civil liberties. Some of these modern accepted democratic themes include (but are not limited to): **free, fair and regular elections** (ideally, with the inclusion of more than one viable political party), **respect for civil liberties** (freedom of religion, speech, the press, peaceful assembly; freedom to criticize the government) as well as the **protection of civil rights** (freedom from

⁷⁵ Source: Holly Oberle, licensed under [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

discrimination based on various characteristics deemed important in society). Democracies which not only facilitate free and fair elections, but also ensure the protection of civil liberties are called **liberal democracies**. Although these are the general themes, there is still ample debate among scholars about the importance and weight of these characteristics. Larry Diamond (2004), an American political sociologist and a scholar of democratic studies, put forth the following four characteristics which make a democracy, a democracy. A democracy must include:

1. A system for choosing and replacing the government through free and fair elections;
2. Active participation of the people, as citizens, in politics and civic life;
3. The protection of human rights of all citizens;
4. A rule of law in which the laws and procedures apply equally to all citizens.

Karl Popper, an Austrian-British academic and philosopher (whom you may recognize from Chapter 2 for his work on the nature of inquiry and the recognition of falsification theory), had a more blunt definition for democracy, “I personally call the type of government which can be removed without violence ‘democracy,’ and the other, ‘tyranny.’ (Popper, 2008). Instead of citing specific characteristics of democracy, which Popper was hesitant to do given the wide variation in democracies that exist, he simply contrasted it with outright tyranny. In general, Popper emphasized the importance not in how the people could exercise authority, but that they have access, availability, and opportunity, through some means, to control their leaders without violence, retribution, or revolution.

Other scholars have noted more rigid qualifications for democracy. In looking at the world of Robert Dahl, Ian Shapiro and Jose Antonio Cheibub, all political scientists, they assert that every vote in a representative democracy must carry equal weight, and that the rights of citizens must be equally protected by a well-defined and clear “law of the land;” in most cases, the “law of the

land,” rests with a written constitution. The rights and liberties of citizens must be protected by the law of the land (Dahl et al., 2003).

Overall, there are hundreds of critiques and frameworks for defining democracies and noting its characteristics, and scholars are generally not in full agreement on what constitutes a perfect democracy. Nevertheless, reaching some consensus on the characteristics is important if scholars want to advance the understanding of regime types like democracy. The difference in perception of democracy can be seen in how some organizations choose to measure democracy across countries. At present, there are at least eight organizations which attempt to quantify the existence and health of democracies worldwide. These eight include: Freedom House, Economist Intelligence Unit (see Figure 61 above), V-Dem, the Human Freedom Index, Polity IV, World Governance Indicators, Democracy Barometer, and Vanhanen’s Polyarchy Index. In Figure 65: Table of different indices that measure democracy below, a few of these are highlighted based on what they identify as main characteristics of democracy. This table shows the differences in components considered when trying to measure democracy. From left to right, Freedom House, Economist Intelligence Unit, and Varieties of Democracy; all are organizations which attempt to determine whether countries are democratic and assess the strength of their democratic institutions.

<i>Index</i>	Freedom House	Economist Intelligence Unit	Varieties of Democracy
<i>Components Measured</i>	Elections	Elections	Elections
	Participation	Participation	Participation
	Functioning of government	Functioning of government	Deliberation
	Free expression	Political Culture	Egalitarianism
	Organizational Rights	Civil Liberties	Individual Rights
	Rule of Law		
	Individual Rights		

Figure 64: Table of different indices that measure democracy⁷⁶

The different organizations, choosing different areas of emphasis and weight for characteristics of democracy, yield different outcomes in terms of identifying whether a country is a democracy, as well as judging the healthiness of a democracy. For instance, as of 2018, the Varieties of Democracies Project finds there are currently 99 democracies, and 80 autocracies. Autocracies are forms of government where countries are ruled either by a single person or group, who/which holds total power and control. For this same period, the Polity IV Index disagrees, finding 57 full democracies, 28 mixed-regime types, and 13 autocratic regimes. Importantly, the Polity IV Index does not take suffrage into consideration as a meaningful indicator of democracy. Freedom House also arrives at different outcomes for this same time-period, asserting that 86 countries are democracies, with 109 non-democracies. Finally, the Economist Intelligence Unit found 20

⁷⁶ Source: Adapted from Democracy is shared under a [CC BY-NC 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Dino Bozonelos, Julia Wendt, Charlotte Lee, Jessica Scarffe, Masahiro Omae, Josh Franco, Byran Martin, & Stefan Veldhuis](#).

countries to be fully democratic, and 55 countries have “flawed democracies.” Given that scholars and these organizations have acknowledged that different types of democracies exist, it is now useful to discuss these types, as well as the implications for these types on the institution of democracy. (See Appendix 1: Weblinks and Databases for links to all these databases).

The number of democracies has significantly grown worldwide since 1900. Political scientists have sometimes called jumps in the number of democracies ‘waves.’ In this way, there have been three major waves of democratization: World War I (First wave, 1828-1926), with subsequent “waves” of democratization coming following World War II (Second wave) and the subsequent anticolonial independence movements (see Comparative Within-Case Study: FATA and Karachi in Pakistan for an example of this), and the fall of the Soviet Union and the subsequent decline of communism (Third wave).

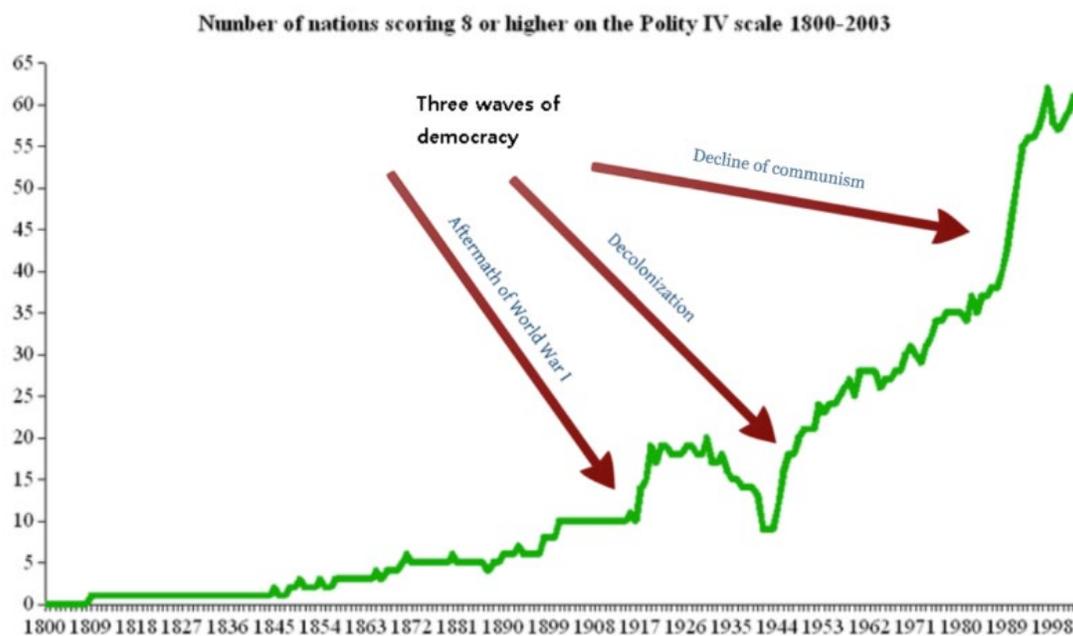


Figure 65: Waves of democracy⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Source: [Waves of democracy](#). Based on File:Number of nations 1800-2003 scoring 8 or higher on Polity IV scale.png by Piotrus – Own work, licensed under [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

Measurements of Democracy

The different organizations, choosing different areas of emphasis and weight for characteristics of democracy, yield different outcomes in terms of identifying whether a country is a democracy, as well as judging the healthiness of a democracy. For instance, as of 2018, the Varieties of Democracies Project finds there are currently 99 democracies, and 80 autocracies. Recall, autocracies are forms of government where countries are ruled either by a single person or group, who/which holds total power and control. For this same time-period, the Polity IV Index disagrees, finding 57 full democracies, 28 mixed-regime types, and 13 autocratic regimes. Importantly, the Polity IV Index does not take suffrage into consideration as a meaningful indicator of democracy. Freedom House also arrives at different outcomes for this same time-period, asserting that 86 countries are democracies, with 109 non-democracies. Finally, the Economist Intelligence Unit found 20 countries to be fully democratic, and 55 countries have “flawed democracies.” Given that scholars and these organizations have acknowledged that different types of democracies exist, it is now useful to discuss these types, as well as the implications for these types on the institution of democracy.

Institutions within Democracy

Aside from considering the variety of ways democracy can manifest across different countries, we can also look at some of the institutions which tend to be common within democracies. In many ways, the institutions described in the first portion of this section are akin to building blocks; each block has distinct functions, wielding distinct forms of power and operating within what political scientists would call a separation of powers with checks and balances. **Separation of powers** is a term that divides government functions into three areas: the legislature, tasked primarily with the making of laws; the executive, who carries out or enforces these laws; and the

judiciary, tasked with interpreting the constitutionality of laws. These three institutions generally operate under a process of **checks and balances**, which is a system that attempts to ensure that no one branch can become too powerful. Traces of the historical underpinnings of separation of powers found in the writings of Harrington, Montesquieu among others. Other hallmark institutions of democracies are their electoral systems and the presence of political parties, which are both discussed in the second portion of this section. **Electoral systems**, simply put, are voting systems; an electoral system provides a set of rules that dictate how elections (and other voting initiatives) are conducted and how results are determined and communicated. **Political parties** are groups of people who are organized under shared values to get their candidates elected to office to exercise political authority. All of these institutions, taken together, contribute to the many unique democracies that exist today, and require, at the very least, a brief overview to consider their importance and implications to democracy today.

Executives and Legislatures

While some elements and characteristics of democracy vary, one constant commonality is the separation of powers among institutions within governments. As described above, this separation of powers promotes checks and balances because it provides for power to be spread throughout multiple branches of government with the intention of splitting up power between institutions so that no single branch has too much power but instead empowering all branches with their own institutionalized powers. The three branches of concern include: (1) the legislature; (2) the executive; and (3) the judiciary.

The **legislative** branch is tasked with performing three main functions:(1) making and revising laws; (2) providing administrative oversight to ensure laws are being properly executed; (3) and providing representation of the constituents to the government. The primary, and most important,

function of the legislature is to make laws. While legislatures can manifest in different ways, the U.S. Congress has two bodies, the House of Representatives, which contains 435 members (representation from states vary based on population size, determined every 10 years by the U.S. census), and the Senate, which contains 100 senators (two for each state). This is called a **bicameral** legislature because it has two “houses.” In a bicameral legislature, one house is usually referred to as the “upper” house and the other the “lower” house. The upper house is usually smaller with more restricted power, while the lower house is usually larger. Some states have **unicameral** legislatures with only one house.

Types of Legislatures

Members of the legislature, elected by the people, represent their interests, and make laws on their behalf. There are three main types of legislatures worth noting. First, the **consultative legislature** is one where the legislature advises the leader, or group of leaders, on issues relating to laws and their application. In the consultative legislature, members could either be elected or appointed. For example, the Shura Council is a consultative legislature with 151 members appointed by the King of Saudi Arabia. (Dekmejian, 1998).

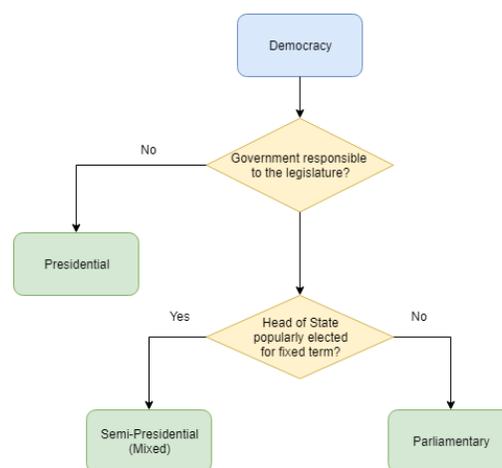


Figure 66: Parliamentary versus Presidential Democracies⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Source: [A flowchart for the classification of democracies](#), by Olfbir – Own work, licensed under [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

The two most popular types of legislatures are **parliamentary** and **congressional/presidential** (there is also a hybrid version, called semi-presidential systems; see Figure 66 above).

Interestingly, while most of the legislatures in North and South America are congressional legislatures (with the exception of Canada, which has a parliamentary legislature), European legislatures have tended to be parliamentary. The main difference between parliamentary and congressional systems is how the executive branch is chosen (see Figure 66 above). In the congressional/presidential system, citizens elect representatives in the legislature separately from the executive branch. In the parliamentary system, citizens elect representatives in the legislative body and *do not* directly elect the executive branch. Instead, the executive (also called the head of government) is usually chosen by the party that gets the most seats in the legislature. In order to form a government, a party needs to win a certain threshold of seats in the legislature, usually around 50%. If one party doesn't reach that threshold (which is very common, since most parliamentary systems are also **multiparty systems**, discussed below), then a group of parties must agree to govern together in a **coalition**. When a coalition is formed, the parties involved agree on which party gets to choose the executive. Most of the time, that is the party within the coalition with the largest number of seats in parliament. A quick look at recent elections in Thailand can help us better understand how parliamentary democracy works, as well as the challenges faced by a many newly emerging democracies.

Snapshot Case Study: Thailand



Figure 67: Detailed Map of Thailand; location of Thailand in Southeast Asia⁷⁹

Full Country Name: Kingdom of Thailand

Head of State: King Wachiralongkon

Head of Government: Prime Minister Prayut Chan-ocha; could be Pita Limjaroenrat if approved by the Senate (see below)

Government: Constitutional Monarchy

⁷⁹ Source: From left to right: [Map of Thailand](#) by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#); [Locator Map](#) by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#).

Official Language: Thai

Economic System: Market oriented economy

Location: Southeast Asia

Capital: Bangkok

Total land size: 513,120 sq km; 198,116 sq miles

Population: 69,794,997

GDP: \$1.223 trillion

GDP per capita: \$17,100

Currency: Thai baht

Thailand, like Ethiopia, (discussed in Student Feature: Ethiopia as a deviant case of post-colonial state-building on page 157), was never completely colonized by a Western power, but this doesn't mean that Thailand escaped colonial influence. This is surprising, because it was completely surrounded by British Burma (known today as Myanmar) and Malaysia, and French Indochina (known today as Vietnam and Laos), Dutch East Indies (known today as Indonesia). Thailand at the time was known as Siam. Siam provided a convenient buffer zone between all three colonial powers. In order to keep these powers at bay, the Siamese kingdom began to adopt colonial styles of governing. For example, the King began to consolidate power among what was then autonomous regions. He also started making maps so the Kingdom's borders were clearly defined. In essence, the Kingdom took steps to create and maintain both internal and external sovereignty. It transitioned from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy following World War I in 1932. Since then, Thailand has been ruled mostly by military coups, followed by short periods of democracy (Baker & Phongpaichit, 2022).

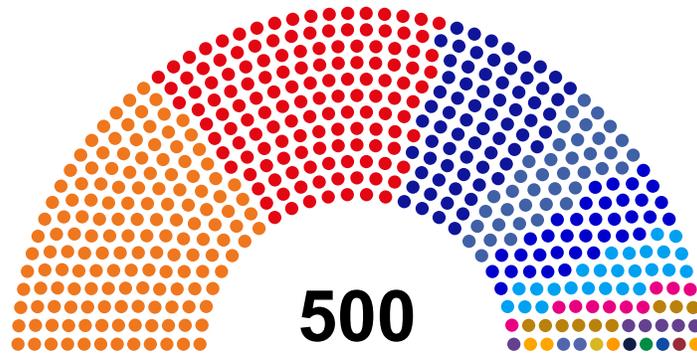


Figure 68: Distribution of seats in parliament after the 2023 general election in Thailand⁸⁰

The most recent election is a good window into how parliamentary democracy works, as well as how constitutional monarchies work. After the 2023 general election in Thailand, the Move Forward party (represented above in orange) won 151 seats, while the former leading party Pheu Thai (represented in red), won 141. However, no party got enough seats to govern without forming a coalition. This was a major victory for Move Forward, as they increased their seats by 70 from the previous election. They are seen as a reform party promising to end the military’s grip on the country. You can see from Figure 68 that several other parties were also elected, some of which will only hold one seat. The Move Forward party, because they won the most seats, should be allowed to choose the prime minister. It is also likely they will form a coalition that includes Pheu Thai, as well as other smaller parties. This is why in a parliamentary democracy the legislative and executive branches are said to be *fused* or *balanced* rather than separate (Bilal, 2023).

However, it is important to note that Thailand is an emerging democracy that has been plagued by military coups, the most recent of which was in 2014. Therefore, it should not be treated as a

⁸⁰ Source: [Distribution of seats in Thai parliament 2023](#), by User:Lookruk - Parliament diagram tool, licensed under [Public Domain](#).

typical case of parliamentary democracy. While the EIU rated Thailand as the most improved state in terms of democracy in 2022, raising its democracy score by 0.68 from 2021 (on a 0-1 scale), democracy remains a serious question in Thailand (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2023). As part of negotiations to balance the military with democratically elected parties, the military controls most of the Senate, which is the upper house of Thailand's legislature. In addition to forming a coalition in the House of Representatives (the lower house), the Senate must also approve of the prime minister. As of publication, it remains to be seen whether the Senate will ultimately allow the leader of Move Forward to become the prime minister (Bilal, 2023).

Head of States and Heads of Governments

Thailand is also a good example of another difference between congressional and parliamentary democracies. In a congressional system, the **head of state** and **head of government** are usually made up of a single leader. The head of state is a ceremonial position that represents the nation, while the head of government is the person with the highest position of political power in the executive branch. The US president embodies both roles. But in a parliamentary system, these positions are usually divided. In the case of Thailand, the head of government is the Prime Minister, and the head of state is the monarchy. The head of state often has limited political power. Systems such as Thailand, as well as the United Kingdom, are called **constitutional monarchies**. They retain the monarchy for ceremonial, historical, and symbolic purposes, but real political power is vested in a democratically elected government. In the case of Thailand, the bulk of political power lies with the government, but the monarchy does retain significant power. Any government, whether a military coup or a democratically elected government, must run with the blessing of the King. Thailand also has one of the most stringent "lèse-majesté" laws in the world, which prohibits citizens from criticizing the monarchy. The Move Forward party is

seeking to decrease the power of the monarchy and loosen lèse-majesté regulations. For this reason, Move Forward faces another obstacle to becoming the ruling party in Thailand, despite winning the most seats (Bilal, 2023).



Figure 69: Grand Palace of the Royal Family in Bangkok, Thailand. The royal family of Thailand is the richest in the world.⁸¹

Another important note: Parliamentary democracies are not always constitutional monarchies. In Germany for example, the head of state is the President, who is chosen by members of the Bundestag (the parliament). The head of government, on the other hand, is called the Chancellor, who is also chosen by members of the Bundestag.

⁸¹ Source: Holly Oberle, licensed under [CC BY-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).

Removal of the Executive

Leaving behind Thailand, it is important to consider another key difference between parliamentary and presidential systems of democracy. Perhaps the most important check a legislature has over the executive branch is the power to remove the executive. However, the process by which this takes place is very different between parliamentary and presidential systems. In presidential systems, the process to remove an executive is called **impeachment**. While the exact process by which an executive is impeached will vary by state, it is often a very complex process and requires not only an act of the legislature but also a constitutional court of some variety. The US is rare in that the courts are not involved in the impeachment process. For example, in Brazil, presidents are provisionally removed by the Chamber of Deputies (the lower house of Brazil's national Congress), then tried and removed by the Federal Senate (the upper house of Brazil's national Congress). Both houses must vote to impeach with at least two-thirds of the vote. Dilma Rousseff was impeached in Brazil in 2016 on charges of corruption.



Figure 70: Former President of Brazil, Dilma Rousseff greeting supporters in 2011⁸²

⁸² Source: [Presidenta Dilma Rousseff cumprimenta populares durante visita à Casa-Museu Mestre Vitalino](#), by Dilma Rousseff, licensed under [CC BY-SA 2.0](#).

In parliamentary systems, it is much easier to remove an executive and is not considered an extraordinary procedure. In fact, executives are removed from office as a matter of routine in many parliamentary democracies. A vote of no confidence can be called when members of the legislature no longer feel the executive is properly leading the government. (See Comparative Within-Case Study: FATA and Karachi in Pakistan on page 169 for an example of a vote of no confidence). If the vote passes, the executive must step down. Because the executive is usually chosen from the largest party in the legislature, the removal of the executive often results in new elections to determine the makeup of both the legislature and the executive. Therefore, elections can happen relatively often in a parliamentary system, instead of on a fixed schedule in a presidential system.

Judiciary

The final “building block” of government to identify is the **judiciary**, which refers to the part of government where laws are interpreted. In some countries, the judiciary is a third branch of government, like in the U.S. In other countries, the judiciary is shared with other branches of government. In authoritarian regimes, the judiciary tends to be subservient to the executive and legislative branches. In democracies, the judiciary is one of the divisions which functions to uphold the rule of law. In the U.S., the highest court is the Supreme Court, the only court mentioned in the U.S. Constitution. It has the sole power of **judicial review**, which is the ability to interpret the constitutionality of laws, and in doing so, the ability to overturn decisions made by lesser courts. This is sometimes called the “American model” but it also exists in other states like Argentina, Australia, Canada, India, Japan and the Philippines (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2017).

The other model, sometimes called the “European model” uses what is called a constitutional court. This is a special type of court separate from the rest of the court system. It reviews laws as well as executive acts, to decide whether the laws are valid according to the state’s constitution and provides remedies if a law is found to be unconstitutional. It does so exclusively; no other court can decide matters of constitutionality. Countries with this type of court include Colombia, France, Germany, Indonesia, South Korea, Taiwan, and South Africa (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2017).

Whether a state follows the European or American model of the judiciary, the independence of the judiciary is a central ingredient for determining the strength of a state’s democracy and its overall freedom. Freedom House, one of the organizations that score and rank countries by their level of democracy, includes judicial independence as one of the variables that contribute to these scores. To measure the independence of the judiciary, Freedom House asks the following questions (Freedom House, 2023, sec. F1):

- Is the judiciary subject to interference from the executive branch or other influences?
- Are judges appointed and dismissed in a fair and unbiased manner?
- Do judges rule fairly and impartially, or do they commonly render verdicts that favor the government?
- Do executive, legislative, and other governmental authorities comply with judicial decisions, and are these decisions enforced?
- Do powerful private entities comply with judicial decisions?

Electoral Systems

As described previously, electoral systems, simply put, are voting systems; an electoral system provides a set of rules that dictate how elections (and other voting initiatives) are conducted and

how results are determined and communicated. Elections are the mechanism through which leaders get chosen around the world. Rules that are relevant to an electoral system can include those that lay out when elections occur, who is allowed to vote, who is allowed to run as a candidate, how ballots are collected and can be cast, how ballots are counted, and what constitutes a victory. Usually, voting rules are set forth by constitutions, election laws, or other legal mandates.

Types of Electoral Systems

There are a number of different types of electoral systems. First, the **plurality voting system** is one where the candidate who gets the most votes, wins. In this system, there is no requirement to attain a majority, so this system can sometimes be called the **first-past-the-post system (FPTP)**. The consequence of this system is that a candidate can win an election with less than 50% of the vote, especially in a multiparty system (discussed below). This is used in the U.S., and it is the second most common election type for presidential elections and elections for legislative members around the world. First-past-the-post systems are also common in **single-member district systems (SMD)**. Simply, all electoral systems depend on the creation of districts, which are territorial boundaries from which representatives are drawn. Representatives are chosen from these districts. In a single-member district, only one person represents each district.

Second, the **majoritarian voting system** is one where, as the name suggests, candidates must win a majority in order to win the election. If they do not win a majority, there needs to be a runoff election. Many single-member districts have instituted a runoff in order to make sure that the eventual winner has received the support from the majority of voters.

Next, another voting system is called **ranked choice voting (RCV) or instant runoff vote (IRV)**. The simplest version of this system allows voters to rank candidates in order of their

preference, rather than having one choice. Voters' first preference are counted and if no candidate gets a majority, the candidate with the lowest total is eliminated, and the votes for the last place candidate are redistributed to those voters' second-choice. A second round commences, following the same pattern. This process continues until one candidate has a majority. See Figure 65:

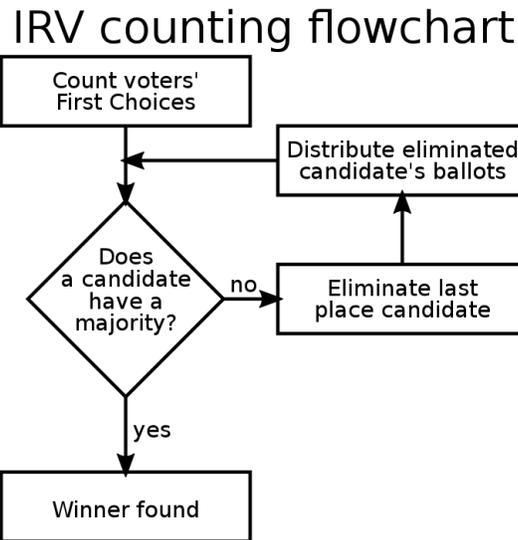


Figure 71: Instant Runoff Voting Flowchart⁸³

Growing frustration with the electoral process in the US has led to increased demand for electoral reform. Ranked choice voting has become an increasingly popular suggestion. RCV is compatible with single-member districts, which the US has, and it is believed by some that using this system would better reflect the will of the people over the current plurality system. Two states use RCV statewide: Alaska and Maine. Several other states and municipalities use it for local elections, but not statewide. At the same time, however, two states have banned the use of RCV: Tennessee and Florida (Richie et al., 2021).

⁸³ Source: [A flowchart showing IRV counting](#), by Zerodamage - File:Alternative IRV counting flowchart.png, licensed under [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

Finally, the **proportional voting system** is one where seats are allocated according to the percentage of the vote. For instance, if 10% of the population vote for Political Party A, then the country's legislature will allow for 10% of its seats to be allocated to representatives from Party A. Because the number of seats is allocated by percentage of the vote, most proportional voting systems are also **multimember district systems**. This simply means that multiple people represent each district, rather than one. The number of representatives from each district will vary greatly. This is called **district magnitude**.

Political Parties

Political parties also play a very important role, not only in elections, but in how a political agenda get accomplished in different countries. Political parties exist in almost every sovereign state today, even North Korea, although the influence and power of parties varies greatly.

Political parties are groups of people who are organized under shared values to get their candidates elected to office to exercise political authority. Beyond getting candidates elected, political parties also provide a training ground for future political leaders and develop loyalty among citizens and voters.

At this point, it is interesting to consider political parties in the context of US democracy.

American Founders didn't plan for parties; in fact, they warned against them. Political philosopher Edmund Burke (2002) was very influential in early America and he considered parties to be good. They protect the people from an abusive monarch or factions within the government. James Madison in Federalist 10 offered this definition of faction: "a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community." He believed that if factions must exist,

it is better to have too many than too few. That way, as President George Washington stated in his farewell address, myriad factions, and by extension multiple political parties, make it “less likely...that a majority of the whole will have a common motive to invade the rights of other citizens.”

Despite some of the skepticism of America’s founders regarding parties, they have become an indispensable tool for modern democracy. Being able to freely vote for and participate in competing parties is considered one of the cornerstones of democratic states. In less democratic states, parties may be illegal or barred in some other way from fully participating in government, with the exception of a few preferred parties. The best way to compare different countries regarding their political parties is by looking at a country’s **party system**. This simply refers to how many political parties are typically active at any given time, as well as any patterns these parties display in a state.

Types of Party Systems

Dominant and Single Party Systems

A **dominant party** structure is one in which one party tends to win elections over a long period of time. Exactly how long is not defined. This can happen for several reasons. First, it can happen in a democracy where a particular party wins frequently

simply because its agenda and messages resonate with the most people. South Africa is an example of a democratic dominant party government. The African National Congress (ANC) has governed the country since 1994, when *apartheid* was officially disbanded. (See Comparative

Apartheid was a system of legal racial segregation that characterized the South African social and political system from 1948 to 1994. In particular, white South Africans were systemically privileged in all areas of society, despite being a numerical minority.

Case Study: South Africa and Iraq for more on South Africa and the ANC). Second, it can happen in less democratic states when parties are banned, or other barriers are put in the way to prevent rival parties from competing meaningfully. If these measures go so far as to functionally make it impossible for other parties to operate, a dominant party system may for all intents and purposes become a **single-party system**. For example, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is by far the most dominant party in National People’s Congress, China’s unicameral legislature. At nearly 3000 members, it is the largest legislative body in the world. As represented in red in Figure 73 below, the CCP (in red) has a clear and overwhelming majority. Importantly, we wouldn’t consider a single-party state a democracy, and most dominant-party states would be considered weak democracies or democracies at risk of backsliding.

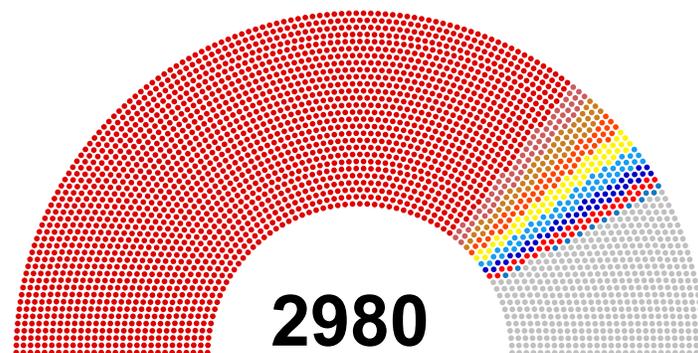


Figure 72: Distribution of seats by party in the 13th National People's Congress of China. The 13th NPC came to an end in 2023. As of publication, the NPC is in its 14th iteration, which is expected to last until 2028. ⁸⁴

Yet, the other parties represented in the NPC should not be thought of as “opposition” parties in the same sense as democratic parliaments. The other eight parties are the only parties legally

⁸⁴ Source: [13th National People’s Congress](#), by User:FreeHK - Parliament diagram tool, licensed under [Public Domain](#).

allowed and technically fall under the direction of the CCP. The grey seats are “independents,” but each works seamlessly with the CCP.

The reasons for dominant and single party systems often lie in the regime type as well as historical context. States that fought for independence from colonial powers often did so through a nationalist movement, which often become a political party upon independence. Because postcolonial states do not have a history of sovereignty, and its people have been divided into various hierarchies to make it easier to govern by outside powers, and have often been economically ravaged through colonization, it is difficult for a new postcolonial state to quickly transition to democracy with multiple freely competing parties. Therefore, postcolonial states tend to be authoritarian which also favors dominant and single-party systems. An exception to this trend is India, which has dozens of parties (although two parties tend to dominate federal elections—the BJP and the INC).

Two Party Systems

A two-party system is, of course, a party system in which only two parties meaningfully participate over multiple election cycles. Two party systems are often the result of single-member districts and plurality electoral systems. The reason for this is intuitive: if only one person can win, then there is little incentive for multiple parties to try and compete because that will split the vote amongst citizens with compatible views. Instead, candidates with similar ideologies and policy goals will strategically band together into a larger bloc to increase their chances of getting the most votes. Parties that form by trying to attract as much support across a large range of positions and voters are called **catch-all parties**.

The US is not the only example of a two party system, although most of the other examples of two party systems might more accurately be described as “two party plus” systems in which two

dominant parties perform the best, but minor parties are still elected and can wield some mild degree of influence. The United Kingdom is dominated by the Conservative Party and Labour Party. These two parties typically get first or second place in general elections, but there are no less than 11 other parties represented in the UK parliament in 2023. Spain was once a solid two party system, with the dominance of *Partido Socialista* and *Partido Popular*, but have since become a two party plus system with the success of the populist party *Podemos*. There are also several others minor parties that serve in the Cortes Generales (Spanish Parliament). Therefore, it is important to note that party systems can ebb and flow.

Multiparty Systems

Multiparty systems are by far the most common party system within democratic states worldwide. Multiparty systems can describe any state with three or more parties that meaningfully participate and have a chance at winning elections at any given time. Some states, like India, have an enormous number of parties. Still the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC) tend to win the most seats in parliament. They must form a complex coalition with a number of smaller parties, however, in order to govern. In recent years, however, the BJP has become even more dominant, comprising 300 of the 543 seats in India's lower house of parliament, with the INC maintaining only 49.

Multiparty systems tend to appear in proportional electoral systems as well as multimember districts. Again, the reasons for this may be obvious: if the seats are distributed according to percentage of the vote, there is no incentive to join forces with similar parties unless a party faces the possibility of not exceeding the threshold to get a seat in the legislature. Because multiparty systems often go hand-in-hand with proportional electoral systems, even clear “winners” usually to form a coalition with other smaller parties.

We will now turn to a case study of Israel, which demonstrates a number of issues within a democratic system of government that we have explored in this chapter. Israel allows us to better explore the parliamentary system of democracy, well as proportional electoral systems within a multiparty system. It can also help us to understand some of the major challenges to a democracy, such as religion, history of colonization, and democratic backsliding.

Snapshot Case Study: Israel



Figure 73: Detailed map of Israel showing borders recognized by the US; it should be noted that these borders are not universally accepted, especially the Golan Heights (not shown); while the map makes it appear that the West Bank is not under Israeli control; in fact, many Israeli settlements are located throughout the West Bank; location of Israel in the Middle East⁸⁵

Full Country Name: State of Israel

Head of State: President Isaac Herzog

Head of Government: Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu

⁸⁵ From left to right: [Map of Israel](#), by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#); [Locator Map](#) by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#).

Government: Parliamentary Democracy

Official Language: Hebrew, Arabic, English

Economic System: Market-based

Location: Middle East

Capital: Jerusalem according to Israel and several other states including the US; Tel Aviv according to most members of the United Nations; some states recognize West Jerusalem such as Russia

Total land size: 21,937 sq km; 8,469 sq miles

Population: 9,043,387 (includes Golan Heights and East Jerusalem)

GDP: \$393.861 billion

GDP per capita: \$42,100

Currency: The new Israeli shekel

Israel is a representative case of parliamentary democracy, with a few unique quirks. While most parliamentary systems use some form of hybrid arrangement, Israel's electoral system is rather straightforward. Studying Israel is also an opportunity to explore the challenges of democracy in a state founded by religion, as well as a potential case of democratic backsliding.

The State of Israel is relatively new, being established in 1948 in the wake of the second World War. Prior to this, the area now under control of Israel was known as the British Mandate for Palestine. This land was being administered by Britain after the breakup of the Ottoman Empire following World War I. The majority of the population of Mandatory Palestine was Muslim during British administration, with smaller but substantial numbers of Jews, Christians, and others such as Bedouins (Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry, 1945). The Mandate required Britain to provide for a national homeland for the Jewish people. Thus, Jewish immigrants from

a variety of ideologies were moving there, many with hopes of establishing a state in the area of their ancestors. This immigration increased drastically because of World War II, and following the war, Holocaust survivors began arriving in Palestine among other Jewish immigrants, which the British opposed. This resulted in a war against the British. Exhausted from World War II, the British eventually referred the problem to the newly created United Nations, which devised a partition plan allowing for a Jewish state and an Arab state. This angered many Arabs since it would mean losing land and power. A civil war commenced, which the Jews won (Laqueur, 2009).

Upon independence, a parliamentary republic was immediately established. Since then, several reforms have taken place, which we will note later. Israel's legislature is called the Knesset and it is a unicameral body. There are 120 members of the Knesset all elected through party-list proportional representation. A party list is a list of candidates provided by each party running for seats in the legislature. Israel uses a *closed list*, which means the parties have determined in advance who will appear on their lists and in what order (Czudnowski, 1970). After the final percentage of the vote is determined and the corresponding number of seats in parliament, the candidates that will fill each seat is determined by their position on the party list. Therefore, those at the top of the list are likely to get elected, and the chances of getting elected goes down the lower the candidate appears on the list. In a closed list system, voters typically only vote for the party—they have no say over the individual candidates. An *open list* is a system where voters have some control over the position of candidates on the list. Legislative elections take place every four years unless there is a vote of no confidence. In fact, few Knessets have survived their four-year term. In order to be elected, a party must get at least 3.25% of the vote (this has been increased over time). This is known as an *electoral threshold*.

Interestingly, Israel does not have a **codified** constitution. A codified constitution simply means one that is written down in an easily identifiable document. When Israel declared its independence, the new government was supposed to write a constitution. However, it never happened, and instead the “constitution” is considered to be a series of individual “Basic Laws.” Hazan (1997) argues that Israel’s lack of a codified constitution stems from its origin as a state: as a sovereign with theological underpinnings. He also argues that in a heterogeneous state such as Israel, popular sovereignty (meaning, sovereignty with the permission of the people) and religious sovereignty are incompatible. Religious parties have traditionally opposed the creation of a constitution out of a fear that such a document would undermine Israel’s religious identity.

After a general legislative election, members of the Knesset elect the president to a single seven-year term by an absolute majority. The president is a ceremonial role, but they have an important job: the president nominates the prime minister after receiving recommendations from the Knesset. This is slightly different than many other parliamentary democracies, in which the ruling party gets to appoint the head of government directly after negotiating with its coalition partners. As a matter of procedure, however, the prime minister is usually selected from the ruling party in Israel since that party is believed to have a mandate from the people to govern. Once a prime minister has been nominated, they must form a coalition, present an agenda, and receive a vote of confidence from the Knesset. Once the prime minister is appointed, he or she forms the rest of the executive branch by appointing cabinet ministers.

This modification of the classic parliamentary system is a result of a reform that was attempted starting in 1996—a new Basic Law was passed to allow for the *direct* election of the prime minister. During this time, Israel was the only parliamentary democracy to directly elect its prime

minister (Hazan, 1997). This experiment ended after only three elections, in which the current model emerged.

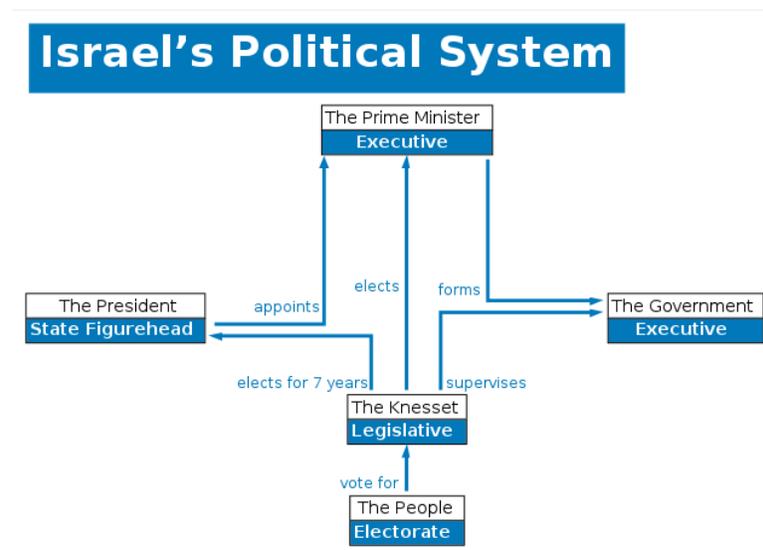


Figure 74: Israel's Parliamentary Democracy⁸⁶

There are around 12 parties in Israel, making it a solidly multiparty system. These include several religious parties and a few parties representing Arab interests. The current prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, became prime minister for the sixth time after his party, Likud, won the most seats in 2022. However, in order to govern, he had to form a coalition which consists of six parties. Likud is considered a secular conservative party. The coalition consists of mostly religious right and far-right parties, but also one non-Zionist party. The more parties that are involved in a coalition, the more difficult it might be to govern, since passing a law requires the consent and compromise amongst all coalition partners.

⁸⁶ Source: [Political system of Israel](#) by SPQR10 and Fredrick R. Brennan (Psihedelista), licensed under [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

This government has come under widespread criticism due to several controversial policies, especially its proposal to modify the judicial system. The reforms would essentially override the independence of the judicial branch. As discussed in the section entitled Judiciary above, the independence of the judicial system is an important feature of strong democracies. In 2022, Freedom House ranked Israel a 4/4 with regard to judicial independence. Many fear that this will be undermined should Netanyahu's proposals pass.

Furthermore, Israel's democratic backsliding is captured in EIU's 2022 report on democracy. Here, Israel is classified as a "Flawed Democracy," with a score of 7.9 out of 10 (10 being the strongest democracy). This represents a drop in rank by six in one year. The most important variable bringing Israel's democracy score down is its civil liberties. (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2023). Its failure to protect civil liberties is also reflected in the legislative branch. Several laws have been passed that some believe are meant to disqualify Arab Israeli citizens and parties. Defenders of these laws contend that it is not directed at Arabs but rather at people who contest the existence of Israel or are terrorists. Some, particularly Palestinians, contend that the increase of the electoral threshold from 2% to 3.25% was an attempt to limit the number of small parties, some of which are Palestinian Arab. (*Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question – Palquest*, 2023).

Thus, not only is Israel a useful case to better understand the proportional electoral system and parliamentary democracy, but it also demonstrates that democracy is not a static condition of states. In fact, democracy may be quite fragile, which we will explore in subsequent chapters.

Conclusion

This chapter has considered one of the most important questions in comparative politics: what is a democracy? How do we know a state is democracy? The importance given to democracy is a

function of the fact that many political scientists, especially those in the West, consider democracy to be the “best of the worst” governing systems we have today. We have explored the institutions, in particular, executives, legislatures and judiciaries that make up democracies, as well as the two major types of democratic systems: parliamentary versus presidential democracy. In the next chapter, we will consider the leading theories of why states become democracies, as well as why states tend to *stay democracies*.

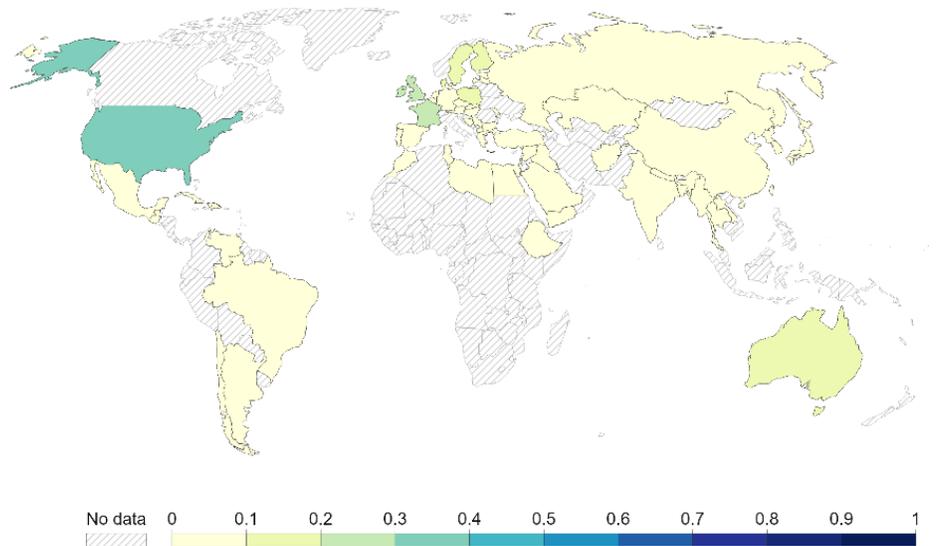
Chapter 7: Theories of Democratization and Democratic Consolidation⁸⁷

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- DEFINE DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION
- IDENTIFY THEORIES OF DEMOCRACY
- CRITICALLY ANALYZE THE CONCEPT OF DEMOCRACY AND ITS ORIGINS

Electoral democracy index, 1789

Based on the expert assessments and index by V-Dem¹. It captures to which extent political leaders are elected under comprehensive voting rights in free and fair elections, and freedoms of association and expression are guaranteed. It ranges from 0 to 1 (most democratic).



Source: OWID based on V-Dem (v13)

OurWorldInData.org/democracy • CC BY

1. **V-Dem**: The Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project publishes data and research on democracy and human rights. It relies on evaluations by around 3,500 country experts and supplementary work by its own researchers to assess political institutions and the protection of rights. The project is managed by the V-Dem Institute, based at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden. Learn more: Democracy data: how do researchers measure democracy? The 'Varieties of Democracy' data: how do researchers measure democracy? The 'Varieties of Democracy' data: how do researchers measure human rights?

Figure 75: Democracies in the world in 1789⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Parts of this chapter adapted from [4.4: Democratic Consolidation](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Dino Bozonelos, Julia Wendt, Charlotte Lee, Jessica Scarffe, Masahiro Omae, Josh Franco, Byran Martin, & Stefan Veldhuis](#).

⁸⁸ Source: [Electoral Democracy Index 1789](#), by Our World in Data, licensed under [CC BY-NC 4.0](#).

Democracy Revisited

Now that we have defined democracy as best we can, and explored the various institutions that are typical of contemporary democracies, we will now contemplate the leading (and one not so leading) theories of why states become democracies what makes democracy “stick.” First, however, it might be worth reconsidering the definition of a democracy. Recall that most definitions of democracy coalesce around two central concepts: political rights and civil rights and liberties. Political rights refer to the ability to citizens to participate in the electoral process and that the electoral process is free and fair. Civil liberties refer to freedoms guaranteed by the government that are fundamental to participating in the electoral process such as speech, assembly, and access to information. Civil rights refer to the fact that the rule of law is equally applied and does not discriminate between groups. States that only have political rights, but struggle with civil rights and liberties, are often called **electoral democracies**. Those that possess both elements are considered **liberal democracies**.

If you imagine a state where less than half can vote, basic rights are only upheld for certain groups based on race and class, and elections are only held sporadically, would we classify this as a democracy? Using the three criteria above, not only would we be unlikely to call it a democracy, but we might also even call it a full-on authoritarian regime (discussed in Chapter 8: Authoritarianism). The US rates 0.35 on a scale of 0-1, with 1 being the most democratic. Yet, this is exactly how American democracy began. Even after the passage of the 15th Amendment, which guaranteed the right to vote to all races (but not to women of any race), various barriers were put into place to continue to keep black Americans from voting such as poll taxes and intimidation. Because blacks were generally much poorer than white Americans, a poll tax effectively disenfranchised the black population. Tactics like this are not unlike tactics by

authoritarian regimes to disenfranchise whole sectors of society, such as intimidation, disqualifying parties from participating, restricting suffrage, or preventing victors from taking office.

According to the Varieties of Democracy, the United States was the only democracy in 1789, the earliest for which they have data. (See Figure 75 above.) To be fair, few states were sovereign at this time, and most were imperial, both of which cannot be democratic. By contrast, in 2022, Pakistan's democracy score is .4. Yet, many would assume that Pakistan is not a democracy, or at least an extremely weak one. Would we make the same assumption about democracy in 1789 America? Would you classify any period of time in the statehood of the United States as authoritarian?

According to Paul Musgrave (2021), another democracy index, Polity, measured by the Center for Systemic Peace (CIS), the US scored between an 8 and 10 from 1809 to 2016, where 10 is the most democratic. As he states, “[t]hat period includes the Civil War, when the losing side launched a violent conflict rather than accept the election results” (Musgrave, 2021, p. 1). He further argues that democracy didn't become a norm throughout most the 50 states until at least the 1960s. This also happens to be the so-called “second wave” of democratization, which coincides with decolonization in Asia and Africa. (Recall Figure 65 on page 198). Up until this time, many states in the US were “stable, one-party authoritarian enclaves,” as whites in the South reliably and consistently voted for Democrats (Mickey, 2015). This echoes our discussion the previous chapter of single-party systems, which are nearly always authoritarian. Finally, for a state to be considered democratic, it must at least be a *state* with the monopoly on the use of force. With widespread lynchings occurring throughout the US for much of its early history, Musgrave (2021) also argues that the US should have been considered not just a failed

democracy, but a failed state. Indeed, as we will explore below, much of America’s experience in the early days of its “democracy” do not look entirely different from the struggles that many postcolonial states as they look for a more stable and equitable governing model.

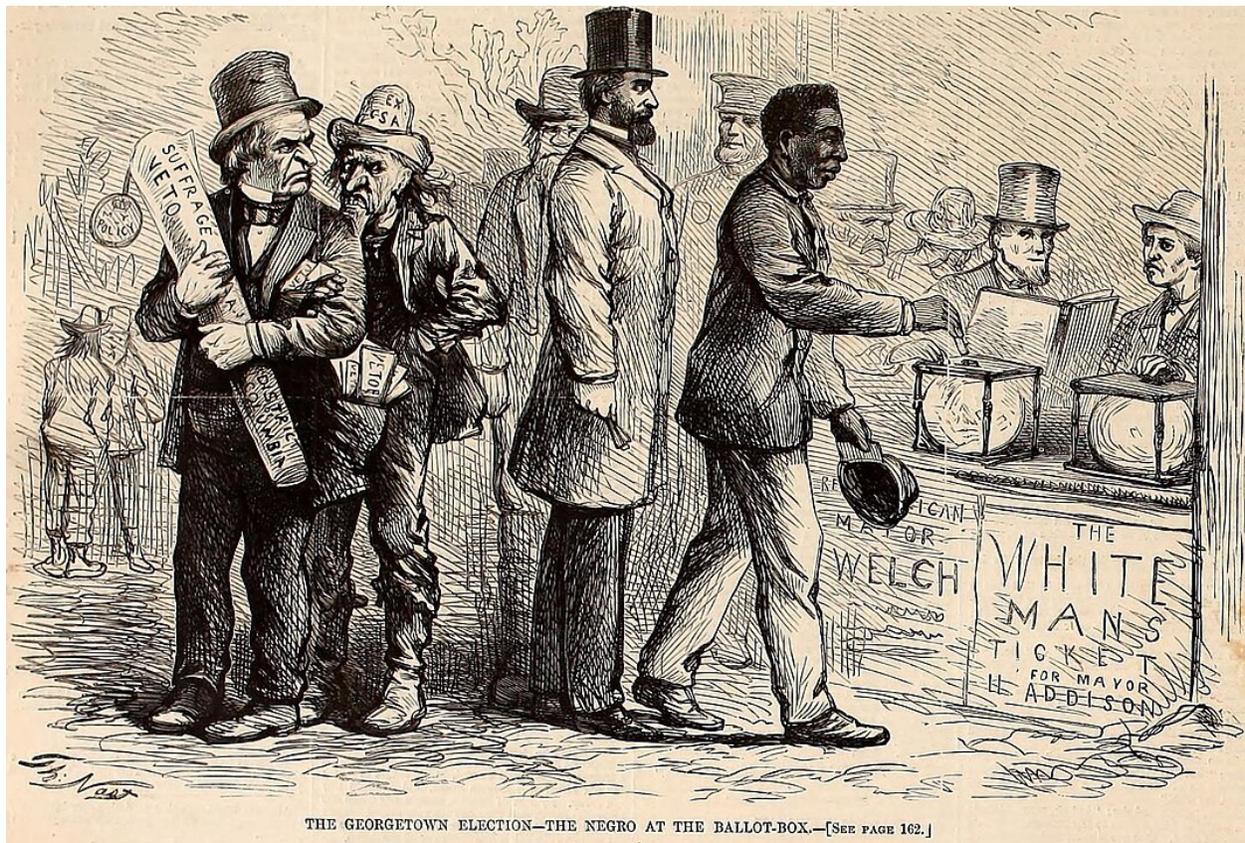


Figure 76: Cartoon depicting the intimidation of a black voter in 1867⁸⁹

Thus, while the US has been considered a model democracy by many in comparative politics, new self-reflective research is emerging, using definitions rooted less in the American experience. None of the major democracy indices rate the US as a strong democracy in 2023. To be sure, the US today does uphold many important features of a democratic state, but the idea that it has always been, and will always be, a democracy, should not be taken for granted. Indeed,

⁸⁹ Source: “[The Georgetown elections – the Negro at the ballot-box.](#)” Cartoon by Thomas Nast, 1867, by Internet Archive Book Images, licensed under [Public Domain](#).

as this volume hopes to show, the style of democracy practiced in the US is rather unique, and therefore it has few applications or fair comparisons to other states. We will continue this discussion of American democracy in Chapter 8: Authoritarianism and Democratic Backsliding.

Theories of Democracy

Having recentered our discussion of democracy, it is now important to think about *why* democracies emerge. These theories of democratization can help us better understand not only the emergence of democracy in the US, but the challenges to democracy in much of the Global South.

Modernization Theory

Perhaps the most frequently cited cause of democracy is “modernization,” which more accurately refers to economic development. Recalling the economic theory of statehood in Chapter 5, modernization theory follows a similar logic: changes in economic conditions lead to democratization. Specifically, as states become wealthier, a middle class emerges. This new economic class, being the largest, begins to demand more rights and more say in the political process (Lipset, 1959). This may be accompanied by other factors such as an increase in leisure time, more education, and more urbanization. Authoritarian regimes find it difficult to maintain their legitimacy in the face of these growing demands, and eventually and slowly, democratic reforms take hold.

There is some evidence to support this theory. If one simply compares the map of democracies (Figure 61, page 187) and the maps of the Global North and South (Figure 7, page 57), one will see that most of the world’s democratic states are also Global North states, which tend to be higher income. Another example will illustrate the power of modernization theory.

Student Feature: Japan and Tunisia

By Molly Brimhall, edited by Holly Oberle

In this comparative case study, we will examine how both Japan and Tunisia went through democratic transitions in a manner aligned with modernization theory despite vastly different circumstances. This can be classified as a Most Different Systems Design case study in that the causes and circumstances were different, but the effects were the same (until recently).

Tunisia

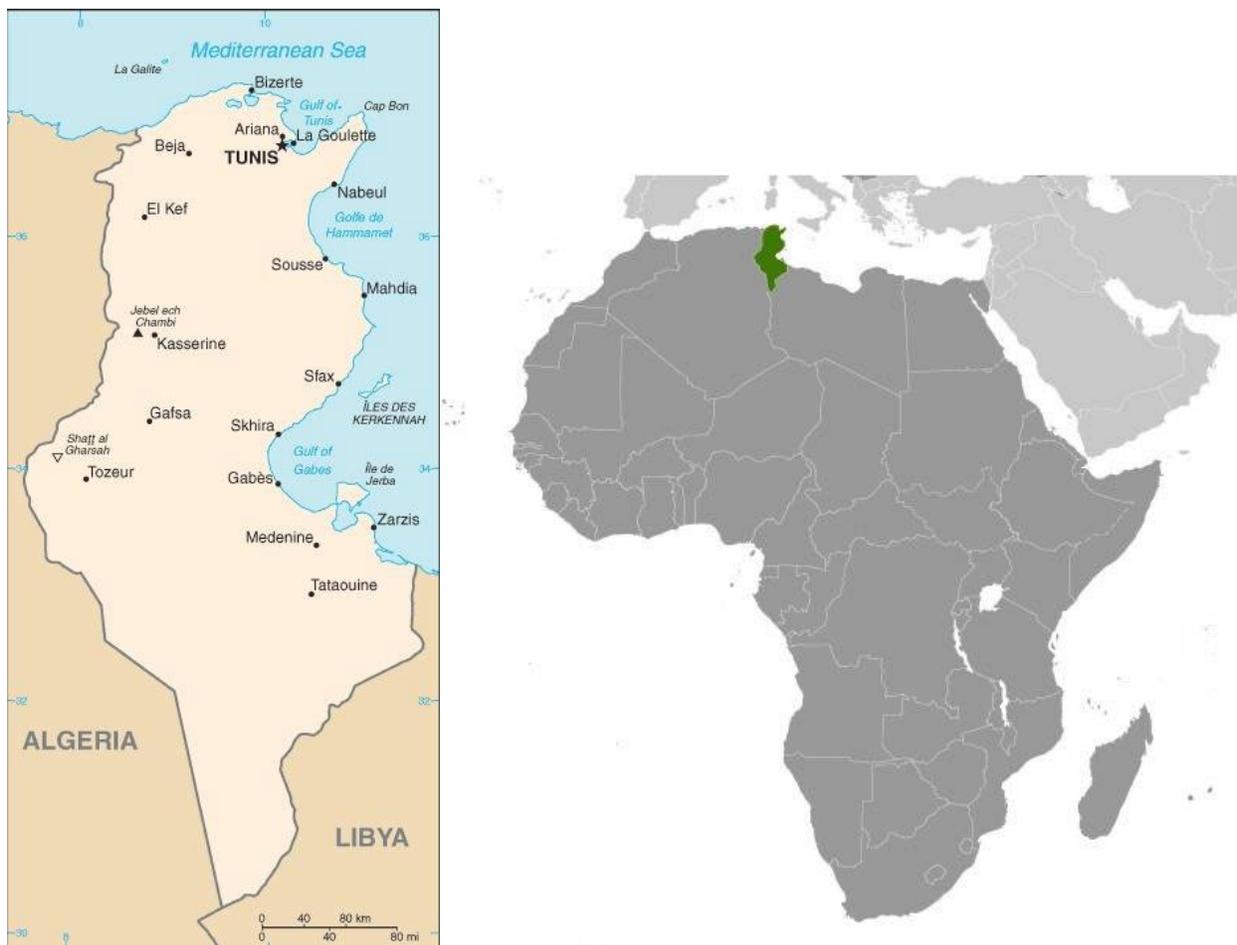


Figure 77: A detailed map of Tunisia; the location of Tunisia in Africa⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Source: From left to right: [Map of Tunisia](#) by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#); [Locator Map](#) by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#).

Full Country Name: Republic of Tunisia

Head of State: President Kais Saied

Head of Government: Prime Minister Najla Bouden Romdhane

Government: Authoritarian (since 2022 constitutional reform), prior to that semi-presidential democracy

Official Language: Arabic, French

Economic System: Market oriented economy

Location: North Africa

Capital: Tunis

Total land size: 163,610 sq km; 63,170 sq miles

Population: 11,976,182

GDP: \$127.509 billion

GDP per capita: \$10,400

Currency: Tunisian dinar

Recalling Figure 46 on page 152, Tunisia was part of the vast French empire which lasted from 1881 to 1956. The French wanted an independent Tunisia to be a constitutional monarchy, which we learned about in Snapshot Case Study: Thailand. There had been a monarch ruling over the territory for centuries while Tunisia was part of the Ottoman empire. In a surprising series of events, elections were held almost immediately upon independence, which resulted in a decisive victory for the nationalist and pro-independence party. Following these elections, the monarchy was dissolved. The first president, Habib Bourguiba, envisioned Tunisia to pursue a similar path as Türkiye (see Snapshot Case Study: Secularism and Sovereignty in Türkiye, page 146), as a

secular state with Islam playing an important cultural role, while also retaining some governing strategies from the French. He aimed for economic growth with a minimal role for the military. But his reign was certainly not democratic; he managed to stay in power until 1987, when he was removed in a coup. The man who removed him, Ben Ali, would stay president until the famous Arab Spring revolutions resulted in sweeping political changes throughout the Middle East (Alexander, 2016). These series of protests and revolutions have been described as the “biggest transformation of the Middle East since decolonization” (Agdemir, 2016).

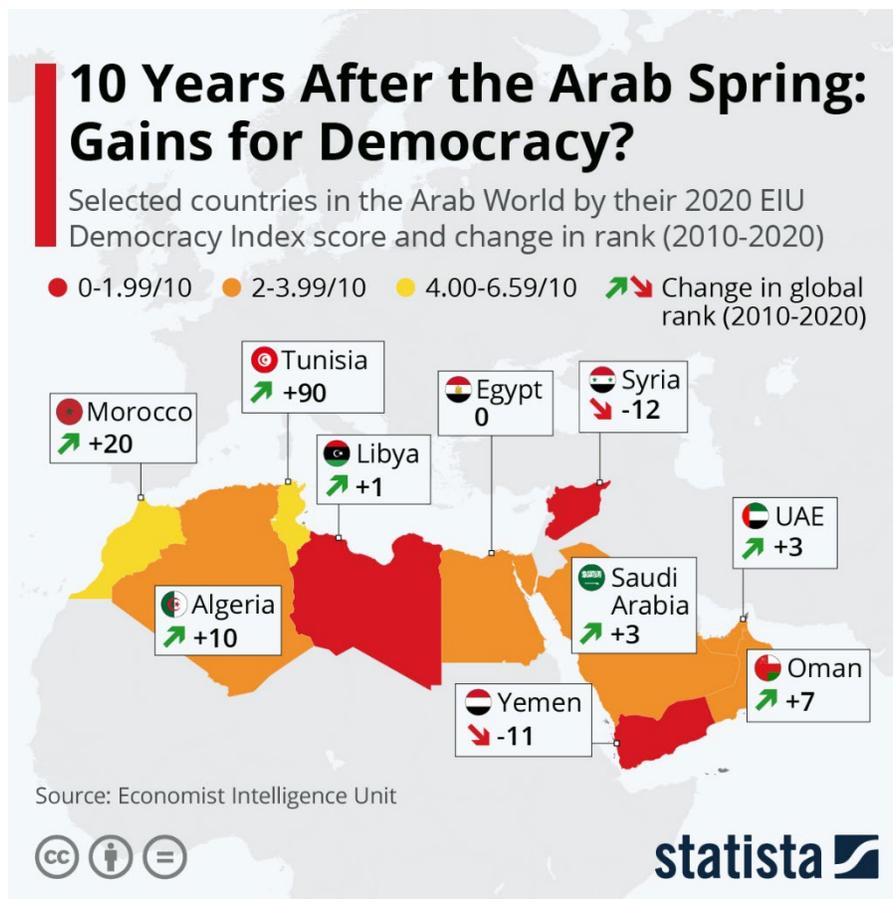


Figure 78: Map showing change in democracy scores 10 years after the Arab Spring. Tunisia clearly became the most democratic state.⁹¹

⁹¹ Source: [10 Years After the Arab Spring: Gains for Democracy?, by Statista](#), licensed under [CC BY-ND 4.0](#).

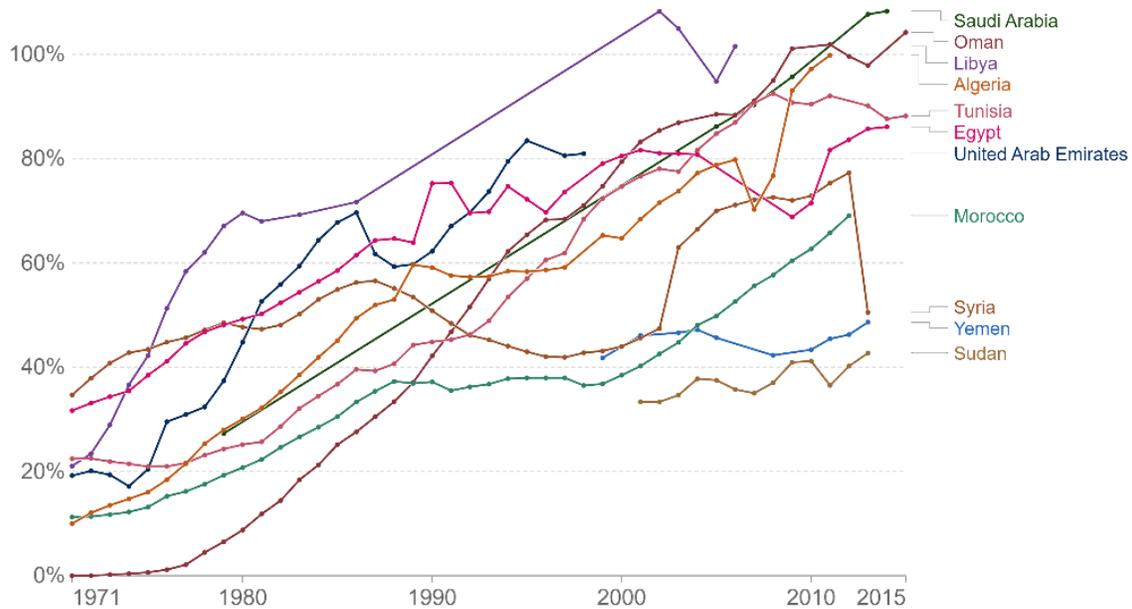
Tunisia was the epicenter of the Arab Spring. It began at the end of 2010 with the suicide of Mohamed Bouazizi over unfair government treatment over his fruit sales. This coincides with an epidemic of poor living conditions in Tunisia. This event sparked massive protests in Tunisia across North Africa. Tunisia was the only state to adopt a democratic system of government (see Figure 78) due to the revolutions, which it maintained until 2021, when the President took advantage of a new constitution and dismissed the prime minister and suspended the parliament. The president cited worsening economic conditions as one of several reasons he invoked Article 80 of the new constitution, which allows the president to take “necessary measures” when Tunisia is “in a state of imminent danger” (Guesmi, 2021).

A key element in the success of the Tunisian revolution and the subsequent democratic reforms (despite recent shifts backwards) was the access to internet and the educated youth as shown in Figure 79. While Tunisia was not the most educated in the Arab world in 2010 at the start of the revolutions, it had experienced one of the steadier increases in education. Socioeconomic advancements such as education and a growing middle class are the causes of democratization under modernization theory. The young people in Tunisia were beginning to become educated and demand an equal and fair place in society.

Gross enrollment ratio in secondary education, 1971 to 2015

Our World in Data

Enrollment of young men and women in secondary education, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population of official secondary education age. The gross enrollment ratio can exceed 100% due to the inclusion of over-aged and under-aged students because of early or late school entrance and grade repetition.



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics

OurWorldInData.org/primary-and-secondary-education • CC BY

Figure 79: Growth of the educated middle class in states affected by the Arab Spring⁹²

The case of Tunisia shows us that growth of an educated middle class might be necessary for democracy, but it is also likely insufficient to build a democratic state. In other words, it is dependent on several other factors. Tunisia also shows us that a worsening economy might be a cause for democratic backsliding, which further demonstrates that there is a strong correlation between democracy and economic growth.

⁹² Source: [Gross Enrollment ratio in secondary education](#), by Our World in Data, licensed under [CC BY 4.0](#).

Japan

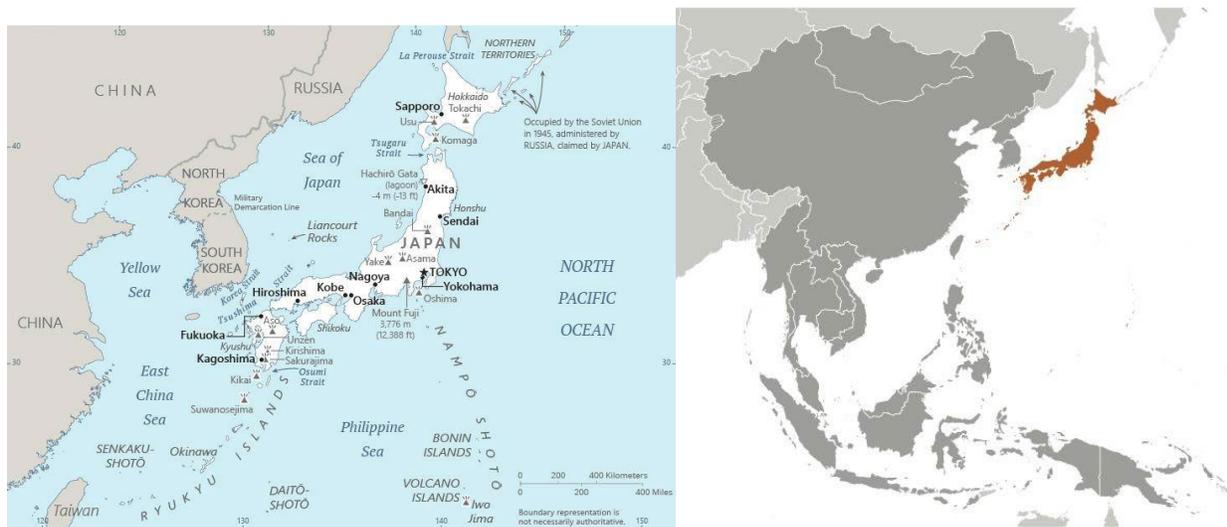


Figure 80: A detailed map of Japan; the location of Japan in East Asia⁹³

Full Country Name: Japan

Head of State: Emperor Naruhito

Head of Government: Prime Minister Fumio Kishida

Government: Parliamentary Constitutional Monarchy

Official Language: Japanese

Economic System: Market oriented economy

Location: East Asia

Capital: Tokyo

Total land size: 377,915 sq km; 145,913 sq mi

Population: 123,719,238

GDP: \$5.126 trillion

GDP per capita: \$40,800

⁹³ From left to right: [Map of Japan](#) by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#); [Locator Map](#) by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#).

Currency: Japanese Yen

Japan never experienced complete Western colonization but was heavily influenced by the desire to keep colonization at bay, similar to China (see Snapshot Case Study: Qing Dynasty in modern-day China on page 116). The Japanese empire took several measures to ban Christianity as well as trade with Europeans in order to limit European cultural influence. In fact, Japan was itself a major colonial power in Asia, expanding its territory into parts of modern-day China, Russia, and Korea (Tipton, 2008). This history of territorial conquest is still a source of resentment between Japan and these states.

World War II came to an official end with the US-led bombings of Nagasaki and Hiroshima in 1945, resulting in the full surrender of Japan. As part of the surrender plan, the US occupied Japan and actively participated in its rehabilitation. The second phase of the occupation plan was focused on the economy (Tipton, 2008). While modernization theory explicitly links democracy with economic growth, an implication of the theory is also that democracy is linked to Western economic models. With the end of World War II came heavy American influence in Japan. The winning powers of World War II were very interested in making sure that Japan did not become communist, and that Japan would adopt Western ideals. Therefore, there was a large emphasis on making the Japanese economy into a free market. These changes coincided with a shift in Japan's political system to democracy, which took place through the drafting of a new constitution, which was written largely by American military generals. Before these changes there were large business conglomerates that undermined democracy and stunted economic growth (Miyajima, 1994). With the liberalization of the Japanese economy came rapid economic growth and democratization. Indeed, the Varieties of Democracy Index rates Japan's democracy as 0.62, nearly the same as the US (0.61) in 1952 (Herre et al., 2013).

Since then, Japan is rated above 0.8 consistently. Elections were held almost immediately following US occupation in 1947, in which the Liberal Party won a plurality of seats. This party has remained overwhelmingly dominant, with only two periods in which it was out of power in the postwar period. Thus, while Japan is considered a strong democracy, it is also a clear dominant-party state (See Dominant and Single Party Systems). This government, with the permission of the emperor, approved the new constitution shortly after it was elected. Perhaps most importantly, this constitution severely limits the Japanese military.

Japan can teach us several lessons about the connection between economic growth and democracy. First, like Tunisia, economic growth is helpful to democratization, but more is required. In the case of Japan, limiting the role of the emperor, and a direct mandate from an occupying power certainly aided its democratization. It can tell us something about democratic consolidation. Long periods of economic growth may lead to long-term democratic stability.

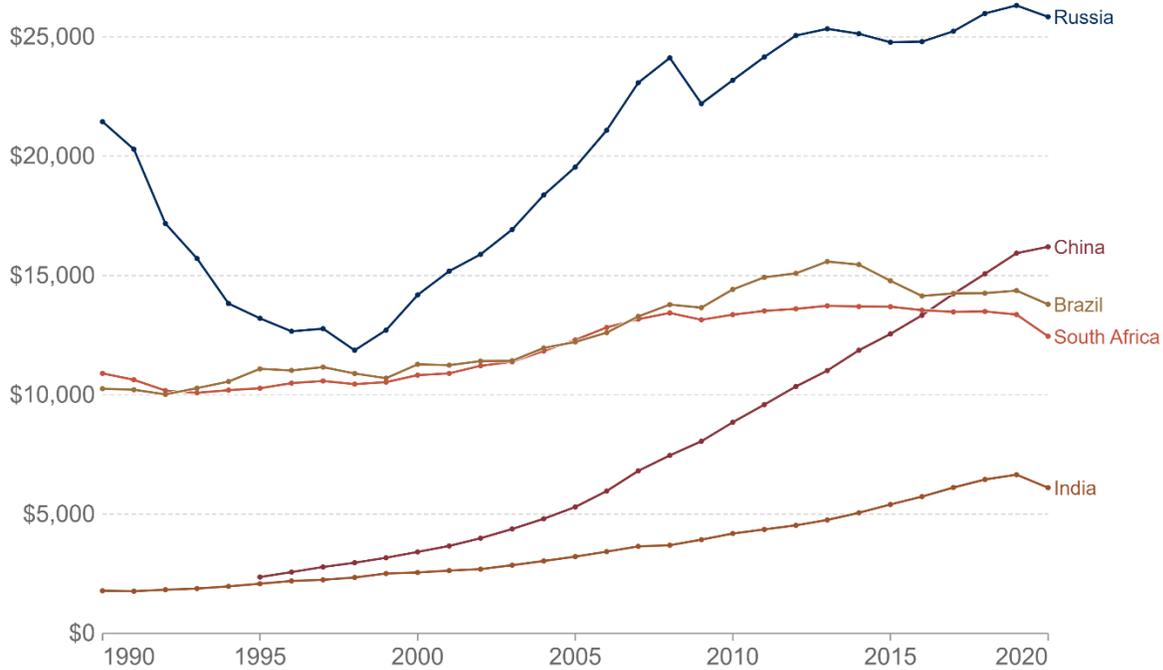
The main criticism of modernization theory is its blindness to Western influence. We see this clearly in the case of Japan. The US had a keen interest in the democratization of the state. We can also see this in the case of Tunisia, which remained clearly undemocratic for most of its post-colonial independence with the tacit support of the Global North. It also ignores the fact that economic growth in the Global North was in part driven by the exploitation of resources in Global South for centuries.

Problems with Modernization

There are also major exceptions that don't fit this theory that could call its explanatory power into question. China is the most obvious exception. China's GDP has exploded in recent years, and there doesn't seem to be any signs, even nascent, of democratization.

Gross national income per capita, 1990 to 2020

Gross National Income (GNI) per capita is adjusted for price changes over time (inflation) and price differences between countries – it is measured in constant international- $\$$.



Source: Data compiled from multiple sources by World Bank

OurWorldInData.org/human-development-index • CC BY

Figure 81: Gross National Income per Capita in BRICS states⁹⁴

As seen in Figure 81, China's Gross National Income per capita (a measure of the total amount of money earned by a nation's people and businesses) has been steadily increasing since 1995 compared to the so-called BRICS states (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). BRICS states are considered the fastest growing middle-income countries in the world. China's rise is expected to continue and may surpass the US by 2035. (Saul, 2022). By the definition of democracy laid out in the previous chapter, China is not a democracy. People do not elect their leaders, it is effectively a one-party state that controls not only politics, but also industry and universities, and the National People's Congress recently removed presidential term limits,

⁹⁴ Source: [Gross national income per capita, 1990 to 2020](#), by Our World in Data, licensed under [CC BY 4.0](#).

which means that the current president, Xi Jinping, can rule indefinitely. Dissent is only allowed within very limited terms (Johnson, 2023). Having lived and taught in China briefly, it was the author's experience that most Chinese students accept and defend the system, and even claim that in their opinion, their system is in fact democratic. A common phrase among Chinese is "democracy with Chinese characteristics," which denotes a belief that China is democratic but not by Western standards. Yet, the grip that the CCP has on most facets of life speaks otherwise and change does not seem to be on the horizon.

Another interesting exception on the other end of the spectrum is India. Of the five BRICS states, India is by far the poorest and yet, democratic. In fact, from about 1977-2008, India was ranked by the Varieties of Democracy Index as in the 0.6-0.7 range (where 1 is the most democratic). Thus, democracy (albeit flawed) can exist in developing states.

Cultural Theories

Just like there are cultural theories of the state, there are cultural theories of democracy. Simply, some cultures are more amendable to democratic governance than others. A study that is considered a classic in cultural theories of democracies is Almond and Verba (1989), where they compared political attitudes in the US, Germany, Italy, the UK and Great Britain. Most newer versions of this theory posit that cultural values that underpin democracy such as individualism are not present in cultures such as Asia, which emphasizes group cohesion. This view was articulated in a famous interview of the former prime minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew (Zakaria, 1994). Again, should this theory hold weight, it might help to explain why most liberal democracies today are in Global North cultures.

But, as noted in our discussion of cultural theories of the state, such perspectives can easily turn towards cultural superiority. On the one hand, without careful treatment of what culture is and

how it relates to democracy, it can be interpreted as, “the non-West is culturally unable to be democratic.” On the other hand, in the case of Kuan Yew’s interview, it can be read as an excuse to resist democratic reforms rooted in culture. Further, as the section on Indigenous sovereignty argued on page 121, there are examples of democratic societies whose culture is group-oriented rather than individualistic. Finally, cultural arguments rarely take the role of colonization seriously. Colonization imposed various forms of governing on the Global South, but none were particularly democratic, and colonial governments often took deliberate action to undermine cultures in order to control their subjects. Therefore, few Global South states had the opportunity to experience democracy and their cultural “ability” to embrace democratic values may be difficult to judge after imperialism.

International and Postcolonial Theories

While there are many direct applications of postcolonial perspectives on the state, there are fewer direct applications to the *democratic* state. “International” perspectives come close. These theorists argue that the global system pushes some states towards democracy and others away from it. Revisiting the “waves” of democracy (see Figure 65, page 198), democracy may simply be an effect of global trends and major international events such as the end of World War II and decolonization. Interestingly, the theorist that is most famous for the “waves of democracy” thesis is Samuel Huntington, but his interest is on the “third wave,” which was the fall of communism. Thus, it seems decolonization was not of interest.

Others would argue that democracy is a result of not just international trends, but to specific programs and policies. During the Cold War, for example, it was convenient for both the Soviet Union and the United States to support authoritarian regimes as long as those regimes would be of benefit to either side of the East-West conflict. The United States was happy to support

dictators in the Global South if they helped the US counter the Soviet Union, engaged in trade with the West, or complied with other American interests such as fighting terrorism. For example, the US supported several undemocratic regimes during the Cold War such as Iran, Nicaragua, Tunisia, the Republic of Congo, and the Philippines. On the other side of the spectrum, the US had a direct role in promoting democracy in both West Germany and Japan after World War II in the hopes of building an alliance of liberal democracies to counter the Soviet Union. (See Student Feature: Japan and Tunisia above).

But once again, these international perspectives rarely engage with the role of colonization directly. Some consider the role of regime transitions in the likelihood of the new regime becoming a democracy. The most notable contribution here is a book called *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* (O'Donnell & Schmitter, 2013). However, the authors treat colonialism only briefly, and discuss it only as an impediment to Portuguese democracy without any consideration of the Global South. Thus, those who consider regime transitions don't consider the transition of *decolonization*. Decolonization is a very specific type of regime change (with much variety within that category as well) that can benefit the democratization of the former colonizer but often disadvantages democracy in the former colony.

The best treatment of postcolonialism to democracy is by Koelble and Lipuma (2008). Here they argue that "the real measure of democracy is the extent to which governance conforms to the visions of democracy worked out by the governed" (Koelble & Lipuma, 2008, p. 3). The argument differs from the cultural one presented above in that culture might produce *different* democracies, not that some cultures are incompatible with democracy. Specifically, they argue that postcolonies are inherently limited in their ability to be democratic by traditional definitions and measurements of democracy. These limitations include the capacity of domestic institutions,

some of which were hollowed out by colonial rule, while others were overfunded and overemphasized, leaving an uneven pattern of social support. Another limitation is the continued economic dependence that postcolonial states find themselves in the global financial system, despite formal independence. Finally, Keoble and Lipuma state that even though colonial governments left postcolonies with few building blocks for democracy, democracy can and has emerged in the Global South but often in ways that scholars in the Global North may not recognize or measure as democratic. A comparative case study can give us a window into the effects of decolonization on the democratization process in the Global South.

Comparative Case Study: South Africa and Iraq

Using the Most Similar Systems Design (MSSD), we will compare two postcolonial states and examine the various challenges, both internal and external, that these states face to democratize.

South Africa

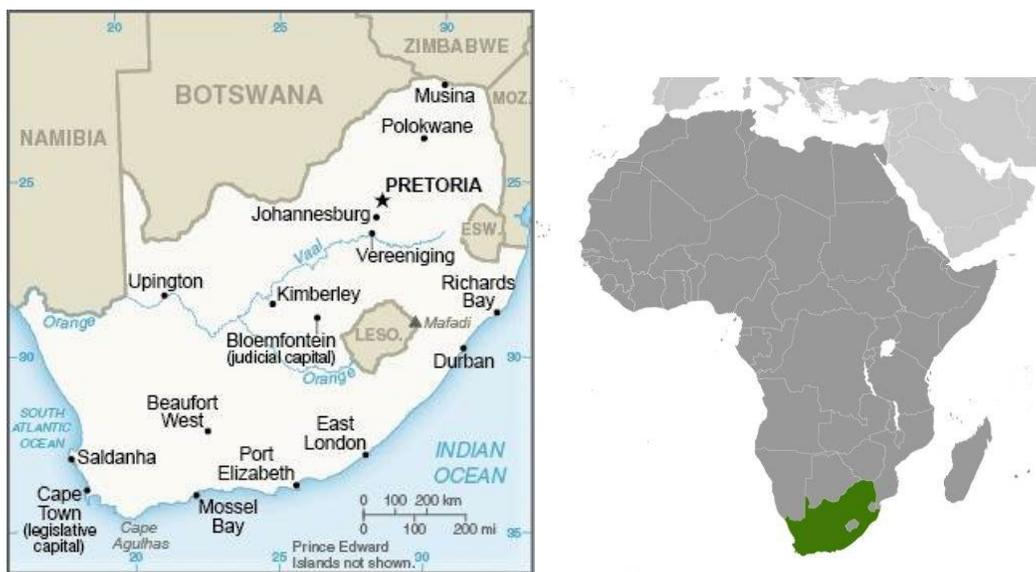


Figure 82: Detailed Map of South Africa, location of South Africa on the African continent⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Source: From left to right: [Map of South Africa](#) by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#); [Locator Map](#) by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#).

Full Country Name: Republic of South Africa

Head(s) of State: President Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa

Head of Government: President Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa

Government: Parliamentary Republic (Unitary dominant-party / executive presidency)

Official Languages: 11 Official languages (English, Zulu, Swazi, Afrikaans, Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, Xitsonga, Xhosa, Tshivenda, isiNdebele)

Economic System: Mixed economy

Location: Southern Africa, at the southern tip of the continent of Africa

Capital: Pretoria

Total land size: 1,219,090 sq km, 470,693 sq miles

Population: 56.9 million

GDP: \$680.04 billion

GDP per capita: \$11,500

Currency: Rand

Like Botswana and Somalia in Chapter 4: States and Regimes, South Africa's history is marked by frequent interventions and occupations by foreign powers through colonialism and imperialism. British and Dutch powers, attempting to expand their empires and grow their influence, colonized parts of South Africa at various points between the 1600s and 1800s. By the early 1900s, there was growing internal demand for South Africa to be independent from Britain. Multiple wars leading up to the 1900s, including the Boers Wars (see also Student Feature: Lesotho), contributed to deep racial divides between black and white citizens. White South Africans demanded independence from Britain, which eventually culminated in the formation of

the Union of South Africa in 1910. The Union of South Africa modeled its government structure after the British system, but had a British leader installed as a ceremonial head of state. Full independence was achieved in 1931, giving South Africa's government the ability to act outside of, and without permission from, the UK.

Although South Africa's government had hallmarks of democratic government, like three branches of government operating with checks and balances, its legacy of colonialism and racial divide made democratization difficult. Under British rule, a number of laws promoted segregation and the disenfranchisement of nonwhite citizens. Following World War II, a political party called the National Party stoked fears within the country that significant growth in the nonwhite population of South Africa was a threat. The National Party won the majority votes in the 1948 election and implemented a system of apartheid. Apartheid is defined as a system of governance wherein racial oppression is institutionalized. In the case of South Africa, this meant laws were implemented to ensure that South Africa's minority white population could dominate all political, social, and economic factors within the country for their own benefit. Apartheid in South Africa resulted in, among other things, the segregation and displacement of nonwhites into segregated neighborhoods and the prohibition of interracial marriage and relationships.



Figure 83: Public Apartheid Notice⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Source: [Sign from the Apartheid era in South Africa](#), by Dewet - Derived from Aprt.jpg on en.wiki, corrected perspective and lighting somewhat, licensed under [Public Domain](#).

The United Nations attempted to sanction South Africa for its rampant discrimination, but these efforts failed due to the United States, which consistently blocked these efforts with their veto power. South Africa's system of apartheid continued until 1991. In the 1970s and 1980s, South Africa experienced intense internal strife as clashes between those who supported the National Party, and those who opposed apartheid, resulted in deadly violence. The main opposition to the National Party, the African National Congress (ANC), worked to bring down South Africa's system of apartheid. The ANC, having been forced into exile for many years, used a variety of tactics to force pressure upon the National Party, including using guerilla warfare and acts of sabotage. Eventually, the National Party and the ANC began meeting to negotiate a way forward. The outcome of these negotiations was the abolishment of apartheid and, in the coming years, the election of the first democratically elected President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela.

Nelson Mandela was a member of the ANC who had been imprisoned for 27 years prior to his release in 1990. Under his leadership as President of South Africa, he oversaw the drafting of a new constitution which, in tandem with solidifying various democratic principles, heavily emphasized racial equality and the protection of human rights. Mandela saw it as his personal mission to heal the racial divides within the country and formed a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was tasked with investigating crimes committed both by the government led by the National Party under apartheid, as well as the crimes committed by the ANC. Though it can be difficult to quantify, the commission was widely held as an important factor towards moving the country forward towards more democratic governance.

Importantly, a heated debate ensued during the process of writing a new constitution between a more deliberative style of democracy or a representative model. (Recall the differences, depicted

on page 194. Mandela and other traditional chiefs argued in favor of the deliberative model, stating that this is more compatible with the types of governing done in precolonial African communities and villages. Many claim that this type of democracy is not only more compatible with African culture but is a superior form of democracy. Others, however, thought these arguments were self-serving by local chiefs and would lead to local authoritarianism (LiPuma & Koelble, 2009). Ultimately, the more adversarial representative style of democracy similar to European party politics took hold. The ANC has ruled South Africa as a dominant party since the end of apartheid.

Mandela stepped down as the President of the ANC in 1998 and retired from politics in 1999. Although Mandela made strides in improving domestic conditions, including investing in education, welfare programs, and the protection of workers and prominent industries, several challenges remained that still challenge South Africa today. South Africa continues to struggle with racial tensions, as well as persistent xenophobia due to large influxes of legal and illegal migrants. One of the major criticisms of Mandela's term in office is his failure to fully address the HIV/AIDS pandemic. For many years, the HIV/AIDS pandemic was so severe in South Africa that the average life expectancy was only 52 years. Failure to provide a strategic approach to combat the pandemic led to decades of poor health outcomes within South Africa.

For many years, South Africa's transition to democracy was heralded as a victorious example of democratization. Nevertheless, current challenges to South Africa's democracy include corruption, enduring racism, and increased rates of femicide and gender-based violence. Each of these realities has contributed to the Economist Intelligence Unit labeling South Africa as a flawed democracy. Recall, flawed democracies are those where elections are free and fair, and basic civil liberties are protected, but issues exist which may hamper the democratic process. It is

worth briefly considering South Africa's current challenges regarding corruption, racism and gender-based violence below.

Corruption is, at best, damaging to democracy and, at worst, fatal to democracy. Corruption can erode the public's trust in the government and its institutions, exacerbate inequality and poverty, and hinder economic development. In 2021, high-ranking political officials in South Africa faced allegations of corruption for misusing billions of dollars of foreign aid targeted towards COVID-19 relief. The government officials charged with corruption are undergoing investigations for their misuse of funds, particularly in allowing various private companies to exorbitantly price gouge the government. There are additional allegations of government corruption, particularly in the favoring of some private companies over others. Corruption within a country can also yield skepticism and condemnation from the global community, as trading partners may lose trust in conducting business with corrupt regimes.

Still, while corruption is certainly a challenge to democracy in postcolonial states, it does deserve some critical attention. The taking of bribes by government officials in the Global South is often characterized as "corruption," but the setting up of political action committees for wealthy donors to funnel money to political campaigns in the Global North is framed as the "free market of ideas." Corruption is rampant in developing economies usually as a result of anemic institutions with little administrative experience, as well as the simple desire for local underpaid bureaucrats to provide for their families.

Racism, too, can present threats to democracy. Failure to protect civil liberties and civil rights within a country can create illiberal or flawed democracies. Ongoing structural racism can exacerbate societal tensions and perpetuate violence. Unfortunately, racism is still an ever present force in South Africa. The last two decades have seen ongoing allegations of police and

military forces engaging in racist activities. During COVID-19, a number of Black South Africans were killed by police officers violently enforcing lockdowns. Frequent instances of violence against Black citizens has prompted recurrent conversations over the implementation of hate crime legislation as well as appropriate rules for conduct regarding the use of force on citizens. To be fair, more “liberal” democracies by the measurements of many indices than South Africa also experience racial violence and police brutality, such as the US and Israel.

Finally, data has shown continued increases in femicide and gender-based violence. Here again, democracies that are unable to protect civil liberties and civil rights of their citizens risk backsliding or inability to ever consolidate fully. To this end, equal protection of women under South Africa law is questionable. As of 2019, it was reported that 51% of women in South Africa experienced some kind of physical violence as a result of their gender. Violence towards women, which was already elevated prior to the pandemic, continued to increase during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Once again, South Africa was not unique in this, and several democratic states recorded an uptick in violence against women during COVID. As we will explore in more detail in subsequent chapters, gender equality and gender-based violence can be used an interesting comparative variable to measure democratic performance of states.

In conclusion, South Africa is rare amongst postcolonial states in that it transitioned to a semi-democratic regime after apartheid. What can explain this outcome? First, South Africa achieved postcolonial *sovereignty* (read: not democracy) much earlier than most other former colonies in Africa, yet it suffered under apartheid long after. The democratic transition in South Africa was certainly aided by the Truth and Reconciliation commission, another rare institution that didn't happen in many other postcolonial transitions. South Africa also benefitted from a very strong leader who argued in favor of a democratic transition in Nelson Mandela, who enjoyed strong

international and eventually, domestic support. Still, South Africa is also plagued by many struggles that have made democracy, at least the way many political scientists define it, difficult.

Iraq



Figure 84: Detailed map of Iraq, location of Iraq in the Middle East⁹⁷

Full Country Name: Republic of Iraq

Head(s) of State: President Latif Rashid

Head of Government: Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani

Government: Federal Parliamentary Republic

Official Languages: Arabic & Kurdish

Economic System: Mixed economy

Location: Middle East, bordering the Persian Gulf, between Iran and Kuwait

⁹⁷ Source: From left to right: [Map of Iraq](#) by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#); [Locator Map](#) by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#).

Capital: Baghdad

Total land size: 438,316 sq ki, 169,235 sq mi

Population: 40 million

GDP: \$250.070 billion

GDP per capita: \$4,474

Currency: Iraqi Dinar

What we now identify as Iraq formed in the wake of the defeat of the Ottoman Empire and its subsequent breakup into smaller colonial outposts, mostly administered by the French and the British. Yet, the history of this region goes back before the Ancient Greeks, the civilization that most histories of democracy mark as the origins of the concept. Importantly, incredibly complex societies appeared as early as 3200 BCE with sophisticated settled agricultural systems and massive temples, as well as the world's first written language.

There is ample evidence that democratic institutions existed in these early city-states of ancient Mesopotamia, a region between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. (See Figure 85 below).

Archaeologists have found evidence of a mythical “Assembly of Gods” that served as a judicial body that could elect and depose kings. Historians speculate that in order to develop this myth, the people must have experienced some form of this governance themselves. Similarly, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, another epic from around 2800 BCE, details a bicameral congress, a system of vetoes, and appeals to the people before going to war. According to Jacobsen (1970), this is an example of a “primitive democracy,” which operated more like a participatory or a deliberative democracy than a representative one. The use of the term primitive is unfortunate here, as these governing structures became increasingly complex. The famous Code of Hammurabi enumerated

the rights and limitations of citizens of ancient Babylon. Several more examples can be found in Isakhan (2016).

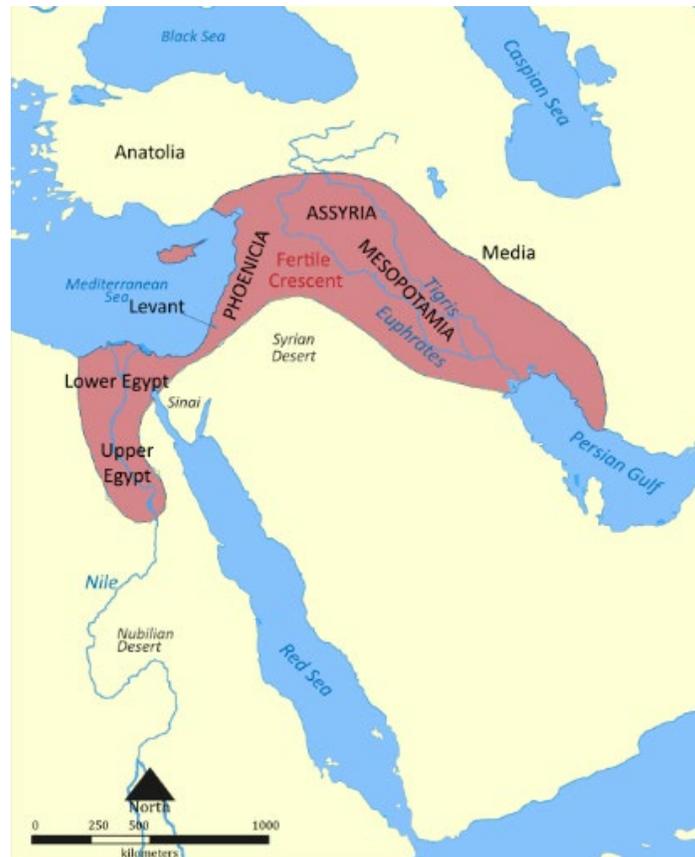


Figure 85: Map of Mesopotamia and the rest of the Fertile Crescent⁹⁸

Furthermore, democratic principles also existed as Islam became the dominant religion in the region. Muhammad and the *Quran* emphasize social justice and consultation with the *ummah* (community). The “Constitution of Medina” emphasizes freedom, justice, equality, and peace.⁹⁹ In the Islamic Abbasid empire, a clear division between “church” and “state” emerged, which remained in place in varying extents even into the Ottoman period in the 16th century (Isakhan,

⁹⁸ Source: [The location and extent of the Fertile Crescent](#), by Nafsadh - Map of fertile crescent.png, licensed under [CC BY-SA 4.0](#).

⁹⁹ For more on the democratic qualities in the religion of Islam, see Abdalla and Rane (2011).

2016). In the waning days of the Ottoman empire, the Young Turks movement challenged the Ottoman government to institute more democratic reforms, and thus instituted large-scale elections in 1908 and then again in 1912 (Kayali, 1995). In summary, contrary to many views of Iraq and the Arab world more generally, there is a history of democratic governance in both the pre-Islamic and the Islamic eras.

During World War I, the British occupied Basra, a city in southern Iraq, in order to extract its oil resources to fuel the war effort (Majd, 2006). The British justified their rule over Iraq by referencing its “inability” to democratize, and that it is accustomed to foreign rule (Isakhan, 2016). As the war drew to a close, the Arab people of the regions of Mosul, Baghdad and Basra fought with the British to gain their independence. However, this did not quite happen. The League of Nations awarded a mandate to the British to administer Iraq, not unlike the mandate to administer Palestine (see Snapshot Case Study: Israel). British imperial authorities controlled the newly formed kingdom’s military and foreign affairs and had major influence over its domestic political and economic affairs. In 1921, Britain established King Faysal II as ruler of Mesopotamia and officially changed the name to Iraq, which means “well-rooted country” in Arabic. Many Arabs in the region saw Iraq as an artificially created country, established by British authorities to maintain power in the region. As a result, many people saw the country, and its newly installed royalty, as illegitimate.

The British remained in Iraq for the next three decades, with military bases, transit rights for troops and eventually British control over the growing oil industry. Still, the question of legitimacy never left. King Faysal and his family were able to stay in power until 1958, when the grandson, Faysal II was overthrown in a coup that also saw the end to British rule. The coup was led by a general that belonged to the **Ba’athist Party**. The Ba’athist Party was a transnational

Arab political party that espouses pan-Arab nationalism and socialist economic policies. The party came to power in Iraq and Syria, but also exerted some power in Jordan, Lebanon, and Libya. After some turmoil between the Ba'athist party and

Pan-Arabism refers to a movement and ideology that advocates for a political alliance of all Arab states.

There are also pan-African movements.

the Iraqi military, the country eventually came under the command of Saddam Hussein. Hussein, who ruled until he was overthrown and executed during the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, was from a mostly Sunni tribe in Tikrit, a city north of Baghdad. His reliance on members of his tribe and the city, which were a minority group in the country, contributed to the eventual violence that would follow the 1991 Gulf War.

After fighting Iran for 8 years to a stalemate in the Iran-Iraq War, the country found itself in debt to its neighbors, particularly Kuwait, located to the South. Kuwait itself had been a thriving autonomous trading community for centuries. Similar to Iraq, the British curried favor with the ruling as-Sabah family and eventually took control of their military and foreign affairs. Iraq historically claimed Kuwait as its 19th province, believing that the British had unfairly kept it from them. The debt burden and the geopolitical advantage of Kuwait's geography led Hussein to invade and annex the country in 1990. The US and a coalition of allies invaded Kuwait and Southern Iraq the next year. Coalition forces routed Iraq forces and heavily bombed Iraq. In 1992, the US set up two 'no-fly zones' in the country to protect the Kurds in the north and the Shi'a in the south, who had rebelled against Hussein's rule. A no-fly zone is when a foreign power intervenes to prevent that country or another country from gaining air superiority. The intervening power must be willing to use their military to prevent certain aircraft from flying over an established area.

The no-fly zones and ensuing UN embargo on Iraq greatly weakened the Hussein regime. However, the incoming US Bush administration strongly believed that Iraq was in the process of developing or acquiring weapons of mass destruction (WMD). After the September 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks, the Bush administration pushed to invade Iraq a second time, focusing particularly on Hussein and the need to install a democratic system in Iraq. These narratives were largely based in a colonial vision of the Middle East and inherently undemocratic. The US invaded in 2003, without much world support. Coalition forces captured Hussein later that year. He was put on trial, found guilty of crimes against humanity and was executed in 2006. During this time, a fact-finding mission found that there was no identifiable WMD program. They were, in the words of the official Presidential Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction, “dead wrong.” While the US wouldn’t have thought of their invasion as colonial, and expected Iraqis to welcome American occupation, the invasion was seen by Iraqis as another colonial incursion.

The US invasion and Hussein’s fall had a dramatic effect on Iraq. Chaos ensued. The US was not ready to govern the country. Millions were displaced within Iraq and millions more fled the country as violence spiked. Long-simmering sectarian and ethnic disputes erupted in a full-fledged civil war and insurgency. Shi’a militias were unhappy about American military rule. Sunni tribes were fearful of reprisals. The Kurdish minority in the northern part of the country sought independence. Remnants of the Ba’athist party loyal to Hussein mostly folded into al-Qaeda in Iraq, which bitterly fought US forces in several major battles, including Fallujah. American soldiers were caught in the middle of a conflict where peace was elusive. Eventually, a surge of US troops in 2007 provided enough security to allow the country to stabilize and US forces finally withdrew from Iraq in 2011.

In 2014, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), a successor terrorist group to al-Qaeda, rapidly grew into a massive presence in the region. Starting in Syria, ISIS took advantage of the security vacuum and moved into Iraq. ISIS surprisingly captured Mosul, considered the second largest city in the country. The terrorist organization used the revenues from the nearby oil fields to finance their violent activities. ISIS quickly expanded to other countries and committed a series of terrorist attacks in Europe. However, by the end of 2017, ISIS had lost 95% of its territory. A combination of Russian-led Syrian forces and US-led Kurdish forces, who sometimes worked together, defeated ISIS on the battlefield.

The majority Shi'a had always chafed under Hussein's rule. His departure meant that the Shi'a would gain political power for the first time in centuries. A transitional Iraqi Governing Council led to democratic elections in 2005, where a religious Shi'a party won the plurality of seats under Nouri al-Maliki. al-Maliki remained as prime minister until 2014, where he governed a tenuous coalition and had been accused of protecting Shi'a militias. al-Maliki also forged closer ties with neighboring Iran, much to the chagrin of the American authorities. In addition, Iraq Kurdistan declared independence in 2017. The referendum results were rejected by the Iraqi parliament, and Türkiye vehemently opposed the move. Kurdistan is still part of Iraq, though the region effectively functions as an independent country.



Figure 86: Map of 2005 election results. Dark green is United Iraqi Alliance Party, light green is the Democratic Patriotic Alliance of Kurdistan, and blue is the Iraqi list party.¹⁰⁰

Today, Iraq is a tenuous confederation of three major groups, Sunni Arabs in the west, Kurds in the north and Shi'a Arabs in the central and southern parts of the country. The current prime minister is supported by the majority political bloc led by Moqtada al-Sadr. He comes from a powerful political family in Shi'a politics and is a major power broker in the country. Iraq also has a president, who is elected by the Iraqi parliament and has a largely ceremonial role. Mostly the country is run through a sectarian apportionment system, *mahasasa taiifia* in Arabic, where the country is structured amongst the three major sectarian identities. Initially, the US supported this sectarian approach to the country. US forces have had a close relationship with the Kurds

¹⁰⁰ Source: [Map of January 2005 Iraqi election results](#), showing the largest list per governorate, by Work of Kermanshahi put into svg format by MrPenguin20, licensed under [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

since the early 1990s and Iraqi Kurdistan has become a relatively peaceful and prosperous region. However, sectarianism is what also led Iraqi Shi'a to look to Iran for leadership and what led Sunni Arab tribes to become receptive to first al-Qaeda and the ISIS overtures.

Conclusion

How long will it take for Iraq to consolidate as a democracy? This is an unfair question, given the major blows most of the organic democratic movements have experienced in Iraq since the fall of the Ottomans. Comparing South Africa to Iraq gives us some important lessons about the possibilities for democratic consolidation. First, it is possible to emerge out of a racial and/or religiously divided society with some democratic institutions, but it is very difficult after decades of international interference. Second, both tales should caution us against assumptions that democracy is not possible in African, Arab, or other postcolonial and Global South states, but that democracy in these places may take on very different qualities than what we count as democracy in the Global North. Finally, we may be able to draw lessons about our own democratic institutions, which have come under intense criticism in recent decades, some of it well deserved. Representative democracy through a congressional or parliamentary model is not the only, or even the best form of democracy. The Global North may consider how to incorporate more deliberative or participatory democracy into its governance, and to also contemplate the effects our influence has had on others' state-building enterprises, and what international interference might have on our own.

To conclude this chapter and to begin considering the topic of the next chapter (authoritarianism), we consider a unique case of democratization, which has occurred under authoritarian influence: Taiwan.

Student Feature: Taiwan

By Kyle Patten, edited by Holly Oberle

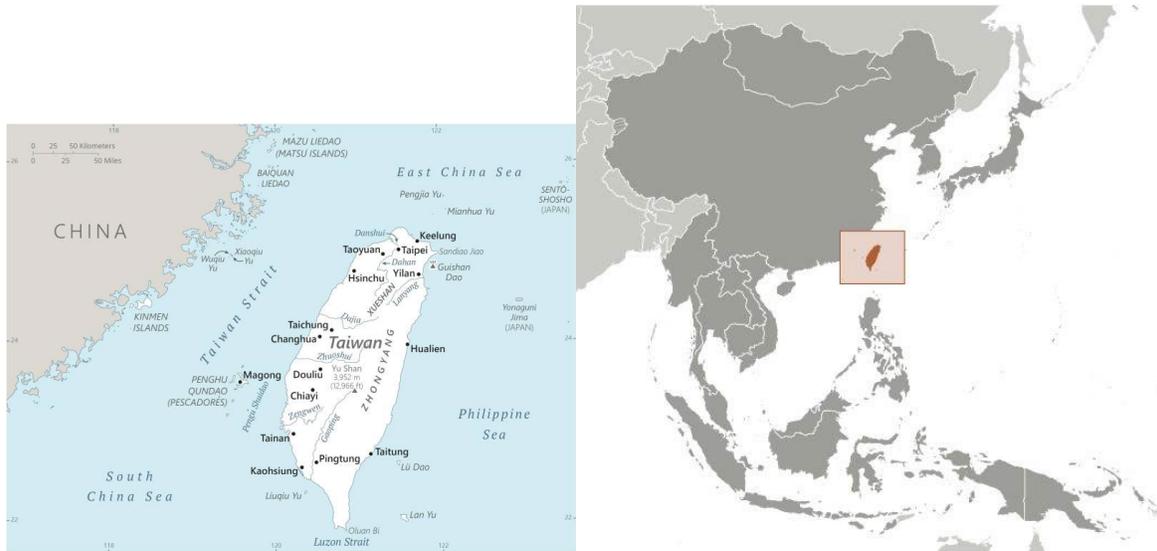


Figure 87: A detailed map of Taiwan, the location of Taiwan off the coast of mainland China is East Asia¹⁰¹

Full Country Name: Taiwan

Head(s) of State: President Tsai Ing-wen

Head of Government: Premier Chen Chien-jen

Government: Semi-presidential republic

Official Languages: Mandarin

Economic System: Market-oriented economy

Location: East Asia, off the coast of mainland China

Capital: Taipei

Total land size: 35,980 sq km, 13,891 sq mi

¹⁰¹ Source: From left to right: [Map of Taiwan](#) by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#); [Locator Map](#) by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#).

Population: 23,588,613

GDP: \$1.143 trillion

GDP per capita: \$47,800

Currency: New Taiwan Dollar

Taiwan, also known as the ROC (Republic of China), is a democratic island nation, whose sovereignty is disputed. The People's Republic of China (PRC) considers the island part of China, and most other states do not officially recognize Taiwan as independent. These states are hesitant to categorize Taiwan as an independent state because it lacks recognition and legitimacy at an international level in places like the United Nations. In favor of autonomy, Taiwan has been self-governing for decades. The PRC does not have complete control of Taiwan. Another example of Taiwan's possible independence is the rapid democratization that has occurred there and the existence of a semi-presidential republic supporting and governing the territory. Even if the political characterization of Taiwan is leaning toward democracy "Taiwan's economic health depends on China" (Copper, 2019). Taiwan is a crucial case of how rapid democratization leading to democratic transition can exist even under authoritarian influence.

Can Taiwan be considered a true democracy? By strict measurements, all scholarly indices answer this question with a resounding "yes." Freedom House ranks Taiwan as 94/100 on its freedom scale. The Economist Intelligence Unit ranks it 10th in its 2022 ranking of democracies. The question then is, how did that democracy develop, especially under entirely unlikely circumstances given that it is not completely sovereign and is under great pressure from mainland China?

There are four theoretical perspectives that work together in determining how democracy developed in Taiwan. First, is the international perspective. Lynch (2002) describes this approach as complex interactions with the outside world that “...stimulated the native Taiwanese community (as well as some mainlanders) to import successful political models from global culture and pursue democratization partly as a way to re-make the ROC and articulate a new Taiwanese nation” (Lynch, 2002, p. 559).

Second, Copper (2019) uses a multi-factor approach with an emphasis on modernization theory to reveal how Taiwan developed into a democracy and whether it should be considered a province or state. In this multi-factor approach he uses “fixed ingredients,” including geography, climate, natural resources, population, ethnicities, and culture to analyze Taiwan’s democracy as well as its sovereign qualities. He concludes that in almost all aspects, Taiwan is both democratic as well as sovereign, except regarding trade. While Taiwan is economically prosperous, which supports its democratization, it remains tied to China through economic links that is hindering its sovereignty.

Third, Tien and Chu (1996) take a more functionalist approach by analyzing Taiwan’s elections as evidence of its democratization. More specifically, they analyze how a “political society” emerged, which they define as “... a polity specifically arranges itself to contest the legitimate right to exercise control over public power and the state apparatus” (Tien & Chu, 1996, p. 1142).

Finally, Ling and Shih (1998) discuss Taiwan’s democracy from a postcolonial perspective. They call Taiwan a “Confucian democracy in a postcolonial order” (Ling & Shih, 1998, p. 66). Taiwan was colonized by the Dutch and Spanish briefly in the 17th Century, followed by the Han Chinese (the majority ethnic group in mainland China) in 1885, then later occupied by Imperial Japan. During China’s communist revolution following the fall of the Qing Dynasty and the World Wars

(see Snapshot Case Study: Qing Dynasty in modern-day China on page 116), the leader of the nationalists, Chiang Kai-shek, and his party, the KMT, was forced to retreat to the island. The island was governed as a benevolent dictatorship in which major investments were made in infrastructure, education, and other public services. The president that took control in 1988, personified postcolonialism. He was born during the Japanese occupation, speaks Japanese better than Mandarin, and received his higher education in the United States. He became particularly nativist and anti-China while in the US. Thus, another explanation of Taiwan's democratization is a "rising nativist-nationalist sensibility directed against China" (Ling & Shih, 1998, p. 68).

All these approaches recognize that democratization was especially rapid in Taiwan, starting around 1988 with the presidency of Lee Teng-hui and consolidating in the early 2000s. This contradicts many other theories of democracy that assumes a lengthy timeline for democracy to take hold, especially in postcolonial contexts. An early factor in beginning Taiwan's rapid democratization is the outside influence from democratic countries. A country that has provided major democratic influence on Taiwan is the United States. An example of the influence the United States has had on Taiwan is education. "By the late 1970s, most of the overseas students had, it appears, consciously or unconsciously adopted the United States as their general model for Taiwan" (Lynch, 2002, p. 564). Taiwanese natives who had their college educations in the U.S. during the Vietnam war not only gained education about democracy, but also experienced protests during that time. Protests in the U.S. may have influenced the ways the Taiwanese have protested for political control over their island.



Figure 88: Then US President Eisenhower next to Chiang Kai-shek in Taipei in 1960¹⁰²

Other factors that assisted Taiwan's rapid transition to democracy are geography, climate and natural resources. This trio increases Taiwan's capabilities as an independent nation. They provide Taiwan with convenient location, predictable agriculture productions, and some access to underwater oil reserves. Other factors present in Taiwan that helped its democratization involve a unique culture, partly influenced by its experience with foreign rule that allowed for a political society to develop. Taiwan has a political society with democratic ambitions that believes itself to be legitimate. Without an independent political society from the PRC that amount of democratic support may not have been achievable (Tien and Chu, 1996). One of the big differences between Taiwan and China is perhaps that democratization was accomplished in a

¹⁰² Source: [President Eisenhower visits with Republic of China President Chiang Kai-shek and Madame Chiang in Taipei](#), by Unknown USAID Photographer, licensed under [Public Domain](#).

very conscientious way, taking into account its Confucian culture as well as its contact with the US. Therefore, democratization was not seen as surrendering to Western supremacy.

Conclusion

Taiwan is a crucial case of rapid democratization leading to democratic transition while fighting authoritarian influence. The case of Taiwan is important because it displays several theories of democratization—modernization, cultural, and postcolonial—in a highly unlikely scenario.

Many factors have contributed to Taiwan's ability to sustain itself as a semi-presidential republic amid threats challenging sovereignty from the PRC. Unfortunately, Taiwan's democracy is under threat by China, which leads us to the next chapter that which considers the origins and techniques of authoritarianism.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- RECOGNIZE THIS SUBEST OF REGIMES IN THE WORLD
- UNDERSTAND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ON0DEMOCRACY AND DEMOCRACY
- EVALUATE VARIOUS INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGIES BY WHICH AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES REMAIN IN POWER



Figure 89: Sculptures of Kim Il-Sung and Kim Jong-Il in Pyongyang¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Parts of this chapter adapted from [5: Non-Democracies and Democratic Backsliding](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Dino Bozonelos, Julia Wendt, Charlotte Lee, Jessica Scarffe, Masahiro Omac, Josh Franco, Byran Martin, & Stefan Veldhuis](#).

¹⁰⁴ Source: [Visitors bowing in a show of respect for North Korean leaders Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il on Mansudae \(Mansu Hill\) in Pyongyang, North Korea](#), by Bjørn Christian Tørrissen - Own work by uploader, <http://bjornfree.com/kim/>, licensed under [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

Definition of Authoritarianism

Introduction

There exists a rich vocabulary for referring to non-democracies and authoritarian, past and present. Scholars have employed terms such as dictatorship, tyranny, monarchy, oligarchy, and totalitarian regime, among others, to describe this kind of political system. All of these, and many more, fall under a broad umbrella of regimes that can be described as non-democratic. This is a problematic way to understand these regimes, however, since the definition of democracy itself is contested. Thus, we tend to use the term *authoritarian* to describe a wide range of states that differ from democracies in important ways. We generally consider authoritarian regimes as all forms of government which deny citizens meaningful institutional channels for making choices about their collective well-being. This can range from limited to no ability for public input in the selection of political leaders and limited to no decision-making power over the allocation of public resources.

Non-democracies are quite diverse, even more so than democracies, and this variety extends across time and space. While there are 'varieties of democracy' ranging from liberal to electoral to "hybrid," with different institutional configurations such as presidential and parliamentary, across democracies there exist common principles such as divided government and accountability to the people. All democracies have electoral systems, an executive, legislature, and judiciary. Authoritarian regimes, in contrast, do not have any common organizational features; instead, they run the gamut from rule by a single person with minimal institutionalization to complex bureaucratic systems under collective leadership, to governments that also have the familiar institutions of a democracy. For example, many authoritarian regimes do have three branches of government and multiple political parties. The difference is often in

how separate these branches really are or how competitive the political parties really are. These differences can be quite subtle at times, as some democracies may also have less than competitive elections and branches of government that aren't fully separate but equal. Therefore, even though we are presenting these two regime types as distinct for the purposes of introducing the new student to these concepts, it is better to think of them in terms of a scale. Thus, authoritarian regimes are a much broader and confounding collection of countries to study. Even more confounding, these states tend to be those that are difficult for outsiders to gain access to, such as North Korea and Russia.

Empirically, authoritarian regimes are also distinct from democracies in important ways. Non-democratic regimes are much more variable in their economic performance. (Gandhi, 2008). Many have swung from extreme levels of nationwide poverty to becoming economic dynamos, presenting sustained economic growth rates unseen in recorded human history. This would be the example set by China from 1978 to 2020. In a reversal of this pattern, the kingdom of Chad and post-colony of Chad (1960-present) made the dramatic turn from a major trading empire during the ninth through nineteenth centuries to becoming one of the poorest sub-Saharan countries in Africa today. Non-democracies appear to experience deeper economic troughs and higher economic highs than their democratic counterparts. As discussed in previous chapters, some of this variation is due to different patterns and time periods of colonization.

While there exist many varieties of non-democracy, a subject taken up later in this chapter, all non-democracies share several overriding characteristics. These relate to accountability, competition, and freedom. Let's take up each of these in turn.

Accountability

Political accountability has many dimensions. Most critically in democracies, it exists between public officials and the public via the institution of free and fair elections. Accountability exists via other channels, such as through the free flow of information about political decisions and developments in a society. A free and independent media can ensure this flow of information, along with monitors within government. Accountability also exists when different branches of government can check each other, for example through vetoes, court rulings, and divided authority.

In authoritarianism, some or all of these forms of accountability are compromised: elections are rigged or don't exist; the media is muzzled or state-owned; government exists to carry out the will of an unchecked political elite. Most non-democracies restrict channels for accountability of political authority(ies) to the governed in some capacity or another. Take the example of Saudi Arabia. This kingdom is one of the few remaining absolutist monarchies in existence today, and all political authority lays with the Al Saud royal family. The Saudi king is the leader of this family, and he is also head of state and head of government of Saudi Arabia. There is no legislature to pass laws in Saudi Arabia, and Saudi citizens do not elect representatives or otherwise have institutional channels for providing input in the national policy-making process. In this polity, the ruling Al Saud family is not accountable to the Saudi people.



Figure 90: Flag of Saudi Arabia¹⁰⁵

Competition

Separate but related, authoritarian governments have limited to no competition for political office. This may mean the absence of political parties, as in the case of Saudi Arabia. Some non-democracies allow limited competition for public office, which was the case in Mexico under PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional). PRI controlled Mexican political life for 71 years and was famously described by novelist Mario Vargas Llosa as “the perfect dictatorship” because it managed to remain the ruling party of Mexico for decades despite the existence of opposition parties. We discussed this in the previous chapter (see Dominant and Single Party Systems, page 214). These opposition parties began to win elections in the 1980s and, in 2000, PAN (Partido Acción Nacional) presidential candidate Vicente Fox won national elections and overturned decades of single-party rule in modern Mexico. Political parties are one way, but not the only way, to observe the degree of competition in a political system, and they are a proxy for a deeper and more meaningful competition of policy ideas. This competition of ideas is a critical marker

¹⁰⁵Source: [Flag of Saudi Arabia](#) by [Saudi Arabia Royal Decree No. M/3](#), via [Wikipedia](#), is licensed under [Public Domain](#).

of the debate, dissent, and diversity that characterizes a democratic system. However, in a more deliberative democratic system, parties may be present but not the only conduit for meaningful debate. Thus, it is important to try to distinguish between parties and other forms of competition that may or may not be democratic.

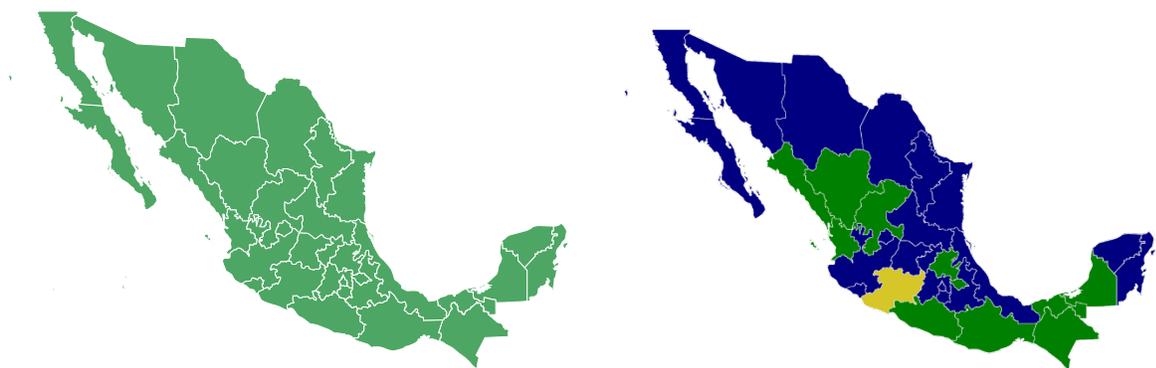


Figure 91: From left to right: Results of the 1994 general election; results from the 2000 general election in Mexico. Green is the PRI, blue is the PAN, and yellow is the PRD¹⁰⁶

Freedom

Many authoritarian systems lack a commitment to individual freedom, which is an important element to be considered democratic. While democracies usually have many institutional channels for individual voice -- elections and independent media are key examples -- these are often manipulated or censored in a non-democracy. To justify the abrogation of individual freedoms, authoritarian states may promote alternate values such as the importance of order and hierarchy over individual will or the need to subsume the individual to larger collective will (as mediated by those in power).

¹⁰⁶ Source: [From left to right: Results of the 1964, 1970, and 1994 Mexican general elections by state](#), by JayCoop – Own work, licensed under [Public Domain](#); [Basado en Plantilla de México, Resultados y Del PREP Y conteos distritales](#) by Darworld – Own work, licensed under [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

It should be noted, however, that states that are classified as democracies do not always perform highly when it comes to individual rights. As discussed in previous chapters, the US has often been classified as a democracy since the ratification of the Constitution, as well as a “steadily democratizing state,” even through the period of Jim Crow and the Civil War.

States can also be mostly authoritarian with pockets of democracy. An example of this could be Iran. Iran is a theocracy (which we will define shortly) that tightly controls its citizens. This was put on full display recently when a young woman named Mahsa Amini died while in the custody of Iran’s morality police after being arrested for violating the state’s firm dress code for women. This resulted in widespread protests throughout the country, and according to a group called Human Rights Activists, the government has detained over 2000 protestors and killed more than 500 (Ellis et al., 2023). Yet, Iran has regular elections, some of which are competitive. The president (head of government) is regularly unseated through these elections, but the head of state is the Supreme Leader, who is both the highest political and religious authority in the country. Currently that post is held by Ali Hosseini Khamenei and is the longest serving head of state in the Middle East.



Figure 92: Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei casting his vote in the 2013 presidential election¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Source: [Khamenei casting his vote in 2013 presidential election](http://www.ypa.ir), by Mohammad Sadegh Heydari - <http://www.ypa.ir>, licensed under [CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

In order to measure authoritarianism, one can rely on many of the same databases as we discussed in the previous chapter on democracy. Recall, these databases typically use a scale or multiple categories to measure a state's level of democracy or lack thereof. Importantly, these databases also provide measurements of a country's freedom over time, which can give us additional information about what events might tip a country in one direction or the other. It also reminds us that a state's regime is never static and thus should never be taken for granted. We will consider democratic breakdown, or the process by which a former democratic state begins to slide into authoritarianism, as well as authoritarian persistence, later in this chapter.

How do authoritarian governments stay in power?

All regimes possess a variety of means for staying in power. One common heuristic for thinking about these tools is through a simple “carrots versus sticks” breakdown of regime strategies. Carrots take the form of inducements or benefits that are doled out to gain the loyalty of constituents. Sticks are focused on meting out punishments as negative reinforcement of the rules. All regimes utilize a mix of carrots, sticks, and ideas to stay in power. Many of the strategies reviewed in this section will have versions in democracies and non-democracies. For example, internal investigative bureaucracies, such as the Ministry of State Security in China, have counterparts in democracies, such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in the United States. Similarly, virtually all countries in the world, regardless of regime type, have police for maintaining domestic order. Importantly, it is not the case that authoritarian states are repressive while democracies are not. But compared to democracies, non-democracies are less restrained in their ability to use force or manipulate information in order to ensure compliance with their rule. The lack of robust accountability mechanisms in non-democracies is a crucial difference in how public institutions are managed and the scope of their authority.

One of the vexing questions concerning authoritarian governments, is how they stay in power, especially when individual freedom is curtailed and it appears, at least from the outside looking in, that the government has no legitimacy. In this section, we will discuss the various strategies that authoritarian governments use to maintain legitimacy, both genuine as well as manufactured. While you read this section, it might be worth it to consider whether you see tactics like this even in democratic states. Seeing these tactics at work in an otherwise democratic state might be a sign of impending democratic backsliding.

Institutional Channels

Regimes are most likely to endure when they build and maintain institutions. Institutions here refers to shared practices, norms, and organizations which exist beyond any single individual. One shorthand way for thinking about institutions is that they are the “rules of the game” for all social life. Institutions structure the way we do things and organize our interactions with others. They are the source of a great deal of social and political power. This is in part because resources follow from beliefs. Take the institution of the state. The state is one of the most powerful institutions in the modern world today. The beliefs and norms surrounding states, which are shared globally, confer great power on states. States manage nuclear arsenals, squeeze taxes from billions of citizens, and manage the global flow of trade and finance.

Because of the power of institutions, regimes have an interest in institutionalizing their rule. This highlights another feature of institutions. Institutions relate to each other in many ways: they can reinforce each other, be nested in one another, and one institution can beget another. Regimes are institutions unto themselves. Supporting regimes, in turn, are many additional institutions. Regimes invest in institutions that enable them to stay in power, which means that these institutions both absorb and disperse resources.

Let's start with institutional carrots. Authoritarians have in place a variety of institutions that provide positive inducements for supporting the regime. We will define and examine three of these: institutions for co-opting opposition, patronage networks, and clientelism. Each of these is distinct but can overlap with the others.

Institutions for Coopting Opposition

All regimes face the problem of an opposition which might oust them from power. The difference in an authoritarian regime as compared to a democracy is that power is expected to rotate regularly in a democracy, and therefore, when a party or a president loses, he or she accepts the result. In an authoritarian state, the opposition is more threatening because one of the characteristics of an authoritarian state is irregular or rare rotations of power.

To blunt the force of an opposition, or even vocal critics with a following, a regime might invest in institutions which have the appearance of democratic representation. These include rigged elections, legislatures, courts, and the like. These institutions are actually “window dressing” or façades for a tightly controlled political system. Judiciaries in these systems are not independent, nor do they provide a meaningful check on the authority of rulers. Many authoritarian regimes have legislatures, but these legislatures lack authority to veto measures passed by those in power. Examples abound in the highly authoritarian Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), or North Korea. North Korea has been ruled since the 1950s by a single Supreme Leader, yet formally it has a unicameral legislature. This Supreme People's Assembly comprises nearly 700 deputies and in theory confers authority on the Supreme Leader. However, DPRK's Supreme Leader makes all governance decisions for the country and does not face any threat of veto by this unicameral legislature.



Figure 93: North Korea's legislature meets at Mansudae Assembly Hall, which is in the capital Pyongyang¹⁰⁸

Opposition parties or critics of the regime might agree to sit on such bodies as a means to have access to and possibly influence political leaders. They may also benefit materially from legislative or judicial seats, like drawing a salary or receiving other perks of office such as a chauffeured car or swanky office. Note that co-opting opposition through such institutions can serve the ruling regime in multiple ways. It can boost the legitimacy of the rulers in the eyes of the public. It also allows rulers to more closely monitor the positions and ideas of the opposition, which might then be countered or even adopted as appropriate.

Patronage Networks

All politics hinge on relationships and the flow of resources. **Patronage networks** are relationships within political systems in which one party with access to resources distributes those resources to those within their network. Within a patronage network are reciprocal bonds that unite members of the network. A leader might take a portion of oil revenues and distribute

¹⁰⁸ Source: [Mansudae Assembling Hall in Pyongyang, Parliament of North Korea](#) by Nicor via [Wikimedia Commons](#), licensed under [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

those monies to their deputies scattered throughout the provinces; those deputies make sure that the leader's posters are prominently displayed in every local government office.

Patronage networks may be organized via many different kinds of organizations or social groups. Political parties are one way to distribute public resources in exchange for political obedience. Other major state organizations, such as the military or state-owned businesses are also sites for building patronage networks. Non-state organizations may be part of patronage networks, such as businesses or business associations. Identity groups, including those bound by ethnicity or tribe, may be the basis of patronage networks. The latter is evident in Syria, where major institutions of the state are controlled by the Alawite minority, a Shia Muslim group that is less than one-fifth of Sunni Muslim-dominated Syria. Alawite networks support the ruling al-Assad family.

Broad-based Clientelism

Related to but separate from patronage networks are institutions that promote clientelism on a broad scale. Clients are those who rely on a patron for resources; **clientelism** is a strategy whereby rulers seek to buy off the loyalties of broad swaths of the population. To do so, rulers may invest in social programs in which they clearly mark their sponsorship of these programs to the masses. Such broad-based distribution of resources has the effect of turning significant parts of a country's population into clients, or dependents, of the regime. If the economic theory of democratization is at least partly correct, then clientelism helps us understand how authoritarian regimes stay in power. By distributing resources in exchange for loyalty, populations get access to programs that increase their quality of life, but to the point where they feel like they are empowered enough to demand more rights.

One place where we see this kind of broad-based clientelism was in Mexico under the rule of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (or Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI) during much of the twentieth century. PRI was in power in Mexico from 1929 to 2000. Under the PRI presidency of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994), social programs were consolidated under a new government organization called Pronasol. Pronasol distributed government funds to poor communities to build public works such as schools, health clinics, water treatment facilities, and electric grids. This organization reflected the national ambitions and reach of PRI: at its height, there were nearly 250,000 Pronasol committees at the grassroots level to carry out community projects in collaboration with community leaders. The results are impressive: renovations of 130,000 schools, creation of 1,000 rural medical units, and plumbing access for 16 million Mexican residents (Merrill and Miró eds. 1996). Looking back on this ambitious program, it represented a broad-based means to build support for PRI rule throughout the country and especially in the countryside.



Figure 94: A rural school in Mexico that was sponsored by the PRI in Mexico¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Source: [Rural School in Mexico](#) by Heather Paul via [flickr creative commons](#), licensed under [CC BY-ND 2.0](#).

Clientelism used to be considered a strategy used exclusively by authoritarian regimes. However, more recent studies have shown that these sorts of programs are also common in democracies as well. Some scholars have even begun to use the word “patronage” democracies to describe states like Mexico, Ghana, Türkiye and Indonesia (Berenschot & Aspinall, 2020). What distinguishes more democratic clientelism from an authoritarian style is that the programs created by leaders are more likely to stick beyond the length of that leader’s term and are not revoked if that district fails to support the regime. In more authoritarian client-based networks, programs tend to only last as long as the leader.

Next, let’s turn to institutional sticks, or strategies of repression. There are a variety of repressive means by which nondemocratic regimes extract obedience from the population. These include the creation of domestic security bureaucracies and paramilitary groups.

Domestic Security Apparatuses

Authoritarian regimes are the creators of the modern secret police, beginning with the creation of the Cheka under Lenin, which became the NKVD – internal secret police – under Stalin. It is now the KGB in today’s Russia. The Cheka was the model for many other secret police that were created in Italy and Germany, to name some familiar examples. These institutions can serve critical purposes, from collecting intelligence on potential dissent within a country to terrorizing citizens.

One authoritarian state which has developed sophisticated means for surveilling its population is China. Since 2010, the ruling Chinese Communist Party has spent more on domestic security than external defense. A vast network of surveillance programs exist throughout the country, including “Sharp Eyes” (*xueliang*) a project announced in 2015 that mandated video surveillance of all public spaces in the country by 2020. Sharp Eyes included nonstop video feed of public

squares, intersections of major roads, public areas in residential neighborhoods, and transit stations, to name a few. It also included monitoring of buildings such as the entry points of radio, TV, and newspaper offices. This video capability is combined with additional technologies such as facial recognition.

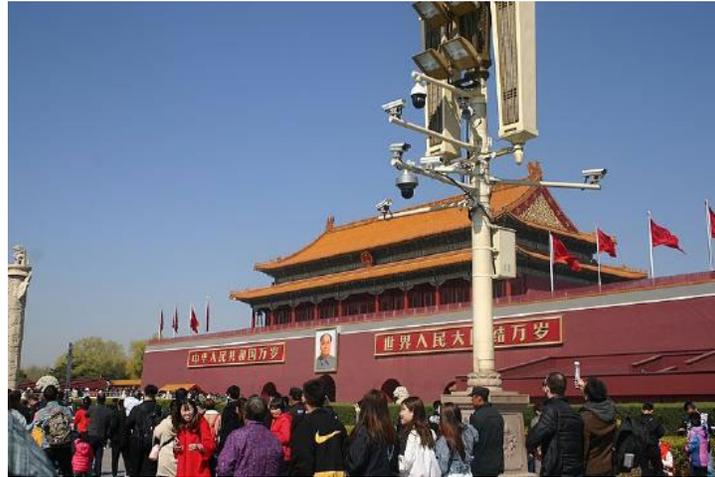


Figure 95: A public square in Beijing under surveillance¹¹⁰

Paramilitaries

Another powerful instrument of repression are paramilitaries. These refer to groups with access to military-grade weapons and training, yet they are not part of the national military. They are “irregular armed organizations that carry out acts of violence against civilians on behalf of a state” (Üngör, 2020). While there are often armed groups in democracies (especially the United States), the difference between these groups and those in authoritarian regimes is that armed groups in the latter often more directly with the government as an additional layer of protection against opposition. Armed groups in democracies are usually anti-government. For example, death squads are one kind of paramilitary employed by governments to carry out extrajudicial

¹¹⁰ Source: [Tiananmen Gate with surveillance cameras](#) by hmchang via [Wikimedia](#), licensed under [CC BY-SA 2.0](#).

murders, usually of political enemies of the state. One tragic example of mass killing carried out by death squads can be found in Indonesia. During the height of the Cold War in the mid-1960s, Indonesian death squads were responsible for the murder of hundreds of thousands of Indonesians believed to have leftist sympathies.

The use of paramilitary organizations can be risky, however, even in authoritarian regimes with tight control over the government. Two recent examples illustrate this. In April of 2023, a civil war broke out between the army and a paramilitary group called the Rapid Support Forces. The RSF had been used by the country's former authoritarian dictator Omar al-Bashir to crush uprisings. Al-Bashir was eventually ousted with the help of the RSF. Now the army-led government and the RSF are engaged in a violent conflict for power that has displaced millions. Similarly, the Wagner Group, a paramilitary group that Russia has used extensively in its invasion of Ukraine, as well as other conflicts in which it is involved such as Syria, revolted against the Russian military and marched on Moscow in June 2023. This mutiny was quickly quelled, however, and civil war was avoided. Questions remain, however, as to the stability of Putin's Russia, who has been in power for 23 years.

Taken together, nondemocratic leaders possess a variety of means, both persuasive and coercive, to enforce their rule. These include positive inducements that can be narrow or broad in scope. Coercive institutions, such as secret police and paramilitaries, offer an institutionalized means for nondemocratic leaders to maintain their monopoly on the use of violence over their societies.

Cultural and Ideological Controls

Another powerful way to maintain authority is to convince people to believe in the legitimacy of authoritarian rule. This is in some ways the most efficient way to stay in power because it preempts resistance. Nondemocratic leaders thus invest in creating strong ideational foundations

for their rule. These ideas may derive selectively from deeper cultural traditions in a society – including those linked to faith traditions – or from the dissemination of nondemocratic ideologies to the masses. Many authoritarian rulers will use cultural or religious traditions to convince the people that the current regime is a continuation of an ancient ideal.

A more narrow tool employed by nondemocratic leaders to remain in power is the creation of a cult of personality. A cult of personality occurs when a state leverages all aspects of a leader's real and exaggerated traits to solidify the leader's power. Drawing upon institutions such as propaganda bureaus and state control of media channels, a cult of personality creates the illusion of mass support for – even adulation of – the ruler. Soviet leader Joseph Stalin was famous for creating such a cult around his personal rule, and this was taken to new heights by other twentieth century rulers such as China's Mao Zedong and Romania's Nicolae Ceaușescu.

Fanning a cult of personality is a powerful way to create emotional links between citizens and ruler. A cult of personality also creates the appearance of invincibility on the part of the ruler, which can serve to stave off challenges to their rule.

Propaganda

One additional tool to add to the mix of carrots and sticks is **propaganda**. Governments may also expend resources to shore up their legitimacy in the minds of citizens, for example through sophisticated propaganda bureaucracies or control of information flows to the people. Here the term propaganda is used to refer to biased information communicated to convince audiences of a particular political view. Deploying propaganda is neither a carrot nor stick – or perhaps it is a bit of both – but rather a powerful means to control people's perceptions and thoughts. Propaganda, as an ideational strategy, is in a category of its own, and especially powerful when it can draw on existing cultural foundations in a society.

Conditions under which the regime took power

So far, we have considered only intentional strategies used by authoritarian states to stay in power. We have not considered external factors that create the context under which authoritarian states maintain their staying power. While there are several explanations for this, one of the more common is that authoritarian states that came to power under massive social revolutions are more likely to remain in power. While revolutions will be explored in later chapters, a social revolution is one that is supported by mass mobilization and seeks to radically change the social structure of society. The American revolution is often considered a political revolution, not a social one because it mostly sought to change the government, not the social life of the colonists. By contrast, the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 in Russia, the Communist Revolution of 1949 in China, and the Iranian Revolution of 1979 completely upended social norms and rules. The Bolsheviks sought to eliminate the bourgeoisie (or capitalist) class of society. (We will explore the case of Russia in more detail later in this chapter). Mao Zedong in China encouraged the destroy the landowning class. The Supreme Leader Ayatollah imposed strict rules of dress and conduct supposedly based on a strict reading of the *Quran*.

Accordingly, when a society completely rebuilds itself, those that support the project are more likely to get into positions of power. If these projects faced intense opposition (which they often do), then those that fought learned how to endure. If a social revolution succeeds even through violence, alternative centers of power are destroyed, leaving society with nothing but the new order to rely on. Leaders often rely on images of the respective revolutions to justify their continued rule (Way, 2023).

Classic examples of authoritarian regimes that employ all of these strategies are North Korea, China, and Russia. However, it is worth investigating other examples that tend to fly under the

radar and are some of the most tightly controlled regimes in the world. To explore how authoritarian states use these strategies, we turn to a case study of Turkmenistan.

Snapshot Case Study: Turkmenistan



Figure 96: A detailed map of Turkmenistan; location of Turkmenistan in Central Asia¹¹¹

Full Country Name: Turkmenistan

Head(s) of State: President Serdar Berdimuhamedow

Head of Government: President Serdar Berdimuhamedow

Government: Authoritarian Presidential Republic

Official Languages: Turkmen & Russian

Economic System: Mixed economy

Location: Central Asia

¹¹¹ Source: From left to right: [Map of Turkmenistan](#) by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#); [Locator Map](#) by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#).

Capital: Ashgabat

Total land size: 488,100 sq km, 188,456 sq mi

Population: 5,690,818

GDP: \$92.331 billion

GDP per capita: \$15,000

Currency: Turkmenistani Manat

Turkmenistan ranks 2/100 on Freedom House's Global Freedom Index. This score is a composite of political rights and civil liberties, in which the state scores 0/40 on the latter and 2/60 on the former. According to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, it is the most authoritarian of all former Soviet states (Stronski, 2017). Therefore, it is a useful look into how it maintains such close control over its people and territory.

Turkmenistan was part of the Persian Empire, then the Seljuk Empire, then the Mongol Empire under Genghis Khan. Finally, it fell under Imperial Russia by 1894. In 1924, it became one of the republics of the Soviet Union (see Figure 47 on page 155 for a map of the Soviet republics).

Therefore, while it wasn't colonized by a European power, the people of this region have experienced a long history of imperial rule. When the Soviet Union dissolved suddenly, Turkmenistan became independent in 1991. Saparmurat Niyazov, the leader of the Communist Party at the time, was quickly elected president with no opposition. He took control of the party and the state and began creating a cult of personality. He banned opposition parties and amended the constitution to allow Niyazov the rule for life. Finally, he took on the moniker of "Turkembashi," which means "Leader of all Turkmen." When he died unexpectedly with no

clear successor, a deputy prime minister, who might be the illegitimate son of Niyazov, became president in an election with 89% of the vote.

The new president, Berdimuhamedow, initially rolled back some of the more draconian policies of his predecessor, but the regime remained decidedly authoritarian. All information is censored, foreigners find it very difficult to get a visa to travel there, and citizens have difficulty leaving. In 2022, the president's son won an election with 99% of the vote (Hiro, 2011).

What explains Turkmenistan's authoritarian persistence? In short, all leaders since the dissolution of the Soviet Union have effectively utilized all the strategies discussed above and more. First, the state is rich in natural gas and oil reserves. Turkmenistan, along with other oil-rich states, use the wealth from this natural resource to fund an extended security apparatus and strengthen patronage networks. This includes a presidential private militia which answers directly to the president. The Ministry of National Security took over the responsibilities of the KGB during the Soviet period. If people are getting the services that they need, along with the knowledge that they are being watched, this weakens the demand for more say in their government. This effect is called the "rentier effect."

The cult of personality continues with the Berdimuhamedow regime(s). This tendency exists in postcolonial states that had a weak sense of national identity prior to colonization. It is said that particularly extravagant praise for the regime results in extra privileges for citizens. Therefore, the cult is sustained not just from above but also from the bottom. The president appears frequently on television performing all matters of dare-devil stunts as well as musical performances and more. The government introduced a media law in 2013 which had the looks of a free press, but in practice the media is tightly controlled. Citizens cannot insult the president, and the internet is extensively censored (Bohr, 2016).

Turkmenistan didn't experience a social revolution directly, but it was indirectly part of the legacy of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia that justified Soviet rule over its republics.

Communist and Soviet rule did recreate society in many facets from a tribal culture. While under the Soviet Union, it was the poorest of the republics. It has few trading partners outside of China and Russia, and therefore, little international pressure to adopt more human rights.

Therefore, much like North Korea, Turkmenistan is a very closed society, and it is likely we do not have the full picture of the extent of its authoritarianism. As far as we know, there has been little demand for reform, or any opposition movement, and thus Turkmenistan can teach us a lot about how authoritarian states remain in power over many decades.

Types of Authoritarian Regimes

Given the diversity of regimes that are commonly labeled “authoritarian,” one first cut at analytical clarity is devising a typology to categorize different non-democracies by their essential characteristics. Typologies offer a powerful means for thinking analytically about a group, by dividing it into subgroups based on certain criteria. However, be mindful of the problems and pitfalls of building typologies, as discussed in Chapter 3: The Promise and Pitfalls of the Comparative Method. Any state can display elements of each of the following categories, so these labels should not be thought of as distinct. This section will explore a few of the major types of non-democracies that exist in the world, past and present.

Type of Authoritarian State	Leadership Characteristics	Sources of Legitimacy	Examples
Theocracy	Single leader	Religious Texts	Iran, 1979-present
Personalist	Single leader	Personality cult linked to protection, tradition, charisma, etc.	Russia, 2000-present
Absolute Monarchy (distinguished from constitutional monarchy)	Single leader	Tradition, family lineage	Saudi Arabia 1932-present
Single party	Collective rule	Party ideology	Soviet Union under Communist Party 1922-1991 China under the CCP, 1949-present
Oligarchy	Collective rule by small circle of elites	Typically class and links to the ruler	South Africa under apartheid 1948-1994
Military	Single leader or collective rule	Military competence, sometimes linked to tradition or culture or history	Myanmar 1988-2011, 2021-present Burkina Faso 2022-present
Electoral authoritarian	Varies	Has semi-legitimate elections	At various times- Armenia, Bangladesh, Lebanon, Philippines.

Figure 97: Types of authoritarian regimes by leadership and legitimacy¹¹²

Theocracy

Theocracies are as old as organized religion. Many **theocracies** are non-democracies in which the authority of political leaders is grounded in a sacred text. These texts provide divine legitimacy to political leaders, who are not accountable to the public. Within theocracies, political institutions are organized in accordance with prescriptions in a sacred text, notably

¹¹² Adapted from [5.3: Varieties of non-democracy](#) is shared under a [CC BY-NC 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Dino Bozonelos, Julia Wendt, Charlotte Lee, Jessica Scarffe, Masahiro Omae, Josh Franco, Byran Martin, & Stefan Veldhuis](#).

executive office, the legal code, legal system, and schools. Some current non-democratic theocracies are those organized around Islam, such as Saudi Arabia and Iran. The Vatican, another non-democratic theocracy, is organized around Roman Catholicism. Another example is Afghanistan, detailed in Snapshot Case Study: Afghanistan, page 130.

Personalist Rule

Authoritarian states characterized by personalist rule are led by a single leader. That leader may derive their legitimacy from a variety of sources, but these are likely to develop a cult of personality to justify their rule. This personality cult often includes individual charisma of that leader or their ability to serve as a convincing interpreter of a political ideology for all of society. An example of the former is Idi Amin of Uganda (r. 1971-1979), and an example of the latter is Fidel Castro of Cuba (r. 1959-2008). Some personalist leaders come to power through family dynasties, such as the al-Assad family in Syria. In all of these cases, personalist leaders are not subject to formal mechanisms of accountability.

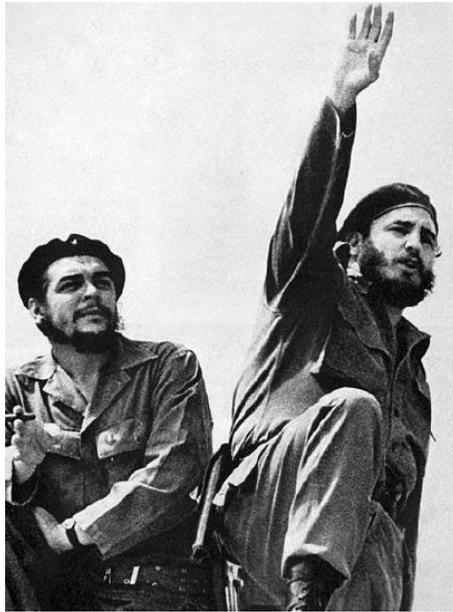


Figure 98: Fidel Castro as a personalist leader based on charisma¹¹³

Personalist rule is often combined with other types of authoritarianism, for example a charismatic leader may rely upon the organizational heft of a ruling party or the military to remain in power. Idi Amin was a commander in the Ugandan army; Fidel Castro commanded the formidable organizational apparatus of the Communist Party of Cuba and Cuban Revolutionary Armed Forces.

Personalist rule tends to be unstable due to problems of succession. A personalist ruler might be hesitant to designate a successor because that successor then has incentives to depose them from power. But if a successor is not designated, then instability is likely to set in upon the ruler's death.

¹¹³ Source: [Che Guevara & Fidel Castro](#) by Alberto Korda [Wikipedia](#) is licensed under [Public Domain](#).

Absolute Monarchy

A monarchy is similar to personalist rule in that there is a single leader, but the bases of legitimacy tend to be grounded in tradition or family lineage. The Vatican City, introduced previously as a theocracy, is also self-described as an “absolute monarchy” because it is led by a pope. The only sovereign state that is currently an absolute monarchy is Saudi Arabia. An absolute monarchy should be distinguished from a constitutional monarchy, in which the state retains the monarchy for symbolic or cultural reasons, but real political power lies with a legislature and executive. The extent of the power retained by the monarchy can vary considerably. For example, the Kingdom of Bahrain is a constitutional monarchy. The royal family has been in power in 1783.

Single party rule and oligarchies

We discussed single-party systems briefly in Chapter 6: Democracy. In contrast to personalist rule, single-party rule and oligarchies are shaped by collective leadership. Oligarchies are an older form of nondemocratic collective rule. In these systems, elites control political office and national resources and are not accountable to the public for their actions. The Roman Republic was a kind of oligarchy in that only the very wealthy could hold high political office. Political scientist Jeffrey Winters has theorized that there are two key dimensions to oligarchies. First, the wealth of oligarchs is difficult to seize and disperse. Second, their power extends systemically, across the entire regime (Winters, 2011). In the contemporary world, some have pointed to Russia as subject to a great deal of political influence by oligarchs, though it is not formally an oligarchy.

The overriding characteristic of single-party rule is leadership by members of a political party. Prominent examples include the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (1917-1991) and the PRI

(Partido Revolucionario Institucional) of Mexico (1929-2000). The latter is especially interesting because PRI rule took place in an environment of multi-party competition, but the competition was so skewed in favor of the PRI that Mexico was subject to single-party rule for decades. A ruling party may have a clear guiding ideology, such as communist parties of the twentieth century, or instead be like the political parties that we see in the United States: organizations for selecting political talent and unifying political elites.

Single-party regimes can be quite stable. For this reason, single-party regimes have been on the rise worldwide since the 1970s (Figure 100: Single party regimes as a percent of authoritarian regimes). Over the period 1972 to 2005, non-democracies led by a ruling party increased from 60 percent of all non-democracies to 85 percent.

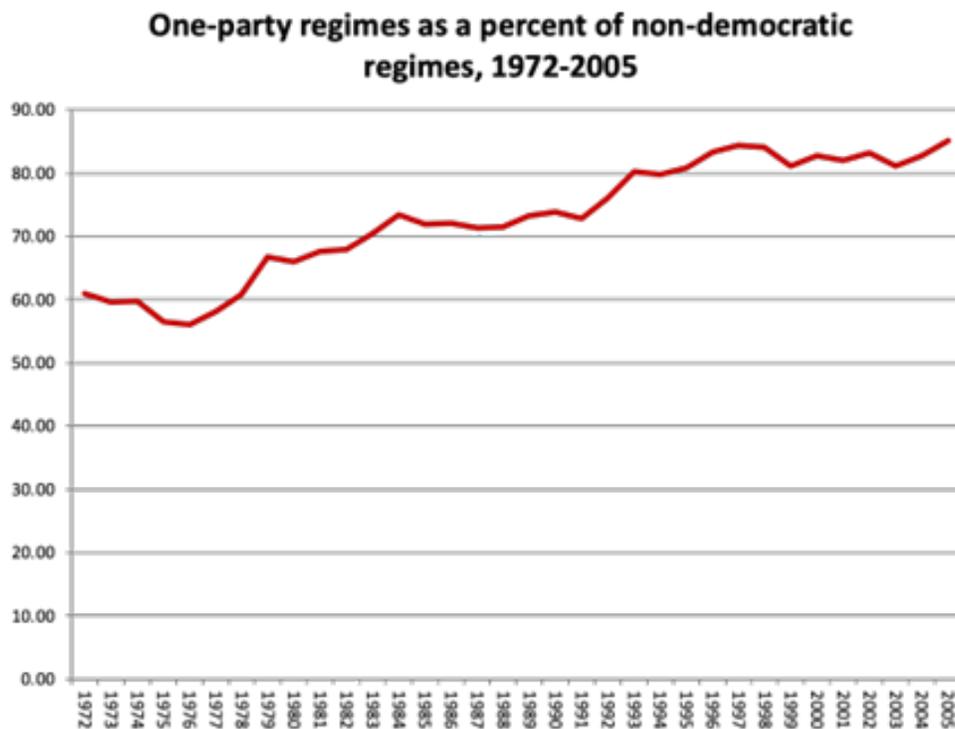


Figure 99: Single party regimes as a percent of authoritarian regimes¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ Source: One-Party regimes as a percent of non-democratic regimes, 1972-2005, by Charlotte Lee is licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

Military Rule

Military rule is characterized by military elites, rather than civilians, running the government. There are various reasons why militaries rise to political power in a society. One is that they possess the material means – the weapons and organizational capacity – to seize control over a society. On the demand side, a population might support military rule because of popular perceptions of the competence of the military, especially if there are charismatic or well-known generals leading the military. In some cases, the military might appear to be a particularly stable and orderly institution during a time of political turmoil. This in turn may appeal to certain segments of society (such as economic elites, who especially value stability) or entire war-weary societies.

There exists a continuum for thinking about the role of militaries within a polity. On one end of this continuum, developed democracies are grounded in civilian control of the military. In the example of Canada, the commander-in-chief of the Canadian military is the Canadian monarch. The reverse, total military control over the civilian population, falls on the opposite end of this continuum, and in these nondemocratic situations the military is not accountable to the public, even for gross human rights violations. Burma is a prominent example of a country which has been subject to repressive military rule for significant chunks of its post-colonial independence since 1948. The Burmese military, known as the Tatmadaw, appeared to allow some liberalization and turn toward civilian leadership during the 2010s, but in the 2020s it has again asserted control over the country and its political apparatus.



Figure 100: Burmese Defense Services¹¹⁵

Electoral Authoritarian

Another category of authoritarianism that is worth considering is that of the electoral authoritarian state. This category is difficult to define but generally it is a state that has some political rights, such as elections that are somewhat free and fair, but lacks consistent respect for civil liberties and rights. The difficulty here is that democracies can easily fall into this category, even if temporarily. But it is worth considering because states in this category may be good candidates for further democratic consolidation. Similarly, democracies that continue with elections but begin to curtail civil liberties may be candidates for democratic backsliding. There are innumerable examples over time as listed in Figure 97 above. Another example is Algeria, which is currently considered (as of 2023) a constitutional semi-presidential republic. Following Algeria's war of independence from France, the postcolonial state developed highly centralized

¹¹⁵ Source: [Burmese Defence Services personnel \(Air Force\)](#) by Thai government via [Wikipedia](#) is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#).

military and secret police apparatus. For a time, only one party, the revolutionary FLN (National Liberation Front) was allowed to run for office, but since 1988 other parties were introduced. The most recent elections, in 2017, were deemed mostly fair but media is tightly controlled. A well known journalist and podcaster was recently arrested for accepting foreign money, which many believe are trumped up charges (Al Jazeera, 2023).

Having explored the definition of authoritarian states, how they remain in power, and the typology of authoritarianism we use to try to classify these states, we turn to a classic study in authoritarianism: Russia.

Snapshot Case Study: Russia

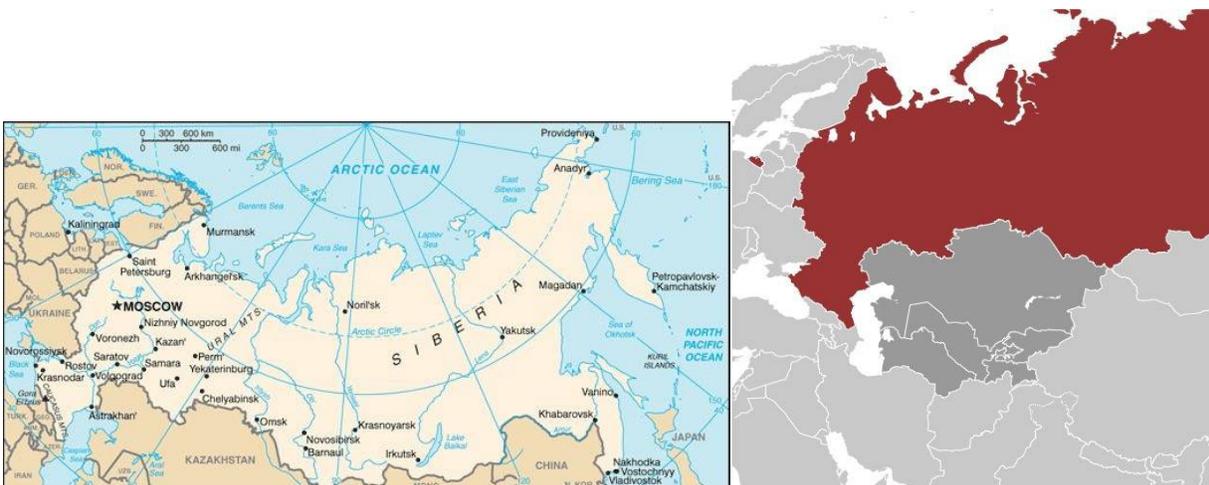


Figure 101: Detailed map of Russia, location of Russia across the European and Asian continents¹¹⁶

Full Country Name: Russian Federation

Head(s) of State: President Vladimir Putin

¹¹⁶ Source: From left to right: [Map of Russia](#) by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#); [Locator Map](#) by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#).

Head of Government: Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin

Government: Authoritarian Semi-presidential Federation

Official Languages: Russian

Economic System: Mixed economy

Location: Eastern Europe and Northern Asia

Capital: Moscow

Total land size: 170,982,46 sq km, 6,601,670 sq mi

Population: 145,478,097

GDP: \$1.710 trillion

GDP per capita: \$11,654

Currency: Russian Ruble

Monarchical Rule 1613-1917

For centuries, Russia was a key node in the trade routes that wound throughout Afro-Eurasia.

Russian explorers traded furs and other animal products for the goods available along these ancient routes: gold, people, and spices. Political consolidation gained momentum during the sixteenth century under Ivan the Terrible, who claimed the title of czar and ruled from 1547 to 1584. He joined with the powerful House of Romanov by marriage and this began a three-century period of czarist rule that would last until revolution in the twentieth century.

During this czarist period, Russia was organized as a feudal state in which power was consolidated in the czar but local power also existed in noble houses. Ivan the Terrible consolidated the czar's power in Moscow through the creation of standing armies and noble councils. The Orthodox Church provided the religious foundation for political power and state

legitimacy. Ivan expanded the territorial reach of Russian rule after defeating khanates in what is now modern-day Russia, along the northwestern shores of the Caspian Sea at the mouth of the Volga River. Subsequent czars, such as Peter the Great (r. 1682-1725) initiated reforms to modernize Russia with military upgrades and the building of a navy, construction of public buildings in European architectural styles, and support for industrialization.



Figure 102: Peter the Great on his deathbed¹¹⁷

Throughout these centuries of czarist rule, Russia struggled with forging its own path on a vast continent. To the west, new ideas were bubbling up during the Enlightenment, and industrialization and modernization were taking off. To the east, empires of Asia were economically dynamic and some, such as Japan, were also rapidly modernizing. In comparison to European counterparts, Russia was slow to industrialize.

¹¹⁷ Source: [Peter I on his deathbed, 1725 by Ivan Nikitich Nikitin](#) via [Wikipedia](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#).

Yet Russian society was not immune to modern ideas, and the abolishment of serfdom in 1861 presented a break with the past. This was not enough to contain growing mass discontent with a brittle political system of czars and noble houses, and revolution broke out in the early years of the twentieth century.

As with much of the world, the twentieth century was a decisive time of change for Russia. In 1905, mass protests broke out in the cities and resulted in Czar Nicholas II creating a legislature. Unrest continued, and this period presented a moment for republican revolution and unprecedented transformation in Russia. The moment passed, however, with the revolution of 1917. This revolution was led by Vladimir Lenin and political parties that adhered to socialism and communism as the path forward for Russia. A vicious civil war ensued, with the Bolsheviks emerging triumphant. Lenin took the mantle as Russia's paramount political leader and forged a federation under single-party rule.

Single Party Rule, 1922-1991

Organized as a multi-ethnic and multi-national federation, the USSR became the largest sovereign country on the planet, stretching from the Baltics to the eastern shores of Siberia. The USSR's first leader, Vladimir Lenin, carried out radical wholesale reorganization of the state and society. State-led modernization and industrialization became the watchwords of this time; the countryside was squeezed for the products that would feed urban industrial centers.

In this single-party system, led by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), the state was pervasive in all aspects of life. Economically, free markets were abolished and replaced by centralized economic planning: production would proceed according to five-year plans set by a vast planning bureaucracy. The countryside was organized into communes, with production quotas and set prices. The state owned all "commanding heights" of industry, from energy

production to steel foundries. Again, production and prices were set, and workers were assigned to workplaces. In this world, there was no inflation and no unemployment – but there existed scarcity and supply-side distortions. Production quotas were set by the state in the USSR. This included the cotton harvest in Armenia, which was part of the USSR. This photo was taken in the 1930s and sought to demonstrate the abundance of the Soviet system.



Figure 103: Cotton farmer in Armenia under the Soviet Union¹¹⁸

Socially and culturally, the CPSU controlled all aspects of life. The media was entirely state-run, across all communication technologies such as radio, print, and television. The party organized youth groups, women’s federations, and provided for leisure spaces. While the party was officially atheist, it permitted state-sanctioned places of worship. There was no independent organized social life for Soviet citizens.

Politically, the party maintained control through a competitive selection process for party membership; the most desirable offices in the party and state bureaucracies were open only to

¹¹⁸ Source: [Cotton picker from Armenian SSR](#) via [Wikipedia](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#).

party members. Appointments were carefully controlled through party personnel bureaucracies, which maintained classified files on all citizens. To enforce party rule through force, Lenin created secret police known as the Cheka, which was the forerunner to the KGB. While there existed paramount leaders within the CPSU, beginning with Lenin and then the disastrous totalitarianism of Stalin, leadership was also collective in some ways. Major party decisions were made through bodies such as the Politburo and disseminated throughout the party and state apparatus.

Communist party rule lasted for seven decades. Internal weaknesses festered, from ethnic resentments to economic distortions to political stagnation. By the 1980s, reform-minded leaders such as Mikhail Gorbachev attempted small steps toward loosening economic and social controls. By then, it was too late. The 1980s were a restive time throughout the USSR, in the Baltics and the Caucasus, Ukraine and Moldova. In 1989, a string of revolutions in client states of the USSR led to the overthrow of communist parties in East Germany, Poland, Hungary, and Romania, among others. In 1990, there was an attempted coup in Moscow. Through a cascade of shocking events in 1991, the Soviet Union dissolved: one after another, republics seceded from the federation and declared themselves independent. On December 25, 1991, the Soviet flag was lowered from the Kremlin and the Russian flag replaced it.

Electoral Authoritarianism, 1991-present

In the decades since the collapse of the Soviet Union, institutions created by the CPSU were dismantled. Central planning, state-owned industry, and communes went into the dustbin of history. Russia and many of the fourteen other post-Soviet republics adopted liberal market economies, to varying degrees, and multi-party political systems. The transition was rocky in every case.

The Russia that emerged from the ashes of the Soviet Union had many assets. It possessed great energy reserves and mineral wealth and a highly educated population base, along with thousands of nuclear weapons and a sophisticated military-industrial complex. All of this was leveraged to maintain Russia's status as a regional power. Today Russia is a major energy provider to the European Union, and it has maintained client states in Eurasia such as Belarus and Syria.



Figure 104: Gas pipelines connecting Russia to Europe¹¹⁹

While there was hope that Russia would join the liberal European fold in the early 1990s, those hopes have since been dashed. Since the breakup of single party rule under the CPSU, Russia has maintained an electoral authoritarian regime. Elections are neither free nor fair according to

¹¹⁹ Source: [Map of the major existing and proposed Russian natural gas transportation pipelines](#) in Europe by Samuel Bailey via [Wikipedia](#), licensed under [CC BY 3.0](#).

election observers. Non-state organizations are allowed to exist, but they are subject to harassment by state security agencies if they promote rights considered taboo by conservative Russian leaders and the Orthodox Church. While there are some media freedoms in the country, it remains a dangerous, and even deadly, place for investigative reporters. The courts are not independent, nor does it appear that presidents such as Vladimir Putin are subject to the rule of law.

Putin has benefited from the legacy of the Bolshevik Revolution despite not coming to power during this violent upheaval. The Soviet Union prevented civil society from taking root, and he utilized the extensive security apparatus from the Soviet days to his advantage in maintaining control. According to a recent study, Russia has more personnel in the current FSB (Federal Security Service) than it did under Soviet rule. The FSB is responsible for a number of assassinations of opposition activists.

In 2014 and 2022, Russian military assets were used to annex Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula and invade Ukraine in its entirety, respectively. One powerful rationale was to consolidate the Russian nation -- despite popular Ukrainian assertions of a distinct Ukrainian identity -- and Russia's future as a disruptive, undemocratic force remains problematic for the region and beyond. The FSB has also penetrated the military, lessening the likelihood of a military coup, even in the wake of the invasion that has not gone as well as Putin thought.

In summary, Russia has experienced centuries of non-democratic rule, and “varieties of non-democracy” are evident in tracing the history. There were moments when it appeared that republicanism might prevail, such as early in the twentieth century and at the end of that same century, but those moments were fleeting. Each non-democratic regime established institutions to maintain social order and economic and political control; each succeeded for varying lengths of

time. Feudal rule under czars persisted for centuries, and Russia's modernization lagged as a result. Single-party rule by the CPSU created a totalitarian system of large-scale economic tragedies and political repression. Today, there are comparatively more spaces for freedom in authoritarian Russia, but they remain highly circumscribed.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to define authoritarianism and provide an analysis of how these states persist, as well as a typology of authoritarianism. This information will be especially useful as we explore theories of authoritarian persistence and democratic breakdown in the following chapter.

Chapter 9: Theories of Authoritarian Persistence and Democratic

Backsliding¹²⁰

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- COMPARE THEORIES OF AUTHORITARIAN PERSISTENCE AND DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING
- CRITICALLY ASSESS CASES OF AUTHORITARIAN PERSISTENCE AND DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING

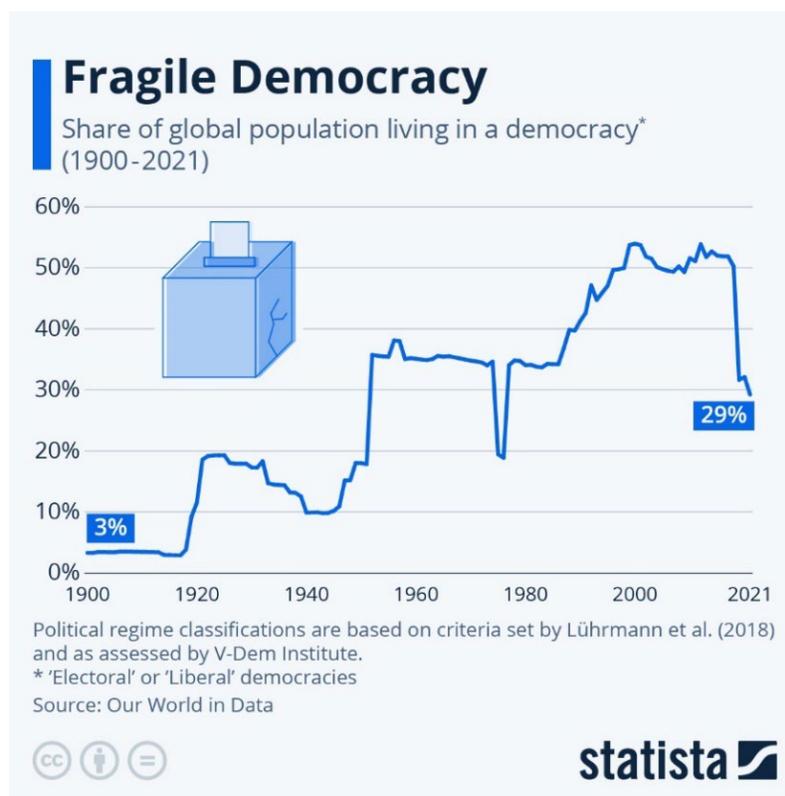


Figure 105: Share of people living in a democracy¹²¹

¹²⁰ Parts of this chapter from [5.4: Democratic backsliding](#) is shared under [CC BY-NC 4.0](#) license and was authored, remixed, and/or curated by [Dino Bozonelos, Julia Wendt, Charlotte Lee, Jessica Scarffe, Masahiro Omae, Josh Franco, Byran Martin, & Stefan Veldhuis](#).

¹²¹ Source: [Fragile Democracy](#), by Statista, licensed under [CC BY-ND 4.0](#).

Authoritarianism Revisited

In the previous chapter, we grappled with the definition of authoritarianism, and struggled with whether it is good enough to simply think about these states as “non-democratic.” While it is true that there is something qualitatively different between non-democratic regimes and democratic regimes, it is often quite difficult to pinpoint. The strategies an authoritarian government uses to stay in power are sometimes not altogether different than strategies used in democracies such as clientelism and patronage. Democracies often send additional funds to the districts of politicians that support the regime. All states engage in some sort of security and surveillance of their citizens. Democracies are not immune to engaging the services of private military contractors, which are not entirely different from paramilitaries. Democracies also engage in their own style of propaganda, which is evidenced by the so-called “military-cinema” complex in the US (Wasson & Grieverson, 2018).

Perhaps the biggest difference, and even this is debatable, is that these strategies, when used by democracies, are meant to legitimize the *state*, whereas in an authoritarian regime, it is meant to legitimize the *government*. Again, the difference is subtle. But democracies try to sustain their state as an idea and institution in which the content of the government can and should change. While authoritarian regimes try to sustain the particular occupants of the government, whether it be a person, a party, a monarch, or a military. Democracy is seen as a threat to authoritarian states because the very idea of a regular rotation of government, while sustaining the central core of the state itself, is antithetical to their rule.

However, because the differences in legitimation strategies are similar, classifying a democratic and autocratic regime becomes an exercise in grey areas in many cases. After reading this text, it is the hope of the editor that students can thoughtfully utilize the typology of authoritarianism /

democracy not to simply classify entire states, but to understand that elements of democracy can exist in authoritarian regimes, and vice versa. In light of the theories of democratization that we considered in Chapter 5: Theories of State Emergence that make strong predictions that states will eventually democratize, we might wonder why and how authoritarian states not only maintain power in the short-term, but how they can sustain their rule over decades or more. Finally, and most importantly, the implication of this nuance between authoritarian and democratic states is that one can shift from one category to another. In this chapter, we will consider theories of authoritarian persistence as well as democratic backsliding.

Theories of authoritarian persistence

Historical Institutional theories

Historical institutionalism broadly refers to a theory that looks for important moments in which institutions, broadly defined, take shape. Therefore, simply, an historical institutionalist perspective would focus on critical junctures in which an authoritarian regime solidified rather than embarking on a path of democratization. While those of us who grew up in democratic states might assume that most or all people have an interest in supporting democracy, this is certainly not the case universally. Many groups may not have an interest in democratization such as those that receive patronage from the state or those that stand to lose power. Historical institutionalist perspectives often come in two main varieties: one that focuses on the class coalitions that help support the persistence of the regime (see for example Moore, 1993), or that authoritarian states persist simply due to inertia.

Economic theories of authoritarian persistence

Modernization theory posits that economic development will lead to democratization. The flip side of this argument is that in conditions of economic underdevelopment, democracy will be

less likely to develop and can even support authoritarian persistence. There are a few variations of this argument. First, in extreme poverty, citizens have far more to be worried about than advocating for their rights to be heard and instead are focused on providing for their families. As long as the regime is not making life even more difficult, there is simply no incentive to rebel or insist on democratic reforms in these conditions. The other side of this theory is that in conditions of extreme poverty, citizens have little to lose and therefore may have an incentive to rebel against a regime that is keeping them poor, especially if the elites are living lavishly. Another more nuanced version of this theory is not that absolute poverty will lead to authoritarian persistence, but that income *inequality* will. Large gaps between the rich and the poor will create divisions in society that an authoritarian regime can exploit to stay in power. They can promise to keep the wealthy in their positions of power, while continuing to make promises to the poor that the regime is the only avenue out of poverty.

Cultural theories of authoritarian persistence

If certain cultural characteristics are more amenable to democratic government, than the reverse must also be true: cultural values will lead to more authoritarian governments. Various interpretations have emerged out of this general line of thought. Some have argued that Asian values are less democratic, others have argued that Islamic values are antithetical to democracy. Still others have argued that a centralist Latin American culture leads to more authoritarianism. As we have noted in previous chapters, however, these arguments are difficult to support and there are plenty of exceptions to seriously question this hypothesis. Furthermore, it treats culture as essentialist, meaning it is unchangeable and destined for certain outcomes.

What is perhaps more convincing is that cultural traditions or symbols are used effectively and strategically to legitimize an authoritarian government, thus giving it staying-power. If a leader

can appeal to broad cultural traditions and convince the population that he or she is the natural successor to carry out these cultural traditions, this can go a long way towards institutionalizing authoritarianism. Because culture is often seen as inherited and therefore passed on by blood, a leader that argues that he is the embodiment of culture can also argue that a rejection of his leadership is a rejection of culture.

Postcolonial theories of authoritarian persistence

In short, a postcolonial perspective would argue that colonization and subsequent decolonization are at loggerheads with democratization, and further, create the structure under which authoritarian regimes are able to stay in power over long periods of time. In *Citizen and Subject*, Mamdani (2018) argues that not only is the postcolonial state in a disadvantaged state to democratize, but the legacy of colonization left a power vacuum that was easily filled by authoritarianism. In some cases, rulers appeal to colonial-style governance and argue that this model must continue for the sake of continuity and stability. In other cases, rulers argue that a clean and profound break from colonial-era politics is necessary to resist neo-colonization and to forge a true postcolonial identity and culture. (Schneider, 2006). Either way, colonization leaves a structure that is particularly prone to authoritarianism, and continued support from major global powers can further consolidate authoritarian rule.

Conclusion

Now that we have explored the major theories of authoritarian we will use two case studies to further demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of these arguments. First, the case of Equatorial Guinea will show that in some cases, no theory is superior.

Student Feature: Equatorial Guinea



Figure 106: Detailed map of Equatorial Guinea, location of Equatorial Guinea on the African continent¹²²

Full Country Name: Republic of Equatorial Guinea

Head(s) of State: President Obiang Nguema Mbasogo

Head of Government: Prime Minister Manuela Roka

Government: Authoritarian constitutional republic

Official Languages: Spanish, French, Portuguese

Economic System: Market-based economy

Location: Central Africa

Capital: Malabo; Ciudad de la Paz under construction to replace it

Total land size: 28,051 sq km, 10,830 sq mi

¹²² Source: From left to right: [Map of Equatorial Guinea](#) by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#); [Locator Map](#) by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#).

Population: 1,737,695

GDP: \$12.27 Billion

GDP per capita: \$7,506.70

Currency: Central African CFA franc

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea, often referred to as Equatorial Guinea or EQG, has an intimate relationship with authoritarian rule. First, it was under Spanish colonization (unusual in Africa) until 1963. Upon independence, inhabitants of the island Bioko and inhabitants of the mainland (called Rio Muni) engaged in a debate over whether to remain unified or to separate. Under its first president, Francisco Macias Nguema (1968 - 1979), EQG saw totalitarian rule in which torture, ethnic violence, and the killing of political dissidents was commonplace. The current president, Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, has served as the country's leader since usurping his uncle in a 1979 coup. While EQG has become slightly less totalitarian since the regime change, it remains concretely authoritarian under Obiang. Even today, the country serves as a representative case in which all theories of authoritarianism and its persistence are applicable, indicating that no one theory is perfect.

EQG demonstrates the overlap between historical institutionalism and postcolonialism, as well as its weaknesses. The former focuses on the formation of a coalition of elites at a particular moment in time; the latter focuses on the particular moments in the postcolonial era that also produce authoritarian elites. To observe this in EQG, we need to go back to the time of its independence in 1968. Backed by the Spanish government under Francisco Franco, Francisco Marcias Nguema initially presented himself as loyal to the government that was in the process of decolonizing the country. The belief was that he would maintain their established status quo, and

the elite Spanish landowners would keep their power. In the country's only free and fair election, Nguema found himself legitimized by this Spanish support. But it was not the Spanish coalition that held on to institutional power. Almost immediately upon assuming power, the newly elected president consolidated power and painted himself as the one who had pushed out the Spanish colonizers. In doing so, he kept control of the institutions previously held by the Spanish and began to move toward more authoritarian rule.



Figure 107: Signing the independence papers of Equatorial Guinea with Spanish minister Manuel Fraga and EQG President Nguema in 1968.¹²³

¹²³ Source: [Signing of the independence of Equatorial Guinea](https://www.flickr.com/photos/certo/4111306999/), by Certo Xornal, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/certo/4111306999/>, licensed under [CC BY 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/2.0/).

Looking at the theories on economic development, we would expect Equatorial Guinea to be a very poor nation in which the citizens allow authoritarian rule because they are more focused on economic security for themselves. Surprisingly, EQG is economically strong on paper, at least at first glance. Between just 1995 and 2021, the GDP per capita of EQG has gone from approximately \$253 to an estimated \$7,506, according to the World Bank. This, however, is where the good news ends. Other indicators of economic development show a different picture. One issue is that a majority of the country's GDP can be attributed to oil and natural gas, which has been its biggest commodity by far following the discovery of the resources in 1995. This reliance on oil and gas has negatively impacted EQG's economic development, as their economy is very volatile and fluctuates with the price of oil. Also, due to the tight control of Obiang's government over major institutions, much of the wealth has gone directly to him and those close to him. As a result, there is a high degree of income inequality between the rich and poor of the country. Based on our theories on economic development and poverty, we can predict that such inequality and lack of development has stifled the formation of a strong middle class, and people are simply unable to fight for greater democracy.

Another explanation for authoritarian persistence in EQG has to do with there being a barrier to collective action. This perspective would suggest that any action against Obiang's regime is met with some form of repression, and therefore people do not see it to be in their best interest to act against the government. This, if anything, is an understatement in the case of Equatorial Guinea. Strict media control, exile, imprisonment, torture, and executions are common tools of the former and current regimes. News comes primarily from the state-run RTVGE, with the only other source being run by Obiang's son and Vice President. Independent journalists and political

dissidents are frequently subject to imprisonment, freedom of assembly is almost nonexistent, and all other political parties work as a coalition with the dominant PDGE.

Least applicable but still worth noting are political culture theories, which suggests there are certain values that contribute to the emergence and persistence of authoritarian regimes. In the case of EQG, this can be seen in the form of tribalism, where the majority ethnic Fang population see the regime as a triumph of their people over the other ethnic groups (namely the Bubi). Institutional weakness is another easily observed issue in Equatorial Guinea, with 15 of the 70 seats of the legislature directly appointed by the president and the other 55 almost completely dominated by the dominant PDGE party. The body that appoints judges is overseen by the president, and he is often consulted directly on rulings. Needless to say, the elections of the executive are widely regarded as rigged, and Obiang has served as president for nearly 44 years. All other institutions are in some way influenced by the regime, and are therefore able to function in a way that could effectively combat the efforts of said regime to maintain its control. The case of Equatorial Guinea is a demonstration of the complexity of theory in comparative politics. It seems that all the major explanations for authoritarian persistence apply quite well to this state. The fact that so many variables go into a state remaining authoritarian also demonstrates how difficult it is to unravel an entrenched non-democracy, even if there is domestic or international will to do so. If there are cases that effectively demonstrate all major explanations of authoritarian persistence, then we can expect to see one case embodying all leading explanations of democratic breakdown. After considering theories of democratic backsliding, some of which are clearly rooted in authoritarian persistence, we will consider the case of the United States.

Theories of Democratic Breakdown

Institutional theories

Certain institutions render a country more vulnerable to nondemocratic rule. Presidential systems are famously unstable (Linz, 1990). They tend to centralize power in a single individual, and there are fewer mechanisms in place to check that individual from abuse of office. Compared to a parliamentary system, where executives are appointed by the legislature and subject to no confidence votes, presidents are relatively difficult to dismiss before they complete their term of office. During this time, they may opt to abuse their power or degrade the democracy in significant ways.

Countries which lack strong institutions of accountability, such as independent judiciaries and independent anti-corruption bureaus, are also more susceptible to democratic backsliding. When courts do not check those in power, and there is only weak rule of law, then serious and flagrant abuse of public office is more likely. Significant and pervasive corruption – defined as misuse of public resources for private gain – can also degrade a democracy, both in practice and in the legitimacy of that regime. Well-resourced, robust anti-corruption bureaus or inspectors general are an important bulwark against this kind of internal decay.

Another major institution which can threaten a democracy is a politically motivated military. When a military is subject to weak or inadequate civilian oversight, it can become a politicized actor and even seize control, culminating in nondemocratic military rule. Building a professional military which is focused on its security responsibilities and ability to prevail in complex military operations, rather than be tempted by political power, is a deep ongoing challenge for many governments.

Economic theories

Not unlike the explanations for authoritarian persistence, class distinctions can be a reason for democratic backsliding as well. If the middle class, the ones that supposedly form the backbone of a democratic society, feel as though they are not getting the benefits they were promised, they can be convinced quite easily that nefarious outside forces are to blame, such as immigrants or other minority groups. An authoritarian leader will take advantage of these resentments and promise to limit their influence, which can further lead to the erosion of institutions, accountability, and human rights. These trends may be exacerbated by a postindustrial economy, in which the voice and the power of the middle class has been fragmented. Furthermore, as the state slowly outsources its economic and social capacities to private or charitable enterprises, the middle class have fewer government resources, which also fosters insecurity and vulnerability. This reduction in the capacity of the state also accelerates the appeal of an authoritarian leader who promises a radical shift.

Cultural theories

Popular and elite beliefs in the appropriateness of democratic rule can shape political outcomes. When there are strong democratic norms in place, this takes on a self-perpetuating quality in which a society supports and reinforces democratic practices and institutions. Yet democratic “habits of the heart” can take long periods of time to mature and gain a taken-for-granted status in a society. Civic education can play a role in this endeavor, especially education that addresses liberal values such as liberty, fairness, representativeness, and accountability. When people in a society think critically about where authority and power should rest in their society and believe that they are empowered to challenge nondemocratic rule, this can offer a deep societal buffer against democratic backsliding.

Charismatic, autocratic leaders can gain a national following and move a democracy toward non-democracy. Such leaders may call upon a variety of tactics to gain a mass following. Many of these strategies might appeal to cultural fault lines or vulnerabilities within a society. An aspiring autocrat might make populist appeals to in-group grievances and label an out-group as the culprit. They might appeal to nationalist ambitions or exploit ethnic divisions. They might present themselves as messengers with a holy message. They might offer promises of a return to a golden past or golden future. Such autocratic leaders take a variety of forms, but one common goal is a degrading of democratic institutions in order to consolidate power in non-democratic forms of governance.

One chilling example of this interplay between culture and political leadership can be found in the breakup of Yugoslavia during the 1990s. In the early years of the republics that formed after the collapse of communist Yugoslavia, one fiery Serb nationalist named Slobodan Milošević argued that a newly independent Serbia should reclaim territories once occupied by the Serb nation. His calls fell on fertile nationalist ground, which intersected with religious and ethnic fault lines in these Slavic territories. Milošević, who was elected president of Serbia during the 1990s, was a major political leader and instigator during a brutal civil war that ensued between former republics of Yugoslavia. He was eventually indicted for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide in Bosnia Herzegovina.

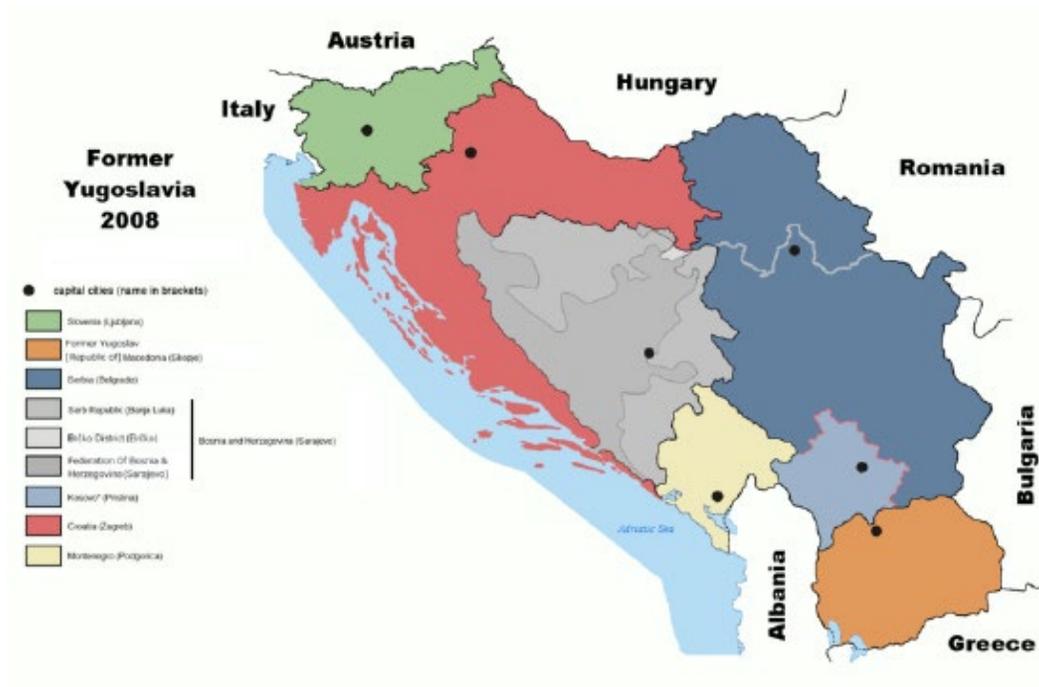


Figure 108: Map of states which emerged from the breakup of the former Yugoslavia¹²⁴

State Capacity

Recall the section titled State Capacity on page 164, in which the ability of the state to conduct its core functions was highlighted. This idea also relates to authoritarianism and democratic backsliding. If a state is weak or failing, this creates the conditions under which an authoritarian leader is more likely to come to power. A weak state is prone to a would-be ruler or party arguing for quick and sudden change to save the state and the people from complete failure. State capacity is related to economic theories as well as institutional theories but is more general—the state could be failing in some ways but strong in other ways. State strength can also be measured in the extent to which people believe in it, i.e. legitimacy. Even if the economy is relatively strong, but people no longer believe in the state, this could be an opportunity for new leadership

¹²⁴ Source: [Map of former Yugoslavia including Kosovo independence](#) by ljdanderson977 via [Wikipedia](#), licensed under [CC BY-SA 3.0](#).

with authoritarian tendencies to take over and begin to corrode democratic structures. Remember that state failure can be a dubious concept, and that most theories in political science are not causal. Therefore, we cannot say that weak states *cause* democracy to break down.

Barriers to Collective Action

This perspective is based on a larger theory of how human beings behave: rational choice. These theorists believe that human behavior is based on a rational cost-benefit analysis to maximize their interests as much as possible. Actors don't always make perfect decisions however, because they often do not have perfect information. From this perspective, people will not act against democratic backsliding if it doesn't immediately benefit them. If protesting or joining the opposition is seen as risky, or the chance of success is seen as low, then people will allow authoritarian regimes to slowly take hold, while hoping that someone else will take the risk to stop it. (Lichbach, 1998). This approach is distinct from cultural theories in that it assumes that regardless of culture, most people will act in the interest of self-preservation.

International theories

A country may be susceptible to democratic backsliding as a result of international factors. These can include "neighborhood effects": if a country resides in a region where countries are trending non-democratic, or if there is a high regional concentration of non-democratic regimes, it is more likely to become a non-democracy. Conversely, a neighborhood which is pro-democracy, such as the European Union, can pull countries in the direction of embracing democracy.

International pressures for a democracy to backslide can be carried out via technological means. New information and communication technologies encourage countries to defy geographical constraints and reach into target countries to wage influence campaigns. These influence campaigns serve to undermine democratic governments around the world through the

dissemination of misinformation via social media platforms and the internet. This kind of sharp power tactic is a means to destabilize democracies by sowing division within populations and undermining democratic institutions such as the free flow of information and electoral integrity.

Student Feature: United States of America

By Addison Chambers, edited by Holly Oberle



Figure 109: Detailed map of the United States, location of the US in North America. Maps do not include overseas territories.¹²⁵

Full Country Name: United States of America

Head(s) of State: President Joseph Biden

Head of Government: President Joseph Biden

Government: Presidential Federal Republic

¹²⁵ Source: From left to right: [Map of the United States](#) by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#); [Locator Map](#) by [CIA World Factbook](#), licensed under [Public Domain](#).

Official Languages: No official language; English and Spanish widely spoken

Economic System: Market-based economy

Location: North America

Capital: Washington DC

Total land size: 9,833,517 sq km, 3796742 sq mi

Population: 339,665,118

GDP: \$21.132 trillion

GDP per capita: \$63,700

Currency: US dollar

The United States serves as a possible crucial case study for the process of democratic breakdown in states consistently measured as highly democratic. It can be considered crucial due to the US's status as a highly democratic state that has served as a model. Therefore, if democratic breakdown can happen here, it can happen anywhere.

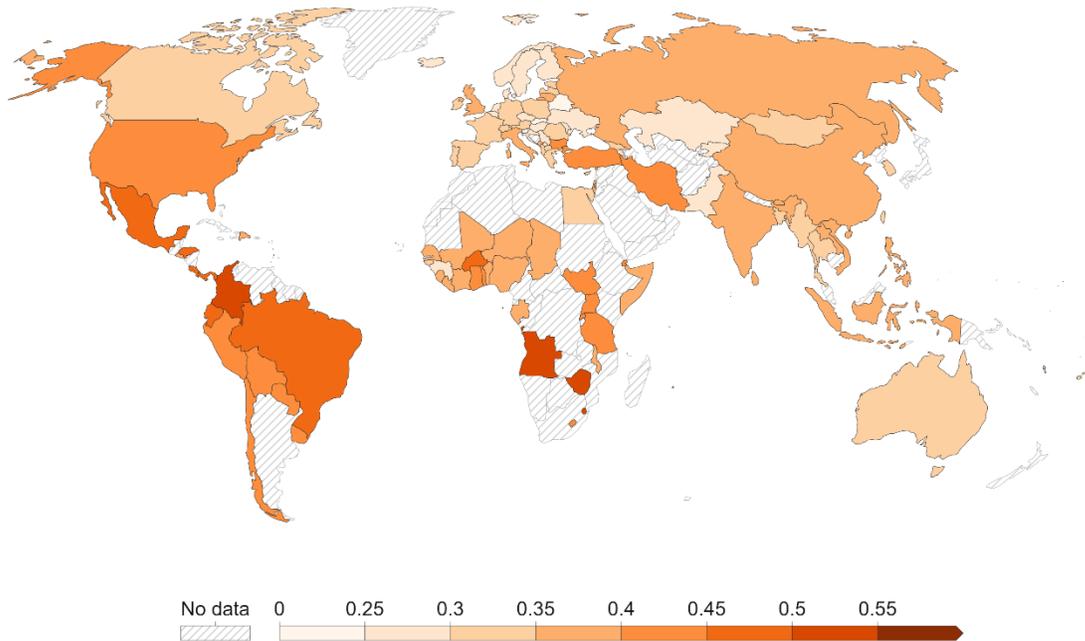
Traits of failing democracies that are evident in the US include high economic inequality, appeal to populism, reactionary movements, barriers to collective action, as well as recent events to subvert elections and popular opinion. However, there is at least two things keeping full democratic breakdown at bay in the US: the cultural tradition of democracy that has stuck with the country since its founding in combination with the strength of the state.

One of the most pronounced factors of democratic breakdown present within the United States is the economic inequality, a factor that produces a great deal of tension between classes and opens the door for populist and reactionary movements. According to the World Bank's Gini index, the United States has consistently had a Gini score higher than .36 since 1981, indicating a higher-

than-average inequality, as well as a score above .40 from 2016 to 2019, which puts the United States on similar rankings with most of Central and South America. This is higher than most countries in Europe, and it has no doubt caused problems for the political situation in the United States by raising class tensions.

Income inequality: Gini coefficient, 2021

The Gini coefficient measures inequality on a scale between 0 and 1, where higher values indicate greater inequality.



Source: World Bank Poverty and Inequality Platform

OurWorldInData.org/income-inequality • CC BY

Note: Depending on the country and year, the data relates to income measured after taxes and benefits or consumption per capita.

Figure 110: Gini Coefficient showing income inequality worldwide¹²⁶

As discussed above, economic inequality can provide fertile ground for authoritarian tendencies to deepen and for populist leaders to take over in conditions they would otherwise find challenging. Economic inequality, combined with the institutional structure of the US such as the

¹²⁶ Source: [Income Inequality: Gini coefficient 2021](#), by Our World in Data via World Bank Poverty and Inequality Platform, licensed under [CC BY 4.0](#).



presidential system, which vests more individual power in one person, and the two-party system, which disincentivizes the party from distancing themselves from authoritarian leaders, has proven fruitful for Donald Trump. Indeed, Trump was first considered a long-shot candidate for president, but he quickly found popularity by appealing to the common American and blaming their economic insecurity on immigrants. The Republican party struggled with Trump as he became more popular, and ultimately supported him and his authoritarian style of populism due to having few other options other than risk losing the election. The backslide is even more alarming because authoritarianism seems to be taking over the whole party, rather than lying with just one person. Indeed, observers such as Grumback and Collier (2022) have declared that the Republican party no longer has an interest in policy, it is only interested in power. This is a classic definition of single-party and oligarchic authoritarian states.

But the role of Trump himself, and the image he sells of himself, cannot be ignored. Another common theme among states that also experienced democratic backsliding is what Schneiker (2020) calls the populist “superhero.” Similarly, Mounk, a professor of International Affairs at Johns Hopkins University, says, “And one of the key characteristics of populism lies in a leader’s belief that they, and they alone, truly represent the people.” This relates to the difference between democratic and authoritarian governments we discussed in the section titled Authoritarianism Revisited. While both go to great lengths to stay in power, authoritarians see the state and themselves as inherently linked—one cannot survive without the other. If followers also believe this rhetoric, they are likely to support deepening authoritarian policies to keep the government in power. Furthermore, Trump also engaged in other familiar tactics of previous authoritarian leaders such as creating a patronage network exclusively for his supporters, viciously attacking any opposition, using his media connections to foster a cult of personality, and refusing to accept the results of an election.

Another concerning development in the United States is the barriers to collective action. Though there are not explicit legal barriers to collective action such as protesting, there have been actions taken to hinder protests by politicians and the media. This was evident when discussing the Black Lives Matter protests during the summer of 2020 in reaction to the death of George Floyd. Political actors, including then-President Trump, demonized the protests in a way that could discourage protests and quell sympathies for them, as well as encourage justifications of violence from law enforcement officers during these protestors. This creates a climate where collective action is framed as irresponsible and immoral when conducted by the opposition, and discourages those on the fence, even if it would benefit them to participate.

These issues proved to be a portent for things to come, because on January 6th, 2021, Trump supporters protested the verification of the 2020 election, and even violently breached the Capitol building and actively disrupted the election process. This is another common tactic by an authoritarian leader—encourage protest and even violence among his supporters but condemn it when conducted by the opposition. It followed claims by Donald Trump that the election was stolen from him, and his supporters would need to fight on his behalf to save the country. Some of the perpetrators of this event and their defenders have also used the perceived violence at the 2020 BLM protests to justify or equate their actions. Even though this event was not a successful coup d'état, it was still an attempt to disrupt democracy and does not bode well for the democracy of the United States.

Finally, the case of the US also shows signs of international theories of democratic breakdown. Trump came to power in an international environment which also saw democratic backsliding throughout the world. Similar leaders with similar styles came to power such as Narendra Modi of India, Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil, Boris Johnson of the UK, and Rodrigo Duterte of the

Philippines. This made it easier for him to take power and to maintain legitimacy internationally. Finally, Trump was an effective user of social media and other technologies to spread anti-democratic culture such as a distrust in the media.

However, in accordance with the theories of democratic breakdown, there are some reasons to be hopeful. Some theories for democratic breakdown claim that certain political cultures set a more fertile ground for authoritarianism while other cultures are more amendable to democracy.

Despite this theory having some deficiencies, the United States serves as a good example of how this dynamic can work. The United States may have had a flawed democracy throughout its history and in the present day, it has held democratic ideals since its inception. Even those who participated in the riot on January 6th believed they were acting to protect democracy.

Another thing standing in the way of democratic breakdown is state strength, which can make the difference in containing authoritarianism. In an essay evaluating the harm of Trump's populism, Kurt Weyland (2020) makes the point that "this fortunate lack of crisis was no accident. In general, advanced industrialized countries like the United States are less exposed to economic shocks than economically weaker Latin America and Eastern Europe." Therefore, stronger states tend to be better at handling these sorts of crises.

Thus, while the US doesn't clearly fit all the signs of democratic backsliding, the theories that does fit should be considered a crucial case that can alert us to slow regime change even in the states that have heretofore been considered the models of democracy. Thus, democracy worldwide, if we agree that democratic ideal is something we should strive for, should be monitored closer to make sure that it does not make the full transition into authoritarianism.

Conclusion

This chapter concludes our detailed comparison of democratic and authoritarian states. This question is one of the most important and oft asked in all of comparative politics. We have considered classic definitions of democracy as well as those coming out of the postcolonial experience, as well as alternative forms of democracy. We have discussed the primary institutions and norms that we find make up democracy, and how democracies can begin to erode. We have juxtaposed this against the dominant alternative to democracy—authoritarianism. While this isn't a perfect comparison, it tells us a lot about the world today and the reasons that states do what they do. We have also tried to be careful in this comparison. Rather than a clear black and white comparison, we have shown that democracy and authoritarianism bleed into each other more frequently than we'd often like to think. We have also endeavored to show that any regime is prone to transition, and thus no regime type is indefinite or inevitable. By looking in depth at several states, many of which are not often treated by the comparative politics literature, we have tried to show the nuances of how democracy and authoritarianism actually work in the real world.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- CONTEMPLATE THE FUTURE OF COMPARATIVE POLITICS



Figure III: Schoolhouse in Senegal¹²⁷

Senegal: An exceptional case no more?

Senegal, a state in West Africa, is a rarity amongst postcolonial states in that it has remained coup-free since its independence in 1960. It has been considered a model for stability and electoral democracy in the region, with several peaceful transfers of power since 2000. It has a

¹²⁷ Source: [Early education in Senegal](#), by U.S. Agency for International Development, licensed under [Public Domain](#).

decently free media and free speech is supported. However, it has been gripped in a political crisis quite unfamiliar to Senegalese, but familiar to many around the world. On the state level, it started when a prominent opposition leader was arrested on charges of rape that he denies, resulting in widespread protests. Some groups have blamed women for his arrest, the LGBTQ community, or the government. This environment has led to an increasingly hostile and divisive society with minority groups becoming frequent targets of violence.

On the international level, this crisis was sparked by the global context in which Senegal finds itself. Coups are rampant in the region from Mali to Chad, Guinea, and Burkina Faso. This has led to an eruption of armed groups displaced throughout the region, some of which are directly linked to terrorist organizations, others linked to paramilitary groups supportive of the new military governments. To add to the complexity, international organizations such as the UN Mission in Mali is coming to a sudden end when the Malian government demanded a complete withdraw, preferring instead to rely on Russia's Wagner Group to provide security. This group itself was involved in a near-coup attempt in one of the least likely places: Moscow. The Wagner Group is being folded into the official military ranks in Russia in response to the mutiny, but for the moment it will remain active overseas.

Until recently, Senegal managed to stay stable despite the chaos in the region. Two policies seemed to be the most effective. First, military camps were deployed along the borders with some of the most unstable states in order to prevent spillover violence. Second, President Sall made efforts to improve water access and basic education to the most remote areas in order to disincentivize citizens from joining rebels and to maintain legitimacy.

But youth unemployment and various corruption scandals have led to disenchantment, even among the more educated middle class. This was exacerbated by the rumor that President Sall

might seek a third term. Observers worry that seeking a third term will signal a power-grab by the current president, who may not accept an electoral defeat. If instability takes hold in Senegal, it could experience similar fates as other states in the region such as infiltration by terrorist groups. Senegal has been able to mostly stave off Islamist groups that have wreaked havoc on states like Mali, largely due to the type of Islam practiced there (Sufism), which preaches non-violence. But young people are starting to regard this practice as outdated and therefore this buffer against groups like al Qaeda might be waning (Toto, 2023).

Future of comparative politics

Why conclude a comparative politics text with a discussion of Senegal? In short, Senegal captures the main questions this text attempted to address:

- *Why are there such stark differences politically, socially, and economically between the Global North and the Global South?*
- *What similarities can also be discovered?*
- *Finally, are there differences in how these broad regions are changing, transitioning, and adapting to the new realities of a globalized world?*

Senegal represents broad trends we see in both the Global North and the Global South:

democratic backslide in the face of domestic, regional, and international pressures. The reasons for this are multifaceted, which this book has attempted to disentangle with simplified theories. Most importantly, the case of Senegal demonstrates the continued importance of comparative politics, and why, despite its roots in a Eurocentric view of the world, it is a discipline that holds promise for understanding an increasingly globalized world. Where a mere decade ago, many political scientists wouldn't have thought to compare Senegal to United States for democratic backsliding, in a globalizing world, this comparison holds two promises: a better and more

authentic understanding of the Global South, as well as the challenges that changing world facing the Global North.

While the unit of analysis in comparative politics remains the state, which this text has taken great care to define, historicize and contextualize, this text has also begun a discussion of alternative forms of government that may take over certain functions currently in the sovereign control of the state. If the discipline is flexible and responsive to change in the real world, as this text has attempted to do, then it will remain steadfastly *comparative* and *political*, but perhaps less state-centric and hopefully less Eurocentric. The state is not going away anytime soon but it will take on new qualities and will have to contend with challengers. Because comparative politics is the only political science subfield that focuses quite specifically on the internal dynamics of states worldwide, it is in the best position to critically analyze the state as it inevitably evolves. Furthermore, it is my hope that comparative politics, starting with this volume, will be a place where understudied and underappreciated societies and peoples will emerge as models from which to learn about your own society.

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Appendix 1: Weblinks and Databases

For general information about a country

- [CIA Factbook](#)
- [BBC Country Profiles](#)

For deep cross-national data on a variety of topics

- [Our World in Data](#)
- [The World Bank](#)

For journals dedicated to the subfield of comparative politics

- [Journal of Comparative Politics](#)
- [Comparative Political Studies](#)

For indices measuring state capacity

- [Fragile State Index](#)
- [State Resilience Index](#)

For indices measuring democracy, hybrid regimes, and authoritarian regimes

- [Economist Intelligence Unit](#)
- [Freedom House](#)
- [Varieties of Democracy](#)
- [Human Freedom Index](#)
- [Worldwide Governance Indicators](#)
- [Democracy Barometer](#)
- [Polyarchy Index of Democracy](#)