A key characteristic of all modern states is sovereignty, which all states will do almost anything to preserve. In spite of massive attacks, including on civilian buildings like this apartment block, the Ukrainian state and the vast majority of its citizens continue to fight to restore their sovereignty in the face of the Russian invasion.

Andalou Agency via Getty Images

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2 THE MODERN STATE

KEY QUESTIONS

- What are the common characteristics of all modern states, and how do these characteristics give their rulers power?
- In what ways do the characteristics of modern states limit power?
- Why are some states stronger than others? Why do some states fail completely?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading chapter 2, you should be able to do the following:

2.1 Define and discuss the roles of sovereignty, territory, legitimacy, and bureaucracy in modern states

2.2 Detail the historical origins of modern states

2.3 Give several examples of theories political scientists use to explain why some states are relatively strong and others relatively weak

2.4 Identify common factors or experiences within each group of states (strong, moderate, weak) and explain how they contribute to their relative strength

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Political development—the origin and development of the modern state—is the starting point for the study of comparative politics. What do we mean by "the modern state"? In everyday language, *state* is often used interchangeably with both *country* and *nation*, but political scientists use the term in a more specific way. *Country*, the most common term in daily discourse, is not used in political science because its meaning is too vague. *Nation*, which we discuss in depth in chapter 4, refers to a group of people who perceive themselves as sharing a sense of belonging and who often have a common language, culture, and set of traditions. Although most states are closely related to particular nations, *state* does not refer directly to a group of people or their sense of who they are. One way to think about the state is to ask how and when we "see" or contact the state. Capitols, courts of law, police headquarters, and social service agencies are all part of the state. If you have attended a public school, gotten a driver's license, received a traffic ticket, or paid taxes, you've come into contact with the state, which provides public goods such as roads and schools, enforces laws, and raises revenue via taxes. These observations lead to a useful, basic definition of the **state** as an ongoing administrative apparatus that develops and administers laws and generates and implements public policies in a specific territory.

Map 2.0 below highlights the countries whose states we will study in this chapter.

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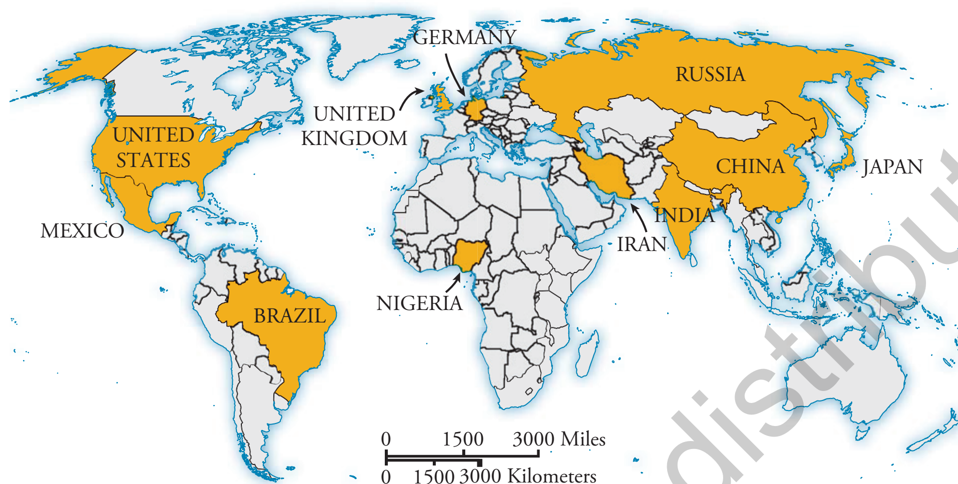
MAP 2.0



The *ongoing* nature of the state sets it apart from both a *regime*, a type of government such as liberal democracy or fascism (see chapter 3), and a *government*. Americans use *government* and *state* interchangeably, but "governments"—usually referred to as "administrations" (e.g., the Biden administration) in the United States—are transient. They occupy and utilize the ongoing apparatus of the state temporarily, from one election to the next in a democracy. Most of the world uses the word *government* in this context (e.g., the Sunak government of Great Britain).

Modern states have become an exceptionally powerful and ubiquitous means of ruling over people. Identifying and understanding the key features of the state help us analyze how governments rule and how much power they have. Looking at a particular country's institutional apparatus and how effectively that apparatus can be deployed (Are people really paying taxes? Are neighborhoods run by drug lords or the police?) can help identify the effective limits of official rule. States with stronger institutions are stronger states and give their rulers greater power.

In addition to understanding what the state is and how it operates, comparativists study its origins and evolution: Why did modern states become so universal? Where did they first emerge, and why did strong states develop sooner in some places and later or not at all in others? A glance at the Country and Concept table shows clearly that even within our group of eleven case study countries, the age and strength of the state varies greatly. These states range from over three hundred to just fifty years old, and they include some of the weakest and strongest, as well as some of the most and least corrupt, in the world. Though they vary widely, all modern states share some basic characteristics that set them apart from earlier forms of political organization.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MODERN STATE

Some modern states are huge, some are tiny, some are powerful, and some are quite weak. All, however, share four key characteristics that identify them as modern states as distinguished from other types of political entities: a claim over territory, external and internal sovereignty, a claim to legitimacy, and bureaucracy.

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Territory

The first characteristic of the modern state is so obvious that you might overlook it. A state must have **territory**, an area with clearly defined borders to which it lays claim. In fact, borders are one of the places where the state is "seen" most clearly via the signs that welcome visitors and the immigration officers who enforce border regulations.

The size of modern states varies enormously, from Russia—geographically the largest at 6,520,800 square miles—to the seventeen states with territories of less than 200 square miles each. The differences between vast Russia and tiny Tuvalu are significant, but territories and borders help both claim the status of state.

A glance at any map of the world shows no territories not enclosed by state borders, except Antarctica. Many states have inhabited their present borders for so long that we may think of them as being relatively fixed. In truth, the numbers of states and their borders continue to change frequently. The most recent examples are Kosovo's independence from Serbia in 2008 and South Sudan's independence from Sudan in 2011. Border changes and the creation of new states, as both these examples attest, are often attempts to make states coincide more closely with nations, groups with a shared identity that often seek to share a distinct territory and government (that is, a state).

Sovereignty

A state that truly controls its territory is said to be sovereign. A state achieves **sovereignty** when it is legally recognized by the family of states as the sole legitimate governing authority within its territory and as the legal equal of other states. Since 1945, this includes having the same vote in the United Nations as all other states. The In Context box shows the expansion of this process since 1950, as first colonial empires and later the Soviet Union collapsed and new states formed and gained international recognition.

Not every entity with a claim to control territory, however, is recognized by the international community. Aspiring states may be unrecognized because the community (or a few powerful members of it) do not believe the new states will be successful, or because they fear that a new state formed by breaking away from an old one will encourage further breakups or will destabilize the balance of power in a particular region. Palestine and Somaliland (see box) are two examples. To have real, effective **external sovereignty**—that is, sovereignty relative to outside powers—a state must not only be recognized but also be able to defend its territory and not be overly dependent on another power. Ukraine's fierce persistence in fighting invading Russian forces in 2022 showed that a state will do almost anything to defend its external sovereignty. Governments that lack sovereignty are not truly modern states. Examples include the Japanese-backed and controlled state Manchukuo (Manchuria) from 1932 to 1945, the collaborationist Vichy government in France during World War II, and all colonial states; although they had a local government and clearly defined territory, they were not sovereign states because their most crucial decisions were subject to external authority.

Modern states also strive for **internal sovereignty**—that is, to be the sole authority within a territory capable of making and enforcing laws and policies. They must defend their internal sovereignty against domestic groups that challenge it, just as they must defend it externally. Internal challenges typically take the form of a declaration of independence from some part of the state's territory and perhaps even civil war. States rarely are willing to accept such an act of defiance. From the American Civil War in the 1860s to Ukraine in 2022, states use all the means in their power to preserve their sovereignty over their recognized territories.

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States try to enforce their sovereignty by claiming, in the words of German sociologist Max Weber, a "monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force" (1970). Put simply, the state claims to be the only entity within its territory that has the right to hold a gun to your head and tell you what to do. Some governments claim a virtually unlimited right to use force when and as they choose. At least in theory, liberal democracies observe strict guidelines under which the use of force is permissible. For example, law enforcement can be called in when a citizen runs a red light or fails to pay taxes but not when she criticizes government policy. All states, though, insist on the right to use force to ensure their internal as well as external sovereignty. As one political philosopher reportedly said in response to students who complained about the university calling in police during a demonstration, "The difference between fascism and democracy is not whether the police are called, but when."

Sovereignty does not mean, however, that a state is all-powerful. Real internal and external sovereignty vary greatly and depend on many factors. Because the United States is wealthy and controls much territory, its sovereignty results in much greater power than does the sovereignty of Vanuatu, even though both are recognized as legitimate sovereigns over a clear territory. Wealthier states can defend their territories from attack better than poorer and weaker ones, and they can also more effectively ensure that their citizens comply with their laws. Even the United States, though, cannot completely control its borders, as the undocumented immigrants and illegal narcotics crossing its long border with Mexico attest.

Legitimacy

The ability to enforce sovereignty more fully comes not only from wealth but also from legitimacy. Weber argued that a state claims a "monopoly on the *legitimate* use of physical force" (emphasis added). **Legitimacy** is the recognized right to rule. This right has at least two sides: the claims that states and others make about why they have a right to rule, and the empirical fact of whether their populations accept or at least tolerate this claimed right. Virtually all modern states argue at length for particular normative bases for their legitimacy, and these claims are the basis for the various kinds of regimes in the world today (a subject explored in chapter 3).

Weber described three types of legitimate authority: traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal. **Traditional legitimacy** is the right to rule based on a society's long-standing patterns and practices. The European "divine right of kings" and the blessing of ancestors over the king in many precolonial African societies are examples of this. **Charismatic legitimacy** is the right to rule based on personal virtue, heroism, sanctity, or other extraordinary characteristics. Wildly popular leaders of revolutions, such as Mao Zedong in his early years in power, have charismatic legitimacy; people recognize their authority to rule because they trust and believe these individuals to be exceptional. **Rational-legal legitimacy** is the right to rule of leaders who are selected according to an accepted set of laws. Leaders who come to power via electoral processes and rule according to a set of laws, such as a constitution, are the chief examples of this. Weber argued that rational-legal legitimacy distinguishes modern rule from its predecessors, but he recognized that in practice most legitimate authority is a combination of the three types. For example, modern democratically elected leaders may achieve office and rule on the basis of rational-legal processes, but a traditional status or personal charisma may help them win elections and may enhance their legitimacy in office.

Legitimacy enhances a state's sovereignty. Modern states often control an overwhelming amount of coercive power, but its use is expensive and difficult. States cannot maintain

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The United States Military and Border Patrol agents secure the United States–Mexico border on November 25, 2018, near San Diego, California, after hundreds of migrants tried to breach a border fence from the Mexican city of Tijuana. Migration raises issues of territoriality and external sovereignty, but modern states have also committed themselves to recognizing the human rights of migrants and refugees. Where and how to draw the line in controlling who can enter the country and how has become a hot political debate in the United States as well as Europe.

Sandy Huffaker via Getty Images

effective internal sovereignty in a large, modern society solely through the constant use of force. Legitimacy, whatever its basis, enhances sovereignty at a much lower cost. If most citizens obey the government because they believe it has a right to rule, then little force will be necessary to maintain order. This is an example of the third dimension of power we discussed in chapter 1. For this reason, regimes proclaim their legitimacy and spend a great deal of effort trying to convince their citizens of it, especially when it is brought into serious question.

Where modern states overlap with nations, national identity can be a powerful source of legitimacy. This is not always the case, however, and most modern states must find additional ways to cultivate the allegiance of their inhabitants. They usually attempt to gain legitimacy based on some claim of representation or service to their citizens. The relationship between states and citizens, addressed in chapter 3, is central to modern politics. We explore the contentious relationship among states, nations, and other identity groups more fully in chapter 4.

Bureaucracy

Modern **bureaucracy**, meaning a large set of appointed officials whose function is to implement laws, is the final important characteristic of the state. In contemporary societies, the state plays many complicated roles. It must collect revenue and use it to maintain a military, pave roads, build schools, and provide retirement pensions, all of which require a bureaucracy. Weber saw bureaucracy as a central part of modern, rational-legal legitimacy, since in theory individuals obtain official positions in a modern bureaucracy via a rational-legal process of appointment and are restricted to certain tasks by a set of laws. Like legitimacy, effective bureaucracy strengthens sovereignty. A bureaucracy that efficiently carries out laws, collects

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taxes, and expends revenues as directed by the central authorities enhances the state's power. As we discuss further below, weak legitimacy and weak bureaucracy are two key causes of state weakness in the contemporary world.

SOMALILAND: INTERNAL VERSUS EXTERNAL SOVEREIGNTY

Somaliland is an interesting case of a country that has maintained almost unquestioned internal sovereignty for over thirty years yet has never been recognized by a single member of the international community as an externally sovereign state. This unusual outcome is a result of the collapse of the larger state of Somalia and the international efforts to resolve that country's civil war.

Somaliland, the northernmost region of Somalia (see Map 2.1), originally was a separate colony under British rule, while the rest of what is now Somalia was a colony of Italy. In 1960, the former British colony gained independence for a few days but then quickly agreed to become part of the larger state of Somalia, which had also just gained independence.

When Somali dictator Siad Barre was deposed in 1991, the rebel movement in Somaliland declared the region independent within a few months, restoring its colonial borders. A conference of the elders of all the major clans of Somaliland in 1993 produced a new government with a parliament modeled after traditional Somali institutions, with representation based on clan membership. In 2001, a referendum approved a new constitution that was fully democratic, with a bicameral legislature: the lower house is directly elected, while the upper is filled by clan elders. The country held successful democratic elections for president, parliament, and local governments up to 2010. Subsequent elections for president and parliament were delayed but then held successfully in 2017 for president, and for parliament (eleven years overdue) and local offices in 2021. Presidential elections were again delayed in October 2022. Concerns about the erosion of civil rights, political intimidation of journalists and public figures, and political exclusion of smaller clans and women have been cited recently as potential threats to the strength of democratic political institutions.

Somaliland has, however, achieved other hallmarks of internal sovereignty, including creation of a civilian administrative bureaucracy that provides much better social services and a military offering greater security than exists in the rest of war-wracked Somalia. It has established a currency, and the economy has grown substantially, based on livestock exports to the Middle East and remittances from the Somali diaspora. Recently, oil has been discovered in its territory. Whether oil revenue will help to strengthen the state or create what political scientists call a "resource curse" (see further discussion of resource curses in the "Strong, Weak, and Failed States" section), which would weaken the state by fueling corruption, remains to be seen.

Somaliland has created the infrastructure of internal sovereignty—albeit a somewhat fragile one—without external recognition, and therefore with very limited foreign aid. Ironically, the international community has chosen to recognize the official government of the larger Somalia, a state with very limited internal sovereignty that only partially controls a modest portion of its territory, due to fears that recognizing Somaliland will encourage more breakaways from weak Somalia. Some observers argue that Somaliland's lack of recognition has forced it to create a stronger state than it might have otherwise in order to survive militarily and financially, and the search for international recognition has become a strong basis for a growing sense of nationalism (Richards and Smith 2015).

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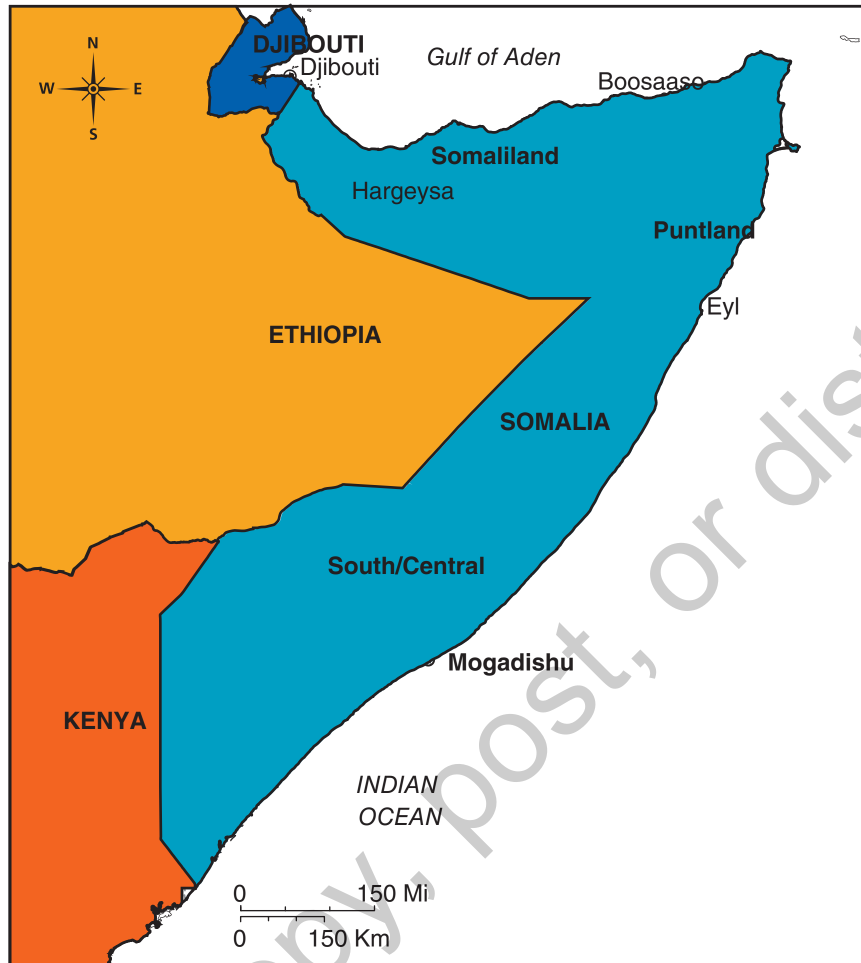
MAP 2.1



Source: William Clark, Matt Golder, and Sona Nadenichek Golder, Map 4.1, *Principles of Comparative Politics*, 2e, p. 92.

While the British parliament held a debate on recognizing Somaliland in 2022, and the first U.S. congressional delegation visited the country the same year, international recognition of this de facto state still seems likely to await resolution of the larger war in Somalia.

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In summary, the modern state is an ongoing administrative apparatus that develops and administers laws and generates and implements public policies in a specific territory. It has effective external and internal sovereignty, a basis of legitimacy, and a capable bureaucracy, as depicted in Figure 2.1. As we argue below, no state has all of these characteristics perfectly; the extent to which particular states have these characteristics determines how strong or weak they are.

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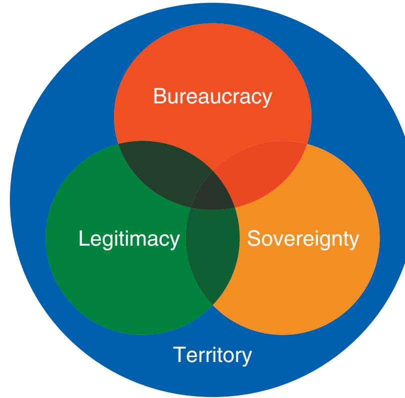
FIGURE 2.1 ■ The Anatomy of a State

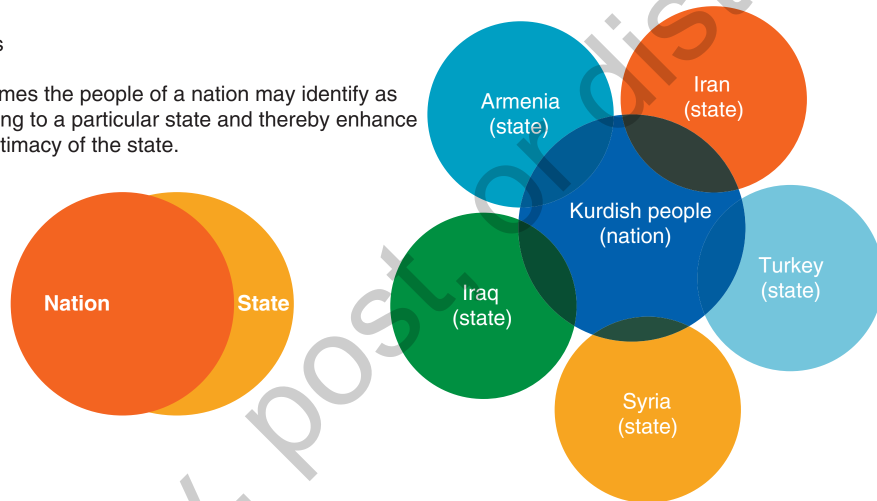
A state must have a legitimate and recognized claim to a defined territory that forms its borders and legitimate and recognized authority to govern within its territory.



It also must have the institutions needed to administer the state's laws and policies.

Nations

Sometimes the people of a nation may identify as belonging to a particular state and thereby enhance the legitimacy of the state.



Some nations strongly overlap with states.

But states may contain one or more nation, or a national movement or a group within a state might contest the state's legitimacy. Some nations exist across a number of state borders or may take up only part of a state.

For instance, the Kurdish people live across the borders of at least five states: Armenia, Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria.

HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF MODERN STATES

Now that we have clarified what a state is, we need to understand the diverse historical origins of modern states, which greatly influence how strong they are as well as their relationships to their citizens and nations. A world of modern states controlling virtually every square inch of territory and every person on the globe may seem natural today, but it is a fairly recent development. The modern state arose first in Europe between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries. The concept spread via conquest, colonialism, and then decolonization, becoming truly universal only with the independence of most African states in the 1960s.

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Modern States in Europe

Prior to approximately 1500, Europe consisted of **feudal states**, which were distinct from modern states in several ways. Most important, they neither claimed nor had undisputed sovereignty. Feudal rule involved multiple and overlapping sovereignties. At the heart of it was the relationship between lord and vassal in which the lord gave a vassal the right to rule a piece of land, known as a fief, and tax the people living on it, in exchange for political and military loyalty. The system often involved several layers of these relationships, from the highest and most powerful king in a region to the local lord. Peasants—the bulk of the population who had virtually no individual rights—were expected to follow their lord and be loyal to anyone to whom he swore allegiance. At any given time, all individuals were subject to the sovereignty of not only their immediate lord but also at least one higher lord and often others, and that loyalty could and did change. In addition, the Catholic Church claimed a separate and universal religious sovereignty over all and gave religious legitimacy to the kings and lords who recognized church authority.

By the fifteenth century, feudalism was giving way to **absolutism**, rule by a single monarch who claimed complete, exclusive sovereignty over a territory and its people. Absolutist rulers won battles for power among feudal lords by using superior economic and military resources to vanquish their rivals. Scholars debate the extent to which the absolutist state was a truly modern state, but it certainly introduced a number of the modern state's key elements. Perry Anderson (1974) argued that the absolutist state included at least rudimentary forms of a standing army and diplomatic service, both of which are crucial for external sovereignty; centralized bureaucracy; systematic taxation; and policies to encourage economic development. It took centuries for these to develop into fully modern forms, however. Legitimacy remained based largely on tradition and heredity, and most people remained subjects with few legal rights. Perhaps of greatest importance, the state was not conceived of as a set of ongoing institutions separate from the monarch. Rather, as King Louis XIV of France famously declared, "*L'état, c'est moi*" (The state, it is me).

The competition among absolutist states to preserve external sovereignty reduced their number from about five hundred sovereign entities in Europe in 1500 to around fifty modern states today. The states that survived were those that had developed more effective systems of taxation, more efficient bureaucracies, and stronger militaries. Along the way, political leaders realized that their subjects' loyalty (legitimacy) was of great benefit, so they began the process of expanding public education and shifting from the use of Latin or French in official circles to the local vernacular so that rulers and ruled could communicate directly, thus adding a new dimension to the rulers' legitimacy. This long process ultimately helped create modern nations, most of which had emerged by the mid-nineteenth century.

The truly modern state emerged as the state came to be seen as separate from an individual ruler. The state retained its claim to absolute sovereignty, but the powers of individual officials, ultimately including the supreme ruler, were increasingly limited. A political philosophy that came to be known as liberalism, which we discuss in greater depth in chapter 3, provided the theoretical justification and argument for limiting the power of officials to ensure the rights of individuals. The common people were ultimately transformed from subjects into citizens of the state. Bellwether events in this history included the Glorious Revolution in Great Britain in 1688, the French Revolution of 1789, and a series of revolutions that established new democratic republics in 1848.

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The relationship between lord and vassal was the heart of the feudal political order. This fifteenth-century work shows peasants paying taxes in the form of money and livestock to their lord. Peasants were born with duties to their lord, and their legal ties to their land gave them no choice but to obey him.

Science & Society Picture Library via Getty Images

Premodern States outside Europe

Outside Europe, a wide variety of premodern states existed, but none took a fully modern form. The Chinese empire ruled a vast territory for centuries and was perhaps the closest thing to a modern state anywhere in the premodern world (including in Europe). African precolonial kingdoms sometimes ruled large areas as well, but their rule was typically conceived of as extending over people rather than a precisely defined territory, having greater sovereignty closer to the capital and less sovereignty farther away. Virtually all premodern empires included multiple or overlapping layers of sovereignty and did not include a modern sense of citizenship.

The Export of the Modern State

Europe exported the modern state to the rest of the world through colonial conquest, beginning with the Americas in the sixteenth century. The earliest colonies in the Americas were ruled by European absolutist states that were not fully modern themselves. Over time, European settlers in the colonies began to identify their interests as distinct from the monarch's and to question the legitimacy of rule by distant sovereigns. The first rebellion against colonial rule produced the United States. The second major rebellion came at the hands of enslaved Black people in Haiti in 1793, which led to the first abolition of slavery in the world and to Haitian independence in 1804. By the 1820s and 1830s, most of the settler populations of Central and South America had rebelled as well. As in the United States, the leaders of these rebellions were mostly wealthy, landholding elites. This landed elite often relied on state force to keep the peasant and enslaved labor forces working on its behalf, so while some early efforts at democracy emerged after independence, most Central and South American states ultimately went through many decades of strongman rule over relatively weak states. Independence nonetheless began the process of developing modern states.

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The colonial origins of early modern states in the Americas created distinct challenges from those faced by early European states. European states took several centuries to develop a sense of national identity. In the Americas, the racial divisions produced by colonization, European settlement, and slavery meant that none of the newly independent states had a widely shared sense of national identity. Where slavery continued to exist, as in the United States, citizenship was restricted to the "free" and therefore primarily white (and exclusively male) population. Where significant Native American populations had survived, as in Peru and Guatemala, they continued to be politically excluded and economically marginalized by the primarily white, Spanish-speaking landholding elite. This historical context would make the ability of the new states to establish strong national identities difficult and would produce ongoing racial and ethnic problems, explored further in chapter 4.

After most of the American colonies achieved independence, growing economic and military rivalry among Britain, France, and Germany spurred a new round of colonization, first in Asia and then in Africa. This time, far fewer European settlers were involved. Moreover, colonizers effectively destroyed the political power of precolonial indigenous states but did not exterminate the population en masse. The result was that a thin layer of European officials ruled over an overwhelmingly indigenous population in these new colonies. Challenges to this new wave of colonialism were quick and numerous. The independence of the first-wave colonies and the end of slavery raised questions about European subjugation of African and Asian peoples. Colonization in this context had to be justified as bringing "advanced" European civilization and Christianity to "backward" peoples. Education was seen as a key part of this "civilizing"

A British colonial official arrives with his camel carriage and entourage at an office in the Punjab, India, in 1865. European colonial states in Africa and Asia consisted of a small number of European officials, with military force behind them, ruling over the local population. To rule, they had to rely on local leaders and staff, who collaborated with colonial rule.

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mission. It had a more practical aspect as well: with limited European settlement, colonial rulers needed indigenous subjects to serve in the bureaucracies of the colonial states. These chosen few were educated in colonial languages and customs and became local elites, although European officials remained at the top of the colonial hierarchy and exercised nearly unlimited power. In time, the indigenous elites began to see themselves as equal to the ruling Europeans and chafed at colonial limits on their political position and economic advancement. They became the key leaders of the movements for independence, which finally succeeded after World War II. By the 1960s, modern states covered virtually every square inch of the globe.

WAS ISIS A STATE?

On June 29, 2014, the head of the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) declared that a new caliphate, an Islamic state, had been carved by force out of Syria and Iraq. At its height in late 2015, ISIS had effective control over about six million people in a territory the size of Belgium (Map 2.2). By July 2017, militarily defeated by combined U.S., Russian, Syrian, Kurdish, and Iraqi forces, it had lost all major cities and almost all of its territory. ISIS is clearly a terrorist organization, but the three-year caliphate raised an interesting question: from 2014 to 2017, was it also a state?

MAP 2.2 ■ ISIS Territory at Its Height, 2015

As Rosa Brooks (2015) noted, "State formation . . . has always been a bloody business." The military and warfare have been key elements in state creation since the formation of early modern states. ISIS is infamously brutal, but that doesn't disqualify it as a state.

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To answer our question, we must ask how it fared in terms of the core components of statehood: territory, sovereignty, legitimacy, and bureaucracy.

The new caliphate ruled a sizeable chunk of territory, but its power was nominal in many places. It exercised internal sovereignty in a handful of key cities along major roadways, but only loosely controlled the mostly uninhabited spaces in between. It divided the territory in Syria and Iraq into twelve provinces, and established an extensive, efficient administrative bureaucracy where its internal sovereignty was greatest. In its heartland, ISIS gained revenue through various taxes on the local population. Documents found after ISIS's fall "describe how the militants monetized every inch of territory they conquered, taxing every bushel of wheat, every liter of sheep's milk and every watermelon sold at markets they controlled" (Callimachi 2018). It also confiscated land and rented it to its supporters, to gain support and revenue.

ISIS's claims to internal sovereignty went beyond merely its military and tax collection: "It ran a marriage office that oversaw medical examinations to ensure that couples could have children. It issued birth certificates—printed on Islamic State stationery—to babies born under the caliphate's black flag. It even ran its own D.M.V." (Callimachi 2018). Once it controlled an area, it demanded that local officials of the Iraqi bureaucracy get back to work, using them to implement new policies. After the caliphate collapsed, some residents admitted that although they hated ISIS, they noted that it picked up the garbage more efficiently than had the Iraqi government.

ISIS attempted to legitimize its rule theocratically, citing Muslim scripture to claim they were re-creating the original, medieval Muslim government. While most of the population under its control shared ISIS's Sunni Muslim tradition, there is no indication they shared its specific ideology or accepted its brutality any more than they would have that of any other "state." ISIS had aspects of effective administration of key state tasks, but legitimacy can rarely be based on that alone.

As for external sovereignty, no UN member recognized ISIS, and ISIS itself was uninterested in such recognition. Its ideology rejects the modern state system, proclaiming that all Muslims should be united in one caliphate. Like some regimes before it (Nazi Germany comes to mind), it is also inherently expansionist. ISIS's failure to recognize the international state system suggests the system's members would never recognize it.

So was the Islamic State really a state, by our definition? It had aspects of statehood: territorial control and internal sovereignty, a functioning bureaucracy, and a claim to legitimacy that was persuasive to at least some. Its rejection of the international system and its brutality meant it was in a state of constant war, however, and could not insure either individual or territorial security, the most universal political goods any state must provide. At best a partial state, it lasted only about three years.

Postcolonial countries faced huge obstacles to consolidating modern states. Although they enjoyed legal external sovereignty and had inherited at least minimal infrastructure from colonial bureaucracies, legitimacy and internal sovereignty remained problematic for most. The colonial powers established borders with little regard for precolonial political boundaries, and political institutions that had no relationship to precolonial norms or institutions. The movements for independence created genuine enthusiasm for the new nations, but the colonizers had previously tried to inhibit a strong sense of national unity, and typically grouped many religious and linguistic groups together under one colonial state. Political loyalty was often divided among numerous groups, including the remnants of precolonial states. Finally, huge disparities in wealth, education, and access to power between the elite and the majority of the population reduced popular support for the state. All of this meant the new states were mostly very weak versions of the modern state. The differences between strong and weak states and the causes of state weakness and collapse are the last subjects we need to address to complete our conceptual overview of the modern state.

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STRONG, WEAK, AND FAILED STATES

The modern state as we have defined it is what Weber called an **ideal type**, a model of what the purest version of something might be. Nothing in reality perfectly matches an ideal type; no state indisputably enjoys complete external or internal sovereignty, absolute legitimacy, a monopoly on the use of force, and a completely effective and efficient bureaucracy. Some states, however, are clearly much closer to this ideal than others. Political scientists think of those closer to the ideal as having higher levels of **state capacity**, the ability to raise resources for state activities, coordinate activities across the bureaucracy and with key economic actors, and gain citizen compliance (Berwick and Christia 2018).

Strong states have high levels of state capacity, while **weak states** have far less. State strength exists on a continuum, with no state being perfectly strong in all conceivable categories. Changes in state strength can also go in both directions. Francis Fukuyama (2014), for instance, argues that the U.S. state has weakened in the last several decades due mainly to what he calls "gift exchange" between legislators, lobbyists, and campaign donors that weakens the state's ability to make independent decisions based on some sense of the public interest. As the Country and Concept table in the next section of this chapter (Table 2.1) shows for our case studies, stronger states tend to be wealthier and consume a larger share of economic resources; they are simply economically bigger than weak states. They also are less corrupt, indicating the presence of stronger bureaucracies, and tend to be more legitimate. Weak states, on the other hand, are often characterized by what Thomas Risse (2015) termed "limited statehood": they have some capacity in some areas but far less in other areas. Other actors—local strongmen, religious institutions, or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)—may substitute for a weak state in some regions, providing key services, such as security, that the state cannot or will not supply.

A state that is so weak that it loses sovereignty over part or all of its territory is a **failed state**. Failed states make headlines—for example, Syria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, and Afghanistan. Syria collapsed into civil war in 2011, though by 2019 the incumbent ruler had mostly reestablished sovereign control of the state's territory. By 2022, Syria's ranking on measures of state strength had rebounded very slightly, but it still remained among the five weakest states in the world by the Fragile States Index (Fund for Peace 2019).

Virtually all elements of state strength are interconnected. If a state lacks the resources to provide basic infrastructure and security, its legitimacy most likely will decline. Lack of resources also may mean civil servants are paid very little, which may lead to corruption and an even further decline in the quality of state services. Corruption in some bureaucracies, such as the military and border patrol, can cause a loss of security and territorial integrity. If the state cannot provide basic services, such as education, citizens will likely find alternative routes to success that may well involve illegal activity (e.g., smuggling), undermining sovereignty that much further. If the state does not apply the rule of law impartially, citizens will turn to private means to settle their disputes (mafias are a prime example of this phenomenon), threatening the state's monopoly on the legitimate use of force. Continuing patterns of lawless behavior create and reinforce the public perception that the state is weak, so weak states can become caught in a vicious cycle that is difficult to break.

Why some states are strong while others are weak has long been a major question in the study of political development. The leading theories emphasize threats to security and elite agreements. Charles Tilly, one of the foremost scholars of the rise of modern states in Europe, famously declared that "war made the state, and the state made war" (1975, 42). War or the threat of war forced leaders of early European states to raise revenue to defend themselves, creating early systems of taxation. Elites would be more likely to accept that taxation if they saw their survival as dependent on the state providing their security; the threat of war led directly to improvements in states' capacity to raise revenue.

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Failed states make headlines around the world and have implications far beyond their borders. In Raqa, the former capital of the Islamic State in Syria, a girl walks through the rubble in 2019, two years after Kurdish-led forces overran the city, taking it back from a regime residents described as brutal. The Syrian civil war gave ISIS the opportunity to create a proto-state within its and Iraq's territory, and it produced a massive refugee crisis that has had profound effects in the European Union.

Delil Souleiman via Getty Images

Economists Douglass North and John Wallis and political scientist Barry Weingast used a rational choice institutionalist argument focusing on elite agreement as a key path to state formation (2009). The earliest states were really just temporary agreements among competing elites, each of whom had control over the means of violence. Elites abided by these agreements in order to gain economic advantages from the absence of warfare and the ability to extract resources. Eventually, some elites negotiated agreements that recognized impersonal organizations and institutions that were separate from the individual leaders. As these developed and functioned credibly, greater specialization was possible, and distinct elites who controlled military, political, economic, and religious power emerged. This required the rule of law among elites. Together with ongoing, impersonal organizations, the rule of law allowed the possibility of a true monopoly over the use of force as individual elites gave up their control of military power. Once established among elites, such impersonal institutions and organizations could expand eventually to the rest of society.

Fukuyama (2014) argued that the continuation of this story—the development of modern states in nineteenth-century Europe—took several different paths. Some, like Prussia (which united Germany), first developed a strong bureaucracy and military in the face of external military threat and only later developed the rule of law and democratic control over the state. Others, such as the United States, saw the rule of law and relatively widespread democratic accountability develop first, resulting in political parties that became corrupt "machine politics"; a modern bureaucracy arose only after industrialization produced a middle class and business interests that demanded reforms to create a more effective government. Following Samuel Huntington (1968), Fukuyama argued that states such as Italy and Greece, which did not develop as strong states early enough, faced the problem of a politically mobilized populace without adequate economic opportunity. This led to corruption as political leaders used the state's resources to provide for their political followers rather than creating a bureaucracy based on merit and equity.

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Comparativists have developed several other arguments to explain why states are weak. A common one for non-European countries is the effects of colonialism. In most of Africa and Asia, postcolonial states were created not by negotiations among local elites but between them and the departing colonial power, and political institutions were hastily copied from the departing colonizers; the kind of elite accommodation to which North, Wallis, and Weingast (2009) pointed did not occur. Not having participated seriously in the creation of the new institutions, elites often did not see themselves as benefiting from them and therefore changed or ignored them. In Africa, postcolonial rulers, lacking functioning impersonal institutions, maintained power by distributing the state's revenue to their supporters and therefore created authoritarian regimes to narrow the number of claimants on those resources. Economic decline beginning in the late 1970s and pressure for democratization a decade later meant those leaders had to try to extract more and more resources from their citizens, leading to a period of widespread state failure and civil war in the 1990s (Bates 2008).

In Latin America, Sebastian Mazzuca (2021) argued that relatively weak states developed because of a context at independence that was very different from the context in which early European states emerged. Newly independent Latin American states did not face a threat of war but instead gained independence as global capitalist markets were forming. State formation was therefore "trade-led" rather than "war-led." Early states could gain revenue from tariffs on trade rather than internal taxation so they didn't have to overcome the power of regional barons; instead, they could use trade revenue to cut deals with them. Trade required peace and access to resources like minerals and agricultural products in the interior; sharing revenue with local barons was cheaper and easier than defeating them militarily. This preserved much of local barons' political strength, meaning the capacity of the central state remained weak, a legacy that has lasted. Most states in the region today have moderate levels of strength. Gustavo Flores-Macias (2022) demonstrated that in one crucial area, taxation, some Latin American states have gained strength in recent years by convincing economic elites to pay more taxes, but only when security concerns were so severe that elites decided that paying more taxes specifically to enhance security was necessary, and trusted the government (under a conservative, business-friendly ruling party) to use the taxes accordingly. Security fears, North argued, were a major reason why modern states developed in the first place, and they continue to provide incentives for state strength today.

Other analysts have looked to the nature of the economy or international system in more recent times to explain state weakness. Wealth certainly plays a role: states need resources to be capable of providing services to citizens. The type of economic activity within a state, however, may make a significant difference. Countries with tremendous mineral wealth, such as oil or diamonds, face a situation known as the **resource curse**. A government that can gain enough revenue from mineral extraction alone does not need to worry about the strength of the rest of the economy or the well-being of the rest of the population. If the asset exists in one particular area, such as the site of a key mine, the government simply has to control that area and export the resources to gain revenue in order to survive. Rebel groups likewise recognize that if they can overpower the government, they can seize the country's mineral wealth, a clear incentive to start a war rather than strive for a compromise with those in power. Once again, in this situation, elite compromise to create stronger institutions seems unlikely. The resource curse is not inevitable. In countries that already have relatively strong states, like Norway when it discovered oil in the North Sea, abundant resources may simply provide greater wealth and strengthen the state further, but in weak states, greater wealth may do little to strengthen the state and even weaken it, given the incentives it provides to various political actors.

The neighboring states of Sierra Leone and Liberia in West Africa are a classic case of the worst effects of the resource curse. Ironically, both countries began as beacons of hope. Britain founded Sierra Leone to provide a refuge for liberated Africans captured from slaving vessels, and the United States founded Liberia as a home for formerly enslaved Americans. Descendants of these liberated

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people became the ruling elite in both countries. Both countries, however, also became heavily dependent on key natural resources. The bulk of government revenue came from diamond mining in Sierra Leone and from iron-mining and rubber plantations owned by the Firestone Tire Company in Liberia. The ruling elites kept firm control of these resources until rebellion began with a military coup in Liberia in 1980. The new regime was just as brutal and corrupt as its predecessor, leading to a guerrilla war led by the man who became West Africa's most notorious warlord: Charles Taylor. After taking control of a good portion of Liberia, Taylor helped finance a guerrilla uprising in neighboring Sierra Leone. Once the guerrilla forces gained control of Sierra Leone's lucrative diamond mines, Taylor smuggled the diamonds onto the international market to finance the rebellions in both countries. The wars were not fully resolved until 2003, when international sanctions against West African diamonds finally reduced Taylor's cash flow and forced him out of power. Both countries are now at peace and have fragile elected governments, but they still rely too heavily on key natural resources, so the resource curse could cause further problems.

The contemporary international legal system, like resources, can prolong the life of otherwise weak states. Prior to the twentieth century, the weakest states simply didn't last very long; they faced invasions from stronger rivals and disappeared from the map. The twentieth-century international system fundamentally changed this dynamic, establishing the norm that the hostile takeover of other states was unacceptable. Exceptions like Russia's invasion of Ukraine notwithstanding, outright invasion and conquest have become rare, so weak states are more likely to survive. The result can be what Robert Jackson (1990) called **quasi-states**: states that have legal sovereignty and international recognition but lack most domestic attributes of a modern state. Jackson argued that many postcolonial states, especially in Africa, are quasi-states. Ruling elites in these states often come to rely on external resources, including foreign aid, for their survival. Once again, they have little reason to compromise with their domestic rivals, and their rivals, being cut out of all benefits, often take up arms. Several weak states in the Sahel region of West Africa long relied on French military support to battle Islamist and other armed rebels who have at times controlled significant territory. As French support waned in the early 2020s, some of these states turned to the Wagner Group, a Russian mercenary force also active in the Ukraine war, reportedly giving them mining rights in exchange for often brutal but effective protection from the rebels. These states were so weak that they had to use what resources they had to pay mercenaries to provide that most basic of state functions: security.

CRITICAL INQUIRY

MEASURING STATE STRENGTH

In response to growing international concern about state failure, the Fund for Peace (2022) developed a Fragile States Index to highlight countries of imminent concern. In 2022, the eighteenth annual index ranked 178 countries on twelve factors in four categories considered essential to state strength:

- Social indicators
  - demographic pressures,
  - refugees or internally displaced persons, and
  - intervention by external political actors
- Economic indicators
  - uneven economic development,
  - poverty/severe economic decline, and
  - sustained human flight and brain drain

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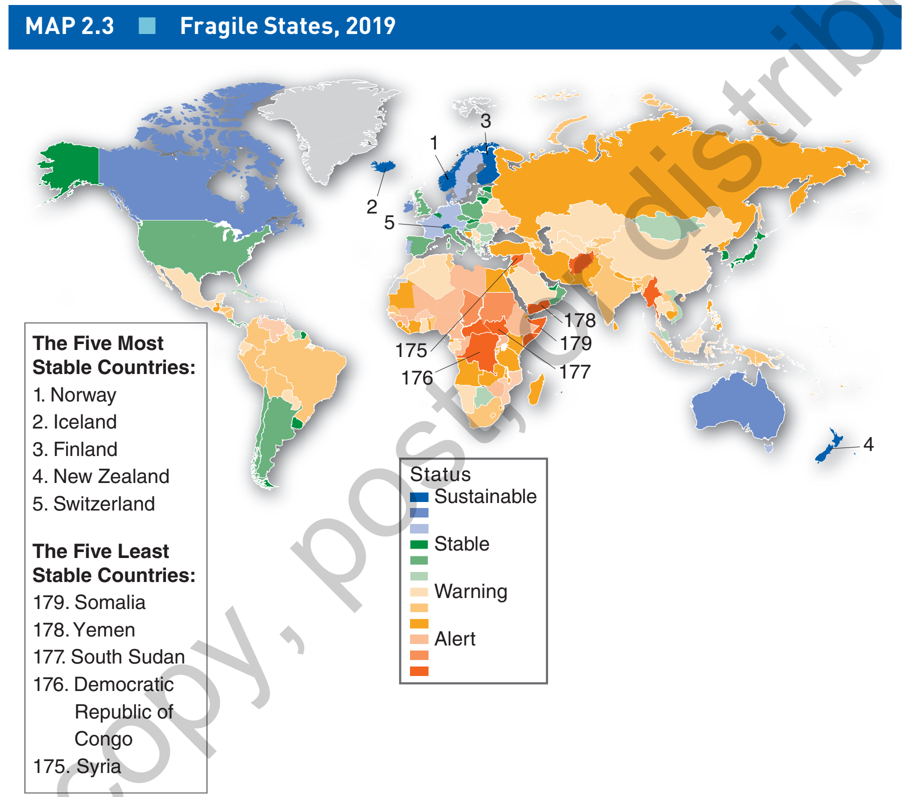
- Political indicators
  - state legitimacy,
  - deterioration of public services, and
  - rule of law/human rights abuses
- Cohesion indicators
  - security apparatus,
  - factionalized elites, and
  - vengeance-seeking group grievances

Map 2.3 shows the least and most stable countries.

MAP 2.3 ■ Fragile States, 2019



Source: Fund for Peace, 2023, "Fragile States Index 2023" (http://fsi.fundforpeace.org/).

We can use the Fragile States Index to ask a couple of interesting questions. First, what kind of argument can we make about why states are weak or stable based on the index? Look at which countries are most threatened, most sustainable, and in between on the index. Based on what you know about the countries (and it never hurts to do a little research to learn more!), what hypotheses can you generate about why states are weak or strong? Do some of these relate to the arguments we outlined above about why states are weak or strong? Can you come up with other arguments that we haven't discussed in this chapter? If so, on what kinds of theories (from chapter 1) are your hypotheses based?

A second interesting question is, How can we really measure state strength? Take a look at the indicators page of the index: https://fragilestatesindex.org/indicators/. The index measures those twelve indicators and then adds them up, weighting them all equally, to arrive at an overall score for each country. Do the indicators each measure an important element of state strength? Is it feasible to think we can measure the indicators and arrive at a number to represent each of them in each country? Does it make sense to weight all the indicators

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equally, or are some more important than others? If you think some are more important, which ones and why? Does your answer connect to any of the theories of state strength and weakness we discussed earlier?

Comparativists don't all agree on the answers to these questions, but we look at evidence and try to generate testable hypotheses for state strength, weakness, and failure in an effort to help states develop stronger institutions. We do this because the human consequences of state weakness—civil conflict, refugees, and human rights violations—and the consequences for the international system are severe.

In the post–Cold War era, the international system and major powers have come to see weak and failed states as a significant problem. Weak states produce corruption and illegal activity. They have porous borders through which illegal arms, contagious diseases, terrorists, and illegal drugs might pass. They undermine economic growth and political stability, and democracy is difficult or impossible to foster when a state is unable to provide at least the basic services citizens expect. For all these reasons, "state-building" (or "nation-building"—the terms are often used interchangeably, even though comparativists draw a sharp distinction between a state and a nation) has become a common element of the international political system. Wealthy countries and international organizations, including the UN, implement programs to try to rebuild states after conflicts. They try to build or rebuild political institutions, train bureaucrats in proper procedures, hold democratic elections, and restore basic services. Much of the comparative research outlined above suggests that state-building is a very long and complicated process, while official state-building programs often focus on a five- to ten-year program and only certain elements of the state.

The United States faced these issues when it left Afghanistan. While the Afghan government the United States and its allies long supported held several elections and was the recipient of massive foreign aid, it remained an extremely weak state, dependent on external military support as well as internal support from former warlords who continued to command the personal loyalty of their security forces, some within the national army. The Taliban, against whom the government and external allies had been fighting since 2001, continued to control significant resources, including much of the lucrative poppy trade (poppies are used to make heroin). When the United States finally decided it was going to leave Afghanistan and pulled its military out, the Afghan state collapsed completely, and the Taliban quickly took power again—right back where they were after twenty years of Western governments trying to "nation-build" a new government. The Taliban itself rules over a very weak state that seems to be succeeding at extracting revenue from the populace and imposing rules such as preventing girls form attending school, but has yet to create the institutions of a state in any real sense. State strength matters but is difficult to achieve.

CASE STUDIES OF STATE FORMATION

We have chosen eleven countries to illustrate the trends, theories, and debates in comparative politics. We introduce all eleven below by describing the historical development of each state and its relative strength or weakness, and we present them from strongest to weakest as measured by the Fragile States Index. The Country and Concept table below (Table 2.1) presents some basic information about all of them. The table yields some surprises. For example, despite Iran's important international role and its moves toward acquiring nuclear weapons, by most measures

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it is a fairly weak state. Similarly, the external power of the United States does not translate into its being the strongest state in the world, though it is certainly one of the stronger ones.

A key benefit that states should provide, presumably, is citizens' basic survival. The COVID-19 pandemic that began in early 2020 posed a serious challenge to that. One would think that stronger states would be best placed to safeguard their people in the face of a pandemic, but that was not uniformly true. The table provides "excess deaths" (deaths beyond what was expected based on pre-COVID trends) for our case studies where available. Among the strongest, Japan was much more successful at protecting its population than were Germany, the UK, and especially the United States. While Mexico, Brazil, and Russia score similarly, in the middle range, of the Fragile States Index, Russia's ability to protect its people seemed to be far weaker than the other two. This shows that while state strength is important, it doesn't explain everything; for instance, the highest rates of excess deaths were almost all in Eastern Europe (including Russia), perhaps because it is a region of only moderate state strength and moderate levels of health, closely interacting with wealthier Western Europe, where the pandemic spread very rapidly. Some of these data themselves are affected by state weakness or desire to hide the truth. While China reported only about 80,000 deaths from the major COVID outbreak in late 2022 to early 2023, other credible estimates put the number as high as 1.5 million. Even at that higher level, though, its overall death rate would still be lower than in the United States or Brazil (Glanz et al. 2023). Weak states also have limited capability at are not collecting accurate data, reflected in no credible available data on excess deaths for several of our weakest case studies.

COUNTRY AND CONCEPT

TABLE 2.1 ■ The Modern State

Country	Approximate year modern state established	Fragile States Index, 2023: Rank among 179 countries (1 = most fragile, 179 = least fragile)	Fragile States Index, 2023: Score (12 = lowest risk of state failure, 120 = highest risk of state failure)	GDP per capita (ppp) (data from 2021 and in 2017 dollars)	Government expenditure as % of GDP (2023)	Corruption Perception Index, 2022 (0 = highly corrupt, 100 = highly clean)	Legitimacy (0 = most legitimate, 10 = least legitimate)	Excess mortality, 2023 (per million people)
Brazil	1889	71	74.5	$14,600	38.7%	38	6.7	3,969
China	1949	101	65.1	$17,600	34.1%	45	8.2	No data
Germany	1871	166	24.6	$53,200	48.9%	79	0.4	2,341
India	1947	73	74.1	$6,600	29.5%	40	4.4	No data

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Country	Approximate year modern state established	Fragile States Index, 2023		GDP per capita (ppp) (data from 2021 and in 2017 dollars)	Government expenditure as % of GDP (2023)	Corruption Perception Index, 2022 (0 = highly corrupt, 100 = highly clean)	Legitimacy (0 = most legitimate, 10 = least legitimate)	Excess mortality, 2023 (per million people)
		Rank among 179 countries (1 = most fragile, 179 = least fragile)	Score (12 = lowest risk of state failure, 120 = highest risk of state failure)					
Iran	1925	40	85.4	$15,000	13.2%	25	9.3	No data
Japan	1867	161	30.5	$40,800	41.5%	73	0.2	1,135
Mexico	1924	85	69.8	$19,100	27.2%	31	6	5,131
Nigeria	1960	15	98.0	$4,900	12.6%	24	8.5	No data
Russia	1917	53	80.7	$28,000	36.3%	28	8.6	8,919
United Kingdom	1707	148	41.9	$45,000	44.0%	73	3.3	3,041
United States	1787	141	45.3	$63,700	41.1%	69	4.5	3,691

Sources: Fragile state data are from the Fund for Peace, 2023. Data on GDP per capita are from the *CIA World Factbook* (https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/index.html). Data on government expenditure as percentage of GDP are from the Heritage Foundation's 2023 Index of Economic Freedom (http://www.heritage.org/index/ranking). Data on corruption are from Transparency International, 2022. Data on state legitimacy are from the Global Economy, 2022 (https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/state_legitimacy_index/). Data on excess mortality are from Our World in Data, 2023 (https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/cumulative-excess-deaths-per-million-covid? country=MEX~PER~FRA~BRA~USA~GBR~BGR~ISR~AUS).

The Strongest States

The strongest states among our case studies were all established as modern states in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, industrialized relatively early, and are among the world's wealthiest countries. In other ways, however, their origins lay in quite different circumstances, from the consolidation of independent monarchies in the United Kingdom and Germany to a negotiated agreement in the United States and a defensive strengthening against Western encroachment in Japan. Only one, the United States, began as a colony. In fact, all four were at least briefly colonial powers themselves.

They all have firm control of their territory, strong militaries, and high levels of legitimacy based on liberal democracy, though questions persist about their capacity in certain areas. They have relatively strong senses of national unity, though three of the four face significant questions about immigration and racial differences. Immigration and race equality, combined with issues of uneven economic development and potentially violent groups internally (terrorists, among others), are their most common weaknesses.

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None of our cases is the very strongest, according to the Fragile States Index (see Map 2.3), and each still has elements of relative weakness. Germany and Japan remain in the top twenty strongest states, while the United Kingdom and United States have fallen in recent years, to the twenty-ninth and thirty-ninth strongest, respectively.

Case Study: Germany: The First Modern Welfare State

Case Synopsis

The modern German state emerged relatively late in Europe after uniting many of the widely dispersed German-speaking people. Its initial strengths rested in a relatively modern bureaucracy and military. Its sovereignty was briefly eliminated under occupation after World War II, and its territory was divided by the Cold War. Nonetheless, the German state, under several different regimes, consciously and effectively created an industrial powerhouse in the heart of Europe that was also the first modern welfare state. Language-based nationalism was the initial basis of legitimacy, and eventually became associated with Nazism. Democracy as a basis of legitimacy emerged twice, disastrously after World War I and successfully after World War II, but was only secure and universal throughout Germany after 1990. Today, the German state is widely considered to be one of the world's strongest, most legitimate, wealthiest, and most stable. This combination makes it the strongest state of our eleven cases as measured by the Fragile States Index.

- FRAGILE STATES INDEX 24.6 (rank 166 of 179); weakest on "group grievance" and "factionalized elites"
- TERRITORY Widespread sense of national identity among German-speaking people but consisted of many states until 1871; boundaries changed with wars until 1990; brief colonial empire prior to World War I
- SOVEREIGNTY Established over much of German-speaking people by 1871; divided by the Cold War, 1945–1990
- LEGITIMACY Based on nationalism first; failed liberal democracy after World War I led to Nazi rule; divided state with liberal democratic and communist regimes until united under democratic constitution in 1990
- BUREAUCRACY Foundation of early modern state; first modern welfare state; extensive since World War II

The Case

A unified Germany first emerged under Otto von Bismarck, the chancellor (equivalent of a prime minister) of Prussia, the largest of many German principalities. Bismarck came to power in 1862 and set about conquering lands populated by German speakers. The Prussian bureaucracy and military, modernized in a reform that began in 1807 in response to Napoleon's invasion, were key sources of Bismarck's ability to build one German-speaking state. The bureaucracy and military were recruited on the basis of merit, and average citizens were increasingly treated as equals before the law, creating a state stronger than its neighbors. In 1871, a united Germany was proclaimed, with the Prussian king named as the German kaiser and Bismarck as the chancellor. This new Germany had a legislature and elections, but virtually all power was in the hands of Kaiser Wilhelm I and Bismarck; the bureaucracy and military remained central to the state and Bismarck's power.

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Reunification in 1990 meant the elimination of the separate and largely illegitimate East German state, whose territory was absorbed by the much stronger and more legitimate West German state. This was only the most recent change in the boundaries of the German state.

AP Photo/Michel Lipchitz

The new German state used its formidable bureaucracy to pursue economic development through rapid industrialization in an attempt to catch up with the economic might of Britain, then Europe's most powerful state. The primary opposition to Bismarck came out of this industrialization in the form of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), founded in 1875, which demanded greater workers' rights and democracy. Bismarck successfully resisted the party's efforts, both by brutal repression and by creating Europe's first social welfare programs. The latter included health insurance and old-age pensions. The military and bureaucracy remained central to the state's strength and the regime's ability to forestall democracy.

By 1900, Germany had become an industrial powerhouse with aspirations to become an empire. It colonized several territories in Africa before World War I, but its defeat in "the Great War" destroyed the country's first regime and its colonial empire. As Allied forces moved on Berlin in 1918, the kaiser fled, and the leaders of the SDP proclaimed a democratic republic, trying to shift the basis for legitimacy from nationalism to democracy. The new democracy, known as the Weimar Republic, survived only fourteen years. Defeat in the war, civil war, and subsequent reparations to the victorious Allies left the nation devastated and led to support for political extremists, including the growing Nazi Party. Adolf Hitler became chancellor in 1932

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and effectively eliminated democracy a year later (see chapter 3). Hitler vastly expanded the state's strength, particularly its military element, in his drive for domination, but his defeat at the end of World War II led to Germany's territorial division. While the United States, Britain, and France united the areas of the country they controlled under one government, the Soviet Union refused to allow its sector to rejoin the rest. It became the German Democratic Republic (GDR), better known as East Germany, a communist state so closely controlled by the Soviet Union that its own sovereignty was quite limited. The rest became the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), governed by the Basic Law (the equivalent of a constitution) that took effect in 1949. In reaction to its Nazi past, West Germany, as it came to be known, created a constitution with safeguards to defend its new democracy, such as permitting courts to ban antidemocratic political parties and the domestic intelligence agency to surveille them. It became both an economic and political powerhouse in Central Europe.

Germany and the city of Berlin were to remain divided for nearly forty years. They were reunited only at the end of the Cold War in 1989, dramatically signaled by the destruction of the Berlin Wall. By 1990, Germany had been reunified with both East and West under the constitution of the former West Germany. Reunification was economically and politically difficult, requiring the integration of the much poorer East German population into the larger and wealthier West German state.

Once the worst of its reunification pains were behind it, Germany led the transformation of the European Community (which it had worked with France to create) into the European Union, giving up significant economic sovereignty to the larger body. This culminated in the creation of the euro currency and the European Central Bank in 1999. Despite the recent difficulties over Britain's exit, the EU nonetheless represents a new phase in the development of states, one in which states for the first time voluntarily ceded elements of sovereignty to a larger body.

Germany was founded with a sense of nationalism based on speaking German (see chapter 4), and its postwar constitution enshrines strong protections for democracy. Immigration, particularly of Muslim refugees fleeing Syria's civil war, has spawned a rise in extreme right-wing activity and a significant conflict over national identity, however. This continuing conflict is reflected in Germany's two weakest indicators on the 2022 Fragile States Index: "group grievance" and "factionalized elites."

Case Questions

1. Germany has had multiple types of governments and was even divided into two states for forty years, yet today it is one of the world's strongest states. What explains this unusual outcome of a tumultuous history?
2. Which single element of state strength that we identified earlier in the chapter is most influential in explaining the German case, and why?

Case Study: Japan: Determined Sovereignty

Case Synopsis

Japan is one of the few places in the world that successfully avoided European colonization and then established a modern state strong enough to allow interaction with the West while resisting domination. The military ultimately took control of this state, created an empire, expanded industrialization, established a modern bureaucracy that became a core element of the state, and then lost power at the end of World War II. After five years of occupation, in which Japan's

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sovereignty was forfeited for the first time in four hundred years, Japan reemerged as a sovereign state fully in control of its traditional territory and with a new source of legitimacy: liberal democracy. Its earlier bureaucracy, though, survived the war and became an exceptionally powerful force. Today, despite significant economic problems, it remains one of the strongest states in the world.

- FRAGILE STATES INDEX 30.5 (rank 161 of 179); weakest on "demographic pressures" and "economic decline"
- TERRITORY Fully consolidated by 1603; colonial empire in Asia in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries
- SOVEREIGNTY Feudal system with unusually strong center since 1603; nearly complete isolation until modern state established in 1867
- LEGITIMACY Traditional but unusually weak monarchy since 1100s; monarch only symbolic since 1867 and rule by modernizing elite; liberal democracy since 1950
- BUREAUCRACY Developed with industrialization prior to World War II; exceptionally powerful influence on state since World War II

The Case

Japan reduced its monarchy to a largely symbolic role much earlier than European countries did. Feudal lords competed for control for nearly a century, called the Warring State period in Japanese history, before Tokugawa Ieyasu claimed the title of shogun in 1603 and fully established sovereignty over the entire territory. The new state came to be called the Tokugawa Bakufu, or shogunate. Roughly similar to European feudal states, the shogunate was more centralized than most, and was led by an elite independent of the mostly symbolic monarch. Like neighboring China, Japan already had a history of a quasimodern centralized bureaucracy that established uniform law across the country.

The Tokugawa Shogunate isolated itself from outside influence until U.S. warships forced their way into the harbor at Edo (present-day Tokyo) in 1853, opening the way to a series of unfavorable treaties with the United States, France, and Britain. Japan's modernizing elite, humiliated by the concessions to Western powers, immediately protested. After a series of battles, the shogunate ceded power in October 1867, in what came to be known as the Meiji Restoration, so called because the new government claimed to be restoring the Emperor Meiji to his full powers. In truth, the new government was controlled by modernizing elites in the bureaucracy and, increasingly, the military.

The Meiji regime created the first truly modern state in Japan. The threat of dominance by Western powers gave the new government the incentive to launch a series of rapid modernizations, borrowing openly and heavily from the West. The new state ultimately included a modern army and navy, the beginnings of compulsory education, and the establishment of a single school to train all government civil servants. Significantly, the bureaucracy and new military had nearly complete autonomy. The military helped Japan gain colonial control over Taiwan in the 1890s and Korea in 1905, briefly creating a Japanese empire. The Meiji government introduced the first written constitution in 1889, formally codifying state institutions, including the first, though extremely weak, parliament. After a brief period of greater parliamentary power after World War I, the military reasserted power at the expense of civilian leaders and ushered in a period of growing Japanese imperialism. This ultimately led to Japan's alliance with fascist Germany and Italy in World War II and its attack on Pearl Harbor.

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Japan was the first non-Western state to create a fully modern economy. By first isolating itself from Western control and then borrowing Western technology, Japan's unusually strong state helped create what is now the world's third-largest economy, as evidenced by the neon lights and bustle of its famed Ginza Street in downtown Tokyo.

REUTERS/Kimimasa Mayama

World War II ended with the United States dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. Japan's surrender led to the country's full occupation by the United States, which completely demilitarized Japanese society and wrote a new democratic constitution for the country. That document prohibited Japan from creating a military or engaging in war, although Japan ultimately did create a "self-defense" force that has become one of the richest militaries in the world. In spite of the fact that one party has won all but two national elections since 1950, liberal democracy has replaced monarchy as the basis for the state's legitimacy. The monarchy remains, but only as a symbol of the nation, as in the United Kingdom.

The long-standing bureaucracy was the only major political institution to survive into the postwar era more or less intact. It became very powerful, working much more closely with Japanese businesses and the ruling party than did bureaucrats in most Western countries. Since 1990, however, Japan's bureaucracy has been rocked by a seeming inability to restart economic growth and a series of corruption scandals. Economic stagnation over the past two decades has combined with a rapidly aging population to present seemingly intractable economic problems, reflected in "demographic pressures" being by far its weakest indicator in the Fragile States Index. Nonetheless, more than seventy years after its defeat in World War II, the country remains the third-largest economy in the world.

Case Questions

1. Japan is virtually unique in emerging early on as the world's strongest non-Western state. What best explains this unusual history?

2. How do the strengths and weaknesses of the Japanese state compare with the case studies of relatively strong Western states, such as Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States?

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Case Study: United Kingdom: The Long Evolution of a Strong State

Case Synopsis

The modern British state developed over centuries of evolution and internal war but was finally united in 1707. Legitimacy shifted slowly from a monarchy to a liberal democracy. Industrialization made it the most powerful state in the world by the nineteenth century. While it lost its empire, Britain remains a strong, modern state with an effective bureaucracy and fairly extensive welfare state. Questions of sovereignty have arisen recently, as the Scottish almost voted to secede from the country in 2014, and the country left the EU at the end of 2020. As in both Germany and the United States, questions surrounding immigration and identity provide some of the most significant remaining areas of state weakness.

- FRAGILE STATES INDEX 41.9 (rank 148 of 179); weakest on "group grievance" and "factionalized elites"
- TERRITORY Consolidated from three nations (England, Wales, and Scotland) by 1707; colonial empire from mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century; question of Scottish secession
- SOVEREIGNTY Aided by island status; fully developed by 1707; partially yielded to European Union; exit from European Union in 2020
- LEGITIMACY Traditional legitimacy of monarchy with some limits since thirteenth century; slow transition to liberal democratic legitimacy since 1688
- BUREAUCRACY Industrialization in nineteenth and twentieth centuries expanded and modernized; welfare state since World War II

The Case

The Acts of Union of 1707 established the modern state in what became known as the Kingdom of Great Britain (later changed to the United Kingdom officially, though "Great Britain" or simply "Britain" are also commonly used), the culmination of centuries of attempts to unify the three parts of the island under one state. England and Wales (the western section of the island) were previously united in 1542. In 1603, when King James VI of Scotland also became King James I of England, the entire island was finally brought under a single monarch, but another century passed before the Acts of Union created a single British parliament joining England, Scotland, and Wales under one state. Both Scotland and Wales came to be primarily English speaking, linguistically uniting the kingdom, though some cultural distinctions remain to this day, including a distinct Welsh language spoken by a minority.

The greatest threat to the early English monarchs' sovereignty came from religious wars between Protestants and Catholics. After King Henry VIII broke with the Catholic Church and established the Church of England (known as the Anglican Church in the United Kingdom and the Episcopal Church in the United States) in 1534, religious conflicts dominated politics for well over a century. This culminated in a civil war in the 1640s pitting the king and mostly the Anglican nobility against more radical Protestant sects representing the rural gentry and urban populations, which brought to power a military dictatorship under a commoner, Oliver Cromwell. The monarchy was restored after about twenty years, only to be removed again by parliament in the Glorious Revolution of 1688. This began a long transition in the basis for

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legitimacy from the traditional monarchy to liberal democracy shortly before the unification of the island was completed with the addition of Scotland.

The doctrine of liberalism gained greater prominence, and slowly the various religious communities learned to live under the same government. Starting in the mid-eighteenth century, Britain was one of the first countries to begin industrializing. By the nineteenth century, rapid economic transformation helped it become the most powerful state in the world and the center of a global empire. Industrialization also expanded the domestic strength of the state and helped create its modern bureaucracy. The growing middle class and military weakness in the Crimean War produced reforms of the civil service starting in the 1850s. These included requiring certain kinds of education for civil service appointments, signaling a shift away from government appointments based on patronage.

A century later, the empire declined rapidly after World War II. The war helped inspire nationalist movements across Asia and Africa that resulted in nearly all British (and other) colonies gaining their independence by the 1960s. The sacrifices made to win World War II also produced a consensus in favor of a more egalitarian society, leading to the creation of the British welfare state, greatly expanding the bureaucracy, and enhancing legitimacy. Starting in the

Prime Minister Boris Johnson led the fight for "Brexit," Britain's decision to leave the European Union. This was, in part, a decision to restore full sovereignty, taking back elements of the country's economic sovereignty that EU members willingly concede to the broader union.

Leon Neal via Getty Images

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1960s, the British state slowly yielded some sovereignty to what became the European Union (EU). Its embrace of the EU, however, has always been partial: it did not adopt the common currency, the euro, and in 2016, a popular referendum in support of leaving the EU, known as "Brexit," passed, sending economic shockwaves throughout the world and forcing the government's leader to resign. The British people, concerned about growing immigration and EU rules imposed on them, voted to regain full national sovereignty, despite warnings that they could face severe economic hardship. The protracted withdrawal process was finally complete on January 31, 2020, just as the first signs of the COVID pandemic were being detected.

Britain successfully molded a national identity out of English, Welsh, and Scottish identities, though the latter two reemerged and helped create "devolution"—the passing of some powers (such as involving education)—to newly created Welsh and Scottish parliaments in 1998. A growing Scottish nationalist movement demanded a referendum on Scottish independence in 2014, which it lost, 55 percent to 45 percent. In Northern Ireland, the relatively poor, Catholic minority long fought to join the Republic of Ireland, but the wealthier Protestant majority, supported by the British, have kept it part of the United Kingdom. More recent questions of national identity have arisen, as in Germany, around the question of immigration. Since World War II, Britain has seen large-scale immigration from its former colonies in the Caribbean, Africa, and South Asia, creating new categories of people such as "Black Britons." More recently, many Eastern Europeans were able to enter Britain because they were part of the EU, creating a backlash that fed the Brexit vote. A growing debate over the place and role of Muslim immigrants (in Britain, mostly from South Asia) has raised questions about national identity that inevitably affect legitimacy as well. As with Germany, the challenges of immigration are reflected in relatively weak scores on relevant indicators on the Fragile States Index.

Case Questions

1. In contrast with the United States, the modern British state arose from a long, historical evolution. What impact has this history had on the modern state, and what differences might this create compared with the U.S. case?
2. What are the weakest elements of the British state, and what effects do these weaknesses have?

Case Study: The United States: A Consciously Crafted State

Case Synopsis

The United States established its sovereignty and legitimacy in an unusually clear and explicit way, first via a Declaration of Independence and then a consciously crafted constitution. The new state's sovereignty was tested in the War of 1812 against Britain and again in the Civil War, but it held. The state simultaneously expanded its territory dramatically via invasion of Native American lands, land purchases from European colonial powers, and war with Mexico. Its modern bureaucracy developed more slowly than most in Europe, but industrialization and a major reform movement ended its famously corrupt "machine politics," slowly expanding a bureaucracy based on merit from the late nineteenth century through World War II. Today, it is the world's leading superpower externally; internally the strength of its state is high but not the highest in the world (at least according to the Fragile States Index). This is due in large part to continuing and growing inequality among the population stemming from the legacy of slavery and immigration.

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- FRAGILE STATES INDEX 45.3 (rank 141 of 179); weakest on "factionalized elites" and "group grievance"
- TERRITORY Consolidated from separate colonies; expanded via purchase, invasion, and war
- SOVEREIGNTY Established via negotiation to create central government; challenged by Civil War over issue of slavery
- LEGITIMACY Constitution established liberal state under which democratic rights slowly extended over two hundred years to mass of citizenry
- BUREAUCRACY Small and corrupt until early twentieth century; progressive reforms created modern form, and modest welfare state added since World War II

The Case

The origin of the United States—in a conference that brought together thirteen separate colonies—is most unusual. Few states were created so completely by design rather than by historical evolution. Nonetheless, its early trials and tribulations and questions about its very existence in the early years were similar to those of many other postcolonial states.

North America's colonial history was not unlike that of South America, despite primarily British rather than Spanish and Portuguese conquest. From early on, the economy of the southern colonies was based on large-scale plantation agriculture, which used extensive labor. Because British conquest decimated the Native American population through disease and displacement, enslaved Africans with no rights and no possibility of gaining freedom became the chief source of plantation labor. While the northern colonies allowed slavery, their economies did not depend on it. Slavery created a racial division that has plagued the nation ever since.

Acting as representatives of poor and rich alike, the white, wealthy authors of the Declaration of Independence adopted the enlightened views then prevalent among European intellectuals. They envisioned a nation in which "all men are created equal and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights." The first effort at creating a state, however—the Articles of Confederation—fell into disarray within a few years, in part because of a lack of effective sovereignty. The Articles severely curtailed the national government's power, preserving for the separate thirteen states the right to approve taxes and trade policies. This weakness led to the adoption of the U.S. Constitution, the document on which the state's legitimacy has depended ever since. The Constitution created a stronger, more sovereign central government with powers to establish a coherent national economy and foreign policy. The individual states did retain significant areas of sovereignty, however, such as responsibility over policing, infrastructure, and education; this created one of the first examples of federalism, in which a state's power is divided among multiple levels of government.

The Constitution also made clear that the political elite at the time had a very limited concept of "all men are created equal." They certainly meant "men," since women had no political rights, but they did not mean "all." To secure the support of the southern states, slavery was preserved. By counting each enslaved person as three-fifths of a person (but not giving them any rights), slaveholding states received more representation in Congress than their number of voters justified.

Under the aegis of white settlers, the United States dramatically expanded its territory at the expense of native populations and Mexico; industrialization produced a stronger

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economy; and the population of the new state continued to grow. Immigration and industrialization increased the size and power of the northern states relative to the southern ones, while a growing abolitionist movement questioned the continuing legitimacy of slavery, a position on which the new Republican Party took the strongest stand. Southern leaders ultimately tried to secede, leading to the Civil War, a four-year, failed effort to preserve a slaveholding society.

After the war, the Constitution was amended to end slavery and guarantee equal rights to all regardless of race, and in 1920 it was amended again to grant voting rights to women. But African American men and women only truly achieved full citizenship, including the de facto right to vote, one hundred years later with the passage of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts in 1964 and 1965, respectively. Native Americans were only enfranchised in 1924 via the Snyder Act, and even then, some Western states failed to fully enfranchise them into the 1940s and 1950s. The Fragile States Index suggests that this racial legacy continues to weaken the state, lying behind its second-weakest indicator, "group grievance," and its relatively weak score (the weakest score of our four strong states) on "economic inequality."

The United States became a global power with the second Industrial Revolution of the late nineteenth century. Cities grew dramatically as immigrants poured into urban areas to provide labor for rapidly expanding factories, and a growing middle class emerged. This brought demands for changes in the state. Since the expansion of the franchise under Andrew Jackson in the 1820s, partisan competition in the United States was characterized by "machine politics," in which victorious parties appointed their supporters to virtually all bureaucratic posts. The country was famous for corruption. Starting in the 1880s with the Pendleton Act, reformers established a civil service under which most jobs would be permanent and based on some concept of merit rather than on the whims of the next elected politician. The same reform movement ultimately produced the national income tax, which became the state's primary source of revenue. These reforms created the state's modern bureaucracy, a process that wasn't fully developed until World War II.

Further expansion occurred with the New Deal in the 1930s, under which an expanded government helped provide jobs and old-age pensions to people in need as part of the effort to pull the country out of the Great Depression. The New Deal, followed by the Great Society programs of the 1960s, increased the size and reach of the U.S. state. Nonetheless, it remained quite a bit smaller than most of its European counterparts.

While the formal rules in the Constitution did not change, the central government's ability to fund popular programs gave it much greater power than it had possessed a century earlier. Federalism continues to divide sovereignty in the United States among the national (or federal) government and the fifty states, making the United States a more decentralized (and, critics contend, fragmented) state than most wealthy countries. Nonetheless, the state is far more centralized and involved in American lives than it was a century ago.

While the United States generally has firm external sovereignty via control of its territory and by far the most powerful military in the world, territorial boundaries still raise questions. Significant illegal immigration from neighboring Mexico shows the limits of sovereignty for even the most powerful state. As is the case with Germany, the country also continues to struggle with how immigrants are incorporated into the national identity (see chapter 4). Furthermore, Fukuyama (2014) argues that in recent decades, the influence of lobbyists and campaign donors and the growing role of the judiciary in making policy decisions (see chapter 5 for more on this) have significantly weakened the state, as decision making has become

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The signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776 was a unique event at the time: a state was being created by conscious design rather than emerging from political battles among rival monarchs. It would take much more work to draft a working form of government and a civil war to create a real sense of national unity. Many colonies would follow the example of the United States in later centuries, demanding independence and writing their own constitutions.

Trumbull, John, Artist, Copyright Claimant Detroit Publishing Co, and Publisher Detroit Publishing Co. *Declaration of Independence*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. United States, None. [between 1900 and 1912] Photograph. https://www.loc.gov/item/2016817173/.

increasingly difficult and bureaucratic agencies less autonomous from political pressures. Many observers also worry that increasing political polarization is weakening the state by undermining trust in its institutions. Allegations of electoral fraud intensified around the 2020 election resulting in the January 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol. Although debunked, claims that electoral institutions were acting illegitimately persisted into 2023. Mistrust of government institutions was also at least partly responsible for popular rejection of masks and vaccinations in many parts of the country during the COVID pandemic, all of which potentially harms legitimacy. The Fragile States Index shows the U.S. score worsening over the course of the pandemic.

Case Questions

1. The United States is unusual in that it is a state created by self-conscious design rather than historical evolution. What impact does that origin have on the strength of its state and the differences between it and other states?

2. What are the weakest elements of the state in the United States, and what effects do these weaknesses have?

3. What evidence do you see in favor of or against Fukuyama's (2014) argument that the American state has become weaker in recent decades?

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Moderately Strong States

The following five countries can be considered moderately strong (or weak) states. They have significant state capacity, but in various important ways they are notably weaker than the strongest states. This weakness often manifests itself in particular areas, including much higher levels of corruption, weaker rule of law, and more difficult intergroup conflicts. They are all middle-income countries, not nearly as wealthy as the strongest states but much wealthier than the poorest. The modern state emerged in most of them in the early to mid-twentieth century and was challenged by regional, cultural, or linguistic groups in several cases. Like Germany and Japan, most have seen multiple bases for legitimacy over the last century, though India, the largest and one of the most enduring democracies in the world, is an exception. Questions of legitimacy, then, are very much alive in some of these countries. With relatively minor exceptions, they face no serious threats to their territory, despite sometimes seething discontent in particular regions. With only moderately strong bureaucracies, however, internal sovereignty is notably weaker than in the strongest states; the state simply does not have the capacity to deliver nearly as uniformly. It is unclear whether stronger states will emerge in these cases or not, though that is certainly possible.

Case Study: China: Economic Legitimacy over Political Reform

Case Synopsis

China established its territory, sovereignty, and a relatively modern bureaucracy centuries before anything similar developed in Europe. The Chinese state, though, was severely weakened from the late-nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries. Out of that chaotic period emerged the world's second major communist regime, which created a modern, if brutal, state. The Communists regained full sovereignty, expanded the state's territory to include the still-disputed region of Tibet, and reestablished a strong bureaucracy that controlled the entire economy. The regime's legitimacy was based on communist doctrine, augmented initially by Mao's charisma, but clearly declined over the years. Since Mao's death, the regime has still officially proclaimed communism as its ideology, but in reality, it bases its legitimacy on economic success. The ruling party has presided over an increasingly strong, modern state that has achieved perhaps the most remarkable economic advance in human history. China has become the second-largest economy in the world and an economic and political superpower, though an economic slowdown in the last few years has raised questions about its continued strength. It also is still plagued by corruption, weak rule of law, and questions about its legitimacy in the face of growing centralization of political control under President Xi Jinping.

- FRAGILE STATES INDEX 65.1 (rank 101 of 179); weakest on "human rights and rule of law" and "factionalized elites"
- TERRITORY Established in ancient empire, though with changing boundaries; Communist rulers annexed disputed territory of Tibet
- SOVEREIGNTY Longest continuous sovereign entity in world history under empire; civil war in early twentieth century; sovereignty restored by Communist revolution in 1949 and start of modern state
- LEGITIMACY Traditional empire; nationalist government came out of civil war; communist ideology until 1978; modernizing authoritarian state since then
- BUREAUCRACY Ancient Confucian system of merit; great expansion under Communist rule; growing problem of corruption

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The Case

The Chinese empire, first united in 221 BCE, "built a centralized, merit-based bureaucracy that was able to register its population, levy uniform taxes, control the military, and regulate society some eighteen hundred years before a similar state was to emerge in Europe" (Fukuyama 2014, 354). While it was not a fully modern state, it developed some elements of a modern state very early.

The empire's demise began in the mid-nineteenth century. While trade with the outside world had long existed, the United States and European powers began demanding greater access to Chinese markets, leading to the Opium Wars from 1840 to 1864 that gave Western powers effective sovereignty over key areas of the country. What had been one of the strongest states in the world was dramatically weakened. Foreign domination and economic stagnation produced growing discontent. Sun Yat-sen, an American-educated doctor, started a nationalist movement that proclaimed its opposition to the empire and to foreign imperialism. By 1911, military uprisings signaled the empire's imminent collapse, and on January 1, 1912, the empress resigned and the Republic of China was established.

The new nationalist government quickly became a dictatorship and ushered in more than a decade of chaos and war. Warlords gained control of various parts of the country as the Chinese state's sovereignty and territorial control crumbled. In the 1920s, the nationalists slowly regained control with the help of an alliance with a new political force, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Once fully back in power, the nationalists turned against the Communists. The state's sovereignty, however, was seriously compromised by reliance on warlords, the continuous threat of civil war with the CCP, and Japanese invasion. The nationalists ruled a very weak state.

The CCP under Mao Zedong moved to the countryside after the nationalists broke the alliance. Starting in the southeast, Mao put together a revolutionary movement that began an intermittent civil war with the government. In 1934–1935, Mao led the famous Long March, a six-thousand-mile trek by party supporters. The CCP took effective sovereignty over the northwestern section of the country and began creating the prototype of its future Communist regime. The Japanese invasion of 1937 left the country's territory and sovereignty divided among the CCP, the nationalist government, and Japan. After the Japanese withdrawal at the end of World War II, the Communist revolution triumphed in 1949, despite U.S. military support for the nationalists, who fled to the island of Taiwan and formed a government there.

Communist rule created the first modern Chinese state, but at a horrific cost. The new government instituted massive land reform programs and campaigns against corruption, opium use, and other harmful social practices. It also created a command economy with a massive bureaucracy, which attempted to industrialize the world's largest agrarian society rapidly. The result was a famine that killed at least twenty million people, and political purges that sent many others to "re-education camps," prison, or execution. During the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, Mao mobilized his followers against what he saw as entrenched bureaucrats in his own party and state, causing widespread political uncertainty, repression, and economic and social dislocation.

The Cultural Revolution ended with Mao's death in 1976. Deng Xiaoping, one of Mao's earliest comrades who had been removed from power during the Cultural Revolution, established his supremacy over the party and state in 1979. Deng initiated a series of slow but ultimately sweeping reforms that reduced the state's direct control of the economy. He also began to reestablish organized, party control over the state and more uniform laws to govern the country. These reforms continue today, a more than four-decade process of introducing a market economy and stronger state that is still not complete. The result has been the fastest economic growth

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Distributing blank pieces of paper during 2022 protests against China's "zero COVID" policy that shut down the economy for an extended period. The policy demonstrated the strength of the repressive elements of China's modern state, including its electronic surveillance capacities. Nonetheless, the protests pushed the regime to abandon the policy. Legitimacy remains important even in the most repressive authoritarian regimes.

SOPA Images via Getty Images

in the world that has moved millions of Chinese out of poverty, spurred a huge exodus from rural areas to cities, and allowed much greater inequality than existed under Mao.

While rebuilding a modern bureaucracy, Deng and his successors have resisted most efforts to achieve greater freedom and democracy. While the state's legitimacy is still officially based on communism, its pursuit of capitalist development has meant its real legitimacy is implicitly based on its ability to modernize the economy and provide wealth. Thus, China now has what we will call a modernizing authoritarian regime (see chapter 3). Many observers see a fundamental contradiction between allowing economic freedoms but denying political ones and argue that ultimately the CCP will have to allow much greater political freedom if its economic success is to continue. Under its current president, Xi Jinping, the regime has actually restricted freedoms further and intervened in the economy more in response to declining growth.

It attempted to prevent COVID from spreading via its "zero COVID" policy of extremely tight lockdowns of nearly everything through December 2022. An outbreak of large-scale protests led the state to reverse its policy suddenly, causing a massive spike in the number of COVID cases and deaths and, many believe, harming its legitimacy. This, along with the social and environmental effects of extremely rapid economic growth, widespread corruption, and growing inequality, are the major weaknesses facing the Chinese state today.

Case Questions

1. What impact does the legacy of Mao's communist system have on the strength of the modern Chinese state today?
2. China boasts the oldest and most enduring premodern state in world history. What impact does this have on the strength of its modern state?

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Case Study: Mexico: Challenges to Internal Sovereignty

Case Synopsis

Mexico's first postcolonial state was extremely weak, rocked by regional and ideological divisions that initially produced great instability and later a weak, personalist dictatorship. Revolution in the 1910s through the 1920s finally resulted in the start of a modern state, ruled over by a single, dominant party for three-quarters of a century. It consciously used an interventionist economic development strategy, funded mainly by oil production, to initiate industrialization and greatly expand the state's bureaucratic capabilities. Economic success amid continuing poverty and declining legitimacy ultimately created a movement for democracy, which succeeded in peacefully ousting the long-ruling party from power in 2000, changing the basis of the state's legitimacy. Today, Mexico has a stable democracy but faces challenges to its internal sovereignty in the south from indigenous groups and, more threateningly, in the north from drug cartels who seem more powerful than the state's security forces. This important middle-income country has seen significant economic success in the last generation but is plagued by growing questions of internal sovereignty.

- FRAGILE STATES INDEX 69.8 (rank 85 of 179); weakest on "security apparatus" (drug cartels and corrupt police forces) and demographic pressures
- TERRITORY Spanish colonial creation; half its original size following the Mexican-American War (1846–1848)
- SOVEREIGNTY Achieved in War of Independence (1810–1821); recent challenges by southern guerrilla movement and northern drug cartels
- LEGITIMACY Nineteenth-century divisions (liberal versus conservative *caudillos*); revolution followed by twentieth-century electoral authoritarian regime; twenty-first-century democracy
- BUREAUCRACY Developed with single-party domination over the twentieth century; part of ruling party's clientelist networks until 2000

The Case

Under colonial rule starting in 1519, Spain exploited Mexico for its gold and silver, but most important was the country's large, disciplined indigenous population that provided valuable labor for the colonial regime. Because of this, Mexico did not become an important market for the African slave trade. Mexico became a sovereign state with the War of Independence (1810–1821), but in the immediate aftermath found itself bitterly divided along regional (north–south) and ideological (liberal–conservative) lines. These divisions manifested themselves in successive military coups, with strongmen (*caudillos*) constantly changing allegiances in support of one side or another. The conflicts resulted in a weak state and a limited capacity to develop a functioning bureaucracy. The internal rifts also had a negative impact on Mexico's ability to defend its sovereignty, as evidenced by the Mexican-American War (1846–1848), which forced it to sell about half of its territory to the United States.

The instability of the nineteenth century did eventually end, but at the cost of political freedoms. Porfirio Díaz, a *caudillo* who had mastered the art of consolidating power through bribery and intimidation, founded an authoritarian regime and ruled from 1876 until 1910. His rule based its legitimacy on an ability to deliver political order and economic growth. The Díaz

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regime's primary supporters were the upper class and business elite. Its enemies were the peasant class (*campesinos*), who lost land to foreign speculators only to find the state unresponsive to their grievances. When Díaz reneged on a promise to retire in 1910, anti-Díaz forces, supported by the rural poor, instigated the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920). Despite Díaz's resignation in 1911, the revolution became a civil war, with various factions turning against the newly installed government, notably the guerrillas led by General Francisco "Pancho" Villa in the north and the peasant armies of Emiliano Zapata in the south.

Ultimately, Villa and Zapata were defeated and President Plutarco Elías Calles (1924–1928) established the modern Mexican state as well as the longest-ruling political party in Mexican history, eventually named the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI). While the PRI embraced the revolution-era democratic constitution of 1917, in practice it formed an electoral authoritarian regime (see chapter 3) that governed Mexico from 1929 to 2000. The party was able to maintain power through systemic corruption, bribery, and intimidation, as well as clientelism and effective voter mobilization tactics.

The PRI's legitimacy rested mainly on its association with the values of the Mexican Revolution, especially land reform and the empowerment of the *campesinos.* It created a functioning bureaucracy that, while corrupt, made important strides in furthering literacy, access to health care, and overall economic development. It used oil wealth and trade with the United States to achieve significant industrialization, transforming Mexico into a middle-income country, though with sharp income and regional inequality. All of this expanded the size, scope, and capability of Mexico's state.

Starting in the early 1980s, the party moved away from its traditional policies that protected the rural poor, and adopted policies more favorable to a free-market economy with less government intervention. This led to a fissure within the party and the creation of a new party that garnered an unprecedented 30 percent of the vote in the 1988 presidential

Delfina Gomez, candidate for governor of the state of Mexico for the Morena Party, at a rally in 2023. The Mexican state's basis of legitimacy shifted with the transition to democracy in 2000. While remaining democratic, Mexico continues to be plagued by problems of a weak state, such as widespread criminal gangs and violence.

Future Publishing via Getty Images

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election, amid widespread claims of electoral fraud. The 1988 election was the start of growing demands for real democracy, finally established in 2000 with the bellwether election of Vicente Fox of the long-standing opposition National Action Party as president, the first non-PRI president in over seventy years. This move from electoral authoritarianism to democratic competition reflects changing notions of legitimacy, from clientelism and modernization to liberal democracy.

Despite its democratization, Mexico remains plagued by severe economic and regional disparities along with questions over the strength of the state. Mexico has experienced large-scale flight of labor to the United States, symptomatic of the desperate economic situation faced by millions of Mexicans. By far the most critical challenge to Mexican sovereignty today, however, is the war among rival drug cartels, which has killed an estimated seventy-five thousand to one hundred thousand people in the last decade. While U.S. consumers have been supporting the border states' manufacturing—or *maquiladora*—economy, America has also been the prime market for the Mexican drug trade. Endemic police corruption, lack of alternative economic opportunities, a supply of small arms from north of the border, and a large appetite for drugs there have all led to the degradation of government authority in the northern region. This has called into question the state's ability to keep a monopoly on the legitimate use of force for the first time since the end of the Mexican Revolution.

Case Questions

1. Since the revolution a century ago, Mexico has been marked by exceptional political stability—the same regime ruled for nearly eighty years—yet it is only a moderately strong state. Why?
2. Which elements of state strength best explain the increasing strength of the Mexican state over the last twenty to thirty years?

Case Study: Russia: Strong External Sovereignty with Weak Rule of Law

Case Synopsis

Russia has had three dramatically different regimes over the centuries, with a fourth emerging in the new millennium. For most of the twentieth century, the communist state controlled virtually all economic and political activity far more tightly than any state does today. It also controlled a vast, multinational empire along its borders, one that was lost with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The smaller but still vast Russian state continues to be plagued by ethnic and national differences, some of which have resulted in violent conflict. The initial postcommunist regime was democratic, but by the early 2000s, Vladimir Putin had transformed it into an authoritarian regime. After a period of weakness in the 1990s, the state has become stronger in most areas in the new century. While it has strengthened its external sovereignty, it remains much weaker internally, with questions about its legitimacy, high levels of corruption, and a weak rule of law.

- FRAGILE STATES INDEX 80.7 (rank 53 of 179); weakest on "factionalized elites," "state legitimacy," and "human rights and rule of law"
- TERRITORY Multinational empire consolidated under tsar; communist state of USSR broken into fifteen countries in 1991, reducing Russia to pre-imperial borders; military annexation of the Crimea in 2014

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- SOVEREIGNTY Feudal state with unusually strong monarchy under tsar; modern state established by communist rule; postcommunist state weak but getting stronger; continuing challenges to central control from regions
- LEGITIMACY Traditional monarchy overthrown by communist revolution; democracy in 1990s; authoritarian regime with strong nationalist appeal since
- BUREAUCRACY Extremely powerful under Communist Party rule, controlling economy; postcommunist weakening with growing corruption; perhaps strengthening since 2000

The Case

Ivan IV Vasilyevich (Ivan the Terrible) took the title Russian "tsar" (emperor) in 1547 and greatly increased the monarch's power and the state's territory. By 1660, Russia was geographically the largest country in the world. The country became a vast, multinational empire in which more than one hundred languages were spoken, governed by a monarchy that would last until 1917. The tsar was an absolutist ruler with even greater power than most monarchs in Europe. The Russian state was an early modern absolutist state in terms of effective sovereignty and control over territory. As industrialization began and Russian cities grew in the nineteenth century, both liberal democratic and Marxist movements arose. Tsar Nicholas II was finally forced to agree to the creation of an elected legislature, the *Duma*, in 1905. He dissolved the body after only three months, however; Russia's first, very brief experiment with democracy was over.

Not long afterward, Russia was drawn into World War I, which proved economically disastrous. Because it was still primarily a poor and agricultural society, soldiers were sent to the front ill equipped and hungry, and as conditions worsened, mass desertions occurred. A crisis of legitimacy undermined the state's ability to maintain its territorial integrity and military force. The makings of another electoral democracy emerged in February 1917, only to be overtaken by a communist revolution that October. The communists assassinated the tsar and his family, after which many of the non-Russian areas of the empire declared themselves independent. It took the communist movement three years to reconstruct what had been the tsarist empire, more or less preserving prior Russian territory. A new government called the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), or the Soviet Union (see chapter 3 for more details), was formed, a brutal but nonetheless modern state. The Communist Party created a dictatorial regime that it tightly controlled. A new basis for legitimacy was established in communist ideology, but most analysts believe the regime's real legitimacy was fairly short lived.

The Communists modernized Russia, but at tremendous human cost (estimates range as high as twenty million dead). Joseph Stalin (1929–1953) rapidly industrialized the country, taking resources and laborers from the countryside as needed and completely controlling all economic activity. The secret police dealt with anyone who opposed the state's methods, creating one of the most oppressive police states in history. Yet Stalin also created a superpower, which became the only serious rival to the United States after World War II. After his death, Soviet leaders reduced the degree of terror but maintained centralized control over an increasingly bureaucratic form of communism. The Communist model, while successful at early industrialization, could not keep pace with the West's economic growth. Recognizing the need for change, a new leadership under Mikhail Gorbachev began reforms in 1985 that soon resulted in the collapse of the Soviet state.

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In 2022, Vladimir Putin speaks to a pro-annexation crowd in Red Square.

Contributor via Getty Images

When elements of the Soviet military who were opposed to Gorbachev's reforms attempted a coup in August 1991, Boris Yeltsin, the leader of the Russian part of the Soviet federation and himself a Communist reformer, stood up to the tanks and proclaimed the end of Soviet rule. The military, faced with masses of people in the streets and with the eyes of the world on it, was forced to back down. By December, Gorbachev had agreed to the dissolution of the Soviet state. The old tsarist empire split into fifteen separate states, with Russia the largest by far.

Today, Russia remains a multiethnic state, with a federal system of government that gives some power, at least in theory, to the various regions, which are defined loosely along ethnic lines. After the dissolution of the Soviet regime, Russia gained a new claim to legitimacy as an electoral democracy. It was very fragile, however; the state became demonstrably weaker, as powerful mafias and super-rich "oligarchs" controlled most political power and economic wealth. Yeltsin's handpicked successor, Vladimir Putin (1999–2008, 2012–), consciously set out to strengthen the state by centralizing power in the executive, strengthening the central government vis-à-vis regional governments, reducing crime, and restoring order. In the process, however, he effectively eliminated democracy; although the trappings of elections and offices with clear mandates continue to exist, Russia in fact is now an authoritarian regime under Putin's tight control. He has increasingly championed nationalism as a basis for legitimacy, most famously in his successful annexation in 2014 of the Crimean peninsula, a primarily Russian-speaking area of Ukraine. His bid to annex more of Russian-speaking Ukraine via invasion in 2022, however, proved much less successful than he expected and revealed weaknesses in the Russian military. Despite Putin's successful strengthening of Russia's external sovereignty, he has undermined the rule of law and weakened the state in other ways; Russia scores very poorly on the Fragile States Index on "state legitimacy," "human rights," and "factionalized elites."

Case Questions

1. Russia has seen exceptionally dramatic swings in the claims to legitimacy of its different regimes. What impact might that have on the strength of its state?
2. What explains the unusual combination of great external sovereignty versus weaker internal strength in the Russian case?

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Case Study: Brazil: A Moderately Strong and Now Legitimate Modern State

Case Synopsis

While maintaining a large sovereign territory since independence, Brazil has faced repeated questions about the state's legitimacy. Various Brazilian leaders have responded by claiming legitimacy on the basis of charismatic appeals, clientelism, modernization, and democracy. Until the last few years, Brazil's democracy seemed to be fully established, but doubts have risen in the face of an economic crisis, a right-wing president's questioning the integrity of the electoral process, and massive corruption scandals. While the state presided over rapid economic growth and reduced poverty for a number of years, "uneven economic development" remains one of its biggest weaknesses. It also continues to be plagued by corruption, which undermines the rule of law and bureaucratic effectiveness, as well as a security apparatus that sometimes seems beyond civilian control. It is nonetheless a moderately strong modern state, with the largest economy in the Southern Hemisphere.

- FRAGILE STATES INDEX 74.5 (rank 71 of 179); weakest on "demographic pressures" and "human rights"
- TERRITORY Colonial creation; Portuguese half of South America
- SOVEREIGNTY Inherited peacefully at independence; legacy of weak central government vis-à-vis states and local elites
- LEGITIMACY Monarchy until 1889; limited democracy thereafter; legacy of military coup (1964), which claimed legitimacy based on modernization; democratic regime since 1985, but under some threat
- BUREAUCRACY Expanded greatly since 1964 under state-guided development; high levels of corruption

The Case

Like most countries, Brazil's modern state was the product of European colonial rule. The Portuguese effectively subjugated the small indigenous population, and colonial Brazil became a major producer of sugarcane and other agricultural products, farmed largely with enslaved African labor. Indeed, Brazil had more enslaved people than any other colony in the Americas. A Portuguese, landowning elite emerged as the socially and economically dominant force in the colonial society.

In contrast with the Spanish colonies in South America, Brazil gained independence from Portugal as a single country, creating by far the largest territory in South America under one sovereign government. In most of South America, the landowning elite rebelled against Spanish rule. In contrast, the Portuguese royal family actually fled to Brazil in 1808 to evade Napoleon's conquest of Portugal. In 1821, King João VI returned to Portugal, leaving his son in Brazil to rule on his behalf. A year later, his son declared Brazil independent and himself emperor, with no real opposition from Portugal. Several regions threatened to secede, but the political elite in the capital, Rio de Janeiro, were able to use trade revenue to cut deals to keep regional leaders loyal, preserving what is now the world's fifth-largest state in terms of territory.

The new state's economy remained agricultural and used enslaved labor until the late nineteenth century, making it the last slaveholding society in the Americas. Liberal elites, facing growing international pressure, finally secured the government's abolition of slavery in 1888 and

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convinced military leaders to overthrow the emperor in a bloodless coup and establish a republic a year later.

The leaders of the new republic created Brazil's modern state, drafting a democratic constitution, but one that gave voting rights only to literate men, restricting the voting population to 3.5 percent of the citizenry. This disenfranchised virtually all the formerly enslaved people, who were illiterate. The new system was federal from the start; a compromise among regional elites, who held most political power, gave significant power to local governments and thereby kept the country united.

Economic influence was shifting to urban areas, but political control remained vested in the rural landowning elite. Known as *coronéis*, or "colonels," these rural elites used their socioeconomic dominance to control votes in a type of machine politics. Meanwhile, in the growing urban areas, politicians mobilized voters by practicing **clientelism**, the exchange of material resources for political support (see chapter 8). As more urban dwellers became literate and gained the right to vote, elite politicians sought their support by providing direct benefits to them, such as jobs or government services to their neighborhoods. Corruption and clientelist use of bureaucratic jobs as perks for supporters simultaneously bloated and undermined Brazil's young bureaucracy, weakening the state.

Getúlio Vargas used clientelism and military support to gain complete power and eliminate democracy in the 1930s. He created a new regime, the quasifascist *Estado Novo* (New State), which he ruled from 1937 to 1945. He significantly expanded the state's economic role and power, creating state-owned steel and oil industries, and expanded health and welfare systems to gain popular support (which also strengthened the state's bureaucracy). When the end of World War II discredited fascism, Vargas was forced to allow a return to democratic rule, but the country was plagued by economic problems and political instability. By the early 1960s, the elite and military saw growing working-class militancy as perhaps the first stage of a communist revolution.

Workers repair the Brazilian Supreme Court building after supporters of losing president Jair Bolsonaro stormed it in January 2023, protesting what they believed to be his fraudulent election loss. Brazil's basis of legitimacy has been liberal democracy since the late 1980s, but Bolsonaro's one-term presidency threatened that legitimacy as never before.

Douglas Magno via Getty Images

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In a preemptive strike, the military overthrew the elected government in 1964 with U.S. and considerable upper- and middle-class domestic support. The military ruled until 1985, leading what we will term a "modernizing authoritarian" regime (see chapter 3), which produced very rapid economic growth and industrialization, further expanding the state's size and capabilities. By the late 1970s, growing inequality and declining economic growth led newly formed labor unions and followers of liberation theology in the Catholic Church to demand democracy, forcing the military to cede power. Democratic governments have ruled since 1985, establishing liberal democracy as the basis for legitimacy.

In the first decade of the new millennium, Brazil's democratic governments oversaw a new period of rapid economic growth that substantially reduced poverty and strengthened the state. Declining oil prices and a massive corruption scandal in the national oil company slowed growth beginning in 2014, tarnishing the state's image domestically and internationally. In 2016, the president was impeached and other top political leaders forced to resign and/or face court cases, as Brazil's democracy faced its greatest crisis since military rule, with some Brazilians even calling on the military to return to power. Indeed, in 2018 Brazilians elected a new president, Jair Bolsonaro, who openly admired the era of military rule, appointed military leaders to a number of key positions, and sowed mistrust of electoral institutions. When he lost the 2022 election, a feared military intervention did not materialize, but his supporters attempted to take over government buildings in the capital in an effort to restore him to the presidency. Growing weakness of the democratic regime threatened legitimacy and therefore the state's strength as a whole.

Case Questions

1. What are the main elements that make Brazil stronger or weaker than other "strong" or "moderately strong" states?
2. What has been the role of democracy in strengthening or weakening the Brazilian state over the last century?

Case Study: India: Enduring Democracy in a Moderately Weak State

Case Synopsis

Indian territory and sovereignty emerged out of colonial rule and the nationalist movement for independence. Most unusual for postcolonial states, its democracy has survived and remains the basis of legitimacy. Its state remains relatively weak, however, manifested in continuing corruption, religious tensions, and poverty. India was famed for its strong bureaucracy after independence, but growing corruption and reforms to reduce the bureaucracy's role in economic policy have weakened it. In recent years, the state has presided over a growing economy, and many observers see elements of a potential economic superpower, hobbled most significantly by its weak state.

- FRAGILE STATES INDEX 74.1 (rank 73 of 179); weakest on "group grievance" (Muslim–Hindu conflicts primarily) and "demographic pressures"
- TERRITORY Created by British colonial rule, though divided into India and Pakistan at independence
- SOVEREIGNTY Established with independence in 1947; dispute with Pakistan over control of Kashmir region

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- LEGITIMACY Continuous liberal democracy; secular government questioned by Hindu nationalists and other religious movements
- BUREAUCRACY Created by British colonialism; central to economic policy; weakening due to external pressure for reform and growing corruption

The Case

The territory that is now India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh was once divided among many kingdoms and languages, most of which practiced Hinduism. Muslim invaders created the Mughal Empire in 1526, which dominated most of northern and central India and ruled over a mostly Hindu population. Like other premodern rulers, both the Hindu kings and Muslim emperors had only loose sovereignty over daily life. At the local level, members of the elite caste, the Brahmin, governed.

The British government took direct control of its largest colony in 1857. The colonial state required educated local people to fill its administrative offices. The resulting all-Indian civil service and military and the start of a modern bureaucracy helped create greater unity among the subcontinent's disparate regions, and newly educated Indians filled the offices of these new institutions. Unfortunately for the British, the first stirrings of nationalism would arise from this educated elite.

India's independence movement, led by the charismatic Mahatma Gandhi, was the first successful anticolonial effort of the twentieth century and inspired similar movements around the world. The leadership of the main nationalist movement, the Indian National Congress that ruled India for most of its independent history, was primarily Hindu but operated on democratic and secular principles and claimed to represent all Indians. Nonetheless, as the nationalist movement developed, India's Muslim leaders increasingly felt unrepresented in the organization, and by the end of the 1930s, some began to demand a separate Muslim state.

The push for independence succeeded after World War II. Muslim leaders, however, demanded and received from the British a separate Muslim state, Pakistan. In 1947, the simultaneous creation of the two states (against Gandhi's fierce opposition) resulted in the mass migration of millions of citizens—probably the largest in world history—as Hindus moved from what was to be Pakistan into what would become India, and Muslims went in the other direction. At least a million people perished in violence that ensued during this time.

India thus gained independence under the rule of the Congress Party in a democratic and federal system. Its bureaucracy inherited from colonial rule, the Indian Civil Service, was a backbone of state strength and a key institution in the country's development. For the first several decades it was considered one of the strongest bureaucracies in the postcolonial world, but growing corruption has weakened it substantially in recent decades.

Besides economic development, the government's other great challenge was the demand for greater recognition by India's diverse ethnic and religious groups. Throughout the 1950s, leaders of local language groups demanded, and some received, states of their own within India's federal system. The legitimacy of the democratic system as a whole was questioned by only a few groups, however, most of which were communist inspired.

When Indira Gandhi (no relation to Mahatma) gained leadership of the Congress Party and the country as prime minister in 1971, she increasingly centralized power in her own hands. In 1975, she declared a "state of emergency" that gave her the power to disband local governments and replace them with those loyal to her. This was the only period that threatened the survival of India's democracy. Her actions were met with increasing opposition, however, and she was forced to allow new democratic elections two years later, in which the Congress Party lost power for the first time in its history.

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An election official shows workers on a tea plantation how to use a new electronic voting system. While India's state is weakened by corruption, suffers from widespread religious and ethnic tensions, and remains extremely poor despite recent economic gains, it has endured as the world's largest democracy for almost seven decades.

REUTERS/Rupak De Chowdhuri

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Starting with a large but unsuccessful Sikh movement for an independent Sikh state in the 1970s and 1980s, religious movements came to replace language-based ones as the most threatening to India's secular democracy. Since then, political battles have increased between Muslims and Hindu nationalists, in particular, many of whom reject the official secularism of the national government. A renewed Hindu nationalist party won a national election and formed the government from 1998 to 2004 and again since 2014. This new government has taken some actions called for by Hindu nationalists, such as the abolition of Muslim divorce and the adoption of an immigration law that offers citizenship to non-Hindu refugees of all religions except Islam, but at least so far, has preserved India's official principles of secular democracy as the core source of legitimacy.

Since the mid-1990s, governments of both major parties have reduced the role of the state in the economy and India has achieved much higher growth rates, carving out a major niche in the global economy in areas related to computer services in particular. It remains, however, a country with growing inequality, widespread malnutrition, and the second-largest number of poor people in the world. While growth has strengthened the state's resources, a weakened bureaucracy, widespread corruption, and continuing religious tensions have weakened it.

Case Questions

1. What have been the effects of colonialism on the relative strength of the Indian state?
2. What are the weakest elements of the Indian state, and how do these differ from the strong states discussed earlier? What explains these differences?

The Weakest States

The weakest states in the world appear to be quite fragile. The Fragile States Index characterizes them with words such as *warning* and *alert*. In many cases, their territorial integrity is at

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least threatened, if not outright violated. Even where they maintain official control, that control is often rather weak: their borders are porous, with huge black markets in people and goods. Corruption is rife, and many institutions therefore function only sporadically, leaving much of the population dependent on personal networks and clientelist ties to survive. They are by and large quite poor, with many dependent on the export of key primary commodities, making the resource curse a common problem. These states provide very limited services for their citizens, undermining legitimacy, whatever its basis. The weakest can accurately be characterized as "quasi-states." They maintain legal sovereignty and the recognition and access to the international system that entails, but they have only minimally achieved internal sovereignty. Our case studies are not among the very weakest, but nonetheless they illustrate the contours of extreme state weakness.

Case Study: Iran: Claiming Legitimacy via Theocracy

Case Synopsis

The Pahlavi dynasty established the first modern Iranian state nearly a century ago, ruled by a modernizing authoritarian regime under the shah that expanded sovereignty internally and externally and attempted to reduce the influence of Islam. Growing inequality and secularization, however, produced a backlash that became the 1979 Islamist revolution. The revolutionary leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, and his successors created an Islamic regime, but one within the confines of a modern (though corrupt) bureaucratic state whose territory and sovereignty are secure. The Islamic regime has expanded the social services the state provides and, therefore, the size and reach of the bureaucracy. It has also asserted international influence via threatened nuclearization, though questions over its legitimacy and economic problems continue to weaken it.

- FRAGILE STATES INDEX 85.4 (rank 40 of 179); weakest on "human rights," "state legitimacy," and "factionalized elites"
- TERRITORY Solidified in nineteenth century; smaller than ancient kingdoms
- SOVEREIGNTY Never formally colonized, though heavily influenced by British and Russian imperialism
- LEGITIMACY Traditional monarchy until first modern state; modernizing authoritarian state under shah in twentieth century; Islamic theocracy since 1979
- BUREAUCRACY Expanded by shah's modernization policies; expanded social services under Islamic republic; continuing problem of corruption

The Case

Iran is the modern descendant of the great ancient empire of Persia and has been ruled by two major empires since. These premodern states united the territory but relied on local elites to rule, especially in peripheral areas; neither created a fully modern state. In the nineteenth century, the empire's real power was drastically reduced by Russian and British imperialism. Like China, Iran was never formally colonized, but the government became extremely dependent upon and compliant with the Russians and British, granting them very favorable terms for key resources such as oil and depending on them for military support. This era also saw the modern, much reduced, borders of Iran clearly demarcated. European imperialism severely compromised Iran's

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sovereignty and reduced its territory, in spite of never officially colonizing the country. By the start of the twentieth century, popular discontent with this foreign influence led to street demonstrations from citizens demanding a new constitution. In 1906, the shah (the supreme ruler) allowed the creation of a democratic legislature, but the state remained weak, divided, and heavily influenced by Russia and Britain.

In the midst of this, Colonel Reza Khan led a coup d'état that overthrew the weakened empire and established what came to be known as the Pahlavi dynasty, ruled first by Reza Shah and then by his son, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi. The Pahlavis created the first truly modern state in Iran. During their rule from 1925 to 1979, they increased the size of the central army tenfold, dramatically expanded the bureaucracy, and gained full control over the provinces. The Pahlavis established a modernizing authoritarian regime, expanding both the state and the economy, increasing agricultural and industrial production, and building tremendous infrastructure, with the government itself directly involved in most of these efforts. They continued to welcome extensive foreign investment, especially in the growing oil sector. They also centralized power in their hands; the elected legislature continued to exist with an elected prime minister, but its power was greatly reduced and eliminated completely in 1953.

In the 1950s, the shah launched a series of social and economic reforms to modernize, as he saw it, Iranian society, which further expanded the role and reach of the state and its bureaucracy. He staked his claim to legitimacy on these modernizations, which included land reform and secularization; the latter reduced the role of Islamic law. An economic crisis in the late 1970s created growing opposition to his policies, which favored wealthier and urban over poorer and rural sectors of society. The opposition coalesced behind the leadership of an exiled Islamic spiritual leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Protests spread through the streets and mosques, and local Islamic militias took over entire neighborhoods. Facing growing opposition, the shah went into what was supposed to be temporary exile in January 1979 but never

Worshippers pray at a mosque in Tehran. The increasingly authoritarian regime in Iran bases its legitimacy on a version of Islamic theology that claims all state authority should be derived from religious law. Mosques are a major source of regime communication to followers and legitimacy for the clerics, who are the most powerful figures in the government.

REUTERS/Raheb Homavandi

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returned, his legitimacy completely gone. A month later, Khomeini came back from exile to complete the Iranian revolution and establish the Islamic Republic of Iran, the first theocratic government in the modern era.

The Islamic Republic has gone through phases of greater openness to political debate and greater repression (see chapter 8), but it has endured and remains regionally powerful. While basing its claim to legitimacy firmly in theocracy, it includes limited elements of democratic rule that have had more influence at some times than others. Patronage from oil revenue and corruption are probably more important than elections in maintaining the government's authority. Questions remain, however, about its legitimacy, as seen in the protests in 2022 and 2023 against the killing of a woman by the morality police, men who enforce the Islamic codes of dress and behavior. The government steadily increased the arrest of protesters and the severity of their sentences as the protests spread over several months. Iran's bid to become a nuclear power or at least to acquire much greater nuclear capabilities has recently made it the center of major global debate and, in 2015, the subject of a treaty seeking to reduce its nuclear potential. U.S.-led economic sanctions in response to Iran's nuclear ambitions have severely weakened the economy in recent years. While it is an important regional player and focus of global attention, over time the Islamic Republic has become a weaker and weaker state.

Case Questions

1. Iran and China share one aspect of their history: strong but informal Western influence in the nineteenth century. What impact did this have on the development of the modern states in the two countries? In what ways were those impacts similar and different?
2. What are the weakest elements of the Iranian state, and what effects do they have?

Case Study: Nigeria: An Extremely Weak State

Case Synopsis

With the exception of the 1967–1970 civil war, the Nigerian state has maintained its sovereignty and territory, though often under military rule. It is extremely weak, however. The long-ruling military claimed legitimacy via promises to end corruption, restore economic growth, and return the country to democracy, but those promises were rarely fulfilled. The democratic regime that has been in place since 1999 is a great improvement over previous regimes, but it has had only limited success in solving the deeply entrenched problems the country faces. While the state's territory is intact, its sovereignty is threatened by ethnic militia and the radical Islamist group Boko Haram; it suffers from widespread corruption that undermines bureaucratic efficiency; and its legitimacy is now based on a rather fragile democracy. The state's weakness originated in colonial rule but has been exacerbated by the country's oil wealth, which has been a huge incentive for corruption.

- FRAGILE STATES INDEX 98 (rank 15 of 179); weakest on "demographic pressures," "public services," "factionalized elites," "group grievances," and "security apparatus"
- TERRITORY Created by colonial rule out of numerous precolonial political entities; divided by civil war, 1967–1970
- SOVEREIGNTY Gained with independence in 1960 but threatened by recent demands for secession; weak internally

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- LEGITIMACY Nationalist movement divided along ethnic and regional lines; limited legitimacy of postcolonial democratic government; six military coups; weak democracy since 1999
- BUREAUCRACY Colonial creation; suffers from extreme levels of corruption fueled by oil wealth

The Case

Nigeria, like most African states, is a product of colonialism. It is by far the largest African country in terms of population (approximately one-seventh of all Africans are Nigerians) and a major oil producer, but also home to more poor people than any other country in the world. Prior to colonial conquest, the territory that is now Nigeria was home to numerous and varied societies. The northern half was primarily Muslim and ruled by Islamic emirs (religious rulers) based in twelve separate city-states. The southern half consisted of many societies, the two biggest of which were the Yoruba and Igbo. The Yoruba lived in a series of kingdoms, sometimes politically united and sometimes not, though they shared a common language and religion. The Igbo in the southwest also shared a common language and culture but were governed only at the most local level by councils of elders; they had no kings or chiefs.

The British conquest began around 1870, part of what came to be known as the "scramble for Africa." The British eventually established "indirect rule," under which colonial authorities, in theory, left precolonial kingdoms intact to be ruled by local leaders. In northern Nigeria, this meant ruling through the emirs, who in general accepted British oversight as long as they were left to run their internal affairs mostly as they pleased. In the south, kings and chiefs fulfilled this role where they existed, but where there were no chiefs, the British simply invented them.

An activist holds a poster demanding the release of Nnamdi Kanu, a leader of the movement to create a separate country of Biafra in southeastern Nigeria. The first Biafran effort resulted in a three-year civil war and at least a million deaths in 1967–1970. After decades of what seemed to be resolution of the problem, a new Biafran movement arose in the new millennium, fueled by feelings that the region, in spite of its oil wealth, is politically and economically marginalized.

Pius Utomi Ekpei/Stringer via Getty Images

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British colonialism gave local rulers more power than they had before, in exchange for rulers' acquiescence in implementing unpopular policies such as forced labor and the collection of colonial taxes. This undermined the legitimacy of those who had been precolonial rulers and prevented newly invented rulers from gaining legitimacy.

As in India, the colonial state required educated natives to help staff its bureaucracy. In the south, Christianity and Western education expanded rapidly; southerners filled most of the positions in the colonial state. The northern emirs, on the other hand, convinced colonial authorities to keep Christian education out in order to preserve Islam, on which their legitimacy was based. The educated elite became the leadership of the nationalist movement after World War II. Given the history of divisions in the country, it is no surprise that the nationalist movement was split from the start. The British ultimately negotiated a new government for an independent Nigeria that would be federal, with three regions corresponding to the three major ethnic groups and political parties formed mainly along regional and ethnic lines.

As in virtually all African countries, the new government was quite fragile. In contrast with their approach in India, the British began introducing the institutions of British-style democracy just a few years before independence in their African colonies. Nigerians had no prior experience with electoral democracy and little reason to believe it would be a superior system for them. In response to fraudulent elections and anti-Igbo violence, the army, led primarily by Igbo, overthrew the elected government in January 1966 in the first of six military coups. A countercoup six months later brought a new, northern-dominated government to power, but the Igbo military leadership refused to accept it. In January 1967, they declared their region the independent state of Biafra. Not coincidentally, large-scale oil production had just begun, and the oil wells in the area were claimed as Biafra. A three-year civil war ensued that cost the lives of a million people. The central government defeated the separatists in Biafra and reestablished a single state in 1970. Interrupted by only four years of elected rule, the military governed Nigeria until 1999. While all military leaders pledged to reduce corruption and improve development, in reality, oil revenue overwhelmed all other economic activity and fueled both corruption and the desire of those in power to stay there. A weak state grew ever weaker and more corrupt.

In 1999, the military finally bowed to popular and international pressure and carried out the country's first free and fair election in twenty years. While many observers have questioned the integrity of some of the elections, Nigeria's democracy nonetheless remains intact, with little threat of further military intervention. Democracy has become the basis of legitimacy, but that democracy in practice remains very imperfect. With corruption still quite significant, state capacity is limited. The democratic government has also faced growing religious tension in the northern states, many of which have adopted Islamic law. A violent Islamist group, Boko Haram, initiated an armed insurgency that has killed thousands, mostly in the northwestern part of the country, since 2010, though the president elected in 2015 initiated a military campaign that severely weakened the group.

In the oil-rich areas of the former Biafra, ethnic militias have demanded greater benefits for their people. Despite the area's natural resources, its residents are among the poorest in the country. Large, pro-Biafra demonstrations in 2015 and 2017 escalated to violent clashes between secessionists and the security forces by 2022. Security forces have been unable to control violence by "bandits" and between religious cults throughout the country, including the capital, Lagos. Politicians have begun recruiting support from these cults and factions, intensifying electoral violence (FSI 2022, 37). While the country has seen significant economic growth in the new century, and for the first time in decades much of it is coming from non-oil sectors of the economy, oil and the resource curse remain a key problem.

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Case Questions

1. Nigeria and India are our only two case studies of states that were put together during colonialism from multiple premodern political entities (a common history in Africa and Asia). What impacts does this history have on the strength of the two states? In what ways were those impacts similar and different?
2. What are the weakest elements of the Nigerian state, and what effects do they have?

CONCLUSION

The modern state is a political form that has been singularly successful. Its characteristics—territory, sovereignty, legitimacy, and bureaucracy—combine to produce an exceptionally powerful ruling apparatus. Arising nearly five hundred years ago, it has spread to every corner of the globe. In fact, the modern world demands that we all live in states. Although state strength can be used to oppress the citizenry, many political scientists argue that long-term strength must come from legitimacy. In strong states, rulers command military force to prevent foreign attack and domestic rebellion, and they control a set of state organizations that can effectively influence society in myriad ways. When this all works well, it can give ruling elites legitimacy and therefore greater power. Weak states, on the other hand, lack the capacity and often the will to provide key services. This threatens their legitimacy and often leaves them dependent on international support or key resources for their survival. While they may appear strong because they use a great deal of force against their own people, this is in fact often a sign of weakness: they have no other means of maintaining their rule. The weakest states are prone to collapse; they become failed states, as violent opponents can challenge the state's monopoly on the use of force with relative ease.

This raises a long-standing question: how can weak states become stronger? The answer usually involves the creation of impersonal institutions and the rule of law. This can lead citizens to trust the state, giving it greater legitimacy and strength. The strongest modern states are virtually all democracies, which are based on such notions as treating all citizens equally and limiting what the state can do, though electoral democracy certainly is no guarantee of state strength.

The strongest states in Europe and elsewhere resulted from centuries of evolution in most cases, as ruling elites ultimately compromised to create more impersonal and powerful institutions that would allow greater economic growth and protect them from attack. These states often began their modern era with strength in one or two particular areas, such as the bureaucracy and military, and developed strength in other areas decades or even centuries later. Postcolonial states had very different historical origins, based on colonial conquest rather than agreements among domestic elites. With independence, these states took the modern form, but not necessarily all of the modern content. They often lacked a strong sense of national unity based on a shared history. The international system, however, demands that they act like states, at least internationally. Their rulers therefore act accordingly, often gaining significant power in the process, even in relatively weak states. Lack of wealth, or wealth in the form of a resource curse, also produces very weak states, often in combination with a problematic colonial legacy.

Political scientists have used various theoretical approaches to understand the modern state. Both Marxist and political culture theorists have long made arguments about how and why states develop. Marxists see them as reflecting the power of the ruling class of a particular epoch. Under capitalism, that ruling class is the bourgeoisie, and the liberal state in particular represents

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the bourgeoisie's interests. In postcolonial countries, weaker states reflect the weak, dependent nature of the ruling elite there. Cultural theorists argue that underlying values, in particular a strong sense of nationalism, are crucial to maintaining a strong state, which must be based on some shared sense of legitimacy. Without this, effective sovereignty will always be limited.

In recent years, rational choice and institutionalist theories have become more prominent. The modern state, these theorists argue, emerged in response to the rational incentives of the emerging international state system, rewarding rulers who developed effective sovereignty, military force, and taxation. Once established, strong state institutions tend to reinforce themselves as long as they continue to function for the benefit of the elites for whom they were created to serve the citizenry adequately. Weaker states develop where colonial rule did not provide the same set of incentives, and variation in colonial rule often led to variation in postcolonial state strength. As modern states demand more from citizens, they develop a rational interest in establishing some type of popular legitimacy, a subject we examine in much greater depth in the next chapter.

KEY CONCEPTS

absolutism
bureaucracy
charismatic legitimacy
clientelism
external sovereignty
failed state
feudal states
ideal type
internal sovereignty
legitimacy
quasi-states
rational-legal legitimacy
resource curse
sovereignty
state capacity
state
strong state
territory
traditional legitimacy
weak state

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY

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WEB RESOURCES

Brookings Institution Index of State Weakness in the Developing World
(https://www.brookings.edu/research/index-of-state-weakness-in-the-developing-world/)

Comparative Constitutions Project
(http://comparativeconstitutionsproject.org)

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The Fund for Peace, Fragile States Index 2016
(fsi.fundforpeace.org)

The Heritage Foundation, Index of Economic Freedom
(http://www.heritage.org/index/ranking)

International Crisis Group
(http://www.crisisgroup.org)

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Better Life Index
(http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org)

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Country Statistical Profiles
(http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/economics/country-statistical-profiles-key-tables-from-oecd_20752288)

Transformation Index BTI
(http://www.bti-project.org/home)

Transparency International, Corruption Perception Index
(http://www.transparency.org/policy_research/surveys_indices/cpi)

United Nations
(http://www.un.org/en)

The World Bank, Worldwide Governance Indicators
(http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx#home)

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