State Building in the Developing World

A proposal for the creation of a global network to be funded by the Princeton Council on International Teaching and Research

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Abstract

There is a growing consensus among scholars and policy makers of development that effective states are deeply consequential for molding the life chances of citizens in the developing world. It has been clearly established that working democracies require effective states and that functioning markets are impossible without institutional governance. It is also clear that some parts of the developing world have acquired more effective states than others. While the study of the state has a long pedigree, what exactly constitutes effective states in a developing country setting, where such states come from, and how less effective states might become more effective are issues that remain underexplored.

We propose to create a global network of scholars to establish an ongoing international research cohort that aims to improve the comparative analysis of states and their development. Such a network will promote long-term institutional linkages, improve a global research effort, promote career advancement of scholars, including graduate students, and provide key scholarly and policy insights.

Scholarly Motivation

State building at a minimum involves developing coercive and extractive capacities. In the more demanding conditions of the developing world, it also involves establishing a separation between the public and the private realms of social life on the one hand, and building capacities to diagnose pressing problems and implement solutions, especially to problems of growth, inequality and poverty, on the other hand. All this needs to be done at the same time that these states must be responsive to their own citizens and to a variety of global pressures. How and why have some parts of the developing world -- for example, in some East Asian countries -- ended up with relatively more effective states than other parts of the developing world -- for example, large parts of Sub-Saharan Africa? By the same token, how does one understand somewhat middling state effectiveness in large parts of Latin America, where countries have been sovereign for a very long time?
The process of state formation in the developing world has proceeded in a series of 'big bangs,' with formative moments few and far between, though incremental changes have certainly altered power configurations within states and, at times, even accumulated to yield basic changes. That the latter process is rare is understandable, given that state formation generally requires a preponderance of force in the hands of some to impose their preferred design on others for long enough of a period that basic institutions take root. That is why wars are deemed to be so important an agent of state development in the context of European countries. By contrast, the historical forces that have molded basic state forms in the developing world have been colonialism, nationalist movements, including radical revolutions, and other type of forceful regime changes, especially militaries moving in and out of power. Incremental changes have in turn been pushed by political parties, social classes, and, on occasion, by external actors.

Of these - and other - forces that have molded patterns of states in the developing world, one may posit for argument that the impact of colonialism has been most lasting. This is because colonialism everywhere was a system of direct political control. Armed with a preponderance of power, metropolitan countries created states or state-like structures in the colonies so as to control territories, people, resources, and economic opportunities. These colonially constructed political institutions, in turn, proved to be highly resilient, especially in Asia and Africa, where colonialism is of more recent vintage than in Latin America. However, as colonialism varied, so did the state forms that metropolitan countries created, leaving long-term variations in state types.

At Princeton, several of us are working on related issues and are thus eager to create a forum where we can pursue these ideas comparatively. Among the PIs for this proposal, Centeno's work has analyzed the historical processes that define state formation in Latin America and is currently working on a collaborative project comparing state formation and 19th century liberalism in Latin America and the Iberian Peninsula. Kohli's work has analyzed the role of the state in addressing social policy and industrialization in the developing world and is currently analyzing imperialism and its consequences for state formation. Yashar has analyzed how state formation has impacted regime outcomes and citizenship and is currently analyzing variations in violence and the rule of law. Collectively, therefore, we have all focused on different aspects of state formation and could provide a hub for further exchange with scholars working on related issues but hampered thus far by the lack of a sustained working group on related issues.
There are others at Princeton too, including faculty and graduate students, that we would approach to take part; among faculty colleagues these might include colleagues in History, Sociology, Politics, and the Woodrow Wilson School. We are also supervising doctoral students who are interested in related topics who will benefit greatly from such scholarly interactions. Princeton can thus provide a hub and as such can generate the next generation of research on the origins and variation in state capacity.

Such issues are best explored by pulling together a group of scholars studying countries with varying degrees of state capacity. A compelling set of analytical cases might include India, China, Indonesia, and the Philippines in Asia; Brazil, Chile, Peru, Guatemala, and Mexico in Latin America; South Africa, Nigeria, and the Congo in Africa, and Egypt, and Iran in the Middle East. These countries span the developing world and also include varying levels of state capacity -- which will provide the comparative and analytic leverage to discuss and evaluate where states are more or less effective and why this divergent pattern results.

The proposed scholarly community would center on a core faculty, some (6-8) in North America, with Princeton as a 'hub' and others from different regions of the developing world, connected via three 'scholarly hubs,' one in India, one in Brazil, and one is South Africa. This core faculty from around the world – and the graduate students they bring with them – will come together regularly to share ideas, establish research partnerships, and produce a scholarly and policy agenda for the next decade. Beyond the core faculty, we will involve additional faculty and graduate students with more specialized interests via periodic conferences where the core ideas will be examined, extended and modified.

**The International Network**

It is our intent to create a global network of prominent scholars who will collectively analyze the following: what constitutes state capacity; how and why have different countries in the developing world acquired states with varying capacities; and what lessons can be derived from such studies for 'social engineering' of states. A group of core faculty from around the world will help propel the intellectual dynamism of the proposed network. Our aim is to bring together the very best minds already working on the problem of states and state capacity in the developing world.

With an aim towards bringing together a diverse, accomplished and dynamic group of scholars working on related issues, we will invite the following scholars to join the three of us to be part of the North-American
hub: Lisa Anderson (specialist on state formation in the Middle East; moved recently from Columbia University to the American University in Cairo); Peter Evans (has written extensively on Brazil but also on states as economic actors in the developing world; UC Berkeley); Patrick Heller (specialist on state-society relations, especially in India, but also in Brazil and South Africa; Brown University); Mahmood Mamdani (specialist on state formation in sub-Saharan Africa; Columbia University); and Bruce Cummings (specialist on East Asia, University of Chicago, USA).

In addition, we will link up with three hubs, one in each of the major regions of the developing world. In Asia, we will form partnerships with two leading scholars at two institutions, both in New Delhi, India: Pratap Mehta, the president of Centre for Policy Research; and Niraja Gopal Jayal, director, Program in Law and Governance, Jawahar Lal Nehru University. Pratap Mehta is a former Princeton Ph.D. and a world class political analyst of India, with strong connections in other Asian countries. Niraja Gopal Jayal is a distinguished scholar of state and citizenship in India; she has been awarded a fellowship by the University Center of Human Values and the project on Democracy and Development (housed at PIIRS) to spend next academic year in Princeton. Our intellectual center in Latin America will be located both in Rio and in Sao Paulo, Brazil. In Rio we will partner with Ana Celia Castro, Professor in the Graduate Program in Public Policy at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro; she already leads a group for the study of the state within Brazil. We will also partner with Professor Maria Herminia Tavares de Almeida at the University of Sao Paolo; she is a distinguished political analyst who has worked on the issue of state reform in Brazil and in other parts of Latin America. And finally, for sub-Saharan Africa, we will link up with Dr. Omano Edigheji at the Human Sciences Research Council in Johannesberg and Jeremy Seekings of the University of Cape Town. Dr. Edigheji is a Norwegian trained political analyst who in recent years has promoted the study of the 'developmental state' throughout Africa. Professor Seekings is the institutional leader of several efforts to analyze the contemporary political economy of South Africa and we have already established a working relationship with him, thanks to his collaboration with PIIRS projects. We will ask each of these set of regional coordinators to connect us to the best scholars analyzing the problem of state development in their respective regions of the world.

The core group will be asked to discuss and move forward pressing questions in the study of state building in the developing world. The question of ‘state failure’ has of course become something of a fad in recent years in some policy and policy-related scholarly circles. Our approach to the subject will be different. We will begin with a view that some states in the developing world are a lot more efficacious than others and will then move to understand the root causes of these variations
before asking questions of social engineering, namely, how less effective states, including failed states, can be made more effective.

**Action Plan**

In terms of analytical priorities, our first task will be to hammer out what exactly constitutes state capacity in the context of the developing world. Existing conceptualizations vary anywhere from a minimal understanding of state capacity that might be adequate for a 'night watchman state' -- territorial control and maintaining law and order -- to a more demanding understanding of a 'developmental state' that might focus on the state's capacity to extract resources from society and then to spend them wisely so as to facilitate development. In addition to conceptualizing state capacity, we will need to develop an understanding of the extent to which these capacities are mainly a function of bureaucratic quality or instead the extent to which they reflect the broader political and social setting in which regime legitimacy and habits of compliance of the citizenry also become key variables.

Following this, the key intellectual task of the core group will be to pursue the question of how does one best explain varying state capacities, both across the developing world, and at times, over time within a country or a region. While the proposed network will discuss this central concern with the aim of developing some key hypotheses, some of our initial thoughts on the subject were already outlined above. To reiterate, a key idea that we wish to pursue is that long term colonial legacies have been deeply architectonic of developing country states. For example, Japanese colonialism left behind effective developmental states in countries like South Korea and Taiwan. By contrast, Britain often ran its colonies 'on the cheap,' via indirect rule, leading to a variety of less than robust states, especially in Africa. While colonialism is a distant memory in Latin America, there too it may be suggested -- as an example -- that the Portuguese decentralized pattern of land colonization in Brazil left behind formidable obstacles to the creation of a centralized state, which were only overcome eventually by military rulers. These bald assertions will of course need to be qualified. In addition to colonial legacies, a variety of other forces have also altered long term trajectories of state building. To center our initial discussion, however, we will focus on colonial legacies to see how far this hypothesis can be pushed in a variety of settings.

During the first year of the grant we will invite the core group -- the eight scholars in the North American hub plus the six hub coordinators from India, Brazil and South Africa -- to meet for a workshop once in Princeton, early in the Fall semester of 2009. It is our hope that this meeting will lead to a clarification of the two core analytical concerns just
outlined so that we can collectively make intellectual progress – not only at the workshop but subsequently through electronic communication. Some of the scholars may also spend a longer time (say, one to two weeks) at each others institutions, interacting more intensely around select issues. This will be followed by three regional workshops, one in India (Spring 2010), one in Brazil (Fall 2010) and one in South Africa (Spring 2011). In each of these workshops and subsequent events, we will host local experts and graduate students recommended by the respective “hub directors”. We also will identify 2-3 Princeton graduate students to attend as many of these as is fiscally possible.

During these workshops we will combine regional foci with comparative reach. It is our hope that the very first workshop in Princeton will generate some organizing hypotheses that can then be examined in specific regional contexts. We will ask our regional coordinators to identify key scholars in their respective regions who may write original essays that tackle a broad set of comparison: comparative variation within regions, and comparative trajectories of state formation within a set of core countries. For some of these comparative essays, scholars will compare overall state capacities; in others we will ask scholars to explain specific state capacities (i.e., rule of law; taxation, etc.); and for yet others we will ask them to explore specific hypotheses (i.e., the comparative impact of colonialism on state formation). These essays will not only advance our empirical base but also provide the basis for examining the validity of the core arguments and to facilitate a dynamic set of conversations about state formation and capacity.

In the third year of the project the focus will shift to broad cross-regional comparisons on processes of state formation and to some attempted generalizations. We propose two conferences in Princeton. At the first conference (Fall, 2011), the PIs would write a comparative essay to frame the discussions as well as ask participants (the best papers from the regional conferences) to submit a revised paper for discussion and deliberation. This will be a major public conference that will involve the broader scholarly community, including graduate students. This will be followed by a smaller conference (Spring 2012) where the core faculty will reconvene to assess the progress that has been made and the issues that remain unresolved, requiring further research. Hence, during the third year the core ideas will be refined, leading to what we hope will be a variety of modes of disseminating the findings to the broader scholarly community.
In closing, we are enthusiastic about the possibility of constructing international networks to pursue foundational questions about state formation and capacity. We see these meetings as the basis for building long-term scholarly exchange around this set of critical questions. In this regard, we believe that Princeton can play an agenda-setting role.