

# CHANGES IN THE STATE

*Causes and Consequences*

Edward S. Greenberg  
Thomas F. Mayer  
editors

A SAGE  
FOCUS  
EDITION

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# Contents

Acknowledgment	7
<b>PART I. Introduction</b>	
1. State Change: Approaches and Concepts <i>EDWARD S. GREENBERG</i>	11
<b>PART II. Changes in the Relationships Between State and Society</b>	
2. The Two-Tiered Theory of the State: Resolving the Question of Determination for the Case of the Local State <i>M. GOTTDIENER</i>	41
3. Effective Demand and Structural Dependence of the State <i>THOMAS F. MAYER and TRACY L. MOTT</i>	53
4. Structure and Consciousness in the Rise of the Nazi State <i>THOMAS F. MAYER and ROBERT A. POIS</i>	72
<b>PART III. Changes in the Institutions of the State</b>	
5. Federal Statebuilding During the New Deal: The Transition from Mothers' Aid to Aid to Dependent Children <i>RUSSELL L. HANSON</i>	93
6. The Police and the Coercive Nature of the State <i>OTWIN MARENIN</i>	115
7. State-Making and State-Breaking: The Origins and Paradoxes of the Contemporary Taiwanese State <i>STEVE CHAN</i>	131
8. Change and Continuity in the British Colonial State in Africa: Integrating Theoretical Perspectives <i>JAMES R. SCARRITT and SHAHEEN MOZAFFAR</i>	149

#### **PART IV. Changes in State Policy**

9. The Transformation of Interests and the State <i>DAVID LEVINE</i>	169
10. Farmers and the State in the Progressive Era <i>ELIZABETH SANDERS</i>	183
11. The Relative Decline of Relative Autonomy: Global Capitalism and the Political Economy of State Change <i>ROBERT J. S. ROSS</i>	206
References	224
Author Index	243
Subject Index	248
About the Authors	257

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## ***PART I***

### ***Introduction***



# *State Change*

## *Approaches and Concepts*

EDWARD S. GREENBERG

There is much talk these days of "theories of the state," "bringing the state back in," and "state-centered" theory. The subject of the state has come to be, in fact, one of the principal foci of scholarly discourse in political science, sociology, economics, and geography. In part, this is a product of the intellectual challenge posed by neo-Marxism in each of these disciplines;<sup>1</sup> partly, this is a product of the seemingly inexorable expansion in the scale and responsibilities of modern states in the First, Second, and Third Worlds and the attempt by scholars to explain this phenomenon. Whatever the cause, debates about the nature of the state and the implications of its activities are now commonplace across several disciplines.

Despite this greater attention, less progress has been made in our overall understanding of the phenomenon of the state than might have been anticipated. I believe that the lack of greater progress can be traced to three primary factors. First, there is as yet, strangely enough, no general agreement about the meaning of the term "state," the very object of inquiry. This is mainly traceable, in my view, to the unwillingness of proponents of the two main approaches to the subject of the state, Marxian and Weberian, to incorporate the essential aspects of the competing view for fear that with the definition must come all of the other epistemological and political baggage. Marxists

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AUTHOR'S NOTE: I would like to thank especially Tom Mayer, Otto Marenin, Bob Ross, and my compatriots in the Political and Economic Change weekly "brown bag" for their incisive critiques of an earlier version of this chapter.

tend to stick to functional and relational concepts, while Weberians focus on the state as an organization and its monopoly of the means of coercion. Second, there is no consensus as yet on the proper conceptual/theoretical approach to be used in the study of the state. Given the general absence of consensus in most areas of concern in the social sciences, this is hardly surprising. Third and finally, scholars from all theoretical schools tend to examine the problematic aspects of the state in more static terms than is warranted. How and why states change, while not entirely ignored in the literature, is simply not often enough at the focus of theoretical and empirical reflection. Since social institutions have change as one of their essential characteristics, approaching them in anything but dynamic terms is of limited value. The purpose of this essay and of the chapters that follow in this book is to address these shortcomings in the theoretical and empirical literature, with particular attention to the understanding of change.

In order to make the exercise more manageable, I confine my attention in this essay to states in capitalist societies. I do so because it is only in capitalist societies where the state is "problematic" in a theoretical sense, given the separation of the political and economic in its prevailing doctrine. In "etat-ism," to use Branko Horvat's term (Horvat, 1982), the state is everywhere in both empirical and theoretical terms. In capitalist societies, and especially in formally democratic capitalist societies, it is not entirely self-evident *why* a state exists (since the market is, according to doctrine, a self-correcting institution) or on what grounds state institutions might be legitimated. I confine my attention to states in capitalist societies, moreover, because much of the interesting theoretical and empirical work on the state over the past decade and a half has taken the capitalist state as its subject.<sup>2</sup>

### *The State*

There has been a tendency in the literature, and the Marxian literature in particular, to overly complicate the definition of the state. Frequently in this literature the state is described in terms of its functions, its effects, or its representations. What is all too often absent is a conceptualization of the state as a concrete object or set of concrete objects that can be observed and described.<sup>3</sup> I believe that the best starting point (but not the finishing point) is the Weberian one that conceptualizes the state as an institution or set of institutions that exercises supreme political authority within a geographically defined territory. This supreme political authority implies a monopoly of "legitimate" coercion, administration over a given territory, and the capacity

to capture revenues for the support of state activities.<sup>4</sup> From a slightly different vantage point, the state may be understood as constituted by the civil and military bureaucracy (or state apparatus); the government, or those having formal control over the state apparatus (usually organized in branches of one sort or another); and the formal and informal rules of the game that structure the form and operation of both apparatus and government. In viewing the state in such concrete terms, it is still possible to raise questions about the relationship of the state to society, and its constituent classes and groups; it is still possible to ask whether or not the state serves certain essential functions in capitalist societies, and it is still possible to ask about the relative autonomy of the state. Indeed, most of the traditional questions regarding the state in the social sciences, its functions, representations, and effects, remain legitimate subjects of inquiry under the terms of the above definition. The clear advantage, however, is that the Weberian definition gives us a concrete object or set of objects toward which we can direct our inquiries.<sup>5</sup>

### Aspects of the State

This general definition remains far too abstract for purposes of research. What remains to be specified are those aspects of the state that are open to change. What is it about the state that changes? Where should one direct one's attention? I would suggest that four aspects of the state ought to be highlighted: its property rules, its regime form, the nature of its apparatus, and its policies. I think about these aspects of the state in terms of the following set of questions:

(1) *What property rules are defined by, articulated in, and protected by the state?* The answer to this question helps us to classify states as capitalist, classical, feudal, or socialist. I use here the classic Marxian approach to the understanding of property rules. That is, if the prevailing forms of property to be protected are those of private property in which individuals and enterprises are free to decide the use of property and enjoy a monopoly on the fruits of its productive use, we are in the presence of a capitalist state. If the main property forms protected by the state involve public control of the uses of property and the collective enjoyment of their fruits, then we may consider the state socialist.<sup>6</sup>

The assumption here is that societies can be described in terms of their basic economic organization; that states in any society tend to articulate, represent, and protect the essentials of the economic organization of society; and that this articulation, representation, and protection takes the form of a

set of rules, guidelines, and strictures, whether formal or informal. In Marxian terms, the mode of production that prevails in any society takes concrete form in the state. It follows that the nature of the state cannot be comprehended without taking into account that underlying structure. This suggests that all capitalist states are fundamentally alike, no matter what differences may exist between them in terms of their mode of governance, the organization of their bureaucracies, or the policies they promulgate. The same would be true of all feudal states, or of all socialist states.

Political debate and struggle in most places and at most times simply takes these rules for granted; they are not the stuff of everyday politics. Fundamental economic structures and the rules by which they are guaranteed are not subjected to continuous and contentious challenge in "normal" times. When the economic organization of a society and the rules that protect and nurture that economic organization are up for grabs, such a society is in a revolutionary situation. When the economic organization of a society and the state rules consistent with that economic organization are fundamentally transformed, a revolution has occurred. Normal politics is about choices made within a prevailing mode of production and not about the mode of production itself. A politics of choice between modes of production is the politics of revolution.

(2) *What is the nature of the political regime?* By regime I mean the formal ways in which political power is organized and exercised in any society. In the research literature, there is no consensus on how states ought to be classified in terms of the formal organization of power. Traditional ways of looking at this issue include the distinction between democracy and authoritarianism. Within democracy and authoritarianism, other kinds of distinctions have been made. As to the former, it is possible to talk about direct, face-to-face democracy; representative democracy; majoritarian democracy; plebiscitary democracy; and the like. As to the latter, totalitarianism is often (if not quite accurately) distinguished from simple autocracy in its monarchical or military clique forms. Scholars also classify regimes according to degrees of centralization of power in which unitary regimes are distinguished from federated ones. In the Weberian tradition, regimes are distinguished in terms of the prevailing forms of authority: traditional (authority based upon custom), legal-rational (authority based upon written rules and procedures), and charismatic (authority based upon the unique and nonreproducible qualities of a single leader).

When considering state change in terms of regimes, we concentrate on transformations in the forms by which formal political authority is exercised. Such transformations almost always accompany transformations in property

rules, though they can and do take place without disturbing the state as an articulated set of property relations. Indeed, state regime changes are far more common than changes in property relations, even when some form of violence is involved. For example, the American Revolution brought regime change without bringing property rules change. Another way of saying the same thing is that America experienced a political revolution but not an economic/social structural one. Many other examples exist: the Glorious Revolution, which brought parliamentary supremacy in England but left property rules intact; the American imposed constitutional order in postwar Japan; the overthrow of Marcos in the Philippines which brought democratic political forms but left property relations untouched; and the like. Many have even argued that National Socialism in Germany brought fundamental change in regime form but left property rules pretty much as they were, though this remains an issue that has not yet been resolved (Mayer & Pois, this volume; Neumann, 1942).

(3) *What is the nature of the bureaucratic apparatus and its role in society?*

It is by now a commonplace that all modern societies, and most not so modern ones as well, are highly bureaucratized. In modern capitalist societies, bureaucratization characterizes much of the private sector as well as the public sector. By bureaucracy, following Weber, I mean a hierarchically ordered set of offices in which full-time officials, appointed on the basis of specialized training and qualifications, work on specialized narrow tasks guided by impersonal, written rules of procedure.<sup>7</sup> There is a vast literature, of course, on the causes of bureaucratization; there is an equally vast literature lamenting the existence of bureaucracy as the prevailing structural form of administrative activity. Neither of them has much to say about state change.

In considering state change at this level, it is best to focus on the elements of the Weberian definition set out above. Our attention ought to be upon changes in the designation and organization of offices; on changes in the grounds for recruitment of officials; on changes in the nature of the tasks they perform; and on changes in the rules that guide the actions of officials and their agencies. Consideration of change ought to focus, as well, on the relationship of the apparatus to the other elements of the state: its property rules, its regime form, its government, and its policies. In the vast literature on the executive branch in the American system in political science, for instance, great attention is paid to the forms and degrees of control of elected officials over administrative agencies, with the potential for bureaucratic autonomy at the fulcrum. The manner in which policies formulated by elected



officials are altered by agencies as they administer the law has been another subject of great interest. This notion of administrative officials as policy-makers and quasi-independent actors is now quite common in the literature. State-centric scholars (whose work will be reviewed below) have been particularly interested in the capacities of states as exemplified by the size and quality of the bureaucratic apparatus.

While state change in terms of property rules and regime form is rare (with the former being extremely rare), the change in a range of aspects concerning the apparatus is quite common, which is why such a vast literature exists about it.<sup>8</sup> What is generally missing, however, are systematic efforts to tie the hierarchy of offices, the nature of specializations, and the rules of operations of the state apparatus to underlying social forces and structures, though there are some important exceptions to this observation (Alford & Friedland, 1985; Clark & Dear, 1984; Therborn, 1978). These relationships, so important for understanding changes in the state apparatus, remain elusive and more work clearly is called for.

(4) *What are the general outlines of public policy?* What does the state do and why does it do what it does? This aspect of state change is the most visible, so it is hardly surprising that the literature on the state tends to be concentrated in this area. This is the stuff of everyday political life that fills the newspapers, journals of opinion, and news broadcasts. It is about the actions of presidents, prime ministers, legislators, judges, and agency officials. It is about changes in broad policy domains (e.g., defense, civil liberties, education, social welfare, labor relations, and the like) and about specific policy actions and decisions. As we shall see below, most of the theoretical and empirical material of the past several decades has been engaged in explaining how and why state policy changes. The debates between pluralists and elitists, for instance, or between structuralist and instrumentalist Marxists, are precisely over how to explain the actions and policies of governmental leaders. I will have much more to say about these matters below.

### ***Concepts of Change in Theories of the State***

Having described the elements of the capitalist state that require attention when examining state change—property rules, regime type, bureaucratic apparatus, and policy—I now consider the three main approaches to the study of the state in the social sciences and how each of these approaches understands change. In the remainder of this essay, I will sketch how each of these