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Chapter 1

The State and Liberal Democratic Politics

For the first time in human history a majority of people worldwide now lives in more or less liberal democratic states. This achievement rests in turn on the idea of the state itself – a form of government that is now near-universal. Originating in Europe in the seventeenth century, the modern state form was invented in response to some otherwise intractable and murderous political problems stemming from religious conflicts. From there, aided by the expansion of European imperialism and migration, the idea of the state spread worldwide, providing a framework for organizing government that progressively eroded or displaced most rivals – chiefly informal or tribal systems, feudal regimes, empires and more short-lived competitors such as communes, city-states and leagues of cities (Spruyt 1994). Yet the age of state dominance may have peaked. Some observers identify a new globalized international order that shifts key decisions beyond the reach of individual states. Others see these developments as minor adjustments to a world-system essentially still run by states.

We shall have much to say on these issues in the chapters that follow, but first we need to define the concept of the state itself. The second section of this chapter will show conceptually how states can develop both top-down from the activities of competing leaders and bottom-up from nations and other social formations. In the third section we move from theory to history to see how the contemporary world system of states came into being. Fourth we sketch how the evolution of the modern state is closely bound up with liberal democracy, which can be defined as elected government constrained by constitutional order.

Defining the State

States are among the most important political form and actors in today's world. As Edelman (1964: 1) puts it, 'The state benefits and it threatens. Now it is "us" and often it is "them". It is an abstraction, but in its name men [and women] are jailed, or made rich on oil depletion allowances and defense contracts, or killed in wars.'

2 *Theories of the Democratic State*

The idea of ‘the state’ rests on the notion that there should be a single, unified source of political authority for a territory, drawing upon the undivided loyalties of its population, operating in a well-organized and permanent way, and directed towards the interests of the whole society. There is now substantial agreement among different analysts on seven *defining characteristics* of the state, and on five *associated characteristics*, shown in summary form in Table 1.1 (p. 4).

If a governmental system lacks one of the seven defining characteristics in the left-hand column, then it is not really a state. These features in more detail are:

- 1 *The state is a set of organized governing institutions which are formally connected to each other and have some cohesiveness.* ‘Institutions’ here are morally compelling and enduring social arrangements, varying from simple conventions (such as ‘being honest’ or ‘promising’) through to formal organizations (such as government bureaucracies) and complex bodies of rules (such as legal systems). To make a state, such institutions must work together to the degree that it makes sense to describe what they do in ‘unitary’ terms, as though the ensemble behaves as a single actor. Of course, states only look like this at some level of abstraction, for example, when we say that ‘Sweden has developed a strong system of social welfare’. Looking more closely we will always see different actors and elements within any state, each pursuing different objectives, sometimes in conflict with one another. Some theories of the state stress its unitary aspects and the forces that compel its parts to act in unison, while others stress internal conflicts and diversity across these component organizations and institutions.
- 2 *A state must operate in a particular territory, where a substantial population lives as a distinct society.* There cannot be a state without a territory. The population in the territory must be organized so as to form a reasonably distinct society – for example, they must interact more with each other than with ‘outsiders’, and show some common bonds (involving language, culture, or economy). However, some states govern divided societies in which one group or more rejects these bonds, and whose members may have identifications and interactions that extend into other territories.
- 3 *The role of state institutions is to reach collectively binding decisions, and to ensure that decisions are obeyed by those living in the territory claimed by the state.* Governing is what any state must do (or try to do). In order to make effective decisions, the governing apparatus must have a considerable toolkit at its disposal in terms

The State and Liberal Democratic Politics 3

of ‘detectors’, ways of generating information about what is happening within its territory, and ‘effectors’, ways of getting things done (Hood and Margetts 2007).

- 4 *The state ‘(successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory’.* This is the classic definition of the state given by the sociologist Max Weber in his 1919 lecture on ‘Politics as a Vocation’. The monopoly can be enforced through police and/or military forces against those who challenge it, be they individual criminals, organized crime syndicates, vigilantes, private armies, invaders, mobs, or insurgents.
- 5 *The state must claim ‘sovereignty’ (that is, unconstrained power over all other social institutions).* Sovereignty means that the state is the highest source of authority in the territory, the final locus of decisions, with few limits on its scope of internal control. That the state *claims* sovereignty does not however mean that all states will necessarily secure it absolutely – as civil wars and the coercion of relatively weak by relatively strong states attest.
- 6 *The existence of state institutions helps define a ‘public’ realm, a part of social life different from the ‘private’ sphere of concern only to the individuals or organizations involved.* The public realm includes not only strictly governmental activities but all political activities aimed at influencing state institutions and changing or stabilizing how the society operates.
- 7 *The state must be able to define ‘citizens’, those who are members of its society; and it must be able to control entry to and exit from its territory by citizens and others.* It was the French Republic’s state that invented modern systems for comprehensively documenting a whole population in 1802, thus creating the basis for controlling all movements into and from its territory. Only recently has a ‘closed boundary’ partition of the whole of the global land-mass between states precluded the once relatively free movements of people around the world.

These seven features define what we mean by a state, although particular states may have difficulty in securing all of them absolutely. For example, a powerful neighbouring state may undermine feature five, and large-scale illegal migration may compromise feature seven.

The characteristics shown in the right-hand column of Table 1.1 are also generally sought and achieved by states, although in principle a state could still exist (with great difficulty) if it did not secure any of them.

4 *Theories of the Democratic State*

Table 1.1 *The defining features and associated characteristics of the state*

<i>Defining features</i>	<i>Associated characteristics</i>
<i>The state is:</i>	<i>The state</i>
– a unified set of institutions	– claims to advance common interests
– controlling a given territory and distinct society	– is accepted as legitimate by significant groups
– making and enforcing collectively binding decisions	– has a developed bureaucracy and tax system
– monopolizing the legitimate use of force	– operates with a constitution and legal system
– seeking sovereignty	– is recognized as a state by other states
– operating in a distinct public realm	
– deciding citizenship and controlling entry	

8 *Any contemporary state must claim to be advancing the common interests of its society.* States are not ‘natural’ – they are always artificial, political creations, constructed around and sustained by ideological or ethical justifications for their existence. Common justifications include the shared history or experiences of a people living within a territory, or a single ethnicity, or a set of durable moral and constitutional principles.

9 *The state should be accepted as legitimate by significant groups or elements in its society.* To survive for long any state must create substantial support bases somewhere. This ‘somewhere’ might be a particular social class, ethnic group, business leadership, the military, or religious establishment. Not every state will be supported by the majority of the people in its territory. Indeed, many states have endured for long periods where a minority group governs a cowed or coerced majority. Only in democratic states are there institutions for changing state leaders in response to mass opinion.

In the eighteenth century, the Scottish philosopher David Hume was the first to stress the significance of the above points:

‘[N]othing appears more surprising . . . than the easiness with which the many are governed by the few; and the implicit submission, with which men [and women] resign their own sentiments and passions to those of their rulers. When we enquire by what means this wonder is effected, we shall find that as FORCE is always on the side of the governed, the governors have nothing to support them but opinion. It is therefore on opinion only that government is founded, and this maxim extends to the most despotic and most military governments, as well as to the most free and popular’ (Hume 1974: 32).

- 10 *Modern states are run in large part by bureaucracies – formal, hierarchical organizations financed by budgets. The operations of government are funded from general taxation, which any successful state must be able to collect effectively.* Unlike private business, states do not finance their activities by sales and profits. They must be able to requisition a flow of resources and to sustain that flow in predictable ways. Rudolf Goldscheid (1917) famously described the budget as ‘the skeleton of the state, stripped of all misleading ideologies’.
- 11 *Modern states regulate social activities using a system of laws, and a constitution to control the activities of government institutions themselves.* Normally a constitution is codified into a single written document that can be changed only with difficulty. But even where this is not the case (as in the UK), a constitution can nevertheless be clearly identified and widely recognized as a set of rules to be respected – until and unless the current state should be overturned in favour of new arrangements.
- 12 *A regime should be recognized as ‘a state’ by other states.* Recognition of a sovereignty claim by other countries confers rights under international law that help to stabilize a state – chiefly a presumption of non-interference by other states.

With a list of characteristics as long and as demanding as this one, we might expect that relatively few government units could meet *all* of them at once. In fact, in today’s world around 190 states successfully pass most of these criteria simultaneously – confirming the importance and success of the state form as a mode of organizing governance. Almost all of the world’s land area is governed or claimed by a state. Bits of territory that are not clearly controlled by any state are often centres of crisis and instability, as well as misery for their inhabitants – think for example of the Gaza Strip, or Somalia.

6 *Theories of the Democratic State*

The widespread coverage of the state form notwithstanding, states may find it difficult to achieve any or all of these twelve characteristics. State-building has often been a long, arduous and incomplete process. Consider for example the case of Southern Italy, which has formed part of the Italian state in something like its current shape since the late nineteenth century. The mafia is a long-established set of institutions (at least as old as the Italian state) that organizes or controls a great deal of political, social and economic life in southern Italy through mostly criminal enterprises (Gambetta 1993). The mafia undermines the Italian state's claims to sovereignty, limits the applicability of the legal system, saps the state's capacity to collect taxes, undermines the state's bureaucracies through systematic corruption of public officials, and challenges the state's monopoly on the organized use of force. Many other contemporary states face challenges to their continued maintenance, especially efforts by disaffected minorities to secede to form a territory and state of their own. But the existence of contested, failing and failed states should not disguise the pervasiveness of the state form.

Despite this pervasiveness, it is important to note that the concept of the state itself remains controversial and disputed. Modern political science is a discipline shaped largely in the United States. In the late nineteenth century its US founders were heavily influenced by European philosophy and legal thinking and regarded the study of 'the state' as the focus that would define their discipline. Many of them were reformers influenced by the kind of efficient centralized state they believed existed in Germany. Woodrow Wilson (1887), political scientist and later President of the United States, famously proclaimed that this kind of state could be introduced to the United States, where it would 'breathe free American air'.

Outside the political science profession, the attractions of a centralized state have always been very limited in the highly decentralized US political system. And with the onset of World War I, the German associations of the centralized state were easily stigmatized as an enemy form. So US political scientists from the 1920s onwards focused not on the state as a whole but on government institutions treated separately: federalism; the Presidency; Congress; and the Supreme Court. In the 1930s and 1940s, centrally planned and dictatorial Nazi, fascist and Communist states in Europe and the Soviet Union, sought to organize all social, economic and political life. The Italian dictator Benito Mussolini argued in a 1932 article *The Doctrine of Fascism*: 'For the Fascist, everything is in the state, and nothing human or spiritual exists, much less has value, outside the state'. American pluralism (discussed in Chapter 2) condemned such extremes, to the degree of refusing to recognize any overarching concept of the state.

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The behavioral revolution in US political science in the 1950s shifted the focus of the discipline from institutions to individuals, be they voters, activists, politicians, or bureaucrats. Inasmuch as the ensemble of institutions and practices remained in view, it was characterized as ‘the political system’ (Easton 1953), not ‘the state.’ The political system concept could be applied to any sort of politics: within an extended family or small community, within a private organization, or in international interaction. The national government of the United States was treated as just one kind of political system, whose ‘outputs’ could be explained largely in terms of the relative weight of the ‘inputs’ it received from American society. In other Anglo-Saxon countries, notably the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, political scientists followed the American lead in focusing on the political system and eschewing talk of the state.

The concept of the state returned very noisily to US political science in the 1980s (Evans, Rueschemeyer and Skocpol 1985). Its supporters argued that ‘outputs’ could not be explained just in terms of ‘inputs’ from society: that public officials had their own interests that influenced outputs; and that these interests of officials were not necessarily beholden to any group in society (be it a labour union, business federation, or interest group). Some members of this new generation of scholars embarked on studies that could speak of ‘the state’ in unitary terms – as sometimes acting as though it were a coherent, integrated actor – although they remained attuned to differences and conflicts among different state actors (such as departments of government, or elected legislators). But whether treated in relatively integrated or relatively fragmented fashion, the concept of the state was brought firmly back into the mainstream of US political science. From there it filtered back into the thinking of political analysts in other countries. The revival of Marxist theory in Western Europe in the late 1960s and 1970s had earlier reinforced a focus on the state. The fading of behavioralism and systems theory in the US and elsewhere in the late twentieth century meant the state had one fewer intellectual challenger.

Ironically, the general re-acceptance of ‘the state’ concept in political science coincided with the first recognitions that perhaps in an increasingly globalized world the state’s role in structuring systems of governance was diminishing. In addition, the state’s conceptual linkage to the nation became problematic in an era when nations multiplied and were often contested in their definition and identity, which did not always coincide with the territory of a state.

8 Theories of the Democratic State

Theories of State Formation

States today are often treated as sovereign entities. *Sovereignty* means that the government of any particular territory should be organized exclusively by a state, and that no other external power has the authority to intervene in the affairs of this state acting on its own territory in relation to its own population. Sovereignty in this sense has never been absolute, because (powerful) states have found all kinds of reasons to intervene in the affairs of other (weaker) states. And the particular attributes and obligations that accompany sovereignty can change with time (Reus-Smit 1999). Nevertheless, sovereignty has served as a strong presumption, whose violation needs some justification.

Yet this is a very recent situation, and it is worth examining how it developed. While today the sovereign state may seem commonplace, most human societies throughout history have not been governed by states, still less anything like the modern state (Finer 1997). The sovereignty-claiming state as we know it is a European invention, first established as a general principle by the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. The Treaty crystallized a peace settlement designed to end chronic wars of religion between Catholics and various strains of Protestantism. The Treaty confirmed that the principle established in the 1555 Treaty of Augsburg that the religion of the Prince (ruler) was to be the religion of the state and its whole population, and that no other state could intervene to change this choice, though Westphalia also specified no state could change the religion it had in 1624. The Treaty did not mean that organized violence inspired by religious difference came to an end in Europe, but merely that a set of presumptions was established to curb this violence. International relations scholars date the emergence of the modern states system to the Treaty of Westphalia. To appreciate the distinctiveness of this seventeenth century solution, we first consider two theoretical perspectives on state formation and then look at how states have developed in light of these perspectives. One perspective is framed top-down in terms of the behaviour of rulers and competition between states, while the other focuses on the bottom-up emergence of states from nations.

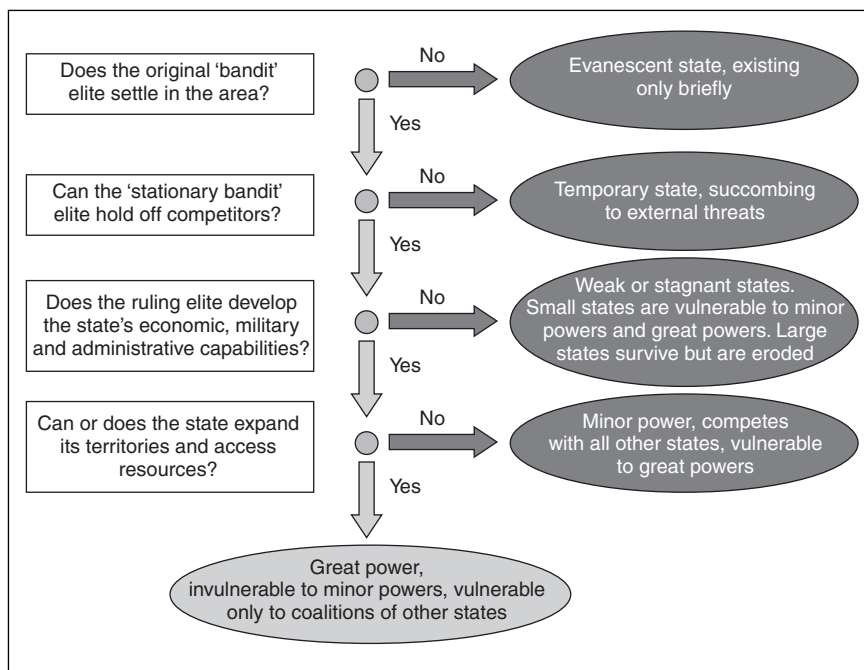
The top-down perspective on state formation

The top-down view emphasizes the behaviour and skill of ruling political elites (in the past often generals, monarchs or aristocrats) as the key determinant of a state's survival and growth in the context of competition with other states or proto-states. Random advantages for new states might include resources such as a healthy temperate climate or fertile land; or geography – for instance, being in protected niches like

the periphery of well-populated continents (Portugal or Korea), or better still offshore islands protected by sea (Japan or the UK), or just a long way from potential enemies (the United States and Australia). Random disadvantages might include a population divided on religious, ideological, or ethnic grounds, which may need unifying in support of the state, be it through conversion, coercion, expulsion, or genocide – or more peaceful settlement.

The sequence shown in Figure 1.1 starts from the observation that periodic incursions and invasions by nomads and outside tribes or societies were a constant feature of ancient civilizations. Mancur Olson (1993) argued that a key choice was made by each of these waves of ‘bandits’, whether to loot and move on, or alternatively to settle down. In this view once ‘stationary bandits’ could hold off other incursions they quickly acquired interests over and above short-term pillaging, instead beginning to build up their society’s economic capacity and long-run capacity to deliver revenues. Charles Tilly (1985) points out that war-making and state-making went hand-in-hand. They share some common features with organized crime when it comes to combining protection of a territory with exploitation of its population. A

Figure 1.1 *One top-down view of states’ survival and development*



10 *Theories of the Democratic State*

successful elite will develop the economy, military capabilities, and administrative competences so as to acquire comparative advantages over competitors in their immediate environment. States that fail in these respects will be vulnerable to conquest, unless they have a geographically protected niche (as did Japan after its rulers turned their backs on all outside contacts in the seventeenth century). Large and relatively stagnant empire states, such as China from the late fifteenth century onwards, could make similar choices (the Ming dynasty renounced all naval developments) and survive even in an obsolescent form through their sheer scale compared to their neighbours.

Even when a state could develop a comparative advantage in its immediate locale, unless it could expand to a critical mass in relation to its local threat environment it would remain a minor power, vulnerable to nearby great powers. From the fifteenth century to 1815 Europe was plagued by 'lengthy coalition wars', in which minor powers were repeatedly forced to choose sides in great power conflicts in order to survive (Kennedy 1989). By contrast, some states successfully built a comparative advantage and expanded their territory via monarchical marriages, land conquests, expansion into a lightly-populated hinterland, or by acquiring a seaborne empire. These countries could become 'great powers' able to see off any single enemy, and thus vulnerable only to a coalition of other hostile great powers mobilizing against them.

Only in the very recent era has the 'realpolitik' dynamic embodied in the top-down view been increasingly limited, by two strong influences about which we will have much to say in the next section. First, the post-1945 international order now places some strong (but not complete) limits on the unrestrained, no-holds barred military competition and economic rivalry between states. Second, public opinion inside the growing number of liberal democracies has arguably created powerful moral constraints on their ruling elites' actions and behaviour toward other states.

The bottom-up perspective on state formation

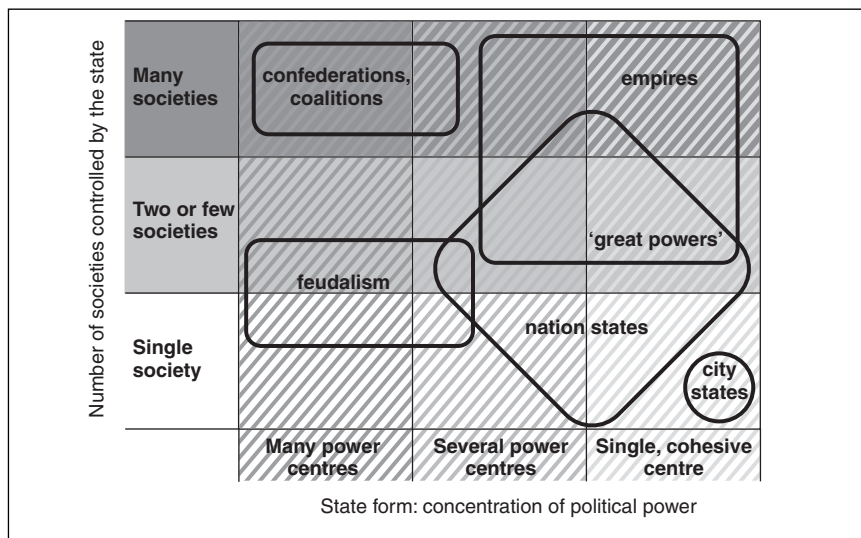
The bottom-up view sees the emergence of states as a process of securing a progressively better fit between political structures and an underlying pattern of human societies, each shaped by a common language, culture, religion, ethnicity or historical experience. In this view the behaviour, skills and resources of ruling elites might make some difference in the short term. Yet in the long run, the efficacy of a cohesive state rests on its mobilization of a single society, if necessary in a contest against external oppressors such as empires. This bottom-up view

is epitomized by those who see nations as the obvious and most secure basis for states, such that 'the state' is shorthand for 'nation state', and not saying the 'nation' part underlines its taken-for-granted character. In this light, nations are the building blocks of the entire world order, the sole rightful possessors of territories (and adjoining seas) and of all the resources that lie within their boundaries. This sort of view backed President Woodrow Wilson's enthusiasm for national self-determination as the key principle for reconstruction of Europe after World War I. At an extreme, this principle implies that the whole land surface of the world (or at least that which can be occupied by humanity) can be assigned to particular nations by giving each one a state.

This kind of view is supported by all the nationalists who in recent centuries have demanded a state to go with their nation, be it Turkey, Serbia, Ireland, Scotland, Germany, Italy, Colombia, or Vietnam. When competing definitions of the nation lay claim to the same territory, the outcome is decided by force of arms, with civil war and genocide often live possibilities.

Figure 1.2 shows the bottom-up view of how the main forms of territorial political organization relate to the societies that they govern. The most important contrast here is between states and empires. The modern form of nation state emerged in its earliest form in very late medieval England and France, seeking governance of a relatively homogenous society in a single power centre. By contrast, in both

Figure 1.2 *The bottom-up view of the broad inter-relationship between nation states, empires and other political forms*



12 *Theories of the Democratic State*

ancient and modern empires a main, metropolitan power centre ruled over many component societies – as in the Roman Empire, its Byzantine successor, the Moghul Empire in what is now India and Pakistan, the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East and Southeast Europe, and the Austro-Hungarian Habsburg Empire in Central Europe. Some empires, like those of Alexander the Great or Genghis Khan, spanned huge numbers of societies but collapsed quickly into smaller regimes once the military campaigns that built them lapsed. Other empires lasted much longer, including those that persisted into the twentieth century, and it is only when they failed that nation states sometimes emerged falteringly from their wreckage. This persistence of empire notwithstanding, the bottom-up view still holds that achieving a close fit between one society and a state apparatus configured to fit the same territory and population is what assigns superior political mobilization potential and legitimacy to the nation state.

In much of feudal Europe, and in India before British conquest, there were multiple overlapping political jurisdictions within the same territories and a strong political fragmentation between multiple proto-states (see Figure 1.2). Here the emergence of states entailed a lengthy and violent period of political reorganization, including massive centralization under strong monarchs. Modern nation states are very different from the city-states of ancient Greece, late-medieval Italy and Switzerland, where sovereignty was vested in a single government founded on a very cohesive micro-society. City-states can be dynamic players but their small size makes them vulnerable. Sometimes they have coped by linking up in confederations (as in the Hanseatic League of medieval Northern Europe), at other times by existing in niches or interstices between empires and great powers, or at still others by using their superior mercantile and economic power so as to make the military and economic costs of invading them prohibitive.

The History of State Formation

In the wider history of the state's emergence as the dominant political form on the planet both top-down and bottom-up perspectives have some applicability. Until late medieval times in Europe, familial, monarchical, and religious forms of political authority were mixed and overlapping. Lines of political authority and obligation often extended across geographical boundaries. Empires and kingdoms arose to govern large territories, and sought to impose central political authority over the territory they controlled, developing laws for the regulation of property and economic transactions, although never laws to control the

authority of the powerful. In the occasional rare case (such as the ancient Roman Republic) a constitution regulated the distribution of power among aristocratic office-holders. More generally, in ancient and medieval empires and kingdoms there was no clear separation of political and governmental authority from family, aristocratic and religious sources of power. The focus of power in a king or emperor generally meant that no distinction was possible between office-holders and their offices.

In the feudal system of medieval Europe there were many levels of rulers, ranging from a weak 'emperor' in Germany, through kings, powerful nobles such as counts or dukes, to several levels of partly autonomous nobles. Multiple centres of power within the same territory were common; lords and monarchs had continually to negotiate their relative powers, and often disputes between them could not be decided even temporarily without recourse to force of arms. These different layers and levels of power were bound together in complex, interlocking patterns of obligation. In addition the Catholic Church claimed political as well as spiritual authority, and parliaments that were assemblies of various categories of the wealthy and powerful began to make claims to a share of power.

From the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries centralizing, absolutist monarchies arose in many areas of Europe, each seeking to consolidate control over their respective territories. These rulers reduced the independent power of the barons and nobility, setting up elaborate royal courts to absorb aristocratic energies in conspicuous consumption and inter-personal court politics. They created central tax powers and bureaucracies, raised professional standing armies and put in place extended legal systems. In many countries these monarchs also squeezed the inherited power of parliaments, and sought to assert themselves over the influence of organized religion – especially in countries where the Protestant Reformation took hold, where rulers could establish state churches free from the power of the Vatican. At the dawn of the modern era it seemed that the most successful form of the modern state was going to be absolute monarchy – a far cry from today's liberal democratic norm. Some powerful monarchies built huge empires spanning diverse territories, such as the Spanish empire in Latin America. The Habsburg Empire covered much of Central Europe and the Balkans, governing disparate peoples with many languages. The Habsburgs successfully presented themselves as defending Christian Europe against the Turks of the Ottoman Empire. Their example illustrates a crucial dynamic in state building: if one's neighbour is a powerful state or empire, the best way to organize against it is to develop a powerful centralized state of one's own.

14 *Theories of the Democratic State*

States could be further centralized and strengthened as a result of successful revolutions, especially those accompanied by effective nationalism. The French revolution is exemplary in this respect. Attempting to match British power, the French monarchy impoverished itself in the late eighteenth century by supporting the American colonies' revolution against British rule. Louis XVI sought to raise further revenues by squeezing the French landed classes, causing them to withdraw their support for the monarchy (Skocpol 1979). This rift between the landed upper classes and the monarchy created the initial space for revolution.

But revolutionary France faced exactly the same external pressures, and the new regime's responses involved further state centralization, now unconstrained by the weight of traditions, customs and religion. Republican France and then the Napoleonic regime demonstrated the power of a ruthlessly modernized state, capable of fielding mass armies and raising finance in pursuit of territorial expansion. Both regimes deployed a populist, mobilizing ideology that turned war from a remote affair waged by aristocratic levies into something like a patriotic crusade, absorbing the concerted energies of a whole society. This state-building transformation allowed France to repeatedly defeat apparently overwhelming great power coalitions constructed against her (until Napoleon met his Waterloo in 1815 and was defeated by Britain and Prussia). The Napoleonic example was not lost on the rest of continental Europe. In the mid nineteenth century centralized nation-states were eventually built in Italy and Germany by one unit among numerous smaller governments successfully extending its control (Piedmont in Italy, Prussia in Germany).

The American Revolution produced the first state designed with reference to a particular set of political principles, which today we can recognize as liberal democratic. The US Constitution of 1789 established a separation and sharing of power between a legislature that made laws, a presidency that executed and administered the laws and a judiciary that made sure both the other institutions of government and the population at large respected the laws. The Bill of Rights subsequently added to the US constitution codified the liberal rights that citizens had against their own government, and, more positively, to constitute for themselves a free realm of public debate.

From the seventeenth to the twentieth century the history of the state was entwined with the history of empires. The Portuguese and Spanish empires in Latin America collapsed amid revolutionary warfare that produced consolidated nation-states. But the late nineteenth century saw continued European colonial expansion in Africa and Asia. Japan embarked on a state-building modernization process that in the twentieth century enabled it to use massive military force to acquire an empire in East Asia.

The twentieth century saw conglomerate empires progressively disintegrate. The Habsburg and Ottoman empires failed to survive World War I and monarchs styled as emperors in Germany and Russia were also overthrown. However, the Soviet Union under Communist Party control rapidly rebuilt the fabric of the Russian imperial territories after a brief civil war. The Japanese and Italian empires were destroyed by military defeat in World War II. While never fully governed by any foreign empire, China had suffered repeated incursions by Western powers and the conquest of much of its territory by imperial Japan between 1931 and 1945. In 1949 the unification of almost all China under a communist regime led by Mao Zedong seemed to usher in its governance by a modern state.

For logistical and financial reasons the enormous French and British empires did not long survive the 1939–45 war. Their systems (and those of smaller European powers such as the Dutch) were profoundly schizophrenic. To their home (or metropolitan) populations these countries appeared as nation-states and liberal democracies, but externally they governed huge overseas empires in authoritarian fashion (Subrahmanyam, 2004). In September 1939 the writer George Orwell noted caustically that the two liberal democracies about to go to war with Nazi Germany between them controlled the lives of 600 million black and Asian people who had no votes or say in how they were governed. The defenders of these so-called ‘liberal’ empires (then and since) argued that rule by the British and French empires in Africa and Asia was a form of ‘enlightened despotism’ maintaining order and nurturing these countries towards self-government. But as George Santayana (1922: 468) remarked:

[W]hen a people exercises control over other peoples its government becomes ponderous even at home; its elaborate imperial machinery cannot be stopped, and can hardly be mended; the imperial people become the slave of its commitment.

In the post-war period the claims of ‘national self-determination’ in Africa, Asia and the Middle East easily trumped the enfeebled liberal imperialist claims to be (very slowly) tutoring subject peoples towards democracy. Even the stubborn domestic ideological support for the British and French empires rapidly eroded. Two smaller shells of earlier European empires, Spain and Portugal, faced the same tension between being a nation-state and maintaining despotic colonial rule, but they solved it by maintaining dictatorships at home into the mid 1970s, whereupon they adopted liberal democracy and discarded the last outposts of empire.

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The last empire turned out to be that of the Soviet Union (though it never admitted the 'empire' title). Its political and ideological grip was extended after 1945 via subordinate Communist regimes in Eastern and Central Europe. In 1956 and 1968 the Soviets showed their willingness to use military force to crush dissent in Hungary and Czechoslovakia respectively. The Soviet empire lost the countries it had acquired in 1945 in a few months in 1989, and in 1991 the Soviet Union itself (roughly coinciding with the territory of the older Russian empire of the Tsars) disintegrated into its component republics.

In all these cases of imperial collapse, the territories and peoples formerly governed by empires organized themselves into recognizably modern sorts of states – though not necessarily with great success. In the inter-war period the states of east-Central Europe formed after 1918 could not withstand the expansion of Nazi Germany, and in World War II they could not resist their 'liberation' by Stalin's Soviet Union. More recently, in post-colonial Africa many states have dissolved into civil war and anarchy, often repeatedly. These setbacks notwithstanding, it is almost universally assumed, even by protagonists in civil wars, that something like the modern nation-state form is the proper way to organize the government of any territory and people. By the end of World War II the Westphalian model was made both universal and standard by the establishment of the United Nations, even if it was not until the 1990s that the last vestiges of the European powers' empires and the Soviet bloc system of control of other states were in practice removed.

Yet it would be a mistake to assume that a system of states was now universally accepted. From time to time 'rogue' states behave outside the Westphalian limits. In 1991 the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein simply invaded and tried to annex his neighbour Kuwait, from which he was subsequently expelled, with a huge cost in Iraqi casualties, by a US-lead military coalition, acting under a clear UN mandate. A decade later the United States organized and assisted an overthrow of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan (which was implicated in supporting terrorists who carried out the 9/11 attacks in New York and Washington). In 2003 the United States and United Kingdom invaded Iraq with no UN mandate, creating a regime dependent on US military support for many years for its survival.

Thus one contemporary challenge to the system of states may be US hegemony, reviving some characteristics of imperialism, however much imperial ambitions are denied by US leaders. With a population of 300 million people set to grow to 500 million by 2050, with unprecedented economic wealth and controlling more than half of all military spending on the planet, the United States occupies a 'great power' position that is less constrained than that of any predecessor. Some neo-conservative thinkers believe the United States should exploit this

historically unique position to order the world unilaterally to its own liking, instead of being constrained to accept the Westphalian doctrine of non-interference within other states (see Chapter 12).

A second challenge to the modern assumption that government should be organized exclusively by states is created by globalization processes, potentially displacing power upwards to supra-governmental organizations and sideways into transnational networks. States choose to give up some aspects of their sovereignty when they join international organizations such as the European Union, the World Trade Organization, or the International Criminal Court. The past presumption has been that even when states make such moves, they do so voluntarily and retain the ability to withdraw if they choose. Globalization theorists argue that the enmeshing of states within many different encompassing international and trans-national processes is now so extensive that this presumption no longer holds (see Chapter 14).

The most venerable tradition of anti-state thinking is however anarchism. While in popular language anarchism is often associated with destruction and nihilism, anarchism can also mean almost exactly the opposite: peaceful cooperation in the absence of any hierarchical authority – including state authority. Anarchy means, quite literally, no state. In anarchic social systems, there is no political specialization (so no division between voters and representatives, or leaders and followers), and no concentration of force (Taylor 1982: 9). There are actually many examples of anarchies; indeed, most of human history has involved small groups of hunter-gatherers living in anarchical societies. Peasant agricultural communities have also sometimes operated on this basis. Instead of coercion, such societies rely on mechanisms of social control such as ostracism of people who violate social norms, fear of violence and conditional cooperation – that is, making one's voluntary contribution to the public good conditional on others in one's society also contributing (Axelrod 1984).

Scholars of international relations (e.g. Bull 1977) have sometimes described the international system as an 'anarchical society' because historically it has achieved a large measure of cooperation without much in the way of central institutions at the system level. International law is very weak compared to its domestic counterpart, and there are few ways for international institutions to force compliance with their decisions. Of course the international system does sometimes degenerate into war – but most of the time it does not.

Anarchism is also a tradition in political thinking, beginning in the nineteenth century with the French philosopher Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and developed later in that century by the Russian Peter Kropotkin. This tradition formed a rival to Marxism, and Marxist rev-

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olutionaries have seen anarchists as enemies who needed to be defeated. There have been a number of anarchist revolutions: the Paris Commune in 1871, the Ukraine in 1917 (soon swept aside by the rival Bolshevik Marxist revolutionaries), and Spain in the 1930s. All these attempts were soon crushed, illustrating what is perhaps the biggest problem faced by anarchists: hierarchical states are so much better at organizing military force than are anarchies. Thus no anarchists have ever had the chance to organize a large-scale, modern society. The real legacy of anarchism may be in its demonstration that voluntary cooperation is a way to organize the resolution of many problems in human societies – even if the anarchist programme cannot show how to organize large scale and complex societies in their entirety. This demonstration is echoed in contemporary work on resource management. Ostrom (1990), though not an anarchist, argues that communities of resource users can sometimes govern their own affairs and regulate access to a resource such as a fishery or water for irrigation without any help from any formal government. We will discuss such cases further in Chapter 11. Anarchist ideas about spontaneous cooperation also find echoes in some of the new forms of cooperative governance we will discuss in Chapter 6 (though practitioners and analysts of these new forms do not acknowledge anarchist antecedents).

Liberal Democracy

We now take a closer look at the emergence and condition of the currently most important state form – liberal democracy. Two sets of principles long stood in tension with each other, liberalism's limited state with a carefully demarcated constitutional order, and democracy's majority rule and free elections, with removal of privilege and inequality. It was only in the nineteenth century that it seemed democracy did not have to be the enemy of liberalism. Today, we can define a liberal democracy as a political system where:

- Periodic elections determine how the legislature is constituted and who shall hold the executive power of government. There should be free and fair competition among candidates and political parties. This is the 'democracy' part of the concept.
- Fundamental civil liberties are protected by law and constitutional safeguards, while legal enactments and rules are equally and impartially enforced by an independent judiciary and legal system. This is the 'liberal' part of the concept.
- The constitution specifies the powers of particular public offices and branches of government and the relations between them.

Both the ‘liberal’ and the ‘democracy’ aspects have to be present for liberal democracy to exist. Elected government without the protection of civil liberties can be tyrannical – for example, by allowing a larger ethnic group to suppress the political freedoms of smaller ethnic groupings, as happened in many Southern states of the United States for a century after the formal abolition of slavery. Having an impartial legal system and protection of rights, without free elections can create a relatively open society and allow a capitalist economy to flourish, as in contemporary Singapore. But without elections through which people can change the composition of their government without fear of government action against them, such a society is not democratic.

This ease of definition is not to suggest, however, that liberal democracies are without tensions and problems. Indeed, the rest of this book is about the questions and conflicts that remain. As a prelude to this analysis, we examine how liberal democracy reached global ascendancy. Then we outline variations in the way liberal democracies arrange representation, and the ways they organize social and economic life.

The development of liberal democracy

For most of their history, the two principles of liberalism and democracy were thought to point in different directions. Of the two principles, **democracy** is the older. It began in ancient Athens with the reforms of Cleisthenes in 508–507 BCE (Grofman 1993), which created what we might now call direct democracy. Key decisions were made by an assembly that all the citizens were entitled to attend. But the Athenian citizenry or *demos* actually constituted only around 15 per cent of the city state’s total population – because women, slaves, men without property and ‘metics’ who lacked the necessary ancestry were all excluded. Office holders were not elected, but instead selected by lot, to serve for a limited period. Such random selection still persists today in the way that juries are chosen for court cases, and it has recently been revived in practices associated with deliberative democracy (see Chapter 9).

Elections were also held in various assemblies that shared power in a complex fashion within the Roman Republic (509–27 BCE). Membership in each of the assemblies was restricted – most severely in the Senate, normally the most powerful of the assemblies. Rome was an aristocratic republic rather than a democracy. With the demise of the Roman Republic amid civil war and the victory of Octavian (Augustus Caesar), election to office on the part of even a small subset of the citizens went into abeyance in Europe for over a thousand years. In medieval times elections did appear in that otherwise most authori-

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tarian of institutions, the Catholic Church, when monasteries would sometimes elect their abbot and convents their mother superior. The College of Cardinals also used a demanding unanimity voting system to choose the Pope.

For many centuries, no political thinker would describe himself or herself as a democrat – with the very occasional exception, such as the Leveller faction in the parliamentary army in the English civil war in the 1640s, which was soon brutally repressed. When in the aftermath of the conflict Thomas Hobbes wanted to belittle his opponents who supported the cause of Parliament against the king, he described them as ‘democratical gentlemen’ pursuing treason and instigating civil war (Hobbes 1969). If ever heard at all in political discourse, ‘democracy’ was a term of abuse:

As it entered the eighteenth century, democracy was still very much a pariah word. Only the most insouciant and incorrigible dissidents . . . could take their political stand upon it, even clandestinely or amongst intimates. Anyone who chose to do so placed themselves far beyond the borders of political life, at the outer limits of the intellectual lives of virtually all their contemporaries. (Dunn 2005: 71)

Matters only began to change at the end of the eighteenth century, with the French and American revolutions. In the early 1790s the radical Jacobin faction of the French revolutionaries, notably Maximilien Robespierre, began to use ‘democracy’ in a positive fashion to denote the unmediated (and as it turned out unrestricted) implementation of the ‘will’ of the people. The revolutionary Babeuf declared in 1790, shortly before his execution:

If the People are the Sovereign, they should exercise as much sovereignty as they absolutely can themselves . . . To accomplish what you have to do and can do yourself, use representation on the fewest possible occasions and be nearly always your own representative. (Quoted in Dunn 2005: 230)

But the excesses of the revolutionary radicals, involving the execution of many real and imagined opponents, helped reinforce democracy’s bad name, and with the overthrow of the Jacobins and the rapid transformation of revolutionary France into Napoleon Bonaparte’s empire, modern democracy at first looked no more stable than its ancient predecessors.

The key innovation that the French revolutionaries did not adopt but which eventually enabled democracy to become feasible in large

modern societies was the idea of *representation*. In 1792 in *The Rights of Man*, the radical English theorist and activist Thomas Paine proposed ‘ingrafting representation upon democracy’. Over the next century representative democracy became the dominant form in both theory and practice. Robert Dahl (1989: 28–30) considers this development central to what he calls ‘the second transformation of democracy’ (the first having been the invention of democracy in Ancient Greece).

On the other side of the Atlantic, a state was devised that initially featured plenty of representation but not a great deal of democracy. The American revolution produced what is now recognized as the world’s oldest liberal democratic state, but its founders certainly did not think they were designing a democracy. James Madison, whose influence on the US Constitution was felt most strongly, insisted that the Constitution would establish a republic but not a democracy. To Madison, democracy was a byword for chaos and instability resulting from unchecked citizen control. In *The Federalist 10* (published in 1787) he wrote: ‘[D]emocracies have ever been spectacles of turbulence and contention; have ever been found incompatible with personal security or the rights of property, and have in general been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths’. The US constitution did institute elections on a national scale for the House of Representatives alone, and state legislatures were also elected. However, the franchise was restricted to male property holders and slaves, black slavery itself persisted until 1865. Women and poor men were excluded from the vote. Moreover, the checks and balances specified in the constitution were designed to guard against an excess of democracy. Senators were originally appointed by state legislatures rather than directly elected by the people, as were the members of each state’s Electoral College that chose the President. An unelected Supreme Court was given power to assess and overrule Acts of Congress as unconstitutional.

Only in the early nineteenth century did democracy cease to be a negative term in American political discourse. Accompanying the populist, anti-elitist approach to politics that Andrew Jackson rode to the Presidency in 1828 was a contrast drawn between ‘the democracy’ (the ordinary people) and ‘the plutocracy’ (the very rich and powerful) (Hanson 1989: 78–9). This usage still retained democracy’s anti-elitist connotations. Only very gradually thereafter were these radical associations diminished. With time the US republic became more democratic. In the nineteenth century states gradually opened the choice of Electoral College members to popular vote, so that today they are ciphers for each state’s winning majority of voters. The direct election of senators was made nationally uniform by constitutional amendment in 1913. Democratization was further advanced by full suffrage for

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women in 1920, the gradual abolition of property qualifications for the vote, and the abolition in the 1960s of tests designed to exclude African Americans from the franchise in Southern states in particular. However, ingenious mechanisms to restrict African-American voting in the South could still be found in the twenty-first century. These mechanisms arguably proved decisive in ensuring that Florida delivered a (contested) majority of votes to George W. Bush in 2000, thus handing him the Presidency.

Progress in other countries now considered the trailblazers of liberal democracy was no faster. In Britain, Parliament in the seventeenth century still had to struggle for its survival against a monarch (Charles I) asserting his divine right to govern unchecked. As of 2008 the UK Parliament's upper chamber, the House of Lords, remains completely unelected, although its powers have shrunk greatly with time. The House of Commons was long elected on the basis of an extremely narrow franchise. Voting rights were first extended to a large group of male citizens holding substantial property in the Great Reform Act of 1832, but the last 40 per cent of adult males only gained the vote in 1918. Equal votes for women in the UK came in 1928. But of course in the whole British empire, spanning at this time a quarter of the world's land mass, only the (white) metropolitan population and those in (white) self-governing dominions had the vote. And when the last major UK colony, Hong Kong, was handed over to China in 1992, its citizens still did not have full democratic rights. In Switzerland, often regarded as one of the world's model democracies, women gained the vote only in 1972, while in Australia aborigines' standing as citizens on a par with other Australians was confirmed only in 1967.

In the long period while democracy was in the doldrums, **liberalism** was in very gradual ascendant. The core ideas of liberalism are that government must be regulated by a constitution, and that all full members of society have rights that protect them against each other and against arbitrary government. Key rights are private property, freedom of contract, freedom of thought (especially in matters of religion), freedom of expression and of association, and rights to due process in the legal system. The ascent of liberalism began in 1215 when Magna Carta was signed by King John of England and his barons. Magna Carta limited the powers of the king and established some rudimentary civil rights – though these rights did not extend very far beyond the privileged classes. In 1649 King Charles I was tried and executed for the crime of waging war on his own people – a key event in the rise of liberalism, because it confirmed that there are rules which even kings had to follow. The political convulsions of seventeenth century Britain culminated in the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688 to 1689 ('glorious' to the winners and

their successors). King James II was overthrown on suspicion of wanting to return England to Catholicism, and replaced by a constitutional monarchy in which political power was shifted away from the monarch and toward the legislature. The freedom of religion, under law (except of course for Catholics) was established in 1689. The revolution's key intellectual defender was John Locke, widely regarded as the main founder of liberal political philosophy. In Britain and elsewhere, the subsequent rise of liberalism went hand-in-hand with the rise of capitalism, for a political philosophy that stressed individual rights (especially private property rights) helped loosen the inherited legacy of feudal social obligations that restricted the flow of labour and capital.

It is quite possible for a state to be liberal without being especially democratic. A highly centralized regime might well choose to grant all kinds of individual rights – for instance, to facilitate economic growth that would benefit the regime. In practice, early liberal governments featured a highly restricted voting franchise, and a distribution of power that was quite oligarchical, conducing to rule by the aristocratic or wealthy few. Well into the nineteenth century, with the French revolution's lessons in mind, liberal political philosophers still feared that democracy would lead to mob rule and wholesale violation of the individual rights necessary for the functioning of liberal society. In 1859 John Stuart Mill wrote darkly of 'the tyranny of the majority'. In many respects Mill was among the most progressive and democratic of nineteenth century liberals. He favoured the emancipation of women and democratic elections, but proposed devices such as weighted voting in order to restrict the power of the masses. And when it came to the British Empire, he had no qualms in asserting that 'despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement' (ironically in Chapter 1 of his book *On Liberty*).

The gradual expansion of the franchise generally showed that the fears of Mill and other nineteenth century liberals were groundless (except when majorities and minorities were permanently defined on an ethnic or religious basis). At most, the newly enfranchised poor used their vote to support social democratic parties that proposed moderate redistribution of income and wealth. But liberal hostility to democracy persisted to the end of the twentieth century. The political scientist William Riker (1982a) wrote approvingly of 'liberalism *against* populism' and praised the many 'defects' of representative politics that prevented any unmediated implementation of the popular will. In 1975 Crozier, Huntington and Watanuki in a famous report to the Trilateral Commission spoke of a crisis of democracy in which too many groups were making too many demands on the state, threatening overload and collapse. For the United States, Milton and Rose Friedman (1984) pro-

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posed the centralization of power in a strong presidency to stop people organizing into groups to demand that resources be redistributed in their direction by government, which the Friedmans thought was ruining the market economy. Some of Milton Friedman's students found a laboratory for liberal authoritarianism under the notorious military dictatorship of General Pinochet in Chile in the late 1970s and 1980s. Pinochet's government implemented rights only to protect private property, freedom of contract, and unrestricted private markets, while vigorously suppressing civil and political rights.

In short, the combined liberal democratic idea that all citizens of a state should jointly and equally determine its affairs via voting in elections, and should have equal civil and political rights including legal and constitutional protections, remains a novel and precarious accomplishment. From 1900 to the 1960s liberal democracies never numbered more than 24 countries at any one time, and for long periods in the twentieth century the number of liberal democracies dropped below 10. A low point was reached in 1942, with almost all of Europe (except for the UK, Ireland, Sweden and Switzerland) controlled by dictatorships.

The victory of the western democracies in World War II, followed by de-colonization of European empires in the 1950s and 1960s, increased the number of liberal democracies. However, liberal democracy generally did not flourish in the former colonies, with the important exception of India. Liberal democracy as a universal model did not really take off until the mid 1970s, when Spain, Portugal and Greece removed their dictatorships. In the 1980s and 1990s most Latin American countries did the same, while from around 1987 South Korea and Taiwan also began to move beyond military and authoritarian control. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union, most of the states in central and Eastern Europe moved toward liberal democracy (though with some authoritarian resistance). In 1994 South Africa abandoned its racist apartheid regime in favour of an exemplary liberal constitution and popular elections.

As we write this book liberal democracy is the dominant state form in Europe, North and South America, Australasia, the South Pacific, India, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, South Africa, plus a few outposts elsewhere. Other parts of the world such as Southeast Asia have witnessed some gradual movement in a democratic direction, amid many setbacks. Even China, while strongly resisting liberal democracy, has recognized the need to create consultative forums in government, and has undertaken experiments at the local level that allowed a measure of citizen participation. While not allowing any competition for the Communist Party or much in the way of civil and political rights, China has moved to establish the private property rights that help

define liberalism, and provided some spaces for limited political and intellectual debate.

Quite where to draw the line between functioning liberal democracies and other sorts of states can be controversial. A number of countries, notably Russia after the election of President Vladimir Putin in 2000, combine apparently competitive elections with strong central control over what opposition is allowed, and very imperfect protections of human rights. Russian security forces, provoked by terrorist attacks, have ignored human rights in internal colonies such as Chechnya. Russia under Putin was actually what Carothers (2002: 12–13) calls a ‘dominant power system’, ruled by elites that manipulate the political system so that they cannot be defeated in elections. Under President Yeltsin in the 1990s, Russia was in Zakaria’s (2003) terms an ‘illiberal democracy’, featuring competitive elections, but with no constraints on what election winners can do. Yeltsin himself preferred to rule by decree. Illiberal democracies have no constitutional constraints on the power of rulers, little accountability between elections and little respect for human rights. Illiberal democracy therefore resembles ‘competitive authoritarianism’ (Levitsky and Way 2002). Examples can be found in other post-Soviet countries, in Iran, the Palestinian Authority, in Latin America and in Africa. Looking at the world in 2006 through American eyes, the non-governmental organization Freedom House classified 89 countries as ‘free’ (i.e., liberal democratic), 58 as ‘partially free’ and 45 as ‘not free’ (www.freedomhouse.org/uploads/pdf/charts/2006.pdf).

For some observers, Islam’s preoccupations with authoritarian or theocratic government since the religion’s founding period (around 660 CE), the Islamic world appear the most problematic area for liberal democracy. But even here it should be noted that a majority of the world’s 1.4 billion Moslems now lives in democratic countries – notably in India, Indonesia, Turkey and the more controversial case of Iran, where electoral democracy is compromised by the power of a theocratic religious establishment. (Bangladesh has been mostly democratic in terms of elections and civilian rule, but has proved susceptible to dynastic politics and occasional suspension of elections, while Pakistan has experienced only brief interludes of competitive elections amid successive military coups.) It is actually the Arab part of the Islamic world that is most resistant to democracy. As we write, competitive elections in the Arab world occur only in Lebanon and the Palestinian Authority (which is not yet a state according to our earlier definition). Sub-Saharan Africa is also a problematic region for liberal democracy, with the exception of South Africa (though even South Africa lacks an opposition party with any chance of winning national

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elections). While liberal democratic constitutions sometimes appear on paper, and competitive elections sometimes occur in African states, dictatorship or civil war are generally not very far away.

Within the world system, liberal democracies have a key advantage over other states in that they seem almost never go to war with one another (Russett 1993). Thus with the spread of liberal democracy war between states ought to decline. This is the essence of the ‘democratic peace’ thesis, first proposed by the philosopher Immanuel Kant over 200 years ago (though Kant spoke of ‘republics’ rather than ‘democracies’). Quite why this should be the case is a matter of some dispute among international relations scholars. Certainly the costs of making war are high for leaders and voters in liberal democracies. The voting population can easily punish leaders if they launch into a war that proves misconceived and costly. And democratic leaders have to justify the war morally to their electorate to begin with, while dictators do not.

Yet these internal political constraints on democratic leaders have not stopped liberal democracies gratuitously initiating wars against non-democracies. Consider for example the invasion of Iraq by US and British forces in 2003, ostensibly undertaken to remove ‘weapons of mass destruction’ that proved not to exist. Liberal democracies have also initiated war or escalated conflicts with other democracies that are not liberal. Think for example of Israeli military actions against Lebanon and Palestinian-controlled Gaza in 2006, or the bombing campaign against Serbia in 1999 over Kosovo, undertaken by NATO, an alliance of liberal democracies. Most liberal democracies have existed only in the late twentieth century, and they have generally been in strategic alliance with the dominant Western powers that are themselves liberal democracies. So it is perhaps no surprise that wars between liberal democracies have been rare. The much more recent spread of liberal democracy well beyond the West means that the democratic peace thesis will face tougher tests, though so far it is holding up reasonably well.

Institutional variations among liberal democracies

The institutional arrangements of liberal democratic states vary considerably along four dimensions:

- (1) *Electoral systems*. Different voting systems produce very different sorts of popular control in a democracy. Governments can be elected with the support of as few as 35 per cent of voters in some systems or of a very strong majority in others. The former outcome is possible under the simplest and crudest voting system, *plurality*

rule (sometimes called first-past-the-post) used in the United States, United Kingdom, and British-influenced countries. Here candidates stand in particular areas (such as congressional districts in the United States, or constituencies in the United Kingdom), where voters, in that area, elect a single winner based on the largest number of votes. If there are multiple candidates this winning number can fall well short of 50 per cent. There is no mechanism for ensuring that the overall distribution of seats in the legislature reflects the pattern of votes in the country as a whole. In a famous proposition originated by Maurice Duverger (1955), plurality rule is expected to produce two-party systems. Duverger's 'law' was once advanced as the closest thing that political science has to a universal scientific law (see Riker 1982b). But this claimed association now holds perfectly only in the United States. Everywhere else, even in the UK, the number of significant political parties in plurality systems is at least three, sometimes more. In India, the world's largest liberal democracy, plurality voting now yields a very diverse multi-party system.

The main alternative kind of voting system is *proportional representation* (PR) where parties' seats in the legislature more or less match their shares of the votes in the electorate. Proportional representation usually produces a larger number of parties, and means that most governments are coalitions of several parties. Most liberal democracies (even sub-national units in the UK) now use some kind of PR, which comes in varied forms. They mostly rely on electing several legislators in larger constituencies, so that parties secure seats in the legislature in proportion to their total votes in the electorate as a whole.

There are also a number of hybrid systems. France uses run-off ballots among the top candidates from a multi-party election. Italy has used different PR and non-PR systems designed to give extra parliamentary seats to the most successful party or coalition and thus ensure a working government majority, as opposed to very close results that make governments unstable. Turkey and Russia use PR systems but with parties required to win a very high minimum national vote share (7 or 10 per cent) before they can take seats in the legislature. This measure is designed to guard against party fragmentation and protect large parties' vote shares, but it does so only at the cost of considerable (and in Russia massive) disproportionality. We will pay closer attention to electoral systems in Chapter 7.

- (2) *Executive and legislature*. In a liberal democracy the legislature must be elected. But in full *presidential systems* (such as the US) a

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president is directly elected by popular vote to serve as both head of the executive branch and head of government, while the legislature is elected separately. The US Congress is almost unique in not being controlled at all by the executive. In pure *parliamentary systems* (such as the UK, Australia, Germany, and many others), ministers are appointed from the legislature, usually from the largest party or coalition. The Prime Minister is normally the leader of the largest party in parliament, and can head the government only as long as he or she retains majority support therein. In hybrid systems (some Latin America countries, France and South Korea) there is both a directly elected president with executive powers, *and* a government of ministers headed by a premier appointed from and responsible to the elected legislature.

- (3) *Centralization and decentralization.* In the few remaining *unitary states* (such as Japan, Israel and New Zealand) a central government dominates revenue-raising and spending and its powers dwarf those of local or municipal governments. At the other end of the spectrum are *federal states* where there is both a national government and regional (or state-level, or provincial) governments (as in the US, Canada, Australia, Germany, and Spain). Their relative powers are carefully specified in the constitution. The trend in Western Europe has been strongly in the direction of more quasi-federal and decentralized internal arrangements. Even the United Kingdom has moved in the direction of asymmetric federalism, as elected governments in Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and London (but not England) share power with the Westminster government that runs UK policy-making. Similarly, previously centralized Bonapartist countries (like France, Italy and Spain) have moved towards multi-tiered governance systems. In the European Union a unique form of quasi-federalism has developed between the member states (which are no longer termed 'nation states') and the EU's powerful central institutions (the European Council, European Commission, European Parliament, and European Court of Justice).
- (4) *The role of the legal system.* In all liberal democracies judges must be independent of politicians' control. But in some countries featuring *parliamentary sovereignty* (such as Britain and New Zealand) there was no supreme court capable of striking down decisions made by the legislature, although the UK has now moved in that direction. In other systems (especially presidential and hybrid ones) a *constitutional court* has the power to declare both legislation and executive decisions unconstitutional. The American Supreme Court represents judicial review of government in its

strongest form. The United States is unique in the degree to which many major political issues end up as legal issues, thus reinforcing the 'liberal' as opposed to the 'democratic' aspect of its political system. A much weaker constitutional court exists in France. In the European Union the European Court of Justice has begun to act as a constitutional court, while a separate European Court of Human Rights helps protect civil liberties in member countries.

Changing functions of liberal democratic states

A final dimension of variation among states, and among liberal democratic states in particular, concerns what exactly states do, their functions and how they relate to the social and economic systems of the societies they govern. Here the conflicts between the liberal push to define state powers narrowly and the democratic push to use political power to address social inequalities remains strongest, and most clearly shapes the state's core priorities.

The early modern state operated in an insecure external environment and in the days before capitalist market economies. It had three core priorities: to maintain order internally (prevent civil conflict); to compete externally with other states; and to raise the revenues necessary for these first two activities (Skocpol 1979). These can be termed the order, security and revenue imperatives. Revenue was generally raised from taxation – which was often resisted by those from whom it was sought. A state unable to collect taxation could encounter deep trouble, especially in the face of enhanced external threats. If a state cares *only* about maximizing the revenues it raises then it is what Levi (1988) calls a 'predatory state' that may even undertake the impoverishment of its own society to fill its own coffers. Recent examples are not hard to find, especially in Africa, of dictators who have amassed massive personal wealth even as average incomes in their societies declined. But most states that want to maximize revenue will find that impoverishment is not a good idea, for two reasons. The first is the violent resistance it can provoke. The second is that there is a more effective way to increase revenue in the long run.

With time and the development of capitalism, state officials found that there was a less painful way to secure additional revenues. By promoting economic growth in the capitalist market economy, total revenues from taxation could increase even as rates of taxation remained constant. Thus grew what can be called the economic priority of government, or what Marxists would call the 'accumulation' imperative (see Chapter 4). Capitalist economies developed at different times in different countries, beginning in the seventeenth century with what is

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now the Netherlands, followed by Britain. Today, this economic imperative has become the foremost priority of most states – or at least those prosperous states that have escaped the threat of invasion by other states, or severe civil conflict. A prosperous capitalist economy requires a range of rights instrumental to the protection of private property – which was a major boost in creating liberal states, for liberalism is defined by its stress on a range of rights. Given that the core interests of business and the state now coalesced around the promotion of the conditions for economic growth, corporate leaders could enter into government from which they had been excluded when the state was dominated by absolute monarchy, landed aristocracy, and the church. Thus did the state become the *capitalist* state.

Capitalist market economies are however a mixed blessing for the state. They can generate wealth, but they are also subject to boom and bust cycles, and the associated political instability can threaten internal order. Karl Marx and his successors on the socialist and communist left long believed that this instability would necessarily culminate in a social revolution by the working class (see Chapter 4). Developed capitalist states mostly managed to avoid this fate by cushioning the blows felt by those at the lower end of the income and employment security scales. This key change was accomplished through welfare state programmes such as unemployment insurance, social security and pensions. Marxists had a name for this too, terming it the ‘legitimation’ function (Offe 1984), because the welfare state helped to legitimate the capitalist political economy in the eyes of the social groups that otherwise stood to suffer most from its associated instabilities. The development of welfare states meant that democratic socialist parties and union leaders, the main political representatives of the organized working class, could be accommodated within a democratic state, because their interests now coincided with one of its core priorities. The political and social stabilization thus achieved made the welfare state critical in immunizing liberal democracies against Marxist revolution, and so preserving capitalism. So the welfare state is still a kind of capitalist state.

The modern liberal state therefore has five key functions, summarized in Table 1.2, which may often stand in tension with one another. The conflict between the economic growth and welfare priorities is stressed by market liberals, who see the taxation necessary to finance the welfare state as a major drag on economic growth, and welfare itself as constituting a disincentive to the hard work on which a dynamic growing economy relies (see Chapter 5). In subsequent chapters we will explore possible additions to this set of core imperatives.

The trend for liberal democratic states to add functions and extend their reach into more areas of social life has always been controversial.

Table 1.2 *The evolving core priorities of the state*

<i>Period</i>	<i>Key functions (cumulative)</i>
Early modern state	Providing external security Maintaining internal order Raising revenue
Capitalist state	Promoting economic growth
Welfare state	Legitimizing the political economy and societal arrangements as a whole through providing income security and social provisions (health care, education, etc.)

The late nineteenth century liberal democratic capitalist states in Europe and North America mostly limited themselves to external defence, maintaining internal law and order, collecting taxation, underpinning markets with a legal system, and undertaking limited public works. But they also turned a blind eye to extremes of poverty and social inequality. The rise of the welfare state meant that government got involved in a range of social programmes, developed most comprehensively in the Scandinavian countries where around 60 per cent of GDP is now allocated by governments, as opposed to around half this level in the US or Japan. Governments also came to play increasingly large roles in funding and operating public education systems – seen as an economic necessity even by most market liberals.

The path to the mixed capitalist-welfare state was followed most smoothly in western Europe. Especially between 1945 and 1976 the state in many countries grew steadily larger in terms of budgets and personnel. Military arms races associated with the Cold War also played a part in the growth of government in the US, alongside a growth in welfare and educational spending, and increasing regulation of the market economy. A counter-attack strongly influenced by market liberal ideology and responding to a perceived crisis of excessive demands upon the state, saw some shedding of functions and personnel by governments in developed Western states during the 1980s and 1990s. But outside the most advanced industrial economies, welfare provision still remains patchy or poor. Many states (including long-lived liberal democracies like India) still have poorly developed capitalist economies, and weak to non-existent welfare systems for the mass of their populations.

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Conclusion

The state remains central to modern political processes. Laws or regulations may be remade to ban or restrict activities; state budgets may be enlarged and resources requisitioned in taxes; existing public facilities may be closed or government subsidies redirected to other groups and interests; or wars or crises may erupt. But state processes equally lie at the heart of positive changes to promote economic development, to create hope for people to escape from or alleviate poverty, and to oversee general improvements in living standards. The state's involvement in virtually all political processes accounts for the frequently high intensity of the conflicts associated with it. There are many ways in which a different majority at the ballot box, a change in the relative influence of interest groups, the arrival in power of a new political leadership, or a shifting balance of influence in international relations may reconfigure the state and so change people's conditions and life prospects.

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This Index contains all references for subjects, along with references to some major theoreticians and authors discussed in the text. For all other author references, please see the bibliography, where the end of each entry shows the pages where that author or work are cited, given in square brackets, e.g [122, 156].

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