



# Coercion, Capital, and European States, A.D. 990-1992

*Charles Tilly*

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This is at once an account and an explanation of the evolution of European states during the present millennium. The central problem addressed by the author concerns the great variety in the kinds of state that have prevailed in Europe since AD 990....Professor Tilly shows how interactions between the wielders of power on the one hand and the manipulators of capital on the other resulted in three state formations each of which prevailed over long periods -- tribute-taking empires, systems of fragmented sovereignty, and national states.

## **Coercion, Capital, and European States, A.D. 990-1992 Details**

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# **From Reader Review Coercion, Capital, and European States, A.D. 990-1992 for online ebook**

## **SpaceBear says**

War made state, and the state made war. Tilly's thesis in this book is that the modern state rose as a function of the need to make war, and to extract funding for those wars from the populations within the territorial controlled by the national state. Overtime, this necessitate all polities to adopt the same model.

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## **Lanny Newton says**

Really good examination of the formation of the modern state, specifically the modern European national state. The author takes 1000 years of European history and compacts it into 227 pages using only what he needs to show the three paths taken. He openly admits the problems of doing this, such as skimming over important events, but does not contort history to make his argument. Parts of it could be further developed, and the sections of his last chapter on the forming of states in the modern world outside Europe had major flaws. Most of the last chapter probably could have been omitted without any problems though. Overall a great book, though do not use it as a definitive history of the last thousand years of Europe, or assume his idea is applicable to all situations as it is not and does not really claim to be.

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## **Dylan Groves says**

Framing question: "What accounts for the great variation over time and space in the kinds of states that have prevailed in Europe since AD 990, and why did European states eventually converge on different variants of the national state?"

three takeaways:

1 - Extraction and struggle over the means of war propagated state formation in Europe

2 - Variation in types of state formation can be traced to different levels of coercion and capital required for economic production (and therefore the means for war). The spectrum runs from coercive intensive regions (like Russia, with few cities and mostly agriculture) to capital intensive regions (like Venice, where market-oriented production was widespread). In the medium run, these differences produced vastly different state structures.

3 - "The increasing scale of warfare and the knitting together of the European state system through commercial, military, and diplomatic interaction eventually gave the war-making advantage to those states that could field standing armies; states having access to a combination of large rural populations, capitalists, and relatively commercialized economy won out. They set the terms for war, and their form of state became the predominant one in Europe. Eventually European states converged on this form: the national state."

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## A. says

Review: *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1992* by Charles Tilly

For some time I have wanted to understand the evolution of kingdoms into modern states. This book seemed to offer answers. There is a sense in which Tilly's answer is contained in the title: coercion, meaning war, and later, police power, and capital, meaning mercantilism (as opposed to a society of great landlords). Tilly constructs a series of combinations of the two forces which, he suggests, explains the development of European states.

This explanation is not surprising inasmuch as one would expect that power—the alpha male—would eventually gather riches, capital. Tilly points out situations where, when power is not strong, the less powerful in the society can gather riches through mercantile transactions and become brokers, keeping the power from becoming absolute.

The land owning societies rarely developed mercantile capital and evolved into modern states by reason of needing to go to war, an expensive undertaking. War (coercion) is the fundamental driver in the evolution of modern European states because it is so expensive: leaders need to recruit popular support, which empowers subjects, who ask for things like political rights, education, security, *etc.*

Although the explanation is fundamentally simplistic, it will have to do until a more persuasive analysis comes along. Thus, I have an answer, but not without cost.

The book seems to be or to wish to be a textbook. Two predictable consequences of such ambition are, one, the author will seldom use a short, plainly understood word where he can find a longer, less understood word, and two, the author will pepper the text with obscure, preferably very obscure test words, in this text, the names of states few non-specialists have ever heard. How else to tell if students have really read the book?

But that is not then end of the cost. "Repetition is the mother of learning," we are told, and Tilly repeats, and repeats, and repeats, until one learns that repetition is also the mother of tedium. This may be the most boring book I have ever read. Its modest length, although padded by diagrams so obscure as to be meaningless, is at least ten thousand words too long. If it were better written, it might make a good magazine article.

Mr. Graziano is the author of *From the Cross to the Church. The Emergence of the Church from the Chaos of the Crucifixion.*

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## Anand Gopal says

The book-length exposition of Charles Tilly's classic line about European state formation: "War made the state and the state made war." In a nutshell, his argument is:

1. certain rulers used guns and men (the means of "coercion") to conquer rivals.
2. Warfare forced these rulers to develop extractive apparatuses -- institutions for taxation, conscription, etc,

in order to fund and man their conquests.

3. This led to the rise of state bureaucracies and, more generally, a centralized and differentiated state.

4. The type of state that developed in this process depended on the prevailing class structure of the area in question. Where merchants and capital predominated, city states arose (example: Venice), and where independent landlords predominated, centralized absolutism developed (example: Russia). In areas where both could be found in ample supply, a sort of hybrid resulted (examples: England and France).

6. Ultimately, all forms of European states converged on the "national state" of today in part through mutual influence and embeddedness in an international state system.

The book was fascinating and well-researched, but would have had greater expository impact if he'd focused on three or four states and followed their stories throughout the longue duree instead of attempting to cover all of Europe.

If you don't have time, focus on chapters 1 and 5, which contain the most interesting elements of the argument.

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### **Øivind says**

Read this if you are at all into political science. Charles Tilly proves that he was the master of academias "big-wave" surfing.

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### **Michael Burnam-Fink says**

*Coercion, Capital, and European States* charts a grand theory of history that attempts to explain why Europe in the late 20th century looks like it does, a fairly uniform sprawl of nation-state social democracies, as opposed to the diverse variety of political systems existent over the past 1000 years: feudal baronies, city-states, sprawling empires. Tilly's basic thesis is that states make war, and vice versa. The increasing expense of maintaining gunpowder, and later armies of mass conscripts, forced centralization and fictionalization, which broke less affluent and efficient states, and lead towards the modern ideal. This is not to imply a singular and inevitable path: Tilly traces a coercion intensive path followed by Sweden, a capital intensive path followed by the Dutch, and a medium path typical of France, England, and Prussia.

As a relatively short book, it's hard to cover every part of the grand theory in detail, but I was dissatisfied. Clearly, coercion and capital are two major forces in history, but as variables they lack explanatory power. Armies look like unitary instruments of coercion from a distance, and in a Clausewitzian framework, are coercive elements of power between states, but this glosses over the factionalism that characterized pre-modern armies, the autonomy of a warrior elite against the agricultural masses, and the difficulty of using coercion systematically against weaker states. While Tilly is right to note that budgets increased in time of war settle at a higher baseline, and to gesture at key phase transitions in warfare, he is vague on key details. In particular, there should be more comparison between strong kings and weak kings at the mercy of major dukes, the rise and fall of the condottieri mercenary regiment, the *Levée en masse* of the French Revolution, and high-tech warfare of the 20th century. I'd point towards McNeill's *The Pursuit of Power* and Mallett's *Mercenaries and the Masters* for the first two, I'm not well-versed enough on the French Revolution to talk about the second one, and the third deserves an entire shelf.

Economics is an area that I am less well-versed on than military history, but I was equally dissatisfied with his explanation of capital. Cities and trade networks serve as the engines of capital accumulation, and wealth is linked to military strength as wars became increasingly financed by loans, but there is more there. The good credit of Dutch merchants helped liberate them from Spanish rule as Spain declared bankruptcy several times during the Spanish-Dutch wars, yet the wealthy city-states of Italy declined as powers past the 16th century. There are obvious benefits to being the center of the financial system, as London and New York's dominance show. Yet capital is fluid, transnational, and while states benefit from and caused monetization, capital is distinct from statehood. In particular, more attention should be paid to 'real capital', in the productive qualities of physical objects on the land, against capital that exists on paper and in the beliefs of bankers.

It's not a surprise that someone with my academic pedigree would say this, but *Coercion, Capital, and European States* could really use more engagement with the biopolitical theories of Foucault. Tilly completely misses the development of disciplinary administrative apparatuses as an element of power, and the circulation of disciplinary techniques between states. The nation-state, which links ethnicity, territory, and administration in a sovereign union, can only be understood from a biopolitical perspective.

The final chapter, on the extension of European style states to the the post-colonial, post-World War II order, and the continued resilience of military elites in the third world, has not aged particularly well. I can't blame someone writing at the fall of the USSR for thinking out loud about states in the 21st century and not capturing the War on Terror, the rise of transnational NGOs as instruments of power, and the concerns about failed and failing states, but this book posits an end to history and fails to see beyond it. And finally, if I were a scholar in this field, I'm not sure how I'd use the ideas here. Plot my state on Capital vs Coercion over time? Draw lines? Postulate moderation as good?

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### **Fabian says**

An ambitious empirical study tracing the role of warfare in the creation of the modern European state. It is a little tedious but comes to profound, hard-won conclusions.

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### **Trashy Pit says**

Tilly at his best!!! Excellent discussion of state development in Europe in the early modern period. Tilly is a master historian. He might not be right about everything, but there's alot of really important stuff here.

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### **Hadrian says**

This is another one of those very small books which hopes to take on very big questions. One: How did Europe give rise to so many different types of polities in its earlier history, such as federations, religious states, kingdoms and knightly orders? Two: How did all of these different forms converge on the 'national state', or a government as we know it today?

War is thus the fundamental activity which shaped nation-states over the past thousand years in Europe. Those states which had survived were best able to not only wage war, but extract capital from the land they

controlled. War unintentionally led to the development of the state, and the state to war.

Geography also plays a major role in his argument - some states on the periphery, like those in Scandinavia or in modern Russia, focused on more of a 'coercion-intensive' path of development for the majority of their history, whereas in more fertile regions, smaller city-states were able to develop. These include the areas of northern Italy and the Low Countries. Their financial and economic development allowed them to survive. It was only in the industrial era where they could no longer survive as polities.

In between these were those states which had to manage the growth of both military coercion and capital development - England, France, and Prussia.

Now this is a tempting approach, but it does miss out on a lot. Were there really no states which developed without constant warfare? Did the role of languages also not play a role? What about social classes or divisions? Still, he admits as much in the very beginning, and even suggests places to look to test or refute his claims.

I am, of course, oversimplifying this. Tilly is presenting a very complicated argument here over a very broad scale. Still, it's a fascinating thing to look at, to see how states form. This is a book on a continental scale, and I'm sure the specialists will pick at it.

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### **Eren Bu?lal?lar says**

Kar??la?t?rmal? bir tarih-siyaset-sosyoloji çal??mas?. Bin y?ll?k Avrupa tarihine bak?yor ve k?tadaki devletlerin nas?l olup da bu biçimini ald???na yan?t bulmaya çal???yor.

Tilly Avrupa'daki devlet olu?umunda gözlemlenen farkl?l?klar?, "zor" ve "sermaye" kavramlar?yla aç?kl?yor. Her co?rafyada, zor ve sermaye kendine özgü bir kar??m gösteriyor. Tilly bunlar? üçe ay?rm?: 16. yüzy?la kadar Venedik'te bol sermaye ve onun hizmetine ko?ulmu? bir zor vard? (sermaye yo?un devlet). Ayn? dönemde Rusya ve Osman? ise gel?memi? ?hirlere, az sermayeye ve güçlü bir zor ayg?t?na yaslanm??t? (zor yo?un devlet). ?ngiltere ve Fransa ise sermaye ve zorun dengelendi?i co?rafyalard? (sermayele?mi? zor).

Buradan yola ç?karak, yazar ?u tezi geli?tiriyor:

"Bir devletin topraklar? içindeki ana toplumsal s?n?flar?n örgütlenmesi ve bunlar?n devletle ili?kileri, yöneticilerin kaynaklara el koyma stratejilerini, kar??la?t?klar? direnci, bundan ç?kan mücadele biçimini, el koyma ve mücadelenin ortaya ç?kard??? kal?c? örgütlenme türlerini ve dolay?s?yla kaynaklara el koyma etkinli?ini önemli derece etkilemi?tir." (s. 40)

Tilly, daha sonra buna ikinci bir katman ekliyor: Sava?. Sava? Tilly'ye yalnızca iç de?il, d?? mekanizmalar? da hesaba katma imkan? veriyor. Bu devlet olu?umu ?yle ?ematize edilebilir:

- i. Devletler kendi aralar?nda kaynaklar ve nüfus üzerine rekabete tutu?unca, her devlet kendi içinde sava? haz?rl??? yapmaya yöneliyor.
- ii. Devlet sava? için gereken kayna??, kendi nüfusundan zorla ya da pazarl?kla kaynak çekerek yaratmak

istiyor.

- iii. Bunun için merkezi bir yap? kuruyor. Vergi topluyor, borç ya da haraç al?yor, askere al?yor.
- iv. Sermaye devletle pazarl?k yapacak güçteyse, bu süreçte imtiyazlar ediniyor (parlamento, dan??ma kurullar? vs.). Kar??l???nda borç veriyor, silah üretiyor.
- v. Küçük köylü, emekçi s?n?flar bu duruma örgütlenip direnerek kar??l?k veriyor. Devlet iç güvenlik ayg?t?n? geli?tirerek onlar? kontrol alt?na almaya giri?yor. Halk? silahs?zland?r?yor ve ?iddeti kendi tekeline al?yor. (?lerleyen a?amalarda konut yaparak, ücretsiz sa?l?k ve e?itim vererek bu kontrolü daha da geni?letecek.)

Tilly Avrupa devletlerine özgünlü?ünü veren ?eyin, benim 5 maddede özetledi?im bu faktörlerin kar??m? oldu?unu söylüyor. Devletin d??ta kar??la?t??? rakibin zay?f/güçlü olu?u; içe kaynak çekmek için kurulan mekanizman?n güçlü/etkili/hantal/küçük olu?u vs. gibi unsurlar devlete tarihsel süreç içinde karakterini veriyor. ?u sözünü etkili buldum:

"Bizim geriye bak??la rahat biçimde "devlet olu?umu" ad?n? verdi?imiz süreç, s?radan insanlar?n k?sa dönemli perspektifinden, fakir köylü ve zanaatkar için ac?mas?z vergiler, çeyiz olacak hayvanlardan zorla al?nan sat?? vergisi, cemaatin gecikmi? vergileri nedeniyle yerel önderlerin esir al?nmas?, itiraz etmeye cesaret eden ba?kalar?n?n as?lmas?, talihsiz sivil halk?n üzerine kaba askerlerin sal?nmas?... anlam?na geliyordu." (s. 173-174)

Son olarak, Tilly Avrupa'daki devletlerin geli?im yolunda 4 a?amadan geçti?ini söylüyor: i. Patrimonial devlet. Egemen s?n?f haraç almakla yetinip, merkezi kontrol kurmad??? döneme denk dü?er. ii. Komisyoncu devlet. Bu a?amada egemen s?n?f sava? i?ini paral? askerlere, kiral?k ordulara havale ediyor ve onlara ya?madan pay veriyor. iii. Ulus-devlet. Frans?z Devrimi ile birlikte burjuvazi merkezi bürokratik bir devlet ile ulusal ordular kurmaya yöneliyor. Napolyon sava?lar?ndan sonra bu Avrupa'da norm haline geliyor. iv. Uzmanla?ma dönemi. Ordular?n sava? i?inde uzmanla?t??? ve siyaseti sivillere devretti?i dönem. Bugün hakim hale gelen bu ulus-devlet modeli, Avrupa'da olu?tu ve sonra 19-20. yüzy?llarda tüm dünyaya yay?ld? diyor Tilly.

Kitap burada özetledi?im süreci, 1000 y?ll?k tarihin önemli duraklar?na bakarak, ülkeler aras?ndaki farkl?l?klar? örmekleyerek aç?klam??. Birkaç nokta dikkatimi çekti:

- Tezler önemli ama kitap biraz eskimi? gibi duruyor.
- Özellikle teoriyi boyutland?rmay? b?rak?p, Hobsbawm gibi "tek paragrafta Vietnam sava??" ya da "1. Dünya Sava??na kat?lm?? ülkeler listesi" vermeye ba?lad???nda cam? aç?p ba??ras?m geldi. Bu türden ilgisiz/deriniksiz/gere?inden fazla ayr?nt?l? yerler okumay? eziyete dönü?türebiliyor.
- Sermaye ile zor aras?na koydu?u keskin ayr?m yan?lt?c?. Özellikle de Frans?z Devrimi'nden ve 19. yüzy?ldan itibaren. Devlet yöneticileri hep sava?a susam??, gül gibi geçinip giden sermayeye "hadi sava?al?m" deyip duruyor gibi.
- Buna paralel, ekonomi, üretim ili?kileri boyutu çok güdüük, sava?a k?yasla hep ikincil duruyor.
- Önce tüm devletlerin a??r? geli?mi? mafya örgütlenmeleri, sava? araçlar? oldu?unu söyleyip, sonra "ulus devletlerin gücünü sava?mak için de?il, adaletin ve demokrasinin yarat?lmas? için kullanal?m" demesine anlam veremedim. Zaten Tilly'nin anlat?s? günümüze yakla?t?kça devletlerin s?n?fsal nitelikleri belirsizle?iyor. "Devlet! Ne senle, ne sensiz olmuyor" diyen apolitik bir yakla??m? var.
- Kudret Emiro?lu'nun Türkçe çevirisinde ufak tefek dikkatsizliklerle kar??la?t?m ama genelde oldukça okunaklı? bir çeviri sunmu?. G?pta ettim.

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## Colin says

This is a partial re-read — I read portions of this around five years ago, and just re-visited it. In brief, the theory argues that European states started with varying endowments of capital and coercive resources and political actors who controlled them; the leaders of the proto-states drew upon these resources to consolidate their control over internal and external rivals; in doing so the most successful formed professional bureaucracies (usually formed in war, with a ratchet effect that led to their continuation in some form afterwards) that were better able to mobilize revenues and the means of coercion; this gave these more modern nation-state structures advantages against other state forms that those rivals were obliged to either copy or otherwise be swallowed up by in a process of continual competition; and the process of extracting or bargaining for resources shaped the form of the state and the degree to which state leaders were obliged to make concessions and compromises in terms of representation, public service provision, etc.

This is a foundational text that echoes throughout the state formation literature, though having read more on the subject in the intervening period since I first picked this up, some of the novelty and presentation of the argument suffers somewhat through comparison with other authors who may have unpacked aspects of the subject in more generalizable or clearly written forms than what Tilly puts forward here. I think the coercive-centric vs capital-centric categories may be a little too broad when making detailed comparative political analysis about actual political organizations, bargaining, coalition management, etc. Some of the points about how states with potential access to high levels of (more easily taxable) mobile capital could thrive with comparatively light administrative structures but that were ultimately unable to compete with larger states that more effectively mixed coercive and capital resources were interesting to consider. I think the explanation of the political logic of coercion-intensive states is less well-developed, though, and the factors that could produce the magic capital-coercive mix to produce a modern nation-state are less clear.

In the end it's essential but not the easiest read on the subject.

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## Daniel says

In these days of historical specialization, a comprehensive treatment of any subject is most welcome, whatever its faults. Tilly has indeed set himself a daunting task, namely to explain the development of state formation in Europe over the last millennium; specifically, he seeks to explain why a pattern of divergent state formations ultimately converged in the form of the modern nation-state. To the chagrin of social scientists, he assumes that war has always been the central object of the state; economic/political determinism is complementary but subordinate. Given that the nation-state has enjoyed the greatest military success throughout the centuries, all states have been forced either to move in that direction or cease to exist.

Tilly makes many good points. He reminds us that rulers did not operate with a specific plan of state formation in mind—they created states only in conjunction with certain of their subjects. Given geographic and temporal circumstances, rulers could only pursue increasingly costly military ventures by bargaining with power blocks within their subject population for the necessary resources—soldiers, rations, etc. Where capital was not accumulated and concentrated, the balance of power lay with landowners. Where a city had emerged with a concentration of capital, proto-capitalists held power. Where capital was unavailable, the ruler could resort to methods of coercion of his subjects. Political and economic conditions dictated the

bargaining terms with which the ruler sought to win support for his military goals. Tilly argues that different combinations of coercion and capital created diverse types of states. As the demands of war increased, the power blocks which rulers depended on gained more and more advantage over them, thus winning for themselves concessions that increased their standing in the state's government. In effect, the era of bureaucratization was born. The means of capitalization and coercion were incorporated into the structure of the state, and thus was born the nation-state. Essentially, the nation-state has proven to be the best at mobilizing and fighting wars, leading lesser states to either emulate it or risk being conquered by it.

Tilly offers a somewhat simplistic argument, acknowledging the criticisms he duly expects will come. State formation is portrayed as little more than an afterthought of warmongering. The accumulation of royal concessions in time laid the foundation for permanent infrastructure. By seeking revenues and compliance from a subject population, rulers eventually found themselves having to provide for their subjects' welfare--via production, distribution, transportation, etc. In the most modern states, social spending now outweighs military spending; this has served to shorten the length of wars while greatly increasing their intensity. A major contribution of this book is its implication that social history by itself does not explain the emergence of modern states and societies. Some will find Tilly's simplistic model untenable, but I find it quite logical and compelling. His argument (and the wealth of resources on which he draws) certainly warrants serious thought on the part of the reader.

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