

## State or democracy first? Alternative perspectives on the state-democracy nexus

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This article addresses the links between democracy, understood in minimal procedural terms, and the state, considered as a political centre that (1) has the monopoly of violence within a territory, (2) rules over a population that shares a sense of nationhood, and (3) delivers public goods other than political order. It considers two perspectives on these state-democracy links: one that holds that, to ensure successful democratization and enduring democracy, the construction of a state must be completed before steps are taken to install democracy; another that posits that state construction can be confronted in the course of democratization or through democracy. The article concludes that variants of the proposition “no state, no democracy”, when understood as involving explanatory relationships, have validity, but are only partially true, frequently one-sided – ignoring how democracy affects state-related problems – and excessively pessimistic – overlooking how democracy can offer a solution to state-related problems. Thus, research on the “no state, no democracy” proposition does not support a general prescription to put the state first. As democracy was established as a key basis for the legitimacy of the state throughout the world in the twentieth century, the democracy first thesis gained considerable plausibility.

**Keywords:** democracy; state; state formation; political order; state capacity; nation-state; administration; patrimonialism; governability

### Introduction

Democracy is a form of government of the state. Moreover, for a state to be democratic, it must have the capacity to enforce basic political rights, such as the right to vote and run for office throughout its territory. Thus, there is no democracy without a state; the state is a definitional aspect of democracy. However, the state-democracy nexus involves more than definitional relationships. The rise,

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evolution and decline of the state and democracy in various settings entail distinct yet intricately connected processes. Thus, we can ask many questions about the state-democracy nexus that concern causal, as opposed to definitional, relationships between the state and democracy. Must political order be secured before democratization can start or can democracy prosper when the political order is weak? Does democracy require the construction of a nation-state or can democracy exist in a multinational state? Does democratic participation threaten governability due to an overload of demands? Must patrimonialism be curbed before democratization can be successful or can democratization unfold even if rulers treat the public administration as a private resource?

This article provides an overview of research on the state-democracy nexus in the modern era, with the aim of assessing the current state of knowledge and identifying the most promising avenues for research. To make this task manageable, some consequential choices are made at the outset. Definitional relationships between the state and democracy are set aside and the focus is put squarely and exclusively on explanatory claims. In turn, to organize the discussion of explanatory relationships between the state and democracy, the following conceptual choices are made. Democracy is conceptualized in procedural and minimalist terms, as an institutional setup in which competitive elections with mass participation determine who occupies the key offices that govern the state. Furthermore, three key aspects of the state are distinguished: (1) the state as a political centre that holds the monopoly of violence within a well demarcated territory (the *territorial state*); (2) the state as a political centre that rules over a population that shares a sense of nationhood (the *national state*); and (3) the state as a political centre that delivers public goods other than political order, such as economic and social welfare (the *administrative state*). The aim of this article, then, is to convey the state of knowledge regarding the explanatory relationships between democracy, understood in minimalist terms, and each of these three notions of the state.<sup>1</sup>

There is no general theory of the relationship between the state and democracy. Theorizing on the three state-democracy links considered here focuses on different processes, and whether they interact or not is rarely even considered. Moreover, theories frequently focus on different time periods and regions of the world, and it is not clear how these theories might be integrated. Yet this article shows that, at an abstract level, scholars studying all three state-democracy nexuses can opt between two different perspectives. One perspective holds that, to ensure successful democratization and enduring democracy, various challenges concerning the construction of a state must be tackled *before* the democracy question is addressed. This is the better known perspective and its catchy proposition, “no state, no democracy”,<sup>2</sup> is widely treated as the conventional wisdom. It is not the only perspective on the state-democracy nexus, however. Indeed, the alternative perspective, which holds that challenges regarding the state can be confronted in the course of democratization or in democracy, offers a crucial counterpoint to the conventional view in the context of all three state-democracy nexuses. Thus, though there is no general theory of state-democracy links, the counterposition between

these two perspectives is an overarching theme that serves to highlight common ideas in a rather wide-ranging and diverse literature.

Also lacking are good tests, using appropriate measures, that empirically adjudicate between these alternative perspectives. Yet a tentative evaluation can be offered. Some variants of the proposition “no state, no democracy” – understood as involving an explanatory as opposed to a definitional claim – certainly have validity. Yet they are partially true, holding only under certain conditions and during some times and in some places. Moreover, they are frequently one-sided – ignoring how democracy affects state-related problems – and excessively pessimistic – overlooking how democracy can offer a solution to state-related problems. Thus, prescriptions derived from the “no state, no democracy” proposition and especially from the variants of this proposition that posit that the state is a precondition of democracy – prescriptions that take the form of advice to put “security before democracy” and warnings about the perils of “premature democratization” and the “excess of democracy”<sup>3</sup> – are questionable. Indeed, as democracy became established as a key basis for the legitimacy of the state throughout the world in the twentieth century, the proposition “no democracy, no state” gained more plausibility. Thus, in the twenty-first century, the democracy first thesis is a better guide to action than the state first thesis.

### **Democracy and the territorial state**

The state understood in minimal terms provides the best point of entry to a discussion of the state-democracy nexus, both because the minimal state is the core of any more expansive concept of the state and because Weber’s uncontroversial conceptual anchor is a key resource in any exploration of the state.<sup>4</sup> Thus, this section offers a first consideration of countervailing explanatory claims about the link between democracy and the state by focusing on the state as a political centre with a monopoly of the use of violence over a population within a given territory or, more briefly, the territorial state.

### ***The effect of state formation on democratization***

The emergence of the territorial state in Early Modern Europe provides support for a variant of the “no state, no democracy” proposition that posits that state formation occurs prior, and sometimes leads, to democratization. In this context, as Tilly and Levi argue,<sup>5</sup> the emergence of political rights was clearly a by-product of state formation and, in particular, a ramification of taxation. The initial wave of modern state formation occurred in the Westphalian context of generalized geopolitical competition among local rulers, a life or death competition that selected out the less competitive organizations. To survive in this environment, rulers were pressed to raise larger amounts of money and bigger contingents of soldiers. Nonetheless, resources could not be extracted for free in capital-abundant and

labour-scarce settings. Tax collection and the military draft were exchanged for political rights.

Not all extractive efforts in Early Modern Europe resulted in democratization or even proto-democratization. Indeed, whether incipient states extended more or less political rights was a function of the environment faced by state-builders in search for resources of war. Scholarly debate revolves around the elements of the environment that were decisive in shaping the political regime. For Tilly the density of the commercial and urban setting is key: where the density of cities was low, state formation resulted in autocratic regimes.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, for Downing and Ertman the strength of the medieval legacy of institutional checks on the executive power is determinant: state formation resulted in autocratic regimes where medieval constitutions were weak.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, the early rise of democracy in Europe in contrast to other regions can be traced to the broad contrast between European state formation, which forced rulers to bargain and make concessions, and the later state formation in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, which did not unfold in a context of generalized geopolitical competition and which did not force rulers into bargains with their population.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the historical record offers considerable evidence in favour of a fiscal connection running from state formation to democratization, whereby, under certain conditions, state formation impelled rulers to raise resources and, in turn, to accept a bargain appropriately conveyed by the political statement “No taxation without representation”.

The fiscal link between state formation and democratization receives further theoretical validation from accounts of the rentier state, as found in oil-rich countries in the Middle East and beyond.<sup>9</sup> In rentierism, a state with direct control over massive reserves of natural wealth, especially hydrocarbons, affords the ruling elites the “luxury” of not having to negotiate with the underlying population for the financial means of governance.<sup>10</sup> Thus, a tax bargain between state and society is absent in rentier states and ruling elites in such states do not face credible pressures for the extension of political rights. In short, rentier states offer further confirming evidence of the impact of the fiscal link between state formation and democratization. Rentier states are more prone to authoritarianism precisely because they are immune to the democratization mechanism associated with extractive efforts that European rulers in capital-abundant and labour-scarce contexts were unable to avoid.

### *The co-evolution of democracy and the territorial state*

If democracy did not make the first territorial states – the modern state precedes modern democracy by no less than a century – democracy can nonetheless have a broad impact on the territorial state. In fact, democracy determines whether a state can ensure the absence of organized political violence – whether in the form of clashes between private armies or challenges to the political centre by one or more rebel groups – and hence effectively deliver political order. Indeed, an important scholarly tradition views democratization as a specific path within the broader family of pacification processes. The vision of democracy as a

pacification mechanism is shared by most democratic theorists, including Schumpeter, Bobbio and Dahl.<sup>11</sup> For these theorists, democracy is centrally about electoral competition, which is contrasted not only with the *lack* of competition typical of repressive dictatorships but also with *non-peaceful* forms of competition typical of civil wars. From this perspective, then, the distinctive characteristic of the democratic path is the creation of mechanisms for the inclusion of political groups that, if deprived of the chance to contest power or excluded from government, would undertake revolutionary action and initiate a civil war.<sup>12</sup>

The vision of democracy as a conflict-management device opens up a well founded alternative to the view that the territorial state is a necessary cause of democratization in Europe, providing the theoretical underpinnings for the argument that the territorial state and democracy, or order and electoral competition, are the joint product of an agreement among potentially violent groups to stop or prevent fighting. The micro-foundations of the argument are quite simple: in a stateless setting, when two or more politically relevant actors face the prospects of a state, they have to decide whether to accept the state or fight against it. Their propensity to fight or accept a state hinges directly on their prospects of military victory. Yet the propensity to fight is also conditional on the regime type of the state. A group within the territory of a potential state can effectively condition its obedience to concessions regarding the regime. In turn, since fighting against rebels is costly, even a group that expects to control the state might relinquish full control of the state in return for gains in political order.

In other words, two modal processes of state formation, in which democracy plays a variable role, should be distinguished. In one, political order emerges as the by-product of a decisive military victory at the centre by an elite seeking to build a state, which makes no institutional concession to defeated groups (for example absolutist France and Prussia). In the other, it emerges as a result of the at least semi-voluntary acceptance of the political centre by political groups that are induced into obedience through institutional concessions that open to them a share of control – actual or expected – of the new state (for example early modern Britain and Sweden). This second route has not always led directly to full democratization. Nonetheless, concessions involving the creation of institutional rudiments have, over time, resulted in gradual transitions to full-fledged democracy. For example, initial concessions by an elite seeking to build a state in terms of representation of, or competition between, rival oligarchies may trigger a bid for allies in the wider population, which increasingly extends the reach of political incorporation. Moreover, in recent decades such concessions have led more directly to democracy, as when the resolution of civil wars has been achieved through the transformation of guerrilla organizations into political parties endowed with the full rights to participate in the democratic process (for example El Salvador in 1992). Thus, the establishment of political order and democratization and/or the endurance of democracy are increasingly simultaneous ongoing processes.<sup>13</sup>

A recent theory of democratization, advanced by Acemoglu and Robinson,<sup>14</sup> develops this vision of democracy as a conflict management device. For this

theory, democracy is the outcome of a universal distributional conflict, the alternative result of which is not only dictatorship but also civil war. A key novelty of this theory is the emphasis on the credibility of democracy as a conflict management mechanism. The rich elite of a population, when faced with a revolutionary threat, can either repress the rebels and initiate a civil war or promise economic redistribution of all future income. However, even if the rich *ex ante* prefer redistribution over repression, once the revolutionary forces demobilize, they are left with no incentives to redistribute. Hence, promises about future income are not credible. For the rich to be credible, they must make not a policy concession but a deeper institutional one, redistributing legal political power through the institutionalization of clean elections and universal suffrage, so that the wide population is not forced to remobilize and depend on fragile collective action to ensure economic redistribution in the future. Democracy is thus the only credible device to prevent civil war.

The role of democracy hinges on some specifics, however. As Lijphart argues, the fundamental device for peaceful coexistence in divided societies is the adoption of not any kind of democracy but rather of consociational democracy.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, as Mazzuca and Robinson show, securing rebel minorities a share of political power through the adoption of proportional representation was key to pacification in the new states of Argentina, Colombia, and Uruguay during the first quarter of the twentieth century.<sup>16</sup> In other words, the co-evolution of democracy and political order through an agreement to prevent civil war is frequently contingent on the adoption of mechanisms that favour power sharing.

In sum, there is some truth to the thesis that state formation precedes and causes democratization. Nevertheless, the prescription to postpone democracy until order is established,<sup>17</sup> on the grounds that a democratic order can be attained only inasmuch as political order is secured before democracy, is not consistent with theory. Theories of democratization that focus on the role of state formation do not make a blanket case for the priority of order. Rather, they hold that only a certain kind of state formation, conditional on other factors, causes democratization. That is, the process of state formation does not always contribute to democratization; it does so only under special circumstances. Moreover, the democratization of a fully developed territorial state is not the only path to a democratic order. State and democracy can co-evolve, also under certain circumstances. Yet an overall case for an alternative prescription, that democracy should be put first in the contemporary world, can be made. In a nutshell, inasmuch as democracy became a recognizable set of institutions and the basis for legitimacy of the state throughout the twentieth century, the simultaneous forging of political order and democracy turned into an increasingly viable option (see [Table 1](#)).

### **Democracy and the national state**

Theorizing about the state-democracy nexus also focuses on the national state, not to be confused with the state in the strict sense of the territorial state. As Rokkan stresses, “state-ness” and “nation-ness” are two different variables, and state formation

Table 1. The state-democracy nexus. Alternative perspectives.

State dimension	Core features	No state, no democracy	No democracy, no state
Territorial state	The state as a political centre that holds the monopoly of violence within a well demarcated territory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The emergence of political rights is, under special geopolitical circumstances and other conditions, a by-product of state formation. In exchange for taxes, groups may credibly demand political rights.</li> <li>• Rentier states are more prone to authoritarianism precisely because they can avoid the state-society tax bargain associated with extractive efforts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Democracy is a conflict-management device and the only credible device to prevent civil war and deliver political order by ensuring the absence of organized political violence. Hence, state order and democracy co-evolve.</li> <li>• Democracy prevents civil war and delivers political order when it involves power sharing.</li> </ul>
National state	The state as a political centre that rules over a population that shares a sense of nationhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreement about the national identity and the membership boundary of a political community is a pre-requisite for democratization and a condition for the endurance of democracy.</li> <li>• Premature democratization, that is, before agreement about the national identity and the membership boundary of a political community are secured, has negative consequences for the long-term prospects of democracy and also diminishes the prospects of peace.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A process of democratization can raise questions about the membership boundary of a state, but can also provide a response to such questions that does not jeopardize democracy.</li> <li>• In functioning democracies, conflicts regarding the fit between state and nation can be dealt with through democratic rules.</li> </ul>

(Continued)

Table 1. Continued.

State dimension	Core features	No state, no democracy	No democracy, no state
Administrative state	The state as a political centre that delivers public goods other than political order, such as economic and social welfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is an inherent trade-off between the effectiveness and the democraticness of government, and to solve deficits in governability political democracy must be limited.</li> <li>• Democracy will be combined with a bureaucratic administration when a bureaucratic administration is developed before democratization unfolds.</li> <li>• A patrimonial administration threatens the endurance of democracy directly, by giving incumbents an electoral advantage, and indirectly, by compromising the effectiveness of the state.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early bureaucratization weakens the democratization process because a capable administration may resist pressures for democratization.</li> <li>• Democracy can generate an external pressure on the administration (i.e. through elected politicians) that reduces the use of the public administration as a source of patronage.</li> </ul>

and nation building are two distinct social processes: state formation involving penetration through force, nation building involving standardization through culture.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, state formation and nation building are processes that begin to unfold at different periods in history: state formation in the sixteenth century, nation building in the nineteenth century. Yet these two processes give rise to a new issue: whether the outcome of these two processes is a tight fit between the nation as a cultural identity and the territorial state or, for short, a nation-state. Hence, the relationship between democracy and the national state is a distinct state-democracy nexus.

### *The nation-state as a precondition of democratization or democracy*

An influential early statement about the democracy-national state nexus, that has largely become the conventional view, is due to Rustow. He argues that “the vast majority of citizens in a democracy-to-be must have no doubt or mental

reservations as to which political community they belong to".<sup>19</sup> He also holds that, in order for democracy to work, "the boundaries [of a country] must endure, the composition of the citizenry be continuous".<sup>20</sup> Moreover, Rustow deliberately emphasizes that these two conditions – which could be labelled as the national identity and the membership boundary conditions<sup>21</sup> – have a special status: they are "a prerequisite of democracy", that is, they must be met *before* the process of democratization can unfold.<sup>22</sup>

More recently, various scholars put a significant twist on Rustow's argument. They part ways with Rustow in that they hold that democratization can occur even when questions pertaining to the national identity and the membership boundary persist. Nonetheless, they actually have a more dire view of the consequences of disputes regarding the identity and boundaries of the nation. They claim that if democratization occurs before nation building has been completed, it will likely jeopardize the long-term prospects of democracy. For example, Snyder argues that democratization in contexts of unfinished nation building creates "fertile conditions for nationalism and ethnic conflict" that may "redirect popular political participation into a lengthy antidemocratic detour" and that such "premature, out-of-sequence attempts to democratize . . . may make subsequent efforts to democratize more difficult and more violent than they would otherwise be".<sup>23</sup> Even more ominously, they claim that instances of "premature democratization" also have negative consequences for order and peace. For example, Wimmer asserts that "democratization . . . is often violence-prone", "is not an effective tool of preventing armed conflict", and leads to an erosion of the state's monopoly on the use of violence.<sup>24</sup> Or, as Bates puts it, "electoral competition arouses ethnic conflict" and that "electoral competition and state failure go together".<sup>25</sup>

These variants of the "no state, no democracy" proposition are more negative than those concerning the territorial state discussed above. The problem of state-ness is seen as a challenge that can provide the impetus for democratization; in contrast, the problem of nation-ness is held to only impede democratization or democracy. Hence the prescriptive implications of this line of thought are decidedly pessimistic. For Rustow, the absence of the factors he identifies as prerequisites simply makes efforts to democratize futile. In turn, for Snyder, Wimmer and Bates, attempts to democratize in the absence of purported preconditions are self-defeating and hazardous. Indeed, addressing the perspective of international democracy promoters more than that of democratic activists, these authors explicitly state that "it is dangerous to push states to democratize before the necessary preconditions are in place",<sup>26</sup> and that, because "effective institutions for channelling social cleavages . . . need to be well developed before democratization can be part of the solution rather than part of the problem",<sup>27</sup> it is preferable "to pursue a strategy of nation building that depoliticizes ethnicity over time" than to "follow more democratic practices".<sup>28</sup> Problems of nation-ness and democracy do not mix well and hence democracy should wait until nation building has been accomplished.

***The nation-to-state fit as an outcome of democratization and democracy***

The thesis that the nation-state is a precondition of democratization or democracy has some face validity. In Europe, the classic age of state formation, which started with the crisis of feudalism and culminated in the eighteenth century, preceded the rise of nationalism, which occurred in the nineteenth century. In turn, the rise of nationalism and nation building preceded the early experiences of democratization during 1870–1914. Thus, the chronological priority of nation building over democratization in Europe gives some plausibility to Rustow's view. At the very least, the conditions Rustow considers as preconditions of democratization were in place before democratization unfolded in Europe. Yet once democratization started to reshape politics in the late nineteenth century in Europe and in the twentieth century in all regions of the world, the fit between nation and state was successfully addressed in many instances in the course of democratization or through democracy.

Democratization allows for the expression of nationalist claims and hence challenges to authoritarianism can open the door to questions about the appropriateness of being ruled from a given political centre. However, countries are not thereby doomed. Countries undergoing democratization have confronted the challenge of national identity in diverse ways without derailing the democratization process. In some cases, the issue has simply been postponed (South Korea 1987, Taiwan 1987). In other cases, the response has been devolution of power or power sharing (for example Spain 1970s, Czechoslovakia 1990, South Africa 1994). Moreover, the problem of nation-ness has been resolved quite frequently through the formation of a new state, either through secession (for example, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania from the USSR in 1991), dissolution (for example, the birth of a new Russian state in 1991 upon the dissolution of the USSR), reunification (for example, the GDR and West Germany in 1990), or decolonization (for example, India from the UK in 1947; and East Timor from Indonesia in 2002).

Functioning democracies also confront nationalist claims. Indeed, conflicts regarding the fit between nation and state are regularly dealt with through democratic procedures – thus strengthening rather than jeopardizing democracy – and in a variety of ways. One option has been accommodation, either through legislation (for example about language or immigration policy) or constitutional change (for example Bolivia 2009). But more radical options have also been tried. Citizens have cast votes on the dissolution of a union (for example Czechoslovakia 1993). Moreover, citizens have cast votes on secession (whether affirmatively, as in the secession of Montenegro from Serbia in 2006, or negatively, as in the decision to keep Quebec within Canada in 1995 and Scotland within the UK in 2014).

Dual transitions, that is, processes of democratization that also raise questions about the appropriateness of the political centre, may be more complicated and volatile than simple transitions to democracy.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, when questions about

the appropriateness of being governed from a given political centre emerge in new democracies, the outcome can threaten peace and ultimately democracy. Nonetheless, there is enough evidence in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to cast doubt on the dire predictions of scholars who hold that the nation-state is a precondition of democratization or democracy. Democratization need not be blocked or derailed because of the problem of nation-ness. Indeed, in many cases, it is precisely the force of nationalism that provides the winds in the sails of democracy. Thus, counter to the conventional view that the nation-state is a precondition of democratization or democracy, there is evidence that supports an alternative perspective, which treats the fit between nation and state as an outcome of democratization and democracy.<sup>30</sup>

### ***Beyond the nation-state as a precondition***

A sketch of a theory of the impact of democracy on the national state is not presented here, as was done in the context of the territorial state. Yet the need for such a theory is apparent. Rustow offers a one-sided theory, which does not even contemplate how the fit between state and nation may be affected by democracy.<sup>31</sup> In turn, Snyder, Wimmer and Bates endogenize the question of nation-ness, but do not envisage democratization and democracy as potentially having a positive impact.<sup>32</sup> Thus, these theories predict either no democratization or failed democracy, and are unable to account for cases of democratization and democracy that successfully confronted nation-ness problems. Moreover, the reasons why existing theories are inadequate offer some important clues regarding how to build better theory.

Rustow's thinking is based on the assumption that the contour of the *demos* has to be established by a decision that is prior to, and hence outside of, the democratic process. This is a widely shared assumption, that can be traced to Jennings's statement that "the people cannot decide until somebody decides who are the people"<sup>33</sup> and that is echoed among others by Dahl, who claims that democratic theory is silent on the matter of the proper scope of democratic units.<sup>34</sup> This position is too restrictive, however, and some versions of it, such as Linz's claim that "one of the most misleading and dangerous applications of the democratic principle is to say that plebiscites should decide on the claims for independence of nationalist movements", foreclose options that deserve consideration.<sup>35</sup>

Democratic elections involve a competition for votes among potential voters, a matter decided prior to elections. Yet there is nothing to prevent the choice of who should have the right to vote within a given country (for example should illegal immigrants be allowed to attain the right to vote?), or even what are the boundaries of a country (for example should Puerto Rico become a state of the United States or an independent country?), from being decided directly through elections or by elected authorities. The procedures for addressing boundary changes are certainly complex. Who can authorize a vote? Who can vote? What percentage of votes is needed to reach a decision to change the status quo? Nonetheless, they can be

assessed within democratic theory.<sup>36</sup> For example, it is certainly more democratic to determine a country's borders through a "free and fair" vote than by military force, the basis for decisions of most colonial powers and of three leaders meeting in Yalta after World War II. In short, theorizing should not treat a country's boundaries as external to democracy but rather contemplate the possibility of a democratic approach to questions about the appropriateness of being ruled from a given political centre.

The arguments advanced by Snyder, Wimmer and Bates exemplify other problems.<sup>37</sup> These authors do contemplate the possibility of democratization beginning even when the question of nation-ness is not resolved. Yet they see the nation-state as a precondition for successful democratization, leading to an enduring democracy, because they assume that the experience of early democratizers applies directly to later democratizers. Indeed, the idea of "premature democratization" only makes sense inasmuch as one accepts that there is only one path to democracy and that a predetermined sequence – constructed through a somewhat selective distillation of the steps followed by early democratizers – is followed in all later successful cases of democratization. However, this formulation, reminiscent of early 1960s modernization theory, is flawed for several reasons.

This formulation disregards the possibility, by now well acknowledged in democratization theory, that there are multiple paths to democracy and that latecomers usually do not replicate the experience of early movers. Moreover, and very critically, it ignores how the approach to the question of nation-ness has changed over time. It overlooks creative responses to nation-ness problems that break with the old notion of a nation-state and make a case that new models are viable in the context of multinational societies.<sup>38</sup> In addition, the suggestion that early democratizers offer a blueprint for late democratizers ignores the costs associated with early nation building. Indeed, the argument against "premature democratization" is based on a skewed assessment of the costs associated with alternative approaches to nation-ness problems. On the one hand, it downplays the costs associated with attempts by non-democratic rulers to resolve the question of nation-ness – the outright suppression of minorities, forced relocation, and mass killings – and fails to acknowledge that the costs of early nation building are today unacceptable – in many instances they would be condemned as "ethnic cleansing".<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, it exaggerates the negative consequences of democratization by attributing violence to democratization when it is due to the weaknesses of the centre or even to decisions of autocratic rulers.

In sum, the variants of the "no state, no democracy" proposition in the context of the national state, and especially the arguments associated with the notion of "premature democratization", are hobbled by significant shortcomings. Conventional thinking on the relationship between democracy and the national state is not able to account for cases of democratization and democracy that successfully confronted nation-ness problems. Furthermore, the reasons given in support of the state first thesis contain questionable assumptions, that new theorizing should correct, about the current viability and costs of the state first and democracy first options.

### **Democracy and the administrative state**

A third focus of theorizing about the state-democracy nexus addresses what is frequently called the administrative state, a term used here to encompass the administrative offices of the state that aim at delivering public goods beyond political order, such as economic and social welfare. The differences between the territorial state and the administrative state are considerable. Most critically, the administrative state involves a substantial expansion of the scope of state action, well beyond the minimal functions of coercion carried out by the state in a strict sense. Moreover, the formation of the territorial state and the expansion of the administrative state began to unfold at very different historical times: the sixteenth century and the twentieth century, respectively. Indeed, the administrative state really gained salience in the wake of the Great Depression and World War II, as the scope of state functions was expanded when countries embraced Keynesianism and other kinds of economic planning and adopted policies regarding access to education and health care, unemployment benefits, and old age pensions. Thus, though the study of both the territorial and the administrative state can be subsumed under the generic label of problems of state-ness or, more precisely, state capacity to deliver certain public goods, the distinctiveness of the administrative state and hence of the democracy-administrative state nexus should be recognized.

### ***From the governability of democracy to state capacity as a problem of administration***

The initial terms of the debate on this state-democracy nexus is provided by Huntington's famous thesis about the governability of democracy in the West.<sup>40</sup> Huntington first makes a claim about the impact of democracy on state capacity: "the operations of the democratic process" and, more specifically, the "broadening of political participation" generates "an overload of demands on government, exceeding its capacity to respond".<sup>41</sup> Next he addresses the consequences of this overload for democracy: it raises "questions about the governability of democracy" and produces a "crisis of democracy".<sup>42</sup> Finally, Huntington introduces a normative preference – "Does anyone govern?" is "more important" than "Who governs?"<sup>43</sup> – and offers a prescription. Given that his diagnosis indicates that there is an inherent trade-off between the effectiveness and the democraticness of government – countries suffer from a deficit in governability due to an "excess of democracy" – he does not hesitate to assert that what is called for are "limits to the . . . extension of political democracy".<sup>44</sup> In other words, going beyond prescriptions to put the state first in the context of the national state by postponing democracy, Huntington's message is even more negative: we must opt between democracy and capable government and, ironically, to save democracy from itself and ensure state capacity, democracy must be sacrificed.<sup>45</sup>

It would not be wise to dismiss concerns about the capacity of the state to respond to demands from society. Indeed, it is likely that once the scope of state

activities reaches a certain threshold, attempts to expand it further simply cannot be matched by the needed capacity. Thus, Huntington's thesis about the governability of democracy captures an important dimension of the challenges faced by democracies in the post-World War II period. However, the pressure on the state to deliver public goods is not a problem only of democracies. Additionally, the trade-off between democracy and state capacity that lies at the core of Huntington's thesis does not hold up to empirical scrutiny. While some authoritarian countries have high state capacity (for example Singapore) and some democratic countries have low state capacity (for example the Dominican Republic), there are plenty of high capacity democracies (for example Germany) and low capacity autocracies (for example Zimbabwe). Thus, differing views on the relative normative value of democracy and state capacity aside, the claim that a limitation of political democracy will solve the problem of state capacity is unwarranted.

More positively, it is fruitful to break with the way Huntington frames the relationship between democracy and the administrative state. Democratic governments are called upon to deliver public goods beyond order, and the delivery of such goods requires the development of new state capacities, in the areas of economic and social policy, and hence the expansion of the public administration. Yet the expansion of the public administration opens up, in turn, the prospect that governments will use the public administration as a source of patronage, that is, for particularistic ends and not to provide public goods. The crux of the problem, then, is that a means can become an end. Indeed, the core question, to draw on Weber again,<sup>46</sup> is whether democracy is conjoined to a *patrimonial administration*, that is, an administration that is used arbitrarily by the government and treated as property of the government rather than as a public trust, or to a *bureaucratic administration*, characterized by meritocratic recruitment, predictable career paths, decisions based on impersonal rules, and the separation of the public and private sphere.<sup>47</sup>

Framing the problem of the state's capacity to deliver public goods beyond order as one of public administration rather than of democracy, as Huntington does, has clear advantages. It avoids the untenable assumption that there is a necessary trade-off between democracy and state capacity and instead opens for research a key question: under what conditions will democracy be combined with a bureaucratic administration? It draws attention to a critical dimension of politics that never comes into clear focus in Huntington's discussion of authority and capacity: the relationship between the government and the public administration.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, as shown next, this framing provides the basis for a more nuanced consideration of the overarching theses considered in this article – whether research offers grounds for putting the state first or for seeing democracy as a means for tackling problems concerning the state – than is offered by Huntington's provocative but questionable argument about the governability of democracy.

***The conditions for democracy and bureaucratic administration***

One influential response to the question “under what conditions will democracy be combined with a bureaucratic administration?” is provided by Shefter, who argues that the relative timing of democratization and bureaucratization determines the extent of patronage in party politics. According to Shefter, “where formal civil service recruitment procedures were enacted . . . *prior* to the development of mass-based political parties”, party politicians are prevented from raiding the bureaucracy by a “constituency for bureaucratic autonomy”. In contrast, when “the creation of a mass electorate *preceded* the establishment of civil service examinations” politicians developed the “capacity to successfully raid the bureaucracy for patronage”.<sup>49</sup> In short, Shefter holds that democracy will be combined with a bureaucratic administration only when a bureaucratic administration is developed before democratization unfolds.

This view of the most propitious sequence to the goal of an effective democracy – a variant of the “no state, no democracy” proposition – is bolstered by arguments about the impact of a patrimonial administration on the endurance of democracy. Inasmuch as a democratic system is, by definition, one in which parties and candidates compete for office under equality of conditions, the ability of incumbents to rely on patronage to gain the support of voters, that is, the use of public resources for partisan advantage, directly threatens the democraticness of a political process. Moreover, inasmuch as a patrimonial administration compromises the effectiveness of the state and this in turn affects the endurance of democracy, the positive impact of a bureaucratic administration on the durability of democracy is rightfully stressed.<sup>50</sup> Thus, a line of thinking that draws heavily on Shefter provides a basis for holding that the most viable path to effective democracy takes as its point of departure a reformed, bureaucratic administration.

The empirical support for Shefter’s view notwithstanding, the case for reforming the administration before democratization can be challenged on various grounds. Early bureaucratization is not cost free, from the perspective of democracy, because a powerful and independent administration able to resist politicians, a desirable trait in Shefter’s view, could also resist pressures for democratization.<sup>51</sup> In addition, inasmuch as bureaucratization increases state capacity and the ability of autocrats to deliver public goods such as economic growth legitimizes their rule,<sup>52</sup> a capable administration may hinder the prospects of democratization. Indeed, autocracies like Singapore remain autocracies for a reason. Thus, Shefter’s favoured path could lead to a bureaucratic administration without democracy.

Ultimately, the case for reforming the administration before democratization rests on the claim that an alternative sequence – starting with democratization – is not viable. Yet it is not the case that a country that democratizes before having developed a bureaucratic administration is doomed to have a weak state. The crux of Shefter’s argument, consistent with his statist approach, is that a barrier to patronage is erected when an *internal* coalition of administrators who oppose the patronage system is formed and when this “constituency for universalism” is

strong enough “to defend the autonomy of the bureaucracy from politicians”.<sup>53</sup> However, as students of democratic politics and clientelism argue, the operation of democracy itself – and the component of competition in particular – can induce politicians to professionalize the bureaucracy and abandon clientelism.<sup>54</sup> In other words, even if democracy is installed alongside a patrimonial administration, democracy can generate an *external* pressure on the administration that reduces the use of the public administration as a source of patronage.

In sum, as in the context of the territorial and national state, doubts can be raised about the suggestion that, in the pursuit of an effective democracy – one that combines democracy and a strong administrative state – it is best to put the state first. Putting the state first does not always contribute to democratization. Indeed, the development of high administrative capacity can be an impediment to democratization. Moreover, the “bureaucratization first, democratization later” sequence is not the only path to the happy combination of democracy and bureaucratic administration. Most countries in the world – and nearly all of the recently democratized countries – became democracies before developing strong state capacities. Additionally, some countries develop administrative capacity after becoming democracies. Thus, it is critical to recognize the promise of the democracy first path and study the conditions under which democracies are successful in developing bureaucratic administrations.

### Conclusions and next steps

The research agenda on the state-democracy nexus is extremely broad. Thus, to tackle a manageable challenge and to do so in an organized manner, this article focuses on the relationship between democracy, conceptualized in procedural and minimalist terms, and three key aspects of the state: the territorial state, the national state, and the administrative state. It shows that with regard to each of these state-democracy links, conventional wisdom largely posits that certain aspects of the state affect the prospects of the birth and endurance of democracy and that the prescription to put the state first can be derived from current knowledge. Furthermore, it draws two conclusions that run counter to conventional wisdom.

The first conclusion is that the different variants of the “no state, no democracy” proposition are, at best, partially true. The strongest case for this proposition is provided, in the context of the territorial state, by theories regarding the impact of state formation on democratization. In that context, a well-developed theory correctly predicts broad regime patterns in multiple regions of the world. At the same time, counter to the expectations of the “no state, no democracy” proposition, many countries have democratized in the face of state-ness problems. Concerning the national state, variants of the “no state, no democracy” proposition are also unable to account for cases where nation-ness problems were confronted in the context of a successful process of democratization or in the context of a stable democracy. Finally, the same point can be made with regard to the administrative

state; there are examples of countries that develop administrative capacity after becoming democracies. The “no state, no democracy” proposition does not hold universally.

The second, related conclusion is that there is no basis for the state first thesis, understood as a prescription derived from valid theory holding that the state is a general prerequisite for democratization or an enduring democracy. Since the theory regarding the impact of state formation on democratization is well developed and supported by considerable evidence, the territorial state is the context in which the “no state, no democracy” proposition is most valid. Yet, as noted, even in this context the translation of this proposition into policy advice about the contemporary world is open to question. Theory suggests that only a certain kind of state formation, conditional on other factors, causes democratization. That is, democratization does not always emerge because political order has been secured. Moreover, democratization does not only proceed where political order has been secured. The state first theses could be a recipe for supporting authoritarianism and blocking other viable paths to democracy.

Beyond these two conclusions, this article makes a case, more tentatively, for an alternative perspective. The need for such an alternative springs from a critique of the conventional perspective that points to gaps and flaws in theories that posit that state-ness and nation-ness problems should be resolved before democratization and that bureaucratization should precede democratization. The main problem with these theories is that they are either one-sided – ignoring how democracy affects state-related problems – or overly negative – overlooking how democracy can offer a solution to state-related problems. More positively, a sketch of an alternative theory is provided to show why democracy can offer a solution to the problem of political order, and an insight that could serve as the basis for an alternative theory in the context of the administrative state is introduced.

We do not seek to replace the conventional view about the universal applicability of the “no state, no democracy” proposition with an equally strong claim regarding the alternative “no democracy, no state” proposition. We also do not seek to replace the blanket prescription to put the state first with an equally general prescription to put democracy first. Nonetheless, given how ingrained the state first theses has become, we draw attention to the contemporary viability of putting democracy first. Democracy is not the full answer to problems of the state. Moreover, the case for the proposition “no democracy, no state” is rooted less in the results of rigorous tests than in reservations about the many variants of the “no state, no democracy” proposition and theoretical ideas that spell out how democracy can be part of the solution to problems of the state. We surmise, however, that as democracy became established as a key basis for the legitimacy of the state throughout the world in the twentieth century, the proposition “no democracy, no state” gained more plausibility. Therefore, we suggest that scholars who subscribe to the state first thesis fail to appreciate how, in the twenty-first century, the democracy first thesis may be an adequate guide to action. Indeed,

we hold O'Donnell general advice, "*In dubio* pro-democracy",<sup>55</sup> to be particularly appropriate in this context.

In closing, it is important to outline the challenges that should be confronted to further develop research on the state-democracy nexus. This article has sought to provide a counterpoint to the conventional wisdom on the state-democracy nexus, with its heavy emphasis on the negative consequences for democracy of ignoring the state. Thus, it has stressed the potentially positive influence of democracy on the state. Nonetheless the ultimate goal of theorizing, which is best prefigured in the discussion provided of the territorial state, is a theory that acknowledges that the state and democracy can positively influence each other, and that specifies the conditions under which the state causes democracy and democracy causes the state. What is needed, to mimic a famous statement by Tilly,<sup>56</sup> is a theory that accounts for how "the state made democracy, and democracy made the state".

To this end, the development of theory about the impact of democracy on the state is a key imperative. The sketch of such a theory in the context of the territorial state offers some clues about how to proceed. Yet more work is needed to specify the conditions under which democratization and democracy contribute to political order. Moreover, such a task must begin practically from scratch with regard to the national state and, as noted, with only some leads concerning the possible effect of democracy on the administrative state.

Research on the state-democracy nexus also must address some significant shortcomings regarding the impact of the state on democracy. Theories that posit that the national and administrative state have an impact on democracy incorporate, as noted, questionable assumptions about the viability and costs of different options. Yet these theories suffer from a less obvious problem. They stress the benefits of building a nation-state and a bureaucratic administration before democratization unfolds. However, in contrast to the scholars who theorize how state formation causes democratization, authors such as Snyder, Wimmer and Bates, and Shefter, actually do not provide a theory of democratization and/or the endurance of democracy. Indeed, the theories about the correct sequence make a negative point – a certain obstacle (for example nation-ness problems) prevents a certain kind of desirable change (for example successful democratization) – but they do not offer a positive argument that spells out why, if the obstacle in question is removed, change in the direction of democracy will occur (there is no theory that spells out how the resolution of the nation-ness problem or the development of a bureaucratic administration provides an impetus to democratization).

In sum, research on the state-democracy nexus is at an early stage. Theorizing is needed on how democracy is a cause of the state – a new area of inquiry – but also on how the state is a cause of democracy – an older area of inquiry that, research on the territorial state excepted, is nonetheless quite underdeveloped. Indeed, the relationships this agenda is concerned with are only gradually coming into clear focus. Yet the likely payoffs of this research agenda are substantial. After all, what issue is politically more central than the relationship between *how much* political power is exercised within an association (whether a state is

more or less capable, stronger or weaker) and *how* political power is *distributed* within an association (more or less equally, more or less democratically).

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### Notes

1. The discussion does not exhaust all aspects of the state-democracy nexus. It does not explore arguments for revising and expanding on a minimal, procedural definition of democracy in light of a consideration of the state. Moreover, it does not address, among other issues, the state as a legal system in full, and hence avoids tackling the relationship between democracy and the rule of law.
2. The proposition “no state, no democracy” is largely due to Linz, who sees the state as a condition of democracy in various ways. See Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition*, 7, 10–1, 19; Linz with Miley, “Cautionary and Unorthodox Thoughts”.
3. On “security before democracy”, see Musharraf, “Security Before Democracy”; on “premature democratization,” see Zakaria, *The Future of Freedom*, 55–8, and Fukuyama, “‘Stateness’ First,” 88; and on the “excess of democracy”, see Huntington, “United States,” 113.
4. Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” 77–9.
5. Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States*; Levi, “Death and Taxes”. See also Weiner, “Political Participation,” 177.
6. Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States*, 15, ch. 5.
7. Downing, *The Military Revolution*, 4–5, ch. 2; Ertman, *The Birth of the Leviathan*, 19–25.
8. Herbst, *States and Power in Africa*; Centeno, *Blood and Debt*.
9. Karl, *The Paradox of Plenty*.
10. The impact of natural wealth is not necessarily direct, as initially posited in Mahdavy, “The Pattern and Problems”. Indeed, scholars increasingly suggest that it is conditional on other factors, such as the type of natural resource, the social and political technology of rent extraction, the size of the rentier sector relative to the rest of the economy, and the level of economic inequality.
11. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy*; Bobbio, *The Future of Democracy*; Dahl, *Democracy and its Critics*.
12. Przeworski, *Democracy and the Market*, ch. 1; Przeworski, “Political Institutions and Political Order”.
13. As a study of the frequency of these two modal processes during the 1945–1999 period shows, the second route became the most common in the 1990s. Hartzell and Hoddie, *Crafting Peace*, 6, 10.
14. Acemoglu and Robinson, *Economic Origins*.
15. Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies*.
16. Mazzuca and Robinson, “Political Conflict and Power Sharing”.
17. Fukuyama, “‘Stateness’ First,” 87; Mansfield and Snyder, “The Sequencing ‘Fallacy,’” 6–7.
18. Rokkan, *Citizens, Elections, and Parties*, 54; Rokkan, “Dimensions of State Formation,” 567.

19. Rustow, "Transitions to Democracy," 350.
20. Ibid., 351.
21. He, "The National Identity Problem," 99.
22. Rustow, "Transitions to Democracy," 351–2.
23. Snyder, *From Voting to Violence*, 20; Mansfield and Snyder, "The Sequencing 'Fallacy,'" 6–7.
24. Wimmer, *Waves of War*, 176.
25. Bates, "Modernization," 161; Bates, *When Things Fell Apart*, 12.
26. Mansfield and Snyder, "The Sequencing 'Fallacy,'" 5.
27. Snyder, *From Voting to Violence*, 40.
28. Wimmer, *Waves of War*, 190, 196; Wimmer and Schetter, "Putting State-Formation First," 536.
29. Offe, "Capitalism by Democratic Design?"; Linz, "State Building and Nation Building," 366–8; Laitin, "Transitions to Democracy," 19–20.
30. This alternative perspective is consistent with Laitin, "Transitions to Democracy"; Laitin, *Nations, States, and Violence*, ch. 5; and He, "The National Identity Problem".
31. Rustow, "Transitions to Democracy".
32. Snyder, *From Voting to Violence*; Wimmer, *Waves of War*; Bates, "Modernization".
33. Jennings, *The Approach to Self-Government*, 56.
34. Dahl, *Democracy and its Critics*, 207.
35. Linz with Miley, "Cautionary and Unorthodox Thoughts," 248. See also Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, 26.
36. Regarding democratic theory on "the boundary problem", see Ochoa Espejo, "People, Territory, and Legitimacy".
37. Snyder, *From Voting to Violence*; Wimmer, *Waves of War*; Bates, "Modernization".
38. Stepan, Linz, and Yadav, *Crafting State-Nations*; Laitin, *Nations, States, and Violence*, ch. 5.
39. Linz, "State Building and Nation Building," 364; Laitin, *Nations, States, and Violence*, 107–8.
40. Huntington, "United States".
41. Crozier, Huntington, and Watanaki, *The Crisis of Democracy*, 8, 158.
42. Huntington, "United States," 64; Crozier, Huntington, and Watanaki, *The Crisis of Democracy*.
43. Huntington, "United States," 92.
44. Ibid., 113, 115. This view is at variance with the one Huntington presented in his earlier work, which posited that democratic and non-democratic governments were equally effective at governing. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, 1.
45. Huntington, "United States," 63.
46. Weber, *Economy and Society*, chs 11–3.
47. For a clarification of the dimensions that underpin and distinguish the democracy-authoritarianism and the bureaucratic-patrimonial administration continuums, see Mazzuca, "Access to Power".
48. This framing does not discard the idea from the overload thesis that state capacity might be affected by the scope of state activities. Indeed, because the temptation to rely on patronage is likely to increase with the growth of state functions and resources (Kitschelt and Wilkinson, "Citizen-Politician Linkages," 36–42), there could be some link between the scope of state activities and state capacity.
49. Shefter, *Political Parties and the State*, 14–5 (emphasis added).
50. Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy," 86; Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition*, 11.
51. Weiner, "Political Participation," 180 (emphasis added).
52. Teorell, *Determinants of Democratization*, 6, 70–6, 142.

53. Shefter, *Political Parties and the State*, 28.
54. Geddes, "A Game Theoretical Model"; Grzymala-Busse, *Rebuilding Leviathan*; Kitschelt and Wilkinson, "Citizen-Politician Linkages". See also Wittman, *The Myth of Democratic Failure*.
55. O'Donnell, *Democracy, Agency, and the State*, 177.
56. Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States*, ch. 3.

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