

Max Weber and the Latin American State¹

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It is difficult to imagine any academic work on the state that does not mention (if not begin with) Max Weber². For most scholars, their interest in the state as an institution began with Weber. Yet, despite his centrality to the field, Weber's work on the state does not appear in a single package nor does it constitute a neatly bundled theoretical whole³. The quantity and quality of work by Weber on various notions of politics is beyond a doubt. However, no matter its centrality to scholarly discourse, our notion of "Weberianess" in states is much more of a post-facto interpretation of a variety of works and analyses than a direct reading of a formal theoretical presentation. This essay attempts a succinct analysis of Weber's views on the state as a form of domination as well as the institution's relationship to the broader society. The central Weberian insight is the relationship of domination (pervasive through history according to Weber) and the connection between the modern state and legal-rational authority.

What can the study of the Latin American state contribute to our appreciation of Weber? How can Weber better refine our discussions of political development in that region? With regards the first, Weber used "ideal types" to explore the double face of sociological analysis: convergence and variation, the universal and the particularistic. Ideal types are "analytical accentuations of certain elements of society" and conceptual tools with which to approach reality. They must not be confused with a set of expectations (normative or otherwise) but rather serve as

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² A quantitative indicator: on ProQuest bibliographic search, the terms "Max Weber" and "state"/"bureaucracy" produced 10344 scholarly journal articles (9/7/12)

³ While he planned to write a chapter on the state and its rise as part of what would become *Economy and Society*, this section was never completed (Titunik 2005, 146). This means that we do not have a direct answer from Weber to the question of what the state is and how it evolved, but rather need to piece together the various parts based on a wide array of works as well as students' notes from his final lectures.

references points with which we can better understand empirical reality (Swedberg 2005, 119-121). Weber did not seek to make holistic claims based on selective evidence, but rather sought to identify patterns among some historical institutional paths and their divergences.

Precisely because of this central faith in the critical importance of historical coincidence, timing, and legacy, Weber would be the first to agree that expanding the empirical reach of his analysis to rarely discussed cases is an imperative part of his legacy. Weber wrote fairly little about Latin America and juxtaposing his ideas with the regional reality will produce some analytical torque. Conversely, the analysis of state development in Latin America would greatly benefit by the application of Weber's "ideal types" to the particularistic characteristics of the region. How and why was the progress of political authority different in the region from what Weber perceived as the pattern in Western Europe?⁴ This analysis provides us with an opportunity to analyze and distinguish between sociological generalization and historical explanation and allow each to inform the other. I seek to apply the developmental rise of the Latin American state to the more general and configurational Weberian concept (Roth 1975, 149).

Domination and Legitimacy

Especially in the last ten years of his life, Weber advanced a sociology of *Herrschaft*. Initially translated by Talcott Parsons as "authority" and "hierarchical coordination", its rendering as domination has lately been preferred by English-speaking scholars, but it also means rule, as favored by Reinhard Bendix, reign, dominion, dominance, mastery, or sovereignty. It is "rule by human beings over human beings" (Weber 1919, 311). Critical to Weber is the difference between *Macht* (power) and *Herrschaft* (rule) (Weber 1978, 53). Power is about the probability of an individual or organization successfully carrying out his or its own will, while rule is about the probability of obedience by others. Power may involve charisma, coercion, direct compulsion or intimidation and is a quality of an individual or a group. Rule is a relationship between two or more individuals that may be better defined not by who exercises it, but by whom it is obeyed and their reasons for doing so; the how and why the dominated assent to this state of obedience. While power may be episodic and idiosyncratic, domination is intrinsically associated with a regularity and predictability that make it particularly susceptible to social and historical analysis. Moreover, "domination implies a minimum of voluntary compliance"; that is, it requires some minimal level of legitimacy (Weber 1978, 212).

⁴ This follows the logic of Centeno and Lopez Alves, 2001.

The emphasis on domination makes Weber's political sociology inherently anti-utopian⁵. He remained ever skeptical of any notion of "*permanent harmony*" (Lassman 2000, 86). Weber believed that "conflict cannot be excluded from social life. One can change its means, its object, even its fundamental direction and bearers, but it cannot be eliminated" (Weber 2011, 26): in any complex society individual and collective interests must often contradict each other. In the 1895 Freiburg address he claimed that we should not imagine that "peace and happiness lie waiting in the womb of the future", nor believe "elbowroom in this earthly existence can be won in any other way than through the hard struggle of human beings with each other" (Weber 1895, 14). Arguably, the central message of his *Politics as a Vocation* is the inherent contradiction between the ethic of conviction and the ethic of responsibility. Every politician must confront the almost inevitable incongruity between ends and means and utopians make the mistake of believing that no such choices are necessary (Weber 1919, 357-367). The rule of humans over other humans is inevitable and we need to accept this fundamental limit to the possibilities of human freedom. For Weber, (paraphrasing from his disciple and friend Robert Michels' most famous aphorism), whoever says society says domination.

In the absence of an absolute hierarchy of values and in the face of the ethical irrationality of the world, domination is not the expression of a common interest because no such thing exists. The distribution of power and resources in a society will shape how domination is used, by whom, against whom, and why. Contradictions between the national interest and the special interests of the dominant social group are likely. This perspective is perhaps clearest in Weber's discussion of the conditions in East Prussia and the Junker class. For Weber, there was a central contradiction between the Junkers socio-economic position and the unity of Germany. The Junkers' interests and those of the nation diverged after unification—e.g. the Junkers wanted cheap Polish labor and some tariff protections even if such policies worked against the interests of both German labor and capital. Despite this basic contradiction between class and national interests, the Junkers maintained dominance through their control of the state. The Prussian state was in many ways their state, even if their class and economic position were in decline. Rather than fighting the Junkers for power, the German bourgeoisie did not become a class for itself, but aped the Junkers modes and shared their reactionary attitudes toward social democracy.

⁵ E.g.: "conflict cannot be excluded from social life. One can change its means, its object, even its fundamental direction and even its bearers, but it cannot be eliminated"(Weber 2011, 26). See Derman 2010.

This skepticism may be best understood in light of Weber's view of democracy as a contest of interests rather than a utopian Eden of direct representation (Weber 1978, 292-299). The essence of all politics is conflict (Weber 1918, 173). In any case, parliaments represent people "who are *ruled* by the means of bureaucracy" (Weber 1918, 165—*italics in original*). So, for example, Weber claimed that there were two roads for democracy in Germany neither of which involved the creation of a collective whole, but rather required a realignment of preferences. First, one could create a wedge between bourgeoisie and traditional landed class by attacking the social status system and by showing the bourgeoisie that their fears of social democracy were groundless. Alternatively, the workers' oppositional attitude towards capitalism could be reduced and they could be encouraged to cooperate with the bourgeoisie. Either strategy required some grand bargain between the relevant social groups. The tragedy of German democracy was that the bourgeoisie was never given the opportunity to share in political power before the appearance of the proletariat and the development of modern class conflict. Their fear of the working class drove them into reaction (Mommsen 1989, 59-60).

Given the emphasis on the domination by a particular set of interests, it should not surprise us that Weber did not consider that there was such a thing as "the state" acting autonomously and with its own agency. A Weberian state has mistakenly been understood as one with organizational autonomy, as a Hegelian subject. The surviving notes from his last lectures on the state clearly indicate, however, that Weber "purged the state of all collective agency" (Polonen 2009, 102; Hubinger 2009, 26). Weber implies that the state, and particularly the rule of law, is a façade covering the reality of relations of power (Lassman 2000, 92-93). The state is a form of organized domination by some over others (Weber 1919, 311), a means to some end.

The state is a tool for the purposes of domination. The state is an "enterprise" or an organization (*Betrieb*). As an instrument of power, the state can be used by different groups (including and in particular, the state cadre) for a variety of purposes, but it is imperative to understand that it is an instrument, not a goal. The state is merely one possible organizational embodiment of social relations; it represents the institutionalization of relations of domination. For Weber, domination does not stem, as in Marx for example, from control of property or other resources, but is based on two foundations: control over violence and over the legitimacy of that control. The analysis of politics is about precisely about who controls violence and how they justify that control. Politics is therefore about the distribution and use of force; the state is best

defined by the means that are peculiar to it, namely physical violence (Weber 1919, 310).

For Weber, violence has always been a part of any political association we might call a state and he includes discussions of predecessors to the modern entity in a broad variety of writings. We are here most concerned with the state “at the present moment” whose relationship with violence is a “particularly intimate one”. The contemporary state is that “human community which (successfully) lays claim to the monopoly of legitimate physical violence within a certain territory” (Weber 1919, 310-311). All three aspects (legitimacy, violence, territory) are critical.

For Weber, violence is, in a sense, the ultimate cause and product of social institutions. This order is delimited by territory; Weber assumes a compulsory territorial structure. In his later work on the state, he pays relatively little attention to nomadic societies or ones not linked through territory. The key to this focus might be the issue of violence, as there appears to be inherent relationship between the use of organized violence and the organization of land along mutually exclusive sovereignties. Territory is key to Weber—not just in terms of limits of rules but also in the creation of a “community of political destiny” ---shared political struggles produce deep feelings of a shared fate-- and we will return to the issue. But the central point is that for the modern state, “military security, economic interest, and community of national culture”---need to coincide on a map (Weber 1978, 900-940).

While the centrality of violence may be historically constant, the form in which the violence is exercised and how decisions are made to exercise it differ across cases⁶. Weber does not see the state as simply a coercive mechanism. No state can survive if it has to exclusively rely on fear or self-interest interest— force or material reward. For a state to function well it needs legitimacy or the belief in the existence of a social order that is obligatory or exemplary (Weber 1978, 947, 31). Weber places legitimacy at the very core of his analysis of obedience. For the state to remain in existence those who are ruled must submit to the authority claimed by whoever rules at any time. When do people do this and why? What inner justifications and what external means support this rule?. In short, rule has to be based on the high probability of obedience by a population and its acceptance of the right of those above to rule.

Critically, for Weber, all forms of legitimate authority depend on the rulers accepting the normative rules and reciprocating the obedience of those below by upholding their part of the

⁶ A key question is the extent to which Weber implicitly considered the development of different forms of authority as evolutionary. While the editors of this volume do not necessarily agree, I read Weber as at least implying an evolutionary progression.

political bargain and meeting their obligations. This is certainly true for patrimonial systems, but Weber also saw the functioning of bureaucracy as ultimately relying on a code of integrity, and a sense of duty—*Amtsehre*—without which it would not be able to perform.

Legitimacy is inherently precarious and it can be threatened in a variety of ways. At every moment those that dominate must wonder what inner justifications and external means support the acceptance or submission to their rule. Critically, legitimacy for Weber does not have a normative content. Just as the state is an instrument, so is legitimacy. What matters for legitimacy is not the substance of the rules per se, but the probability of compliance and the extent to which the relevant population orients its acts to compliance. Weber is a realist: since the world and social life will be inherently unfair (based as they are on prior historical domination and the unequal distribution of resources therein), social orders must come with rationales that either explain or justify the unfairness. In this sense, legitimacy is anything but an inherent good and more of means of enabling domination.

Weber famously discusses the three forms of rule associated with specific forms of legitimacy and forms of administration: traditional, charismatic, and legal-bureaucratic. For these ideal types, he emphasizes both the “auto-justification” of the domination and the organization thereof. Given the limits of a chapter, the discussion that follows will focus on 2 concepts: patrimonial and legal-bureaucratic authority⁷.

Patrimonial domination is a sub-type of traditional authority or that based on the “taken for grantedness” of tradition and historical legacy. As in all forms of traditional authority, both the ruler and the subject’s identity are critical. There is no division between the person and the office or function, nor is there any expectation of universal and identity free decisions or judgments. This form of domination originates in the decentralization of the household whereby both master and subject depend on the compliance with a mutual set of obligations. What further distinguishes patrimonial authority is the structure of mutually dependent personal ties based on “loyalty and fidelity” (Weber 1978, 1010). An expectation of reciprocity defines patrimonialism even when power asymmetries are large. Changes to the arrangements may represent threats to the benefits derived from the relationship by both sides. The control over the means of violence remains critical however, and it is the ability of the master to produce and use such forces that in the end

⁷ Obviously, much could also be said about the relationship between the ideal type of charismatic authority and the various Latin American cases that might apply. For example, is *caudillismo* a sub-type of charismatic authority?

establishes the basis of this relationship.

The most important characteristic of the ideal type of the modern state is the replacement of traditional patrimonial systems of administration by bureaucratic authority. Bureaucracy is domination through knowledge and regulations and is by nature the most efficient method of domination. It is rule through a set of universal laws and principles. Rationality implies calculability and predictability. Systems are rational when they are aimed at a substantive ends AND they are not subject to individual caprice or favor; such systems are guided by awareness of and regard of consequences. It is important here to note that the bureaucracy is not necessarily the state for Weber. Rather the modern state is an organization that administers itself and legitimates itself through bureaucratic-legal authority.

How does this state arise? One possible reading of Weber is as an “evolutionary” thinker where the progress across ideal types is inevitable, irresistible, and irreversible⁸, while another is that the ideal types are not meant as any form of “model” but purely and strictly as a heuristic device. Favoring the latter and more conservative reading we could say that Weber identifies three conditions under which the transition to the modern state could be observed. First, geopolitical competition requires that states be efficient enough to defeat or defend themselves from neighboring states. This is Weber at his most geopolitically Darwinist and functionalist. An organizational form triumphs because it provides a critical advantage in an internecine competition with other similar organizations. Second, bureaucratic authority is superior as a managerial instrument and reduces friction between personal and administrative costs. Bureaucratic management helps resolve the agent-principal problems that dogged patrimonial organizations. Only this kind of structure is capable of managing the complexity of tasks facing a modern state. It may also triumph because it provides a powerful instrument for the cadres within it, who may use it as an instrument for their own social domination. Finally, the establishment of bureaucratic rule is a critical step in the formation and development of markets. States and their monopoly over violence makes possible the calculability and predictability required by capitalism. Given the centrality of capitalism to Weber’s view of modernity, only those states able to support such economic systems will survive geopolitical competition.

Over and above the form of authority that is established, legitimacy in the modern world,

⁸ While Weber disdained deterministic models, his belief in the inevitability of bureaucratic authority seems an exception. In his 1918 address on “Parliament and Government in Germany”, he refers to “inescapability” of a process that is “unstoppable” (Weber 1918, 156-159).

is increasingly based on claims to some form of communal identity. The ideal-type modern state is both bureaucratic and a “nation”—a “community of sentiment” where people have a feeling of solidarity. Weber argued that this sentiment need not be inherent to a community, but could be attained in a relatively short period of time; especially when such efforts were supported by the literati seeking to create disseminate a particular identity. Again, what a state can achieve through coercion alone is limited—it needs the special legitimacy of the nation: “the state does not have the power to compel the free allegiance of individuals”. In contemporary societies, nationalism might provide a common consciousness above that of class and would help draw the proletariat away from opposition to existing social order. This sense of a community (however politically motivated or artificially constructed) is necessary to attract the proletariat or subalterns from their focus on the class or ethnic position towards their identity as a nation (Weber 1895, 25-26; Weber 1978, 395-398).

For Weber, nation and state are two very different things, but domination is more easily assured when they are congruent. “A state must not necessarily be a ‘nation state’ in the sense that its policies are oriented exclusively to interests of a single, predominant nationality. The state can serve the cultural interest of several nationalities” (Roth 2000, 129). But it would appear that the legitimacy of the central claim to rule by one community is critical for the success of a state. Conversely, a community can only call itself a nation if its linked to a state—a nation is a *Gemeinschaft*—linked by solidarity while a state is a *Gesellschaft* organized for specific purposes (Beetham 1985, 129).

What do you need for a nation? While noting the “artificiality” of belief in a common ancestry (1978, 389-390) Weber cites three critical components: a) some objective common factor (such a language), b) that this common factor be regarded as a source of value (speaking the language is worthy and an end of itself; c) this common factor is transformed into a solidarity against outsiders (they speak something else), and d) where this solidarity finds expression in political institutions and co-extensive with the community (*our* schools teach the right language). This process must be widely accepted: ‘the nation state rests on a basic psychological foundation which is shared even by the broad strata of the economically subordinate classes, and is by no means merely a ‘superstructure’ created by the economically ruling classes” (Weber 1985, 21).

Paraphrasing and summarizing a much more complex story that can be analyzed in a few pages, we may say that for Weber the modern state is:

- a. An instrument to be used by a social sector or group
- b. In order to assure its domination over other claimants to power or privilege
- c. Based on the monopoly over the use of violence
- d. And the legitimacy of that monopoly
- e. In a defined territory.

The contemporary/modern state is characterized by:

- f. The predominance of legal bureaucratic authority and subsequent governing legitimacy
- g. And the creation of horizontal solidarities that allow for the belief that said state represents some commonly held views and interests.

This organizational form is the product of:

- h. The inherent organization efficiencies of bureaucracy
- i. Internal and external competition that rewards those who use the most efficient means of domination.

The Weberian state is therefore an institutionalized form of control whose characteristics are defined in relationship to its social environment. It demands two conditions: a disposition by a population to obey rulers, and that the latter have at their command the organizational sources necessary to maintain their rule (Weber 1919, 313). The development of the modern state is a parallel process of monopolizing violence *and* the increasing bureaucratic organization and legitimacy of authority.

The Latin American State⁹

The central narrative of Latin American political development has had an uneven adherence to the ideal-type modern state noted by Weber. With some limited exceptions, the expected obedience of the population to the rulers has not been institutionalized/internalized in nearly as complete a form as Weber incorporated into this ideal type. Second, and relatedly, the state organization itself has often lacked the resources necessary to create or legitimize this form of obedience. Here it is vital to note Weber's insistence on the technical qualifications of personnel (1978, 217-226) and the region wide disdain for many civil servants. These two conditions: imperfection or fragility of legitimacy and a general dearth of institutional resources characterized the Latin American state from the beginning and arguably still help to define it today. The critical question for us is how does this different path help us to better understand the Weberian ideal type and, simultaneously, how does Weber help us understand why Latin America was different.

⁹ This section relies on Centeno and Ferraro, 2013.

The notion of domination is certainly not new to the region. One could find few examples of establishing a domineering power over a territory as extreme as what happened in the Americas during the 16th Century. The Conquest was aided by an epidemiological disaster that reduced the native population to a small fraction of what it was in 1492. There is no question that by 1600, with a few outliers, the Spanish had established control over their parts of Latin America. The Portuguese were also beginning the process of controlling the coast. In both Brazil and the Caribbean, this domination extended to the slave populations brought in to substitute for the now dead natives.

There is a strong case to be made for characterizing the colonial regime as patrimonial (Sarfatti Larson 1966; Zabludovsky 1989). A key question here is whether this form of rule was anything other than coercive in nature. To what extent did the black and Indian populations accept the authority of the Iberians in the sense that Weber means to apply the concept of rule? The legitimacy of colonial rule is a subject of considerable debate. The colonial regime appears to have been based on the kind passive acceptance or obedience that Weber considers critical. This was facilitated by the segregation of much of colonial life, the “thinness” of the state, and the myriad customs, norms, and obligations that delineated the races and castes. The system was anything but just, but in a similar manner to what Weber describes in East Prussia prior to the 1880s, a set of mutual obligations and understandings provided the colonial regime with a patina of legitimacy.

The first threat to this order came from the Bourbon reforms, which sought to impose a series of controls over both empires. This resulted in both fissures within the white community and increasing resistance from the sub-altern. The Napoleonic invasion of Spain shattered what was left of the traditional colonial legitimacy. Not only was the king gone, but also the rupture in imperial authority further exacerbated conflicts between *peninsulares* and *criollos* as the web of reciprocal obligations and benefits broke down. As Weber emphasizes, the key to claims of traditional legitimacy is their taken for granted nature. Once the curtain has been pulled back and the imperial wizard proven to be a charlatan, it may not be possible to reestablish the naturalness of obedience.

The independence period from 1810 to 1830 in Latin America (with the exception of Brazil) was one of things falling apart, centers not holding, and where the structure of expectations collapsed. For the next half-century (at least), the rights and obligations of dominated and dominant were no longer obvious or apparently irreversible. The remaining legacies of racial

castes and exploitation daily gave the lie to very claims to legitimacy of the independent republics: to represent the people. Rebellions, brigandage, and random violence demonstrated the weakness of the state. What resulted (again with the prominent exceptions of Chile and Brazil) were several decades of instability including intra-elite squabbles and revolts from below. In many ways, the violence that characterizes the region during this period is exactly what Weber might have predicted once the domineering cap of empire had fallen. During these years and for most of the region nothing other than the most primitive and superficial level of domination could be said to exist.

Contrast this narrative with the contemporary story in Prussia east of the Elbe. There, the Junkers continued to enjoy a centuries long control over much of the territory and large parts of the population. The shock of Jena in 1806 did not produce the de-institutionalization of Prussian domination. The peasantry was held in a largely serf-like state and the landowners possessed total social and economic power. Political power consisted of a partnership with the Hohenzollern monarchy that supported the Junkers' claims while they staffed the army and most of the bureaucracy. In this case, domination included a clear marriage between a dominant class and a dominant state. Note that as Weber was writing his early work, the functionality of the state-class alliance was breaking down as the Junkers' economic position deteriorated and the economic needs of Germany changed (Bendix 1977). By contrast, in Latin America during much of the 19th century, the ownership of the state was not clear. Obviously imperial trading powers had a voice, and at various times, merchants, landed elites, or military caudillos commanded. But, unlike in the Prussian case, no social group was able to institutionalize or legitimize its interests over others.

In the second half of the 19th Century, the region did achieve a new form of "liberal" order. This was characterized by economies oriented towards export markets, authoritarian rule and sham democracies, the consolidation of post-colonial hierarchies and inequalities, but also significant growth and development. The apparent progress on show at the many world fairs of the period belied a fragile political, economic, and social order. Obedience was rarely guaranteed, wealth flowed to very few, and divisions along a myriad of axes rived societies. Between 1910 and 1930, the liberal order that had been created in many countries was shattered by rebellions from below, fear from above, and the economic challenges of the Great Depression. However, the product of this crisis was neither the continuation of the patrimonial status quo nor the

development of modern states with bureaucratic-legal authority, but a hybrid that included aspects of both. The machinery of the state expanded enormously particularly in public welfare and in the economy, but patrimonial relationships and reciprocities remained significant while the rule of law central to bureaucratic authority was often shallow.

In any case, the legitimacy of the monopoly over the means of violence of the state and its representation and management of national interests were continuously challenged. The next five decades were characterized by cycles of revolutionary claims from the left and reactionary responses from the right. Argentina had military coups, populist uprisings, Peronism, terror threats and the “dirty war”. In both Peru and Colombia the literal monopoly over violence in parts of the territory were successfully challenged by a variety of groups and both endured years of intense armed conflict. The same could be said for all of Central America with the exception of Costa Rica after 1948 and Panama after 1989. The double transition away from state economic control and towards democratic governance brought something of a honeymoon to many of these countries, but again with some exceptions, increasing levels of violence marred the transition to more democratic rule while inequality undermined the legitimacy of the economic system. The image of the Latin American state is thus distinctively different from Weber’s assumption of modern legal-rational domination. There is no question that these are states in more than a purely nominal sense,¹⁰ and have been so since mid-19th century, but neither the physical monopoly nor legitimacy of public authority have been as assured as that in the ideal-type modern state. Equally important, the underlying bureaucratic structure of the state remained underdeveloped. The Latin American states of the 21st Century, for the most part, had all the appropriate trappings expected of such institutions. Yet, the distance between the regional empirical reality and the legal-bureaucratic ideal type is much greater than what we may observe both in large parts of Europe and East Asia.

How do we explain this different empirical path? To begin with, the origins of the Latin American state were quite different than what was imagined by Weber. His vision, dominated by European cases, is of organic growth of authority in line with social development and the size of the territory involved. The European states to which Weber refer began as small and consolidated territories controlled by small groups of elites. Over the centuries the range of command and the

¹⁰ It is important to see the LA states as a middle category between the OECD and the failed states of parts of Africa and Asia.

size and composition of the elite expanded and changed in order to exert domination over a territory and defend it from external enemies. The state arose as a project of an elite within a territory and while the identity of the former changed over the centuries, the organizational control of the latter retained historical legitimacy.

In Latin America, we have a very different origin narrative. The primordial states (e.g. Inca or Aztec empires) were destroyed by the Conquest. This produced a colonial rule characterized by explicit caste differentials and little conflict with other formal rivals. This order collapsed at the beginning of the 19th century and large parts of the region remained beyond any form of central control for decades. Because they inherited the imperial administrative boundaries, but possessed little power, the new states' official reign extended much further than their effective rule; these states began their institutional lives organizationally and politically incapable to establishing their authority over their territory.

Consider Weber's rationale for the ultimate development of the bureaucratic authority. Summarizing what is a complex and decades long effort to understand the rise of the modern state, I suggest that Weber focuses on three critical attributes of this ideal type: its effectiveness in inter-statal competition, its resolution of agent-principal problems, and the support it provides to the rise of capitalist markets. In Latin America, there was little geopolitical need for a particularly effective state. External competition for territory was largely absent and states (and their elites) felt little need to construct bulwarks against external enemies. Internal control was either privatized to local elites or easily maintained with relatively limited resources. For long periods, patrimonial patterns of authority were effective enough to maintain control. While capitalism did triumph it was of a particular sort built on either exports to international markets or domestic monopolies defended by alliances between dominant classes. Moreover, large parts of the population remained marginal to the state project: they were not significant as producers, as consumers, or as soldiers. Consider that even today many states need to actively encourage significant groups of citizens to leave the country given the absence of a social or economic role for them at home.

In short, the expected shift from patrimonial to bureaucratic authority was significantly delayed in Latin America and occurred in geographical and social pockets. Certainly the possession of private means of violence, which is a characteristic of patrimonial authority, lasted much longer in the region and arguably still plays a significant role in some countries. What characterizes the Latin American state during much of its two centuries is what could be

considered a lack of interest in resolving the problems associated with patrimonial rule. Agent-principal conflicts were accepted as the cost of doing political business. The general absence of external threats shielded the state as an instrument from the kinds of negative incentives that play such a prominent role in the analyses of Weber, Hintze, and Tilly.¹¹ In many cases, losing power was a temporary and not very costly outcome and certainly not worth the political effort required to assure it would not happen. Only when faced with serious threats from below were elites able and willing to use state sanctioned violence, but this could be accomplished with relatively limited means and, most importantly usually did not require that the central state challenge elite patrimonialism. When it did (e.g. Porfirian and PRI Mexico) it resembled a beast from Borges: a massive bureaucratic animal resting on complex pyramids of patrimonial reciprocities.

The central tenets of Weberian bureaucratic/legal-rational authority: universality of codified rules and the divorce of private and public selves remain no more than aspirations in much of Latin America. The states created after 1930 were often large and even the downsizing after 1990 has left huge organizations and bureaucracies. But aside from some “islands of excellence” (e.g. the Central Bank, the diplomatic service) much of public service in Latin America is subjective, personalized, corrupt, venal, and inefficient. Outside of isolated cases such as Chile, few Latin Americans expect justice or administration to be universal and anonymous. The often heard indignant plea of “Do you know who I am?” exemplifies the way most people see their interactions with the state. A white driver of a late-model car can expect to have a very different interface with the Brazilian police than her young and black equivalent on a bicycle. Personnel appointments are made according to a wide array of personalistic and patronage defined criteria. Corruption, whether as featherbedding, outright theft, paybacks, or bribes, is endemic. Weber predicted a form of “patrimonial bureaucracy” where the state cadre used the instrument of the state for their own purposes and we might use the term to describe the old Communist bloc. In Latin America, this developed in conjunction with an alliance between political, social, and economic elites.

This bureaucratic incapacity had costs other than to the delivery of services and the protection of rights. Following Weber, the real problem comes not from the qualities of the organizational instrument itself, but of the way it is perceived. The disfunctionality of state

¹¹ More specifically, the armed struggles in the region tended to be dominated by cavalry and not so focused on infantry, precisely the organization that Weber credits as a central disciplinary institution.

apparatus makes it ever more difficult for citizens to consider it legitimate over and above their agreement or disagreements over specific policies. At the heart of bureaucratic-legal authority is a belief in its universal and consistent application and studies of legitimacy in the region demonstrate the interaction between expectations and perception of the state.¹² The methodological rigor and robustness of the results indicates that these general findings do reflect an underlying reality.

The first observation is that there is a great deal of variance within the region. In practically every study the triumvirate of Chile, Costa Rica, and Uruguay are leagues ahead of their neighbours while the Andean and Central American countries are at the bottom. Not surprisingly, these same states tend to perform the best in surveys of the population. Survey after survey demonstrates that the majority of citizens in many countries do not accept the political (not to mention the socio-economic) rules of the game as reasonable, sensible, and justifiable. Too many political conflicts are not about who will run the machinery of the state, but about the fundamental right of the state to rule. In large part this may be explained by the low levels of trust in the capacity of state governance. Some of the individual findings describe what can only be called a “rejected state”: only 6.6% of Argentines have significant trust in the civil service, 19.2% of Peruvians trust “the government” and 30% of Mexicans trust the police (World Bank 2010, 214-215).

The absence of trust leads “citizens to become cynical about the political system and disaffected with the existing order.” (Diamond 2007, 1)¹³ The consequences of this are greater than individual discontent or alienation; no system of governance is efficient and fair to all, all of the time. In fact, working systems may need to “fool” some of the people, some of the time in order to function. Constraints on belief make it harder to deliver good governance or for the relevant groups to recognize it when they see it. So, for example, it is much more difficult for officials to remain honest and behave appropriately when nearly three quarters of citizens feel that they are corrupt and expect them to behave that way.¹⁴ There is something of a causal circularity involved in the relationship between trust and governance, which makes policy reform very difficult. Lack of trust reflects low quality of governance, but may also retard efforts to improve it.

Behind these issues lies a fundamental fragility of allegiance to the state (Norkus 2004).

¹² See Gilley 2006; Power and Cyr 2010; Seligson and Booth, 2009.

¹³ Larry Diamond, “Building Trust in Government by Improving Governance” 7th Global Forum on Reinventing Government: *“Building Trust in Government”* (Vienna, Austria: June 27-29 2007), 1.

¹⁴ See Seligson 2002 and Espinal, Hartlyn, Morgan Kelly 2006.

We may begin by distinguishing between two types of nationalist sentiment. The first privileges some kind of psychological bond between people, a conviction of their identity and differentiation from others; it refers also to a perceived and identified community (Connor 1978). We can easily detect such sentiments in Latin America, but we need to differentiate this psychological nationalism from a more institutionalized political kind of bond. Usually designated as patriotism in political philosophy, it has to be understood in reference to the state as a political entity. It involves the identification with a state and the recognition of no higher duty than advancing its interests. This communal “commitment” to the state is what often underlies legitimacy and is central to patriotism. This form of nationalist sentiment is much harder to find in the region.

The dominant characteristic of Latin America from the very beginning of its modern history through today has been its social and political fractionalization; Latin America is a permanently divided region with not very well developed “horizontal ties” (Lomnitz 2001). Latin America is defined by intra-statal divisions much more so than by inter-statal ones. We can begin with the obvious racial/ethnic legacy of the Conquest that still defines so much of Andean and Mesoamerican societies, and that of plantation agriculture, which characterized much of the Atlantic Coast. There are also the regional gaps that pervade practically every country: plains and mountains, coasts and interior, capital and provinces. There are also the class gulfs in this most unequal of regions, a fact that defines the rhetoric and struggles of politics. Finally, there are the ideological divisions of Left-Right and in between. That many of these divisions are congruent and interact makes the schisms even starker.

The image that comes through these figures is clear: with some exceptions, the Latin American state lacks an appropriate degree of legitimacy among its citizens. As a result of this, it does not exert the expected monopoly over violence, generate effective development, or provide services at the levels one would expect. Perhaps more importantly, this failure is widely acknowledged in large parts of the population and shapes its image of the state. How do we accord the hybrid nature of political authority in much of the region with Weber’s theoretical constructs?

The Post-Colonial State

Looking at Weber through a Latin American lens confirms the heuristic value of using ideal-types. The Latin American experience with chaos in the 19th Century and how it frustrated powerful imperial and domestic elites demonstrates that control over the means of violence is as

critical (if not more so) than control over production and finance. Weber was a realist and he appropriately privileged control of violence as the fundamental base for any system of political authority. But, the control of violence is not enough if those on whom it is imposed do not believe in its inherent “rightness”. Similarly, for bureaucracies to function, the need to create a spirit of duty or dedication is central. Societies do not just reflect what their members do, but very much what they believe. Latin American states may have resolved other problems and established some control, but have largely been unsuccessful in developing a patriotic faith. Weber’s skepticism might also temper the expectations that have dogged the Latin American state from the beginning. These institutions have been tasked with resolving divisions and inequalities stemming from centuries of racial, social, and economic domination. This is not to suggest that any political order could escape one or another form of domination, but to note that the colonial experience was characterized by a particularly ferocious version of it, one associated with ethnic membership, and one whose historical legacies remain very much a part of daily life.

What is the major lesson that Latin America can offer a Weberian vision of the state? The Weberian progression of ideal types from patrimonial to bureaucratic authority presumes that a social elite would seek some strategy to maximize form of organizational effectiveness. That is, the dominant group will seek to maximize the effectiveness of its control. The experience of Latin America indicates that in the absence of certain contexts and historical tracks, the organization of the state can survive in a less than optimal state. The parallel here with optimizing vs. “*satisfying*” strategies may be relevant (Simon 1956). Some dominating groups may not wish or be able to maximize their domination. A light control in partnership with others with whom they share power may be sufficient for their purposes. Similarly, their needs of and expectations of the ruled population may be low enough so as to not require extensive control. In a generally peaceful geopolitical environment, one of the central motivators offer the Weberian state may disappear. In short, the organization of the state need not progress, but may remain in some “in-process” stage for decades if not centuries.

A second addendum of the Weberian ideal type may be even more important: while Weber certainly recognized the importance of communalist sentiment and identity, many of his cases feature a fundamental congruence between identity and state. When he recognized possible contradictions (e.g. Polish rural workers in Prussia), he assumed these issues could be resolved with some form of cultural and administrative autonomy. Unfortunately we have much less from

Weber on the political sociology of ethnicity and race. Certainly his treatment of the racial question in the American South (1978, 386-387) indicates that he was aware of formally hierarchical racial categories, but it is not clear how these, in turn, would re-define the bureaucratic/legal-rational ideal type¹⁵. In his treatment of bureaucratic control, the state treats all subjects of the population as belonging to the same category in so far as they are citizens. The state may not be fair or just, but it will be consistent in the face it presents to the population. What happens, however, when a system is codified to systematically treat people differently and according to their racial identity? Weber recognized that the state will reflect the hierarchy of social power, and his writings on contemporary Germany clearly demonstrate that he was aware of how that hierarchy would bleed into the very bureaucratic organization of the state. Yet, I would argue that Weber did not pay enough attention to how a permanently fractionalized society would produce a fractionalized (and fractionalizing) state¹⁶.

From both Weberian and Latin American perspectives we might do well to accept the central importance of what the post-colonial theorists have long advocated: First, an appreciation for the special birthing conditions of post-coloniality. These are not organic organizations adapting to an environment and being shaped by the needs and possibilities thereof. Rather they are often artificial constructs meant for a very different type of rule. Second, we should borrow the emphasis on how state-sanctioned and state-enforced discrimination served as the central political legacy for many of these societies. The legacy of inequality may be the defining feature of Latin American societies and it is impossible to understand the politics of these states without privileging that for many centuries (even after 1810), the central role of the state was not the creation of a nation but the maintenance of social privilege.

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¹⁵ But see Moritz Manasse 1947; Hechter 1976; Abraham 1991.

¹⁶ With much debt to the work of Yael Berda and her forthcoming dissertation. This represents the leading edge of any analysis of how post-colonial states deal with their legacies.

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