**State Policy**

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*This article is about the general concept of the state. For the subjects of international law, see* [*Sovereign state*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sovereign_state)*. For other uses, see* [*State (disambiguation)*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_(disambiguation))*.*



The frontispiece of [Thomas Hobbes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Hobbes)' [*Leviathan*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leviathan_(book))

A **state** is an organized political community, living under a [government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government). States may be [sovereign](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sovereign). Many states are [federated states](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federated_state) which participate in a [federal union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_union). Some states are subject to external sovereignty or hegemony where ultimate sovereignty lies in another state. The state can also be used to refer to the secular branches of government within a state, often as a manner of contrasting them with churches and civilian institutions (civil society).

**Etymology and definition**

**Etymology**

The word ***state*** and its cognates in other European languages (*stato* in Italian, *Estado* in Spanish *état* in French, *Staat* in German) ultimately derive from the Latin *status*, meaning "condition" or "status."

With the revival of the [Roman law](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_law) in the 14th century in Europe, this Latin term was used to refer to the legal standing of persons (such as the various "[estates of the realm](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Estates_of_the_realm)" - noble, common, and clerical), and in particular the special status of the king. The word was also associated with Roman ideas (dating back to [Cicero](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cicero)) about the "*status* [*rei publicae*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Res_publica)", the "condition of public matters". In time, the word lost its reference to particular social groups and became associated with the legal order of the entire society and the apparatus of its enforcement.

In English, "state" is a contraction of the word "estate", which is similar to the [old French](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_French) *estat* and the modern [French](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_language) *état*, both of which signify that a person has status and therefore estate. The highest estates, generally those with the most wealth and social rank, were those that held power.

The early 16th century works of [Machiavelli](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Machiavelli) (especially [*The Prince*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Prince)) played a central role in popularizing the use of the word "state" in something similar to its modern sense.

**Definitions**

There is no academic [consensus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consensus) on the most appropriate definition of the state. The term "state" refers to a set of different, but interrelated and often overlapping, theories about a certain range of political [phenomena](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phenomena). The act of defining the term can be seen as part of an ideological conflict, because different definitions lead to different theories of state function, and as a result validate different political strategies.

According to the [*Oxford English Dictionary*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oxford_English_Dictionary), a state is "**a** an organized political community under one [government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government); a [commonwealth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commonwealth); a [nation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nation). **b** such a community forming part of a [federal republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_republic), esp the [United States of America](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_of_America)". [Max Weber](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Max_Weber)'s commonly used definition describes the state as a compulsory political organization with a [centralized](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Centralized) [government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government) that maintains a [monopoly of the legitimate use of force](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monopoly_of_the_legitimate_use_of_force) within a certain territory. General categories of state institutions include administrative [bureaucracies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bureaucracies), [legal systems](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legal_systems), and [military](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military) or [religious](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious) organizations.

**Types of states**

States may be classified as [*sovereign*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sovereign_state) if they are not dependent on, or subject to any other power or state. Other states are subject to external [sovereignty](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sovereignty) or [hegemony](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hegemony) where ultimate sovereignty lies in another state. Many states are [federated states](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federated_state) which participate in a [federal union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_union). A federated state is a territorial and [constitutional](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution) community forming part of a [federation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federation). Such states differ from sovereign states, in that they have transferred a portion of their sovereign powers to a [federal government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_government).

**The state and government**

See also: [Government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government) and [Form of government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Form_of_government)

The concept of the state can be distinguished from the concept of [government](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government). The government is the particular group of people, the administrative [bureaucracy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bureaucracy), that controls the state apparatus at a given time. That is, governments are the means through which state power is employed. States are served by a continuous succession of different governments.

Each successive government is composed of a specialized and privileged body of individuals, who monopolize political decision-making, and are separated by status and organization from the population as a whole. Their function is to enforce existing laws, legislate new ones, and arbitrate conflicts via their monopoly on violence. In some societies, this group is often a self-perpetuating or hereditary class. In other societies, such as [democracies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democracies), the political roles remain, but there is frequent turnover of the people actually filling the positions.

**States and nation-states**

See also: [Nation-state](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nation-state)

States can also be distinguished from the concept of a "[nation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nation)", which refers to a large geographical area, and the people therein who perceive themselves as having a common identity.

**The state and civil society**

In the classical thought the state was identified with [political society](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_society) and [civil society](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_society) as a form of political community, while the modern thought distinguished the [nation state](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nation_state) as a political society from civil society as a form of economic society. Thus in the modern thought the state is contrasted with [civil society](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_society).

[Antonio Gramsci](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antonio_Gramsci) believed that civil society is the primary locus of political activity because it is where all forms of "identity formation, ideological struggle, the activities of intellectuals, and the construction of [hegemony](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hegemony) take place." and that civil society was the nexus connecting the economic and political sphere. Arising out of the collective actions of civil society is what Gramsci calls "political society", which Gramsci differentiates from the notion of the state as a polity. He stated that politics was not a "one-way process of political management" but, rather, that the activities of civil organizations conditioned the activities of political parties and state institutions, and were conditioned by them in turn. [Louis Althusser](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_Althusser) argued that civil organizations such as [church](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_church), [schools](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/School), and the [family](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Family) are part of an "ideological state apparatus" which complements the "repressive state apparatus" (such as police and military) in reproducing social relations.

[Jürgen Habermas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J%C3%BCrgen_Habermas), spoke of a [public sphere](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_sphere) that was distinct from both the economic and political sphere.

Given the role that many social groups have in in the development of public policy and the extensive connections between state bureaucracies and other institutions, it has become increasingly difficult to identify the boundaries of the state. [Privatization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Privatization), [nationalization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nationalization), and the creation of new [regulatory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regulation) bodies also change the boundaries of the state in relation to society. Often the nature of quasi-autonomous organizations is unclear, generating debate among political scientists on whether they are part of the state or civil society. Some political scientists thus prefer to speak of policy networks and decentralized governance in modern societies rather than of state bureaucracies and direct state control over policy.

**Theories of state function**

See also: [Corporatism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corporatism) and [Elite theory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elite_theory)

Most political theories of the state can roughly be classified into two categories. The first are known as "liberal" or "conservative" theories, which treat [capitalism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capitalism) as a given, and then concentrate on the function of states in capitalist society. These theories tend to see the state as a neutral entity separated from society and the economy. Marxist theories on the other hand, see politics as intimately tied in with economic relations, and emphasize the relation between economic power and [political power](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_power). They see the state as a partisan instrument that primarily serves the interests of the upper class.

**Anarchist**

Main article: [Anarchism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anarchism)



[IWW](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrial_Workers_of_the_World) poster "Pyramid of the Capitalist System"(c. 1911), depicting an [anti-capitalist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Criticism_of_capitalism) perspective on statist/capitalist social structures

[Anarchism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anarchism) is a [political philosophy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_philosophy) which considers the state [immoral](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Morality) and instead promotes a [stateless society](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stateless_society), or [anarchy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anarchy).

Anarchists believe that the state is inherently an instrument of domination and repression, no matter who is in control of it. Unlike Marxists, anarchists believe that revolutionary seizure of state power should not be a political goal. They believe instead that the state apparatus should be completely dismantled, and an alternative set of social relations created, which are not based on state power at all.

**Marxist perspective**

[Marx](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Marx) and [Engels](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_Engels) were clear in that the communist goal was a [classless society](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classless_society) in which the state would have "[withered away](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stateless_communism)". Their views are scattered throughout the [Marx/Engels Collected Works](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marx/Engels_Collected_Works) and address past or the then extant state forms from an analytical or tactical viewpoint, not future social forms, speculation [about which](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Utopian_socialism) is generally anathema to groups considering themselves Marxist but who, not having conquered the existing state power(s) are not in the situation of supplying the institutional form of an actual society. To the [extent that it makes sense](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marxism#Dispute_that_the_Soviet_Union_was_Marxist), there is no single "Marxist theory of state", but rather many different "Marxist" theories that have been developed by adherents of Marxism.

Marx's early writings portrayed the state as "parasitic", [built upon the superstructure](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Base_and_superstructure) of the [economy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy), and working against the public interest. He also wrote that the state mirrors [class](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_class) relations in society in general, acts as a regulator and repressor of class struggle, and acts as a tool of political power and domination for the ruling class. The [*Communist Manifesto*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communist_Manifesto) claimed that the state is nothing more than "a committee for managing the common affairs of the [*bourgeoisie*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bourgeoisie).

For Marxist theorists, the role of the non-socialist state is determined by its function in the global capitalist order. [Ralph Miliband](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ralph_Miliband) argued that the ruling class uses the state as its instrument to dominate society by virtue of the interpersonal ties between state officials and economic elites. For Miliband, the state is dominated by an elite that comes from the same background as the capitalist class. State officials therefore share the same interests as owners of capital and are [linked to them](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interlocking_directorate) through a wide array of social, economic, and political ties.

Gramsci's theories of state emphasized that the state is only one of the institutions in society that helps maintain the [hegemony](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hegemony) of the ruling class, and that state power is bolstered by the [ideological domination](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/False_consciousness) of the institutions of civil society, such as churches, schools, and mass media.

**Pluralism**

[Pluralists](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pluralism_(political_theory)) view society as a collection of individuals and groups, who are competing for political power. They then view the state as a neutral body that simply enacts the will of whichever groups dominate the electoral process. Within the pluralist tradition, [Robert Dahl](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Dahl) developed the theory of the state as a neutral arena for contending interests or its agencies as simply another set of [interest groups](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interest_group). With power competitively arranged in society, state policy is a product of recurrent bargaining. Although pluralism recognizes the existence of inequality, it asserts that all groups have an opportunity to pressure the state. The pluralist approach suggests that the modern democratic state's actions are the result of pressures applied by a variety of organized interests. Dahl called this kind of state a [polyarchy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polyarchy).

Pluralism has been challenged on the ground that it is not supported by empirical evidence. Citing surveys showing that the large majority of people in high leadership positions are members of the wealthy upper class, critics of pluralism claim that the state serves the interests of the upper class rather than equitably serving the interests of all social groups.

**Postmodernists**

[Jürgen Habermas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J%C3%BCrgen_Habermas) believed that the base-superstructure framework, used by many Marxist theorists to describe the relation between the state and the economy, was overly simplistic. He felt that the modern state plays a large role in structuring the economy, by regulating economic activity and being a large-scale economic consumer/producer, and through its redistributive [welfare state](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Welfare_state) activities. Because of the way these activities structure the economic framework, Habermas felt that the state cannot be looked at as passively responding to economic class interests.

[Michel Foucault](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michel_Foucault) believed that modern political theory was too state-centric, saying "Maybe, after all, the state is no more than a composite reality and a mythologized abstraction, whose importance is a lot more limited than many of us think." He thought that political theory was focusing too much on abstract institutions, and not enough on the actual practices of government. In Foucault's opinion, the state had no essence. He believed that instead of trying to understand the activities of governments by analyzing the properties of the state (a reified abstraction), political theorists should be examining changes in the practice of government to understand changes in the nature of the state.

Heavily influenced by Gramsci, [Nicos Poulantzas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicos_Poulantzas), a Greek [neo-Marxist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neo-Marxism) theorist argued that capitalist states do not always act on behalf of the ruling class, and when they do, it is not necessarily the case because state officials consciously strive to do so, but because the '[structural](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Structuralism)' position of the state is configured in such a way to ensure that the long-term interests of capital are always dominant. Poulantzas' main contribution to the Marxist literature on the state was the concept of 'relative autonomy' of the state. While Poulantzas' work on 'state autonomy' has served to sharpen and specify a great deal of Marxist literature on the state, his own framework came under criticism for its '[structural functionalism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Structural_functionalism).'

**State autonomy (institutionalism)**

Main article: [New institutionalism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_institutionalism)

State autonomy theorists believe that the state is an entity that is somehow impervious to external social and economic influence, and has interests of its own.

"New institutionalist" writings on the state, such as the works of [Theda Skocpol](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theda_Skocpol), suggest that state actors are to an important degree autonomous. In other words, state personnel have interests of their own, which they can and do pursue independently (at times in conflict with) actors in society. Since the state controls the means of coercion, and given the dependence of many groups in civil society on the state for achieving any goals they may espouse, state personnel can to some extent impose their own preferences on civil society.

[G. William Domhoff](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/G._William_Domhoff) claims that "The idea of the American state having any significant degree of autonomy from the owners and managers of [banks](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bank), [corporations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corporations), and [agribusinesses](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agribusinesses) is a theoretical mistake based in [empirical](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Empirical) inaccuracies.", citing empirical studies showing a high degree of [overlap](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interlocking_directorate) between upper-level corporate management and high-level positions in government.

**Theories of state legitimacy**

Main article: [Legitimacy (political science)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legitimacy_(political_science))

See also: [State of nature](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_of_nature) and [Social contract](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_contract)

States generally rely on a claim to some form of [political legitimacy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legitimacy_(political)) in order to maintain domination over their subjects.

**Divine right**

Main article: [Divine right of kings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divine_right_of_kings)

The rise of the modern state system was closely related to changes in political thought, especially concerning the changing understanding of legitimate state power. Early modern defenders of absolutism such as [Thomas Hobbes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Hobbes) and [Jean Bodin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean_Bodin) undermined the doctrine of the [divine right of kings](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Divine_right_of_kings) by arguing that the power of kings should be justified by reference to the people. Hobbes in particular went further and argued that political power should be justified with reference to the individual, not just to the people understood collectively. Both Hobbes and Bodin thought they were defending the power of kings, not advocating democracy, but their arguments about the nature of sovereignty were fiercely resisted by more traditional defenders of the power of kings, like [Sir Robert Filmer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sir_Robert_Filmer) in England, who thought that such defenses ultimately opened the way to more democratic claims.

**Rational-legal authority**

Main article: [Rational-legal authority](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rational-legal_authority)

Max Weber identified three main sources of political legitimacy in his works. The first, legitimacy based on traditional grounds is derived from a belief that things should be as they have been in the past, and that those who defend these traditions have a legitimate claim to power. The second, legitimacy based on charismatic leadership is devotion to a leader or group that is viewed as exceptionally heroic or virtuous. The third is [rational-legal authority](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rational-legal_authority), whereby legitimacy is derived from the belief that a certain group has been placed in power in a legal manner, and that their actions are justifiable according to a specific code of written laws. Weber believed that the modern state is characterized primarily by appeals to rational-legal authority.

**The historical development of the state**

The earliest forms of the state emerged whenever it became possible to centralize power in a durable way. [Agriculture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agriculture) and [writing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Writing) are almost everywhere associated with this process: agriculture because it allowed for the emergence of a class of people who did not have to spend most of their time providing for their own subsistence, and writing (or the equivalent of writing, like [Inca](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inca) [quipus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quipu)) because it made possible the centralization of vital information.

The first known states were created in [Ancient Egypt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Egypt), [Mesopotamia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mesopotamia), [India](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_India), [China](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_China), Central America (e.g. [Mayan civilization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mayan_civilization), [Inca civilization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inca_civilization)) and others, but it is only in relatively [modern times](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modern_Era) that states have almost completely displaced alternative "[stateless](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stateless_society)" forms of political organization of societies all over the [planet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Earth).[[64]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/State_(polity)#cite_note-NOCW-63#cite_note-NOCW-63) Roving bands of [hunter-gatherers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hunter-gatherer) and even fairly sizable and complex [tribal societies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tribal_society) based on [herding](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herding) or [agriculture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agriculture) have existed without any full-time specialized state organization, and these "stateless" forms of political organization have in fact prevailed for all of the [prehistory](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prehistory) and much of the [history of the human species](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_world) and [civilization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civilization).

Initially **states** emerged over territories built by conquest in which one culture, one set of ideals and [one set of laws](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Law) have been imposed by force or threat over diverse [nations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nation) by a [civilian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_authority) and [military](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_organization) [bureaucracy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bureaucracy). Currently, that is not always the case and there are [multinational states](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multinational_state), [federated states](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federated_state) and [autonomous areas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autonomous_area) within states. Additionally [multiculturalism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multiculturalism) is currently adopted in many [unitary](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unitary_state) and [nation states](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nation_state) following different processes of [human migration](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_migration) such as [population transfer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Population_transfer), [political migration](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_migration), [immigration](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Immigration) and [emigration](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emigration).

Since the late 19th century, virtually the entirety of the world's inhabitable land has been parceled up into areas with more or less definite borders claimed by various states. Earlier, quite large land areas had been either unclaimed or uninhabited, or inhabited by [nomadic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nomad) peoples who were [not organized as states](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stateless_society). However, even within present-day states there are vast areas of wilderness, like the [Amazon Rainforest](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amazon_Rainforest), which are uninhabited or inhabited solely or mostly by [indigenous people](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indigenous_people) (and some of them remain [uncontacted](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uncontacted_people)). Also, there are states which do not hold *de facto* control over all of their claimed territory or where this control is challenged. Currently the international community comprises around 200 [sovereign states](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sovereign_states), the vast majority of which are represented in the [United Nations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations).

**Pre-historic stateless societies**

Main article: [Stateless societies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stateless_societies)

For most of human history, people have lived in [stateless societies](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stateless_societies), characterized by a lack of concentrated authority, and the absence of large [inequalities](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_inequality) in economic and [political power](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_power).

The [anthropologist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthropologist) [Robert L. Carneiro](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_L._Carneiro) comments:

"For 99.8 percent of human history people lived exclusively in autonomous bands and villages. At the beginning of the [Paleolithic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paleolithic) [i.e. the [stone age](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stone_age)], the number of these autonomous political units must have been small, but by 1000 B.C. it had increased to some 600,000. Then supra-village aggregation began in earnest, and in barely three [millennia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Millennium) the autonomous political units of the world dropped from 600,000 to 157. In the light of this trend, the continued decrease from 157 to 1 seems not only inescapable but close at hand".

The anthropologist [Tim Ingold](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tim_Ingold) writes:

"It is not enough to observe, in a now rather dated anthropological idiom, that [hunter gatherers](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hunter_gatherers) live in 'stateless societies', as though their social lives were somehow lacking or unfinished, waiting to be completed by the evolutionary development of a state apparatus. Rather, the principal of their sociality, as [Pierre Clastres](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_Clastres) has put it, is fundamentally *against* the state."

**The Neolithic period**

Main article: [Neolithic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neolithic)

During the [Neolithic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neolithic) period, human societies underwent major cultural and economic changes, including the development of [agriculture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agriculture), the formation of sedentary societies and fixed settlements, increasing population densities, and the use of pottery and more complex tools.

Sedentary agriculture led to the development of [property rights](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Property_rights), [patriarchal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patriarchal) societies, [domestication](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Domestication) of plants and animals, larger family sizes, and provided the basis for the centralized state form. Agriculture also enabled the production of a large surplus of food, which created a more complex [division of labor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Division_of_labor) by enabling people to specialize in tasks other than food production. Early states were characterized by highly [stratified](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_stratification) societies, with a privileged and wealthy ruling class that was subordinate to [monarch](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monarch). The ruling classes began to differentiate themselves through forms of architecture and other cultural practices that were different from those of the subordinate laboring classes.

In the past, it was suggested that the centralized state was developed to administer large public works systems (such as irrigation systems) and to regulate complex economies. However, modern archaeological and anthropological evidence doesn't support this thesis, pointing to evidence of several non-stratified and politically decentralized complex societies.

**The state in ancient history**

See also: [Mesopotamia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mesopotamia), [Ancient Egypt](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Egypt), [Indus Valley Civilization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indus_Valley_Civilization), [Ancient China](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_China), [Mesoamerica](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mesoamerica), and [Inca civilization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inca_civilization)

[Mesopotamia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mesopotamia) is generally considered to be the location of the earliest [civilization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civilization) or [complex society](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Complex_society), meaning that it contained [cities](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cities), full-time [division of labor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Division_of_labor), social concentration of wealth into [capital](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capital_(economics)), [unequal distribution of wealth](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Income_inequality), ruling classes, community ties based on residency rather than [kinship](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kinship), long distance [trade](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trade), [monumental](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monument) [architecture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Architecture), standardized forms of [art](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Art) and culture, writing, and [mathematics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mathematics) and [science](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Science). It was the world's first [literate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Literate) civilization, and formed the first sets of written [laws](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laws). By the middle of the 4th millennium B.C., most Mesopotamian settlements were [fortified](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fortified), signifying that organized [warfare](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warfare) was common.

**The state in classical antiquity**

See also: [Athenian democracy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athenian_democracy) and [Roman Republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_Republic)



Painting of Roman Senators encircling [Julius Caesar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julius_Caesar)

Although primitive state-forms existed before the rise of the Ancient Greek empire, the Greeks were the first people known to have explicitly formulated a political philosophy of the state, and to have rationally analyzed political institutions. Prior to this, states were described and justified in terms of religious myths.

Several important political innovations of [classical antiquity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_antiquity) came from the [Greek city-states](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Greece) and the [Roman Republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Rome). The Greek city-states before the 4th century granted [citizenship](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athenian_democracy#Citizenship_in_Athens) rights to their free population, and in [Athens](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athens) these rights [were combined](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athenian_democracy) with a [directly democratic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Direct_democracy) form of government that was to have a long afterlife in political thought and history.

**The feudal state**

See also: [Feudalism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feudalism) and [Middle ages](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_ages)

During Medieval times in Europe, the state was organized on the principle of [feudalism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feudalism), and the relationship between [lord](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord) and [vassal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vassal) became central to social organization. Feudalism led to the development of greater social hierarchies.

The formalization of the struggles over taxation between the monarch and other elements of society (especially the nobility and the cities) gave rise to what is now called the [Standestaat](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Standestaat), or the state of Estates, characterized by parliaments in which key social groups negotiated with the king about legal and economic matters. These [estates of the realm](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Estates_of_the_realm) sometimes evolved in the direction of fully-fledged parliaments, but sometimes lost out in their struggles with the monarch, leading to greater centralization of lawmaking and military power in his hands. Beginning in the 15th century, this centralizing process gives rise to the [absolutist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_absolutism) state.

**The modern state**

See also: [Bureaucracy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bureaucracy), [Constitution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution), [Corporation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corporation), [Globalization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Globalization), and [Neoliberalism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neoliberalism)

Cultural and national homogenization figured prominently in the rise of the modern state system. Since the absolutist period, states have largely been organized on a [national](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nation) basis. The concept of a national state, however, is not synonymous with [nation state](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nation_state). Even in the most [ethnically](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnic) homogeneous societies there is not always a complete correspondence between state and [nation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nation), hence the active role often taken by the state to promote [nationalism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nationalism) through emphasis on shared symbols and national identity.

**See also**

* [Civil society](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_society)
* [Civilian control of the military](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civilian_control_of_the_military)
* [International relations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_relations)
* [Libertarianism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Libertarianism)
* [Rule of law](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rule_of_law)
* [Statism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Statism)

This page was last modified on 25 March 2012 at 16:53.