

# Review of: "State crisis theory: A systematization of institutional, socio-ecological, demographic-structural, world-systems, and revolutions research"

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Peer Review of "State crisis theory" by Tilman Hartley

For Queios

The author provides a comprehensive comparative assessment of five literatures that seek to explain why state crises occur. He finds that they share much in common with each other and suggests that they might engage in a more collaborative approach to shared interests. He argues persuasively that they might begin by distinguishing between crises that occur under conditions of "sufficiency" and under conditions of "scarcity," and suggests that this might help them move forward in a more collaborative, constructive way.

The article is not based on original research but on a detailed and wide-ranging evaluation of different theoretical approaches in the field. This is very useful because the theories inform the research that will be conducted in the field. He demonstrates that the participants in different literatures read and reference each other's work and identifies the cases examined by advocates in these literatures, to make the case that they have shared interests and concerns. I think the author makes a compelling case that a shared research agenda might be to distinguish between crises of sufficiency and scarcity and identify the shared characteristics of each, and he has suggested a number of possible conditions and pathways.

I recommend that the paper be published because it will make a positive contribution to diverse literatures in the field.

I realize upon reading it that I take issue with some of the author's assumptions, but because they are assumptions held widely, almost universally by authors in the field, I am not in a position to ask that the author to address them. I will simply note what they are.

The first assumption is that "the state" is an organization with a monopoly on the use of force. This is taken from Weber's definition of the state. But no state, ever, has had a monopoly on force. State officials license, delegate, assign, require, and allow non-state actors to use violence on their own initiative. They let slave-holders to inflict violence on enslaved people, owners to discipline their indentureds, husbands to beat their wives, parents to beat their children, school teachers to whack their students, bounty hunters to hunt down criminals, and citizens to bear arms and use them, at their own discretion, to protect their lives and property. Historically, states in the last century have tried to limit or restrict the use of

force by non-state and “monopolize” force under the authority of state officials and police forces, but this process is nowhere complete. Dictatorships, who have a greater monopoly on the use of force than other states, also enroll and license non-state actors to use force on their own authority. So I get a little impatient when people assume that Weber’s definition is an accurate starting point for scholars who study states.

The second assumption is that states can be compared even if they belong to different economic-political-social systems in different eras, even if they are based on different organizational assumptions. For example, in the modern world-system, the “state” has undergone dramatic change, and the most important change has been the transition from dynastic (royal) states to republican states. In 1800, there was only one republic (the United States), today the vast majority of the 193 states around the world identify themselves as republics. The rise of the republican interstate system (in the world-system) is erased by the assumption that you can compare the state of 15<sup>th</sup> century “Spain” (and its scattered European and American territories) with the state of Spain today and treat them as the kind of Spain.

But again, that’s just me. It is not my job to quarrel with the basic assumptions of scholars in the field, including the author, but rather to evaluate the article presented, given the assumptions made and agreed upon by participants in the literature. Using that criteria, I think the author has provided an interesting, informative analysis that deserves to be read by people in the field.

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