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Consent and Legitimacy: A Revised Bellicose Theory of State-Building with Evidence from around the World, 1500–2000

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Abstract

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CONSENT AND LEGITIMACY

A Revised Bellicose Theory of State-Building with Evidence from around the World, 1500–2000

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ABSTRACT

This article builds on the large literature that discusses if frequent international wars enhance state-building, as famously argued by Charles Tilly. It integrates key insights of that literature and a series of additional arguments into a more comprehensive and systematic model of bargaining between rulers and ruled. The model specifies the conditions under which wars are likely to build states: if there are political institutions enabling such bargaining and expressing the consent of the ruled, if the population contributed substantially to the war efforts by providing soldiers and taxes, and if rulers are legitimized either through nationalism or success at war. The article expands the empirical horizon of existing quantitative research by assembling two measures of state development, ranging from the early modern period (for nearly 20 states) to the years from 1860 to the present (for 116 countries). Findings from a variety of regression models empirically support the model.

CHARLES Tilly's dictum that "war made the state, and the state made war" perhaps represents one of the most often quoted phrases ever written by a social scientist.¹ Although a half century has passed since its initial publication, Tilly's so-called bellicist thesis of state formation continues to be vividly debated.² To be sure, the vast literature includes other research on the rise of the modern state, including prominent arguments in economics about how state formation interacted with property rights and economic growth.³ The bellicist thesis remains at the core of discussions in political science and historical sociology, however. Such discussions are mostly concerned with the first

¹ Tilly 1975, 42.

² See most recently Kaspersen and Strandsbjerg 2017; Queralt 2019.

³ North 1981; Acemoglu and Robinson 2012.

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