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Overview

According to a family story, in 1859 two Italian brothers arrived in Argentina escaping poverty and conflict. One travel-weary brother stayed in Buenos Aires, while the other decided to make a last effort and continue upriver to Asunción, Paraguay. This neighboring country had been politically stable for decades, was known for its superior security forces and public education system, and flourished economically. In Argentina, on the other hand, the rulers of Buenos Aires refused to accept the constitution and the authority of the capital, Paraná. Tellingly, after the defeat of Buenos Aires in the Battle of Cepeda, the son of the Paraguayan president had arrived to mediate the Argentine conflict. Considering the relative ability of these governments to enforce rules and deliver services – their *state capacity*, in short – it would have seemed the second brother had made a smarter choice by continuing his travels.

By the end of that century, however, Argentina had consolidated a strong state that could exert authority across its expansive territory and population. Buenos Aires, now its capital, received more immigrants than any other port in the Americas besides New York and was the hub of a dense railway network transporting agricultural produce sufficient to generate a per capita product comparable to that of the United Kingdom. Literacy rates in Argentina were now the highest in Latin America and twice as high as in Paraguay, where the state had become weak, plunging the country into poverty and conflict. Because the gap between Argentina and Paraguay persisted, my great-great-grandfather who stayed in Buenos Aires proved lucky, but why?

State capacity is fundamental for development and peace. Capable states able to enforce the rule of law and provide public goods and services can set countries on a stable path toward economic growth and social development. Yet, as the preceding paragraphs illustrate, state capacity varies widely across countries, even within the same world region. What causes these disparities in state capacity? And why do countries – sometimes even neighbors such

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as Paraguay and Argentina – switch places, change trajectories, and find themselves on opposing state-building paths?

According to the existing literature, one factor stands out as the most powerful explanation for state building: war (Tilly, 1990). To mobilize armies, states had to concentrate authority, collect tribute, suppress dissidents, and develop efficient administrations. Even public roads, education, and healthcare seem to have originated primarily for the fulfillment of military needs. In the process of fighting wars, states became stronger, and those states that failed to keep up disappeared. This logic is quite compelling, and, indeed, it does not take an encyclopedic knowledge of history to see the pattern. Normative concerns aside, it must be admitted that, intuitively, if violence is not the mother of the state, it must have been at least its midwife. Those who fail to see this should be considered, as Max Weber (1994, 362) put it, political infants.

Yet history is not so linear. Wars are full of examples of aborted mobilization, weaker states resulting victorious, and losers that fail to disappear. In the War of the Triple Alliance (1864–1870), for example, notwithstanding its superior state capacity and greater wartime mobilization, and having almost forced Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay to surrender after the Battle of Curupaití, Paraguay was finally defeated. However, despite having lost what was arguably the deadliest international war in the entire world from 1815 to 1914, the Paraguayan state did not disappear. What is more, the divergence in state capacity between the contenders did not develop during the war, nor immediately after Paraguay's demographic collapse and occupation, but during the several decades that followed. In short, the most capable state lost the war, the state that lost the war survived, and most of the effects of warfare on the state capacity of both the losers and the winners manifested long after the war. These three observations do not fit our current understanding of how wars make states and require a new theory that emphasizes the contingency of war outcomes and how they affect the state in a postwar period.

In this book, I advance a more complete understanding of how wars make states, which allows me to make sense of cases that seemed hitherto unexplained. I argue that states facing the threat of international war are forced to mobilize large armies and strengthen their bureaucracy to support them, but this is only an initial phase of a longer and more complex process triggered by war. Wartime state building develops in a state of exception, its long-term stability being therefore contingent on the unforeseeable outcome of the war. Winners will typically consolidate and enlarge their wartime political coalitions and see their states strengthen in the postwar era. Losers, on the other hand, will usually see their statist politicians, bureaucrats, and military officers fall into disgrace and, with those actors excluded from power, will experience protracted declines in state capacity.

This logic provides a better explanation for the relative capacity of states across the world today, the rigidity of state-building trajectories, and why historical turns happened when they did. It also illuminates why (re)building

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states after military defeat has been difficult, why defeated states can only be rebuilt in the presence of new external threats, and why the wars of today – where both winners and losers survive – have contradictory effects on state building. Most importantly, however, this book brings war back into our discussions about the state in a world where war itself is back.

The idea that "war made the state and the state made war" (Tilly, 1975, 42), on which I elaborate, has been largely validated by research in fields ranging from anthropology to economic theory. Variations of this approach have been used to explain state formation from prehistory (Carneiro, 1970; Boix, 2015) to modern Europe (Downing, 1993; Ertman, 1997), including the oldest state alive, China, which was born out of a period of "warring states" in the third century BC (Hui, 2005; see also Fukuyama, 2011; Dincecco and Wang, 2018). In regions like Africa (Bates, 2014; Herbst, 2014; Sharman, 2023), Latin America (Centeno, 2002; Thies, 2005), and parts of the Middle East (Lustick, 1997; Jung, 2006) less stringent interstate warfare seems to account for the existence of relatively less capable states (Migdal, 1988, 273; Desch, 1996, 242). No competing explanation of state formation comes even close in empirical breadth and explanatory power.

Nonetheless, this *bellicist theory* of state formation has faced considerable criticism as of late. These objections have been normative, logical, and empirical. Normatively, bellicism has been called into question by scholars who see it as a Trojan horse for social Darwinism and fascist ideas.[1] Logically, it has been criticized for extrapolating from the history of successful states in a functionalistic manner and without paying much attention to agency and contingency.[2] Perhaps, more importantly, many have convincingly argued that the theory can no longer account for empirical trends in a world where conquest has virtually disappeared (Tir et al., 1998; Zacher, 2001, 218; Atzili, 2011, 24), states rarely die (Lake and O'Mahony, 2004, 703; Fazal, 2011, 29), wars cannot be won anymore (Chowdhury, 2018), and warfare has become infrequent (Taylor and Botea, 2008, 33; Goertz et al., 2016, 92; Lee, 2020, 6–8).

Put together, these normative, logical, and empirical concerns have operated as a strong argument against the theory, facilitating its portrayal

[1] The normative critique often focuses on the political and propagandistic tergiversations of this so-called German school of state formation (Mann, 1988, 2; Hui, 2017, 268). Pieces that seem to suggest the virtues of letting states fight (Herbst, 2004, 316; see also Cohen et al., 1981) continue to give bellicists a bad name.

[2] Some versions of the paradigm asking "Why did the European states eventually converge on different variants of the national states?" (Tilly, 1990, 5) are arguably guilty of extrapolating back into the past based on the end result of the process. This is exacerbated when the paradigm takes the form of a natural selection argument (Spruyt, 2001) whereby only the states that developed large armies, efficient bureaucracies, and extractive capacities were able to survive. When (unobservable) "dead" states are assumed to have lacked the attributes of the survivors, bellicists incur an *ad hoc ergo propter hoc* fallacy (Spruyt, 2017, 86), which craves to be amended by (re)incorporating contingency – in particular that of the outcomes of war – into the theory.

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as "Eurocentric and inapplicable to non-European contexts" (Hui, 2017, 268). For most social scientists nowadays, wars might have formed states in modern Europe, but "state formation and warfare did not go hand in hand in other regions" (Grzymala-Busse, 2023, 1). Such a situation urgently calls for a serious reevaluation of bellicist theory.

In this book I go back to the classics of bellicist theory and extract two main lessons from them, which will hopefully breathe new life into the paradigm: These scholars did not endorse an evolutionary understanding of bellicist theory that requires states to fight to the death (Sharman, 2015, 201) and were mainly concerned with the lingering effects of the outcomes of war in a postwar period. Their more holistic version of the theory integrated pre and postwar dynamics in a way that resolves all three issues highlighted earlier and explains patterns of state formation even in what is considered to be the hardest case for the theory: Latin America.

1.1 THE STATE OF BELLICIST THEORY IN LATIN AMERICA

Latin America has become the poster child of the "antibellicist" camp in the state formation literature. Paradoxically born out of pioneering works exploring the nuances of the European-inspired bellicist paradigm in the region (Centeno, 1997, 2002; López-Alves, 2000; Thies, 2005), more recent studies of Latin America have taken a strong stance against the paradigm, arguing that war could be financed by external substitutes for domestic taxation (Queralt, 2022) and was not frequent or severe enough to have produced state capacity (Kurtz, 2013; Saylor, 2014; Soifer, 2015; Mazzuca, 2021).

In his celebrated work *Latin American State Building in Comparative Perspective*, Marcus Kurtz (2013, 35) set up the foundations of this new anti-bellicist consensus, discarding the "conflict-centric" approach to Latin America on the basis that the region features only "some interstate conflict of a severe character." Instead he proposes that state building in the nineteenth century depended on the existence of free labor and the elites' disposition to delegate political authority.

In *State Building in Boom Times*, Ryan Saylor (2014, 52) also argues that "outside of Europe the relative lack of warfare has severed a chief pathway to new state capacity." He observes that Latin America "features little warfare" and did not develop extractive capacity because states "could generally fund their activities with foreign aid and loans" and "depended on customs duties for revenue." He alternatively suggests that states are born out of commodity booms and specific patterns of elite competition.

Hillel Soifer also dismisses the "bellic approach" in *State Building in Latin America*, concluding that "in trying to understand variation among Latin American states in the nineteenth century the overall absence of war in the region cannot be helpful" (Soifer, 2015, 18). Since "war did not make states in Latin America" (Soifer, 2015, 202) and "is better seen as a crucible that *tests*

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the state rather than as a forge that *makes* the state" (Soifer, 2015, 235),[3] he proposes that liberal elites in countries with a single urban hub consolidated states when the deployment of central bureaucrats to the peripheries was possible.

In his groundbreaking work *Latecomer State Formation*, Sebastián Mazzuca (2021, 38) writes that "Kurtz, Saylor, and Soifer rightly dismiss the war-led path." For him, while "western European leaders of state formation were war-makers, their Latin American counterparts should be considered market-makers" (Mazzuca, 2021, 8). Since the *Pax Britannica* eliminated international anarchy, a key scope condition of bellicist theory, to understand "trade-led" state building, Mazzuca points instead to the preferences and strategies of commercial elites, *caudillos*, and political parties.

Finally, in *Pawned States*, Didac Queralt (2022) builds strongly on evidence from nineteenth-century Latin America to conclude that war did not make states in world peripheries during the nineteenth century. Although he differentiates himself by admitting that "war in the nineteenth century in the global periphery was bigger, longer, and more frequent than usually understood" (Queralt, 2022, 2), he reproduces the antibellicist argument according to which "it did not translate into stronger states because it was disproportionally financed with external capital" (Queralt, 2022, 13).

These authors illustrate a new consensus (Thies, 2022) that has been highly influential on those who discard the value of bellicist theory beyond Europe (Hui, 2017; Grzymala-Busse, 2023) but does little justice to studies of Latin America, the findings of which align with the theory (Thies, 2005; Cardenas, 2010) and suggest that we should give war a chance.

One problem of the current antibellicist consensus is that it builds strongly on the *argumentum ab auctoritate*, according to which "[Miguel] Centeno has shown that this [bellicist] argument does not apply to Latin America" (Soifer, 2015, 204; see also Kurtz, 2013, 22; Saylor, 2014, 52; Mazzuca, 2021, 36; Queralt, 2022, 5). Indeed, Centeno (2002) popularized the idea that the current relative weakness of Latin American states can be explained by the absence of total warfare in the region and the use of custom tariffs and external financial assistance – instead of income taxes – to fight limited wars (see also Rouquié, 1987, 61; Centeno, 1997). Yet his reference to total warfare and income taxes suggests Centeno wrote mostly with the twentieth century in mind. In fact, he explicitly recognizes the importance of war in explaining intraregional variation in state capacity during the nineteenth century.[4] Put differently, Centeno focused on a broad regional comparison with Europe across two centuries, but he never discarded war as an important factor

[3] Emphases present in the original.

[4] For example, he admits that "war did have some of the expected results in Latin America. As in Europe, it often led to the destruction of the losing side. At least in three cases (Peru in the 1880s, Mexico in the 1850s, and Paraguay after 1870) war led to the practical elimination of the state as an entity. Among winners (Argentina and Brazil in the 1870s) war led to an increase in the

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driving differences *within* Latin America, particularly during the nineteenth century.

This observation gains greater significance when considering that the entire body of academic literature on state formation in Latin America uniformly identifies the late nineteenth century as the pivotal period for the emergence and consolidation of national states in this region (Oszlak, 1981, 19). This historical turn was pioneered by James Mahoney (2003, 2010), who noted that the ranking of social and economic development in Latin America changed notably in the late nineteenth century and rigidified afterward. Indeed, the authors of the recent Latin American antibellicist consensus start with the observation that "the hierarchies of political development" in the region have "remained strikingly stable over long periods of time" (Kurtz, 2013, 16–17) and refer to the nineteenth century as a critical juncture that set states onto path-dependent trajectories (see also Soifer, 2015, 15; Mazzuca, 2021, 40).

Current scholarship has missed three important implications of this historical insight, all of which point to war as a key variable explaining state formation. First, the weaker states of today might be the result of the conspicuous absence of international wars during the twentieth century (Mares, 2001; Kacowicz, 2005; Schenoni et al., 2023), a period when the regional state capacity ranking effectively froze. Second, state formation took place precisely during the nineteenth century – in particular its second half – when we know the most severe wars were waged.[5] Third, this scholarship fails to explain the fundamental inversion of the state capacity ranking that sent colonial centers to the bottom and peripheries to the top. Mahoney (2010, 190) himself suggested that to completely resolve this puzzle, "attention in the search for causes must gravitate toward interstate warfare." Following this advice, one cannot help but notice that the victorious and defeated states of nineteenth-century wars are those at the top and bottom of the current state capacity ranking, respectively.

These macroscopic observations indicate that war may have played a crucial role in the emergence of the Latin American state.

size of government" (Centeno, 1997, 1571). Centeno then adds Chile in the 1880s as another example of victory leading to state formation.

[5] Some scholars seem to consider that "Latin American wars were more frequent in the first decades after independence than in the second half of the nineteenth century, which was the key period of state formation in the region" (Mazzuca, 2021, 37), but this is wrong. Two-thirds of the wars and militarized interstate disputes in the region concentrate on the second half of the century. Then "one sees patterns of peace and war, intervention, territorial predation, alliances, arms-racing, and power-balancing quite similar to those found in eighteenth-century Europe" (Holsti, 1996, 153). Severe episodes like the Franco-Mexican War (1862–1867), the Paraguayan War (1864–1870), and the War of the Pacific (1879–1884) demonstrate the collapse of the *Pax Britannica* precisely during the key period of state formation in the region.

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1.2 BELLICIST THEORY REDUX

Many authors have noted that the reason why the bellicist approach seems unfit to explain Latin America and most of the world beyond modern Europe has to stem from an underspecification of its causal mechanisms (Spruyt, 2017, 89) and scope conditions (Vu, 2010, 153; Hui, 2017, 272).

In the social sciences, two distinct interpretations of bellicist theory are prevalent. The first one suggests that international wars lead to the expansion of armies and bureaucracies. In this view, "*preparation for war* has been the great state building activity" (Tilly, 1975, 42).[6] The second interpretation proposes that "the mechanism of state formation resides solely in the selection of the weaker actor" (Kurtz, 2013, 32; Saylor, 2014, 200; Soifer, 2015, 233; Spruyt, 2017, 78), suggesting an evolutionist interpretation of state formation.

In short, current understandings of the theory focus on a *prewar phase* and see the outcomes of war as mere selection mechanisms. This has naturally narrowed the scope of the theory to very competitive international environments characterized by mass mobilization and frequent state death. It has also concealed how defeat and victory might have lingering effects well into the *postwar phase* by virtue of mechanisms other than selection – for example, mechanisms of adaptation and reproduction. In other words, both interpretations miss the importance of the long-term, enduring effects of the outcomes of international war. This has become a significant blind spot in the literature.

Moreover, scholars who see international war as a mechanism for killing weak states assume that war outcomes are determined by previous state capacity. This belief is wrong. Not only do major theories of war agree that "in the whole range of human activities, war most closely resembles a game of cards" (Clausewitz, 1984, 86; see Waltz, 1979, 61; Fearon, 1995, 387) but in light of empirical evidence it seems clear that state capacity does not define the outcomes of international wars (see Reiter and Stam, 2002, 58–83; Arreguin-Toft, 2005, 1–18; Biddle, 2006, 20–25; Henderson and Bayer, 2013). The fact that weak states frequently win wars simultaneously deals a fatal blow to the evolutionary understanding of bellicist theory and hints at a possible solution to the infinite regress in Tilly's famous aphorism, "Which came first, states or wars?" (Centeno, 2002, 106). While the "War made the state and the state made war" dictum is explicitly circular, the exogeneity of war outcomes is an aspect of warfare that can be leveraged in research design.

Incorporating this insight, I propose that international wars have a compound effect on state formation. In a prewar phase and when hostilities are taking place, mobilization boosts state building by triggering the extraction–coercion cycle and the development of some wartime institutions – in particular

[6] The emphasis is mine. Note that bellicist theory is about international wars and not civil wars (Slater, 2010, 37; Schwartz, 2023, 10). This distinction is fundamentally about the type and range of mobilization they produce and is elaborated on further in Section 2.2.

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those necessary to support a standing army – but the institutionalization of state building does not take place during such a state of exception, in which the law is put on hold and institutionalization remains rather thin.

Only the contingent outcomes of war can determine whether those temporary policies become institutionalized after the critical juncture and reverberate in the postwar phase. While victory consolidates the wartime political coalitions and allows these actors to continue building the state, defeat delegitimizes them, leading to the demise of wartime institutions and setting losers on a path of state weakening.

Victorious states will no doubt demilitarize once the war is over. The size of their armies is likely to shrink, and rulers will find it difficult to impose new taxes now the foreign threat has receded. However, having demonstrated their capacity to protect their citizens and property, winning states will quickly consolidate their treasuries, establish the authority of their armed forces, and widen the ranks of the state-building party, which will have overwhelming popular support. Such states will thus continue on a trajectory characterized by the provision of new services, bureaucratic expansion, and centralization.

Defeated states, on the other hand, will be severely impaired and weakened. Immediately after a war, defeated states that survive can suffer from destruction, pillaging, territorial loss, and foreign occupation. Yet once they have reached rock bottom and the storm has cleared, their capacity to enforce rules and deliver services could be restored if it was not for the collapse of state authority and the mechanisms that reproduce it. Citizens will distrust the inefficient state that could not protect them and make the military and bureaucracy responsible for their misfortune, siding instead with those who opposed the war effort and state building in the first place. Unless a new threat arises, making the state an absolute necessity again, defeated states will thus shrink and decentralize.

Notably, this story should hold in environments where states systematically survive and in those where they are more likely to die, explaining the divergent evolution of Latin American states while continuing to fit the modern European experience.

My understanding of these mechanisms is very much aligned with the process that the forefathers of bellicist theory had in mind. Pioneers of this paradigm such as Max Weber (1978) and Otto Hintze (1975) hardly mention selection mechanisms while putting a strong emphasis on military success and how victory made the state. Although the emphasis on the outcomes of war declined in his later works, Charles Tilly (1975, 42) himself ended the paragraph featuring his famous dictum by mentioning "*success* in war" as an important mechanism of state formation (see also Lemke and Carter, 2016, 501). Because the focus on postwar dynamics is particularly prominent in these classical works, I refer to my interpretation of the theory as *classical bellicist theory*.

Intuitive as it is, classical bellicist theory – in particular the idea that states lose capacity after defeat – faced the challenge of two apparent outliers in the

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postwar era: Germany and Japan. However, under the magnifying glass it is clear that such historical anomalies – and a few others such as Prussia after Jena–Auerstedt – can be explained by the effects of subsequent mobilization. Like Prussia in 1806, the German and Japanese states collapsed in 1945 and only regenerated years later with the support of the victor, because a new conflict found them on the frontline. Most states, however, rarely have the opportunity to rise from the ashes of devastating defeats via immediate postwar mobilization and are more commonly set onto declining, state-weakening trajectories – if they survive at all.

The long-term institutional effects of war outcomes that classical bellicists were interested in are far more consequential for the state than the short-term, material consequences of war. While defeat can be immediately devastating for a country, Germany and Japan illustrate how the rapid regeneration of a pro-state coalition can prevent the dismantling of key state institutions and set a country back onto a trajectory of state building and development. Yet when defeat not only entails human and material loss but the discrediting of the state as an ideal, together with the dissolution of the political coalition that supports it, the dismantling of state institutions is likely to take place, leading to a rigid trajectory of state weakening and the development problems associated with this.

When understood in this holistic form, the theory sheds new light on how international wars of the past can explain path-dependent state-building trajectories now, affecting economic development, democracy, and other relevant outcomes (Mahoney, 2010). Because wars can both strengthen and weaken the state depending on their highly contingent outcomes, this interpretation of the theory provides a solid response to normative and functionalist critiques. Normatively, it sees war as a double-edged sword, both creating and destroying states. Logically, it does not assume that states strengthened because they performed a specific function (Spruyt, 2017) and points to agency and contingency as key forces determining both the shape of state institutions and their success. As Michael Mann (1993, 55) puts it, classical bellicist theory provides "an institutional, not a functional definition of the state," which is very much in line with historical institutionalism.

Moreover, the incorporation of postwar trends *can* "explain the development of states in a world in which war to the death is not the state of nature" (Kurtz, 2013, 35) by focusing on the effect of minor shocks such as those produced by militarized interstate disputes short of war, or providing some insights into the marginal mutations that take place when competitive pressure is milder, as in the case of rivalries (Thies, 2005). When such nuances are incorporated, classical bellicist theory improves our understanding of state formation in nineteenth-century Latin America in at least three ways.

To begin with, the focus on the outcomes of war easily satisfies the "Occam's razor" criterion, as it offers the most parsimonious explanation for the diversity in state capacity trajectories. In contrast, other competing explanations rely

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on complex and convoluted sequences, which often involve the interplay of two or more factors. Moreover, while previous authors need to differentiate between state formation and state building (Mazzuca, 2021, 6) and state-building emergence from state-building consolidation (Soifer, 2015, 3) – each requiring specific explanations – I show how the outcomes of war can account for all these (largely endogenous) processes simultaneously.

Second, this explanation is more broadly applicable than any other alternative. While the current antibellicist consensus builds upon small comparisons, providing idiosyncratic stories that are modest in scope, my version of classical bellicist theory should generalize to all of Latin America and, ultimately, all other states as well, both contemporarily and historically.

Third, the outcomes of war not only outperform but also precede and ostensibly cause some prominent factors in the literature, such as the effective exploitation of economic booms (Saylor, 2014), the pro-state ideology and the policies of governing elites (Mahoney, 2010; Kurtz, 2013), the consolidation of ports, lords, and parties (Mazzuca, 2021), and even the preeminence of one city over others (Soifer, 2015). Once we take into account the structural shocks that wars brought about in Latin American societies, it becomes apparent that victory in war could plausibly account for all of these outcomes.[7]

1.3 CASE SELECTION AND CHAPTER LAYOUT

A specter has been haunting bellicism: the specter of Europe. A curious feature of the theory that posits a connection between war and state formation is that it has been primarily developed and refined by analyzing a region where most defeated states were effectively winnowed out by war – sometimes along with their historical records. Although reconstructing the history of defeated states is not impossible (Ziblatt, 2008; see also Davies, 2011), the postwar trajectory of

[7] The Chilean nitrate boom and the Argentine wool boom, to name two examples, were admittedly key to the formation of those states, yet victory in a previous war played a large role in allowing those states to capture and control those resources. Paraguay was similarly blessed with a yerba mate, timber, and cotton boom and Peru enjoyed both a guano and a nitrate boom, yet they lost their window of opportunity due to their inability to exploit those resources after military defeat. In a similar fashion, the consolidation of state-building elites supporting *paz y administración* in Argentina and *ordem e progresso* in Brazil, similarly to the Mexican *científicos*, can also be understood as a product of victory in war. The *civilistas* in Peru illustrate the fate of state-building elites who were defeated in war. The liberal parties in Mexico and Colombia, as well as the Uruguayan *doctores* – an alliance of urban elites from the traditional *blanco* and *colorado* parties – were all admittedly central to state formation, but they were also strengthened by international victories against France, Ecuador, and Argentina, respectively. Even apparently structural factors like the preeminence of one urban hub over others were often a consequence of war. While the deadlock between Alajuela, Heredia, and San José in Costa Rica, for example, was definitively brought to an end by a war, the struggle between Leon and Managua continued to feature prominently in defeated Nicaragua and in countries that did not feature significant international warfare, such as Colombia. These points are all further discussed in Part III of this book.

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states that died in war can only be pictured counterfactually. This has resulted in a skewed European sample, which overrepresents victorious states while severely underrepresenting losers. Tilly (1975, 38) himself was aware that in Europe, "the disproportionate distribution of success and failure puts us in the unpleasant situation of dealing with an experience in which most of the cases are negative, while only the positive cases are well documented."[8]

Although this is an unresolvable problem for Europe, the postwar trajectories of defeated states can be systematically studied in regions or historical periods where both losers and winners tended to survive. Nineteenth-century Latin America is an ideal setting in which to examine this phenomenon.

On the one hand, nineteenth-century Latin America looked much like Europe in many respects. First, because the norms that regulate interstate conflict were still in their infancy at the time, borders were changing and contested, and great power intervention acted as a destabilizing rather than a pacifying factor, the nineteenth century provides many examples of severe and enduring warfare. Second, since other parts of the world were either colonized or organized as suzerain systems involving a mix of states and prestate polities, Latin America was probably the only region with a European-like system of sovereign states at the time.[9] Third, initial conditions for state-making in Latin America – for example, certain levels of cultural homogeneity amongst elites and a relatively uniform institutional background inherited from the collapse of previous empires (Tilly, 1975, 18–21) – were akin to those in Europe, not least because Latin American states were built on the ruins of European colonial institutions. In all these ways, Latin America can be seen as a useful mirror of Europe (Centeno and López-Alves, 2001).

On the other hand, nineteenth-century Latin America presents one key difference: While Europe had around 200 sovereign entities at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, and this number was reduced tenfold by the end of the century, the eight sovereign entities in Latin America that were born after

[8] Early Tilly seems to be especially preoccupied with the problem of looking only at victorious states: "The tension appears in the very selection of a small number of West European states still existing in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries for comparison. For England, France, and even Spain are survivors of a ruthless competition in which most contenders lost. The Europe of 1500 included some five hundred more or less independent political units, the Europe of 1900 about twenty-five. The German state did not exist in 1500, or even in 1800. Comparing the histories of France, Germany, Spain, Belgium, and England (or, for that matter, any other set of Western European countries) for illumination of the process of state-making weights the whole inquiry toward a certain kind of outcome which was, in fact, quite rare. Having chosen to deal comparatively with those large historical experiences, we never quite escaped the difficulty" (Tilly, 1975, 15). In previous pages, he had already highlighted the fact that "as seen from 1600 or so, the development of the state in Europe was very contingent; many aspiring states crumpled and fell along the way" (Tilly, 1975, 7).

[9] Recent studies that try to generalize to the Global South in the nineteenth century include states – for example, China, Ethiopia, Japan, and Siam (Queralt, 2022) – that were surrounded by European colonies and did not conform to a clustered Westphalian subsystem in the way Europe and the Americas did.

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the Wars of Independence expanded into more than twenty during the same period.[10] Although leaders feared their states would be taken over by colonial powers and neighbors, the absorption of smaller states rarely took place, even after military defeat.[11] The systematic survival of defeated states means that, contrary to the European case, we can observe and compare postwar phases in both winners and losers of all Latin American wars. Moreover, the fact that virtually no international war has taken place in Latin America since the Chaco War (1932–1935) – and even this war was anomalous in the twentieth century (Butt, 2013) – means that we can look at the very long-term effects of wars in the distant past, with these effects remaining uninfluenced by subsequent competition in the region.[12]

Latin America should be considered a puzzle for bellicist theory, given the evolutionary understanding of the theory that prevails in the current literature (Rapport, 2015). If this amended theory proves to be a good fit for Latin America while continuing to work for other regions and eras, the impact of this study should prove critical for the paradigm (Gerring and Cojocaru, 2016).

This book is divided into three parts. This part lays the conceptual and theoretical groundwork for the rest of the study. After this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 discusses the mechanisms by which war makes states before, during, and after war, according to classical bellicist theory. First, I introduce the theory in the abstract and by reference to how Max Weber, Otto Hintze, and other forefathers of the bellicist approach pictured the formation of the first states. Second, I use the more recent tools and insights of historical institutionalism and the comparative historical approach to lay out the main concepts and stages in the theory, situating it historically in the modern context, and with reference to the national state. Third, I offer a detailed description of the actors, processes, and institutions that would have been relevant in nineteenth-century Latin America, discussing the validity of state capacity indicators and providing concrete observational expectations to test the theory against.

Although the purpose of this book is to explain variation in state capacity *within* Latin America, in Chapter 3 I provide some comparisons between

[10] The proliferation of national states was mostly due to secessions like those of Uruguay (1828) and the Dominican Republic (1848) and to the breakup of federations like Great Colombia (1831) and Central America (1841).

[11] The few exceptions seem to be quasi-states often lacking international recognition, for example, the Confederation of the Equator (1824–1825), Los Altos (1838–1840), the Miskito Kingdom (1844–1860), the Argentine Confederation (1853–1861), the Republic of Piratini (1836–1845), the Republic of the Rio Grande (1840), and the Republic of Yucatán (1841–1848); see Mazzuca (2021) for a deeper discussion. It is likely that many other cases of de facto sovereignty are retrospectively overlooked, but in general these short-lived experiences would be better conceptualized as having died in secessionist civil war rather than in international war due to the comparatively limited dimensions of state mobilization to suppress them.

[12] As we will see, the sequencing of wars and intense rivalries confounds the effects of previous warfare, rendering cases such as Germany – and previously Prussia – particularly difficult to interpret.

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Latin America and Europe, which are necessary to give context. The purpose of this chapter is fourfold. First, I aim to show that although comparisons between Europe and Latin America are impossible before the independence of the Iberian colonies gave birth to Latin American states, the evolution of Latin American colonial institutions was shaped by warfare both in Europe and on the peripheries of European empires. Second, I review basic descriptive statistics that challenge the idea of Latin America as a pacific international environment in the nineteenth century and help me identify a subset of cases of severe warfare that will be the focus of an in-depth historical analysis of the mechanisms behind classical bellicist theory in Part III of the book. Third, I document the fact that despite the formation of a norm of territorial integrity in Latin America, territorial conquest was prevalent until the end of the nineteenth century. Fourth, this chapter compares Europe and Latin America with regard to the modes of war financing and tax structures in the nineteenth century, showing that the state capacity gap between the two regions was small before World War I and that states financed war in roughly similar ways.

The rest of the book tests the observational expectations of classical bellicist theory using a multimethod inference strategy that combines different forms of cross-case and within-case analysis (Goertz, 2017, 5). Given the interdisciplinary nature of studies on state formation, I employ a diverse range of methodologies to make my argument more compelling and persuasive for a broad range of audiences and cultures (Goertz and Mahoney, 2012) within the social sciences.

Part II looks at variation in state building within Latin America. Because states "appear in clusters, and usually form systems" (Tilly, 1990, 4), this part looks at the entirety of the Latin American interstate system,[13] combining a traditional comparative historical approach with statistical approaches that are relatively new to the literature (Thies, 2022).[14]

In Chapter 4 I explore whether preparation for war in Latin America triggered bellicist dynamics. One of the key tenets of the antibellicist consensus is that wartime mobilization in Latin America was financed through external sources – customs revenue and foreign loans – allowing rulers to avoid domestic taxation and confrontation with entrenched patrimonial interests. However, a systematic analysis of historical statistical data ranging from 1830 to 1913 and covering the entirety of the region demonstrates that, in the wake of a foreign threat, access to external resources actually decreased – ostensibly due

[13] Like Mazzuca (2021) and Centeno (2002), I believe in the necessity of discussing the region as a whole, given the selection issues that arise when one focuses on a small subset of cases, as do Kurtz (2013), Saylor (2014), and Soifer (2015).

[14] Cameron Thies (2005) tests the bellicist argument statistically in Latin America but does so for the twentieth century. Didac Queralt (2022) does apply regression-type analyses to nineteenth-century data but does so comparing very different regions and excluding some Latin American cases. The statistical approach in this book is more precise in terms of regional scope – exploring more meaningful variation – and focuses on a time-frame of especial interest for bellicist theory.

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to blockades and sovereign defaults – while the likelihood of domestic taxation and internal conflict increased, just as bellicist theory would expect.

In Chapter 5 I turn from preparation for war to the long-term effects of the outcomes of war in the postwar period. To do so, I apply a different set of statistical techniques to a similar cross-national time-series dataset covering all of Latin America and zooming in to the period of state building when the big Latin American wars took place (1865–1913). The results of these analyses show that the state capacity trajectories of winners and losers diverged when the outcomes of war were revealed, and the gap between them grew with time, just as classical bellicist theory predicts.

In Chapter 6 I replicate previous comparative historical analyses that try to explain the Latin American ranking of state capacity by the year 1900. Since state building relatively froze in the twentieth century, authors agree that explaining the cross-national variation at that point amounts to explaining the similar variation we see now (see Mahoney, 2003; Soifer, 2015, 205). By replicating these analyses and introducing my variable of interest, I show that a state's martial record at that point in time predicts the Latin American hierarchy better than any other alternative explanations, even when we use the methodological approaches and designs of previous scholarship. In this chapter I also discuss how international wars coincide with shifts in trajectories of state capacity and better explain their precise timing. This sets the stage for some longitudinal analyses in my case study chapters.

After examining the entire region through various statistical and Boolean methods, Part III analyzes individual cases by looking at three different subregions. While previous analyses uncover broad trends and provide a strong basis for generalization, the case studies in this part confirm that the mechanisms outlined in the theory are present in virtually all the cases when they are considered separately and in greater historical detail.

The selected cases represent the most intense and enduring examples of warfare in the nineteenth century. Thus the mechanisms of classical bellicist theory should be clearly evident in them. This allows me to conduct within-case analyses, observing how warfare affected individual countries, as well as small-n cross-case comparisons that contrast winners and losers. Historical sources quoted in this part of the book test expectations at the level of concrete causal processes that are difficult to incorporate into statistical analyses and allow me to discard theories that, unlike bellicist theory, clearly do not fit certain cases.

My detailed examination of the historiographies of these wars reveals that secondary sources are often biased and tainted by nationalism.[15] For this

[15] Just to give an example, Argentine historiography tends to misrepresent embarrassing events like an outright invasion of Uruguay and a defeat against the army of Brazil as a civil war, denying the very international dimension of these processes. Another common tendency is that of victorious states to downplay the historical importance of a military victory and represent it retrospectively as a predictable outcome, while defeated states tend to put considerable weight

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reason I rely on a critical comparative understanding of secondary sources that considers the historiography of every country involved in the conflict. I then complement this with primary sources, leveraging months of original archival work at the American and British National Archives. For all major wars I analyze, my interpretation of events is fundamentally based on my reading of first-hand accounts by American and British diplomats deployed to these countries at the time, which provide a more impartial representation of the events as they were seen by contemporaries. It is against this nuanced understanding that I evaluate the accuracy of key expectations of classical bellicist theory, such as the preferences of central and peripheral elites or the contingency of battles and their domestic effects.

Part III is divided into three chapters. In Chapter 7 a detailed analysis is presented of the River Plate basin, comprising Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay, with a specific focus on the Paraguayan War and a brief detour to cover the Great Siege of Montevideo. Similarly, in Chapter 8 an in-depth examination is undertaken of countries in the South Pacific, including Bolivia, Chile, and Peru, with a particular emphasis on the War of the Pacific. Finally Chapter 9 concentrates mainly on Mexican history, with a focus on the Mexican–American War and the Second Franco-Mexican War, along with a brief digression to discuss William Walker's attempted invasion of Central America.

The chapter structure allows me to illustrate, albeit summarily, how the systematically positive outcomes of war can explain all cases of high state capacity in Latin America: Chile, Costa Rica, and Uruguay. Analytical historical narratives are offered for cases that experienced a mix of victory and defeat, such as Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico, and three cases of losers that experienced an abrupt decline in state capacity: Bolivia, Paraguay, and Peru. Although it is quite clear how these nine countries fit the expectations of the theory in a correlational sense, the case studies will make a much more compelling case for a causal association.

The downside of a case selection strategy based on wars is that countries that did not experience major international warfare – Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela, and most of Central America – are not dealt with individually or in any detail. To compensate for their absence in the case study chapters, I refer to these countries in several examples throughout the book. When possible, I also document that these countries did not experience a sudden expansion of their armies and bureaucracies, nor the drastic partisan or financial consequences related to war outcomes, and therefore followed a relatively flat and stable state capacity trend, remaining roughly in the middle of the Latin American ranking throughout the century – just as classical bellicist theory would predict.

on those events as detrimental to their development and blame the defeat – by no means predictable – for their misfortunes.

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My case studies systematically demonstrate how the rise of external threats triggered a coercion–extraction cycle. They also illustrate the fragile domestic equilibria during wartime and how the thick fog that covers all wars made the outcome of these conflagrations essentially unpredictable for contemporary observers. Finally, they show how defeat and victory affected state capacity by weakening or strengthening, respectively, nationalist parties and the military. By identifying critical actors and institutions and offering a detailed account of causal processes, these amount to a thorough evaluation of the theory almost case by case. Because "national states always appear in competition with each other" (Tilly, 1990, 23), directly comparing contenders during wars also proves effective in illustrating concomitant mobilization and the contrasting fates of losers and winners after wars by mirroring their histories.

In relation to other potential explanations, these case studies allow me to focus on concrete, temporally bounded causal processes (Collier et al., 2004) and show that other factors are either epiphenomenal to war dynamics – for example, how elite cohesion, economic booms, party consolidation, and so on happen after victory – or are simply nonconcurrent with temporal changes in state-building trajectories. In other words, the case studies in this book are not mere illustrations of causal mechanisms. These small-n cross-case comparisons and within-case process-tracing exercises analyze alternative hypotheses as well.

The richness of the cross-national analyses and case studies is boosted by the level of detail of the theory itself, which renders multiple observational expectations ranging from long-term state capacity trends in victors and losers to changes in the preferences of actors immediately after a battle is won or lost. Let us then delve into what classical bellicist theory is and how it can enhance our understanding of war-making as state-making.

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