

THE LOGICS OF STATE WEAKNESS IN EURASIA

An Introduction

John Heathershaw and Edward Schatz

Once confined to Europe, by the late twentieth century Leviathans had become global. After more than three centuries of imposition and imitation, the state was the political organization most broadly experienced and accepted as normal. In spite of the powerfully alternative logics that emerge from globalizing, transnational flows of capital, people, and ideas, in the early twenty-first century they were—contrary to the assumptions of post–Cold War globalization scholarship (Held 1995)—in no position to dislodge the preeminent position of the state. Global politics continue to flow *through* states in such a way as to *alter* the state gradually and progressively rather than supplant it.

In light of the survival and proliferation of the national state in an era of global politics, we consider the utility of a common analytic distinction: that between “strong” and “weak” states. Like many binaries, this one provides a valuable first cut. Yet our title hints that it leaves much in shadow. First, it is possible that some of the traits understood as signs of “weakness” could be recast as strengths; we are interested in the varied logics that drive them. Second, lurking in the background of any discussion of state strength is something worth problematizing: namely, strength to do *what*? Third, once we have problematized state capacities, broad-brush characterizations of a given state (e.g., “Russia has a weak state,” or “Latvia has a strong state”) can no longer satisfy. States are polymorphous (Jessop 2016: 42). There are some respects in which Eurasian states are strong. In general, the idea of the state has defined the political thinking of post-Soviet citizens due to their recent Soviet history. But there are also significant differences in the systematic effectiveness of the region’s states in particular areas of governance. Finer-grained depictions of specific aspects of statehood (e.g., “Russia’s state is weak in fighting corruption,” or “Latvia’s state is strong in promoting IT connectivity”) are the order of the day.

Events of the 2000s and 2010s gave debates about state weakness renewed visibility. As we explore below, new patterns of global security and counterterrorism ensured that Eurasian states playing host to transnational militants, real or imagined, were offered international support to strengthen their coercive power. Popular uprisings in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan with subsequent conflicts in each of those states raised questions of state fragility. Ongoing political violence in the North Caucasus and Tajikistan, and the heating up of the supposedly frozen conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, suggested states that had apparently strengthened since the 1990s may have returned to weakness. Russia's actions in Georgia and Ukraine, and the international sanctions that followed its annexation of Crimea, led some to consider it a rogue state in world affairs. Internal political violence is often considered the primary indicator of weakness. While dramatic, these patterns of violence were not new to these particular states and territories. In many cases it is the limited nature of the violence and rapid reassertion of state power that is more telling than the crisis itself. Highly securitized discussions do much to obscure the logics by which such states work.

THE IDEA OF STATE WEAKNESS

If understandings of the state have become ossified over time, this was not always the case. Weber's classic definition allowed for variety of actually existing states without reducing them to degrees of strength. Historical sociologists such as Tilly and his fellow travelers focused on the European experience without proposing a universal model of state formation beyond the insight that war makes states and states make war (Tilly 1985). Decolonization truly raised the question of state weakness. If it had not already been plain, the existence of radically different political formations with tremendously varied capacities all subjected to a single norm of sovereign statehood presented analytic challenges (Jackson 1990).

Why were these states slow to imitate their European midwives despite the foreign aid, training, and constitution-building projects that had been visited upon them? Why did war-making not seem to lead to state-making in the third world (Sorensen 2001)? Scholars addressed these questions in great empirical detail but did not broadly theorize the relationship between violence, order and political institutions (Young and Turner 1985).

Huntington's 1968 landmark *Political Order in Changing Societies* provided a possible answer. The violence that accompanied the birth of such states was not productive (whereas in European cases violence led to the centralization of power and the consolidation of statehood) but rather a sign of political underdevelopment. "Authority," he argued, "has to exist before it can be limited" (1968: 8), whereas, for Tilly and colleagues (Tilly and Ardant 1975), authority had to be limited before it could exist and when it was limited it was often contested and violent. Huntington's claim—that violence was a sign of political decay rather than emerging political

order—turned the political theory of state formation on its head, even as some admirably demanded greater specification (Cohen 1984; Cohen et al. 1981). The intellectual seeds that Huntington planted would grow a generation later.

The violence-as-decay argument had shortcomings. Consistent with Huntington, analysts of state weakness elided the difference between two types of disorder: the decline of previously established (strong) states and the violence and disruption found in the formation of newly independent states. For example, an oft-cited volume identified weak states as those that “*no longer* deliver positive political goods,” whose “governments *lose* legitimacy, and the very nature of the particular nation-state itself *becomes* illegitimate” (Rotberg 2004: 1, emphasis added). In sum, the objective is to understand “why weak states *slide toward* failure” (2, emphasis added). However, the slippage here is not merely that of the empirical objects themselves. Many of these weak states are “new recruits” to statehood, including those admitted following “the implosion of the Soviet Union,” little more than ten years before, and Timor Leste, which was less than two years old in 2004. State weakness, Rotberg claimed (2), encompasses both the “rise *and* fall of nation-states.” Thus overgeneralized, the term “state weakness” is now overwhelmingly applied by analysts to recent postcolonies, few of which are more than fifty years old. As we discuss below, this analytic move compares the incomparable: states that were once legitimate and delivered political goods with those that have little or no history of independent statehood.

Nonetheless, the idea of state weakness proved infectious. In International Relations, scholars such as Bull (1977: 254–55) denoted the postcolonial era as one of “neo-medievalism” wherein a modern international order structured around the pluralist notion of functionally equivalent and legally equal nation-states was being undermined by global movements and notions of individual rights. Bull regarded this development without prejudice and did not refer to Huntington’s argument. However, his English School followers seemed inspired by Huntington. For example, Jackson (1990) argued that decolonization had ushered in “quasi-states” which had the negative sovereignty of *de jure* status without the positive sovereignty of *de facto* state capacity, and thus were often beset by violence. In a similar vein, Zaum (2007) suggested that international state-building in weak states was inspired by the reemergence of a global “standard of civilization,” against which postcolonial states were destined to be judged.

This conceptual shift took place alongside a normative shift in the international security imperatives of Western states and international organizations. Indeed, by the late 1980s, Huntington’s violence-as-decay thesis had come to seem prescient. After all, Cold War era proxy conflicts were transforming into civil wars; in the extreme, states that had previously relied on external support (Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Zaire) simply failed or collapsed. In fact, “failed” and “collapsed” became the staple of discussions about statehood, especially in African contexts (Helman

and Ratner 1992; Zartman 1995). States collapse, claimed Zartman (1995: 5), “[b]ecause they can no longer perform the functions required of them to pass as states.”

In the post–Cold War era, this discourse of extreme state weakness was extended. In 1994, the CIA funded a multiyear, multidisciplinary *State Failure Task Force*. Considering the possible need for foreign intervention in postconflict contexts, policy analysts and academics—whatever their views on the advisability of intervention—agreed that the “failed state” was to blame. The United Nations’ 1992 call for intervention, *An Agenda for Peace*, placed restitution of the functions of government at its heart. In a clear echo of Huntington (1968), Paris (2004: 186) proposed “institutionalization before liberalization,” privileging security-providing institutions over others.

The attacks of September 11, 2001 brought weak and “failed states” to the top of the international agenda (Call 2008). “In a time of terror,” Rotberg (2004: 1) remarked, “appreciating the nature of and responding to the dynamics of nation-state failure have become central to critical policy debates.” Both in the United States (2002 and 2006) and the United Kingdom (2008), national security strategies identified “failing” states as a source of insecurity and terrorism.¹ The “failed state” became central to the “war on terror,” informing how policy-makers justified intervention and conducted postconflict operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.² By the mid-2000s, state-building dominated peace-building discussions and generated a substantial academic, policy-making, and even popular literature (Fukuyama 2004; Krasner 2004; Paris 2004).³ Two prominent thinkers even made a high-profile call for the return of trusteeship to address a crisis of postcolonial states (Fearon & Laitin 2004). By 2014, as global publics became preoccupied with the rapid rise of the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS),⁴ the fear of state failure showed no risk of abating. It was widely recognized that it was the earlier breakdown of state authority in Iraq that enabled the rise of ISIS (Herring and Rangwala 2006).

Research aiming to identify causes of state sovereignty and capacity proliferated. One project, coauthored by a future president of Afghanistan (the talismanic weak state of the time) used a quantitative index to measure state sovereignty to “allow an overall assessment to be made of whether the multiplicity of interventions by a wide array of international actors is closing or widening the sovereignty gap” (Ghani, Lockhart, and Carnahan 2005: 5). States-with-adjectives proliferated, as if strength and weakness were a question of degree (Balioune-Lutz & McGillivray 2011; Rotberg 2002; Zartman 1995). By the end of the second Bush administration, Ghani and Lockhart (2009: 4) would grandly declare that a consensus had emerged: “that only sovereign states—by which we mean states that actually perform the functions that make them sovereign—will allow human progress to continue.” It was clear that the sovereignty to which Ghani and Lockhart were referring was that of OECD states; laggards were not merely failures of institutional reform according to a particular model, but were weak states and dangerous for being so.

STATE WEAKNESS OR WEAK ANALYSIS?

Whatever the real-world dangers of state failure, we are unsatisfied with existing treatments. For one thing, if state weakness is posited as the problem and state-building is declared the solution, then there is a certain tragedy when international state-building efforts ultimately undermine state formation (Bliesemann DeGuevara 2012; see also Berman & Lonsdale 1992, Herring and Rangwala 2006).

On a more conceptual plane, we share the threefold disquiet of some critics of the weak-state literature.⁵ First, we are disturbed by *conceptual reductionism*. Strangely, scholars of state weakness have sought simultaneously to embrace and to overcome the essential imprecision of the state. For Ghani, Lockhart, and the neo-Weberians who responded to Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol's (1985) call to "bring the state back in," the state is an institution—an empirically observable, functional organization—autonomous of and standing atop its society and governing a fixed territory (Rotberg 2004; Zartman 1995). Weber himself would not have made the reductionist move to consider the state as distinct from its social context. Reno (1998: 2) remarks that the term weak state "signifies a spectrum of conventional bureaucratic state capabilities that exists alongside (generally very strong) informal political networks," but adds that this in itself tells us very little. It ignores a multitude of academic studies that have advanced our knowledge of the state over the past 20 years.⁶ In the neo-Weberian "failed state," Weber's charismatic and traditional sources of authority and his detailing of the social bases of bureaucracy are easily disregarded as anachronistic in light of the "standard of civilization" demanded by international state-builders (Zaum 2007). Thus, terms such as "clan" and "networks" are deployed as evidence of state failure—that is state capture by a regime—rather than as features of states themselves. The hybrid and polyvalent forms of statehood found in post-Soviet Eurasia, variously characterized as "strong-weak states" (McMann 2004; Migdal 1994), the "state against itself" (Jones Luong 2004) and "modern clan politics" (Schatz 2004), remain unexplored as features of regimes (not states) or are dismissed as mere indicators of weakness.

Just as elite networks, populist discourses, and well-organized interest groups become inextricably intertwined in Western state structures, so too is the Central Asian state *in* its societies (Migdal 1994; Jones Luong 2004: 2). As Mitchell (1991: 77) notes, some analyses treat the state's fuzzy boundaries as a problem to be overcome rather than a "clue to the nature of the phenomenon" and a condition of its very possibility. We take our cue from those who deploy qualifying terms that highlight the contradictions of actually existing states: "de facto" states that possess functions of government without international recognition (Isachenko 2012), "quasi-" states that enjoy international recognition without the functions of government (Jackson 1990), "shadow" states based on paramilitary networks of organized

crime that exist for rent-seeking and resource-extraction purposes (Reno 1998), and “improvised” states that marshal international material and symbolic resources for themselves without enjoying independence of action (Jeffrey 2013; see also Reeves 2014). Such modifiers suggest not aberrations but rather trends that could be the harbinger of durable changes to stateness.

Second, we are troubled by the unquestioning acceptance of *an exogenous normative model*. Judged against a Western standard of ideal-typical states, weak states cannot but “fail,” and unrealistic policy prescriptions for building state capacity and sovereignty ensue. Tajikistan is illustrative of this pattern. In 2001 the International Crisis Group (ICG) made eight recommendations to the government for democratization and power-sharing, without which Tajikistan’s fragile peace was at risk of collapsing (ICG 2001: ii); none of them was substantially pursued. Eight years later, the ICG privileged external standards of statehood over internal ones, concluding that Tajikistan was “on the road to failure.” In fact, the ICG paid no attention to how nationalism was centered on the state for the Tajik intellectual and political elite (Laruelle 2007), how this state-nation nexus was fostered in the population (Blakkisrud & Nozimova 2010), and how it was buttressed by fear of national “encirclement” that generated indirect support for the regime and state (Marat 2006b). This discursive environment generated popular patriotism and elite nationalism, providing a flimsy yet important legitimacy for a Tajik state that failed to provide substantive social and political goods (Heathershaw 2009a). Most significantly, built on a series of pacts between a weak central government and militia commanders, post-Soviet Tajikistan exemplifies how state weakness does not preclude considerable progress in state formation (Driscoll 2015, see also Driscoll, this volume). In short, the language of “state weakness” obscured the varied processes by which Tajikistan’s statehood was instantiated.⁷

Third, reports of state weakness tend to *dehistoricize politics and the state*. If we treat state weakness that occurs when states have *lost* capacity and sovereignty the same as we treat state weakness in contexts where such capacity and sovereignty *never existed*, then we are proceeding ahistorically. Yet historical trajectories and sequences matter enormously (Beissinger and Kotkin 2014). In the Tajik case, it is misleading to consider the prospects for antistate rebellion without considering its violent origins as a Soviet republic, its normalization as the USSR’s poorest and most-dependent republic, the massively reduced expectations about the role of the state since the Soviet collapse, and the civil war of the mid-1990s. In this sense it may be usefully compared to other post-Soviet states, as well as others that have been through comparably extensive state-building and modernization projects.⁸ If the future witnesses a gradual “forgetting” of the civil war hardships and a rise in expectations about government-provided services, it will have to be established through substantial research. Indeed, we should avoid a determinism that is not merely ahistorical but materialist: deplorable material conditions do not necessarily

provoke rebellion according to simple calculations of opportunities over threats. Serious attention to history and memory help us to avoid these pitfalls.

WHAT DOES STATE WEAKNESS MEAN?

From an intellectual problem to a developmental problem to a security problem, the “weak state” has traveled a long and winding road. Yet the initial puzzle that inspired Huntington remains: how should we make sense of chronic and enduring state weakness?

We start from a position that was commonplace in the early state weakness literature. We speak of “state weakness” rather than a “weak state.” This difference emphasizes stateness (the practical process of “doing state”) rather than the state (the state of being a state). State weakness exists when a state *does not generally perform the tasks expected of it*. By *generally*, we signal that even many well-consolidated strong states at times fail to perform crucial functions; conversely, only states of very great weakness are wholly lacking in institutions for distributing goods. By *perform* we mean two things. First, we mean that states carry out their duties. Second, we mean that states play roles designed to satisfy an audience. These two senses of performance are closely linked (as we detail below). Notwithstanding Weber’s warnings of the iron cage of bureaucracy, little of what contemporary Eurasian states do—from distributing pensions to international security agreements—is fully hidden; even money-laundering and off-shore vehicles occasionally burst into the public domain.⁹ Finally, we emphasize that states behave with regard to *expectations*—from their domestic and international societies. States’ tasks do not exist in a vacuum. We need to appreciate the changing political and ethical benchmarks against which performance is evaluated. The modal “duties” of states in the early twenty-first century are quite different from those of the eighteenth-century state; they also differ from region to region. By implication, while detailed cross-regional collections can be of immense value for shedding light on regional distinctiveness (Beissinger & Young 2002a, 2002b), analyses that pay mere lip-service to regional variation are of little utility (Hameiri 2013).

In short, a state is weak when its geographically limited and historically contingent “state effect” (Mitchell 1991) is weak. This becomes empirically observable when it fails to provide (formal or informal) institutions through which elites distribute patronage, when a hegemonic discourse for generating common expectations of the state breaks down, and when the state stops becoming a focal point for public performances of subordination. If there is an element of tautology in this definition—that states are weak when they are demonstrably ineffectual—it is inevitable. A state is a practically complex “ensemble” parasitic on founding myths and governing ideas (see Abrams 1988, also Jessop 2016: 16). Adopting Wendt’s (1992) formulation, we contend that state weakness is—to a considerable extent—what is made of this ensemble and what becomes of this idea.

We are inspired by Weber's basic understanding of the state as the entity that successfully claims a monopoly on the legitimate use of force on a given territory, but we seek to probe whether durable state weakness is in fact a harbinger of a new kind of stateness that is more performative and internationalized than Weber could have imagined. Emerging as newly independent states under late-modern conditions of rapid capital flows, global governance, and off-shoring of finance that challenge the hierarchy, legitimacy, and territoriality of the nation-state, does post-Soviet Eurasia give us a peek into the future of stateness?

We offer our definitions for analytic purposes, but they naturally index a central debate in political philosophy: is strong statehood a *good*? While most assume that the functions the state is meant to discharge (for examples, ensuring security, building and maintaining physical infrastructure, facilitating prosperity, protecting individual rights) are normatively desirable, others recognize that strong states carry alternative and sometimes troubling logics. Scott (1998) reminds us that the individual finds herself vulnerable to the deeply coercive "high modernism" that the state epitomizes and actuates. Scott's solution is not to be rid of the state, but rather to encourage individuals to practice "anarchist calisthenics," i.e., to exercise their agency by breaking trivial laws, thus ensuring that, should justice or rationality ever require it, they will be ready to break significant ones (Scott 2012). Strong states bring perils; individuals must be prepared.

Similarly, we should be open to the possibility that state weakness can—to a certain degree and under some conditions—bring desirable outcomes. For example, Way (2002a, 2002b; 2015), taking the Belarusian, Moldovan, and Ukrainian examples, shows that a regime without the capacity to coerce may produce a *de facto* pluralism that can break down authoritarian political systems. Likewise, at least some of the United States' historical economic dynamism can be attributed to the weakness of the central state and the resulting space for profit-seeking entrepreneurialism. Relatedly, Reeves (2006: 11) reminds us that normal understandings of state weakness arise from a normative assumption that "the state 'ought,' in both a normative and descriptive sense, to be a singular rather than a multiple entity." In fact, while weakness may be undesirable over the long term, at key moments it can be a boon.

Ultimately, we are less interested in normative judgments than in analytic ones. Thinking about states in terms of performance and expectation sheds light on how polities that lack the formal benchmarks of procedural and substantive legitimacy might have a basis for order in economic relations and discourses where "the state" remains central. Emblematic in the literature for its weakness, the Tajik case again deserves attention. It is through the internationally recognized, sovereign state—not a parallel shadow economy—that onshore and offshore networks of patronage flow (Heathershaw 2011). A relatively strong top-down executive has emerged from what began as bottom-up pacts between warlords where the executive was no more

than an arbiter that owed its position to the very same warlords (Driscoll 2015, see also Driscoll, this volume). It is the nation-state that serves as the object of all legitimate political discourse, both governmental and oppositional, both secular and Islamic (Epkenhans 2011). It is the state security apparatus that defines militia groups as “terrorists” and successfully suppresses counterhegemonic discourse (Lemon 2014). It is the patriarchal state that is seen as the guarantor of the “harmony” demanded and expected in popular discourse (Mostowlansky 2013). Widely expected to be corrupt and susceptible to outbreaks of political violence, it is a weak state with certain strengths. If state weakness is a matter of a shortcoming in *general performance according to expectations*, Tajikistan is far less weak than it first appears.

Put differently, the *quantity* of stateness is less important than its *qualities*. These qualities relate to the nature of state institutions and the expectations and performances of it. They may be desirable or undesirable. While state weakness can both emerge from and reinforce dysfunctional politics, pernicious policies, and inscrutable processes, we should not assume that such politics, policies, and processes necessarily accompany state weakness. To the contrary, this book finds surprisingly resilient *logics* that propel such states along. It may seem like a paradox of power that state weakness can be both durable and fragile, both productive and destructive, and both inspiring and frustrating. It is a paradox that this volume seeks to resolve.

THE STATE AFTER SOCIALISM

Postsocialist Eurasia is particularly productive terrain to till. While the boundaries of “Eurasia” are essentially ambiguous, this book considers the ground left after the implosion of multinational socialist states. Focusing principally on the former Soviet Union, we also include a study of the Bosnian republic. Although the Soviet and Yugoslav successor states have followed different paths, with the latter subject to Western intervention and European Union accession, the similarities in their starting points provide a strong basis for comparison. With their relatively recent decolonization and partial de-Sovietization,¹⁰ the whole of Eurasia from Croatia to Mongolia was profoundly shaken by the Soviet collapse and the shifting conditions of postsocialism. Many contexts suffered political crisis and some faced armed conflict linked to irredentist claims or ethnoregional struggles (Zürcher 2007). The logics of state weakness that this book covers are, we emphasize, a product of a particular regional historical experience.

Across the region, the residues of empire and state socialism have entered the layered bedrock of political life. Like many postcolonial African states, some Eurasian ones enjoy juridical sovereignty without concomitant empirical sovereignty (Rotberg 2004). What O’Donnell (1993) called “brown areas,” which the state lacks the infrastructural power to penetrate, are legion. Capital and people who easily cross borders produce pockets of statelessness. State policies, whether by de-

sign or by incapacity, may fail to reach the rural or urban poor; the state may simply ignore them, as long as their ranks do not swell to politically problematic levels. In some cases, stateness varies significantly over space; as Herbst (2000) describes for sub-Saharan Africa, states may fail to project power much beyond capital cities. In the meantime, like African Leviathans (Young 1994; Young and Turner 1985), Eurasian states contain untold spoils: political contests about the nature of, and control of, the Eurasian state are sometimes literally life-and-death struggles.

Such departures from the Weberian ideal type happen elsewhere, but postsocialist space has three additional features that, in their prominence, distinguish it from other geographic areas. First, the region encompasses informal relations that *constitute* the state, deeply complicating any analytic distinction between formal and informal. Second, most Eurasian societies have experienced Leviathan in the form of the effective developmental state and therefore favor state strength, state sovereignty, and the principal of nonintervention in international affairs. Finally, given the prominent role for ideology under state socialism, these are states that—as a part of their everyday functioning—put a premium on propagating official discourse and performing state power. These three legacies of state socialism are, of course, experienced by degree across the region, but we contend that they have ongoing influence.¹¹ We address each in turn.

State socialism placed a premium on informality (Stark and Bruzst 1998; Verdery 1991). It was not necessarily—and we emphasize this point—that citizen-subjects were quietly subverting or resisting the state; their intention may have been simply to cope rather than to perform political acts (Ledeneva 1998; Yurchak 2006). But the combined force of many petty transgressions produced an outcome of political import: the region's states held a significant place for informal relations amid, not apart from, the institutions of the state. In Uzbekistan, as Rasanayagam (2010) argues, the use of the term informal economy is moot; the state itself is informal and often denoted as “mafia.” When informality penetrates and in fact constitutes statehood, some reconceptualization is in order.

There are untold varieties of informality (Helmke and Levitsky 2004), and the various socialist experiences provide a wealth of examples for how such localisms, modern clans, and networks constitute and are constituted through the state. Analysts discuss mafias, clans, lobbies, pressure groups, cliques, oligarchs, and interest groups (sometimes with, often without, scare-quotes), whose behaviors can undermine policy-making.¹² However, this opposition is neither necessary nor fundamental. Indeed, if one returns to early European statehood, it was egotistical behavior by criminal rackets that developed positive externalities and, eventually, the core of the modern state (Mann 1984; Tilly 1985). Even if such positive externalities are not guaranteed, neither should we assume that—by virtue of how the principal actors involved are named or characterized—they are impossible to achieve. The question is whether the realities of informality are increasingly in-

stitutionalized, largely expected, and routinely performed. Such patterns would be signs of incremental state formation that may eventually enable a more robust statehood to emerge.

There is nothing predetermined about this pathway. The stubbornness of informal relations across much of Eurasia speaks to a crisis of faith that undermines states' legitimacy. One widespread inheritance of state socialism is how normal it remained well into the 2010s for individual citizens to be cynical about state agencies or actors and reliant on informal networks without—except in moments of crisis—fully transferring their loyalties to nonstate actors. Indeed, ritualized conformity remained part of the social fabric of the region and a continuation of the “cynical reason of late socialism” (Yurchak 2006). The collective hedging of bets about the prospect for states to discharge their functions effectively became self-fulfilling. Postsocialist citizens began the 1990s with low expectations of formal procedures and high expectations about the ability of informal relations to solve pressing problems. While in some parts of Eurasia (such as Kazakhstan and Russia, which enjoy relatively effective welfare systems and enormous hydrocarbon wealth) this had begun to change by the 2010s, the exceptions say much about the general trend.

Of course, informal relations of various sorts characterize any setting. Advanced, industrial economies and consolidated democracies are rife with them, and we would be well served to take closer stock of their various dynamics (as methodologically challenging as this can be).¹³ But there appears to be an important difference of degree, if not one of kind, in postsocialist Eurasia. “Cynical reason” toward and the ritualized performance of the state suggest that state collapse is much less likely than in other postcolonial regions where this “hegemony of form” (Yurchak 2003) did not take hold.

Second, state socialism was a massive state-led effort at societal transformation that produced lasting legacies. It matters less that the state socialist project failed to achieve its extraordinary aims than that the project was undertaken at all. Indeed, all of state socialist space is marked by high expectations of what states should do (and an equally high tolerance for their failure to do so).

Put differently, the citizen-subjects of postsocialist space know Leviathan. There is a fundamental difference between, for example, the Maasai in Kenya, who have historically experienced the Kenyan state only weakly and distantly,¹⁴ or the hill peoples of Southeast Asia escaping to the “shatter zone” between states (Scott 2009), on the one hand, and the populations of Siberia, Central Asia, or the Caucasus, on the other. In the latter, the state was unavoidable; its directives might be variously considered, selectively implemented, or quietly resisted, but the state was deeply felt and institutionalized. Thus, the retreat of state agencies and services that most regions witnessed under postsocialism did not erase an important memory and source of expectations about politics. While there was great distance between

the ideals and realities of the state, this pathway back and forth remains well trodden and still navigable for former Soviet citizens.

In some cases, such reasoning about the state led to performances of consent and normative expectations about the services that most modern states provide. Universal literacy, education, and healthcare—despite enormous setbacks in the 1990s—nonetheless continued to be provided, in part because citizens expected as much. Similarly, where the state failed to meet its obligations, it ran the risk of generating a backlash, as in mobilization in Kyrgyzstan in protest of a lack of adequate housing (Sanghera & Satybaldieva 2012).

In other cases, this same reasoning led to conflict. The state—by popular definition—was understood to be the site of inscrutable political-security networks of surveillance and intrigue. That criminality, policing functions designed for control of citizens rather than for protection, or elite practices of dubious ethical standards would suffuse the state was considered normal. But the state had to keep up its end of the bargain: the Ukrainian state witnessed a steep economic decline that precipitated mass street protests and toppled a regime in 2014.¹⁵ Kyrgyzstan and Georgia were like Ukraine in this regard, experiencing similar periods of instability even as the majority of post-Soviet states found relative stability under single-pyramid systems (Hale 2012).

Finally, and crucially, state socialism was the site of hypertrophic state propaganda. On top of providing pervasive systems of welfare and coercion, the state embarked on ambitious social engineering projects to refashion relationships among individual, society, and polity. Thus, the state under socialism propagated “culture”—both the “national”/folk and cosmopolitan/European varieties (Adams 2010; Grant 1995; Igmen 2012). As a result, the abandoned edifices from Soviet-era “houses of culture” in rural Kyrgyzstan in the 2000s were not considered reminders of colonial rule. Rather, they underscored a failure of the post-Soviet state to provide ways for citizens to be *cultural* (as well as economic, social, or political) beings (Igmen 2012). This mattered politically; as Adams (2010) argues with respect to Uzbekistan, there is meaning and even pride felt within such models of production.

With a few exceptions,¹⁶ pure propaganda no longer exists, but the willingness to lead information campaigns remains prominent. Indeed, as Oates (2007) shows, the typical Russian citizen does not expect the broadcast media to be unbiased and objective; rather, she expects them to deliver information about politically correct positions. In such cases, the media cannot play the watchdog or informational roles that democratic theorists such as Dahl (1967) envision. Citizens may not accept media-provided information as valid or legitimate (Wedeen 1998), but they do accept as legitimate that the state would *engage* in information management. The result is, again, what Yurchak (2006) refers to as “cynical reason.”

This was true even under state weakness: information campaigns remained prominent and dwarfed what one might expect, given state finances. Tajikistan is

again an illustrative case. On the heels of a brutal (if short-lived) civil war, the state sought quickly to reestablish its dominance in information management, propagating a historical narrative it found conducive to state consolidation (Heathershaw 2009b; Laurelle 2007; Marat 2009). But Tajikistan was far from unique. Billboards with broad proclamations of important principles of statehood adorned otherwise dilapidated streets in capital cities like Yerevan, Tbilisi, and Almaty in the 1990s, as well as in smaller towns and rural centers. The state was normatively expected to announce its presence, and announce it did.

VARIED LOGICS

While this terrain is littered with state weakness, a closer look reminds us that these “soils” contain numerous “varietals” of statehood.

We divide our approach into logics of consolidation, logics of internationalization, and logics of performance. All speak to our understanding of stateness in terms of general performance according to expectation. However, we take seriously Abrams’s (1988) warning not to conflate the state system (a complex ensemble) and state idea (a simple whole).¹⁷ This distinction provides the basis for two of our logics. In between, we consider the “external” dimensions of both the state system and the state idea. First, informal relations always constitute the state system, but the degree of consolidation varies from case to case. Second, amid the common tradition of the sovereign Leviathan there are degrees of internationalization and therefore variations in the extent and kind of organized hypocrisy (Krasner 1991). Third, a single state idea is found in artifacts of ideology and hegemonic discursive production; however, how this state idea is performed (and how effectively it is received) varies in practice.

By calling them “logics,” we emphasize that these varied practices of weak statehood are not mystical formations on some inscrutable terrain. To the contrary, they can be laid bare and made legible by careful analysis.

Logics of Consolidation

We start with how the states of Eurasia undergo consolidation, to the extent that they do. Mining the historical sociology literature (Cohen et al. 1981; Tilly 1985), our chapter contributors consider how informalities become institutionalized and may—*pace* common perspectives on the topic—in fact strengthen weak states. Indeed, state weakness may be a function of capture by regional factions (Jones Luong 2002), clans (Collins 2006), warlords and criminal networks (Marat 2006a; Nourzhanov 2005) or coalitions of disaffected elites (Radnitz 2010), but these “traditional” or “pre-state” forms are continually reconstructed through the state and via modern means (e.g., politico-administrative divisions, nationalism) (Jones Luong 2002; Radnitz 2010; Schatz 2004). How these nonstate communities and political arrangements influence, and are influenced by, nascent state security functions is crucial to study.

Security lies at the origin of stateness, and Eurasia is no exception. Yet our cases present a peculiar variation on the general theme. As Cooley (2005) demonstrates, Eurasia combines both “multidivisional” (M-form) and “unitary” (U-form) organization; M-form organization entails a greater devolution of powers to subordinate entities (e.g., Soviet republics, autonomous units, oblasts, raions), while U-form organization retains these powers for the center. M-form organization, which was commonplace in the USSR, is “more likely to preserve and even entrench existing peripheral institutions and is far more susceptible to control problems, co-optation, and patrimonial-types of bargain than U-form” (Cooley 2005: 12). As a result, M-form institutions of agriculture (*kolkhoz* and *sovkhos*) and policing have largely endured, while the Soviet U-form institutions of industrial planning and the armed forces withered away. Post-Soviet state-building efforts are thus characterized by this particular legacy wherein police forces remain comparatively robust and active (Cooley 2005: 111–15).

While the armed forces underwent a rapid decline, internal security institutions have remained remarkably strong since 1991. Perhaps as a result, even the weak states of postsocialist space have been free of military coups, whereas police forces have established links with organized crime, as respective chapters by Kupa-tadze and Slade show. The clear rise of a class of “violence entrepreneurs” (Volkov 2002) should not necessarily be equated with a slide to state weakness or collapse. Notably, with the exception of the North Caucasus and Tajikistan for brief periods in the 1990s, post-Soviet Eurasia has avoided the collapse of the monopoly of legitimate violence that characterized Afghanistan for much of the last two decades, Bosnia during its war of the 1990s, and several cases from postcolonial Africa.¹⁸

Part of the explanation for the relative stability of postsocialist states lies in their informal relations. Consider rent-seeking mechanisms, which are typically understood to undermine the state, subordinating them to patronage networks and particularistic interests. Much of the early literature on Africa’s weak states and on the political economy of armed conflict suggested as much, but even “warlord states” are states. Reno (2011: 127) notes with respect to Liberia that “some types of corruption may entice strongmen to tolerate a political settlement as they go about their business”; it is, he argues, “the *organization of corruption*” that matters (141). Similarly, North, Wallis, Webb and Weingast (2011: 2) argue that limited access orders “solve the problem of violence by using the political system to create and allocate rents.” In Eurasia, warlords emerging from civil war even in the weakest contexts (Georgia, Tajikistan) became indistinguishable from officials, opting into the state rather than establishing a competing political order. Thus, as Driscoll shows in chapter 2, these actors in Tajikistan quickly came to appreciate that wealth and power could accrue to those who aligned with the emerging state order and therefore “transmogrified into violence sub-contractors for the regime.” Importantly, the consolidated regime emerged out of anarchy via multiple pacts made among

commanders rather than via the prior establishment of effective central authority. In fact, the practices by which central authority and organized crime intertwine are surprisingly effective in shoring up state functioning for the short- and medium-term, as Kupatadze shows in chapter 4 with regard to Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine. Radnitz in chapter 3 agrees, though he cautions that reliance on a “personalized apparatus of regime control” (instead of robust institutions) generates structural fragilities (to which Kyrgyzstan succumbed in 2010, even if Georgia did not). While each of these regimes relies on its informal relations, the degree of consolidation varies depending on the kinds of informality and the particular contingencies of each.

The logics that produced the consolidation of Eurasia’s weak states quickly became the logics of their functioning. As Engvall describes in chapter 5, corruption on a massive scale in Kyrgyzstan—something that outsiders routinely decry—is best seen as “an alternative system serving to keep the state together,” rather than a “distortion of formal rules and institutions.” Slade proposes in chapter 6 that the Georgian state uses mass incarceration as part of a more general social policy to assert the state’s moral authority over its population. It may be that this particular road to statehood produces systemic corruption and overly exuberant practices of criminal justice *and* also explains distinctive institutional formations, limited armed conflict, and actual strength amid apparent weakness.

Logics of Internationalization

While the Weberian definition of statehood emphasizes a sovereign monopoly on violence within a given territory, in reality pure sovereign independence is mythical. Eurasia’s weak states offer acute examples. After all, some unrecognized states (e.g., the Transdniestrian Moldovan Republic) manage to survive and enjoy striking strengths, others see their sovereignty formally divided between national and international actors (e.g., Kosovo), and still others see their sovereignty *de facto* lost and *de jure* contested (e.g., Georgia). Moreover, we might question this understanding of the state when states routinely develop transnational links to off-shore spaces (Cooley and Heathershaw 2017).

Krasner (1999) has referred to this conundrum between the appropriate expectation of sovereignty and the practical consequences of its interference, intervention, and dependency as the perpetual order of “organized hypocrisy.” But if the logic of consequence so often departs from the logic of appropriateness, surely some reconceptualization of the state is called for. To accept that all which lies within official national boundaries is under the state while all that lies beyond is not is to fall victim to “methodological nationalism” (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002) and the unsatisfying dichotomy of inside/outside (Walker 1992). This is the foundational myth of International Relations—the so-called “myth of 1648” (Teschke 2003). The Peace of Westphalia (of 1648) is often described as distinguishing inside

from outside, hierarchy from anarchy, peace from war, but the myth itself helps to constitute the state in practice, obscuring key aspects of states' emergence, formation, and mutability. "Failed states" are often dismissed as anarchical and war-torn spaces where external actors compete for influence to maximize their own security, but perhaps their great failure is a failure to fit with this nationalist image. In fact, states that are neither fully sovereign nor contained within their territorial boundaries are very much part of global politics and rarely succumb to the failure that is forecast.

If state sovereignty is a Weberian ideal-type, the ideal itself is one with a clear effect on international practice. As a result, aspiration to statehood seems nearly universal even in the face of significant opposition (as in the unrecognized states of Kosovo, Palestine, Somaliland, and Transdniestrian Moldovan Republic [Isachenko 2012]). In Central Asia, territorially land-locked states enjoy off-shore spaces, particularly through tolling arrangements, lobbying campaigns, and legal disputes related to the export of their mineral and hydrocarbon resources (Cooley 2012; Heathershaw 2011). One of the attributes of these state formations is that they are both legally and illegally resourced through international political and economic networks. In turn, such networks provide the symbolic and material resources to fulfill the functions of government.

Thus, new and old types of ordering coexist, overlap, and even integrate. Lawson, paraphrasing Sassen, argues that "globalization, even as it adds to the sense of decreasing state capacity, must still be shaped, channeled and enabled by institutions and networks which are rooted in the nation state" (2008: 68). Technical infrastructures include complex tolling arrangements and financial audits, administrative apparatuses include the procedural systems of the high court in London, and value regimes include the legal norms of international arbitration.¹⁹ As global forms are assembled and reassembled, so too is the putative Leviathan shaped and reshaped.

Such complex global assemblages are becoming more typical. Comparing sub-Saharan Africa and Central Asia, Schlichte proposes in chapter 7 that states with such robust international links "look like exceptions at first sight" but may in fact foreshadow processes afoot across the globe. In Eurasia, they cross issue areas, such as border management, dialogue exercises, and elections (Heathershaw 2009a, ch. 5; Ismailbekova 2013). Indeed, nearly all aspects of government in Bosnia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan—states particularly open to global actors at various times for varying reasons—are subject to assemblages that emerge from regional or global spaces.

Such international links occur across Eurasian contexts. Both the *de facto* breakaway states (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) and their estranged parent (Georgia) show that territorial integrity and formal sovereign status are not necessary for states to emerge and endure. In the western Balkans, interventions to end armed

conflict and the potential of European Union entry made misnomers of both the idea of territorial exclusivity and the narrowly drawn concept of sovereignty. Bosnia has “been improvised among a variety of actors operating across a range of spatial scales” since the Dayton accords of 1995 determined who, where, and what it was as a state (Jeffrey 2013: 5). As Jeffrey illustrates in chapter 10 with regard to the creation of the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina, improvisation using raw material of both domestic and international provenance is the order of the day.

Other chapter authors agree. Lewis makes a similar conceptual move in chapter 8, showing that the Armenian state (and its paradoxical strength amid apparent weakness) can be understood as the combination of three “state spaces”—one constitutional, a second political-economic, and a third nationalist-expansionist. Like the assemblages described above, these spaces are geographically porous, their functioning subject to change. Even Russia, a powerful state capable of playing a decisive geopolitical role, claims legitimacy based on international links. As Ortmann shows in chapter 9, the Putin regime projected its power internally to a domestic audience with clear reference to its “evolving narrative of state weakness that centrally focuses on a fear of Western encroachment.”

Thus, with Bosnia at one end and Russia at the other (and Armenia and others arrayed in the middle), our authors show that no Eurasian state can be understood without full attention to international links. Although there were clear practices of “nationalization” that occurred after the Soviet collapse (Brubaker 1996), denationalization is equally noteworthy. If the coexistence of these two practices seems a logical contradiction, we accept this as a clue (Mitchell 1991) to how the contemporary Eurasian state functions.

Logics of Performance

Two types of performance underlie the state weakness that our chapter authors cover; both concern the relations between formal/informal and national/international patterns of politics. First, to what extent and in what ways do states discharge (or fail to discharge) their functions, especially by providing public goods? Second, how do states play a political role vis-à-vis an audience, whether domestic or international, and how does such performance reify states’ existence? Many of the contributions to this book demonstrate that these two questions are inherently connected.

Two crucial points are worth making. First, we avoid a rigid distinction between a fake, formal façade and an informal reality such as that found in Wilson’s (2005) notion of post-Soviet “virtual politics.” However, if we are not claiming that the informal realm is primary and the formal realm is secondary, what *are* we claiming? Part of what holds informal and formal relations together is performance, which Goffman defines as the activities of a person, “during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers” (1990: 22). Such performances are scaled multiply, indeed at the level

of the state itself. In Central Asia, “a multitude of voices can be heard, talking about ‘the state’” (Reeves, Rasanayagam, and Beyer 2014: 13). Various ritualized acts and speech that appear on the stage of politics serve to objectify the state. “There is,” they go on, “a dialogue of form only and not a dialectic of argument when it comes to performing ‘the state’ in the public realm.” The difference between this analysis and that of Wilson is that formal discourses of the state are not without their effects, both moral and material—consistent with what Mitchell (1991) denotes as the “state effect.” The state form, Reeves, Rasanayagam, and Beyer note, “while constituted by a plurality of forces, does not lead to a plurality of opinion but rather seems to (re-)create ‘the state’ as a unified, solitary, and personified object” (15). It is this re-creation—this reproduction of the appearance of the unitary state out of various parts—upon which the state’s discharge of its functions is necessarily premised.

Our chapter authors tend to agree. In chapter 8, Lewis shows that the formal (what he calls the “constitutional”) state in Armenia is counterbalanced by two informal “state spaces”—one based on political-economic ties and the other based on nationalist-expansionist ones. Shored up by these networked informal relations, the Armenian state—by all “objective” indicators suffering massively from empirical weakness—manages to remain stable, as long as the essential foundations for its functioning remain unchallenged. Similarly, in chapter 14, Reeves details the ways by which community-based acts of charity and voluntarism effectively supplement state-led efforts to produce public goods. In so doing, these acts “elicit” the state, reifying it beyond what its purely material capacities would suggest is possible. Jeffrey similarly shows how the public symbolizing and performing of the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina was integral to the state’s functioning.

This link between public performance and practical function is encapsulated in the logic of performance found amid state weakness. As Khamidov shows in chapter 11 via the example of state regulation of religious life, the state’s effectiveness depends on the good services of key societal actors; religious tensions were averted in those parts of Uzbekistan where state policies were well attuned to the specific, disaggregated realities of the local level. Similarly, D’Anieri in chapter 13 shows that being attuned is a classic question of Weberian legitimacy. In Ukraine, one cannot separate the essential dysfunction of the state that became apparent in 2014 from its shaky legitimacy, although many analysts were surprised that such a seemingly stable state could succumb to violence so quickly.²⁰ Finally, as Maltseva shows in chapter 12, the performance of the state in Kazakhstan is enormously buoyed by oil receipts; yet, the state’s ability to meet societal expectations with regard to social policy was deeply called into question when local authorities massacred protesters in Zhanaozen in December 2011. Thus, one of the seemingly strongest states of the region demonstrated a tragic incapacity to perform to desired effect.

In combination, these chapters undermine any simplistic equation of the formal

realm with classical state performance and the informal realm with performance à la Goffman. Under postsocialism, the two types of performance are suffused with formal and informal dynamics and are interdependent.

CONCLUSION

Other scholars have noticed the “strong-weak” paradox of Eurasian states (Jones Luong 2004; Reeves 2014: 10; Starr 2011: xviii). Moving beyond this conundrum, our volume lays bare the multiple logics of state weakness at play in the region that, rooted in the socialist experience, are more durable than many assume. In this sense, the region’s idiosyncracies offer not a harbinger of collapse but a clue to their endurance. The three logics we identify in the volume intertwine with and are bound by the special postsocialist habit of incorporating apparently contradictory discourses and practices without conflict or indeed contradiction (Dudoignon 2004). The obsession with formality binds informal patterns into the formal system rather than offering a parallel structure. Leaders’ perceptions of the state as Leviathan make the internationalization of weak states conditional on the performance of their sovereignty. Finally, the performance of the state, far from revealing a Potemkin village, mobilizes populations and excites their emotions. Because of these logics, Eurasia’s weak states often work, against expectations to the contrary.

In sum, the chapters in this volume offer no single argument about the endurance of Eurasia’s apparently weak states. Empirically, our contributors together offer a fascinating and closely comparable set of case studies that shed light on the particular stories of how former Soviet states have survived, and in many cases flourished, despite expectations of disaster and collapse after the turmoil of the early 1990s. Conceptually, we suggest there is still such a thing as the postsocialist state which intertwines the informal with the formal, relying heavily on the performance of statehood at home and abroad. It is remarkable that these states remain so distinctly postsocialist fully twenty-five years after the fall. Theoretically and methodologically, however, pluralism—the combination of disparate approaches from different disciplines and with different methods—offers a more promising line of inquiry than a single historical narrative of the postsocialist state’s consolidation, internationalization, and performance. We agree with Mark Beissinger in this book’s conclusion, who comments that the neo-Weberian account offers “only one of many ways to think about the state—one that contains significant ambiguities, limitations, and contradictions.” The study of Eurasia has suffered in the past twenty years from misleading security analysis of state failure and the unwarranted application of apparent “lessons” about the postcolonial state from other regions. Both these blind alleys suggest ignorance of the particularities of the region’s statehood. The antidote is not yet another grand theory of state formation but the multidisciplinary scholarship and contextual expertise found only among collaborations of scholars of regional studies.