

PS363 States and War

Seminar Leader: Prof. Dr. Boris Vormann

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Office Hours: by appointment

Course Times: WF 1045-1215

Course Description

This course explores the bellicist tradition of state formation — the theory that war and preparation for war drive the emergence of centralized, capable states. We begin with its roots in early modern European political thought and trace its development through the work of Charles Tilly and others. A central focus is the American case, which complicates the bellicist model: Is the U.S. an exceptional state built more through law, administration, and internal conflict than through classic geopolitical struggle? In the final weeks, we examine global divergences — how regions such as Africa, Latin America, and Asia followed distinct paths to statehood, and how feminist and postcolonial critiques challenge the coercion-centered narrative. Students will gain a strong theoretical foundation, engage with comparative historical cases, and grapple with enduring debates about how modern states are made.

Requirements

Reading material

- Class Reader (available at the library)

Class preparation

In preparation for class, read the texts thoughtfully and engage with their core argument. Take notes while reading and try to identify questions in advance: Why do the authors argue as they do? How do they raise and substantiate their claims? How does their line of argumentation relate to earlier readings and discussions in class?

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation. Every unexcused additional absence from a 90-min session lowers the participation grade by one step (i.e., from B+ to B). Bard College Berlin may not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Assignments, Grade Breakdown and Essay Deadlines

Oral

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| ● Classroom Participation (2*15%) | 30% (of overall grade) |
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This seminar involves thoughtful and active participation in class discussions and working groups. The classroom is a protected space and you should feel free to voice your arguments and comments. Please do not hesitate to address the seminar leader if you feel that this is not the case.

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| ● Case Study Workshops | 20% |
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Student groups will organize 90-minute workshops focused on different geographical cases. The session will begin with a 15-minute presentation that introduces the case's historical context, current complexities, and develop questions on state formation. The rest of the workshop should use interactive methods, such as debates, simulations, or discussions, to engage the class and deepen understanding. The goal is to critically analyze the case while fostering active class participation and applying concepts from critical geopolitics.

Written

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| ● Mid-term (March 27, 2026) | 20% |
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The in-class mid-term exam will encompass a range of questions designed to evaluate students' grasp of the course material and their ability to engage in critical reflection. This assessment will include short answer prompts and essay questions that require detailed analysis and synthesis of key political concepts and theories discussed throughout the semester.

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| ● Final Paper (May 8, 2026) | 30% |
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The details for the final paper will be discussed in class.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students will receive feedback for their course work during and at the end of the semester. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Week
Beginning

Session 1

Session 2

I. State Theory: The Bellicist Tradition

1

Jan 26

Classical Theories

Held (1991), *Central Perspectives on the Modern State*

The Military and the State

Hintze (1902), *The Formation of States and Constitutional Development*
& (1906), *Military Organization and the Organization of the State*

2

Feb 2

Dimensions of State Formation

Stein Rokkan (1974), *Dimensions of State Formation and Nation-Building*
Tilly (1981), *Stein Rokkan's Conceptual Map of Europe*

Exit-Voice-Loyalty

Finer (1974), *State-Building, State Boundaries and Border Control*

3

Feb 9

Autonomous Power

Mann (1984), *The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms and Results*

States and Societies

Skocpol (1985), *Bringing the State Back In*

4

Feb 16

War-Making

Tilly (1985), *War-Making and State-Making as Organized Crime* & (1992) *Coercion, Capital, and European States*

The English State

Brewer (1988), *The English State and Fiscal Appropriation, 1688-1789*

5

Feb 23

European State Formation

Ertmann (1997), *Birth of the Leviathan*

The Bellicist Tradition

Ertmann (2017), *Otto Hintze, Stein Rokkan and Charles Tilly's Theory of European State-Building*

II. An American Exception?

6

March 2

The New American State

Skowronek (1982), *Building the New American State*

Flexible Capacity

Katznelson (2002), *Rewriting the Epic of America & Flexible Capacity*

7

March 9

Corps of Engineers

Adler (2021), *Engineering Expansion*

Railroads

Callen (2016), *Railroads and American Political Development*

8 March 16	Civil War Bensel (1990), <i>Yankee Leviathan</i>	Invisible Government Balogh (2009), <i>A Government out of Sight</i>
9 March 23	A New Take Novak (2022), <i>New Democracy: The Creation of the Modern American State</i>	Mid-term exam
Spring Break March 30-April 5, 2026		
III. Beyond the West and Back <i>Regional Case Study Workshops</i>		
10 Apr 6	Postcolonial States Migdal (1989), <i>Strong Societies and Weak States</i>	Africa Herbst (2000), <i>War and the State in Africa</i>
11 Apr 13	Latin America Kurtz (2009), <i>Social Foundations of Inst'l Order</i> Holden (2017), <i>Beyond mere war</i>	China Tin-Bor Hui (2017), <i>How Tilly's State Formation Paradigm is Revolutionizing the Study of Chinese State-Making</i>
12 Apr 20	The Balkans Malesevic (2019), <i>War, State Formation, and Nationalism</i>	Europe Kelemen & McNamara (2022), <i>State-building & the EU</i> Genschel & Schimmelfennig (2022), <i>War, Political Development and European Integration</i> Genschel et al (2023), <i>War and Integration</i>
13 Apr 27	North America Sparrow (1996), <i>From the Outside In</i> Weiss (2014), <i>America Inc.?</i>	Federal Holiday
14 May 4	Looking Back and Forward Spruyt (2017), <i>War and State Formation</i> Teschke (2017), <i>After the Tilly Thesis</i>	Submit Final Paper

Accommodations

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen, (accommodations@berlin.bard.edu) to request an official accommodation.

Requests for accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement. If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with Atticus Kleen outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the [Bard College Berlin Accessibility page](#). Questions about this process can be directed to James Harker (j.harker@berlin.bard.edu) or Maria Anderson-Long (m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu).