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## State-Centered Approach to Political Economy

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### ABSTRACT

*The rise of political economy has led to the continued generation of arguments as to the relevance and obligation of the state. This paper however focuses on the state centered approach to political economy. Being a qualitative approach data were drawn from secondary sources such as journals, books, newspaper, online publications and articles. The national accommodation theory of pluralist societies was adopted to explain the dynamics of African states. The paper concluded that, the state is the main driving force of structural change and economic progress. That most of the third world countries as requiring a recreation through comprehensive administrative transformation and political discipline and that a distinction between “soft and hard” states should be made. Hard states are capable of enforcing and with little resistance policies on the society. While, the soft states are primarily overwhelmed by interest groups (Rent- seeking), that are capable of deterring and also reversing the agenda of the state.*

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**Keyword:**

*Africa,  
Development,  
Political economy,  
State-centered  
approach, and  
Theory.*

## **Introduction**

The emergence in the 18th century of political economy facilitated peoples understanding and adaptation to the drastic shift in system of wants satisfaction, in terms of nature of wants as well as the way of production and supply of products for satisfying such wants. The dramatic change from “Economy: (Older concept) to a newer concept “Political Economy” signaled this drastic shift. In Greek usage economy entails household management, which was pertinent to a great level for societies in which wants emerged and are satisfied by household production (Caporaso & Levine, 1992a).

According to Caporaso and Levine (1992b) political economy refers to managing the economic activities of the state. The word “Political” deals with two interrelated attributes of the system on want satisfaction. In the first instance, the system connects independent people (Strangers as oppose to relatives). Satisfying ones wants now depends most likely on such strangers. Secondly, the arena of want satisfaction became political (system of wants under public authority). This (political Economy) is channeled towards advising the ruling class on the best possible ways to managing the economic life of the state with a view to satisfying societal wants.

The rise of political economy has led to and continues to generate arguments as to the relevance and obligation of the state. This paper however focuses on the state centered approach to political economy.

## **RESEARCH QUESTION (HYPOTHETICAL)**

What is the relevance of the state (state-centered approach) to economic development in African countries?

## **METHODOLOGY**

This is a research that adopts the conceptual type of research, meaning it is a qualitative approach utilizing secondary sources of data. Authoritative documents such as journals, academic textbooks, amongst other non-quantitative sources of information are utilized for the purpose of this journal paper.

Considering the plurality of the African society and the need to be able to analyze nation building in relation to public policy, “National accommodation theory” is chosen for an effective theoretical framework.

### **CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION**

According to Anifowose (1999) the origin of the state as a result of natural evolution as seen by natural theory meaning the genesis of government was due to several factors or condition working through the ages like religious, political consciousness, force and kinship. Thus, the state came out of diverse human needs over time.

Aristotle asserts that man is a political animal by nature. This idea cements the need for a state to ensure a conducive political and socio-economic life for the people.

This state origin theory like the force theory do not provide for society’s independence from their government as well as the rights to political participation in the activities of the state. Thus, the state holds complete power over the citizens (Shaapera, 2012).

For centuries political thinkers have shown great concern in the concept of the state; its origin, structure and relevance (Vermani, 2005). Only through persistent and continuous examination can researchers determine their validity.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL APPROACH**

Max Weber refers to the state as an actor capable in formulating and pursuing its own goals (Luiz, 1999). In line with the Weberian ideal-type perspective, Migdal (1988) refers to state as an organization comprising of various bodies directed and coordinated by the executive authority of the state which has the authority and power to formulate and execute rules for the people including social bodies in a particular territory, plus applying force where required to achieve its goals.

According to Martinussen (1996), the state can be examined from several analytical perspectives; including that it serves as an arena for conflict and interaction, and also an actor in its own right. These two perspectives support the state-centered approach by concentrating on the real actions of the state instruments; focusing on ideas such as state autonomy and capacity.

State-centered and political institutional work has always been in sociology and political science. The centrality of states to political life and politics was influenced mainly by German scholars, especially Max Weber and Otto Hintze (Almond, 1990)

The Historicist Approach is a sympathetic critique of the neo-Weberian works regarding state capacity and putting forward the historicist approach: re-emphasizing legitimacy by Leonard Seabrook. This approach tries to correct the lapses of the main neo-Weberians; Theda Skocpol and Micheal Mann amongst others.

In essence, four reasons have been forwarded for re-emphasizing legitimacy:

- ❖ Legitimacy is a pertinent part of Webers' approach which has been sidelined by the neo-Weberian approach.
- ❖ Legitimacy allows for the state-society dynamics as a contested and not functional space. Requiring an understanding of material factors and social norms in their historical situation.
- ❖ Legitimacy facilitates the rise of historicist approach that is not ahistorical; or evolutionary sense to change.
- ❖ Legitimacy permits the viewing of state action as not just a functional response to challenges created by the international anarchical system. The approach is in line with the methodology of Weber as well as neo-Weberian historicist. Emphasizing the study of material norms and conditions with the legitimization of power under a historically specified period.

As a theoretical approach Scholars have adopted various theories to analyze plural societies. In our study we employed the "National accommodation theory" propagated by Smock and Smock (1975) in their comparative study of two plural societies (Ghana and Lebanon). The approach gives recognition to, public policies which pay attention to the existence of subgroups in the distribution of national resources and offices aimed at minimizing parochial conflicts, while ensuring stability in the political system for nation building (Obiyan,2000).

## **COMPONENTS OF STATE – CENTERED THEORY**

The main components of state centered theory are listed below: -

- State is an independent entity (State Autonomy),
- State capacity,
- The state is the dominant actor for development, and
- Society is a building block available to the state.

## **CRITIQUE OF THE THEORY**

This paper sees the state through the Weberian actor that is able to pursue and formulate its goals. However, the approach ignores the influence of the environment on the state. State conceptualization usually tends to be at an extreme: The state is either having unlimited power or powerless. The problem here is that their autonomy and capacity fluctuates, and sometimes are more able than others. Thus, state autonomy and capacity should not and cannot be assumed (Luiz 1999). State-centered theories usually refer to the state as having tremendous ability to achieve its set-goals and also having enough autonomy to facilitate them with ease. The state stands as the main actor in the development process, while the society is like a building block before the state as resource (Migdal, 1988 Kohli, & Shue, 1994).

The Manifesto of the communist party refers to “the executive of the modern state (as being) a community for managing the common affairs the whole bourgeoisies” usually to the detriment of the poor (Marx & Engels, 1975).

The political and economic powers of the state are established powers of one class used to oppress another (Miliband & Seville, 1965). For Lenin (1945) the state is the dictatorship of the bourgeoisies. Engels (1975) refers to state (Capitalist) to being where means of production and others are in private hands used to subjugate the peasants and even the working class.

Engels (1969) argues the working classes (Proletariat) will eventually seize power (state), making the state to function as an instrument of the state and down the line there would be no existing social class oppressed, no class rule, no individual struggle for survival. And therefore, no need for a state (A special Coercive force). To Engel, the capitalist state will not “wither away” rather it will be abolished by the working class during the revolution. He opined that the proletarian state or semi state will wither away post revolution (Lenin, 1945).

## **FINDINGS**

Myrdal (1968) asserted the state as the main driving force of structural change and economic progress. He sees most of the third world countries (TWC) as requiring a recreation through comprehensive administrative transformation and political discipline. In view of this he made a distinction between “soft and hard” states. Hard states are capable of enforcing and with little resistance policies on the society. While, the soft states are primarily overwhelmed by interest groups (Rent- seeking), that are capable of deterring and also reversing the agenda of the state. Weak states are without the capabilities to undertake planned policies. Myrdal saw many of the less developed countries (LDCs) as soft and not in a position to ensure development. Most LDCs are ineffective and not having the capability to rule due to fragmented over-politicized and being open to corruption. Myrdal however is confident that these socio-cultural and political institutional hindrances could be surmounted via conscious state building.

A new set of social scientist achieved prominence in the late 80s by inculcating a more state-centered approach utilizing myrdals’ work (Chang, 1994; Evans, 1989, Leftwich, 1993). This approach came out of a multi – disciplinary analysis carried mainly by economists, political scientists and sociologist. The interventionists insisted that late industrializers needed the state to play the leading role in their developmental process in their bid to compete with the industrialized states.

East Asian states identified a number of sectors to be developed, but due to the costs and risks in the development project the private sector could not undertake them without the state support. Only the state can boast of the resources to compete with the ‘economies of scale of existent’ multinational companies. Making it necessary for the state to start industrial state companies, protect domestic industries from multinational competition, and give out subsidized capital to private sector (Amsden, 1989).

## **CONCLUSION**

The rise of political economy came with an argument as to what are the responsibilities of the state (Or states man) in relation to the economy. The debate still continues and maintains a vital position in political economy. Is it

the states responsibility to decide which wants are to be satisfied and sourcing the resources for ensuring their satisfaction? Or are wants better satisfied if left in the hands of individuals acting in the capability of private agents with private interests as the motivator? (Caporaso & Levine, 1992c).

The different approaches to political economy came up with ways of resolving such questions and more. However, this paper concentrated its' assessment on the state – centered approach to political economy.

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