

A systematic nomenclature for the typological classification of state strength profiles

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State strength is a concept that seeks to encompass the basic preconditions needed for the development of state capacity and functional institutions. These are associated with outcomes such as economic development and improvements in public health. States are traditionally classified in a binary fashion: as either strong or weak. Giraudy (2019) critiques this dichotomy, arguing that it fails to express the full diversity of states that exhibit some but not all of the characteristics of an unambiguously strong state. These are threefold:

1. The state's effective control over the territory that it claims to govern;
2. The presence of a professional bureaucracy capable of extracting resources, delivering public goods, and in general of executing state policy;
3. The states' ability to implement its policies independently of other actors.

Note that in this typology these are binary attributes. States are considered to either exhibit or not exhibit them. Thus, states can have eight different combinations of attribute presence or absence. These combinations will hereafter be called *state strength profiles*. She identifies the two prevailing ways of implementing the strong/weak state dichotomy: the necessary and sufficient structure, and the family resemblance structure.

The necessary and sufficient structure stipulates that a state is strong if and only if it meets all three characteristics of state strength. Otherwise, it is weak. Thus, only one state strength profile gets classified as strong, while there are seven that get classified as weak. The family resemblance structure, meanwhile, classifies a state as strong if it exhibits at least one of the three state strength characteristics, and as weak if it has none. Thus, seven profiles get labeled as strong, and only one as weak.

Both of the implementations just presented share the critical drawback of lumping together a great diversity of state strength profiles within their respectively chosen half of the dichotomy. Giraudy rightly considers these systems inadequate, and proposes to replace the dichotomy with a subtype system, which can be summarized in the following table:

Territorial reach	Bureaucratic capacity	Autonomy from other actors	Type of state
yes	yes	yes	Strong
no	yes	yes	Nonreaching
yes	no	yes	-
yes	yes	no	Crony
yes	no	no	-
no	yes	no	-
no	no	yes	Weberianless Nonreaching
no	no	no	Weak

While undoubtedly a step in the right direction, Giraudy's work is incomplete, as her typology includes only five labels, (strong state, weak state, non-reaching state, Weberianless non-reaching state, and crony state), while there are eight state strength profiles. In her eleventh footnote, she acknowledges this incompleteness, as well as the awkwardness of some of her proposed labels, and invites future work to find a better nomenclature. An attempt at fulfilling her request follows.

It is evident that a state that displays all three hallmarks of state strength can only be reasonably classified as strong, while one that presents none as weak. All previous classification systems share this minimum common ground, and this proposal won't buckle the trend. Now note that any state that exhibits neither none nor all of the three characteristics must necessarily possess either exactly one or exactly two of them; and thus must either display a single one or be exactly one characteristic short of exhibiting all three. This fact can be exploited to construct a very systematic nomenclature for any state that has not already been defined as either strong or weak. To accomplish this, it suffices to define such mixed states as quasi-weak or quasi-strong, depending on whether they exhibit one or lack one characteristic, and then denote them by it, be it their sole or missing hallmark. The following table exhaustively displays the system.

Territorial reach	Bureaucratic capacity	Autonomy from other actors	Type of state
yes	yes	yes	Strong
no	yes	yes	Nonreaching quasi-strong
yes	no	yes	Ineffectual quasi-strong
yes	yes	no	Dependent quasi-strong
yes	no	no	Reaching quasi-weak
no	yes	no	Capable quasi-weak
no	no	yes	Autonomous quasi-weak
no	no	no	Weak

Once someone is acquainted with the simple rule behind the systematicity of this typology, they can derive the presence or absence of each characteristic of state strength from merely seeing and very lightly interpreting a given label, no memorization needed. This system also accommodates for a degree of label variance via synonymity, a practice that facilitates the production of pleasantly-read writing. For instance, the “autonomous quasi-weak” label may as well be written as “independent quasi-weak” with little fear of engendering confusion. It is hoped that this system may facilitate a more conceptually precise approach to discussion about degrees of state strength in future work.

References

Giraudy, A. (2019). Conceptualizing state strength: moving beyond strong and weak states. *Revista De Ciencia Política*, 32(3), 599–611. <https://doi.org/10.4067/S0718-090X2012000300005>