

Leviathan's Latent Dimensions: Measuring State Capacity for Comparative Political Research

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State capacity is a core concept in political science research, and it is widely recognized that state institutions exert considerable influence on outcomes such as economic development, civil conflict, democratic consolidation, and international security. Yet researchers across these fields of inquiry face common problems involved in conceptualizing and measuring state capacity. In this article, we examine these conceptual issues, identify three core dimensions of state capacity, and develop the expectation that they are mutually supporting and interlinked. We then use Bayesian latent variable analysis to estimate state capacity at the conjunction of indicators related to these dimensions. We find strong interrelationships between the three dimensions and produce a new, general-purpose measure of state capacity with demonstrated validity for use in a wide range of empirical inquiries. It is hoped that this project will provide effective guidance and tools for researchers studying the causes and consequences of state capacity.

In the influential volume, *Bringing the State Back In*, Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol (1985) noted a surge of interest in the state as an actor. This interest has not abated in the years since. It is widely recognized that state institutions exert considerable influence on outcomes, including economic growth, human development, civil conflict, international security, and the consolidation of democracy. Along with the proliferation of theories containing state capacity as an explanatory variable, however, has come divergence in how it is conceptualized, impeding our ability to compare findings and expand our understanding of its roles. The difficulty of measuring state capacity empirically, however conceptualized, magnifies this problem.

A core question confronting scholars of state capacity is how to address the multidimensional nature of the concept. Despite a multitude of theorized, underlying dimensions of state capacity, the conceptual and empirical interrelationships among these dimensions remain poorly understood, leading to a number of potential measurement issues. First, absent clear definition of the concepts underlying state capacity, researchers may select

dimensions and measures that are not relevant to their research (Berwick and Christia 2018; Cingolani 2013; Soifer 2008) or to the broader concept of state capacity. Second, measures are not always distinct from other concepts of interest such as economic development or regime type. Third, sparse geographic and temporal coverage for many measures of state capacity may prevent researchers from using the best measures possible.

In this article, we seek to address these challenges theoretically and empirically. First, we draw upon the growing literature on state capacity to identify the most fundamental functions of modern states and outline three core types of capabilities that state organizations must possess in order to fulfill those functions. Second, drawing upon a wide range of carefully selected indicators, we use Bayesian Markov-Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) models to estimate state capacity as a latent variable. The results provide strong evidence of the interrelationship of the three dimensions, and validity tests demonstrate the utility of this variable as an aggregate estimate of state capacity.

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The central result of this investigation is thus a general-purpose empirical tool built upon the idea that state capacity arises from the interrelationship of its most commonly identified dimensions. The estimate has two key strengths for empirical analysis compared with other work in this area. First, by incorporating information from indicators related to multiple dimensions of state capacity, it is more comprehensive than measures that are oriented on a single dimension. Second, with annual estimates for every state in the Polity data set from 1960 to 2015, it provides broader temporal and geographical coverage than other projects that seek to measure state capacity in a comprehensive manner. This measure is thus well suited for a broad variety of comparative analyses, especially cross-national studies set in the postwar, postcolonial era.

DEFINING STATE CAPACITY

Usage of the term “state capacity” varies considerably across the literature in political science and related disciplines. This variation creates potential confusion for its use as a “productive, analytical concept” (Centeno et al. 2017, 4) and complicates the task of measurement. Further complications arise from an abundance of concepts that refer to other, closely related attributes of states: strength, fragility, failure, effectiveness, efficiency, quality, legitimacy, autonomy, scope, and so on. With such a broad array of concepts in use, it is not surprising that state capacity “remains a concept in search of precise definition and measurement” (Hendrix 2010, 273).

As a starting point for a definition of state capacity that is conducive to reliable comparative measurement and avoids conflation with other concepts, we recognize that many works share the central idea that state capacity relates to the state’s ability to implement its goals or policies (Cingolani 2013). Beyond this concordance, however, lie two key areas of divergence about what it means for states to possess such abilities. The first concerns the nature of the state’s power. The second involves defining the set of functions on which state capacity should be assessed. In this section, we examine these debates and outline a definition of state capacity that embraces areas of agreement among different approaches.

State capacity embodies state power, as in the ability of one actor (the state) to get another actor (members of society) to do things they would not otherwise do (Dahl 1957). Like others working in this area, we seek a conception of state power that avoids conflation with other concepts and eschews normative beliefs about what constitutes legitimate exercise of state power (e.g., Centeno et al. 2017; Lindvall and Teorell 2016). It is helpful to begin with Mann’s concept of infrastructural power: the capacity of the state to penetrate society and “to implement logistically political decisions throughout the realm” (Mann 1984, 189).

As Soifer (2008) describes, scholars think about infrastructural power in three ways: the state’s material capabilities, its effects on society, and its territoriality. In defining state capacity for the purpose of creating a measure that is useful for comparative research, it is more constructive to focus on the capacities that exist within the state’s organizational structures, and the territorial reach of these capacities, than on the effects of state actions on social relations and identities. Assessing state capacity based on the state’s effect on society risks entangling a decision to not deploy state power with its inability to do so. Additionally, these outcomes often serve as dependent variables in political science research.

State capabilities include material resources and organizational competencies internal to the state that exist independently of political decisions about how to deploy these capabilities. Giddens observes, for example, that “resources are the media through which power is exercised” (Giddens 1979, 141). Lindvall and Teorell (2016), similarly, describe state power as arising from access to monetary, human, and informational resources. Others direct attention to the organizational and bureaucratic competence of state institutions (Centeno et al. 2017, 4–7), which itself flows from resources, expertise, and professionalism. The territorial reach of the state is likewise central to its level of capacity, and we note that there is vibrant scholarship on variation in state capacity at the subnational level (Foa and Nemirovskaya 2016; Harbers 2015; Harbers and Steele 2020; Soifer 2008).¹

Finally, we argue that Mann’s concept of despotic power—the “range of actions which the elite is empowered to undertake without routine, institutionalized negotiation with civil society groups” (1984, 188)—is deeply entwined with characteristics of political regimes and issues of state autonomy that should be separated from the concept of state capacity. As Lindvall and Teorell (2016) argue, the state’s capacity is a function of the power it projects, which is conceptually distinct from mechanisms for societal involvement in political decisions regarding what outcomes states should pursue (e.g., democracy) or from the power of civil society to push back against the state (Migdal 1988).

A second issue in defining state capacity relates to the question of what functions a capable state should have the capacity to perform. The capacity to do what? Connected to this question of scope is the issue of whether we can conceive of capacity as a general characteristic of states that relates to core state functions or whether a disaggregated approach is required.

1. Although our focus in this article is not on subnational measurement of state capacity, we see efforts to measure state capacity in this way as complementary to our approach.

On one end of the spectrum lie approaches that define a state's capabilities in terms of its most essential features and functions. For example, some state capacity research focuses on the concept of "stateness," which involves the extent to which the state lives up to its Weberian definition as holding a monopoly on the legitimate use of force in its territory (Linz and Stepan 1996), and is sometimes used interchangeably with state capacity (Møller and Skaaning 2011). A specification this narrow would obscure the complexities of modern states and produce measurement strategies that are incapable of capturing important variation in contemporary state capacity. To study states in the modern, postcolonial era, it is necessary to recognize that the expected roles of states are not simply about the establishment of a monopoly on the legitimate use of force.

On the other end of the spectrum lie approaches that consider a much broader range of functions. Work in this perspective describes states as serving a potentially large number of roles such as the development and maintenance of economic systems, the provision of public services to the population, and the administration of justice (Bersch, Praça, and Taylor 2017; Besley and Persson 2011; Rauch and Evans 2000). For example, Besley and Persson (2011) include a wide range of fiscal, administrative, public service delivery, and legal capacities in their definition.

Conceptual and measurement issues flow from this question of scope. As Levi contends, "good analysis requires differentiating among the features of the state in order to assess their relative importance; the state becomes less than the sum of its parts" (2002, 34). By this logic, a state's capacity is assessed severally with respect to particular functions or goals. Skocpol (1985), in foundational work, uses the plural "state capacities," noting the potential for the unevenness of state capabilities across policy areas or sectors. Recent empirical work fruitfully builds upon this perspective (Bersch et al. 2017; Foa and Nemirovskaya 2016; Gingerich 2013) by addressing variation in capacity across states' agencies and regions.

Definitions that lead to assessments of state capacity across a highly disaggregated set of state functions, however, may drift from a core theoretical focus on the state's ability to implement goals (Cingolani 2013, 36–37), capturing instead the results of "negotiations within the state and between it and other actors regarding the level, type, and form of intervention in society" (Centeno et al. 2017, 4). In other words, these approaches risk conflating the issue of the state's capacity to implement policies in a particular sector or region with the political decision to prioritize these functions. For this reason, Fukuyama (2004, 7) distinguishes between state scope and state strength. In the United States, he explains, the state is relatively limited in terms of its scope of activities but, "within that scope, its ability to create and enforce laws and policies is very strong."

In order to advance conceptual clarity, embrace the multifunctional realities of modern states, and facilitate cross-national measurement comparability, we seek a middle ground between these perspectives. We thus define state capacity as the state's ability to perform the core functions most commonly deemed necessary for modern states: protection from external threats (Tilly 1990), the maintenance of internal order, the administration and provision of basic infrastructure necessary to sustain economic activity (Mann 1984), and the extraction of revenue (Levi 1988; North 1981; Tilly 1990). This approach steers clear of normative questions about what states should do, avoids conflating capacity with political priorities, and creates a viable framework for comparative analysis. It provides the basis for a measurement strategy that focuses upon key dimensions of state capacity rather than disaggregate the concept into ever-smaller functional roles.

DIMENSIONS OF STATE CAPACITY

Even when focusing on core state functions, there remains a multitude of theorized dimensions of state capacity that relate to such functions. This array of potential dimensions creates confusion for researchers when employing the concept and selecting appropriate measures. It also raises a broader question: with so many underlying dimensions, is state capacity sufficiently coherent as a concept to be amenable to measurement?² In this section, we discuss how the literature addresses the dimensionality of state capacity and distill three essential and plausibly distinct dimensions out of the many that appear. We then consider the mutually supporting nature of these dimensions and make the argument that state capacity can be measured as a latent concept that lies at their intersection.

In a review of state capacity scholarship, Cingolani (2013) identifies at least seven different dimensions of state capacity in use: coercive, fiscal, administrative/implementation, transformative/industrializing, relational/territorial, legal and political capacities. We add several more to this assortment and illustrate the widely varying terminology across the literature (see the appendix, available online). In another comprehensive review, Berwick and Christia (2018) note that researchers often describe state capacity as involving only the aspects that they confront in their particular inquiry. The result is a confusing array of dimensions and insufficient attention to how specific dimensions relate to the broader concept of state capacity.

The dimensionality of state capacity appears in three basic ways across the literature. First, many approaches, explicitly or

2. Coherence is an important feature of concept formation that refers to the internal consistency of the instances or attributes of the phenomenon (Adcock and Collier 2001; Saylor 2013).

implicitly, treat these dimensions as operating independently of each other. Albertus and Menaldo (2012), for instance, argue that coercive capacity in particular undermines democratization because of the potential for effective repression of pro-democratic movements. Likewise, in a study of state compliance with international human rights treaties, Cole (2015) argues that administrative capacity supports effective enforcement of such treaties, while other types of state capacity do not. Studies of this genre underscore the desirability of measuring state capacity and its dimensions in disaggregated fashion.

Second, many approaches use a measure of one dimension of state capacity as being a strong proxy for the overall concept. For example, many studies state that a government's ability to tax its population serves as a good overall representation of state capacity due to the broad range of infrastructural capabilities it requires (Brautigam, Fjeldstad, and Moore 2008; Harbers 2015; Rogers and Weller 2014). In other recent work, Brambor et al. (2020), D'Arcy, Nistotskaya, and Ellis (2019), and Lee and Zhang (2017), develop measures of "legibility" and "information capacity," citing the crucial role of information as a resource for the state for taxation, conscription, growth promotion, and administration. Both sets of studies, accordingly, express the idea that one dimension of state capacity is a key dimension because of the way in which it supports and links with other dimensions.

Third, other approaches take these interrelationships one step further, conceiving of the dimensions as a set of mutually dependent underpinnings that work in tandem to enable states to perform a broader range of functions. Tilly's (1990) account of European state formation embodies this school of thought as, according to his account, the imperatives of territorial protection and conquest drove the development of states with capacities to raise revenue, build armies, and provide public goods. In a similar fashion, Besley and Persson observe strong complementarities in the development of states' fiscal and legal capacities, noting that "investments in one aspect of the state reinforce the motives to invest in the other" (2011, 15).

We note that empirical efforts to disaggregate state capacity have produced ambiguous results. Hendrix (2010), for example, makes a conceptual distinction between military capacity and administrative capacity but finds in factor analysis that indicators such as military expenditures load heavily on the same dimension (factor) as high-quality bureaucratic institutions. In another study, Fortin-Rittenberger (2014) investigates the relationship between two dimensions: infrastructural capacity, which combines indicators of both extractive and administrative capabilities, and coercive capacity. Her results also point to the difficulty of measuring these dimensions, particularly coercive capacity. Large militaries, she finds, are equally dispersed across states with low and high infrastructural capacity, thereby

complicating efforts to disentangle the two dimensions. Accordingly, we argue, more attention should be devoted to the question of whether state capacity should be conceived and measured as a single concept or whether it is more fruitful for researchers to focus on specific dimensions of state capacity.

To address the question of aggregation, while following the definitional principles laid out in the previous section, we concentrate on three dimensions of state capacity that are (1) minimally necessary to carry out the functions of contemporary states and (2) most plausibly distinct from one another. These criteria lead us to the identification of three dimensions: extractive capacity, coercive capacity, and administrative capacity. These three dimensions accord with what Skocpol identifies as providing the "general underpinnings of state capacities" (1985, 16): plentiful resources, administrative-military control of a territory, and loyal and skilled officials.³

The extractive, coercive, and administrative aspects of state capacity are fundamental to modern states. Raising tax revenue is not only a critical function of the state to support all of its activities, but it also encompasses a particular set of capabilities that are foundational to broader powers of the state. In particular, states must be able to reach their populations, collect and maintain information, possess trustworthy agents to manage the revenue, and have enforcement capabilities to ensure compliance (Pomeranz and Vila-Belda 2019). North defines the boundaries of the state in terms of its ability to tax constituents (1981, 21), while Levi (1988) and Tilly (1990) make a direct connection between a state's revenue and the possibility to extend its rule. Empirically, taxation is associated with property rights (Besley and Persson 2009), the reach of the state (Harbers 2015), and state legibility (Lee and Zhang 2017).

Like extractive capacity, coercive capacity is also central to the definition of the state, particularly in the Weberian tradition that defines the state as the organization possessing a monopoly on the legitimate use of force within its territory (Weber 1919). Coercion connects directly to the state's ability to preserve its borders, protect against external threats, maintain internal order, and enforce compliance with the law. To perform other functions, including the collection of revenue, a state must possess the force necessary to contain threats throughout its territory or at least convince its rivals that this is the case. While coercion is not the only way to maintain order and evoke compliance from the population (Levi 1988), it represents a key aspect of the ability of states to survive and implement policies.

Administrative capacity is an encompassing dimension that pertains to the state's organizational capabilities with

3. These three aspects of state capacity are also similar to those examined by Soifer (2015) in his study of Latin American state building and what Berwick and Christia (2018) propose as a unifying framework.

respect to developing policy, delivering public services, and regulating commercial activity. Effective policy administration is a function of capable state agents, technical competence, data collection and record keeping, monitoring and coordination mechanisms, and effective reach across the state's territory and social groupings. In particular, Weber (1919) emphasizes the importance of professional bureaucracies that legitimize the authority of the state, manage complex affairs, and ensure efficiency, but non-Weberian forms of bureaucratic organization can also be effective (Darden 2008).

Thus, even though these dimensions are distinct conceptual lenses through which one can usefully think about state capacity, there are logical reasons to believe that, in practice, they are mutually constitutive and interrelated. It is the need for coercive capacity, according to Tilly (1990), that drives leaders to adopt tax systems and provide goods and services. Gurr (1988), for example, argues that coercive power involves the institutionalization of the means of coercion, which requires capable personnel and functional specialization of state agencies. According to Levi (1988), the keys to effective revenue extraction are measurement, monitoring, and enforcement capabilities, which in modern states often necessitate bureaucratic revenue collection backed by a coercive apparatus. Finally, as Fjelde and De Soysa state, "governments rely on revenue to invest in the military, police, and bureaucratic apparatus, which in turn allow[s] them to accumulate power for further penetration and extension of state rule" (2009, 8).

If there are elemental linkages between the coercive, extractive, and administrative dimensions of state capacity, we should expect they will be related to each other empirically. This logic provides the basis for a strategy to estimate state capacity as a latent variable that arises from the conjunction of its extractive, coercive, and administrative capabilities. The outcome of this investigation has important implications for the way we advance knowledge of state capacity. If state capacity dimensions are empirically inseparable from each other, research that claims to study one dimension of state capacity may actually capture a broader phenomenon. Conversely, if state capacity dimensions do not cohere into a broader construct, researchers must be especially careful to select measures that meaningfully represent the narrower concept of interest.

MEASUREMENT STRATEGIES AND CHALLENGES

As a latent concept, state capacity (or its underlying dimensions) is not directly observable, but it is connected to a range of indicators from which we can learn information about its level. In this section, we consider various indicators that relate to the three dimensions presented above. For each di-

mension, we discuss a range of possible measurement strategies and explain our own selection of indicators.⁴

We apply several criteria to decide which indicators to include in our latent variable model. First, we consider conceptual fit with the three core dimensions of state capacity, avoiding those that overlap too much with other concepts. Second, with the goal of gathering sufficient information to capture variation in state capacity in many countries over five decades, we seek broad geographical and temporal coverage.⁵ Finally, we avoid aggregate indexes, as they may include either indicators used individually in our model or indicators that are connected more closely to other concepts. The selection criteria are described in more detail in the appendix.

Indicators of extractive capacity

Measures of extractive capacity typically come in two main forms. First, many researchers use data on government revenue collections as a measure of state capacity.⁶ Tax revenue data are available for most countries from the early 1970s onward, generally from the International Monetary Fund's *Government Finance Statistics*.⁷ Data on different types of revenues are usually expressed as a raw amount, as a proportion of GDP, or as a proportion of total revenue collected. As Lieberman (2002) explains, there are many factors to consider when selecting revenue indicators that are appropriate for a particular purpose.

Aggregate revenue, for example, is a noisy indicator of extractive capacity. For states with relatively high extractive capacity, the level of tax revenue collection reflects a policy choice rather than extractive capacity. Additionally, different types of revenue vary significantly in terms of their administrative complexity. As Lieberman (2002) and Rogers and Weller (2014) argue, the revenue sources that are most likely to capture concepts related to state capacity include income, property, and domestic consumption taxes. These taxes are more administratively complex, requiring higher levels of record keeping, transparency, and a more sophisticated bureaucratic apparatus than other revenue sources. Taxes on international trade, on the other hand, are much easier to collect and, like rents from mineral resources, do not require

4. In the appendix, we provide a list of possible state capacity indicators with coverage and descriptive data.

5. The temporal coverage we strive for is more limited than recent efforts to generate long-run time series of particular dimensions of state capacity (Brambor et al. 2020; D'Arcy and Nistotskaya 2017) but includes broader country coverage and a more encompassing conceptual approach.

6. See, e.g., Besley and Persson (2009) and Dincecco (2017).

7. Prichard et al. (ICTD/UNU-WIDER 2017) have usefully standardized and compiled tax data from IMF country records. Tax data are also available from other sources, such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

significant enforcement capacity (Lieberman 2002, 98). In some cases, researchers have sought to assess the amount of tax collected relative to an estimated expected amount of revenue (Arbetman-Rabinowitz et al. 2012; Kugler 2018). Though this measure of “relative political capacity” is useful for some applications, we argue that it differs conceptually from state capacity and find in empirical tests that it correlates only weakly.

Our strategy with respect to revenue data is twofold. First, we use total tax revenues as a proportion of GDP to capture overall extractive capacity. We exclude nontax revenues for the reasons Lieberman identifies. Second, we expect that the mixture of tax revenues—specifically taxes on income and taxes on trade—provides information about both the extractive and administrative capacities of the state. Given a particular level of taxation, the greater the proportion of tax revenue that comes from income taxes, the higher the expected level of administrative capacity. The opposite should be true with respect to the proportion of revenue that comes from taxes on trade, which are administratively easy to collect. We thus use the proportion of tax revenues—as opposed to taxes as a proportion of GDP—that come from these two sources as measures of the administrative capability of the state’s extractive efforts.

We also include expert-coded indicators such as the World Bank’s (2017) Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (CPIA) rating of the efficiency of revenue mobilization. From Coppedge et al. (2019), we use a measure of state fiscal capacity (*v2stfiscap*) capturing the extent to which the state is able to fund itself through taxes that are of greater administrative complexity. Finally, we expect that some of the indicators that are logically related to the dimensions of coercive and administrative capacity will also provide information about extractive capacity. For example, a state’s ability to collect information about its citizens is relevant for extractive capacity, something we discuss in greater detail below.

Indicators of coercive capacity

Researchers seeking to measure coercive capacity may turn attention to military size or sophistication, as well as attributes of the state thought to promote the maintenance of order. Data on military expenditures, military personnel, and security forces are available from data sets such as the World Development Indicators, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), and the Correlates of War (COW) (Singer, Bremer, and Stuckey 1972). Coverage and reliability for these measures is generally quite good for most countries in the period 1960 to the present. The relationship between coercive force and a state’s coercive capacity, however, is not necessarily straightforward (Hendrix 2010; Kocher 2010; Soifer and vom Hau 2008). States

that have the capacity to maintain order might have effective military and/or security forces, although there are countries that maintain order with little or no military. A large military force, moreover, may be a sign of war or insecurity, both of which could deplete state capacity. We use the log value of military expenditures per million in population and the number of military personnel per thousand in the population (Singer et al. 1972; World Bank Group 2020) as indicators of military capacity. We also include a measure of the size of the police force obtained from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

In light of potential issues with indicators of personnel or spending, we also include other, expert-coded indicators of coercive capacity. From the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI), we adopt a measure that assesses the degree to which the state has a monopoly on the use of force (Bertelsmann Stiftung 2006). We also include ratings from the Political Risk Services’ (PRS) International Country Risk Guide on “law and order,” which assess the strength and impartiality of the legal system, and the popular observance of the law (Howell 2011).

Finally, two indicators tap the dimension of coercive capacity by capturing the state’s level of institutionalization or presence in the territory (i.e., stateness). First, we use V-Dem’s (Coppedge et al. 2019) measure of state authority over territory (*v2svstterr*), which measures the percentage of territory controlled by the central state.⁸ Second, we extend the state antiquity index developed by Bockstette, Chanda, and Putterman (2002) to code 27 additional countries and to reflect territorial changes and sovereignty post-1950.⁹ This measurement strategy is based on work showing the importance of historical roots of the state in its territory (Boone 2003; Herbst 2014; Wimmer 2016).

Indicators of administrative capacity

Since administrative capacity is a broad dimension of state capacity, a number of different measurement strategies exist. A common way to measure administrative capacity is to look at the outcomes of public goods and service delivery such as the percentage of children enrolled in primary schools, infant mortality rates, or literacy rates. These measures are attractive for their broad coverage and comparability, but assessing capacity based on measures of this kind poses several problems. First, as discussed above, a state may not prioritize the particular outcome being measured, such as schooling or health

8. The corresponding proportion is converted to the inverse of the cumulative standard normal distribution.

9. We extend the original measure with annual coding of its three components—presence of a state, percentage of territory under the control of that state, and whether that state is sovereign—for each year from 1950 through 2015.

or infrastructure. Second, using these measures may compromise analytical leverage, since these types of outcomes are closely linked to economic development, the nature of the political regime, or participation in international programs with policy conditions.

Among indicators of administrative capacity, two of the most popular are the government effectiveness rating from the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) (Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi 2003) and the International Country Risk Guide's (ICRG) bureaucratic quality rating (Howell 2011). Both measures have come under scrutiny. The WGI, for example, are frequently criticized for their aggregation procedures and for the fuzzy analytical boundaries that characterize their different governance indices.¹⁰ In our case, using the WGI scores would be duplicative because the set of constituent indicators overlaps with others we employ. The ICRG bureaucratic quality ratings, on the other hand, may be prone to measurement errors based on subjective analyst perceptions of economic or social outcomes rather than bureaucratic quality per se (Henisz 2000). We include the ICRG bureaucratic quality rating in our analysis, however, since it is one of the few measures with relatively broad coverage that focuses on strength of the bureaucracy, including mechanisms of recruitment and training. Our estimation procedures expect some noise in the component indicators.

We also include several measures of administrative capacity from various sources: administrative efficiency (Adelman and Morris 1967), the Weberianness index (Rauch and Evans 2000), and ratings of quality of budgetary and financial management and quality of public administration from the World Bank's CPIA index. None of these ratings covers a long period of time, but the combination covers significant portions of the 1960–2015 time period with at least one indicator.¹¹ Finally, we include the measure of impartial public administration developed by V-Dem (Coppedge et al. 2019), which is based on expert survey ratings of the extent to which the law is fully respected by public officials.

Additionally, we include a set of measures aimed at capturing the information-gathering capabilities of states. First, we derive a measure of census frequency calculated with data on country censuses provided by the US Census Bureau.¹² As ar-

gued in Centeno (2002b) and Soifer (2013), countries that can conduct censuses have not only the capacity to collect information but also exhibit higher levels of territorial reach. These data cover 173 countries throughout the 1960–2015 time period. Second, we use the measure of information capacity developed by Brambor et al. (2020), which is derived from indicators of whether a state has a statistical agency, a civil register, a population register, and its capabilities relative to producing a census and a statistical yearbook. The information capacity index covers 70 countries during the 1960–2015 time period. Finally, we include the World Bank's statistical capacity measure, which assesses the extensiveness of statistical systems in up to 139 countries annually from 2004 to the present.

Indicators overall

Altogether, we employ 21 different indicators related to the three key dimensions of state capacity (table 1). The indicators span 56 years (1960–2015) and up to 163 countries in a given year, with 94,135 data points in total. In 99% of country-years, at least six indicators are available, and the median number of indicators per country-year is 12. By adopting a latent variable analysis of the kind employed to assess measures of democracy (Pemstein, Meserve, and Melton 2010; Treier and Jackman 2008) and governance (Arel-Bundock and Mebane 2011; Bersch and Botero 2014) we can use these multiple measurements of the same underlying concept to gain information about the distribution of the latent parameters that generate the observed indicators.

LATENT VARIABLE ANALYSIS

We employ the latent variables estimation approach developed by Arel-Bundock and Mebane (2011) that uses Bayesian Markov-Chain Monte Carlo (MCMC) techniques to identify underlying factors. This technique, based on earlier work by Lee (2007), has many advantages over traditional factor analysis, including robustness to missing data. By incorporating indicators of state capacity drawn from multiple sources, we seek to provide annual measures of state capacity for the set of all countries that appear in the Polity data set (Marshall and Jaggers 2016) during the 1960–2015 time period.

Specifically, each observed indicator x_k for country i in time t is a linear function of J latent variables and a disturbance ε_k :

$$x_{kit} = c_k + \sum_{j=1}^J \lambda_{kj} \xi_{jit} + \varepsilon_{ki}. \quad (1)$$

In equation (1), ξ_{jit} is the latent value of the j th dimension of state capacity for country i in time t , and λ_{kj} is the linear effect of the j th dimension on the observed indicator x_k . Overall, then, the various observed indicators are linear functions of

10. There are debates about the validity, reliability, and aggregation of the WGI. For an overview and response to critiques, see Kaufman, Kraay, and Mastruzzi (2007).

11. We code administrative efficiency as covering the years 1960–62 and Weberianness as covering the period 1970–90 based on the objectives of their creators.

12. We have annualized this measure by looking forward and backward in time from a given year to find the nearest censuses. The longer the gaps between censuses, the lower the census frequency measure.

Table 1. Indicators of State Capacity

Indicator	Countries	Years
Administrative efficiency (Adelman and Morris 1967)	69	1960–62
Bureaucratic quality (Political Risk Services)	141	1984–2015
Census frequency (calculated from UN 2016)	173	1960–2015
Efficiency of revenue mobilization (World Bank CPIA)	72	2005–15
Fiscal capacity (V-Dem v9)	174	1960–2015
Information capacity (Brambor et al. 2020)	70	1960–2015
Law and order (Political Risk Services)	141	1984–2015
(log) Military personnel per 1,000 in population (COW, WDI)	176	1960–2015
(log) Military expenditures per capita (SIPRI, COW)	176	1960–2015
Monopoly on use of force (BTI)	129	2006–15
(log) Police officers per 1,000 in population (UN)	121	1973–2015
Quality of budgetary and financial management (World Bank CPIA)	72	2005–15
Quality of public administration (World Bank CPIA)	72	2005–15
Rigorous and impartial public administration (V-Dem v9)	177	1960–2015
State antiquity index, based on Bockstette et al. (2002)	172	1960–2015
State authority over territory (V-Dem v9)	177	1960–2015
Statistical capacity (World Bank)	127	2004–15
Taxes on income as % of taxes (ICTD, IMF)	168	1963–2015
Taxes on international trade as % of taxes (ICTD, IMF)	167	1960–2015
Total tax revenue as % of GDP (ICTD, IMF, OECD)	167	1960–2015
Weberianness (Rauch and Evans 2000)	34	1970–90

Note. CPIA = Country Policy and Institutional Assessment; COW = Correlates of War; WDI is from World Bank Group (2020); BTI = Bertelsmann Transformation Index; SIPRI = Stockholm International Peace Research Institute; ICTD = ICTD/UNU-WIDER (2017).

the latent values of state capacity in each dimension measured with some error. Since there are k observed indicators measured in many countries over several years, we have multiple data points with which to obtain the posterior distributions of the latent parameters.¹³ We assign standard normal priors to

13. The greater the number of indicators, the more information we have about the values of latent dimensions of state capacity in country i at time t . The

latent factors. The intercepts c_k have independent, diffuse normal priors, and the disturbance terms ε_k have independent uniform priors with mean zero. In general, diffuse normal priors are used for each λ_{kj} .

To facilitate identification, one of the parameters λ_{kj} is fixed at 1 for each of the J dimensions in the analysis. In these cases, the intercepts c_k are fixed at 0. Additionally, truncated (positive) normal priors were applied to facilitate identification where we had a strong prior belief that the relationship between a given indicator (x_k) and the parameter representing Capacity (ξ_j) is positive. In our main model (with $J = 1$) truncated, normal priors are applied in the following cases: census frequency, state antiquity, taxes on income, Weberianness, the World Bank's statistical capacity index, information capacity, the V-Dem public administration measure, PRS law and order, and the administrative efficiency rating of Adelman and Morris (1967).¹⁴

The MCMC is implemented in JAGS through the package `rjags` (Plummer 2012) for R statistical software. The algorithm tours the parameter space specified by the sets of equations represented by equation (1). Successive draws lead to descriptions of the posterior distributions of the remaining parameters that produce the observed indicators of state capacity. A typical MCMC run included five chains with an adaptation phase of 5,000, a burn-in phase of 10,000 iterations, and a sampling phase of 5,000 iterations. Samples were thinned with a setting of 5 to alleviate memory/storage constraints.

In order to test whether the three theorized dimensions are discernible in the data independently, we run multiple analyses, letting the number of dimensions J range from one to three. The parameter estimates that emerge from choosing a particular number of dimensions need not bear any particular relationship to the theoretical dimensions we describe. As with traditional factor analysis, we would rely on analysis of which indicators align with the resulting parameters to interpret the dimensions. One possibility is that each successive dimension captures more marginal aspects of variation in the observed indicators rather than clear dimensions.

LATENT VARIABLE ANALYSIS RESULTS

In repeated tests, we found that a one-dimensional model ($J = 1$) was the only model to converge consistently. Attempts to identify a second or third dimension did not bear fruit. Typically, the different chains would fail to converge, and the

larger the number of country-years, the more information we have to uncover λ_{kj} , the effect of dimension j on indicator k , which is treated as constant over time.

14. Otherwise, some chains would simply take on the opposite signs of other chains.

posterior distributions for some parameters would exhibit strong nonnormality. These outcomes arise when the MCMC routine does not produce a stationary distribution for various parameters. In other words, given a particular set of observed indicators, and a specification of multiple dimensions of state capacity that are connected to these indicators, the routine does not yield information about the relative probabilities for different levels of state capacity in these dimensions and the parameters that connect these levels to the observed indicators. Consequently, in the sections that follow we present results that reflect a single, latent dimension that we call Capacity.

Accordingly, we believe that the results are consistent with the theoretical perspective that extractive, coercive, and administrative dimensions of state capacity, though distinct conceptually, are interrelated in practice. Extractive capacity both supports coercive power and provides the resources needed to sustain a sophisticated administrative bureaucracy. Likewise, states that lack coercive and administrative capabilities are likely to find revenue extraction more difficult. Finally, although state coercion can take many different forms, some of them very simple, coercive power is facilitated by a well-organized, administratively sophisticated coercive apparatus. These interrelationships make it difficult empirically to disaggregate state capacity into separate dimensions, which has been noted in previous efforts to understand the relationship between these dimensions (Fortin-Rittenberger 2014; Hendrix 2010).¹⁵

Exploring the aggregate measure

As a latent variable that lies at the conjunction of state capacity's core dimensions, Capacity plausibly captures the concept more comprehensively than previous work that is focused on a single indicator or dimension. Additionally, with 8,254 observations in total, the Capacity estimates have much broader coverage than the most commonly used general indicators of state capacity for research in the postwar, postcolonial era. The measure can thus serve to fill an important niche in comparative cross-national research involving state capacity, particularly for large-sample analysis. A comparison of coverage with other measures is presented in the appendix. The Capacity measure is scaled from -2.31 to 2.96 , with a mean of $.26$ and a standard deviation of $.95$.

To understand what factors drive the Capacity estimates, we first examine their correlation with the observed indicators included in the estimation procedure, presented in table 2. Overall, capacity appears to be a general-purpose measure of state capacity that draws from indicators representing all three

Table 2. Correlation of Capacity with Base Indicators

Indicator	<i>r</i>	<i>N</i>
Statistical capacity	.83	1,492
Bureaucratic quality	.81	4,089
Rigorous and impartial public administration	.80	8,252
Law and order	.77	4,089
Quality of public administration	.74	724
Monopoly of force	.74	1,247
Fiscal capacity	.73	7,673
Quality of budgetary and financial management	.71	724
Administrative efficiency	.70	199
(log) Military expenditures per capita	.70	7,925
Efficiency of revenue mobilization	.67	724
State authority over territory	.66	8,237
Total tax revenue as % of GDP	.66	6,413
Information capacity	.66	3,591
Weberianness	.59	714
Census frequency	.59	8,201
Taxes on income as % of tax revenue	.57	5,854
State antiquity index	.42	8,032
(log) Military personnel per 1,000 in population	.26	8,116
(log) Police officers per 1,000 in population	.03	1,569
Taxes on international trade as % of tax revenue	-.67	6,270

theorized dimensions. The indicators most strongly associated with Capacity are the World Bank's measure of statistical capacity ($r = .83$), the PRS bureaucratic quality ($r = .81$), V-Dem's rigorous and impartial public administration ($r = .80$), PRS law and order ratings ($r = .77$), the CPIA's quality of public administration rating ($r = .74$), BTI's monopoly on use of force rating ($r = .74$), and the measure of state fiscal capacity from V-Dem ($r = .73$). Most of the indicators are correlated with Capacity at the $.5$ level or greater (or less than $-.5$ in the case of taxes on trade).

The indicators with weakest correlation to Capacity are the measures related to military and police personnel. Since other measures of coercive capacity are strongly correlated with Capacity, the pattern appears to be limited to security personnel. A few explanations seem plausible. First, the Capacity measure misses aspects of coercive capacity that arise from state employment of security personnel. Second, rulers of weaker states, or those engaged in conflict, tend to expand their security forces in response to this weakness, thereby further weakening the relationship. Third, it is not the numbers of security personnel that matter but their level of capability as measured by their administrative organization or technological sophistication.

Validity checks

The broader coverage of countries and years is welcome, provided that the measures perform well. The goal of this section

15. We also conduct a dimensionality test using traditional factor analysis. The results, provided in the appendix, also produce latent factors lacking any clear relationships to the three dimensions.

is to investigate whether the Capacity measure behaves in the expected manner and whether it will be useful for investigating theoretical questions regarding state capacity. Following guidance from Adcock and Collier (2001), McMann et al. (forthcoming), and Seawright and Collier (2014), we examine the new measure in terms of its face validity, content validity, convergent validity, and nomological validity.

Figure 1 displays the mean and standard deviation of each country's Capacity posterior distribution in the year 2015,

ranked from the highest to the lowest. In terms of face validity, the countries we might expect to have strong state capacity are found to have higher scores, while those that are experiencing or have recently experienced war or have notoriously weak capacity are found to have the lower scores. That Singapore ranks among the 25 highest Capacity scores helps us to know that these measures do not capture concepts more closely related to democratic governance than to capacity itself. At the lower end of the scale, we see states such as Somalia, Yemen, and Central

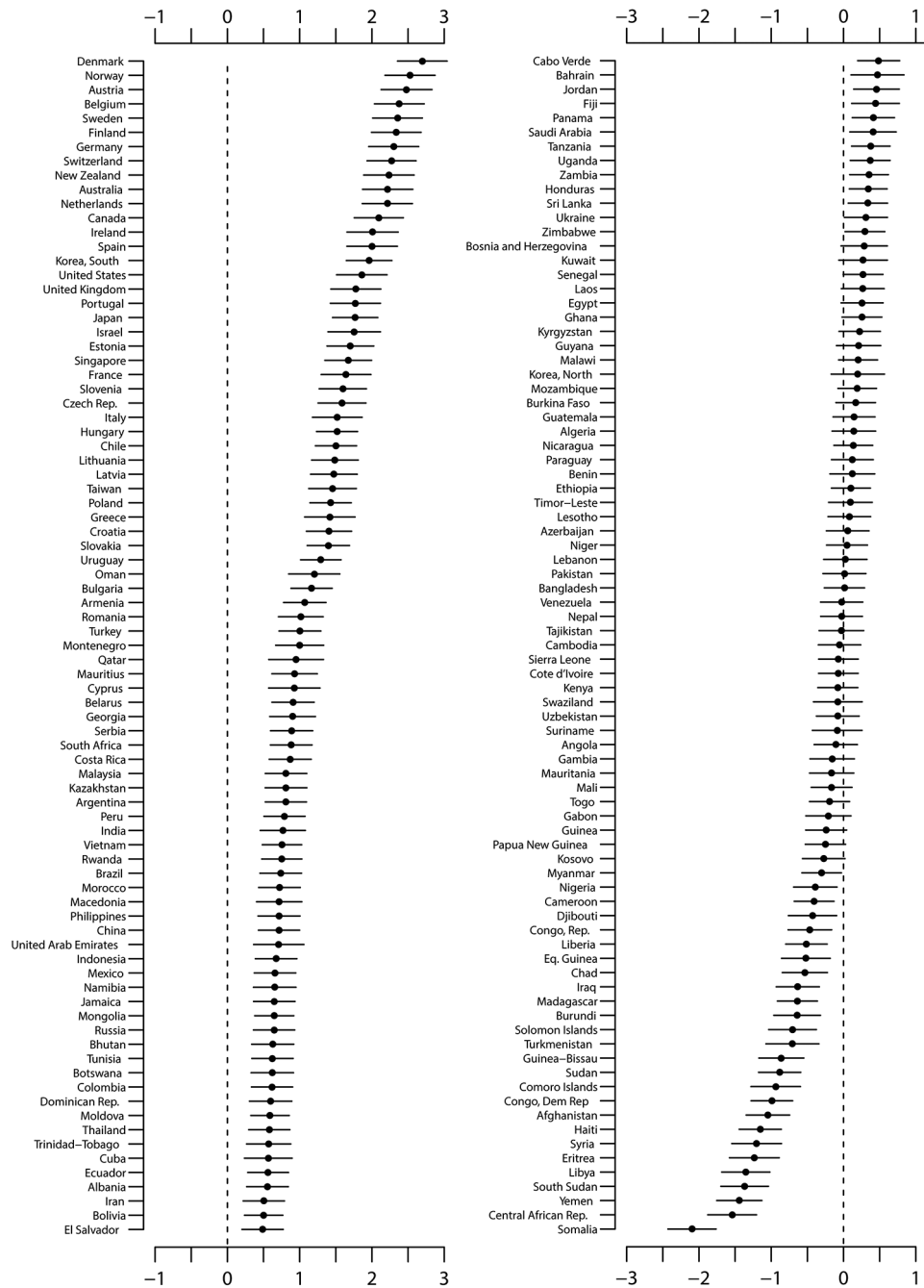


Figure 1. Posterior distribution of capacity in the year 2015

African Republic that are embroiled in conflict, lacking state structures, or both. Plots similar to figure 1 for several other years are included in the appendix.

To examine over-time variation, figure 2 plots Capacity scores for all the countries in the data set, with 1975 scores on the *x*-axis, 2015 scores on the *y*-axis, and a 45 degree line between the two. As theory would predict, the relationship between the Capacity variables in different years is strongly positive. Most countries starting with high scores in 1975 also have high scores in 2015. Overall, Capacity rose in most countries, rising the most in Uganda, Bolivia, Rwanda, Lesotho, and Nicaragua. Countries where Capacity decreased the most include Somalia, Libya, Venezuela, Syria, Kuwait, and Iraq. In the appendix, we show the evolution of Capacity over time in Chile, Haiti, Iraq, and Singapore to further illustrate the face validity of the measure’s temporal variation.

Given the latent nature of the Capacity measure, we check convergent validity by comparing the Capacity variable with other measures that were not used in the MCMC process in order to assess whether it accurately taps the intended concept of state capacity. We choose a variety of other indicators, most of which are other indexes, constructed using different methodologies. If Capacity is a valid measure, we should observe strong correlation with other attempts to measure this concept.

As can be seen in table 3, the Capacity measure is quite strongly correlated in the expected direction with a broad range of these other measures in pairwise tests. Among those most strongly correlated with Capacity, for example, are the WGI government effectiveness index ($r = .91$), the WGI rule of law index ($r = .88$) ratings, the fragile states index ($r = -.88$), and the WGI regulatory quality index ($r = .86$). Among these measures, Capacity is the least correlated with the BTI management index ($r = .66$).

In a recent notable work, Lee and Zhang (2017) develop a measure of legibility—the extent of state information about

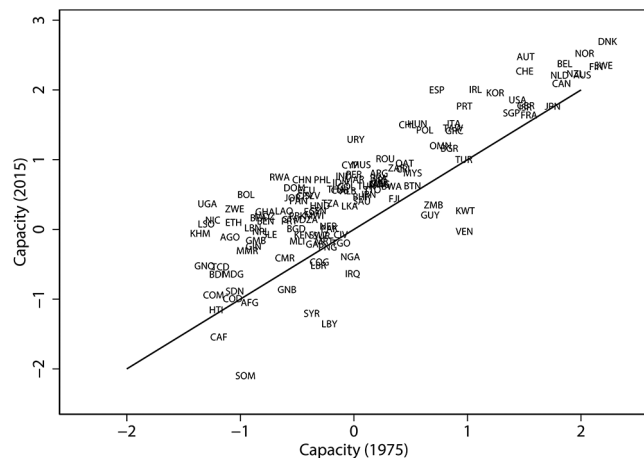


Figure 2. Scatter plot of capacity 1975 and 2015

Table 3. Correlations of Capacity with Other Measures

Indicator	<i>r</i>	<i>N</i>
Government effectiveness (WGI)	.91	2,782
Rule of law (WGI)	.88	2,784
Regulatory quality (WGI)	.86	2,783
Impartial public administration (Rothstein and Teorell 2008)	.80	50
Public sector management average (CPIA)	.82	724
Rational-legal (Hendrix 2010)	.84	1,408
CPIA index (CPIA)	.80	724
Stateness index (BTI)	.77	1,592
Rule of law index (BTI)	.68	1,592
Management index (BTI)	.66	1,588
(log) Myers index (Lee and Zhang 2017)	-.74	345
Public services indicator (Rice and Patrick 2008)	-.86	1,719
Fragile states index (Rice and Patrick 2008)	-.88	1,719

Note. WGI = Worldwide Governance Indicators; BTI = Bertelsmann Transformation Index; CPIA = Country Policy and Institutional Assessment, World Bank.

citizens that is available in standardized forms—built upon the accuracy of age reporting in national censuses. Where the state creates little reason to know one’s age exactly, citizens tend to report their ages in numbers that end with zeros or fives. The degree of “heaping” creates a way to measure legibility: the Myers index, which Lee and Zhang show to have a moderately strong correlation to other measures of state capacity. Although constructed in a very different manner, the Capacity measure developed here is correlated more strongly with both the log Myers index ($r = -.74$) and many of those other measures than they are with each other. Figure 3 illustrates this relationship.

A valid measure should also discriminate between the concept of interest and other concepts. Table F.1 (tables A.1, B.1, C.1, D.1, F.1 are available online) presents correlations between Capacity and measures such as elections, conflict, and economic growth that may be correlated with state capacity but represent distinct concepts. The correlations are particularly low for indicators of conflict, population, oil production per capita, urbanization, and the number of consecutive presidential elections. The relationship between Capacity and measures of other regime traits are slightly higher, though still not as high as the alternative state capacity indicators presented in table 3. Unsurprisingly, the correlation between Capacity and log GDP per capita is fairly high ($r = .79$), but it is reassuring that these two variables are not capturing exactly the same thing.

We further demonstrate validity in tests where we use the Capacity measure as a predictor of various outcomes widely associated with state capacity. Table 4 presents the results

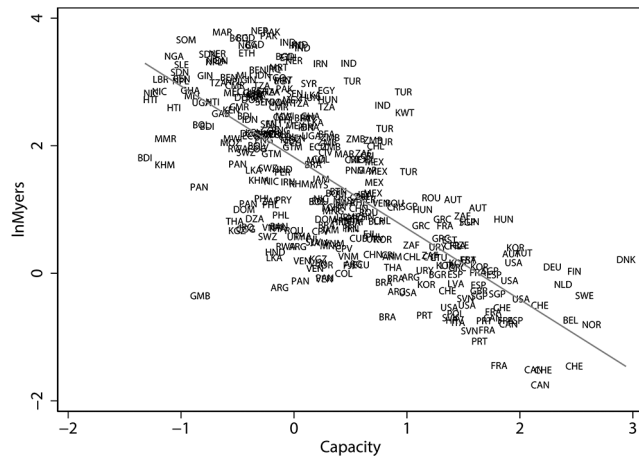


Figure 3. Scatter plot of lnMyers and capacity

from six regression models that test whether Capacity predicts development outcomes even after controlling for log GDP per capita. In each of these tests, Capacity is substantially strong and statistically significant (at the 99% level) predictor.

In model 1, the dependent variable is a measure of the size of the shadow economy as a percentage of GDP (Schneider, Buehn, and Montenegro 2010).¹⁶ We find that each 1-point increase in Capacity is associated with a reduction in the size of the shadow economy by 1.96 percentage points of GDP, controlling for the log level of GDP per capita. Models 2 and 3 use as dependent variables the log Myers index and the fragile states index Public Services indicator, which is a measure of the state's capability to carry out core functions (higher values mean less capability). Even after controlling for log GDP per capita, Capacity is strongly associated with both of these measures. A one-unit increase in Capacity is connected with a reduction in the log Myers index to about 47% of its previous size and a decrease in the Public Services indicator by .32 points.

In models 4 and 5, we draw upon a study conducted by Chong et al. (2014) to assess the efficiency of government in 159 countries by measuring how long it would take the country's postal service to return undeliverable mail to an international address. They sent 10 letters to each country and found that about 60% of letters were returned. The mean number of days it took to return a letter was about 228. For model 4, the dependent variable is the percentage of letters sent to a country that were returned. Where Ca-

capacity is 1 point higher, the percentage of letters returned is about 20.8 percentage points higher. Similarly, in model 5 where the dependent variable is the average number of days it takes to return a letter, a 1-point increase in Capacity is associated with a reduction of about 69 days in how long it takes for the letter to be returned.

Finally, model 6 uses data from United Nations E-Government Development Database, which tracks the e-governance readiness of each UN member country's government and the extent of citizen e-participation in government. The scale runs from 0 to 1, with higher scores meaning greater preparedness. We find that each 1-point increase in Capacity predicts a .11 point increase in the e-government development index, which is about one-half a standard deviation in the index.

To demonstrate the utility of the Capacity measure, we conduct a set of tests using the level of Capacity as measured in 1960, or the earliest available year for a country, as a predictor for the year-2010 levels of different development indicators.¹⁷ We consider this a very challenging test, since we control for the initial level of GDP per capita (logged), the mean level of Democracy during the period (using polity2 rescaled from 0–1), and the mean level of tax revenues as a percentage of GDP.¹⁸ As seen in table 5, each test nevertheless shows Capacity to be strongly related to these outcomes.

In model 1, the dependent variable is a country's infant mortality rate. Where Capacity was one unit higher in 1960, mortality in 2010 was about 12.2 deaths lower per 1,000 infants, all the other variables being held constant. Similarly, as model 2 shows, a one-unit higher 1960 Capacity score is associated with 5.3 years longer life expectancy in 2010. Models 3 through 5 present tests in which the dependent variables are measures of national infrastructure and health care facilities. Where Capacity was one unit higher in 1960, there are about .41 more kilometers of road per 100 square km land area, the percentage of citizens using at least basic water services in 2012 is about 6.9 points higher, and the number of hospital beds per 1,000 people is 1.5 beds greater. Finally, as model 6 shows, Capacity in 1960 is associated with greater GDP per capita 50 years later, even after controlling for the initial level of GDP per capita. Each one-unit increase in Capacity in 1960 is associated with GDP per capita in 2010 being 59% higher. The robustness of these results to controlling for country wealth and democracy, we argue, provides confidence

16. The shadow economy includes "all market-based legal production of goods and services that are deliberately concealed from public authorities" (Schneider et al. 2010, 444).

17. Except for access to basic water services, which is from 2012.

18. We control for the initial level of GDP per capita since 1960 levels of Capacity could affect subsequent economic growth and thus bias the estimates.

Table 4. Construct Validity Tests for Capacity

	InformalEcon (1)	lnMyers (2)	PublicServ (3)	Letters (4)	AveDays (5)	eGov (6)
Capacity	-1.96** (.21)	-.47** (.10)	-.32** (.09)	20.83** (3.95)	-69.04** (13.59)	.11** (.01)
lnGDPcap	-5.95** (.24)	-.61** (.10)	-.62** (.10)	2.16 (2.39)	-16.28* (8.21)	.08** (.01)
Constant	83.58** (1.94)	6.47** (.76)	11.23** (.85)	28.00 (18.33)	409.09** (63.04)	-.25** (.06)
N	1,350	345	1,719	150	150	164
R ²	.99	.91	.97	.45	.51	.86
Fixed effects?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No

^ $p < .10$.* $p < .05$.** $p < .01$.

that the Capacity measure is indeed capturing something that is distinct from these other concepts.

SUMMARY

Ultimately our understanding of the causes and consequences of state capacity depends on our ability to measure it in valid, reliable, and practical ways. That state capacity is composed of multiple dimensions, fundamentally latent, and

closely related to a range of concepts presents a particularly complicated set of measurement challenges that researchers must overcome. In focusing on the use of state capacity across political science research, identifying its core theoretical dimensions, and systematically analyzing the best available data for these dimensions, we hope to have advanced the discussion of the conceptual and measurement issues related to state capacity, addressed recently by, among others,

Table 5. Illustrative Tests Using Capacity

	InfMort (1)	LifeExp (2)	Roads (3)	Water (4)	Hospitals (5)	lnGDP/cap ₁₀ (6)
Capacity ₆₀	-12.15** (3.13)	5.32** (1.19)	.41* (.18)	6.92** (2.11)	1.52** (.41)	.59** (.11)
lnGDP/cap ₆₀	-7.27** (1.69)	2.83** (.64)	.18^ (.10)	5.49** (1.14)	.26 (.21)	.63** (.06)
Democracy	-9.40 (7.39)	4.19 (2.80)	-.02 (.40)	4.98 (4.98)	-1.90* (.95)	-.23 (.27)
TaxRev	-.26 (.28)	-.06 (.10)	-.01 (.02)	.12 (.19)	.12** (.04)	.01 (.01)
Constant	95.29** (14.32)	45.33** (5.42)	-.64 (.80)	37.63** (9.65)	.28 (1.82)	3.74** (.52)
N	148	148	106	148	112	149
R ²	.53	.54	.22	.50	.39	.73

Note. Cross-sectional OLS regression with standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variables, measured in the year 2010 for all but Water (2012), are Roads (km of road per 100 square km), Water (% of population using at least basic water services), Hospitals (number of hospital beds per 1,000), InfMort (infant mortality rate), LifeExp (level of life expectancy), and log GDP per capita. The independent variables are lnGDP/cap₆₀ (log level of GDP per capita in 1960), Democracy (mean level during the period 1960–2010), TaxRev (mean level of tax revenue as a percentage of GDP over the period 1960–2010), and Capacity in 1960.

^ $p < .10$.* $p < .05$.** $p < .01$.

Centeno et al. (2017), Fukuyama (2013), Hendrix (2010), Lindvall and Teorell (2016), Rogers and Weller (2014), and Soifer (2008).

In particular, our analysis has provided new insight into the empirical manifestations of state capacity. First, our findings suggest that the dimensions of state capacity are mutually constitutive and interrelated, meaning that attempts to isolate specific types of capacity may be difficult to achieve. Surely, states differ in which capabilities are most strongly developed, but significant strength in any one dimension likely requires at least some strength in the others. Second, given the interrelationship between these dimensions, we hope that these data will facilitate research about how state capacity has developed since the decline of European colonialism in the mid-twentieth century. For example, researchers may want to pursue the “chicken and egg” question of state capacity: which dimension comes first, if any?

Second, the broader geographic and temporal coverage provided by these estimates can support research to provide new insights on a range of familiar questions. The value of this exercise is evidenced by a wide range of published research utilizing earlier versions of the Capacity measure. For example, the data have been used to produce new knowledge on state building processes (Grassi and Memoli 2016), resilience in electoral authoritarian regimes (van Ham and Seim 2018), the relationship between democracy and state capacity (Wang and Xu 2018), and even stock market development (Guillén and Capron 2016). The Capacity measure has also been used extensively as a control variable in cross-country regressions (e.g., Graham, Miller, and Strøm 2017; Houle 2017). We hope that the measure can be useful in many long-standing debates about the relationship between institutions, economic growth, and development outcomes.

With expanding data and sustained interest in the state as a conceptual variable in political science research, we are confident that measurement options will grow in the coming years. To make meaningful improvements on the data currently available, however, we recommend careful consideration of the issues laid out in this article, particularly as they relate to the need to focus on core functions of the state, to expand coverage of existing measures, and to eschew definitions of state capacity that relate too closely to decision-making procedures. The result, we contend, will be progress on assessing the effects of state institutions on a broad variety of outcomes.

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