



# The State and the Citizen: Overview of a complex relationship from a paradigmatic perspective

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## Abstract

Notwithstanding the huge literature on *state* studies, both definition and method have always been subject of intense debate. This debate is still open and equally intense despite two millennia of philosophical and methodological attempts to define *what* the *state* is, to describe *how* the state works, and *why* does it work. As times, geopolitical contexts, and human action have shaped the historical and conceptual trajectory of polity studies, the theories as well as methodologies have increasingly emphasized focus on individuals, (political) cultures, power, and relationships both between individuals and between individuals and the *state*. With time, the study of these types of relationships have revealed the complexity of the *state*, and the dynamics of its change. Though economy and political economy theories of the twentieth century gradually diminished the central role of the state in economy in favor of the free market and individual and company small as well as big entrepreneurship, the increased focus on individuals and individual (inter)action(s) has paradoxically turned into a revival of the *state*, a reinforcement of its role, as latest neo-statism trends reveal. It was the COVID-19 global pandemics to highlight what people think and expect from the state in the volatile European and global political context of our time. Not only that isolation and social distance conditions have deepened and strengthened the perception of the *state* as the source of their security and receptor of their highest level of trust but have also revealed that the *state* studies are about to reach again a turning point in the philosophical thinking about society and polity.

**Keywords** State research methodology · State model · Polity model

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## 1 Introduction

The *state* has been the subject of philosophical debate from ancient times. The theories of Greek ancient age of democracy have fundamentally related the *state* concept to the *individual citizen* on philosophical, moral, and normative bases. Plato (*Republic*) and Aristotle (*Politics*) have conceived the *state* as a way of organizing the human society based on rules and principles, rights and duties, institutions, moral, and culture. Aristotle's theories with concern to state and citizens have represented the roots of the functional approach on the state. Aristotelian concept of *city-state* and its explanation as "formal cause" (Aristotle, *Metaphysics V*) has induced a concept of *state* which has the *individual citizen* as its structural, functional, and moral center and focus. This view has essentially influenced the modern concept of *state*. Following the Aristotelian view, *polity*, *people*, *society*, *governance*, and *culture* could hardly be taken as separate issues.

The relationship between the *state* and the *individual* has been ever since the focus of polity studies and the main stimulus for their conceptual enrichment. It is this relationship which has influenced the philosophical and methodological thinking about the state definition, principles, and operation. On the other hand, it is this relationship that has historically guided research on the role played by the citizens in the state emergence and development, in state growth and decay, and in state failure and post-failure reconstruction.

European Middle Ages witnesses a time of hard confrontation between long-established as well as emerging state entities with political and administrative structures and leaderships able to rule over territory, economy, and people. While Middle Ages focused on the existential as well as operational principles of the state (Machiavelli 2009), the Modern age focused on the functions of the state able to ensure the happiness and welfare of its citizens (Bentham 1789; Mill 1863; Smith (1776, 1759).

Modern times brought industrial development as a key issue in the state development and in the relationships between states, also providing a strong basis for colonialism and inducing a complex dynamic of the global and regional order.

Max Weber's definition of the state (Weber 1919: 10–11) has been the most influential and it still is:

A state, as well as the political organizations which came historically before it, has a rulership [Herrschaft] relationship of the people and over the people, which means legitimate but coercive power (that is, legitimate in the eyes of the people). To ensure that the state endures, the people who are ruled need to submit to this dominating coercive authority. (Weber 1919: p. 10–11).

This definition includes three basic aspects of the state: territoriality, violence and coercion, and legitimacy. Along with the notions of 'bureaucracy' and 'state employees', the definition of the state comes to what we know it to be even today. As a difference from Downs' theory of democracy (Downs 1957) which is essentially based on economic principles, Parsons' theories (1967, 1975) introduced as fundamental in the state definition the values, principles, and norms, thus providing the background for the study of democratic society and state with a strong political culture dimension. Structural-functionalist view over the state has provided for a state definition which identifies the institutions as the state structure, while the functions of the state are defined as the governance process. These two concepts are replaced later by the concept of state as 'political organization' (Almond and Powell 1978).

The pillar of these theories in the state studies has always been the complex relationship between two evenly complex entities: the *polity* and the *individual*.

Starting with mid'1950s, the theories on the state have been challenged by the major scientific innovations and technologies of communication, information processing and intelligent frameworks and artefacts which have changed the world and human civilization to mostly what it is today.

In the mid'1960s the relationship between the citizen and the state has been included in the foundation of the state from a functionalist point of view. With a strong Weberian and Parsonian legacy, the political culture theory (Almond and Verba 1963; Converse (1964) makes of this relationship the thesis of a new approach concerning the mutual conditioning of the *individual citizen* and the *state*. Macro polity modelling research (Erikson et al. 2002) extends and enhances the political culture model. Polity modelling represents an advanced framework which could inform polity operational analysis, policy design, and resilience of polity institutional structure and dynamics against misrule generated by corruption, external threat, or economic failure.

Fundamentally oriented on the individual and the relationship between individual and the state, Weber's theory introduces the most influential definition of state based on the concept of coercion (Weber 1919). Weber brings forward the strongest argument toward a paradigm shift from social classes and their political role and action to groups, collective action, and the social and political role of the individuals with respect to the state's functions.

Parsons enriches the Weberian view and consolidates a structural-functionalist approach on state definition and operation as based on values, beliefs, and principles (Parsons 1967, 1975; Weber 1947). Both paradigms are still fundamental for the theories on democratic state: political culture and political participation developed by the mid' 1960s (Almond and Verba 1963; Converse 1964) revived during the 1990s after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the rise of the new democracies in the eastern half of Europe (Klingemann et al. 2006; Mishler and Pollack 2003). All paradigmatic perspectives included in these major trends of conceptual and methodological debate address the definition of the state in reference to the individual citizen and provide—in terms of methodology research—for action-based paradigms of state dynamics and state operation research.

It is this imbricate interdependence between the *state* and the *individual citizen* that makes polity studies the proper means for addressing essential issues, like: (1) control and prediction of state behavior and dynamics, (2) state resilience to endogenous and exogenous pressures and threats, (3) state adaptiveness to internal and/or external conditions, and (4) (upward and downward) emergence of polity complexity.

The paradigmatic views over this relationship bounced back and forth between state-centered and governance-centered approaches, between theories of state which are mainly concerned with the contemporary Western liberal democracies with a special focus on pluralism from the perspective of the new right and neo-pluralism approaches (Dryzek and Dunleavy 2009; Dyson 2009; Hay et al. 2006; Marinetto 2007; Nelson 2006; Vincent 1987; Dunleavy and O'Leary 1987: *Preface*, p. xii) and neo-statism theories which renew the central role of the state to the true or only claimed benefit of the individual's well-being and welfare (Lindberg 2020; Jessop 2011; Kennedy 2010; Jensen 2008; Bendix et al. 1992; Mitchell 1991; Evans et al. 1985; Nordlinger 1987, 1981), between state institutions and (political) culture-centered approaches on political leadership and governance, between international relations old and new theories from the Hobbesian to Lockean to Kantian, from Westphalian (Agnew 2009) to the global polity (Corry 2010), from Weberian to peacebuilding-oriented approaches (Lemay-Hébert 2011, 2013). No matter the specific

area, polity studies have gradually emphasized their focus on the role individuals play or could play in polity complex dynamics.

It was the COVID-19 global pandemics to reveal what are the individuals thinking and expecting from the state now-a-days?—The experience of the global pandemics arrived at a time when the historical political structures have been changing such that the polity space has been organized in many possible ways from vertical to polar to concentric, and the state itself has experienced a precarious dynamic between centralized and decentralized role in society and economy (Corry 2010: Table 1). Notwithstanding the constant and much theorized withdrawal of the state from the central role in the societies of the democratic realm, the pandemics revealed that isolation and social distance conditions have deepened and strengthened people’s attachment to the ideas of security and protection state could ensure. Nothing new in this. Nothing new also in the view that the *state* as (a set of) institution(s) (objects and rules), and the *governance* as process are two facets of the same abstract entity as *state* is defined (Hay et al. 2006). What is new in the global pandemics time is that people trust more and expect more from the *state* and trust less and accept less from the governance (i.e., government and public policy). They look for protection, but in some measure, they reject prevention policies, they look for security, but in some proportion, they reject security policies and any limitations to their freedoms.

What then is the ‘*state*’ they are demanding from the security of their lives and the freedom of their minds, decisions, and actions? What could the polity research methodology reveal about the impact of the global pandemics on people beliefs about the state, and moreover, about what *polity* could mean from now on?

These questions have been already answered, and the answers come substantially anew as the time passes. It seems that once again at a crossroad, the theories about the state would face once more a strong challenge. This time the challenge comes from the complex relationship between the individuals and their society, on the one hand, and the meaning of the polity in the times when interrelationships and interactions between individuals have been drastically affected and modified by digitalization, global public health threats, communication technologies and the technologies of the artificial.

This Special Issue includes six approaches on (at least) three hotly debated issues in polity research theory and methodology:

1. the state as either complex functional system or complex meaning generation and communication entity,
2. the policy impact on the relationship between the citizens and the state,
3. the state research methodology as based on empirical paradigm with predictive and anticipative orientation.

## 2 Paradigms and methodological approaches in state studies

As one looks back in the history of methodological research in state studies, an essential trend is revealed: research methodological approaches have been stimulated and have in turn stimulated themselves the gradually increasing emphasis on the *individual citizen* and its role in state studies.

It is the *system theory* which has provided the major initial methodological approach and research instruments for the classic definition and description of the state. As system, the state has been viewed from a holistic perspective as “input–output” box able to employ

internal transformation functions of the input into the output data (Easton 1953, 1965). Easton's work has provided the theoretical background for defining the political system and to characterize its workings from a behaviorist point of view. His theory has dominated the state research methodologies for explaining functions, performance, and equilibrium.

The methodological as well as theoretical focus on the individuals' role in state workings has increased the complexity of state description such that, at both qualitative and quantitative levels, the methodological approaches have been smoothly shifting from holistic to *institutional* and *governance* specifications, which have taken over separately the functional-structural components as well as the mechanisms and processes which characterize the state. In functionalist-structuralist view this general dichotomy has generated fundamental changes in both state theories and research methodologies employed in the state studies.

From a paradigmatic point of view, state modelling research shifted essentially from sovereignty (Agnew 2009) to globality and globalization (Ferguson and Mansbach 1996; Sassen 2006; Shaw 2000; Ougaard 2004), and from hierarchic (power-focused) to horizontal (relational) architecture (Marsh 2011; Rhodes and Bevir 2010; Ansell 2000), from coercion-based to peace-based principles of state building (Weber 1919; Lottholz and Lemay-Hébert 2016; Richmond 2009).

One of the major changes in system theoretical approach on the state appeared as the role of individual citizen has been modeled by the political culture theoretical approach as aspect of political participation, namely political and social attitudes toward the government, beliefs (ideologies), and actions, which influence the workings of the government by means of policymaking, and the workings of the state by means of institutional feedback to citizens demands (Erikson et al. 2002; Converse 1964; Almond and Verba 1963). This political culture-based perspective has had a long-term impact on the state studies and has finally provided for an essential change in the system theoretical approaches on the state as political system. Modeling the state as an input-output box has turned into a model based on dynamics of the governance process by means of a new concept: "*open government*" (Almond et al. 2006).

Polity empirical modelling has been lately challenged by the revival of political culture-based research targeting the democratization wave in Eastern Europe after the fall of the iron curtain in 1989. Political culture theory as accompanied by relevant revisions of value and ideology theories concerning the transitional phenomena in the new Eastern European democracies have finally reinforced polity modelling research. Moreover, the inevitable association between computational and simulation research methodologies, on the one hand, and polity modelling, on the other hand, has re-opened the classic debate on processes and mechanisms in political methodology research as approached by Charles Tilly and others by the mid'90s and afterwards (Goodin and Tilly 2006). Employed to explain political phenomenology of democratization in Eastern Europe, qualitative research on political culture has got strong arguments for revising its relationship with polity modelling in terms of democracy-building processes in former autocratic (ex-communist) polities after the fall of the iron curtain (Klingemann et al. 2006; Mishler and Pollack 2003).

Analysis of state performances at the institutional levels as well as governance and policymaking levels has aggregated huge amounts of empirical data which, for the first time in political science history have been systematically employed as analysis methodology able to support the challenge of data processing. The first half of the twentieth century consolidated the survey research and data analysis methodologies of state operation. Beside the considerable development of survey research in electoral studies which required the computer technology, state analysis have been the second major area which has acknowledged

data processing as the state research methodology at that time. Though computers and computing technologies have soon prevailed, thus making everything in research methodology turn fast to the computational methodologies, the first half of the twentieth century remained the time when statistical analysis flourished and impressed the state and government expert audience in Europe and overseas.

Later, the empirical modeling of the state has made room to another type of modeling the dynamic relationship between the individuals' trust in the government and state, on the one hand, and state legitimacy, on the other hand. Both these dynamic aspects are related to individual participation in the policymaking and state workings (Pickel 2007; Fuchs 2007). Moreover, the nomothetic approaches on state modeling made room to qualitative and analytical state modeling approaches based on mechanisms and processes (Merton 1949; Tilly 1995, 2001). The dynamic view over the state structure, functions and performances has been further developed by means of system dynamics research methodologies, especially in conflict scenarios in the international relations areas (Choucri et al. 2005).

The classic system theoretical approaches on the state have been essentially challenged by Luhmann's works on the social and political systems as meaning generation and meaning communication systems (Luhmann 1982, 1990). In his theory, Luhmann introduces a view of the social and political system as a self-reflexive system in which meaning is generated and communicated without fully specifying the workings of such systems. As a possible difference from culture as a semiotics system (Pickel 2019), in which meaning is generated and communicated by means of symbols and internal representations, in politics viewed as self-reflexive systems the meaning generation as well as the meaning communication process might not be necessarily tied to symbols, symbol representation and knowledge representation. The computational models of meaning generation and communication in artificial systems are inspired by biological systems and the studies in brain and neural sciences, where meaning formation and communication is associated with multiple layers of physiological and chemical processes, neurotransmitters transfer between memory cells, etc. Similarly, explanation of meaning generation and communication in social and political system might get inspiration from *autopoiesis* (Maturana and Varela 1972), a concept of the living systems in which structural coupling is maintained between two or more biological or ecological entities which inform the communication and mutual conditioning of two or more systems sharing themselves (fully or partly) and/or sharing their environments. Notwithstanding hard critics, Luhmann's theory has informed the anticipatory system theory (Dubois 1998; Leydersdorff 2005) in which social and political systems could generate and communicate meaning in terms of the relationships between embedded structurally coupled socially and politically differentiated subsystems (Voinea 2021a, b, 2022).

### 3 Polity modelling with agent-based systems

The domination of empirical analysis has been weakened as soon as system dynamics appeared as a necessity in analyzing and understanding social and political systems. Moreover, system theory has been weakened by the new theories of social systems based on self-organization and autonomy. Emergence and complex systems theories (Sawyer 2005) and methodologies have dominated the sociology and social-psychology areas, followed short by political research area.

Many areas of social and political studies have included during the past decades relevant interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary research literature covering sophisticated

combinations of sociology, political sciences, or ancient history and archaeology with computer sciences, sciences of the artificial, and sciences of complexity. Such inter-, and multi-disciplinary types of research approaches have become more visible as more domains of social sciences and humanities have been essentially transformed by the computational and simulation research methodologies. It is this way that new disciplinary areas, like 'social simulation' (Gilbert and Troitzsch 1999), 'computational social science' (Cioffi-Revilla 2010), or 'computational sociology' (Squazzoni 2012), have emerged in the social sciences analysis and modelling domains especially after the '90s, and challenged the classic empirical experimental approach.

Political science could not escape this tremendous challenge. More and more sub-areas of research, from political theory to political methodology, have opened for this great transformation in spite of traditional domain's resistance to methodological change.

This is because attitudes, opinions and communications held by citizens or broadcast by media or cast into political strategies can only artificially be quantified. Although there is a long tradition of quantifying attitudes, back at least to Abelson and Bernstein (1963) and to de Sola Pool and Abelson (1961) in empirical studies and in simulation modelling, attempts at modelling communication in a qualitative manner are rare and came rather late in a movement under the headline "qual to rule" (Edmonds 2015; Scherer et al. 2015) where qualitative evidence extracted from texts is converted into a formal language which is still understandable to stakeholders, i.e. to those who formulated the texts, and is at the same time unequivocal enough to be treated by algorithms in a way that conclusions can be drawn from the combination of those texts which allow to forecast what potential consequences could be (or have been) expected when the rules which the authors of the texts believed to hold were applied in the reality of a local community, a state or between states (Troitzsch, *forthcoming*).

Polity modelling has experienced a strong impetus from acquiescing the *virtual experiment*, that is, a research methodology consisting in computer simulation based on artificial agents, like *multi-agent systems* (MAS) or *agent-based systems* (ABS). Though appeared quite early in the presidential electoral campaign studies in USA starting with 1940 (Voinea 2016a, b, c, d, e), the assault of the computational technology, followed after the 1980s by the assault of the advanced technologies of the artificial proved decisive for revisiting at least one classic area of research endeavor: *polity modelling*.

By mid'90s, a small conflict-based international relations modelling study developed by Robert Axelrod (1995) introduced the *Tribute Model*, an agent-based model able to re-produce by means of computer simulation the dynamics of the relationships between nation-states with simple rules of interaction. The paradigm underlying this modelling methodology, known as KISS ("*keep it simple, stupid*") has been extensively described and explained by Axelrod: it is based on the idea of endowing autonomous agents with individual attributes, with the ability to develop goal-driven behavior, and with interaction capabilities, (i.e., motion), which make them interact with one another following simple interaction rules, like the similarity-based rules. Theorized by authors of the artificial society modelling and simulation theory as well (Epstein and Axtell 1996), the paradigm became soon dominant in the agent-based modelling research: its irresistible appeal and its great benefits reside in the generative potential of the highly interactive artificial agent systems.

Later theoretical and experimental approaches have suggested revisions of this paradigm to make it more powerful when employed in polity modelling based on more sophisticated artificial agent systems. Post-KISS paradigmatic research has been more oriented toward modelling complexity issues, like the emergence of structure and order in artificial



systems which model polity dynamics by reproducing the architecture, organization, operation, and performances of real polities.

One strong argument in adopting and developing computational and simulation polity modelling was the need to emphasize in more detail the role played by *territory* in polity dynamics during processes of formation, evolution, integration/disintegration (Cioffi-Revilla et al. 2008, 2015; Cioffi-Revilla 2001, 2009; Cederman 1997). A true computational simulation modelling approach on a typical polity model which makes references to the state dynamics and complexity and includes environment as territory, weather, and communication roads has been elaborated by Cioffi-Revilla and Rouleau (2009b). MASON RebeLand is an agent-based model of a polity aimed at configuring and studying the emergence of insurgency. From this perspective, MASON RebeLand Model is a reference model of geographically situated single-country autonomous polity based on economic principles.

GIS technologies have helped in revealing the importance of this argument: detailed territorial maps have been included in the polity modelling design and employed in explaining polity dynamics (Cederman et al. 2009).

The intensively embedded GIS technologies in agent-based modelling of state internal and external conflicts have eventually resulted in defining a new paradigm in polity modelling, namely the TASS paradigm (“*time and space system*”), able to endow polity models and international relations agent-based models with more explanatory power (Ito and Yamakage 2015; Yamakage et al. 2007; Sakamoto and Endo 2016).

Another strong argument was the politically grounded behavior of individual agents in a dynamic polity situated in a complex environment. The idea has inspired various types of polity models addressing exclusively conflict issues by combining territorial characteristics with political regime, ethnicity, and nationalism (Cederman 2008; Cederman and Girardin 2007), and political and economic culture characteristics (Cioffi-Revilla 2010).

Finally, apart this substantial conflict-oriented experimental research area, polity modelling has been lately challenged (Voinea 2017) by the revival of political culture-based research targeting the democratization wave in Eastern Europe after the fall of the iron curtain in 1989. Political culture theory as accompanied by relevant revisions of value and ideology theories concerning the transitional phenomena in the new Eastern European democracies have finally reinforced polity modelling research.

#### 4 Artificial society and artificial polity

The fundamental approach in developing *artificial society* research has been Epstein and Axtell’s work (1996) on bottom-up experimental agent-based systems replicating the basic characteristic of a human society. Relevant approaches on this issue define the polity as a geographically situated macro agent and simulates its operation with an agent-based system (Cioffi-Revilla and Rouleau 2009b). RebeLand models the development of a public policy as a governmental response to a public issue: as the individual agents might get unsatisfied with a public policy or might request a new one, the model studies the emergence of civil insurgency as a reaction of the population to public policy development and management processes. This reaction is conceptually described in the RebeLand model as “affect”. The complex mechanisms underlying public perceptions and moods, decisions, and actions of the individual agents (Cioffi-Revilla 2010: 47) is modelled as “satisfaction” with a policy (see the main simulation loop depicted in Fig. 4, Cioffi-Revilla 2010: 39).



The computational simulation of policy development is based on the principle of “demand-and-supply”, and the satisfaction with a policy is modelled as the utility associated by each individual agent to that policy.

Other models approach the polity and the emergence of mass behaviors as based on conflict theory: civil uprisings and insurgence are studied by employing either an abstract model of polity or relevant parts of it in scenarios of ethnical or social conflict (Fearon and Laitin 2003), models with geography and territory, which takes into consideration the natural environment as a basic element for the definition of a polity (Cioffi-Revilla 2009), coercion, violence and legitimacy in the conflict between governmental forces and insurgents (Lang and De Sterck 2012), corruption and its impact on the political organization (Voinea 2014), democracy and state operation in an artificial polity with an artificial culture (Voinea 2021a, b, 2022), and agent-based model of a polity with political stability principles (Vallier 2017).

Other approaches are mainly concerned with polity formation and change in various regions of the ancient world, like Asia, Africa, and South America (Cioffi-Revilla et al. 2015; Cioffi-Revilla and Rouleau 2009a; Cioffi-Revilla and Landman 1999).

## 5 Another big challenge of the twenty-first century: narratives

One of the most powerful ideas and research trends in polity research is represented by the narratives theories in social sciences and political sociology, interpretive theories and culture of governance (Bevir and Blakely 2018; Bevir and Rhodes 2006, 2010).

The narratives theories and research methodologies have provided an unexpected reinforcement to polity studies by means of explaining people’s understanding of the reality, and the formation of collective perceptions and how they are further aggregated as the generative basis of mass attitudes toward government and governance. As a difference from the rational choice theory, and also from the political culture theory in which the relationship between the citizens and the government has been modeled on the basis of ‘utility’, ‘affect’, and ‘attitudes’, the *narrative policy analysis* provides for a new conceptual framework for aggregating both reasoning and emotions into a mix which reveals the fabric of a policy narrative and explains the attitude formation from collective perceptions underlying the policy narratives (Roe 1994). It was the idea which had a major impact on state studies, and especially on governance research. The impact has seriously shaken the structuralist, neo-structuralist and the constructivist theories as well by introducing the need for a paradigm change which could take the challenge of explaining the governance in terms of its relationship with the individual citizens.

The impact of the narratives on polity and governance research (Smith-Walter et al. 2020) along with big data, data mining and machine learning techniques (Takikawa and Sakamoto 2020), text, content, and discourse analysis, web semantics, and the increasingly complex emotional phenomenology generating huge amounts of data in social media, especially in the socializing networks, have provided support for the fast development of polity research—an issue which has been extensively addressed in a special issue on interdisciplinary research methodologies employed lately in political culture research methodologies (Voinea and Neumann 2020).

During the past half-century, notwithstanding the split between the institutional and the governance research methodologies, the polity research is standing still in a paradigmatic dilemma: while strongly anchored in hierarchical governance systems, it is also

looking for theoretical and methodological clarifications required by the differentiated polity modelling (Marsh 2011) as well as the horizontal type of social networks-based approaches on governance processes (Rhodes and Bevir 2010). From this perspective, polity research methodologies need to be revisited and reinforced such that they could mirror the paradigmatic shifts due to the rise of the new computational disciplines, and to the new theories on the state, and how state operation can be best described and explained.

The debates on the alternatives of (neo) structuralism, constructivism, instrumentalism or interpretivism reveal that the state theory seems to have reached once again a turning point in its history: perhaps more than the mark of influence left by Luhmann's theory, the research methodology associated and employed in state studies might be essentially marked by the Bourdieu's state theory which combines symbolic domination and physical violence (Bourdieu 2015: 7). Inspired by the theories of symbolic forms (Cassirer 2020), Bourdieu's theory introduces the concept of field to describe and explain the political object, power, and relation. From a methodology perspective, the theory of social forms (Simmel 1971) has provided the theoretical background for the generative concepts in the agent-based systems in which agents interactions explain structural emergence and complexity (Cederman 2001). Evaluated from a methodology perspective, Bourdieu's theory of fields provides the conceptual background for explaining the formation and communication of meaning in the polity viewed as a relation-based political organization of actors, and (fields of) powers (Bourdieu 1991, 1999, 2012; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

This Special Issue aims at addressing the ways in which both classic and advanced methodologies in state and policy research have provided for a better understanding of some essential trends in polity research which reveal the prevailing role of individuals by means of their collective perceptions of reality and policy, and the meanings they communicate and use for addressing governmental action.

This Special Issue provides a paradigmatic view over the state studies. The selected papers address the relationship between the individual and the state and try to evaluate the ways in which collective perceptions of state, governance, and policy influence the institutional dynamics, the governance process, and the policy making.

Krzysztof Kasianik's paper refers to classic system theory in political science emphasizing however an essential differentiation between systems and their environments such that systems achieve their identification by communicating with their environments in order to get whatever is missing from their own dynamic identity construction. This comes to a system identification which depends on (fully or partly) inclusion and exclusion of their own environments. The idea of searching the identification by searching borders or drawing distinctions may therefore go anywhere between von Bertalanffy's classic system theory and Spencer-Brown's *Laws of Form* (1976).

Tzagkarakis and Kritas emphasize in their paper the utility of empirical mixed methods and multidisciplinary approaches in political analysis which are based on empirical data. The benefits are enormous as both the primary and finally political analysis take their backgrounds and draw their conclusions on this basis. However, in between these two extreme positions (both based on empirical data) there are increasingly efficiency-improving and fast-rising experimental technologies which provide for deeper levels of evaluation of complexity issues (dynamics, anticipation).

While narratives are about the top-down effect of state role in the formation of collective perceptions on policies, in this Special issue there are two different approaches which study the role of the state in top-down effect over the individual citizens: the role of the state in the formation of collective perceptions, positions (preferences and reasoning) on

policies, and attitudes (Chytilek et al.), and the role of the state in securitization/desecuritization of public health threat (Dimari and Papadakis).

Chytilek and collaborators address the relationship between the citizen and the state in terms of the role of the state in the experimental evaluation of individual citizens' positions on policies and measures against public threat. Experimental treatment is a paradigm of addressing the role of the state in the formation and modification of the collective perceptions over the public threats. On the other hand, the individuals' positions on policies are evaluated in experimental research such that appropriate measures could be identified by innovative means. The contamination risks in experimental treatments may (and often do) substantially modify the effects of treatment, which in security area could have important consequences. The individual citizens' understanding of reality is therefore 'guided' by means of experimental treatment which, in turn, provides for the formation of collective perceptions which further become the background for the formation or modification of attitudes toward both policy and object (i.e., threat). The idea of the paper is to investigate the top-down role of the state in the formation of the individuals' attitudes over a wide conceptual range going from libertarian paternalism to the experimental state. While in the former paradigm, the state might be modeled as authoritarian, the latter alternative might raise the question of moral limits of innovative (experimental) methods to identify adequate measures for achieving policy making effectiveness.

Holger Mölder's paper theorizes the strategic imagination as a method based on strong predictive and anticipative capabilities in security studies. Starting from the scenarios of "what-if...?", the strategic imagination addresses the state's anticipative dimension as a capability of emphasizing its own behavioral trending and characteristics in simulated situations (real, abstract or virtual). States as systems with predictive characteristics are important in security studies as state predictability makes future situations controllable (Mölder 2022). The cybernetics approaches to predictability in state operations are mainly concerned with the feedback management and control. Anticipative approaches instead are addressing the state capabilities to foresee or to let the individual citizens foresee its future behavior and operational characteristics. Strategic imagination is therefore combining the capacity to design a state with characteristics which make its behavior highly predictive, on the one hand, and the state's capacity to self-organize its internal resources in order to foresee its own (desirable or undesirable) future condition and thus adapt in order to always select the desirable, on the other hand. In the neo-Kantian perspective, the strategic imagination would inform peacebuilding processes in state building, security risk management at both individual and institutional level, state development and state post-failure reconstruction.

Dimari and Papadakis ask an inherently normative question: Following the framework of securitization theory of the Copenhagen school they describe the COVID-19 countermeasures as an act of securitization. While the first case studies of the Copenhagen School (Buzan, 1991) had a very critical view on securitizing acts, attempting to deconstruct ideological constructs, Rita Floyd extended this theoretical framework to a theory of just securitization (Floyd, 2011, 2014). Following Floyd's theory, the authors ask whether the securitization of the COVID-19 pandemic in Greece was just or unjust. More specifically, they pose two questions: was the initiation and the conduct of securitization just or unjust, leaving out the question of a just termination of the securitization. As securitization is described as a speech act, they utilize a discourse analytical approach for this purpose. They examined statements and legal documents from the first phase of the pandemic with the analytical tools provided by Rita Floyd's theory of just securitization. This entails answering a total of eight sub-questions such as examining whether there was an objective

existential thread in case of the initiation of the securization, or whether the response was appropriate in case of the conduct of the securization. The examination of the documents revealed the answer that the securization can indeed be described as just. Thereby the article provides a contribution to the debate whether securization can be morally justified.

The contribution of Ladini and Maggini as well as the contribution of Dimari and Papadakis thematise the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on political culture. These papers address the top-down role of the state in the formation of attitudes toward public policy and public threat. They pick up the fact that the virus is not just a biological phenomenon. Rather a pandemic is inherently a political phenomenon, and the way societies resonate to the threat informs us about political culture. Both articles also demonstrate the wide spectrum of methodological approaches that can be used in investigating political culture: While Ladini and Maggini use a quantitative approach for studying the role of party preferences in explaining the acceptance of freedom restrictions, Dimari and Papadakis undertake a qualitative investigation whether countermeasures against the pandemic can be described as just securization.

Italy was the first European country that was hit by the pandemic. This motivates Ladini and Maggini to use survey data from Italy for their investigation. They ask whether the evolution of the pandemic and party preferences contribute to an explanation of attitudes towards government measures and whether these attitudes are moderated by trust in institutions and collectivist orientations. The role of party preferences is broken down in two sub-questions: the left–right scale of ideological orientations and the question whether support for the government or the opposition influences attitudes towards government measures. The findings show that indeed collectivist orientations have a strong impact and trust in institutions a moderate influence on attitudes towards COVID-19 countermeasures. Political attitudes do have an impact as well. However, in contrast to the expectation that conservatives would favour a strong state and thus, support harsh freedom restrictions, the relationship between ideological orientations and acceptance of freedom restrictions is reverse: Liberals are more likely to accept freedom restrictions. This finding calls for a re-examination of the classical left–right dichotomy in value orientations. Modern right-wing populism in Western societies has an ambiguous nature: while it has an authoritarian element, it also has a strong anti-elitist element. This explains resistance against state measures. While a counter reaction to enlightening and emancipation, following Lütjen (2021) it can be described as its legitimate child nevertheless. This call for further research, in particular in comparison with Eastern European countries which did not experience the emancipatory movements of the 1970s.

## 6 Drawing conclusions from reflections on hard challenges

Though not as many as one might expect the paper contributions to this Special Issue succeed to address some of the most relevant challenges the state theory and methodology research seem to face at a time which could prove to be a turning point in their development. First of all, there is the challenge of lacking appropriate and/or appropriately integrated research methodologies. In their qualitative approach, Dimari and Papadakis address the methodology issue in the case of studying securization from a normative, moral perspective on a qualitative discourse analysis basis, without however providing for an appropriately integrated methodological approach which might combine discourse analysis with data mining and machine learning methodologies, to mention but one of many

other possible methodological choices. Secondly, there is the challenge of creating the necessary research methodologies or revisiting some old ones which are open to substantial improvement on both conceptual and technological dimensions in methodology research. In his qualitative approach, Mölder suggests an "what-if-...?" paradigm. In spite of its novelty in both concept and area of application, the paradigm has already been employed into-, or has already acquired status and methodological dimensions from new interdisciplinary paradigms, like the agent-based systems and the anticipatory systems, which include both mathematical modelling (Dubois, 1998) as well as agent-based differentiated social system modelling and simulation (Leydersdorff, 2005) and artificial polity and artificial political culture modelling employing agent-based simulation and political culture theory (Voinea, 2021a, b, 2022). Thirdly, there is the challenge of missing the chance of building both new theory and new methodology as theoretical approaches on state and governance (Marsh 2011; Rhodes 2010; Bevir and Rhodes 2006) fail to find dimension(s) of convergence and, moreover, fail to provide for the emergence of state and governance theories, systems and cultures which can cope with massive digitalization and explosive technological advances hardly impacting almost all societal, economic and cultural layers of social and political life. This Special Issue could therefore be viewed as a reflection on all these and other hard challenges.

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