

State Formation and the Challenges of Creating a New Country

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Abstract:

Creating a new country along with a state apparatus to run it is tricky business. But what if you were challenged to create a new country yourself? How would you do it? In this activity students are challenged to draw upon course material on state formation and the emergence of new nations and states to symbolically create new countries and states themselves, gaining greater understanding of course materials and their real world applications in the process.

Details:

Resource Types	Class Activity
Authors	DaShanne Stokes University of Pittsburgh
Date Published	5/1/2012
Subject Area	Political Sociology
Class Level	College 400
Class Size	Medium
Language	English

Usage Notes:

The instructor serves as a coordinator and facilitator in this activity, guiding students in their application of theories and concepts connected to state formation and shaping their understanding through in class discussion.

Learning Goals and Assessments:

Goal	Students will gain an introductory understanding about the dynamics surrounding the emergence of states, including aspects such as the challenges of acquiring a land base and drawing international borders, resource acquisition, & international resistance.
Assessment	Instructors may assess student learning and critical thinking skills through student

responses during in-class discussion and through essay exam questions. Illustrative samples of these types questions are included.

**Goal
Assessment
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Assessment**

Resource Files:

StokesStateFormation.docx

State Formation and the Challenges of Creating a New Country

As we've seen in the readings this week, creating a new country along with a state apparatus to run it is tricky business. But what if you were challenged to create a new country yourself? How would you do it?

For purposes of this activity you get to play the role of the founding fathers and founding mothers of a new country that your group will create.

Students will be broken into small groups of five or six people. Imagine that your group is a nation or people of which you are a part. You and your nation are seeking to create a new country, *your* new country, along with a state government to run it. You, as a trained political sociologist, have been called upon to use your expertise to help create this new country. How will you create your new country, and what will it look like?

Please draw upon class lectures, discussions, and readings for this week to answer the following questions:

1. What will you name your new country?
2. Will you create a democratic, authoritarian, or totalitarian government? What will it look like?
3. Where will you locate your new country and how will you acquire this land base?
4. How might you inspire and/or draw upon a sense of nationalism amongst your people?
5. Will your country be created through secession or civil war, and how will you handle resistance to your cause should it arise?
6. Will your state government serve the interests of one or more elites or classes or will it be more pluralist in nature? How might you ensure this is the case?
7. What resources will you need and how might you get them?
8. What about police, courts, and military?
9. Who will be your country's figurehead(s)?
10. What about international support or resistance?
11. What kinds of laws will your country enact to help in the creation of your new country?
12. What about the other new countries being formed in class? Will you go to war with them for territory and resources? Will you seek alliances with them? How?

As founding fathers and mothers, you may draw upon existing laws, practices, governments, institutions, etc., either within the U.S. or abroad, or create new ones, even if they are quirky or whimsical. You may also feel free to create any form of government you choose, even if it's one you do not personally support (Please feel free to have some fun with this activity!).

Groups are encouraged to interact. Each group/country may, for example, symbolically go to war with other groups/countries; they may also exchange "diplomats" and create alliances, such as political unions like the European Union or even multi-nation empires if they choose. Time will be set aside in class on Monday and Wednesday for groups to meet, but groups are also highly encouraged to meet and communicate outside of class through email or the online discussion boards that will be created. On Friday I will ask one or two representatives from each new country to present what types of countries they've created and how they answered the questions above. The floor will be opened to allow groups to discuss the challenges each faced as the founders of a new country, how they overcame such challenges, and to facilitate interaction to see how the new "countries" we've created might interact.

****NOTE:** Please get contact information from your group members to communicate outside of class.

ASSESSMENT: SAMPLE IN-CLASS DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Instructors may actively assess student understanding by drawing on in-class student responses to the questions above provided in the activity hand-out given to students.

Here is an illustrative sample of additional discussion questions with which instructors may further assess student learning and critical thinking:

Where did your group decide to locate your new country, and by what means did your new country acquire this land base?

--This question challenges students to think about the difficulties new countries face in selecting and acquiring a land base. It challenges students to think critically about how countries locate their new land bases as well as how they go about the business of establishing international borders. Student responses reflect their learning and critical thinking about these issues new countries face.

How would your new country handle any resistance it might face in establishing these borders and breaking away from your parent country?

--Land is a scarce and precious resource, one which many countries war over to protect; therefore this question challenges students to think about war making (over contested borders, in this example) as an element in state making as well as how new countries might meet and potentially overcome international resistance (e.g., by seeking foreign aid or creating military alliances with other countries, etc.).

What resources do new states need, and how might your new country go about acquiring these?

-- This question challenges students to think about what resources new countries need and how they may be acquired. Prior to the activity it is useful to discuss and have students read about how state making may be linked to resource acquisition and capital extraction, such as through taxation of citizens and the formation of a bureaucracy to carry out taxation, which further increases state-making, etc. (see, for example, the work of Charles Tilly).

Did your country create a democratic, authoritarian, or totalitarian form of government? How do you know it was this type of government?

--This question challenges students to think about the different forms the nation-state may take, ranging from democracy to authoritarian to totalitarian regimes. Student responses reflect critical thinking and their understanding about the distinguishing features of each of these three major state forms. As many state forms are mixed hybrids of these types, a useful follow-up question might be, "Does your new country's form of government reflect one of these ideal types, or might it be more of a hybrid? If so, how?" or "Can you think of any examples of governments that might reflect a mixture or hybridization of these government forms? How do we know they are hybrids?"

What other challenges did your group face in creating your new country? How did you overcome these?

--This question is a useful catchall intended for use near the end of an in-class discussion on this activity. It is meant to encourage students to mention other aspects they found challenging that the instructor might not otherwise have foreseen, and to see how students drew upon their learning and critical thinking abilities to solve any problems they might have encountered.

ASSESSMENT: SAMPLE ESSAY EXAM QUESTIONS

Here is an illustrative sample of additional in-class or take-home essay exam questions useful for assessing student learning and critical thinking in connection to this activity:

You are hired to consult with the leaders of an emerging state who wish to know what problems they might face in creating their new state. As a trained political sociologist, what problems can you identify that they can be expected to face, and what suggestions might you recommend for them to overcome these challenges?

If you had to categorize the new countries created during our in-class activity on state formation as democratic, authoritarian, or totalitarian, how would you classify them? Why would you classify them this way?