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State capacity and executive constraints in early modern Europe

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Abstract

The prevailing view of Europe's political history is that the rise of constrained governments and the increases in state capacity advanced hand in hand. In this study, we reevaluate this perspective by constructing new historical indices for both. Our findings challenge the presumed connection, illustrating that high-capacity states existed under unconstrained government, and low-capacity states existed under constrained regimes. We also identify what made England historically distinctive: its political system stood out for combining constrained government with high state capacity. This rare combination helps explain the eventual take-off of modern economic growth in England.

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Keywords: historical political economy, executive constraints, state capacity, government effectiveness, checks and balances.

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¹ We thank James A. Robinson and François Velde for discussions. Mikolaj Malinowski provided information about Poland. Mauro Rota kindly shared unpublished data for Naples. Elena Korchmina in turn provided data on Russian wages and prices. Mariana Martins Cardoso provided helpful research assistance.

It is excellent to have a giant's strength, but it is tyrannous to use it like a giant.

W. Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure* (Act II, 2)

1. Introduction

The historical relationship between constraints on executive authority and state capacity is ambiguous. Constraints on the executive are mechanisms that restrict the power of executive authorities and maintain checks and balances within the political system. State capacity, on the other hand, reflects a state's ability to effectively implement policies, often measured through its tax revenues, which gauge the executive's ability to mobilize and manage material resources. Hence, while constraints on the executive are about the structure of the decision-making process, state capacity is fundamentally about the implementation of decisions.

Although executive constraints and state capacity are distinct variables, the prevailing view in the literature is that they moved in tandem in European history.² One explanation for this presumed association is that constraints on executive authority increased state capacity by solving commitment problems and facilitating tax-for-services agreements between executives and taxpayers.³ An alternative explanation suggests that causation operated in the opposite direction, with high-capacity states resulting from this ability to force the wealth holders to participate in parliamentary assemblies and provide funds (Marongiu 1968; Harris 1974; Boucoyannis 2021; Henriques and Palma 2023).

To empirically examine the relationship between executive constraints and state capacity, we compile historical data series. To assess executive constraints, we develop new datasets extending to 1850, adhering to the coding rules established by Polity IV and providing detailed justifications for our choices. To measure state capacity, we refine and expand existing per capita tax revenue data, adjusting for inflation and income variations.

The empirical evidence we gather qualifies those unidimensional discussions of European history. Concerning state capacity, we find that most European states made substantial gains, even those often described in the literature as struggling with tax collection, such as Spain

² North and Weingast (1989), O'Brien (1988), Levi (1989), Hoffman and Norberg (1994), Dincecco (2015, 2017), Brewer (2002).

³ In practice, the constraints on the executives were imposed by representative assemblies (Hebert 2015). It was also possible, however, for representative assemblies to be co-opted and turned into mere endorsements of the executive, acting as "cheques to the executive" rather than "checks on the executive" (Henriques and Palma, 2023).

and France. For executive constraints, we find a divergence. While states such as England and Poland reinforced executive constraints, others, such as Spain⁴ and France, weakened them.

Turning to the central question of the study, when we bring together the empirical evidence on executive constraint and state capacity and analyze their relationship, we find that they did not necessarily evolve in a synchronized manner. There were states for which they are closely related, such as in England, which achieved progress in both dimensions, and the Ottoman Empire, where both remained low. However, there were also states like France, Spain, Portugal, and Naples that developed state capacity while removing constraints on the executive; others, such as Poland⁵, that strengthened constraints without gains in state capacity; and yet others, such as Russia, that increased state capacity while remaining an unconstrained regime.⁶ As Table 1 shows, by the end of the 18th century, all four possible combinations were present on the European map: England⁷, as a constitutional state with robust fiscal capacity; the Ottoman Empire, characterized by absolutism as well as low fiscal capacity; Poland, a constitutional regime with weak fiscal capacity⁸; and France⁹, Spain¹⁰, and Russia, unconstrained regimes with relatively high levels of fiscal capacity.¹¹

Table 1. Types of states in the eighteenth century: some examples

	Low fiscal capacity	High fiscal capacity
Unconstrained executive	Ottoman Empire	Spain, France, Russia
Constrained executive	Poland	England

⁴ Henriques and Palma (2023) counted all the confirmed Castilian and Portuguese meetings of parliaments, as well as classifying their actions, between the late Middle Ages and the early nineteenth century and documented the effective constraining capacity of Castilian and Portuguese parliaments (*Cortes*) into the seventeenth century. We note here an update to that counting – a meeting of the Portuguese *Cortes* of 1495 (in Montemor-o-Novo) has been since documented by Dias and Pinto (2024) in their latest revision of the sources.

⁵ When we refer to Poland, we are using shorthand for the Poland Lithuanian Commonwealth, which formed in the Union of Lublin (1576), though it existed in practice since the Krewo Pact of 1386.

⁶ Like Russia, the Ottoman Empire also state capacity under a constrained regime, but after 1800.

⁷ Formally, England should be referred to as Great Britain from the Acts of Union (1707).

⁸ The weak state capacity in Poland eventually led its partitioning by Prussia, Austria, and Russia at the end of the 18th century.

⁹ France “lacked a great representative body like the English Parliament where the political nation’s consent to necessary measures could be obtained in advance” (Dickson 2016, p. 14)

¹⁰ Following the evidence presented in Henriques and Palma (2023), eighteenth century Portugal and Spain can be considered absolutist, despite contrary claims by Grafe (2011, p. 116).

¹¹ For other dimensions of state capacity, see Bonfatti et al. (2022), Koyama (2022), Besley et al. (2025).

The patterns we identify contribute to the understanding of both the evolution of political systems and the impact of political systems on economic growth. Regarding the evolution of political systems, these findings challenge the notion that the rise of fiscal capacity and proto-representative institutions in Europe progressed hand in hand. Instead, it supports a more nuanced and conditional relationship. Specifically, it corroborates the argument that, under certain conditions, constraints on executive authority can act as obstacles to state-building efforts (Karaman and Pamuk 2013), and executives can leverage state capacity to suppress constraints on their power (van Zanden et al. 2012). As such, presenting European historical experience as evidence for a singular path of constrained executive leading to state-building is misleading.

Our findings also help explain the takeoff of modern economic growth in England. A key puzzle in economic history is the so-called Little Divergence, where Northwest Europe advanced ahead of the rest of the continent, ultimately leading to the Industrial Revolution in England. We find that what set England apart was not merely having a constrained regime or high state capacity, as these political characteristics were individually present in other European states to varying extents. What made England stand out among major European states was that it had both, a combination that allowed not only formulating policies conducive to growth but also implementing them.¹²

More broadly, our findings relate to the debates on the historical relationship between political institutions and growth. In the literature on institutions, a central idea is that constrained executives played the pivotal role in fostering economic growth by enabling credible commitments, securing property rights, and encouraging investment (North and Weingast 1989; Acemoglu and Robinson 2012). Alternatively, a different literature puts the emphasis on the role of state capacity, and the ability to provide public goods and security—as critical (e.g. O’Brien 1988, Brewer 2002, Besley and Persson 2011, Dincecco 2017).¹³ Our findings lend support to the view that it was not one or the other, but rather, the combination of state capacity with constrained executives that was the necessary condition for take-off of

¹² A strong state with a constrained executive may have been a necessary condition for modern growth, but it was not sufficient on its own. Several small or city-states, such as the Dutch and Venetian Republics, met these criteria and experienced periods of economic expansion. However, they did not transition into sustained modern growth, likely due to factors such as the burdens of continental warfare, limitations of scale, and shifts in trade routes.

¹³ At the same time, it has been pointed out that parliaments representing wealth holders have not invariably been favourable for growth, and that the nature of state expenditure, rather than state capacity itself, is what matters for market-supporting government action to take place (Ogilvie and Carus 2014, Ogilvie 2022, Costa et al. 2024).

economic growth. Capacity without constraints, to borrow Shakespeare's imagery, may transform states into giants prone to tyranny.¹⁴ Conversely, constraints without capacity risk leaving a state impotent, unable to implement policies or address societal needs, even when sound policies are formulated.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. In section 2, we present our new executive constraints dataset and review the evolution of the political regimes covered. In section 3, we show and discuss our comparative fiscal capacity data. In section 4 we then investigate the relationship between executive constraints, fiscal capacity, and economic growth. Section 5 then concludes.

2. Comparative executive constraints

In this section we analyze the political systems of the countries considered in this study by drawing on recent historiographical literature. We code the changing level of constraints on the executive according to the Polity IV methodology. Scores are as follows. A classification of 1 means there are "no regular limitations on the executive's actions". A score of 3 means there are "some real but limited restraints on the executive". The number 5 means "the executive has more effective authority than any accountability group, but [it] is subject to substantial constraints by them". And 7 means that there is executive parity or subordination, i.e. "accountability groups have elective authority equal to or greater than the executive in most activity". Even numbers in-between represent intermediate cases.

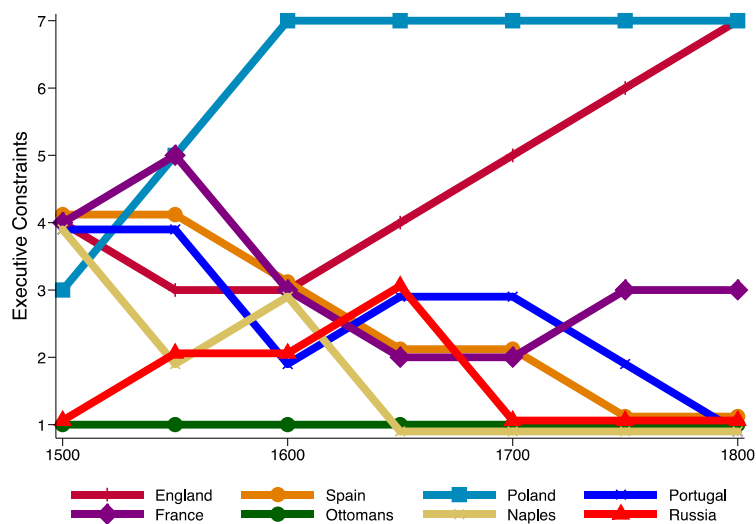
Polity IV does not cover the period prior to 1800. Following Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson (2005), we have built a new dataset by coding the most relevant of the component variables of this index: "executive constraints" for the early modern period (1500-1800).¹⁵ This variable captures the accountability of the executive vis-à-vis an external group (such as the legislature or the party in a single-party system) and it is coded in a seven-category scale, which goes from 1 (Unlimited authority) to 7 (Executive Parity or Subordination). In the former, "there are no regular limitations on the executive's actions" whereas in the latter "accountability groups have effective authority equal to or greater than the executive in most

¹⁴ A similar insight is invoked by New Institutional Economics: "the very same institutions that make property rights [and contracts] transparent and enforceable (...) also facilitate the government's ability to expropriate property" (Haber et al. 2008, p. 4). Relatedly, Acemoglu and Robinson (2009) argue that sustained liberty arises only when a balance is maintained between a mobilized society and a capable state.

¹⁵ In the Appendix, we justify our coding in further detail, giving detailed sources, and compare it with the original Acemoglu et al. (2005) sources. Our numbers often differ from theirs.

activity”. A value of 3 means that “there are some real but limited restraints on the executive”, while a value of 5 indicates that “the executive has more effective authority than any accountability group, but [it] is subject to substantial constraints by them”. Scores of 2, 4, and 6 are used for intermediate situations (Marshall et al. 2002). In the coding proposed here, the features, social interests and institutional composition of the accountability body are not taken into consideration, only its strength. We use 50-year benchmarks representing the endpoint of the preceding half-century. So, for instance, our code for “1500” reflects the constitutional rules in place in that year. Our classification of England, Spain, and Portugal follows prior research by Henriques and Palma (2023), who show that an institutional divergence of the Iberian monarchies of Spain and Portugal relative to England is not noticeable prior to the seventeenth century: for example, parliaments were roughly comparable in dimensions such as meeting frequency or executive checks performed.¹⁶ We build on prior work and add here France, Naples, the Ottoman Empire, Poland, and Russia. Our comparative classifications are based on a detailed analysis of the country-level specialized political and institutional literature. The historical details and justifications are given in the Appendix. The results are shown in Figure 1.¹⁷

Figure 1. Polity IV-type constraints on the executive score



Notes: The values for Spain prior to 1707 correspond to Castile. France in 1800 corresponds to 1780. Poland in 1800 refers to 1791.

Sources: up to 1800, see text. For 1850, Polity 5 (2020).

¹⁶ On the extractive nature of England’s institutions until this time, see, for example, Bottomley (2023). With regards to the gradual change whereby institutional change was predated by social and cultural preconditions, see Murrell and Grajzl (2017, 2024).

¹⁷ See also Table A1 of the Appendix.

By 1500, rulers in all European polities considered —except the Ottoman Empire— had to contend with representative assemblies or parliaments. Despite considerable variation in procedures, regularity, and internal organization, these assemblies were strong enough to place limits on monarchical decision-making, acting in the name of the governed. The latter was not an empty claim. Although the number of electors and the degrees of royal meddling varied, the representatives seated in the assemblies were elected by intermediate bodies with well-defined, concrete interests: municipalities or town governments (in all cases), regional assemblies (the French *parlements*, the Polish-Lithuanian *sejmiks* after 1569 and the Russian assemblies of the gentry) and territorial administrative units (the English shires), with some room for representatives or petitions from other groups like guilds, universities or minorities. Thus, upon arriving at the assemblies, the members bore a mandate to act in the name of the subjects and taxpayers they legitimately represented.

Claims of “absolute” power notwithstanding, sovereigns had to seek assemblies for introducing extraordinary taxes or new legislation. This created effective constraints on the executive power by moderating the tax burden and/or influencing reforms and new regulations. For governments involved in a tense geopolitical competition and, hence, on resource-maximization these assemblies acted as a constitutional counterweight. Recent research (Henriques and Palma 2023, p. 277) shows that at least the parliaments of Castile, England and Portugal had some success in limiting the respective monarchs.¹⁸

While legislative and, especially, fiscal bargaining was often understood as a zero-sum game by the parts involved, there was the notion that common interests and mutual benefits were also at play. The rulers were keenly aware that they had to heed the interests of the people, a principle that even self-proclaimed “autocrats” like the Tsars acknowledged. As assemblies voiced the collective interests of the country, they endowed legitimacy to the fiscal demands and reforms intended by the monarchs. Conversely, the subjects accepted that they had some obligation to support their monarchs, even in the case of offensive wars and projects. By reuniting the entire body politic and listening to grievances in exchange for extraordinary taxes and political support, these assemblies gave sovereigns an opportunity to commit the entirety of the country to taxes and obedience of law. The parliaments gave the monarchs

¹⁸ As the early modern period advanced, however, Portugal and Spain experienced peaks in revenue during their colonial zenith. Reliance on overseas mineral wealth produced a resource curse that in the long run weakened both economic and institutional performance (Charotti et al. 2022, Kedrosky and Palma 2025). The Iberian cases provide an example of rulers leveraging fiscal revenues to dismantle executive constraints.

the possibility to “unite and rule” (Henriques 2009, p. 205). Thus, by 1500, most of the executive constraints are in the Polity IV levels between 3 and 5.

The intense geopolitical confrontation within Europe tested these internal political equilibria. One century later, with the meaningful exceptions of Poland-Lithuania and Russia, executive constraints overall decreased. By 1600, their Polity IV codes are between 2 and 3. In Castile, England, France, Naples and Portugal executives strengthened their positions vis-à-vis the assemblies. They became closer to writing “cheques to the executive” than imposing the proverbial “checks to the executive”. The two eastern exceptions were engulfed in war with each other and were under periods of dynastic instability. By contrast, through the *Sejm*, the Polish local parliaments repeatedly used the power of the purse to limit the military ambitions of the sovereigns (even if sometimes because foreign interference).

By 1650, the internal political equilibrium had turned in favor of the sovereign nearly everywhere. In France, the powerful and unruly *Estates-General* were not summoned after 1614 (except for the fateful meeting of 1789-91). The Neapolitan and Castilian parliaments ceased to be summoned in the mid seventeenth century (their last summons respectively happened in 1642 and 1667). In these three cases, the court nobility and high officers saw parliaments as detrimental to their influence and as potentially disruptive factors. Conversely, in Portugal and Russia, assemblies were on all-time apex as they partnered with new dynasties (Braganza and Romanov) that became sovereign with the support. The high tide of parliamentary participation in government in Russia was the Great *Sobor* of 1648-9, which was forced upon unwilling Tsar Alexis I by open revolt. The Portuguese *Cortes* gave support to the new dynasty, but did not meet after 1699.

By 1700, executive constraints were at their lowest almost everywhere in Europe. In France, only a couple of regional parliaments survived the autocratic rule of Louis XIV, who shut the *Parlement de Paris* down and disbanded half of the regional assemblies. As the Romanov consolidated power, Russia acquired its characteristic autocratic regime. This did not mean that the notion of a partnership between the monarch and the country had died. Most polities kept a token of the original assemblies. In Spain, the ceremonial *Cortes de España* languished, along with the *Comission de Millones* and the *Deputación de Cortes*. In Naples, the negotiations took place with Naples municipal government. In Portugal the *Junta dos Três Estados* played the role of the *Cortes* in administering taxes, while in France regional *parlements* continued to meet and negotiate taxation in their territory. Even Peter the Great kept a successor of the *Boyard Duma* (called the Senate).

Without the representative assemblies, executives lost an ally against entrenched special interests and oligarchies. To some extent, the defeat of the assemblies could be seen as the triumph of court politics and special interests over the common interests. The Russian *Zemskii Sobor*, which was dominated by the local gentry, was opposed by the great boyars and the state officials, more than by the Tsar (Keep 1957). The Spanish authorities feared the parliamentary Pandora Box in overtaxed Castile and Naples. By contrast, the Parliament of England was close to attaining parity with the executive, like the Polish-Lithuanian *Sejm* had since 1600. The ascent of courts politics over parliaments had serious consequences. This can be seen by contrasting the responsiveness of Westminster to petitions to create growth-enhancing infrastructure (like turnpikes) with the excessive protection of private property and other interests threatened by such projects in France (Le Bris and Tallec 2024, p. 19).¹⁹ The resurgence of the *Parlement de Paris* under Louis XV and Louis XVI and the continuation of regional parliaments did not change this. As executive decisions became more dominated by court politics, Polity IV scores approached 1 nearly everywhere in Europe.

3. Comparative fiscal capacity

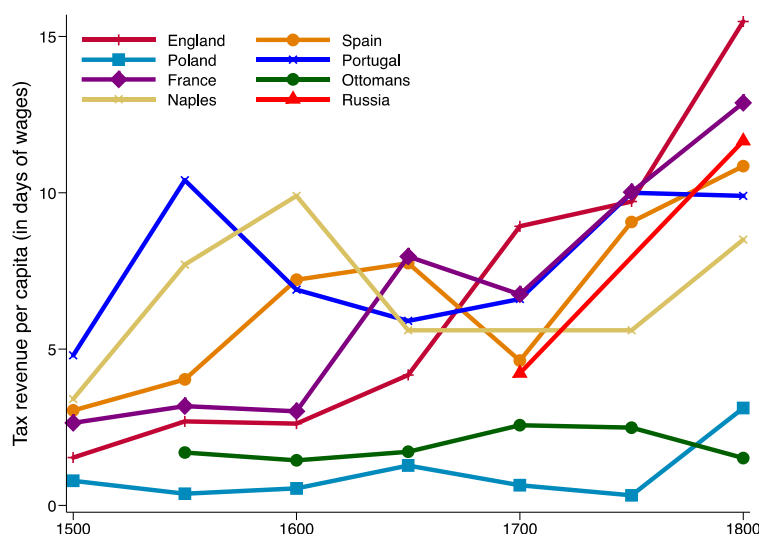
In this section we analyze the historical evolution of fiscal capacity in Europe, the main proxy for state capacity in the literature. We document a divergence across regions, with some states experiencing up to three-fold increases in fiscal capacity, while others remained persistently weak. The evidence also reveals that gains in state capacity were not solely tied to regime type or economic growth; both authoritarian and constrained regimes achieved increases under different conditions. Instead, a complex array of factors — including warfare, geopolitical position, and institutional design — appear to have shaped each state's trajectory. These patterns suggest that the path from state capacity to economic growth is less linear than has oftentimes been suggested in the literature (e.g. Dincecco 2015, 2017).

To quantify the evolution of state capacity, we use fiscal capacity as a proxy, as it offers a concrete, consistent and historically comparable basis for evaluating a state's capabilities. It also captures two essential dimensions of state strength: first, the ability to extract resources from the population, which reflects legal and administrative reach as well as coercive power; and second, the enforcement ability to finance, design, and implement public policies, which signals overall governance competence and institutional effectiveness.

¹⁹ See also Rosenthal (1990, 1992), Bogart and Richardson (2009, 2011).

To measure fiscal capacity, we calculate per capita tax revenues expressed in terms of unskilled daily wages. This measure is calculated in several steps. First, annual total central government tax revenues for each polity are converted from local currency into silver. Next, per capita tax revenues in silver are derived by dividing total tax revenues by the population. Finally, per capita tax revenues in daily wages are calculated by dividing per capita tax revenues in silver by the nominal daily wages of unskilled workers in silver. Thus, our measure indicates the number of days an average worker would need to work to fulfil their tax obligations. Wage series are available annually for most polities and, due to their high quality, are frequently employed by economic historians as proxies for per capita income during this period. In this respect, tax to wage ratio is analogous to the tax-to-GDP ratio commonly used in modern economies to gauge fiscal capacity.²⁰ The resulting series is summarized in Figure 2.²¹

Figure 2. Per capita tax revenues divided by nominal wages, 1500-1800



Notes: Naples corresponds to the Kingdom of Naples's pre-1816 borders; Portugal includes imperial revenues.

Sources: see text.

²⁰ Our starting point for the tax revenue series is earlier work by Karaman and Pamuk (2010), which we updated as follows. Portugal's series is based on Costa et al. (2024). For Russia, we use new wage data for Moscow, restricting ourselves to information concerning free labour; accordingly, the period 1750-59 was left out given that unfree labour (serfs and slaves) prevailed in the construction labour force then (Korchmina 2025). For Naples, we constructed new tax series constructed based on government revenues from Bianchini (1859, pp. 318, 447); Lukacs (1993, p. 73); Del Treppo (1986, p. 118-20); Calabria (2002); Sabatini (2005a, p. 73); Sabatini (2005b, p. 579); Naples's population was kindly shared by Mauro Rota, from ongoing work (Rota et al. 2025), and the deflator is that from Allen (2001).

²¹ See also Table A2 of the Appendix.

Throughout the period considered, most European states multiplied their levels of fiscal capacity, with the significant exceptions of Poland-Lithuania and the Ottoman Empire. By 1500, the fiscal capacity of the remaining European powers, as measured by day wages of unskilled laborers, averaged three day wages but, by 1780, it was close to 13. England, France and Russia achieved the most substantial gains in fiscal capacity during the eighteenth century: England's from 1.5 days of nominal wages in the early 1500s to 15.5 days by the 1780s, while France experienced a comparable surge from 2.6 to 12.9 days. Naples, Portugal and Spain peaked earlier but still ended the eighteenth century with comparatively high values.²² This trajectory contrast with Poland-Lithuania and the Ottoman Empire which consistently recorded low levels of revenue, ranging from 0.3 to 3.1 per capita unskilled day wages for the latter and 1.4 to 2.6 per capita.

As Figure 2 makes clear, this was not a smooth trend. The early advantage of the southern European countries came from their wide-reaching universal sales taxes (Naples: *gabeller*; Portugal: *sisas*; Spain: *alcabalas* and *millones*) complemented by tapping major trade flows (salt and overseas commodities in Portugal, American silver entering Seville, and the grain, silk and wool exports in Naples) with a sizeable contribution, in the case of Portugal, from imperial revenues. These three countries were also early adopters of sovereign credit. In direct response to their protracted foreign or imperial wars, they continued to assign increasing shares of revenues to the service of securities (*juros*).

Overall, the rest of Europe remained relatively behind, with the parliamentary regimes of England and Poland-Lithuania being successful in keeping taxation extraordinary and conditional to times of war. England trended up from the Civil War, but most of the increase occurred in the eighteenth-century, a period of fiscal and financial innovation for nearly all the states involved. Anglo-French rivalry led to the broadening of the tax base beyond what had existed in the southern countries. France managed to increase its great power status by creating new types of direct, universal taxation (the 1695 Capitation, the 1710 Dixième and the Vingtième of 1749) (Bonney 1995). Likewise, Versailles obtained private resources from a variety of credit instruments (the old *rentes*, the newer *billets d'état*, and the anticipations).

With parliamentary support, England imposed a series of excises of various products and, eventually, an income tax. Most importantly, the parliamentary regime in England allowed

²² By contrast, Irigoien and Grafe (2013) classify early modern Spain as a weak state, in contradiction to the evidence we show here as well as that in Cermeño and Santiago-Caballero (2020), Karaman and Pamuk (2013), and Costa et al. (2024).

for a successful sovereign credit system that tapped the country's growing wealth via the consols, after different experiments. In Russia, by contrast, the initial defeats in Sweden led Peter the Great to initiate a sweeping change of the fiscal foundations of the state, allowing victory in the Great Northern War of 1700-21 over Poland-Lithuania and Sweden (Frost 2014, Kollman 2017). The poll tax (instead) (1718), combined with heavier tariffs, duties on economic activities and levies on foreign merchants, state monopolies on the key commodities (vodka and salt), imposition of and a heavy imposition over the church. Half a century later, Russia also developed fiat currency (the assignats) allowing to defray the costs incurred the long and costly Sixth Russo-Turkish War (1768–1774). Also tied to the European balance of power, Portugal and Spain did not fail to substantially increase their level of revenues increase in the second half of the eighteenth century. These fiscal experiments were noticeably less intense in Bourbon Naples and in the decaying Commonwealth and absent in the Sublime Porte.

Geopolitical confrontation called for the adoption of taxes and increase of the existing ones to meet increasing military expenditure. As the results show, fiscal capacity cannot be directly equated with any given political regime. Contrasting systems like Russian autocracy and the British parliamentary regime ultimately produced similar fiscal capacity results. Similarly, economic growth is a separate process too: prior to 1800, with the important exception of England, European growth was limited and insufficient to account for the threefold increase in per capita tax revenues relative to income. The reasons are to be found in what Bonney called the *primum mobile* driving the growth of fiscal systems: wars. Europe's tense geopolitical confrontation meant that states had to be able to raise large and well-equipped permanent armies to remain competitive in the battleground and in the diplomatic chessboard (Hoffman 2015; Scheidel 2019). Thus, by 1800, most states fielded comparable fiscal capacity.²³

4. Executive power, fiscal capacity, and long-run growth potential

The changes in executive constraints and fiscal capacity for the eight European countries we have considered can be linked to their economic growth performance. In this set of eight

²³ The exceptions indicated here are especially important for establishing this rule. After centuries of military prowess, in the eighteenth century, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Ottoman Empire were outgunned in the battlefield by states who proved able to muster larger resources. These great powers' reliance on old institutional arrangements, like the citizen army or the near-servile janissaries, was no match for the professional, permanent armies sustained by tax revenues, i.e. the hallmarks of what historians called the "fiscal military state". This is precisely what the sweeping fiscal and military reforms under Peter the Great achieved. In sharp contrast to the latter two, Russia, witnessed a remarkable transformation, with revenues rising to 11.7 day wages per capita by the 1780s.

countries, we can observe a variety of trajectories (Figure 3). In marked contrast to the major changes undergone by the other powers, the Ottoman Empire barely changed its constitution and, accordingly, its fiscal capacity remained stagnant (Pamuk 2004, pp. 230–2). Both executive constraints and fiscal capacity remained low, placing the empire close to the origin of the graph in Figure 3. England was also a singular case, given the positive relationship between constraints and fiscal capacity, as the strengthening of Parliament vis-à-vis the executive went together with increasing real revenues. However, the remaining six countries — continental powers engulfed in war and geopolitical tensions— present a negative relationship.²⁴

By 1500, except for the Ottoman Empire, the largest polity, countries were at a similar level, with moderate executive constraints and modest fiscal capacity. Over the following centuries, up to 1800, these countries diverged in constitutional terms but, with the notable exception of Poland, converged in fiscal capacity.²⁵ As anticipated by Hoffman’s Tournament Model (Hoffmann 2015), intensifying geopolitical competition led to similar fiscal outcomes across Europe by 1800 (see also Tilly 1993). The fact that they reached near parity in fiscal terms is consistent with what one would expect under intense geopolitical pressure, which forces states to maximize revenue. These countries had representative traditions and representative assemblies that negotiated the tax burden (either in the form of new taxes or new rates). Representative assemblies were effective in binding the power players to legitimate taxation. Thus, this set of countries originally had active representative institutions but increasingly bypassed them, once they obtained the fiscal resources and legitimacy. Although not formally abolished — not even in Russia — their national parliaments ceased to be called in the seventeenth century and were replaced by token institutions that “represented” the original representative institutions (the Neapolitan *Giunta*, the surviving Province Estates in parts of France, the Portuguese *Junta dos Três Estados* and the token *Cortes* of the Spanish Bourbon). The fact that these states were close to near parity in fiscal terms is what to be expected in a tense geopolitical competition, forcing them to maximize revenues.

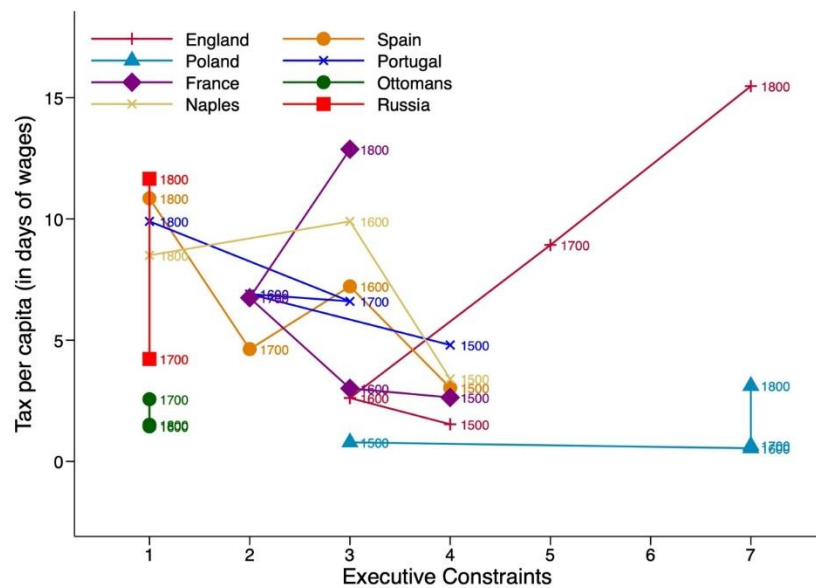
The case of Poland-Lithuania, which had the dimensions of a Great Power but whose constitutional institutions created political gridlock (Malinowski 2019) and crippled its military capacity (Frost 2000), shows *a contrario* how executive constraints by themselves are an insufficient foundation for growth. Poland-Lithuania exhibits a flat trajectory, in which increasing

²⁴ Our results contrast with the arguments of Dincecco (2015, 2017), who argues that states need to centralize first and only constrain the executive power later.

²⁵ We focus here on Naples, but for evidence about other parts of Italy, see Rota and Weisdorf (2020, 2021).

constitutional constraints had little effect on fiscal capacity over time, despite a challenging geopolitical environment. Tellingly, after analyzing the Republican institutions of the Polish-Lithuanian, Jean-Jacques Rousseau advised the country to reduce its territory if it wanted to keep its institutions and the ethos of the nobility (*szlachta*).²⁶ Eventually absorbed by its increasingly powerful rivals, the polity paid the ultimate penalty, whereas medium powers like Portugal and Naples avoided this threat.

Figure 3. State capacity and executive constraints



Sources: See text.

There were distinct paths to high fiscal capacity. Whereas England’s Parliament came to control the executive branch, by contrast, France, Naples, Portugal, Russia, and Spain grew their fiscal capacity by removing constitutional constraints — bypassing taxpayers and dealing instead at best with token committees representing the original representative institutions. The evidence confirms that increasing fiscal capacity is a distinct process that cannot be directly equated with either political regime type or economic growth. A prevalent view in the literature equates state building with the imposition of constraints on executive authority, an argument largely inspired by the English experience, where tax revenues rose after the Glorious Revolution and are often favorably contrasted with stagnant revenues under more authoritarian regimes like France. However, our findings suggest this interpretation is misleading. Once changes in income are considered, English revenue performance does not clearly surpass that of France. Furthermore, other polities with executive constraints, such

²⁶ Butterwick (2020).

as Poland-Lithuania, failed to achieve fiscal capacity, while authoritarian states like Russia did. Similarly, economic growth is a separate process: for most of Europe prior to 1800, growth was limited and insufficient to account for the two- to threefold increase in per capita revenues relative to income. Together, these findings indicate that state building was an autonomous process, shaped by distinct historical and institutional dynamics, and not merely a byproduct of economic development or regime type.

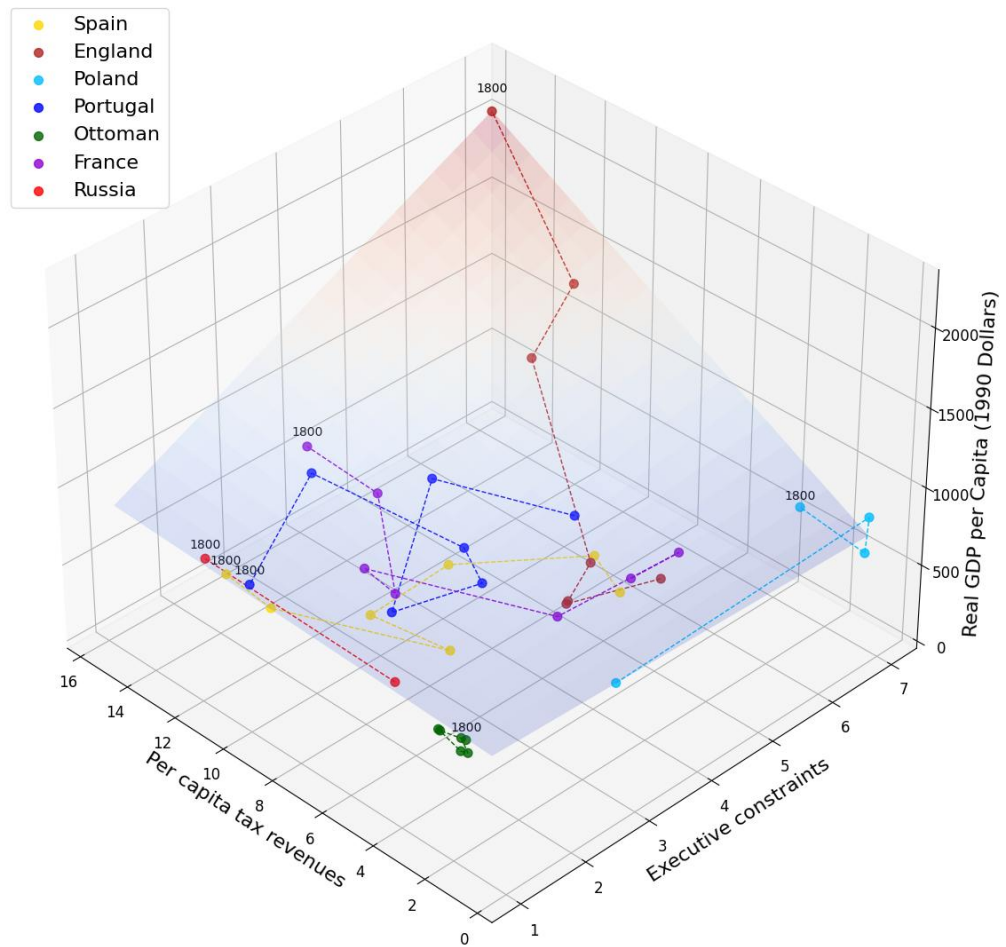
The differences documented here align with the differences in economic outcomes between England, the country which initiated modern economic growth (Broadberry et al. 2015), and the other states. Unlike her continental rivals, England's state combined high levels of fiscal capacity with a constitutionally constrained executive, as parliamentary supremacy rose hand in hand with increasing fiscal strength. A fiscally strong but constitutionally constrained executive proved to be the optimal condition for growth. England's gradual improvement in executive constraints after the Civil War (1641–51) paved the way for effective governance and modern economic growth. Elsewhere, development failures occurred where revenue-maximizing states, unchecked by constitutional mechanisms, discouraged investment, innovation, and entrepreneurship. Moreover, these states often failed to direct expenditure toward non-defense public goods (Costa et al. 2024).

By the end of the eighteenth century, England was the country closest to this optimal. The state was fiscally strong, but constitutionally limited. Parliament legitimated the construction of a broad tax base and a functioning credit system, which elevated England to the status of a great power. In particular, the supremacy of Parliament decisively increased borrowing capacity. After the 1672 “Stop of the Exchequer,” a partial default on Crown debts, creditors “must have reflected that had their loans been on “parliament security” instead of being backed only by the Crown's promises, they would not have been repudiated” (Dickson 2016, pp. 44–45, 50). After the Glorious Revolution, by contrast, Parliament guaranteed public loans by making them “debts of the nation” (Dickson 2016, p. 50). Sustained economic growth and the industrial revolution were outcomes of high state capacity (Bogart and Richardson 2009, 2011; Besley et al. 2025).

The economic evolution of England stands in stark contrast to the path tread by the continental powers. By 1500, France, Portugal, and Spain were among the richest countries in the region, but they fell behind in the following centuries (Palma and Santiago-Caballero 2024). Recent research has examined these countries' institutions (parliaments, coinage, debt systems) in the mid-seventeenth century (Henriques and Palma 2023). Over the early modern

period, their economic performance fell behind that of England and the Netherlands — an outcome long noted by many scholars (North 1990; Acemoglu et al. 2005, 2012). The evidence points to resource curse as the culprit behind reduced executive constraints and economic growth (Kedrosky and Palma 2025; Charotti et al. 2022). Figure 4 summarizes the diverse path of the eight states we have covered in this paper.

Figure 4. Executive constraints, fiscal capacity, and GDP per capita in constant GK “international” 1990 dollars.



Sources: Palma and Santiago-Caballero (2024, p.174), who summarize multiple sources cited there. For Poland, Malinowski and van Zanden (2017, p. 401); we use the 1820 figure for 1800 given the lack of data for the latter date; for Russia, Broadberry and Korchmina (2024), whose data is representative of the respective decade rather than exact years.

5. Conclusion

Early modern European states differed in the extent of their gains in state capacity, but also in the distinct pathways they followed to achieve them. Charles Tilly's thesis on warfare as a driver of state capacity helps explain the experiences of England and France, where heightened military pressures in Western Europe catalysed the development of taxation systems (Tilly 1993). However, in England, these gains emerged under a constrained, parliamentary regime, whereas in France they occurred without a parliament and with fragmented and localized political checks. Portugal and Spain experienced early peaks in revenue during their colonial zenith, suggesting that reliance on overseas wealth produced a resource curse that in the long run weakened not only economic performance but also domestic state-building. To the east, Poland exemplified a fragmented, noble-dominated polity resistant to central authority, while the Ottoman Empire's dependence on land-based taxation and the reluctance of its authoritarian regime to adopt Western military and bureaucratic innovations limited its institutional capacity. In contrast, Russia utilized its authoritarian structure to implement a late but significant surge in fiscal capacity, exemplifying a form of "catch-up" state-building driven by coercive centralization rather than organic institutional evolution.

At a more abstract level, the evidence confirms that state building is a process that cannot be directly equated with either political regime type. A prevalent view in the literature equates state building with the imposition of constraints on executive authority, an argument largely inspired by the English experience, where tax revenues rose after the Glorious Revolution and are often favorably contrasted with stagnant revenues under more authoritarian regimes like France. However, our findings suggest this interpretation is misleading. Other regimes with executive constraints, such as Poland, failed to achieve meaningful state-building, while authoritarian states like Russia did. Economic growth is similarly a separate process: for most of Europe prior to 1800, growth was limited and insufficient to account for the two- to threefold increase in per capita revenues relative to income. In a competitive geopolitical setting, states had to increase revenues. Poland and the Ottomans did not do so successfully and eventually suffered repeated military defeats and territorial loss as a consequence; most European countries instead followed during the early modern period a path of increasing capacity but weakening constraints. England was the exception.

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ONLINE APPENDIX

Table A1. Our Polity IV constraints on the executive score summary table.

	Spain	England	France	Naples	Ottoman Empire	Poland	Portugal	Russia
1400	5	5	4	1	1	2	5	N/A
1450	5	5	4	4	1	3	5	1
1500	4	4	4	4	1	3	4	1
1550	4	3	5	2	1	5	4	2
1600	3	3	3	3	1	7	2	2
1650	2	4	2	1	1	7	3	3
1700	2	5	2	1	1	7	3	1
1750	1	6	3	1	1	7	2	1
1800	1	7	3	1	1	7	1	1
1850	4	7	5	N/A	1	N/A	3	1

Sources: see the main text and section “Polity IV Constraints on the executive: detailed explanations” of the Appendix below.

Table A2. Per capita tax revenues divided by nominal wages, 1500-1850

	England	Dutch Republic	Spain	France	Venice	Austria	Prussia	Poland	Ottoman Empire	Portugal	Kingdom of Naples	Russia
1500-09	1.5	N/A	3.0	2.6	10.4	N/A	N/A	0.8	N/A	4.8	3.4	N/A
1550-59	2.7	N/A	4.0	3.2	9.5	2.4	N/A	0.4	1.7	10.4	7.7	N/A
1600-09	2.6	12.0	7.2	3.0	7.5	N/A	1.1	0.5	1.4	6.9	9.9	N/A
1650-59	4.2	13.6	7.7	8.0	10.6	2.6	2.1	1.3	1.7	5.9	5.6	N/A
1700-09	8.9	24.1	4.6	6.7	13.4	4.9	6.6	0.6	2.6	6.6	N/A	4.2
1750-59	9.7	20.9	9.1	10.0	12.4	7.9	15.9	0.3	2.5	10.0	5.6	N/A
1780-89	15.5	24.7	10.9	12.9	14.1	14.7	12.3	3.1	1.5	9.9	8.5	11.7
1850-59	13.6	19.0	13.9	15.9	N/A	29.3	13.9	N/A	5.0	N/A	N/A	N/A

Sources: see the main text.

Table A3. Per capita real tax revenues, 1500-1850, a decade around given years

	Dutch Re- public	England	Portugal	France	Spain	Prussia	Venice	Austria	King- dom of Naples	Ottoman Empire	Poland	Russia
1500-09	N/A	2.9	5.2	3.1	4.6	N/A	9.7	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.9	N/A
1550-59	N/A	4.0	6.5	3.3	4.3	N/A	7.5	3.1	6.8	1.4	0.4	N/A
1600-09	19.6	3.6	5.0	3.1	7.7	0.9	6.8	N/A	8.3	1.0	0.6	N/A
1650-59	20.6	6.6	3.8	8.2	6.4	2.2	8.3	3.2	N/A	1.6	1.7	N/A
1700-09	44.5	16.4	4.6	7.4	4.1	6.0	11.3	5.1	N/A	2.7	0.6	6.4
1750-59	38.1	18.6	10.6	9.2	7.0	13.0	9.0	7.3	6.1	2.2	0.3	N/A
1780-89	40.6	25.2	8.1	11.8	8.8	9.3	8.2	11.5	9.0	1.4	3.3	12.7
1850-59	22.5	26.7	N/A	19.5	17.2	17.8	N/A	14.8	N/A	5.2	N/A	N/A

Sources: see the main text.

Notes: The measure consists of per capita government revenue in Allen respectability baskets. Countries appear ranked by their 1750-59 order. Percentages correspond to medians; Kingdom of Naples corresponds to pre-1816 borders; Portugal includes imperial revenues. In the case of Dutch Republic, for 1850-59 it refers to the Kingdom of the Netherlands. For Russia, Korchmina (2025).

Polity IV Constraints on the executive: detailed explanations

Castile

By 1400, the *Cortes* of Castile (a separate polity from Aragon or Navarre, which kept their own assemblies, despite being united under a single monarch) fit the description of an “accountability group”. The Castilian representative assemblies had their heyday precisely during this period, as they managed to mitigate the fiscal demands of the king and acquired de facto roles in consenting to administrative reform, laws, and changes in coinage (Triano 2019, p. 80). The new dynasty of the Trastámara largely owed its legitimacy to the *Cortes* (Nieto Soria 2021, p. 95-7) and summoned them more often than his predecessors (Serrano 1986, p.406). The strong reductions in the sums asked in the 1430s and 1440s are a testament to the strength of the Castilian *Cortes* (Triano 2019, p. 96-7). The *Cortes* were ultimately cut short to only 17 municipalities (González-Sánchez 2017) as a response from complaints voiced by the municipalities themselves over the expenses caused by their frequent summoning. On the other hand, the Crown granted the *Cortes* the possibility to appoint fiscal officers for the taxes demanded. This concession opened a very active phase for the *Cortes* in which they got the strength to discuss the issue of coinage and to demand fiscal reforms, even if they lost the initiative in foreign affairs (González-Sánchez 2017).

The “Catholic Kings” managed to bypass the Castilian *Cortes* between 1480 and 1498 and denied the *Cortes* its legislative and political ambitions (Zamora 1988, p. 52-6). In Castile, under Carlos I, the *Cortes* attained the long aspiration of having a permanent committee to oversee the taxes: the *Diputación* (Fortea 2008, p. 11). The municipalities also obtained an old aspiration: the fixation (*encabezamiento*) of the sums of the sales taxes (*alcabalas*). The *Cortes* of Toledo in 1538-9 rejected the sales taxes known as *sisas*. At the same time, the *comuneros* revolt was violently put down, and the right to sit at the assembly remained restricted to 18 great municipalities (i.e. the previous 17 plus Granada) which were, however, increasingly represented in the *Cortes* by municipal rulers (*regidores*) appointed by the monarchy (Dominguez 1978, pp. 196-8). This strengthening of the *Cortes* was interrupted by the death of Philip II (Gelabert 2003). In the early seventeenth century, The *Cortes* met more frequently but also became clearly more pliable. Executive constraints weakened, as exemplified by the inability of the *Cortes* to stop the major fiscally motivated debasements of the coinage undertaken by the Crown and by the lowering responsiveness of the Spanish kings to the petitions and demands of their subjects (Henriques and Palma, 2023, p. 273) even if the subsidies

consented had a high degree of conditionality). In 1655, a royal decree abolished the fiscal role of the *Cortes*, a decision that sounded the death knell for the institution, which ceased to meet in their traditional form in the next decade. The *Cortes* of 1665 had consented to the *millones* until 1668, administered by a commission. The *Cortes* summoned to 1667 agreed that the same subsidy would be prolonged every six years, with the monarchy negotiating the figures individually with each of the 17 municipalities. To coordinate these efforts, the monarchy appointed a commission (the *comission de millones*) that represented the *Cortes* and ended up effectively sidelining their role in apportioning the tax burden (Guillamon and Rodrigues 2004). This commission emptied the *Cortes* of its most important role.

When in 1698 the possibility of summoning *Cortes* to respond to a dynastic crisis resurfaced: the nobility and the high officers and the municipal elites were decidedly again opening a “Pandora box” (Garcia-Badell 2006, p. 145). Under the Bourbon dynasty, the *Cortes* were reformed to represent the whole of Spain (except Navarre), but they did not recover their fiscal powers and became essentially ceremonial. Non-parliamentary taxation resumed after the *Cortes* lost their fiscal prerogative by decree in 1655, with 11 kingdom-wide *servicios* imposed between 1667 and 1785 (Artola 1982, p. 175). Eventually, even the *Deputación* was extinguished in 1698.

England

By 1400, the Parliament of England deserves to be classified as an “accountability group” that was able to exert some checks on the executive. As “the institutional expression of the community of the realm” (Harriss 1996, p. 510) parliament was entitled to negotiate on its behalf with the monarch. The main political role of the parliament – the consent to taxation – was based on this. As such, there are very few instances of non-parliamentary taxation, and the monarchs understood that only through parliament could they obtain the resources to finance their military projects. The regularity of meetings of the English Parliament contributed to a stronger sense of continuity by comparison of all other cases studied here. Nevertheless, Westminster proved very pliable to the demands of the monarch, with no refusals and relatively rare reduction of the taxes demanded.²⁷

The Tudors “debased” the legislative role of the Parliament and exerted more royal control over the representatives (Keir 1973, pp. 99, 139). In the reigns of Elizabeth and James I,

²⁷ See Henriques and Palma (2023), Tables 6 and 7.

constitutional historians speak of an “ascendancy of the Crown in government”. Although the formal fiscal and legal competences of Parliament were not affected (Keir 1973, pp. 155-6; Russell 1990), monarchs showed little inclination to negotiate (Henriques and Palma 2023, Figure 6).

In the buildup to the Civil War, Parliament successfully opposed royal meddling in the elections of the representatives to the Commons (Keir 1973, pp. 174-7) and kept a united stance against the unpopular foreign policy of Charles I and his fiscal devices. The monarchy responded by proclamations of the divine right of kings and by increasing non-parliamentary taxation legitimacy. The parliamentary rebellion that ensued led to the abolition of the monarchy, but not to Parliamentary sovereignty with parliaments adding to their traditional fiscal role. By 1700, England was under the “Classical Age of the Constitution”, which took shape from the 1660s, and according to which sovereigns “could not legislate nor tax outside of parliament”, though the monarch retained executive powers. Both prior and after the Glorious Revolution of 1688-9, “parliamentary encroachment” was resisted by the Crown, which kept the veto on Parliament. The creation of the prime-minister as an established position with control over the expenditure and the annual budget materialized the strength of Parliament vis-a-vis the Monarchy (Cox 2016, p. 12). This warrants at least a score of 5. The second half of the eighteenth century saw the emergence of a Parliament-appointed cabinet and prime-minister which acted independently of the Crown”. Finally, with the Act of 1797, the Parliament would no longer be dissolved by the death of the person of the king (Keir 1973, p. 375). Hence the score of 7 given by Polity IV for 1800 (Marshall et al. 2002) makes sense.

France

From 1400 to 1789, the French monarchy contended with not one but three different accountability bodies, whose relative strength fluctuated over the centuries: the countrywide General Estates (the English term for the *États Generaux*), the Provincial Estates, and finally the *Parlement*, a court which took a constitutional role.

The institutional history of the General Estates is like other Western representative institutions. The General Estates were a representative assembly whose origins can be found in summoning by Philip the Fair of the three orders in 1302. Called *consilium* or *parliamentum*, these early assemblies were one of the many forms of representation, together with provincial estates and order-specific états (Drolet 2017). As revealed by their very name, the General

Estates were a representative assembly that voiced the “general” interest of the realm, it reflected the local communities as well as the clergy and nobility. They proved a formidable obstacle to the monarchy in the fourteenth century, when aids solicited by the king were refused in 1321 and 1328. In the aftermath of the Battle of Poitiers and capture of John II by the English, the Estates General tried, but failed, to seize an executive role under the famous Étienne Marcel.

The monarchy distrusted the Estates and preferred to deal with their more pliable provincial counterparts. Nevertheless, the General Estates remained an option for kings to obtain the assent of the entire realm. The *États Généraux* meeting in Tours in 1483-4 “self-consciously representing the whole *res publica* of the kingdom” (Hébert 2015). This assembly obtained the reduction that he would not levy new *aides* and would keep permanent taxation under certain levels, an effective constitutional constraint (Chevalier 2002, p. 43-5). The troublesome Estates General were not pliable to the will of the monarch. Their strength proved their weakness, as being too difficult to negotiate with, unlike the ductile local assemblies, they were seldom summoned until 1614, when an unruly session failed to reach any decision. In 1648, they were summoned but did not meet, as the crown considered their meeting potentially disruptive (Mousnier 1981). The fateful *États* of 1789 are not entirely exceptional in this regard.

The *États de Province* (here translated as Province Estates) were representative assemblies comprising a variable number of representatives of the clergy, nobility and the representatives of the towns within a given province. As the events in the 1350s greatly weakened the Estates General, the provincial assemblies emerged as the legitimate body for consenting to extraordinary aids (*aides*). When *aides* were solicited, the Province Estates drove hard bargains in their lengthy negotiations with the king’s proxies (the *intendants*). Yet historians have found very few instances of refusal by the most powerful estates. Essentially, the monarchy held all the cards and via patronage and prosecution could bend the will of the most obdurate members. Ultimately, the king could simply do away with these assemblies. For instance, the Estates of Dauphiné were dissolved in 1628 after Louis XIII thought them excessively obdurate in the fiscal bargaining (Loiseau 2023, p. 123).

By 1620 (Mousnier 1981, p. 139) already nine *États de Province* had already disappeared (Orleans, Anjou, Maine, Touraine, Berry, Marche, Limousin, Haute Auvergne et Perigord).

Eighteenth Province Estates still remained by then: Normandy, Brittany, Languedoc, Provence, Dauphiné, Burgundy Basse-Auvergne, Rouergue, Guyenne, Quercy, Velay, Béarn, Labour, Basse Navarre, Nébousan, Quatre Vallées, Bigorre, Soule, Comté de Foix. Four of these provinces (Béarn, Dauphiné, Rouergue, and Quercy) became *pays d'élection* between 1621 and 1628, although the latter two recovered their *d'état* condition. Guyenne and Normandy lost their status as *pays d'états* in 1635 and 1657–9, respectively, with Basse-Auvergne (1675), Quercy (1683) and Rouergue (1683), while Louis XIV added another tier of *pays d'états* with the conquered territories of 1670: Franche-Comté, Artois, Flanders and Cambrésis. The core of France was under direct royal control, with provincial estates limited to frontier territories (Blaufarb 2010).

Thus, by the end of the seventeenth century, in the words of Hoffman (1994), “the royal tactics had rendered the remaining estates completely docile”. Also, the estates could not mount any significant obstacle to the introduction of “universal” taxes (the *vingtième* and the *capitation*) by Louis XIV and later by Louis XVI (Kwass 1999, Degrave 2023).

Nevertheless, the Province Estates should not be neglected. The calculations made by Anne Degrave (2023) show that in the seventeenth century the net per capita tax burden in the *pays d'états* was half that of the *pays d'élection*; at the time of the French Revolution, the same measure was close to the 1/5. This low per capita net revenue was achieved at the price of corruption and economic inefficiency, as revealed by the null effect on living standards of the Provincial Estates (Degrave 2023).

One indicator of the overall strength of the *États de Province* over the executive is their coverage of French territory. By 1500, 60% of territory had provincial assemblies to negotiate and allocate the tax burden, and which retained some administrative roles, with the rest being *pays d'élection* governed by an officer appointed by the monarch (the *élu*). At the eve of the Revolution, the share of *pays d'états* had fallen to only 30 percent of France. As such, it would not be correct to ignore the constitutional role of the states, however compliant they were to the king's demands. Cases studies on individual estates led Willian Beik (2005, p. 205) to conclude that these “continued to be important not so much as defenders of local liberties but as intermediaries who facilitated royal government while defending the interests of provincial elites.” Historians agree that the *États Provinciaux* increased their scope of executive

activities (Beik 2005), but their capacity to represent broad local interests was very low (as shown by the mismatch between the tax burden and the living standards (Degrave 2023).

The Parlement of Paris (or *Parlement de Paris*) was one of 15 regional courts also called parlements (Gay et al. 2024). In its origins, it stemmed from the *Curia Regis* as a court rendering justice on behalf of the monarch in cases involving the king's vassals and officers. Its role as the keeper of the laws issued by the monarch led to the so-called *droit de rémontrance*, which amounted to a judicial review of the laws issued by the king). By the late 16th century, the PP became the guardian of the *Lois Fondamentales du Royaume* (Fundamental Laws of the Realm). While this right was not absolute as the king could force through the laws by means of a special case (*lit de justice*), forced registration led to magistrates' strikes and refusals to serve (Swann 1999, p. 10), delays and the obstruction of future legislation (Feutry, 2013). After the apparent ending of Estates General after 1614, this *lit de justice* was the single most important obstacle to the king's prerogatives. The Parlement even claimed to have inherited the role of the Estates General as representative of the entire kingdom. Louis XIV suspended the *droit de rémontrance* in 1673. Nevertheless, as the Sun King died in 1715, the regent, needing to overturn the late king's will, sent it to the Parlement de Paris to test its validity. Still, Louis XV and Louis XVI had both spars with the *Parlement*, the former suspending it in 1771 and the exiling it in 1786 (Feutry, 2013). Under the latter, Parlement blocked useful financial reforms proposed by the king's ministers (Jaaidane et al., 2023) and played a decisive role in opposing the monarch in the 1787-9 "pre-Revolution" period (Égret 1961) that led to the summoning of the first General Estates since 1614.

Given this complex picture, sixteenth-century France (1500 and 1550 to 1600) gets a score of 3, as the Estates General were active and able to resist royal will, though. By 1650, the *Parlement* and the Province Estates were still active. Thus, the last phase of the reign of the Sun King was the apex of French absolutism, when Provincial Estates and the *Parlement de Paris* had no constitutional role and the General Estates did not meet, hence the score of 1 in 1700. Afterwards, the *Parlement* recovered its previous strength vis-à-vis the monarch and the provincial assemblies continued their passive, but nor entirely ineffective, resistance to the fiscal demands of the crown. Nevertheless, the executive could still increase taxation or default without constitutional constraints.

Naples

The Neapolitan *Parlamento* acted as an accountability group vis-à-vis the monarchy. The *Parlamento* was first summoned in the late 13th century. Under the Angevine dynasty (1266-1443) its meetings were sporadic and motivated by dynastic and political, rather than fiscal, issues and the monarch could (and did) demand taxes without consent from this assembly. The conquest of Naples by the Aragonese in 1443, meant a sea-change in the country's institutions. As it was the norm in the polities united under the Crown of Aragon (D'Agostino 1978; Scarton and Senatore 2018), an overhauled representative assembly, first reunited in 1443, acquired legislative responsibilities and a large political role in the, often fractious, politics of the realm. For this parliament, *all* the municipal governments (the *università demaniali*) were also summoned (Scarton and Senatore 2018, p. 256).

The Aragonese dynasty (1443-1504) enhanced the role of representative assemblies. Thus, the kingdom-wide parliament (*Parlamento Generale*) met very often, and the municipalities sent their special delegations. The once sporadic parliament met 17 times from 1443 to 1497, and kings Alfonso and Ferrante promoted other 10 meetings on a regional scale or with a consultative role. Unlike most monarchies at the time, their fiscal role was not so much to consent to taxation but instead to consent to changes (in the size, distribution, and enforcement rules) of the annual *donativo*. In this phase, the parliament proved an apt counterweight to the demands of the monarchs, having refused the increase of the sum demanded at least once (in 1474; Scarton and Senatore, 2018, p. 360).

In the early sixteenth century, the General Parliament of the Kingdom (*Parlamento Generale del Regno*) convened the most important barons, the municipal representatives of the cities (*demaniali*) and the *Giunta degli Eletti* from the city of Naples (with six elected members, five from the nobility and one from the people). Since 1566, it met biannually. It approved the amount and timing of an annual contribution (*donativo*) and its distribution across the different towns and districts. Under the Spanish rule, the *parlamento* did prove very amenable to the interests of the Viceroy. Calabria counted 14 tax increases between 1542 and 1640, resulting in the trebling of the per capita rate of the *donativo* (from 1.5 to 4.8 *ducati*). The lack of opposition made the *parlamento* redundant. As such, in 1628, only 35 representatives took part personally although they vote for 336 absent representatives (that sent procurations) (D'Agostino 2022: p. 25). After 1642, *parlamenti* were no longer summoned and were in practice replaced by the city government of Naples (Calabria 2002, p. 41). The concerns of the

realm were thus voiced by the urban elites, who controlled the city's municipal institutions, since it was in the capital that most of the taxation occurred (D'Agostino (2022, p. 30). The end of the *parlamento* is explained by the fact that it finally agreed on raising the tax rate of the subsidy. For this reason, for the Spanish rule, after 1642 the *parlamento* was both useless and dangerous as a potential vehicle for anti-fiscal revolts (D'Agostino 2022, p. 32-4).

Ottoman Empire

There was no formal constraint on the Ottoman executive until the late 19th century. There was no parliament or other legislative body that could limit the Sultan's decisions. The Imperial Divan, the cabinet of the Empire, was composed of officials appointed by the Sultan who served at his pleasure. Initially, the administrative apparatus was manned by Turcoman aristocratic families, who had an autonomous power basis. They were, however, purged in the 15th century and were increasingly replaced by the *devshirme*, the personal slaves of the Sultan, which did not enjoy any legal protection. The sultan also held legislative power, and his decrees had full authority.²⁸ While in theory the laws had to be consistent with Islamic principles, in practice, the legal code contained clauses that were patently in contradiction or only marginally compatible with Muslim legal traditions. The judges and the religious scholars (*ulema*) tasked with interpreting Islamic law were trained and appointed by a dedicated state department.²⁹

The formal political institutions outlined above hide informal constraints that rulers had to consider when governing. Early Sultans were involved in day-to-day governing and commanded military operations in person. Nevertheless, after the 17th century, with growing sophistication of the administrative and military bureaucracy, the Sultans took on a more symbolic role and delegated more often.³⁰ The rulers also had to consider and balance cliques within the administrative apparatus. Before the 17th century, all sons of the ruler had a claim on succession and cliques formed behind the contenders. After the 17th century, the establishment of agnatic seniority reduced the tension over succession.³¹ Still, cliques and interest groups within the palace and military frequently revolted and deposed Sultans. There was also a gradual shift in the political balance between the central government and magnates in the countryside. After the apex of centralized administrative power from the sixteenth to the

²⁸ İnalcık (1973). Imber (2002)

²⁹ Kuran (2011)

³⁰ Darling (1996)

³¹ Pierce (1993)

eighteenth century, local magnates increasingly consolidated power through tax farming contracts and private armies and could challenge the orders of the central government.³²

These fractures, however, do not qualify as institutional constraints on the executive. The cliques within the administrative apparatus can be characterized as divisions and rent seeking activities within the executive, rather than outside constraints over it. They were transient and never formalized. The fracture between the central government and local magnates could potentially evolve into institutional constraints, as it did in European history, but did not. The local magnates lacked organizational and ideological capacity to coordinate and effectively constrain the center, and the central government relied on divide and rule strategies to undermine them.³³ Eventually, during the nineteenth-century modernization program, the magnates were eliminated and central government consolidated control over the countryside.³⁴

Poland

After two centuries of fragmentation into several duchies under different branches of the Piast dynasty, Ladislas I managed to reunify the country in 1320. Under Casimir III, the monarchy was undisputed and there was no representative assembly. The Polish kings were also sufficiently strong to tax the lands of the nobility via a permanent tax (the *Poradlne*). Nevertheless, a series of disputed successions starting in 1360 and the exclusion of cadet branches of the Piast family (Frost 2015, p. 12), placed the kings in a subordinate political position relative to the nobility (*szlachta*). This inaugurated the process of foreign leaders bargaining with the nobility to secure the crown and giving away vast privileges (Davies 2005, p. 163-5).

The fifteenth century reinforced the kingmaking role of the high nobility, as disputed successions were the norm. The dynastic upheavals largely allowed the nobility to obtain more concessions from the candidates. The 1374 Privileges of Kassa issued by the crown to the nobility to secure the feminine succession to the throne (Davies 2005, p. 164). Specifically, it was established that public offices would be reserved to the Polish nobility and the rates of the permanent land tax (*Poradlne*) would be capped and could not be revised without the consent of the assembly of the nobles. In 1386, kingless Poland presents herself as a state

³² Quataert (2005)

³³ Barkey (1994), Aksan (2007)

³⁴ Zürcher (2004).

(*corona regni Poloniae*) in her dealings with the Great Duke of Lithuania, Jagellio, which became King of Poland. These limitations mean that by 1400 the executive was not all powerful and the Polity IV Constraints on executive score is 2.

The first half of the 15th century saw the continuation of the process of deepening of the noble privileges and further limitation of the royal prerogatives to secure the throne. In 1430, under the so-called “Jedlina Privileges”, the monarch conceded that nobles could no longer be imprisoned without court order (Frost 2015, p. 352). The king could no longer expropriate the nobility without a court order. Moreover, the legal and executive powers of local state officials were weakened, as it was allowed for the nobles to oust the local representatives of the king from their office and Those reforms further constrained the executive and limited. By 1450 and in 1500. The Polity IV Constraints on executive score is 3.

In the sixteenth century, a set of institutions translated the political ascendancy of the nobility into a solid institutional framework that would endure until the late eighteenth-century. Under Alexander I, the Sejm of Radom (1505) passed a statute stating no new law could pass without the approval of the Chamber of Envoys (*nihil novi*), with the argument, which was compiled shortly afterwards (Frost 2015, p. 351). Accordingly, when being elected, Alexander I was told by the nobility in no uncertain terms that “it was not by succession, but by free election that the kings ascended to the Polish throne” (cit. in Frost 2015, p. 346). Likewise, the 1501 Mielnik Articles set in no uncertain terms “the conditions under which the monarch might lawfully resisted and even deprived of his throne should he behave tyrannically” (Frost 2015, p. 347).

The parliamentary system was composed of the Great Diet, Sejm, composed of the King, Senate, and the Chamber of Envoys. These were formed in 1493. The Chamber of Envoys was composed of representatives of ancient regional diets, the regional assemblies of the nobility (*sejmiki*). This chamber retained legislative power and appointed some statewide offices, including the treasurer, while others were appointed by the Senate. By 1550, the Polity IV Constraints on executive score is 3. The second half of the 16th century saw the formation of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the entrenchment of the “Golden Freedoms of the Nobility”. The 1569 Union of Lublin united Poland and Lithuania as a “Commonwealth” (the original Polish term *Rzeczpospolita* conveyed the Latin *Respublica*), with Lithuania

adopting the Polish institutions (including the regional *sejmiki*) and a commensurate representation in Parliament.

Yet another succession crisis in 1573, led to a decisive step in codifying the rule that the Polish kings, like the pope or the Holy Roman emperor, were elected instead of succeeding along dynastic rules. In the spirit of the earlier 1501 Articles of Mielnik, the 1573 Henrician Articles were a permanent constitution between the “Polish nation” and a newly elected king sworn upon his election to the throne. Under this constitution, the Great Diets had to be summoned every other year, and the monarchy could be abolished, if need be. This separated Poland-Lithuania from most other European countries where the executive had a clear upper hand. The election of kings resulted in some successful rulers, like the Hungarian Prince Stephen Bathory (Stephen I). But it also allowed for candidates who were hostile to the Commonwealth’s existence – such as Ivan the Terrible, who bid for the throne in 1576 while his armies were ravaging Lithuanian lands (Davies 2005), or even worse, for bribery and foreign interference.

As historians of Poland indicate, the role of the *Sejm* and the Polish-Lithuanian institutions was not state-building, but protection of privileges enjoyed by the gentry (Frost 2000, p. 150). For this reason, since 1600 constraints on executive score must be 7, since there is parity between the executive and the accountability body. The financial support of the *Sejm* for non-defensive military operations was very limited.

In the early seventeenth century, Poland-Lithuania was at its prime and on the verge of imposing a Polish ruler on Russia despite, not because of, the *Sejm*. The great victories of Kircholm (1605) and Kloschino (1610) were obtained by Polish armies fighting with numerical inferiority and with limited fiscal support from the *Sejm*. While a source of pride amongst Polish elites, the political hold of the *sejmiki* over the monarchs proved unfit for Europe’s unforgiving geopolitical conditions. From 1635 onwards, the Polish system proved unable to pull the country’s great-power weight at the service of geopolitical security, which in the plains of eastern Europe entailed some measure of offensive wars (Frost 2000, p. 152). Around 1650, the rule of unanimity led to the unintended development of the *liberum veto*, the stipulation that the *Sejm* had to be dissolved if any of the members of the Chamber of Envoys objected. This placed crippling limitations on the king’s executive power. The *liberum veto* system made it very difficult to create a royal faction that would secure a majority in the Great Diet and, consequently, most seventeenth-century meetings of the *Sejm* ended with a *liberum veto*. The fact that Austria, Prussia, Sweden and Russia formally agreed to preserve the

republican institutions in treaties signed from 1667 to 1696 is a clear sign that the system worked against the interests of the country (Frost 2004, p. 13). An equally clear indication of these limitations was that the 1717 *Sejm*, which met at the thick of the Great Northern War, voted to drastically limit the size of the army caving to pressure by Peter, the Great (Frost 2004). The political system of the commonwealth remained largely unchanged until its demise in the late 18th century when it was partitioned by Russia, Prussia, and Austria. In the words of a widely-travelled English visitor to Poland, liberty “was the source of Polish wretchedness”.³⁵

Portugal

Until the reign of Fernando I (1369-83), the Portuguese *Cortes* were seldom summoned. After the wars, debasements and taxation that marked that reign, the *Cortes* acquired an important political role and the capacity to consent, and reject, fiscal demands under the dynasty of Avis (1385-1580). The *Cortes* held their fiscal role and even obtained two important concessions: the devolution of the administration of the sales taxes to the municipalities and their regular summoning (agreed by João III in 1525). Nevertheless, the Spanish rule (1580-1640) altered the status quo of the Cortes, which rarely met under the foreign monarchs. Without the Cortes, non-parliamentary taxation and forced loans returned. Henriques and Palma (2023) document the existence and effective constraining behavior of parliaments in Portugal into the late seventeenth century.³⁶

When the country recovered its independence, the monarchy resorted to the Cortes to find the necessary legitimacy and material support. The parliament obliged and became indispensable during times of war, with the creation of a permanent Junta charged with the administration of the income tax granted by the *Cortes*. The assembly was consulted in the second half of the century for dynastic and political issues and declared the inability of Afonso VI to reign effectively, confirming the palace coup led by his brother Pedro.³⁷ Nevertheless, the Cortes did not meet after 1699, as the monarchs did not want to negotiate further taxes with this body. This situation of “no taxation and no representation” lasted until the second half

³⁵ Cited in Frost (2004, p. 11).

³⁶ Henriques and Palma (2023) counted all the confirmed Castilian and Portuguese meetings of parliaments, as well as classifying their actions, between the late Middle Ages and the early nineteenth century. A recent revision of the sources by Dias and Pinto (2024) identified that the meeting of the Portuguese Cortes in 1495 (in Montemor-o-Novo) is no longer in dispute.

³⁷ This happened in 1667, so it does not affect our Polity IV ranking for 1700.

of the eighteenth century, when non-parliamentary taxation occurred again and became legitimate.

Russia

Despite the association of Russia with the autocratic power of the Tsars, the Russian lands had a long tradition of collective government. In 1611-2, at the height of the Time of Troubles, Russia was even ruled by a representative assembly (Keep 1957, p. 103). Kievan Rus had known the military council, whereby great military decisions were debated with the nobility, a tradition that was alive in the emergence of Muscovy (Ruttenbach 1961, p. 41). The church also developed an enlarged chapters or councils (*sobor*) in which the clergy and lay persons discussed and could challenge the actions of the prince. After the end of Kievan Rus, the northern city-states were parliamentary republics, whose assembly (*veche*) appointed city officials and issued laws. In cities like Novgorod, this system survived the Tatar Yoke and lasted until the fifteenth century (Shekhovtsov 2014, Sablin and Kukushkin 2019).

The unification of Russia was led by the princes of Moscow, a city where no *veche* tradition had consolidated. The power of the hereditary princes of Muscovy was not autocratic, though, as there was a firm accounting body: the Boyar Duma. The Boyar Duma did not have representatives but was independent from the monarch as it was not summoned by him. As such, the Boyar Duma influenced the policies and laws directed by the Grand Prince (Ruttenbach 1961, p. 11).

Ivan IV the Terrible led to the development of a new institution, that nineteenth-century historians called the Zemsky Sobor (the council of the land) to act as a counterweight to the Boyar Duma. This new assembly included representatives of the cities, craftsmen the merchant interests, although playing second fiddle to the nobility and church (Keep 1957, p. 102). Following Keep (1957, p. 102), it was during the “Time of Troubles” (1598-1613) that arose “a new conception of the nature and role of the Sobor as a “council of the whole land”, expressing the will of the entire nation and composed of popularly elected representatives instead of mere official members”. Parallel to the *Zemsky Sobor*, stood the Boyar Duma, a collective assembly that reunited all nobles.

By 1600, the Zemsky Sobor represented the ultimate authority in Russia electing Tsars Boris Godunov (1598) and Michael Romanov (1613). With some 700 participants (Keep 1957, p.

104, Liseitsev 2019), the latter was possibly the largest representative assembly ever summoned. The election of Michael Romanov was disputed, as there were many factions and candidates. Like many elections in its Western rival, Poland-Lithuania, Michael Romanov was chosen precisely for not threatening the rights of the Boyars, a point explicitly made by Prince Sheremetev (Keep 1957, p. 104).

Unlike its western counterparts, the fiscal role of the Zemsky Sobor was not clearly defined. At the height of its power, the assembly consented to three out of five general taxes between 1614 and 1618, but this was not the rule (Keep 1957, p. 106). In 1632, 1633 and 1637 the Zemsky Sobor gave its assent to the collection of an extraordinary subsidy destined for wars against Poland and the Ottoman Empire. Like in the other polities, there are signs of bargaining and reluctance to consent to the funds demanded, especially in the 1633 Zemsky Sobor.

Not unlike what we see in seventeenth-century France, the Zemsky Sobor proved for the monarchs to be too strong to be summoned. The unruly Zemsky Sobor of 1642, in which nearly all the 192 representatives took a position against the proposed military intervention, was a key factor in Tsar Alexis I not wanting to summon any Zemsky Sobor in his long reign (1645-79) (Keep 1957, p. 113), despite being forced to convoke one, the Great Sobor of 1648-9, to placate a revolt. Of the 900 petitions placed in the Great Sobor of 1648-9, at least 87 were enshrined as laws, a success rate comparable with early seventeenth-century Castile and England (Henriques and Palma 2023, p. 274). The Zemsky Sobor continued to be summoned for, and lend its authority, to major decisions to be taken by the Tsar under the two immediate successors of Michael I until 1680. However, under Peter “The Great”, the Zemsky Sobor ceased to meet. The Boyar Duma continued to meet until it was abolished by decree in 1711 and, supposedly replaced by a Senate, whose attendants were the emperor’s appointees.

Polity IV Constraints on the executive

AJR below corresponds to Acemoglu et al. (2005)'s classification, in their Appendix. This is shown here for ready comparison with ours.

CASTILE/SPAIN, 1400-1800

	AJR	Our classifica- tion	Explanations
1400	2	5	Parliament influenced decisions on foreign politics, had a legislative role and approved extraordinary taxation.
1450	N/A	5	Idem.
1500	1	4	Legislative and fiscal roles intact, but loss of influence on foreign politics decisions.
1550	N/A	4	Idem.
1600	1	3	Capacity to oppose the king's fiscal demands and monetary policy weakened.
1650	N/A	2	Capacity to oppose to the king's fiscal demands and monetary policy further eroded, loss of legislative influence, with the end of the provision of the <i>capítulos</i> . In 1655, a royal decree transferred the fiscal role of the <i>Cortes</i> to a permanent committee (<i>Diputación</i>).
1700	1	2	<i>Diputación</i> extinguished in 1698; <i>Cortes</i> only played a ceremonial role.
1750	1	1	<i>Cortes</i> only played a ceremonial role; occurrence of extra-parliamentary taxation.
1800	2	1	Idem.

ENGLAND/GREAT BRITAIN, 1400-1800

	AJR	Our classification	Explanations
1400	3	5	Parliament influenced decisions on foreign politics, had a legislative role and approved extraordinary taxation, unable to control expenditure or appoint officers.
1450	N/A	5	Idem.
1500	2	4	Loss of influence on foreign politics, with remaining prerogatives intact.
1550	N/A	3	Erosion of the legislative role, with fiscal prerogatives intact.
1600	3	3	Fiscal and legal competences of Parliament not affected.
1650	N/A	4	Parliament exerted checks on the executive.
1700	5	5	Parliament appointed officers, had a legislative role, approved extraordinary taxation, could control expenditure but had no influence on decisions on foreign politics.
1750	5	6	Parliament appointed prime-minister cabinet and held exclusive legislative and fiscal powers.
1800	7	7	With the decree of 1793, Parliament ceased to be dissolved by the death of the King.

FRANCE, 1400-1800

	AJR	Our classification	Explanations
1400	3	2	Estates General met very seldom.
1450	N/A	2	Ascent of the Province Estates
1500	2	4	Loss of influence on foreign politics, with remaining prerogatives intact.
1550	N/A	3	Erosion of the legislative role, with fiscal prerogatives intact.
1600	3	3	Estates General seen as the arbiter of national politics, especially in terms of religion
1650	N/A	4	Mass extinction of Province Estates under Louis XIII and Louis XIV. Estates General summoned in 1648 (but not convened)
1700	5	5	Parliament appointed officers, had a legislative role, approved extraordinary taxation, could control expenditure but had no influence on decisions on foreign politics.
1750	5	6	<i>Parlement de Paris</i> was able to challenge executive decisions, if contrary to earlier laws. Strengthening of the executive powers. Introduction of further universal tax
1800	7	1	Under the Napoleonic Constitution, all powers were in practice concentrated in the first Consul.

POLAND/POLAND-LITHUANIA, 1400-1800

	AJR	Our classification	Notes	Explanations
1400	3	2	-	Polish monarchy in a personal union with a foreign monarch, bound by the 1386 Krewo Pact.
1450	-	3	-	Strengthening of noble privileges and further limitation of the royal prerogatives due to succession crises. Since 1422: the King could no longer expropriate the nobility without a court order. Legal and executive powers were separated. Since 1423: the nobility can oust the local representatives of the king from their office. Since 1433, noblemen could not be imprisoned without court order (<i>Neminem captivabimus nisi iure victum</i>)
1500	3	3	-	Two-chambers <i>sejm</i> established in 1493; king could not start wars nor force the nobility to fight without its consent. The nobility had to be consulted in the matters pertaining to their region. New kings elected from the ruling family by the Senatorial elite. “Accountability group” in the shape of the representative assembly – House of Delegates. No new taxes without the approval of the House of Delegates. Very few permanent taxes.
1550	-	5	-	1501 Mielnik Articles: kings subject to legal resistance and even being toppled in case of tyranny”(Frost 2015, p. 347) Since 1505 no new law can be passed without the approval of the House of Delegates (<i>nihil novi</i>). Since 1504 supervision of the House of Delegates over who is appointed by the king to some offices. Since 1538 the king cannot remove anyone from the office.
1600	3	7	-	Since 1573: Elected officials always present next to the king to observe his actions (<i>senatorowie rezydenci</i>); kings were elected, and any nobleman could be king; the crown was not hereditary; the king must summon the diet

				every two years at least; money for the military was collected and spent locally; the king could not borrow without the Diet's permission; personal inviolability of the nobility; religious freedom; kings could be abolished; king had to swear to uphold a constitution. Since 1591, control over the expenditures from the common/public treasury by a comity (<i>komisja skarbowa</i>).
1650	-	7	-	Since 1613, the comission that controls the expenditures acquire judicial powers, initially appointed by the king, but later commissaries are appointed by the regional assemblies of the nobility (<i>sejmiki</i>)
1700	3	7		Since 1654 every law can be vetoed by any one member of the parliament.
1750	3	7	-	In 1717, the Treasury Tribunal became permanent.
1791	1	7		Since 1764, the budget starts to be composed, it is controlled by new grand comity (<i>Komisja Wielka Skarbu</i>). In 1791, a new constitution was signed, based on the US constitution, but with a hereditary crown and a government tightly controlled in taxation, war declarations, and budgets by the Chamber of Envoys. The country was partitioned in 1795.

PORTUGAL, 1400-1800

	AJR	Our classifica- tion	Explanations
1400	2	5	Parliament influenced decisions on foreign politics, had a legislative role and approved extraordinary taxation, unable to control expenditure or appoint officers.
1450	N/A	5	Idem.
1500	1	4	<i>Cortes</i> lost influence on foreign politics and summoned less often, with remaining prerogatives intact.
1550	N/A	4	Municipalities secured the administration of sales taxes in 1525. João III accepted to convene the <i>Cortes</i> in regular intervals.
1600	2	2	<i>Cortes</i> continued to meet but lost their political and legislative roles under the Spanish kings; occurrence of extra-parliamentary taxation.
1650	N/A	3	With the <i>Cortes</i> recovered their fiscal and legislative roles. Creation of a permanent delegation of the <i>Cortes</i> (the <i>Junta dos Três Estados</i>) in 1643.
1700	2	3	Idem.
1750	2	2	<i>Cortes</i> no longer met, but <i>Junta</i> continued to meet until 1791.
1800	2	1	<i>Cortes</i> did not meet, and occurrence of extra-parliamentary taxation.

KINGDOM OF NAPLES, 1400-1800

	AJR	Our classification	Explanations
1400	N/A	1	The <i>Parlamento</i> met sporadically, and its consent was not a condition for collecting taxes or making war (Hébert 1998; Morelli 2020).
1450	N/A	4	Since 1443, under the influence of the Aragonese Dynasty Parliaments met often, with fiscal and legislative roles and negotiated the apportioning of the tax burden (Scanton and Senatore 2018).
1500	N/A	4	Continued strength of the <i>Parlamento</i> under Ferrante (Scanton and Senatore 2018 mention a refusal of the king's tax in 1474). Since 1503, the new king, Spain's <i>Catholic King</i> Fernando, summoned parliaments with some regularity intent on showing the differences between the mild, negotiated Aragonese realm and the forceful rule of the French (D'Agostino 1978, p. 25). Parliament takes its definitive shape: the barons (<i>baronia</i>) municipalities (<i>univesita demaniali</i>) and the municipal government of Naples (6 representatives from each <i>Seggo</i>) send their <i>capitulaciones</i> to the King (or viceroy) and negotiate the amounts, distribution, and timing of the <i>donativo</i> .
1550	N/A	2	Clamping down of the <i>Seggi</i> of the City of Naples under viceroy Pedro de Toledo (1532-55). The <i>Parlamento</i> met regularly every two years, since 1566.
1600	N/A	3	The <i>Parlamento</i> moderated heavy tax demands from Spain (Calabria 2002, p. 41). The <i>Parlamento</i> met often: 1604, 1604bis, 1607, 1609, 1611, 1613, 1615, 1616, 1617, 1619, 1628 (Mrozek 2019), if reduced to passive resistance (the last parliament of 1642 was summoned 19 months before it met, as the viceroy sought previously the approval (Di Franco 2020, p. 35).

1650	N/A	1	No <i>Parlamento</i> . Changes and size of taxes are discussed with the <i>Seggi</i> of the City of Naples, which represented a thin layer of interests (the populace of Naples itself was barely represented: 1 in 6 <i>seggi</i> (Maiorini). Mrozek (2019) on <i>Parlamento</i> as the place for arm wrestling
1700	N/A	1	No <i>Parlamento</i> .
1750	N/A	1	No <i>Parlamento</i> .
1800	N/A	1	No <i>Parlamento</i> .

THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE, 1400-1800

	AJR	Our classification	Explanations
1400	1	1	There was no legislative or representative body to limit the Sultan's power. De factor, leading Turcoman aristocratic families had some provincial autonomy, but they had no legal authority to constrain the Sultan's decisions or policies, and had limited leverage.
1450	N/A	1	The Sultan's authority remained unconstrained. The Turcoman aristocracy was gradually purged and devshirme system was expanded to ensure a more loyal administrative class of janissaries and bureaucrats who were directly dependent on the Sultan. The ulema (religious scholars) provided legitimacy to the Sultan's rule but had no institutional power to impose constraints on the executive.
1500	1	1	The period marks the beginning of the apex of Ottoman central government's power. Administrative and legal codifications (e.g., the Kanun laws) streamlined governance, but these reinforced, rather than constrained, executive authority. While the judiciary (qadis) operated within the legal framework, their rulings were subject to the Sultan's approval.
1550	N/A	1	Power remained centralized with the Sultan, who commanded a relatively small but centralized government apparatus. The process of replacing Turcoman notables with devshirme continued.
1600	1	1	The Sultan's power was somewhat diluted due to the growing role of powerful factions within the palace (e.g., viziers, eunuchs, and the janissaries) and political disorder and banditry in the countryside, but this did not translate into formal constraints. Local leaders gained more autonomy in collecting taxes and administering regions, yet their power remained contingent on the Sultan's approval or tolerance.

1650	N/A	1	The political disorder in the countryside subsided but triggered a process of decentralization of authority with provincial leaders (<i>ayan</i>) asserting more influence over local affairs. Despite this, no formal constraints on the Sultan existed at the central level. The Sultan retained unchecked formal control over appointments, taxation, military decisions, and law-making.
1700	1	1	The internal strife between cliques within the central administration resulted in dethronements and turnover in government officials, but did not evolve into institutional constraints on the Sultan. The local <i>ayan</i> 's process of consolidating power in the provinces continued, but they remained fragmented and could not pose an effective constraint on the government.
1750	1	1	The Sultan's authority remained absolute, with local provincial leaders (<i>ayan</i>) continuing to gain informal power in their regions due to the weakening central administration. However, no formal checks on the Sultan's power were institutionalized.
1800	1	1	Efforts to modernize the military and administration, such as the early Nizam-i Cedid reforms under Selim III, began during this period. These reforms were aimed at strengthening central authority but did not introduce mechanisms to constrain the Sultan's executive power, which remained absolute.

Note: Acemoglu et al. (2005) refer to the Ottoman Empire as “Turkey”.

RUSSIA, 1450-1850

	AJR	Our classification	Explanations
1400	1	1	No representative institutions in
1450	N/A	1	No representative institutions
1500	1	1	No representative institutions
1550	N/A	2	First <i>Zemsky Sobor</i> met in 1549 to acclaim Ivan IV as Tsar. Boyar Duma
1600	1	2	Sporadic meetings
1650	N/A	3	Tsar Michael I “elected” in 1613 by a <i>Zemsky Sobor</i> . End of the Time of Troubles The monarch issued laws out of the
1700	1	1	Zemsky Sobor met in 1653. Boyar Duma met in 1660 Loss of influence of the Boyar Duma Last meeting of the <i>Zemsky Sobor</i> (1680)
1750	1	1	The Boyar Duma was abolished in 1711. Creation of the “Senate”, an administrative office. No representative institutions
1800	1	1	No representative institutions

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