

**SOCIAL  
EVOLUTION & HISTORY**      **Studies in the Evolution  
of Human Societies**

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Volume 24, Number 2 / September 2025

DOI: 10.30884/seh/2025.02.00

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# **Stories of Ancient Stones: A Living Tradition of Indigenous People (*Mundas*) in Jharkhand, India**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The study explores the continued tradition of constructing megalithic monuments among the Munda community, an indigenous group in Jharkhand, India. These monumental stones serve a dual purpose: as burial sites and symbols of collective heritage and resilience. The paper examines the historical, cultural, and ritual significance of these megaliths, demonstrating their central role in the Munda's oral traditions and spiritual beliefs. These structures are not only places of ancestral memory but also key markers of the Munda's unique cultural identity. Additionally, the study highlights the growing threats to this tradition, particularly from modernization and urbanization, which risk erasing these ancient practices. By documenting these megaliths' ongoing relevance, the paper emphasizes the urgent need to preserve them, as they represent a critical link to the past and a living tradition*

Recommended citation: Tuti, E., Kumari, M., Nayak K. V., Alam Sh. Stories of Ancient Stones: A Living Tradition of Indigenous People (*Mundas*) in Jharkhand, India. *Social Evolution & History*, Vol. 24 No. 2, September 2025, pp. 3–26. DOI: 10.30884/seh/2025.02.01.

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*that continues to define the Munda community today. Through this exploration, the research makes a compelling case for the protection and conservation of this invaluable cultural heritage.*

**Keywords:** *ancient stones, Munda, living tradition, Jharkhand, India.*

## INTRODUCTION

Megalithic structures, often regarded as remnants of ancient, prehistoric civilizations, continue to capture the imagination of historians, archaeologists, and indigenous communities alike (Laporte *et al.* 2022; Wunderlich 2019; Russell and McNiven 1998; Holtorf 1996). From the famous Stonehenge in England to the lesser-known dolmens in Africa and India, these ancient stones serve as physical testimonies to early human civilizations (Allen 2022). However, their significance extends beyond their role as archaeological markers of prehistoric times. For many indigenous communities, including the *Mundas* of Jharkhand, megaliths remain a living tradition (Shekhar 2021). These stones were not merely remnants of a distant past but serve as active, vibrant components of social, spiritual, and cultural life (Pétursdóttir 2013). Hence, this paper aims to delve into the dynamic role of megaliths in *Munda* society by examining how these ancient structures are integrated into rituals, commemorate ancestral presence, and maintain a deep connection to the land.

Across the globe, megalithic monuments, ancient stone structures found across continents, showcase the architectural ingenuity and cultural practices of prehistoric societies (Laporte *et al.* 2022). Notable examples include England's Stonehenge, aligned with astronomical events, and Africa's Nabta Playa and Ethiopia's Tiya megaliths (Das 2017). These sites highlight a shared tradition of building monumental stones for socio-religious or astronomical purposes. Archaeologists primarily focus on the construction methods, astronomical alignments, and symbolic meanings attached to these megalithic structures, often regarding them as relics of a civilization that no longer exists (Krzemińska *et al.* 2018).

However, the role of megaliths in some indigenous communities, particularly in South Asia, challenges this narrative. In many parts of India, especially in Jharkhand, megaliths are far from being dead stones of the past (Shekhar 2021). Among the *Mundas*, these ancient stones are still imbued with life, playing an essential role in rituals, social organization, and territorial demarcation (Standing 1976). They serve as

markers of cultural continuity, linking the past with the present, and offering insights into how indigenous peoples interpret their world through physical and spiritual landscapes (Smith *et al.* 2000; Sissons 2005).

For the *Mundas*, these megaliths have been sacred (Devi and Bhoi 2017; Shekhar and Joglekar 2017). They were seen as an enduring part of the landscape, often connected to the broader spiritual geography of the area (Das 2017). The stones, whether large standing ones or flat slabs, have been symbols of territorial ownership and ancestral protection (Verardo 2003). This connection to the land has been vital in understanding the importance of megaliths in *Munda* society. These stones have been physical representations of the indigenous' claim to the land, rooted in their belief that the spirits of their ancestors continue to inhabit the earth (Shekhar 2021). Such spiritual connection reinforces the *Mundas'* attachment to their land and provided a cultural counter-narrative to the modernization and industrialization pressures encroaching on indigenous territories.

One of the most distinctive features of the *Munda* megalithic tradition has been its integration into daily life and rituals. Unlike other parts of the world where megaliths were regarded as static, archaeological objects, for the *Mundas*, they still remain central to their religious and communal practices (Shekhar 2021; Das 2017). Rituals involving the megaliths have been performed throughout the year, particularly during significant life events such as births, marriages, and deaths (Shekhar 2020). These rituals have been vital for maintaining the indigenous' connection to the land and the spirits that protect it (Standing 1976; Rahmann 1959). The stones serve as conduits between the living and the dead, ensuring that the spirits of the ancestors are honoured and that their protection over the community and its land continues (Srivastava 2007; Shekhar *et al.* 2014).

By emphasizing the spiritual and cultural significance of these stones, the *Mundas* have been able to challenge external forces seeking to encroach on their land (Arora 2006). Hence, the megaliths serve as focal points in this spiritual landscape, acting as markers of ancestral presence and spiritual power (Mullick 2011). This connection to the land has been central to the *Munda* identity, and the stones play a crucial role in maintaining this bond (Saha 2024). This relationship between the stones and the environment reflects a broader indigenous

worldview in which the land, the people, and the spirits were and are still interconnected.

Hence, the study focused on the *Munda* megalithic tradition represents a unique intersection of material culture, spirituality, and social identity. Unlike megalithic structures in other parts of the world that have become relics of the past, for the *Mundas*, these stones remain a living tradition. Therefore, the focal theme of the study revolves around how living traditions serve as vital components of rituals, commemoration, and territorial demarcation, reinforcing the community's connection to their ancestors and the land. Understanding the dynamic role of megaliths in *Munda* society not only enriches our understanding of indigenous cultural practices but also offers valuable lessons on the importance of preserving and protecting indigenous heritage in a rapidly changing world.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Recent archaeological research has significantly enhanced our understanding of megalithic monuments. Parker (2012) provides a thorough analysis of Stonehenge, integrating data from recent excavations to explore its social and ceremonial significance. Cummings (2019) analyzes the placement of megalithic structures within landscapes, emphasizing the strong relationship between geography and ritual in pre-historic Europe. Similarly, Chambon *et al.* (2018) discuss the social organization of megalithic societies in Western Europe, emphasizing communal efforts in monument construction. Hardenberg (2016), focusing on Indian megaliths, examines their cultural and spiritual continuity among tribal communities. The article by Avikunthak (2022) explores recent excavations in South India and reveals new insights into the socio-political contexts of these monuments.

Megalithic sites are scattered across the Indian subcontinent, with notable concentrations in the southern and central regions. Thapar (1975–76) and Krishnaswami (1949) have extensively studied the distribution and typology of megaliths, identifying common features such as dolmens, menhirs, stone circles, and cairns. These structures, typically associated with burial and ancestral worship, date back to the Neolithic and early Iron Age periods, with most megalithic cultures flourishing between 2000 BCE and 500 CE (Thapar 1976). However, unlike in many other parts of the world where megalithic traditions have faded into history, some indigenous communities in India con-

tinue to maintain living megalithic traditions which is persistent and evident among the tribes of central India, including the *Mundas* of Jharkhand (Shekhar 2021).

### **Evolutionary Trajectory of *Munda* Megalithic Structures: Tracing the Importance from the Past to the Present**

Megalithic structures among the *Mundas* in Jharkhand have evolved from their ancient origins to present-day significance, adapting to changing contexts while maintaining their spiritual and social cohesion. Prehistoric megaliths were integral to *Munda* society, serving ritualistic and commemorative purposes. Constructed during the Neolithic or Chalcolithic periods, these stones marked burial sites, territorial boundaries, and sacred spaces (Thapar 1976). Megaliths were believed to house ancestral spirits, ensuring protection and continuity between the living and the dead. Often aligned with natural or celestial landmarks, these structures symbolized the relationship between the human world and the cosmos (Krishnaswami 1949).

In the medieval period, the *Mundas* adapted their megalithic traditions to changing social, political, and economic contexts. The stones continued to symbolize ancestral presence, but also became crucial in asserting territorial rights against external encroachments, particularly during the rise of feudalism and the arrival of non-indigenous rulers (Shekhar 2021). During the colonial period, *Munda* megalithic traditions faced challenges from British authorities, who viewed them as obstacles to modern legal and economic systems. In response, the *Mundas* used these traditions to resist colonial policies, with megaliths becoming symbols of indigenous identity and resistance, notably during the *Munda* rebellion led by Birsa Munda (*Ibid.*).

In the post-colonial period, megaliths have continued to evolve, playing a role in contemporary political and cultural struggles, such as land rights, conservation, and debates about indigenous heritage. They served as reminders of historical connections with the land and resistance to industrialization and environmental degradation (Das 2018). In the modern era, the *Munda* megalithic tradition faces challenges from modernization, urbanization, and industrial expansion. Despite these pressures, the tradition continues to evolve with megaliths becoming symbols of cultural revival and indigenous pride. Indigenous activists, scholars, and community leaders work to preserve

and protect these sites in Jharkhand, advocating against industrial encroachment and illegal mining.

Highlighting the theories of origin, the beginning of these massive stone structures was linked to changes in society during the Neolithic period, which included developments in farming and technology. The shift towards agriculture around 9000 BCE resulted in communities becoming more settled, increasing demand for cultural or religious symbols like megaliths, which served as markers of territory, burial places, or locations for social events (Renfrew 1973). Improved technology, such as the development of polished stone tools, allowed for large-scale construction (Renfrew and Bahn 1991). In economic terms, having access to extra food allowed people to focus on specific jobs, including the construction of these monuments, which contributed to social stratification (Pearson 2012). Politically, these structures represented a shared sense of identity and power, strengthening community ties and early forms of religious leadership (Renfrew 2004).

Focusing on theories on the cultural and linguistic affiliations of ancient megalith scholars suggests they shared cultural traits or linguistic origins. Many associate megaliths with Neolithic and Chalcolithic agricultural societies, such as the Cardial Ware and Bell Beaker cultures, which spread throughout Europe, Asia, and Africa and used sophisticated stone tools (Kipfer 2021). The Proto-Indo-European hypothesis links megalithic traditions to early Indo-European-speaking groups, although evidence is mixed, as some regions retain non-Indo-European languages. In South Asia, Austro-Asiatic speaking groups like the Munda have deep-rooted megalithic practices, suggesting connection between language and cultural rituals and highlighting both diffusion and adoption across linguistic borders.

### **The *Mundas* and Their Megalithic Traditions**

The *Mundas* are part of the larger Austroasiatic language family (Roy 1912). They have a long-standing tradition of erecting megaliths, known locally as *Sasandiri* (stones of the ancestors). Roy's work mentioned that these megaliths serve as commemorative markers for the deceased, with each stone symbolizing the continued presence and influence of an ancestor. The erection of megaliths is a communal event, involving elaborate rituals, feasting, and offerings to the ancestors. The megaliths are often arranged in specific formations, such as circles or rows, and are located near burial sites. Roy's early work provided valuable insights into the spiritual and social significance of

these stones, which are viewed as sacred objects imbued with the spirits of the deceased.

Recent studies have expanded on Roy's foundational work by exploring the deeper cultural and cosmological meanings of megaliths in *Munda* society (Shekhar 2021). In a similar vein, Singh (2016) contended that megaliths are not only spiritual markers, but also symbols of *Munda* identity. Singh's research emphasized the role of megaliths in reinforcing kinship ties and social cohesion. The communal nature of megalithic rituals strengthens the bonds between family members, clans, and the larger community, and they are seen as living entities embodying the history and memory of the community. Singh's work provides a nuanced understanding of how megaliths function as both cultural artifacts and symbols of identity in *Munda* society.

### **Oral Traditions and the Role of Megaliths**

One of the most important aspects of the megalithic tradition in *Munda* society is its connection to oral traditions. The stories, songs, and folktales that surround the megaliths serve as repositories of ancestral knowledge and cultural memory. Both Roy (1912) and Imam (2014) document the rich oral narratives that accompany the megalithic sites, noting that these stories often revolve around themes of bravery, leadership, and the relationship between humans and the natural world. These narratives are passed down through generations, ensuring that the cultural significance of the megaliths remains alive even as physical stones endure.

The role of oral traditions in preserving the megalithic heritage of the *Mundas* is also explored by anthropologists such as Singh (1985), who argues that oral narratives play a crucial role in maintaining the continuity of cultural practices in indigenous societies. Singh notes that stories associated with megaliths are not static but evolve over time, to incorporate contemporary events and issues. For example, some *Munda* oral narratives have incorporated references to land alienation and displacement due to industrialization and development projects, focusing the resilience of indigenous culture in the face of external pressures. This dynamic aspect of oral tradition ensures that the megalithic heritage remains relevant to the *Mundas* in the present day.

### **Contemporary Challenges to the Megalithic Tradition**

While the megalithic tradition of the *Mundas* has persisted for centuries, it faces significant challenges in the contemporary era. The rapid pace of industrialization and urbanization in Jharkhand has resulted in

the destruction of many megalithic sites, particularly due to mining activities and infrastructure development. As Pathy (1999) notes, the displacement of indigenous communities from their ancestral lands has not only disrupted their social and economic lives but also severed their spiritual connection to the land and the megaliths that embody their history. The loss of these sacred sites threatens the survival of the megalithic tradition and cultural identity of the *Mundas*.

In addition to the physical destruction of megalithic sites, the younger generation of the *Munda* community is increasingly disconnected from their traditional practices and knowledge systems. Bhengra *et al.* (1998) argues that modern education and urbanization have led to a gradual erosion of traditional practices, as younger *Munda* individuals are more exposed to mainstream Indian culture and less involved in the rituals associated with megalithic sites. This cultural disconnection poses a significant threat to the transmission of the megalithic tradition, as the oral narratives and rituals that sustain it are in danger of being lost. However, both the *Munda* community and external stakeholders are making efforts to preserve and revitalize the megalithic tradition. The activists, anthropologists, and scholars have been documenting and studying megalithic sites, recording oral histories, and conducting ethnographic research to ensure that the tradition is preserved for future generations.

### **Megaliths as Symbols of Resistance and Identity**

In contemporary Jharkhand, megaliths have taken on new meanings in the context of indigenous struggles for land rights, cultural preservation and political autonomy. As Singh (2016) notes, the megaliths have become symbols of resistance for the *Mundas*, who invoke their cultural heritage in their fight against land alienation and displacement. Stones, once primarily viewed as spiritual markers, are now also seen as political symbols, representing the *Mundas'* historical claims to the land and their right to self-determination.

By invoking the megaliths in political and legal discourses, the *Mundas* are asserting their right to control their ancestral lands and protect their cultural heritage from the forces of industrialization and development. This politicization of the megalithic tradition is not unique to the *Mundas* but is part of a broader trend among indigenous communities around the world. Alfred (2009) and Coulthard (2014) have explored how indigenous peoples use their cultural traditions as tools of resistance against colonialism and dispossession. In the case of the *Mundas*, the megaliths have become both symbols of resistance

and markers of identity, embodying their struggle for cultural survival and self-determination.

The literature on the megalithic tradition of the *Mundas* of Jharkhand mentioned the complex interplay between archaeology, culture, spirituality, and identity. Roy (1912), Imam (2014), and Pathy (1999) have documented the historical and cultural significance of these stones, emphasizing their role as both spiritual markers and symbols of identity. However, the megalithic tradition faces significant challenges in the contemporary era, as industrialization, urbanization, and cultural disconnection threaten the survival of these sacred sites. Despite these challenges, the megaliths have taken on new meanings in the context of indigenous struggles for land rights and cultural preservation, becoming symbols of resistance for the *Mundas*. The continued efforts to protect and revitalize the megalithic tradition offer hope for the preservation of this unique cultural heritage for future generations.

## RESEARCH GAP

Despite extensive research on megalithic structures in India, significant gaps remain in understanding the cultural, social, and spiritual dimensions of megaliths among the *Mundas* of Jharkhand. One primary gap is the lack of comprehensive ethnographic data on contemporary practices, with most studies focusing on historical significance and neglecting present-day rituals and beliefs. Another gap pertains to the intersection of *Munda* megalithic traditions with modernity and globalization, including the impact of urbanization, industrialization, and mainstream culture on the preservation of these traditions. The role of younger generations in these traditions, influenced by technology and globalized cultures, is also largely unexplored. Additionally, the gendered dimensions of the *Munda* megalithic tradition, in particular the involvement of women in rituals and the transmission of oral traditions, are less well understood. Finally, there is a need for research on policy and preservation strategies for megalithic sites in Jharkhand.

Although there has been advocacy for protecting indigenous cultural heritage, including megalithic sites, the effectiveness of these efforts remains under-researched such as how are current governmental and non-governmental initiatives addressing the threats to megalithic sites? What role can indigenous communities themselves play in the preservation of these sites, and how can they be empowered to safeguard their cultural heritage? These questions remain largely un-

explored in the existing literature. Accordingly, three primary objectives have been formulated:

1. To document the contemporary practices and beliefs surrounding megalithic stones among the *Mundas*.
2. To examine how modern developments, such as industrialization, land alienation, and cultural shifts, are impacting the preservation of megalithic traditions.
3. To explore the intersection of gender, social identity, and the megalithic tradition, particularly focusing on the role of women in the rituals and oral transmission of knowledge related to megaliths.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

The research methodology is based on a qualitative framework with an emphasis on ethnographic and participatory research methods. The qualitative approach was appropriate as it allows for an in-depth understanding of the meanings and significance attributed to megaliths by the *Mundas*. It also permits the exploration of intangible aspects such as oral traditions, rituals, and the spiritual connection between the community and the stones.

### **Site Selection**

The research focused on multiple *Munda* villages in capital city of Jharkhand that is Ranchi, where megalithic traditions are still practiced. The selection of diverse sites is intended to capture variations in the megalithic practices across different *Munda* communities and to understand how regional factors influence the tradition.

### **Participant Selection**

The *Munda* people aged between 18–70 years and residing in rural areas of Ranchi were the research participants in this study. This age range was chosen to capture a broad range of experiences and knowledge about culture, beliefs, traditions, oral history, and their participation and engagement with living traditions. Initially, participants were approached through the contact of peers and colleagues of researchers working in tribal areas, and then the snowball method was employed to identify potential participants. For this study, 15 participants (see Table 1 for participants' background information) shared their views on the living tradition of megaliths. All of the participants belonged to the *Munda* community.

Table 1

**Background of Participants**

Sl. No	Research Participant (Pseudonym Names)	Age	Gender	Designation	Place (Different blocks of Ranchi)
1	Sawna Pahan	37	Man	Pahan (Religious Head of community)	Shembo Kudlong (Ratu)
2	Nishita Kumari	27	Woman	Normal Person	Janum (Namkum)
3	Janamlal Munda	39	Man	Village Head	Childag Soso (Namkum)
4	Mahendra Pahan	45	Man	Pahan	Kucchu (Ormanjhi)
5	Chumna Pahan	23	Man	Normal Person	Humbai (Purbi Sarnatoli) (Ormanjhi)
6	Manmohan Pahan	38	Man	Village Pahan (Religious Head of five villages)	Humbai (Ormanjhi)
7	Shanti Kispotta	45	Woman	Normal Person	Sundil (Kanke)
8	Bablu Munda	34	Man	Normal Person	Childag Soso (Namkum)
9	Pradeep Pahan	36	Man	Pahan	Hesel 1,2,3 (Namkum)
10	Tuiya Pahan	47	Man	Pahan	Nagri Tikratoli (Nagri)
11	Jaynath Munda	34	Man	Normal Person	Hatma (Mandar)
12	Sundri Devi	67	Woman	Village Head's Mother	Hatma (Mandar)
13	Chotu Munda	34	Man	Normal Person	Khijurtoli (Mandar)
14	Sahendra	25	Man	Old Pahan	Khadra/Nayatoli (Burm)
15	Magho Pahan	46	Man	Pahan	Maltuti (Burm)

Source: compiled from fieldwork.

**Data Collection**

Ethnographic fieldwork was the core component of this research, involving immersive observation and participation in the daily lives and cultural practices of the *Mundas*. The fieldwork included participant observation, informal and semi-structured interviews, and collection of oral narratives. Participatory methods, such as participatory action research (PAR), were also incorporated to ensure collaboration with

the *Munda* community, guiding the research with local voices and providing practical benefits. Focus groups and interviews with women were conducted to explore their participation in rituals, oral traditions, and the transmission of cultural knowledge, offering a holistic understanding of social dimensions of the megalithic practices.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis process was primarily qualitative, employing thematic and narrative analysis to interpret fieldwork data. Thematic analysis identified recurring patterns or themes regarding the cultural and spiritual significance of the megaliths, their role in social identity, and the impact of modernity on these traditions. It involved systematic coding of interview transcripts, field notes, and oral narratives to reveal underlying meanings and connections. Narrative analysis focused on understanding how stories are constructed and what they reveal about the community's worldview and values.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Conducting research among indigenous communities requires careful attention to ethical principles, including respect, consent, and reciprocity. All participants were informed about the purpose of the research, their role, and their rights, with verbal consent obtained to ensure they could withdraw at any time. Identities were protected through pseudonyms and confidentiality, and sensitive cultural information was shared only with express permission. The researchers approached fieldwork with cultural sensitivity, consulting community leaders and elders to respect local customs and norms.

## **FINDINGS**

The findings of this study on the living megalithic tradition of the *Mundas* revealed a multifaceted relationship between the community, their ancestral landscape, and the ancient stones they continue to revere. It has been organised into several key themes: the cultural significance of megaliths, the ritualistic practices associated with them, their role in community identity and social cohesion, the gendered dimensions of the tradition, and the impact of modern challenges such as land alienation, industrialization, and cultural erosion, as illustrated below.

### **Cultural Significance of Megaliths**

Megaliths, historically been recognized as a key feature of the *Mundas'* cultural heritage. The research findings confirmed that the stones

were not merely relics of the past but continue to play an active role in the spiritual and cultural life of the *Munda* community. The stones, locally known as *sasan* or *bir* stones, serve as sacred markers that are tied to ancestral spirits and the memory of deceased family members (Imam 2014). Regarding this, Sundri Devi (67 years, the village head's mother) illustrates:

...these megaliths are often associated with burial practices, with stones being erected to commemorate the dead. However, their significance extends beyond funerary functions. The stones are viewed as a tangible link between the physical world and the spiritual realm, embodying the presence of ancestors who are believed to watch over the living. As such, they are integral to our community's cosmology, representing a connection to the land and a deep sense of continuity with the past...

Such oral histories, collected during fieldwork, emphasize the role of these megaliths in preserving the collective memory of the *Mundas*. In the viewpoint of respondents, the ancient stones function as repositories of communal knowledge, ensuring that future generations remain connected to their heritage and the sacredness of the land. Thus, the megaliths are both spiritual and historical artifacts, preserving the identity and resilience of the *Mundas*.

### **Ritualistic Practices Associated with Megaliths**

One of the most significant findings was the active ritualistic use of megaliths in *Munda* community. Contrary to the view that megaliths were relics of an ancient civilization, the *Mundas* continue to perform rituals around these stones, especially during funerary and commemorative ceremonies. These rituals, known as *Munda Sasan Puja* or *Munda Jatra*, involve the entire community and are conducted to honour the spirits of ancestors, ensure their protection, and seek their blessings for the wellbeing of the living, also documented by Imam (2014) and Manmohan Pahan (38 years, Village Pahan) described it as

The rituals are typically led by village elders or Pahan, who possess specialized knowledge of the spiritual significance of the stones and the appropriate methods of veneration. The ceremonies involve the offering of food, drink, and sacrificial animals, alongside prayers and chants directed at the ancestors. These practices underscore the role of megaliths as conduits between the living and the dead, maintaining the community's spiritual balance and harmony.

Such fieldwork observations highlight that these rituals were collective in nature, reinforcing social bonds within the community. The participation of all village members, regardless of gender or age, in these ceremonies fosters a sense of unity and shared responsibility for the care of ancestral spirits. The ritualistic use of the stones also illustrates the enduring nature of *Munda* spiritual traditions, despite the pressures of modernization and cultural assimilation (Pathy 1999).

### **Role of Megaliths in Community Identity and Social Cohesion**

During fieldwork it was observed that megaliths play a crucial role in shaping the social identity and cohesion of the *Mundas*. The erection and maintenance of these stones were not individual acts but community-based efforts, reflecting the collective nature of *Munda* community. The stones symbolize the collective memory of the village, linking the present generation to their ancestors and reinforcing the community's connection to the land. Explaining about it, Jaynath Munda (34 years, normal person) highlighted,

The erection of new megaliths is typically performed during significant communal events, such as after a major harvest or the birth of a prominent child. These events are marked by celebrations that involve feasting, music, and dance, further strengthening the community's social fabric. The stones, therefore, serve as focal points for social gathering, reinforcing the collective identity of the *Mundas* as custodians of their ancestral heritage.

Moreover, the findings suggest that the megaliths have been used as markers of territorial boundaries and clan affiliations within the *Munda* community. These stones delineate the sacred spaces that are regarded as belonging to specific families or clans, and they are often used in resolving land disputes or demarcating inheritance rights. In this sense, the megaliths function not only as spiritual symbols but as social and legal instruments that help to maintain order within the community (Singh 1985).

### **Gendered Dimensions of the Megalithic Tradition**

A key finding of this research is the recognition of the gendered dimensions of the megalithic tradition. While the physical erection of the stones is typically seen as a male-dominated activity, the role of women in the ritualistic and symbolic aspects of the tradition is significant. Interviews with women in the *Munda* community reveal that they are of-

ten the custodians of oral traditions associated with the megaliths, passing down stories, myths, and rituals from one generation to the next, as Sundri Devi (67 years, Village head's mother) states,

Women are also actively involved in the rituals performed at megalithic sites, particularly in preparing food offerings and participating in prayers.

The involvement of women in the megalithic tradition challenges the perception that such practices are exclusively male-dominated and underscores the importance of incorporating a gendered analysis into the study of indigenous cultural practices.

### **Impact of Modern Challenges on the Megalithic Tradition**

The findings also shed light on the challenges facing the *Munda* megalithic tradition in the context of modernization, industrialization, and cultural assimilation. Land alienation due to industrial projects, such as mining and infrastructure development, has resulted in the displacement of many *Munda* communities, severing their connection to the ancestral lands where megaliths are located. This displacement has not only disrupted the practice of erecting new megaliths but has also led to the neglect or destruction of existing stones (Pathy 1999). Sawna Pahan (34 years, Pahan) elaborates,

...the encroachment of mainstream cultural practices and the influence of modern education have contributed to the erosion of traditional beliefs surrounding megaliths, particularly among younger generations. Further, a growing disinterest in the rituals and spiritual significance of the stones, with many perceiving them as outdated or irrelevant in the modern world.

The findings suggest that the pressures of urbanization and economic development are contributing to the gradual fading of the megalithic tradition, especially as younger generations prioritize integration into mainstream society over the preservation of indigenous practices. However, the findings also highlight the resilience of the *Mundas* in the face of these challenges. Efforts to revitalize the megalithic tradition, led by community elders and cultural advocates, are underway in several villages. These efforts include the establishment of cultural heritage programs, the documentation of oral histories, and the promotion of traditional rituals as part of cultural tourism initiatives. Such initiatives represent a form of indigenous resistance to cultural ero-

sion, as the *Mundas* assert their identity and reclaim their ancestral heritage in the face of external pressures (Coulthard 2014).

### **Megaliths as Symbols of Indigenous Resistance**

One of the most compelling findings of this research was the evolving role of megaliths as symbols of indigenous resistance. In the context of struggles over land rights and cultural preservation, the megaliths have taken on new meanings for the *Mundas*. They were not only seen as sacred markers of ancestral presence but also as symbols of resistance against the forces of dispossession and cultural assimilation (Alfred 2009).

... the megaliths have become rallying points for land rights movements, with Munda activists invoking the stones as evidence of their historical claim to the land. The stones, which mark the graves of ancestors and delineate traditional territories, are used to assert indigenous sovereignty and challenge the legitimacy of land acquisitions by industrial and governmental authorities. (Pradeep Pahan, 36 years)

In this context, the megaliths have become powerful symbols of the *Mundas'* ongoing struggle to protect their land, culture, and way of life (Singh 1985). The megalithic tradition, far from being a relic of the past, is actively evolving in response to contemporary challenges. The stones, once primarily spiritual and cultural symbols, have taken on new political significance as the *Mundas* navigate the complexities of modernity and fight to preserve their heritage. Far from being static relics of a bygone era, the megaliths continue to play a vital role in the spiritual, social, and political life of the *Munda* community. While the megalithic tradition remains resilient, it is clear that concerted efforts are needed to ensure its preservation for future generations. These efforts must include the documentation of oral histories, the promotion of cultural heritage initiatives, and the protection of ancestral lands from industrial encroachment.

### **DISCUSSION**

The *Munda* megalithic tradition has been a striking example of how indigenous communities maintain a dynamic relationship with their ancestral past while simultaneously negotiating the pressures of the present. This discussion explores the broader implications of the findings on the *Mundas* megalithic practices, situating them within the contexts of indigenous knowledge systems, spirituality, land rights,

gender, and cultural resilience. By examining these interrelated themes, the discussion reflects on the significance of megaliths as more than just material artifacts but as living symbols that link the *Munda* to their ancestors, land, and identity.

### **Indigenous Knowledge Systems and the Living Tradition of Megaliths**

The *Munda* megalithic tradition has been part of a broader indigenous knowledge system that interweaves spirituality, history, and the environment. Indigenous knowledge systems have often been characterized by their holistic approach to understanding the world, where material culture, oral history, and rituals are deeply interconnected (Cajete 2000), evident in the oral histories and rituals surrounding megaliths. These stones act as repositories of communal memory, ensuring that knowledge of family lineages, historical events, and the spiritual significance of the land were preserved across generations (Singh 2016).

By participating in rituals, the *Mundas* reaffirm their connection to their ancestors and the landscape, maintaining a continuous dialogue with the past. However, these knowledge systems are under threat due to the encroachment by modern educational systems, economic pressures, and cultural assimilation. Many younger *Mundas*, especially those exposed to formal education, are increasingly disconnected from the traditional significance of the megaliths (Pathy 1999). This disconnection raises important questions about how indigenous knowledge systems could be preserved in an increasingly globalized world.

One potential solution is the incorporation of traditional knowledge into formal education systems. This could include the teaching of oral histories, the significance of megaliths, and the broader cosmological views of the *Mundas* within local schools. Such initiatives would help ensure that younger generations understand the value of their cultural heritage, even as they navigate towards modern life (Cajete 2000).

### **Spirituality and the Sacred Landscape**

Megaliths hold profound spiritual significance for the *Mundas*. They are not simply stones but have been viewed as living entities that embody the presence of ancestors and the spirits of the land. This belief reflects the broader indigenous cosmology in which humans, nature, and the spiritual world are inextricably linked (Imam 2014). The findings suggested that this spiritual relationship with the land is being

increasingly threatened by industrialization, mining, and land alienation. The loss of ancestral lands due to these factors not only disrupts the *Munda's* material livelihood but also severs their spiritual connection to the land (Coulthard 2014). As land is commodified and exploited, the sacred spaces where megaliths are located are often destroyed or desecrated.

This erosion of the spiritual landscape has serious implications for the cultural identity of the *Mundas*. Indigenous communities worldwide have long emphasized the importance of land as central to their spirituality and identity (Alfred 2009). For the *Munda*, the megaliths are a symbol of this spiritual bond with the land, and their destruction represents a profound cultural loss. The struggle for land rights, therefore, becomes not just an economic or political issue but a spiritual one. Protecting ancestral lands where megaliths are located is essential for maintaining the spiritual balance of the community. Indigenous land rights movements, such as those led by the *Mundas*, often invoke the sacredness of the land as a key argument in their fight against industrial encroachment (Coulthard 2014).

### **Land Rights and Megaliths as Symbols of Resistance**

The findings discovered that megaliths have taken on new meanings in the context of contemporary struggles over land rights. As symbols of ancestral presence and markers of traditional territories, these stones are now being used as tools for asserting indigenous sovereignty and challenging land alienation. The *Munda* people's efforts to protect their ancestral lands from industrialization and state acquisition are rooted in their spiritual and cultural connection to the land, embodied in the megaliths. The use of megaliths in land rights movements the political significance of indigenous material culture. While megaliths have long served a spiritual function, they are now also symbols of resistance against the forces of dispossession. This reflects a broader trend among indigenous communities worldwide, where cultural heritage is used as a form of political resistance (Alfred 2009).

By invoking the presence of their ancestors and the sacredness of the land, the *Mundas* are able to frame their struggle in terms of both cultural survival and political sovereignty (Coulthard 2014). The megaliths, in this context, are not only material objects but symbols of the *Munda's* enduring connection to their ancestral past and their right to self-determination. The destruction of megalithic sites for mining or development projects is a stark reminder of the vulnerability of indigenous cultural heritage in the face of industrial capitalism (Pathy

1999). The challenge, therefore, lies in finding ways to protect these sites while also addressing the economic needs of the *Mundas*.

### **Gender and the Megalithic Tradition**

One of the key findings of this research has been the gendered dimensions of the megalithic tradition. While the physical erection of megaliths is often associated with male members of the community, women play a crucial role in the spiritual and ritualistic aspects of the tradition (Aswani and Kumar 2018). Women are the custodians of oral histories, the preparers of ritual offerings, and, in some cases, spiritual intermediaries between the living and the ancestors. This finding challenges the common perception of megalithic practices as maledominated and uncovers the importance of incorporating a gendered analysis into the study of indigenous cultural traditions. The involvement of women in the ritual life of the community reflects the broader gendered division of labor in indigenous societies, where spiritual and material responsibilities are often shared between men and women (Pathy 1999).

However, the research also suggests that the role of women in the megalithic tradition is often overlooked or undervalued in scholarly discussions of indigenous material culture. This reflects a broader pattern in anthropological research, where the contributions of women to cultural and spiritual life are frequently marginalized (Aswani and Kumar 2018). By highlighting the role of women in the *Munda* megalithic tradition, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the gendered dynamics of indigenous cultural practices. As *Munda* society adapts to modernity, the role of women in maintaining the megalithic tradition may become even more important to preserve the traditional burial rites, particularly as younger generations become disconnected from traditional practices (Coulthard 2014).

### **Cultural Resilience and the Preservation of the Megalithic Tradition**

The findings reveal that this tradition has been increasingly at risk of being lost, particularly as younger generations become disengaged from their cultural heritage. The influence of modern education, urbanization, and economic pressures has led many young *Mundas* to view the megaliths as irrelevant to their lives (Singh 2016). This generational divide raises important questions about the future of the megalithic tradition and the role of cultural heritage in contemporary indigenous communities. Efforts to preserve the megalithic tradition must therefore take into account the changing social and economic

realities of the *Mundas*. Initiatives such as cultural heritage programs, the documentation of oral histories, and the promotion of traditional rituals as part of cultural tourism offer potential pathways for preserving the megalithic tradition for future generations (Cajete 2000). These initiatives must be community-led and designed in a way that empowers the *Mundas* to take ownership of their cultural heritage. The recognition of megalithic sites as cultural heritage under national or international law could provide legal protection against their destruction.

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The study of the *Munda* megalithic tradition is significant for its contributions to indigenous studies, cultural heritage preservation, and social resilience. It enhances our understanding of *Munda* cultural practices and provides insights into indigenous cultural preservation and resistance. The research aids in preserving *Munda* cultural heritage by documenting ongoing rituals and the spiritual significance of megaliths, crucial in a context of modern challenges. Additionally, it explores the gender dimensions within the tradition, challenging gendered assumptions and emphasizing the importance of a gender-sensitive approach to cultural heritage. Overall, the study is significant for its contributions to cultural preservation, understanding of indigenous knowledge systems, analysing cultural resilience and resistance, and recognizing gendered dimensions in cultural practices.

### **LIMITATION OF THE STUDY**

While providing valuable insights, this study has several limitations. It focuses on a specific region in Ranchi, which may not fully represent the diversity of practices across Jharkhand or among other indigenous groups in India. The reliance on oral histories, while crucial, introduces challenges such as subjectivity and the potential for variation or loss of content due to generational shifts. The dynamic nature of the tradition means it is subject to continuous change influenced by modernization, urbanization, and cultural assimilation, and the study captures it at a specific point in time, which may not reflect ongoing changes or future trends. Ethical considerations also arise when conducting research with indigenous communities. Addressing these limitations through broader geographic research, rigorous documentation methods, longitudinal studies, and ethical considerations could contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of indigenous cultural practices.

## CONCLUSION

The study on megalithic tradition reveals a complex and vibrant cultural practice that holds profound significance for the *Mundas* of Jharkhand. These ancient stones, integral to the *Munda's* spiritual and social fabric, function as physical manifestations of ancestral presence and spiritual connection. The tradition maintains cultural continuity, asserts land rights, and navigates the challenges of modernity, reflecting the *Munda's* resilience and cultural identity. Despite modernization and cultural assimilation, the megalithic tradition persists as a symbol of cultural resilience. The ongoing practice of rituals and efforts to protect these sites illustrate a dynamic interplay between tradition and contemporary challenges. The megaliths stand as a testament to the *Munda's* ability to adapt while preserving core aspects of their cultural identity.

*The megalithic tradition also plays a crucial role in the Munda's struggle for land rights and cultural sovereignty, serving as symbols of ancestral territories and spiritual significance. The study underscores how megaliths are powerful tools for asserting indigenous rights and resisting land alienation and industrial encroachment. The study also reveals important insights into the gendered dimensions of the megalithic tradition. While the physical construction of megaliths is often associated with male roles, women play a critical role in the ritualistic and spiritual aspects of the tradition. In conclusion, the Munda megalithic tradition offers a rich and multifaceted perspective on indigenous cultural practices, demonstrating the intricate connections between material culture, spirituality, and social identity. By safeguarding these traditions, the Mundas not only preserve their heritage but also assert their resilience and adaptability in the face of contemporary challenges. The insights gained from this study contribute to a broader understanding of indigenous cultural preservation and provide valuable lessons for similar efforts globally.*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors want to thank the study participants for their kind support in the successful completion of this study and the funding agencies for providing financial support.

## FUNDING

The authors received financial support from Indian Council of Social Sciences Research (ICSSR), New Delhi, India for conducting this research.

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# The Dynamics of Aggression and Anxiety during Disasters (a Case Study of Three Waves of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Russia)

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Recommended citation: Burkova, V. N. *et al.* The Dynamics of Aggression and Anxiety during Disasters (a Case Study of Three Waves of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Russia). *Social Evolution & History*, Vol. 24 No. 2, September 2025, pp. 27–56. DOI: 10.30884/seh/2025.02.02.

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## ABSTRACT

*Over two years have passed since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and by now enough data have been accumulated on its psychological effects and mental health disorders in different countries. In this study, we present self-reported data collected from 7,450 participants during the three waves of the COVID-19 pandemic in Russia from May 2020 to July 2021. These data have been compared with the pre-pandemic data on 480 participants. The study aimed to trace the dynamics of aggressive and anxious behavior during the three waves of the COVID-19 pandemic in comparison to the data from the pre-pandemic period. Three questionnaires were used to measure behavior in this study, namely: the Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ), the Generalized Anxiety Disorder Scale (GAD-7), and the State Anxiety Inventory (SAI). Sex differences in aggression and anxiety levels were demonstrated. The reduction in anxiety levels during COVID-19 waves may indicate that people had generally adapted to the stressful situation. All four scales show the highest level of aggression before the pandemic compared to any of the three waves. It is important to emphasize the discovered association between all types of aggression and anxiety, as individuals with high anxiety levels also scored higher on aggression scales, especially on the anger scale.*

**Keywords:** *COVID-19, aggression, anxiety, stress, Russia, adaptation.*

## INTRODUCTION

During disasters of any kind (economic, political, medical, *etc.*), there is a global disruption and restructuring of the usual way of life for millions of people; horizontal and vertical connections are often inter-

rupted or completely stopped, which inevitably leads to stress for people. Because of 'life stress,' millions of people suffer from malaise, sleep disturbance, fatigue, withdrawal or anxiety; stress symptoms of emotional distress appear (such as excessive aggression, hyperactivity, nightmares, and enuresis), people suffer from alcoholism and drug addiction as they try to get rid of stress; thousands commit or attempt suicide (Levi 1981). Common responses to mass disasters include fear, aggression, stigma, explanations and actions based on information deficits (Strong 1990). Uncertainty about the situation and the inability to cope with it make people more vulnerable to stress caused by disasters and at high risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder after various negative events.

Extreme situations are divided into short-term ones, where response programs are activated and in effect, and which are always 'ready' in a person, and long-term ones, which require an adaptive restructuring of human functional systems (Kitaev-Smyk 2001). With prolonged stress, the onset of stress is erased with a limited number of visible manifestations of adaptive processes (Popkin *et al.* 1978). If superficial reserves are not enough to respond to extreme environmental demands, and the rate of mobilization of deep reserves is insufficient to compensate, then the individual may die with completely unused deep adaptive reserves. For example, many people who died from starvation during the Leningrad siege (1941–1942) had abundant fat deposits in their subcutaneous tissue. Their deaths were largely caused by the psychological experiences of hunger and fear (Kitaev-Smyk 2001).

The epidemic carries not only the risk of death from infection, but also unbearable psychological pressure. Loneliness leads to a decrease in cognitive abilities, affects anxiety levels, and increases the likelihood of developing symptoms of depression, which in some cases, leads to serious physiological changes (Victor *et al.* 2000; Coyle and Dugan 2012). Being in a situation of isolation for a long time makes people feel vulnerable, causing several cognitive, behavioral, and physiological reactions of a defensive type: lonely people tend to be less trusting and more anxious and aggressive (Cacioppo and Hawkley 2009). The fear of infection leads to internal conflict and discomfort; other people are perceived as a potential threat. People who are intolerant of uncertainty tend to engage in risky and impulsive behaviors, such as aggression, motivated by the desire to eliminate the distress caused by uncertainty (Sadeh and Bredemeier 2019; Celik *et al.* 2021).

Previous experience in researching psychological health during various epidemics (such as SARS, MERS, and Ebola) has shown that increased anxiety is associated, first of all, with a threat to health and people's desire to protect themselves and their loved ones (Brooks *et al.* 2020). With the long course of a pandemic (including quarantine), we are dealing with prolonged stress, which, in turn, can lead to immune system dysregulation and increased susceptibility to viral infections (Cohen *et al.* 2012), as well as to psychological distress and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (Cohen *et al.* 2012; Berta *et al.* 2020), depression and higher levels of stress (Mak *et al.* 2009), insomnia, irritability and low mood (Halsøy *et al.* 2021), nervousness, fear, sadness and guilt (Reynolds *et al.* 2008). A review of studies in ten countries that have experienced atypical pneumonia, Ebola fever, the H1N1 influenza pandemics, MERS, and equine influenza has shown the presence of negative psychological factors related to quarantine and has also shown that the psychological impact can be both large-scale and very long-lasting (Brooks *et al.* 2020).

To this moment research literature has focused on cases of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and major depression following disasters, while other aspects of mental health have rarely been studied. The cognitive action theory of PTSD suggests that PTSD causes cognitive bias in the processing of threatening information. Therefore, mild evidence of a threat activates threat-response structures that bias individuals to interpret ambiguous evidence as threatening (Zhen *et al.* 2022). Major natural disasters can be extremely stressful for populations (especially children and youth) and have mental health consequences similar to those of war. For example, depending on the severity of the disaster in a particular region, PTSD rates range from 14% to 95 % in various communities affected by Hurricane Mitch in Nicaragua and in an earthquake-affected region in Armenia (Catani *et al.* 2008). In meta-analysis of studies on children and adolescents worldwide, Alisic *et al.* (2014) found that 15.9 % of those exposed to traumatic events developed PTSD, with 9.7 % of youth exposed to noninterpersonal trauma, such as accidents and natural disasters, developing the condition. Review studies estimated that the rates of moderate post-traumatic stress symptoms during the acute post-disaster period could be as high as 50 % and 30 % at 1 year or later (Pfefferbaum *et al.* 2019).

Studies show that individuals who have experienced major disasters (*e.g.*, an earthquake, war) report a variety of psychological problems, including PTSD. In addition to psychological difficulties such as

anxiety, depression, and PTSD, there is also a risk of escalating aggressive behaviour during times of disaster. Many empirical studies have found a correlation between traumatic experiences and aggressive behaviors (Celik *et al.* 2021; Zhen *et al.* 2022). Traumatic experiences can reduce individuals' sense of intimacy and trust in others, making it difficult for them to get along with others and inducing more interpersonal conflicts and aggression. Any form of aggression may also be further exacerbated, since the individuals' capacity to manage stress deteriorates in traumatic conditions (Celik *et al.* 2021). During a pandemic, the constrained conditions of quarantine and restrictions, economic problems, fear of infection, isolation, and social distancing can prevent victims from leaving an aggressive environment.

Previous studies have suggested that traumatized individuals may show increased aggressive behaviors (Nel and Righarts 2008). Several types of negative reactions (including anxiety and aggression) can be associated with exposure to natural disasters. Anger is an important aspect of affect and a prominent feature of post-traumatic mental health (Cowlshaw *et al.* 2021). Among youth, peer aggression may be related to the stress from disaster exposure, and aggressive behavior after a disaster may be more closely linked to PTSD symptoms than to disaster exposure (Scott *et al.* 2014). In other words, disaster exposure is more proximally linked to PTSD symptoms that in turn prompt aggression as part of a heightened activation of the anxiety and fear response system (Kunimatsu and Marsee 2012). Also, the sudden nature of natural disasters may lead to global mobilization of resources in disaster-exposed communities (*e.g.*, social support), and help people restore their daily routines that minimize the direct impact on emotional and behavioral problems (Scott *et al.* 2014). Numerous studies on anger in veterans have found a correlation between aggression or violent behavior and post-traumatic mental health (Novaco and Chemtob 2015; Cowlshaw *et al.* 2021). A study of people's behavior during Australia's massive fires has found significant anger issues (in association with anxiety and stress) after the disaster, and elevated levels among women and young people (Cowlshaw *et al.* 2021). The correlation between aggression (especially hostile and impulsive aggression) and anxiety may reflect underlying deficits in emotional regulation that are clinical features of maladaptive reactions to trauma exposure and perceived threat (Novaco and Chemtob 2015).

Reactions to trauma vary across cultures and may include somatic and emotional responses (*e.g.*, stress, distress, dysphonia, sadness,

nervousness, anger), in addition to or instead of post-traumatic stress outcomes (Miller *et al.* 2006). A major problem is that Western concepts may not adequately address non-Western social and cultural contexts, outcomes, or coping strategies (Morris *et al.* 2007; Pfefferbaum *et al.* 2019). The expression of depression and anxiety, and aggressive behavior varies across cultures, and focusing on these more widely accepted responses may facilitate the adoption and implementation of effective interventions in disaster situations. The results of studies conducted in the USA and Italy show that the different human responses observed during floods were linked to basic differences in four cultural elements: (1) experience with floods, (2) socio-political traditions and organization, (3) level of integration within a community, and (4) perception of the physical environment (Marincioni 2001). In this context, the COVID-19 pandemic is an excellent opportunity to study human behavior and their response to global stress in different cultural environments. The success of preventing and preserving the psychological health of the population during these crises depends, among other things, on how well the norms and traditions of a given society are taken into account. These can both worsen or alleviate the psychological state.

COVID-19 pandemic is considered as the most crucial global health crisis of the century. The behavior of people during a pandemic is an area of interest to specialists in evolutionary sciences and several articles have been published on the long-term changes in human behavior. A study of German adults showed that the anxiety and depression symptoms were particularly high in early 2020 but decreased in the months that followed (Bendau *et al.* 2021a). Another research was conducted in the United States and found that anxiety and depressive symptoms increased three times more often in the initial phase of the pandemic in early 2020 than in 2019 (Twenge and Joiner 2020). Data from 10,979 individuals from Germany who responded between October 1, 2020 and February 28, 2021 revealed an increase in the severity of depression among women (Abreu *et al.* 2021).

Studies of aggressive behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic are more controversial. Researchers have also found that during the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, conflicts and cyberbullying have risen sharply (Zhen *et al.* 2022). Some researchers have demonstrated that amid quarantine and lockdown restrictions, the level of aggressiveness increased, specially this was claimed to be the case with domestic violence (Killgore *et al.* 2021; Abreu *et al.* 2021), whereas in other studies, on the contrary, have been reported its decrease (Zhang

*et al.* 2020). Presumably, this may be due to cultural differences in the use of aggressive behavior strategies, as well as to specific situational factors in each country. In the USA, movement restrictions were introduced amid mounting racial tensions, stronger protests and riots related to the presidential elections, and natural disasters in a number of regions. In Belarus, the second COVID-19 wave coincided with the presidential elections and the ensuing riots (Burkova *et al.* 2021b; (Burkova *et al.* 2022). These factors led to an additional increase in anxiety and aggression, which is almost impossible to separate from pandemic-induced stress.

The frustration-aggression hypothesis originally stated that frustration is a necessary and sufficient condition for aggression, that is, any frustration will inevitably lead to aggression, and any act of aggression is provoked by frustration (Kruglanski *et al.* 2023). According to this theory, various restrictions imposed during the pandemic, especially social isolation and social distancing, can lead to frustration, because the aspect of frustration that produces an instigation to aggress is the negative feelings that frustration produces (Berkowitz 1989). The pandemic itself, the fear of infection, stress, as well as social, economic and psychological problems against its background are the most powerful frustrating factor provoking increased aggression.

The Touch Deprivation/Aggression Model predicted that touch deprivation during the COVID-19 pandemic may cause higher aggression levels (Field *et al.* 2020). Sensory deprivation early in adolescence may contribute to adult violence, namely cultures practicing higher physical affection for young children demonstrate lower rates of physical abuse among adults and vice versa (Prescott 1990). In one COVID-19 survey, less touching was associated with more aggression (Field *et al.* 2020). Thus, it can be assumed that a reduction in contacts between closely related people during restrictive measures during the COVID-19 can lead to more aggression. However, this association may be highly culturally specific, depending on the norms of behavior in the specific society, including the prevalence of tactile contacts.

The Scapegoat Theory claims that when people cannot deal with the cause of their negative emotions, they look for a ‘scapegoat’ to let out their frustrations (Wang *et al.* 2022). Being in forced isolation, facing various restrictions during a pandemic, people can redirect their negative emotions to their loved ones who are quarantined with them. According to this theory, expect a full range of domestic violence, that supported some studies (Killgore *et al.* 2021; Usher *et al.* 2021). It was even suggested that the COVID-19 pandemic had unleashed a

‘perfect storm’ of factors that could bring about escalating domestic violence (Usher *et al.* 2021). According to the summary based on 18 studies, domestic violence increased by 8 % during pandemic (Piquero *et al.* 2021; Field 2021). However, it needs to be mentioned that such reports lacked the baseline data. In addition, the use of different methods and localization of data (majority of data being collected in North America) should be taken into account. In our research, we will concentrate on the general self-assessment of aggression and anxiety by the respondents rather than on domestic violence.

Also, behavioral dynamics were usually followed during the first six months of the pandemic and did not cover a longer period (Abreu *et al.* 2021; Zhang *et al.* 2020; Killgore *et al.* 2021). Thus, it is not impossible to predict how the level of aggressive behavior would have changed in a later period. People could have coped with their early fears and insecurities about the pandemic, adapted to the stressful situation, and, thus, aggressive behavior and general anxiety could have decreased.

Our present study aimed to follow the dynamics of aggressive and anxious behavior during the three waves of the COVID-19 pandemic in Russia as compared to the pre-pandemic data. We covered the three COVID-19 waves in Russia with the total duration of 15 months (from May 2020 to July 2021), and examined the association between aggressive behavior and anxiety during the pandemic depending on sex and the wave. Based on the predictions from the previous studies, we expected a higher level of aggressive behavior in comparison with the pre-pandemic data due to increased general stress, as well as due to a number of other negative restrictive factors. We hypothesized that after quarantine was eased and the number and severity of restrictions were reduced, and people on the whole adapted to constant stress, a decrease in aggression and anxiety from the first to third waves would be registered.

## **DATA AND METHODS**

### **Participants**

Self-reported data from 7,450 participants were collected during the three waves of the COVID-19 pandemic from May 2020 to July 2021 in different Russian regions (Table 1). Additionally, we use our 2019 pre-pandemic data collected using the same design research.

Table 1

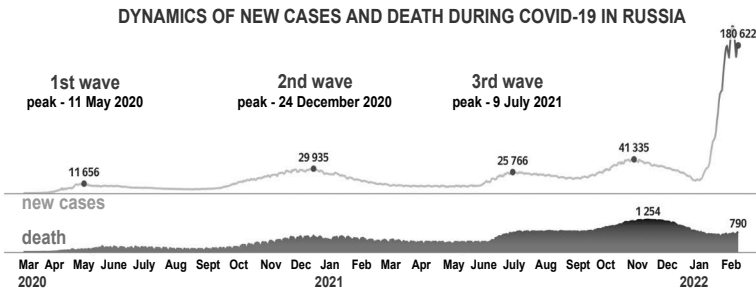
**Distribution of the sample**

WAVE OF COVID-19	Total N	SEX		Mean age
		men	women	(±SD)
0 (pre-pandemic data)	488	212	276	19.50 (±1.53)
1	1,904	486	1,418	20.99 (±4.72)
2	1,606	681	925	20.14 (±3.96)
3	3,664	971	2,693	23.44 (±8.57)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7,662</b>	<b>2,350</b>	<b>5,312</b>	<b>21.89 (±4.69)</b>

**Procedure**

All of the co-authors collected data for this study in their home regions. The questionnaire was compiled through the Google Forms service. The participants were recruited from the university environment. The inclusion criteria were: 1) aged 18 and above; 2) not having a chronic disease and/or predisposition for depression, or not undergoing treatment (based on the self-assessment of participants). All the participants provided their informed consent before completing the survey.

The survey was conducted during the three waves of the COVID-19 pandemic: 1) the main data set was collected in May 2020 (median – May 5, 2020); 2) the main data set was collected in December 2020 (median – December 7, 2020); 3) the main data set was collected in May–June 2021 (median – May 28, 2021). The collection of data generally corresponds to the dates of the waves indicated by Rospotrebнадзор\* (Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1. Distribution of the sample during COVID-19 phases**

The Scientific Council of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Russian Academy of Sciences approved the ethic proto-

cols used to recruit participants and to collect data (protocol No 01, issued April 9, 2020).

## Methods

The participants completed a standard demographic survey and asked about their lockdown conditions. Self-reported aggression was assessed with the Buss-Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ) (Buss and Perry 1992) in adapted version in Russian (Enikolopov and Tsybul'sky 2007). The BPAQ includes four scales – Physical Aggression ( $\alpha$  reliability coefficients = 0.78), Verbal Aggression ( $\alpha = 0.75$ ), Anger ( $\alpha = 0.81$ ), and Hostility ( $\alpha = 0.83$ ).

Two questionnaires for measurement of anxiety level were used in this study – the Generalized Anxiety Disorder Scale (GAD-7) (Spitzer *et al.* 2006) and the State Anxiety Inventory (SAI) (Spielberger 1983). GAD-7 screens for the presence of anxiety and related disorders, while SAI evaluates anxiety as a state, a reaction to stress. The GAD-7 asks participants to rate their symptoms of anxiety over the past two weeks ( $\alpha = 0.91$ ). Total scores across items are calculated, and anxiety symptoms are classified as norm, mild, moderate and severe.

Anxiety as an emotional state was measured using the first part of questionnaire, The State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI). It was developed to provide reliable, relatively brief, self-report scales for assessing state and trait anxiety in research and clinical practice. Participants report the intensity of their feelings of anxiety right now, at that moment. Total scores anxiety symptoms are classified as norm, moderate and high ( $\alpha = 0.76$ ).

SPSS (Version 29.0) and Python were employed for data evaluation and visualization.

## RESULTS

Sex differences were found in the three scales of aggression except VA prior to the pandemic and during the first wave (Table 2). Men showed higher self-ratings on physical aggression in each phase of the pandemic, while women had higher self-ratings on anger and hostility. Verbal aggression estimates are slightly higher in women in the second COVID-19 wave and a little lower in the third wave. Sex differences were not found in SAI only before the pandemic (Table 2). The level of anxiety is higher in women over the entire period (Table 2).

Table 2

**Descriptive statistics and sex differences on aggression  
and anxiety scales**

scales	Wave of COVID-19	N	Men		Women		t	p (sig.)	Cohen' d
			Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
PA	0 (pre)	488	21.51	5.32	18.03	6.33	6.431	< 0.000	.588
	1	1,904	19.86	6.26	17.23	5.88	8.287	< 0.000	.439
	2	1,606	19.40	6.09	16.81	6.16	8.286	< 0.000	.422
	3	3,664	19.51	6.66	16.88	5.99	10.646	< 0.000	.426
VA	0 (pre)	488	14.62	3.97	14.02	3.94	1.692	NS	.155
	1	1,904	12.37	4.88	12.60	4.51	-0.919	NS	-.049
	2	1,606	12.34	4.51	12.87	4.61	-2.260	.024	-.115
	3	3,664	12.44	4.92	11.83	4.77	3.142	.002	.126
Anger	0 (pre)	488	13.36	5.52	15.61	6.43	-4.068	< 0.000	-.372
	1	1,904	14.06	5.94	15.24	6.15	-3.636	< 0.000	-.193
	2	1,606	13.00	5.32	15.37	6.32	-7.856	< 0.000	-.114
	3	3,664	13.92	5.94	14.42	6.02	-2.082	.037	-.083
Hostility	0 (pre)	488	20.83	5.02	23.03	5.91	-4.340	< 0.000	-.397
	1	1,904	18.89	7.41	20.59	7.39	-4.332	< 0.000	-.230
	2	1,606	18.42	6.83	21.08	7.22	-7.389	< 0.000	-.400
	3	3,664	18.53	7.30	19.35	7.71	-2.699	.007	-.108
SAI	0 (pre)	368	23.51	8.11	24.28	9.08	-0.852	NS	-.089
	1	1,904	25.34	11.57	29.47	11.66	-6.768	< 0.000	-.356
	2	1,606	24.58	11.18	30.97	12.20	-10.736	< 0.000	-.542
	3	3,664	25.33	11.91	28.31	11.91	-6.417	< 0.000	-.250
GAD-7	0 (pre)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	1	1,904	3.80	4.42	5.71	4.98	-7.503	< 0.000	-.394
	2	1,606	3.58	4.16	6.89	5.14	-13.779	< 0.000	-.696
	3	3,664	4.23	5.26	6.29	5.85	-9.682	< 0.000	-.362

*Sex differences presented according to Student's T-test (t – test statistics, p – statistical significance, Cohen' d – effect size, NS – not significant). Cohen' d power: d = 0.8 (large effect), d = 0.5 (medium effect); d = 0.2 (small effect).*

The GLM MANOVA analysis with ratings on four aggression scales as dependent variables and the wave, sex, the GAD-7 and SAI as fixed factors showed significant main effects of sex for physical and verbal aggression, and the wave for all aggression scales (with small effect sizes (Table 3).

Table 3

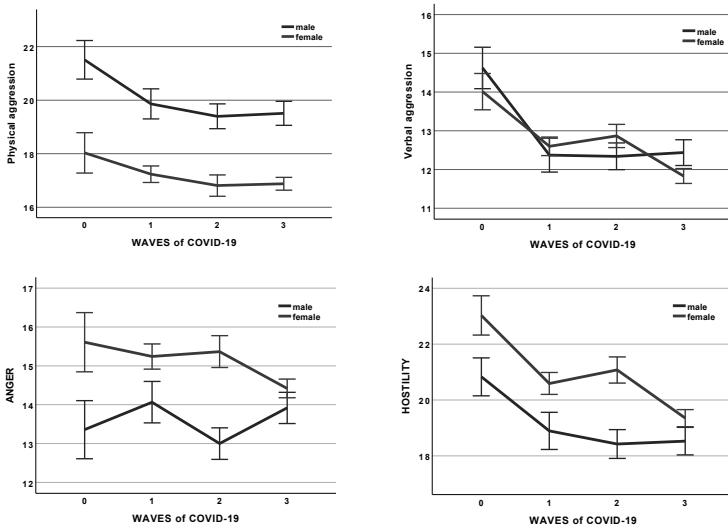
**The impact of sex, COVID-19 wave, and anxiety scales  
on individual aggression ratings**

Predictor	Dependent variable	F (df)	p (sig.)	Partial Eta <sup>2</sup>
Wave	Physical aggression (PA)	4.539(2)	0.011	0.001
	Verbal aggression (VA)	5.951(2)	0.003	0.002
	Anger (A)	9.120(2)	< 0.001	0.003
	Hostility (H)	7.287(2)	0.001	0.002
Sex	PA	396.990(1)	< 0.001	0.057
	VA	38.979(1)	< 0.001	0.006
	Anger	0.818(1)	NS	0.000
	Hostility	1.339(1)	NS	0.000
GAD-7	PA	9.135(21)	< 0.001	0.028
	VA	22.357(21)	< 0.001	0.066
	Anger	26.447(21)	< 0.001	0.077
	Hostility	31.677(21)	< 0.001	0.091
SAI	PA	1.967(60)	< 0.001	0.018
	VA	2.873(60)	< 0.001	0.025
	Anger	4.350(60)	< 0.001	0.038
	Hostility	5.234(60)	< 0.001	0.045

*F* – test statistics, *df* – degree of freedom, *p* – statistical significance, partial Eta<sup>2</sup> – effect size PA:  $R^2 = 0.110$ ; VA:  $R^2 = 0.119$ ; A:  $R^2 = 0.226$ ;  $R^2 = 0.248$

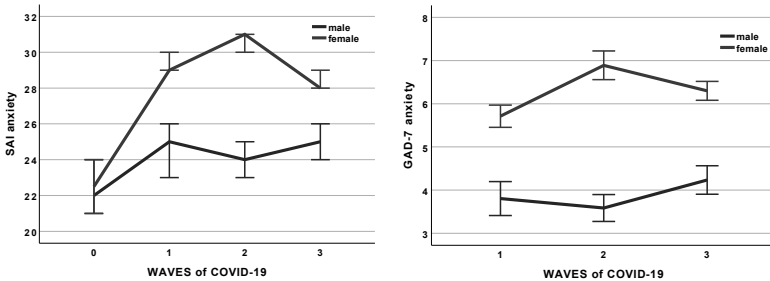
The maximum on all aggression scales was obtained before the pandemic (Fig. 2). During the COVID-19 waves, the level of physical aggression decreased from the first wave to the second, and remained almost unchanged to the third phase (Fig. 4a). The level of verbal aggression followed a similar trend among men, but decreased sharply from the second wave to the third among women (Fig. 4b). The anger and hostility scales show different trajectories for men and women. The level of anger decreased from the first to the second wave in men and then increased again to the third; the level of hostility dropped from the first to the second, and remained practically at the same level to the third wave (Figs 4c, d). Whereas, in women, anger ratings were stable between the first and second waves and decreased to the third wave; hostility increased from the first to second wave and then decreased to the third (Figs 4c, d). It is important to note that only anger

had lower levels in men before the pandemic compared to during it, as compared to other aggression scales (Fig. 4c).



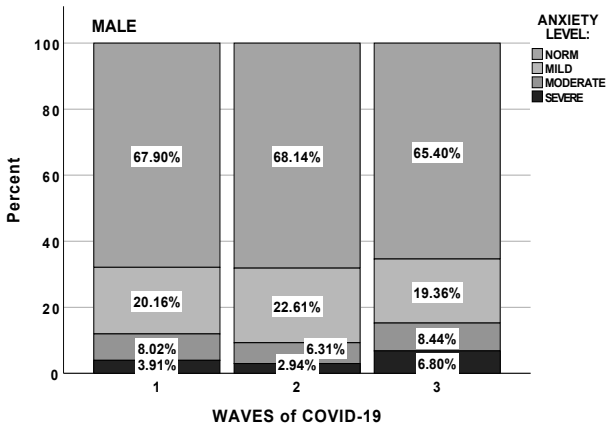
**Fig. 2. The dynamics of aggression scales (medians) before and during waves of COVID-19: a) physical aggression, b) verbal aggression, c) anger, d) hostility**

On the contrary, the level of anxiety was minimal before the pandemic, and increased significantly during COVID-19, especially in the first and second waves among women (Fig. 3a). In men, an increase in anxiety is observed in the first and third phase of the pandemic (Fig. 3a, b).

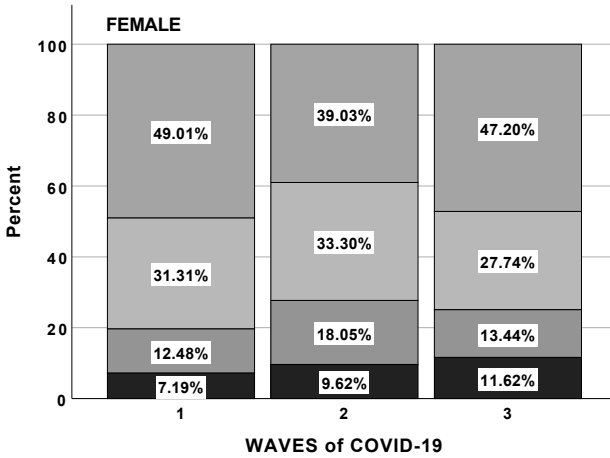


**Fig. 3. The dynamics of anxiety scales (medians) before and during COVID-19 waves: a) State Anxiety Inventory (SAI); b) Generalized Anxiety Disorder Scale (GAD-7)**

A total of 67.90 % of males during the first COVID-19 wave reported minimal (low) symptoms of anxiety on the GAD-7; 20.16 % reported mild symptoms, 8.02 % – moderate symptoms and 3.91 % reported severe symptoms (Fig. 4a). Women showed more disturbing data: only 49.01 % of females during the first COVID-19 wave reported minimal (low) symptoms of anxiety on the GAD-7; 31.31 % – mild symptoms, 12.48 % – moderate symptoms and 7.19 % reported severe symptoms (Fig. 4b). During the second COVID-19 wave the number of the most anxious respondents strongly increased among women (9.62 %), but not among men (2.94 %). The number of low-anxiety respondents considerably declined among women (39.03 %), but not in men (68.14 %). By the third COVID-19 wave, the number of the most anxious (severe-level) men almost doubled (6.80 %), as did the number of women (11.62 %) (Figs 4a and 4b). Also, the number of low anxiety levels among male decreased to 65.40 %, while in women, the number of normal anxiety level respondents conversely increased to 47.20 %, although in general the number of anxious women is almost twice the number of anxious men during all the waves of the pandemic (Fig. 4). Thus, we can point to a delayed reaction to stress in men.



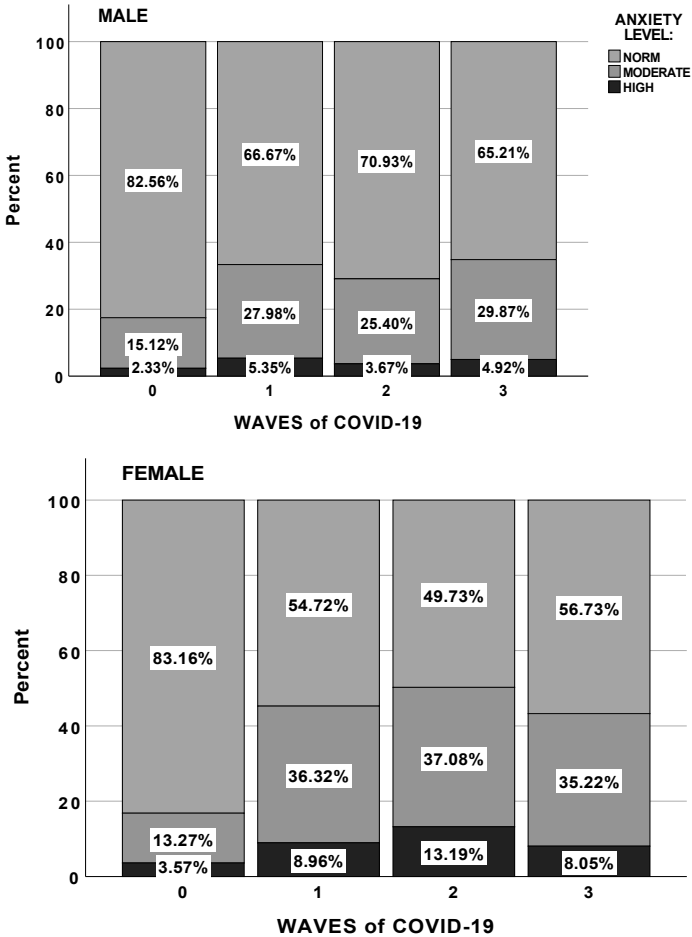
4a.



4b.

**Fig. 4. The dynamics of GAD-7 anxiety levels during COVID-19 waves**

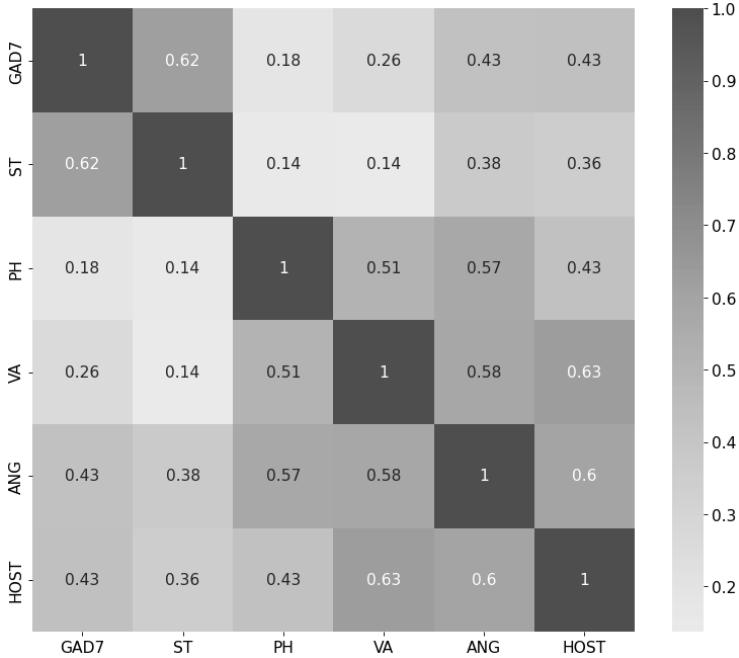
Similar trends were observed in the SAI questionnaire: the largest number of anxious men was observed during the first (5.35 %) and third (4.92 %) waves of the pandemic (Fig. 5a), while in women the highest number of highly anxious women was seen during the second phase – 13.19 % (Fig. 5b). In general, the number of anxious women was almost twice the number of anxious men during all the waves of the pandemic (Fig. 5). Before the pandemic, the lowest level of anxiety – 2.33 % – was observed among men with the high anxiety level and 3.57 % of women (Fig. 5); during the third phase of COVID-19 the level of anxiety did not drop to the pre-pandemic levels. The lowest rates are observed before the pandemic.



**Fig. 5. The dynamics of SAI anxiety levels before and during waves of COVID-19**

**ASSOCIATION OF AGGRESSION AND ANXIETY**

To evaluate the association between the aggressive scales and self-reported symptoms of anxiety, we used a regression analysis. The strongest associations were found between the scales of anxiety and anger and hostility (Fig. 6).



**Fig. 6. Correlation matrix of the association between aggression scales and anxiety scales**

The respondents with high anxiety ratings on both anxiety scales also scored high on all the aggressive scales in the total sample (Tables 4 and 5), regardless of gender (Figs 7 and 8) and COVID-19 waves (Figs 9 and 10).

*Table 4*

**The regression analysis for the factors predicting aggression (GAD-7 as dependent variable)**

Predictor	B	SE	Beta	t	P	R <sup>2</sup>
Physical aggression	.159	.010	.185	15.375	< 0.000	0.034
Verbal aggression	.298	.013	.263	22.297	< 0.000	0.069
Anger	.379	.010	.427	38.700	< 0.000	0.183
Hostility	.309	.008	.431	39.099	< 0.000	0.186

Table 5

The regression analysis for the factors predicting aggression  
(SAI as dependent variable)

Predictor	B	SE	Beta	t	P	R <sup>2</sup>
Physical aggression	.276	.022	.144	12.248	< 0.000	0.021
Verbal aggression	.347	.030	.137	11.656	< 0.000	0.019
Anger	.742	.022	.377	34.176	< 0.000	0.142
Hostility	.575	.018	.358	32.250	< 0.000	0.128

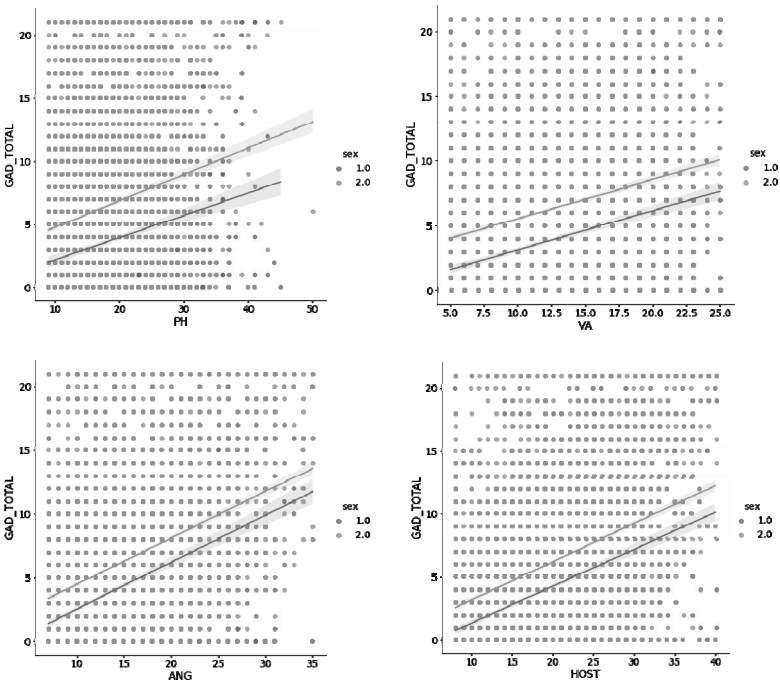
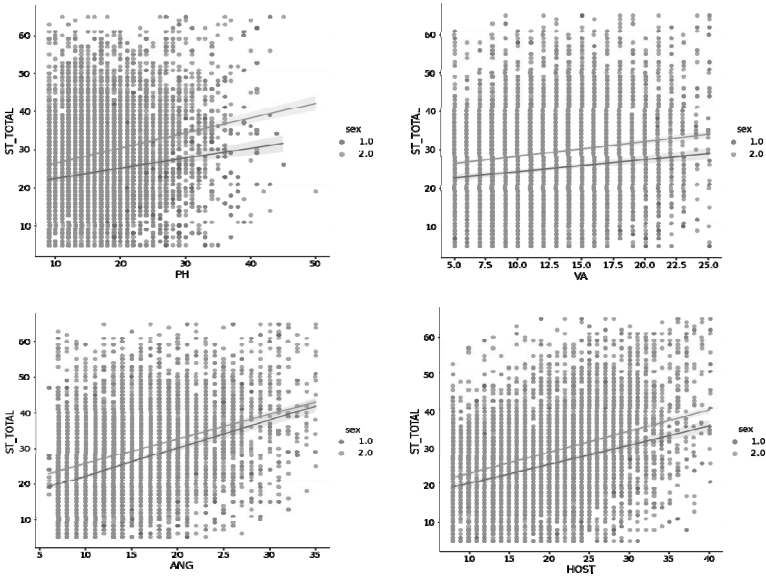
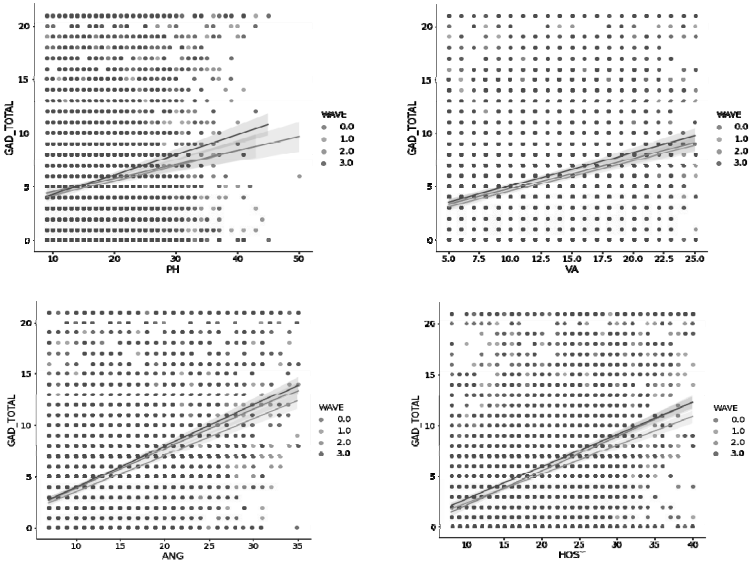


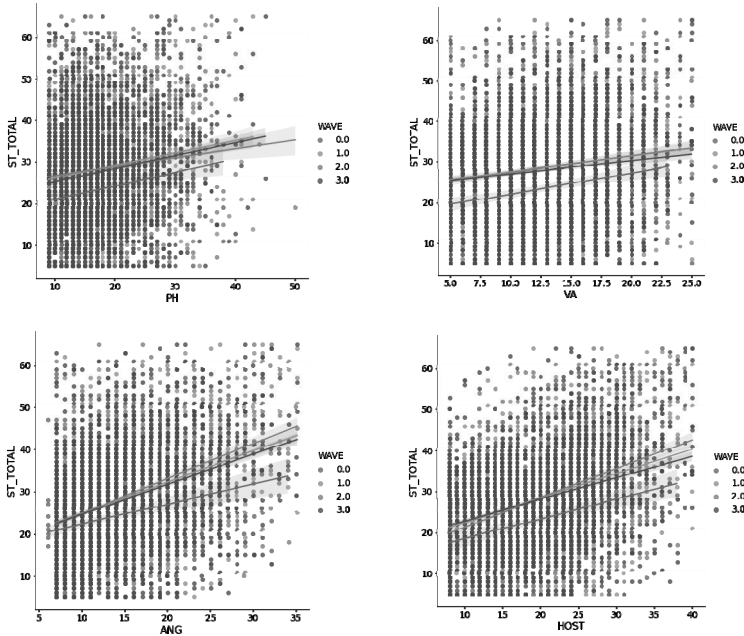
Fig. 7. Association of aggression and anxiety (GAD\_TOTAL) depending on sex (1 – men, 2 – women): a) PH – physical aggression, b) VA – verbal aggression, c) ANG – anger, d) HOST – hostility



**Fig. 8. Association of aggression and situational anxiety (ST\_TOTAL) depending on sex**



**Fig. 9. Association of aggression and anxiety (GAD\_TOTAL) depending on waves**



**Fig. 10. Association of aggression and situational anxiety (ST\_TOTAL) depending on waves**

**DISCUSSION**

The results of the current study based on the sample of 7,662 participants revealed the dynamics of aggressive and anxious behavior during three waves of the COVID-19 pandemic in Russia with the total duration of 15 months (from May 2020 to July 2021) in comparison with the pre-pandemic data.

Our data demonstrate that women reported higher levels of anxiety compared to men during the entire period of the COVID-19 pandemic. This finding supports the data from other studies conducted both before and during the pandemic in different populations (Abreu *et al.* 2021; Burkova *et al.* 2021a; Burkova *et al.* 2022; Butovskaya *et al.* 2021; Fedenok and Burkova 2020; Kowal *et al.* 2020; Semenova *et al.* 2021; Spitzer *et al.* 2006; *etc*). One of the latest meta-analyses of 315 studies on associations between gender and COVID-19-related fear and anxiety showed that women perceive the coronavirus as a greater threat to their personal health than men (Metin *et al.* 2022). A study conducted in the UK from April to November 2020 showed that mental health of women deteriorated as the lockdown restrictions were

tightened, compared to males' mental health (Stroud and Gutman 2021). Based on these findings and other data, it can be concluded that the COVID-19 outbreak has had a more negative impact on women.

Data on reduced anxiety levels during the pandemic are broadly consistent with what has already been done around the world (Bendau *et al.* 2021a, b; Burkova *et al.* 2022; Twenge and Joiner 2020) and show that people generally adapt to stressful situations. These results also agree with a decrease in anxiety symptoms during previous epidemics (Chong *et al.* 2004). A longitudinal study of a German sample of 6,551 people, who were continuously monitored during the localized four COVID-19 waves from March to June, 2020, showed that all symptoms generally decreased over time. However, the symptoms of fear, depression, and anxiety associated with COVID-19 were on average higher in patients with depression or increased anxiety or other psychiatric disorders, compared to individuals in the normal sample (Bendau *et al.* 2021b). These data are consistent with our results, which show the increasing number of respondents with high ratings of depression against the total decrease in anxiety. Similar results are observed in the study conducted on a mixed sample in the US students (Fruehwirth *et al.* 2021; Vahratian *et al.* 2021; Jia *et al.* 2021).

The dynamics of aggression during COVID-19 waves showed that maximum scores on all scales were achieved before the pandemic. Hence, our hypothesis that after the outbreak of the pandemic the level of aggression would increase due to stress, social isolation, and various restrictions, has not been confirmed. It should be noted here that our study was unique in that we had access to the data collected before the pandemic using an identical study protocol for a similar age group. A possible explanation for the results obtained may be as follows: the aggression level may have declined as a result of lack of social contacts. The limited interpersonal distance reduces the frequency of violent situations (Moccia *et al.* 2020). Frans de Waal earlier suggested that human violence occurs through psychological processes of depersonalization and disqualification between individuals or different groups (de Waal 2006). According to this theory, depersonalization of population occurs not only due to constant feelings of danger and risk of life and the high contagiousness of the virus, making another person a potential carrier; but also because social isolation paradoxically deprives people of the ability to establish empathic relationships with others (*Ibid.*).

We have demonstrated a decrease in aggression and anxiety levels from the first to third waves after the easing of quarantine and the

gradual removal of restrictions. Therefore, our next hypothesis has been confirmed. With slight deviations depending on sex, the level of physical aggression decreased from the first to the second wave, and remained almost unchanged to the third phase. The level of verbal aggression followed similar trends among men but decreased sharply from the second to the third wave in women. Anger and hostility scales showed different gender strategies: in men, the level of aggression decreased to the second wave and increased to the third, while in women, on the contrary, it grew to the second and demonstrated a downward trend in the third wave. Unlike the findings of other researchers, our data do not show a spike in aggression during the pandemic. However, it should be noted that most of those studies examined domestic violence and cyberviolence, particularly in stricter quarantines (Abreu *et al.* 2021; Piquero *et al.* 2021). In our study, respondents evaluated their aggressive behavior. On the other hand, these studies do not contain data on the level of aggression before the pandemic.

In a similar study conducted in Germany (with 10,979 participants) people showed an increase in aggression between October 1, 2020 and February 28, 2021, with a more significant increase in men compared to women (Abreu *et al.* 2021). Researchers attributed this jump to the tightening of restrictive measures, including aggravating factors such as decreasing income (which affected men more) and personal experience with coronavirus infection. However, this study did not analyze the direct dynamics of aggressive behavior during that period, but only identified significant factors. As the stringency of the lockdown increased, men showed higher levels of aggression compared to women (Abreu *et al.* 2021).

Our results are partially consistent with the Frustration/Aggression and the Touch Deprivation/Aggression theories: at the peak of primary stress from the pandemic, during periods of the most severe quarantine and restrictions of social contacts (the first wave), according to respondents' self-assessment, the highest rates of aggressive behavior were demonstrated. In one study, higher total aggression scores were reported for individuals under lockdown compared to those who were not experiencing lockdown (Killgore *et al.* 2021). In our study, we did not conduct such a comparison, but we observed a certain trend of decreasing level of aggression and anxiety with less strict restrictions, which was especially noticeable during the third wave, when quarantine was not announced, and restrictions were advisory in nature.

Chinese scientists analyzed changes in aggressiveness in 66 students during the first wave of COVID-19 (February-March 2020) – decreases in aggressiveness levels were found during lockdown and isolation (Zhang *et al.* 2020). The researchers attributed these results to the fact that the outbreak of COVID-19 made people realize the fragility and value of life. However, sample size may have negatively affected the results of the study.

One study conducted in the USA (5,928 people) also used the BPAQ from April 9, 2020 to September 11, 2020 (Killgore *et al.* 2021). During the six months spanning the initial stay-at-home orders and the subsequent summer spike in US COVID-19 cases, aggressive tendencies among respondents demonstrated an increase (*Ibid.*). However, the dynamics of behavior depended on the situation in the country: aggression decreased slightly from early April to early May 2020 during the initial period of lockdowns in the USA, but then quickly increased in June and July 2020, when many bans were extended and social and political unrest grew amid the growing number of COVID-19 infections and deaths (*Ibid.*). Increased aggression was mainly characteristic of those who reported that they were in isolation, compared to those who reported that they were not under such restrictions. It is important to note that changes in aggression in the USA were demonstrated only during six months in 2020. In our study three large waves of COVID-19 were studied over a longer period, from May, 2020 to May, 2021. Thus, we cannot predict how the level of aggressive behavior in the USA would have changed in a later period. It is also interesting to note that anger was the only scale that did not fit the resulting model, since it was higher among a small percentage of people (6.4 %) who denied that they were in isolation during the first month of lockdown (Killgore *et al.* 2021). The American researchers suggested that these people may have dealt with their early fears and insecurities about the pandemic by heightening anger, which was more pronounced in communities that resisted stay-at-home orders. This hypothesis may also be valid in relation to our data: the association of all types of aggression with anxiety especially expressed in anger, shows high levels of anxiety among respondents with high anger ratings. Anger, as an emotion, is typically associated with depression and anxiety and is often a predictor of aggression (Field *et al.* 2021; Spielberg *et al.* 1983), and it also predisposes to aggressive behavior in response to a (perceived) threat (Bettencourt *et al.* 2006). The current models of aggression describe aggressive behavior as the result of situational factors (*e.g.*, stress, frustration), personality traits

and internal states (e.g., cognition, emotion) (Bushman 2016; Abreu *et al.* 2021). A stressful situation such as the COVID-19 pandemic with its various restrictions and difficulties can create increased levels of threat, frustration, and discomfort. The COVID-19-related stressors stimulate threat-related behaviors, such as fight-or-flight, that result in higher levels of anger and other forms of reactive aggression (Abreu *et al.* 2021). A research among university students in Mexico also found a positive correlation between overall aggression score and overall anxiety in males but not in females (Vuelas-Olmos *et al.* 2022). Similar findings were obtained in a study of 1,005 Chinese people – anxiety had positive associations with cyber aggression (Wang *et al.* 2022). According to the Frustrate Aggression Theory, which stipulates that stress and aggressive behavior are closely related (Berkowitz 1989), people feel frustrated and have strong aggressive tendencies in stressful situations. Within the framework of this theory, one can also assume a strong correlation between aggression and anxiety: people with high anxiety levels have high levels of aggression despite the general decrease in aggression during the pandemic in Russia.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the fluctuation of aggression and anxiety levels in Russia during the various COVID-19 waves between May 2020 and July 2021. The results obtained were compared with the pre-pandemic data.

Our data showed that before the pandemic, aggression levels were higher, which contradicts theories about frustration and aggression deprivation, according to which an increase in aggression is more likely to happen in case of stress and isolation. However, these hypotheses were partially confirmed during the three pandemic waves. From the first to the third wave, there was a decrease in the level of aggression (and stress), which indicated successful adaptation of people to constant stress. In addition, the decreased levels were associated with more lenient restrictions. However, we should not exclude a possibility that the decline in aggression could also be caused by the inability to interact with other people (in this study we do not consider domestic violence).

Relying on our data, we suggest that one should be very careful when interpreting findings indicating the growth in aggression in the form of violent acts during pandemic-related restrictions and isolation. Most studies with such conclusions were conducted during the first wave of the pandemic and did not provide any information about later

periods. However, our data show that the aggression levels declined over time from wave to wave. Hence, it may be incorrect to extrapolate conclusions from early stages to the entire period. The average age of our sample ranges from 19.5 to 23.4 years, allowing us to limit the results to this age group. Thus, whether the current findings can apply to other population groups remains unclear, and future research should, therefore, examine the impact of age on behavioral parameters studied.

## FUNDING

The article was prepared in accordance with the research plan of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology RAS (Human Ultrasociality: Biosocial and Cross-Cultural Aspects).

## NOTE

\* Official statistics are presented on The Yandex DataLens portal, based on official statistics from the Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation and Rospotrebnadzor <https://stopcoronavirus.rf> [https://datalens.yandex/7o7is1q6ikh23?tab=X1&utm\\_source=cbmain&state=4d4ea3bc211](https://datalens.yandex/7o7is1q6ikh23?tab=X1&utm_source=cbmain&state=4d4ea3bc211).

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# Digital Transformation of Sub-Saharan African Countries in Historical Perspective: From the First Computers to the AI-driven Economy

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## ABSTRACT

*The development of breakthrough technologies occupies a special place in the national policies of both well-developed and developing countries, as they can represent an effective tool for ensuring sustainable socio-economic development and solving various problems. In this regard, it seems understandable why African countries have declared the development of information technology as one of their top priorities. Thus, this article attempts to analyze the evolution of digital transformation in Sub-Saharan African economies. Finally, the authors conclude that over the past 30 years, African countries have really achieved remarkable results in this area, despite the absolute zero, which was observed in the late 1990s and early 2000s. But the limited financial and technological resources make African countries extremely dependent on foreign aid to meet their development and this threatens their technological sovereignty.*

**Keywords:** *Sub-Saharan African countries, artificial intelligence, information technologies, technological sovereignty, sustainable development.*

Recommended citation: Thomann P.-E., Pantserev K. Digital Transformation of Sub-Saharan African Countries in Historical Perspective: From the First Computers to the AI-driven Economy. *Social Evolution & History*, Vol. 24 No. 2, September 2025, pp. 57–76. DOI: 10.30884/seh/2025.02.03.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Just after becoming independent states, Sub-Saharan African countries faced the challenge of integrating into the contemporary system of international relations as equal actors. In their desire to match the level of socio-economic development with leading world powers, particularly former colonial empires, these countries adopted a number of socio-economic development strategies aimed at ensuring sustainable growth in all key sectors of their economy in the medium term. However, the question remained how this growth could be achieved, as it required a solid financial and technological foundation, which African countries did not have.

Nevertheless, this fact did not prevent Julius Nyerere, in the Arusha Declaration of 1967, from proclaiming the principle of ‘self-reliance,’ which was considered a fundamental condition capable of ensuring real independence and socio-economic development in Tanzania.

However, the example of Tanzania clearly shows that, without a solid financial and technological base, such a strategy has proven to be ineffective. In other words, one can declare anything, but it is much more important to ensure the results promised in the strategy, because otherwise it can undermine trust both in the ruling power at the domestic political level and in the state as a reliable partner at the international level.

Returning to the Tanzanian case, which, in our opinion, is the most revealing, we should say that, in fact, the proclamation of the principle of self-reliance led to an opposite result – a sharp increase in Tanzania's dependence on external development assistance, which ultimately became one of the reasons for Nyerere's resignation, first from the post of president (1985), and then from the position of a chairman of his political party (1990), and the beginning of the process of economic liberalization (Bondarenko *et al.* 2014: 7).

Unfortunately, Tanzania is not the only country in this situation. Many African countries have tried to bridge the enormous economic gap with well-developed countries, but in fact they have only increased their dependence on external development assistance.

With the advent of advanced information technologies (ICT), whose capabilities have begun to grow almost every day, many African countries have seen a real chance to move towards a more innovative economy and finally ensure sustainable socio-economic growth, thereby solving all the most significant tasks they face.

Thus, it seems understandable why the governments of the vast majority of African countries have declared the development of in-

formation and communication technologies (ICT) one of their top priorities. In this regard, specialized concepts, action plans, and strategies for ICT development, both long-term and medium-term emerged in many Sub-Saharan African countries in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Nevertheless, despite the numerous attempts made by African countries over the past three decades to reduce digital inequality, it should be recognized that the current level of ICT development in Sub-Saharan Africa does not allow the countries in the region to rely on rapid and equal integration into the global information and communication space.

African countries do not have adequate financial and technological resources to create a well-developed ICT infrastructure on their territory. In order to catch up with Western countries in terms of the development of ICT sector, they are forced to seek assistance from the same Western countries, which by speculating on the financial dependence of their African 'partners,' force them to implement reforms aimed most of all at full liberalizing the ICT-Industry in African countries and creating favorable conditions for the activity of Western IT giants in the promising African ICT-market.

Thus, we can observe the closed circle effect. African countries recognize the need for developing advanced information technologies in their territories. However, it is also obvious that in order to create an appropriate ICT infrastructure in a country, on the one hand, the elaboration of national programs for the development is required, and on the other hand, it is completely impossible to think about further research in the field of ICT without a solid financial and technological basis, whose lack should be considered as the main obstacle on the way to independent technological development (Pantserov 2021).

That is why in their attempts to ensure the digital transformation of their economies, African countries have been forced to carry out economic and political reforms that are mainly aimed at creating favorable conditions for attracting foreign (non-African) investors.

This process, which was called the 'structural transformation' of African countries' economies, initially had the character of 'controlled liberalization,' but it quickly turned into an almost uncontrolled, spontaneous process, resulting in almost the entire ICT infrastructure on the continent falling into the private ownership of foreign companies.

In current circumstances, it seems important to analyze in a historical perspective how the process of digital transformation of African economies has been going on in the last 30 years and what measures have been taken by the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, which have limited financial and technological potential and are extremely de-

pendent on foreign aid to ensure their development to achieve technological sovereignty.

## **2. THE CREATION OF THE ICT INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE STATES OF SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA**

The first task that the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa needed to solve was creating a well-developed ICT infrastructure that would form the backbone of their upcoming digital transformation. In this context, one of the key goals mentioned in the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) – a special programme adopted in 2001 – was to create up-to-date ICT infrastructure, including penetration into remote and sometimes inaccessible rural areas. According to authors of the initiative, this would reduce the cost of telecommunication services (The New Partnership... N.d.).

Then, in 2001, almost immediately after the signing of the NEPAD Program, the e-Africa Commission was established. Its aim was to develop specific continental Pan-African programs and strategies in the field of ICT. In 2015, during the 15<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session of the African Union, held on 27 July in Kampala, Uganda, a decision was made to change the name of the NEPAD e-Africa Commission to the NEPAD e-Africa Programme. However, despite the change in the name, the mission of this institution has remained the same – ‘to drive the ICT priority sector’ (Foadey 2015).

The key goal of the NEPAD e-Africa Commission is to promote the construction of the Pan-African ICT Broadband Infrastructure Network that is supposed to significantly increase data transmission capacity and reduce connection costs. This will give a new impetus to the development of ICT within the continent. The adoption of the Broadband Development Program in Africa on March 9, 2003, has become the first step towards the solution of this task. The Program aims to connect African countries to the global communications backbone and has been recognized as one of the priorities among other projects launched by NEPAD.

The Broadband Development Program in Africa itself consists, in fact, of two programs: the broadband development program in Eastern and Southern Africa, and a similar program for West, Central, and North Africa. The Programme for the development of broadband communication systems in Eastern and South Africa was approved at a conference held under the auspices of the NEPAD e-Africa Commission in Johannesburg, South Africa, on July 28–30, 2004. And in July 2005, a similar Programme was approved by the countries of West and Central Africa at a conference held in Dakar (Senegal).

According to the most general estimates, more than 30,000 km of fiber optic cable were supposed to be laid across Africa. Initially, it became evident that this project would require huge financial investment, and it was difficult to expect African countries would be able to take over the full financing of this project themselves. In this respect, they placed high hopes on the support of international financial organizations such as the World Bank, the African Development Bank, the Development Bank of South Africa and the French Development Agency.

In particular, the e-Africa Commission signed an agreement with the French Development Agency worth 850 million euros, which the Agency was going to invest in the development of a broadband communication system in Africa. From our point of view, this fact convincingly indicates that Western countries are striving to actively participate in the construction of the most significant infrastructure projects in Africa in order to preserve their influence over management of ICT-infrastructures that are going to be created in the region.

At the same time, the creation of a well-developed ICT infrastructure was only half of the equation, since in addition to laying fiber-optic communication lines, technical modernization of African telecommunication companies was also required. This was mainly due to the pressure from leading world superpowers seeking to gain a foothold in the African ICT market and providing broad support for the creation of modern ICT infrastructure in Africa. As a result, most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa had to completely liberalize this sector, which led to almost the entire ICT industry of the continent falling into the hands of foreign investors. The most typical example in this regard is the case of TelecomKenya, a Kenyan telecommunication company, whose controlling stake was bought out by the French company FranceTelecom in the early 2000s when the need for technical modernization of its facilities arose.

Understanding this fact and in order to try to reduce the dependence on Western development assistance, African countries have made a number of attempts to join their efforts in creating a pan-African ICT infrastructure. Thus, on August 29, 2006, in Kigali (Rwanda), Botswana, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe signed a special protocol aimed at promoting the development of broadband fiber-optic networks in Eastern and Southern Africa. This Protocol entered into force in February 2008, after being ratified by vast majority of countries that signed it.

As for the countries of West and Central Africa, it should be noted that they failed to develop a joint document such as the Kigali Protocol, which would demonstrate, on the one hand, the elaboration of a joint approach to the ways of creating up-to-date ICT infrastructure in East Africa, and, on the other hand, it would show a desire to cooperate and join forces in this area.

Taking this into account, countries that have signed the Kigali Protocol have decided to extend its action to other African states, explaining that they are pursuing the goal of developing an ICT broadband infrastructure network across Africa. A relevant resolution was adopted on October 15, 2007, in Johannesburg (South Africa), at a meeting of ministers responsible for the development of ICT sector in countries that had signed the Kigali Protocol. At this meeting it was especially emphasized that the Kigali protocol does not only cover the development of ICT broadband infrastructure networks in the Southeast part of the continent but also allows other African countries to join in.

To our opinion, the signing of such an agreement and its subsequent expansion to other countries on the continent shows the desire of African countries to elaborate a joint approach to the development of ICT infrastructure on the continent. However, a number of legislative, political, and bureaucratic obstacles stand in the way of implementing the Protocol that was signed in Kigali, which each African country must eliminate on their own.

This means that it is possible to achieve the goals set out in the Protocol only if national strategies are elaborated to establish legislative frameworks for comprehensive development of ICTs and to eliminate existing barriers to their spread across the region. In this regard, governments of Sub-Saharan Africa should, first of all, bring their legislation into line with the requirements of the Kigali Protocol and, first of all, simplify the procedure for establishment and licensing of telecommunication companies that will own and manage regional ICT Broadband Infrastructure Network and provide technical support for it.

As a result, between 2000 and 2010, many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa adopted long-term strategic plans for national development, in which special attention was paid to the development of ICT. In particular, Ghana adopted such a document in 2003 (Ghana ICT 2003), Kenya adopted the Kenya Vision 2030 in 2007 (<https://vision2030.go.ke>), and Nigeria adopted Nigeria Vision 2020 in 2009 (see Nairametrics 2009). All these strategic plans focused on the following key areas:

- a) general liberalization of the ICT sector and creation of favorable conditions for the functioning of private investors (mostly non-African ones);
- b) stimulation of public-private partnership in the ICT sector;
- c) further development of fiber-optic networks and search for technological solutions for the ‘last mile’;
- d) provision of the universal access;
- e) promotion of opportunities for the ICT use among local citizens;
- f) implementation of ICT in functioning of public authorities;
- g) development of e-government services;
- h) application of advanced information technology in education and training;
- i) promotion and development of local digital content;
- k) development of electronic commerce.

In general, providing an overall overview of the level of technological development in Sub-Saharan African countries, it should be noted that over the past 30 years, these countries have managed to achieve significant success in this field, compared to the ‘absolute zero’ that was observed for this indicator in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

The main catalyst for this process was the construction of the ICT broadband submarine network along the coast of West and East Africa in the first decade of the twentieth-first century. This network starts in Portugal and runs along the entire coast of Western Africa to Cape Town. Then, the East African cable system starts in Johannesburg and goes along the coast of East Africa via Mombasa (Kenya), and further to Egypt (Chasia 2007: 12). Thus, African countries have been connected to the global communication backbone. The implementation of this project has caused a significant reduction in the costs of Internet connection, making it more affordable for the general public.

Of course, it is impossible to say that all the problems of creating an ICT broadband infrastructure network across the continent have been solved, since high-speed Internet connections have appeared mainly in large cities and industrial centers, and in countries like Chad, Niger, and the Central African Republic, only main lines have been laid out, which are supposed to link West and East Africa together.

Therefore, mobile communication services have been actively developing in Africa, which provide an opportunity for even residents of rural areas to access the Internet using mobile devices. This rapid development of mobile communications in African countries has been called the ‘mobile revolution.’

### 3. AFRICAN PATTERNS OF SILICON VALLEY

The creation of an appropriate ICT infrastructure should be considered a necessary basis without which it is not possible to initiate the process of digital transformation. The second component will be the start of research and development in advanced information technologies.

Sub-Saharan African countries recognize this fact. In this regard, special attention is paid to the development of national innovative technological parks that would be responsible for developing both software and hardware that would reduce the dependence on imported, mainly Western, technologies.

That is why, starting from 2013, they have been building huge innovative complexes – technological hubs – in several African countries. They were supposed to be responsible for developing the ICT industry in their countries of origin in the future. However, the further realization of all these projects faced the typical problem for most African countries – lack of funds.

It is necessary to point out that Sub-Saharan African countries initially recognized that the construction of these innovation complexes would be very expensive. That is why the final realization of these projects depends on a steady flow of private investment because national governments can only cover up to 10 % of the costs, mainly for the construction of basic infrastructure, communications, and several administrative buildings. The remaining expenses must be covered by private investors, who will be responsible for building universities, ICT-centers, offices, residential areas, and hotels (Tueva 2023).

Despite expectations, it cannot be said that private investors show great interest in these projects, and the lack of a steady flow of investments causes delays in the construction of these technological hubs that were initially announced.

One of the most well-known examples of such innovative complexes is the Konza TechnoCity, the construction of which began in the savannah about 70 km from Nairobi, Kenya, in 2013 (<https://konza.go.ke/>). According to the general master plan, the new city will house key telecommunication companies as well as research institutes, including the Kenyan Institute of Science and Technology.

Initially, they were planning to finish this project in 2020. However, construction was delayed – only one of the eight administrative buildings had been built by that time. The main reason was a lack of investors, although the Kenyans assure that foreign investors show great interest in the project, in the near future all areas allocated for construction will be taken over by private investors. However, now we

can only talk about the completion of the first phase of construction, which involves laying all necessary communications and roads – the so-called ‘horizontal infrastructure’ (Otieno 2022).

There is also a project for the creation of a technopark in Ghana, called HOPE City (it is an abbreviation for *Home Office People's Environment*). In 2014, the masterplan for the new city was introduced. And they planned to complete this very ambitious and expensive project within just three years by 2016 (HOPE City N.d.). But unfortunately, this project remained only on paper and the construction was frozen at the early stage due to lack of funds.

In this regard, the Ethio-ICT Village in Ethiopia, which was opened in 2015, should be considered to be the only technopark in Africa that is actually functioning. The Ethio-ICT Village was supposed to serve as the headquarters for both the telecommunication company Ethio Telecom and the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology, and it was expected to become the leading ICT center in Africa. ‘Software development center, cloud ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) data center, call center (contact center), research center and auditorium’ are currently functioning in the Ethio-ICT Village (Bekele 2017). And more than 20 companies have already become residents of the Village. This experience has turned out to be so successful that the government has decided to create similar technology parks in other parts of the country.

Among other projects that involve the construction of technological parks in Africa, it is necessary to highlight the building of Diamniadio *Lake City*. This city, which is being built 30 km away from Dakar near Diamniadio lake, has been declared the most high-tech and smart city in Africa. This initiative differs from similar ones in Kenya, Ghana, and Ethiopia, as its main goal is not to create a technological park, but to relieve overcrowded Dakar, although it assumes the creation of an industrial park and university for about 30,000 students (Bendix 2018). Besides, a more realistic deadline for completion of this project was initially announced – 2035. Now the active phase of construction is underway, and there is reason to believe it will be completed by that time.

Rwanda also has its project to create a smart city called Kigali Innovation City (World Construction Network 2024). The aim of the project is to attract technological companies to Rwanda and strengthen the country's innovation ecosystem. It will position the country as a leading pan-African center and accelerate its transformation into a knowledge-based economy. Within the framework of the project, they are going to build four universities, offices and living areas, business incubators for startups, and retail facilities and hotels (Kagire

2024). However, the construction of the city began only in 2022 so it is too early to sum up results, but taking into account the current level of socio-economic development in Rwanda, this project is likely to be completed.

Based on the facts stated above, one can see that Sub-Saharan African countries are trying to conduct appropriate research and development in the field of advanced information technologies and are thinking about the creation of specialized ICT hubs in this regard.

But it is evident that full implementation of such ambitious projects is only possible with the involvement of big foreign (non-African) investors. Therefore, the backbone of the business models of all these technological hubs is a public-private partnership. At the same time, the government definitely plays a small role of just building the so-called horizontal infrastructure, which supposes the construction of all appropriate communications and administrative buildings. Whereas foreign (non-African) investors from all over the world: Europe, the United States, China, the United Arab Emirates should be responsible for creating the technological clusters in these ICT hubs.

That is why the creation of a favorable investment climate remains the main priority for the economic policy in most African countries, and the lack of a steady flow of these investments is the main cause of delays in finishing these ambitious projects that were initially announced.

#### **4. AI-TECHNOLOGIES AS A NEW STAGE IN THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN COUNTRIES**

The contemporary level of development of advanced information technologies poses new challenges for sub-Saharan African countries. Nowadays all leading nations are paying increased attention to the development of hybrid intelligent systems that are ‘capable of learning and self-development’ (Grinin *et al.* 2024a).

Today, artificial intelligence (AI) is actively penetrating our daily life and is used in different fields, from machine translation to medical diagnostics and even in the generation of new content: it can formulate ideas, conduct dialogues, create works, stories, images, videos, and music, as well as edit images, videos, *etc.* (Grinin *et al.* 2024b).

At the same time, the support for domestic developers in the field of AI is often provided by governments. Today, more than 30 countries have adopted national AI strategies, including the USA, China, France, Japan, the UAE, and Russia.

Despite the fact that countries of Sub-Saharan Africa generally lag significantly behind well-developed countries in terms of development of advanced information technologies, they still consider further development of hybrid intelligent systems as a key priority in their national policies and are sure that those technologies can become key tools to give a new impetus for economic development, making it more innovative.

In this regard, many African countries have begun to develop national AI strategies. The first national AI strategy in Sub-Saharan Africa was adopted by Mauritius in November 2018 (Mauritius AI Strategy 2018). Rwanda, Senegal, and Benin also elaborated their own AI strategies and became the first countries in continental Sub-Saharan Africa to adopt such a document (Hankins *et al.* 2023).

The National AI-strategy in South Africa, called the National Artificial Intelligence Policy Framework, has been elaborated for a long time (more than 4 years), as it demanded a large number of different consultations. It was finalized only in August 2024 (South Africa National ... Framework 2024). And before that, the key document which defined the main lines of development of AI technologies in the country was the Report of the Presidential Commission of the Fourth Industrial Revolution that was adopted in 2020 (Presidential Commission ... 2020).

And finally on March 27, 2025, after seven years of hard work and intensive consultations with all stakeholders, the National AI-strategy of Kenya was introduced.

The elaboration of such documents strongly demonstrates that the development of advanced information technologies has become a key priority for national development in the vast majority of African countries. Among the concrete steps towards further implementation of AI technologies is the creation of appropriate government bodies and educational and research centers.

Thus, in Nigeria, the Nigerian Ministry of Science and Technology announced the creation of the National Agency for Research in Robotics and Artificial Intelligence (NARRAI). And the University of Lagos established the Artificial Intelligence Hub in June 2018. This research center was established with the initiative of Bayo Adeganmi, one of Nigeria's leading specialists in data science. It is expected that the Center will largely focus on developing data collection tools necessary for the development of machine learning instruments and, of course, selecting young talent specialists in data analysis (Ndiomewese 2018).

Kenya is not far behind Nigeria. In particular, Strathmore University in Nairobi has created an African Research Center (@iLabAfrica), which aims to conduct research in the fields of big data and artificial intelligence.

And, of course, South Africa has managed to achieve the greatest success in this field among all Sub-Saharan African countries. For example, the University of Pretoria has created the Intelligent Systems Group (ISG), which specializes in the development of various hybrid intelligent systems, mainly in the field of computer vision.

In addition to the development of research centers in the field of AI, an active implementation of AI-based technologies is taking place in industry in several African countries. Currently, many companies use AI in their business processes in Sub-Saharan Africa. South Africa is the undisputed leader in this respect (726 companies), followed by Nigeria – 456 companies and Kenya – 204 companies. For comparison, Ghana has 115 such companies, Cameroon has 54, and Mauritius has 35 (DIPLO 2022).

In South Africa, financial and insurance companies, for example, actively use chatbots to answer consumer questions about financial products. AI now makes decisions in the banking sector on granting loans and vehicle insurance. South Africa also holds a leading position in the production and sale of AI-controlled drones in Sub-Saharan Africa capable of performing various civilian and military tasks, from moving goods of various weights to monitoring the terrain (carrying out search and rescue or reconnaissance operations, assessing damage from natural disasters or hostilities, adjusting fire on enemy positions, *etc.*).

Cameroon-based Agrix Technology offers an AI platform that identifies plant diseases and offers treatment options. Farmers can scan a sample of an affected plant directly using a smartphone without the Internet. The app has text and voice recognition options in local African languages (<https://www.agrixtech.com>).

The first Kenyan startup using AI technologies is FarmDrive (<https://farmdrive.co.ke>), a technology platform based on large amounts of data that provides financial institutions with models relevant to the agricultural industry, which is necessary for assessing the risk of issuing a loan and developing targeted loan products that meet the needs of small farmers.

Another Kenyan startup suggests the integration of a specialized chatbot called Sophie into social networks and messengers. This free chatbot, equipped with a simple voice interface, represents a platform where any user can ask questions in the intimate sphere, including in the field of reproductive medicine, and receive an exhaustive answer.

This service is available on popular messaging apps (Sophie Bot: <http://sophiebot.tk>).

In Nigeria, one of the first technological platforms to use the AI was the Kudi.ai service, which was launched in 2017 (*kudi* means ‘money’ in Hausa language). This service is a chatbot that provides financial assistance, including transferring money and paying bills. Just like Sophie, Kudi is integrated into the most popular messengers and social networks (Akinwamide 2017).

Another Nigerian startup, chatbot Lara, which was launched on March 5, 2017, is an intelligent system that helps users get from one place to another by providing detailed, step-by-step text-based instructions and calculating the exact fare in advance (Ndiomewese 2017).

Basing on the examples above, one can make a conclusion that Sub-Saharan African countries start to use AI technologies to create various services that will significantly simplify people's lives (Pantserov 2020). However, it is clear that in order to conduct in-depth research and development in the field of AI, African countries need strong financial and technological bases, which, for obvious reasons, they do not currently possess. As a result, these countries continue to rely on Western technologies. This leads some experts to believe that there is no real AI in Africa and what we see today is simply copying Western technologies (Matuluko 2017).

As for the world's largest IT companies, such as Microsoft, IBM, and Google, they are trying to preserve their position in the promising African ICT market under the pretext of implementation and localization of their innovative technical solutions in Africa. The most well-known example of this is the opening of the AI Research Center in Africa by Google Corporation in Accra, Ghana, in 2018 (Miley 2019). On the one hand, such initiatives really stimulate the development of technologies in Africa, but on the other hand, they undermine the technological sovereignty of African countries.

## **5. HUMAN CAPACITY BUILDING AS AN INDISPENSABLE CONDITION FOR DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN COUNTRIES**

As has been shown above, nowadays we can observe widespread implementation of AI technologies into the business processes of various enterprises in Africa. However, this requires significant transformation of education in Sub-Saharan African countries, as it is necessary to organize training of highly qualified personnel who would be

able to work with advanced technologies. Special attention should be paid to training of data analysts and ML engineers in this regard.

Sub-Saharan African countries have already started solving this problem, and there have appeared a number of relevant educational programs in African universities over the past ten years.

Thus, for example, the University of Pretoria established the Institute for Big Data and Data Science in September 2017. The University of Lagos, in Nigeria, Strathmore University in Kenya, and the University of Rwanda are also training data scientists.

But the appearance of such educational programs in certain African universities cannot fully meet the demand of the entire region for highly qualified IT specialists. As a result, many talented young professionals are often forced to leave African countries in order to get high-quality technical education. And not all of them return.

In order to improve the situation, online education platforms are being actively developed in Africa today. For this purpose, back in 1997 the African Virtual University (AVU) was established. Initially, it was a project of the World Bank, but later, in 2002, the university headquarters were moved to Nairobi, Kenya and in 2003, it became into a pan-African intergovernmental organization aimed at improving education quality in Africa. At present, 54 African universities are involved in its activities.

The experience of the AVU turned out to be so successful that several African countries have launched their own online education startups (Halilou 2016). For example, Samaskull, the Senegalese online platform, provides access to various online courses. In this regard it is an analogue to the world-famous Coursera platform, but made in Senegal with a very ambitious goal to become an innovative and open platform that allows Africans to fully control their future. The slogan of this platform is ‘made by Africans for Africans.’ Dapatio, a South-African Startup launched in Cape Town in 2013, also uses AI technologies to help students find relevant educational content.

The appearance of such new educational programs, together with online courses offered by the AVU, has led to an increase in the number of young professionals in the fields of applied mathematics and computer science in Africa. However, the specifics of data scientists training lie in the fact that basic skills are not enough. This can be explained by the fact that computer science represents a field that is developing very quickly and no educational standard can keep up with its development. That is why, the most crucial aspect of preparing highly qualified data scientists is developing of knowledge-sharing

professional groups that would bring together leading researchers and practitioners in the field, who would share their ideas within the community.

In order to provide such a platform, Data Science Africa was launched in 2015. The key mission of this non-profit organization is ‘to provide quality training in data science, machine learning, and other emerging technologies, with the aim of leveraging these technologies to develop solutions to African problems.’ Thus, since 2015, Data Science Africa has organized a number of summer schools and workshops at a wide range of universities across East Africa (Data Science Africa N.d.).

Another remarkable initiative in this regard is the establishment of the Machine Intelligence Institute of Africa in 2016. It is a non-profit organization whose key mission is ‘to transform and help build an AI-powered Africa through a strong, innovative and collaborative Machine Intelligence, AI and Data Science community consisting of individuals and key players in the African Artificial Intelligence Ecosystem’ (MIIA N.d.).

All those initiatives have caused the increased growth of the data science community in Africa. Various specialized conferences in machine learning are held regularly in different African countries. It is a remarkable fact that in 2023 Rwanda hosted the International Conference on Learning Representations (ICLR), which is one of the largest ML-conferences that annually brings together the best specialists in AI and its proceedings have the highest ranking (A\*) according to CORE (International Conference on Learning Representations N.d.).

To our opinion, the choice of Rwanda as a venue for such a remarkable event demonstrates that Sub-Saharan African countries have really managed to build a data science community that is recognized by leading experts in the field.

## 6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Basing on the analysis that has been undertaken, we can see that Sub-Saharan African countries today are paying increased attention to the development of advanced information technologies. And over the past 30 years, they have managed to achieve remarkable results in this area, if we keep in mind the absolute zero in this indicator which was observed in the late 1990s and early 2000s, specifically:

- 1) the backbone fiber-optic infrastructure network was constructed, which caused a significant reduction in costs for Internet traffic;

2) vast majority of Sub-Saharan African countries adopted national strategies for the further development of the ICT industry, both in the short and long term;

3) a number of African countries initiated the construction of innovation technical hubs that are supposed to be responsible for the development of advanced information technologies.

Nowadays, African countries pay increased attention to the development of AI technologies and their rapid implementation into the daily life of ordinary Africans. This means that the digital transformation of Sub-Saharan African countries has turned into a number of attempts at rapid implementation of different technological innovations with very weak financial and technological support. Therefore, the full implementation of all these initiatives faces serious challenges, namely:

1. The need to provide broadband high-speed Internet access to citizens. Despite the fact that a major high-speed broadband network was built in the first decade of the twenty-first century, it must be recognized that the problem of providing high-speed Internet access throughout the continent remains unsolved. This is because, for African countries, the most pressing issue is still the search for a solution to the ‘last mile’ from backbone fiber-optic networks to households. As a result, today only 22% of urban and 10% of rural populations have high-speed Internet access, and the effectiveness of AI technologies, as is known, directly depends on having high-speed Internet.

2. Human capacity building. Today, this problem is gradually beginning to be solved and one can observe a significant growth of the Data Science community over the past ten years. But nevertheless, there is still a lot to be done to ensure that enough specialists are trained in such a rapidly growing field as data science.

3. The creation of AI laboratories that would be equipped with sufficient computational powers capable for developing and training hybrid intelligent systems.

4. The construction of an extensive network of data centers. Nowadays, there is taking place an extreme imbalance in the distribution of data centers across Africa. Today, there are about 165 data centers in Sub-Saharan Africa, but all of them are located in 28 Sub-Saharan African countries (out of 49!). At the same time, South Africa has the largest number of such centers (47). Kenya has 18 data centers, Nigeria – 16 and Mauritius – 10 (DataCenterMap N.d.). This forces governmental bodies in African countries to continue storing data on servers located in the United States, which cannot but threaten the

information security of African countries. It should also be noted that not all these data centers launched in Africa belong to African companies. In particular, on March 6, 2019, Microsoft announced the launch of two data centers in Cape Town and Johannesburg. And the Amazon Web Services data center was launched in Cape Town in 2020.

5. The availability of domestic software, which should be considered as an indispensable condition for ensuring technological sovereignty for the country. This is because only domestic software can be maximally adapted to the demands of local citizens. At the same time, we must highlight the extremely unsatisfactory state of research and development in AI in African countries, where they mainly import ready-made technical solutions instead of producing their own software. Today, Microsoft and other Western corporations continue to be the main software suppliers for African countries. Their licenses, as a rule, do not imply or rather even explicitly prohibit making any changes to the code of computer programs. This fact makes some experts conclude that there is no AI in Africa at all, and what we see today is simply copying Western technologies (Matuluko 2017).

African countries will have to redouble their efforts and investments in international cooperation to improve their digital sovereignty and develop their own AI research and technologies. Strong bilateral coalitions or smaller ones should be created for cooperation within the framework of international organizations (UN, UNESCO, African Union, and BRICS), as well as with various states that are already advanced in AI development. The challenge is also to find voluntary actors that are ready to pool the necessary resources and skills in order to ensure their independence and future digital sovereignty in order to avoid being totally dominated by a single country.

These challenges seem to be rather complicated in nature, and African governments should involve all stakeholders in their solution: scholars, private investors, civil society, politicians, and different regulatory bodies. In our opinion, only in this way can an effective exchange of experience and search be organized and optimal solutions be found to meet specific local and regional demands and ensure the creation of a high-tech ecosystem in the region.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The authors acknowledge Saint-Petersburg State University for a research project 116471555.

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# Islamist State Formation in Somalia

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This article examines the trajectory of jihadist state-building in Somalia from the early 1990s to the present, focusing on the evolution of Islamist governance projects initiated by Al-Ittihad al-Islami\*, the Union of Islamic Courts\*, Al-Shabaab\*, and the Islamic State's Somali affiliate (Wilayat al-Somal\*). Drawing on field research conducted in Somalia in May 2023, expert interviews, as well as reports from research centers, government institutions, and propaganda materials from jihadist organizations, the study employs qualitative content analysis and critical discourse analysis to explore both narratives and governance practices. The analysis demonstrates that Al-Shabaab has developed the most durable proto-state structure in Somalia, successfully institutionalizing judicial mechanisms, taxation, and basic service provision while embedding itself into local clan dynamics. In con-*

Recommended citation: Askerov M.-A., Issaev L., Korotayev A. Islamist State Formation in Somalia. *Social Evolution & History*, Vol. 25 No. 2, September 2025, pp. 77–102. DOI: 10.30884/seh/2025.02.04.

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*trast, Wilayat al-Sumal remains limited in scope, focusing on insurgency and terrorist attacks without establishing meaningful governance or territorial control, and functioning instead as a logistical and financial hub within the broader Islamic State network in Africa. The article argues that the Somali case illustrates the divergent approaches of al-Qaeda\* and the Islamic State towards state-building: whereas Al-Shabaab's relative success stems from its ability to localize and integrate into Somali social structures, Wilayat Somalia's failure underscores the limits of a transnational jihadist model detached from local realities. This comparison not only enhances our understanding of Islamist governance in Somalia but also sheds light on the broader dynamics of jihadist competition across Africa.*

**Keywords:** *Somalia, state-building, the Islamic State\*, Al-Shabaab\*, Wilayat al-Sumal\*, al-Qaeda\*, jihadist.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Africa has undeniably emerged as one of the global epicenters of jihadist expansion (e.g., Grinin 2020; Issaev *et al.* 2020, 2021, 2022; Bacon, Warner 2021; Raineri 2022; Besenyő, Sólyomfi 2024; Besenyő *et al.* 2024; Korotayev *et al.* 2024). This trend became particularly pronounced following a series of setbacks for jihadist movements in the Arab world. Terrorist organizations have continued to exploit local socio-economic, ethnic, and political instability to consolidate their power. Against this backdrop, two regions stand out most prominently – the Sahel and the Horn of Africa. In both areas, jihadist activity has persisted for decades and has long since evolved beyond guerrilla warfare into attempts at state-building, with varying degrees of success.

Somalia was the first African country where jihadists declared the creation of their own state. The collapse of the Somali state in the early 1990s led to widespread disillusionment with secular models of governance. Out of this environment, the group *Al-Ittihad al-Islami*<sup>1</sup> emerged and, in 1992, proclaimed the establishment of the Islamic Emirate of Somalia, with Bosaso as its center (this entity, however, turned out to be rather short-lived) (Sheikh 2019). This precedent was later emulated by Islamists in Azawad, who in 2013 overthrew the rule of the Tuareg nationalists in the newly established Tuareg state and tried to replace it with Islamist statehood (e.g., Korotayev and

Khokhlova 2022). Comparable cases include Boko Haram in Nigeria, the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant,<sup>2</sup> and the Taliban in Afghanistan – all of which pursued distinct strategies for state-building. What sets *Al-Ittihad al-Islami* apart, however, is that it sought to construct an Islamic polity almost entirely from scratch, without continuity from pre-existing government structures.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the rise of Somali Islamists and the measures they undertook in the process of state-building and the establishment of their own emirate. It also examines the extent to which these efforts proved successful. Particular attention is paid to the approaches adopted by different armed Islamist groups in Somalia, as well as to the unique features that distinguish the Somali jihadist experience from others across Africa and beyond.

Accordingly, the article is structured as follows. It begins by exploring the roots of Islamism in Somalia, the characteristics of Somali society, and the role of clans/tribes in Islamic state-building. It then turns to the case of the Union of Islamic Courts and considers how the experiences of the 2000s have shaped contemporary Islamist projects in the country. Finally, the article assesses the experience of the Islamic State in Somalia, which diverged from earlier groups by abandoning ambitions for state-building entirely.

This article draws on data from news agencies, reports from research centers and governmental organizations, as well as findings from fieldwork conducted in Somalia in May 2023 and a series of expert interviews. These sources made it possible to assess the perspectives of both the expert community and government officials on the processes under study. In addition, propaganda materials produced by *Al-Shabaab* and the Islamic State were analyzed. The research employed qualitative content analysis and critical discourse analysis. This approach made it possible, on the one hand, to identify the key narratives disseminated by these organizations and, on the other, to examine discourse across three levels: linguistic practices, discursive practices, and the socio-cultural practices resulting from the application of these discourses.

### **1.1. Traditional Socio-Political Organization of the Somalis and Emergence of the Somali State**

The history of modern Somali statehood began in 1960 when the former Italian and British colonies in the Horn of Africa gained inde-

pendence and united to form a single state. Despite early efforts to establish a democratic national government during the first decade (1960–1969), clan-based rivalries soon dominated the political arena (Korotayev and Voronina 2024). As Aleynikov notes, the political parties that emerged during this period largely represented the interests of specific clans, while ideology was not a decisive factor in their competition (Aleynikov 2012: 21).

The terminology used to describe Somalia's socio-political structure is itself problematic. To start with, an important feature of the social structure in Somalia is the presence of ethno-political formations, which in modern English-language publications are most often referred to as ‘clans’ (Lewis 1961, 1988, 2008; Zoppi 2018; Yuusuf 2021; Osman and Abebe 2023). At the same time, it is quite obvious to social anthropologists dealing with the traditional socio-political organization of the population in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) that we are talking specifically about those forms of socio-political organization that in this macro region are usually designated as *qabā'il* (singular *qabīlah*), almost universally translated into English as ‘tribes’ (Eickelman 2001: 65–119; Korotayev 2003, 2020, 2021). To designate these entities, the Somalis use the word *qabiil*, which goes back precisely to the above-mentioned Arabic term *qabīlah*.

Note that in political anthropology, the ‘tribe’ can be considered as a form of both political and ethnic organization. The famous British social anthropologist, Bronisław Malinowski proposed to distinguish between ‘tribe-state’ (tribe as a form of political organization) and ‘tribe-nation’ (tribe as an ethnic or subethnic entity) (Malinowski 2015; Korotayev 1996). The Somali *qabiil* has both meanings and resembles both the Arabic usage of the term *qabīlah* (as primarily a form of socio-political organization) and the Swahili usage of the term *kabila* to designate an ethnic entity (in Swahili, e.g., the word *kabila* can denote such large ethnic groups as the Maasai, Makonde or Iraqw). This is, apparently, no coincidence, since the Somalis have experienced both a powerful Arabic influence and the influence of the Swahili civilization (currently, the number of Somalis whose native language is Swahili is even slightly higher than the number of those whose native language is Arabic) (Menkhaus 2003).

In general, when we talk about Somali clans, we are referring to that kind of socio-political structures, which in the space from Moroc-

co in the west to Afghanistan in the east, from Kurdistan in the north to Yemen and in the south, are usually called ‘tribes’ (*qabā’il*) (Gellner 1971; Korotayev 2020; Tapper 2011); on the other hand, ‘clan’ structures of the highest level (so called ‘clan families’) are rather subethnic (Isaaq, Darod, Hawiye) or even ethnic (Rahanweyn) entities (and in this regard they more closely correlate with the Swahili *kabila*). However, since the term ‘clan’ has been established to describe the traditional socio-political structures of the Somalis (Lewis 2008; Zoppi 2018), we will primarily use it in what follows.

According to the famous British anthropologist, Ioan M. Lewis (1961), the upper level of the traditional Somali ‘clan’ organization is constituted by so-called ‘clan families,’ which in the MENA region would rather correspond to tribal confederations (they may be also called ‘superclans’). ‘Clan families’ consist of ‘clans’ (which in the MENA region would rather correspond to federations of tribes), whereas ‘clans’ consist of ‘sub-clans’ (which in the MENA region would rather correspond to individual tribes) that control specific territories (Farah and Lewis 1997: 352; Abbink 2009b).

It is generally believed that there are four main clan families in present-day Somalia: the Hawiye, the Dir (including the Isaaq), the Darod and the Rahanweyn (the Digil-and-Mirifle) (*e.g.*, Aleynikov 2014: 27), although the Isaaq tend to consider themselves as a separate clan family of the same level as the Darod or the Hawiye (*e.g.*, Konovalov 2010; Ahmed 1995).

The core of the Dir, Isaaq, Darod, and Hawiye clans relied mostly on nomadic pastoralism (especially, camel-breeding), whereas the Rahanweyn clans mostly practiced agriculture combined with animal husbandry, and, thus, their status has traditionally been significantly lower than that of the ‘camel-breeding’ clans (Ambroso 2002; Konovalov 2010).

Most Rahanwein communicate with each other in a language different from that used by the other major (‘pastoralist’) clan families. We are talking about the Af-Maay language, also known as Af-Maymay, Mai-Mai or simply Mai/Maay (Paster 2006). Previously, Af-Maay was often classified as a Somali dialect, but more recent research by linguist Mohamed Diri Abdullahi suggests that it is a distinct Afro-Asiatic language of the Cushitic branch, albeit very closely related to North Somalian (the official language of the Federal Republic of Somalia) (Abdullahi 2001: 9). At the same time, many Digil

tribes ('clans') that are part of the Rahanwein confederation speak their own languages (Af-Tunni, Af-Garre, Af-Bun, Dabarre) of the so-called Digil subgroup (Eberhard *et al.* 2022). Thus, the Rahanwein should be more reasonably considered not a subethnic, but an ethnic group, or even a set of ethnic groups included in the Somali super-ethnos (Korotayev and Voronina 2024; Korotayev and Khayrullin 2024).

Across all levels of the clan-tribal hierarchy – from the smallest unit, the *rer* (extended family), to the highest level encompassing an entire tribal confederation ('superclan') – governance is supposed to be exercised through councils in which the interests of different social groups are represented by elders and other respected figures. Each confederation is headed by a chief supported by a council of clan representatives. The chief resolves internal disputes by consensus and represents the clan in inter-clan affairs; he also interprets both customary and Islamic (sharia) law in new contexts. However, the chief cannot act independently and does not serve as an absolute military leader, since matters of war are usually situational (Lewis 1994: 97).

In the post-independence Somali state, political power was dominated by members of the Darod confederation, which provoked resentment among other groups. The 1969 military coup brought to power a junta led by Mohamed Siad Barre, who undertook an attempt at a revolutionary transformation of the Somali society along the lines of 'scientific socialism'.<sup>3</sup> However, despite its rhetoric of building an egalitarian socialist society and combating tribalism, the regime not only failed to address these problems but reinforced the dominance of the Darod superclan, to which the 1969 revolution leaders themselves belonged (Hassan 2021: 1902). The suppression of political activity and neglect of other clans' interests inevitably laid the foundations for future internal conflict. These tensions deepened further with the outbreak of war between Somalia and Ethiopia.

By 1981, widespread repression and mass killings of Isaaq clan members had prompted the formation of the opposition Somali National Movement, which launched a guerrilla struggle against the Somali state forces (Marchal 2007: 1102). In 1988, Siad Barre's decision to abandon Somalia's territorial claims to Ethiopia's Ogaden region – home primarily to the Ogaden clan of the Darod superclan – cost him the loyalty of significant Darod elites, who went on to establish the Somali Patriotic Movement (Ahmad 2015: 90). In 1989, the Hawiye

clans also entered the armed struggle, forming the United Somali Congress. Later, several clans coalesced into the Somali National Alliance under the leadership of former General Mohamed Farah Hassan Aideed. However, clan rivalries also penetrated the opposition, fueling further fragmentation and factional conflict (Aleynikov 2012: 23).

Thus, in 1991, after the overthrow of the Siad Barre regime and the victory of the Somali revolution, Somalia entered an era of civil war (*e.g.*, Korotayev and Voronina 2024) that continues to this day and in which clan and tribal dynamics play a decisive role. However, as Aleynikov observes, the active phase of the civil war concentrated primarily in the southern and central regions of the country, formerly under Italian control. The northern provinces, where the self-declared independent state of Somaliland and the State of Puntland (now a constituent part of the Somali Federation) have been established, are marked by relative security and stability. This can be explained in large part by their clan homogeneity: in Somaliland, the population is predominantly Isaaq, while in Puntland it largely belongs to the Harti branch of the Darod clan-tribal confederation/superclan (Aleynikov 2012: 33).

Religion also deserves special mention, as Sufi orders (*tariqas*) have traditionally played an important role in Somali society. Among the most influential are the Qadiriyya, Ahmadiyya, Salihyya, and Rifaiyya. Historically, Sufi *tariqas* were active in anti-colonial uprisings, the dissemination of Islamic knowledge, and charitable work. Their *jamaats* are respected among Somali clans and remain actively involved in social life, engaging in economic activities, helping the poor, and organizing pilgrimages to Mecca (Aleynikov 2012: 145). Since the 1990s, however, various Salafi associations have also expanded their presence in the country. These groups seek to fulfill a similar role in Somali society and actively compete with Sufi *tariqas* for the allegiance of clan leaders and elders (Brazhalovich, Klyuchnikov, and Lukyanov 2016: 185).

## **1.2. Development of the Somali Crisis and the Islamic Courts Union**

Following the collapse of Siad Barre's regime in January 1991, the political movement known as the United Somali Congress (USC) attempted to establish a transitional government. However, some of the USC's allied groups refused to support this initiative, as the Congress

was seen as representing primarily the interests of the Hawiye superclan. Soon after, fighting broke out in Mogadishu between the USC and the Somali Patriotic Movement, which represented the Ogaden and Harti clans (both are branches of the Darod superclan), as well as the Somali Democratic Alliance, led by the northern Gadabursi clan (of the Dir superclan) (Issa-Salwe 1996: 104).

The deteriorating humanitarian situation and the effective collapse of the Somali statehood prompted UN intervention under the UNITAF and UNOSOM I missions. Their mandate was to reconcile warring clans and negotiate arrangements for shared use of vital resources. Despite some successes – for example, in mediating between the Abgal and Habar Gidir clans (of the Hawiye superclan) – the UN missions failed to achieve lasting stability. Certain groups, particularly the Somali National Alliance, perceived UN forces as a threat to their dominance and openly engaged in armed confrontations with the international peacekeepers (*e.g.*, Drysdale 1994: 168).

In 2000, the Transitional National Government (TNG) was established in Djibouti with the aim of uniting several rival clans. Yet this institution soon faced competition from the Somali Reconciliation and Restoration Council, headed by Hussein Farrah Aideed, former leader of the Somali National Alliance and a member of the Habar Gidir clan of the Hawiye confederation. The TNG was eventually forced to concede to the *de facto* autonomy of clans and sub-clans that, by that point, had established their own political structures (Sumie 2003: 464; Korotayev and Khayrullin 2024; see also, *e.g.*, Le Sage 2002).

In 2004, the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) was created in Nairobi, temporarily resolving the conflict between the TNG and the Reconciliation Council by integrating the leaders of the latter into the new federal framework. However, this structure – despite possessing the formal institutions of government and an army – wielded no real authority, due to its lack of effective territorial control, financial resources, technical support, and capacity to collect taxes to provide even basic social services to the population (*e.g.*, Korotayev, Voronina 2024). By 2006, an alternative political force – the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) – began to gain influence. By July of that year, the ICU had succeeded in capturing Mogadishu and temporarily extended its control over most of Somalia.

## 2. THE ISLAMIC COURTS UNION

The origins of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) date back to the early years of the Somali civil war, when the collapse of the state and the resulting lawlessness prompted local religious leaders in northern Mogadishu to establish the first sharia courts (Massoud 2021: 76). These courts primarily dealt with family disputes and petty crime, and quickly earned the trust of the population because their leaders did not take sides in clan or factional rivalries (Massoud 2021: 81). Although the courts were known for the severity of their punishments and lacked a formal organizational structure, they managed to bring a degree of stability and effectively addressed administrative issues in the areas under their control (Kaplan 2006).

The consolidation of sharia judges into the Islamic Courts Union occurred in April 1999, with the aim of driving warlords from the outskirts of Mogadishu. By June–July 2006, the ICU had succeeded in defeating the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counter-Terrorism, an umbrella group of warlords, becoming the first faction since the outbreak of civil war to establish full control over the Somali capital. During its short rule from June to December 2006, the ICU managed to reconstruct state institutions, attract investors, and facilitate the return of refugees by issuing visas; it also restored citizens' rights to property that had been confiscated during the conflict (Ali Ismail 2010: 372). Top UN officials referred to the brief period of the ICU rule in Central and Southern Somalia as a 'golden era' in the recent history of Somalia (Okure 2007). During our own fieldwork in Somalia, conducted in May 2023, we could see with our own eyes that the only banknotes circulating in the country were still those issued by the ICU government during their rather short period of control over the country.

One of the ICU's central policy agendas was the fight against tribalism. Public rhetoric against tribalism was not new in Somali politics, having already been characteristic of Siad Barre's government. What distinguished the ICU, however, were specific measures it adopted, such as encouraging marriages between members of marginalized and privileged clans as a means of weakening entrenched divisions (Elmi 2010: 193). Yet the ICU's leadership had long relied on the financial backing of Hawiye businessmen, and most of its leaders were themselves from the Hawiye clan. Enforcement of court rulings also de-

pended on militias drawn from local clans (Skjelderup, Ainashe, and Abdulle 2020: 560). Thus, while the ICU achieved a degree of egalitarianism in its judicial system – with rulings issued regardless of clan affiliation – the organization itself was marked by clear Hawiye dominance.

Ideologically, the ICU did not initially emerge as an Islamist movement but rather as a pragmatic response to the need for restoring law and order. Early courts had little explicitly Islamist agenda, and they were often headed not by trained scholars of Islamic law but by local clan elders. Moreover, the ICU did not adhere to any single school of Islamic jurisprudence or theological orientation (Abdullahi 2021: 9).

Over time, however, as the courts evolved into a more unified organization, they remained far from homogeneous. According to Cedric Barnes and Harun Hassan, the ICU brought together adherents of both moderate and radical strands of political Islam (on the difference between moderate and radical Islamism/political Islam see, *e.g.*, Grinin *et al.* 2019). This produced deep internal divisions between the moderate wing, represented by the cabinet of ministers under Sheikh Sharif, and the radical or ‘Salafi’ wing, represented by the legislative council led by Sheikh Aweys. The ICU's vanguard faction, *Al-Shabaab* – at that time still not fully independent – pursued an especially radical agenda. Its rigidly conservative policies alienated many Somalis and fueled internal disputes within the ICU. Moreover, despite the ICU's declared struggle against tribalism, *Al-Shabaab* militias often supported the Hawiye clans in clashes with the Darod, at times openly disregarding ICU rulings when these favored the latter (Barnes and Hassan 2007: 157). Despite these tensions, *Al-Shabaab* played a decisive role in the ICU's military successes, which prevented even the moderate leadership from expelling its radical elements.

The growing influence of *Al-Shabaab* alarmed the international community. The ICU's territorial expansion – most notably its advance into the Kismayo region – also provoked concern from the Transitional National Government and from Ethiopia, both of which became targets of the ICU's increasingly hostile propaganda. During this period, the ICU frequently invoked the idea of ‘Greater Somalia,’ a project dating back to Siad Barre's rule and one of the underlying causes of the war with Ethiopia over the Ogaden region. The vision of ‘Greater Somalia’ sought to unite all territories inhabited predominantly

by ethnic Somalis: present-day Somalia, Djibouti, parts of Ethiopia, and provinces of Kenya (Zoppi 2015: 51).

Ethiopia viewed the ICU's consolidation of power and the return of irredentist ideas with alarm, particularly as they recalled earlier Somali territorial ambitions that had led to war. In response, the Ethiopian government launched a campaign to discredit the ICU, portraying it as a radical Islamist threat – a highly effective narrative in the early 2000s. Ultimately, this campaign laid the groundwork for support of (or at least acquiescence to) Ethiopia's military intervention. In December 2006, an international coalition backed by Ethiopia and the United States launched a military offensive against the ICU government with the aim of overthrowing it and installing the Transitional Federal Government control over Somalia. The Islamists declared a jihad against Ethiopia. Despite initial resistance, the ICU government was defeated and forced to leave the capital (Bamfo 2010; Hansen 2013: 50; Khayre 2014: 208; Warner and Weiss 2017; Alekseyev 2020; Shirkey 2022: 24).

### **3. THE EMERGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF AL-SHABAAB AS AN INDEPENDENT ORGANIZATION**

Al-Shabaab is one of the largest and most notorious terrorist organizations not only in Africa but globally. Its full name, *Harakat al-Shabaab al-Mujahideen*, translates as the 'Movement of the Youth Practicing Jihad.' The group's self-proclaimed goal is to wage war against foreign powers and their local allies within the territory of 'Greater Somalia,' as well as to establish Islamic rule across these lands. Rejecting the legitimacy of modern national borders, Al-Shabaab extends its operations beyond Somalia into Kenya, Ethiopia, and Djibouti. Furthermore, it actively draws upon the same 'Greater Somalia' project described earlier (Bacon and Muibu 2019: 282).

The roots of Al-Shabaab are closely tied to both the history of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) and the earlier organization *Al-Ittihad Al-Islami* (AIAI), one of the most prominent Salafi political groups of the 1990s. AIAI maintained ties with Osama bin Laden and pursued an active militarization strategy. In the early 2000s, AIAI split: the more moderate faction continued to align itself with clan-based militias, while its radical wing joined the ICU. This wing quickly distinguished itself by adopting more uncompromising positions on both political and religious issues. Politically, former AIAI members strongly op-

posed any cooperation with international organizations, particularly the United Nations, and rejected the idea that the ICU required international recognition (Shinn 2004: 40). Religiously, they clashed with proponents of Somali Sufi Islam and the region's longstanding synthesis of Shafi'i jurisprudence, Ash'ari theology, and Sufi practice (Shinn 2004: 43).

As has been already mentioned above, in late 2006, an international intervention began when Ethiopian forces, supported by the United States, entered Somalia alongside the Transitional Federal Government (TFG). By February 2007, African Union peacekeepers (AMISOM), authorized by the UN Security Council, also joined the campaign. The coalition dealt a series of decisive defeats, forcing the Islamists to withdraw from key urban centers. However, in October 2008, the TFG signed a power-sharing agreement with moderate former ICU members, paving the way for the inclusion of moderate Islamists in the government (Abbink 2009a: 105; Kasajja 2013; Demeke 2014: 251–252; Robinson 2016).

This arrangement elevated Sheikh Sharif Ahmed, the leader of the ICU's moderate wing, to the presidency. Yet the agreement lacked broad legitimacy, particularly among Islamists, and triggered another major split. Many ICU leaders firmly rejected any compromise with the TFG. At the forefront of this opposition stood Al-Shabaab, which subsequently consolidated all hardline elements under its leadership and transformed from a faction into a fully independent organization led by Ahmed Abdi Godane (also known as Mukhtar Abu Zubair). Since this split was primarily ideological, Al-Shabaab absorbed the most radical actors on Somalia's Islamist political scene (Omenma, Hendricks, and Ajaebili 2020: 2). As Rob Wise of the Center for Strategic and International Studies argues, the Ethiopian intervention, though framed as counterterrorism, ultimately played a decisive role in transforming Al-Shabaab from a small and relatively marginal wing of a broader Islamist movement into the Horn of Africa's most powerful and radical militant group (Wise 2011: 4).

From its inception, Al-Shabaab maintained close ties with al-Qaeda<sup>4</sup>, as many of its founding members were veterans of AIAI who had trained in al-Qaeda camps. In 2012, Al-Shabaab's leadership formally pledged allegiance to al-Qaeda, making it the Somali branch of the global jihadist movement. This step served a dual purpose: attracting more international volunteers and securing increased support –

including financial assistance – from transnational jihadist networks and sympathizers. Importantly, the pledge did not entail the subordination of Al-Shabaab's leadership within Somalia to al-Qaeda's global command (Joseph and Maruf 2018: 216). In 2014, the group's leader, Ahmed Abdi Godane, was killed in a U.S. drone strike. He was succeeded by Ahmed Umar (also known as Abu Ubaidah), who continues to lead the organization.

In terms of religious ideology, while Al-Shabaab has remained firmly Salafi-jihadist, certain shifts toward relative moderation within the Somali Islamic context can be observed. Interviews with experts suggest that the group's most aggressive campaigns against local Sufi practices peaked between 2008 and 2010. Since then, Al-Shabaab has gradually scaled back such activities, including attacks on Sufi shrines and graves. Critical discourse analysis confirms this trend. For instance, the graduation ceremony of Al-Shabaab's 'Brigade of Seekers of Martyrdom' (*Katibat al-Istishhadiyin*) was held at a training camp named after Sayyid Muhammad Abdullah Hassan – a Sufi leader of the early twentieth century known for his anti-colonial struggle, whom the British derisively labeled the 'Mad Mullah.' Previously, Al-Shabaab refrained from invoking his legacy due to his strong Sufi associations. Yet at this ceremony, the group's spokesperson Ali Mahmoud Rage praised Hassan extensively, portraying Al-Shabaab as his successor. The ceremony was broadcast by Al-Kataib Media Foundation, the group's propaganda outlet. Another illustrative case is the fatwa of Abu Salman Hassan Hussein al-Somali, a scholar linked to Al-Shabaab, who advised studying jurisprudence through traditional madhhabs, particularly the Shafi'i school dominant in Somalia, and rejected the 'non-madhhab approach' promoted by some Salafi scholars. This represents a significant shift, given that disputes over madhhab adherence had previously been a major fault line between Salafis and the wider Somali Muslim community.

Al-Shabaab's territorial control has fluctuated over time. The group maintains a persistent presence across parts of central and southern Somalia, though it has lost its earlier footholds in the north, where some militants defected to the Islamic State (*e.g.*, Korotayev and Voronina 2024). The town of Jilib, in the Middle Juba region of southern Somalia, currently serves as the group's de facto capital.

#### 4. AL-SHABAAB AND STATE-BUILDING

The idea of establishing an Islamist state in Somalia can be traced back at least to the early 1990s, when *Al-Itihaad al-Islami* first became active. Following the collapse of Siad Barre's regime, some of its members were able to form militias by exploiting clan warfare in Puntland. These forces even seized the strategic port city of Bosaso, turning it into a major training hub and later a command center. They subsequently captured Garowe, 750 kilometers to the south, and declared the creation of the 'Islamic Emirate of Somalia in Bosaso' (Sheikh 2019: 58). However, this experiment was short-lived: the militants quickly lost control of the towns and were decisively defeated, leaving little evidence of how the emirate functioned. Nevertheless, the attempt demonstrates that the idea of an Islamic emirate in Somalia had already been articulated and briefly realized. By contrast, the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) never described its territories as an emirate, underscoring its relative distance from jihadist state-building discourses.

Since 2011, Al-Shabaab has referred to its territories as the 'Islamic Emirate of Somalia.' While no formal declaration has been found, it appears that the group gradually began to present itself as a stable political entity founded on Islamic principles (Rudincová 2011: 44). In many respects, this self-perception aligns with reality: in certain areas, Al-Shabaab administers institutions more effectively than any other Somali faction.

As emphasized earlier, clan/tribe and lineage remain central to Somali society and politics. Tribal rivalries were a principal cause of the civil war, and thus Al-Shabaab's approach to clan politics warrants particular attention.

Even during its time as part of the ICU, Al-Shabaab was criticized by clan elders for bias in conflicts between the Darod and Hawiye. While the ICU as a whole relied heavily on Hawiye support, Al-Shabaab's partiality was especially visible. Once it became an independent organization, however, the group sought to distance itself from clan politics and embraced a discourse of egalitarianism, branding itself as an 'Islamic movement for all Somali Muslims, regardless of lineage' (Solomon 2014: 360). Notably, leadership appointments reflect this attempt: while its first leader, Aden Hashi Ayro (2006–2008), was Hawiye, his successor Ahmed Abdi Godane (2008–2014),

who oversaw the transition to the ‘Islamic Emirate’ discourse, came from the Isaaq clan, and the current leader, Abu Ubaidah (2014–present), is from the Dir (Solomon 2014: 360).

Despite such gestures, Al-Shabaab's internal structures remain far from clan-neutral. Leadership positions are still concentrated among a limited number of clans, with Hawiye dominance particularly marked. For instance, the *Amniyat* (secret intelligence service)<sup>5</sup> conducts fewer operations in Hawiye areas than elsewhere and is itself controlled largely by Hawiye members. A 2018 Hiraal Institute report found that of *Amniyat* officials, 50 % were Hawiye, 22 % Darod, 18 % Rahanweyn, and 4 % Dir. The military command reflected similar patterns: 57 % Hawiye, 15 % Darod, 13 % Rahanweyn, 13 % Dir, and 2 % others (Mubarak 2018).

Yet at the administrative level, Al-Shabaab is more inclusive. Its governance structure incorporates members from nearly all Somali clans, including diaspora communities in eastern Ethiopia and north-eastern Kenya. This inclusivity helps sustain the group's ‘pan-Somali’ image. In 2018, the overall composition of Al-Shabaab officials was reported as 43 % Hawiye, 31 % Darod, 12 % Rahanweyn, 11 % Dir, and 3 % others (Mubarak 2018).

The picture is thus mixed. On the one hand, Al-Shabaab has successfully instrumentalized the clan system to consolidate its authority, and many Somalis view it as a stabilizing force because it manages inter-clan disputes and prevents them from escalating into violence. On the other hand, Hawiye dominance persists, particularly in senior ranks, and this partly explains why the Islamic State in Somalia attracted less defectors from Hawiye backgrounds.

Media analysis further illustrates how Al-Shabaab engages with clan politics. The group regularly publishes reports and videos documenting conferences with clan elders across its territories. These elders publicly voice grievances, pledge loyalty to Abu Ubaidah, and receive recognition. Propaganda materials on military operations highlight not only the names of fighters but also their clan affiliations, with thanks extended to elder networks that supported them. Importantly, such media always showcase members of multiple clans, reinforcing Al-Shabaab's anti-tribalist image. Officially, the group presents itself as the only Somali actor that has transcended tribalism.

Another recurring theme in its media output is the idea of ‘Greater Somalia’ – the unification of all Somali-inhabited territories divided

by colonial borders. Al-Shabaab actively mobilizes this concept, arguing that only Islamic governance can achieve true Somali unity.

In terms of governance, Al-Shabaab distinguishes between urban and rural administration. In urban centers, the group establishes ministries, police forces, courts, prisons, schools, and medical facilities. Its de facto capital, Jilib, illustrates this model. There, hospitals receive approximately USD 2 million annually in group funding, schools (including one for girls) teach both secular and religious subjects, and food distribution centers support the poor (Osman 2022). The presence of girls' schools teaching English, mathematics, and computer science is striking given the group's jihadist orientation. Al-Shabaab also enforces environmental policies, such as banning non-biodegradable plastic bags (Osman 2022).

Perhaps the clearest attribute of statehood is taxation. Al-Shabaab collects taxes not only across its emirate but also from businesses operating in government-controlled areas. According to interviews conducted by the Hiraal Institute, the group taxes all major Somali companies. Taxes include the annual *zakat* and monthly payments, while additional *infaq* contributions are levied during financial shortages (Mubarak 2020). Al-Shabaab even maintains financial reserves – an unprecedented achievement among Somali factions. By some estimates, in 2014, its monthly revenue from taxation exceeded USD 15 million (Keatinge 2014: 7).

The group also provides arbitration services for business disputes and regulates agricultural exports, such as lemons, by setting quotas through farmers' associations. Taxpayers receive security guarantees, including safe passage at checkpoints and protection in conflict zones.

Expert interviews conducted in Mogadishu and Hargeisa in spring 2023 further emphasize Al-Shabaab's effectiveness as a governing authority. Respondents consistently described its judicial system as efficient and fair – to the extent that residents of government-held areas sometimes travel into Al-Shabaab territory to resolve disputes. They also praised the group's ability to maintain order, noting markedly lower levels of crime, robbery, and corruption compared to other Somali administrations.

In rural areas, Al-Shabaab adopts a more decentralized approach, delegating authority to clan elders. These elders are either co-opted through voluntary pledges of loyalty or appointed after the removal of rivals. Elders receive certain salaries. Their responsibilities include tax

collection, overseeing religious schools, and adjudicating minor disputes.

In conclusion, Al-Shabaab's state-building project stands out as one of the most effective not only among African jihadists but within the broader radical Islamist movement. The group has managed to provide governance and social services more efficiently than the Somali federal government in many respects. Its experiment in combating tribalism is notable, though incomplete, as clan dynamics continue to shape its internal structure. Moreover, tribal tensions have fueled broader divisions within Somalia's jihadist landscape – a subject addressed in the following section.

## 5. THE ISLAMIC STATE'S SOMALIA PROVINCE

Any discussion of Islamists and state-building in Somalia would be incomplete without reference to another group that sought to establish its own project – *Abna' al-Khilafah* ('Sons of the Caliphate'), more widely known as the Islamic State's<sup>6</sup> Somalia Province (IS-SP/ *Wilayat al-Sumal*)\*.

The origins of this organization are closely linked to Al-Shabaab's decision in 2012 to dispatch one of its charismatic figures, Abdulqadir Mumin, to Puntland to conduct a recruitment campaign. The aim was to establish a foothold for Al-Qaeda's<sup>7</sup> East African branch in the mountainous areas of northern Somalia and to expand its operational reach. Mumin himself, a native of Puntland from the Majerteen branch of the Darod, represented what was at the time a 'clan minority' within Al-Shabaab. His appointment thus reflected both his personal charisma and his local roots.

By 2014, however, internal divisions and power struggles within Al-Shabaab left Mumin effectively isolated. Although he did not formally break with the leadership, he operated autonomously and without support. At the same time, the Islamic State (IS)<sup>8</sup> was rising to prominence and had declared the caliphate. In October 2015, Mumin responded to its call by pledging allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (Webber and Garofalo 2023). Not all of his followers joined him – only around 30 of 300 local Islamist fighters in Puntland defected – resulting in a sharp split within the local faction.

Initially, the Somali IS cell remained inactive. Its first significant operation occurred in October 2016, when it briefly seized the port town of Qandala. This episode is reminiscent of the earlier seizure of

Bosaso by *Al-Ittihad al-Islami*. As in that case, IS fighters were unable to hold the city and quickly withdrew. Cells loyal to IS also appeared in Mogadishu and southern Somalia, but they were either eliminated by Al-Shabaab or failed to attract meaningful support. Puntland therefore remained, and still remains, the group's main stronghold, though IS operatives continue to conduct attacks across southern states of Somalia.

Analysts emphasize that IS's growth in Somalia was linked partly to its more radical stance on tribalism (Warner and Weiss 2017: 29). Whereas Al-Shabaab has been dominated by Hawiye leaders, many non-Hawiye members defected to IS. In Puntland's Bari region, where recruitment has been strongest, IS became increasingly associated with Darod – particularly its Majerteen branch. Its propaganda makes this clear: while Al-Shabaab's media emphasize the marginalization of clans within the federal government, IS highlights the marginalization of clans within Al-Shabaab itself.

Unlike Al-Shabaab, however, IS in Somalia has made no serious attempt at governance. Even during its brief control of Qandala in 2016, there is no evidence that it established administrative structures. Civilians had fled during the fighting, and the group did not attempt to organize local governance. Its current areas of presence, mainly in the sparsely populated mountains of Bari around Bosaso, lack significant civilian populations. Moreover, IS propaganda in Somalia contains no references to taxation, welfare, or sharia-based justice – themes heavily featured in other IS provinces. Instead, its media output is restricted almost entirely to reports of attacks.

In effect, there is virtually no evidence that IS-SP engages in territorial governance. Confronted with limited manpower and lacking secure territorial control, the group has focused on guerrilla warfare and terrorism. Nonetheless, several research reports suggest that IS-SP plays an important logistical and financial role for IS affiliates across Africa. In this sense, Somalia represents a unique case: it is the only African IS province that has made no effort to present itself as a governing entity. This can be explained by two factors: first, the presence of a relatively successful jihadist state-building project already established by Al-Shabaab, and second, IS-SP's lack of resources to compete with it. By contrast, in regions such as the Sahel, IS has engaged in direct competition with Al-Qaeda affiliates that have developed effective governance structures.

## CONCLUSION

The emergence of the Islamic Emirate of Somalia in 1992 marked a strategic shift among radical Islamist groups toward experimenting with proto-state formation in territories under their control. Unlike the Taliban, who assumed power in Afghanistan in the mid-1990s by relying on an existing political infrastructure, *Al-Ittihad al-Islami* – and later Islamic Courts Union and *Al-Shabaab* – sought to build statehood virtually from scratch. The Somali experience of the late twentieth and early twenty first century subsequently served as a reference point, in varying degrees, for Islamist state-building projects in Mali, Yemen, Syria, and Iraq.

Although the state created by *Al-Ittihad al-Islami* proved unsustainable and lasted less than a year, it laid fertile ground for subsequent experiments in Islamic governance. By the late 1990s, the Union of Islamic Courts had emerged, briefly establishing relative stability in Mogadishu and southern Somalia. Judicial institutions, in particular, became the foundation upon which later Islamist state-building projects were constructed, with the experience of the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant serving as a prominent parallel.

After 2006, *Al-Shabaab* – the radical offshoot of the Union of Islamic Courts – emerged as the architect of the most durable experiment in jihadist governance in Somalia: the Islamic Emirate of Somalia. Its ability to establish Islamic courts perceived as more just than secular counterparts, to provide limited but functioning systems of education and healthcare, to collect taxes, and to enforce security on controlled territories made it appear more effective than the federal state. Furthermore, its relatively inclusive approach toward marginalized tribes, particularly the Rahanweyn clans, contributed to its durability as a jihadist proto-state.

By contrast, the Somali affiliate of the Islamic State – the so-called *Wilayat al-Somal* – failed to reproduce this trajectory. Despite pledging allegiance to the Islamic State in 2015 and attempting to position itself as part of a broader caliphate project, it has neither secured stable territorial control nor created meaningful governance institutions. Its activity has remained largely limited to guerrilla warfare and terrorist attacks, with occasional symbolic seizures of towns like Qandala in 2016. Moreover, its propaganda lacks any emphasis on taxation, service provision, or judicial enforcement – elements that

form the core of Islamic State messaging elsewhere. Instead, *Wilayat al-Somal* has functioned primarily as a logistical and financial node within the wider IS network in Africa.

This contrast highlights an important dimension of global jihadist competition: the rivalry between al-Qaeda and the Islamic State is not only military or ideological but also deeply connected to state-building strategies. While *Al-Shabaab*, aligned with al-Qaeda, has managed to institutionalize governance by embedding itself within Somalia's social and clan structures, *Wilayat Somalia* demonstrates the limits of the Islamic State's transnational model when confronted with entrenched local movements. In Somalia, therefore, the struggle between al-Qaeda and the Islamic State has been decided less on the battlefield than in the realm of governance, with *Al-Shabaab* successfully presenting itself as an apparently more legitimate and effective political authority in the eyes of many Somalis.

## FUNDING

The study was carried out within the framework of the HSE University Basic Research Program in 2025 with the support of the Russian Science Foundation (project No. 24-18-00650).

## NOTES

\* This organization is recognized as terrorist and banned in the Russian Federation.

<sup>1</sup> This organization is recognized as terrorist and banned in the Russian Federation.

<sup>2</sup> This organization is recognized as terrorist and banned in the Russian Federation.

<sup>3</sup> Note that those events can be regarded both as a 'revolution analogue' of the Afro-Communist type (Grinin *et al.* 2022), and as Type II coupvolution (Korotayev *et al.* 2025a, 2025b).

<sup>4</sup> This organization is recognized as terrorist and banned in the Russian Federation.

<sup>5</sup> For details on the secret intelligence service of Al-Shabaab see Besenyő and Sinkó 2024.

<sup>6</sup> This organization is recognized as terrorist and banned in the Russian Federation.

<sup>7</sup> This organization is recognized as terrorist and banned in the Russian Federation.

<sup>8</sup> This organization is recognized as terrorist and banned in the Russian Federation.

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# The Genetic Basis of Altruism and Cooperative Behaviour in Human Societies

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## ABSTRACT

*Altruism and cooperative behaviour are selected characteristics of societies that range from private to public ones. Though such communal sacrificing seems to go as far as being not in congruence with the principle of natural selection, evolutionary science offers some explanations about how altruism persists. Theories like kinship selection, reciprocal altruism, and group selection suggest that prosocial behaviours develop because they have had evolutionary benefits in terms of survival of genes and group cohesion. Advancement in genetics and*

Recommended citation: Muzammal M. *et al.* The Genetic Basis of Altruism and Cooperative Behaviour in Human Societies. *Social Evolution & History*, Vol. 24 No. 2, September 2025, pp. 103–117. DOI: 10.30884/seh/2025.02.05.

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*neuroscience enables showing the biological basis by which altruism has specific genes and neurochemical pathways' effects on empathy, trust, and co-operation. Studying oxytocin, dopamine, serotonin, and the MAOA gene bring the genetics of altruistic behaviour into focus, and epigenetic research shows how environmental factors shape altruistic tendencies. However, altruism is not only a product of biology; but also cultural, social, and economic factors go along in reinforcing or curtailing cooperative behaviour, and altruism within societies is well maintained by moral systems, social norms, and institutional frameworks, but at the same time it is increasingly threatened with new types of challenges – like economic inequality, anonymity on the digital platform, and global collective action problems – confronted in the modern era. The essay concentrates on the genetic, evolutionary, and cultural foundations of altruism, emphasizing how biological predispositions interact with environmental influences to mold human cooperation. Such an understanding will enable us to develop strategies that could enhance cooperation toward the response to some of these contemporary global dilemmas.*

**Keywords:** *genetic, evolutionary, cultural, foster.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Altruism and cooperation form important categories of human social life, dictating interpersonal relations between individuals, families, and whole societies. These can range from the smallest acts, like sharing food or helping a stranger, to some of the largest-scale humanitarian efforts. Humans build a life of prosocial acts in ways that benefit others, sometimes at their expense. In this regard, one question becomes interesting: if natural selection favors traits underlying individual survival and reproductive success, why is it so often that humans act against such biological inclinations? (Alexander 2017)

The answer to why we have developed altruism has historically interested biologists, psychologists, and anthropologists. If one accepts classic Darwinism, it should be clear that Darwin stated that individuals acted in a way that is beneficial for them. There is a trade-off between costs and benefits. Darwin realized that in social species, individuals cooperate with each other, mothers risk protecting their offspring, *etc.* More recent frameworks of evolutionary theory have suggested that cooperative behaviour can be an adaptive benefit in certain instances. Kin selection, reciprocal altruism, and group selection theories support the notion that cooperation and altruism have survived evolution because they promote the survival of genes on an individual

level, as well as the family, social group, and population levels (Apicella *et al.* 2012).

After the introduction of genetics and neuroscience, some researchers have ventured into the biological basis of prosocial behaviour. Genetics of the twins, neurotransmitters, and hormonal influences have proven that the propensities towards altruism, in very general terms, have been mediated by particular genetic and neurobiological factors in a person. Thus, genes regulating the synthesis and release of oxytocin, dopamine, and serotonin play a crucial role in determining how humans' bond with others, develop empathy, and cooperate. One of the many discoveries of recent epigenetic studies is that environmental factors, what one experiences in their youth, the surrounding socialization mechanisms, and cultural training, influence the expression of genes correlated with altruistic tendencies (Bowles 2006; Butovskaya *et al.* 2020a, 2022; Yadav *et al.* 2024).

Altruistic behaviour is evolved genetically, but is by no means naturally obligatory. Different factors – social, economic, and technological – can have diverse influences on human behaviour, some contributing to prosociality, others fostering selfishness or competition. For example, economic inequality, ambiguous identity on the internet, and large collective action dilemmas such as climate change challenge altruism in modern society. Understanding the genetic basis of altruism and cooperation is of more than scientific interest. It is increasingly required in practical terms as the world faces problems of such as scale and complexity that the levels of cooperation required will be unprecedented. Such research can illuminate the biological and cultural foundations of prosocial behaviour and, hence, move toward a more compassionate and cooperative world (Krebs 2011; Darwin 2023). This review will discuss the evolution and adaptive advantages of altruism, genetics and neurobiology of cooperation, cultural and environmental influences, and the major challenges facing altruism in contemporary society. Through this lens, we may gain a better understanding of human cooperation and how to encourage pro-social behaviour for the benefit of individual and societal welfare (Bowles 2006; Clutton-Brock 2009).

## **2. THE EVOLUTIONARY FOUNDATIONS OF ALTRUISM AND COOPERATION**

The evolutionary roots of altruism have been proposed to explain why organisms, including humans, sometimes cooperate instead of com-

peting with one another. This behaviour is understandable and forms part of the most important theories regarding prosocial-human behaviour persistence. Key theories are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

### Key Theories Explaining Altruism and Cooperation

Theory	Proponent(s)	Core Principle	Examples in Nature & Human Society
Kin Selection	William D. Hamilton (1964)	Altruism is directed toward genetically related individuals to enhance shared gene survival	Parental care, family support, eusocial insects (bees, ants)
Reciprocal Altruism	Robert Trivers (1971)	Individuals help non-kin with the expectation of future reciprocation	Food sharing in primates, cooperative hunting, business transactions
Group Selection	Darwin, E.O. Wilson	Groups with cooperative individuals outperform less cooperative groups	Religious communities, cooperative military units, collective farming
Strong Reciprocity	Fehr & Fischbacher (2003)	Humans enforce cooperation by punishing cheaters, even at a personal cost	Legal systems, whistleblowing, social ostracization of rule-breakers
Cultural Evolution	Richerson & Boyd (2005)	Altruism is reinforced by learned norms and cultural traditions	Charitable organizations, ethical systems, moral education

Note: Trivers 1971; Fehr *et al.* 2002a; Lieberman *et al.* 2007; Leigh 2010; Birch and Okasha 2015; Birch and Heyes 2021.

### Kin Selection and Hamilton's Rule

One of the earliest explanations for altruism, which is still widely accepted, is kin selection, which was proposed by the British evolutionary biologist William Hamilton in the 1960. Hamilton's rule states that altruistic acts evolve under conditions when:

$$rB > C$$

Where:

- $r$  stands for the genetic relatedness between individuals,
- $B$  is the reproductive benefit to be realized by the recipient, and
- $C$  is the cost borne by the altruist at the very instance.

This can explain why people are more likely to help close kin than those who are unrelated. Those relatives share incredibly high proportions of genes, so the survival and reproduction of relatives indirectly benefit from the altruistic actions of their genetic lineage (Emlen 2001).

Some natural examples include eusocial insect species such as bees and ants, where sterile worker castes renounce their own reproductive potential to serve their queen and colony of genetically related individuals. Among mammals, including humans, there are investments in children who can be too expensive even for parents because they preserve their genetic inputs through avenues of offspring (Abid *et al.* 2022; Ali *et al.* 2022; Hussain *et al.* 2022; J. Als Salman *et al.* 2022a; N. Alhashem *et al.* 2022). Kin selection among humans is found in family support, inheritance, and caregiving activities (Hussain *et al.* 2022). For example, people are generally more willing to perform more for their children, siblings, or even close relatives than other people, which indicates a cross-cultural and cross-generational access pattern (The age of empathy: nature's lessons for a kinder society, 2010).

### **3. RECIPROCAL ALTRUISM: COOPERATION BEYOND KIN**

Kin selection explains why individuals help their relatives, but not cooperation among unrelated individuals. According to Robert Trivers' reciprocal altruism theory of 1971, cooperation can evolve when individuals are helped with the expectation that something will be returned in the future (Trivers 1971; Muzammal *et al.* 2019; Gul *et al.* 2021; J. Als Salman *et al.* 2022b; Khan *et al.* 2022; Mohaini *et al.* 2022a; Muzammal *et al.* 2022; Ahmad *et al.* 2023; Ayaz *et al.* 2023).

### **4. RECIPROCAL ALTRUISM KEY PRINCIPLES:**

a) They should meet each other at least many times in future to form a possible reciprocity.

b) It is necessary to identify cheaters and punish them for accepting without returning favors (Trivers 1971; Emlen 2001; Leigh 2010; Gardner *et al.* 2011; Bourke 2014).

c) Cooperation must have a positive and greater payoff over the long-term than the cost incurred through cooperation over the short-haul.

For example, human and animal behaviours include:

- i. Consider chimpanzees observed to groom non-relatives and later return that by sharing food,

- ii. In hunter-gather societies, food sharing is an activity where everyone contributes to the very group during a time of plenty and then expects help from that group during times of shortage.
- iii. It has spread its roots into the most modern economies, and in principle, it is considered a positive factor in most modern economic theories: trust and mutuality in economic transactions (Birch and Okasha 2015).

## 5. GROUP SELECTION AND CULTURAL EVOLUTION

Co-operation benefits not only individuals but also society as a whole. The theory of group selection suggests that cooperative and altruistic groups are more likely to outcompete less cooperative groups. Geographers were previously discontent over the idea of group selection, but have gradually come to accept the fact that cultural evolution indeed plays a significant role in promoting prosocial behaviour (Cohen 2013; Author 2013).

### 5.1 Examples of cultural reinforcement of cooperation:

- **Religious and moral systems** encourage altruism and often frame prosocial behaviour as a moral duty. Many religions promote charity, kindness, and community service.

- **Legal and social institutions** enforce cooperation through laws, contracts, and norms that discourage selfish behaviour (e.g., tax-funded welfare programs, anti-fraud regulations).

- **Nationalism and collective identity** foster cooperation on a large scale, as people tend to act altruistically toward those they perceive as part of their 'in-group.'

## 6. THE GENETIC BASIS OF ALTRUISTIC AND COOPERATIVE BEHAVIOUR

Genetics and neuroscience have advanced to the point where they reveal that altruism is not simply acquired behaviour, but rather a biological phenomenon. Various genetic, hormonal, and neural mechanisms have been linked to prosocial tendencies in individuals.

### 6.1 Twin Studies and Heritability of Altruism

Twin studies have been conducted by behavioural geneticists to estimate the heritability of altruism and cooperative behaviour. Identical

twins have a greater resemblance in their prosocial behaviours than fraternal twins, and the latter share only half of their genetic material. These studies have put forward evidence that genetics accounts for approximately 30 % to 50 % of altruistic tendencies while environmental and cultural factors account for the rest (West *et al.* 2007).

## 6.2 Key Genes Associated with Altruism and Cooperation

Some gene candidates have been implicated in prosocial behaviour:

### 6.2.1 Oxytocin and Vasopressin Receptor Genes (*OXTR* & *AVPR1A*)

Oxytocin, the so-called ‘love hormone,’ determines how much social bonding, trust, and empathy humans have. Variations in the *OXTR* gene are linked to differences in generosity and emotional intelligence. In addition, some studies have shown that carriers of the *OXTR* rs53576 GG variant display altruism significantly more frequently, both towards friends and strangers (Butovskaya *et al.* 2020b). The *AVPR1A* gene is responsible for regulating the vasopressin system which is responsible for social bonding. The vasopressin system is responsible for social bonding and cooperativeness, especially among men (Nowak *et al.* 2010; Muzammal *et al.* 2021; Stonerook 2021; Ahmad *et al.* 2022).

### 6.2.2 Dopamine and serotonin pathways

Prosocial behaviour is reinforced by the dopamine system through the attachment of positive emotions and rewards to such acts. Therefore, any generous act will result in the release of dopamine in the brain and hence cause a pleasurable feeling. Higher serotonin levels are associated with patience, fairness, and cooperative decision-making. The serotonin system regulates mood and impulse control (Smortchkova 2017; Mohaini *et al.* 2022b; Ahmed *et al.* 2024).

### 6.2.3 MAOA (‘Warrior Gene’)

Gene MAOA is thought to influence aggression and social behaviour. Some variations in the gene are associated with increased aggression and reduced empathy, but environmental factors still play a huge role in their expression (Golya 2005).

### 7. EPIGENETICS: THE ENVIRONMENT SLIGHTLY AFFECTS GENETIC EXPRESSION

Epigenetics indicates that life experiences can affect gene expression without changing DNA sequences. Some examples include childhood experiences: children raised in a nurturing environment develop stronger prosocial tendencies, while those raised in neglectful conditions show low levels of trust and empathy (Ramsay 2005). Stress and adversity: stress can inhibit oxytocin production, which can impede bonding to social networks. The genetic and neurobiological basis of altruism is shown in Table 2.

*Table 2*

#### Genetic and Neurobiological Basis of Altruism

Gene/Hormone	Function	Impact on Altruism & Cooperation	Empirical Findings
OXTR (Oxytocin Receptor Gene)	Regulates oxytocin, the ‘bonding hormone’	Enhances trust, empathy, and social bonding	Variations in OXTR influence generosity and emotional intelligence
AVPR1A (Vasopressin Receptor Gene)	Regulates vasopressin, involved in social behaviour	Affects bonding, particularly in males	Associated with pair bonding in mammals and cooperation in humans
Dopamine (D4R, DRD4 gene)	Reward system neurotransmitter	Reinforces prosocial behaviours through pleasure and reward	Higher dopamine activity linked to generosity and fair decision-making
Serotonin (5-HTTLPR gene)	Regulates mood and impulse control	Promotes patience, fairness, and cooperative behaviour	Increased serotonin associated with prosocial choices in economic games
MAOA (‘Warrior Gene’)	Regulates aggression and emotional control	Certain variants linked to reduced empathy and increased aggression	Low MAOA linked to antisocial behaviour, especially under stress

Evolutionary benefits of altruism are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

### Evolutionary Benefits of Altruism

Benefit	Mechanism	Example
Enhanced Survival of Kin	Kin selection ensures shared genetic material is passed on	Parents invest in children, siblings support each other
Reputation & Social Status	Altruistic individuals are trusted and respected, increasing social capital	Philanthropy enhances public image; generous leaders gain loyalty
Reciprocal Benefits	Helping others increases chances of future support	Business partnerships, alliances in warfare
Group Success & Stability	Cooperative groups outperform selfish groups in competition	Nation-building, teamwork in corporations
Reduction of Conflict	Altruism fosters social harmony and reduces aggression	Mediation in disputes, legal systems promoting fairness

## 8. OBSTACLES TO ALTRUISM IN TODAY'S WORLD

However, the modern world presents a series of challenges to altruism in general, despite its evolutionary and genetic underpinnings.

### 8.1 Economic inequalities and social fragmentation

Enormous disparities in wealth can erode trust and cooperation within societies, leading to less prosocial behaviour. Studies have shown that people in highly unequal societies are less likely to give or support charitable causes (Golya 2005; Ramsay 2005; Smortchkova 2017).

### 8.2 The Digital Era and Online Behaviour

Online social media creates a phenomenon known as ‘moral outrage amplification,’ in which people participate in performative versions of altruism, such as virtue signaling, instead of cooperating to achieve meaningful actions (Fehr *et al.* 2002b; Birch and Heyes 2021). Digital anonymity tends to diffuse responsibility, thus creating more hostile interactions and less cooperation online (Santos and Pacheco 2011a).

### 8.3 Global Collective Action Problems

Climate change, pandemics, and international conflicts all require the parable of large-scale cooperation, yet many people and nations stand in the way and choose self-interest, which frustratingly interferes with

the optimality of joint solutions (Seyfarth and Cheney 1988; Fehr *et al.* 2002b; Santos and Pacheco 2011a, 2011b; Author 2013; Claidie *et al.* 2014; A natural history of human morality 2016; Tomasello 2018). Challenges to altruism in modern society are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

### Challenges to Altruism in Modern Society

Challenge	Cause	Impact on Altruism	Possible Solutions
Economic Inequality	Wealth disparities reduce trust and cooperation	Less charitable giving, social fragmentation	Progressive taxation, social safety nets
Digital Anonymity	Online interactions lack accountability	Increased trolling, cyberbullying, reduced empathy	Stronger regulations on social media behaviour, digital identity verification
Global Collective Action Problems	Climate change, pandemics require large-scale cooperation	Nations act in self-interest, leading to failures in global solutions	International treaties, incentives for cooperation
Cultural & Political Polarization	Ideological divisions weaken social cohesion	Reduced willingness to help out-groups	Promoting dialogue, education on shared values
Declining Face-to-Face Interaction	Virtual communication replaces real-world interactions	Reduced emotional connection, lower empathy	Community-building initiatives, encouraging in-person engagement

## 9. CONCLUSION

The genetic basis of altruism and cooperation is a topic of great fascination and complexity, invoking a tangled interplay between biological inheritance and environmental factors. Genes provide the foundation for prosocial behaviour, while cultural evolution, social norms, and individual experiences determine its expression. Cooperation is at higher demand than ever in today's world, with pressing solutions required to rectify economic inequality, digital isolation, and the challenges of collective action on a global scale. With an understanding of the biological and cultural roots of altruism, we will be able to make significant progress toward a more cooperative and compassionate

world. Figure showing the Altruism and Cooperative behaviour in Human Societies.



**Fig. Representation of Altruism and Cooperative behaviour in Human Societies**

*Note:* Aoki 2017; BioRender 2023.

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*Special Section*

*'Evolution and Forms of Socio-Political Organization: Historical and Anthropological Approaches. Colloquium Proceedings'*

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**Evolution and Forms  
of Socio-Political Organization:  
Historical and Anthropological Approaches  
(Introductory Remarks)**

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It is no coincidence that history and socio-cultural anthropology have the same progenitor. We all know from childhood that Herodotus is the 'father of history'. But he should also rightfully be considered the 'father of anthropology.' In his work 'History', already in the fifth century BCE, he formulated a number of most essential for anthropology questions and to address them used methods and hypotheses that became classical for anthropological science many centuries later (Hodgen 1964: 20–28). Thus, already two and a half thousand years ago, in one of the greatest creations of ancient culture, the fruitfulness of the union of 'the muse of history and the science of culture' (Carneiro 2000) in solving the problems of both disciplines was demonstrated.

In the middle and second half of the nineteenth century, when anthropology was forming as a special science, in the minds of its first classics – Adolf Bastian, Edward Tylor, Lewis Morgan, John McLen-

Recommended citation: Bondarenko D. M. Evolution and Forms of Socio-Political Organization: Historical and Anthropological Approaches (Introductory Remarks). *Social Evolution & History*, Vol. 24 No. 2, September 2025, pp. 118–126. DOI: 10.30884/seh/2025.02.06.

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nan, Julius Lippert and others – it resonated with historical science quite clearly. They saw the meaning and purpose of anthropology as being a replacement for history for nonliterate peoples – those whose past cannot be studied using written records. After all, historians have always had a cult of written source as the only material basis for reliable reconstruction of the past events, and therefore, peoples without writing systems were perceived as ‘the people without history’ (Wolf 1982). But these were peoples precisely without written history, full of events, with dates and names – the one to whose study historians initially reduced their task. A reconstruction of the eventful history was indeed impossible for nonliterate peoples (at least for the time before they entered into active interaction with peoples who had writing systems), but anthropologists saw their mission in restoring their socio-cultural history, or more precisely, in including the cultures of these peoples in the general scheme of the cultural history of humankind.

Nonliterate societies were of interest in themselves, but within the framework of the evolutionist worldview (and anthropology was formed as an evolutionary science), reconstruction of the socio-cultural past of ‘civilized peoples’, primarily modern Europeans, and of all humanity – its single culture in its temporal dynamics perceived as universal and unidirectional – was seen as an even more important task. This vision of the socio-cultural process assumed that the cultures of all peoples develop in the same direction (from simpler to more complex forms, from lower to higher), only at different pace. Therefore, it was argued that by studying ‘modern savages’, one can see what the culture at the time of the ‘childhood of mankind’ was like, the starting point on its path ‘from savagery through barbarism to civilization’, and in particular what the cultural appearance of today’s ‘civilized nations’ once was.

It is worth noting, however, that a potential conflict between anthropology and history was inherent from the start. After all, anthropology was understood as a science that studies cultures that exist today, although archaic in type. The emphasis on this became especially pronounced in the early twentieth century, when, thanks to Franz Boas in America and Bronisław Malinowski and Alfred Radcliffe-Brown in Europe, anthropology began to be clearly positioned as a field discipline. As for history, it is a science about the past. However, this conflict was by no means insurmountable. Rather, it can serve as a driving force for the development of both disciplines. This is evident, in particular, from the emergence of an anthropological sub-discipline called

historical anthropology that studies archaic cultures of the past basing on available written sources (*e.g.*, Dube 2007), and from considering archaeology (primarily in North America) as part of anthropology within the framework of the ‘four-field approach’ to the latter (*e.g.*, Hicks 2013). Yet the most striking evidence of this is James Frazer’s ‘The Golden Bough.’ Wanting to understand a specific historical fact – claiming that ‘The primary aim of this book is to explain the remarkable rule which regulated the succession to the priesthood of Diana at Aricia’ (Frazer 1963: V) – he created one of the greatest anthropological masterpieces.

It is remarkable that, at about the same time, in the middle – second half of the nineteenth century, historians began to actively study the past of ‘historical’ peoples not only as a chain of events but also as a series of long-term phenomena that flow from one another – as a socio-cultural process that took the form of the birth and transformation of social institutions that form societies. The works of the classic scholar Numa Fustel de Coulanges were of particular importance in this regard.

It should be noted that the philosophical basis for all sciences of that era – natural, social, and humanities – was Modern European rationalism, rooted in ancient worldviews, developed in the philosophical thought of the Middle Ages, and fundamentally transformed during the Renaissance and Reformation, which flourished in the philosophy of the seventeenth–eighteenth centuries and reflected the general character of the worldview of the era in the West in the nineteenth century. This worldview affirmed the belief in the cognizability of the world by the power of human reason, as the world itself was seen, if created by God, then not by arbitrariness, but by logic, which found expression in the universal laws of the universe. These laws were seen as objective and immutable, *i.e.*, embodied uniformly and inevitably always and everywhere, beyond people’s will and desires.

It is especially important that the human and society were perceived as an integral part of the universe – of Nature with a capital letter, subject to the same laws as everything else in the world. That is exactly why Tylor and after him many other anthropologists of the first generations, insisted that cultures should be studied using the methods of natural sciences, and that cultural elements should be treated in the same way as biological species in natural science. Both the first anthropologists who studied ‘primitive culture’ and the first historians who began to study the past of ‘historical’ peoples as the

unfolding of socio-cultural processes in time, understood their activities as an analysis of manifestations of the global laws of the universe (Nature) in human societies – past or present, nonliterate or with writing systems – and ultimately in humanity as a single whole, existing in historical time and geographical space.

The history of science is a part of intellectual history, which in turn is directly linked to the course of socio-economic and political history. The First World War marked the end of the ‘optimistic era’ of Western history – the era of unbridled faith in scientific and technological progress, supposedly naturally leading the entire world along the path towards ‘civilization’ under the leadership of peoples who had already achieved it. This path was initially understood as a movement not only from the lower to the higher and from the simple to the complex, but also from the worse (less moral humans and societies) to the better (more moral ones). The Great War clearly demonstrated the illusory nature of faith in the moral power of scientific and technological progress perceived as social progress: it led not to improvement of the human being and society, but rather to the invention of more sophisticated means of killing each other. The First World War was not only the first war in scale, but also in the use of tanks, military aircraft, and poison gases. Symptomatically, in 1920, the historian John Bury published the book titled *Idea of Progress* which he precedes by the dedication and epigraph: ‘Dedicated to the memories of Charles Francois Castel de Saint-Pierre, Marie Jean Antoine Nicolas Caritat de Condorcet, Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, and other optimists mentioned in this volume. *Tantane uos generis tenuit fiducia uestri?*’ – ‘Did your confidence hold those of your kind to such an extent?’ (Bury 1920).

However, the most sensitive minds felt the approaching end of the ‘optimistic era’ even before the Great War. In 1888, Friedrich Nietzsche (1931: 44; emphasis in the original. – *D. B.*) wrote: ‘Mankind surely does *not* represent an evolution toward a better or stronger or higher level, as progress is now understood. This “progress” is merely a modern idea, which is to say, a false idea.’ In philosophy, the approaching end of the ‘optimistic era’ was expressed in the emergence and gradual spread among the intellectual circles from the last decades of the nineteenth century of trends that no longer saw humanity as subject to the impact of general and inexorable laws of the universe. For the history of science, the classification of sciences by the founders of the Baden school of neo-Kantianism, Wilhelm Windelband and Heinrich Rickert,

was of particular importance. They divided sciences into two types: those designed to discover general laws – nomothetic (generalizing) and describing events – idiographic (individualizing). They classified natural sciences as the former, and the humanities and social sciences as the latter. That is, they proceeded from the idea that the entire universe is not subject to the impact of objective laws, but only the world of nature (with a lowercase letter); the world of humans, their society and culture changes as a result of individual events that have no internal interconnection and are not determined by any general laws.

Naturally, history and anthropology found themselves among the idiographic sciences. In anthropology, the first major relativistic (anti-universalistic) teaching – diffusionism in its versions put forward by Fritz Graebner and Franz Boas – was directly based on a neo-Kantian, completely different from the evolutionist, understanding of the essence of the phenomena it studied and of itself as a scientific discipline. Precisely with the establishment of postulates about the lack of universality and regularity in the world-historical socio-cultural process, when each society began to be seen primarily as a unique entity at each moment in time, rather than as a local manifestation of socio-cultural unity among humanity, and when the sense of internal connection not only between different societies, but also between different periods in the history of a single society was lost, a break occurred between anthropology and history.

And in the first decades of the twentieth century, Boas and his students called for studying cultures only as we see them today (Averkiewa 1979: 75–77, 106–107), while Malinowski wrote directly that history is useless for anthropologists, since knowledge of the past of cultures is unable to provide anything for understanding their present (Tokarev 1978: 235–236). For most of the twentieth century and a quarter of the twenty-first century, anthropology and history have been increasingly moving away from each other to the point of almost mutual ignorance within the framework of the currently dominant postmodernism, which asserts the absolute uniqueness of each society (and, consequently, the inadmissibility of using the comparative-historical method) and denies the very possibility of objective knowledge of anything related to human and society, including history and culture. In the mid-1990s, a representative large-scale survey of historians and anthropologists from many countries demonstrated a ‘conflict of paradigms’ between the two disciplines, showed that ‘historians and anthropologists had different agendas ... and these agendas were in fact anchored in the in-

ternal dynamics of their disciplines and to their respective responses to wider societal change' (Kalb *et al.* 1996: 8, 9).

The nowadays obvious gap between history and anthropology has extremely negative consequences for both disciplines. For history, they are expressed, in particular, in the fact that, when dealing with topics to which anthropologists have made a great, fundamental contribution (*e.g.*, such as the institution of community or the phenomenon of sacralization of power), historians do not rely on it, do not use it to the extent necessary, and often simply ignore it. In anthropology, the feeling of the approaching end of the dominance of postmodernism is slowly but surely growing, and, accordingly, the question becomes increasingly acute: what will happen to the discipline, what will be its theoretical and methodological foundations after the end of the period of domination by the postmodern extreme relativism, which denies the legitimacy of creating any general theories, and ultimately denies the very possibility of cognizing cultural phenomena.

As long ago as in 1968, David Bidney (1968: 248) argued that 'The lesson to be derived from a study of modern anthropological thought is that a science of cultural anthropology must be historical if it is not to be reduced to a brunch of psychology or sociology'. Over the course of more than five and a half decades since these words were written, re-historicizing anthropology has become an increasingly urgent necessity for its development as a theoretical and concrete scientific discipline (which has led to the appearance of several notable publications on the topic since the early 2000s [Carneiro 2000; Whiteley 2004; Kalb and Tak 2005; Tagliacozzo and Willford 2009; Cowan 2012; Stewart 2016; Roque and Traube 2019]). Moreover, bringing a historical perspective into anthropological studies of industrial and post-industrial societies, which are most often the focus of attention of anthropologists in our time, turns out to be no less necessary than for the successful study of archaic societies (Bondarenko 2022).

Restoring the connection between historical and anthropological knowledge offers the prospect of not only giving a new impetus to anthropological theoretical thought, but also deepening historians' understanding of past phenomena. One of the most direct and promising ways to reunite history and anthropology is by studying the relationship between the historical past, social memory, and contemporary cultural identities (Yelvington 2002). It is no coincidence that the 'memory boom' in anthropology that occurred at the turn of the millennium was directly linked to the 'memorial turn' in historical sci-

ence (Berliner 2005; Krause 2007). However, the connection between anthropology and history needs to be restored, not simply at the level of studying specific scientific topics, and those related not only to cultural memory, but also to the entire spectrum of issues covered by these disciplines, including the study of a wide range of social, economic, political, and cultural phenomena and processes of the past and present. It is necessary to restore the connection between anthropology and history at the theoretical and methodological levels. This is possible, on the one hand, if anthropology is understood as a science that is fundamentally and essentially historical, which in turn presupposes the recognition of the existence of socio-cultural processes unfolding in historical time at the global, regional, and local levels. On the other hand, the reunification of anthropological and historical sciences, fruitful for both disciplines, is possible if historians, especially those studying not specific events but fundamental historical phenomena and deep historical processes, stop consciously or unconsciously perceiving anthropological issues, theories, and methods, *etc.* as alien to them, as belonging to a completely different field of knowledge and in no way capable of helping them in their research.

Our colloquium is an attempt to unite historians and anthropologists in order to try to see, at least as a first approximation, how it is possible to restore the connection between anthropology and history, which, according to the conviction of its organizers, we emphasize once again, is equally necessary for both disciplines. We have brought together experts in the history of ancient world, as well as the early Middle Ages, and anthropologists who specialize in so-called archaic societies. There is no doubt for us that history and anthropology can be mutually useful in the study of societies of all eras and all types, including contemporary ones (Bondarenko 2023). However, this is most evident in the study of archaic and ancient societies. Therefore, we hope that our colloquium will demonstrate the need for and show possible ways of reuniting the disciplines of anthropology and history with particular clarity.

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# Why do We Need a Typology (Classification) and a Political Anthropological Meta-Language for Describing Post-Neolithic Pre-Modern Polities?

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In the twenty-first century, historical science witnessed a rapid obsolescence of most conceptual models of history and meta-languages for describing societies of the past, especially the history of archaic, post-Neolithic pre-Modern, societies, *i. e.* the period of Ancient Times and the Middle Ages. Now historians-theorists in their majority steal bits of empirical data from practitioners (Edward Evan Evans-Pritchard [1961] wrote about this), not really understanding how they were obtained, while historians-practitioners often appropriate fragments of social theories from theorists without caring to understand the procedures of their elaboration and the axioms underlying them. Of course, the time of philosophers of history, who ignore descriptions of the reality of the past and present, has almost passed, but they have been replaced by compilers of various specialties who parasitize on the idiosyncrasy of researchers working with sources for broad generalizations. In contrast to the 'narrow-minded' empiricists who solemnly reject 'new-fashioned theories' and terminological systems developed within their frameworks, they continue to flourish, believing that in this way, they preserve their corporate identity. In fact, such a declarative rejection of any theory means that these 'craftsmen' simply use

Recommended citation: Shchavelev A. S. Why do We Need a Typology (Classification) and a Political Anthropological Meta-Language for Describing Post-Neolithic Pre-Modern Polities? *Social Evolution & History*, Vol. 24 No. 2, September 2025, pp. 127–132. DOI: 10.30884/seh/2025.02.07.

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old theoretical schemes and zombie concepts developed in the century before last and outdated in the last century due to inertia. These guardians of empirical purity remain hostage to alien axiomatic assumptions and destructive memes, which emerged under conditions of strong ideologization of social sciences and humanities, with an obviously less factual basis.

The methodological relevance of the rhetorical question posed in my essay title is due to the fact that a number of types and directions of historical research do not require any special terminology to achieve their goals. Scholars in these fields usually use a combination of ‘cultural vocabulary’ from original sources and ‘natural language’ of researchers themselves, often including obsolete terms that have survived due to historiographic inertia and the conservatism of academic discourse. For example, the oxymoronic ‘retinue state’ and the zombie concept ‘feudalism’, as well as their various derivatives, still appear in Medieval studies. This does not prevent studying genealogies of ‘feudals’, determining dates of military campaigns of ‘retinues’ and reconstructing events in ‘states’, which do not have any features of statehood. Again, when describing the actions of rulers at any time or scale, one can still call them ‘tsars’, ‘kings’, ‘princes’ and so on, but the essence of the matter remains unchanged. Meanwhile, modern social disciplines, sociology, economics, political science, criminology, psychology, and sexology provide an optimal set of terms for describing any society. Thus, the definition of ‘racketeering’ (Tilly 1985) is much better and more accurate than the academically exalted ‘tribute,’ and ‘field commander,’ ‘power partner,’ or ‘warlord’ is much more accurate than ‘barbarian king’. I see the urgent need to reject the artificial archaization and outright sanctimony of the vocabulary of historical research.

As for the terminology used to describe political systems, political science, historical macro-sociology and political anthropology are optimal. However, even now modern Russian historians still use the primitive dichotomy ‘tribe vs state’, which is based on the immanent statism, *i. e.* a priori overestimation of the ‘state’, and a hidden colonial-racist underestimation of any people who ‘failed’ or ‘did not have time’ to create a ‘state’. As Petr Skalník (2004: 82) correctly points out, if we write ‘state’, it does not matter what adjective comes before it, ‘early’, ‘barbaric’, ‘archaic’, ‘patrimonial’, or even ‘headless’ (*cf.* Krajin 2012), because the polity called ‘state’ will, one way or another, be perceived as approximately the same as a modern state and evaluated depending on the expressiveness of the signs of statehood. And it is even more methodologically stupid to summarize all the variety of

types of archaic political systems under the meaningless definition of ‘tribe’.

If the researcher has an anthropological task to understand how this or that socio-political system is organized, or even more so if several societies are compared (Trigger 2003), it becomes necessary not only to analyze the original emic vocabulary, but also to have or develop an adequate ethical terminological system (Pike 1967; Headland, Pike, and Harris 1990).

This essay is my personal application of conceptualization of socio-cultural anthropological and macro-sociological theories to describe and analyze the Western Eurasian societies from the first to eleventh centuries, I am researching. I rely on the scale of levels of complexity of political organization by Allen W. Johnson and Timothy Earle (2000) and the classification proposed by Ted C. Lewellen (2003: 16–41). Now the world historiography of the Early Middle Ages has already produced a number of successful examples of this approach (Curta 2001: 311–334; Macháček 2009; Gibson 2012; Hodges 2012), while Russian scholars studying the Middle Ages and early Rus’ are still living in the ‘long nineteenth century’.

According to my observations in Western Eurasia during the first millennium AD, from the first to the eleventh centuries, the most common types were ‘bigmanship with bigmen-leaders’ and ‘bigmen associations’ (Sahlins 1963; Godelier and Strathern 1991; Whitley 1991), ‘simple and complex chiefdoms’ and their analogs (Skalník 2004; Earle 2021), and ‘early states’ (Claessen, Hagesteijn, and van de Velde 2008; Skalník 2009). To these classical types, we should add ‘koinoniacracy’ (‘archaic corporatocracy’), in which the functions of the chief and his lineage are performed by some socio-professional group (businessmen, warriors, or cultists) linked not by kinship-genealogical, but by mobilization-adoptive mechanisms. The bigman heads a decentralized polity that is an economic (production, exchange-trade, *etc.*) and communication network (negotiation, cult-ceremonial, military-mobilization, *etc.*). He acts as an organizer, coordinator and mediator in his society and represents it in external contacts. His power is personal and consensual, it cannot be inherited or multiplied, *i. e.* it can be transferred to relatives, descendants, and clients. Bigmen can create complex associations, often analogous to chiefdoms, and it is often a precursor of chiefdom. The chief is at the head of a centralized polity, his power is hereditary and performative, and his kin (blood and adopted) either constitute the elite, or are a privileged group within the elite. The main features of a chiefdom are, first of all, the presence of the figure of the chief and his lineage, whose members are political functionaries. The chiefdom has

a functional analog of ‘koinoniacracy’ (from Ancient Greek *ἡ κοινωνία*, *i. e.* community, fellowship, or commonwealth for cooperation), in which the role of the chiefly lineage is played by some oligarchy, for example, an association of bigmen or a heterarchical community of warriors. The key feature of any ‘state’ of any level of complexity or scale, is the exercise of management and control by a socio-professional group of ‘general and specialized functionaries’, *i. e.* bureaucracy (Shchavelev 2021). The ‘state’ is a centralized polity in which the management of complex societies with pronounced social hierarchies and clear territorial boundaries is carried out by specialized bureaucrats using writing technology, special quantitative systems, and performative texts embodied in a multi-level and multi-component graphosphere (Goody 1996; Shchavelev 2021). Let me emphasize that we are talking about the most common types of political organization of different levels of complexity (Bondarenko, Grinin, and Korotayev 2011), whose diagnostic features are revealed through comparisons between cases from different regions of the world and different historical eras.

If we turn to specific historical cases, Florin Curta has exceptionally perceptibly shown that Slavic-speaking societies of the sixth–seventh centuries, well described in Byzantine and Latin sources, were headed by bigmen and chiefs (Curta 2001: 311–334). There is a classic example of a bigman named Samo, who in the seventh century led the community of ‘Sklavs-Vinids’. He coordinated trade operations on the borders of the Frankish kingdom and led the mobilization of Slavic border communities to fight against the Avars and the Franks (Wallace-Hadrill 1960: 39–40, 56–57, 63; Curta 2001: 59–61, 109, 115, 330–331, 343–344). Medieval Iceland appears in historiography as a unique political system, either as a unique form of state or as a complex society that was an alternative to the state. Scholars were fatally influenced by the mythologized national ideology of Iceland, supposedly a unique democracy with ‘the first parliament in Europe’ and the ‘oldest original legal system’ (even the most anthropologically minded Jesse Byock [2001] shares these misconceptions). In fact, Icelandic society was initially a large ‘dispersed village’, *i. e.*, a network of family groups, then, it evolved into an association of bigmen (O. N. *goði*, pl. *goðar*). Finally, several proto-chiefdoms were formed on the island, with their leaders, the ‘*stórgoðar*’ and even the first local jarls, waging wars for the status of ‘paramount chief’ of the whole island (Andersson 1999; Sigurðsson 1999; Byock 2001; Jakobsson 2012). The trajectory of transformations of Icelandic society is quite similar to that of Hawaiian island communities (Kirch 2010). However, in Iceland, resources and historical time were insufficient even for the

creation of a complex chiefdom and Hawaii has reached the level of an early state. Finally, the Rurikid polity in the Middle Dnieper area of the tenth century was an association of bigmen, a koinoniacracy of owners of homesteads and ships, then by the mid-tenth century, it ceased to be a chiefdom headed by the Rurikid lineage, and finally, only in the first half of the eleventh century it had an apparatus of special officials, which is a diagnostic sign of an early state (Shchavelev 2020). So, the presence of elaborated concepts of the main types of political systems allows us to see similar scenarios of evolution in societies with very different sociocultural characteristics, such as Iceland, Hawaii, Rus' and the Slavs of the borders of the Byzantine and Frankish Empires.

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# Historical Reality in Ancient and Modern Political Terminology: In Search of a Common

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In the presented paper, I will consider one of the most important examples from two categories of political terms. I include in the first category the terms from modern science that originate from classical antiquity. This is the most numerous category, as modern political terminology is almost entirely based on classical languages. The main challenge here is the misleading similarity of terms, since their modern meaning differs fundamentally from that of antiquity (a classic example is *res publica* and the republic). The second category includes terms generated exclusively by antiquity or by modern times (e.g., *polis* and state). Accordingly, the question arises as to what extent each of them is applicable to another civilization. I would describe these two groups of political terms as being deceptively similar and deceptively dissimilar. Due to the limited format, I will limit myself to presenting my own views without providing detailed arguments or historiography.

In the first category, I will consider the concept of 'democracy', which is currently one of the most widely used in political discourse. Roman political theory was familiar with the idea of participation (and even formally dominant participation) of the people (citizens) in power and accepted it as just. Cicero's famous expression *res publica – res populi* means that public property (*res publica*), understood very broadly – from tangible things to power and ideology – belongs to the civil collective (*populus*), i.e. the people. But it is important to empha-

Recommended citation: Smorchkov A. M. Historical Reality in Ancient and Modern Political Terminology: In Search of a Common. *Social Evolution & History*, Vol. 24 No. 2, September 2025, pp. 133–136. DOI: 10.30884/seh/2025.02.08.

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size that the Roman *populus* differs from the Athenian *demos*, for it includes all citizens, including the ruling elite. Moreover, the Romans came up with the idea of ‘the people is the source of power’, *i.e.* it is not the people who rule (literally ‘democracy’), but the people who determine who will rule, which anticipates modern views.

In historiography, the opinion about the non-democratic nature of the political system of the Roman Republic throughout its history is absolutely dominant. However, after the discussion caused by works of Fergus Millar (starting in 1984), it is noted that the Roman Republic of the third–first centuries BC had democratic potential but nothing more. Millar expressed confidence that it was possible ‘to restore the Roman people to their proper place in the history of democratic values’ (Millar 2002: 158). Similar ideas were expressed before Millar, but it was his works that gave rise to a very sharp and very fruitful discussion, although his conclusions were rejected by most researchers to one degree or another. But Millar took the bright and unique Athenian democracy as a model for democracy, likening the Roman political system to it (Millar 2002: 112; 139). In my opinion, Millar’s opponents made the same fundamental mistake in making it easier to criticize him because it is impossible to equate the Roman Republic with Athens at the height of its democratic system.

But modern parliamentary democracies are just as far removed (if not further) from the Athenian model, and, from the point of view of ancient theory, clearly fall under the definition of oligarchy, since representative democracy cannot be recognized as direct power of the people. A paradoxical situation arises: the ancient term is applied to regimes that ancient theories would never recognize as democracies, while criteria are applied to Rome that do not apply to modern democracies. In other words, by proving that Rome did not have democracy, one is actually only proving that Rome did not have the Athenian version of democracy. This is true: according to ancient theory, the Roman Republic in its heyday clearly falls under the definition of aristocracy. However, even today, citizens of large democratic states are unlikely to feel more involved in lawmaking and governance than Roman citizens. And this feeling reflects the real situation, not doubts about the existence of democracy. Therefore, it is completely incomprehensible why the political system of the Roman Republic should be judged using much stricter criteria than modern ones.

The real and most serious claim of Republican Rome from the point of view of democratic principles is the lack of a concept of quorum in the activities of popular assemblies. In other words, most

important decisions were actually made by a minority of citizens, and a random minority at that. This is an objective problem for direct democracy when the number of citizens exceeds a fairly narrow range. And for the modern understanding of democracy, ensuring the opportunity to vote, even if the voter does not exercise it, is an important criterion for the legitimacy of the system. But is representative democracy a solution to the problems inherent in direct democracy? After all, elected deputies proceed from their own understanding of state and public interests, without the opportunity or even the need to consult their voters on every issue.

When speaking about the achievements of the civil society in ancient Rome, we should not forget about the question of its effectiveness, the correspondence between the content and declared goals and forms, but the same problem also faces modern institutions of civil society in the most democratic countries. Accordingly, if we recognize one, we must also recognize the other: *i.e.* recognize the Roman Republic as a democracy, of course, with its own specific features (in fact, modern democracies also differ greatly from each other). In other words, we are talking about the meaning of the term, and not about the presence or absence of the phenomenon itself.

As for the second category, the key problem here is the relationship between the concepts of *polis* and state. The concept of *polis* is limited to classical antiquity and has not entered the modern political lexicon. I will turn to its meaning, which, in my opinion, determines the specificity of ancient civilization. The theory of *polis* was developed primarily on Greek material, which is natural given its diversity. However, the characteristics of the *polis* must also include the Roman *civitas*, otherwise the unity of classical world would be torn apart.

And as much as the *polis* is an ancient phenomenon, the concept of the state is a product of modern science. We will not find an adequate correspondence to 'state' in ancient theory. *Res publica* and *ta koina pragmata* express the idea of community, while the state has contradictory, though mutually recognized relations with society. In my opinion, the *polis* and the state are different taxonomic categories. Therefore, strictly speaking, interpreting the *polis* as a state (city-state, citizen-state) is not entirely correct. The widespread interpretation of the *polis* as 'civil community' is actually one of the meanings of the word *polis*, and accordingly, it is itself a term. But it clearly shows that the *polis* is part of the conceptual series of 'community', in other words, it is a self-regulating association of people. This circumstance determines, in particular, the limitation of its territorial and numerical size.

Going beyond the limits within which self-organization of the community is possible leads to the transformation of the *polis* into other structures. The state arises when society is unable to self-regulate, both due to objective contradictions that divide it or other complex problems facing society, and because it goes beyond the limits within which self-regulation is possible. Under such conditions, society's preservation requires an external force, *i.e.*, the state, whose main task is to maintain order and organize social life in its various aspects.

The *Polis* and the state are closely related, respectively, the *polis* determines the form and features of the state, which is reflected in the concept of 'polis state'. This state differs from other types of states by the specific organization of the population stratum that is admitted to power (to one degree or another). Here, the ruling elite is forced to share political power (of course, in varying amounts) with the majority of the free population, which, with other paths of state formation, turns them into a subordinate and exploited stratum. Relations of exploitation, domination, and subordination are taken outside the *polis*, since the *polis* as a collective of citizens does not include the exploited categories of population, but they undoubtedly exist outside this civil collective, constituting the necessary 'external' conditions for its existence.

This union of the ruling elite and ordinary citizens, which in turn constitutes only a part of the population on the territory of the *polis*, is based on principles of community, the most natural and usual for that stage of development. Accordingly, I propose the following definition: '*Polis (civitas)* is a politically dominant community of full-fledged residents of an ancient state (citizens), uniting the top of society and a part of the ordinary population.' Of course, such a formulation emphasizes formal features, but their actual functioning is another matter. But this is a problem for any terminological definition.

Paradoxically, the ancient *polis* is not exclusively an exhibit of the historical cabinet of curiosities. In connection with the development of the Internet, ancient direct democracy is becoming increasingly possible and therefore more relevant, as evidenced by studies on the phenomenon of the so-called network *polis*.

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# Socio-Political Terminology for Pre-State Societies in Antiquity: Sarmatian Rulers between History, Anthropology, and Archaeology

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The purpose of the study is to compare the political terminology of ancient authors, archaeological realities and modern scientific terminology using the example of the Sarmatians of the second century BC – second century AD.

There is a point of view about the non-terminological nature of ancient authors, that the concepts they use are rather vague. Nevertheless, this information is very valuable and needs verification in any case. The array of terminology was taken from Strabo as a sample. Strabo is known for his good knowledge of political diversity, and a sober and realistic approach to various management practices. It is possible to trace the peculiarities of the use of political terms in Strabo's *Geography*.

The following patterns are revealed in Strabo's political terminology. The most general term for a ruler is 'hegemon' (*ἡγεμών*), used for rulers at various levels, including representatives of the Roman administration.

The main term for a legitimate ruler-monarch is 'basileus' (*βασιλεύς*), used for the ancient kings of Rome and Greece, Hellenistic monarchs, kings of Persia, and a number of barbarian rulers.

Dynasts in most cases are rulers of middle rank, lower than basileoi. It is necessary to pay attention to expressions '*βασιλέων καὶ δυναστῶν*' (Strabo I, 2, 32, 26; XVI, 1, 11, 33), '*καὶ βασιλεῖς καὶ δὲ*

Recommended citation: Vdovchenkov E. V. Socio-Political Terminology for Pre-State Societies in Antiquity: Sarmatian Rulers between History, Anthropology, and Archaeology. *Social Evolution & History*, Vol. 24 No. 2, September 2025, pp. 137–142. DOI: 10.30884/seh/2025.02.09.

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*καὶ δυνάσται δεκαρχίαι*’ (Strabo XVII, 3, 25, 39). Barbarian leaders are usually called hegemons, dynasts, and sometimes kings.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL MATERIALS

In the Northern Black Sea region, in the area from the Lower Volga region to the Carpathians, in the second–first centuries BC, we find burials united under the name of the Early Sarmatian culture. At this time, the location of the burial mounds is fixed over time to the west – from the Lower Volga region and the Don region to the Dnieper and Tauria steppes, and then further to the northwestern Black Sea region at the turn of the era.

In the first – middle second centuries AD, the Early Sarmatian culture was replaced by the Middle Sarmatian culture, whose epicenter was most likely the Don-Volga interfluvium.

What happened in the steppe zone at the turn of the era, during the transition from one epoch – the Early Sarmatian – to another? This was a change from the Early Sarmatian culture to the Middle Sarmatian; an increase in the number of rich burials and the appearance of elite burials of ‘royal’ rank; the emergence of heavy cataphract cavalry in the steppe zone and a change in nomadic tactics; the fixation of tamgas – signs of family property. There is also a closer interaction between nomads and the settled world. All this indicates an increase in complexity of nomadic society and growing importance of rulers. These changes were largely initiated by migration of nomads from the east, primarily the Alans.

Were these changes reflected in the political terminology of ancient authors?

## SOCIO-POLITICAL TERMINOLOGY OF THE EARLY SARMATIAN ERA (2<sup>nd</sup> –1<sup>st</sup> CENTURIES BC)

At the end of the third century BC, king (*βασιλεύς*) Saitafarn and his subordinates *σκηπτοῦχος* from the Sava people, appeared in the vicinity of Olbia. They extorted gifts and tribute from the city's population (Decree in honor of Protogenes. IOSPE I, 32).

The European ruler of the Sarmatians, Gatal, acted as the guarantor for the treaty of Asia Minor rulers in 179 BC, Polybius used the term ‘*δυνάσται*’ (Polyb. Hyst. XXV, 2, 13).

Polyaen mentions, the wife of Medosacc, the king of the Sarmatians in the Northern Black Sea region for the presumably first half of the second century BC, ‘*Αμάγη γυνὴ Μηδοσάκκου βασιλέως Σαρματῶν*’ (Polyaen. Strateg. VIII, 56).

Strabo has evidence of the Roxolani's participation in the Crimean Scythian war against Mithridates Eupator at the end of the second century BC (Strabo VII, 3, 17). The Roxolani fought under the leadership of Tasius (*ἡγεμόνα Τάσιον*) (Strabo VII, 3, 17, 24).

Strabo reports that Abeak, king of the Siraks, provided 20,000 horsemen when Pharnaces owned the Bosphorus, while Spadin, king of the Aorsi, provided 200,000 horsemen (Strabo XI, 5, 8). The Aorsi were the population of Lower Don, the Siraks were nomads on the right bank of the Kuban. This message is from the middle of the first century BC, and it uses the term *‘βασιλεύς’*.

### **SOCIO-POLITICAL TERMINOLOGY OF THE MIDDLE SARMATIAN EPOCH (1<sup>st</sup> – MIDDLE OF THE 2<sup>nd</sup> CENTURY A.D.)**

The *‘Res Gestae Divi Augusti’* mentions the kings of the Sarmatians who lived on both banks of the Tanais and asked Augustus for friendship: *‘Sarmatarum ... reges’* (Imp. August. XXXI) (the beginning of the first century A.D.).

Tacitus mentions the participation of the Bosporan king Mithridates VII in the war in the 40s of the first century AD. The Siraks were led by king Zorsin (Tac. Ann. XII, 15: Zorsines Siracorum rex) and the Aorsi were led by *rex* Eunon (Tac. Ann., XII, 19). It is important to note that Zorsin's desire to maintain the kingdom inherited from his father (Tac. Ann. XII, 17) is an important evidence of the hereditary nature of power among the Siraks in this case.

Tacitus also mentions in Eunon's letter the *‘kings of great nations’* (*magnarum nationum reges*), who refer to both Eunon himself and the loser of the war, and the kingdom of Mithridates VII (Ann. XII, 19).

The well-known epitaph of Plautius Silvanus tells about the events in the year 62 AD in the Northwestern Black Sea region. According to the well-founded opinion of a number of researchers, the opponents of Plautius Silvanus – *‘kings unknown to the Roman people or hostile to them’* *‘ignotos ante aut infensos p(opulo) R(omano) reges’* (CIL, XIV, 3608) were the Alans. The same inscription mentions the *‘kings of Bastarnae and Roxolani’* (*regibus Bastarnarum et / Rhoxolanorum*).

The inscription *‘Rasparaganus Rex Roxolanorum’* (CIL V, 32) (from the city of Pola, Istria) dates back to the beginning of the second century AD and refers to the king of the Roxolani, Publius Elias Rasparagan.

Sometimes he is considered to be the same king, whom Emperor Hadrian was in contact with: *‘With the king of the Roxolans (cum*

*rege Roxolanorum*), who complained about a decrease in annual payments, he made peace after reviewing the case' (SHA. V. Adr. VI, 8).

The Mangup Decree, which researchers date to the middle of the first century AD and associate with Olbia, mentions 'great kings of Aorsia' (*βασιλέας*) (Sidorenko 1996: 36–37). Researchers usually mean by this 'Aorsia' the territory in the northwestern Black Sea region in the second half of the first century AD.

In the Pantikapaion encomium of the Bosphoran statesman and military figure of the time Sauromat I (according to Sergey Saprykin), the kings of the Alans in the Crimea are mentioned: 'and to the kings of the Alans (*καὶ τοῖς Ἀλανῶν βασιλευσιν*) he considered it necessary to determine (a fair punishment?) for (their guilt?)' (Saprykin and Parfenov 2012: 169). These Alans are considered as the Don Alans at the end of the first century AD.

In addition to kings, other terms are mentioned in the sources from this period. Tacitus, in his *Historia*, when describing the Roxolani raid in the winter of 67–68 AD, mentions 'the leaders and all the nobility' – *principes and nobilissimi* (Tac. Hist. I, 79, 1–4), which is an important evidence of separations among the elite of the Roksolans.

At about the same time, describing the Sarmatians on the Middle Danube, Tacitus mentions 'the leaders of the Sarmatian Iazyges (*principes Sarmatarum Iazugum*), who ruled the local tribes' (Tac. Hist. III, 5).

The *skeptouchos* – *sceptuchi* (who are usually understood as second-rank leaders) are also known from Tacitus' description of the Sarmatian raid on Transcaucasia in 35 AD (Tac. Ann. VI. 33).

## CONCLUSIONS

The specificity of archaeological material allows us to reconstruct general principles of political organization and its structural features. Two alternative models can be distinguished for nomads: the homoarchic principle of organization of society and the heterarchic one. Heterarchy is the coexistence of different social hierarchies and ranks, none of which is dominant, and it is represented by nomads. Both hierarchy and homoarchy have been proposed as antonyms to the concept of heterarchy. In this case, this discrepancy is not fundamental, and these concepts can be used interchangeably.

Of course, the concentration of resources and labor costs come to the fore when determining the features of a hierarchical model. Although, of course, the scale of Sarmatian mounds is not comparable to the classical Scythian mounds, but all the sizes of mounds are also important markers of the richest and most outstanding burials. The

most important feature of this model is also the established elite sub-culture.

The presence of a hierarchical model is usually compared to chieftdom. Among anthropologists and archaeologists studying ancient societies, 'chieftdom' has gradually become a central concept that allows us to understand the ways of politogenesis. The idea that chieftdoms existed among the Sarmatians has already been considered and substantiated (Skripkin 2015: 76), and now the existence of chieftdoms among the Sarmatians is not disputed. An important circumstance is that chieftdom is not typical of all Sarmatian societies. This is compared to societies with a developed stratification, primarily with the population of the Middle Sarmatian culture (first – middle second century AD). In this respect, the Early Sarmatian culture is characterized by a greater poverty of burials, the absence of a pronounced elite sub-culture, and there are only a few rich burials from that time. Previously, we assumed that the people of the Early Sarmatian culture were more tribal in organization with egalitarian tendencies.

For the early Sarmatian era, we have five mentions of a ruler. There are three kings (Medosakk, Abeak, and Spadin) and two other titles for hegemon Tasiy and the dynast Gatal. Although Gatal is often referred to as a king in the literature, this is not the case.

We can fix nine mentions of kings for the Middle Sarmatian era – and this, in our opinion, is obvious evidence of increased political activity of the Sarmatians, as well as greater subjectivity (and these two phenomena are mutually conditioned). Archaeologically, these kings correspond to the regions where there were concentrations of elite monuments in the Lower Don region and the Northwestern Black Sea region in the Middle Sarmatian era. For these regions, at that time, we can assume the existence of a hierarchical (homoarchic) model and a form of polity as chieftdoms.

The mention of the βασιλεύς Saitafarn and the σκηπτοῦχος in the decree of Protogen raises a question. Whoever they were, during this period, there was no stable population in the northern Black Sea region. The third century BC was a time of systemic crisis and aridization when the steppe zone became deserted. It is unclear who king Saitafarn and the skeptouchos ruled.

There is also a significant difference between the nomadic burial mounds of the second–first centuries BC in the Lower Don region and those in the Kuban. There are richer burials in the Kuban region, and it is easier to reconstruct society with a king ruling based on archaeological evidence. The Don material is much poorer, with only 500 bur-

ials known, none of which are truly elite. Therefore, Strabo's reference to Spadin, the king of the Aorsi (who lived in the Don region), raises questions. In the Kuban area, it is easier to imagine the existence of a kingdom led by Abeak, the king of the Siraks.

This problem – the discrepancy between the data of ancient tradition and archeology – requires a solution. And the answer, perhaps, lies precisely in the phenomenon of pseudo-hierarchy among the early nomads. A pseudo-hierarchy is a situation where titles do not correspond to the real state of affairs.

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# On the Discussion of the Concepts of 'Chieftdom' and 'Tribe' in Current Political Anthropology and History of Primitive Society

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The paper is dedicated to different interpretations of the concepts of 'chieftdom (вождество)' and 'tribe (племя)'. The author concludes that modern science does not provide a clear answer to the question of what 'a tribe' is. In contemporary political anthropology, the 'tribe' is defined as a segmentary political structure in which each segment (community, lineage) is economically independent and leadership is personal and does not involve any formal positions.

In evolutionary schemes, the tribe is usually placed between the primitive community and the chieftdom (Elman Service, Marshall Sahlins), despite Elman Service's exclusion of the tribe as an obligatory stage of evolution from his scheme of levels of political integration (under the influence of Morton Fried). Some researchers have defined the tribe based on the absence of certain features characteristic of chieftdoms or early states, emphasizing egalitarianism and acephality. There are some very simple and obscure formulations like 'more family, but less nation, bound by ties of kinship and obligation' (H. Prins).

In Soviet ethnology/ethnography and history of primitive society, the Morgan's view of the Iroquoian tribes was dominant as interpreted by Friedrich Engels. In other words, social and ethnic constructivism flourished, extrapolating a speculative model of the Marxist theory of primitive society into the past. The 'tribe' was declared a primitive ethno-potestarian (ethno-social) institute combining the primary form

Recommended citation: Popov, V. A. On the Discussion of the Concepts of 'Chieftdom' and 'Tribe' in Current Political Anthropology and History of Primitive Society. *Social Evolution & History*, Vol. 24 No. 2, September 2025, pp. 143–146. DOI: 10.30884/seh/2025.02.10.

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of an ethnic community (within the framework of the famous triad ‘tribe – nationality – nation’) and a potestarian organization.

There is no single or more or less coordinated point of view on the genesis, development, typology, and especially the ratio of ethnic and potestial in a tribe, although some authors distinguish between primary tribes (initial, early, pre-tribe) and classical ones (late tribes, potestarian tribes), or tribes themselves. As a rule, they are associated with various life support systems. The primary tribes (among hunters and gatherers) are a kind of proto-ethnos or ethnicos (ethnos in its pure form), according to Yuri V. Bromley’s definition, in which there are no strong potestarian functions and unified rulers or controlling institutions, but there is unity in territory, economy, language (dialects), and awareness of a common origin reflected in self-identity and self-naming.

Socially, the primary tribe is usually treated as either an over-community level of social organization (mainly endogamous) that unites several interrelated clan communities, or as a set of epigamous clans, usually two, characterizing the initial (embryonic) tribe as a dual-generic organization. In other words, the tribe allows for two ways of dividing into its main components: along the line of clans and along the line of communal institutions that overlapped each other. The reproduction of the tribe occurred in the form of continuity of socially organized generations.

The classical tribe is characterized by a high degree of ethno-cultural and social-potestarian design. The integrity of this type of tribe was provided by kinship (real or fictional) and potestial institutions led by the chief, which also stipulated a greater degree of ethno-cultural unification, *i.e.* the classical tribe is an ethno-potestarian organism. Clans within one tribe could grow, mature, form phratries, and there were specific tribes with dual or triple-phratrian organizations. Classical tribes are characteristic of farmers and pastoralists from the late pre-historic era. During this era, early political (military-political) associations (unions, leagues, federations, confederations), of related and neighboring tribes were also characteristic. These associations were often hierarchically organized according to the principle of inequality (incompleteness) between separate tribes (‘younger’, ‘adopted’, *etc.*) and formed the basis for the formation of chiefdoms or early state structures (or their analogues), such as the so-called barbarian kingdoms of the ancient Germans and the first principalities of the Slavs.

There were also secondary tribes formed in synpolitean primitive societies under conditions of inter-formation interaction with more developed neighbours and especially under the influence of European bourgeois societies during the Great Geographical Discoveries and the Modern Age. Such secondary tribes were usually transformed into parapolitean societies, unstable formations that reproduced the forms of European political structures.

However, by the end of the twentieth century, terminological ambiguity in the concept of 'tribe' was realized. In fact, the concept of 'tribe' has lost its former conceptuality. Modern Russian ethnologists have abandoned the use of the 'tribe' concept and other familiar ethnological terms of Soviet science, such as 'nationality' and 'nation'. Most researchers avoid referring to specific ethnic communities' tribes, nationalities, or nations and instead use more neutral concepts like 'people' or 'ethnos' and its derivatives ('ethnic communities', 'ethnic groups', *etc.*), especially the terms 'ethnic group' and 'people' that do not have a stadial meaning and do not evoke associations with primitivity.

Thus, with the concept of 'tribe' there is what always happens when one term refers to different phenomena – namely the loss of terminological uniqueness and conversion into a phantom. At the same time, the concept of 'tribe' is still popular among Russian historians-medievalists and archeologists, who identify archeological cultures with tribes, most often bearing in mind ethnic communities. In the same sense, the term 'tribe' is used by many Africanists and Americanists, who study peoples of Sub-Saharan Africa and American Indians (Native American).

Modern Russian political anthropologists replace the term 'tribe (potestarian tribe)' with the term 'chieftdom' or its analogues. At the same time, the concept of 'chieftdom' is not so unambiguous and heuristic. In fact, the chieftdom is an intermediate form of socio-political organization (between the community and the early state) with centralized administration, a hereditary hierarchy of chiefs and nobles, and social and property inequality. Yet, there is no formal or even less legal repressive apparatus. The chieftaincy power system is characterized by chiefs – institutionalized hereditary leaders who become leaders in the economic, socio-potestarian, military, and ideological spheres of life. From an economic point of view, the role of the chieftdom is to accumulate and distribute basic material wealth.

According to the degree of structural complexity, it is customary to distinguish between simple, complex (compound), and supercomplex (maximum) chiefdoms. Simple chiefdoms (*e.g.*, Trobriand chiefdoms) consist of a number of village communities, totaling up to several thousand people, united under the authority of a chief who resides in a central settlement. A complex chiefdom, such as Hawaiian chiefdoms), is a two-level (or more) group of simple chiefdoms that are subordinated to the administration of a supreme chief. Typically, the potestarian apparatus of the chief is exempt from direct participation in production. The population can reach 30,000 people. Three-tier (or more) supercomplex chiefdoms (*e.g.*, the Turkic Khaganate or the Bamum 'kingdom' in the forest zone of Cameroon) may have ethnically heterogeneous populations, and can number up to several tens of thousands of people.

Most researchers consider chiefdom to be a universal stage in the evolution of political organizations (although chiefdoms are not typically found in ethnic communities of Melanesia), which often leads to 'fitting' and 'adaptation' of a specific material to a 'fashionable' (or 'trendy'?) concept. In other words, chiefdoms, or their analogues, began to define any early political formations with signs of social hierarchy and the presence of some kind of potestarian apparatus.

It should be noted that the term 'tribe' is used in the English-language scientific literature and journalism to designate large ethnic communities, numbering tens of millions of people, primarily African (*e.g.*, Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, Fulbe, Zulus, Bakongo, *etc.*). They are very far from being primitive tribes and are analogues to large nations. The use of the term 'tribe' contributed to the emergence of the concept of tribalism. Tribalism is one of the most complex and acute problems in the internal political development of most African and other developing countries. It can be interpreted in two ways: as a kind of nationalism and separatism, and adherence to cultural, cults and socio-political separateness, including the desire to preserve the attributes of primitive customs, traditional beliefs, clan organizations, large families, the structure of community self-government, *etc.* As for social anthropology, the 'tribe' acts as a synonym for primitive society (*cf.* with the stable in the past phrase 'tribal system').

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## Debates on the Origin of the State: Some Results and Perspectives

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The origins of the state are a never-ending story. Since the mid-1980s, when I started studying this topic, we had similar authorities (Carneiro 1970; Service 1975; Claessen and Skalnik 1978; Kubbel' 1988). Over forty years, many important books and articles have been published in this field (Earle 1997; Feinman and Marcus 1998; Claessen 2000; Kradin *et al.* 2000; Haas 2001; Trigger 2003; Grinin *et al.* 2004; Yoffee 2005; Bondarenko 2006; Maisels 2010; Price and Feinman 2010; Grinin 2011; Flannery and Marcus 2012; Berezkin 2013; Turchin 2016; Scott 2017; Bondarenko, Kowalewski, and Small 2020; Graeber and Wengrow 2021; Kradin 2021; *etc.*). Here, I will try to summarize contemporary ideas about the formation of statehood and civilization.

As is known, the most ancient archaic or early states could form in different ecological conditions – arid zones with river irrigation (Mesopotamia, Egypt), river valleys in the jungle (India), loess river valleys (China) and mountain jungles (Mexico, the Andes). The emergence of statehood could be influenced by various factors – favorable ecology, a productive economy, population growth, an increase in internal conflicts, technological innovations, diffusion, wars and conquests, external influence, long-distance trade, ideology, *etc.* Currently, most researchers agree that the emergence of the state was a complex multivariate process dependent on a large number of different variables (Peregrine, Ember, and Ember 2007: 84).

In the course of long discussions, two opposing approaches to the state phenomenon were formed. Supporters of the first approach em-

Recommended citation: Kradin N. N. Debates on the Origin of the State: Some Results and Perspectives. *Social Evolution & History*, Vol. 24 No. 2, September 2025, pp. 147–156. DOI: 10.30884/seh/2025.02.11.

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phasize the positive and creative role of the state. In anthropology, this is commonly referred to as the *functional (adaptationist, integrative)* approach. Adherents of the second approach view the state as an instrument of control and power. They consider it an institution of violence, and often also as a mechanism for oppression of the poor. Therefore, some propose to destroy it (anarchism) or radically transform (Marxism). This approach is called the *conflict* or *Marxist* approach. Nowadays, few researchers are willing to unconditionally accept either side. It is obvious to everyone that they are two sides of the same process. They are intertwined. The state is ambivalent: it both helps and punishes, while performing important social functions (it protects the population from external and internal threats, maintaining infrastructure, buildings towns, *etc.*). At the same time, those with power have more access to resources and benefits, while the subjects are forced to accept their lower status.

It is common to divide early or archaic states into pristine and secondary. The pristine states include those that emerged in the course of spontaneous evolution without external influence. There were only six such states: Mesopotamia, Egypt, India, China, Mesoamerica, and the Incas. Their emergence spanned over a long historical period from 3500 to 1500 BC. All secondary states arose under the influence of already established centers, and this must be taken into account when studying them. Six major leaps in the growth of polities and states are recorded in Afro-Eurasia. All of them are directly connected with global world-system processes. The first (3000 BC) was the origin of pristine civilizations in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Harappa. The second (2000 BC) was the synchronous growth of Egypt (the Middle Kingdom), Babylon, Crete, and complex polities in China. The third stage (1000 BC), after the Bronze Age crisis, was associated with the beginning of the Iron Age and simultaneous rise of the Western and East Asian world-systems. The fourth (300 BC) is the onset of the so-called *classical antiquity* in Afro-Eurasia. It led to the formation of the first global Eurasian communication network (the *Silk Road*) between Rome and Han China. The fifth step (600 AD) can be designated as the beginning of the early Middle Ages. The next important step (1200 AD) was the stage of Mongol expansion and unification of the mediaeval world-system. Finally, the last leap (1600 AD) marked the beginning of the Modernity and the formation of the capitalist world-system (Taagapera 1997: 475, 480; Kradin 2024: 145–148).

Most researchers believe that three major steps or stages can be distinguished on the path to modern statehood: (1) the stage of pre-state society, in which the population is removed from key decision-making (*pre-feudal society, pre-class society, chiefdom, analogues of the state*, etc.); (2) early state with an inchoate apparatus, but without developed private property (*early state, early class society, archaic state, barbarian state, tribal state, early feudal state* etc.); (3) a formed pre-industrial state, with a bureaucracy and private property (*traditional state, mature state, agrarian state, developed state, estate-class society* etc.) (Claessen and Skalnik 1978, 1981; Gellner 1988; Pavlenko 1989; Iliushchkin 1990; Johnson and Earle 2000; Grinin 2011; *etc.*). According to big data (see Seshat), the threshold of statehood is reached when the population number in a polity exceeds 100,000 (Turchin *et al.* 2021).

By the way, there is at least one exception – nomadic or steppe empires. They could unite large masses of people without bureaucracy. Nomads were usually semi-peripheral societies. They were neighbors of agrarian states and civilizations. The degree of centralization of pastoral society depended on the level of centralization in the neighboring sedentary society. Tribal confederations and chiefdoms arose near oases. Nomadic empires were created near urban civilizations. The power of the leaders and rulers in steppe empires was based on their ability to organize raids and distribute booty and gifts (Khazanov 1984/1994; Barfield 1992; Kradin, Bondarenko, and Barfield 2003; Golden 2003; Kradin 2014 *etc.*).

In the settled agrarian world, in parallel with the creation of hierarchical societies (chiefdoms, early and mature states), there is another vector of social or cultural evolution. In anthropology and archeology, it is customary to talk about two opposing strategies – hierarchical or network and heterarchical or corporate. These strategies represent polar variants of social types. At one end are classical chiefdoms and states of varying complexity, and at the other end are complex societies with no clearly expressed hierarchical structure. In between, there are a vast number of variations with different economic systems, political institutions, and forms of ideology (Berezkin 1995; Korotayev 1995; Crumley 1995; 2001; Blanton *et al.* 1996; Kristiansen 1998; Bondarenko and Korotayev 2000; Kradin *et al.* 2000; Haas 2001; Feinman 2001; Grinin *et al.* 2004; Bondarenko 2006; Chapman 2008;

Earle and Kristiansen 2010; Price and Feinman 2010; Chacon and Mendoza 2017; *etc.*).

Therefore, social or cultural evolution is multilinear. In a somewhat schematic form, the general scheme of the evolution of pre-industrial societies can be presented as follows:

*Table 1*

### Evolution of pre-industrial societies

<b>strategy: heterarchy</b>	<b>evolution stage: pre-industrial</b>	<b>strategy: hierarchy</b>
city-state	pre-industrial civilization	pre-industrial (agrarian) state
polis	archaic civilization	early state
tribal confederation	complex society	complex chiefdom
tribe	middle rang society	chiefdom
egalitarian society	local group	transegalitarian society

Probably the most confusing issue is the features that distinguish a state from pre-state formations. Vere Gordon Childe identified ten characteristics of the stage of civilization, which he associated with the urban revolution (Childe 1950). In fact, his publication was about archaeological features of the state. The article became the beginning of an endless discussion about the criteria of the state. This list of characteristics has been repeatedly clarified and revised. The most common criteria are urbanization, monumental architecture, the elite burials, three or more levels of hierarchy, taxes, laws, writing (Feinman and Marcus 1998; Maisels 2010; Flannery and Marcus 2012; Smith 2023 *etc.*). However, there is no universal criterion.

Anthropologists have also criticized Max Weber's thesis that the state has a monopoly on violence (Carneiro 1981; Gellner 1988). As a result, the view has become widespread in anthropology that bureaucracy is the only criterion for a state (I have also contributed to the spread of this position [Kradin 2009; 2021]). As a consequence, there have been discussions about whether all ancient and medieval civilizations can be considered states. Initially, experts in the history of early Rome (Shterman 1989) and ancient Greece (Berent 2000) argued that the polis was not a state because it lacked a professional bureaucracy. This caused an angry protest from historians of antiquity (Van der Vliet 2005). Then, we came to the conclusion that many nomadic empires were not states, but supercomplex chiefdoms without a bureau-

cratic apparatus (Kradin, Bondarenko, and Barfield 2003; Kradin 2014). This has caused similar misunderstandings among classical historians (Scheidel 2011), as well as among historians of young post-Socialist nations. The same debate arose among medieval historians regarding whether feudal kingdoms were states, or statehood in Europe emerged during the late medieval – early modern period (in particular, see Davies 2003; Reynolds 2003).

As a result, a terminological trap arose. Based on logic, the state must correspond to the stage of civilization. But understanding the state as bureaucracy leads us to the fact that civilization appears before the state. To avoid scholastic disputes, I suggest recalling the discussion among archaeologists about the Neolithic. There were also disputes about when certain signs of the Neolithic appeared. Over time, archaeologists realized that it was a very complex process, which took place differently in different parts of the world. So they prefer to talk about the process of *Neolithization*. I propose to talk about the origins of the state and civilization in a similar context. This could be called *civilization as a process*. What does it mean? In different regions of the world, the signs of a state (or civilization) appear differently. In many early states in Africa, there was no writing. But writing was in the hierarchies of the Celts. Monumental structures were found in many chiefdoms in Europe and Asia. There were towns in the ancient civilization of Harappa, but there was no state there. On the contrary, on Hawaii, there were no towns but an early state emerged there. There are many other examples. It is important to note that, taken as a whole, this was a gradual process of transformation of human societies into a state with towns, writing, bureaucracy, taxes, and laws.

A similar term was used by Norbert Elias. However, his main function of the civilizing process was the internal transformation of human psyche and the formation of ethics and mentality, using the example of medieval Western Europe (Elias 1994). I believe that the formation of a specific *ethos* is an important part of the process of development of a civilization (or different civilizations). However, the civilizational process is a broader phenomenon that includes technological innovations and inventions, exquisite crafts, writing and literature, the beginnings of scientific knowledge, architecture, urbanization, original artistic styles, ideology or religion, and much more. In the course of an original transformation in different polities, some features of a civilization

or state may appear earlier or later than others due to a combination of some special circumstances. All this suggests that the civilizational process was complex, multifactorial, and multilinear.

Apparently, tangible progress in the study of state origins in the future may be associated not with history and anthropology, but with archeology, where new discoveries are regularly made. Modeling historical processes using *big data* (Turchin *et al.* 2021), comparative studies (Peregrine 2004; Smith 2012) and the creation of *middle range* theories (Smith 2023).

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# On the Stages of the Evolution of Statehood\*

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The state has passed along a great evolutionary path, whose analysis is an important task for political and historical anthropology, as well as for various other social sciences. Unfortunately, there are still no generally accepted approaches either to the definition of the state as such or to the definition of polities that can be designated as early states; and moreover, some anthropologists deny this stage of statehood, confusing it, in my view, with complex and super-complex chiefdoms and their analogues (on such approaches see Grinin 2017; see also Kradin 2008, 2011), or consider as non-state entities those polities and poleis that do not fit the characteristics of a developed state, for example, ancient Athens (Berent 2004; see criticism of such approach in Grinin 2008a; see also van der Vliet 2005).

When analyzing the development of statehood, those who recognize the stage of an early state, following Henri J. M. Claessen and Peter Skalník (Claessen and Skalník 1978a), usually distinguish two main stages within the historical process: the *early* state and the *mature* state. This division is undoubtedly rational and productive. However, Claessen and Skalník limited their scheme of the development of statehood to the evolution of only *pre-capitalist non-industrial* states (Claessen and Skalník 1978b: 5). Consequently, the concept of the *early–mature* states needs important additions. The reasons for this are as follows:

1. It would be more than strange to assume that the industrial revolution of the eighteenth – nineteenth centuries did not bring about major changes in the organization of the state. Meanwhile, the scheme of the *early – mature* state in no way reflects these changes.

Recommended citation: Grinin L. E. On the Stages of the Evolution of Statehood. *Social Evolution & History*, Vol. 24 No. 2, September 2025, pp. 157–161. DOI: 10.30884/seh/2025.02.12.

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2. If the first mature states, according to the widespread view, emerged already in ancient times (in Egypt) or at the turn of our era (in China), then, how should we classify the European states of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, not to mention the modern states? Should they also be considered as mature states or already as super-mature ones?

3. The European states of the nineteenth century differed greatly from the complex politically centralized monarchies of the late antiquity and the Middle Ages in a number of other characteristics, particularly in the level and culture of governance, the development of law, and the relationship between the state and society.

Consequently, taking into account the above-mentioned differences between industrial and pre-industrial states, it becomes obvious that it is necessary to distinguish not two, but three stages in the development of statehood. They are:

a) the *early*, insufficiently centralized states with an underdeveloped social and class structure, and often underdeveloped administrative-political structure;

b) the already established centralized states of the late antiquity, the Middle Ages and of the New Age with a clearly manifested class-estate division;

c) the states of the industrial age, in which the estates disappeared, the bourgeoisie and proletariat classes appeared, nations were formed, and representative democracy spread.

Therefore, I propose to consider the evolution of statehood not in terms of two main stages of statehood development – early state and mature state, but in terms of three: 1) the *early state*; 2) the *developed state*; and 3) the *mature state*. Of course, each stage of the evolution of statehood lasted quite a long time and went through its own internal developmental stages (for more details, see Grinin 2008b, 2017).

## **THE MAIN DIFFERENCES BETWEEN EARLY, DEVELOPED AND MATURE STATES**

Early states differ greatly from each other in many characteristics, especially in the degree of development of centralization, governance, taxation and legal system. But if we define similarities between them in terms of their general differences from states at a higher stage of evolution, then an early state is always an incomplete state (organizationally and socially). In most cases, this incompleteness was expressed in the most direct sense, since many early states often did not have a full set of the most important features of a state, or did not de-

velop all or some of them to a satisfactory degree. This applies primarily to such attributes of statehood as a *professional apparatus of administration and repression, taxation, territorial division, and the degree of centralization and written law*. However, in some early states (e.g., the Third Dynasty of Ur, the late 3d millennium BCE, or Hammurabi in Mesopotamia, the 18<sup>th</sup> century BCE) there was an opposite disproportion. Although the administrative apparatus and bureaucracy were quite powerful, they were built on the society that was not sufficiently developed in social and ethnic terms.

A *developed state* is a state that is *formed* and *established* and has almost all of the above-mentioned attributes of a state (including a professional apparatus of administration and repression, taxation, and territorial division), and it is *centralized*. Thus, many features that could be found in the early states, but which could also be absent, become obligatory in the developed states.

This type of state was already the result of a long historical development and selection, which proved that the state is much stronger when its institutions are organically linked to the social structure of the society and when they are at the same time dependent on the social order and support it. A developed state is not only closely connected with the peculiarities of the social and corporate structure of society, but institutionalizes these peculiarities in its political and legal institutions. In this sense, it can be considered an *estate-corporate* state.

Of course, different states entered this stage at different times.

A *mature state* is already the result of the development of capitalism and Industrial revolution, that is, it has a fundamentally different production basis. Other differences between a mature state and its predecessors are also very significant. The mature state is based on an established or emerging nation with all its characteristics; it necessarily has professional bureaucracy with certain characteristics (see, e.g., Weber 1947: 333–334), and a clear mechanism for the transfer or rotation of power.

On the basis of the above said, we can make a very important conclusion that *in antiquity and the Middle Ages there were no mature states*, but only early and developed ones. The very first mature states appeared at the end of the seventeenth – eighteenth centuries.

The stage of a mature state is associated with the formation of classes of entrepreneurs and hired workers and *the creation of a class-corporate state*. For the European developed states, this process was completed in the nineteenth century.

The most important characteristics of this new social structure already in the middle and second half of the twentieth century were:

- the formation of the so-called middle class, which gradually became the leading class in terms of numbers;
- the growing importance of social legislation and laws limiting the polarization of society into rich and poor (such as high income taxes, inheritance taxes, *etc.*);
- the increasing importance of factors that had not previously played a leading role in the national and state factors: gender, age and occupational group characteristics.

During the twentieth century, social policy underwent very considerable changes. *The state gradually transformed from a class state into a social state, i.e. a state that actively pursues the policy of supporting the poor and the socially vulnerable, and limits the growing inequality.* This process began at the end of the nineteenth century and became more pronounced in the period after the First World War and even more so after the Second. And since then this trend has only strengthened and developed.

When the USA and a number of Western European countries became *welfare states and mass consumer societies* in the 1950s and 1960s, this essentially meant that a mature state had acquired certain features that were not entirely characteristic of it and had begun to evolve into something new. At the same time, class distinctions became increasingly blurred. In our view, all these features are no longer characteristic of a mature state, nor are the numerous social guarantees for the population.

There are also other things that are not typical of mature states. Among them, a completely new and extremely important phenomenon is particularly indicative – the partial renunciation of sovereignty by many countries with regard to their internal fiscal, customs, penal and social policies, the right to wage war, *etc.*, in connection with voluntary membership in regional and global organizations, the recognition of the supremacy of world law over national law. It is also worth noting the creation of various supranational organizations and their growing importance.

We can therefore assume that we are entering the final stage of the era of mature states, which will be replaced by a new stage of political evolution. In the distant future, we can think of a supranational and suprastate stage of evolution. But that is still a long way off. So it

is still precipitate to bury the state. All the more so as a counter-wave of strengthening national sovereignty has begun.

## FUNDING

This research has been supported by Russian Scientific Foundation (project № 23-00-00535)

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# **The Nome Polities in Egypt and Mesopotamia in the Fourth and Third Millennia BC: Reconstructions and Scholarly Models**

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## **A. EGYPT**

Anyone going to speak about the Egyptian nome polities of the Predynastic period, when they are expected to have existed as independent entities, might easily hear that they are going to talk about something that probably really existed but is virtually unobservable with means of optics at our disposal. In fact, the word 'nome' (νομός) was introduced by Herodotus (II. 164) to denote the regions (Egyptian *spt*) of Persian-governed Egypt, which were just small provinces, as presented in sources from the earliest times, apart from the epochs of country's dissipation during the so-called 'intermediate periods'. Even then, not every nome gained independence, as autonomous structures of those times often comprised several nomes. Nevertheless, each nome was denoted by a sign of a sacred standard with a specific symbol over it, having as its center a larger town with an old and renowned temple. So it was natural to infer that their history went back to the most ancient times when nomes could be real inchoate Predynastic polities of the fourth Millennium BC. (This actually led Igor Diakonoff

Recommended citation: Ladynin I. A., Nemirovsky A. A. The Nome Polities in Egypt and Mesopotamia in the Fourth and Third Millennia BC: Reconstructions and Scholarly Models. *Social Evolution & History*, Vol. 24 No. 2, September 2025, pp. 162–167. DOI: 10.30884/seh/2025.02.13.

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to transplant the term ‘nome’ in his account of Early Dynastic Mesopotamia.) But by the end of the twentieth century, the scheme of 22 Upper and 20 Lower Egyptian nome states mingling together into two big entities, with Upper Egypt finally conquering Lower, was abandoned in favour of a more nuanced notion based on well-considered archaeological evidence (see, among the mass of bibliography, synthesis in Wilkinson 2000; Hendrickx 2014; Köhler 2020).

*Table 1*

no.	Archaeological epoch, dating:	Polities
1	Naqada I B/C-II B, ~3900–3500 BC	Polities of Abydos, Abadiya, Naqada, Gebelein, Hierakonpolis, Elkab (?), Edfu (?), Elephantine (?)
2	Naqada II C-D, ~3500–3300 BC	Polities of Abydos, Naqada, Hierakonpolis absorbing weaker neighbouring entities and struggling in-between themselves
3	Naqada III A-B, ~3300–3100	Abydos merging other two polities, expanding southwards (Qustul, Nubia) and northwards (Lower Egypt). Emergence of the all-Egyptian state

The basis for postulating this scheme are the archaeological sites in Upper Egypt, with Lower Egypt being a real outsider to the process, but an important mediator in contacts with the Eastern Mediterranean. The evidence for the scheme comes from archaeological sites, especially wealthy tombs and elite cemeteries. What might be called ‘nome polities’ has to be looked for at stages 1 and 2, especially at stage 1, because stage 2 has already seen their merger. Notably, by far not all of these polities developed into historical nomes in dynastic Egypt: Abadiya, Naqada, and Gebelein were eventually incorporated by other nomes as smaller townships. Hence Wolfgang Helck stated in his research on the nomes' system that they actually developed from royal domains in different parts of the country (Helck 1974: 49), which is supported by the evidence of agricultural development in the Delta in the early Old Kingdom. However, the key question for those (few) Egyptologists reflecting over the origins of the state in the land of their interest is the distinction between pre-state formations and those that can be qualified as early states.

Stage 1 saw the emergence of artifacts and pieces of iconography that could be connected with the symbols of kingship in Dynastic Egypt (a red crown on a pottery piece from Naqada, images of a falcon comparable to the eventual Horus at Hierakonpolis, an image of a

ruler smiting his enemies at Abydos), and the society of that time was strongly stratified (notably, the elite cemeteries at Hierakonpolis and Naqada were separated from the burials of common people). But nothing attests to the existence of an administration before stage 3, which saw the emergence of writing used to account for goods flowing to the kings of Abydos from various parts of Egypt (tomb U-j). Thus, defining the polities of stage 1 as chiefdoms is well-attested in scholarship (e.g., Köhler 2020: 133–134). If this is true, then the real early Egyptian state must have emerged during stage 2 and/or at the early stage 3, during the unification wars and the expansion of a complex trade network across Egypt and its periphery. Incidentally, a feature of eventual dynastic Egypt was the underdevelopment and weakness of kinship ties in society: it seems likely that this resulted from the deliberate eradication of clans and local structures as natural competitors to the all-Egyptian state, almost immediately after its emergence. The total merger of not only early polities, but also rural communities omnipresent in prehistoric societies, must have been the result of this course.

## B. MESOPOTAMIA

The history of early Mesopotamian institutions and territorial organization, as far as it can be traced through archaeological and surviving written data, provides greater clarity regarding the timing of the accumulation of features indicating this or that kind of potestary structures (cf. Stein and Rothman 1994; Crawford 2013).

Table 2

no.	Archaeological epoch, dating:	phenomena	
1	Ubaid, ~5500–3900 BC	local polities with larger sites as centers, communal pre-temple structure centers with pre-literate accounting (i.e., complex societies), but almost always without any materially visible social differentiation or concentration of power by any ruler	
2	Uruk, ~3900–3100 BC	colonies, temple as administrative and household center, writing for accounting	c. 20 polities (Ur, Larsa, Nippur, Uruk, Keš, Zabala, Ku'ara, Eredu etc.), mostly in league
3	Jemdet Nasr, ~3100–2900 BC	<i>en</i> as title of the ruler and other officials, with large landholding	

Table 2 continued

4	Early Dynastic I–II, ~2900–2600 BC	<i>ensi</i> and <i>lugal</i> rulers, palace as administrative and household center, ‘Kengir League’, overlodship of one polity ( <i>lugal</i> ) over other ones (ED II – early ED III: Kish I, later Uruk I supremacy; Fara archive – Uruk I or Kish II supremacy)
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By the middle of the Ubaid period (5<sup>th</sup> mill. B), relatively large settlements served as centers for groups of smaller ones, with a large structure in the center of these settlements (proto-temple communal centers), pre-scriptural means of economic accounting, but there was almost always no trace of social differentiation or the existence of an elite or powerful ruler in burials or anywhere else (*cf.* Kopanias and Barlagianni 2019). Some prominent scholars argued that the entire Ubaid era was an era of chiefdom (Gil Stein in Stein, Rothman 1994; Flannery 1999). By the middle of the subsequent Uruk period (*ca.* 3500 BC), there existed about twenty local polities (city-states in usual terminology) maintaining an alliance that enabled them to effectively establish colonies of the same type. The monumental structures in their centers were undeniably temples, and social differentiation had progressed significantly, and an ideographic proto-cuneiform script functioned, primarily for keeping records of a large centralized household (with dozens or hundreds of personnel) belonging to temple, which also served as administrative centers. Professional overseers are mentioned, and the existence of some managerial apparatus is undeniable. High-ranking officials managed the temple economies, but the relationship between their authority and other institutions remains unknown.

For the subsequent Jemdet Nasr phase (late 4<sup>th</sup> mill. BC), the statuses of *en* (head of a local polity, primarily with priestly functions) and other high-ranking officials became known, along with the fact that they were provided with large land holdings (far larger than the allotments of commoners). It is considered more likely that these lands were assigned to them as to holders of corresponding offices. In the first half of the following Early Dynastic period (ED II, 28<sup>th</sup>–27<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, Ur archive; early ED III, late 26th century, Fara archive; see Westenholz 2002; Bartash 2020), a range of new institutions became known. The rulers of local polities were hereditary (as perhaps before), and alongside the status of the local ruler, *ensi* (apparently

derived from en), emerged the status *lugal* ('big man, sovereign, king'), somewhat like the Roman 'emperor' in some respects. The term was used as an epithet for the city's patron god, who stood above the *ensi*, and when applied to a human ruler it originally denoted direct, primarily military-command authority, with a fundamentally diminished (or none) role for communal potestary structures (councils and popular assemblies) – including the role of hegemonic rulers over subordinate rulers. At least occasionally, the militia could declare someone a *lugal*. The residence of the *lugal* and the *ensi* was the palace (*egal*, 'great house'), with its own vast household separate from the temple economy (temples were now directly led by high priests and maintained a connection with the ruler). It is not definitively known whether leaders designated as *ensi* and *lugal* could temporarily coexist within a single polity (probably not), but typically, an *ensi* would either transition to the title of *lugal* or be replaced by rulers who adopted it. The epic tradition preserved memories of a ruler's ability to compel community members to perform construction work and wage war at his discretion. In the Early Dynastic period, in addition to militia, there existed household troops under the ruler's command.

No doubt, the 'city-states' or 'nome states' of the Early Dynastic period were indeed states. But was the Ubaid period an era of chiefdoms, or did its societies belong to an earlier stage? A more complex question, further dependent on terminology, deals with defining structures from the fourth to the early third millennium (Uruk to ED I), as it remains unclear to what extent the temple-administrative center and its governing apparatus, headed by a ruler, stood above the collegial self-government of the polity, and to what degree it was their establishment; how the palace estate emerged and separated from the temple; what were potestary opportunities for rulers and institutions, *etc.* Compared to Egypt, a clear distinguishing feature was the much longer existence of local polities in Mesopotamia even after the end of any possible chiefdom era (*i.e.*, at least from the mid-4<sup>th</sup> mill. until the Akkadian unification of Lower Mesopotamia in the late 24<sup>th</sup> century BC). One obvious factor contributing to this dissimilarity was that Mesopotamian local centers were not situated along a single river line, but across multiple rivers, thus excluding the 'snowball effect' in their integration. This can be compared to the lag of Egypt's Delta behind the rest of Egypt in terms of political integration.

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# Middle Euphrates Polities of the Bronze Age and Their Place in the Typology of Ancient States

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During the Bronze Age, several significant polities emerged in the Middle Euphrates region. This area was strategically important, as it controlled the major waterway connecting Southern Mesopotamia and Syria. Situated at the crossroads, the region was exposed to a wide range of political, cultural, and ideological influences.

The history of the Middle Euphrates states is documented by a vast corpus of epigraphic sources, written in Mesopotamian cuneiform, primarily in the Akkadian language. The earliest written evidence of political developments in the region dates back to the second half of the third millennium BC. At the beginning of the second millennium BC, the royal archives from Mari (modern-day Tell Ḥarīrī, Syria) shed important light not only on local conditions, but also on the broader situation in Northern and Southern Mesopotamia and throughout the wider Near East. However, the chronological scope of these archives is limited to just a few decades. It was only in the Late Bronze Age (15<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> centuries BC) that cuneiform archives covering a considerable time span of up to 150–200 years were encountered. Among these, the archives of the ancient city of Emar (modern Tell Mesekene, Syria) stand out.<sup>1</sup> More than 1,500 cuneiform texts illuminate its political and religious institutions, legal practices, and social relations.<sup>2</sup> One of the peculiar traits of the Emarite political system was its underdeveloped institution of royal power, for which the term ‘limited kingship’ was coined in secondary literature (Fleming 1992). This feature sets Emar in sharp contrast to such prototypical Ancient

Recommended citation: Alexandrov B. Middle Euphrates Polities of the Bronze Age and Their Place in the Typology of Ancient States. *Social Evolution & History*, Vol. 24 No. 2, September 2025, pp. 168–173. DOI: 10.30884/seh/2025.02.14.

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Near Eastern states as Egypt or the various city-states and kingdoms of Mesopotamia.<sup>3</sup>

Specialists working with the Emar corpus have advanced several approaches to accounting for the city's specific socio-political organization. Daniel Arnaud believed that it was based on a system of family clans (Arnaud 1981; 1987). These clans asserted the principles of collectivism and social justice, and their powerful influence, embodied primarily through assemblies, inhibited the full development of other political institutions. Arnaud proposed that this clan system was a direct legacy from a nomadic past, when the ancestors of the Emarites were pastoralists in the steppes adjacent to the Middle Euphrates Valley. This concept was challenged by Jean-Marie Durand, who argued that institutions such as the council of elders and assemblies originated in the urban culture of the third millennium BC, predating the migrations of the nomadic Amorites into the region around 2000 BC. He maintained that these institutions were not based on blood relations, but on common residence (Durand 1990). According to Durand, Emar was not a unique case, but rather one manifestation of a distinct Euphrates civilization characterized by its own developed cities and towns.

Similar to the city's collective bodies of power, the Emarite kingship has also received divergent interpretations in scholarly literature. According to some scholars, it was a recent innovation introduced by the Hittites who sought to create a more effective and coherent system of control over Emar which they conquered in the second half of the fourteenth century BC (e.g., Pruzsinszky 2007: 32). The Emarite monarchy, embedded into the pre-existing system of collective power, was consequently unable to attain a status comparable to that of Mesopotamian or Anatolian kings. Alternatively, other Assyriologists dispute this view, stating that some form of individual rule existed at Emar prior to the Hittite conquest (Viano 2010: 146). Another perspective argues that there was a genuine form of kingship in place at Emar in both the pre-Hittite and Hittite periods, claiming that it was a distinctive type that had more affinities with ancient Syrian traditions rather than with the Mesopotamian model (Seminara 2024).

Furthermore, scholars have attempted to analyze the Emarite system from a more theoretical and comparative perspective. One such approach is the so-called two-sector model, which posits that variability in socio-economic and political dynamics across the Ancient Near East can be explained by the relationship between two major societal segments: the state-temple (or royal) sector, on the one hand, and the

communal (or private) sector, on the other. This relationship was in turn deeply influenced by the geographic and economic conditions of the region. For instance, alluvial plains that permitted intensive irrigation agriculture had a particularly significant impact on their populations. According to this model, Bronze Age states can be categorized into three types:

(1) those where the state sector predominates over the communal sector (Southern Mesopotamia, Elam);

(2) those where the state completely absorbs communal structures (Egypt); and

(3) those with a relative balance between the two sectors (the so-called peripheral civilizations of the alluvial plains, including Syria, northern Mesopotamia, Anatolia, the Aegean, and the Armenian Highlands).

Originally elaborated by Igor M. Diakonoff based on Mesopotamian data (Diakonoff 1982; Diakonoff and Jakobson 1982), this model was later applied in detail by his students and followers to other regions. Among them, Michael Heltzer viewed Ugarit (modern Ras Shamra near Latakia in Syria) on the Mediterranean coast and Emar as societies with many similarities. However, unlike Emar, Ugarit developed a fully-fledged monarchical and bureaucratic regime, a difference that may be attributed to its geographic location and its deep involvement in political and commercial exchanges with the leading powers of the day. Thus, Ugarit is largely characterized as belonging to the third group of the Bronze Age states.

The situation at Emar was markedly different due to its lack of a powerful kingship and bureaucracy. Heltzer considers this to be an archaism derived from the tribal past of the Emarite population (Heltzer 2001). On the whole, with its dominance of communal institutions, Emar should be considered a special case, even within the third group of states according to Diakonoff's classification.<sup>4</sup>

Nowadays, the two-sector model faces substantial criticism in scholarship. As an alternative, the concept of patrimonial society has been proposed to describe social relations and politics in Ugarit and other Late Bronze Age Syrian states (Schloen 2001). However, data from Emar has not been integrated into this new hypothesis.

Probably, several aspects of Emar's internal organization do not align well with the two-sector model. First, the written sources reveal no evidence of a substantial palatial economic sector. This indicates that the role of the kings was restricted not only politically but also in

economic affairs. Second, on the opposite end of the social spectrum, the communal clan-based ownership was a rare phenomenon, while individual land property was widespread. The nuclear family prevailed at Emar and there was no evidence for powerful clans in the city of the kind documented in the Old Babylonian archives from Mari. Similarly, there are no attested cases of agricultural land repartition (Viano 2010). Third, the scenario central to the two-sector model – that the decline of the Late Bronze Age was precipitated by a social crisis (including indebtedness and pauperization caused by the state's over-exploitation of the communal sector and the privatization of the state land by officials) – finds no confirmation in the Emar sources (Viano 2023).

Consequently, scholars are still searching for a model that can adequately account for the peculiarities of Emar, and significant work remains to be done to frame them within a clear theoretical perspective. Previous research has devoted considerable attention to the Hittite, Mesopotamian, and Old Syrian (Eblaite) influences on the Emarite culture and society. However, the long period of Mitannian hegemony over the region has often been overlooked in these studies. The primary reason for this gap is undoubtedly the scarcity of available sources. Nevertheless, given the constant, though slow, expansion of the epigraphic corpus related to Mitanni and the Hurrians, a comparative analysis with the evidence from Emar may yet prove fruitful.

## FUNDING

The article was written with the financial support of the Russian Science Foundation grant no. 25-28-00652 «Община в цивилизационных моделях древнего Ближнего Востока и Мезоамерики: генезис, структура, региональное своеобразие» / ‘Community in the civilizational models of the Ancient Near East and Mesoamerica: genesis, structure, regional specifics’, <https://rscf.ru/project/25-28-00652>.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Other archives are represented, first of all, by Ekalte / Tell-Munbaqa (89 tablets) and Azu / Tell-Ḥadīdī (15 tablets) for which see Mayer 2001; Torrecilla 2014; 2019. These archives reflect socio-political and legal realities very close to those of Emar.

<sup>2</sup> This number is adduced by Pruzsinszky and Solans 2015: 318. According to more prudent estimates, the Emar corpus amounts to several hundred tablets (Rutz 2013).

<sup>3</sup> This restricted nature of the Emarite kingship is manifested in the following key aspects: 1) the limited role of the king in ritual life; 2) the absence of royal inscriptions glorifying the person of the king, his achievements, or piety; 3) limited participation in legal procedures as a judge and arbiter; 4) the necessity to share administrative and judicial powers with other institutions, such as elders, the city assembly, Ninurta (god), the mayor, ‘brothers’; 5) scant economic resources (with no evidence of a vast royal domain or property on public land).

<sup>4</sup> The Emar archives were published after the main publications on the two-sector model had been released. However, the specific situation in this ancient city was in a way anticipated by the proponents of the model. For instance, Carlo Zaccagnini argued that the communal (village) sector could be more powerful than the state in the regions like Syria and Anatolia (Zaccagnini 1981: 22; cf. also Diakonoff, Yakobson 1982: 5).

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## Greek *Polis* on the Scale of Potestary Formations: State, ‘Proto-State’, ‘Post-State’?

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First of all, it should be noted that any debate on State and statehood in contemporary scholarship is to some extent irrelevant due to the serious terminological difference between classical and modern political vocabulary. In most modern European languages, the term under discussion (State, *Staat*, *État* etc.) is derived from the Latin word *status*. A special case is the Russian language, where the term for the State – *государство* (*gosudarstvo*) – is generated directly from *государь* (*gosudar*) ‘sovereign’, that is, the monarchical ideology is immanent.

Quite another situation is there in classical languages, be it Latin with its *res publica* (applied mainly to the Roman State properly) and *civitas* or Greek with its *πόλις* and *πολιτεία*. The latter word shows especially close connection with the notion of citizenship. *Πολιτεία* is both statehood (‘constitution’) and citizen rights. The above-mentioned circumstances should be taken into account in the fullest degree.

Was *polis* a (kind of) State? Scholars who deny that (they are very rarely ancient historians, but very often political scientists) point out to the virtually complete absence of bureaucracy in Greek *poleis*, which really makes this structure extremely different from ‘normal’ States. Sometimes, the term ‘proto-State’ is applied to *polis*; so the latter is equated, say, with chiefdoms in late tribal societies. The ‘proto-’ prefix clearly marks something imperfect and incomplete compared to traditional bureaucratic states.

Recommended citation: Surikov I. E. Greek *Polis* on the Scale of Potestary Formations: State, ‘Proto-State’, ‘Post-State’? *Social Evolution & History*, Vol. 24 No. 2, September 2025, pp. 174–177. DOI: 10.30884/seh/2025.02.15.

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But as a matter of fact, the situation is rather contrary. First, *polis* was a full-fledged State, which possessed all the attributes of statehood, such as political sovereignty and independence (I mean normal *poleis*; there were dependent ones, of course, but they existed, and were considered, deviations), a full set of state institutions, an army, finances, laws, *etc.* However, second, *polis* is truly unique, looking radically different from most other states, both ancient and modern.

It may be said that the *polis* is not a ‘backward’ but rather a more perfect kind of human community than traditional states. It better favoured the development of both individuals and the collective body; it promoted true rather than fake equality among citizens, and true rather than fake political participation. All other political forms seem to be some degradation as compared to the *polis*, which provided a great degree of emancipation of creative and competitive spirit, as well as cultural flourishing.

It is characteristic that, as Ivan A. Ladynin noticed (Ladynin 2024), the return to traditional (monarchical and bureaucratic) forms of state in the Greek world took place in the Hellenistic period, that is, in the times of decline.

May it be that the *polis* is (if not a State) not a ‘proto-State’ but rather a ‘post-State’, a kind of a *τέλος* for human beings (using Aristotelian terminology)? The notion of ‘post-State’ implies something that exists, by definition, ‘after the State’; ironically, *poleis* originated in Greece exactly *after* ‘normal’ bureaucratic states (the Mycenaean kingdoms), on and from their ruins.

The basic principle of the *polis* was egalitarianism, which, as is often ascertained, was typical not only for democratic *poleis* but also for oligarchic ones (in the latter, all full-right citizens were also equal to each other). Only tyrannies lacked this principle, but the tyrannical form was considered deeply alien to the *polis* order.

Lot is a manifest symbol of the *polis*. The phenomenon of lot-drawing in Greek political (and not only political, see below) life has been neglected in historiography for a long time but quite recently (and almost simultaneously) two monographs on the subject have been published (Malkin and Blok 2024; Gebler 2024), which clearly indicates increasing interest in this topic. Of these books, the latter provides a thorough analysis of specific practices, but of more importance is the former, which was written by prominent experts in the fields of Greek colonization and Athenian civic institutions, respectively.

Malkin and Blok insist that the lot was the real core of the Greek *polis*. When a *polis* was founded (e.g., a colony), the first thing to do was to divide its *chora* (by lot!) into land plots for citizens. Each such plot was the main criterion for civic status (only citizens had the right to possess it) and was called a κλήρος; the Greek word has the same root as the verb κληρώω ‘to cast lots’. So the very process of the *polis* emergence was closely connected to law-making.

Now, the principle of lot clearly denies any hierarchy. Dmitri Bondarenko argues that there do not exist and cannot be non-hierarchical, completely egalitarian societies (Bondarenko 2024: 19). We can assume this to be true. However, if any society in the world history approached closest to the ideal of egalitarianism and absence of hierarchies, it was the Greek *polis*-based society. I should emphasize that I am specifically talking about hierarchy, as I would like to avoid using that term coined by Professor Bondarenko's team, ‘homoarchy’, especially since it is formed not quite correctly (‘homarchy’ would be better).

It is necessary to emphasize that I mean only the Greek *polis*. The Roman *civitas*, although it is a very similar structure in many ways, differs greatly in this respect. It was hierarchical, as is well-known. The career of a Roman politician was his *cursus honorum*; it may be compared to a staircase in which every step has an absolutely definite place. In the democratic Greek *polis*, there is nothing like this. If an ex-consul in Rome would never pretend to say, quaestorship, there were cases in Athens when an ex-*strategos* (a citizen who had held generalship, the highest magistracy) later took a lower position. But later in the Roman period even Greek cities became hierarchical (Zoumbaki 2024: 311).

The idea of lot implies that all citizens are absolutely equal in political respect and the place of each person in public life is determined solely by chance (or, rather, by the gods' will, which the Greeks themselves believed the lot was). Having noted this, let us return to the question of the State terminology. Earlier, it was said that modern European languages derive their terms for the State from *status*. But the notion of status, as such, is inseparably connected with the hierarchical nature of the society in question. A person's status is his place in a relevant hierarchy. The Greeks, not having a political hierarchy, did not recognize statuses. In this sense, their *polis* was not a State, as it did not have a system of statuses. However, as we have seen, neither was it something like a ‘proto-State’ or a chiefdom (by the way, chiefdoms do have hierarchies). The *polis* had all the attributes of a normal state and performed all functions of a normal state. However, it was an anti-hierar-

chical (and therefore anti-bureaucratic) State, a state not based on statuses. Instead, it was based on equality. In such a State all are ἴσοι, and the extent of words with the ἴσo- root in the Greek political language is very impressive: ἰσoνομία (‘equality of rights’, the earliest term for democracy), ἰσηγορία (‘equality in speech’), ἰσοπολιτεία (‘equality in citizenship’), and so on. Is not this model of statehood (a ‘post-State’), based on ἰσότης without privileges for anyone, preferable to the traditional model?

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## **Etatist and Non-étatist Approaches to the Study of Ancient Civil Community: Discussions on *civitas Romana***

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The civil community, as a structure-forming element of ancient civilization, serves as the central object of study, both in its Greek model (πόλις) and in the Roman one (civitas). In the process of long-term research into the world historiography of these models, two approaches have been developed: the étatist approach (recognizing the state organization of society), and the non-étatist one (denying it), which led to controversial discussions. Let us consider them in relation to the Roman model; a new round of discussion about whether the Roman civitas was a state took place in 2023 (Shaw 2023; Shaw *et al.* 2023), which indicates the continued scientific relevance of this issue.

Until the mid-twentieth century, the concept of ‘state’ was applied to the Roman community in classical studies as a matter of course. But in the 1960s, Álvaro d’Ors Pérez-Peix, a Spanish specialist in Roman law, began to deny the legitimacy of this use (D’Ors Pérez-Peix 1965: 107–164). His position found support, above all, in Spanish and Italian historiography, while the étatist approach prevailed in German, English, American, and Russian historical science (although there were exceptions everywhere).

It is obvious that the recognition or non-recognition of the statehood of the civitas Romana rests on the definition of the concept of ‘state’. Theorists from various philosophical and political schools have proposed different definitions. The definitions of the state given

Recommended citation: Dementyeva V. V. Etatist and Non-étatist Approaches to the Study of Ancient Civil Community: Discussions on *civitas Romana*. *Social Evolution & History*, Vol. 24 No. 2, September 2025, pp. 178–182. DOI: 10.30884/seh/2025.02.16.

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by Carl Schmitt (Schmitt 1958: 385–398) and Georg Jellinek (Jellinek 1905: 381–420) have received the greatest resonance in Western science. Schmitt believed that the concept of ‘state’ is applicable to European history only since the sixteenth century, he did not extend it to Antiquity, proposing to replace this term for this era with the concept of Herrschaftsorganisation – ‘organization of domination’. According to the Jellinek’s teachings, three elements make up a state: territory (das Staatsgebiet), people (das Staatsvolk), and state power (die Staatsgewalt). This understanding of the main components goes back to Aristotle, who wrote about the polis. He believed that, in addition to territory and population, something else must be taken into account, since delineated boundaries can also have formations that are more similar to a tribe than to a polis (μᾶλλον ἔθνους ἢ πόλεως – Arist. Pol. 1276 a 29). From the text of Aristotle’s work, it is clear that we should talk about the existence of a political organization, a political connection between people, a ‘political community’ – εἴπερ γὰρ ἔστι κοινωμία τις ἢ πόλις, ἔστι δὲ κοινωμία πολιτῶν πολιτείας (Arist. Pol. 1276 b 1–2) – ‘after all, the polis is a certain community, namely the community of citizens of the polity.’

Supporters of the non-etatist approach to the characterization of the civil community believe that the third element of the definition of the state proposed by Jellinek is not applicable to it. Uwe Walter argued against this: ‘Aber einen Grund, weswegen man die politischen Organisationen der Antike nicht “Staat” nennen sollte, sehe ich darin nicht’ (Walter 1998: 21), arguing his position in detail. After well-founded objections to the supporters of the non-etatist position, formulated primarily in German historiography in the mid-1990s, it would seem that the discussion has been exhausted.

However, a return to discussions of this issue occurred in the 20s of the twenty-first century and was connected, in my opinion, with the fact that the emphasis that had been put in the study of Roman politics on rituals and its ‘scenography’, on the accumulation of ‘symbolic capital’ by representatives of the ruling elite, *etc.* led to the institutional history of Rome being pushed into the background, which veiled the main activity of the authorities (if the role of the comitia was reduced in studies to a demonstration of consensus and a procedure of obedience, and their legislative and electoral functions were ignored, then it is no wonder that more and more doubts arose about them as an organ of state power).

Let us also pay attention to the fact that, in the discussion of Roman statehood, incorrect comparisons and substitutions of concepts sometimes arise: thus, Maxim V. Shisterov believes that modern researchers argue about whether it is possible to translate the Latin expression *res publica* with the word 'state', making a negative conclusion (Shisterov 2013: 134–144), which determines his support for the non-etatist position. Let us emphasize: *civitas* and *res publica* are different concepts; *res publica* is what the civil collective (*civitas*) has, *i. e.*, an object of possession with material and non-material components, including political structure. Modern historians debate whether *civitas Romana* was a state, rather than a correspondence between the concepts of 'state' and '*res publica*'.

Let us dwell on the latest discussion of the problem. Brent Shaw sets out to prove that Rome – both in the republican and imperial periods – corresponds to the definition of the state given by Schmitt. Shaw poses the question 'And if the Roman state was not a state, then what was it?' and seeks to show that if we define the state 'as something modern' and use a set 'of hyper-modern criteria for its existence', then there arises (Shaw uses the anthropological concept) the 'emic trap'. He emphasizes that among those who consistently defended the non-etatist position (including, *e.g.*, Reinhart Koselleck), the lack of a term in Latin that could be translated as 'state' was considered to be an argument. Shaw emphasizes: 'The question in this case is: Can the term legitimately be used to describe something from a period of thousands of years earlier that might well have been different in kind?' (Shaw 2023: 10). I have always answered this question as follows: we are talking about a scientific categorical apparatus; the designation in this case is the result of analytical work; the category of analytical description is a scientific abstraction that may not have been used in a certain historical era. Shaw rightly notes: 'In any event, in Schmittian terms, neither the 'scramble for offices' or 'the politics of patronage' are sufficient to deny a polity the status of being a state.'

In response to the thesis that personal connections in Rome acted as a substitute for the impersonal institutions of the state, Shaw writes: 'By contrast, the Roman state certainly displayed an autonomy of its political structures, including its armed forces, that set the state over and above an accumulation of familial powers' (Shaw 2023: 13).

In general, Shaw identifies the following features of the Roman structure and government, which confirm, as he rightly emphasizes, its governmental character: the expansion of the instruments of govern-

ment through colonies and municipalities; the existence of banks of information, the vast documentation in the Aerarium; ‘the application of census not just to Roman citizens as in the republic, but in making a count of all of the subjects in each province of the empire’; such authorities as the senate and magistracies; resources beyond the resources of individual families; and ‘pragmatics in the design, planning, and building of an extensive and unprecedented system of public roads’; ‘the building, and operation of the gigantic aqueduct systems’.

Since Schmitt considered the army of the entire state, its financial, legislative and legal systems to be specific organizational means of state power proper, Shaw seeks to show that they were characteristic of both republican and imperial Rome. He emphasizes that

in Schmittian terms as one of the state's defining essences is that it is the organizational entity that is capable of waging war on a large scale against entities that it alone is capable of designating as ‘the enemy’ (in his terms). If this is so, then the Roman state more than meets this requirement (Shaw 2023: 24).

Is it possible to have a universal definition of the state, namely, as a category of scientific apparatus? I believe it is. Anthropologists distinguish between two organizational principles on which society is built: ‘heterarchy’ and ‘homoarchy’, while calling for heterarchy not to be identified with a democratic system, and for both concepts to be applied ‘within a broader framework of social relations and social structure as a whole, and not only in connection with power relations’, and for the state to be considered ‘a special type of social organization’ (Bondarenko 2024: 27–28). In my opinion, the definition of a state as a type of social organization should include: 1) the elements of which it consists (here I prefer to side with Aristotle and Jellinek – territory, people, and political power in its various structures); and 2) its main functions (I believe that the main one is maintaining the stability of society and reproducing the conditions for existence, which includes various methods of regulation, including the use of violence while monitoring the legality of its use).

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# Commonwealth, People, Civil Community – State? Revisiting Augustine's Polemic with Cicero

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In my paper, I return once again to the question of whether it is appropriate to introduce the concept of the State into the texts of Cicero and Augustine. In his first book *De re publica*, Cicero provides a famous definition for the term 'people,' describing it as '*multitude of people associated with each other by consensus on justice (ius) and mutual benefit (utilitas)*.' What unites many individuals into a people was termed by Cicero as **res publica**. Almost five centuries later, Aurelius Augustine challenged Cicero's definition, proposing his own, according to which a people is '*a unity of reasonable beings bound together by a common agreement about the objects of their love*'. To denote the trigger for political unification, Augustine also used the concept of **res publica**. In describing the genesis of a people from, so to speak, a spatial perspective, Augustine asserts that, after the family and the city (**civitas**), the third stage of human association emerges, namely, the circle of the earth (**orbis terrae**). Existing Russian translations of Cicero and Augustine, render a number of the aforementioned concepts – **civitas**, **res publica**, and even **orbis terrae** – as 'state'. I dare to argue that this interpretation of Roman political terminology is discursively incorrect and leads to distortion of the thoughts of both the Roman orator and the Hippo's Bishop. The inaccuracy of this interpretation, I believe, lies primarily in the fact that it allows for the introduction of a political subject into the texts of Cicero and Augustine that was absent from their works – namely, the State. For both authors, the only possible political subject was the people themselves, whose visible form of manifestation was the civil community or the city (**civitas**).

Recommended citation: Marey A. V. Commonwealth, People, Civil Community – State? Revisiting Augustine's Polemic with Cicero. *Social Evolution & History*, Vol. 24 No. 2, September 2025, pp. 183–185. DOI: 10.30884/seh/2025.02.17.

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The difference between the two authors lies only in the definition of the trigger that transforms a multitude of individuals into a single political organism – either rational deliberation on the rules of communal life as proposed by Cicero or emotional unification around a common object of love as insisted upon by Augustine. The presence of this commonwealth – **res publica** – is what makes a people a people in the true sense of the word.

Thus, my first argument is based precisely on the discursive error of translation. In modern realities, the state is conceived as an active political subject, moreover, the only legitimate political actor within its borders and, consequently, the only possible source of law and simultaneously the guarantee of its execution. Attempting to introduce such a category into texts from the first centuries of our era inevitably leads to semantic confusion hindering the correct interpretation of Cicero's and Augustine's words. I would add that from an institutional perspective, the state is seen as a system of political and legal institutions existing within a defined territory and alienated from the population it governs. This in turn does not align with the notions of '*Commonwealth, the people's thing*' or '*the circle of the earth*' that the authors discussed in this text attempt to formulate.

Consequently, the introduction of the category of the state into the texts of Cicero and Augustine is the result of a poorly reflected use of the method of *exo-definitions*. The essence of this method lies in what can be called '*naming from the outside*.' The phenomenon of interest to scholars is studied, typologized, and checked against pre-developed criteria. A kind of '*grid*,' created by the scholar (a metaphor by Aron Gurevich), is imposed on the phenomenon. If it meets a significant number of these criteria, it is classified into a particular category of phenomena. However, I would like to emphasize that these criteria are developed in isolation from the source material, formulated based on the realities and ideas of the era when the scholar lives and works. When applied correctly, this approach offers significant opportunities for comparative-historical or anthropological research, but it seems to work poorly with the history of social, political, and juridical thought, that is, with the history of human ideas about how society as a whole or any of its parts should function.

An alternative set of research tools can be called the method of *endo-definitions*, or '*naming from inside*.' When using this method, greater attention is paid not to the correspondence of the studied social structure to external features identified by the researcher, but rather to the perception of society by its inhabitants and their reflection – if it

exists – on their social structure. The focus shifts to the system of concepts developed in the language of the studied culture to describe their forms of social and political organization and their legal structure. Accordingly, the approach to interpreting these concepts also changes – we strive not to translate them into the closest and most understandable analogous word in our language for the modern reader, but instead take a longer and more difficult path of constructing or creating new concepts or reviving old ones imbued in this case with new meaning. Often it is necessary to abandon the principle of ‘*one word by one word*’ generally accepted in scientific translation and convey the content of a foreign concept using several words or even a whole phrase in Russian.

And if we approach the texts of Cicero and Augustine, which were the initial subjects of interest, from the perspective of this second method, refusing to introduce categories alien for Latin language such as the *state* or *state union* into them, we can see that both authors focus precisely on the people as the subject of political action. For Cicero, this people is still relatively small in number and not significantly different from the Roman civic community (*Civitas Romana*), which makes it possible to interpret the rational daily discussion of rules of communal life as a trigger for political unification of that community. For Augustine, who lived in the early fifth century CE, the Roman people appeared as a vast whole, stretching from Britain to Mauritania and from Portugal to Armenia (indeed – I note in the margin – Augustine's treatise *The City of God* is one of the most elegant sources that excellently demonstrates that the reforms initiated by Caracalla in 212 AD had finally begun to take effect in full force). At the same time, in the view of the Bishop of Hippo, the Roman people remained a unified people – a political actor capable of enacting laws, appointing emperors, and so on. The rational mechanisms for producing civic solidarity proposed by Cicero no longer worked – Augustine notes the diversity of languages, which disunites the people and hinders any possible rational communication. In search for other mechanisms to produce civic solidarity, Augustine turns to political emotions, rightly believing that, where rational considerations of common benefit and law fail, shared feelings can take effect. However, whether united rationally or emotionally, the political subject for both authors remains the people, and the form of its manifestation and most compact existence becomes the *civitas*, that is, the civic community, the city. The state, however, is absent in both cases.

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# Modern Imperiology Theories and Problems of the Study of Ancient Empires

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The historical importance and omnipresence of empires in world history cannot be overstated. In total, more than 200 empires are known. The concept of ‘empire’ is applied to polities that are vastly different in their nature and dates of existence, ranging from the earliest states in Western Asia and classical antiquity to modern political entities. Even polities previously treated as proto-states are now described as empires, including formations without a state at the heart of power, as for example the empire of the Comanche Indians.

Various social and humanities disciplines offer their own theories of empire. Beginning in the 1960s and especially in the 1990s, one can observe an explosive interest in the phenomenon of empire, resulting in the so-called ‘imperial turn’ and the emergence of a broader discipline conventionally called imperiology (this term is much more popular in the Russian academy than in Western scholarship), as well as ‘new imperial history’. Its subject matters and methodologies are substantially based on theories of postcolonialism and postmodernism, and correlate with such categories as nationalism, ethnicity, race, and archaeology of knowledge. Some theorists see the main task of imperial studies in justifying the empire as a politically formalized peak of the development of a specific civilization or culture of a given super-ethnos. However, scholars in the field of law, international relations, sociology, ethnology, cultural studies, and political sciences, although drawing on historical material to a greater or lesser extent, often do so rather superficially, so that their suggestions are sometimes of rather speculative and abstract character. Historians, in turn, being immersed

Recommended citation: Makhlaiuk A. V. Modern Imperiology Theories and Problems of the Study of Ancient Empires. *Social Evolution & History*, Vol. 24 No. 2, September 2025, pp. 186–190. DOI: 10.30884/seh/2025.02.18.

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in their material, rarely develop or offer their own generalized models of empires. Nevertheless, the 'new imperial history', during recent decades, has expanded its boundaries to include not only traditional issues of power structures or imperial political economy, but also explores new topics such as environmental problems, gender and sexuality, identities, and globalization.

One of the hot topics of 'new imperial history' is the implementation of theoretical concepts and approaches of imperiology in studies of concrete imperial formations of the past. How can these theories and their apparatus shape actual agendas and what can they offer students of ancient empires? How, in turn, can the studies of concrete historical empires help to validate, tune and probe proposed theoretical constructions? The survey of current research reveals a number of unresolved and controversial issues.

Thus, despite the widespread use and discussion of the central concept of 'empire', debates about its meaning and heuristic potential continue. It is evident that attempts to define empire as an analytical category remain far from any generally accepted solution. The analysis of proposed definitions reveals that they are vulnerable to criticism. Sometimes, one of the imperial parameters is quite arbitrarily considered as fundamental, and their inextricable connection with each other and with the political significance of empire is overemphasized. Most definitions in academic literature can be called syndromic, *i.e.* a simple listing of the attributes of an empire (primarily political or spatial ones). More productive are genetic (or functional) definitions that highlight causal connections and functional mechanisms of empires. All in all, the proposed definitions need to be juxtaposed with what we know about individual ancient empires.

Recently the concept of 'empireness' ('impérialité', 'Imperialität') has begun to be used, although not strictly terminologically. It is proposed that this concept will allow us to not only state the fact of the existence of different forms of empire, but also to present it as a kind of variable quality, a change in statuses, a claim for dominance. 'Empireness' is seen as a set of properties and characteristics of an empire, such as the functions of borders, the distribution of rights, the peculiarities of emergence, the extent in time and space, and the special logic of empires. Sometimes 'empireness' is interpreted as a form of power in the context of polymorphic imperial spaces; or as a certain 'internalization' of the imperial approach when imperialism in relation to the outskirts and colonies starts to be reproduced in the political struc-

tures of the imperial metropolis. It seems that a similar range of questions can be raised when studying ancient empires and imperialism. However, the category of ‘empireness’ itself requires further a clear definition.

In any case, despite the continuing range of opinions and interpretations, at present the empire is increasingly viewed not so much as a kind of state, but as a specific substantial historical form that is essentially different from national or communal states and from hegemonic formations. At the same time, it also appears as a kind of cultural (in the broad sense of the word) practice. In this connection it is worth noting that recent scholarship has produced interesting studies on the cultural history of empires (see Collier *et al.* 2018).

One of the important and promising tendencies in recent studies is the accentuation, as a characteristic identifying feature of all empires, their own world views, which at times can even be designated as messianic and missionary. Among other promising approaches, there are studies of imperial discourses and practices, or the languages of self-description of imperial experiences, which are intertwined in a dynamic open system of an ‘imperial situation’. They are oriented towards a more trusting and serious attitude towards attempts at self-representation and self-description of each specific empire. Such a research perspective is indeed appropriate, allowing (to a certain extent) to avoid abstract generalizations and overly speculative ‘constructivist’ judgments about empires, and to prioritize interest not so much in some theoretical generalization, but rather in the historical specificity of a particular imperial formation and a specific understanding of what it means to be an empire.

Particular issues of typology (classification) of empires also are under intense discussion in current scholarship. The typologies of imperial polities of the past are based on either a spatial criterion, according to which they are divided primarily into maritime and continental/land (thalassocratic and tellurocratic ones), oasis empires, and ‘amphibious’ empires, or on political and economic factors (including methods of appropriation and redistribution of surplus product, and various forms of exercising power); accordingly, scholars distinguish between tributary empires (these include almost all empires of the ancient world, which were complex agrarian societies at their core), colonial, patrimonial, bureaucratic, imitative, trade, satellite, shadow empires, oligarchic empires, tribal, currency empires and economic empires. These typologies deserve further exploration with regard to

ancient imperial polities, in particular from the point of view of their stadial differentiation as earlier, mature, and later empires. Certain speculative typologies require critical examination, such as the classification proposed by Ilya I. Rogov, who distinguishes between four types of empires:

1. True, fully-fledged empires (Imperial Idea is Divine Providence);
2. Not-quite empires (those that self-proclaim or consider their mission sacred, as well as those who are unable to realize their mission);
3. Nominal empires only in name (geopolitical 'simulacra');
4. Anti-empires (that distort or emasculate the imperial mission through the absolutization of power as such) (Rogov 2017).

Some researchers introduce into the analysis of empires such a category as 'imperial people (ethnos)' and identify a number of characteristics that form it (integration of oneself into one's own ideal image, the ability to convey one's truth to other peoples, increased ability to interact with other peoples and colonize alien territories, ability to endure and overcome internal contradictions brought by an empire, *etc.*) (Aksyutin 2009; Lurie 2012). Although one can argue with individual formulations and assessments by the authors, the very appeal to the issue of the imperial people as a subject of empire-building seems important and promising, and this research direction surely deserves further development.

In general, despite the speculative nature of many modern theoretical works on the nature and significance of empires, their frequent isolation from the latest concrete historical interpretations, some of the proposed ideas and generalizations deserve further testing against empirical historical material. For example, ideas about imperialism as a specific discourse, about the significance of literary works as a part of the general relationship between culture and empire, or ideas about the imperial culture as a specific phenomenon, about a palimpsest of identities, about biopolitics underlying imperial projects, about empire as a way of organizing peoples, spaces and resources, as a factor in cultural transfer, and so on. The concepts, which are developed in theoretical imperiology literature, if critically configured, can open up new research subjects and lead to a better understanding of ancient empires.

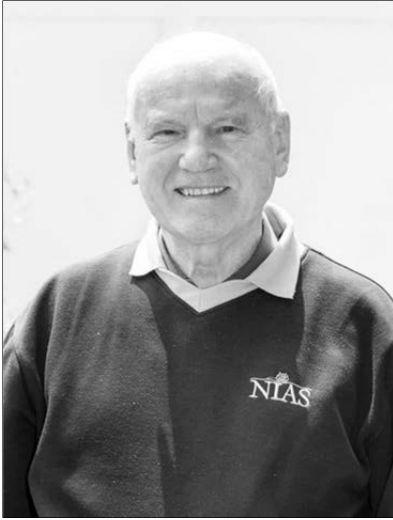
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## **Congratulations on the 80<sup>th</sup> Birthday of Professor Petr Skalník**

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The editorial board of *Social Evolution & History* would like to congratulate a renowned Czech social anthropologist and Africanist, Professor Petr Skalník on his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. His seminal works have inspired many scholars over the years in the study of the state and chiefdom and other related issues.

Professor Skalník has been the member of the Editorial Board of our journal from its very foundation and also served as the guest editor of two special issues ‘Anthropology, History and Memory in Sub-Saharan Africa. In Memoriam Michel Izard’ and ‘The Intellectual Legacy of Ernest Gellner’. He made a great contribution to the scientific development and further advance (promotion) of our journal. We would like to express our gratitude and deep respect for scientific contribution to our journal. The Journal Editors cordially wish Professor Skalník and his family good health, happiness and prosperity, and new creative successes in all fields.

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‘Uchitel’ Publishing House  Moscow

Адрес редакции:

400001, г. Волгоград, ул. Кирова, д. 143.

ООО «Издательство «Учитель»

Контактные телефоны: (8442) 42-17-71 (доб. 129), 42-04-08.

E-mail: editor@sociostudies.org, peruch@mail.ru.

Адрес издателя:

400001, г. Волгоград, ул. Кирова, д. 143.

ООО «Издательство «Учитель»

Свидетельство о регистрации СМИ ПИ № 77-11556 от 04 января 2002 г. выдано Министерством Российской Федерации по делам печати, телерадиовещания и средств массовых коммуникаций

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Цена свободная.

Подписано в печать 30.09.25. Дата выхода: 31.10.25.

Формат 60×90/16. Печать офсетная. Усл. печ. л. 12.

Тираж 1000 экз. Заказ № 221025.