



# State Building in Boom Times: Commodities and Coalitions in Latin America and Africa

*Ryan Saylor*

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Governments that preside over a capable state apparatus can better uphold the rule of law, ensure democratic accountability, stimulate economic development, and provide good governance. In the developing world, countries differ substantially in their levels of state capacity and ability to achieve these ends, leaving scholars and concerned citizens alike wondering about the origins of such inequalities.

In *State Building in Boom Times*, Ryan Saylor argues that commodity booms and coalitional politics are central to understanding variations in state building within and across Latin America and Africa. He shows how resource booms can trigger the provision of new public goods and institution building, thus helping countries expand their state capacity. But these possibilities hinge on coalitional politics, as he demonstrates through six cases. Countries ruled by export-oriented coalitions (Argentina, Chile, and Mauritius) expanded their state capacity as a direct result of commodity booms. Countries in which exporters were politically marginalized (Colombia, Ghana, and Nigeria) missed analogous state building opportunities because ruling coalitions preyed upon export wealth, rather than promoting export interests-which in turn undercut state building. The coalitional basis of these divergent outcomes suggests that, contrary to the prevailing belief in a "resource curse" natural resource wealth does not doom countries to low state capacity. Instead, export-oriented coalitions can harness boom times for developmental gains, even in the context of weak institutions.

Saylor's work encourages us to reexamine widespread assumptions about the relationship between resource wealth and state building, particularly the resource curse. *State Building in Boom Times* elucidates which public policies best serve developing countries trying manage their natural resource wealth.

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