

POLS 280:  
Politics of Development  
and Foreign Aid

Classes 15 and 16:

Seeing like a state—the developmental pitfalls of capable states

# Recap

- Developmental states' developmental success
- Driven by:
  - Export-led industrialization
  - Close relationships between capable bureaucracies and industries ('governed market' / 'embedded autonomy')
  - State autonomy (Kohli)

What explains the developmental  
achievements of the South  
Korean state according to Kohli?

# The next three classes

- States → state-society relations:
  - Developmental pitfalls of capable states
  - Political regimes
  - Neopatrimonialism

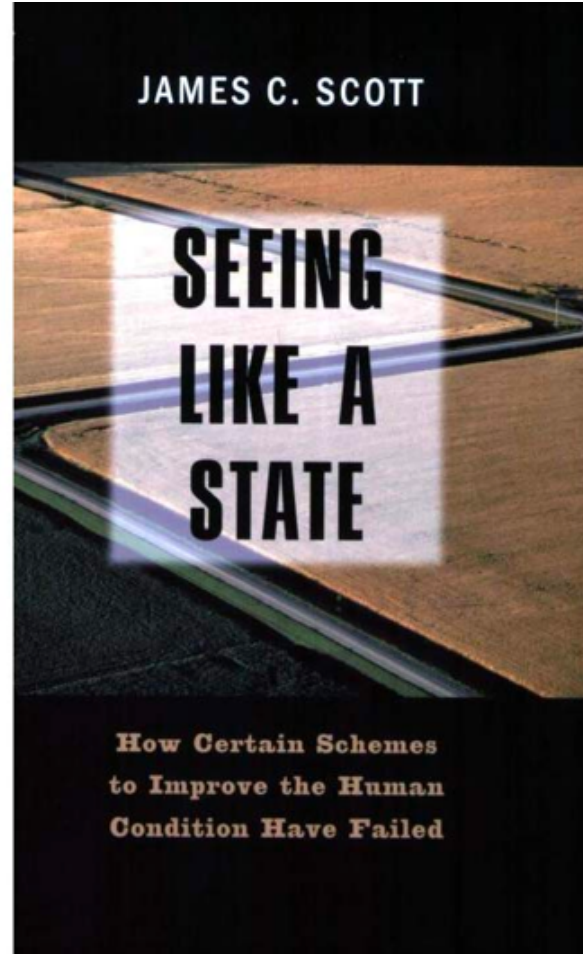
# Plan for today

- Uses of state capacity
- Development as a technical and ‘wicked hard’ problem
- Depoliticization of development
- Pitfalls of state capacity (and state autonomy)

How do some states use their capacity according to Scott?

# Seeing like a state

- Legibility as a central problem in statecraft →
- States' need to make society legible →
- Schemes to engineer society (and nature), e.g. to:
  - Simplify taxation and conscription
  - Effect development
- Subversion of local knowledge (*metis*) in favor of rational administrative ordering (*techne*)
  - Scott, James C. 1998. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press.



Is development  
a technical problem?



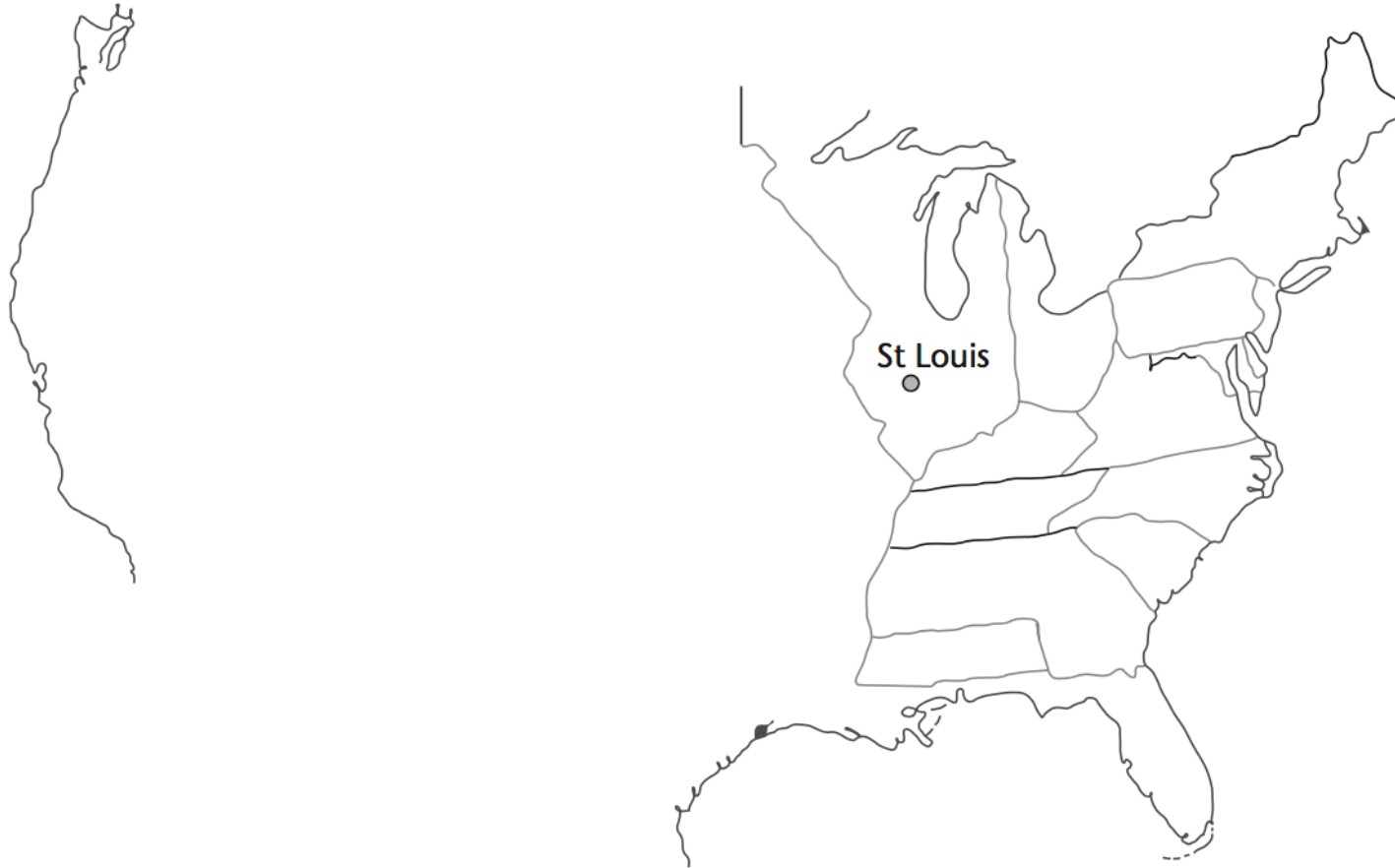
# Going west in 2015



**Figure 6.1.** How would you get from St Louis to Los Angeles in 2015?

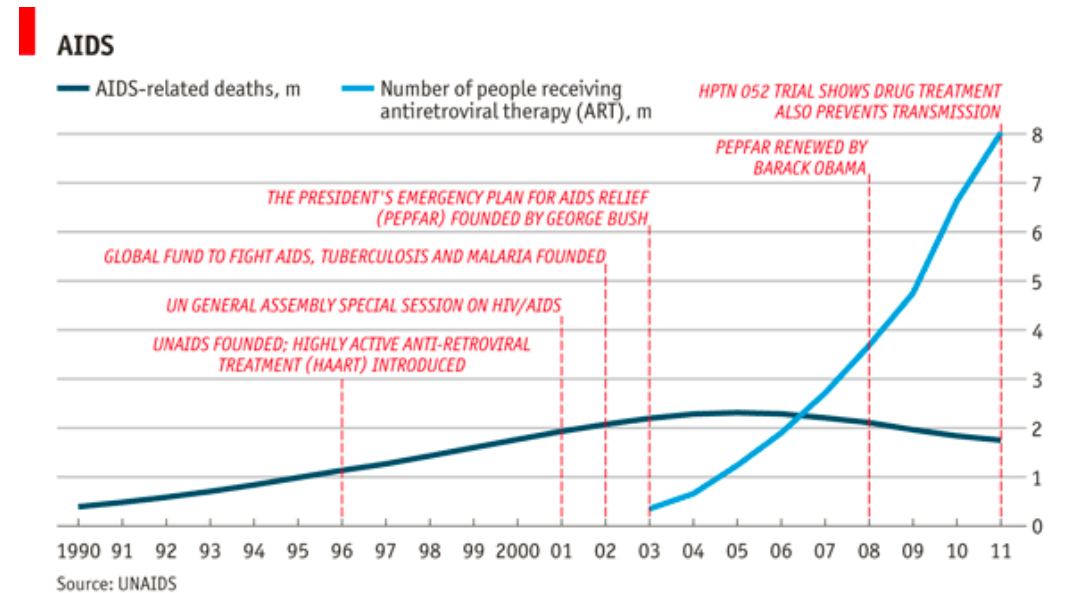
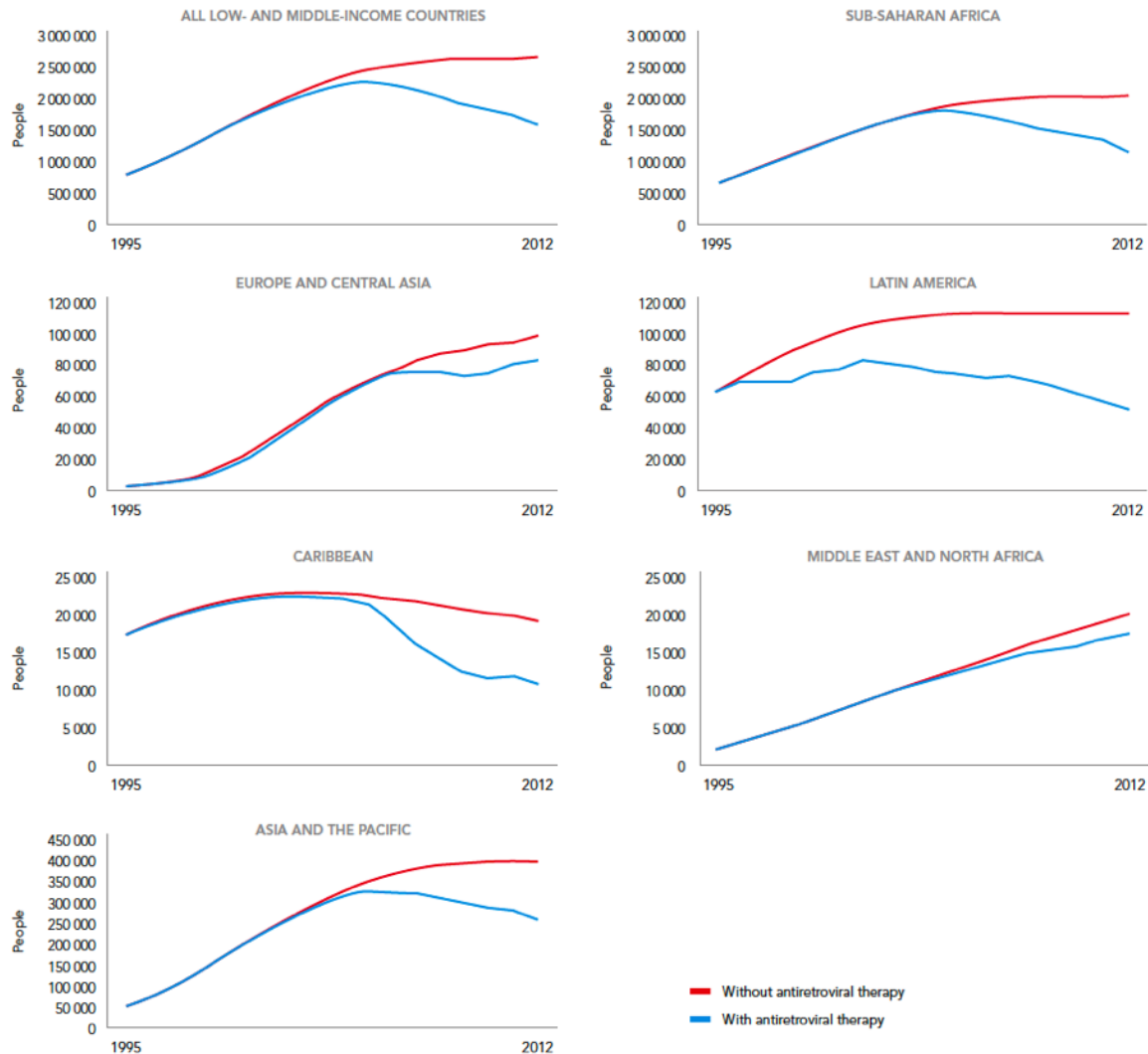
Source: Google Maps

# Going west in 1804



**Figure 6.2.** How would you get to the west coast from St. Louis in 1804?

# Development as a technical problem



Sources:

Our World in Data: <https://ourworldindata.org/hiv-aids/>

The Economist:

<https://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2012/07/daily-chart-12>

When is development not  
a technical problem?

# When is development not a technical problem?

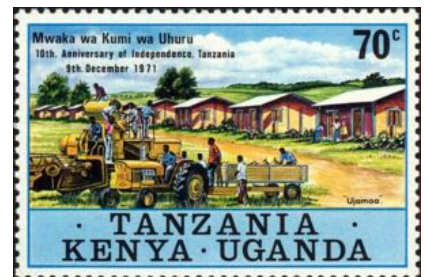
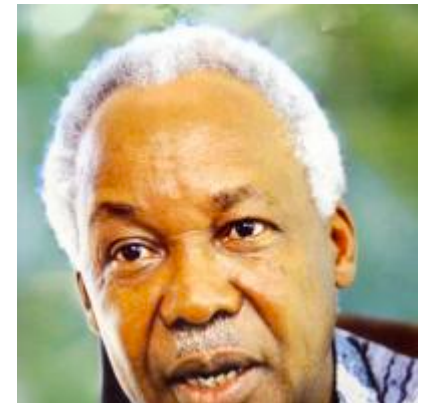
		Examples	
		Health	Finance
Policy making/elite services		Iodization of salt	Monetary policy
Logistics		Vaccinations	Payment systems
Implementation intensive service delivery		Curative care	Loans
Implementation intensive imposition of obligations		Regulation of private providers	Regulation of private providers
Wicked hard		Preventative health	Equity financing of start-ups

**Figure 5.2.** The five types of activities that have different capability needs in implementation

# Seeing like a state in Tanzania

- ‘Illegibility’ of the rural population in Julius Nyerere’s Tanzania in the 1970s
- *Ujamaa* compulsory villagization scheme
- 5 million Tanzanians relocated to *ujamaa* villages
- No attention paid to the local knowledge and practices of cultivators and pastoralists →
- Economic and ecological failure

- Scott, James C. 1998. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press.



# Seeing like an NGO in Lesotho

- Thaba-Tseka project (1975-1984) in the highlands of eastern Lesotho:
  - Failure as an agricultural development project
  - Powerful ‘instrument-effects’:
    - Construction of a road linking Thaba-Tseka with Maseru
    - Establishment of new district administration
    - Greater government presence in Thaba-Tseka
      - Ferguson, James. 1994. *The Anti-Politics Machine: “Development”, Depoliticization and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.



# Development according to Ferguson

- Construction of “Lesotho as a particular kind of object of knowledge” and creation of “a structure of knowledge around that object”
- Real Lesotho:
  - South Africa’s labor reserve
  - Economically dependent on SA
  - Capitalist
- Lesotho in development discourse:
  - Traditional, bounded national economy based on agricultural production





What are the effects of treating the lack of development as a technical problem?

# Anti-politics machine

- “In this perspective, the ‘development’ apparatus in Lesotho is not a machine for eliminating poverty that is incidentally involved with the state bureaucracy; it is a **machine for reinforcing and expanding the exercise of bureaucratic state power**, which incidentally takes ‘poverty’ as its point of entry—launching an intervention that may have no effect on the poverty but does in fact have other concrete effects. Such a result may be no part of the planners’ intentions—indeed, it almost never is—but resultant systems have an intelligibility of their own.” →

- The political effects of ‘apolitical’ interventions

• Ferguson, James. 1994. *The Anti-Politics Machine: “Development”, Depoliticization and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Why is “reinforcing and expanding the exercise of bureaucratic state power” problematic according to Acemoglu?

# The pitfalls of state capacity

- Excessively strong state:
  - Imposition of high taxes → little private investment
    - Acemoglu, Daron. 2005. "Politics and Economics in Weak and Strong States." *Journal of Monetary Economics* 52 (7): 1199–1226.



# State capacity in development

- Capable states are necessary for development.
- Capable states undermine development.

In what conditions does state capacity lead to development?  
In what conditions does state capacity undermine development?