

Abstract:

How does the external strategic environment of a territory affect the power balance between its state and society? We investigate the cause and consequences of weak state integration on the peripheral island of Corsica and its relationship to its centre Genoa in the Early modernity (1358-1755). We develop a novel game to show how the presence of competing for central powers can both strengthen or weaken peripheral society depending on the defendability of the peripheral territory. Through the lens of this model, we show how strategic competition between Genoa and the regional competitor Aragon interacted to have opposing effects on their peripheral island territories of Sardinia and Corsica. The rugged terrain on Corsica gave Genoa fewer incentives to support the local elites in disputes with society as the strategic importance of the island grew. The flat terrain on Sardinia had the opposite effect; heightened strategic importance increased Aragon's support for local feudal lords. We argue the resulting weakened state integration benefited Corsica, while the integration with Aragon impeded development on Sardinia; thus we argue an identical strategic environment in the Early-Modernity caused enduring differences in human capital on two neighbouring islands.