



Corporate Sovereign Awakening and the Making of Modern State Sovereignty: New Archival Evidence from the English East India Company

Published online by Cambridge University Press: **04 March 2022**

Swati Srivastava 

[Article](#)

[Figures](#)

[Supplementary materials](#)

[Metrics](#)

**International
Organization**

Article contents

[Abstract](#)

[Early Modern Layered
Sovereignty](#)

[Emergence of a
Company-State](#)

[Company Sovereignty
as Self-Possessed
Right](#)

Abstract

The English East India Company's “company-state” lasted 274 years—longer than most states. This research note uses new archival evidence to study the Company as a catalyst in the development of modern state sovereignty. Drawing on the records of 16,740 managerial and shareholder meetings between 1678 and 1795, I find that as the Company grew through wars, its claim to sovereign authority shifted from a privilege delegated by Crown and Parliament to a self-possessed right. This “sovereign awakening” sparked a reckoning within the English state, which had thus far tolerated ambiguity in Company sovereignty based on the early modern shared international understanding of divisible, nonhierarchical layered sovereignty. But self-possessed nonstate sovereignty