Failed state

A **failed state** is a political body that has disintegrated to a point where basic conditions and responsibilities of a sovereign government no longer function properly (see also fragile state and state collapse). A state can also fail if the government loses its legitimacy even if it is performing its functions properly. For a stable state it is necessary for the government to enjoy both effectiveness and legitimacy. Likewise, when a nation weakens and its standard of living declines, it introduces the possibility of total governmental collapse. The Fund for Peace characterizes a failed state as having the following characteristics:

- Loss of control of its territory, or of the monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force
- Erosion of legitimate authority to make collective decisions
- Inability to provide public services
- Inability to interact with other states as a full member of the international community

Common characteristics of a failing state include a central government so weak or ineffective that it has an inability to raise taxes or other support, and has little practical control over much of its territory and hence there is a non-provision of public services. When this happens, widespread corruption and criminality, the intervention of state and non-state actors, the appearance of refugees and the involuntary movement of populations, sharp economic decline, and military intervention from both within and without the state in question can occur.[1]

Metrics have been developed to describe the level of governance of states. The precise level of government control required to avoid being considered a failed state varies considerably amongst authorities.[2] Furthermore, the declaration that a state has "failed" is generally controversial and, when made authoritatively, may carry significant geopolitical consequences.[2]

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Definition and issues

According to the political theories of Max Weber, a state is defined as maintaining a monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force within its borders. When this is broken (e.g., through the dominant presence of warlords, paramilitary groups, corrupt policing, armed gangs, or terrorism), the very existence of the state becomes dubious, and the state becomes a *failed state*. The difficulty of determining whether a government maintains "a monopoly on the legitimate use of force", which includes the problems of the definition of "legitimate", means it is not clear precisely when a state can be said to have "failed".

The problem of legitimacy can be solved by understanding what Weber intended by it. Weber explains that only the state has the means of production necessary for physical violence. This means that the state does not require legitimacy for achieving monopoly on having the means of violence (*de facto*), but will need one if it needs to use it (*de jure*).

Typically, the term means that the state has been rendered ineffective and is not able to enforce its laws uniformly or provide basic goods and services to its citizens because of (variously) high crime rates, insurgency, extreme political corruption, an impenetrable and ineffective bureaucracy, judicial ineffectiveness, military interference in politics, and cultural situations in which traditional leaders wield more power than the state over a certain area. Other factors of perception may be involved. A derived concept of "failed cities" has also been launched, based on the notion that while a state may function in general, polities at the substate level may collapse in terms of infrastructure, economy and social policy. Certain areas or cities may even fall outside state control, becoming a *de facto* ungoverned part of the state.[3]

There is no real consensus on the definition of a "failed state"; the subjective nature of indicators that are used to measure state failure have led to an ambiguous understanding of the term.[4] Some scholars focus on the capacity and effectiveness of the government to determine whether or not a state is failed.[5]

Other indices such as the Fund for Peace's Fragile States Index underline the democratic character of state institutions in order to determine its level of failure.[6] Finally, other scholars focus their argument on the legitimacy of the state,[7] on the nature of the state,[8] on the growth of criminal violence in a state,[9] on the economic extractive institutions,[10] or on the states' capacity to control its territory.[11] Robert H. Bates refers to state failure as the "implosion of the state", where the state transforms "into an instrument of predation" and the state effectively loses its monopoly on the means of force.[12]

As part of the debate about the state failure definition, Charles T. Call (2010) attempts to abandon the concept of state failure altogether; as, he argues, it promotes an unclear understanding of what state failure means.[6] Indeed, one of the main contributions to the theorization of the "failed-state" is the "gap framework" developed by Call (2010). This framework builds on his previous (2008) criticisms of 'state failure', as a concept used as a catch-all term for diverse states with varying problems and as a base and explanation for universal policy prescriptions.[13] It unpacks the concept of "state failure" focusing on three gaps that the state is not able to provide when it is in the process of failure: capacity, when state institutions lack the ability to effectively deliver basic goods and services to its population; security, when the state is unable to provide security to its population under the threat of armed groups; and legitimacy, when a "significant portion of its political elites and society reject the rules regulating power and the accumulation and distribution of wealth."[6] The "gap framework" seems to be more useful than other definitions.

Instead of attempting to quantify the degree of failure of a state, the gap framework provides a three-dimensional scope useful to analyse the interplay between the government and the society in states in a more analytical way. Call does not necessarily suggest that states that suffer from the challenges of the three gaps should be identified as failed states; but instead, presents the gap idea as an alternative to the state failure concept as a whole.[6] Although Call recognizes that the gap concept in itself has limits, since often states face two or more of the gap challenges, his conceptual proposition presents a useful way for more precisely identifying the challenges within a society and the policy prescriptions that are more likely to be effective for external and international actors to implement.

Further critique for the way in which the way the 'failed state' concept has been understood and operationalised is brought forth in research by Morten Bøås and Kathleen M. Jennings who, drawing on five case studies—Afghanistan, Somalia, Liberia, Sudan, and the Niger Delta region of Nigeria—argue that "the use of the 'failed state' label is inherently political, and based primarily on Western perceptions of Western security and interests".[14] They go on to suggest that Western policy-makers attribute the 'failed' label to those states in which 'recession and informalisation of the state is perceived to be a threat to Western interests'.[14] Furthermore, this suggests a hypocritical approach on behalf of Western policy-makers, due to the fact that the characteristics that would lead certain states to be labelled as failed are accepted in other states where these characteristics are in accordance with Western interests. In fact, "this feature of state functioning is not only accepted, but also to a certain degree facilitated, as it creates an enabling environment for business and international capital. These cases are not branded 'failed states'".[14]

Measurement

The measurement methods of state failure are generally divided into the quantitative and the qualitative approach.

Quantitative approach

Quantitative measurement of state failure means the creation of indexes and rankings *State Fragility Index* (SFI) are particularly important. However, a number of other indexes are generally used to describe state weakness, often focusing on the developmental level of the state. Examples are: the *Freedom House Index* (FHI), the *Human Development Index* (HDI) or the *World Bank Governance Indicators*. Additionally, regional evaluation might give concrete details about, inter alia, the level of democracy such as the Report of Democratic Development in Latin America (*Informe de desarrollo democrático de América Latina*).[16] However, the Fragile States Index has received comparatively much attention since its first publication in 2005. Edited by the magazine *Foreign Policy*, the ranking examines 178 countries based on analytical research of the Conflict Assessment System Tool (CAST) of the Fund for Peace.[17]

The Fragile States Index published its eleventh annual report in 2015, prepared by the Fund for Peace and published by *Foreign Policy Magazine*. The Index categorizes states in four categories, with variations in each category. The Alert category is in dark red, Warning in orange, Stable in yellow and Sustainable in green.

The FSI total score is out of 120, and in 2015 there were 178 states making the ranking. Initially, the FSI only ranked 75 countries in 2005. The FSI uses two criteria by which a country qualifies to be included in the list: first of all, the country must be a United Nations member state, and secondly, there must be a significant sample size of content and data available for that country to allow for meaningful analysis. There are three groupings: social, economic and political with overall twelve indicators.[18]
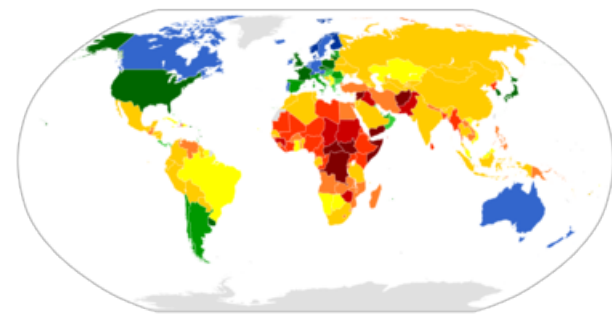
Social indicators:

- Demographic pressures
- Refugees or internally displaced persons
- Group grievance
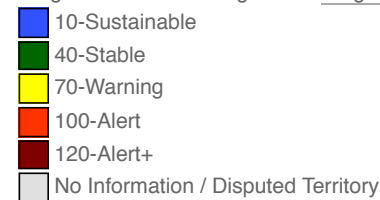- Human flight and brain drain

Economic indicators:

- Uneven economic development
- Poverty and economic decline

Political and military indicators:

- State legitimacy
- Public services
- Human rights and rule of law
- Security apparatus
- Factionalized elites
- External intervention

Fragile States according to the "Fragile States Index 2018"[15]

- 10-Sustainable
- 40-Stable
- 70-Warning
- 100-Alert
- 120-Alert+
- No Information / Disputed Territory

The indicators each count for 10, adding up to a total of 120. However, in order to add up to 120, the indicator scores are rounded up-or-down to the nearest one decimal place.[19] In the 2015 Index, South Sudan ranked number one, Somalia number two, and the Central African Republic number three. Finland is currently the most stable and sustainable country in the list.[20]

While it is important to note that the FSI is used in many pieces of research and makes the categorization of states more pragmatic, it often receives much criticism due to several reasons. Firstly, it does not include the Human Development Index to reach the final score, but instead focuses on institutions to measure what are often also considered human aspects for development. Secondly, it parallels fragility or vulnerability of states with underdevelopment. This comparison firstly assumes that underdevelopment (economic) creates vulnerability, thus assuming that if a state is "developed" it is stable or sustainable. Thirdly, it measures the failure (or success) of a state without including the progress of other areas outside the sphere of the 12 indicators, thus excluding important measures of development such as the decline in child mortality rates, and increased access to clean water sources and medication, amongst others. Nonetheless, when discussing failed states it is important to mention the FSI not just for its use by governments, organisations, educators and analysts, but also because it provides a measure of assessment that tries to address the issues that cause threats, both domestically and internationally.

Qualitative approach

The qualitative approach embraces theoretical frameworks. Normally, this type of measurement applies stage models to allow a categorisation of states. In three to five stages, researchers show state failure as a process. Notable researchers, inter alia, are Robert I. Rotberg in the Anglo-American and Ulrich Schneckener in the German sphere.

Ulrich Schneckener's (2006) stage model defines three core elements, monopoly of violence, legitimacy and rule of law. The typology is based on the *security first* logic and thus, shows the relevance of the monopoly of violence in comparison to the other two while at the same time acting as the precondition for a functioning state. His four statehood types are: (1) consolidated and consolidating states, (2) weak states, (3) failing and (4) collapsed/failed states. The first type is directed towards functioning states; all core functions of the state are functioning in the long term. In weak states, the monopoly of force is still intact, but the other two areas show serious deficits. Failing states lack the monopoly of force, while the other areas function at least partially. Finally, collapsed or failed states are dominated by parastatal structures characterised by actors trying to create a certain internal order, but the state cannot sufficiently serve the three core elements.[21]

Both research approaches show some irregularities. While the quantitative approach lacks transparency concerning its indicators and their balancing in the evaluation process of countries, the qualitative approach shows a diversity of different foci. One of the major discrepancies is the question whether all the stages have to be taken continuously or if a state can skip one phase. Schneckener stresses that his model should actually not be interpreted as a stage model as, in his opinion, states do not necessarily undergo every stage. Robert I. Rotberg's model underlies an ordinal logic and thus, implies that the state failure process is a chronological chain of phases.[22]

Theoretical mechanisms for state development

State development through war-making

Charles Tilly (1985) argued that war-making was an indispensable aspect of state development in Europe through the following interdependent functions:

- War-making—rulers eliminate external rivals (requires building military forces and supportive bureaucracies)

- State-making—rulers eliminate internal rivals and establish the control over their territories (requires building police forces and bureaucracies)
- Protection—rulers bring about benefit to their clients by eliminating their external rivals and guaranteeing their rights (requires building courts and representative assemblies)
- Extraction—rulers extract more tax from their subjects (requires building tax collection apparatuses and exchequers)

Tilly summarized this linkage in the famous phrase: "War made the state, and the state made war."

Similarly, Herbst (1990) added that a war might be the only chance to strengthen an extraction capability since it forced rulers to risk their political lives for extra revenue and forced subjects to consent to pay more tax. It is also important for state development in that the increased revenue would not return to its original level even after the end of wars. Contrary to European states, however, he also pointed out that most Third World states lacked external threats and had not waged interstate wars, implying that these states are unlikely to take similar steps in the future.[23]

"Nation-building" by developed countries

Steward and Knaus (2012) tackled a question "can intervention work?" and concluded that "we can help nations build themselves" by putting an end to war and providing "well resourced humanitarian interventions." They criticized the overconfidence of policy makers on nation-building by contrasting successful interventions in Bosnia (1995) and Kosovo (1999) with failed attempt of nation-building in Iraq (2003) and Afghanistan (2001) in which the U.S. lost thousands of lives over ten years and expended more than a trillion dollars without realizing its central objective of nation-building.[24] When a so-called failed nation-state is crushed by internal violence or disruption, and consequently is no longer able to deliver positive political goods to its inhabitants, developed states feel the obligation to intervene and assist in rebuilding them.[25] However, intervention is not always seen positively, but due to past intervention by for instance the US government, scholars argue that the concept of a failed state is an invented rationale to impose developed states' interests on less powerful states.[26] The labelling of states like Somalia, Afghanistan, Liberia or Sudan, as failed states, gives Western countries the legitimization to impose the western idea of a stable nation state. It is commonly accepted that nation building or international response to troubled/rogue states happens too late or too quickly which is due to inadequate analysis or lack of political will. Still, it is important to highlight that developed nations and their aid institutions have had a positive impact on many failed states. Nation building is context specific and thus a countries' cultural-political as well as social environment needs to be carefully analyzed before intervening as a foreign state.[27] The Western world has increasingly become concerned about failed states and sees them as threats to security. The concept of the failed state is thereafter often used to defend policy interventions by the West. Further, as Chesterman and Ignatieff et. Al. argue, regarding the duration of international action by developed states and international organizations, a central problem is that a crisis tends to be focused in time, while the most essential work of reframing and building up a state and its institutions takes years or decades. Therefore, effective state- building is a slow process and it is disingenuous to suggest otherwise to domestic publics.[28]

Promoting development through foreign aid

Pritchett, Woolcock and Andrews (2013) analyzed the systematic failure of the development of failed states. They defined "state administrative capability for implementation" as the key aspect of state development, and found out the mechanism in which failed states stumbled regardless of decades of development practices tried, billions of dollars spent, and alleged "progress" boasted. These countries adopted the following techniques which led to undermine it:

1. *systemic isomorphic mimicry*—disguising the dysfunction of states by simply mimicking the appearance of functional states.
2. *premature load bearing*—limited-capacity states being overloaded with "unrealistic expectations."

In light of the fact that many of these countries would likely need centuries to reach the state capability of developed countries, they suggested creating "context-specific institutions", promoting "incremental reform process", and setting "realistic expectations" for attaining the goal of substantial development.[29]

Foreign aid produces several unintended consequences when used to develop the institutional capacity of state. Donors will often delegate aid spending to recipient governments since they do not have the information or capacity to identify who is in the greatest need and how it can be best spent.[30] The downside of this is that it can be captured by recipient governments and diverted either towards self-enrichment of incumbent elites, or to establish and maintain clientelist networks to allow them to remain in power, for example, in Kenya, aid allocation is biased towards constituencies with high vote shares for the incumbent, so the geographic distribution of aid changes to their supporters following a change of regime.[31] Furthermore, aid can also be diverted to non-state actors, and thus undermine the state's monopoly on violence, such as in Colombia during the 1990s and 2000s, where US aid to the Colombian military was diverted by the military to paramilitary groups, leading to significant increases in paramilitary violence in municipalities located near military bases.[32] The implication is that foreign aid can undermine the state by both feeding corruption of incumbent elites, and empowering groups outside of the state.

Moss, Todd, Gunilla Pettersson, and Nicolas Van de Walle (2006) acknowledged the controversy over the effect of foreign aid that has developed in recent years. They argued that although there is a call for an increase in large aid efforts in Africa by the international community, this will actually create what they call an "aid-institutions paradox."[33] This paradox is formed because the large cash contributions that Western countries have given to African countries have created institutions that are "less accountable to their citizens and under less pressure to maintain popular legitimacy."[33] They mention that the gradual decrease of aid may help foster long-lasting institutions, which is proven by the United States' efforts in Korea after the Cold War.

Berman, Eli, Felter, Shapiro, and Trolan (2013) also found similar evidence to support the paradox, stating that large US aid attempts in African agriculture have only resulted in further conflict between citizens. Notably, small investments such as grants for schools have proven to decrease violence compared to large investments, which create "incentives to capture economic rents through violence."[34]

Furthermore, Binyavanga Wainaina (2009) likens Western aid to colonization, in which countries believe that large cash contributions to spur the African economy will lead to political development and less violence. In reality, these cash contributions do not invest in Africa's growth economically, politically and most of all, socially.[35]

Neotrusteeship

James Fearon and David Laitin suggest in "Neotrusteeship and the Problem of Weak States" that the problem of failed states can be addressed through a system of "neotrusteeship", which they compare to "postmodern imperialism."[36] Fearon and Laitin's idea of neotrusteeship involves a combination of international and domestic organizations which seek to rebuild states. Fearon and Laitin start with the assumption that failed states comprise a collective action problem. Failed states impose negative externalities on the rest of the international system, like refugees who are displaced by war. It would be a net good for the international system if countries worked to develop and rebuild failed states. However, intervention is very costly, and no single nation has a strong enough incentive to act to solve the problem of a failed state. Therefore, international cooperation is necessary to solve this collective action problem.

Fearon and Laitin identify four main problems to achieving collective action to intervene in failed states:

1. Recruitment - getting countries to participate in and pay for interventions
2. Coordination - providing good communication between all of the peacekeeping countries
3. Accountability - ensuring that any peacekeeping countries that commit human rights abuses are held responsible
4. Exit - having some mechanism for the peacekeeping countries to withdraw

Fearon and Laitin do propose some solutions to these problems. To solve the recruitment problem, they argue for having a powerful state with security interests in the failed state to take the lead in the peacekeeping operations and serve a point role. Having a single state lead the peacekeeping operation would also help solve the coordination problem. Empowerment of a UN body to investigate human rights abuses would solve the accountability problem. Finally, forcing the failed state to contribute funds to peacekeeping operations after several years can reduce the incentives of the peacekeepers to exit. Fearon and Laitin believe that multilateral interventions which solve the above four collective action problems will be more effective at rebuilding failed states through neotrusteeship.[36]

Autonomous recovery

Jeremy Weinstein disagrees that peacekeeping is necessary to rebuild failed states, arguing that it is often better to allow failed states to recover on their own.[37] Weinstein fears that international intervention may prevent a state from developing strong internal institutions and capabilities. One of Weinstein's key arguments is that war leads to peace. By this, he means that peace agreements imposed by the international community tend to freeze in place power disparities that do not reflect reality. Weinstein believes that such a situation leaves a state ripe for future war, while if the war were allowed to play out for one side to win decisively, future war would be much less likely. Weinstein also claims that war leads to the development of strong state institutions. Weinstein borrows from Charles Tilly to make this argument, which states that wars require large expansions in state capabilities, so the states that are more stable and capable will win wars and survive in the international system through a process similar to natural selection. Weinstein uses evidence from Uganda's successful recovery following a guerilla victory in a civil war, Eritrea's forceful secession from Ethiopia, and development in Somaliland and Puntland—autonomous regions of Somalia—to support his claims. Weinstein does note that lack of external intervention can lead to mass killings and other atrocities, but he emphasizes that preventing mass killings has to be weighed against the ensuing loss of long-term state capacity.[37]

Capability traps of failed states

Capability trap means that countries are progressing at a very slow pace in the expansion of state capability even in the contemporary world, which is also the core problem of failed states.[29] Many countries remain stuck in conditions of low productivity that many call "poverty traps." Economic growth is only one aspect of development; another key dimension of development is the expansion of the administrative capability of the state, the capability of governments to affect the course of events by implementing policies and programs.[38] Capability traps close the space for novelty, establishing fixed best-practice agendas as the basis of evaluating failed states. Local agents are therefore excluded from the process of building their own states, implicitly undermining the value-creating ideas of local leaders and front line workers.

Matt, Lant and Woolcock from the Harvard Kennedy School of Government proposed an approach called the "Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA)", to escaping the capability traps.[39] Given that many development initiatives fail to improve performance because they promote *isomorphic mimicry*, PDIA focuses on solving locally nominated and prioritized performance problems of failed states. It involves pursuing development interventions that engage broad sets of local agents to ensure the reforms are politically supportable and practically implementable.

While failed states are the source of numerous refugees, the chaotic emigration allowed by UN regulations and open border policies have contributed to human capital flight, or brain drain. Without sufficient professional and skilled workers, such as doctors, nurses, biologists, engineers, electricians, and so on, the severity of failed states tends to increase, leading to even more emigration. Similarly, policies that don't

require third country resettlement on the same continent as failed states makes eventual resettlement after war, famine, or political collapse even less probable, as the distance, cost, and inconvenience of returning to home countries increases with distance and language change among refugee families. In Somalia, Afghanistan, and Yemen the reform movements and modernization efforts are weakened when there are not effective refugee resettlement programs.

Promoting good governance and combating further hostilities in failed states

Transnational crime and terrorism

According to U.S. Department of Justice Trial Attorney Dan E. Stigall, "the international community is confronted with an increasing level of transnational crime in which criminal conduct in one country has an impact in another or even several others. Drug trafficking, human trafficking, computer crimes, terrorism, and a host of other crimes can involve actors operating outside the borders of a country which might have a significant interest in stemming the activity in question and prosecuting the perpetrator".[40]

A study of the Cligendael Center for Strategic Studies[41] explains why states that are subject to failure serve as sanctuaries (used to plan, execute, support, and finance activities) for terrorist organisations. When the government does not know about the presence of the organisation or if it is not able to weaken or remove the organisation, the sanctuary is referred to as a "Terrorist Black Hole". However, next to governmental weakness there need to be "Terrorist Comparative Advantages" present for a region to be considered as a "Terrorist Black Hole". According to the study, social tensions, the legacy from civil conflict, geography, corruption and policy failure, as well as external factors contribute to governmental weakness. The comparative advantages are: religion and ethnicity, the legacy from civil conflict, geography, economic opportunities, economic underdevelopment and regional stimuli. Only the combinations of the two factors (governmental weakness and Terrorist Comparative Advantages) explain what regions terrorists use as sanctuaries.

Research by James Piazza of the Pennsylvania State University finds evidence that nations affected by state failure experience and produce more terrorist attacks.[42] Contemporary transnational crimes "take advantage of globalization, trade liberalization and exploding new technologies to perpetrate diverse crimes and to move money, goods, services and people instantaneously for purposes of perpetrating violence for political ends".[43]

Contributing to previous research on the matter, Tiffany Howard[44] looks at a different dimension of the connection between state failure and terrorism, based on evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa. She argues that "citizens of failed states are attracted to political violence because of the deteriorating conditions within this type of states".[44] Focusing on individual citizens decision-making patterns, it is suggested that "individuals living in failed states are attracted to political violence because the system is broken—the state has failed in its duty".[44] This finding is based on empirical evidence using barometer survey data. This individual-level approach, which differs from previous research which has focused on the attractiveness of failed states for terrorists and insurgents[45][46] finds that "failed states threaten an individual's survival, which ultimately drives them to obtain tangible political and economic resources through other means, which include the use of political violence".[44] This finding has significant implications for the international community, such as the fact that "this pattern of deprivation makes individuals in these states more susceptible to the influence of internationally sponsored terrorist groups. As a consequence, failed states are breeding grounds for terrorists, who then export their radical ideologies to other parts of the world to create terrorist threats across the globe"[44]

The link between state failure (and its characteristics) and terrorism, however, is not unanimously accepted in the scholarly literature. Research by Alberto Abadie, which looks at determinants of terrorism at the country level, suggests that the "terrorist risk is not significantly higher for poorer countries, once the effects of other country-specific characteristics such as the level of political freedom are taken into account".[47] In fact, as the argument goes, "political freedom is shown to explain terrorism, but it does so in a non-monotonic way: countries in some intermediate range of political freedom are shown to be more prone to terrorism than countries with high levels of political freedom or countries with highly authoritarian regimes".[47] While poverty and low levels of political freedom are not the main characteristics of failed states, they are nevertheless important ones.[48] For this reason, Abadie's research represents a powerful critique to the idea that there is a link between state failure and terrorism. This link is also questioned by other scholars, such as Corinne Graff, who argues that 'there is simply no robust empirical relationship between poverty and terrorist attacks'.[49]

Moreover, "problems of weakened states and transnational crime create an unholy confluence that is uniquely challenging. When a criminal operates outside the territory of an offended state, the offended state might ordinarily appeal to the state from which the criminal is operating to take some sort of action, such as to prosecute the offender domestically or extradite the offender so that he or she may face punishment in the offended state. Nonetheless, in situations in which a government is unable (or unwilling) to cooperate in the arrest or prosecution of a criminal, the offended state has few options for recourse".[40]

Examples

A relevant contribution to the field of failed states and its attributes was made by Jack Goldstone in his paper "Pathways to State Failure". He defines a failed state as one that has lost both its effectiveness and legitimacy. Effectiveness means the capability to carry out state functions such as providing security or levying taxes. Legitimacy means the support of important groups of the population. A state that retains one of these two aspects is not failed as such; however it is in great danger of failing soon if nothing is done. He identifies five possible pathways to state failure:

1. Escalation of communal group (ethnic or religious) conflicts. Examples: Syria, Somalia, Myanmar, Chad, Iraq, Yemen, Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic, Liberia, Yugoslavia, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Sudan, South Sudan.
2. State predation (corrupt or crony corralling of resources at the expense of other groups). Examples: Nicaragua, Venezuela, Brazil, Philippines, Croatia, Hungary, Sudan, South Sudan, Nigeria, Eritrea, Zimbabwe, South Africa, North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Russia, Qatar, Lebanon.
3. Regional or guerrilla rebellion. Examples: Libya, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Congo, Colombia, Vietnam.
4. Democratic collapse (leading to civil war or coup d'état). Examples: Liberia, Madagascar, Nepal.
5. Succession or reform crisis in authoritarian states. Examples: Indonesia under Suharto, Iran under the Shah, the Soviet Union under Gorbachev[50]

Larry Diamond, in his paper "Promoting democracy in post-conflict and failed states", argues that weak and failed states pose distinctive problems for democracy promotion. In these states, the challenge is not only to pressure authoritarian state leaders to surrender power but rather to figure out how to regenerate legitimate power in the first place. There are mainly two distinct types of cases, and each of these two types of cases requires specific kinds of strategies for promotion of good governance:

1. The post-conflict states that are emerging from external or civil war. Many of these countries have been in Africa—South Africa, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Somalia. Some have been in Latin America (Nicaragua, El Salvador, and much of Central America), in Asia (e.g. Cambodia), and in the Middle East (Lebanon, Algeria, and Iraq);
2. Countries that are in the midst of civil war or ongoing violent conflict, where central state authority has largely collapsed, as in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Generally speaking, order is the most important prerequisite for democracy promotion, which relies heavily on formal democratic mechanisms, particularly elections to promote post-conflict state-building. In the absence of an effective state, there are basically three possibilities: If there has been a civil war and a rebel force has ultimately triumphed, then the vacuum may be filled by the rebellious army and political movement as it establishes control over the state; second, there may be a patchwork of warlords and armies, with either no real central state (as in Somalia) or only a very weak one. In this situation, the conflict does not really end, but may wax and wane in decentralized fashion, as in Afghanistan today; the third possibility is that an international actor or coalition of actors steps in to constitute temporary authority politically and militarily. This may be an individual country, a coalition, an individual country under the thin veneer of a coalition, or the United Nations acting through the formal architecture of a UN post-conflict mission.[51]

During the 2020 coronavirus pandemic, there was much debate about whether the United States's response to it classified the country as a failed state. In April 2020, George Packer argued in the *The Atlantic* that the United States federal government's response to it meant that the United States was a "failed state", saying "The United States reacted instead like Pakistan or Belarus – like a country with shoddy infrastructure and a dysfunctional government whose leaders were too corrupt or stupid to head off mass suffering.".[52] Two articles in the *National Review* responded critically to the article[53][54] and Mr. Packer later clarified that when he said the United States was a failed state, he meant it figuratively and not literally.[55][56] Two article in *Salon* also argued that the United States was a failed state[57][58] as did former British diplomat John Dobson who said that "Whatever the result of the November election, America will remain hopelessly divided and on course to become a failed state."[59] and Rebecca Gordon who wrote that "While this country may not yet be a failed state, it's certainly in a free fall all its own."[60] Those who disputed the notion that the US was a failed state included opinions by Ramesh Ponnuru,[61][62] an article by Karla Mastracchio and Marissa Wyant who concluded that "While the U.S. is facing challenges, it does not come anywhere near the definition of a failed state and that's important.",[63] an article by Matthew Gault in *Vice*, who said "Indicators are bad, but decline isn't predetermined."[64] and Charles Fiertz, a Programs Manager who works on the Failed States Index who said that among the advantages that the U.S. has is that it is a very wealthy nation, which give it options, even when that wealth is unequally distributed.[64]

In January 2021, former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown expressed concern that if issues regarding out-of-touch political elites and lack of trust in the country's institutions were not properly addressed, then the United Kingdom could become a failed state.[65] Similar concerns have been expressed regarding the UK's post-Brexit economy, a lack of attention to the country's welfare state, and its response to the COVID-19 pandemic.[66][67][68]

Criticisms of the concept

The term "failed state" has faced criticism along two main strands. The first argues that the term lends itself to overgeneralization, by lumping together different governance problems amongst diverse countries, and without accounting for variations of governance within states.[69] The second is concerned with the political application of the term in order to justify military interventions and state-building based on a Western model of the state.[70]

Olivier Nay, William Easterly and Laura Freschi have critiqued the concept of state failure as not having a coherent definition, with indices combining various indicators of state performance arbitrarily weighted to arrive at unclear and aggregated measurements of state fragility.[71] Call (2008) argues that the label of "failed state" has been applied so widely that it has been effectively rendered useless.[72] As there has been little consensus over how to define failed states, the characteristics commonly used to identify a failing state are numerous and extremely diverse, from human rights violations, poverty, corruption to demographic pressures.[73] This means that a wide range of highly divergent states are categorised together as failed (or failing) states. This can conceal the complexity of the specific weaknesses identified within individual states and result in one size fits all approach typically focused on strengthening the state's capacity for order. Furthermore, the use of the term 'failed state' has been used by some foreign powers as a justification for invading a country, or determining a specific prescriptive set of foreign policy

goals. Following 2001, Call notes that the US stated that failed states were one of the greatest security threats facing the country, based on the assumption that a country with weak – or non-existent – state institutions would provide a safe haven for terrorists, and act as a breeding ground for extremism.

Call (2008) suggests that, instead of branding countries as failed states, they could be categorised in more relevant, understandable terms. For example, a "collapsed state" would refer to a country where the state apparatus completely falls apart and ceases to exist for a couple of months. This would only apply to a country where absolutely no basic functions of the state were working, and non-state actors were carrying out such tasks. A "weak state" could be used for states whereby informal institutions carry out more of the public services and channelling of goods than formal state institutions. A "war-torn" state might not be functioning because of conflict, but this does not necessarily imply it is a collapsed state. Rotburg argued that all failed states are experiencing some form of armed conflict. However, the challenges to the state can be very different depending on the type of armed conflict, and whether it encompasses the country as a whole and large territories, or is specifically focused around one regional area. Another type of state that has been traditionally put under the umbrella term "failed state" could be an "authoritarian state". While authoritarian leaders might come to power by violent means, they may ward off opposition once in power and as such ensure there is little violence within their regime. Call (2008) argues that the circumstances and challenges facing state-building in such regimes are very different from those posed in a state in civil war. These four alternative definitions highlight the many different circumstances that can lead a state to be categorised under the umbrella term of "failed state", and the danger of adopting prescriptive one-size-fits-all policy approaches to very different situations. As a result of these taxonomical difficulties, Wynand Greffrath has posited a nuanced approach to "state dysfunction" as a form of political decay, which emphasizes qualitative theoretical analysis.[74]

See also

- Banana republic
- Crisis States Research Centre
- Fragile States Index
- Fund for Peace
- Human capital flight

- Mafia state
- Ochlocracy
- Pariah state
- Rogue state
- Societal collapse

- Stabilization of fragile states
- Examples of state-collapse anarchy
- Third country resettlement
- Violent non-state actor
- List of ongoing armed conflicts

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