State Failure and Reconstruction: Comparative Perspectives

Simon Fraser University
School for International Studies
Fall Term 2011
Wednesday 9.30-13.20 (HC 1525)

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 15.00-16.00 at HC 7272.

Description:

“State failure” and “state building” have become keywords in the popular media and academic circles since the mid-1990s to refer to the challenges domestic publics and the international community face today. This graduate seminar will provide an overview of the general conceptual, normative and practical debates on statehood, state capacity, state failure and state building. Some of the central questions of the course will be:

- What constitutes state capacity?
- What, if anything, does state “failure” mean?
- Why are some states more capable than others in the provision of freedom, security and public goods?
- When and why do states “fail”?
- What does state building entail?
- How can a “failed” state be rebuilt, especially in the wake of conflict?
- Does the international community have a right and/or obligation to intervene in the case of state “failure”?
- What is the relationship between socioeconomic development and state building?
- What are the implications of state “failure” and state building for human rights, the rule of law, and the provision of justice?

As we shall see, scholars address these questions through a variety of perspectives. We will begin with conceptual discussions of what “state”, “state failure” and “state building” mean. Then we will explore the historical development of the modern state in different parts of the world. The majority of the readings deal with contemporary issues on state failure and state building, employing approaches and tools from a variety of disciplines. The course will deepen our understanding of state institutions, development, conflict and post-conflict reconstruction, and we will have a better grasp of the current issues at hand.

Requirements:

The grading will consist of a midterm (25% of the total grade), a writing assignment (25%), a final paper (40%), and participation (10%). The midterm will consist of two parts: (i) short-answer questions that test students’ mastery of the basic debates and terms; and (ii) essay questions that allow the students to synthesize the material learned in class. The writing assignment and the final paper will be essays that engage debates on state building and state failure.
The participation grade consists of regular attendance as well as active participation in the classroom. Since this is a graduate seminar, much of the course time will be devoted to class discussion. Therefore it is absolutely necessary that each student participate actively. Each student will be asked to make a short presentation on one of the relevant themes of the class. Week 11 is devoted to student presentations on a selected topic (see below).

**Readings:**

The readings are a mixture of books, academic articles and field papers. The books that we will refer to extensively (see below) will be available at the SFU bookstore. There will also be a courseware that contains book chapters. I will make available online as much of the readings as possible.

**Books:**


**Promptness and Excuse Policy:**

Please make sure to be on time for class, as well as tutorials. Students who arrive more than 5 minutes late will not be admitted to class.

Students are allowed to take make-up exams only when they have a serious excuse (e.g. personal illness or death in the family), and when they bring an official document to prove the excuse (e.g. hospital certification).

**Academic Integrity:**

All students taking courses in International Studies are expected to read and understand the University’s policies regarding academic integrity. Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated under any circumstance! There are clear rules and regulations of the University to punish offenders of academic honesty. It is possible that you may not know the appropriate rules of citation and quotation; in this case please consult me immediately. Please make sure to read the University policies at: [http://students.sfu.ca/academicintegrity.html](http://students.sfu.ca/academicintegrity.html)
More resources:
- SFU Library: Identifying and avoiding plagiarism:
  http://www.lib.sfu.ca/researchhelp/writing/plagiarism.htm
- Understanding and Avoiding Plagiarism: A Self-Directed Tutorial
  http://www.lib.sfu.ca/researchhelp/tutorials/interactive/plagiarism/tutorial/introduction.htm
WEEKLY OUTLINE

Week 1 (9/7): Introduction to the Theories of the State and State Failure

Chapters 6 and 7 in Fixing Failed States: A Framework for Rebuilding a Fractured World.


Recommended:


Week 2 (9/14): The Emergence of the Modern State


Recommended:

Week 3 (9/21): Institutions, Organizations and State Building


Recommended:

**Week 4 (9/28): and State Building**


**Week 5 (10/5): Ideas about State Failure**


Robert I. Rotberg, “Failed States, Collapsed States, Weak States: Causes and Indicators.” Available at: [http://www.brookings.edu/press/books/chapter_1/statefailureandstateweaknessinatimeoferror.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/press/books/chapter_1/statefailureandstateweaknessinatimeoferror.pdf)


**Recommended:**


**Week 6 (10/12): When and why do States “Fail”?**


*State: Why Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed. New Haven, Yale University Press.*
Recommended:


Week 7 (10/19): The International Community and State Building: Moral and Practical Aspects (1)


Paul Collier, (2009) “Votes and Violence” (Chapter 1); “Better Dead than Fed?” (Chapter 9) and “On Changing Reality” (Chapter 10) in Wars, Guns and Votes: Democracy in Dangerous Places.


Week 8 (10/26): The International Community and State Building: Moral and Practical Aspects (2)


http://cisac.stanford.edu/publications/more_secure_world__our_shared_responsibility


**Week 9 (11/2): Foreign-led State Building: Security and Legitimation**

Chapters 2, 3 and 7 in Building States to Build Peace.


**Week 10 (11/9): Social and Economic Dimensions of State Building**

Chapters 4 and 5 in Building States to Build Peace.


**Recommended:**


Week 11 (11/16): Post-conflict Justice and Reconciliation

Chapter 6 in Building States to Build Peace.


Recommended:


Week 12 (11/23): Presentations of Country Studies

Week 13: Conclusion