Cultural and Religious Studies, April 2026, Vol. 14, No. 4, 193-202
doi: 10.17265/2328-2177/2026.04.001

# Regime Change and the Fallacy of Strategic Reasoning: State Capacity, Institutional Continuity, and Strategic Miscalculation in the Middle East*

ZHAO Guangcheng
Wenzhou University, Wenzhou, China

This article investigates why regime change interventions frequently fail to produce stable political orders despite extensive institutional engineering efforts. Existing explanations emphasize implementation deficiencies, including insufficient planning, limited local knowledge, or resource constraints. While useful, these accounts do not adequately explain the structural regularity of failure across diverse contexts. The article proposes an alternative explanation centered on the concept of state continuity disruption, defined as the breakdown of interdependent mechanisms through which administrative coordination, coercive capacity, and political legitimacy are reproduced over time. It argues that regime change does not merely replace formal institutions, but destabilizes the underlying processes that sustain institutional continuity. Drawing on comparative analysis of Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, and Iran, the article demonstrates that variation in outcomes is systematically linked to the degree of disruption of these continuity mechanisms. Where disruption is severe, institutional collapse follows; where continuity is preserved, political order remains relatively stable. By shifting analytical attention from institutional design to the reproduction conditions of political order, the article contributes to debates in comparative politics and state-building theory. It argues that institutions should be understood not as transferable organizational templates, but as historically embedded processes of continuity reproduction.

*Keywords:* regime change, international intervention, state continuity disruption, institutional capacity, Middle East

## Introduction

Contemporary debates on regime change have re-emerged with renewed urgency in light of ongoing geopolitical conflicts, particularly in the Middle East. From the protracted instability following the Iraq War to the state fragmentation after the Libyan Civil War, and the rapid institutional collapse associated with the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, regime change has repeatedly failed to produce the stable political order that its proponents anticipated. More recently, escalating tensions surrounding Iran have once again raised the question of whether regime transformation can serve as a viable strategic instrument.

The persistence of these outcomes suggests that the problem may not lie solely in policy execution, but in the underlying reasoning that informs regime change strategies. Existing explanations typically emphasize

* This research was supported by the Key Project of the National Social Science Fund of China (2025), "A Study of Manuscript Materials of Major Iranian Political Figures After the Islamic Revolution" (Project No. 25AZZ003).
ZHAO Guangcheng, Professor, College of Overseas Chinese, Wenzhou University, Wenzhou, China.

contingent factors such as inadequate planning, insufficient resources, or unfavorable local conditions. While these factors undoubtedly shape outcomes, they do not fully explain the recurring pattern of state capacity erosion across otherwise diverse contexts.

This article advances a different argument: that regime change strategies are often grounded in a set of systematic strategic fallacies regarding the nature of state capacity, institutional transferability, and political legitimacy. These fallacies lead policymakers to overestimate the ease with which political order can be reconstructed and to underestimate the structural consequences of disrupting existing state systems. As a result, regime change frequently generates not institutional renewal but a process of state continuity disruption, in which the mechanisms sustaining governance capacity are undermined.

A growing body of scholarship provides important insights into the components of this problem. Douglass North (1990, pp. 83-104) emphasizes that institutions depend on historically embedded constraints rather than formal design alone. Charles Tilly (1992, pp. 67-75, 90-95) demonstrates that state capacity is historically rooted in coercion and resource extraction processes. Michael Mann (1986, pp. 113-150) further shows that effective governance depends on infrastructural power and administrative penetration. Meanwhile, Max Weber (1978, pp. 212-216) conceptualizes legitimacy as rooted in distinct types of authority, while Seymour Martin Lipset (1959, pp. 69-72, 86-90) links legitimacy to performance and social stability. However, these strands of research have rarely been integrated into a unified explanation of why regime change systematically produces adverse outcomes.

Building on these insights, this study develops a theoretical framework centered on three strategic fallacies: institutional transplantability, external augmentability of state capacity, and procedural sufficiency of legitimacy. It then links these fallacies to a common causal mechanism—the disruption of state continuity—through which regime change undermines governance capacity. By connecting strategic reasoning to institutional outcomes, the analysis seeks to bridge the gap between policy discourse and state theory.

Empirically, the article examines four cases—Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, and Iran—to illustrate both the manifestation of these strategic fallacies and the mechanisms through which they affect state capacity. The first three cases represent different trajectories of externally influenced regime transformation, while Iran provides a contrasting case in which sustained external pressure has not produced comparable institutional breakdown. Together, these cases allow for a more nuanced assessment of the conditions under which state continuity is disrupted or preserved.

The remainder of the article proceeds as follows. The next section reviews existing literature on regime change and state capacity. The third section integrates analytical framework and research design by specifying the three strategic fallacies and their associated mechanisms. The fourth section presents comparative case analysis. The final section concludes with theoretical implications and directions for future research.

## Theoretical Foundations and the Limits of Institutional Transplantation

Existing scholarship on regime change, state capacity, and political order provides important analytical foundations but remains insufficiently integrated to explain the recurring failure of regime transformation strategies. In particular, while institutionalist, state formation, and legitimacy-centered approaches each illuminate critical dimensions of governance, they tend to overlook the systematic errors in strategic reasoning that underlie regime change policies.

**Institutionalism and the Limits of Institutional Transplantability**

Institutionalist scholarship has long emphasized the central role of formal rules in shaping political and economic outcomes. Douglass North (1990, pp. 3-10) defines institutions as the "rules of the game" that structure human interaction and reduce uncertainty. Building on this framework, Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson (2012, pp. 74-81, 91-95) argue that inclusive institutions are the key determinant of long-run prosperity and political stability.

However, this line of research often assumes that institutional forms can be transferred across contexts with limited distortion. North (1990, pp. 83-104) explicitly notes that institutions are embedded in historically evolved informal constraints that shape enforcement patterns. When institutional designs are transplanted without these embedded constraints, formal rules may fail to produce expected behavioral outcomes. This insight directly challenges the strategic assumption of institutional transplantability, which underpins many regime change initiatives.

**State Formation and the Constraints of Capacity Construction**

A second strand of literature emphasizes the historical and structural foundations of state capacity. Charles Tilly (1992, pp. 67-75, 90-95) argues that modern states emerged through processes of coercion, war-making, and resource extraction, which gradually consolidated administrative and military structures. This perspective underscores that state capacity is not a modular attribute but the outcome of long-term organizational development.

Michael Mann (1986, pp. 113-150) further conceptualizes state power as the combination of despotic and infrastructural capacities, highlighting the importance of administrative penetration into society. In this view, the effectiveness of the state depends on its ability to coordinate action across territory through institutionalized networks. These arguments cast doubt on the assumption that state capacity can be externally augmented through short-term intervention, revealing the structural limits of capacity construction in post-regime-change contexts.

**Legitimacy Theory and the Problem of Procedural Sufficiency**

A third body of scholarship focuses on political legitimacy as a foundation of stable governance. Max Weber (1978, pp. 212-216) identifies three ideal types of authority—traditional, charismatic, and legal-rational—each grounded in distinct sources of legitimacy. This typology suggests that legitimacy is not reducible to institutional form but depends on the alignment between authority structures and social expectations.

Seymour Martin Lipset (1959, pp. 69-72, 86-90) further argues that legitimacy is closely linked to performance and the capacity of a political system to deliver stability and economic development. This implies that procedural mechanisms such as elections or constitutional design are insufficient to establish durable legitimacy in the absence of effective governance outcomes. Together, these insights challenge the assumption of procedural sufficiency, which treats institutional formalization as a substitute for legitimacy formation.

**External Intervention and the Limits of Reconstruction**

Research on external intervention and post-conflict reconstruction provides empirical evidence of the difficulties associated with rebuilding state capacity. Francis Fukuyama (2004, pp. 1-17, 23-47) argues that state-building is fundamentally constrained by the complexity of institutional development and the difficulty of transferring administrative practices across contexts. Stephen Krasner (2004, pp. 90-98, 108-112) similarly argues that externally imposed governance structures often fail due to weak domestic institutional foundations.

Empirical studies further substantiate these concerns. Toby Dodge (2012, pp. 102-118, 125-140) demonstrates that post-2003 Iraq experienced persistent institutional weakness despite extensive external support. Ashraf Ghani and Clare Lockhart (2008, pp. 63-82, 137-148) argue that state-building efforts in Afghanistan were undermined by the absence of coherent institutional integration. These findings suggest that regime change strategies often underestimate the structural constraints on institutional reconstruction.

Taken together, these strands of literature reveal a critical gap in existing research. While institutionalist theory highlights the importance of embedded constraints, state formation scholarship emphasizes the historical construction of capacity, and legitimacy theory underscores the social foundations of authority, these insights have rarely been integrated into an analysis of strategic reasoning in regime change.

This gap allows for the persistence of three interrelated strategic fallacies: the belief that institutions can be transplanted without distortion, that state capacity can be externally augmented in the short term, and that procedural mechanisms are sufficient to generate legitimacy. The next section develops an integrated analytical framework to examine how these fallacies operate and how they lead to the disruption of state continuity.

## Analytical Framework and Methodology

This section integrates the theoretical and methodological foundations of the study by specifying the three strategic fallacies underlying regime change policies, identifying the mechanism through which these fallacies affect state capacity, and outlining the research design used for empirical analysis. The central argument is that regime change strategies are not only empirically flawed but theoretically mis-specified, as they rely on incorrect assumptions about how institutions, state capacity, and legitimacy function. These mis-specifications generate systematic outcomes through a common mechanism: the disruption of state continuity.

### Methodology and Research Design

The methodological approach of this study is based on comparative case analysis combined with mechanism-based causal explanation. Rather than estimating causal effects through large-N statistical inference, the analysis seeks to identify recurring causal processes that link strategic reasoning to governance outcomes. This approach is consistent with what Alexander George and Andrew Bennett (2005, pp. 176-206, 207-219) describe as process tracing, which aims to uncover the intervening mechanisms connecting cause and effect.

Case selection follows a most-similar-systems logic in which cases share the common feature of exposure to regime change pressures but differ in outcomes of state capacity continuity. Iraq, Libya, and Afghanistan represent cases of externally influenced regime transformation followed by varying degrees of institutional breakdown, while Iran serves as a contrasting case where regime change has been attempted through sustained external pressure but without systemic collapse. This configuration allows for the identification of both mechanism presence and absence across cases.

The empirical strategy focuses on tracing observable implications of three mechanisms: institutional decoupling, administrative fragmentation, and legitimacy disjunction. By examining whether these mechanisms appear consistently in cases of state capacity decline and are absent or mitigated in cases of continuity, the study aims to provide structured qualitative evidence for the theoretical framework.

### Analytical Framework: Three Strategic Fallacies

The first strategic fallacy is the assumption of institutional transplantability, which posits that formal institutional designs can be transferred across contexts with limited distortion. This assumption underlies many

regime change strategies that prioritize constitutional reform and electoral systems as primary tools of political reconstruction. However, Douglass North (1990, pp. 83-104) demonstrates that institutions are embedded in historically evolved informal constraints that shape enforcement and compliance. When these constraints are absent, formal institutions may fail to function as intended.

The second strategic fallacy concerns the assumption that state capacity can be externally augmented, which presumes that administrative effectiveness can be rapidly enhanced through external intervention. This assumption is contradicted by historical evidence on state formation processes. Charles Tilly (1992, pp. 67-75, 90-95) shows that state capacity emerges through long-term processes of coercion and resource extraction. Michael Mann (1986, pp. 113-150) further argues that infrastructural power depends on deeply embedded administrative networks rather than formal authority alone. These insights suggest that capacity cannot be easily reconstructed once disrupted.

The third strategic fallacy is the assumption of procedural sufficiency of legitimacy, which holds that the introduction of formal political procedures, such as elections, is sufficient to establish legitimate authority. Max Weber (1978, pp. 212-216) conceptualizes legitimacy as rooted in socially recognized authority structures rather than institutional form alone. Seymour Martin Lipset (1959, pp. 69-72, 86-90) further links legitimacy to performance and stability. These arguments indicate that procedural reforms cannot substitute for broader legitimacy formation processes.

Taken together, these three fallacies reveal a systematic overestimation of the ease with which political order can be reconstructed following regime change.

**Mechanism: Disruption of State Continuity**

The three strategic fallacies generate a common causal mechanism: the disruption of state continuity, defined as the breakdown of institutional, administrative, and normative processes that sustain state capacity over time. This mechanism captures the transition from flawed strategic reasoning to observable governance outcomes.

The first component of this mechanism is institutional decoupling, which occurs when formal rules diverge from actual enforcement practices. Douglass North (1990, pp. 83-104) argues that institutions depend on stable enforcement equilibria linking formal and informal constraints. When regime change disrupts these equilibria, institutional effectiveness declines even if formal structures remain intact.

The second component is administrative fragmentation, which reflects the erosion of coordinated bureaucratic authority. Michael Mann (1986, pp. 113-150) emphasizes that infrastructural power depends on the ability of the state to implement decisions across territory. When administrative networks are weakened, governance becomes uneven and fragmented. Charles Tilly (1992, pp. 67-75, 90-95) similarly highlights that the breakdown of coercive and extraction systems leads to declining organizational coherence.

The third component is legitimacy disjunction, which arises when formal authority structures fail to align with socially recognized sources of legitimacy. Max Weber (1978, pp. 212-216) suggests that legitimacy requires congruence between authority and social expectations. Seymour Martin Lipset (1959, pp. 69-72, 86-90) further indicates that legitimacy depends on perceived effectiveness. When this alignment is disrupted, compliance weakens, reinforcing administrative and institutional breakdown.

Together, these components form a self-reinforcing cycle in which disruptions in one dimension exacerbate failures in others, leading to cumulative state capacity decline.

### Analytical Implications and Testable Expectations

The integration of strategic fallacies and the mechanism of state continuity disruption generates a set of testable expectations for empirical analysis. If the argument holds, cases of regime change should exhibit consistent patterns of institutional decoupling, administrative fragmentation, and legitimacy disjunction, regardless of variations in policy design.

The first expectation is that formal institutional reforms will not produce consistent enforcement outcomes in the absence of embedded constraints. The second expectation is that administrative coherence will decline following disruptions to organizational structures. The third expectation is that legitimacy will remain unstable despite the introduction of procedural mechanisms. Conversely, in cases where state continuity is preserved, these patterns should be significantly attenuated. These expectations provide the basis for structured comparison across cases and enable the evaluation of whether the proposed framework offers a more coherent explanation than alternative accounts focused on contingent or case-specific factors.

This section has developed an integrated analytical framework that links strategic reasoning, causal mechanisms, and empirical expectations. By identifying three strategic fallacies and specifying the mechanism of state continuity disruption, the analysis establishes a coherent basis for explaining why regime change often leads to state capacity decline. The next section applies this framework to comparative case analysis in order to assess its explanatory power across different political contexts.

## Mechanism-Based Comparative Analysis of State Continuity Disruption

This section applies the proposed analytical framework to four cases—Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, and Iran—to demonstrate how variation in the disruption of state continuity produces divergent governance outcomes. Rather than treating these cases as independent narratives, the analysis systematically traces how the three mechanisms—institutional decoupling, administrative fragmentation, and legitimacy disjunction—operate across contexts.

### Iraq: Comprehensive Mechanism Breakdown

The case of post-2003 Iraq illustrates a comprehensive breakdown across all three mechanisms, resulting in persistent institutional instability. First, institutional decoupling emerged rapidly following the dismantling of the Ba'athist state apparatus. The formal introduction of democratic institutions, including elections and a new constitution, was not accompanied by the preservation of underlying enforcement structures. Toby Dodge (2012, pp. 102-115, 130-140) demonstrates that de-Ba'athification policies disrupted administrative continuity, severing the link between formal rules and actual governance practices. As a result, newly established institutions lacked the embedded constraints necessary for effective implementation.

Second, administrative fragmentation became evident as state authority was increasingly dispersed among competing actors. The dissolution of the Iraqi army and bureaucracy weakened centralized control, allowing militias and sectarian organizations to assume governance functions. Drawing on insights from Charles Tilly (1992, pp. 67-75, 90-95), this fragmentation reflects the breakdown of coercive and extractive capacities that underpin state organization. Governance consequently became uneven and territorially fragmented.

Third, legitimacy disjunction further undermined political stability. The post-intervention political order failed to establish a widely recognized basis of authority across Iraq's sectarian divides. Fanar Haddad (2011, pp. 52-60, 75-82) shows that sectarian identity became a primary organizing principle of political competition,

weakening national legitimacy. In line with Seymour Martin Lipset's (1959, pp. 69-72, 86-90) argument, the inability of the state to deliver stability reinforced perceptions of illegitimacy.

Taken together, Iraq represents a case in which all three mechanisms were simultaneously activated, producing a durable pattern of state weakness and fragmented authority.

**Libya: Fragmentation Without Institutional Substitution**

The Libyan case demonstrates how the collapse of centralized authority leads to acute administrative fragmentation in the absence of institutional substitution. Institutional decoupling occurred following the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime, as formal transitional arrangements failed to translate into effective governance structures. Without a pre-existing institutional foundation, newly introduced political frameworks lacked enforcement capacity. Wolfram Lacher (2015, pp. 8-15, 21-34) shows that formal institutions remained largely nominal, with limited influence over actual political behavior.

Administrative fragmentation became the dominant feature of the post-2011 political order. Armed groups and local militias assumed control over territory, replacing centralized bureaucratic coordination with decentralized authority structures. Frederic Wehrey (2018, pp. 210-230, 265-275) highlights that Libya evolved into a system of competing governance networks rather than a unified state apparatus.

Legitimacy disjunction further compounded instability. Competing political authorities—each claiming formal legitimacy—failed to secure broad social recognition. Reports by the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (United Nations Security Council, S/2017/726, pp. 5-9, S/2018/780, pp. 6-10) document the persistence of parallel institutions and contested authority, reflecting the absence of a shared legitimacy framework.

Libya thus represents a case where administrative fragmentation dominates, and where the absence of institutional continuity prevents the consolidation of state authority.

**Afghanistan: Partial Reconstruction and Latent Fragility**

Afghanistan illustrates a case of partial institutional reconstruction in which underlying mechanisms of disruption remained unresolved, leading to eventual state collapse.

Institutional decoupling was evident in the gap between formal constitutional arrangements and actual governance practices. Despite the establishment of democratic institutions, enforcement remained dependent on external support. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction reports (2021, pp. 20-24 (Executive Summary), 140-144 (Institutional Capacity)) repeatedly highlight the disconnect between formal institutional design and operational capacity.

Administrative fragmentation persisted due to the coexistence of central authority and local power structures. Warlords, regional elites, and informal networks continued to exercise influence over governance processes. Barnett Rubin (2002, pp. 30-42, 215-225) emphasizes that Afghanistan's fragmented political structure limited the reach of centralized administration.

Legitimacy disjunction became increasingly pronounced over time. Although elections were regularly held, they failed to generate sustained public trust. Ashraf Ghani and Clare Lockhart (2008, pp. 63-82, 137-148) argue that the absence of effective institutional integration undermined the credibility of the state.

Afghanistan thus represents a case of incomplete mechanism activation, where partial reconstruction masked underlying fragility, ultimately culminating in rapid institutional collapse.

**Iran: Continuity and Mechanism Containment**

By contrast, Iran demonstrates how the preservation of state continuity can contain the disruptive effects of

external pressure. Institutional decoupling has been limited due to the persistence of historically embedded governance structures. Despite significant political transformation following the 1979 revolution, core institutional linkages between formal authority and enforcement mechanisms were maintained. Vali Nasr (2013, pp. 125-140, 215-222) highlights the resilience of Iran's political system under conditions of external pressure.

Administrative fragmentation has also been contained through the maintenance of centralized authority structures. The state retains the capacity to coordinate policy implementation across its territory, reflecting sustained infrastructural power. Kevan Harris (2017, pp. 80-105, 155-175) demonstrates that institutionalized welfare and administrative systems contribute to this continuity.

Legitimacy disjunction, while present, has not reached destabilizing levels. The political system continues to draw on multiple sources of legitimacy, including ideological, institutional, and performance-based elements. Comparative indicators from the World Bank (2005-2020) suggest relative stability in governance capacity compared to intervention cases.

Iran therefore represents a contrasting case in which the mechanisms of disruption are mitigated by institutional continuity, allowing for the preservation of state capacity.

A comparative perspective reveals that the variation in governance outcomes across the four cases is best explained by the degree to which the three mechanisms are activated. Where institutional decoupling, administrative fragmentation, and legitimacy disjunction occur simultaneously—as in Iraq—the result is persistent instability. Where one mechanism dominates, as in Libya, governance becomes fragmented but not fully collapsed. In cases of partial disruption, such as Afghanistan, institutional fragility remains latent until external support is withdrawn. By contrast, where these mechanisms are contained, as in Iran, state capacity remains relatively resilient. This comparison reinforces my central argument: Regime change fails not simply because of flawed design, but because it disrupts the mechanisms through which state continuity is reproduced.

## Conclusion

This study began with a puzzle that has become increasingly salient in contemporary international politics: Why do regime change strategies, despite their repeated application, so often fail to produce stable political order? From the trajectory of post-2003 Iraq to the fragmentation of Libya and the rapid collapse of the Afghan state, and in contrast to the continued resilience of Iran under sustained external pressure, the empirical record suggests a systematic pattern rather than a series of contingent failures.

The central argument advanced in this article is that these outcomes are best explained not by deficiencies in implementation alone, but by systematic errors in strategic reasoning. Specifically, regime change strategies are often grounded in three interrelated fallacies: the assumption that institutions can be transplanted across contexts without distortion, that state capacity can be externally augmented in the short term, and that procedural mechanisms are sufficient to generate political legitimacy. These assumptions lead to policies that underestimate the structural consequences of disrupting existing state systems.

The first theoretical implication is a shift from institutional design to institutional reproduction as the primary unit of analysis. While existing scholarship, particularly that of Douglass North (1990, pp. 83-104), emphasizes the importance of institutional constraints, this study demonstrates that the central problem in regime change contexts lies in the disruption of the processes that reproduce those constraints over time. This reframing moves the analysis beyond static institutional comparison toward a dynamic understanding of state capacity.

The second implication is the integration of state formation theory with contemporary regime change analysis. Charles Tilly (1992, pp. 67-75, 90-95) conceptualizes state capacity as the outcome of long-term processes of coercion and extraction, while Michael Mann (1986, pp. 113-120, 129-134) emphasizes the organizational and infrastructural dimensions of state power. By linking these insights to contemporary cases, the article bridges a gap between historical sociology and international political analysis.

The third implication concerns the reconceptualization of legitimacy in post-intervention contexts. Max Weber (1978, pp. 212-216) defines legitimacy as a form of authority grounded in social recognition, whereas Seymour Martin Lipset (1960, pp. 77-83) highlights the role of performance and effectiveness in sustaining legitimacy. The analysis demonstrates that legitimacy is not an institutional input but an emergent property shaped by performance and continuity, challenging the widespread assumption that procedural reforms alone can stabilize political systems.

Empirically, the comparative analysis of Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, and Iran provides consistent support for the proposed framework. In the first three cases, the disruption of state continuity generated institutional decoupling, administrative fragmentation, and legitimacy disjunction, which in turn reinforced one another in a cumulative process of state capacity decline. By contrast, the Iranian case illustrates that in the absence of systemic disruption, these mechanisms do not fully materialize. Despite external pressure, the preservation of core institutional and administrative structures has allowed for the maintenance of governance capacity. This contrast strengthens the causal argument by demonstrating that the key variable is not external pressure per se, but the extent to which state continuity is disrupted.

The findings of this study have important implications for policy debates on regime change and state-building. Most importantly, they suggest that strategies premised on rapid institutional reconstruction are likely to encounter structural limitations that cannot be overcome through technical adjustments alone. This does not imply that political transformation is impossible, but rather that it must be understood as a long-term process rooted in institutional continuity and gradual adaptation. External actors, in particular, face significant constraints in shaping these processes, as the mechanisms sustaining state capacity are deeply embedded in local historical and social structures. Recognizing these constraints is essential for avoiding the repetition of strategic errors observed in past interventions.

This study acknowledges several limitations that point to directions for future research. First, while the selected cases provide meaningful variation, expanding the empirical scope to include additional regions and historical periods would enhance the generalizability of the findings. Second, further work is needed to develop more precise indicators for measuring institutional decoupling and legitimacy disjunction, particularly in quantitative terms. Third, the role of international actors could be examined in greater detail, especially with regard to how external interventions interact with domestic institutional structures. Such research would help refine the framework and extend its applicability to a broader range of policy contexts.

In conclusion, this study argues that the failure of regime change strategies is not accidental but structurally conditioned by flawed assumptions about how political order is constructed and sustained. By identifying the strategic fallacies underlying these assumptions and linking them to the mechanism of state continuity disruption, the analysis provides a more coherent explanation of why regime change so often produces instability rather than order. More broadly, the findings suggest that the study of regime change must move beyond questions of institutional design toward a deeper engagement with the processes that sustain state capacity over time. Only by addressing these underlying dynamics can both scholars and policymakers develop more realistic understandings of political transformation in complex societies.

## References


Acemoglu, D., & Robinson, J. A. (2012). *Why nations fail: The origins of power, prosperity and poverty.* New York: Crown Publishers.

Ayoob, M. (1995). *The third world security predicament: State making, regional conflict, and the international system*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.

Buzan, B. (1991). *People, states and fear: An agenda for international security studies in the post-cold war era*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.

Call, C. (2008). *Building states to build peace*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.

Diamond, L. (2005). *Squandered victory: The American occupation and the bungled effort to bring democracy to Iraq*. New York: Times Books.

Dobbins, J. (2007). *The beginner's guide to nation-building*. Santa Monica: RAND Corporation.

Dodge, T. (2012). *Iraq: From war to a new authoritarianism.* London: Routledge.

Fearon, J., & Laitin, D. (2004). Neotrusteeship and the problem of weak states. *International Security, 28*(4), 5-43.

Fukuyama, F. (2004). *State-building: Governance and world order in the 21st century*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

George, A., & Bennett, A. (2005). *Case studies and theory development in the social sciences.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Ghani, A., & Lockhart, C. (2008). *Fixing failed states: A framework for rebuilding a fractured world.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Haddad, F. (2011). *Sectarianism in Iraq: Antagonistic visions of unity.* London: Hurst.

Harris, K. (2017). *A social revolution: Politics and the welfare state in Iran.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Huntington, S. (1968). *Political order in changing societies*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Krasner, S. (2004). Sharing sovereignty: New institutions for collapsed and failing states. *International Security, 29*(2), 85-120.

Lacher, W. (2015). *Libya: Fragmentation and conflict*. SWP.

Lipset, S. M. (1959). Some social requisites of democracy: Economic development and political legitimacy. *American Political Science Review, 53*(1), 69-105.

Lipset, S. M. (1960). *Political man: The social basis of politics*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Mann, M. (1986). *The sources of social power: A history of power from the beginning to AD 1760, Vol. 1*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nasr, V. (2006). *The Shia revival: How conflicts within Islam will shape the future*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Nasr, V. (2013). *The Shia revival.* New York: Norton.

North, D. (1990). *Institutions, institutional change and economic performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

North, D., Wallis, J., & Weingast, B. (2009). *Violence and social orders: A conceptual framework for interpreting recorded human history*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Paris, R. (2004). *At war's end: Building peace after civil conflict*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Risse, T. (2011). *Governance without a state? Policies and politics in areas of limited statehood.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Rotberg, R. (2003). The failure and collapse of nation-states. *World Peace Foundation Reports*. Somerville: World Peace Foundation.

Rubin, B. R. (2002). *The fragmentation of Afghanistan.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Rubin, B. (2013). *Afghanistan from the cold war through the war on terror*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rubin, B., & Rashid, A. (2008). *Post-soviet Afghanistan and regional security*. (various policy reports and edited volumes)

Snyder, J. (2000). *From voting to violence: Democratization and nationalist conflict*. New York: W. W. Norton.

Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. (2021). *What we need to learn: Lessons from twenty years of Afghanistan reconstruction.* Washington, DC.

Stepan, A. (2002). Comparative perspectives on state breakdown. *Journal of Democracy, 13*(2), 29-44.

Tilly, C. (1992). *Coercion, capital, and European states, AD 990-1992*. Oxford: Blackwell.

United Nations Security Council. (2017/2018). *Report of the secretary-general on Libya*.

Weber, M. (1978). *Economy and society: An outline of interpretive sociology*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Wehrey, F. (2018). *The burning shores: Inside the battle for the new Libya.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

World Bank. (2005-2020). *Worldwide governance indicators*. Government Effectiveness & Political Stability (Iran, Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan).