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Beyond Capacity: A Resilience Framework for Understanding State Failure

[Od zdolności do odporności: rekonceptualizacja upadku państwa]

Abstract
Traditional approaches to state failure focus primarily on state capacity–the ability of governments to perform key functions and deliver public goods. This article advances a fundamental reconceptualization, arguing that state failure should be understood through resilience theory and complexity science rather than solely in terms of capacity deficits. Drawing on network science, systems theory, and ecological resilience research, this framework conceptualizes states as complex adaptive systems whose survival depends on dynamic responses to perturbations and shocks. The analysis introduces equilibrium transitions, tipping points, and transformative adaptation to explain state trajectories from stability through instability to potential collapse. By analyzing states through stability dynamics borrowed from physical and natural sciences, this approach reveals striking parallels between sociopolitical decomposition and system failures in other complex domains. The framework integrates State Failure Task Force findings on regime types, material well-being, and structural risk factors with insights from complexity theory on adaptation and metastability. This demonstrates that state failure represents a distinct phenomenon related to systemic resilience rather than merely institutional capacity deficits. The reconceptualization offers new pathways for early warning indicators, prevention strategies, and policy interventions accounting for non-linear system dynamics rather than prescribing universal institutional templates.

Keywords: state failure, resilience theory, complexity theory, political instability, equilibrium framework, systems theory, state capacity, transformative adaptation.

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Introduction to the Conceptual Framework

Our understanding of the state and its role in international politics has remained essentially unchanged since the 19th century. Globalization, internationalization, and the multicentricity of international law[1] have yet to change how we perceive the state through the global changes that have occurred. Unlike the convergence theory predicted, the civilizational, economic, and social gap between different states is not narrowing but widening, and the general state of world affairs is increasingly unstable. We still tend to recognize the state as a fully autonomous and sovereign entity within an anarchic, volatile, unpredictable international system. Therefore, we lack adequate resources to 'restabilize' states on the verge of state collapse.

A general shift of our perception is needed, as all states in the post-Westphalian international system must be perceived as unobvious, blurred, ubiquitous, and obscured entities,[2] slipping away from the *cuius regio, eius religio* principle. Today, they should merely portray various codependent institutions, escaping any formal or substantive definition. Much like snowflakes, today's states are both similar and different from one another.

Although we would like to characterize them through some ordinary, uniform, and Western standard, i.e., based on definitions of a modern (nation) state or good governance, it is simply impossible,[3] unless, following Max Weber, we consider them merely entities with some familiar empirical characteristics, purely as beings that exist to function purposefully.[4]

We need a new 'ideology-free' conceptual framework (consisting of new, purely abstract concepts) grounded in multiple fields of study, that is more than a mere 'metaphor' for the world we try to analyze and describe. For this, a state (in its idealistic form) must be recognized as a political-legal abstraction representing the governing elite (within an accepted political system) that can effectively regulate society and the population within a given territory. The governing elite, through its government (and its bureaucracy), constitutes a state's main external and internal characteristics.

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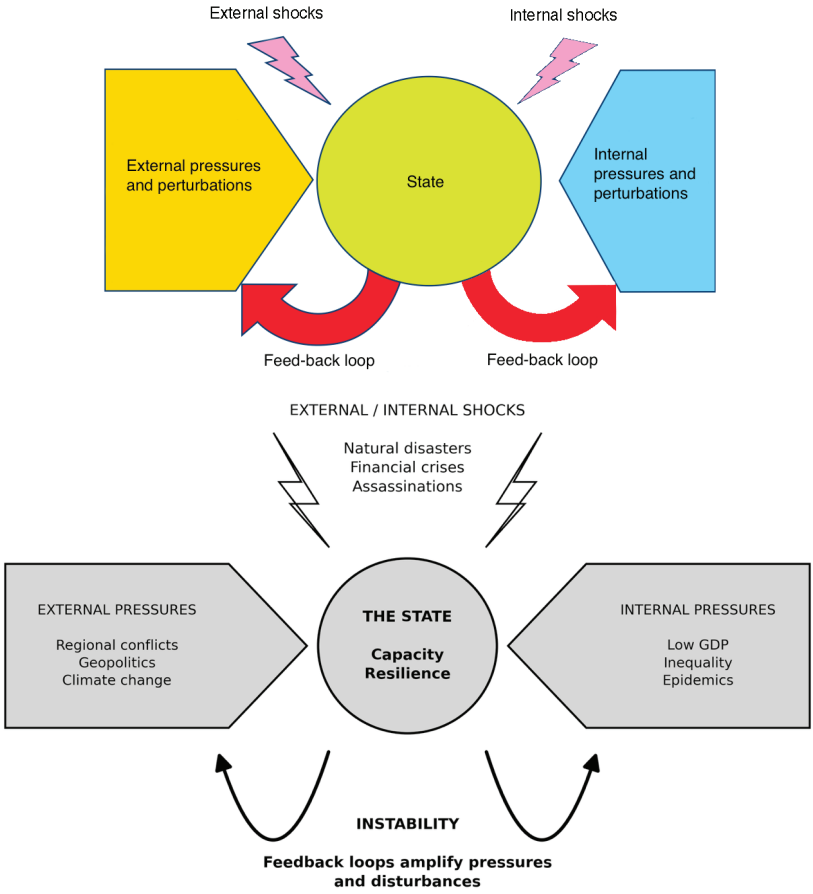
1 J. Raciborski, *Klasyczne teorie państwa a doświadczenia czasów najnowszych* [in:] O mocy i niemocy współczesnego państwa polskiego, J. Raciborski, P. Sadura (eds.) Warszawa 2024, p. 43.
2 J. Raciborski, P. Sadura, *Wstęp* [in:] O mocy..., p. 7.
3 Possible dimensions: rule of law, effectiveness, political accountability, corruption, social inclusion, etc.
4 J. Raciborski, *Klasyczne*..., p. 28.

The State as System: Interrelationships and Responses to Stimuli

The state, in its very essence, can be understood only through the interrelationships among the system's various components (elemental parts) in response to internal or external stimuli, i.e., external/internal pressures and perturbations and external/internal shocks.

Graph 1. Framework for Understanding Instability



The state *symbolizes a country's capacity and resilience, i.e., the extent to which a country can successfully manage risk factors, potential external/internal pressures and perturbations, and external/internal shocks, as well as leverage external and internal stabilizers. Country capacity depends on both state and non-state institutions and should be assessed at an aggregate level and in relation to the capacity to manage specific risk factors.*

- ***External and internal pressures and perturbations*** *reflect the internal processes and factors within the country or result from the actions or inactions of other countries or the international community. They are typically structural and must be addressed through long-term measures and investment.*
- ***External/internal shocks*** *are more proximate and unpredictable risk factors that can trigger instability at any moment by imposing enormous pressures on a country's capacity and resilience. They necessitate contingency planning.*
- ***The feedback loop of instability*** *into external and internal pressures and disturbances can, once a crisis or conflict arises, create a vicious cycle of instability by further undermining the state's capacity and resilience.*

Source: Further developed from UK Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, Investing in Prevention: An International Strategy to Manage Risks of Instability and Improve Crisis Response, Cabinet Office, London 2005, England [stable link: https://gsdrc.org/document-library/investing-in-prevention-an-international-strategy-to-manage-risks-of-instability-and-improve-crisis-response/], p. 6.

Where,

- External pressures and perturbations include (but are not limited to) destabilizing regional environments, geopolitical competition, organized crime and terrorist networks, conflict financing systems, climate change, etc.
- Internal pressures and perturbations include (but are not limited to): low GDP per capita, economic decline, history of conflict, natural resource dependency, horizontal inequality, unfavorable demographic patterns, AIDS/HIV/COVID-19/Ebola and other epidemics, etc.
- External/internal shocks include (but are not limited to) natural disasters (global/regional), internal/external financial crises, hyperinflation, commodity price shocks, political assassinations, etc.

The State as Conglomerate: Government, Society, and Feedback Loops

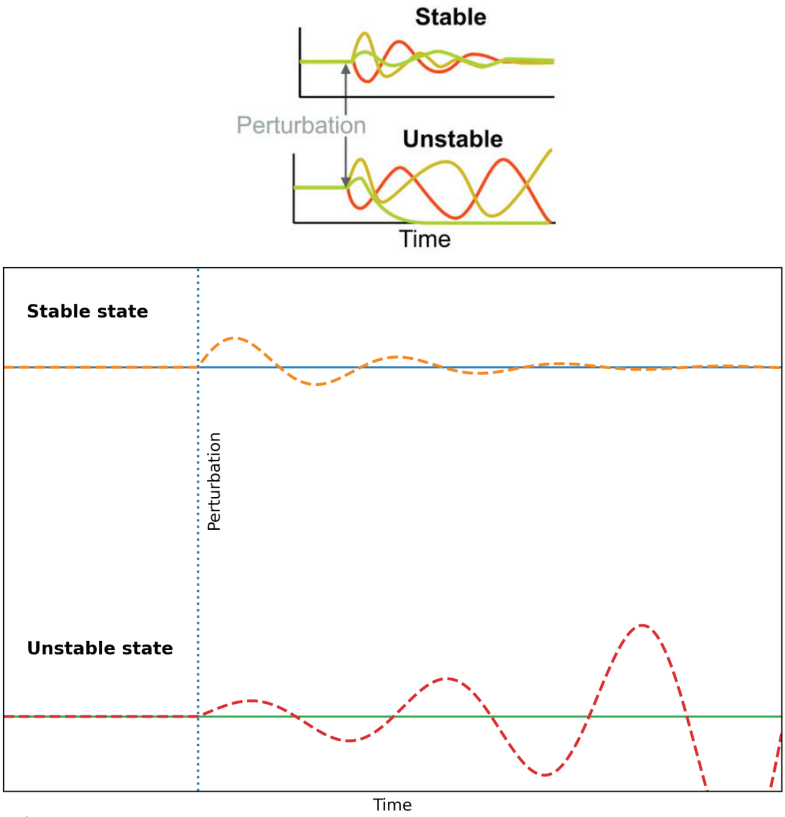
A state, therefore, is a conglomerate of society (the governed) and the governing elite within an internationally recognized territory, where the governed are subservient to the ruling elite whose will can be enforced upon them with force. This is the central empirical aspect of every state. However, a state is not reducible to its individual components. It can function only as a set of its elements (as recognized by Dahl, who identified a state as a combination of inhabitants of a given territory and a functioning government[5]). Through this prism, the government shapes social action and expectations among different social groups within a given territory and political system, and communicates

[5] R. A. Dahl, Modern Political Analysis (5th ed.), Englewood Cliffs (NY) 1991, p. 31.

with them through feedback loops. Thus, the state functions within the political system it creates and maintains, as well as its external environment.

Effective governments have order-producing[6] capabilities to mitigate the natural and ever-present societal tendency for disorder. By implementing legitimate and awaited laws and regulations, a state of stability can be reached within a state. The longitudinal stability of each state is reflected in its ability to constantly adjust to internal and external perturbations by readjusting and rebalancing the normative sphere or state's actions (reinforced by the use of legitimate force) to create an accepted by the society state of balance. If the state's response is mismatched or absent, instability can arise and, in extreme cases, lead to state collapse.

Graph 2. Linear Stability/Instability after perturbation



Communities/States that return to their previous functionality after a perturbation are classified as stable, and those that return to their equilibrium faster are categorized as more stable. Those that continue to diverge from the equilibrium are considered unstable.

Source: X. Liu, L. Daqing (et al.), Network Resilience, Physics Reports 971 (7034), p. 85.

[6] Or order-suppressing.

Government Capacity and Regime Types

Governments possess varying capacities, enabling them to generate different degrees of order within sociopolitical systems. In the absence of effective governing institutions, states risk descending into disorder. Governments thus function to produce organizational stability by generating countervailing forces that mitigate internal and external destabilizing pressures. Levitsky and Way[7] observe that long-consolidated democracies and strong totalitarian regimes tend to exhibit the highest levels of long-term stability. Yet much of the world is governed by unconsolidated democracies or weak authoritarian regimes (such as military juntas or personalistic strongman systems), which are more accurately characterized as semi-stable or unstable. Moreover, even highly consolidated regimes may transition into semi-stable or unstable configurations when confronted with severe crises—such as economic collapse, war, prolonged trade isolation, or uncontrolled migration—often more rapidly than fragile regimes can achieve restabilization.

Johnson[8] and Eckstein[9] argued that state stability depends on sociopolitical congruence, with incongruence identifying a state in disequilibrium. An incongruent state is a necessary precondition for spiraling into chaos (marking state failure and state collapse), which requires merely a spark to ignite. In such cases, governmental capacity and effectiveness need to focus on aligning the objectives of authority figures with those of the rest of society. Stability ensues if the elite's authority is recognized as rational, legal, and based on consent (i.e., legitimacy). In such cases, a state becomes a framework for constructively manifesting grievances and negotiating policies between elites and the masses (*ergo*, self-regulating and limiting the necessity for brute force). However, at times, the governing elites (which consist of fluid social groups) are partisan, biased, and/or inept; therefore, by inefficaciously regulating grievances, they breed conflict, and chaos ensues.

[7] S. Levitsky, L. Way, Revolution and Dictatorship: The Violent Origins of Durable Authoritarianism, Princeton (NY) 2021.
[8] C. Johnson, Revolutionary Change, Boston (MA) 1966.
[9] H. Eckstein, Division and Cohesion in Democracy: A Study of Norway, Princeton (NY) 1966.

Building a Conceptual Framework

The Power of Analogical Reasoning

Analogies and parallels are commonly recognized as aids to discovery. They generate valuable insights and formulate possible solutions to problems. Many investigations are motivated by analogical reasoning, which already has yielded great new insight:

- Simon[10] pioneered the study of complexity in biological and social organization.
- Padgett and Powell[11] published seminal work on the emergence of organizations and markets based on analogies with chemical processes of biological change.
- Daems[12] has applied complexity theory in an effort to understand the emergence and evolution of civilizations.

These examples illustrate that analogical transfers across disciplines have historically generated major theoretical breakthroughs. By extension, applying concepts of stability and transformation from the natural sciences to the study of state failure is not a metaphorical exercise but a structurally grounded analytical strategy.

This research therefore analyzes parallels between the social and natural worlds through the prism of stability, focusing on mechanisms that drive systems from stability to instability and, in extreme cases, to disintegration. It demonstrates that characterizations of equilibrium, transformation, and regime shifts in the physical sciences exhibit structural similarities to the sociopolitical dynamics of state failure.

Theoretical Foundations: Political Science Meets Physical Science

This research is influenced by:

- A recent article by George W. Breslauer and Kenneth J. Breslauer, titled "Political Science Meets Physical Science: The Shared Concept of Stability," highlights structural and functional parallels between the biophysi-

[10] H. A. Simon, *The Architecture of Complexity*, „Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society" 1962, vol. 106, 6, pp. 467–482.

[11] J. F. Padgett, W. W. Powell, *The Emergence of Organizations and Markets*, Princeton (NY) 2012.

[12] D. Daems, Reimagining the Rise and Fall of Civilizations, https://longnow.org/ideas/reimagining-the-rise-and-fall-of-civilizations/ [retrieved: 22.01.2024].

cal world and self-organizing sociopolitical systems such as sovereign states.[13] The authors argue that "the structure, function, and organizational similarities of such parallelism are particularly noteworthy, given that human agency introduces greater contingency in the sociopolitical world than do the 'laws of Nature' in the natural-scientific world."[14] This parallelism legitimizes the analytical transfer of stability concepts from physical systems to sociopolitical entities and provides the epistemological foundation for reconceptualizing state failure in systemic rather than purely institutional terms.

- By Xueming Liu *et al.* study "Network Resilience."[15] In this study, the authors focus on the real-world complex networked multidimensional systems (in domains such as ecology, biology, society, and infrastructure) and their resilience functions and early warning indicators.

From Capacity to Resilience: Reconceptualizing State Failure

From a political perspective, there are many acknowledged and conceptual examples of stabilizing features one expects to find within a stable state: unity of elites, meritocratic recruitment, shared norms, robust civil society, authentic political participation of the population, independent legislature, homogeneity or well-integrated heterogeneity, low corruption, and high transparency, to name a few. However, no such consensus can be reached regarding state failure.

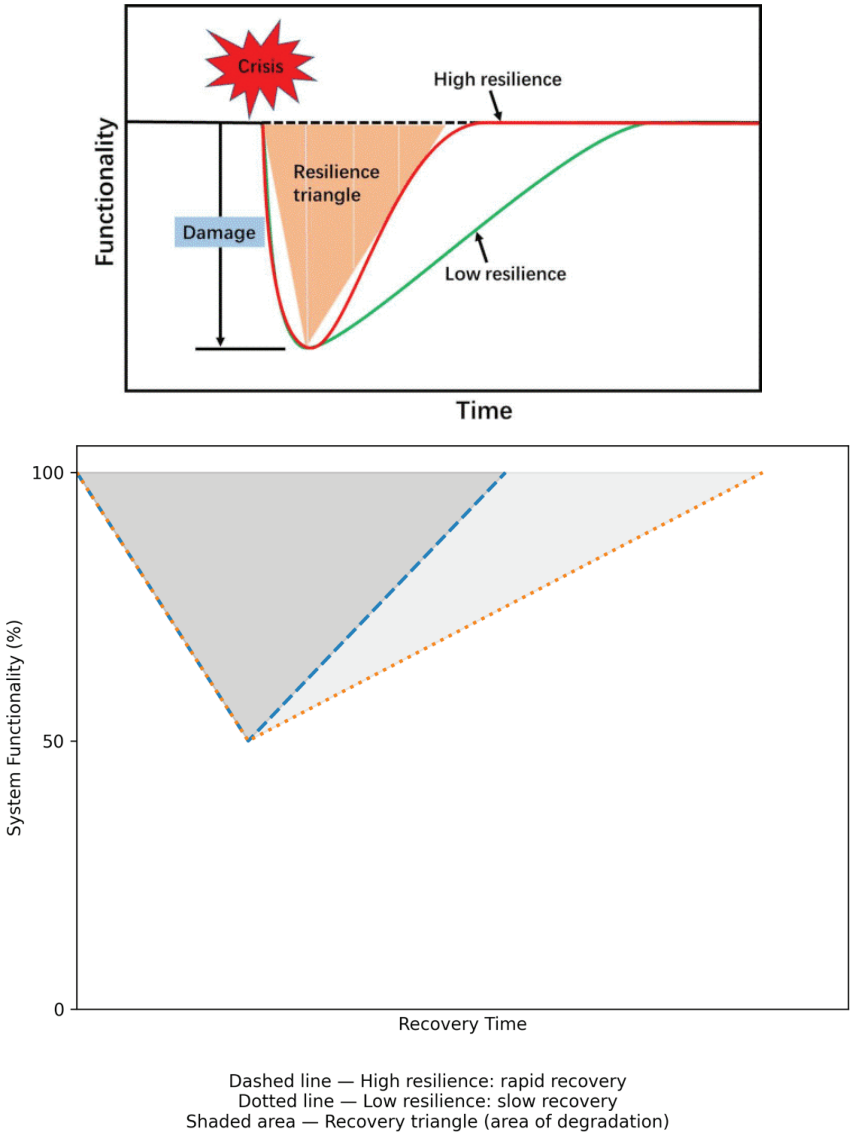
State failure was at first perceived as directly related to the state's lack of resilience. The more resilient the state, the more stable it was thought to be, defining resilience as the ability to bounce back after a perturbation. This also assumed that a failed state was in equilibrium in its pre-perturbation state, with resilience characterizing the degree to which a system can endure perturbations without collapsing.

[13] G. W. Breslauer, K. J., Breslauer, *Political Science Meets Physical Science: The Shared Concept of Stability*, „PNAS Nexus" 2023, vol. 2, DOI: 10.1093/pnasnexus/pgad401, p. 1.

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] X. Liu, L. Daqing (*et al.*), *Network Resilience*, Physics Reports 971(7034) pp. 1–108, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/360717846_Network_resilience [retrieved: 02.02.2024].

Graph 3. Schematic diagram of a resilience triangle



The system's performance decreases after a crisis, but it gradually recovers to its pre-crisis level in the long run. The recovery will be rapid for a system with high resilience, but slow for a system with low resilience. A resilience 'triangle' is the area of degradation in the quality of recovery.

Source: X Liu, L. Daqing, M. Ma, B. Szymanski, J. Gao, (2020). Network resilience, DOI: 10.48550/arXiv.2007.14464, p. 12.

Multiple Equilibria and Tipping Points

Contemporary insights from the natural sciences suggest that some (if not all) states can be associated with more than one steady state. Large-scale perturbations and shocks might cause a system to adapt and persist, or to transform while maintaining its basic functionality. If the perturbation is small, the system may adapt and return to its pre-perturbation state. If, on the other hand, the perturbation proves more significant in magnitude, the state could cross a tipping point, change its structure, identity, and some of its functions, and shift to another regime (an alternative stable state or a new equilibrium) while maintaining its minimal core functionality. This new equilibrium is reached when old social structures render the old system untenable within 'new realities.'

Shifts from one stable state to another may result from either a 'threshold' (set of small and incremental changes that accumulate over time) or a 'sledgehammer' (significant and dramatic perturbation) effect. When a system is close to a tipping point, even small, incremental changes can trigger a tremendous, disproportionate qualitative change within the system without any early warning signals, making it difficult to both foresee and reverse.

Applied to state trajectories, this implies that collapse should not be interpreted as a linear erosion of institutional capacity but as a nonlinear transition between alternative equilibria. State failure thus appears as a regime shift within a complex adaptive system rather than the gradual exhaustion of administrative resources.

Early Warning Indicators: State Failure Task Force Findings

Predicting tipping points (where a critical transformation occurs) can be extremely difficult. Fortunately, when discussing state failure, specific yet generic symptoms emerge that mark a broad class of states as they approach a critical point of state collapse, a phenomenon the state failure Task Force[16] has identified based on its research on 114 distinct events of state failure that have occurred between 1955 and 1998. By better tracking these symptoms, we can better assist states with these characteristics in counteracting state failure.

Conditions associated with several types of state failure:

- Bad quality of life (meager material well-being of a country's citizens).
- Unfavorable regime type (unfavorable institutional configurations).

[16] J. Goldstone, T. Gurr (*et al.*), State Failure Task Force Report: Phase III Findings, January 1999, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/247639865_State_Failure_Task_Force_Report_Phase_III_Findings [retrieved: 14.03.2023].

- Limited international integration (low openness to trade, no membership in regional organizations, and violent conflict in neighboring countries).
- Problematic ethnic or religious composition of a country's population or leadership.

Factors directly associated with the risk of state failure in all countries (INFLUENCE):

1. Regime type (all other things being equal, the State Failure Task Force "found the odds of failure to be seven times as high for partial democracies[17] as they were for full democracies and autocracies,"[18] with autocracies being slightly more stable than full democracies[19]).
2. Low levels of material well-being (measured by infant mortality rates).
3. Low trade openness (measured by imports plus exports as a percent of GDP).
4. The presence of major civil conflicts in two or more bordering states.
5. Total population and population density, i.e., states with larger populations and higher population density, are more prone to episodes of serious political instability (moderate relationship to state failure).

Factors indirectly affecting episodes of state failure:

1. Unfavorable environmental factors (droughts, heavy rainfall, forest fires).
2. High ethnic and/or religious discrimination.
3. Spikes in price inflation.
4. Big government debt.
5. High military spending.

Complexity Theory and States as Adaptive Systems

Multi-Causality and Interdisciplinary Integration

State failure is a multi-causal phenomenon, and there are critical differences between individual states that have experienced state collapse (with relatively little overlap between identified causes). Scholars have provided some causal insights that can serve as steppingstones toward a more extensive comparison; however, to fully grasp the process of state failure, it must be understood through the lens of interdisciplinary research and complex theory. Parallelism and analogy to other fields of study are also encouraged, given the

[17] Especially the ones with a powerful chief executive and a fractious and/or ineffective legislature.
[18] J. Goldstone, T. Gurr (*et al.*), State..., p. VI.
[19] J. Goldstone, T. Gurr (*et al.*), State..., p. 14.

overarching concept of decomposition, which is complex and elaborate and spans many scientific fields.

Complexity theory, "through the exploration of general patterns, dynamics, and interactions,"[20] aspires to deepen our comprehension of common properties and behaviors of complex systems such as states. It presupposes that a state (in any of its many forms) is a product of social evolution (through the process of fitness adaptation) to change (i.e., internal or external circumstances). The inherent complexity of every state increases over time as internal and external expectations rise, placing greater pressure and burdens on the state, which must adapt and evolve to fulfill social and political expectations for the universal delivery of political goods. Through the lens of complexity theory, we can gain a deeper understanding of how states truly function, grow, evolve, and, especially, fail and collapse. Complexity theorists have sought to identify the state's organizing internal logic to understand the onset of instability and decomposition in social organizations.

States as Self-Regulating Systems

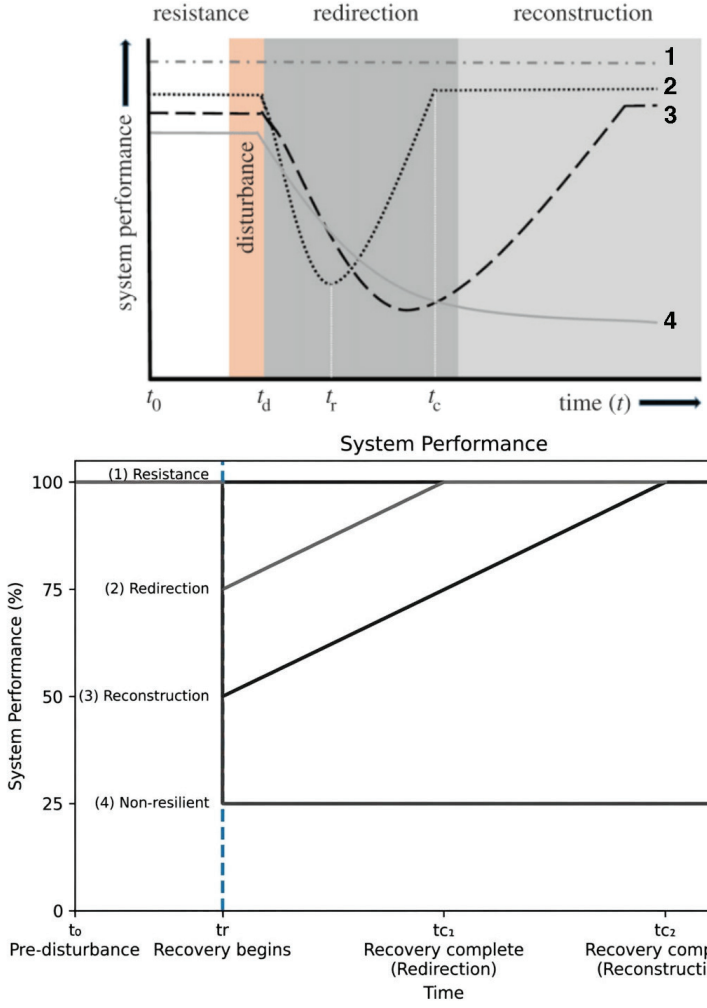
All states can be perceived as self-regulating,[21] dynamic, adaptive, and complex social systems formed to support, maintain, and perpetuate the conditions necessary for their survival (with the ability to renew themselves endlessly through adaptation and transformability). Due to their extensive exposure to internal and external disturbances and perturbations (of varying intensity), states remain in constant flux. Instability, from this perspective, is seen as an imbalance between the necessary functions the state must perform on behalf of its citizens and external actors, and its existing structures for performing them. When states fulfill their duties, they possess at least three stabilizing characteristics: internal social cohesion, consensus, and order (attesting to the state of equilibrium, i.e., stability).

Whenever a state is exposed to an internal/external disturbance or perturbation, it reacts in one of the following ways:

1. The social system maintains its original state without any adverse effects.
2. The social system may lose some of its functions but recover to the previous state after some time.
3. The social system may lose most of its functions and not recover to its original state.
4. The social system may collapse.

[20] D. Daems, Reimagining..., *ibid.*
[21] Via self-editing and self-shaping.

Graph 4. Potential responses of a system to a disturbance



System performance is a case-specific measure of a system's functionality. Time t_0 *is the start of the examination, pre-disturbance; td indicates the start of the disturbance, and tr indicates the beginning of the recovery phase for a system, while tc indicates the point at which recovery is complete since system performance has returned to pre-disturbance levels. (1) Shows a system that has invested in resistance and, as a result, does not experience a decrease in functionality after the disturbance. (2) Shows a system that is using redirection. Although there is an initial decrease in performance, it is rapidly mitigated by rerouting flows using existing infrastructure. (3) Shows a system that uses primarily reconstruction-based resilience strategies. Since reconstruction requires the construction of new infrastructure, it takes longer to recover pre-disturbance performance. (4) Shows a non-resilient system, which does not recover pre-disturbance performance.*

Source: Liu, Xuemiung and Daqing Li (***et al.***), Network Resilience, p. 62.

Parsons's Essential Function for System Survival

The equilibrium perspective gains additional analytical depth when complemented by classical sociological systems theory. Talcott Parsons's general theory states that for a social system to survive disturbance or systemic stress, it must perform at least one of its four essential functions—mechanisms that, in resilience terms, may operate through resistance, redirection, or reconstruction. These functions are: **Adaptation**, whereby the system adjusts to changes in its internal and external environment; **Goal attainment**, through which it defines and achieves its primary objectives; **Integration**, which coordinates and regulates relationships among its components to maintain cohesion; and **Latency**, which sustains and renews the cultural and motivational patterns necessary for role performance. From a resilience perspective, these functions can be interpreted as structural mechanisms that enable sociopolitical systems to preserve or reconstitute equilibrium under conditions of stress.

The Equilibrium Framework: Stability as Dynamic Balance

Additionally, each state (as a complex sociopolitical system) can be characterized and viewed within the equilibrium framework in terms of degrees of instability. By framing state failure as an issue of instability (i.e., as a decomposition, an ultimate manifestation of instability), a different analytical perspective emerges. State failure is not merely a lack of sufficient capacity of state institutions but a new and separate phenomenon vis-à-vis the state's survivability.

As stability is not equivalent to "stasis," the equilibrium framework conceptualizes the state as a non-static entity constantly reacting to ever-present change. As one scholar notes, "social structures do not spring forth fully-fledged from one day to the next but are the result of incremental expansion, addition, and recombination of the outcomes of day-to-day decision-making processes."[22] This observation reinforces the argument that stability is not a static condition but an emergent property of continuous structural adaptation. Over time, such adaptive processes generate denser institutional arrangements capable of addressing increasingly complex challenges. However, two structural risks emerge:

1. When institutions grow rigid, they reduce their capacity to respond adequately to events.
2. Institutions tend to specialize in addressing naturally occurring challenges, increasing the risk of incorrectly addressing unknown or unforeseen risks.

[22] D. Daems, Reimagining..., *ibid.*

Therefore, a state should be regarded as an entity with homeostatic capabilities, i.e., the tendency of a self-regulating system to establish a relatively stable equilibrium between its interdependent elements. The state, as a social system, maintains stability through internal processes while adjusting to internal and external conditions to guarantee its survival.

Equilibrium, in this framework, denotes a dynamic state of balance rather than mere resistance to change. Whenever internal or external disturbance or shock affects a social system, the system needs to make incremental changes (compensatory adjustments within a specific range) without substantially altering its internal organization and overall stability (its resilience) conducive to survival. Therefore, resilience is the sociopolitical system's ability to return to a stable state after perturbation or shock.

Metastability: The Intermediate State Between Stability and Instability

Contemplating state failure through an equilibrium framework is also justified, as it also relates to metastability, i.e., a relatively long-lived intermediate state between stability and instability that can be easily destabilized or restabilized by internal or external perturbations (as foregrounded by G. W. Breslauer and K. J. Breslauer[23]). Metastability is a persistent non-equilibrium state of "apparent stability" if the system remains insulated or isolated from severe internal or external perturbations (outside forces).[24] However, once the system tries to adapt to the external environment, instability often ensues (with possible state collapse induced by changes within the social system itself).

When any social system is severely disturbed, it usually reacts with a transformation (rather than mere adaptation), i.e., by reshaping the status quo. Transformation recaptures the original framework's (previous status quo) lost stability by dramatically changing key elements/functions of the social system. Transformations, therefore, increase the system's susceptibility[25] (understood as a shift from one equilibrium to another), providing the system with an extra degree of freedom beyond decomposition.

[23] G. W. Breslauer, K. J. Breslauer, *Political Science Meets Physical Science: The Shared Concept of Stability*, „PNAS Nexus" 2023, vol. 2, p. 3, DOI: 10.1093/pnasnexus/pgad401.

[24] For example: North Korea, Cuba.

[25] Susceptibility helps distinguish between long-lived stable states, relatively long-lived quasi-stable states, also known as metastable states, and unstable states i.e., non-equilibrium states.

The Limits of Prediction: Quantification and the Anna Karenina Principle

Unlike the strict laws of natural sciences, social sciences are characterized by 'mere principles' that are hard to quantify. Any search for a strict relationship between cause and effect is difficult to substantiate, given the diverse and limitless possibilities of causal impacts in the sociopolitical landscape (especially when human agency is considered). Given the current state of knowledge, leaders, governments, and NGOs must rely on context-sensitive judgment rather than deterministic prediction.

As each individual and integral part of a social system can individually react to any and all perturbations in an individualized or orchestrated manner (sometimes causing a chain reaction within the system), foreseeing destabilization, fragmentation, rebellion, or decomposition is often impossible. Each perturbation or shock must be understood in accordance with the Anna Karenina principle. which states that a deficiency in any one of several stabilizing factors might doom the whole endeavor to failure. Many reactions, adaptations, or transformations that uphold, reshape, or destabilize a state's original *status quo* would need to be quantified to foresee state failure. As states become increasingly complex, a virtually unlimited 'dendritic' branching of potential outcomes would need to be calculated and considered on a case-by-case basis for each state, with each shock or perturbation.

Conclusions

There is no universally applicable formula for restoring a failed or collapsed state. Acemoglu and Robinson[26] argue that inclusive and egalitarian political institutions are a direct source of economic development. Additionally, a delay in adopting inclusive and egalitarian political institutions delays economic development.[27] However, as presented above, these policies, when implemented too quickly and at too large a scale, can breed massive discontent and instability when states lack sufficient implementation capacity. Additionally, inclusive and egalitarian political institutions at this developmental stage often lead to clientelism, unqualified agents, and unhealthy political norms, resulting in low state capacity and a dissatisfied, corrupt bureaucracy. As a correlation can be found between the quality of political leaders and

[26] D. Acemoglu, J. Robinson, Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty, New York 2012.
[27] K. L. Sokollof, S. L. Engerman, *History Lessons: Institutions, Factors Endowments, and Paths of Development in the New World*, "Journal of Economic Perspectives" 2000, vol. 14, 3, pp. 217–232.

bureaucratic productivity (such as health services),[28] bureaucracies closely related to incompetent or corrupt political leaders are more likely to be absent from their jobs[29] and to breed corruption.

Providing external financing for capacity building has also met mixed results. As studies show, foreign aid can:

1. Undermine political accountability by allowing (rent-seeking) incumbent leaders to remain in office despite poor performance;[30]
2. Hinder the development of state capacity (which would otherwise have to evolve without foreign aid);
3. Result in sub-optimal or ineffective reforms (due to poor quality of technical advisors and bureaucrats).[31]

One potential pathway of state restabilization involves leadership capable of restructuring institutional equilibria under conditions of systemic disequilibrium. The case of Charles de Gaulle provides a historical illustration of such a transformative intervention.

He "became a charismatic leader but not a dictator. His political beliefs combined the attachment to republican values and to the French national interest, which required the democratically elected government to be strong enough to be able to lead France to her destiny. When appointed prime minister of the provisional government of newly liberated France, he tried to reform French political institutions in a way consistent with these ideas. When, in 1946, the parliament adopted a constitution that continued the tradition of a weak executive, he stepped down from his position as head of government and temporarily withdrew from politics. He was called back in 1958 to save French democracy from the revolt of the military. After his return to power, he used his prestige as the wartime leader to end the rebellion not by force but by persuasion. He then used his charisma to obtain public support for the constitutional reform and for the end of the Algerian war – in both cases acting against what used to be the dominant sentiment of his nation. He ruled France as Prime Minister and President from 1958 to 1969 and used his power not only to reform the Republic and to end the war in Algeria but also to strengthen France's position as a great power within the Western alliance. 'In this context – writes his biographer – de Gaulle appears as an exemplar of the transformative leader."[32]

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[28] J. Habyarimana, S. Khemani, T. Scot, Political Selection and Bureaucratic Productivity, Policy Research Working Paper No. 8673, World Bank 2018, https://hdl.handle.net/10986/31074 [retrieved: 21.06.2023].

[29] M. Callen (*et al.*), The Political Economy of Public Sector Absence: Experimental Evidence from Pakistan, National Bureau of Economic Research 2016, No. 22340, https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w22340/w22340.pdf [retrieved: 02.02.2024].

[30] A. Deaton, The Great Escape: Health, Wealth, and the Origins of Inequality, Princeton (NY) 2013, DOI: 10.2307/j.ctt3fgxbm.

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In equilibrium terms, this episode can be interpreted as a transition from systemic disequilibrium toward a reconstituted executive-centered equilibrium. Rather than representing a purely personalistic phenomenon, transformative leadership here functions as a resilience mechanism enabling regime-level realignment without systemic collapse. Leadership thus emerges as a contingent but potentially decisive resilience variable within complex sociopolitical systems.

Ultimately, the resilience framework proposed here reframes state failure not as administrative weakness but as a qualitative transformation in the stability dynamics of complex sociopolitical systems.

Abstrakt

Tradycyjne podejścia do upadku państwa koncentrują się przede wszystkim na zdolności państwa (*state capacity*) – rozumianej jako umiejętność rządów do wykonywania kluczowych funkcji oraz dostarczania podstawowych dóbr publicznych. Niniejszy artykuł proponuje jednak fundamentalną rekonceptualizację tego zjawiska, argumentując, że upadek państwa należy rozumieć przez pryzmat teorii odporności oraz nauk o złożoności, a nie wyłącznie jako rezultat deficytów zdolności instytucjonalnej. Wykorzystując dorobek teorii sieci, teorii systemów oraz badań nad odpornością ekologiczną, zaproponowane ramy pojęciowe ujmują państwa jako złożone systemy adaptacyjne, których przetrwanie zależy od dynamicznych reakcji na zakłócenia i wstrząsy. Artykuł wprowadza pojęcia przejść równowagowych, punktów krytycznych oraz adaptacji transformacyjnej w celu wyjaśnienia trajektorii państw – od stabilności przez niestabilność aż po potencjalny upadek. Analiza państw w kategoriach dynamiki stabilności, zapożyczonej z nauk fizycznych i przyrodniczych, ujawnia uderzające analogie między dekompozycją społeczno-polityczną a awariami systemów w innych złożonych domenach. Ramy te integrują ustalenia State Failure Task Force dotyczące typów reżimów, dobrobytu materialnego oraz strukturalnych czynników ryzyka z wnioskami teorii złożoności odnoszącymi się do adaptacji i metastabilności. Pokazuje to, że upadek państwa stanowi odrębne zjawisko związane z odpornością systemową, a nie jedynie z deficytami zdolności instytucjonalnej. Zaproponowana rekonceptualizacja otwiera nowe możliwości w zakresie wskaźników wczesnego ostrzegania, strategii prewencyjnych oraz interwencji politycznych uwzględniających nieliniową dynamikę systemów – zamiast narzucania uniwersalnych szablonów instytucjonalnych.

Słowa kluczowe: upadek państwa, teoria odporności, teoria złożoności, niestabilność polityczna, ramy równowagowe, teoria systemów, zdolności państwa, adaptacja transformacyjna.

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