

State-Building Section

During his second inaugural address, President George Bush put forward what has come to be known as the “Bush Doctrine.” In its most basic form, the doctrine presupposes that stable democratic regimes, by virtue of their professedly moderating impulses, will effectively reduce the threat of ideological and religious extremism. In addition, the President noted that US relations with other governments would be contingent upon their adherence to the tenets of “...America’s belief in human dignity.” By extension, and in accordance with US policy following the tragedy of September, 2001, the United States has proactively encouraged procedural democratization in several (although certainly not all) key states around the world.

President Bush’s call for a democratic world where individuals enjoy the fruits of political liberty is a noble vision. It is, nevertheless, a vision that requires careful consideration of the lessons of history. Almost three years after Bush’s address, it is scarcely a revelation to say that US policy is under intense scrutiny, both at home and abroad. Elections in Iraq and Afghanistan, ostensibly conducted to combat extremism, have roundly failed to provide a forum for communal moderation. Recent elections in Congo and Nigeria were beset by gross violations of even the most leniently defined electoral rules. More disturbing for advocates of democratization in the current US administration, openly free and fair elections in several Latin American states (Brazil, Bolivia, Chile) returned governments opposed to US policy.

In the post-1989 period and especially in the post-9/11 period, “democracy” and “democratization” have become buzzwords of U.S. foreign policy and of public discourse more generally. Natan Sharansky’s *The Case for Democracy: The Power of Freedom to Overcome Tyranny and Terror*, is widely attributed with having made this case in an especially compelling—and simplistic—way. Recent experiences with the limits of democratization in Afghanistan and Iraq, and indeed throughout the Middle East, have raised questions about this democracy-building project, questions that have been pressed with particular force by Francis Fukuyama, whose recent apostasy from the ranks of neo-conservatism has been widely, and rancorously, discussed. Indeed, many democratization practitioners, perhaps most notably Tom Carothers, have been raising similar questions for a long time.

Iraq and Afghanistan have both held multiple rounds of elections, yet both countries teeter on the brink of collapse, are riven with deep internal communal divisions, and are characterized by the utter absence of governance in virtually all areas of civic life. Is it possible that, in the world community’s rush to legitimize more moderate elements in these countries, a serious error was made in conflating democratic elections with state-building?

This debate compels us to ask whether it is democracy-building or good governance that is the primary imperative in many parts of the world. This is a strategic question but also an ethical one, as evidenced by the descent into civil war in Iraq. In its bluntest form, the question is also a Hobbesian one: is it not the case that political order is the precondition

of either the rule of law or democracy? What are the requisites of state-building? What are the challenges? How do the lessons of history instruct us as we think about current challenges, especially in such war-torn places as Iraq, Afghanistan, and Kosovo?

The criticisms that have been directed toward US foreign policy can also be leveled against current trends in the US social sciences. Did the social science community experience a failure of theory in the analysis of the fourth wave of democratizations in Asia and Africa? How did these failures inform the democracy-assistance industry? How can the American academy use its resources to address these issues and 1) provide better information about the underlying dynamics of political transition and 2) respond more quickly to issues on the ground?

Building on these observations, the first section of the State and Nation-Building panel was driven by questions about the utility of 'transitology' theories of democratic reform. These theories tend to see any move away from authoritarianism as an automatic move towards democracy. Put bluntly, panelists considered whether historical assessments of the third-wave of democracy can help expose the shortcomings of theories of democratic change and if it is possible to conceive of better ways of thinking about democracy or the process of democratization.

Ultimately, the first panel asked participants to critically assess both the normative and positive claims about the role of democratization in the state-building process. Do we seek procedural democracy as a long-term goal simply because we assume it to be superior to other modes of collective choice in forging a common national bond? Is the communal extremism that has almost universally accompanied democratic transitions in the global south justified by the possibility, however remote, that elections will yield moderation in the long run? Finally, what does 'state-building' mean in the contemporary world, particularly in terms of the minimization of communal violence and international terrorism?

In tackling these issues, panelists initially struggled with the idea of linking third-wave transition states in Eastern Europe with contemporary cases of democracy-building. At root, this discussion emerged from the observation that social scientists initially developed transition theories around the post-1989 collapse of communism. Accordingly, most contemporary theories of transition, particularly those employed by practitioners, privilege key assumptions about the process of democratic reform. Three thematic dilemmas quickly emerged. First, several panelists noted that, consistent with Tom Carothers, the collapse of authoritarianism and the 'opening' of political space is no guarantee of democratic reform. Indeed, the holding of elections in post-authoritarian contexts may only serve to produce a new political hierarchy that is unwilling to share political power. As one panelist noted in this discussion, external advocates for democratization are very capable when it comes to providing assistance about how formal institutions ostensibly work, but tend to do a very poor job at building the relevant infrastructures that support viable long-term democracy. Specifically, two panelists observed that advice given to democratizers is generally poor and fails to incorporate domestic political concerns, particularly in terms of the primacy given to electoral system

design. According to this perspective, the ‘creation’ of infrastructures for democracy is only successful if there exists a viable political community capable of using it. When such a community is absent, particularly in the form of political parties and a free press, it is entirely likely that free and fair elections will yield only the most ephemeral of democratic politics. Related to this observation, one panelist noted that the democracy-assistance community has traditionally focused solely on the demand side of the equation, advocating for more open electoral practices, while tending to downplay the actual process of state-building. According to this view, there is a stark disconnect between academics’ and practitioners’ ideas of states and what they are intended to do. Given the complexities of democracy assistance, many leaders in the NGO and diplomacy fields necessarily tend to view state-building in relatively simple terms, equating the process of state-building with democracy-building. In contrast, contemporary debates among social scientists have tended to emphasize multiple features of the state-building process, especially those features that have little to do with electoral competition. These include instrumentalist views that focus on the pecuniary benefits of political control, institutionalist approaches that focus on governance, rhetorical perspectives that stress the ways that democratic communication can define citizenship, political-economy theories that tend to view the state as a nexus of contracts, and historicist accounts that focus on structural determinants of state-building. In each of these cases, the significance of electoral competition is secondary to other features of democratic life. This points to two key problems. First, academics are themselves quite divided over what precise mechanisms contribute to effective state building. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the complexity of these debates make simple policy advice difficult to provide.

Second, three panelists suggested that it is not merely a question of building states. Indeed, a key part of democracy reform may be the *dismantling* of formal institutions and replacing them with viable political parties capable of defining the political space and mobilizing citizens to participate as co-equals. As one discussant accurately observed, there tends to be an assumption that the holding of elections will automatically generate political parties. This assumption simply does not obtain, however. The Russian case amply illustrates the inability of viable parties to spontaneously emerge in spite of the holding of regular elections. Moreover, the institutional incentives faced by parties may not be amenable to the process of state-building, especially if we define state-building exclusively in terms of procedural democracy. Specifically, what value do successful parties see in democracy-building since they stand to lose the most should the reform process succeed? According to this perspective, in the immediate post-authoritarian period, it is probable that only a small number of political parties are likely to exist. Once one of these parties successfully captures control of the government through elections, it is unlikely that party leaders will see any incentive to augment electoral rules to benefit competing parties.

A similar dilemma emerges in post-conflict states in terms of determining exactly who can claim the mantle of leadership. In both Iraq and Afghanistan, external patrons chose the leaders who would guide their countries through the state-building process. In many respects, this highly anti-democratic practice was chosen because of perceptions that the

chosen leaders would cooperate with US policymakers. In both cases, however, minimal attention was given to whether Hamid Karzai or Iyad Allawi could credibly claim to be representative of a large swath of their countries' respective populations. Efforts at building states were essentially hamstrung by the overly centralized nature of what was widely perceived to be illegitimate governments.

Each of these discussions point to a significant problem with post-1989 transition theories. Specifically, these theories take for granted extant states and governable populations. As two panelists note, contemporary democratization efforts are taking place in countries with minimal notions of national identity and poor infrastructures of governance. Building on this line of debate, panelists discussed the comparative virtues of state-building models predicated on community-building and those based on elite bargaining. While not mutually exclusive, both approaches stress different assumptions about the nature of governance and institutional design. Four panelists tended to agree that community-building efforts aimed at improving urban and peri-urban infrastructure and minimizing local conflicts was critical to long-term state and nation-building. This Tocquevillian perspective tends to accept as given that most large-scale conflicts in post-authoritarian states, while important, are generally vehicles for local and regional leaders to exploit extant cleavages for political gain. A central assumption of this approach is that state-building is intimately connected to effective governance and local linkages. Where citizens see few benefits from wider political community, they are unlikely to contribute to its maintenance.

In contrast, several panelists advocated a more purely instrumentalist approach that stressed elite-level bargaining. According to this perspective, elites can use a variety of patronage networks to compel constituents to cooperate with wider state and nation-building strategies. More closely linked to post-1989 transition theories, the elite-bargaining model takes as a given the pecuniary interests of citizens and leaders and stresses the ability of patronage to forge distinct political communities. Panelists conceded the risks of corruption and malfeasance associated with this approach, but argued forcefully that of all communities it is elites who must "buy into" the state-building project. More generally, advocates of this position suggested that it is necessary to work with elites since the fundamental nature of representative government means that elites are likely to comprise future elected governments.

In closing the first session, the discussion leader noted two critical conclusions. First, efforts at policy formation have been ill-served by simplistic theories, or perhaps more accurately, by the simplistic translation of complex theories. While academics have produced more nuanced ways of understanding political change, these theories have been difficult to translate into policy. This is as much the fault of academics as it is the practitioners. Indeed, both academics and practitioners in attendance conceded this problem and viewed efforts such as the conference as a means of ameliorating the difficulties of translating theory into practice. A second key conclusion was that we tend to erroneously link democracy with a specific set of values. These values include pure electoralism and a particular form of market capitalism. Both of these values, the

immediate holding of elections in states ill-prepared for them, and the division of resources among competing elites based on market incentive, are not consonant with the normative principles we claim to privilege. Specifically, it might well be the case that democracy, as we intend to mean it, has very little to do with elections and market institutions. More importantly, a number of panelists suggested that what is more important is to build the requisite set of social expectations that underlie stable democracy. Among the most important of these expectations is the mutual understanding that political conflict need not be a zero-sum game defined by communal values.

The critiques leveled at using “electioneering” to mitigate the troubles of post-conflict societies figured prominently in the second panel session. This session dealt primarily with the troubles of nation-building as a goal. Whereas the first session dealt primarily with the dilemmas associated with building democracies in post-authoritarian contexts, the second panel addressed a vastly more nebulous issue. Specifically, it required panelists to separate the processes of state-building from the more difficult aspects of collective identity that underlie nation-building. While both activities are decidedly different and speak to distinct collective imperatives, they also differ in terms of political expectations, especially if we continue to view post-conflict state-building as a democratic project. Simply put, nation-building rarely conforms to the liberal and inclusive principles that modern state-builders prize.

Both democracy and the state are institutionalized political forms. In the modern world these projects have been connected to the ideology of nationalism and nation-building. The nation—whether understood in “civic” or “ethnic” terms—has been the primary source of ideological legitimation and serves as the social “glue” holding together states and unifying citizens under a sovereign authority promulgating universal law. In other words, it is the mechanism that binds people together such that they see each other as sharing a common fate or destiny.

While “the nation” is often treated as a primordial community in popular discourses—including discourses mobilized by political elites—it is widely understood by social scientists and historians that nations are constructed and “imagined communities” linked to modern technologies, forms of print media, commercial networks, and political and legal projects. Nationalism is at once omnipresent—and sometimes virulent—and in many places quite fragile.

The ideology of nationalism, particularly in its most exclusionary forms, can facilitate communal mobilization and terrible violence. Sunni’s in Iraq, fearful of Shiite dominance and clearly aware of their prior legacy of political and economic supremacy, have few incentives to trust an elected government perceived to be controlled by leaders bent on ethnic vengeance. Nevertheless, the vision of a multi-cultural nation-state where different communities find a common interest in cooperation despite ethnic, religious, and linguistic difference remains an ideal goal. It is thought that such a national model will eliminate the incentives for internal conflict by casting national membership as tolerant, mutually respectful, and mutually advantageous. Is this realistic? Images of street riots in

Paris between Muslim youth and French police suggest that even in the most widely lauded case of a 'civic' nation, communal anger and resentment can override broad national ideologies and manifest in more narrowly construed ways.

What are the ways that states and nations can and do overlap? Is nation-building a necessary dimension of state-building in contemporary hot spots? What are the challenges to nation-building? What strategies seem most effective?

Several academics on the panel noted that, despite the observed distinctions between nation and state-building, many social scientists tend to assume a 1:1 relationship between the two processes. Unfortunately most post-authoritarian states and former colonies are highly multi-ethnic. This presents a significant problem since it is difficult to introduce purely civic notions of national identity. In part, this is due to the ethnicized nature of the former colonial government. As one panelist noted, colonial governments were decidedly ethnic. Specifically, Europeans controlled the colonial government in order to either extract resources and/or to maintain some strategic advantage vis-a-vis other European powers. In either case, colonized populations from all ethnic communities saw control of the state as a means of advancing communal interest. Given the tendency of colonizers to pit ethnic groups against one another in the form of 'divide and rule' strategies the imperatives of state control became all the more potent. In the post-authoritarian context this combination of tensions has, more often than not, resulted in groups equating control of the government with group survival. Panelists particularly noted this tendency in sub-Saharan Africa where ethnically-based coups are comparatively common. Consequently, elections are frequently characterized by ethnically-defined political parties, rank corruption and vote-rigging, and acts of political intimidation and violence. In this way, nation-building and state-building are very similar processes to the extent that group members see them as similar activities. The "nation" is a rhetorically deployed artifact that typically implies communally defined benefits distribution. Put simply, citizens of many post-conflict states see little difference between the formal state and the communal group that controls it. This ideal is not consistent with the image of the nation-state as it is viewed in Western Europe.

This observation led to two main strands of discussion; the exclusionary nature of nation-building and the utility of electoral democracy as a means of advancing the nation-building project. According to Andreas Wimmer, nationalism is about exclusion. The benefits derived from national membership, whether pecuniary or not, are not subject to universal distribution. Indeed, Ashutosh Varshney has argued that it is precisely the value-rational goods of dignity and collective memory that are more 'indivisible' than material benefits of patronage and wealth, a position borne out by the fact that most nationals in the post-colonial world scarcely enjoy the financial fruits of national membership. What this suggests is that efforts to produce inclusive nations in post-conflict states are fraught with difficulty. This is not to imply that such goals are impossible, however. India was brought up as a case that historically defies conventional knowledge by retaining a surprisingly high degree of unity despite its extensive communal cleavages.

Can procedural democracy carry out the functions of inclusive nation-building? This question was partly addressed in the first panel. Many participants were reluctant to advocate early elections in post-conflict states, pointing to the strong incentives for communal mobilization, mutual mistrust among members of the population, and an overarching lack of governance. Is this view correct? Several panelists argued that democracy, by one definition, is about mediation and finding methods to arrive at acceptable resolutions to disputes. Most states in the modern world have some degree of diversity, be it linguistic, religious, ethnic, or regional. At the same time, violent conflict is thankfully very rare. In part, this might be explained by a degree of congruence between the nation and state-building projects in some countries.

One alternative to the immediate holding of elections is the reorientation of borders. According to this argument, advanced by one member of the panel, nationalist ideologies may prevent the effective inclusion of key minority groups, especially if these minorities are perceived as having hegemonic intentions. In such cases, partition or confederacy models may prove more effective at ameliorating conflict. Clearly, this idea has been advanced by several observers in the Iraqi case as a means of minimizing violence by dividing the country into Kurdish, Sunni, and Shiite zones. The empirical record on partition is, however, quite mixed. The 1947 partition in India resulted in horrific bloodshed and greatly influenced subsequent conflicts between India and Pakistan and between Pakistan and Bangladesh in 1970. Moreover, recent scholarship has strongly suggested that the ethnic 'unmixing' that accompanies partition, particularly in urban enclaves, often results in higher levels of mistrust and violence. Given that few communal groups are homogeneously concentrated in specific and easily separable regions, this implies that partition is not a simple alternative. Consequently, the majority of panelists argued that nation-builders, both at home and abroad, would do well to seek alternative methods.

Ultimately, this discussion leads us to ask what the best strategies are in terms of effective nation-building. In contrast to state-building and its implied formalism, nations are of a decidedly different character. Derided as essentially non-rational by many political theorists, nationalist ideologies nevertheless trump virtually all other forms of collective identity, including class, race, and sometimes even religion. As one panelist noted, if we seek a democratic and inclusive nation, it behooves practitioners and citizens to approach the problem democratically. On the face, this proposition might seem self-evident, but US attempts at democracy promotion in the broader Middle-East have been characterized by a general rejection of communal mobilization in Iraq and Afghanistan, particularly when social movements are perceived as anti-US. Many panelists agreed that the mission of nation-building and its attendant impacts on state-building required a new 'tool-kit' that would help practitioners deal with complex on-the-ground realities.

The concept of 'tool building' figured prominently in the day's final session. Specifically, panelists explored the 'state of the art' in democracy assistance. What are the limits of state-building? In the early modern period states developed over long periods of time, and in elitist, authoritarian, and brutal ways unhindered by contemporary notions of human rights (or a vigilant international media). Put simply, individual citizens were often

crushed into accepting an overarching national identity and into adhering to centrally determined rules and norms that defined emergent states. Is it even possible to engage in state-building as a conscious policy in an age of mass media, mass politics, human rights norms, and, perhaps most especially, the many centrifugal forces associated with “postmodern” society? Is state-building an outmoded “high modernist” aspiration?

Two panelists suggested that one of the most difficult problems with democracy-assistance has nothing to do with values, as was argued in the first panel, but rather with communal divisions that seem insurmountable. According to this view, informal norms that govern particular communities assume a higher status than formal political rules in post-conflict states. This is due in no small part to the capacity of communally-recognized values and norms to provide a degree of uncertainty reduction when formal political institutions are weak and incapable of providing effective governance. Nevertheless, two practitioners noted that the propensity of informal social institutions to trump formal rules creates highly divergent sets of expectations between ethnic and communal groups.

One panelist built on this point to suggest that western democracy-promoters do ill service to the state-building mission by focusing on the adversarial side of democracy, particularly through advocating Westminster-style models of democracy. According to this perspective, the stressing of the adversarial aspects of democracy, while important, can only work in places where there exists a base consensus about mutual expectations and rules of the game. This is not to tautologically suggest that viable nations must already exist in order for nation and state-building enterprises to succeed. Rather, it implies that communities must be able to accept that other communal groups will prove tolerant in both political victory and defeat. The traditional Westminster model accepts a viable and well-functioning opposition as central to procedural democracy. Significantly, the model requires that competing parties accept, ex-ante, the results of elections provided that the process is free and fair. As one panelist noted, however, when democracy is promoted in terms of its institutionally antagonistic principles (competitive elections, party building, etc.) as opposed to values of cooperation and ex-ante tolerance it is scarcely surprising that our ‘tools’ of democracy-building prove insufficient.

A closely related dilemma stems from the crisis of accountability that arises when democracy-promoters must find domestic partners to work with. In many respects, this harkens back to the discussion from the first session that stressed the general lack of legitimacy afforded to political elites who work closely with foreign democracy practitioners. Typically, Western cooperation with domestic “democrats” is part of a larger strategy aimed at forging a grand bargain between elites. The key dilemma with this approach is that it eschews incrementalism in favor of rapid change based on elite cooperation. Given that constituent support for elites can wane, especially when elites are perceived as beholden to Western interests, it is difficult to avoid significant pitfalls with grand bargaining strategies.

In this regard, several panelists noted that social sciences do indeed have a role to play. In particular, practitioners noted that what is perhaps most effective is technical capacity

building, in contrast to democratic training and promotion. Specifically, this requires that post-conflict states not be thrust into the position of holding immediate elections with conventional carrot-and-stick approaches that convey democracy as the sole means of minimizing conflict and promoting economic development. Rather, a wide range of infrastructure is needed, including political parties and trained party cadres. This advances the conclusions put forth in the first session where the imperatives of governance were deemed vastly more important than purely procedural notions of state-building. Beyond this, academics on the panel briefly outlined the dilemmas associated with separating “pure” knowledge and “applied” knowledge. Specifically, they responded to critiques which suggested that academics were pursuing value-neutral knowledge at the expense of real-world applications. To this, several academics noted that the use of social science knowledge by policy-makers is not determined because of its “pure” or “applied” nature. Rather, it is typically used (sometimes irresponsibly) because it advances a particular policy agenda. The key conclusion wrought from this discussion was that academics, rather than criticize policy-makers who use their conclusions, should actively outline the implications of their research in clear ways. Even in the case of ostensibly non-practical knowledge it is possible to develop ways in which others might infer particular applications.