

## **Birth Legacies and State Failure**

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### **Abstract**

We argue patterns of state failure are influenced by variation in how states emerged as independent political actors. In particular, states with positive birth legacies, those whose emergence required relatively high levels of capacity and legitimacy, should be less fragile and likely to experience state failure over time than states that experienced less auspicious births. We assess this claim on the universe of sovereign states in the international system between 1816 and 2002 with multistate duration models that estimate the probabilities states transition into and out of periods of state failure. Consistent with our expectations, we find that states with positive birth legacies are less likely to experience state failure.

## **Introduction**

State failure represents one of the most important issues in the contemporary international system. States that have failed or are in the process of failing provide their citizens with fewer essential services and have lower levels of economic growth than do functioning states (Berry et al. 2004, Chauvet and Collier 2004). In terms of international security, failed states are more likely to host and produce international terrorists (Piazza 2008). Further, failed states increase the probability their neighbors experience political turmoil and unrest, civil war, and interstate war (Iqbal and Starr 2008). This is particularly worrisome given that political turmoil and unrest, civil war, and interstate war increase the probability that states will fail (Iqbal and Starr 2016).

State failure scholars argue that fragile states are more likely to experience state failure than stable states and commonly focus on the role of a state's economy, conflict experiences, or contemporary political institutions (e.g., Goldstone et al. 2010, Iqbal and Starr 2016). We argue that these factors represent proximate causes of state failure nested within the larger context of state making processes. A state making perspective suggests that how states were born, develop, persist, fail, or die are related (most notably, Tilly 1975, 1990). With this framework in mind, we argue that state failure is strongly influenced by how states were born.

Our argument is straightforward. States vary considerably in terms of how much political capacity and legitimacy was required for them to emerge as independent political actors, which influences their ability to consolidate control over their territory and population (Lemke and Carter 2016). States are fragile and, consequently, more likely to fail to the extent that they lack capacity, legitimacy, and authority over their territory (Carment et al. 2008, Goldstone 2008). It therefore follows that states with positive birth legacies should be less likely to be fragile and less likely to experience failure than states that experienced inauspicious births.

We empirically assess the relationship between birth legacies and state failure using a data set of all countries in the international system between 1816 and 2002 and multistate duration models that allow us to estimate the probabilities states transition from functioning to spells of state failure and from spells of failure back to functioning states (Metzger and Jones 2016). We find that states with more positive birth legacies

are less likely to be fragile or experience state failure than are states with less positive birth legacies. However, the relationship between birth legacies and state failure is driven more by states with positive birth legacies having a higher probability of transitioning from spells of failure back to being a functioning state than them being less likely to suffer the onset of a failure spell in the first place.

The remainder of this article proceeds in six sections. First we provide an overview of the literature on state failure. Second we discuss the concept of states' birth legacies. Third, we link state failure to birth legacies. In our fourth section we describe our research design. Our fifth section reports our empirical results. We conclude with a discussion of the larger implications of our findings for how the process by which states emerge influences their subsequent success and failure in the international system.

## **State Failure**

Definitions of state failure abound in the literature (see Carment et al. 2008 and Iqbal and Starr 2016, especially Chapter 2, for extensive discussions of this point). As used here, state failure refers to the “complete collapse of state authority” (Iqbal and Starr 2016:12). Owing partly to the relative rarity of state failure, existing scholarship typically seeks to explain the presence or absence of factors that make states more susceptible to failure (Carment et al. 2008, Goldstone 2008, Starr 2008, Iqbal and Starr 2008, 2016).

What makes some states more fragile than others? States are fragile and susceptible to failure to the extent that they lack legitimacy, capacity, and/or authority (Carment et al. 2008). These terms have many definitions, so it is useful to clarify how we employ them. A state's legitimacy refers to its ability to “command public loyalty to the governing regime and to generate domestic support for government legislation and policy” (Carment et al. 2008:357). This is similar to Englebert's definition of (vertical) legitimacy as “the existence of an agreement over the principle(s) upon which the 'right to rule' is based” (Englebert 2000a:11). A state's political capacity or effectiveness refers to the ability “of the political system to carry out the tasks imposed upon it by its own political elite” (Organski and Kugler 1980:72).<sup>1</sup> Drawing on Weber, Carment et al.

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<sup>1</sup> Carment et al. (2008, 357) define capacity as “the power of a state to mobilize and employ resources toward productive ends,” which is consistent with Organski and Kugler's definition of state capacity to the

(2008:356) identify authority as a state's ability "to enforce binding legislation over its population, and exercise the coercive force over its national territory necessary to provide a stable and secure environment." Thus, a state is fragile and at an elevated risk of failure if it is unable to exercise control over its claimed territory and citizens (authority), citizens do not recognize the state's right to rule (legitimacy), and it cannot enact the preferred policies of its rulers (capacity).

State failure and fragility are conceptually distinct, a point stressed by Iqbal and Starr (2016), Carment et al. (2006, 2008), Goldstone (2008), and others. However, fragile states are more likely to fail than are stable states. In particular, scholars point to differences in fragile states' and stable states' economic conditions, political institutions, and conflict experiences as explanations for why fragile states are more likely to fail than their stable counterparts (Iqbal and Starr 2016, Goldstone 2008, Goldstone et al. 2010).

While rarely framed in terms of causal processes, evidence suggests the economies of fragile and stable states influence their relative likelihood of failure. In general, fragile states have lower levels of economic development and economic growth than stable states (Carment et al. 2008). This finding is consistent with Englebort's (2000a, 2000b) research on the relationship between legitimacy and economic performance and work by development scholars on the so-called LICUS (low-income countries under stress) states (Chauvet and Collier 2004). Goldstone et al. (2010) find that state-sanctioned economic discrimination increases the probability a state will experience significant instability. Bates (2007) demonstrates that states are more likely to lose their monopoly over the means of coercion when the economy performs poorly. Similarly, Goldstone (2008) suggests that poor economic performance due to extreme predation by the state or reform crises contributes to state failure. Focusing on the outcome of ultimate interest, Iqbal and Starr (2016:35-36) find that, on average, less economically developed states are significantly more likely to fail than wealthier states. Thus, existing research suggests that fragile states are more likely to have poorer economies and states with poorer economies are more likely to fail.

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extent that the regime's leadership determines how "productive ends" are defined. From our perspective, it is possible for a state to have high levels of capacity even if what it produces is not economically valuable or good for the general public.

Scholars commonly link state fragility and failure to violent conflict. In fact, civil conflict is so closely associated with poorly performing states that civil wars have been used to operationalize state failure or state fragility (Goldstone et al. 2010). Goldstone (2008) argues that, in general, fragile states are more likely to experience ethnic conflicts and/or regional or guerrilla rebellions than are stable states. Fragile democracies, in particular, are thought to be more likely to collapse into coups or civil wars than are stable democracies (Goldstone 2008). This is consistent with the finding that weak states are more likely to experience low-level civil conflicts and civil wars (among others, Fearon and Laitin 2003 and Fjelde and de Soysa 2009; although see Thies 2010). Interstate wars can also destabilize states and result in their authority and political institutions collapsing (Iqbal and Starr 2016). Indeed, Iqbal and Starr (2016: Chapter 3) find that participation in civil war and participation in external armed conflicts are the two strongest predictors of state failure between 1952 and 2009.

Finally, states' political institutions are intimately related to their underlying fragility and, consequently, the likelihood they will fail. Fragile states are more likely to have weak, ineffectual political institutions than stable states. Among other things, weak institutions limit a state's ability to extract revenue from society and provide a secure environment for its citizens (Organski and Kugler 1980, Fearon and Laitin 2003, Carment et al. 2006). Consistent with this, Goldstone (2008:290-291) argues that the conflict between the FARC and the central government in Colombia lasted as long as it did due to an ineffectual state security apparatus. In terms of regime type, it appears that states with high levels of democracy generally are less likely to fail than states with low levels of democracy and that states with a mix of democratic and non-democratic institutions are more likely to experience political instability and face a greater risk of state failure than either consolidated democracies or consolidated dictatorships (Goldstone et al. 2010, Iqbal and Starr 2016).

An important but often overlooked aspect of state failure is the duration of a failure spell. Indeed, there is substantial variation in how long states remain failed after their authority has collapsed. For example, Iqbal and Starr (2016:41-42) point out that while Angola and Uganda failed and recovered from their respective collapses within a single year, Laos was a failed state for twelve years (1961-1972) and Lebanon was in a

state of failure for fifteen years (1975-1990). Empirically, correlates of state fragility generally are associated with longer spells of state failure. For example, higher levels of societal instability during a period of state failure reduce the likelihood a failure spell will end by approximately 45% (Iqbal and Starr 2016:45).

The complete collapse of state authority is a rare event, but it is relatively more likely to occur among fragile states with lower levels of legitimacy, capacity, and/or authority due to their poor economic performance, negative conflict experiences, and weak and unconsolidated political institutions. Further, conditional on failure occurring, fragile states are thought to experience longer spells of state failure. Our next section describes the concept of states' birth legacies or birth types, while the following links birth legacies to variation in state failure.

### **Birth Legacies**

A state's birth legacy or birth type refers to the process through which it emerged as an independent political actor. Our categories of birth types are reasonably straightforward, but since the concepts of birth type and birth legacy are not widely used in existing research, we believe it useful to clarify what they represent. Our categories may not be surprising, but they are original to research about state behavior.

We label the first birth type "indigenous generation." These are states that have existed in recognizable form for a very long time, and whose origins lie in the distant past. Examples include countries like France, Turkey, and Japan, whose struggles for autonomy and territorial coherence occurred so long ago that the vast majority of individuals in these states regard them as legitimate. Their continued existence for so long a time almost certainly required substantial coherence and political capacity.

A second birth type occurs when a state violently secedes from an existing state. This category combines both traditional secession and violent decolonization campaigns that lead to new states. To win such a struggle requires considerable political capacity and legitimacy, and such an outcome is expected to be associated with subsequent successes as well. Examples include the United States of America, and, more recently, Eritrea.

Non-violent secession represents a third birth type. In such instances a would-be state makes claims of or demands for independence from another state, and these claims are respected or demands conceded. States born this way have likely impressed the former “host” state that their prospective autonomy is plausible, that they encompass a coherent population and territory, and perhaps even that they will govern it well. Examples include Slovakia’s non-violent secession from Czechoslovakia in 1993, and Norway’s peaceful separation from Sweden in 1905.

The fourth type of birth we identify is “births by agreement.” Many existing members of the interstate system reverted to sovereignty after a period in which they were occupied and/or governed by an external state. An example of long-term reversion is Poland. It lost its initial autonomy in the 1790s but was resurrected by agreement among the victorious powers following World War I. Shorter term reversions to sovereignty are represented by the various European states that lost independence during World War II but regained it by war’s end, or cases like Syria that temporarily ceded its autonomy to the United Arab Republic. Another form of birth by agreement is the creation of buffer states like Belgium. Also falling into this category are a number of “split” states (e.g. West and East Germany, North and South Vietnam), that were constructed by agreements among other states to create new states that did not have an earlier period of sovereign independence. A final type of births by agreement is observed when decolonization follows a careful, long-term policy of preparing the colony for self-governance. Examples include Australia and Canada. Such states effectively are born by agreement between themselves and their former colonizer, rather than between two already-existing states.

A fifth type of birth occurs when an existing state or empire fragments due to poor governance or some other cause, and new states emerge by default from the political wreckage. Recent examples include the fifteen states that emerged from the dissolution of the Soviet Union. We consider Russia itself to be indigenously generated, but other former Soviet Republics were born by default as the Soviet Union fragmented.

A final form of birth occurs when a state that is not failing abandons territory with little or no consideration given to what will emerge subsequently. These births are

designated as “derelict decolonization.” Many sub-Saharan African states, like Democratic Republic of the Congo, were born this way.

The six birth types vary in the extent to which the political entities that became states had political capacity and political legitimacy. By claiming that birth types vary in the political capacity and legitimacy of the proto-state, in effect we are arguing that some birth types require the emerging state to have its administrative act together on the course to statehood to a significantly greater degree than do other birth types. For example, a successful secession usually requires the seceding entity to defeat the rump militarily. Gaining statehood through warfare is nearly impossible without a substantial effort, support from a sizeable portion of the domestic population, and the ability of the proto-state’s political leadership to execute their plans successfully. In contrast, states that emerge from sudden decolonization or the fragmentation of empire require neither capacity nor legitimacy. Lemke and Carter (2016:500-501) offer systematic evidence consistent with the claim that states with positive birth legacies had higher levels of legitimacy and capacity upon obtaining political independence than did states with less positive birth legacies. Specifically, they show that a positive birth legacy is a positive and statistically significant predictor of whether the state is considered legitimate (Englebert 2000b), had coherent political institutions (Marshall and Jagers 2005 and Gates et al. 2006), and its material capabilities (Singer, Bremer, and Stuckey 1972) in its first year as a member of the interstate system.

Having introduced the concept of birth legacies and identified how birth types vary with respect to states’ endowments of political capacity and legitimacy, our next section links states’ birth legacies to state failure.

### **Theoretical Argument**

We argue that state failure is related to how states emerged as independent political entities. States are more likely to fail when they are fragile (Starr 2008, Iqbal and Starr 2016). Economic performance and development, civil and interstate conflict, and weak and non-democratic political institutions are associated with state fragility and represent proximate causes of state failure (e.g., Goldstone et al. 2010, Iqbal and Starr

2016). However, the underlying causes of state fragility are located in states' capacity, legitimacy, and authority. Goldstone argues states with both legitimacy and capacity are stable and, therefore, are unlikely to find themselves on a pathway to state failure (2008). Similarly, Carment et al. (2006, 2008) argue that states are fragile and, thus likely to experience state failure, to the extent that they are lacking in authority, legitimacy, and/or capacity. We link state failure to states' birth legacies by viewing state emergence, fragility, and failure as part of the larger state making process.

Students of state making address the processes through which states are constructed (Tilly 1975, Spruyt 1994). Our version of the state making perspective conceives of states' political development occurring in three stages. The first stage is a state's birth, or how it emerged as an independent political entity and became a member of the interstate system. The second stage of state-making is the growth stage, encompassing efforts by states to secure and retain control of their territory and population, to expand their material assets, and to deepen political control over their territory and people. A state's growth can occur with respect to political and/or economic development and in terms of administrative capabilities (e.g., stronger state apparatus, greater extractive power) and/or geographic territory. The growth stage persists as long as the state survives as an autonomous entity. If a state is conquered, stagnates to the point of state failure, or voluntarily merges with another state, it dies. Death is the third stage of state making. While often the end of the road for a state, it need not be final. There are historical examples of conquered states subsequently regaining autonomy and re-igniting their temporarily-squelched state making efforts (e.g. Poland).

We argue that the stages of state making are linked. At the most general level, we expect that the manner in which a political entity became a state will influence how successful it is in its subsequent political development and ability to avoid failure. While the processes are not deterministic, states with a good birth legacy generally should be more successful at state-making than states that did not have a positive birth experience. According to the bellicose theory of state-making (e.g., Tilly 1975, 1985), successful state-making occurs primarily through fighting and winning interstate and civil wars. If a good birth legacy leads to state-making success, states with a positive birth legacy should be more likely to fight and win wars, have greater extractive capacity, and be more

consolidated in their political power than states that did not have a good birth experience. Consistent with this view, states with positive birth legacies are more likely to fight and win interstate and civil wars than are other states (Lemke and Carter 2016).

A state's birth legacy should influence the likelihood that it experiences state failure through its effects on a state's fragility. As noted above, states are fragile and are more likely to find themselves on the path to state failure to the extent that they lack authority, capacity, and/or legitimacy (Carment et al. 2006, 2008, Goldstone 2008). The six birth types described in the previous section systematically vary in the extent to which the political entities that became states required political capacity and legitimacy to join the club of nations. For example, the United States, Eritrea, and other states that emerged through violent secession needed, among other things, to organize a military force, support from a sizeable portion of the domestic population, and the ability and coordination of their political leadership to execute their plans. The former Central Asian republics of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan required far less to become independent states after the fall of the Soviet Union. The variation in the capacity and legitimacy of states that experienced "good births" and those that experienced "bad births" therefore should translate directly to states with positive birth legacies being less fragile and at a lower risk of experiencing state failure than those without such legacies.

The effects of birth legacies on states' ability to consolidate political power should also result in states that experienced positive births being less fragile and less likely to fail. This claim follows from war's influence on state power and the relationships between birth legacies and war. Fighting and winning wars leads to stronger, more expansive states with fewer political rivals for control over a given territory (Tilly 1985; Jagers 1992; Thies 2004, 2005, 2007; Gibler 2010). States with positive birth legacies are significantly more likely to fight and win interstate and civil wars (Lemke and Carter 2016). The consolidation of political power and increased political capacity associated with fighting and winning wars, therefore, will more frequently accrue to good birth states than to states with less positive birth legacies. This implies good birth states will have stronger state structures that will be less likely to fail and allow the political elites more successfully to ensure that their control of the territory continues. Simultaneously, states that win wars and that develop their economies more

successfully are more likely to deter internal opposition to the political status quo. Thus, in addition to suffering less political instability and failure due to bad war outcomes and bad economic conditions, well-born states should face fewer serious challenges to their authority.

The greater capacity and legitimacy initially possessed by states with a positive birth legacy make it more likely they will be able to provide their citizens with a stable and secure environment and, thus, exercise authority over their territory. It therefore follows that states with positive birth legacies should be less likely to experience state failure because their greater endowments of capacity, legitimacy, and authority make them less fragile than states with less positive birth legacies. State fragility, then, is the theoretical mechanism that links birth legacies and state failure. As discussed above, there is strong evidence that various indicators of state fragility predict spells of state failure (Iqbal and Starr 2016). Our claim that the processes by which states emerged as independent political entities influence their subsequent fragility, though, is relatively novel. Given its centrality to our theoretical argument, we think it is useful to provide some evidence in support of this claim. To that end, Table 1 presents the results of a set of state-year and state-level, bivariate regression models of a state’s score on the variables *Fragility Index*, *Ineffectiveness Score*, and *Illegitimacy Score* (higher values represent “worse” outcomes) from the Center of Systemic Peace’s State Fragility Project (Marshall and Elzinga-Marshall 2017) on a six-point scale of states’ birth legacies (coding described in detail below, but higher values correspond to better birth legacies) between 1995 and 2016.<sup>2</sup> Consistent with our expectations, the results in Table 1 suggest states with better birth legacies are, on average, less fragile, more effective, and more legitimate than are states with worse birth legacies.

**Table 1: Birth Legacies and State Fragility, Effectiveness, and Legitimacy**

	Fragility Index		Ineffectiveness Score		Illegitimacy Score	
Birth Legacy	-1.19***	-1.38***	-0.65***	-0.75***	-0.53***	-0.63***

<sup>2</sup> We renamed *Effectiveness Score* and *Legitimacy Score* from Marshall and Elzinga-Marshall (2017) as *Ineffectiveness Score* and *Illegitimacy Score* to reflect the fact that higher values are associated with “worse” outcomes. For example, in 2016 Marshall and Elzinga-Marshall code the Democratic Republic of Congo as having scores of 24, 13, and 11, respectively, on the *Fragility Index*, *Effectiveness Score*, and *Legitimacy Score* while the United Kingdom has a score of 0 on each measure. We feel the names *Ineffectiveness Score* and *Illegitimacy Score* more intuitively reflect how the variables are coded.

	(0.11)	(0.30)	(0.06)	(0.17)	(0.06)	(0.15)
Constant	13.70***	14.43***	7.31***	7.68***	6.39***	6.75***
	(0.39)	(1.07)	(0.22)	(0.60)	(0.19)	(0.53)
Unit-of-Analysis	State-Year	State	State-Year	State	State-Year	State
Observations	1216	152	1216	152	1216	152
R <sup>2</sup>	0.08	0.12	0.08	0.12	0.07	0.11

Estimator: OLS

Standard errors in parentheses.

Two-tailed significance- \*:p<0.05; \*\*: p<0.01; \*\*\*: p<0.001.

The preceding discussion argues that states with positive birth legacies are less likely to experience state failure than are states without positive birth legacies.<sup>3</sup> States with positive birth legacies emerged as independent political entities with greater political capacity and legitimacy, which allowed them to consolidate their authority over their claimed territory and population more easily than states that joined the club of nations under less auspicious circumstances. States with low levels of authority, legitimacy, and capacity are fragile and more likely to experience state failure (Carment et al. 2008, Iqbal and Starr 2016). It therefore follows that states with positive birth legacies should be less likely to suffer failure than other states. The next section describes how we empirically assess this claim.

## Research Design

The primary analyses of our hypothesis are conducted on a time-series cross-sectional, country-year data set of the 214 members of the Correlates of War (COW) interstate system between 1816 and 2002. Our data set contains 13,215 state-year observations.

## Dependent Variable

Our argument predicts variation in state failure. Conceptually, state failure occurs when there is a “complete collapse of state authority” (Iqbal and Starr 2016: 12).

<sup>3</sup> The argument presented here links states’ birth legacies to failure at a general level. It is possible to develop our argument in a more fine-grained fashion by indicating why each type of birth generates expectations of increasingly likely state failure as we move from the best to the worst births. For space purposes, this argument is provided in the appendix.

Operationally, we code a state as failed based on the variable *SF* from the Polity IV project (Marshall and Jaggers 2005). The dichotomous *SF* takes on a value of one when a polity suffers “a complete collapse of central authority” or “a state disintegrates” (Marshall and Jaggers 2005:35).<sup>4</sup> Coding state failure in this manner allows one to make a clean empirical distinction between when a state fails and the presence or absence of factors that make states fragile and, thus, more or less likely to fail. There are 186 state-year observations of state failure in our data set.

### Explanatory Variables

Our primary explanatory variable identifies a state’s birth legacy. In coding each COW system member we consulted Stearns’ (2001) historical compendium, the ICOW Colonial History Data Set (Hensel 2006), and additional historical monographs, to determine the conditions attendant upon the emergence of each system member as an autonomous political entity. We code each state as being born in one of six ways: indigenous generation, violent secession, peaceful secession, birth by agreement, imperial fragmentation, and derelict decolonization.

The coding process focuses on each state’s formative experience. We begin with the date of independence and consider the circumstances attendant upon that emergence. If a state’s independence occurred so long ago that there is debate among historians about when, exactly, it emerged, we code it as an indigenously generated state. If the state emerged as the result of a successful war of independence (either from colonialism or from within the homeland territory of an existing state), we code it as a violent secession. If the state emerged non-violently from an existing state, we code its birth as a peaceful secession. If a state was a former colony but gained independence without resort to violence, we consider how well the metropole prepared the polity for self-governance. If the process was drawn out over several years during which a plan for developing local administrative capacity was implemented, we code the state’s emergence as a birth by

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<sup>4</sup> More specifically, a state receives a value of one on Polity IV’s *SF* variable if it is coded as a -77 (authority collapse), 96 (state disintegration), or when “the authority of the previous Polity is assumed to have collapsed completely prior to the revolutionary seizure of power and subsequent restructuring of authority” (Marshall and Jaggers 2005:35). As Marshall and Jaggers write, “Using the *SF* variable to select regime information will facilitate identification of periods of state failure” (pg. 35).

agreement. Other births by agreement occur when a state's independence is the resurrection after conquest and occupation by other states (we do not distinguish between states that were occupied for long periods of time and those whose loss of independence was short). We also code states purposefully created by other states, usually to serve as buffers between rivals, as Births by Agreement. States that gain independence when a central government disintegrates, and that were not colonies but instead were considered part of the prior state, are coded as births by Imperial Fragmentation. Finally, former colonies that were granted independence by the metropole either abruptly or without any concerted effort to develop local administrative capacity, and without any ongoing war of independence, are coded as instances of birth by Derelict Decolonization.

As can be seen from this discussion, the process of coding a state's birth type is not as subjective as might be feared. The characteristics of a state's emergence rather easily fall into one of the categories. If an independence movement involved violent struggle, it was either an Indigenous Generation or a Violent Secession. Where a birth was not marked by conflict, it was one of the other four types. Another clear characteristic of a state's emergence is what it was, politically, before birth. If it was a part of an existing state, its birth type is either Violent or Peaceful Secession, Birth by Agreement, or Imperial Fragmentation. If it was a colony, its birth was either a Violent Secession, a Birth by Agreement, or an instance of Derelict Decolonization. If the existing state helped the new state into existence, the birth was either Peaceful Secession or Birth by Agreement. In short, it is relatively straightforward to apply our coding scheme reliably to the historical record.

Validity is more of a concern. A first type of validity concern arises when external support causes the birth and thus it is the capacity of the intervening external state, rather than of the newly born state, that is operating. An example is Bangladesh's birth in 1971. Our dataset records Bangladesh as a Violent Secession, a "good birth." But in reality, Bangladesh likely would not have been born absent Indian intervention. In instances like this we have coded the births as though they reflect the capacity and legitimacy of the emergent state. We ignore the foreign interference, and thus introduce a conservative bias against finding support for our hypothesis. A second sort of validity concern arises when a birth appears to be non-violent only because a few years of truce

intercede between violence and independence. Kenya's birth in 1963 offers an example. The Mau Mau uprising from 1953 to 1956, resulting in 17,000 battle fatalities (COW Extra-state War # 464), convinced the British that continued colonization would be too costly, and thus this war convinced them to leave. Because the British were worried about demonstration effects in other colonies, they did not leave immediately, neither did they make much effort to prepare Kenya for independence. This delay does not mean that Kenya's new government lacked either capacity or legitimacy, as Jomo Kenyatta (Kenya's first president, and a leader of the Kikuyu community which had produced the Mau Mau movement) enjoyed tremendous legitimacy and approval within the new country. It is also possible that Kenyatta's Kenya African Union developed administrative capacity during the insurgency. Thus, Kenya was probably in much better shape administratively in 1963 than its coding as a case of Derelict Decolonization would indicate. Again, our coding decision introduces a conservative bias against finding support for our hypothesis.

Our primary measure of a state's birth type, *Birth Legacy*, is a six-point scale that ranges from one (derelict decolonization) to six (indigenous birth). This variable allows us to identify how marginally better (or worse) birth legacies influence whether a state experiences failure. We also estimated models using trichotomous (good/neutral/bad) and dichotomous (good/other) measures of states' birth legacies. Using multiple measures protects against the possibility that our statistical results are simply an artifact of how we code our key explanatory variable.

Given our interest in state failure, there are three possible critiques one might have regarding our measures of birth legacy. The first is that, on average, European states have had better births than non-European countries. If European states are more stable than other countries, it could be the case that support for our hypothesis would just reflect differences between European and non-European states. A second critique is that, on average, African states enjoyed worse births than non-African states. If African states are more prone to failure than non-African states, our results might follow largely from the experiences of African states. A third critique is that, on average, older states had better births and are more stable than younger states. This would imply that our results are an artifact of the

correlation between a state's age and its birth legacy. To protect against these possibility, all of our models include variables that identify a state's (logged) age<sup>5</sup> and whether it is located in Europe or Africa. These variables should render our measures of birth legacy insignificant if a state's age, Europe's wealth of indigenously-generated states, and/or Africa's many states that emerged via derelict decolonization are driving our results.<sup>6</sup>

Our primary model also controls for four factors previously shown to influence state failure. The first two are dichotomous variables that identify whether a state was involved in a *Civil War* or an *Interstate War* (Sarkees and Wayman 2010). We proxy a state's level of economic development with its level of energy consumption due to the limited coverage of GDP per capita data before the end of World War II. *Energy* is taken from the National Material Capabilities data set (Singer, Bremer, and Stucky 1972, version 5.0). Finally, we account for the observation that state failure is less likely given higher levels of democracy. The variable *Democracy* is coded based on the 21-point *Polity2* index from the Polity IV project (Marshall and Jaggers 2005).

### Statistical Model

We estimate the relationship between birth legacy and state failure with multistate Cox models in gap time extended to account for non-proportional hazards. Multistate duration models allow analysts to model duration processes in which subjects can transitions between multiple states of the world either recursively or sequentially (de Wreede, Fiocco, and Putter 2011, Metzger and Jones 2016). While uncommon in political science, multistate duration models recently have been used to analyze dynamic processes related to the development and reversal of nuclear weapons programs (Mattiacci and Jones 2016) and the escalation and resolution of territorial disputes (Jones and Metzger Forthcoming).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> We log state age because we expect the marginal effect of a state aging decreases with age.

<sup>6</sup> We note here that Lemke and Carter (2016) demonstrate that states' birth legacies do not systematically vary based on their colonial experiences, which indicates birth legacies are not merely intervening variables between colonial experiences and state failure

<sup>7</sup> Although multistate duration models are rarely used in political science, Metzger and Jones (2016, 462) usefully point out that competing risks models are just a special case of multistate duration models.

Multistate duration models have three advantages over more traditional duration models that are useful for our purposes (Metzger and Jones 2016). First, they allow one to specify transition-specific baseline hazards. This is a nice feature as there is no *a priori* reason to think that the baseline hazard of a state transitioning from a functioning state to a failed state is the same as the baseline hazard of a state transitioning from failure back to a functioning state. Second, multistate duration models allow for transition-specific covariate effects. This is important given that it is likely that factors that decrease the hazard of a state transitioning from functioning to failure will increase the hazard of a state transitioning from failure back to functioning, which is consistent with some of Iqbal and Starr's results (2016, especially Chapters 3 and 4). Third, and most importantly, they allow analysts to calculate transition probabilities that identify the probability a subject will be in a given state of the world at a given point in time given that the subject started in a given state of the world (Metzger and Jones 2016). This is very useful for our analyses because there are two different processes that could result in a state being in a state of failure at a given point in time in our data. The first is that a state could transition from a functioning state to a failed state in a given year. The second is that a state that failed in a previous year could remain failed. Thus, using a multistate duration framework allows us to estimate how birth legacies affect the probability a state is experiencing failure in a given year *and* whether this relationship is driven by variation across birth legacies in the onset of a state failure spell or the duration of a state failure spell.

We estimate multistate, semi-parametric Cox models because Cox models are preferable to parametric event history models when the phenomenon of theoretical interest is the relationship between a set of covariates and the likelihood of a subject failing rather than the specific distributional form of subject failure (Box-Steffensmeier and Jones 2004). Our models also account for non-proportional hazards between covariates and state failure. We identified the presence of non-proportional hazards by post-estimation analyses of the Schoenfeld residuals associated with each covariate. If the presence of non-proportional hazards was detected at greater than the 0.05 level, the offending variable was interacted with the natural log of time since the beginning of that spell per Box-Steffensmeier and Zorn (2001) and Box-Steffensmeier and Jones (2004).

## Results

Our analyses suggest that states with positive birth legacies are less likely to experience state failure than are states with less positive birth legacies. This relationship, though, appears to be driven more by variation across birth legacies in states' abilities to transition from state failure back to being a functioning state than the effect of birth type on the onset of state failure spells. We begin with Table 2, which reports a cross-tabulation of *Birth Legacy* and *State Failure*.

Table 2: Cross-Tabulation of Birth Legacy and State Failure, 1816-2002.

	Functioning State	Failed State	Total
Indigenous Generation	3,012	26	3,038
Violent Secession	3,189	46	3,235
Peaceful Secession	291	0	291
Birth By Agreement	3,563	46	3,609
Imperial Fragmentation	1,052	7	1,059
Derelict Decolonization	1,922	61	1,983
Total	13,029	186	13,215

$\chi^2$ -statistic: 55.32; p-value: < 0.001

Table 2 indicates that the distributions of *Birth Legacy* and *State Failure* are not independent of each other ( $\chi^2$ -statistic is significant at greater than the 0.001 level). Indeed, there are only four more observations of state failure among the states with the two most positive birth legacies than among states with the two least positive birth legacies (72 vs. 68) despite the fact that there are more than twice as many observations of states that emerged via *Indigenous Generation* or *Violent Secession* than those that became independent political entities due to *Imperial Fragmentation* or *Derelict Decolonization* (6273 vs. 3042). Table 2, therefore, provides initial evidence consistent with our argument that states with positive birth legacies should be less likely to experience failure than states with less auspicious birth legacies.

The results of our primary statistical analysis also are consistent with our claim that how states emerged as independent political entities influences whether they

experience state failure. Unfortunately, standard parameter estimates from a multistate Cox model are of limited utility in assessing our hypothesis, as they do not directly identify how a state's birth legacy influences the likelihood it is failed or functioning in a given year. Accordingly, we focus our discussion here on the results from a series of post-estimation simulations and report the statistical model in the appendix.<sup>8</sup>

A common way to present substantive results from multistate duration models is with figures that "stack" the probabilities that subjects will find themselves in each state over time (de Wreede, Fiocco, and Putter 2010). These quantities identify the overall effect a variable has on the possible transitions between or among the possible states of the world; in our case, whether a state transitions from functioning to failed and, if failed, from failed back to functioning. Figure 1 presents the probabilities that a state born via indigenous generation (Panel A) and a state born via derelict decolonization (Panel B) are functioning (gray) or failed (red) during the first one hundred years following their emergence as an independent political entity.

Two substantive results stand out in Figure 1. First, states are far more likely to be functioning in a given year than they are to experience state failure. Across the two sets of simulations, the mean probability a state is functioning in a given year is greater than 0.98 while the mean probability of failure is less than 0.02. Second, state failure is less likely to be observed among states with a positive birth legacy (indigenous generation) than states with a negative birth legacy (derelict decolonization). This is reflected in Figure 1 by the relatively greater prevalence of the color red in Panel B than in Panel A. More precisely, our results indicate that the mean probability a state that emerged through indigenous generation is failed in a given year is 0.005 while the analogous probability for a state born via derelict decolonization is 0.03. Framed differently, on average, a state is five times more likely to be failed in a given year if it emerged as an independent political entity after a process of derelict decolonization than if it was born via indigenous generation. Thus, the results of our primary analyses are consistent with our claim that state failure is less likely among states with positive birth legacies.

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<sup>8</sup> The simulations set continuous control variables to their means and categorical variables to their medians. More details about the simulations are provided in the appendix.

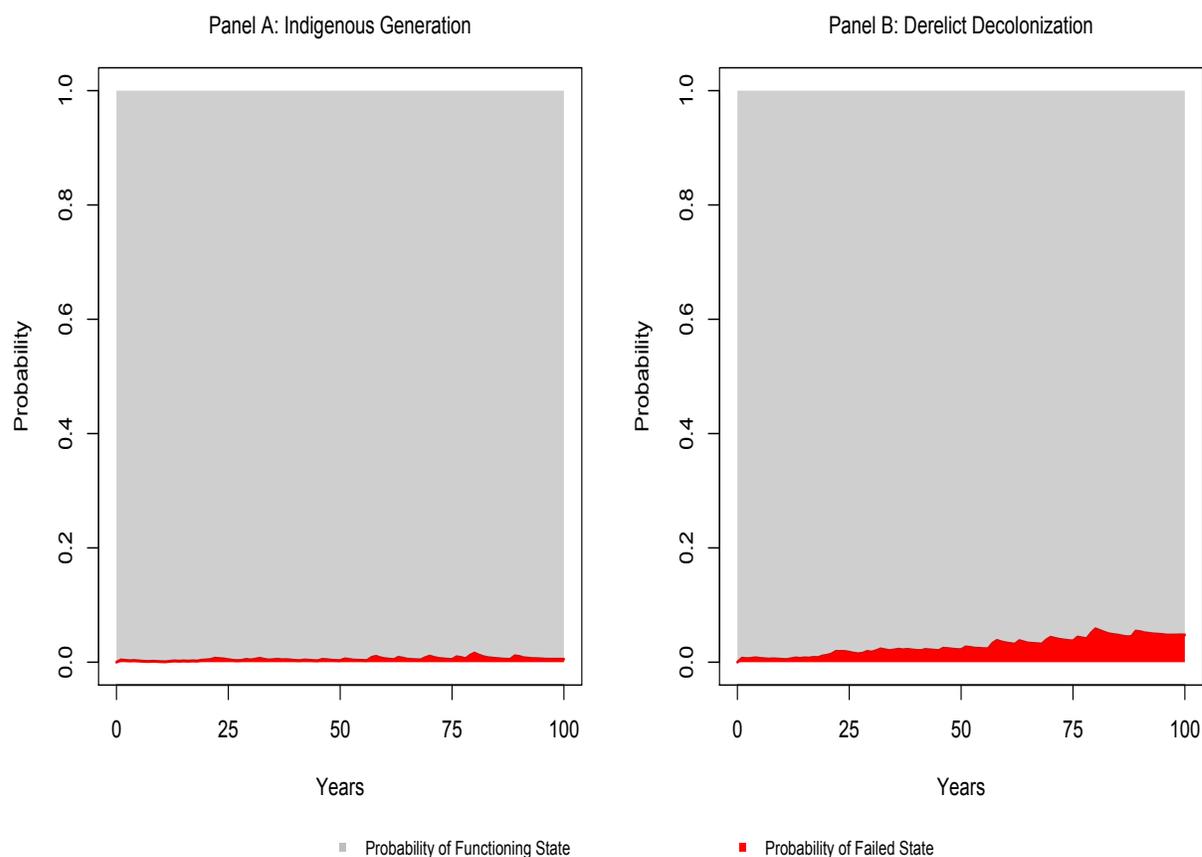


Figure 1: Birth Legacies and State Failure, 1816-2002.

Figure 1 demonstrates that, overall, countries with positive birth legacies are less likely to be failed states than are states with negative birth legacies. As noted above, one of the nice features of multistate duration models is that they allow analysts to disentangle the processes that lead a subject to reside in specific states of the world. In our case, this means that we can analyze how the finding that states with positive birth legacies are less likely to be in a state of failure is driven by how states' birth legacies influence transitions into and out of state failure. To this end, Figure 2 presents the probabilities (along with 95% confidence intervals) that an indigenously-generated state (solid blue line) and a state born via derelict decolonization (dotted red line) transition from a functioning state to failure over the course of one hundred years.

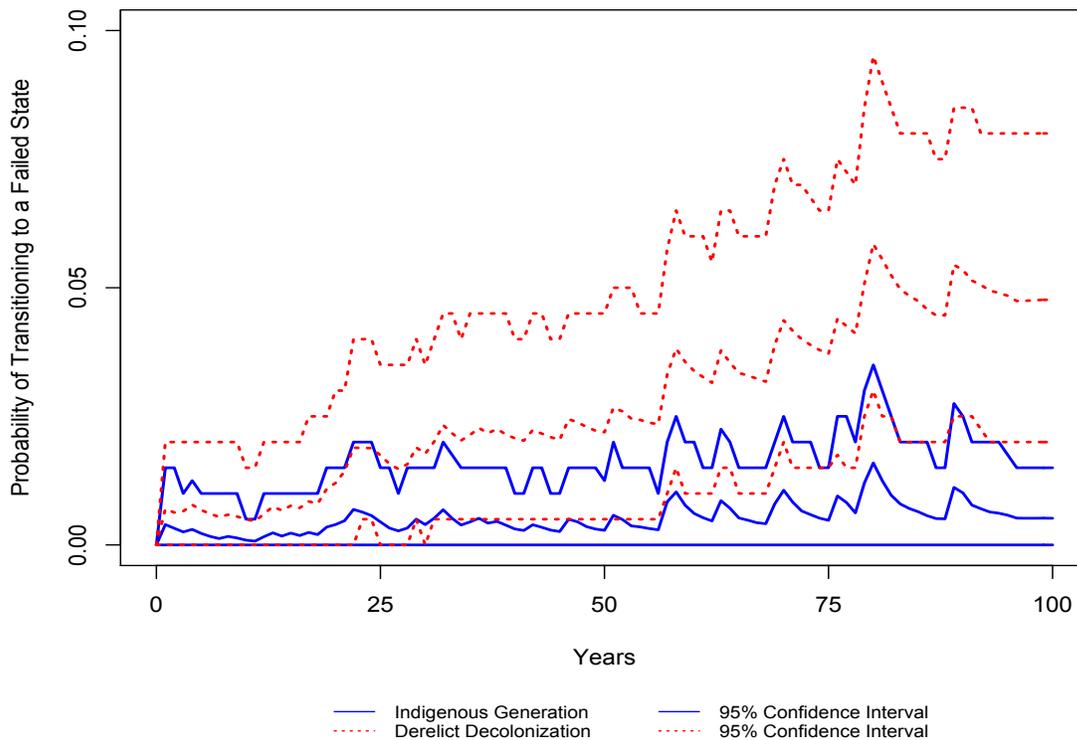


Figure 2: Birth Legacies and the Probability of State Failure 1816-2002.

Figure 2 suggests that, on average, states that emerged through a process of indigenous generation are less likely to fail in a given year than are states born via derelict decolonization, but that differences in the annual probability of failure are typically insignificant. This inference follows from two observations. First, the mean probability of state failure onset is always lower for an indigenously-generated state than a state born after a process of derelict decolonization. Second, the lower bound of the 95% confidence interval associated with the probability of failure for a state that emerged via derelict decolonization is almost always lower than the upper bound of the 95% confidence interval associated with the probability of failure for a state born via indigenous generation.

Where Figure 2 reports the probability a state fails given it is functioning, Figure 3 presents the probability (with 95% confidence intervals) that, conditional on having previously failed, a state that emerged via indigenous generation (solid blue line) and a

state born after a derelict decolonization (dotted red line) will remain failed over a period of twenty years.

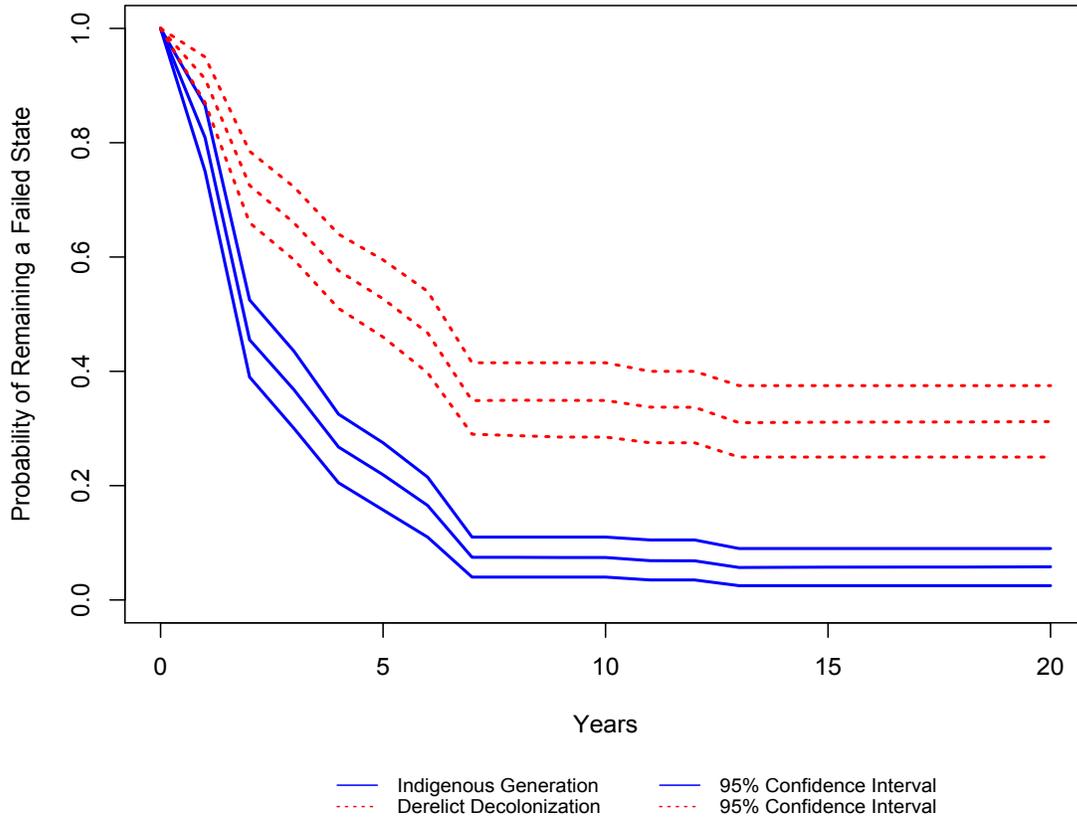


Figure 3: Birth Legacies and the Probability of Remaining a Failed State, 1816-2002.

Figure 3 suggests states with positive birth legacies are significantly less likely to remain failed than are states with less positive birth legacies. For example, the probability of a state remaining failed for four years (sample mean) given that it emerged via derelict decolonization is 0.58 (95% CI: 0.51-0.64) while the analogous probability for a state that was indigenously generated is 0.27 (95% CI: 0.21-0.33). More generally, the probability of remaining failed among states born via indigenous generation is always lower than the analogous probability for states that emerged from derelict decolonization and the confidence intervals about the respective predicted probabilities do not overlap.

Taken together, Figures 1-3 indicate that states with positive birth legacies are less likely to be in a state of failure and more likely to be functioning in a given year than are states that experienced less auspicious births. Further, this relationship is driven by states with positive birth legacies being more likely to transition back to being a functioning state after failing than being substantially less likely to fail in the first place.

### **Additional Analyses**

We conducted a series of robustness checks to assess the extent to which the results reported above are sensitive to our specification choices. For space purposes, we focus the discussion here on our substantive findings and report results tables and figures in the appendix.

Our primary specification includes the variables *Civil War*, *Interstate War*, *Energy*, and *Democracy* to account for factors previous scholarship has identified as influencing state fragility and state failure (e.g., Iqbal and Starr 2016). Our argument and existing research, though, suggest that these factors might be intervening variables between a state's birth legacy and state failure. In our case, intervening variables are factors that (1) are a consequence of a state's birth legacy and (2) have a subsequent impact on state failure. Including such variables in our analyses could result in post-treatment bias and lead to incorrect substantive inferences about the relationship between birth legacy and state failure (e.g., King and Zeng 2007). We argue states with more positive birth legacies are endowed with higher levels of capacity and legitimacy and, therefore, should be more successful at developing politically and less likely to be fragile or experience state failure than states with less positive birth legacies. Existing research links variation in capacity and legitimacy to state fragility and failure via economic development and political institutions (for example, Bates 2008, Carment et al. 2008, Iqbal and Starr 2016). Further, states with positive birth legacies are more likely to fight and win civil wars and interstate wars than are states with less positive birth legacies (Lemke and Carter 2016), and participation in violent conflict is one of the strongest predictors of state failure (Iqbal and Starr 2016). As including intervening variables as standard control variables can induce post-treatment bias, we estimated a set of

state-year and state-level bivariate regression models to see whether *Birth Legacy* predicts *Civil War*, *Interstate War*, *Energy*, and/or *Democracy*. These analyses and existing research suggest that variation in the manner in which states joined the international system predicts commonly used predictors of state failure.<sup>9</sup> We therefore conducted two robustness checks that attempt to avoid inducing post-treatment bias. First, we used residualization to identify the effect of Birth Legacy on whether a state experiences failure independent of *Civil War*, *Interstate War*, *Energy*, and *Democracy* (Clarke and Stone 2008 offer a nice description of this process). Second, we estimated a model that omitted *Civil War*, *Interstate War*, *Energy*, and *Democracy* as control variables. As with our primary analyses, these models indicate that states with positive birth legacies are less likely to experience state failure in a given year than are states with less positive birth legacies. Further, these models also suggest variation across birth legacies in the probability of experiencing state failure is due to the combination of a negative and (largely) insignificant relationship between birth type and the onset of state failure and a positive and statistically significant relationship between better birth legacies and the probability a state transitions from a failure spell back to being a functioning state.

We re-estimated all of the models mentioned above (full specification, with residualization of potential post-treatment controls, without potential post-treatment controls) with alternative measures of states' birth legacies. The first set of models used a trichotomous indicator coded 2 if a state has a good birth legacy (indigenous generation or violent secession), 1 if a state has a neutral birth legacy (peaceful secession or birth-by-agreement), and 0 if a state has a bad birth legacy (imperial fragmentation or derelict decolonization). The dichotomous variable is coded 1 if a state has a good birth legacy and 0 if a state has a neutral or bad birth legacy. The results of these models were consistent with the findings reported here: states with better birth legacies are less likely to be failed than states with worse birth legacies, and this relationship is driven more by

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<sup>9</sup> These results are reported in the appendix.

the effect birth type has on the probability a state transitions back to a functioning state than the effect birth legacies have on the onset of a state failure spell.

The analyses and results described thus far define state failure based on the *SF* variable from Polity IV, which designates a state as failed when there has been a complete collapse of its authority or the state has disintegrated (Marshall and Jaggers 2005:35). Iqbal and Starr (2008, 2016) also rely on the Polity IV data for their measure of state failure, but define a state as failed when it receives a -77, or “interregnum”, code. We therefore re-estimated our primary specification with a dependent variable based on Iqbal and Starr’s coding of state failure. The results of this model also indicate that states with positive birth legacies are less likely to experience state failure than are states that experienced less auspicious births.

A number of scholars argue that state failure largely is the result of the post-World War II territorial sovereignty norm (e.g., Iqbal and Starr 2016). Our data are at least partially consistent with this view, as there are substantially more state-year observations of state failure after the conclusion of World War II than during the period between 1816 and 1945 (131 vs. 55).<sup>10</sup> Our final analyses therefore consider whether spells of state failure are less common among states with positive birth legacies before and after the end of World War II. Importantly, models estimated on the periods between 1816-1945 and 1946-2002 both indicate that states with positive birth legacies are less likely to experience state failure than are states that emerged as independent political actors under less favorable conditions.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

We argue that the process by which a state became a state should influence whether it subsequently experiences state failure. States that joined the club of nations with relatively high levels of political capacity and popular legitimacy should be more successful at consolidating control over their population and

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<sup>10</sup> A two-sample test of proportions indicates state failure is significantly more likely to occur in the period between 1946-2002 than between 1816-1945 at greater than the 0.001 level.

territory than states whose emergence required little to no work of their own. Overall, we find broad support for our claim: states with positive birth legacies are less likely to experience state failure than states with less positive birth legacies. However, this relationship appears to be less a function of variation across birth legacies in the probability states fail and instead is driven more by states with better birth legacies transitioning out of spells of state failure faster than those states that experienced less auspicious births.

At a broad level, our results imply that the stages of state-making and political development are related. We demonstrate that how states emerge significantly influences their subsequent authority over their territory. Recall that diagnostic analyses indicate that good birth states are more developed, less fragile, and enjoy greater levels of legitimacy and effectiveness. Elsewhere, Lemke and Carter (2016) demonstrate that states with positive birth legacies are more likely to fight and win interstate and civil wars than are other states. Taken together these findings indicate that how a state entered the international system influences its subsequent political and economic development, power, propensity to fight and win wars, political stability, and ability to avoid state failure. A state's birth legacy therefore influences many of the phenomena central to the study of comparative and international politics.

The above discussion suggests two related points. First, ignoring how the states they study came to exist has resulted in scholars missing a factor that explains many prominent independent and dependent variables in the study of comparative politics and international relations. Pitched at one level, this statement can be interpreted as an argument that many statistical models suffer from misspecification. More critically, it implies that scholars concerned with economic and political development, war, and a number of other issues need to consider carefully how the context surrounding a state's emergence influences the topics they study. This implies, second, that the study of birth legacies represents a promising research agenda with implications for a wide-variety of substantive issues. The process by which a state joins the international system is by definition temporally antecedent to any of its behaviors, largely exogenous to various state

characteristics, and appears to significantly influence variation on a number of issues. These qualities suggest that focusing on how a given political entity became a state is a fruitful approach for explaining state behavior.

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