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International Statebuilding and the Domestic Politics of State Development

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Abstract

Managing the threat of violence remains a central concern in international security and development. International actors seek to terminate civil wars and prevent conflict recurrence by building peace and strengthening state institutions. In this article, I review the scholarship on international statebuilding, defined broadly as external efforts to create, strengthen, reform, and transform the authority structures of the state. Much of this literature models international statebuilding as provision, in which external actors provide a solution to the enforcement problem that plagues postconflict bargains. However, in many cases, the assumptions about domestic politics underpinning the provision model do not hold. When the central problem of domestic politics concerns bargaining over the distributional consequences of the peace rather than the parties' ability to credibly commit to the peace, international statebuilding is more fruitfully modeled as imposition, in which terms are imposed on recalcitrant domestic actors. The imposition model allows the preferences of external actors over the postwar order to diverge from the preferences of domestic actors. Divergence arises because statebuilding interventions have distributional consequences that threaten the interests of domestic elites. To unpack why this is the case, I turn to the literature on the domestic politics of statebuilding, which shows that governance arrangements that appear to outsiders as weak statehood can help manage violence by facilitating the distribution of sovereignty rents. Insights from these literatures suggest exciting new avenues for future scholarship.

INTRODUCTION

Managing the threat of violence remains a central concern in international security and development. This threat is especially acute in the world's weak and failing states (Fearon & Laitin 2003; Besley & Persson 2010; Hendrix 2010; Lee 2018, 2020). Although the number of active civil wars has declined since their peak in the early 1990s, about 30 wars are ongoing in about 20% of the world's non-microstates at any given time (Fearon 2017, p. 20). The consequences of civil war for human welfare and security are grievous and do not remain confined within national borders.

In response to this threat of violence, the international community has developed a robust regime for addressing conflict with the goal of terminating war and preventing its recurrence (Gowan & Stedman 2018). A significant component of this response includes international statebuilding—externally led attempts to strengthen and reform state institutions and the exercise of state power—on the grounds that reconstituting the state is necessary to avoid a return to conflict. Reflecting this logic, many post–Cold War peace deals now contain numerous statebuilding provisions. Although international actors have enjoyed considerable success at ending civil war and limiting civilian victimization (Doyle & Sambanis 2006, Fortna 2008, Hultman et al. 2013, Hultman et al. 2014, Matanock 2017, Ruggeri et al. 2017), their efforts to alter domestic authority structures have stalled or failed outright (Paris 2004, Lake 2010, Richmond 2014, Barma 2016, Fearon 2017).

How does international statebuilding work, and what explains this pattern of differential success and failure? The answers depend on the approach, or model, that one applies to international statebuilding. Drawing inspiration from the domestic statebuilding literature (Soifer & Tiberti 2020) and the scholarship on bargaining and war (Fearon 1995, 1998; Wagner 2000), I identify two models of international statebuilding. The first approach is what I call the provision model, in which international actors provide willing domestic actors a solution to the problem of peace agreement enforcement. A second approach is the imposition model, in which the terms of the postwar order are imposed upon recalcitrant and resistant domestic actors. Each model of statebuilding reflects different assumptions about the politics of violence management. These assumptions shape the questions that scholars ask about international statebuilding and the answers that they get.

Much of the literature implicitly models international statebuilding as provision. In this model, the central issue affecting domestic politics is the problem of enforcement, in which domestic actors are unable to credibly commit to not use the power of the state to renege on negotiated agreements (Walter 2002, 1997; Girod 2015; Fearon 2017; Matanock 2020). An implicit assumption of this approach is that peace—an important goal of statebuilding—is elusive because belligerents fear noncompliance from the other side. In other words, even when the belligerents can identify a mutually agreeable bargain, the fear of noncompliance makes continued fighting preferable to a negotiated settlement.

International actors provide a solution to this credible commitment problem by shaping the costs and benefits of compliance with the peace. Statebuilding success or failure thus turns on the international actor's ability and willingness to serve as an enforcer by committing adequate resources and following through on its threats (Walter 1997, 2002; Dobbins et al. 2003, 2005; Chesterman 2004; Doyle & Sambanis 2006; Miller 2013; Girod 2015; Howard 2019; Matanock 2020). Those conditions are more likely to hold in the case of stopping violence than in state restructuring. This observation can explain why these different phases of statebuilding have different rates of success.

The influence of the provision model is considerable. It has generated an enormously productive literature focused on international factors, actors, and organizations. Yet, it also has important consequences for how scholars think about the politics of international statebuilding. In focusing

on enforcement and problems of commitment, the provision model downplays bargaining and problems of distribution. By implicitly assuming that there exists at least one mutually acceptable bargain that addresses the thorny political questions about the distributive consequences of the peace, scholars focus on international factors rather than domestic factors as explanations for variation in statebuilding success.

A separate branch of statebuilding scholarship departs from the assumptions of the provision approach and instead—again implicitly—models international statebuilding as imposition. Here, the critical issue in domestic politics is bargaining over the distributional consequences of the postwar order: who gets what, when, and how (Barma 2016). Despite being central to the war termination bargaining process and to domestic (autonomous) statebuilding, and logically prior to the question of enforcement, these questions are absent from the provision approach. By centering analysis on enforcement, provision scholars assume the existence of a compromise agreement preferable to fighting if the enforcement problem can be solved. For them, enforcement, not bargaining, is the challenge.

In contrast, the imposition model places domestic politics and conflicts of interest at its center. If the bargaining problem over distributional issues remains unresolved and the belligerents prefer to keep fighting, or if the external actor prefers terms unacceptable to the belligerents, then international statebuilding is imposed from the outside, not provided as a solution to the enforcement problem. Belligerents who object to those terms are likely to resist or undermine their implementation (Barnett et al. 2014, Barma 2016). The imposition approach therefore suggests that success or failure in international statebuilding can be traced to domestic politics (Mac Ginty 2011, Lake 2016, Russell & Sambanis 2022). To be clear, however, by "imposition," I refer specifically to international actors' use of power to dictate the terms of a postwar order—the peace settlement—to domestic actors. This is distinct from the use of power to incentivize compliance with an agreement.

One important contribution of the imposition literature is to shift scholarly attention to domestic politics as an explanation for variation in statebuilding success. Studies in this vein focus on the interaction between domestic actors and international actors. Scholars pay particular attention to domestic actors' ability to thwart the efforts of the international actor (Englebert & Tull 2008, Mac Ginty 2011, Barnett et al. 2014, Richmond 2014, Barma 2016, Campbell & Matanock 2021). As a result of this theoretical focus on domestic politics and resistance, a second important contribution is to conceptualize outcomes not in terms of the binary of success and failure, but as a continuum or as compromised and hybridized (Mac Ginty 2011, Barnett et al. 2014). This conceptual shift allows scholars to probe how international statebuilding changes politics in the host state even as interventions fail to build effective states.

By shifting attention to domestic politics and allowing for the possibility of resistance, the imposition model raises an important question: Why would domestic actors oppose some or all of the international statebuilding project? I draw insights from the literature on domestic statebuilding to offer a new explanation. Domestic rulers have long confronted the same problem that vexes international statebuilders in postconflict settings: how to manage the pervasive threat of violence given the costliness of coercion (Tilly 1985, Barkey 1994, Migdal 1988, North et al. 2009). Overcoming this problem requires co-opting violence entrepreneurs by giving them access to sovereignty rents—rents generated through the use of state power—as side payments for peace. The structure of the state and the way it exercises power are integral to the use of co-optation as a strategy for managing violence (Migdal 1988, Hibou 2004, Driscoll 2015). Provocatively, this finding implies that statebuilding failure may be necessary to maintain the peace. I conclude with a discussion of the implications of this literature for new avenues of research on international statebuilding and the politics of state development.

INTERNATIONAL STATEBUILDING IN POSTCONFLICT SETTINGS

What is statebuilding, and what is international statebuilding? Statebuilding without the modifier refers to domestic processes that strengthen the state's authority and presence throughout its territory. These processes, which are domestic in origin and execution, include the monopolization of force and the management of violence, or "extraordinary statebuilding." They also include the creation and strengthening of administrative institutions and the extension of state presence over physical territory and in the lives of the governed, or "ordinary statebuilding."[1] As a general concept, statebuilding does not refer to a political order organized around a particular mode of authority (e.g., rational-legal, charismatic, or traditional, to use Weber's ideal types) (Weber 2009).

International statebuilding is a murkier term. Despite an explosion of scholarly interest in post–Cold War international efforts to address the problem of violence in weak and failing states, the literature lacks a consensus on the definition of international statebuilding. In fact, some scholars refer to this practice as nation-building, and others call it peacebuilding (Dobbins et al. 2003, 2005, 2008; Brownlee 2007; Autesserre 2010; Barnett et al. 2014; Barma 2016). Still others consider colonialism to be a form of international statebuilding (Duffield & Hewitt 2009, Matsuzaki 2019).

I adopt a broad definition for the purposes of this review. International statebuilding refers to the efforts of international actors to shape how a sovereign state exercises domestic state power by constructing and reforming that state's formal authority structures. While domestic statebuilding refers to the processes that construct any kind of state, the intended ends of international statebuilding are usually specific: The state should be secure, stable, effective, legitimate, liberal, and formally rule bound (Chesterman 2004, Call 2008, Sisk 2013, Lake 2016). This definition encompasses both control over violence and the creation of institutions.[2] The bias toward the liberal-democratic, rational-legal ideal state reflects the influence of the external actors engaged in international statebuilding. These actors are typically—and currently—Western states and intergovernmental organizations such as the United Nations. Interventions can take place against the will of the host state, as in the US-led invasion of Afghanistan or in UN-led peace enforcement operations, or they can be invited by the major parties to the conflict, as in many UN peacekeeping missions. An invitation, however, does not necessarily imply full domestic cooperation.

International statebuilding remains the prescription for managing violence in the aftermath of civil conflict. One rationale for international statebuilding focuses on state strengthening as the antidote to a plethora of problems associated with violence in weak and failing states. These include instability, human suffering, underdevelopment, and the potential for weak states to generate public "bads": the spread of conflict and disease and the inadvertent hosting of transnational criminal and terrorist organizations (Sisk 2013). Such problems could be prevented or minimized by addressing the underlying weakness of the state (Fearon & Laitin 2004, Fukuyama 2004).

A second rationale focuses not on preventing negative outcomes but on fostering positive outcomes after conflict. Scholars have argued that increasing economic development, improving legitimacy, reforming the security sector, and deterring future political abuses can consolidate peace (Call 2008, Toft 2010, Sisk 2013). The effective exercise of state power in service of these functions requires a strong state, which is often lacking in the immediate aftermath of conflict (Paris 2004). In this sense, ordinary statebuilding reinforces extraordinary statebuilding.

Statebuilding provisions are common and explicit in post–Cold War intrastate peace agreements. **Figure 1** shows the proportion of peace agreements and peace processes that include

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[1]I thank Hillel Soifer for these terms (see also Mann 1984, Loveman 2005, Soifer 2008).

[2]That these goals may strike some readers as ill-defined or amorphous reflects the gap between what international statebuilders hope to achieve and their understanding of how to achieve it.
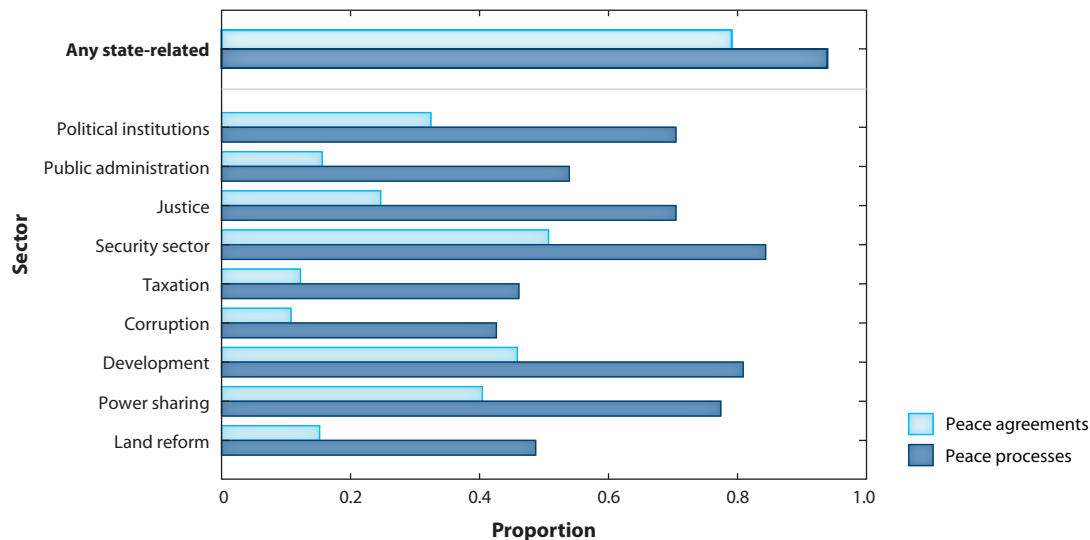
Figure 1

Peace agreements and processes with state-related provisions, 1990–2020. Peace agreements are formal documents. Peace processes are formal attempts to end conflict through mutual agreement; a process can have multiple agreements. Data from Bell et al. (2020).

provisions related to the exercise or structure of state power for the period 1990–2020. Peace agreements are formal documents addressing the end of conflict, while peace processes are formal attempts to bring about the end of conflict through mutual agreement (Bell et al. 2020). As we can see, state power is implicated in sectors and issues ranging from the administration of justice and taxation to the implementation of land reform and development policies. **Figure 1** also illustrates the pervasiveness of these provisions: 90% of agreements and nearly 94% of processes contained at least one state-related provision. For the post–Cold War period, at least, conflict termination and statebuilding are intimately related.

International statebuilders operate on two underlying assumptions: Weak states cannot recover on their own, and intervention is necessary for stabilizing and strengthening states (Weinstein 2005, p. 4; Phillips 2020). These assumptions—as well as the discourse of state fragility and the entire enterprise of international statebuilding—are the subject of much criticism from scholars and citizens in the countries that experience intervention, regardless of whether the intervention occurs with the consent of the host state government (Gruffydd Jones 2013, Sabaratnam 2017, Woodward 2017, Phillips 2020). Despite these criticisms, the reconstitution of domestic authority structures remains the default response to weak statehood. A significant body of scholarship thus explores the theoretical basis for the idea that international statebuilding is necessary to help states recover after conflict.

ENFORCEMENT PROBLEMS: INTERNATIONAL STATEBUILDING AS PROVISION

Scholars working in the rationalist tradition tend to approach the study of international state-building through the lens of enforcement and the problem of credible commitment. Commitment problems plague negotiations over the terms of the postconflict peace and the nature of the postwar political order. In the civil conflict context, these negotiations involve a government bargaining with one or more nonstate groups. Commitment problems arise from power

asymmetries: Government actors have access to the full machinery of state power while nonstate actors do not. The former cannot credibly commit not to use state power to renege on its bargain with the latter. In this view, even if the belligerents can identify a mutually acceptable compromise deal, they will prefer continued fighting if they do not trust the other side to adhere to the bargain.

The particulars of the commitment problem vary depending on the issue area but always involve either endogenous or exogenous shifts in power or implementation that take place over time. The best-known formulation focuses on the vulnerability of rebel groups, who fear that the government will use its military to wipe them out after they lay down their arms (Walter 1997, 2002). Commitment problems also afflict other domains whenever the government must use state power to implement the provisions specified in the peace agreement or alter rules in order to share power (Fearon 2017, Matanock 2020). Because these provisions often concern the exercise of state power, implementation falls to the government, which cannot credibly commit not to use state power to thwart reforms and revert to the status quo ante. Reversion problems are not unique to postconflict negotiations (Matanock 2020), but they are an important barrier to the conclusion of bargains between government and nonstate belligerents.

For the international statebuilding literature, the most consequential insight to emerge from the commitment problem paradigm is the idea that external actors can mitigate these problems by enforcing domestic bargains. Enforcement operates by manipulating the benefits of compliance and the costs of defection. When the former exceed the latter, domestic actors should prefer to adhere to the terms of the postwar bargain. International actors supply the resources that shape these cost–benefit calculations, and in doing so help reassure domestic actors that each side will not renege on the peace deal.

Scholars who give theoretical primacy to credible commitment in international statebuilding make an important assumption about domestic politics in host states: that belligerents agree about the terms of the deal. Enforcement problems are relevant only if there is a deal to be enforced. The crucial step of bargaining over the terms of the postwar order is prior to the question of enforcement [a point Fearon (1998) also makes about international cooperation]. For enforcement to matter, there must be a mutually acceptable deal preferable to continued fighting that cannot be reached in the absence of external enforcement. In centering analysis on commitment problems and enforcement, scholars assume that the bargaining problem has been resolved.

This assumption suggests a model of international statebuilding as provision, where the international actor provides the necessary enforcement that the domestic belligerents want. One consequence of the provision model is that it directs scholarly attention away from domestic politics and focuses it instead on the international actor. Indeed, the two most productive strands of scholarship to emerge from this approach are deeply related to international provision. These include (*a*) studies that examine how international actors enforce deals and (*b*) studies that examine when and why international statebuilding succeeds or fails.

The first strand of scholarship concerns the "how" question, which focuses on the mechanisms and modalities of international enforcement. At minimum, international actors must be able to monitor compliance and detect defection. They must then be able to condition the application of coercive, inducement, and persuasive power on compliance with the agreement (Howard 2019, Matanock 2020). The modalities of international statebuilding vary considerably and are not mutually exclusive. They include transitional administration (Kosovo, East Timor, Cambodia); occupation (Iraq); complex or multidimensional peacekeeping (Mali, Mozambique); shared sovereignty (Solomon Islands, Sierra Leone); security and development training and assistance (Philippines, Afghanistan in the 2010s); and observation (Namibia).

The second strand of scholarship focuses on questions of success and failure. One striking pattern that has emerged is that international enforcement ends conflict and limits violence against

civilians (Doyle & Sambanis 2006; Fortna 2008; Hultman et al. 2013, 2014; Matanock 2017; Ruggeri et al. 2017) but fails to reshape the exercise of state power as outsiders intend (Paris 2004, Lake 2010, Richmond 2014, Barma 2016, Fearon 2017).[3] Put differently, even though international actors can resolve the commitment problem inherent in civil war termination, they are unable to enforce adherence to peace deal terms pertaining to the restructuring of the state and its institutions. That international actors stop fighting and contribute to a more durable peace is not to be minimized; the monopoly of force is the defining feature of states and thus a crucial step in the broader domestic statebuilding process. However, the international postconflict statebuilding agenda has always been more ambitious than conflict termination because statebuilding is meant to prevent conflict recurrence. Why, then, has the record been so uneven?

Many explanations for the failure of institutional restructuring focus on the international actor's enforcement ability and willingness. These arguments can be grouped into roughly two categories: insufficient ability to manipulate costs and benefits and insufficient willingness to manipulate costs and benefits.

Arguments about insufficient ability typically focus on external resourcing and effort in terms of time, money, and manpower. Resources affect the ability of the external actor to enforce postwar bargains through cost–benefit manipulation. For example, larger statebuilding interventions have greater coercive power or reach and therefore make defection costlier, while greater financial resources and a willingness to take the time to build institutions make compliance more attractive. Resources are more likely to bind as a constraint when peace deals include sweeping reform agendas involving statebuilding (Krasner & Risse 2014). Consequently, several scholars have argued that appropriately matching means to ends improves the likelihood of success (Dobbins et al. 2003, 2005; Chesterman 2004; Doyle & Sambanis 2006; Miller 2013).

Recent statebuilding experiences challenge the effort hypothesis. It is true that many of the early interventions with statebuilding objectives were severely under-resourced. However, the Afghanistan and Iraq interventions, the best-resourced statebuilding missions since the end of the Cold War, have failed to transform these states as outsiders intended. As one study of US-led statebuilding observed, "the U.S. has done best where it has done less, that is, refurbishing existing local institutions rather than attempting to construct new ones" (Brownlee 2007, p. 315). Applied to our puzzle of differential success, this set of explanations suggests that external actors commit sufficient resources to terminate conflict but not enough resources for the monumentally harder task of building institutions.

Whereas arguments about insufficient ability assume that the international actor wants to assist in the termination of conflict and restructuring of state institutions, arguments about insufficient willingness focus on international actor's interest in following through on its promise to act as an enforcer. A particularly important factor in the decision to follow through is the enforcer's strategic interests in the host state. These interests undermine the credibility of the international actor's enforcement threats (Walter 2002, Donno 2013, Girod 2015, Matanock 2020). Good enforcers are hard to find, however. They must be interested enough in the host state to invest time and resources in enforcing agreements and rebuilding institutions, but not so interested that they become wedded to a particular side or outcome (Walter 1997, Matanock 2020). This set of arguments explains differential success with reference to the external actor's greater willingness to enforce the parts of peace agreements that focus on conflict termination as opposed to conflict recurrence through state restructuring.

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[3]The failures are even more clear if we also include outcomes related to the regime rather than the state: International actors rarely succeed in building liberal democracies after conflict (Jarstad & Sisk 2008, Zürcher et al. 2013).

Though scholars do not always draw the connection explicitly, these two sets of arguments align well with the idea that problems of enforcement plague domestic politics after war. Walter (2002, p. 27) summarizes the link between insufficient resources, insufficient willingness, and outcomes succinctly: "If combatants do not believe outsiders will faithfully verify or enforce compliance, or they see outsiders failing to commit sufficient resources to the task at hand, promises to monitor and protect will have no positive effect and combatants will refuse to abide by their agreements."

A related set of arguments takes willingness and ability to enforce for granted and instead examines international actor organizational characteristics that hamper interventions. These arguments variously attribute success and failure to variation in organizational learning (Howard 2008), bureaucratic interests (Woodward 2017), peacebuilding "culture" (Autesserre 2010), and access to local-level feedback (Campbell 2018). Like other scholarship in the provision model, these arguments assume that domestic actors desire international statebuilding.

The provision model has been enormously productive. It is also self-limiting. By placing the locus of inquiry squarely on international enforcers and focusing on the problem of enforcement, scholars minimize other facets of domestic politics and assume away the distributional problems that give rise to conflict in the first place. In the provision model, the critical barrier is the enforcement of the bargain, not the terms of the bargain. If the commitment problem cannot be resolved, the domestic actors are unlikely to bargain seriously (Fearon 1998). If the domestic actors have negotiated an agreement, then bargaining and distribution remain irrelevant for provision scholars because the fundamental questions of who gets what, where, when, and how have already been addressed and incorporated into the settlement.[4] Within this model, then, there is little theoretical room for the complexities of domestic politics to complicate the analysis of international statebuilding. The virtual absence of domestic politics is problematic because it limits theoretical innovation to international politics, despite the fact that the object of international statebuilding is the reconstruction and transformation of domestic state structures.

BARGAINING PROBLEMS: INTERNATIONAL STATEBUILDING AS IMPOSITION

Given the self-limiting assumptions of the provision model, it is not surprising that theoretical advances oriented around domestic politics come from a different approach that I call the imposition model. **Table 1** summarizes the key differences between the imposition and provision models.

Scholarship in the imposition approach centers attention on bargaining problems over the distributional consequences of the peace. This approach assumes that outside actors impose the terms of the postwar order on domestic actors against their preferences, or that there is no deal mutually acceptable to domestic belligerents and the external enforcer that is also preferable to continued fighting.[5] This mismatch arises because postwar orders are distributional in nature. Peace agreements establish postconflict political orders and thereby settle how state power will be structured and exercised. These issues have deep distributional consequences. Power-sharing and democracy provisions are clear examples of reforms with such consequences. So too are reforms that affect the organization of the state, its institutions, and the rules about the use of state power.

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[4]This claim assumes that negotiations and agreements are not concluded for strategic bad faith reasons (see Min 2020).

[5]While some critical theorists would agree that international statebuilding is imposed, that literature differs by focusing instead on informal imperialism and unequal power relations (see Chandler 2006, Duffield 2007, Richmond 2014).

Table 1 The provision and imposition models of international statebuilding[a]

	Provision	Imposition
Critical barrier	Enforcement to overcome credible commitment problems	Bargaining over distributional consequences of the peace
Assumption about bargaining	At least one mutually acceptable bargain settling distribution issues exists	Distributional issues not settled or terms are imposed from the outside
Focus of theoretical innovation	International actor	Interaction between international and domestic actors
Limits	Domestic politics underexplored	Preferences and distributional consequences underexplored

[a]The provision and imposition models make no assumptions about whether the statebuilding intervention is impartial, invited, or enjoys the consent of the major parties.

The prospect of credible external enforcement can in fact intensify bargaining problems over these thorny distributional issues, since the parties know that if they accept an agreement they will actually have to live with it (Fearon 1998).

Focusing on bargaining and distribution rather than enforcement and commitment enriches our understanding of international statebuilding in two ways. First, the imposition approach allows for domestic–domestic and international–domestic interest-based conflicts to acquire explanatory power. For example, by assuming international–domestic preference divergence as a starting point, Lake (2016) identifies a legitimacy–loyalty trade-off that afflicts the international statebuilding endeavor. Self-interested international statebuilders seek leaders who will protect the external actor's interests (loyalty), but who will also govern effectively and with the support of the governed (legitimacy). This contradiction implies that international statebuilding missions will tend to fail to build legitimate states because of the tension between international and domestic preferences over the postwar order, a conclusion that is radically different from the explanations common in studies that adopt the provision model.

Russell & Sambanis (2022) take a different approach to preference divergence by showing that it can emerge endogenously in response to external and local actor behavior. They posit three interlocking dilemmas of statebuilding. One is a sectarian dilemma, in which violent con-testation between social groups incentivizes identity-based patronage politics at the expense of a well-functioning state. International actors can mitigate this dilemma—in a provision sense—by reducing violence and solving commitment problems. This incentivizes politicians to shift toward a nationalist strategy predicated on public goods provision despite weak state capacity (an insti-tutionalist dilemma). International actors can substitute their capacity for the state, but doing so sparks a sovereignty dilemma, in which newly nationalist leaders demand external actor withdrawal prior to the construction of a functioning state. As Russell & Sambanis (2022) argue, solving one dilemma generates another in ways that can lead to statebuilding failure.

Second, international–domestic and domestic–domestic conflict allows scholars to eschew the binary of success and failure and instead examine outcomes as hybridized, in a categorical sense, or as lying on a continuum. Hybridized outcomes contain a mix of elements from the statebuilding program, while a continuum permits intermediate outcomes between success and failure. Aban-doning the binary acknowledges that domestic actors can subvert or thwart some aspects of the international statebuilding program while embracing others (Mac Ginty 2011). As Barma (2016, p. 1) notes, "international peacebuilders want to build effective and legitimate governments, [while] domestic elites essentially do not"—or at least, not on the terms that international actors impose. However, domestic elites covet international resources that accompany external demands for state reform and restructuring. These resources include not only material transfers but also,

more fundamentally, the power and recognition that international actors bestow on domestic actors selected to govern the postconflict state. In a context where the basic political issues of the postwar order have not been settled, the material and symbolic support of international actors is especially valuable to the belligerents who control the state.

In order to obtain resources while avoiding reform, domestic actors dilute, alter, and instrumentalize the statebuilding program in often subtle ways that undermine the overarching goal of state restructuring (Englebert & Tull 2008, Mac Ginty 2011, Barnett et al. 2014, Barma 2016). Much of this domestic subversion takes place through procedural tactics (Campbell & Matanock 2021). For example, the government of Timor-Leste thwarted the UN peacekeeping mission's efforts to reform the national police by retaining control over decisions concerning personnel and institutional restructuring—functions crucial for reform (Ciorciari 2021, p. 155). In Cambodia, the belligerents manipulated the power-sharing system set up under UN supervision to create parallel crony-based networks within the state apparatus; the effect was to enhance their own political power while simultaneously weakening state capacity (Barma 2016, pp. 156–58). To conclude that international statebuilding has had no effect on host state domestic politics would be misleading, however. International statebuilding does alter and transform states, but those states do not look like the ones that international statebuilders hope to create. The temptation to label these cases as statebuilding failures, as if politics remains unchanged, obscures the important ways in which international actors unintentionally contribute to these new orders.

These theoretical advances demonstrate the productivity of the imposition approach for generating new understandings of international statebuilding and its effects. Many of these insights arise from the relaxation of the provision model's assumption that the distributional issues implicated in the postwar order have already been settled. But how do preferences of domestic belligerents and international enforcers over those issues diverge? The literature offers three answers.

The first way in which preferences can diverge occurs in cases of one-sided intervention. The most prominent recent example is the US invasion of Afghanistan. The United States overthrew the government and imposed terms for the postinvasion political order that were clearly misaligned with the interests of domestic elites, including the victorious side. Even in less extreme cases, one-sided interventions can change the content of settlements if the intervener coerces the less-favored side to accept terms that advantage the interveners' protégé (Favretto 2009). These agreements reflect common expectations over continued fighting with international military involvement, but they can become obsolete as international involvement wanes.

The second way in which preferences diverge occurs when domestic actors prefer continued fighting. This domestic–domestic disagreement becomes an international–domestic disagreement when an external actor compels the parties to accept a bargain with terms that do not reflect the belligerents' common expectations about the military consequences of continued fighting. War provides valuable information that shapes these expectations. Belligerents should prefer fighting until they no longer believe they can obtain a better deal on the battlefield than at the negotiation table. However, international involvement can halt wars before both sides can form common beliefs. The end of the Cold War saw a tremendous increase in international efforts to end conflict. Diplomatic interventions increased (Regan et al. 2009, p. 143), and mediation attempts occurred so much more frequently (Greig & Diehl 2012, Wallensteen & Svensson 2014) that they have become "almost automatic" (Gowan & Stedman 2018, p. 172). Armed UN interventions into active conflicts, without the consent of the host state and sometimes under the mantle of "peace enforcement," are not uncommon (Hultman et al. 2014).

A key consequence of greater international involvement is intense pressure to settle conflicts peacefully. Civil wars are now more likely to end in negotiated settlement than victory on the battlefield (Kreutz 2010). Yet, this pressure can produce "unnatural settlements" whose terms differ

from the ones the belligerents would have negotiated—if they would have come to an agreement at all (Werner & Yuen 2005, Beardsley 2008, Cunningham 2012). Examples include the 1991 Paris Peace Agreements, which halted the Cambodian civil war, and the multiple failed agreements intended to stop the round of fighting in the Central African Republic that began in 2012. Unnatural agreements are particularly prone to failure, not because of inadequate international enforcement, but because the domestic actors do not agree on the terms of the postwar order (Werner & Yuen 2005). Disagreement is a distribution problem, not a commitment problem.

A third way in which preferences diverge occurs when international actors inject settlement provisions or implementation programs that the belligerents would not have pursued on their own. In these cases, domestic actors may agree about the terms of the postwar order, but those terms are unacceptable to international actors without additional provisions. Whether motivated by normative considerations or by the belief that effective, constrained states reduce the probability of future conflict (Paris 2004), international actors demand the inclusion of a variety of reforms that may not have anything to do with the immediate issue of conflict termination or the distributional disagreements that led to war in the first place. International enforcement may also result in implementation programs that resemble, in the words of one critic, "peacebuilding from IKEA, whereby the vision of peace is made off-site, shipped to a foreign location, and reconstructed according to a prearranged plan" without any sensitivity to local issues (Mac Ginty 2011, p. 39).

These provisions and programs may have little support among the major parties. For example, provisions concerning security sector reform, which are among the most common types of statebuilding provisions in agreements, can be deeply threatening to militaries—even existentially so (White 2020). Similarly, the implementation of rule-of-law programming in Afghanistan ran into roadblocks precisely because domestic elites, including former belligerents, were uninterested in and opposed to the reforms (Swenson 2017). External pressure can thus produce agreements whose terms and implementation plans are only partially acceptable to the belligerents, who nonetheless acquiesce in the short run out of a desire for peace or external material resources (Mac Ginty 2011).

To be clear, preferences over the terms of the postwar order can diverge even when interventions take place under the auspices of the United Nations and at the invitation of the host state. Although impartiality is a basic principle of UN peacekeeping, and the UN's perceived lack of bias contributes to its effectiveness at limiting violence (Nomikos 2022), the United Nations is statist in orientation, and its decisions reflect the interests and agendas of its most powerful members (Vreeland & Dreher 2014). This agenda includes adherence to the Western-oriented international statebuilding paradigm. For example, in Somalia, the United Nations imposed a set of participatory reforms "designed from the top and imposed on local actors," even though these reforms were at odds with local interests and the balance of power on the ground (Lake 2016, p. 168).

Moreover, domestic resistance can and does take place in consent-based missions and shared-sovereignty arrangements. Consent from the main belligerents does not imply universal consent on the ground, nor agreement with specific peace provisions, and the incomplete nature of the contracts that govern these relationships provides considerable leeway for resistance (Matanock 2014, Campbell & Matanock 2021, Ciorciari 2021). In other words, the provision/imposition typology does not map cleanly onto distinctions between the partiality/impartiality or consent-based peacekeeping/non-consent-based peace enforcement dichotomies common in the literature.

Reorienting analysis around bargaining problems and preference divergence necessitates rethinking the model of international statebuilding. In cases where domestic actors do not agree about the rules of the postwar political game, modeling international statebuilding as provision is misleading. Domestic actors do not desire international engagement as an efficient solution to the problem of enforcement because there is no mutually acceptable deal in the first place. Given the

distributional consequences of state-related reforms, preference divergence generates domestic opposition and resistance to some or all of the provisions in the statebuilding agenda.

The implications of this model for understanding what international actors do and why they struggle to reform states are strikingly different from those of the provision model. As we have already seen, the provision approach models international intervention as a means of reassuring wary belligerents that state incumbents will not be tempted to use the power of the state to renege on peace deals. In contrast, the imposition approach interprets international intervention as an attempt to get domestic actors to do things that they would not otherwise do, namely, accept imposed state structures despite their distributional consequences.

What is currently missing from the imposition approach is a fuller analysis of why domestic actors resist international statebuilding. Understanding resistance in turn requires understanding why bargaining over the postwar order and reform of the state is so difficult. Because bargaining over distributional issues is central to the (domestic) autonomous statebuilding process, I turn to the literature on domestic statebuilding for insights.

THE DOMESTIC POLITICS OF VIOLENCE MANAGEMENT

The problem of violence management is not unique to international politics. In fact, violence management plays a central role in the domestic politics of state development, where domestic rulers confront the challenge of monopolizing authority. All rulers seek to assert their own authority at the expense of their rivals, and all state leaders seek to make the state the preeminent (if not the sole) rule-making organization in society. Migdal (1988, p. 32) describes this process of extraordinary statebuilding as "the *real* politics" of much of the world, while Tilly (1985, p. 181) simply calls it "state making." Much of the domestic statebuilding literature has studied how rulers mitigate the threat of violence, and scholars who adopt the imposition approach to international statebuilding can apply insights from this literature to think about domestic opposition and resistance.

How do rulers secure and maintain the monopoly of authority? Monopolizing authority is inherently conflictual. It requires displacing, neutralizing, and accommodating competitors that can threaten violence against the state. I refer to these competitors as violence entrepreneurs.[6] Monopolizing authority is also a continual, constantly renewing process. The threat of violence can never be eliminated, only managed or contained (North et al. 2009, p. 13; Driscoll 2015, p. 30), and state authority is rarely absolute or constant over territory (Lee 2020). In this sense, civil wars can be thought of as periods in which the state has lost control over the problem of violence, making the postconflict moment crucial for the reconstitution of state authority. Many of the countries that we now consider to be strong, effective states fought their own civil wars. China, France, Japan, Russia, Britain, and the United States are but a few examples.

Violence and coercion play a well-known role in the monopolization of authority. To a great extent, however, the politics of sovereign centralization also involve the manipulation and control of violence entrepreneurs through nonviolent means. For rivals who cannot be defeated or disarmed on the battlefield, rulers turn to the strategy of co-optation.

Co-optation is an ongoing process of negotiation and incorporation in the shadow of coercion. Rulers offer violence entrepreneurs private rewards in return for their loyalty and subordination

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[6]I use this term in a value-neutral manner, since some violence entrepreneurs provide order and enjoy popular legitimacy (Stewart 2021, Arjona 2016, Blair & Kalmanovitz 2016, Mampilly 2012, Staniland 2012). The state, of course, is itself a violence entrepreneur.

to state's authority; alternatively, violence entrepreneurs "extort the rents of sovereignty" from the ruler (Driscoll 2015, p. 30; see also Barkey 1994).[7] Exchange is important, but what facilitates exchange is the use of state power in selective and particularistic ways. The arrangements that result are akin to North et al.'s (2009) concept of a limited access order, which is based on personal relationships rather than impersonal, formally institutionalized authority. As those authors note, limited or privileged access is "not simply a method of lining the pockets of the dominant coalition; it is the essential means of controlling violence" (North et al. 2009, p. 17). The success of co-optation as a strategy for controlling violence depends on a delicate balance where the benefits of subordination—sovereignty rents—outweigh the potential benefits of challenging the state.

These sovereignty rents depend directly on the state and the exercise of its power. Just as the state's security apparatus provides the means to coerce and repress its rivals, the state's regulatory and enforcement institutions enable rulers to use state power to extract rents. Consider the use of patronage appointments in the civil administration. These positions and the power that comes with them provide for wealth transfers, the possibility of rent extraction, and the ability to distribute government largesse (Geddes 1994). Patronage appointments played a key role in the centralization of state authority and construction of loyalty in seventeenth-century Prussia, Tokugawa Japan, and absolutist France (Grindle 2012). In Ottoman Turkey, the distribution of governorships to powerful bandits halted their use of violence against the state (Barkey 1994). In Afghanistan under the Karzai administration, the appointment of warlords to provincial governorships served a similar purpose. Their integration into the state in return for the opportunity to extract private rents neutralizes their threat; if they are strong but not too strong, they can even provide effective governance (Mukhopadhyay 2014).

Rulers can also provide sovereignty rents through the selective (non)enforcement of the law. Selective enforcement in the economic sphere provides an avenue for personal enrichment. Business concessions, monopoly taxation rights, control of state-owned enterprises, unequal access to land, and rigged privatization schemes illustrate the diverse ways in which selective enforcement delivers rewards to elites willing to abjure violence and submit to the state (Migdal 1988, Reno 1998, Hibou 2004, Driscoll 2015). For example, in the 1990s, Ugandan government officials manipulated the World Bank–backed privatization process to allow officials key to the maintenance of regime stability to acquire assets on highly favorable terms (Tangri & Mwenda 2008, p. 183). The state can also turn a blind eye to official corruption and graft, in effect tolerating illicit wealth accumulation. In New Order–era Indonesia, President Suharto permitted state officials—regime insiders—to use their posts to turn a profit by skimming from the budget or imposing fees on citizens (McLeod 2011). In fact, while selective nonenforcement of corruption and graft can cement loyalty to the state, the threat of selective enforcement can actually serve as a noninstitutionalized means for rulers to secure obedience and ensure government effectiveness (Darden 2008). In this sense, the pervasiveness of selective enforcement is not an indicator of state weakness but evidence of the continual formation of the state (Hibou 2004).

Three aspects of co-optation are particularly relevant for the study of international statebuilding. First, the connection between sovereignty rents and state power is central to the efficacy of this strategy in securing the monopoly of authority. Sovereignty rents are not ordinary bribes paid to violence entrepreneurs in return for their subordination to the state. They are bribes whose

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[7]The literature on political survival and political regimes extensively discusses the use of co-optation as a means to neutralize threats to the leader as opposed to the state itself (e.g., Geddes 1994, Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003, Svolik 2012).

value is linked directly to state integrity and state power. The value of a ministerial position or governorship is greater when the state's coercive, regulatory, and enforcement apparatuses are more effective. Similarly, selective enforcement will be attractive only when the state is actually strong enough to enforce restrictions on firm entry and access or to defend property rights.

Because sovereignty rents depend on state power, co-opted violence entrepreneurs acquire an interest in the survival of the state. Moreover, because the value of those rents is higher when state power is stronger, the co-opted also acquire a stake in the maintenance and even strengthening of state authority. In this way, the extraordinary statebuilding of violence management can, over time, facilitate the ordinary statebuilding of routinization and institutional strengthening (Loveman 2005). To be clear, this does not mean that the co-opted will not challenge the state or attempt secession if the balance of power shifts in their favor. Nor does it mean that they will support the creation of a liberal state organized on principles of universalism and impartiality. Rather, co-optation can yoke their interests to state effectiveness. Indeed, effectiveness may have no direct relationship with modes of authority (Mkandawire 2015, McDonnell 2020). In Prussia, Japan, France, and Britain, for example, "early solutions to problems of administrative incompetence were not to do away with patronage but to ensure that patronage was adapted to competence" (Grindle 2012, p. 55).

Second, co-optation and the politics of patronage are substitutes for violence as a means of political consolidation and elite integration (Nye 1967, Scott 1969). One reason why rulers turn to co-optation is that coercion is expensive, is difficult to exercise, and creates liabilities for the regime (Svolik 2012, Greitens 2016). Coercion and violence can also fail outright. Civil wars that end in negotiated settlements are clear examples. In contrast, by facilitating informal deals to distribute and secure wealth, the state can achieve the same ends as violence without having to fire a shot. What thus appear to international statebuilders as corruption, malgovernance, and dysfunction—properties associated with weak states—are actually byproducts of a political solution to the oldest political problem of managing violence. To draw this conclusion is not to defend corruption or particularism in politics but to recognize their instrumental role in the monopolization of authority and the suppression of violence.

Third, the politics of co-optation will be self-enforcing when the state provides sufficient benefits to violence entrepreneurs to gain their acquiescence to the postwar order and when the state has incentives to punish defections from that order. Sovereignty rents provide the reward that entices violence entrepreneurs into the state. Yet, co-optation always takes place in the shadow of coercion: Because the state does not disarm, it reserves the option of violence as a deterrent to defection from the state and the resumption of war. This deterrent threat is credible because rulers value their own political survival (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003) and care about violent challenges from would-be sovereigns (Walter 2006, Lee 2020). The alignment of self-interest should produce a self-enforcing equilibrium.

While co-optation and side payments feature prominently in the literature on domestic statebuilding and the monopolization of authority, they are virtually absent from the literature on international statebuilding. In large part, the latter literature's silence reflects the dominance of the provision approach, where the built-in assumption about the resolution of the bargaining problem obviates the need for side payments as the basis for the peace. Scholars in that literature view transfers like foreign aid as rewards for conditional compliance with peace (Matanock 2020) and external assistance for the rebuilding of state institutions as a form of inducement (Howard 2019). The imposition literature also does not explicitly consider the possibility of side payments. Yet, as we have seen, side payments can be an important means for managing violence, making them integral to the political logic of the postwar order.

What are the implications of the domestic statebuilding literature for the study of international statebuilding? Perhaps the most important implication is that the form of the state, the rules of the game, and the way the state exercises power have distributional consequences that pervade political life, particularly among the elites who can threaten violence against the state. The set of institutions and rules that international actors prescribe to states recovering from conflict carry a very different set of distributional consequences. Put simply, they are fundamentally incompatible with the kind of co-optation strategies that domestic actors might devise on their own, particularly when the former set of institutions and practices do not reflect the balance of power on the ground. Recognizing the difficulty of promoting wholesale state reforms in post-conflict states, Eikenberry & Krasner (2021, p. 23) argue that international interveners should aim for "good enough" governance: security, health, and economic growth that "[do] not threaten the rent-seeking opportunities of national elites."

More provocatively, the domestic literature implies that the stabilization of the peace, at least in the near term, depends on the existence of an unreformed or partially reformed state. Scholars working within the imposition approach have already observed that the kind of state that international actors seek to create threatens the political and economic interests of domestic elites (Barnett et al. 2014, Barma 2016). The domestic statebuilding literature adds to that claim by highlighting the ways in which elite self-interest can be yoked to the state as a means of managing violence. What appears to outsiders as malgovernance is neither pathological nor the product of ignorance. To use the language of the bargaining and war literature, sovereignty rents are essentially side payments that facilitate agreement over distributional issues. In that sense, malgovernance is a rational response to the exigences of sovereign centralization.

This literature also suggests a different explanation for the failures of international statebuilding. One of the productive advances of the imposition literature is its treatment of international statebuilding as a strategic interaction between international actors and domestic belligerents. International actors have valuable material and symbolic resources that domestic belligerents desire. Domestic actors comply with external demands for reforms only to the extent necessary to maintain the continued flow of those resources. While this dynamic is generally well understood, the domestic statebuilding literature offers a different interpretation: External resources are an unintentional side payment for peace, not unlike the sovereignty rents of the state. As Driscoll (2015, p. 12) puts it in his account of political consolidation in Central Asia, "foreign aid professionals can have a positive effect on war settlement not *despite* but *because* of the fact that these funds can be stolen by violence entrepreneurs" (emphasis original). Domestic actors do not implement externally imposed reforms sincerely or fully, instead instrumentalizing reforms for their own benefit—behavior that also extends to reforms in the economic sphere (Hellman 1998, Van de Walle 2001).

The partially reformed state also serves as a hedge against the cutoff of external resources by preserving the ability to access and extract sovereignty rents. External side payments and deterrent threats to uphold the internationally imposed postwar order do not continue in perpetuity. Domestic actors know that international statebuilders will one day leave and international pressure will wane. In contrast, the threat of domestic violence always remains and must be continually managed. Maintaining the ability to use the state to generate sovereignty rents to uphold the peace is therefore a rational response to this problem in the face of fleeting international attention.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEW DIRECTIONS

The two models of international statebuilding in the literature reflect competing assumptions about the political barriers to state reform. These assumptions structure the questions scholars

ask and the answers they get. The provision model downplays problems of distribution and focuses instead on problems of commitment. Here, the barrier to statebuilding success is enforcement of a peace deal. The imposition model focuses instead on bargaining over the distributive consequences of the peace. International–domestic and domestic–domestic disagreements over bargaining suggest that statebuilding failures have origins in the very different preferences over the terms of the postwar order. Because of their different starting assumptions, both the provision and imposition approach have generated productive insights for the study of international statebuilding.

The provision/commitment and imposition/distribution dichotomy in international statebuilding is more implicit than explicit. I have illuminated the unstated assumptions in each model, thereby shedding light on why theoretical innovation has focused on international actors in the provision literature and on the international–domestic nexus in the imposition literature (**Table 1**). Insights from the domestic politics of statebuilding enrich the imposition approach by unpacking why domestic preferences over the distributive consequences of the postwar order may diverge so intensely from those of international actors. To be clear, I do not argue that the provision model is wrong and the imposition model is right. Both models capture elements of reality, but they apply to different cases at different times.

Future research could address the questions of when, for whom, and under what conditions each model holds. A new wave of scholarship could begin by focusing on variation in actors, interests, and statebuilding reforms and by drawing on insights from adjacent literatures. Not all domestic elites have interests that are antithetical to international statebuilding, and not all behavior in search of sovereignty rents is incompatible with the construction of an effective state. Future work could examine the configuration of underlying social preferences with an eye toward explaining when and why they impede international statebuilding. In the case of democracy, Zürcher et al. (2013) find that interventions are more likely to build democracy when domestic "adoption costs" (threats to elite interests) are lower. The political economy literature also links elite self-interest to democratization under certain conditions. For example, asset mobility and financial integration can reduce wealthy elites' opposition to democracy (Boix 2003, Freeman & Quinn 2012). Similar arguments could apply with respect to elite preferences toward domestic authority structures and the way state power is exercised.

Much of my discussion in this article has treated preferences over governance issues as static. Yet, preferences can and do change—and may shift in ways that are endogenous to the actions of the international intervener or the domestic actors on the ground (Russell & Sambanis 2022). In Tilly's (1992) seminal work on statebuilding and war, the state imposed conscription and taxation on its population and later provided concessions that the population desired in return for the continued extraction of labor and capital. The logic of population-centric counterinsurgency, which emphasizes winning the hearts and minds of the governed, also turns on the idea that preferences can shift. Indeed, the UN Transitional Administration in East Timor unintentionally shifted the distribution of political power and in turn shifted support for the postwar order (Ingram 2012). Allowing preferences to shift over time opens up the possibility that the imposition and provision models can apply at different points in time within the same case. Future research could examine the causes of those shifts and their consequences for international statebuilding.

The politics of co-optation in domestic statebuilding also point to intriguing avenues for future work. Co-optation takes place within an institutional arena that structures how states interact with powerful members of society such as violence entrepreneurs. The design of institutions of state–society mediation varies considerably. For example, state leaders in Zambia empowered traditional chiefs to provide state services in ways that enhance democratic responsiveness even though the chiefs themselves are unelected (Baldwin 2016). Colonial-era statebuilding also offers

lessons: Japanese authorities disciplined local elites in Taiwan by formalizing the punishments and rewards for obedience to the state, while American authorities inadvertently contributed to state weakness in the Philippines by assuming that elite interests were already aligned with American goals (Matsuzaki 2019). All statebuilding involves side payments in the shadow of coercion, but not all states remain mired in a low-level equilibrium trap of poor governance. Variation in how the state interacts with society affects long-term political development (Migdal 1988, Hibou 2004, Matsuzaki 2019). Future work should unpack this variation in institutional design to understand the long-run effects of co-optation in different institutional settings—a topic with significant implications for policy.

Future research should also explore the implications of the domestic statebuilding literature for understanding variation in international statebuilding outcomes. The track record of post–Cold War statebuilding is not enviable. However, the scholarship within the imposition approach demonstrates that the binaries of success and failure do not capture the reality of reform. The so-called failures of international statebuilding are more varied, more complex, and more counterproductive than the broader scholarship has acknowledged (Mac Ginty 2011, Richmond 2014, Barma 2016, Swenson 2017). Much of the empirical reality lies between the poles of success and failure. The imposition model's focus on domestic preferences and problems of distribution suggests that one explanation for this variation lies at the nexus between the international and the domestic. Future research should thus explore variation in how international statebuilders shape the ability of the domestic state to extract and distribute sovereignty rents, and it should examine the consequences of this variation for the development of the state.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

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