

Syria peacebuilding efforts must address causes of the country's pre-war 'failed' state, suggests study

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Any attempts to build peace in Syria must address the factors that led to the country being a failed state before civil war began, new research

says.

There must be more inclusive governance practices and structures to allow meaningful popular participation in the running of the country's affairs, according to the study. Citizens should be allowed to air their grievances and have a new "social contract" with their leaders.

The analysis shows how state failure was a factor in the uprising but has become more clearly apparent in the ongoing civil war. The Syrian state has 'failed' because it cannot meet its citizens' economic, political and [social needs](#) and requirements.

The study, published in the *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, was carried out by Samer Bakkour, from the University of Exeter, and Rama Sahtout.

Dr. Bakkour said, "The outbreak of the civil war was not due to the sudden deterioration of state capacity or the abrupt collapse of state institutions. Instead, it was more clearly due to the regime's attempts to crush a peaceful uprising by using force. This strength was superficial, rested on shallow foundations and lacked popular support.

"Any governance was distinctively 'sectarian' and state structures were 'hollowed out' by pervasive corruption. Even efforts to 'modernize' or 'reform' functioned to reinforce and perpetuate this.

"State failure and weakness were established parts of the country's political arrangement, and the appearance of state strength could hardly conceal the fact that the state was vulnerable to a broad-based uprising."

The study says repression pre-war was an inadvertent and implicit acknowledgement that it lacked both legitimacy and more subtle means through which to assert its authority. There was no social contract and

the heavy-handed governance that served as an implicit acknowledgement of this would ultimately contribute to the outbreak of the civil war. Sectarian policies were deliberately planned to create divides and animosities between different groups.

Involvement of other nations in the [civil war](#) has further underlined the weakness of the Syrian state.

Dr. Bakkour said, "The extent of the displacement of the country's population, both internally and externally, is a further confirmation of state failure. Minority groups forced to leave their homes were the worst affected in terms of reported deaths, sexual violence, and poverty and malnutrition.

"Rapid economic decline, huge demographic decreases and growing [food insecurity](#) are now long-established trends in the country, and clearly have the potential to 'feedback' into conflict and instability. Basic food items such as bread are still rationed and foreign sanctions have inflicted billions of dollars of damage on the country's economy."

More information: Samer Bakkour and Rama Sahtout, The Dimensions and Attributes of State Failure in Syria, *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* (2023). [DOI: 10.1080/19448953.2023.2167337](https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2023.2167337)

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