

2020 BEIRUT EXPLOSION: POLITICAL CRISIS AS AN INSTIGATOR AND CONSEQUENCE

IF CORRUPTION LED TO ECONOMIC +
SOCIAL CRISIS + THE BLAST, HOW IS
SIDELINING OF THE STATE AFFECTING
LONG-TERM STATE VIABILITY?

THE LINK TO MY RESEARCH

During the research for my thesis - which deals with the modern heritage after the blast - especially during interviews I conducted with experts and NGO representatives, the view of the state as largely absent in the recovery process was often expressed. In addition, the Army's involvement was described as misguided and out of touch with the urban reality of Beirut.



Sebastian Andersson, PLANA6775, 04/08/2021

WEBER AND THE FUNCTIONS OF THE STATE

Weber (1978) highlights among other things the basic functions of the state as including 'the protection of personal safety and public order', as well as 'the cultivation of hygienic, educational, social-welfare, and other cultural interests'. If we consider on the one hand, the economic crisis that has hit the country, skyrocketing rates of poverty, as well as a political dysfunction that led to the port explosion, and on the other hand the non-willingness of NGOs and INGOs to work with the state despite its capacities, are we perhaps in a situation of de facto and perceived state failure that constitutes an amorphous combination?

AUGUST 4, 2020

A warehouse in the port of Beirut explodes, sending shockwaves across the city, killing over 200 and leading to widespread destruction. Nearly 3,000 tonnes of ammonium nitrate had been stored in the warehouse, representing a failure of politicians and officials with regard to public safety and public trust.



NGOs, INGOs + ACTIVISTS AND THE ANTI-STATE RHETORIC

Mona Fawaz and Mona Harb wrote in October 2020 that activist movement, NGOs and INGOs involved with reconstruction efforts following the explosion are happening 'within a discourse of *sidelining the state*'. This anti-state rhetoric exists in a context of 'a devastating financial meltdown generated by the deep corruption of Lebanon's ruling elite', with the explosion coming to 'consecrate [...] a war waged against Lebanese citizens by the country's political class'.

This reluctance to mix with the state in the context of the reconstruction efforts made me think of the following question:

HOW CAN WE THINK OF THEORIES OF FRAGILE + FAILING STATES IN RELATION TO THIS HUMAN-MADE CRISIS?



THE OCCIDENTAL + CAPITALIST TINT OF TERMINOLOGIES

Political scientist Olivier Nay traces the genealogy of the terms 'failed' and 'fragile' states in a 2013 article. The former emerged in a post-Cold War context by foreign policy analysts, and has since 9/11 been 'widely disseminated by US administrations and policy analysts'; the latter has 'spread internationally among donors, technical agencies and some governments', including by the OECD and the World Bank. Thus, does the mere usage of these terms automatically put any inquiry into an analytical framework that is distinctly Western and developmentalist, or is there a way to frame them differently?