

## II. Fragile States: Definitions, Measurements and Processes

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“...fragility is created by someone (or some set of forces), and serves particular interests.” (Krause and Jütersonke 2007: 9)

### Introduction

The fragile state agenda has been generated by events such as widespread internal war, cases of the collapse of central state authority, fear of what might happen in territories beyond government control, and donor governments’ frustrations with their working relations with certain states. We may interpret the agenda as being driven by the hope of developing way of preventing state collapse and helping build responsible states, as well as by attempts to understand and pack all this into well-defined and well-described cases which donor states and international administrations can deal with in regularized ways. In other words, the notion of the fragile state is emerging as a focus of attempts to forge stable and manageable relations with states that do not conform to established images and expectations of states. These attempts are mainly donor-driven, and few state incumbents are likely to present themselves as representing a ‘fragile’ or ‘failed’ state. But maybe this will change as policy fields and budget-lines crystallize around the notion of fragile states.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter provides an overview of some of the basic features of this emerging policy field, mainly the discussions of how, and to what extent, it is possible to define, describe and measure fragile states, and to distinguish between different types and processes of state fragility. Rather than providing a particular typology, the paper will discuss important analytical distinctions from the point of view of donor involvement in other states, as well as the problems involved in applying Weberian analytical categories as norms for state-building.

### Definitions

A range of concepts have emerged to describe states that do not live up to common understandings of how states should work, ranging from collapsed, failed and failing

<sup>1</sup> See the chapter on the international context for further analysis of the background and promises of the fragile state debate.

states, to fragile, crisis, rogue and poorly performing states, difficult partnerships, and low-income countries under stress. These concepts have often been used indiscriminately. While the terms ‘collapsed’ and ‘failed states’ are usually reserved for cases where central state institutions and authority have ceased to function, ‘fragile states’ is increasingly being recognized – in the donor community at least – as a common descriptor of states that represent persistent challenges for the donor community by not living up to Weberian expectations and by foreshadowing the risk of collapse in the future.

A certain consensus seems to be emerging around the definition of fragile states as ‘those where the state power is unable and/or unwilling to deliver core functions to the majority of its people: security, protection of property, basic public services and essential infrastructure’, this being the definition used in the OECD/DAC. While this definition is rather static, others are more dynamic, such as that adopted by the Japanese government: ‘states with limited capacity to cope with instability risks’, a definition which focuses on the vulnerabilities that result from the weakness of basic institutions of the state. Alternatively there is the minimalistic, future-oriented definition of fragile states as ‘states that are prone to failure in the future’ (Francois and Sud 2006), which, however, does not say anything about the dimensions of the impending failure.

An overview of the working definitions used by different governmental and inter-governmental agencies and ministries (Cammack et al. 2006) shows that definitions tend to emphasize either:

- a) the *functionality* of states, i.e. the will and capacity to perform the functions necessary for the security and well-being of their populations. Working definitions often imply a range or a hierarchy of positive functions of, for example, security; adjudication of conflict, rule of law, the enforcement of contracts and the protection of property; political participation; and social service delivery, infrastructure and regulation of the economy (Rotberg 2003);
- b) the *effects* of state fragility in terms of poverty, insecurity, armed conflict, refugees, organized crime, terrorism etc. spilling over into neighbouring states and the wider global community, in other words emphasizing potential threats relating to states that lack control over their territories and populations;
- c) the *relationship* between donors and the governments in question, thus focusing on the problems of achieving agreements over (reform) policies and programmes of cooperation; this may, however, tell us more about the

donor state than the recipient state, which may have good relations with other donors.

Despite some convergence and overlap, large variations exist in how different donor governments and international agencies define state fragility and which countries they include in their lists. Differences in working definitions exist even between different departments of the same government, with security agencies typically emphasizing the threat aspect, while agencies of development cooperation focus on relations or functions, and diplomats tend to avoid the concept altogether.

The definition of fragility with regard to armed conflict in contrast to more general governance issues constitutes one of the major distinguishing features. If current or recent armed conflict is not taken as the defining trait, the number of countries to include in the category of fragile states is potentially very large, comprising most of Africa and most non-OECD countries. This shows that one of the problems of the notion and definition of fragile states is that it includes and glosses over a huge variety of specific states and state trajectories. Classic examples to prove the point include the highly efficient genocidal state of Rwanda and Colombia, which has been steeped in decades of lethal conflict while displaying impressive macroeconomic management and growth. Thus, states vary hugely in their performance in terms of different state functions, and few states score high on more than a few dimensions of state fragility.

Whereas almost all definitions implicitly assume endogenous (rather than exogenous) causes of fragility, some disagreement exists regarding the balance in the definition between the performance or functionality of the state as such, and broader social conditions and effects in terms of poverty, for example, and what precisely is the causality between governance, poverty and conflict. In general, 'we ought to be wary of the risk of elevating fragile statehood to an all-embracing generic category for development deficits, placing the blame on acts of commission or omission by the state. Do the governance debates ongoing since the 1990s and the discussions on violent conflicts fit into this paradigm? Are we talking about all the problems of unconsolidated states, that is, almost all regions and countries outside the OECD bloc?' (Klingebiel 2007: 321).

### **Measuring Fragility?**

The debate over fragile states draws upon and involves a number of analytical frameworks, instruments and indexes that claim to measure different dimensions and

indicators of state fragility and failure.<sup>2</sup> While some have been developed specifically for this purpose (see below for four influential examples), others have primarily been conceived with the aim of predicting and preventing armed conflict (early warning instruments)<sup>3</sup> or measuring the (potential) impact of different forms of policies and development interventions on peace and conflict dynamics (Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment tools).

*Low Income Countries under Stress:* The World Bank's list of LICUS countries is based on the vast range of indicators of the Bank's Country Policy and Institutional Assessment, which focuses on issues of governance, policy and institutions. LICUS countries represent serious challenges in terms of poor capacity for service delivery, accountability and control of corruption; they face the risks of political instability and conflict;<sup>4</sup> and the Bank has estimated that the cost of entering the LICUS category is US\$ 80 billion, which mainly falling on neighbouring states (Carment et al. 2006). The index has been well validated through widespread use, but the aspects of politics and violent conflict are not sufficiently taken into account. Furthermore, critics have argued that the set of indicators is informed by a particular policy and ideology (Rosser 2006), by a focus on 'good governance' which is a-historical and not supported by evidence if it is viewed as a strategy for state-building (Kahn 2006).

*Political Instability Task Force:*<sup>5</sup> Established in 1994 as 'the State Failure Task Force' by the US Government under CIA auspices, this index seeks to develop models capable of predicting state failure, in particular in relation to democratic transitions. The highest risk of instability is found in 'hybrid regimes' – partial democracies, 'anocracies' or 'illiberal democracies' – with high factionalism, i.e. when open political competition for offices is dominated by highly polarized ethnic, local or other identities and weak party systems. But even though the 'post-dictive' accuracy of this model is high, instability is far from being an inevitable outcome of factionalism, and the inductively developed models fall short of theoretical explanations of failure.

*Failed States Index:* Managed by the US-based Fund for Peace<sup>6</sup> and based on their Conflict Assessment System Tool (CAST), this index aims at identifying, measur-

<sup>2</sup> See Cammack et al. 2006 for an overview of the most commonly used frameworks.

<sup>3</sup> It may be argued that the capacity to cope with disasters and other external shocks is one indicator of state capacity.

<sup>4</sup> Between 1992 and 2006, 21 of 26 conflict-ridden countries were also on the LICUS list (Di John 2008).

<sup>5</sup> See <http://globalpolicy.gmu.edu/pitf/pitfdata.htm>

<sup>6</sup> See <http://fundforpeace.org/programs/fsi/fsiarticle.php>

ing and monitoring countries that are vulnerable to conflict. The Fund undertakes a trend analysis combining twelve social, economic and political indicators (including inequality, tax-collection capacity, corruption, population displacement, demographic pressures, economic development etc.) with the capacity of core institutions (including police, military, justice and the civil service), histories of violence, and idiosyncratic factors and surprises. The resulting scores place countries in categories of 'alert', 'warning', 'monitoring' and 'sustainable', and establish 'rates of decline'. According to the Fund, governments, private business, the military and others use the assessment tool for planning and monitoring conflict-preventing assistance, investments and stabilization operations.

*Country Indicators for Foreign Policy*: Originating in a standard geopolitical database, CIFP, supported by the Canadian Government, has been developing indicators for state fragility since 1997.<sup>7</sup> A first generation of assessment focused very much on violent conflict as the main dimension of state failure, but a new generation is being developed that looks into issues of authority, legitimacy and capacity as the most important dimensions of stateness and hence of state fragility (Carment et al. 2007). Their first results from modelling confirm that states are very uneven across different dimensions and seldom show signs of fragility across the board. The aim of the indicator system is to provide statistical and analytical support for both strategic tasks (when, where and how to channel resources) and operational tasks (monitoring, benchmarking, evaluation etc.).

Such instruments have been criticized for a variety of reasons. Even though they do not claim to measure exactly the same dimensions of state fragility and failure, a comparison between different instruments expose a troubling lack of convergence. Countries that rank high in one index may be absent from another, and even in regard to the same dimensions – such as demographic pressure – there are huge differences. Comparing the LICUS lists (26) and the Fragile States Index (28) for 2006, only thirteen countries appear on both listings.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, the instruments tend to be fairly general, and even though they manage to provide a picture of a state's fragility, they provide retrospective snap-

<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.carleton.ca/cifp/>. The rating system operates with more than a hundred indicators relating to demography, economy, governance, politics, human development, militarization, culture/heterogeneity and international linkages for 196 countries.

<sup>8</sup> These were Afghanistan, Burundi, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Haiti, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Myanmar, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Somalia, Sudan and Central African Republic.

shots only and are not very precise when it comes to deciding on key intervention points and designing specific interventions (Cammack et al. 2006; Krause and Jütersonke 2007). To the extent that they develop series of annual observations, they can become valuable aids in monitoring developments and providing inputs for further analysis. The combination of general statistical observation and analysis with contextual analysis and participatory workshops has been incorporated in several of the instruments, such as the CIFP and the Dutch Clingendael Institute's Stability Assessment Framework.

The instruments for measuring different dimensions of risk and weakness of states still need development and refinement, and the question is to what extent these instruments are decisive in processes of decision-making, rather than a host of other political considerations. To a certain extent, the instruments reflect underlying differences in the interests and agendas of the donors and institutions that are involved in their development. Thus, the specific purpose, the actual users and their interests must all be taken into account when deciding whether and how to use which instruments (e.g. choosing countries for aid and cooperation, designing development or peace-keeping interventions, or as an analytical tool for non-experts in the field).

Under all circumstances, the analytical tools involved must provide an assessment of the types of situations and processes that characterize specific state trajectories.

### **'Fragile Situations' and Processes**

Various attempts at identifying and distinguishing different situations in terms of the conditions and possibilities for donor intervention exist in the literature. Since 2005 the World Bank has used 'four main business models for engagement: (a) prolonged political crisis; (b) fast turnaround (post-conflict or political transition); (c) gradual improvers, and (d) deteriorating governance' (World Bank 2005: 13; World Bank 2006, 2007). These are concerned with capacity, policies and conflict, and they emphasize, in particular, the various phases of change, from deterioration and impasse to turnaround and amelioration. While covering the dominant issues in current discussions, these 'business models' are organized around the change processes in fragile situations. In response to each of them, the Bank suggests a number of good practices which may be relevant in specific countries. In times of deterioration and crisis, these comprise support to non-state actors, focus at the local level and service delivery, and other practices, while policies and reforms are the primary concern when circumstances gradually improve.

In a similar manner, BMZ, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, sets up a matrix of 1) the level of governance and 2) the trends in the development orientation of governments (BMZ 2007). Given different levels of governance and capacity, the development orientation of a government may improve or deteriorate, and subsequently different types of response are suggested. In addition, questions of conflict and “a peace mission environment” are raised as further dimensions of the analysis. However, BMZ proposes a strong focus on the development orientation or what is elsewhere termed the political will of governments characterized by weak statehood. Compared to the World Bank approach, BMZ also adopts a slightly more interventionist stance, given that interventions may include attempts to strengthen the forces of reform and should meet the international responsibility to protect.

Turning to the academic literature, a large variety of more or less explicit typologies of fragile or failed states have been presented, which also incorporate fragile situations. One proposal, which emphasizes the lack of will and/or capacity in the same way as the donor literature does, uses a bottom-up approach to identify seven categories of countries or situations presenting distinctive challenges to the donor community (Patrick 2007): (i) endemically weak states (e.g. Zambia), (ii) resource-rich poor performers (e.g. Nigeria and Angola), (iii) deteriorating situations (e.g. Zimbabwe), (iv) prolonged political crisis (e.g. Nepal before 2006), (v) post-conflict situations (e.g. Mozambique as a case of negotiated settlement and Uganda with one victorious side), (vi) brittle dictatorships (e.g. North Korea and Myanmar), and (vii) reform-minded governments struggling with unfavourable legacies (e.g. Georgia). While much closer to the realities of many countries that are suffering from fragility, it is difficult to recognize the specific criteria underlying this typology, and it may be difficult to fit other countries into these categories.

With a strong focus on economic and structural factors, Paul Collier (2007), former director of the research department at the World Bank, discusses four traps that keep countries and people in poverty: (i) the conflict trap, (ii) the natural resource trap, stemming from the tendency for a wealth of resources to undermine productive and other economic activities, (iii) the trap of being landlocked with poor neighbours, and (iv) the trap of bad governance in a small country. According to his assessment, 58 countries and almost a billion people are suffering from these traps. The four categories are not mutually exclusive, and they are not insurmountable despite the rhetoric. They are, however, much more concerned with structures inhibiting change than with conjunctures characterizing a country's development. Leaders come and

go and capacities may be boosted, but certain obstacles – or so the argument goes – are not easily dismantled. In the context of support for fragile situations, however, one may question whether the policy and capacity issues are not more important to donors than the structural obstacles.

The problem with these and other typologies is first and foremost that they seek to limit the diversity and complexity of fragile situations to a few categories. They do so either based on the selection of a couple of possibly important dimensions or by idealizing particular observed trends or characteristics. The elaboration of typologies is mainly defensible if there is a reasonably close connection between the resulting categories and the realities they are supposed to depict. This is not the case in relation to fragile situations. First, despite ending up in one of the above categories, two countries marked by fragility are bound to differ in significant respects requiring different kinds of support. Secondly, it is not hard to find important dimensions, structures and characteristics related to fragility that are not covered by the various typologies (see e.g. Maxwell et al. 2008). Thirdly, we know too little about the complexities that determine the dynamics of fragile situations to be able to categorize them. Countries ending up in one category are therefore likely to evolve differently, some possibly deteriorating further, others gradually improving. Interventions based on a categorization of countries may accordingly push some of them further into fragility. When seeking to support countries in fragile situations directly, there is no shortcut circumventing a detailed analysis of the historical evolution and specific characteristics of individual situations.

### **Forgetting Weber?**

The debate on fragile states has (re)emphasized the importance of public institutions in providing peace and prosperity. To some extent it has succeeded in showing that state fragility is about social and political processes and interests, rather than accidental situations of a humanitarian nature. But the agenda is still flawed in terms of providing analytical tools for understanding the forms and directions of current statehood and the relationships between state legitimacy, citizens and non-citizens.

The shared assumption is that, in the long run, all states will converge towards a model of Western liberal democracy, which provides both the guidelines for state-building and the benchmarks for existing statehood (Hagmann and Hoehne 2007). The fragile and failed states agenda is permeated by Weberian ideals of what

a state should look like in terms of monopoly of force, legitimate authority and clear-cut distinctions between state/society, public/private and civil/military. As suggested in Jung's chapter on the sociological definition of the state, we should avoid using this analytical approach in a normative way. If we focus on the analysis of 'empirical statehood' and actually existing arrangements of authority and security, rather than seeing contemporary states as they are wished to be, we may acquire a more realistic idea of the challenges and possibilities of state-building in the current world order.

In many cases, including otherwise 'strong states' in, for instance, Latin America or Asia, the state does not fully control its population and territory.<sup>9</sup> Rather, protection and other state functions are, for practical purposes, provided by non-state forms of authority. In such 'frontiers' or 'margins' of the state, be they urban or rural, its authority depends on mediation and alliances with non-state actors, a process which has been conceptualized as 'the mediated state' (Menkhaus 2007). These non-state actors and institutions, which sometimes act on behalf of the state and sometimes oppose it, have been described as 'twilight institutions' that blur the state/non-state distinction (Lund 2006). The question is whether the contours of future forms of the state that are sustainable under current conditions of globalization and the world order are to be found in this mish-mash of overlapping and interdependent authorities.

As many critics of the fragile states debate have argued, peace and state-building are too often assumed to be parallel and mutually enforcing processes, whereas it is actually more likely that state-building will involve serious levels of political violence. The credibility of the state depends on the control of force if it is to gain legitimate authority, but this represents huge problems with the current levels of economy in many states. Taking the Afghan security sector as an example of the very real dilemmas of state-building, the plan to develop national security forces – thus releasing NATO from its costly engagement – is hardly sustainable. In 2004-5 alone, the expenses for the security sector ran at 500% of state revenues or 25% of the GNP as compared to a global average of 4% (Sedra 2007). In this sense, a major potential merit of the fragile states agenda is to give the future of the state serious analytical attention and to pose important new questions regarding the representation and recognition of non-state actors in the international system.

<sup>9</sup> We may here suggest a distinction between states in which effective sovereignty 'fades' beyond the capital and major towns, and states that lack effective sovereignty over a particular region or population.

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