

State Fragility in Africa: A Critical Reading of the Methodological Limits of Measurement

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Abstract

The concept of **state fragility** has witnessed remarkable development in the literature of political science and international relations, and it has become one of the most prominent concepts in contemporary studies, particularly with the growing interest in the ability of states to perform their basic functions amid the escalation of internal conflicts and the decline in the effectiveness of public institutions. This development was accompanied by the emergence of a number of international indicators that sought to measure levels of fragility and classify states according to political, economic, social, and security criteria. These indicators have become reference tools relied upon by international institutions, policymakers, and researchers in assessing the conditions of states.

Despite the practical importance of these indicators, they continue to generate broad academic debate regarding their conceptual and methodological foundations and the extent to which they are capable of expressing the actual reality of fragility, particularly in African states that are characterized by historical and institutional specificities different from the contexts within which most international measurement models were developed. From this perspective, this study aims to provide a critical reading of state fragility indicators in Africa through analyzing their theoretical foundations, discussing their methodological limitations, and demonstrating the extent of their ability to explain the reality of fragility in African states.

The study adopted the descriptive-analytical approach in analyzing the major international indicators, while making use of the comparative approach and linking their findings to the particularities of state-building in Africa. The study concluded that state fragility indicators, despite their importance in providing a standard framework for comparison among states, remain limited in their ability to explain the phenomenon in the African context because they rely on standardized measurement models that do not adequately accommodate the historical, institutional, and social particularities that have contributed to shaping the African state. The study concluded by proposing a more appropriate analytical approach based on the integration of quantitative indicators and qualitative analysis, while taking into account the specificity of each national context when assessing levels of fragility.

Keywords: State Fragility; Fragility Indicators; African State; Composite Measurement; State-Building; Methodol

Introduction

The growing interest in the concept of **state fragility** has led to the emergence of research trends that sought to develop methodological tools for measuring fragility, after it became evident that relying solely on theoretical definitions was insufficient to understand the variation in the conditions of states or to explain the differences in their levels of stability. As a result, a number of international

indicators emerged that adopted political, economic, social, and security variables to evaluate state performance and classify states according to varying degrees of fragility. These indicators have become references upon which international organizations, research centers, and policymakers rely in analyzing the conditions of states and directing intervention and support policies (OECD, 2022; Fund for Peace, 2024).

Despite the widespread use of state fragility indicators, they have not been free from criticism. A significant part of the academic debate has focused on the methodological foundations upon which these indicators are based and on the extent to which they are capable of reflecting the reality of states with their different historical, institutional, and social characteristics. The selection of indicators, the mechanisms for calculating them, and the weights assigned to each variable are all factors that directly influence measurement results and may lead to classifications that do not reflect the true conditions within states, especially in environments characterized by the complexity of state-building processes, as is the case in many African countries (Call, 2011; Carment, Prest & Samy, 2010).

This issue acquires particular importance in the African continent, which still includes a large number of countries classified among the world's most fragile states according to international reports, despite the clear differences among them in terms of institutional structure, the nature of political systems, levels of development, and historical experiences. This reality raises questions regarding the suitability of international indicators for measuring fragility in Africa and whether they are capable of explaining the structural causes that produce fragility, or whether they are limited to monitoring its outcomes and manifestations without penetrating its deeper roots.

Accordingly, this article seeks to provide a critical reading of state fragility indicators in Africa through analyzing the conceptual and methodological foundations upon which they are based, discussing their limitations in measuring the phenomenon, and demonstrating the extent of their ability to explain the reality of fragility in African states.

The research problem of the study is represented in the following question:

To what extent do state fragility indicators reflect the actual reality of fragility in African states, and what are their methodological limitations in explaining this phenomenon?

Based on this problem, the study is founded on the following hypothesis:

The study assumes that state fragility indicators, despite their importance in providing a standard framework for comparison among states, remain limited in their ability to explain the reality of fragility in Africa because they rely on standardized measurement models that do not adequately accommodate the historical, institutional, and social particularities that have contributed to shaping the African state.

To answer this research problem, the study relied on the descriptive-analytical approach in analyzing the literature and international indicators, while making use of the comparative approach to highlight the differences among measurement models and their applications to selected African cases, within a structure consisting of two chapters. The first chapter addresses the conceptual and methodological foundations of state fragility indicators, whereas the second examines the limitations of these indicators in explaining the African reality, ultimately proposing a more appropriate methodological approach for measuring fragility on the African continent

Chapter One: The Conceptual and Methodological Foundations of State Fragility Indicators

Section One: The Concept of State Fragility and the Problem of Measurement

The concept of **state fragility** constitutes one of the most debated concepts in the literature of political science and international relations because of the multiplicity of theoretical approaches that have addressed it and the diversity of the perspectives upon which these approaches have relied in interpreting it. This concept emerged clearly after the end of the Cold War, when international attention shifted toward the study of internal crises experienced by many states, whereas previous attention had been focused on external threats and interstate conflicts. Internal conflicts, the declining effectiveness of institutions, and the weakening of the state's ability to exercise its authority contributed to making state fragility an analytical framework for understanding patterns of political and security instability, particularly in developing countries and African states in particular (Zartman, 1995; Rotberg, 2004).

Despite the widespread use of this concept, scholars have not reached a unified definition of it, owing to the differences in the theoretical and methodological backgrounds from which their studies have proceeded. While one approach focused on the state's ability to perform its fundamental functions, another concentrated on analyzing the legitimacy of institutions, whereas other approaches were concerned with the relationship between the state and society and the degree to which the state monopolizes the legitimate use of force. Consequently, the concept of fragility has extended beyond the security dimension to include political, economic, social, and institutional dimensions.

It is also observed that this variation in defining state fragility is closely associated with the evolution of the concept of the state itself in political thought, which demonstrated that the state is not merely a territory, a population, and an authority, but rather an institutional structure founded upon legitimacy and the capacity to manage public affairs and ensure security and stability.

In this context, **Robert I. Rotberg** argues that a state becomes fragile when it fails to perform its fundamental functions, foremost among them protecting its citizens, enforcing the rule of law, providing public services, and maintaining the monopoly over the use of force within its territory. He emphasizes that security constitutes the primary function of the state and that any failure in fulfilling this function gradually transforms the state from a condition of weakness to one of fragility, a process that may ultimately culminate in state collapse if it loses control over its institutions and territory (Rotberg, 2004).

As for **I. William Zartman**, he associates fragility with the gradual erosion of state institutions. In his view, the state does not collapse suddenly; rather, it passes through successive stages of declining capacity to perform its functions as a result of diminishing legitimacy, weakening institutions, and escalating internal conflicts until it becomes incapable of exercising its authority effectively (Zartman, 1995).

In contrast to this perspective, **Charles T. Call** offers a critical reading of the concept of state fragility. He argues that Western literature has often reduced fragility to weak institutional or security performance without taking into account the historical and political differences among states. He further maintains that applying a single model of good governance to all states leads to misleading conclusions, particularly in African countries whose institutions were formed within colonial and political contexts fundamentally different from the Western experience (Call, 2011).

From these definitions, it becomes evident that state fragility is not a rigid concept but rather a multidimensional phenomenon, in which political, economic, social, security, and institutional considerations are intertwined. This makes its measurement more complex than simply relying on a single indicator or an isolated variable.

Accordingly, academic debate gradually shifted from searching for a definition of state fragility to examining how it could be measured objectively in a manner that would allow comparison among states and the monitoring of changes in fragility levels over time. This development paved the way for the emergence of international indicators that have become the principal reference for assessing and classifying the conditions of states.

As a result of this conceptual diversity, attention shifted from the question, "**What is meant by state fragility?**" to the more complex question, "**How can state fragility be measured?**" International organizations and research centers moved toward developing quantitative and qualitative indicators capable of estimating levels of fragility, comparing the conditions of states, and monitoring their evolution over time, thereby providing an information base upon which researchers and policymakers could rely in analyzing domestic conditions and directing intervention and support policies.

However, the construction of these indicators was not isolated from the previously mentioned theoretical differences. Rather, each indicator reflects a particular conception of the nature of the state, its functions, and the elements that determine the degree of its fragility. Some indicators give priority to the **security dimension**, considering the state's capacity to monopolize the use of force and exercise its sovereignty as the principal criterion for assessing fragility. Other indicators focus instead on the **quality of institutions**, the **level of development**, the **effectiveness of public administration**, and the **degree of respect for rights and freedoms**. Consequently, classification results vary from one indicator to another, even when they are applied to the same states.

This problem becomes more evident in the African context, where the conditions of states cannot be adequately explained by relying on standardized indicators without taking into consideration the historical contexts in which the modern state was formed. As demonstrated in our dissertation, the African state inherited, upon independence, political and administrative institutions that had originally been established to serve the colonial administration rather than as the product of a natural internal evolution. This legacy affected the nature of the relationship between the state and society, as well as levels of legitimacy and institutional capacity, all of which are factors that cannot easily be measured through quantitative indicators alone.

Accordingly, differences in the definition of state fragility are directly reflected in differences in the instruments used to measure it. An indicator that regards security as the state's primary function will inevitably differ from one that emphasizes development, good governance, or institutional quality. This explains the multiplicity of international indicators and the differences in countries' rankings across them. Furthermore, the reliance of these indicators on variables assigned different weights means that measurement outcomes are determined as much by the adopted methodology as by the actual conditions of the state under examination.

In this context, David Carment argues that measuring fragility should not be limited to observing manifestations of weakness; rather, it should distinguish between the causes of fragility and its consequences, because focusing only on visible indicators may lead to confusion between states that display similar crisis outcomes while differing fundamentally in their underlying structural causes. He also emphasizes that improving measurement tools requires combining quantitative analysis with qualitative analysis, rather than relying exclusively on numerical indicators (Carment, Prest & Samy, 2010).

Based on the foregoing, it may be argued that the methodological problem in measuring state fragility does not lie in the absence of indicators, but rather in the nature of the variables employed, the manner in which they are selected, the weights assigned to them, and their capacity to capture national and regional specificities. Therefore, understanding state fragility indicators first requires understanding the conceptual background from which they originate, since the nature of any indicator necessarily reflects the theoretical perspective adopted by those who developed it.

Table (1): Major Theoretical Approaches to the Concept of State Fragility

Primary Criterion of Fragility	Conceptual Foundation	Scholar
Loss of the capacity to exercise authority	Erosion of state institutions	Zartman (1995)
Failure to provide security and public services	Failure of state functions	Rotberg (2004)
Differences in historical and institutional contexts	Critique of the conventional approach	Call (2011)
Integrating the causes and consequences of fragility	Multidimensional analysis	Carment et al. (2010)

It is evident from the table that the concept of **state fragility** is not subject to a single definition; rather, it reflects a plurality of theoretical approaches. This explains the differences among international indicators in the selection of variables and measurement mechanisms. The table also shows that the evolution of the concept of fragility has been associated with a shift from focusing on the failure of the state to perform its fundamental functions toward emphasizing the analysis of the historical and institutional contexts that produce fragility. Consequently, the results of international indicators should be interpreted with caution, particularly when they are applied to African states.

State fragility therefore represents a multidimensional concept that cannot be reduced to a single definition or a single indicator. The diversity of theoretical perspectives has been directly reflected in the diversity of international measurement instruments. The analysis also demonstrates that the real problem does not lie in the existence of fragility indicators, but rather in the extent to which they are capable of accommodating the historical and institutional particularities of states, especially in Africa.

Section Two: The Development of State Fragility Indicators and the Major International Models for Measuring Them

The need emerged to develop tools capable of measuring levels of fragility in a more objective manner and providing a basis for comparing states and monitoring changes in their conditions over time. This trend arose in response to the growing reliance of international organizations on quantitative indicators in directing development policies, peacebuilding efforts, and crisis management, making the measurement of fragility one of the principal approaches to understanding state conditions and determining priorities for international intervention.

Within this context, the early years of the twenty-first century witnessed the emergence of several international indicators that sought to construct quantitative models based on a set of political, economic, social, and security variables with the aim of classifying states according to varying degrees of fragility. Although these indicators are produced by different institutions, they share the assumption that state fragility reflects the decline in a state's ability to perform its fundamental functions and maintain political and social stability.

The **Fragile States Index (FSI)**, published by the Fund for Peace, is among the most widely used and recognized indicators in academic studies. It is based on twelve sub-indicators distributed across four principal dimensions: cohesion, economic, political, and social. Each state is assessed on a numerical scale that allows for its annual ranking according to its level of fragility. The index has gained broad recognition because of its continuity, annual updates, and its ability to facilitate comparisons among states over time.

In contrast, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has adopted a relatively different approach by expanding the concept of fragility to include dimensions that go beyond traditional institutional performance. Accordingly, fragility is measured through the interaction of six principal dimensions: the economic, political, security, societal, environmental, and human capital dimensions, based on the assumption that state weakness may result from complex and interconnected imbalances that cannot be explained through a single dimension alone.

The World Bank has also developed a framework for classifying Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations (FCS), which is based primarily on the quality of institutions, the level of armed conflict, and the state's capacity to manage crises. This classification is used mainly to guide international assistance and financing programs rather than for academic comparisons.

Despite the differences among these indicators in terms of methodology and data sources, they share a common reliance on the construction of composite indicators, which combine a large number of different variables into a single numerical value. This approach aims to simplify complex phenomena and facilitate comparisons among states. At the same time, however, it raises methodological issues concerning the selection of sub-indicators, methods of data standardization, relative weighting, and the extent to which the final score reflects the actual reality of the state.

The methodological literature on the construction of composite indicators has shown that any indicator of this type passes through several stages, beginning with the definition of the conceptual framework, followed by the selection of variables, data collection, data standardization, weight assignment, and finally the calculation of the overall indicator value. Accordingly, any difference in one of these stages is directly reflected in the final measurement results and the classification of states (Nardo et al., 2005).

Table (2): Comparison of the Major State Fragility Indicators

Institution	indicator	Main Dimensions	Primary Purpose
Fund for Peace	Fragile States Index	Cohesion, Economic, Political, Social	Annual ranking of states according to their level of fragility
OECD	States of Fragility	Economic, Political, Security, Societal, Environmental, Human Capital	Analysis of multidimensional fragility
World Bank	Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations	Institutions, Conflict, Institutional Capacity	Guiding support and financing programs

The foregoing comparison demonstrates that the differences among these indicators are not limited to the number of variables they employ but also extend to the underlying philosophy upon which each model is based. Whereas the Fund for Peace seeks to provide a global comparative tool, the OECD

adopts a more comprehensive perspective on fragility, while the World Bank focuses on the practical use of the indicator in designing development policies and state-building programs.

However, this diversity in measurement tools does not necessarily mean that the methodological problems associated with measuring fragility have been overcome. Rather, it demonstrates that the variation in indicator results reflects differences in the theoretical foundations and methodological choices upon which each model is constructed. Consequently, relying on any single indicator without understanding its conceptual background may lead to conclusions that do not accurately reflect the reality of the state under study, particularly in environments characterized by complex institutional structures, as is the case in many African countries.

It is therefore evident that the development of state fragility indicators represents an attempt to transform a complex theoretical concept into a quantitative instrument that allows comparisons among states. Nevertheless, the diversity of the institutions producing these indicators and the differences in the variables and weights they adopt make measurement outcomes dependent upon the methodological framework underlying each indicator.

Chapter Two: The Limitations of State Fragility Indicators in Explaining the African Reality

Section One: The Limitations of International Indicators in Measuring State Fragility in Africa

State fragility indicators have become one of the principal tools employed by international organizations to assess the conditions of states and classify them according to varying levels of stability or fragility. Despite the opportunities these indicators provide for comparing states and monitoring changes in their conditions over time, their use in explaining the realities of African states has remained the subject of extensive debate within the academic literature because of the conceptual and methodological issues they raise concerning the nature of the African state and the historical and institutional trajectories through which it was formed.

The first of these limitations lies in the fact that international indicators are based on a standardized model of the state, which is implicitly derived from the Western experience of modern state-building. Accordingly, state effectiveness is measured by the extent to which the state monopolizes the legitimate use of force, the effectiveness of its institutions, the stability of its political system, and the quality of its public services. However, this conception is not fully compatible with the particular characteristics of the African state, which, in most cases, emerged within colonial contexts in which political borders were drawn before the process of nation-building had been completed. As a result, state institutions were established under conditions fundamentally different from those that characterized the European experience.

Moreover, most indicators focus more on measuring the outcomes of fragility than on analyzing its causes. They monitor levels of displacement, the deterioration of public services, declining security, and economic contraction, yet they do not sufficiently explain the structural factors that have produced these outcomes, such as the colonial legacy, the nature of the rentier economy, weak national integration, and the interaction between ethnic and tribal identities and state institutions. Consequently, two states may obtain similar fragility scores while their underlying causes of fragility differ fundamentally.

Another methodological limitation concerns the nature of the data upon which these indicators rely. They are generally based on international databases and reports prepared by experts and international organizations, whereas local data remain only marginally represented. This results in giving priority to external perspectives at the expense of domestic perceptions of the nature of crises,

particularly in states that suffer from weak national data production or considerable disparities between the capital city and peripheral regions.

In addition, although composite indicators simplify complex phenomena, they often conceal substantial differences among the various dimensions of fragility. A state may perform well in certain areas, such as economic growth or financial stability, while exhibiting serious weaknesses in security or political integration. Nevertheless, combining these variables into a single numerical value may reduce a complex reality to an overall ranking that fails to reflect its detailed characteristics.

This problem is even more evident in Africa, where patterns of fragility differ from one state to another. In the Sahel countries, fragility is generally associated with the state's declining control over peripheral territories and the rise of armed groups, whereas in other countries it is linked to crises of legitimacy, weak development, or societal divisions. Subjecting these diverse cases to a single standardized measure therefore reduces the explanatory power of the indicators and makes them more suitable for statistical comparison than for political analysis.

Table (3): Major Limitations of State Fragility Indicators in the African Context

Impact on Measurement Results	Methodological Limitation	Dimension
Neglect of the particularities of the African state	Reliance on a standardized model of the state	Theoretical Framework
Weak explanatory capacity	Greater emphasis on outcomes than on causes	Selection of Indicators
Limited representation of local realities	Reliance on international sources	Data
Reduction of the phenomenon to a numerical ranking	Combining diverse variables into a single value	Composite Indicator
Difficulty in explaining differences among states	Standardization of weights and criteria	International Comparison

As illustrated in the table (prepared by the author), the problem does not lie in the existence of international indicators themselves, but rather in the methodological framework upon which they are constructed. The further these indicators depart from taking national and regional specificities into account, the more limited their ability becomes to explain the reality of fragility. Consequently, they tend to function more as classification tools than as analytical instruments.

Based on the foregoing, it may be argued that state fragility indicators constitute an important point of entry for understanding the conditions of states; however, they are not sufficient on their own to explain the reality of fragility in Africa. Accordingly, evaluating the performance of these indicators should be accompanied by an analysis of the historical and institutional contexts in which the African state has developed, thereby making it possible to understand the differences among states that may display similar measurement results while differing substantially in the nature of their crises.

The summary of this section

A critical reading of the international indicators reveals that their limitations do not stem from procedural weaknesses, but rather from their reliance on standardized approaches that do not fully accommodate the particular characteristics of the African state. Consequently, improving fragility measurement requires shifting the focus from ranking states to explaining the factors that produce

fragility, thereby paving the way for the following section, which proposes a more appropriate analytical approach to measuring state fragility in Africa, supported by an illustrative case study.

Section Two: Towards a More Appropriate Approach to Measuring State Fragility in Africa: An Applied Reading in Light of International Indicators

If international indicators have contributed to the development of quantitative tools for measuring state fragility, their effectiveness in explaining the reality of African states remains dependent upon the extent to which they are capable of accommodating the historical and institutional particularities that have characterized the emergence of the state on the continent. Fragility in Africa is not a homogeneous phenomenon that can be explained through a single numerical indicator; rather, it is the product of the interaction of historical, political, economic, and security factors that vary from one state to another. Consequently, the results of these indicators always require an analytical reading that goes beyond mere numerical values.

Accordingly, overcoming the limitations of international indicators requires the adoption of a multidimensional analytical approach that combines quantitative indicators with qualitative analysis and relates measurement results to the national contexts of each state. As demonstrated in the dissertation, relying solely on the numerical ranking of states is insufficient to explain levels of fragility, because states may obtain similar indicator scores while differing fundamentally in the nature of their crises and their historical trajectories.

To illustrate this point more clearly, three African cases representing different levels of fragility may be examined: **Somalia, Mali, and Rwanda**, as they constitute distinct models of state-building and institutional development.

First: Somalia A Model of the Collapsed State

Somalia represents the most widely cited example of a collapsed state in the contemporary literature. Since the beginning of the 1990s, it has lost the ability to perform its basic functions, while the control of the central government over large parts of its territory has declined, accompanied by the spread of armed groups and the disintegration of state institutions. This is reflected in its ranking as the most fragile state in Africa according to the 2024 Fragile States Index, confirming its continued position among the most fragile states worldwide.

Second: Mali A Model of the Fragile State

Mali represents a different case. It has not reached the stage of state collapse, but it suffers from evident institutional and security fragility, particularly since the 2012 crisis. Although its constitutional institutions continue to function and the state retains international recognition, its ability to exercise authority throughout its territory remains limited because of armed rebellions and the growing activity of terrorist groups. According to the 2024 Fragile States Index, Mali ranked 14th in Africa, with a total score of 97.3 points, reflecting its continued classification among states experiencing high levels of fragility.

Third: Rwanda A Model of Overcoming Fragility

Rwanda represents a contrasting case within the African continent. Following the events of 1994, it succeeded in rebuilding state institutions, strengthening the effectiveness of public administration, and achieving relatively high levels of stability compared with many other African countries. Its position in the 2024 Fragile States Index (46th in Africa) reflects a significant improvement compared with Mali and Somalia, confirming that rebuilding institutions and improving governance contribute

to reducing levels of fragility, although numerical indicators alone remain insufficient to explain all dimensions of this transformation

Table (4): Comparison of the Applied Cases According to the 2024 Fragile States Index

Analytical Significance	Ranking in the Index	Classification	State
Collapse of state institutions, absence of an effective monopoly over the use of force, and the continuation of armed conflict.	1st in Africa (111.3 points)	Collapsed State	Somalia
Continuity of state institutions despite weak control over the national territory and the worsening of security threats.	14th in Africa (97.3 points)	Fragile State	Mali
Relative success in rebuilding institutions and improving indicators of stability and governance.	46th in Africa (81.8 points)	State that has Relatively Overcome Fragility	Rwanda

Source: Prepared by the author based on data from the **2024 Fragile States Index**.

The preceding comparison demonstrates that international indicators succeed in providing a general picture of levels of fragility; however, they do not, by themselves, explain the structural differences among states. Somalia and Mali are both classified among fragile states, yet the nature of fragility differs between them. In Somalia, fragility is associated with the near-total collapse of state institutions, whereas in Mali it is reflected in the state's limited ability to exercise authority throughout its territory despite the continued existence of formal state institutions. Rwanda, by contrast, represents a model demonstrating the possibility of a gradual transition from fragility to stability through rebuilding institutions and strengthening state effectiveness.

Accordingly, it may be argued that international indicators remain important instruments for comparing states; however, their explanatory value increases when they are integrated with historical and institutional analysis, thereby allowing a better understanding of the specific characteristics of each case rather than relying solely on numerical rankings. Therefore, assessing state fragility in Africa should be based on an integrated approach that combines quantitative indicators with qualitative analysis, which constitutes the most appropriate framework for understanding the reality of fragility on the continent.

A Critical Reading in Light of the Latest International Reports

Recent publications by international organizations confirm that the debate on state fragility is no longer confined to measuring levels of fragility; rather, it has increasingly shifted toward understanding the nature of fragility and the diversity of its patterns. In the 2024 Fragile States Index, reliance continues to be placed on the traditional indicators relating to cohesion, economy, politics, and society, while emphasizing that armed conflicts, worsening economic crises, climate change, and declining trust in institutions have become interrelated factors that increase the complexity of fragility. Consequently, interpreting the results of the Index requires an analytical reading that goes beyond the numerical ranking of states. ([OECD][1])

In the same direction, the OECD States of Fragility 2025 report introduced an important development in its methodological approach by shifting from the concept of the "fragile state" to that of "fragile contexts" (Fragile Contexts), on the grounds that fragility is not confined to the state alone but also affects systems, institutions, and societies to varying degrees.

The report further adopts a multidimensional framework based on six interconnected dimensions: political, security, economic, societal, environmental, and human fragility, emphasizing that the interaction among these dimensions explains the diversity of fragility patterns across states rather than performance in a single dimension alone. ([OECD][2])

The report further indicates that 61 contexts fall within the categories of high and extreme fragility, accommodating approximately 2.1 billion people, representing nearly one-quarter of the world's population. These contexts are home to 72% of the world's population living in extreme poverty, a proportion projected to increase to 92% by 2040 if current trends continue. The report also highlights that fragility is no longer confined to low-income countries but has become a global phenomenon of varying intensity, although its most severe consequences remain concentrated in states with limited institutional capacity, particularly in Africa and the Sahel region. ([OECD][3])

These findings are consistent with the conclusions reached by the present study, which emphasize that the real value of international indicators does not lie in ranking states, but rather in diagnosing patterns of fragility and identifying areas of weakness and resilience within each context. [OECD][4])

They also support the study's argument that, despite their importance, international indicators cannot constitute self-sufficient explanatory tools unless they are integrated with historical and institutional analysis that takes into account the particular characteristics of the African state and the trajectories of its formation. Consequently, the evolution reflected in recent **OECD** reports represents an implicit acknowledgment of the criticisms directed by the academic literature toward traditional normative approaches and reinforces the call for adopting more flexible and multidimensional approaches in the study of state fragility.

The summary of this chapter

The study has demonstrated that state fragility indicators constitute important tools for providing a general picture of the conditions of states and for enabling comparisons among them. Nevertheless, their explanatory capacity remains limited when it comes to analyzing the realities of African states. This is because these indicators rely on standardized normative models and on composite indicators that combine different variables into a single numerical value, making them more capable of classifying states than of explaining the structural causes that produce fragility.

The comparative case study of Somalia, Mali, and Rwanda further showed that states may display similar levels of fragility while differing fundamentally in the nature of the crises they face, their trajectories of state-building, and the capacity of their institutions to adapt to challenges. Somalia represents a case of comprehensive institutional collapse, whereas Mali reflects a form of fragility associated with weak territorial control and persistent security threats. Rwanda, on the other hand, provides a model illustrating the possibility of a gradual transition from fragility to stability through institutional reconstruction and the strengthening of governance.

Accordingly, it may be argued that international indicators should be employed as preliminary diagnostic tools rather than as definitive explanations of fragility. Enhancing their analytical value requires linking their results to the historical, institutional, and social contexts specific to each state.

Such an approach makes it possible to achieve a more accurate understanding of the phenomenon of fragility in Africa and renders the process of measurement more consistent with the reality it seeks to explain.

Conclusion

This study sought to provide a critical reading of state fragility indicators in Africa through analyzing their conceptual and methodological foundations and identifying their limitations in explaining the reality of fragility within African states. The study was based on the central question of the extent to which these indicators are capable of reflecting the actual reality of fragility in light of the different historical and institutional contexts in which the African state has emerged.

The analysis demonstrated that the multiplicity of theoretical definitions of state fragility has been directly reflected in the diversity of measurement instruments. Each indicator adopts a particular conception of the nature and functions of the state, resulting in differences in the variables selected, the weights assigned to them, and consequently the classification results produced by international indicators. The study also showed that, despite their importance in providing a standardized framework for comparing states, these indicators remain limited in their ability to explain fragility when applied according to uniform criteria that do not take into account the historical, political, and social particularities of the African state.

Furthermore, the applied study comparing Mali, Somalia, and Rwanda demonstrated that international indicators are successful in highlighting the general differences in levels of fragility, but they are insufficient to explain the differences in state-building trajectories or the specific nature of the crises confronting each case. Fragility in Mali differs from fragility in Somalia in both its causes and manifestations, while the Rwandan experience confirms that improving state performance depends not only on better numerical indicator scores but also on the existence of a comprehensive institutional process aimed at rebuilding the state and strengthening its legitimacy.

Accordingly, the study confirms the validity of its initial hypothesis, namely that state fragility indicators constitute important tools for comparison and diagnosis but are insufficient on their own to explain the reality of fragility in Africa because they rely on standardized measurement models that do not fully accommodate the particular characteristics of the African state. Therefore, these indicators should be employed within an integrated analytical approach that combines quantitative measurement with qualitative analysis in order to achieve a more accurate understanding of the factors producing fragility and to enhance both the scientific and practical value of measurement outcomes.

Findings

The study arrived at a number of findings, the most important of which are as follows:

1. There is no single unified definition of the concept of state fragility. Rather, theoretical approaches vary according to the intellectual and methodological backgrounds of researchers and international institutions.
2. State fragility indicators are closely associated with the theoretical perspectives upon which they are constructed, which explains the variation in measurement results among international indicators.
3. Most international indicators rely on standardized normative models, which limits their ability to accommodate the historical and institutional particularities of the African state.

4. International indicators tend to measure the manifestations of fragility more than they analyze its structural causes, thereby reducing their explanatory capacity.
5. The comparative case study demonstrated that similarity among states in terms of fragility levels does not necessarily imply similarity in their causes or historical trajectories, as illustrated by the comparison between Mali, Somalia, and Rwanda.
6. International indicators remain important tools for comparing states; however, they need to be complemented by qualitative analysis that takes into account the local context of each state.

Recommendations

In light of the foregoing findings, the study proposes the following recommendations:

- Not relying exclusively on international indicators when studying state fragility, but integrating historical and institutional analysis into the interpretation of the results.
- Developing measurement models that are more appropriate to the African context by taking into account the particularities of state-building and the nature of political and social transformations on the continent.
- Strengthening the role of national institutions in producing data and statistics in order to reduce complete dependence on international databases.
- Expanding comparative studies among African states to achieve a more accurate understanding of patterns of fragility and trajectories of recovery.
- Encouraging research that links fragility indicators, good governance, peacebuilding, and sustainable development, thereby contributing to the development of tools with greater explanatory capacity.
- Using the results of international indicators as decision-support tools, rather than treating them as definitive judgments regarding the conditions or future prospects of states.

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