

Fragility and the State: Current Debates and Historical Perspectives

Gianfabrizio Ladini

Acknowledgement

The author wishes to thank all AfSol reviewers and editors for their constructive feedbacks and revisions.

About the author

Gianfabrizio Ladini holds an MA in European Studies and an MA in Peace Studies. He currently manages technical assistance projects focusing on fragile and post-conflict settings. He can be reached via email at: g.ladini@outlook.com or via post at: 80 Rue Saint-Georges 1050 Brussels, Belgium.

Keywords

Fragile states;
Development;
Institutions

Abstract

This paper examines fragile states from a historical and policy-focused context. It analyses both fragility and the state as complex phenomena with specific history and logic. International debates are introduced, from the 'failed states' narrative to more sophisticated frameworks on fragile contexts. Modern state-building is placed in a historical perspective and analysed through a political economy framework, while rents and patronage are explained as standard forms of social organization. Modern state-building and economic development is analysed, together with the impact of colonialism, further exposing the features of fragile states and placing them within the context of the contemporary world economy, making fragility appear as a dysfunctional form of governance.

Introduction

The number of people living in extreme poverty has consistently declined in the past 200 years, and most spectacularly in the last few decades. Literacy, health and life conditions in general have also vastly improved (Roser, 2017). On the other hand, inequality is rising, demographic growth and urbanisation rates are producing major transformations and climate change looms large. Overall progress notwithstanding, Paul Collier (2007) argues that a limited number of countries have been left behind in these developments. The 'bottom billion' of the global population has not benefited from widespread improvements in income and living conditions. In his analysis, he points out that this is due to 'development traps,' or vicious cycles that are difficult to break and are borne out of conflicts and poor governance. Absolute poverty may be declining globally, but violence persists in pockets of conflict, poverty and instability all over the world. By the same token, prospects of interstate wars have diminished but protracted crises still affect countries like Somalia, the DRC, Afghanistan, Iraq and Haiti, among others. New man-made emergencies have further engulfed Yemen, Nigeria, Libya, Syria, Venezuela and Myanmar.

The intrastate nature of these complex crises is often complemented by their regional spill-overs in the Sahel, the Lake Chad Basin, the Great Lakes Region, the Horn of Africa, the Middle East and Southern Asia. Besides armed conflicts, drug-related violence and high homicide rates are endemic in Central America, and human trafficking thrives in North Africa. Criminal transnational networks operate across and within borders, incentivized by the relative impunity they enjoy against weak national security forces, in the same way as terrorist organizations like Boko Haram, ISIS or Al-Qaeda do. Domestic instability has regional and global externalities, as almost all of the networks operating within and across borders have transnational, regional and global elements.

Current debates on fragile states have their origins in the 1990s, when state institutions collapsed or were involved in the facilitation of ethnic cleansing and economic pillage. The next decade began with the 9/11 attacks on America, orchestrated by Al-Qaeda under the protection of the Afghan government. Organised corruption and violence, crony capitalism and warlords are nothing new. However, domestic situations now have international security implications and fragile states have risen to the top of the global agenda.

This paper gives an account of the context and debates surrounding state fragility.

The first section examines the development of these debates among scholars and policy-makers; it traces their evolution from the concept of 'failed states' to more sophisticated frameworks currently in the literature. The next sections place state fragility in a historical perspective using a political economy analysis. Rents and patronage are shown as the historical norms, rather than exceptions, while the modern state and the globalized economy emerge as closely interconnected phenomena. Regional competition in Europe had global implications, with colonial institutions affecting post-colonial development. The last section introduces some common features of fragile states in the context of the contemporary world economy. It examines pertinent issues and ways forward in the global effort to address state fragility.

An Outline of the Debate: From Failed States to Fragile Contexts

The debate on state fragility has its origins in the 1990s and early 2000s. It has largely evolved in response to policy-makers' and donors' initiatives in the security and development sectors. This practical focus helps explain why there are no agreed-upon definitions of what constitutes fragility, nor on the states that are to be considered 'fragile'. The issue is also politically sensitive, as states are reluctant to be labelled as fragile. It is feared that this negative status might invite unwelcome external intervention or might discourage potential investors from engaging economically. On the other hand, governments play the fragility card to secure foreign aid. These political considerations have prompted several shifts in the narratives around state fragility. As such, in the past 25 years ongoing debates have moved from 'failed states' to fragile contexts.

The first use of the expression 'failed states' was in a 1993 article on Foreign Policy magazine, which reflected on the experiences of the wars in the former Yugoslavia, in Eastern and Western Africa and in Cambodia (Helman & Ratner, 1993). Central governments were unable to assert territorial control within their borders; in Yugoslavia and Somalia state institutions collapsed entirely. In October 1993, US forces suffered 18 casualties during the 'Battle of Mogadishu'. Soon after the US withdrew from the United Nations Operation in Somalia II (UNOSOM II), whose mission was to ensure humanitarian access and support peace-making, the mission itself was shut down. These events are of paramount importance in understanding the US involvement in multilateral engagements in forthcoming crises (Brock et al., 2012; p. 103-107). As a result of the 1993 failure in Somalia, the US was reluctant to join international intervention efforts in Rwanda and Bosnia in 1994, where a timely and determined intervention would have prevented genocides. Between April and July 1994, an estimated 800,000 people were slaughtered in Rwanda, while in July 1995, around 8,000 Bosniaks were killed in Srebrenica. Continued failures to prevent these genocidal acts strengthened the voices in the US administration calling for more resolute action. Madelaine Albright was the US Secretary of State under the Clinton Administration between 1997 and 2001, and she was a strong advocate of military actions to force Serbian forces out of Kosovo. Following many such calls for action, NATO eventually carried out a bombing campaign against Serbia in 1999, without UN backing.

Appalling death tolls, mass-scale violence against civilians and a large mediatisation drew a lot of attention to the Balkan wars from scholars, policy-makers and the public at large. Mainly focusing on the Balkans, Mary Kaldor (1999) called those post-Cold

War conflicts that were typically sub-state in nature “new wars” juxtaposing state and non-state actors under the ‘politics of identity’ and featuring close links with global markets and criminal networks. The pillage of local resources for personal enrichment and for financing war operations was also noticed in contexts as diverse as Bosnia, Liberia and Colombia. Local resources, including human labour, were looted and exploited. They were then sold on global markets, where vast arm procurements took place. As a result, a fierce debate on the role of political grievances and economic greed in civil wars ensued (Berdal & Malone, 2000). For instance, the warlord Charles Taylor made an estimated gross profit of USD 400 million per year during the 1992-1996 civil war in Liberia (Berdal & Malone, 2000; p. 5). In turning Liberia into his personal enterprise, warfare became part of a profitable business model. Another case where domestic instability fuelled looting of local resources was the war in the Democratic Republic of Congo in the mid-1990s; Uganda and Rwanda ganged up with local armed groups and entered the lucrative business of mining in DRC’s eastern regions. In these and other cases, war and business went hand in hand, and this provided powerful incentives for opposing forces to keep fighting and looting, instead of sitting at negotiation tables and working towards peace (Ladini, 2010a).

Reflecting on the complexity of conflicts of the 1990s, new concepts appeared in policy and academic debates, such as ‘Linking Relief Rehabilitation and Development’ (LRRD), or the idea that there can be no development without security, and no security without development. The latter came to be known as the ‘security-development nexus’. Duffield (2001) critically argued that these views would lead to politicized humanitarian interventions, with the risk of humanitarian and development objectives playing a support function to Western security interests. Discussions on ‘human security’ attempted to extend the notion of security from the traditionally military-focused one to being viewed through a more comprehensive lens (Ladini, 2010b). The concept of ‘Responsibility to Protect’ (R2P) also emerged in the late 1990s as a genuine attempt to frame legitimate external interventions in countries suffering from violent conflict. In 2000, the Canadian Government set up the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty. Failure to prevent genocides and ethnic cleansing in Rwanda and Bosnia sparked the debate on what could be done to avoid the same mistakes in the future. The Commission came up with the 2001 ‘Report on the Responsibility to Protect.’ They argued that sovereignty entailed first and foremost the responsibility to protect state citizens. This responsibility falls on state governments. However, the international community should step in, should the state be unable or unwilling to fulfil its responsibility. Multilateral actions could take the form of monitoring, assistance and capacity building activities, resorting to armed interventions as a last resort and with the backing of the UN Security Council.

The real breakthrough on the notion of failed states came with the attacks of September 11, 2001 (9/11) on the US. The Taliban regime had given Osama bin-Laden protection, hence it constituted a direct threat to US and international security. This was the narrative that, in the aftermath of 9/11, made domestic state structures a matter of international security concerns. The US Administration became a vocal advocate of the failed states concept, in their attempt to frame their ‘war on terror.’ The 2002 US National Security Strategy, for instance, argued that 9/11 “taught us that weak states, like Afghanistan, can pose as great a danger to our national interests as strong states. America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones” (US, 2002; p. 1). The European Union followed suit. In the first document outlining a security strategy for Europe, Javier Solana (the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy at the time) stated that “state failure is an

alarming phenomenon, that undermines global governance, and adds to regional instability” (EU, 2003; p. 4). The concept of failed states has been criticized for both its theoretical limits and political implications (Nay, 2012; Grimm et al., 2014; Brock et al., 2012; Call, 2008). Chomsky (2007) argued that the US itself should be regarded as a case of a failed state, and a threat to international security. Strong backing from US administrations notwithstanding, the concept of failed states has largely disappeared from policy and academic debates. It has instead been replaced by a more nuanced idea of state fragility, with donors and international organizations proactively engaged in articulating this new definition.

A second line of policy interest in fragile states stems from the donor community. Debates on aid effectiveness started earnestly in the late 1990s. They led to the ‘Monterey Consensus on Financing Development’, approved during a UN conference in 2002. Official Development Assistance (ODA), it was argued, had to complement other sources of funding, including domestic revenue. ODA had to enhance the ‘absorptive capacity and financial management of the recipient countries’ to utilize aid effectively. In a shift from previous development thinking, aid flows had to support poverty reduction strategies, and not simply economic growth. A perverse effect, however, was to concentrate aid on good performers (Grimm et al., 2014; p. 200). In the mid-2000s, the World Bank reacted to critics by setting up two units in charge of informing policy-making: the Fragile State Unit and the Conflict Prevention and Reconstruction Unit. During the 1980s and the 1990s, a lot of emphasis was placed on redressing public finances through cuts in public expenditure, then to further tie ODA to aid effectiveness. In the following decade, the World Bank brought the state back, in the sense that state-building was identified as a key measure for effective programming and delivery in ‘low-income countries under stress’.

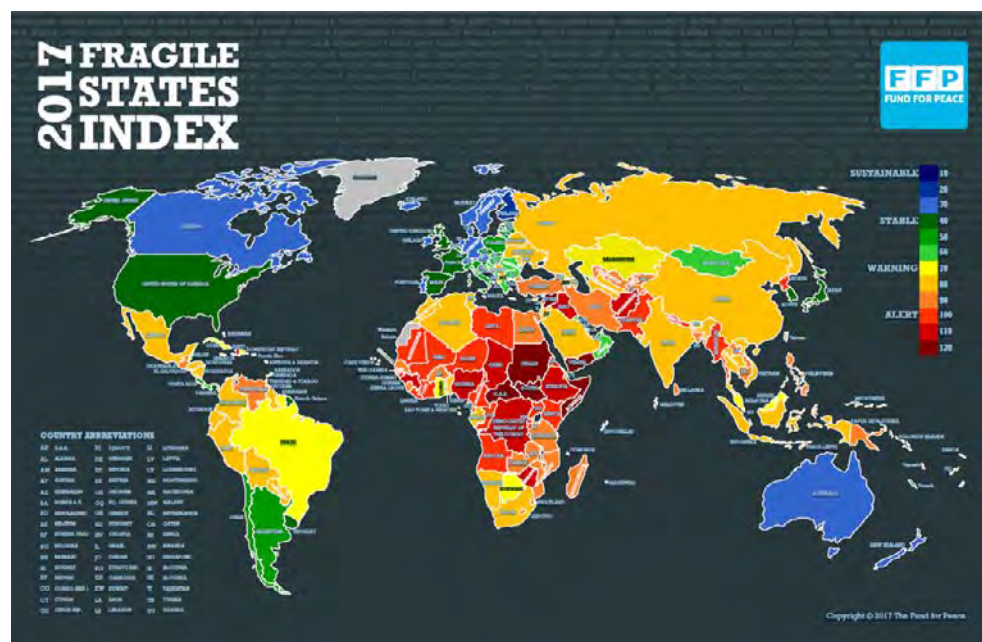
This was broadly in line with UN thinking on peace-building. In his 1992 Agenda for Peace, UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali stated that “for peace-making and peacekeeping operations to be truly successful, they must come to include comprehensive efforts to identify and support structures which will tend to consolidate peace and advance a sense of confidence and well-being among people” (par. 55). UN initiatives on peace-building started from there, and the strengthening of state institutions was as important as the involvement of non-state actors (Ladini, 2009; p. 40-45). Similarly, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) included state-building in its ten ‘Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States & Situations’ (2007). In 2010, the G7+ group was formally created and brought together countries affected by fragility and conflict in a common platform for political dialogue and advocacy. The G7+ and donors sat together at the International Dialogue on Peace-building and State-building, where they negotiated a set of principles for international engagement in fragile situations. These principles were officially endorsed on 30 November 2011 during the 4th High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan, Korea. The ‘New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States’ represented a global policy agreement, and was developed in consultation with states, development agencies and civil society actors. It was signed by more than 40 countries and organizations and was based on three pillars: (i) Peace-building and State-building Goals (PSGs) including legitimate politics, security, justice, economic foundations, and revenue and services; (ii) structured engagement, from fragility assessments to progress monitoring based on PSGs and political dialogue; (iii) aid effectiveness through transparency, risk-sharing, strengthening country management systems, and timely and predictable aid flows.

Following this, several fragility indexes appeared in policy and academic circles. The aim or rationale was twofold. On the one hand, state fragility's trappings had to be more clearly specified. On the other, lists and rankings could better support policies and programmes, including decisions on aid disbursement. Fragility indexes, as Ziaja and Mata (2010) note, can be useful to fine-tune aid approaches, to monitor trends in global political stability, to evaluate the impact of development aid and to investigate the dynamics of state fragility in general. The Fragile States Index, formerly Failed States Index, was one of the first to be published in 2005 by the Fund for Peace and Foreign Policy magazine. It ranks countries according to social, economic and political indicators.

Figure 1
Fragile States
Index 2017

Source:

<http://fundforpeace.org/fsi>



The World Bank's (WB) Harmonized List of Fragile Situations is an example of donors' need to assess fragility for disbursement programming. The WB's statute prevents it from allocating funds based on political considerations. The Fragility, Conflict and Violence group in the World Bank releases an annual list of fragile countries based on (i) a Country Policy and Institutional Assessment, and (ii) whether the country hosts a peacekeeping or a political and peace-building mission. The former assesses the capacity of countries to implement development policies, and to manage International Development Assistance (IDA) effectively. It is used to allocate IDA to eligible countries. The latter is meant to take political conflict and violence into account in an objective and apolitical manner.

In line with their policy dialogue mission, the OECD has also invested great resources on fragile states, releasing 12 reports between 2005 and 2018. The OECD began working on fragile states in the mid-2000s, with the limited scope of monitoring official development assistance to countries. In 2007, the 'Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations' were published. In advocating for fragile and conflict-affected countries not to be left behind in aid

flows, the OECD used indexes and definitions developed by others. In 2015, they set up the first wave of expert consultations aimed at producing a multidimensional fragility framework. This process resulted in the 'States of Fragility 2015' report (2015), followed by the 'States of Fragility 2016' (2016). To date, the latter represents the latest version of the OECD Fragility Framework, revolving around five dimensions of fragility: economic, environmental, political, security and societal. Here, fragility is defined as “the combination of exposure to risk and insufficient coping capacity of the state, system and/or communities to manage, absorb or mitigate those risks” (OECD, 2016; p. 21). In terms of numbers, over 1.6 billion people, or 22% of the global population, currently live in fragile contexts, and these figures are expected to increase to 3 billion people, or 32% of the global population, by 2050 (OECD, 2016; p. 20-24). The OECD framework is currently the most widely used internationally: the EU, for instance, employs it for programming purposes.

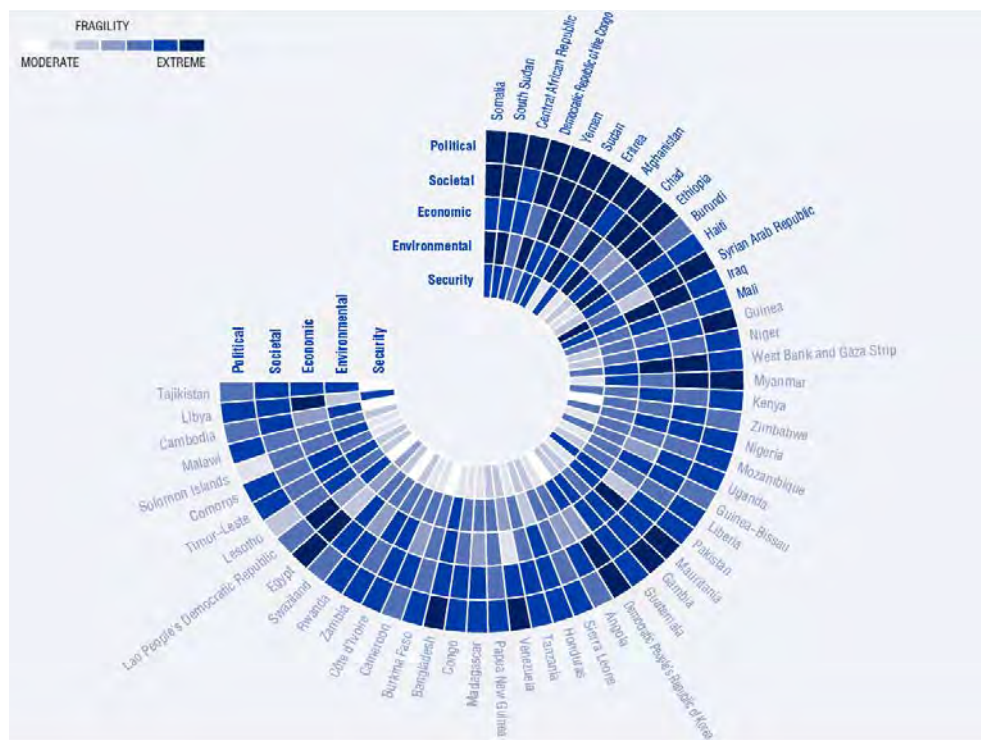


Figure 2
The 2016
OECD
Fragility
Framework
diagram

Source:
OECD (2016)

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG, 2015) have given fragile states renewed attention, especially SDG 16 'Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions', where “effective, accountable and inclusive institutions” are mentioned. The debate continues on the theoretical merits of fragile state concepts. These concepts are here to stay, however, because they are instrumental in designing and delivering policies and programmes. To a large extent, therefore, the concept of 'fragile states' can be seen as a political concept (Grimm et al., 2014). Labelling countries as 'failed', 'collapsing', 'weak' or 'fragile' also risks reflecting more of our ideas and expectations on what a state should do and be, rather than the realities of what governments do and are (Brock et al., 2012). This notwithstanding, debates on state fragility have shown remarkable evolution and, it could be argued, genuine progress. The shift from state failure to fragile contexts, as Putzel puts it, “moves away from a tendency to pathologise states, so common in the failed states discourse, and argues against

applying uniform ‘governance templates’ without taking into account the historically and spatially specific dimensions of fragility” (2010; p. 2-3). All the debates outlined above have resulted in a broad consensus around the fact that fragility is complex and multidimensional, can affect only localized regions within countries and tends to have spill over effects. Rich and middle-income countries can and do suffer from shock or stress factors the same way as poorer countries do. Latin America, for instance, suffers from the highest levels of homicides (OECD, 2016). States of south-eastern US are exposed to environmental hazards like hurricanes in a similar way Caribbean countries are. Also, trends have been identified that show fragility as more localized in big urban settlements, suggesting that debates on fragile states could move to fragile cities (de Boer, 2015). Some projects are also ongoing that aim at producing fragility indexes based on people’s perception at the sub-national level, and these could be better adapted to practical development programming (Hoagland, 2018).

Every country can face fragility concerns. However, not every country withstands stress and recovers from shock the same way. The key to understanding this difference lies in institutions. These provide the framework governing the distribution of resources within a society. Ideally, resources are mobilised from prevention to recovery by predictable institutional mechanisms; decisions are taken and implemented at local, national or international level. Fragility becomes a problem either when decisions are not taken, or when institutions are not adequate to implement them. To investigate these phenomena, the next sections place institutions in a historical perspective.

Methodological Note: Development, Institutions, Political Economy

Research on development and economic growth has been wide, rich and diverse in the past few decades. One broad conclusion emerging from this wealth of knowledge is that institutions matter; they constitute decisive factors for sustained growth and development. Debates have increasingly focused on policy choices, institutional structures, forms of governance and how these respond to colonial legacies, conflicts, geography or natural resource endowment (Adam & Dercon, 2009).

Economic growth and development require functional institutions, and institutions emerge and evolve in specific political and economic environments. The acknowledgment of this fact has served as a call to realism in development thinking. The value for money garnered from the billions of USD of development aid has been contested and critically reviewed, not only by authors like Dambisa Moyo (2009) but within the donor community itself. ‘Political Economy Analysis’ is now widely incorporated in donor programming and guides the delivery of interventions. The idea is that politically informed programmes help ensure better development outcomes, and a wide range of tools and case studies in this regard have emerged in recent years (Mcloughlin, 2014).

The following sections constitute a political economy analysis of institutions and institutional change. This analytical framework has been developed in particular by North, Wallis and Weingast (2009) and previous work, like North (1990). The framework considers political and economic institutions as forms of social order that structure interaction within societies and between communities. These orders evolve through the competition and cooperation of social organisations representing the interests of individuals, elites and other groups in society. The development of accountable institutions is regarded as a question of access to political and economic organizations

within society at large, i.e. not limited to specific groups and elites. The framework is of great interest to development theory in general, and to the analysis of fragility in particular. Acemoglu and Robinson (2012), for instance, employ this framework in their analysis of inclusive vs extractive institutions as factors of relative power, wealth and poverty. The analysis in this paper is based on these premises. It starts by introducing rents and patronage systems as the standard form of governance in recorded human history. It continues by examining how the modern state and world economy emerged and got structured in Europe and elsewhere. It further illustrates the links between colonisation and state fragility and it ends with an overview of fragility today, with pertinent issues and recommendations for the work on resilience as a pathway out of fragility.

Violence, Rents and Patronage: The 'default social outcome'

The Neolithic revolution is perhaps the biggest turning point in the history of mankind. Around 12,000 years BCE, small communities of 20-50 nomadic hunter-gatherers began to settle down in different world regions and to rely more and more on farming and breeding for their subsistence. At the end of the Neolithic revolution, as Keeley (1996) notes, the homo sapiens sapiens ceased to be an endangered species and became a threatening one. Over the course of several thousand years, as more food became available and stocked, communities began to increase in number, reaching hundreds, and to trade more systematically with each other.

These communities also had to be wary of one another. In his account of primitive wars, Keeley (1996) shows that defence and aggression were a shared responsibility within the community; farmers were warriors too, and war was a constant feature of life. Archaeological findings suggest that societies used to live in a constant state of low-intensity conflict, marked by episodic raids and pillages, more likely during economic downturns. Prehistoric wars were "total wars with limited means" (Keeley, 1996; chap. 5). The difference between WWII and prehistoric wars, in this account, lies essentially in logistics and in the productive capacity that societies can mobilize for the war effort. The image of war as a chess match between armies, indirectly involving societies and economies, is both very recent and essentially limited to the conflicts between modern states and their armies. In prehistoric societies, military assets were dispersed and military responsibilities were widely shared.

Innovations in food production, combined with organizational advantages opened up by the development of writing, led to the possibility of structuring a society that consists of more than a few hundred people. Specialization and division of labour within larger and more complex societies led to differences in wealth, status and power. It also meant that military assets could be put under the control of violence specialists. Defence from external threats and aggression against external enemies remained paramount concerns for the group's survival. A new problem arose, however, on how to deal with violence from within. The issue, in other words, was how to ensure that competition between powerful individuals and groups within a society did not result in its collapse.

North, Wallis and Weingast (2009) argue that the standard way societies have dealt with this problem in history is to limit access to economic opportunities and political representation to specific individuals and groups, namely the elite with the power to influence a given society's organisation and possibly its disruption. 'Limited access orders' are thereby generated, where economic opportunities are created and distributed among the elite (or the 'dominant coalition', as they put it) in the form of rents. The same elite is widely represented in political decision-making processes. North (1990) defines institutions as the "rules of the game"; they provide a set of rules for the interactions of elites taking place through specific economic and political organizations. Wealth, and the possibility to translate it into political influence, gives the dominant coalition credible incentives to support the system and to refrain from violence that would disrupt it. The state slowly emerges as an organization of organizations, sustained by an institutional architecture that, in turn, it guarantees and enforces. This elite-based framework does not prevent forms of social inclusion. These, however, follow patron-client patterns based on personal contacts and trust. The trickle down of wealth and opportunities through patronage helps ensure social stability and some form of legitimacy.

Elite politics, rents and patronage represent the 'default social outcome' in recorded human history: institutions can evolve in their complexity, impersonality and inclusion, but they tend to go back to default after internal or external shocks. Rents and patronage proved compatible with sophisticated forms of governance and with technological and scientific progress. For thousands of years, elites in city states, kingdoms and empires sustained their power by controlling trade routes and methods of production and exchange through effective administrative systems. Wealth and power were translated into complex art, architectural and engineering works. Science and technology flourished in leading research centres like Baghdad, Cairo or Samarkand. Frankopan (2015) argues that Central Asia and the Middle East provided the engine for global historical developments. The region was a hub of networks where luxury goods were traded, armies clashed and diseases spread across continents. This region gave birth to the biggest land empires in history; the Caliphate and the Mongol empires controlled vast territory and the region also hosts the most ancient polity, China. The stability ensured by these regional hegemonies allowed transcontinental exchanges to flourish, science and philosophy to be cultivated as well as art, architecture and engineering to be showcased.

The wealth and power base of these systems, however, proved incapable of withstanding the hegemonic rise of Europe. The political landscape of the European continent, unlike elsewhere in Eurasia, had been highly fragmented and competitive since the fall of the Roman Empire in the 5th century AD. Fragmentation and competition brought about conflict and war, but also growth and innovation in technologies and institutions. Still in 1500, Europe had no substantial strength compared with the Caliphate, China and the Moghul Empire (Kennedy, 1988; chap. 1). Through successive waves of expansion and colonisation, however, a handful of European countries took control of world trade routes and strategic territories. History offers a rich showcase for the rise and fall of empires, and Europe is no exception in this regard. European exceptionalism was the fact that a regional competition resulted in the expansion of a normative and institutional order, from one limited region to the entire world. The next sections look at the development of the modern state and global economy, two interconnected phenomena with a strong European footprint.

State-building and World Economy: The European Footprint

The Thirty Years' War, waged by all major European powers between 1618 and 1648, was a mass-scale bloodshed of exceptional proportions. Roughly one-third of the entire German population was wiped out by violence, famines and epidemics, and whole regions were almost entirely depopulated. The war effort exhausted all economies, and although it was fought mainly in Central Europe, military operations were extended outside the continent and stretched from South America to Asia. Some scholars speak of the war as the first world war in history (Kennedy, 1988; chap. 2). The war ended with a system of treaties known as the Peace of Westphalia (1648), which sanctioned the principles of state sovereignty and of non-interference in a state's internal affairs.

The formal recognition of this territorial decision-making authority lies at the heart of modern statehood and at the center of the world's political division into sovereign units called states (Schmitt, 1950; p. 141-147). Concerned in preventing another total war in Europe, and conscious that no power was strong enough to reach continental hegemony, the Europeans set the stage for a world order based on sovereignty, national interest and the balance of power (Kissinger, 1994; chap. 3, and 2014; chap 1). Power was given legitimacy regardless of any moral or religious assumption, as was the case in China or in the Caliphate at the time. Sovereigns were those who controlled a given territory and whose authority was recognized by other sovereigns with the same characteristics. In his classic formulation, Max Weber (1919) defines the state as "a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory". The historical significance of the Peace of Westphalia lies in the fact that state sovereignty still constitutes the legal basis for the world's political organization (Murphy, 1999; Ruggie, 1993).

In reconstructing the historical trajectory of modern statehood and sovereignty, however, the system of interstate relations is only one side of the story. In fact, the emergence of territorial units under centralized control had to pass through long processes of domestic consolidation. The competitive international context provided domestic actors with immediate incentives, as funds and soldiers were permanent stays in military planning. On the one hand, this facilitated the emergence of centralized tax and administrative systems. On the other, it led to the dependence of royal governments on external sources of funding. The emergence of an independent financial system in Europe, which then contributed to the structure of the modern world economy, was strongly boosted by European kings' need for credit. With notions and practices of public finance management still in the making, there were few other options outside of relying on financial markets for credit. Kings could, and often did, declare bankruptcy and ruin their creditors in the process. As soon as further credit was needed, however, their reputation made it less easy to obtain, and they would often do so at higher interest rates. Kennedy (1988) shows that the evolution of the modern market economy and the dynamics of state centralization were symbiotic processes; states provided law and order, businesses ensured public revenue and armies and navies were employed by mercantilist policies. Power and trade complemented each other, the distinction between economics and politics was blurred: Europe's rise to world domination was essentially a public-private partnership.

In the 19th century economic development became a matter of national interest. Economic policies were designed to strengthen the position of national economies on the international arena: domestic tariffs were removed to harmonize internal

markets; infrastructure was developed; strategic industrial sectors were protected; banking systems were reorganised for national investment and mass education improved human capital and labour productivity (Allen, 2011; chap. 1). Boosted by the UK example, the world economy became increasingly sophisticated and interdependent. In the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution, Western states achieved what North, Wallis and Weingast (2009) call the “incorporation of the masses”. Not only were voting rights progressively extended to larger segments of the population, but access to economic and political organizations ceased to be a privilege enjoyed only by elites. Workers could form trade unions and social conflicts were progressively institutionalised by parliamentary representation. Welfare state policies are direct results of the inclusion of the masses in politics and economics. They helped sustain the legitimacy and stability of the existing order even in the context of rising inequalities.

The emergence of Western democracies represented a substantial departure from previous institutional frameworks based on rents and patronage. Elite and great power competition, business interests as well as national and class conflicts intertwined over the course of several centuries to produce a relatively stable and inclusive social order. Different historical legacies place fragile states in a different position, with institutions instead facilitating predatory politics and economics.

The Global Economy, Colonialism and Decolonisation

Colonialism was another major factor in the trajectory of the global economy. South America experienced Spanish and Portuguese occupation in the 16th and 17th centuries, as the European powers needed it for its mining resources. In Asia and Africa, Western powers competed mainly for monopoly through coastal bases. Large-scale territorial occupations began only in the second half of the 19th century. Different systems of colonial governance were based on the same objective: the extraction of resources, labour and essentially anything providing value. The organisation of this extractive enterprise resulted in political and economic institutions that outlived specific dominant groups. Institutions are path-dependent, North (1990) argues, because they frame people’s expectations and arrange sets of constraints and opportunities for social interaction.

Institutions change incrementally through an evolutionary process, and are often adapted to new circumstances. This explains why post-colonial institutions reflected colonial realities and were generally adapted to new conditions and opportunities. Spanish conquistadores, for example, used the institution of the *encomienda* to organize slave labour: Spanish settlers – the *encomenderos* – were allotted a town, and the indigenous people had to give them tribute, labour and crops at fixed prices. These institutions persisted until the 20th century (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012; p. 13-19). Guatemala provides another case in point: the *Consulado* was the organization in charge of economic development there. It actively blocked the building of roads and infrastructures; far from irrational, it was an effective form of rent management based on price control over agricultural commodities. When coffee became a valuable staple in the 1870s, the *Consulado* reverted to land grabbing and forced labour for coffee production (*ibid.*, p. 345-351).

State-building in post-colonial contexts used former colonial organizations as a starting point. Nowhere more than in Africa did this process unfold more clearly.

Before 1500, African societies were less politically centralized than those in Europe, Asia or Latin America. There were rich and powerful kingdoms all over the continent, ones that did not necessarily compete extensively for the control of territory, resources or trade. Sub-Saharan Africa was linked to the outside world mainly through the trade of gold and slaves. In Western Africa, the Ghana, Mali and Songhai empires exported gold to Europe through Arab middlemen. In the South, the city-state of Zimbabwe (which gives the current state its name) prospered by controlling the gold trade on the Indian Ocean (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 2011; p. 87-94).

Perhaps nothing like the transatlantic slave trade had a deeper impact on Africa. Between 1700 and 1850, an estimated 11 million people were exported as slaves, countless others suffered the raids of slave suppliers. The slave industry became by far the most profitable business, affecting the political economy of the whole continent (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 2011; chaps. 6-7). The slave trade was not a European invention. The Arabs had traded slaves across East and West Africa for centuries. The revolution in the slave business, however, came with the huge demand from the European sugar industry in South America and the Caribbean. Western and Central Africa were soon integrated into the world economy: African rulers were quick to jump onto this business opportunity, and converted themselves into slave suppliers. The Kingdom of Kongo in Central-East Africa, Oyo in Nigeria, Dahomey in Benin and the Asante in Ghana became essentially slaving states, whose elites' fortune and survival depended on their performance on the slave market (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012; p. 250-260). The end of the transatlantic slave trade route in the 19th century did not end slavery. The business was reorganised and adapted. The West African state of Asante, for instance, stopped selling slaves and began settling them in large plantations. Their agricultural outputs were then sold in legitimate commerce. Slavery appears to have expanded in Africa in the 19th century, and continued into the 20th century (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012; p. 250-258, 58-60; Bales, 1999; chap. 3).

European powers were scantily interested in the political control of Africa before the second half of the 19th century. The 'scramble for Africa' was essentially an extension of European conflicts (Lowe, 1988; p. 49-63). About 10,000 polities were divided into 40 colonies that Europeans distributed among themselves and whose boundaries they negotiated at the Berlin conference of 1884-85. There were differences in colonial systems. However, in much of Africa, Meredith (2005; p. 5-6) notes that the colonial imprint was barely noticeable: in the Nigeria of the 1930s, less than 400 UK colonial administrators ruled over a population of 20 million people; a staff of 385 officers served in the whole French West Africa with a population of 15 million; in 1936 the Belgians ran the Congo with 728 administrators. The provision of basic services was poor to non-existent. As such, non-state actors like religious missions often provided basic education.

The development of local elite was generally opposed and locals were excluded from public administration. One consequence of this was the lack of competent staff once the Europeans left. In Congo at independence, for instance, there were 30 university graduates and 136 children that had secondary education, out of a population of 20 million (Meredith, 2005; 93-115). Until the 1940s, colonial powers subcontracted authority and territorial control to local chiefs they could trust, and they were given extensive power over land management. This was, literally, empire on the cheap. Infrastructure was built only for natural resources to reach ports and international markets; neither infrastructure nor fiscal policies were put in place to develop modern economies and social services. The inclusion of the local masses

“The lines of patronage radiated out from presidencies to regions, districts and villages. At each level, ‘big men’ worked the system, providing followers and friends with jobs, contracts and favours in exchange for political support (...) Throughout Africa, the politics of patronage and patrimonial rule became a common political pattern” (Meredith, 2005; p. 169).

into political and economic life, as was slowly taking place in Europe, did not extend to Africa.

Newly independent countries in Asia would rely on institutions and traditions that supported public administration. South America witnessed slow yet substantial reduction of inequality and exclusion in the second half of the 20th century. None of this was to be found in Africa after centuries of depredation by external actors and local partners. Since the political movements of the 1940s, student associations and trade unions mushroomed throughout the continent, demanding equality, accountable government and self-determination (Cooper F., 2002; chap. 2-3). Decolonisation offered genuine hopes for justice and development. However, these hopes were soon to encounter the harsh realities of strongmen and patronage networks. Democratic institutions were proclaimed but parliaments were filled with party supporters; government jobs, contracts and licences were given as a result of personal ties; the allocation of infrastructure and development projects followed similar considerations and trends.

Particularly disliked in colonial times were the marketing boards, where agricultural products were sold at fixed prices. The justification was that farmers were protected from price variations on volatile international markets. The reality was that these boards were an indirect taxation on food production and dwarfed incentives to invest in agricultural productivity (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; p. 338). Trade unions and political movements fought hard against colonial marketing boards. Post-colonial governments maintained them, declaring national development as their progressive aim. The possibilities offered by marketing board revenues were fully exploited by autocratic leaders, from idealist Pan-Africans like Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah to ruthless dictators like Sierra Leone's Saka Stevens (Cooper F., 2002; chap. 4).

Colonial legacies do not bring about deterministic outcomes. Botswana, Costa Rica, Singapore or, more recently, Rwanda prove that relatively stable, accountable and legitimate orders can evolve from colonialism. In a common pattern for fragile states, however, decolonisation resulted in a change of guard, not in institutional change. Those presiding over the extraction of national resources were now locals, instead of foreigners, but the institutions they use largely kept a colonial footprint.

Post-colonial and Fragile States

Newly independent states were created in critical conditions. New elites inherited weak administrations and poor infrastructure, but also the control over national resources, assets and customs. The sovereignty of these new states was sanctioned and protected internationally by the UN system, the two Cold War superpowers and, in its former colonies, by France (Verschave, 1998). The Cold War engaged the US and the Soviet Union in a global competition, where newly founded states were encased in their sphere of influence. It was not a difficult task to find interested partners, as friendly regimes received substantial economic and military aid. As Brock et al. note, "the international society, led by the UN, and backed by the United States and the Soviet Union, in effect issued a life insurance policy (...): no matter how weak you are, no matter how comprehensively unable you may be to create order, security, welfare and freedom, we confirm your right to independence within existing colonial borders" (2012; p. 37).

As for Europe, however, the international context was only part of the story in the development of the state. Domestic factors were equally important. The two dimensions, international and domestic, cannot be understood in isolation. In particular, the bargaining power of local elites was further empowered by their sovereign status. This gave them access to international organizations, economic aid and mining licences. African leaders became 'gatekeepers for foreign companies', providing businesses with access and legitimacy (Meredith, 2005; p. 698; Brock et al., 2012; p. 35). Their services would not come free of charge. The Cold War provided security rents while international markets offered economic opportunities. To some extent, this had a stabilizing effect. Ruling elites could get revenues for public and private consumption, and patronage networks could be sustained. There were disruptive effects too, however: gate keeping states provided incentives for infighting because controlling the government meant managing the gate. While the elites in power struggled to keep their monopoly, competing groups, regional movements, criminal networks and rebels engaged to disrupt it (Cooper F., 2002; p. 361-365).

The struggle for the gate turned the state into a source of domestic insecurity in an international context of relative peace. In a reversal of the European experience, anarchy and insecurity were moved from the international to the domestic level. The search for security was pursued either by attempts to control the state or through secession. Whenever the state becomes a danger, then a security paradox emerges where weak national armies cause less insecurity. Self-help becomes the norm for public service delivery, often along community or ethnic lines as sources of trust. These processes consolidate the weaknesses of public structures and state fragility evolves as a self-reinforcing mechanism.

African governments faced serious troubles in the 1970s and 1980s. The oil crisis of 1973 abruptly decreased Western demand for commodities, and security rents declined substantially in the 1980s with the Cold War slowly coming to an end in 1991. 36 African governments signed agreements with the IMF or the World Bank. More than USD \$200 billion reached Africa in the 1980s and the 1990s (Meredith, 2005; 368-377). Financial aid was tied to reforms and austerity measures. There is little doubt that 'structural adjustment' programmes corroborated pre-existing stress fault-lines and had negative long-term impacts on economic growth, political stability and social cohesion (Stiglitz, 2002). Budgetary crises forced leaders to focus on short-term survival by fomenting divisions and manipulating the reforms. Privatisation became an innovative instrument of rent distribution, as public assets were sold to political cronies. The same institutional set of constraints and opportunities that led to market failures provided ample ways to avoid reform. These measures were short-lived, as central governments grew weaker and incentives consolidated to challenge them. (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; chap 22; de Waal, 2015; p. 44-46, 182).

De Waal (2015) calls the 1990s an "inter-rentier period", when Cold War security rents had elapsed but post-9/11 rents, linked to the 'war on terror,' were yet to begin. The weakness of central governments decreased the costs of fighting them. Competitors would seek to replace them in their centralized, monopolistic position, or they would try to dismantle the monopoly altogether by disrupting central authority. What emerged in the 1990s was then a deregulated bargaining over access to government rents and public resources. As de Waal puts it, "patronage-based political orders should not be treated as a phenomenon that is passing into history, then contrasted with globalization as the way of the future. Patronage and globalization are not in fact opposites: the two evolve together" (2015, p. 195).

Situations of fragility and the collapse of state institutions emerged in the 1990s because the monopoly of central governments over state assets and financial flows could be challenged. And challenged it was. In some cases, state collapse turned into a profitable business. Charles Taylor's estimated turnover in Liberia was USD \$400 million per year between 1992 and 1996 (Berdal & Malone, eds., 2000; p. 5). Elsewhere, warring parties set up quasi-feudal economies based on tight control over exchanges and the disruption of wider market integration, on the looting and trading of natural resources and on the appropriation of humanitarian aid. These resources were commodities on globalized markets where licit and illicit arms procurement also take place (Cooper N., 2002; Duffield, 2001; p. 156-159; Duffield, 2000; Collier, 2007; chaps. 2-5; Ladini, 2010a). Moreover, an estimated USD \$50 billion evades Africa each year through commercial tax evasion by multinationals, money laundering, corruption and theft of state assets (De Waal, 2015; p. 177-179).

These predatory behaviours are possible and profitable because institutional mechanisms are not in place to keep them in check and increase their costs. State fragility and collapse emerged in the 1990s as a functioning form of governance for the appropriation and trade of resources. The problem with this form of organization is that it sustains short-term gains for power groups at the expense of structural, long-term needs of wider populations. In particular, fragile states are dysfunctional with regards to protection from violence, economic shocks and natural hazards.

Conclusion: Fragile States Today, Pertinent Issues and Ways Forward

The fragility indexes highlighted in Section 2 of this paper include different African countries. This paper has attempted to explain this phenomenon as a result of poor institutions and historical legacies. Sections 3-4, in particular, outlined a political economy framework for the analysis of institutions and institutional change. To understand fragility concerns today, it is worth looking into the conditions that led to their emergence. The next sections examined modern state-building and the structuring of the world economy as symbiotic phenomena.

Modern state-building followed a very different path in Europe than elsewhere. In all contexts, however, local and global governance were closely linked. In Europe and the West, the interaction between local actors and global factors evolved into relatively stable, inclusive and legitimate orders: modern democracies (Section 5). In typical fragile states, sections 6-7 argued, colonial legacies facilitated predatory behaviours on local resources by domestic and external actors. Institutional fragility represented a return to the 'default social outcome' of rents and patronage introduced in Sections 3-4. This return to default takes a most violent form when state structures collapse altogether. Violence and predation notwithstanding, institutional fragility and state collapse represent forms of governance. Additionally, differences in history and geography notwithstanding, current fragile states share some common features:

- i. Domestic insecurity. They are exposed to credible risks of violence and armed conflict, affecting personal safety and investment decisions.
- ii. Lack of government legitimacy and poor public service delivery. Public trust towards government institutions is low, and the delivery of order and justice, health, education and social protection is weak. Situations of high polarization

result when governments play an active role in conflicts, or limit access to public resources to specific groups.

- iii. Poor business environment. Weak access to justice and contract enforceability makes doing business in fragile states a risky enterprise. Access to credit, if any, is reduced and those allowed abide by higher interest rates. Poor institutions and infrastructure dwarf local initiative through high transaction costs.
- iv. High exposure to economic shocks. Economic vulnerability extends from macroeconomic indicators down to micro-level household circumstances. This has a negative impact on the state's capacity to withstand economic, environmental and political shock events. Likewise, households cannot cope with reduced income or displacement caused by natural or man-made crises.

The last point was made apparent in the aftermath of the global financial crisis of 2008-2009. The crisis originated in the US and quickly extended to Europe. Fragile states were thought to be less affected by the crisis, thanks in part to their low level of integration with US and European capital markets. These conclusions proved wrong. The crisis was transmitted to the real economy through a reduction in exports, lower migrant remittances, decreased foreign direct investment and a reduced tax base. Jobs were lost and households were put under increased stress. The EU, among other donors, reacted in 2009 by setting up the Vulnerability Flex mechanism. For the period 2009-10, EUR 500 million were allocated for grants to fragile countries, in particular to allow for priority spending in social sectors (European Report on Development 2009, chap. 6). The magnitude of the economic crisis was amplified by a food crisis and a hike in fuel prices. It could not be countered with the limited resources available for short periods of time, itself received from donors also facing the crisis domestically.

A point that this paper has stressed is the global dimension of fragile states and their integration in the world economy. Not only are fragile states dependent on external aid because of weak capacity in domestic resource mobilisation, they also suffer from poor global governance. It was noted that USD \$50 billion is estimated to leave Africa illegally every year. This is made possible by flaws in international regimes set up against illicit financial flows and corruption. Similarly, the looting of minerals and natural resources is profitable because these goods are able to reach global markets and get accounted for as legitimate commerce. Agriculture provides the main source of income for fragile states' populations, but subventions and terms of trade have historically favoured European and US farmers. Counter-terrorism efforts provide support to governments without considering how those governments were perceived by their respective public. In all these cases, fragility sources extend beyond fragile states and have ripple effects globally.

External and global factors, however, should not obscure the relevance of domestic agency. Political economy frameworks, introduced in Sections 3-4 and employed in Sections 5-7, show the active role of domestic actors in responding to constraints and opportunities, and in shaping and adapting institutions in the process. Global environments and historical legacies are contextual factors that do not determine domestic outcomes. There are example of states and regions that, based on colonial legacies, natural resources and low income levels, 'should' be trapped in downward spirals of poverty, corruption and predatory behaviours like their neighbours. But they are not. Botswana, Costa Rica, Singapore or Rwanda all emerged successfully

from colonial rule, some of them from war and ethnic cleansing. They now constitute islands of relative stability, growth and increasing accountability. The reason for this relative success is that their institutions provide incentives for cooperation and nonviolent competition; virtuous circles are so sustained where inclusion and representation, accountability for public service, growth and wider tax base link up. External development actors can assist and support the process but domestic constituencies and political leadership are in the driver's seat of reform efforts. It seems worth mentioning that, according to the economist Hernando de Soto (2000), the value of assets and savings among the poor in low-income countries is significantly higher than foreign investment or development aid. Due to poor legal systems, however, these assets and savings cannot be used as collateral to access proper credit: in de Soto's terminology, the result is 'dead capital', funds that exist but remain untapped. Critical work seems then to be needed domestically to build better institutions, reliable legal systems as well as wider and innovative access to credit.

Debates on fragility show that fragility issues are here to stay, and that additional risks are coming from demographic and environmental changes. It can be argued that, following these debates, policy responses to state fragility have improved since the early 2000s (von Einsiedel, 2005). It is now commonly accepted that complex and context-specific combinations of political, economic and environmental risks call for equivalent coping strategies. Resilience frameworks have emerged as the natural response to fragility across all its features: domestic insecurity, government legitimacy, public service delivery, business environment and economic vulnerability. The OECD 'Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States & Situations' (2007) and the 'New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States (IDPS, 2011) are examples of positive international efforts in this sense. Budget support programmes for fragile states, like the EU's State and Resilience Building Contracts, are also interesting forms of engagement as they aim to reinforce the capacity of the state in meeting public needs and expectations by focusing on accountable public spending. Working with, not around, governments seems the key to reach home-grown and incentive-compatible solutions with local coalitions of political, business and social organizations (Commission on State Fragility, Growth and Development, 2018).

There is more than state-building in the resilience agenda, however. As indicated above, tackling fragility and resilience would require substantial changes in how the global economy is organised. In a more limited yet still challenging setting, international donors have to learn to better cooperate and work with each other, especially when they come from different corporate cultures, principles of engagement, procurement and contractual frameworks. Discussions on policy coherence, linking relief rehabilitation and development, disaster risk management, conflict-sensitive programming, the 'humanitarian-development-peace nexus' all reflect a shared understanding that aid has to be thought of and delivered differently, in a more integrated manner, to ensure positive outcomes. One way or another, these outcomes should point to the graduation of vulnerable states, communities and households out of fragility into self-sustainable resilience. Fragile states, this paper argues, are forms of governance that are dysfunctional in their efforts to meet public needs and to deliver public services. Working towards resilience as a pathway out of fragility means promoting a different form of governance. This would be based on better access to global markets, on accountable political institutions and on inclusive economic systems.

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