

## Risk Factors of Fragile States

**Summary of key risk factors:** Poverty rate, GDP per capita (PPP), GINI index, armed conflicts in neighboring countries, infant mortality, trade openness, militarization, state-led political discrimination, institutional multiplicity, bad governance, political repression, political transition processes, social exclusion, gender inequality, lack of social cohesion, weak civil society, legacy of colonialism, global economic shocks.

**Aim:** To assist analysts with the identification of risk factors for the production of risk terrain maps. Specifically, this brief provides an annotated review of the factors related to fragile states and the settings and times for which some factors may be most relevant. This information should be especially useful to help choose a time period for creating risk terrain maps (i.e., Step 3), to identify aggravating and mitigating risk factors to include in your risk terrain model (i.e., Steps 5 and 6), and to inform the operationalization of your risk factors to risk map layers (i.e., Step 7).

**By:** Alejandro Giménez Santana

States which are “failing”, “on failure” or “recovering from a failure” can all be considered as fragile states. (Goldstone et al., 2003). The causes leading to fragility are not static and change from case to case. However the literature suggests that some factors are common through different episodes of fragility. The main factors include: past armed conflict, poor governance and political instability, militarization, ethnically and socially heterogeneous population, demographic stress, low levels of human development, environmental stress and “bad neighborhoods”. (European University Institute, 2009)

Fragile states get caught in a negative circle or “trap” of perpetual poverty and instability from which they cannot escape (Goldstone, 2008). The number of fragile states is estimated to be over thirty to fifty, most of them located in Africa, with an approximated population of one billion people worldwide. Why do fragile states turn into failed states? A state can be considered in failure when two general qualities are not met, *effectiveness* and *legitimacy*. First of all a state has to provide security, promote economic growth, ensure law and deliver social services to be considered as effective. States also need to be seen as legitimate by most of its population in terms of prevailing social norms (Goldstone, 2008). Fragility is not uniquely a

result of internal malfunctions but the consequence of other international systemic factors. The impacts of exogenous shocks such as the global economic downturn also have important spillover effects on fragile state. Why do states remain fragile and confined into this trap without exit? The occurrence of political instability and violence, insecure property rights and unenforceable contracts, and corruption reinforce the framework of slow growth and poor governance equilibrium (McLoughlin, 2012).

### **Operational definition:**

The OECD Development Assistance Committee (2007) defines fragility as: “States are fragile when state structures lack political will and/or capacity to provide the basic functions needed for poverty reduction, development and to safeguard the security and human rights of their populations.”

### **Aggravating/Mitigating Risk Factors Based on a Review of Empirical Literature**

The study of early warning systems on fragile states has received growing attention from international organizations and governments worldwide. The PITF model sponsored by the CIA or the PESS-ES matrix design by the IRIS center for USAID, are just a few examples of increasing interest in a system capable of forecasting risks.

**Economic and structural factors:** Postcolonial states in an attempt to free themselves from their former colonizers introduced *import-substitution policies* causing severe market inefficiencies. Trade openness can increase or decrease the risk of fragility. The *impact of FDI policies* will be generally positive, although other factors, such as low levels of democracy and development may affect the distribution effect on FDI which consequences may lead to conflict. Furthermore, *natural resource abundance* can magnify the effects of fragility with an increase in political corruption affecting the quality of the governance and ultimately the economic development of the state. Finally, *food insecurity* can encourage fragility and the possibility of conflict (European Report on Development, 2009).

**Political and institutional factors:** Political instability can be caused by contested elections, with irregularities registered by international observers; successive attempts of coup d'état to overthrow the government; or, a lack of institutional order caused by weak institutions, no authority or means to govern the society (Brinkerhoff, 2007).

**Social factors:** These include gender inequalities, and weak civil society, and horizontal inequalities between groups based on ethnicity, religion, caste or identity leading to political violence (Mcloughlin, 2012).

**International factors:** The legacy of colonialism and corporate interests may reinforce fragility. The occurrence of international shocks on oil or food prices can have destabilizing effects leading to fragility (Mcloughlin, 2012).

## References & Recommended (Publicly Available)

### Readings

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## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> For steps of risk terrain map production, download the RTM Manual at [www.riskterrainmodeling.com](http://www.riskterrainmodeling.com)