Call for Papers “State fragility. Multi-perspective approaches to a complex phenomenon”

Editors: Jörn Grävingholt, Hans-Joachim Lauth, Theresa Paola Stawski.

According to a recent OECD classification, 23% of the world population lived in “fragile contexts” in 2020, comprising 13 countries categorized as “extremely fragile” and 44 as “other fragile” contexts. Furthermore, the same source observed that the fragility gap was widening. In other words, the difference in levels of fragility between extremely fragile and nonfragile contexts was growing. Even if one accounts for possible methodological shortcomings of the OECD “States of Fragility” framework (and of indices that measure stateness in general), these findings still reinforce the scientific necessity to further engage with and analyse the fragility of states and its implications. More quantitative and qualitative research is needed to understand not only the causal complexity of state fragility on both national and sub-national levels, but also to identify patterns of institutional stability among fragile states as well as paths of transformation to either collapse or consolidation.

At the same time, the “neo-patrimonial state” and related concepts used to grasp the complex realities of many polities continue to emphasize the importance of informality in the way states operate. Do scholars need to adjust their understanding of state and stateness to capture those settings that blend formal and informal institutions and control? This brings us to the more general question if one state concept can adequately reflect the vast empirical characteristics of various types of regimes: What differences and commonalities do states display in democratic, autocratic and hybrid regimes? What role do elites and institutions – both formal and informal – play in fragile states? How can we measure fragility without conflating society, regime and state characteristics? (Or should we?) Consequently, these questions also emphasize the need for high-quality data on stateness that do not suffer from an inherent democracy (or other unintended) bias.

This call for papers for a Special Issue aims at studies on state fragility. The Special Issue focuses on the conceptual, theoretical, methodological and causal dimensions of state fragility, questions of measurement and analyses of change over time. Further attention is given to the connection between state fragility and regime type, formal and informal institutions as well as actors and the socio-political contexts that underpin fragility (multifactorial causality).

Potential authors include researchers in academia, policy think tanks and research divisions of international organisations. Papers may be primarily conceptual and/or empirical in nature. Papers discussing the conceptual foundation of the terms “state and fragility” with reflections on the “western” ideal type, including innovative approaches on how to define and/or measure stateness, are welcome. We also welcome papers that focus on the design and challenges of quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods used to analyse state fragility and its causes and effects. We give particular consideration to submissions that discuss the inter-relatedness of regime and state, also from a transformative perspective, and the interaction of formal and informal institutions in fragile states. Furthermore, contributions centred on current case studies and regional comparisons (synchronic or diachronic) with a strong conceptual and (innovative) methodical foundation are the focus of this call.
Schedule and Deadlines:

Abstracts to this call for papers must be submitted in English by March 5th 2022 to the editors (Joern.Graevingholt@die-gdi.de, hans-joachim.lauth@uni-wuerzburg.de, theresa.stawski@uni-wuerzburg.de) with the following information:

- E-mail subject: Call for Papers ZfVP “State Fragility”
- Provisional title of the contribution
- Abstract of the contribution: 250 - 300 words

Decisions on the call will be communicated by April 2022. Authors will be invited to participate in an online conference in September 2022, with a first draft of their paper to be submitted by the end of August 2022. Papers accepted for the next stage must be turned into a 50,000 word draft ready for double-blind peer review by the end of November 2022. Final drafts of papers recommended for publication will be due at the end of February 2023.

Submitted manuscripts should not have been published previously, nor be under consideration for publication elsewhere (except conference proceedings papers). Co-authored and multidisciplinary papers are welcome.

For more information and further details, please, contact:
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