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Effectiveness of Democracy-Support in "Fragile States": a Review

Kimana Zulueta-Fülscher

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Abstract

Over the past decade, the interest in aid effectiveness has grown exponentially, with a proliferation of both praxis-oriented evaluations and academic studies. At the same time, the rising interest in “fragile states” has prompted the aid-effectiveness literature to focus its attention on this category of states. Parallel to the development of the aid-effectiveness literature, the literature on the impact of specific development-aid sectors has also surged. The increasing number of analyses on the impact of external policies contributing to processes of political transformation (democratisation or stabilisation) has been remarkable. This discussion paper thematises the growing literature on both fragility and the effectiveness of democracy support, with a special focus on the quantitative literature. Its novelty lies in its contribution of drawing links between these different bodies of literature. In other words, how does the positive outlook of the quantitative literature – with regards to the general effectiveness of democracy-support policies – relate to a more complex definition of fragility? Relevant articles and books are identified and reviewed, whereby three to four central pieces are used to articulate the argument in each section.

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1 Introduction

Over the past decade, the interest in aid effectiveness has grown exponentially, with a proliferation of both praxis-oriented evaluations and academic studies. At the same time, the rising interest in “fragile states” has prompted the aid-effectiveness literature to focus its attention on this category of states. Leading questions included whether development aid contributes to growth or to a political *turnaround* in fragile states (Chauvet / Collier 2008), and whether factors that usually contribute to the effectiveness of development aid in general have the same impact in fragile states (Baliamoune-Lutz 2009). The definition of “fragile states,” however, has evolved faster than this literature has accounted for. The latter has continued to embrace a one-dimensional definition that only accounts for one overall level of fragility, but does not examine the different dimensions of statehood (see Section 2 below).

Parallel to the development of the aid-effectiveness literature, the literature on the impact of specific development-aid sectors has also surged. The increasing number of analyses on the impact of external policies contributing to processes of political transformation (democratisation or stabilisation) has been remarkable. The qualitative case-specific literature, for instance, has addressed peace-keeping and peace-building missions, in addition to state-building and democracy-support policies, in specific country contexts. The quantitative literature, on the other hand, has tried to analyse the average impact of peace-keeping missions and democracy-support policies. Still, communication among quantitative and qualitative research design practitioners has been rather limited (see Doorenspleet / Kopecký 2008, 709; see also Goertz / Mahoney 2012).

This discussion paper thematises the growing literature on both fragility and the effectiveness of democracy support, with a special focus on the quantitative literature. Its novelty lies in its contribution of drawing links between these different bodies of literature. Relevant articles and books are identified and reviewed, whereby three to four central pieces are used to articulate the argument in each section.

The structure of the paper displays those questions linking the literature on fragility with the (quantitative) literature on the effectiveness of democracy support. Section 2 offers a brief review of the literature on the concept of fragility; Section 3 deals with the literature on processes of political transformation in fragile states; Section 4 analyses the literature on external interventions in fragile states; Section 5 mainly deals with the quantitative literature on the effectiveness of those policies contributing to democratisation or stabilisation; and Section 6 tries to define factors that the effectiveness literature should take into account when focusing on contexts of fragility. Research gaps are thematised in the paper and again listed in the conclusion in the attempt to scope possible next steps for academic inquiry.

2 Fragility: a matter of degree or of kind?

There are at least two reasons why the concept of fragility is generally important for both academics and practitioners. Its definition is likely to affect the decision-making processes of donors. And at the same time, “fragility” is likely to have an impact on the effectiveness of donors’ policies. The concept, however, is still developing, and, despite

ample debates among academics and practitioners, a consensus on its definition has been difficult to achieve. This section reviews its evolution over the past decade. The next section analyses how the literature has dealt with processes of political transformation in contexts of fragility, and whether or not this literature has been informed by the evolution of the concept.

The concept of fragility has gone through a steep maturation process (see Browne 2007, 11; Cammack et al. 2006, ix; and Carment / Samy / Prest 2008, 351–352) and has evolved in two different directions. First, the definition of fragility has moved away from the state as the “monopoly holder” (see Wennmann 2010, 16). Scholars are now looking beyond the concept of state into other forms of social and political organisation that are subject to fragility (see Mac Ginty 2010; Richmond 2011; Wennmann 2010). Second, and perhaps most relevant to this paper, the concept of fragility is becoming more complex.

States now classified as “fragile” initially belonged to various unrelated and partial categories, such as anarchic vs. phantom states (Gros 1996) and post-colonial or quasi-states (Jackson 1990). Later authors classified “fragile states” using an additive index, which would rank them according to their (uni-dimensional) degree of fragility: as weak, failing, failed or collapsed states (see Rotberg 2003; see also Faust / Grävingholt / Ziaja forthcoming).

In these rankings, however, a number of states were grouped with one another without having anything more in common than their alleged degree of fragility. The consciousness about the heterogeneity of fragile states, therefore, generated another forward movement among scholars and practitioners alike. They started thinking about the intrinsic characteristics of a state, i.e. its capacity, authority and legitimacy, and ended up classifying states in clusters (see Brinkerhoff 2007; Call 2010; Carment / Samy / Prest 2008; François / Sud 2006; and Goldstone 2008).

Call was one of the first scholars to dispute “the utility of universal rankings of ‘fragile’ or ‘failing’ states” (2010, 304), proposing instead discrete categories of analysis to better identify specific problems and contextually appropriate solutions. Call’s categories indicate three crucial – overlapping and interrelated – gaps that should provide a lens for analysing the challenges faced by states and formulating policies: the capacity gap (i.e. the degree that state institutions are able to provide or regulate the minimal provision of core public goods); the security gap (present in countries in the midst of armed conflict and/or just emerging from warfare); and the legitimacy gap (i.e. whether the regime’s rules and/or processes are sufficiently transparent and accountable to permit popular free expression and participation). According to Call, a donor’s failure in acknowledging these gaps devolves into ineffective policies (see also François / Sud 2006, 149).

Along the same lines, Besley / Persson (2011) formally explore the origins of state fragility, highlighting two main pathologies that are related to state capacity and violence: “state ineffectiveness *in enforcing contracts, protecting property, providing public goods and raising revenues, and political violence either in the form of repression or civil conflict*” (Besley / Persson 2011, 373; also in Besley / Persson 2010). They define an ineffective state as one that has made few investments in fiscal and legal capacities, and a

violent state as one in which the government and opposition invest in violence to maintain or acquire political power.¹

Grävingholt / Ziaja / Kreibaum (2012) establish a “fragility typology” also based on the three dimensions of capacity, authority and legitimacy. This multi-dimensional definition of fragility goes further than Besley / Persson’s (2011) two-dimensional definition, which uses “state effectiveness” and “political violence”. Furthermore, where Call (2010) looked at a dimension’s presence or absence, Grävingholt / Ziaja / Kreibaum (2012) use cross-country data to measure the degree to which this given dimension is present within a state to identify differentiated country clusters.

This multi-dimensional characterisation of fragility has yet to inform, among other things, the broader literature on processes of political transformation or aid effectiveness in these contexts. This could have serious practical as well as theoretical implications. Using the typology could help academia to better assess the effectiveness of certain types of policies. And it might also offer a chance for donors to better tailor their policies with regards to specific country contexts. In what follows, we analyse how the academic literature has incorporated, or not, the issue of fragility in its analyses of processes of political transformation and the evaluation of external policies supporting those processes.

3 Democratisation and fragility

The literature on processes of political transformation in contexts of fragility usually responds to one of three approaches: the *process* of state failure, the *persistence* of state failure or the *way out* of state failure. As mentioned earlier, none of these approaches has yet incorporated the multi-dimensional definition of fragility.

Furthermore, democratisation in contexts of fragility, as a process of political transformation, has been repeatedly thematised in the academic literature.² And its role with regards to fragility has been hotly debated, in terms of either contributing to fragility or to stability. This controversy is briefly reviewed in this section. The following sections further examine the literature on the role of external donors in processes of democratisation, and their effectiveness.

1 In their analysis, they differentiate between determinants and symptoms but focus on the former. They assume that the degree of common interest, the existence of cohesive institutions, the presence of resource rents and the technologies for organising and conducting violence constitute the determinants of fragile states and the independent variables that situate a state along two dimensions: state capacity and violence. On the other hand, “*phenomena like civil war, repression, low income per capita, low spending on common interest goods, low taxation, and weak enforcement of property rights are all symptoms rather than determinants*” (Besley / Persson 2011, 386). This difference between symptoms and determinants is of consequence not only for the thorough understanding of the concept of fragility, but also for policy design – as far as the latter deals with the root causes of fragility, and not just with its symptoms.

2 As we concentrate on processes of political transformation, the literature also acknowledges that democratisation is not an inevitable process: liberalisation can arise within already stable or stabilising autocracies (Schneider / Schmitter 2004, 29), e.g. China; conflict can persist where peace-building or peace-keeping operations fail, e.g. DRC; and/or an unsuccessful institution-building (state-building) process may prevent an increase in capability, authority and legitimacy, e.g. Afghanistan, inhibiting any significant progress towards democracy (see Coppedge et al. 2011 on the measurement of democracy).

Authors indeed differ when considering the relationship between fragility (or the process of state failure) and democratisation. Collier (2009), for instance, sees democratisation as an uncertain process *detached*, to a certain extent, from state failure. State failure, in his view, responds to states being governed by a very small elite class, the “selectariat” being unable to credibly hold the ruler to account, and/or elections being subverted by the incumbent through illegitimate tactics to ensure victory (see Collier 2009, 226; see also Bueno de Mesquita / Smith 2011). These problems might be further exacerbated, according to Collier, by high levels of poverty as well as lack of social cohesion and resource wealth. *In these circumstances*, any process of democratisation “*might at best be a two-edged sword, introducing the possibility of accountability but at the price of a greater risk of large-scale political violence*” (Collier 2009, 233).

Bates (2008), on the other hand, seems to include democracy – in addition to economic factors and ethnicity – as a *determinant* of state failure.³ Supporting Mansfield / Snyder (1995, 2002, 2007),⁴ Bates sanctions the idea that “*democracy and underdevelopment appear to be a volatile combination*” likely to result in a higher degree of fragility (Bates 2008, 9).

Mansfield / Snyder (2002) indeed analyse the effect of democratisation processes on conflict. However, their analysis argues for the positive relationship between democratisation processes and conflict in states *that suffer from institutional weakness*. In their book, *Electing to Fight* (2005), they show that “*transitional countries that were comparatively well-endowed with the prerequisites for democratic politics, such as relatively competent and impartial state institutions, were unlikely to detour into violence*” (2007, 5).

Following their argumentation, it might appear that the relationship between democratisation and conflict might not be due to the democratisation process as such, but to eroded institutions that indeed tumble towards democratisation as a solution to their problems.⁵ This would contradict Bates’ (2008) thesis. According to this interpretation, democratisation would not be a direct cause of conflict, whereas it may indirectly contribute to conflict due to its intrinsic slowness and complexity (see also de Zeeuw / Kumar 2006, 12; Ottaway 1995, 239). This could explain that “*not all newly democratizing states suffer from institutional weakness, but for those that do the resulting*

3 According to Bates (2008), “*those who study the impact of economic factors on political disorder focus on the impacts of poverty (Sambanis / Hegre 2006; Goldstone et al. 2010 vs. Fearon / Laitin 2003; Alexander / Harding 2007), public revenues (Skocpol 1979; Bates 2008), and natural resources (Collier 2000; Collier / Hoeffler 2004; Mueller 2007).*” On ethnicity, Bates cautions that it “*proves to bear a less straightforward relationship to the likelihood of state failure than might be expected (Collier / Hoeffler 2004 vs. Fearon / Laitin 2003, 1996), but that rule by minorities indeed increases the likelihood of state failure (Padró i Miquel 2007).*” Finally, “*in addition to economic and cultural factors, scholars [Bates included] stress the role of democratization in state failure (Hegre et al. 2001; Mansfield / Snyder 1995; Snyder 2000; Bates 2008).*”

4 Other scholars that have contributed to questioning the peacefulness of the democratisation process include Gleditsch / Ward (2000); Goldsmith (2010); Mann (1999, 2005); Narang / Nelson (2009); among others.

5 Goldstone (2008, 288) suggests five major pathways “*that comprise the most common processes leading to state failure*”: escalation of communal group (ethnic or religious) conflicts; state predation (corrupt or crony corralling of resources at the expense of other groups); regional or guerrilla rebellion; democratic collapse (leading to civil war or coup d’état); and succession or reform crisis in authoritarian states. “*These pathways are not exclusive, and may combine in various sequences.*”

political dynamic creates conditions that encourage hostilities” (Mansfield / Snyder 2002, 301).

In short, authors differ when assessing the role democratisation plays in contributing to – or guarding a state from – fragility. Some argue for the higher likelihood of conflict in a fragile state entering a process of democratisation. Others note that democratisation could indeed help in the institutional build-up of a state, but could also prematurely open up a society’s political spectrum, engendering violent conflict. Therefore, timing is key, as well as the specific country context where the democratisation process takes place.

4 On external support of democratisation processes in contexts of fragility

According to the literature, donors need to address a number of challenges when supporting democratisation in a state with weak institutions or a generally unstable state. These challenges can be tagged as follows: first, of course, is the issue of the available range of policies aimed at supporting the political transformation of a country; namely, what can donors do to support democracy while avoiding further deterioration in a specific country context. Second is the issue of whether donors should sequence their policies or support all processes at once; in other words, should donors help build institutions *before* promoting democratic principles, or should they combine both policies? (See Leininger / Grimm / Freyburg 2012).⁶ In this section, we focus on the latter.

Any policy design or policy response might essentially depend on the internal characteristics of a country. The academic literature, however, has argued that there might be a temporal lag at play. Sequencing might be more appropriate in the very first phase of political transformation, and a simultaneous but gradual approach might be necessary after reaching a certain degree of stability.

This is at least one of the conclusions reached by Carothers vs. Mansfield / Snyder (2007) in their debate on the potential sequencing in the institutional build-up of a state. While Carothers recognises state-building as a necessary prerequisite for democratisation in weak or collapsed states, in a second stage, he advocates a gradualist approach to democratisation. Directly addressing scholars like Mansfield and Snyder, Carothers claims that *“democratic gradualism is different from sequencing. It does not entail putting off for decades or indefinitely the core element of democratization – the development of fair and open processes of political competition and choice. It involves reaching for the core element now, but doing so in iterative and cumulative ways rather than all at once. Gradualism can take different forms depending on the context”* (Carothers 2007, 25). Mansfield / Snyder, in turn respond that what they argued for was *“that it is dangerous to push states to democratize before the necessary preconditions are in place and that*

6 External interventions supporting political transformations in third countries comprise state- or peace-building, or democracy-support policies. These three policies may overlap in terms of instruments and goals, but they also include distinguishing characteristics, i.e. a focus on post-conflict stabilisation (peace-building), on setting the stage for or actually improving the democratisation experience (state-building), or on full-blown top-down and bottom-up system transformation or consolidation (democracy support).

prudent democracy-promotion efforts should pay special attention to fostering those preconditions” (Mansfield / Snyder 2007, 5). In other words, they did not advocate for any transitional template (state-building first and democratisation later), but for prudence and humility of external democracy promoters.

Effective and stable⁷ institutions, therefore, have come to be seen as a prerequisite (or a necessary – though not sufficient – condition) for successful political and economic liberalisation (see Goldstone / Ulfelder 2004; Levitsky / Murillo 2009; Paris 2004; Paris / Sisk 2009; Schneider / Schmitter 2004).⁸ And state-building has emerged as a critical element, at least during the first phase of a country’s political transformation.⁹ Still, differences between state-building and democracy-support policies have not been systematically addressed; neither has the literature addressed the criteria that policy-makers use to decide whether to implement both policies sequentially or simultaneously (see Leininger / Grimm / Freyburg 2012).¹⁰

The relevance that state-building has gained within the literature, however, should not be understated. Especially in post-conflict environments – where scholars and practitioners had under-emphasised the importance of stable and capable state institutions for decades (see Paris / Sisk 2009, 8)¹¹ – the merging of state- and peace-building programmes has had crucial implications. In practice, for instance, multi-dimensional (civil and military) peace-keeping operations, combining both short- and long-term measures for sustainable peace, are on their way to becoming the norm rather than the exception (see Fortna 2008; Joshi 2010, 829–830).¹²

Furthermore, the literature seems to support the idea that state-building is a necessary element to attain stability in *all possible contexts of fragility*, not only in peace-building contexts (see Schneckener 2011, 235). As we saw in Section 2, contexts of fragility can be

7 Levitsky / Murillo (2009) distinguish two dimensions of institutional strength, enforcement and stability, arguing that different levels of these two elements have important effects on actors’ expectations and behaviour, and the institutional design they would support.

8 Interesting to note is that the OECD, in its Policy Commitment and Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations, states as its third principle, precisely, the need to “*focus on statebuilding as the central objective*.”

9 Schneckener (2011, 235) defines state-building as aiming at “*strengthening state structures and institutions as well as the capacities for the state apparatus to govern*.”

10 Some scholars seem to agree on the fact that stability is a necessary element for economic, but also political liberalisation. According to Goldstone / Ulfelder, for instance, “*the key to maintaining stability appears to lie in the development of democratic institutions that promote fair and open competition, avoid political polarization and factionalism, and impose substantial constraints on executive authority*” (2004, 10). Others – usually critical of foreign intervention in general – see both terms as reflecting opposing policy strategies, i.e. donors intend stability, and consider democracy as an obstacle more than an asset. The debate on the relationship between democratisation and stabilisation, in other words, has not been sealed yet, developing mostly at a non-empirical, prescriptive or descriptive, level.

11 This new awareness was also reflected on the practitioners’ side when, a few years later, the OECD Development Assistance Committee merged the two working groups on fragile states and on conflict prevention into the International Network on Conflict and Fragility, bringing together both the peace- and the state-building debates (Grävingholt / Gänzle / Ziaja 2009).

12 Taking this relationship as a given, Brinkerhoff’s (2011, 132) analysis pleads for increasing the weight of governance reforms, in their link to conflict mitigation, for better stabilisation and reconstruction outcomes. These governance reforms would connect, in his view, citizens and the state at sub-national levels by reviewing how decentralisation, citizen participation and service delivery has an effect on post-conflict countries.

defined by the complex interaction of a number of factors, namely the defining dimensions of statehood, i.e. authority, capacity and legitimacy (see Call 2010; Grävingholt / Ziaja / Kreibaum 2012), as well as other internal or external factors, i.e. levels of inequality, growth of gross domestic product (GDP), GDP per capita, aid fractionalisation, etc. (see Brinkerhoff 2011, 143; Schneckener 2011, 232; see also Call / Cook 2003; Diamond 2006; Wennmann 2010). State-building, according to Paris / Sisk (2009, 1), would reinforce all three dimensions.¹³ Still, the specific outlook of state-building policies in different contexts of fragility has not yet been systematically examined.¹⁴

According to Paris / Sisk (2009, 13; see also Brinkerhoff 2010), both scholars and practitioners do not fully grasp the complexities inherent in any state-building process. This seems to increase the number of critical accounts of state- and peace-building (see, for instance, Wesley 2008, also Hameiri 2009). Some authors list alternatives to state- and peace-building such as stopping any external intervention (Herbst 2004; Weinstein 2005), stocking up on resources or increasing the strategic coordination among donors. Others, like Paris / Sisk (2009, 11; see also Paris 2010, 347–354), allege that these alternatives do not fully grasp and respond to the inherent challenges presented by these policies, such as the sustainability of results and the legitimacy of interventions.

In conclusion, there seems to be an overall agreement within the literature that state- and peace-building are prerequisites for successful democratisation, and (should) contribute to stability by strengthening institutions. The design of state-building policies, moreover, should crucially depend on the specific country context – for instance, the type of feasible and desirable political settlements in place (see Brown / Grävingholt 2011; di John / Putzel 2009). Favourable internal and external factors will likely give the donor more space to manoeuvre, and attention to these factors would, in turn, increase these policies’ impact.¹⁵ Unfortunately, however, external donors are still grappling with how to take these factors into account. In addition to the low number of systematic analyses on state-building-support effectiveness, this increases the number of normative-critical reports. But what most of these reports demand is twofold: a higher context-sensitivity in policy-

13 According to Paris / Sisk (2009, 1–2), “statebuilding is a particular approach to peacebuilding, premised on the recognition that achieving security and development in societies emerging from civil war partly depends on the existence of capable, autonomous and legitimate governmental institutions.”

14 Patrick / Brown (2007) are the first to take up the colossal task of describing whole-of-government strategies for fragile environments in different donor countries, i.e. the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, France, Germany and Sweden. They intend to catalogue advances made in policy coherence, the resources and instruments available to implement joined-up approaches, and the early implications of pilot projects. Their descriptive methodology, however, lacks the analytical character that would enable them to draw generalising conclusions on instruments’ effectiveness with regards to fragility. However, they do set the conceptual stage for empirically-based research in this regard.

15 O’Donnell / Schmitter / Whitehead already stressed, in their four-volume work *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule* (1986), the fact that internal forces are crucial to any transition to democracy, as opposed to international or external factors, which only play a secondary role (see also Almond / Verba 1963; Muller / Seligson 1994; Muller 1988; Rueschemeyer / Huber-Stephens / Stephens 1992; Vanhanen 1997; Bollen 1979; Casper / Taylor 1996; Moore 1993; Przeworski 1988). Linz / Stepan (1996) challenged this assertion and advanced some hypothesis pointing to the importance of international influences: foreign policies, zeitgeist and diffusion effects (see Gleditsch / Ward 2006; see also Booth 2011).

making,¹⁶ and thorough micro- and macro- effectiveness studies on the academic side. The following section reviews how the academic literature has so far handled the latter.

5 On the effectiveness of external policies supporting processes of political transformation

While state-building seems to be an integral part of both peace-building and democracy-support policies, it is not explicitly mentioned in the quantitative effectiveness literature. Only practice-oriented policy evaluations (see Grävingholt / Leininger / von Haldenwang 2012), or theoretical or qualitative analysis (see Call / Wyeth 2008; de Zeeuw / Kumar 2006) take state-building policies as impending targets of their analyses.¹⁷ Quantitative analyses on the impact of external interventions on democratisation processes, on the other hand, focus on three different (but interrelated) types of interventions: aid in general, peace-building and democracy support.

Both the (quantitative) aid-effectiveness literature and the literature on the effectiveness of democracy-support policies analyse average effects, controlling perhaps for geographical regions or types of regimes (see Cornell 2012). They do not explicitly account for statehood dimensions, namely capacity, authority and legitimacy, even though these factors could potentially have an impact on policy effectiveness. The peace-building literature confines its universe of cases to post-conflict environments and multilateral interventions in these contexts (see, for instance, Doyle / Sambanis 2000; Fortna 2008; Paris / Sisk 2009; Zürcher 2011; Zürcher et al. 2013). But it does not further qualify and differentiate among post-conflict contexts.

While the impact of aid on democratisation is still an issue within this literature,¹⁸ there seems to be a tacit agreement that the average effect of democracy-support policies on

16 At the same time, the question persists over whether, or to what extent, external interventions are legitimate and local ownership is warranted, in the frame of contexts of fragility (see Donais 2009). With regards to state-building, one could think that the inevitability of the process to attain a minimum degree of stability might reduce in first instance the need for locals to take ownership (see Chesterman 2007; Narten 2009; Schneckener 2011). Or as Chesterman (2007, 7) puts it: *“Ownership is certainly the intended end of such [post-conflict] operations, but almost by definition it is not the means”* (see also Chesterman 2007, 18–19; Schneckener 2011, 249).

17 See also Bassu (2008) and Roessler (2005). De Zeeuw / Kumar (2006) edit a volume in which they pick three state-building sub-sectors in post-conflict states, i.e. support for elections and political party development, human rights assistance, and support to independent media development, with three to four different country case studies for each sub-sector, i.e. Uganda, Ethiopia and Mozambique; Guatemala, Cambodia and Sierra Leone; and Rwanda, El Salvador and Afghanistan. Despite departing, as they say, from the tradition of country- and topic-specific research, one caveat to their methodology is the difficulty of cross-country and -issue comparisons.

18 See Balamoune-Lutz (2009, 879) for a compilation of the two opposing strands of research, defending on the one hand the positive influence of aid on policy-reform and democracy, through conditionality and its effect on income (Tavares 2003; Kilby 2005), and on the other hand, the weakening effect of aid on accountability and institutional reforms (Bräutigam / Knack 2004; Djankov / Montalvo / Reynal-Querol 2008; Ear 2007; Knack 2004). Wright (2009, 553) and Wright / Winters (2010, 71) hypothesise a methodological issue as the reason for this contradiction. *“Pessimistic findings generally estimate the average effect of foreign aid on political institutions or governance, whereas the more optimistic results stem from examining conditional effects”* (Wright 2009, 553).

these processes is positive. At least this is the overall result of independent research in this area, and the focus of this section.

Some methodological issues, however, need to be presented beforehand. When analysing the impact of democracy-support policies, the proxy most commonly used by scholars is hard data on “democracy assistance”, that is, financial data taken out of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) “Government and Civil Society” budget line, or directly from donors’ budgets (most commonly from the US Agency for International Development, USAID). Other policies, such as conditionality, diplomacy or the level of coherence and fragmentation among donors, have not been systematically analysed as part of democracy-support policies, and are therefore not included in the calculations (see Burnell 2008, 245). Related to the latter is the fact that the intrinsic political nature of democracy support presents at least one key problem for the analysis of its effectiveness, namely, the fact that the publication of democracy-assistance allocation data directly depends on the donor’s commitment to transparency. There might be instances where donors prefer to keep funding as covert as possible, precisely in light of its effectiveness.

Other methodological concerns, not directly related to data insufficiency, have been collected by Green / Kohl (2007, 156). They include, for instance, the direction of causality in the process, namely, whether democracy assistance leads to democratisation, or the other way around (*endogeneity*). Another methodological concern is the micro-macro paradox (Mosley 1986), after which programmes might be individually effective but do not visibly contribute to the broader aim of democratisation. And another point they mention is the so-called impact attribution, that is, how one can specify whether the impact of a programme is only due to the programme, or to a favourable combination of other programmes, in addition to a beneficial country and international context.

Kalyvitis / Vlachaki (2010) try to overcome some of these concerns with a comprehensive study that uses aggregate democracy assistance data from all donor countries. While the controversial study of Finkel et al. exclusively looks at USAID data, both their results are similar. Kalyvitis / Vlachaki (2010, 214) conclude *“that democratic assistance, proxied here by Governance and Civil Society Aid, promotes future democratization in the recipient country. This result is robust to many sensitivity tests, including the scaling of aid flows, the measurement of democracy, the estimation methodology, and the potential endogeneity of aid flows.”*

Scott / Steele (2011) again analyse USAID’s democracy assistance effectiveness. Critical with scholars who analyse the effects on democratisation of general development-aid policies, they allege that carefully targeted democracy assistance has a greater impact on democratisation than more generic economic aid packages (2011, 48). At the same time, they are also critical with those scholars who “lump” together donors and policies, ignoring *“considerable variation in the purposes of different foreign aid packages and different donors”* (2011, 51). Hence, their research target is the impact of (USAID) democracy aid on democratisation in Latin America, the Middle East, Africa and Asia, between 1988 and 2001.

According to Scott / Steele (2011), two mechanisms link targeted aid to progress in democratisation in the beneficiary country. The first is “anticipated reactions”, where donors as well as recipients are rational (“strategic”) actors. Donors calculate the likely

effect of aid, and recipients encourage or accommodate democratic improvements to receive more development aid. The other mechanism is “agent empowerment”, where *“democracy aid focuses on agent-centred assistance that empowers individuals, groups, and political institutions in a recipient country and therefore impacts democracy directly”* (2011, 53).

Their results are therefore positive. Scott / Steele (2011, 65) conclude that their analysis *“supports two important conclusions: (i) democracy aid has a positive impact on democratization even when controlling for the effect of democratization on aid allocation decisions; (ii) democracy aid has a positive impact on democratization, while general foreign economic aid does not.”* Still, the fact that they do not control for other US democracy assistance mechanisms, and other donors’ allocations, casts doubts on their results.¹⁹

Savun / Tirone (2011) also remark on the positive effects of democracy assistance. They indeed come closest to analysing the effects of democracy-support policies in contexts of fragility by analysing its preventive role upon civil conflict. By using an instrumental variables approach that accounts for potential endogeneity problems in aid allocation,²⁰ they conclude that *“there is a potential path to democracy that ameliorates the perils of democratization, and democracy assistance programs can play a significant positive role in this process”* (2011, 241).

Buying into Mansfield / Snyder’s argument that any process of democratisation will, with high likelihood, be unstable, Savun / Tirone (2011, 234) investigate *“whether higher levels of external democracy aid can partially compensate for the instability created by democratic transition.”* Their goal is to further develop recent work on democratisation that *“shows a mostly positive relationship between democracy aid and democratization”* (Finkel / Pérez-Linan / Seligson 2007; Kalyvitis / Vlachaki 2010; Scott / Steele 2011; Wright 2009) by assessing *“whether democracy aid can provide political stability in a fragile environment”* (Savun / Tirone 2011, 234).

19 Scott / Steele state that *“even after controlling for other factors, and for the selections effect of democratization on aid allocations themselves, democracy aid exerts a statistically significant, positive, and substantively meaningful impact on democratization”* (2011, 62). They use a simultaneous equation model examining the link between democracy aid and democratisation as simultaneous processes, where *“one equation represents the strategic allocation of aid to promising recipients, and the second equation represents the impact of democracy aid on democratization”* (2011, 56). In addition to this, they include a highly problematic cultural affinity control variable, allegedly to increase their confidence in the aid-democracy results, actually rendering non-significant any other variable that might be correlated to this multiple control variable.

20 They deal with the issue of endogeneity by using instrumental variables analysis, estimating the endogenous variable (level of aid allocation) using an exogenous variable that is correlated with the endogenous variable but uncorrelated with the dependent variable (onset of civil conflict). *“These criteria imply that any changes in the dependent variable that may result from changes in the values of an instrument must be attributable to the endogenous variable and must be unrelated to the reciprocal relationship between the dependent variable and the endogenous variable”* (Savun / Tirone 2011, 239). Their two instrumental variables are donor GDP and affinity with the United States – the similarity in the two countries’ votes in the United Nations General Assembly in a given year (Gartzke / Jo 2006). *“The results show that both instruments are significant predictors of the endogenous variable democracy aid”* (Savun / Tirone 2011, 240). *“In each model the effect of democracy aid on civil war onset during democratization remains negative and statistically significant”* (Savun / Tirone 2011, 241).

They divide democracy assistance programmes into three categories, depending on the object at hand: (a) state institutions, (b) civil society, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the media, and (c) electoral assistance. Then they discuss *“how by bolstering both state institutions and civil society, which supports both top-down and bottom-up democratization, democracy aid can lower the risk of domestic political violence during the early phases of regime transition”* (Savun / Tirone 2011, 235).

Though they do not empirically pursue this programme differentiation, they find that *“democratizing states that receive higher levels of aid are less likely to experience conflict than those that receive less aid”* (Savun / Tirone 2011, 238). While democratisation processes are conflict-enhancing, those democratising states that do not receive democratisation aid are (over four times) more likely to experience civil wars than aid recipients. Still, according to Savun / Tirone, the relationship between democracy assistance and the likelihood of conflict is only statistically significant in cases where a democratisation process is already in place.²¹

In short – and assuming that their instrumental variables approach is able to control for *endogeneity* – some questions arise directly from their analysis. First is the issue of whether democracy support can also generate a democratic process in contexts of fragility, in addition to responding to the instability born out of such a process. The second question is whether the specific fragility configuration of a country might affect the way in which democracy assistance impacts a given stabilisation and democratisation process.

6 On the determinants of effective democracy-support policies

It is not difficult to imagine that when considering different contexts of fragility, scholars come up with various sets of (internal and external) determinants of aid effectiveness, as well as of democracy support. This has been the case in the qualitative single-case study literature.²² The quantitative literature, on the other hand, has indeed analysed the impact of individual determinants of aid effectiveness in general, or particularly in fragile states (albeit in its one-dimensional definition). But it has fallen short of empirically analysing the determinants of the effectiveness of democracy-support policies.

With regards to the determinants of aid effectiveness in general, current quantitative analyses have focused on two different angles: the donor and the recipient. On the donor side, authors have mainly focused on two critical elements for aid effectiveness: donor

21 *“We measure democratization as the change from year t-2 to year t in the 21-point Polity score from the Polity IV data”* (Marshall et al. 2002). *“Democratization is coded 1 if a country experiences a 3-point or more positive change in its Polity score during the previous two years, and 0 otherwise”* (Savun / Tirone 2011, 237).

22 See Moehler (2010, 33) for a list of democracy and governance (country-based) field experiments, completed or under way. *“A quarter of the field experiments took place in post-conflict settings or in settings subject to ongoing conflict, such as Eastern DRC, and Afghanistan”* (2010, 34). She groups studies according to types of interventions: elections, community-driven development (CDD) and reforms to improve public service delivery. She then analyses five potential limitations incurred by field experiments that can potentially lead to biases: the level of intervention and analysis; complexity of intervention; synergies and coordination with other programmes; best performers volunteer for impact evaluation; and research planning under ambiguity.

fragmentation and coordination (see Djankov / Montalvo / Reynal-Querol 2008; Knack / Rahman 2007; Gibson et al. 2005; Knack / Smets 2012) and the manner in which aid is disbursed (see Cordella / Dell'Ariccia 2003). On the recipient side, determinants of aid effectiveness can be grouped into three broad categories: the political and institutional environment (Burnside / Dollar 2000; Svensson 1999; Collier / Dehn 2001; Guillaumont / Chauvet 2001; Chauvet / Guillaumont 2004; Collier / Hoeffler 2004; Dalgaard / Hansen / Tarp 2004), including regional and international aspects, such as diffusion (see Gleditsch / Ward 2006); the economic context (see, for instance, Collier / Dehn 2001; Pettersson 2007); and geographical issues (see, for instance, Hansen / Tarp 2001).

When focusing on contexts of fragility, authors can also be classified as using either the donor or the recipient perspective. Allegedly, however, determinants in these contexts have a different impact on aid effectiveness than in other developing countries or contexts (see Patrick / Brown 2007, 2).²³ The following overview on the determinants of aid effectiveness in fragile states should set the stage for further research on possible determinants of effective democracy-support policies, specifically when looking at different contexts of fragility.

With regards to the **donor side**, some authors have focused on the type of assistance, namely technical and financial assistance, as a determinant of aid effectiveness in the “turnaround” of failing states (see Chauvet / Collier 2008, 334).²⁴ They conclude that while technical assistance has a positive effect with regards to a state’s turnaround – that is, the achievement and sustainability of radically improved policies and institutions – financial assistance does not. Therefore, especially in contexts of fragility, development aid needs to be especially tailored to have a positive impact therein. Unfortunately, Chauvet / Collier (2008) only focus on aid volumes and do not control for diffusion mechanisms, i.e. a democratising or *autocratising* neighbourhood,²⁵ of conditionality principles (recognisably difficult for lack of indexes), both of which are likely to have an impact on aid effectiveness. Furthermore, should democracy support be considered part and parcel of technical assistance, one could assume it would also have a positive impact

23 However, Kim / Sikkink (2010) defend the opposite thesis. Taking three different types of transitions as research objects – democratic transition, transition from civil war and transition by state creation – they explore the effect of human rights prosecutions, i.e. trials or truth commissions, on “repression”, defined as “*human rights violations*”, i.e. torture, summary execution, disappearances and political imprisonment. One of their results is especially interesting to this review, namely that “*although civil wars certainly exacerbate repression, human rights prosecutions still appear to have a positive impact on human rights protection in those situations*” (2010, 956). This would mean that, at least in such a specific sub-sector as the protection of human rights, the logic between “transitioning” countries, including fragile states, is one and the same.

24 Chauvet / Collier consider a failing state as a country with low income. They use as an income cut-off the criteria that the country should have been classified as a “low-income country” for at least one year by the World Bank. They continue by saying that not all low-income countries are failing states. As a cut-off for weakness in policy, institutions, and governance, they adopt a level of the Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (CPIA) that is no better than 2.5 – a very low rating – adding the requirement that the CPIA should have been under the threshold of 2.5 for at least four consecutive years.

To make a turnaround, policies, institutions and governance must improve above the threshold for a failing state. They consider it to be sustained if the CPIA remains above 3 for at least two years after the turnaround is achieved (2008, 335–336).

25 “*External support can have a particularly dramatic impact on the relative power of groups when we see shifts in the coalitions that hold power in neighboring entities*” (Gleditsch / Ward 2006, 919).

in contexts of fragility. The quantitative literature on the effectiveness of democracy-support policies would support this thesis (see Section 5 above).

A rather descriptive strand of the aid allocation literature has dealt with *aid scarcity* and *aid volatility* as determinants of aid effectiveness in contexts of fragility (see Levin / Dollar 2005; and also Burnside / Dollar 2000; Carment / Samy / Prest 2008; Epstein / Gang 2009; François / Sud 2006; McGillivray 2006). Aid volatility might, indeed, be excruciating with regards to fragile states, since the unpredictability of funding might hinder long-term policy planning, and hamper sustainable progress. However, development aid and democracy support are not considered separately, specifically with regards to possibly diverging patterns of volatility and its impact – a gap that needs to be amended.

With regards to the **recipient side**, other authors focus specifically on determinants of fragility. As we saw above, Chauvet / Collier (2008) look at fragility as a linear category, in terms of states upholding thresholds on poverty and political institutions. Besley / Persson (2011), on the other hand, analyse the heterogeneity of fragility, and establish a formal model to analyse the effects of development assistance therein. They formally and theoretically review the effects of *cash aid*, *conditionality* and *non-cash development assistance* in different contexts of state fragility. They conclude that aid effectiveness depends on the specific elements framing fragility, namely the degree of state ineffectiveness and political violence present in a given country. Their model suggests that development assistance can be effective, if it includes the right mix of development-aid instruments, but that it needs to be specifically tailored to country circumstances and institutions (Besley / Persson 2011, 395; see also Wright / Winters 2010). An empirical test of their theoretical formulations might help us understand the dynamics they describe.

Baliamoune-Lutz (2009, 881) also contends that “*the three factors (trade, institutions, and social cohesion) that are often hypothesized to be deep determinants (with positive effects) of income seem to have an ambiguous or negative correlation with income in fragile states.*” Her results indicate, first, that “*greater openness to trade may actually be harmful to fragile states, particularly in those countries that have high levels of export concentration since diversification enhances the positive effects of trade.* Second, at least initially, improvements in political institutional quality also may be harmful. It seems that only a substantial improvement could have positive effects. Third, social cohesion has a threshold effect. Improvements in social cohesion produce positive effects only once it has reached a relatively high level. (...) Fourth, social cohesion seems to influence the effectiveness of political institutional reform” (2009, 886). Hence, the specificity of fragile states, as opposed to other developing countries, seems to be a given, but the latter could be further specified by differentiating among types of contexts of fragility.

In conclusion, the literature on the determinants of aid effectiveness seems to acknowledge the specificity of fragile states and the need for effective development aid to be tailored to the specific context. Still, it has overlooked the fact that the category “fragile state” is rather heterogeneous and multi-dimensional. At the same time, despite the obvious progress made within the aid-effectiveness literature, it still needs to catch up to the literature on the effectiveness of democracy-support policies. It does not seem to be enough to assume similarities in both fields. Further research is warranted with regards to the determinants of the effectiveness of democracy-support policies, also when specifically looking at contexts of fragility.

7 Conclusion

The aim of this article has been to clarify concepts and draw links between different research strands. In this process, research gaps have become apparent within the academic literature on external interventions supporting political transformation in contexts of fragility.

As outlined in Section 2 above, the very concept of fragility is still developing. Its multi-dimensionality has led scholars and practitioners to cluster countries in relatively differentiated groups according to their levels in some of the dimensions of statehood, namely, capacity, authority and legitimacy.

The adoption of such a multi-dimensional definition in other areas of the academic literature would enable scholars to fine-tune the empirical results and the theories on processes of political transformation. Additionally, and as we have seen in this paper, it offers a new lens to evaluate the existing literature on political transformations and on the effectiveness of external support. Furthermore, a number of research gaps have emerged in this literature review, which will need to be taken up in the near future.

The first gap is the analytical distinction, operationalisation and measurement of democracy- and state-building support policies. Currently, the most commonly used proxy for democracy- and state-building support is the data of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee on "Government and Civil Society". This proxy only accounts for volumes of aid and excludes other policies, with a possible impact upon a country's process of political transformation, such as diplomacy, conditionality or sanctions. This exclusion might lead to *omitted variable bias*. Especially with regards to contexts of fragility, information on the specific policy combination – the level of diplomatic pressure, the use of conditionality clauses in trade agreements and the relative commitment to supporting civil society organisations – might add relevant information when analysing the effectiveness of external support mechanisms.

The second gap is the scoping and classification of determining factors that might affect the impact of democracy-support and state-building policies. Looking at the recipient country, a number of factors might contribute to the success or failure both of the political transformation process and of external interventions supporting this transformation process. Additionally, this may vary when looking at the specific fragility cluster a country is a member of.

In Section 6 above, we saw that intervening factors for aid effectiveness change when focusing on fragile states, as opposed to all countries in general. Yet the appraisal of these factors regarding democracy- and state-building support has not yet ensued. Still, these factors could constitute essential tools in testing the effectiveness of the aforementioned external interventions. And they would add precision to potential causal links between those policies and actual processes of political transformation in contexts of fragility.

In conclusion, this article has tried to summarise the big debates around the literature on the effectiveness of democracy-support policies in contexts of fragility, as well as identifying a number of research gaps. These include, as mentioned above, the adoption of the multi-dimensional definition of fragility; the definition, operationalisation and measurement of state-building and democracy-support policies; and the classification of

determinants of the effectiveness of those policies. Addressing these gaps would likely contribute to policy-relevant analyses on the effectiveness of democracy-support policies.

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