Education and nation-state fragility: Evidence from panel data analysis

Pavel Tendetnik[a], Grant Clayton[a,*], Katy Cathcart[b]

[a] University of Colorado Colorado Springs, 3001 Columbine Hall, 1420 Austin Bluffs Parkway, Colorado Springs, CO, 80918, USA
[b] University of Colorado Colorado Springs, ACAD 310, 1420 Austin Bluffs Parkway, Colorado Springs, CO, 80918, USA

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ABSTRACT

We empirically investigate the efficacy of current US foreign assistance policy and state-building efforts on state fragility through the effects of school enrollment levels on state fragility. This is accomplished by investigating whether levels of school enrollments (primary, secondary, or tertiary) can predict nation-state fragility; which level of enrollments has the highest effect on the levels of fragility and is subsequently the best investment for foreign assistance efforts; and whether there is a difference in levels of nation-state fragility based on changes in the average number of years of school enrollment. Results indicate education is capable of mitigating state fragility and promoting stable regimes under certain conditions.

1. Introduction

There are many elements that contribute to state fragility and various perspectives as to how to mitigate this phenomenon. From the perspective of human rights, sufficient rationale exists for educational interventions in fragile states (Barakat et al., 2008). The hypothesis that fragility negatively affects education has received adequate empirical support (Bird, 2009; Kirk, 2007; Miller-Grandvaux, 2009; O'Malley, 2010). However, large-scale empirical examinations of the potential inverse relationship between education and fragility remain unexplored. Furthermore, the research within the framework of education and fragility has often been limited to discrete case studies, has only addressed the relationship in brief, and has not examined fragility within the context of educational research. Meanwhile, education appears to be the foundation of all key elements that mitigate state fragility.

After the end of the Cold War, the focus of U.S. foreign policy shifted from states as the primary security referent to one that emphasized the rights of individuals instead (Chandler, 2009). However, starting early 2000s, the state reemerged as the central unit of political analysis and a primary actor in international politics, although the extent to which is often debated (Rotberg, 2003). The concept of fragile states was developed to articulate the need for better programming in states that have been directly or indirectly linked to international security issues: states are fragile "when governments and state structures lack capacity and/or political will to deliver safety and security, good governance, and poverty reduction to their citizens"(OECD/DAC, 2007, p. 12). However, this does not imply that state fragility is exclusively produced by an incumbent regime—the condition may arise from a complex interaction of social, political, and economic factors (Barakat et al., 2008).

There is no single effect of education on fragility, and therefore, any interpretation of competing evidence and the dimensions of fragility should be guided by a unifying framework (Barakat et al., 2008). In the past two decades, several frameworks have been developed to analyze the complexity of fragility and serve as foundations for various fragility indices. Most of them examine fragility along four dimensions: security, political, economic, and social (Mata and Ziaja, 2010). For instance, Ghani and Lockhart (2008) proposed a framework that evaluates state performance in terms of ten functions: rule of law, a monopoly on legitimate means of violence, administrative control, sound management of public finances, investments in human capital, creation of citizenship rights through social policy, provision of infrastructure services, formation of a market, management of public assets, and effective public borrowing. *The Ten Functions of the State framework*, however, is subject to consensus at any specific moment and serves only as "a basis for a common understanding of state functionality" (Ghani and Lockhart, 2008, p.124). Likewise, Marshall and Cole (2011) recognize that any assessment of a state's ability to garner the loyalty of its people hinges upon its performance in multiple spheres encompassing governance, economic performance and opportunity, security, and delivery of social services. The strength of this framework is the explicit requirement for the state to exhibit both effectiveness and legitimacy in its performance. In other words, a state may remain in a condition of fragile instability if it lacks effectiveness or legitimacy in a number of dimensions; however, a state is likely to fail, or already to be a failed state, if it has lost both.

* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: ptendetn@uccs.edu (P. Tendetnik), gclayto2@uccs.edu (G. Clayton), kcathcar@uccs.edu (K. Cathcart).

While the events that lead to it may be sudden or gradual, fragility is a dynamic process and a continuous variable in the condition of governments of developing countries, which fluctuates between weak, fragile, failing, to failed or collapsed or similar categories (Moulton and Dall, 2006). However, it is less important to define these categories precisely than to illustrate a spectrum of relative fragility levels (Barakat et al., 2008). Whereas deciding what constitutes the highest and the lowest level of fragility may be subjective, it is not arbitrary (Baliamoune-Lutz and McGillivray, 2011). Subsequently, the role of education in fragile contexts is also likely to vary according to the conditions that contribute to fragility. The Education and Fragility framework, advanced by Miller-Grandvaux (2009), considers equally how fragility affects education and how education can mitigate fragility. He asserts that education can do the following: contribute to and mitigate the root causes of fragility; promote stability; extend to the delivery and quality of security, governance, livelihood, and protective services; work across sectors to achieve stability goals; and bridge the gap between humanitarian assistance and sustainable development, two key aspects of state-building.

Based upon prior research and the established theoretical framework of Miller-Grandvaux (2009), we addressed the following research question: Is there a relationship between levels of school enrollments based on type of schooling (primary, secondary, and tertiary) and nation-state fragility?

2. Literature review

All persons have a right to education in times of peace, fragility, turmoil, or emergencies (Moulton and Dall, 2006). This concept is articulated in a number of international conventions and documents: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948); the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951); the Fourth Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War; the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966); the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989); and the Dakar World Education Forum Framework for Action (2000); promoting Education For All The Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (2004). Education is a factor that merits consideration by foreign assistance agencies and organizations implementing polices to address fragile states. Education should be at the center of fragile states discussions as more than a basic service, and instead it should be used in fragility analysis to identify and prioritize stabilizing interventions: "In relation to fragility, education is at the same time cause, effect, problem and possible solution" (Kirk, 2007, p. 188).

Although the stability enhancing qualities of educational opportunity are widely recognized including the promotion of linguistic and ethnic tolerance, along with the disarming of history, many scholars underscore the potentially negative influence of education if it is unevenly distributed, applied as a means of cultural repression, or used to distribute literature that promote intolerance (Bush and Saltarelli, 2000). Lange (2011) further questions the assumption that education, by default, promotes peaceful ethnic relations. He argues that education may emphasize ethnic differences and increase inter-communal antipathy; it may also promote frustration and aggression when the high expectations of the educated are unmet. Worse, it may become a coveted resource that fuels intense or dangerous competition, and it may even provide the very resources needed to organize and sustain violent ethnic movements. In addition to education's destructive potential when it is abused to promote war propaganda, or when teachers agitate ethnic groups to violence against one another, the educational institutions themselves are easily shaped, to a considerable degree, by structural violence (Seitz, 2004).

National educational policies are fueling conflict in certain areas and are frequently cited as the reason for which schools are attacked (O'Malley, 2010). Thus, the formal education system itself may exacerbate or escalate societal conflicts when it produces socioeconomic disparities which create social marginalization, or when it promotes the teaching of identity and citizenship concepts that deny the cultural plurality of society. Brainwashing tactics used by extremist organizations quickly fill the void left by the absence of peaceful education, a key medium by which ethnicity is mobilized for the escalation of conflicts (Baran, 2005; Seitz, 2004).

Clearly, health and shelter rank among the most important of human needs, yet education is every bit as essential to help children live a normal life and prepare them for adulthood (Sinclair, 2002). Although the desirability and necessity of offering education under crisis conditions are both generally acknowledged, it cannot be asserted that education receives the same emphasis as the other pillars in humanitarian assistance (Seitz, 2004). Since 2008, when the U.N. estimated that more than 250,000 children remained in the ranks of armed forces or para-military groups, the systematic targeting of students, teachers, academics, education staff and institutions has been reported in a number of countries. While protecting education is an important part of creating stability, the reverse seems also to be true: the vast demolition of schools seen in conflict situations can be a contributing factor in a downward spiral of violence and increased displacement of populations (O'Malley, 2010). Although conflict has a devastating impact on education, both in terms of the suffering and psychological impact on the pupils, teachers, and communities affected and the degradation of the education system and its infrastructure, research demonstrates that schools and education systems are surprisingly resilient, and education appears to be a worthy long-term investment (Buckland, 2005). Until recently, with the exception of refugee camps maintained by international agencies, most foreign assistance agencies conducted operations to respond to humanitarian crises without including education activities in these responses (Burde, 2006).

Educational investment is believed to provide a strong signal to the people that its government is attempting to improve their lives; it can generate economic, political, and social stability by giving people tools with which they can resolve disputes peacefully, which can make them less likely to incur the risks involved in joining a rebellion (Thyne, 2006). Thyne (2006), in a large-scale statistical analysis of the determinants of civil war, found that increases from 1 standard deviation below to 1 standard deviation above the mean for primary enrollment, educational expenditure, adult literacy, and secondary male enrollment decreased the probability of civil war onset between 43% (adult literacy) and 73% (primary enrollment ratio).

When families have access to schools, teachers, and books, they credit their government and feel a sense of security (Moulton and Dall, 2006). An educated population is more likely to express its grievances through peaceful means and understand the difficult job of governing during times of poverty, and thus is more apt to give the government leeway to make social and economic reforms that may hurt in the short term (Thyne, 2006). Conversely, in a fragile environment, the decay of good schools signals to the public that their government is failing (Moulton and Dall, 2006).

Educational investment in fragile states is positively associated with long-term economic growth, fertility reduction, and improved child health, and it lends short-term stability and legitimacy to weak governments and strengthens civil society. Education it is the largest, most widespread, and most visible institution in a country, and it represents government in every community (Moulton and Dall, 2006). Education can offer safe spaces for learning and help identify and support seriously affected individuals, particularly children and youth; it can mitigate the psychosocial impact of conflict and disasters by providing a sense of normalcy, stability, structure and hope for the future, and it can save lives by providing physical protection from the dangers and exploitations of a crisis environment. Education can convey life-saving information to strengthen critical survival skills and coping mechanisms, such as how to protect oneself against sexual abuse, how to prevent HIV/AIDS, or how to access health care and food (D'Escoto Brockmann, 2009). Further, not only does education appear to assist in