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Backsliding and Reversal: The J Curve Revisited

David Carment, Peter Tikuisis, Rachael Calleja, and Mark Haichin

Norman Paterson School of International Affairs, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada

ABSTRACT

In this article we argue that democratic transitions can reverse, oscillate, or simply stall. These transitions are exemplified in the different types of states we categorize. We construct a model of stability vs openness using three dimensions of stateness, namely authority, legitimacy, and capacity. With the additional application of a six-fold typology of states, we offer a robust analytical framework with which to identify and explain changes in state status. Our construct of stability and openness leads to a novel development of a global conflict damage index, which is built upon conflict risk, but considers a state's capacity to deal with conflict. The paper concludes with implications for policy and the application of the model to conflict prediction when states under go transition.

KEYWORDS

Backsliding; Conflict; Democracy; Development; Early warning; Fragile states; Stability

The J curve revisited

Just over 10 years ago, Ian Bremmer published a treatise on the stability of states built on the notion that states fall along a curve resembling a slanted "J" when plotting their stability against openness.[1] The basic idea is that states to the right of the turnover (bottom of the curve) are increasingly open, while those to the left are increasingly closed. As states transition from the left side of the curve to the right, they become more open to interactions with the rest of the world (e.g., free press), as well as in their own domestic politics (e.g., free elections). In doing so, they are expected to gradually replace the authoritarian elites of the old system with more democratic political institutions. However, states in the turnover process are considered unstable, and are at risk of either reversing to a closed and stable system or even collapsing. States on either side of the turnover exhibit increased stability the further they rise along the curve, with the implicit assumption that closed states cannot reach the same level of stability as the most open states.

While stability is attained with strong authority and capacity, openness elevates the potential for a state to achieve higher stability than a closed state. The continued prevalence of partially liberalized regimes raises the question

CONTACT David Carment david_carment@carleton.ca Carleton University, RB 5313 Richcraft Hall, NPSIA, K1S 5B6, Ottawa, Canada

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of why such regimes have not transitioned out of hybridity (i.e., toward full liberalization or consolidated democracy).

States that reside near the turnover are considered in crisis, lacking the authority and capacity to prevent and withstand destabilizing shocks. Crises arise when leaders confront strategic tradeoffs. On the one hand, leaders need to establish a power base that is broad and inclusive enough to fend off potential challengers. On the other hand, to maintain support from within their narrow political base, leaders have to show they are unwilling to compromise on fundamental policy issues, which can result in increased instability if the narrower political base prevails and generates narrow benefits for themselves. Institutional changes create opportunities for organized political groups to more openly pursue their objectives in the political arena along narrow bands of political support. In a nutshell, crises of destabilization begin when leaders take advantage of uncertainty in the political system to consolidate their power base and provide benefits primarily to their political supporters.

According to the selectorate theory advanced by Bueno de Mesquita et al., and Bueno de Mesquita and Smith, the nature of the benefits for the political base will vary with the nature of the government.[2] Democratic regimes need to reward their base with public goods that benefit large parts of the population, as even a narrow political base in such a regime will be too large to win over with private benefits. Autocratic regimes, on the other hand, are able to survive with a smaller support base, and can therefore use private benefits to tie their welfare to that of the current regime. A government that lacks sufficient resources to retain either of these supporters is likely to lose their power base, thus becoming vulnerable to challenges that could destabilize it. Other authors, such as Geddes et al., have taken different approaches to selectorate theory, such as focusing on the interests of necessary supporters rather than the size of the relevant groups.[3] At its core, however, the primary argument of selectorate theory remains intact: regime type determines which audience a government needs to retain the support of and what type of reward is necessary to do so.

A similar theory regarding the transition between autocratic and democratic regimes, albeit focusing on the role of state administrative capacity, is that proposed by Bäck and Hadenius.[4] When plotting levels of democratization against state administrative capacity, states on the left and right side of a J curve demonstrate high levels of capacity. Those at the bottom of the curve, which are presumed to be transitioning from authoritarianism to democracy, have lower levels of capacity. The explanation for this trend in the model is that authoritarian states require a strong repressive apparatus for the regime to retain power, and that the democratization process initially erodes this capacity by dismantling state organizations associated with repressive policies. As the state democratizes further (moving further upward on the right

of the curve), the gradual emergence of democratic institutions and increasing political participation increases the state's administrative capacity once again, potentially beyond what those on the left could achieve.

In brief, what emerges from Bremmer's J curve, and similarly with the above two hypotheses of regime change, is a dichotomous ranking of countries susceptible to crises of instability. Countries with highly functional democratic processes are more stable, but then so, too, are deeply entrenched repressive regimes. The most unstable countries are those with moderate levels of democratic performance. These partially liberalized regimes "are neither clearly democratic nor conventionally authoritarian," often resulting in a mixture of traits from both types.[5] An example of this would be how some regimes, such as Iran, may hold popular elections for determining government leadership while severely limiting political participation or even manipulating the results to favor incumbents.[6] Others, such as Singapore, may enshrine rights and freedoms for citizens while doing little in practice to protect them, if not outright curtailing them.[7] A myriad of labels have been used to describe these gray zone regimes, including "hybrid," "semi-democracies," "illiberal democracies," "electoral democracies," "competitive authoritarian," "semi-authoritarian," "soft authoritarianism," "electoral authoritarianism," and "anocracies."[8]

At face value, Bremmer's key point about hybrid regimes being susceptible to instability and reversal appears valid. For example, the 2016 report by Freedom House indicates that 59 out of 195 countries currently meet the definition of "partly free."[9] Despite moving out of authoritarianism through the adoption of varying degrees of political, social, and economic liberalization, these are countries that have not fully transitioned to democracy or have reversed in some key areas as they began to open up. Such regimes—notably found across Africa (e.g., Kenya, Mozambique, Zambia), post-communist Eurasia (e.g., Albania, Ukraine), Latin America (e.g., Haiti, Mexico), and Asia (e.g., Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan)—began transitioning with the "third wave" of democratization (initiated in 1974) and were expected to transform into full democracies. Yet many remain "partially liberalized," having only adopted varying degrees of democratization.[10]

However, we believe Bremmer's interpretation of the kinds of states that are susceptible to instability and reversal is too simplistic, neglecting key interactions between the state dimensions of legitimacy, capacity, and authority that are not part of Bremmer's framework. The key point missed by Bremmer is that there are multiple hybrid regimes that failed to make the full transition to democracy or autocracy. The state dimensions of legitimacy, capacity, and authority were used by Tikuisis and Carment, and Tikuisis, Carment, Samy, and Landry, to categorize six types of states beyond simply ranking them from strength to weakness, with hybrid regimes occupying the middle ground.[11] In this article, we formulate original expressions of stability

and openness involving the above three dimensions that place states along a modified J curve with greater discrimination.

The benefits of our approach are two-fold. First, we shift from Bremmer's framework of associated conditions to a causal model. Second, we more accurately specify the causes of reversal in which crises of instability occur. To meet those objectives, we identify states according to the six types characterized by Tikuisis and Carment.[12] We then define stability as a function of two state dimensions—authority and capacity—and apply the remaining state dimension of legitimacy as a proxy for openness.

In testing the model, we find that shifts to openness and reversals leading to increasing instability are not as clear-cut as Bremmer argues. Transitions can reverse, oscillate, or simply stall, which are exemplified in the different types of states we categorize. For example, we find that the least stable states experience the highest volatility in shifts between stability and openness, while the most stable states exhibit the lowest volatility. Improved capacity was solely responsible for the significantly improved stability of all state types, while changes in openness (essentially legitimacy) were mixed over the 1996–2015 period of study.

In the following sections, we first elaborate on the causal mechanisms that generate instability and relate these findings specifically to hypothetical claims regarding expected outcomes. We then present a causal model and test it using our six-fold typology of states, followed by a section on policy implications. Our construct of stability also allows us to develop a novel risk index of destabilizing intrastate damage based on a conflict risk index, which in our view ignores state capacity to deal with conflict. Finally, we conclude with a summation and directions for future research.

Causes of instability and reversal

In reviewing our reassessment of the J curve, it is important to note that research examining the conditions that tend to favor the emergence of stable, open societies has yielded several competing results. Lipset's seminal contribution on modernization theory argued that economic development is positively correlated with democracy.[13] Lipset's view was that industrialization, urbanization, wealth, and education would provide the conditions, rather than the causes, for democracy to flourish.[14] While the relationship identified by Lipset has been extensively studied, the modernization perspective can be considered deterministic, where democratization becomes a byproduct of development rather than an outcome of deliberate action.[15]

The literature on democratic consolidation suggests that there are a number of potential impediments to democratic transitions. One example of this is rapid economic growth, which may be used by autocratic leaders to enrich themselves or pay for tools of repression instead of encouraging democratic

reforms.[16] Extreme income inequality is similarly problematic for democratic transitions and may even encourage backsliding.[17] This is due to economic inequality empowering elites to establish and maintain control of government institutions, allowing them to block the implementation of democratic reforms and shift the state toward nondemocratic rule to ensure they can maintain their wealth.[18] Inadequate constraints on executive power, such as a weak judiciary, can also keep states from transitioning to democratic regimes, as there would be little to keep the executive branch from accruing further economic and political power to maintain control.[19] Other obstacles can include high rates of inflation, ethnic fragmentation, and the insufficient provision of public goods.[20]

In our view, the plausibility of Bremmer's argument regarding increasing/decreasing stability hinges on claims regarding interactions between the superordinate elements of state authority, capacity, and legitimacy and not just economic development and democracy. For example, positive changes in authority that address societal well-being not only provide valuable guidance for government policy, but also reduce literal barriers to commerce and economic development (measures of capacity) such as restrictions on citizen movement and assembly (measures of legitimacy). Responsiveness may also induce governments to produce policies addressing popular concerns that are not growth-focused, such as wealth distribution and social programming, and that, by extension, increase state legitimacy.

Several authors, such as Goldstone and Andersen, among others, have shown that state stability is related to state effectiveness (i.e., how well a state carries out basic functions such as providing security, promoting economic growth, law making, and delivering services) and legitimacy (i.e., the degree to which state actions are considered "reasonable" based on domestic social norms).[21] For Goldstone, states with both effectiveness and legitimacy are typically stable, while states that possess only one or the other are more prone to failure. Instances where the state possesses legitimacy, but not effectiveness, are of particular interest when discussing partially liberalized regimes.[22] Goldstone and others have suggested that while newly emerging democracies tend to have some legitimacy (although this can also be eroded in cases with severe corruption), they may suffer from a lack of effectiveness that leaves them unable to provide basic economic and physical security to the general populace.[23] In these cases, "democracies that are perceived as ineffective are often replaced by military regimes in coups," resulting in democratic collapse similar to that seen in Nigeria in 1983.[24] Similarly, a state that is effective while its government is perceived as illegitimate will likely encourage the rise of regional or group-based rebellions.[25] This is primarily a concern for fully authoritarian states, though there are instances of semi-authoritarian regimes attempting to bolster their legitimacy through democratic means that have backfired, such as the Pakistani federal

parliament elections in 1970 that sparked a Bengali revolt when the results were rejected.[26]

State capacity and political leadership are both seen within the literature as being particularly significant determinants of stability in regimes. State capacity, which can be broadly defined as the ability of state organs to carry out their given tasks, is considered key to both autocratic and democratic regimes to ensure that the state remains functional.[27] The leadership of a state and their decisions are similarly important to the stability of the state due to influencing key aspects of the state, such as economic growth.[28] Differentiating between regimes in "equilibrium," "decay," and "dynamic change," Olcott and Ottaway examine how capacity and leadership influence the direction and potential transformation of partially liberalized, or semi-authoritarian, regimes.[29] For instance, while countries in "equilibrium" tend to be those that have brought about growth and established legitimate leaders (e.g., Egypt before the Arab Spring), "decay" is likely to follow countries with poor capacity to influence development, while "dynamic change" in the pursuit of further liberalization is often driven by political leaders seeking to promote further growth, trade, and integration into the international system (e.g., China).

In combining these insights on the relationship between authority, capacity, and legitimacy, we see that there are three scenarios where instability or its potential can ensue. First, the potential for instability occurs in countries where weak legitimacy is the key driver. According to Takeuchi et al., whose insights are similar to Goldstone's, these are countries that have demonstrated a high capacity to provide security and services to the population but suffer from weak legitimacy due to expanding inequalities under authoritarian management.[30] This lack of legitimacy can also occur as a result of the state's population (or a considerable section thereof) refusing to acknowledge the current government as being the only actor with the right to set laws.[31] In this weak legitimacy scenario, the state-building experience generally does not improve the state's ability to provide security and social services, since the resources generated by state-building are not used to provide public goods.[32] The inequality resulting from the lack of broad distribution of the benefits of economic growth results in a failure to strengthen the state's legitimacy. The risk is that such states face a closure of the political system (i.e., diminished liberalization/openness) even when growth is achieved. This leads to the left upswing of Bremmer's J curve when a state with good capacity fails to establish strong legitimacy.

A second scenario is one where the country fails to develop effective capacity. The relationship between state stability and economic development is well established throughout the literature.[33] According to Przeworski and Limongi, economic development is important for the sustainability of

democratic regimes, while partially liberalized regimes that are unable to enhance capacity tend to be more fragile and unstable than countries with higher levels of economic growth.[34] Leaders of "impoverished" states may simply not have the (natural) resources to grow their capacity. The rationale for capacity-driven instability is that populations are unlikely to commit to open political systems and democratic consolidation if they do not see tangible improvements in local conditions. These populations will thus have little reason to continue defending the current regime, and they may even choose to rebel against it, thus contributing to potential unrest and instability.[35] To avoid this under conditions of economic liberalization, governments promote linkages with different economic groups to avoid becoming beholden to any particular faction. Politically, Brumberg suggests that providing social groups with a degree of freedom allows states to pursue a "divide and rule" strategy whereby control is maintained by playing groups against each other. In such cases, partial economic liberalization can be seen as a strategy not for democratization, but to sustain authoritarian control.[36]

A third scenario describes authority-driven instability in a fragile state where countries transitioning to democracy backslide from openness to regime failure and civil war, as was the case in Côte d'Ivoire (2002) and Guinea (2001).[37] Weak or nascent democracies have the potential to backslide as a result of authority-related issues in several ways. Some, especially in Eastern Europe, have demonstrated a tendency to backslide as a result of officials implementing anti-democratic policies.[38] Other states have had their democratic practices subverted by the military, which they may remain reliant on during the transition process, to the point that they are ultimately supplanted by a junta, with this scenario being most apparent in fragile Latin American and African states.[39] Still others simply fail to consolidate opportunities to grow into democratic polities and backslide to autocratic rule as leaders exploit weak institutional constraints to accrue greater political and economic power, which has become readily apparent in the Middle East following the Arab Spring of 2011.[40]

For example, Huntington warns that previous waves of democratization have been followed by reverse waves that pull countries away from newfound democracy.[41] Driven by weak democratic values among the elite and society, economic setbacks, social and political polarization, and the breakdown of law and order due to insurgency and reverse snowballing, such transitions could steer countries into the gray zone between democracy and authoritarianism. Huntington's wave approach has received a mixed reception, generating both support (e.g., Strand, Hegre, Gates, and Dahl) and rejection (e.g., Doorenspleet; Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub, and Limongi).[42] Diamond contends that instead of a reverse wave, the last decades have seen a "protracted democratic recession" that has ebbed freedoms in some regions but has not reversed democracy as Huntington predicted.[43]

Patterns of democratization and backsliding in recent years have highlighted some regional differences. Over the past decade, some of the most protracted backsliding events have occurred in East-Central Europe (EEC), where former Soviet-bloc democracies consolidated throughout the 1990s have recently undergone a period of deconsolidation.[44] Deconsolidation in the EEC has been linked to both a hollowing out of citizen involvement in democracy and backsliding toward semi-authoritarian practices.[45] Unlike other regions, the hollowing out of EEC institutions can be linked to the pure neoliberal capitalist regimes that emerged throughout the 1990s, where weak political participation was viewed as favorable to advancing the market economy, yet ultimately facilitated the unchecked use of executive power.[46]

In Latin America, recent threats to democracy have tended to stem from both legitimacy and capacity related challenges. Public disillusionment over the benefits of democracy and its capacity to bring opportunities and prosperity to the many has raised concerns over the continued legitimacy of democracy as the best form of government.[47] At the same time, continued corruption and the diversion of public funds for personal benefit has been linked to low institutional capacity to prosecute and curtail corrupt practices.[48] The knock-on effect of continued corruption, however, is that public services remain underfunded, which raises serious concerns for the ability of public institutions to enforce the rule of law and provide basic services to the majority.[49]

Unlike EEC and Latin American countries, which can generally be said to have undergone democratic transition and embraced democracy throughout transition phases, there remain questions as to whether democracy has reached similar levels of entrenchment in East Asia. Not only did East Asia largely defy the global movement toward democracy, with many countries within the region maintaining elements of authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes, but also, according to Chu et al., democracy largely failed to become the spirit of the times as in other regions.[50] While there is some evidence of backsliding in some East Asian countries, including South Korea and Thailand, there remain questions about the degree of democratic uptake across in the region in the first instance.[51]

In reference to Bremmer's J curve, there is some debate about where to place hybrid states along the bottom of the curve, considering that not all researchers consider hybrid regimes transitional insofar as they are deliberately designed to "maintain the appearance of democracy without exposing themselves to the political risks that free competition entails."[52] Indeed, there are many examples of countries that have remained stable in their hybridity. For instance, some observers have pointed to pre–Arab Spring Egypt as a hybrid country with stability that "can be sustained indefinitely, if there is astute political leadership and if the resources exist to keep public demands at bay."[53] Similarly, Brumberg notes that the adoption of hybrid models that

utilize liberalized economies and pluralistic political systems may actually help Arab states maintain control.[54]

In contrast, Menocal et al. find that hybrid regimes tend to be unstable, unpredictable, or both.[55] Indeed, Marshall and Cole state that hybrid regimes "very often reflect inherent qualities of instability or ineffectiveness and are especially vulnerable to the onset of new political instability events such as outbreaks of armed conflict, unexpected changes in leadership, or adverse regime changes."[56] Menocal et al. continue to suggest that such instability is caused by the absence of a "principled" commitment to the rules of democracy by elites and the public.[57] For instance, in examining public opinion data from various countries in Africa, Bratton find that while people are attached to the idea of democracy, they have little knowledge of its specific institutional components.[58] Goldstone et al. have also noted that democratic hybrid regimes can have their stability undermined by factionalism between political blocs, with countries such as Venezuela and Thailand being cited as cases where this led to mass political mobilization or outright electoral manipulation.[59] The unstable nature of politics in these states similarly means that they are more prone to sudden and unforeseen shifts in their domestic affairs. For example, Epstein et al. found that hybrid democracies are more prone to sudden changes in leadership than pure autocracies or democracies, making it difficult to predict whether they will backslide, remain stable, or ultimately transition to democracy.[60]

In essence, processes of reversal and instability are more complex than those implied in Bremmer's J curve. While it is clear there are numerous examples of states that stall or even reverse in their quest for democratization, the underlying reasons need to be more carefully understood. We believe that reversals can occur when states achieve sufficient capacity to meet the needs of their population, and yet are caught in a legitimacy trap with little inclination to exit. Then there are those states that are perpetually economically weak and often plagued by violence, perhaps shifting slightly with changes in effectiveness and leadership, but not sufficiently enough to escape fragility. Such conditions can be exacerbated by high economic inequality (see Acemoglu and Robinson; Houle) or low development and recessions (see Svolik).[61] Finally, there are those states with strong authority and democratic aspirations, but without sufficient capacity to break free of instability. All of these states, including stable ones, can be located in unique clusters along a "fattened" J curve using the state dimensions of authority, legitimacy, and capacity introduced earlier. We demonstrate these points in the following section.

Hypotheses

The three dimensions of stateness—authority (A), capacity (C), and legitimacy (L)—were first proposed by Carment et al. to arrive at a fragility index (FI).[62] State authority reflects the institutional ability of government to enact binding legislation over its population and provide it with a stable and secure environment. State legitimacy reflects leadership support of the population along with international recognition of that support. State capacity reflects the state's resources that can be mobilized for developmental and defensive purposes. All state dimensions are scaled from 1 to 9 to represent strong to poor performance, and FI is a simple average of the three.

Tikuisis et al. and Tikuisis and Carment introduced a state categorization schema to describe six types of states based on the values of A, L, and C, as follows.[63] Fragile states are those considered to perform poorly in all three state dimensions with a resultant high value of FI (essentially within the high tertiary of values; i.e., FI > 6.5). Brittle states are those that perform well in A and C (mostly mid tertiary values), but score poorly in L (essentially sufficiently resourced, but autocratic; i.e., A and C < 6.5, and L > 6.5). Impoverished states perform moderately well in A and L (mostly mid-tertiary values) but are challenged by poor capacity (essentially sufficiently managed, but poor; i.e., A and L < 6.5, and C > 6.5). Remaining states are categorized as struggling functional (4.6 < FI < 6.5), moderately functional (3 < FI < 6.5), or highly functional (FI < 3) according to their FI value (essentially a separation by degree of performance in all three dimensions of state with FI values in the low and mid-tertiary range). Hypotheses regarding the positioning of these different state types relative to the J curve are:

H1: Fragile states are expected to occupy the portion below the turnover of the J curve given that they are the most unstable states.

H2: Brittle states are expected to occupy the upper portion on the left side of the J curve given that they are ostensibly stable with restricted openness.

H3: Impoverished states are expected to occupy the lower portion on the right side of the J curve given that they tend toward openness, and yet are susceptible to instability due to poor capacity.

H4: Struggling functional states are expected to mostly occupy the portion of the J curve above the impoverished states (i.e., increased stability) given their stronger capacity.

H5: Moderately functional states are expected to occupy the right side of the J curve above the struggling functional states given that all three dimensions of stateness are stronger.

H6: Highly functional states are expected to occupy the right side of the J curve above the moderately functional states given that all three dimensions of stateness are the strongest.

Methodology

To generate a likeness of the J curve, we quantify a state's stability and openness using the state dimensions of A, L, and C. Borrowing from Bremmer's concept, state stability essentially comprises authority and capacity, which we quantify as 9 – (A + C)/2. We also propose that state openness can be represented by legitimacy and quantified as 9 – L.

Following the minimalist approach of Tikuisis and Carment (i.e., fewer indicators lessens the potential ambiguity when analyzing changes in state status and causal relationships), unweighted World Bank data were used to

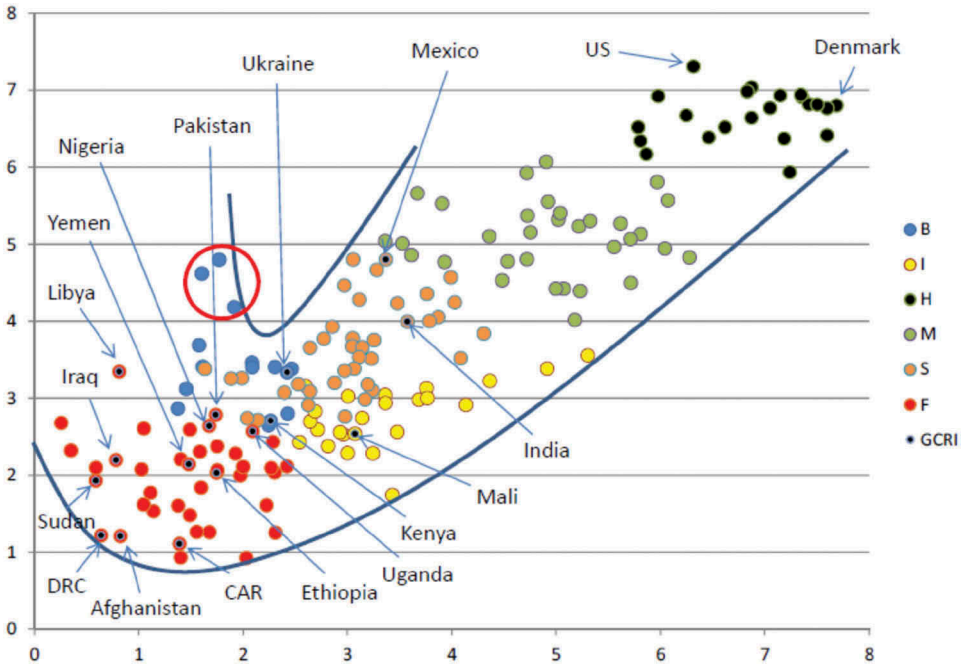

Figure 1. Scatter plot of stability versus openness for 172 states color-coded by cluster type (B = brittle, I = impoverished, H = highly functional, M = moderately functional, S = struggling functional, and F = fragile). States within the circle clockwise from the top are Saudi Arabia, Russia, and China. The 16 states labeled as GCRI (Global Conflict Risk Index) are among the top 20 predicted at risk of violent internal conflict.

quantify the three dimensions of stateness.[64] World Governance Indicators of Government Effectiveness, Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism, Rule of Law, and Regulatory Quality were selected to represent authority. World Governance Indicators of Control of Corruption and Voice and Accountability were selected to represent legitimacy. GDP and GDPpc were selected to represent capacity. To maximize the number of states for analysis (n = 172), the period of study spanned from 1996 through 2015, inclusive, although data were not available for odd years until 2003. Further, data were incomplete for 1996 and 1998 (n = 167), 2000 (n = 170), 2012 and 2013 (n = 170), 2014 (n = 168), and 2015 (n = 164). Results are based on the data available without imputation. Despite certain gaps in the data, these were the most complete available for our purpose.

Results

Figure 1 shows the scatter plot of stability against openness for all states identified by type using the state's average values of A, C, and L during the period from 1996 and 2015 inclusive. Although not a thin curve, it is apparent that the states fall within the outline of a broad "J" with several notable features that were hypothesized. First, we found that the values of stability and openness between the various clusters were significantly different ($p < 0.05$; ANOVA with Tukey HSD post hoc test) in all cases except for stability between the brittle and struggling functional states, and for openness between the brittle and fragile states, and between the impoverished and struggling functional states. Hence, the distribution of clusters within the broad J curve is statistically distinct in at least one of the measures of stability and openness, and in both measures for most cases.

Highly and moderately functional states reside in the upper right of the distribution with relatively high stability and openness, supporting both H5 and H6. Struggling functional states mostly reside to the right of the turnover (located approximately at an openness value of 2.2) with relatively less stability and openness, supporting H4, though some remain on the left of the turnover. Fragile states mostly reside at the bottom and to the left of the turnover with very low stability and openness, supporting H1. Impoverished states reside to the right of the turnover with low stability and moderate openness, supporting H3. And, finally, brittle states mostly reside to the left of the turnover with moderate stability, but low openness, partially supporting H2 as these states share similar values of stability and openness with struggling functional and fragile states, respectively. This depiction also confirms that states to the left of the turnover do not attain the elevated stability

of states with high openness (i.e., highly and moderately functional states).

Bremmer identified authoritarian regimes as those that reside on the upper left of the J curve. Our analysis allows for greater discrimination given that capacities can vary widely among states that are closed, or at least less open. For example, Saudi Arabia, Russia, and China (all categorized as brittle) display the highest stability among closed states and are largely responsible for the upswing of the J curve (openness ranging from 1.6 to 1.9; stability ranging from 4.2 to 4.8; see Figure 1). Less capable authoritative and semi-authoritative states such as Afghanistan, Central African Republic, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (all categorized as fragile), meanwhile, display very low stability among even less open states (openness ranging from 0.6 to 2.0; stability ranging from 0.9 to 1.2). Overall, the diversity in both stability and openness among states within their clusters causes a "fattening" of the distribution of states.

Inspection of the average of all the states' stability values indicates an overall upward shift in stability (3.6 to 4.0) between 1996 and 2015, which is due to an improvement in capacity (5.8 to 5.2) without any significant change in authority (5.0 to 4.9). There was also no significant

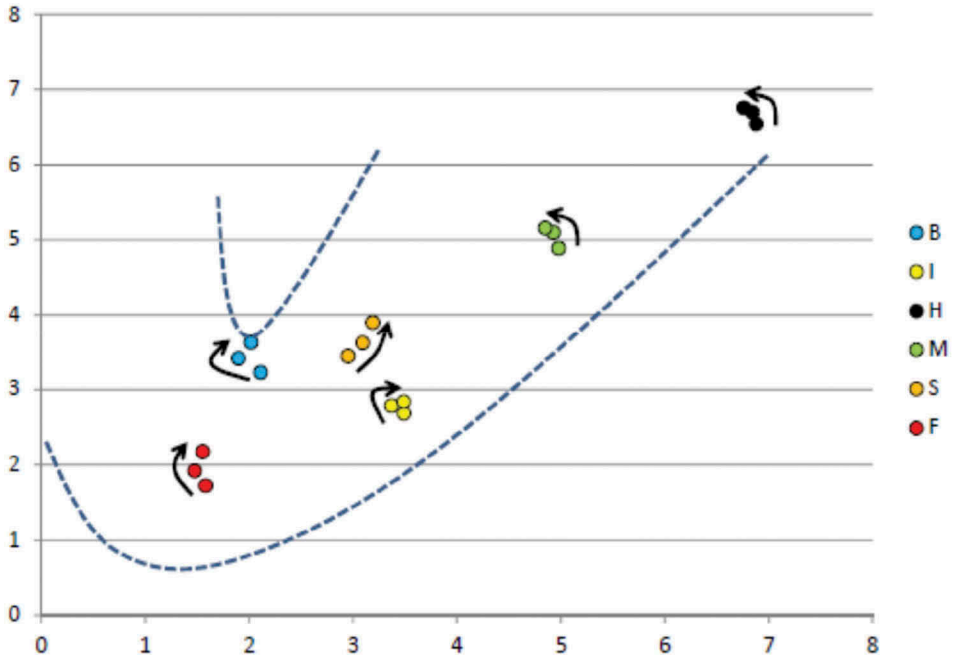

Figure 2. Average cluster values of stability versus openness for the years 1996, 2006, and 2015 shown in chronologic order by the arrows (B = brittle, I = impoverished, H = highly functional, M = moderately functional, S = struggling functional, and F = fragile).

Table 1. Significance of changes for clusters and selected states between 1996 and 2015, where S, O, and Yr refer to stability, openness, and year, respectively. –ve and + ve depict whether the significant regressions are negatively or positively correlated.

State(s)	S vs. O	S vs. Yr	O vs. Yr
B (15)	$p < 0.01$; -ve	$p < 0.01$; + ve	$p = 0.01$; -ve
I (24)	ns	$p < 0.01$; + ve	ns
H (22)	ns	$p < 0.01$; + ve	$p = 0.01$; -ve
M (32)	$p < 0.01$; -ve	$p < 0.01$; + ve	$p < 0.01$; -ve
S (39)	$p = 0.01$; + ve	$p < 0.01$; + ve	$p < 0.01$; + ve
F (40)	ns	$p < 0.01$; + ve	ns
Afghanistan	$p = 0.04$; + ve	$p < 0.01$; + ve	ns
Belarus	ns	$p < 0.01$; + ve	ns
Brazil	ns	ns	ns
China	ns	$p < 0.01$; + ve	ns
Egypt	ns	$p < 0.01$; -ve	$p < 0.01$; -ve
Haiti	$p < 0.01$; + ve	ns	ns
India	ns	$p < 0.01$; + ve	ns
Iran	ns	ns	$p < 0.01$; -ve
Iraq	$p < 0.01$; + ve	$p < 0.01$; + ve	$p < 0.01$; + ve
Madagascar	$p < 0.01$; -ve	$p < 0.01$; + ve	$p < 0.01$; -ve
Mali	$p < 0.01$; + ve	ns	ns
Mexico	ns	ns	ns
Nigeria	ns	$p < 0.01$; + ve	$p < 0.01$; + ve
Pakistan	ns	ns	$p < 0.01$; + ve
Russia	$p < 0.01$; -ve	$p < 0.01$; + ve	$p < 0.01$; -ve
South Africa	$p = 0.01$; -ve	$p = 0.01$; + ve	$p < 0.01$; -ve
Turkey	$p = 0.01$; + ve	$p < 0.01$; + ve	$p < 0.01$; + ve
Ukraine	$p = 0.02$; + ve	ns	ns
Uzbekistan	$p < 0.01$; -ve	$p < 0.01$; + ve	$p < 0.01$; -ve
Venezuela	$p < 0.01$; + ve	$p < 0.01$; -ve	$p < 0.01$; -ve
Yemen	$p < 0.01$; + ve	$p < 0.01$; -ve	$p < 0.01$; -ve

change in openness (~3.5), indicating no overall change in state legitimacy (5.5 to 5.5). However, within the clusters, certain changes over time were consistent and others varied, as seen in Figure 2 and detailed in Table 1. For example, stability is seen to increase significantly for all clusters, while openness worsened for brittle and both highly and moderately functional states. In contrast, openness significantly improved for struggling functional states. With respect to the relationship between stability and openness, brittle and moderately functional states exhibit negative correlations, indicating that a general improvement in one is coupled with deterioration in the other. Only within the struggling functional cluster was a positive correlation found between stability and openness.

Figure 3 illustrates the chronological changes for F states.

Figure 4a, b shows the detailed chronology of changes in stability and openness for Iraq and Egypt. In the former case, both stability and openness are seen to improve overall despite a setback in stability during the early period. In the case of Egypt, there is an overall deterioration in

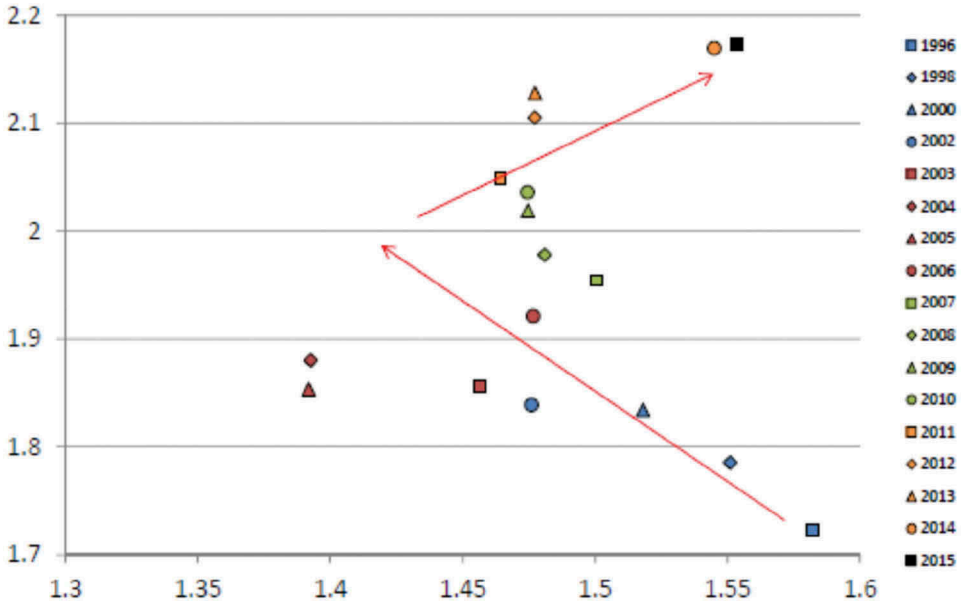

Figure 3. Chronology of stability versus openness for F states (arrows shown for emphasis).

both stability and openness over time, with a precipitous decline in stability during the latter period.

To test the volatility of state transitions, we determined the coefficient of variation (cv) of both the stability and openness for each state during the period from 1996 through 2015. Table 2 summarizes these values for each state type in increasing order of volatility. Accordingly, the least volatile states are the highly functional ones, followed by moderately functional and struggling functional states. Next are the brittle and impoverished states that share a similar overall volatility, followed by fragile states at more than twice the volatility.

Implications for policy and directions for future research

The complexity and range of contexts surrounding hybrid regimes highlights the importance of examining how, and whether, members of the international community can contribute to strengthening stability and promoting democracy in countries that remain stuck in the gray zone, identified through our analysis as states that occupy the lower portion of the J curve, as seen in Figure 1. While there remains an ongoing debate about the capacity for development assistance to contribute to democratic deepening, the question is not only whether donors can spark democratization through aid and other programming, but also what types of programs are needed to enact change in partially liberalized regimes.[65] Such programming is likely to

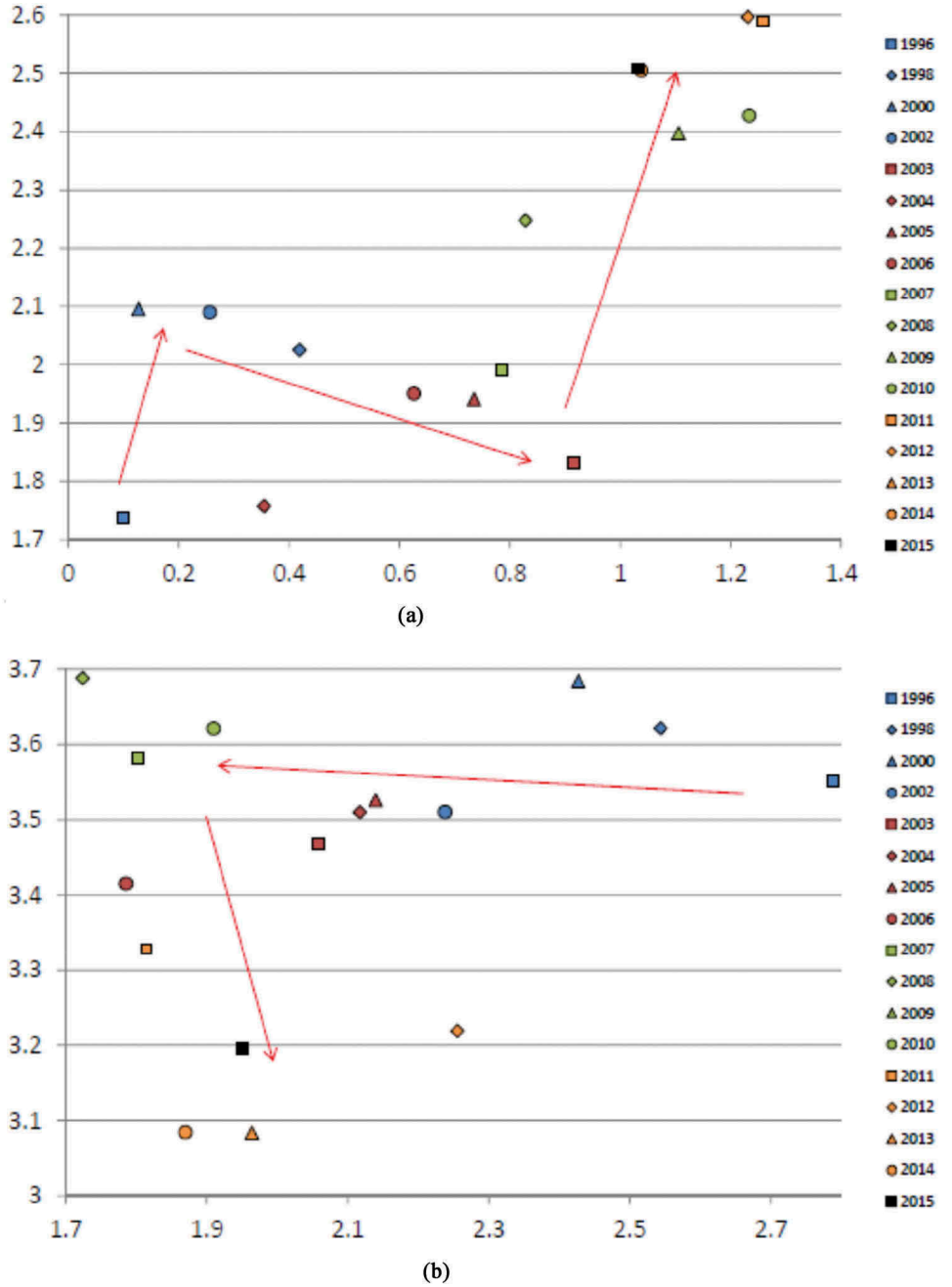

Figure 4. a, b. Chronology of stability versus openness for Iraq (top) and Egypt (bottom).

differ across fragile, brittle, and impoverished states, each of which could require different degrees and types of state-building interventions to advance stability, openness, and, ultimately, democratization.

Table 2. Coefficients of variation of stability (S) and openness (O) of state types between 1996 and 2015 (the numbers in parenthesis indicate the number of states of that type).

State Type	S	O	Average
H (22)	0.016	0.030	0.023
M (32)	0.055	0.078	0.066
S (39)	0.072	0.121	0.097
B (15)	0.086	0.150	0.118
I (24)	0.097	0.139	0.118
F (40)	0.191	0.339	0.265

For fragile states, the sheer scope of policy interventions needed to advance political transformation through supporting institution-building raises key questions concerning the sequencing of policies to best promote democratic deepening.[66] For instance, recognizing that countries in transition face a higher risk of conflict due to the institutional weakness, Mansfield and Snyder suggest that donors should prioritize strengthening recipient institutions prior to providing broader democracy promotion and support.[67] While such "sequencing" is intended to maximize the likelihood of successful transitions by "rationalizing" democratization through securing institutional strength prior to transformation, Carothers argues that a "gradual" approach to building democracy, which encourages donors to contribute to supporting democratic principles and values in current contexts, could help develop democracy from current conditions rather than waiting for the conditions needed under sequencing.[68] Importantly, Grävingholt et al. note that while donors appear to acknowledge the need to sequence programming efforts, they do not rank or organize various—and potentially conflicting—objectives in a sequential manner.[69] In some cases, this results in donors paying little attention to competing objectives, such as security issues in development assistance that donors face when engaging in democracy promotion.[70]

Grimm and Leininger note, particularly in post-conflict situations, that complex mandates are prone to competing objectives and mismanagement during implementation.[71] In these cases, the risk is that donors will ignore competing objectives, using a "wait and see" approach to identify challenges as they arise rather than seeking to integrate conflicting objectives into their strategies for democratization from the outset. While complex and multi-faceted interventions are likely to be necessary in transitional regimes, Grimm and Leininger recommend that donors "acknowledge the relevance of conflicting objectives and consider how intrinsic and extrinsic conflicts could develop as a part of their strategy building."[72]

In impoverished states, low capacity to provide basic needs and public services to citizens likely contributes to the erosion of public trust in government institutions. Indeed, Takeuchi et al. suggests that in capacity trap countries, the inability for countries to provide security and services

necessitates donor interventions designed to foster trust in public authority to enhance legitimacy.[73] In such cases, a combination of technical assistance designed to strengthen the capacity of the civil service as well as traditional development interventions intended to fill the gap of basic needs could provide a basis for strengthening government capacity. Similarly, brittle states, which face challenges to state legitimacy and a debilitating tendency to destabilize if their openness improves, may also benefit from providing assistance to disadvantaged populations to counter growing inequalities sometimes linked with authoritarian governance.[74]

We now turn our attention to intervention policy regarding the imminence of violent conflict. Several agencies, institutions, and think tanks regularly publish forecasts of conflict risk around the world (e.g., International Crisis Group has issued monthly assessments under CrisisWatch since 2003). Recently, the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) released the Global Conflict Risk Index (GCRI) for the prediction of conflict within a state. In their report, they listed 20 states with the highest predicted risk of violent conflict, which included Mexico and India.[75] While informative, perhaps more critical for intervention decision policy is how damaging an outbreak of conflict might be. Arguably, Mexico and India could probably survive violent conflict without crippling effect given their relatively strong capacity, whereas fragile states such as Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Iraq, Sudan, and Yemen, which are also on the top 20 list, would likely suffer further severe destabilization. The other states on the list might fare somewhat better given their modestly higher capacity (see Figure 1 for the identity and placement of these states with respect to their stability, which comprises capacity). Hence, greater attention for intervention might be warranted for the weaker states with low capacity to deal with internal conflict.

These insights provide the motivation for the development of a derivative index, which we identify as the Global Conflict Damage Index (GCDI). The CGDI can be applied in concert with conflict risk as a decision support tool for intervention policy. As a simple demonstration, assume the GCDI equals the GCRI score divided by the value of Stability for 2015. The Central African Republic and Afghanistan top the list for both GCRI and GCDI, followed by Ukraine and Nigeria having the next highest GCRI scores, while Yemen and the Democratic Republic of Congo have the next highest GCDI scores (see Figure 5). Although Ukraine and Nigeria might be at greater risk of conflict, Yemen and the Democratic Republic of Congo might warrant greater attention due to a higher potential of destabilizing conflict damage. Figure 5 also shows that India and Mexico have the lowest GCDI, though their GCRI scores are comparable to several other states with a higher potential of destabilizing conflict damage.

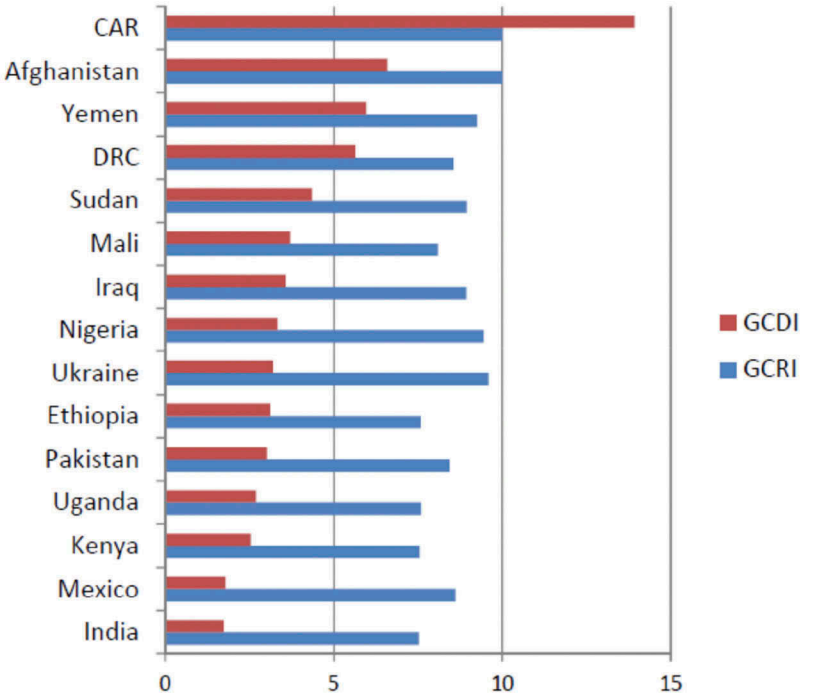

Figure 5. Comparison of GCRI and GCDI scores for 15 of the top 20 predicted states at risk of violent internal conflict.

Conclusions

We believe that policies for preventing backsliding and reversals require a more robust analytical framework with which to identify country changes over time and, more importantly, greater specificity on the interrelated dimensions of capacity, authority, and legitimacy. Our state typology provides that level of specificity in comparison to single rank indexes.[76] Such an approach not only identifies the direction of state change but also its significance. This is an important addition to indexes that typically only identify relative rankings. In brief, our typology provides additional insights regarding state instability and the possibility of improved policy application.

More specifically, understanding the relationship between capacity and legitimacy leading to (in)stability is relevant for clarifying the types of interventions that donors could initiate to improve state-building under various conditions. Using the state dimensions of authority, capacity, and legitimacy, we constructed a relatively simple formulation of stability versus openness that generated a fattened J curve with enhanced explanatory power. This enhancement was possible through the categorization of states using the above three dimensions of state performance that clearly separated well-performing states from hybrid regimes susceptible to various degrees of instability near and below the turnover of the J curve. The most susceptible

states exhibit the highest volatility shifts in both stability and openness and, therefore, are the most in need of effective intervention policy. Future work will focus on the development of the GCDI.

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