

Vaccaro, Andrea; Gisselquist, Rachel M.

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WIDER Working Paper 2024/49

## **Statebuilding in fragile countries**

What can we learn from past stateness?

Andrea Vaccaro<sup>1</sup> and Rachel M. Gisselquist<sup>2</sup>

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**Abstract:** Supporting state capacity is a priority for the international community, yet the record of internationally supported statebuilding to date has been mixed at best. A key question for continuing research concerns the factors influencing more versus less successful interventions. We show that the quality of past ‘stateness’ is crucial in understanding contemporary state fragility and statebuilding. Extending beyond previous work, we introduce the concept of past stateness, consider theoretically its relationship to contemporary fragility, and explore this relationship empirically, drawing on cross-national data and newly developed indicators. In line with our expectations, descriptive and inferential analysis shows that lack of experience of two core features of stateness—monopoly of violence and existence of a professional bureaucracy—in the past century predicts chronic fragility today. This association is mainly driven by monopoly of violence rather than existence of a professional bureaucracy. Our analysis sheds new light on the underlying heterogeneity among states today labelled as ‘fragile’. From a policy perspective, a key implication is that, in designing interventions, the most relevant experiences are likely to be from other countries with similar stateness legacies, rather than from ‘fragile states’ more generally. Our analysis does not imply that statebuilding is impossible in contexts with weak stateness legacies, but it does underscore the challenges of this and the importance of setting expectations appropriately.

**Key words:** state fragility, statebuilding, stateness, monopoly of violence, professional bureaucracy

**JEL classification:** F50, H10, H70, O57

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<sup>1</sup> Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford, UK, corresponding author: [andrea.vaccaro@bsg.ox.ac.uk](mailto:andrea.vaccaro@bsg.ox.ac.uk);  
<sup>2</sup> UNU-WIDER, Helsinki, Finland

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Katajanokanlaituri 6 B, 00160 Helsinki, Finland

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# 1 Introduction

Between 2001 and 2021 Afghanistan received nearly US\$85 billion of net official development assistance—more than any other country in the world during this period. A large part of this money was destined for statebuilding, with the objective of creating strong and effective public institutions. The failure of these efforts, culminating in the collapse of the Afghan Republic in 2021, has been widely documented.

The case of Afghanistan is only one of many where recent international statebuilding interventions have fallen short of their goals. Evidence from Mali and South Sudan shows a similar pattern (Zürcher 2022), and the list could be continued with the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, and Myanmar, to name only a few. These failures suggest to some that statebuilding is doomed to fail. Yet, recent statebuilding efforts in other countries, such as Timor-Leste and Sierra Leone, have been more successful, and there is abundant positive evidence from specific programmes in multiple countries around the world (Justino 2019). Less recent examples from post-Second World War reconstruction efforts in Europe and East Asia provide additional evidence of successful statebuilding.

In brief, the outcomes of statebuilding have been mixed, and our understanding of the factors influencing such outcomes is highly incomplete. For instance, a widely accepted idea has been that international aid is effective only under a good policy environment (e.g. Burnside and Dollar 2000, 2004; Collier and Dollar 2001, 2002; Collier and Hoeffler 2002). Yet, a good policy environment would seem to be more the exception than the rule in contexts where statebuilding interventions have occurred, whether ultimately successful or not. In this paper, we explore how better mapping of the underlying heterogeneity of so-called ‘fragile states’ can shed new light on contemporary statebuilding. A key element of this heterogeneity identified in previous work is the historical continuity of the state, i.e. that reconstructing a temporarily fragile state is fundamentally different from building a state apparatus anew where it never existed (Englebert and Tull 2008; Gisselquist 2021). Extending beyond previous work, we introduce the concept of past stateness, consider theoretically its relationship to contemporary fragility, and explore this relationship empirically, drawing on cross-national data and newly developed indicators.

State fragility has been criticized for being an overly broad concept (e.g. Ferreira 2017; Nay 2013). Previous efforts to disaggregate state fragility have focused either on core functional dimensions of the state—like authority, capacity, and legitimacy—or on expected outcomes of fragility—like poor economic, societal, and environmental performance. Here we adopt a third approach: the institutional persistence of the state, or its historical ‘stateness’, and show its usefulness as a lens for analysing fragile states and statebuilding today. Focusing on ‘stateness’ in terms of monopoly of violence and the existence of a professional bureaucracy, we distinguish between past cumulative experience of stateness (‘stateness stock’), the degree of present-day stateness, and the contemporary condition of state fragility. We set out two key expectations based on this discussion: (1) that stronger (past) stateness stock will reduce the likelihood of being a chronically fragile state today; and (2) that deeper past experience of stateness may also reduce the likelihood of being today a fragile, as opposed to a non-fragile, state.

To empirically analyse the interplay between stateness stock and present fragility, we develop a set of new cross-country indicators that capture this more nuanced perspective on the state and state fragility. First, we classify countries as chronically fragile, temporarily fragile, or non-fragile based on the persistence of fragility in recent years, from 2005 to 2020. Second, we create indicators that

measure stateness stock from 1900 to 2004. Third, we measure the level of these core state institutions (in terms of the core features of stateness) in countries around the world today.

Finally, we use descriptive and inferential statistical analysis to examine how these different aspects of modern statehood and state fragility are associated. We show evidence in particular that a higher stateness stock reduces the probability of getting stuck in a condition of chronic fragility. Further, we find that cumulative experience of monopoly of violence matters more than cumulative experience of having a professional bureaucracy. Interestingly, however, we find little evidence that stateness stock has an impact on the likelihood of being fragile or not today. These results underscore the importance of better understanding of contextual specificities in fragile countries. From a policy perspective, a key implication is that, in designing interventions, the most relevant experiences are likely to be from other countries with similar stateness legacies, rather than from ‘fragile states’ more generally. Our analysis does not mean that statebuilding is impossible in contexts with weak stateness legacies, but it does underscore the challenges of this and the importance of setting expectations appropriately.

Our paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, we review the literature on statebuilding in fragile states and explain why we expect stateness stock to matter for fragility. In Section 3, we discuss the concepts of chronic fragility, temporary fragility, and stateness stock. In Section 4, we introduce the empirical strategy, data, and methods, including the coding and development of our new measures of fragility and stateness. In Section 5, we present our empirical analysis and discuss the results. Section 6 concludes.

## **2 Statebuilding in fragile states**

Building stronger state institutions that are effective, accountable, and inclusive is a globally agreed objective, as stated in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, most explicitly in Goal 16. Yet, decades of international statebuilding efforts with mixed outcomes have shown that building stronger institutions is a challenging task at the very least. This is particularly the case in fragile countries, which have thus become a priority for many actors in international development policy. For instance, the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID) was (until it was closed in 2020) committed to target half of its aid budget to fragile countries, and a recent report by the House of Commons’ International Development Committee recommends DFID’s successor—the Foreign Commonwealth Development Office—to recommit to this objective (IDC 2023). The increased relevance of fragile countries is reflected in scholarly research as well. Between 1991 and 2000, 52 publications included the term ‘state fragility’; this number rose to almost 1,800 between 2001 and 2010 and to about 9,900 between 2011 and 2020.

Despite remarkable attention on state fragility in recent years, many critical questions on statebuilding in these contexts remain unanswered. In particular, there is insufficient understanding of whether and how statebuilding occurs via distinct mechanisms in different contexts. Indeed, many policy-makers seem to neglect that context matters in statebuilding and tend to draw up similar ‘best practices’ for every situation. Research has for some time underscored the importance of considering the different dimensions of the state and state fragility. Typically, these dimensions include state authority, state capacity, and state legitimacy—respectively conceived as political order and security, an administrative apparatus that is able to offer public services, and popular acceptance of rule (e.g. Bratton and Chang 2006; Carbone and Memoli 2015; Gisselquist and Vaccaro 2022; Grävingholt et al. 2015; Ziaja et al. 2019). These dimensions have been important for better analysing and understanding some of the differences in state fragility across countries as well as how different fragile countries function.

Although analysing these dimensions of state fragility has been instrumental in pushing forward the literature, this approach has paid insufficient attention to temporal variation. Much less work has investigated systematically whether currently fragile countries have been fragile for many years uninterruptedly or whether fragility tends to be a short-term rather than a more permanent condition (see, however, Carment and Samy 2019).

The importance of such temporal variation has been well noted in several studies. Englebert and Tull (2008), for one, highlight the lack of consideration of pre-conflict state institutions by external actors as one of the main ‘flawed ideas’ about post-conflict state ‘reconstruction’ in Africa. They observe that many of contemporary Africa’s fragile states never had strong state institutions, thus the task is not state ‘reconstruction’ but the creation of state institutions *ex novo*, and the track record of such statebuilding interventions is particularly poor (Englebert and Tull 2008).

Case studies from other parts of the world point in a similar direction. Drawing on comparative case studies, Gisselquist (2014) argues that one of the main contextual factors that drives divergent statebuilding outcomes is ‘historical state strength’. For instance: in post-Second World War East Asia, the strength of pre-war state institutions emerges as a key factor in determining variation in the outcomes of statebuilding efforts and development trajectories in South Korea, Taiwan, and South Viet Nam (Gray 2014). Japanese colonialism had created a strong bureaucracy with deep territorial penetration in South Korea and Taiwan, but French colonialism in Viet Nam was concerned more with extracting resources from the colony than with creating a strong state apparatus (Gray 2014). In the aftermath of the Second World War, US-led statebuilding efforts were eventually successful in South Korea and Taiwan but failed in South Viet Nam, because the first two countries could take advantage of the stronger state institutions that had been created before the war.

In the same volume, Monten (2014)’s consideration of US-led statebuilding efforts in post-conflict Japan, Iraq, and Afghanistan tells a similar story. In reconstructing post-Second World War Japan, the US relied heavily on a pre-existing state apparatus with well functioning structures and human capital. More recent statebuilding objectives related to the ‘war on terror’ in Afghanistan and Iraq, in contrast, failed, in part due to their weaker pre-existing state institutions. Afghanistan never had a strong central state. Iraq had a stronger, albeit corrupt, state apparatus before the war, but in an attempt to break ties with former political elites US officials preferred not to deploy existing state structures, leading again to unsuccessful statebuilding.

Indeed, there seems to be ample evidence from case studies that statebuilding may be different in ‘*chronically*’ versus *temporarily* fragile states and that ‘supporting the *rebuilding* of a once capable state (even a colonial one) is different from *building* a capable state where one has never existed’ (Gisselquist 2015: 1274). Although systematic consideration of such variation has not been central in the research or policy literature on statebuilding in fragile countries, it does have clear resonance with other literatures on the state more generally. A vast body of scholarship on institutional path dependence, for instance, explores how past institutions affect future institutions. As Putnam (1993: 184) notes, ‘most institutional history moves slowly’. Putnam’s (1993) analysis of institutional performance in Italy illustrates how the functioning of new regional institutions established from 1970 was influenced by civic traditions rooted in the Middle Ages, which gave rise to the country’s traditional division between a well functioning and effective North, with horizontally structured social and political relations, and a dysfunctional and corrupt South, with vertically structured social and political relations. Acemoglu et al. (2001) argue for the path dependence of colonial institutions established by European powers, as these institutions persisted in colonies after independence. Settler colonies such as Australia retained a well functioning institutional framework with property rights protection and checks against government power, whereas extractive colonies such as Belgian Congo kept their dysfunctional institutional framework

(Acemoglu et al. 2001). The British institutional tradition that became established in North America shaped the continent's path towards well functioning institutions, whereas the Spanish and Portuguese institutional tradition continues to shape Latin America's corrupt state bureaucracy (North 1990).

Other studies provide evidence more specifically of the path dependence of democracy. Gerring et al. (2005) show that democratic institutions tend to have a cumulative legacy, rather than an immediate effect on development. Likewise, Persson and Tabellini (2009) show that the accumulation of democratic capital—understood as the historical experience of democracy within a given country or in neighbouring countries—increases democratic stability. Edgell et al.'s (2020) results indicate that democracies with a deeper democratic legacy are less likely to experience large decreases in the level of democracy and become autocracies. These studies indicate that democratic institutions are path-dependent and that not only the current degree of democracy but also past experiences of democracy matter.

Overall, then, the literature suggests that historical experience as a state should play an important role in contemporary statebuilding. Nevertheless, this association has not been examined empirically in a large-N cross-country setting. Our study fills this gap in the literature.

### **3 Chronic and temporary fragility, and stateness stock**

'Stateness' and state fragility are closely related but distinct concepts. We use the term 'stateness' to refer to the existence of a state and whether the core, minimal structures of modern statehood are present in a polity. In contrast, state fragility refers to the quality and performance of a state, not just to its existence. The concept of state fragility thus encompasses a broader idea of the responsibilities of a modern state—what we expect a modern state to deliver and whether it is fulfilling its obligations in the contemporary international community. The most fragile states struggle to function effectively, but they still need to have some degree of stateness, because they are states by definition.

More specifically, the state is 'a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory' (Weber 1946a: 78). For a territory to be identified as a state, such a claim on the monopoly of legitimate use of force must thus be present. We term the historical existence of a state within a given territory 'stateness stock'. A country with higher stateness stock has a deeper legacy of existence as a state. While multiple aspects of the state are usefully distinguished for other purposes (e.g. Andersen et al. 2014; Bratton and Chang 2006; Carbone and Memoli 2015; Carment et al. 2008; Cingolani 2018; Gisselquist and Vaccaro 2022; Grävingholt et al. 2015; Hanson and Sigman 2021; Savoia and Sen 2015; Saylor 2013; Ziaja et al. 2019), our focus here is the existence of a state in this most essential sense.

Drawing on Weberian ideas on the modern state, it can be argued that the very existence of a state as 'a compulsory association which organizes domination' (Weber 1946a: 82) depends primarily on two factors: monopoly of violence and state administration. As described above, the monopoly of the use of force within a territory is an inextricable characteristic of the state by definition. Without such monopoly of violence, a state is in fact not a state in the Weberian sense. To uphold its monopoly of the use of force, a modern state also needs an administrative apparatus, which ensures that the state controls the staff and the material resources needed for 'organized domination' (Weber 1946a). And in a modern state such administrative apparatus takes the form of a professional bureaucracy (Weber 2019).

Scholars have identified other important dimensions of the state. In addition to the distinction between authority, capacity, and legitimacy, common dimensions include the fiscal, infrastructural, and legal capacities of the state (Cingolani 2018; Savoia and Sen 2015)—respectively, the state’s ability to raise tax revenues, control territory through its infrastructure, and enforce laws and contracts—and, more recently, also the informational capacity of the state (D’Arcy and Nistotskaya 2018; Lee and Zhang 2017; vom Hau et al. 2023), understood as the ability of the state to gather information on the society. Nevertheless, regardless of whether additional aspects are considered or not, the two above-discussed aspects—monopoly of violence and state administration—tend to be at the core of any definition of stateness. Hence, additional aspects of the state are important, but are also secondary to and dependent on monopoly of violence and state administration.

Our core hypothesis is that stateness stock influences contemporary state trajectories. Specifically, we expect to find (1) that states with stronger stateness stock are less likely to be chronically fragile (HP1). A related, but weaker expectation is (2) that states with stronger stateness stock are less likely to be fragile and more likely to be non-fragile (HP2). In brief, we expect that even states with strong stock may occasionally be classified as fragile due to various shocks or crises, but they will rarely be chronically so. Due to their stateness stock, they will have greater domestic capacity to both withstand crises and exit fragility, with or without international assistance. Externally supported ‘statebuilding’ efforts will thus be qualitatively different in states with strong stateness stock versus weak stock—because, as discussed in the previous section, ‘rebuilding’ a state is different from ‘creating’ a state where it never (strongly) existed.

We additionally distinguish between countries that are today chronically fragile or temporarily fragile. This distinction is based on the persistence of fragility within a certain period—in our analysis from 2005 to 2020 (i.e. in recent memory). If a country is fragile but has had a functioning state apparatus at some point in recent memory, we consider the country temporarily fragile. Conversely, fragile countries that have not had functioning state institutions in recent memory are considered to suffer from chronic fragility. Fragility has been a concept of significance in international policy discussions only in the past few decades, and we follow standard sources in identifying fragile countries. Similarly, our focus on the period 2005–20 in this paper is due to the availability of standard source data on this period.

Real-world cases illustrate the difference between chronic and temporary fragility more clearly. Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo are chronically fragile countries. They have never had a functioning state apparatus. Ukraine, on the other hand, is a temporarily fragile country. Prior to the ongoing war against Russia, we would not have described it as fragile nor expected it to become fragile. Yet it is today a war-torn country that is unable to effectively deliver the services that citizens can expect from a modern state. Put simply, Ukraine was a well functioning country in recent memory but is not one at the moment. It is therefore a temporarily fragile country.

In the long term, although not a focus of the paper at hand, we expect that countries can transition between chronic and temporary fragility or between temporary fragility and non-fragility. For instance, after a devastating civil war in the early 1950s, ‘the South Korean state was unable either to feed its people or to provide them with basic necessities’ (Gray 2014: 44). It was fragile, as it did not have the capability to deliver basic services to its citizens. But South Korea managed to exit fragility in the subsequent decades and has today strong and effective state institutions. On the other hand, a country like Ukraine could be facing a dim future and transition from temporary to chronic fragility in the long run. An indefinite protraction of the ongoing war is likely to lead to chronic fragility. Even if a prolonged ‘war of attrition’ is avoided, a successful reconstruction process is not guaranteed. For instance, after the war, there could be a lack of skilled bureaucrats, memory of good pre-war institutions could be diminished, the state could be unable to deliver



basic public services, uncontrollable pockets of unrest could arise, and the central state could lose its monopoly of violence in some parts of the country.

Several earlier studies have also usefully distinguished empirically between different conditions of fragility in terms of persistence, although our approach is somewhat different. In particular, Carment and Samy (2019) identify countries that are in a fragility ‘trap’, those that move in and out of such a trap, and those that have exited it. The authors focus, however, on a longer and earlier period, as well as on different criteria to distinguish between the three categories. Chauvet and Collier (2008) also distinguish between ‘failing’ states and countries that have a ‘sustained turnaround’. Yet, again, they focus on an earlier period and use different definitions for the two categories. A sustained turnaround is achieved when performance is good for six consecutive years, but it remains unclear whether such a sustained turnaround is synonymous with non-fragility. Our approach additionally considers the impact of long-term historical experience of stateness on fragility’s persistence.

## **4 Empirical strategy, data, and methods**

Our empirical analysis has three main parts. First, based on existing secondary data from multiple sources, we classify countries as chronically fragile, temporarily fragile, or non-fragile. Second, based on existing secondary data from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) dataset, we develop new measures of stateness stock. Third, through descriptive and inferential statistical analysis, we use these data to investigate the relationship between stateness stock and current condition of state fragility.

### **4.1 Chronic and temporary fragility**

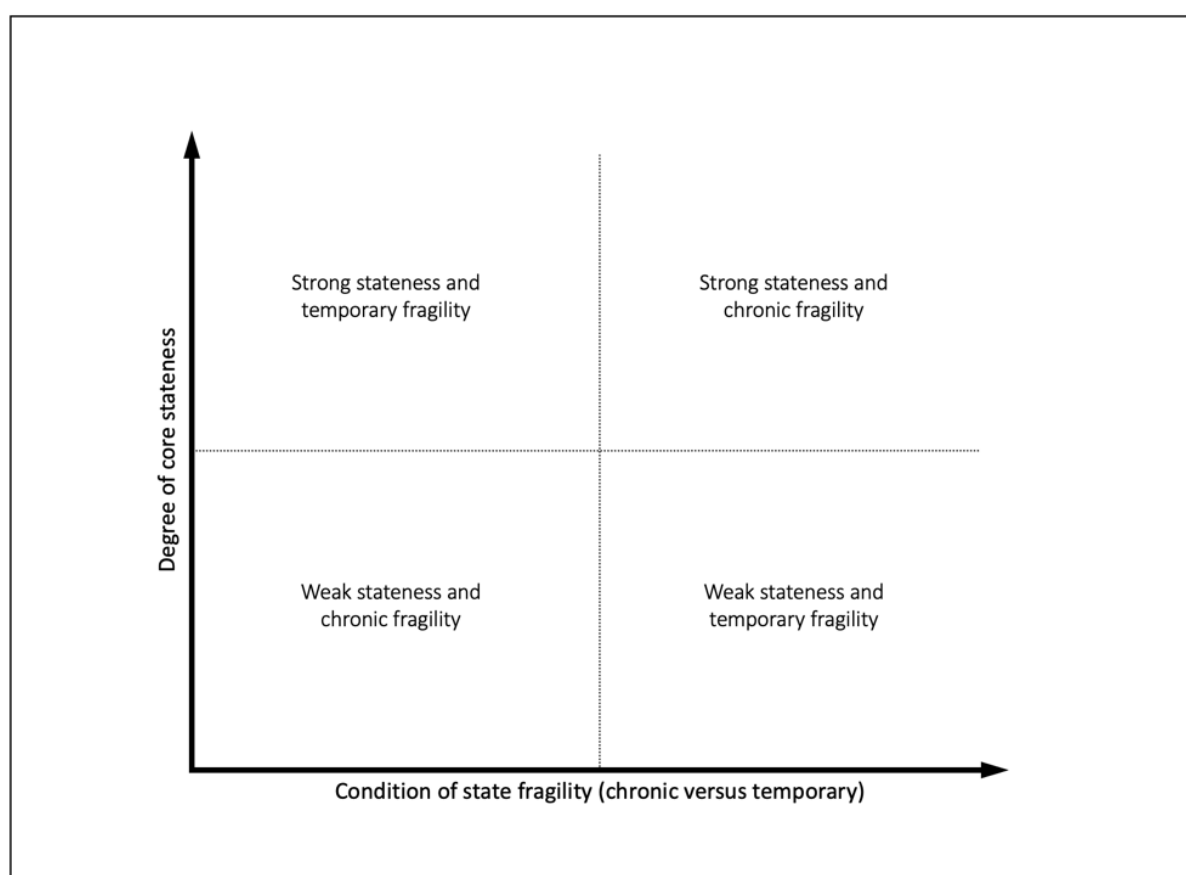
In distinguishing countries with chronic and temporary state fragility, we rely on some of the most widely used state fragility datasets: the OECD’s States of Fragility (SOF), the Fund for Peace’s Fragile States Index (FSI), and the Centre for Systemic Peace’s State Fragility Index (SFI). The SOF (OECD 2022) classifies countries according to three degrees of fragility: as not fragile, fragile, or extremely fragile. The FSI classifies countries in as many as 11 categories of degree of fragility: very sustainable, sustainable, very stable, more stable, stable, warning, elevated warning, high warning, alert, high alert, and very high alert. The SFI, in contrast, classifies countries in six categories of fragility: extreme, high, serious, moderate, low, and little or no fragility. We also consider using other well known fragility data sources, including the World Bank’s list of fragile and conflict-affected situations, although this list includes in total fewer than 40 countries—less than half of the countries we identify as fragile based on the three above datasets.

The chosen datasets are helpful in identifying which countries are fragile and non-fragile, together with their degree of fragility. Nevertheless, these datasets do not provide explicit information on which countries are chronically or temporarily fragile, as this last distinction is related not only to the degree of fragility but also—and in particular—to its condition in terms of persistence (Figure 1).

We first classify countries as fragile or non-fragile on the basis of their dataset-specific classification in the years of available data in each dataset from 2005 onwards (2007–22 for SOF; 2005–22 for

FSI; 2005–18 for SFI).<sup>1</sup> Distinguishing between fragile and non-fragile countries is straightforward with SOF. We treat ‘fragile’ and ‘extremely fragile’ countries with SOF as fragile, and the remaining ones as non-fragile. The exercise is more challenging with FSI and SFI, as these two datasets distinguish between numerous levels of fragility. For FSI, we code ‘high warning’, ‘alert’, ‘high alert’, and ‘very high alert’ countries as fragile, and the remaining countries as non-fragile. For SFI, we code ‘high’, ‘serious’, and ‘extremely fragile’ countries as fragile, and the remaining countries as non-fragile.

Figure 1: Today’s fragile countries: degree of stateness and condition of fragility



Source: authors’ construction.

These groupings provide a good first step on our way to developing a classification between temporarily and chronically fragile countries. Based on these three datasets we create our own classification. Chronically fragile countries are those countries that are classified as fragile for at least 10 consecutive years by at least one of the three fragility datasets. Temporarily fragile countries are those countries that are classified as fragile at some point in time by at least two of the three fragility datasets, but are not classified as fragile for 10 consecutive years or more by any of the fragility datasets. Countries that are never classified as fragile, that are classified as fragile at some point in time by only one of the three fragility datasets, and that are not classified as fragile for at least 10 consecutive years by any of the fragility datasets are treated as non-fragile countries. We

<sup>1</sup> Following Teorell et al. (2021), the timing of the FSI data has been changed. In the original reports, the data reflect the situation in the previous year, not the year of the report. Hence, data from the 2023 report were recorded in 2022, data from the 2022 report were recorded in 2021, and so on.

thus base our classification on multiple widely used sources rather than just a single dataset, increasing our classification's robustness.

The outcome of the above process is ultimately a classification of fragile countries between chronically and temporarily fragile ones, as well as a residual category for non-fragile countries. This last category includes all countries that exist in at least one of the fragility datasets and are not classified as chronically or temporarily fragile. Our classification then includes 57 chronically fragile countries, 45 temporarily fragile countries, and 82 non-fragile countries (Table S1, Supplementary Material).

Distinguishing between these different categories necessarily involves a degree of arbitrariness, as fragility cannot be directly observed. The distinction between fragile and non-fragile countries or between chronic and temporary fragility is more open to interpretation than, say, whether the temperature is below or above 0 degrees Celsius. There is no clear threshold for fragility or its persistence. We adopt this approach for three key reasons. First, it relies on information from three widely used fragility datasets, rather than just one or two of them, and thus is more likely to reflect common understandings. Second, the threshold of a decade for distinguishing chronic fragility from temporary fragility is a round number and arguably less arbitrary than, for instance, 8, 9, or 11 years. We have also considered different thresholds and their implications for the identification of both fragile and non-fragile countries as well as chronically and temporarily fragile countries. The chosen threshold best strikes a balance between minimizing arbitrariness and maximizing empirical face validity. Finally, in terms of the distinction between fragility and non-fragility, the two groups of countries are similar in terms of size in each of the three fragility datasets.

## **4.2 Stateness stock**

We create a continuous index that quantifies the historical existence of a state within a given territory, or stateness stock, where higher values indicate a deeper state institutional legacy.

In building such a stateness stock index, we are guided by the literature on democracy, where a few scholars have created similar 'stock variables' for democracy (Edgell et al. 2020; Gerring et al. 2005; Persson and Tabellini 2009) and civil society (Bernhard and Edgell 2022). Following a common strategy adopted in these studies, our final stock index is based on a weighted cumulative sum of stateness for each country.

Compared with studies on democracy, a typical problem in the literature on state fragility is that measures of the state or its different dimensions do not extend back in time far enough to credibly account for the institutional legacy of the state that we aim to measure. This includes both standard measures of state fragility (including SOF, FSI, and SFI) and other related measures such as Kaufmann et al.'s (2011) Worldwide Governance Indicators (available from 1996 on), Bertelsmann Stiftung's Transformation Index (available from 2004 on), Rice and Patrick's (2008) Index of State Weakness (available only in 2008), or Ziaja et al.'s (2019) Constellations of Fragility (available from 2005 to 2015).

To quantify long-term stateness stock, we use data from the well known Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) dataset (Coppedge et al. 2023). Some of its indicators extend as far back as 1789, and the various indicators that we use here extend back to at least 1900. Through these data we are thus able to create an index that captures the stock of stateness in countries around the world from 1900 to 2004.

We focus on two key measures of the existence of a state. Going back to basics, our core indicator, 'political violence', proxies (successful) claims on the monopoly of legitimate use of physical force

within the territory. This indicator quantifies the degree of physical violence against persons that non-state actors have used in a given year to achieve political objectives.

We also consider alternative indicators to capture monopoly of violence. Another indicator from the V-Dem dataset that scholars have recently used to measure this aspect of stateness is ‘state authority over territory’. While at first glance this indicator may seem an equally valid measure of monopoly of violence, it would be erroneous to think that the territorial reach of the state is entirely equivalent to its monopoly of violence. For instance, a state might have effective authority on most of its territory, but not necessarily the monopoly of legitimate use of violence. These two indicators are strongly and positively correlated (Pearson’s  $r$ : 0.60 in 2022). Yet their empirical differences illustrate the above point while also confirming that the chosen indicator better reflects the monopoly of violence. For instance, in 2022, Somalia and Cyprus had approximately the same score with the ‘state authority over territory’ indicator, and Syria had higher ‘state authority over territory’ than either Somalia or Cyprus. Afghanistan, however, had higher ‘state authority over territory’ than countries like Costa Rica and Italy, but did not score well in terms of ‘political violence’.

Additionally, there is a large literature showing that historically in some parts of the world—especially in sub-Saharan Africa—controlling people was more important than territorial control, in contrast with the priorities of effectively controlling the territory in other more densely populated regions of the world, such as Europe (e.g. Herbst 2014). Having the authority over legitimate use of force seems instead to be a more universal characteristic of the state, as no expert would claim that large-scale violence perpetuated by non-state actors has ever reflected a strong state.

We also consider other indicators that have been used to capture the ‘coercive’ capacity of the state. The International Country Risk Guide’s (ICRG) ‘internal conflicts’, the FSI’s ‘security apparatus’, and Bertelsmann Stiftung’s ‘monopoly on the use of force’ are some of the most valid alternative perception-based indicators that cover most countries in the world. But these indicators all suffer from a previously discussed shortcoming: none of them goes back in time far enough to potentially reflect stateness stock. The first extends back to 1984, the second and third only until 2005 and 2006, respectively.

Some scholars have used ‘objective’ measures such as the amount of military expenditure or the number of armed forces personnel to capture monopoly of violence. These indicators may offer a longer time-series, but we believe that they represent at best a very specific characteristic of the state’s monopoly of violence, and at worst something entirely different. Costa Rica illustrates why these objective indicators cannot be considered valid for our purposes: the country has no standing army at all, but its state apparatus is still capable of upholding effectively its monopoly of violence.

Second, we consider the existence of the state as a formal institution in its own right, using the indicator ‘bureaucratic remuneration’ as a proxy. This indicator captures whether those who act as state administrators are employed by the state, with a contract and regular pay from state coffers (rather than, for instance, acting as volunteers or being paid by a private patron). We again consider various other indicators from the V-Dem dataset and other data providers. However, as before, we believe that the chosen indicator outperforms other potentially relevant options in terms of both face validity and coverage. V-Dem’s ‘rigorous and impartial public administration’ and ‘criteria for appointment decisions in the state administration’ have been used in past studies to reflect the quality of state bureaucracy (e.g. in Cornell et al. 2020). It is possible to make a case for both indicators, as they indeed reflect certain important aspects of state bureaucracy. ‘Impartiality in the exercise of public power’ is at the core of the related concept of ‘quality of government’ (Rothstein and Teorell 2008). And neutral and impersonal public officials are at the core of the

Weberian ideal type of bureaucracy (Weber 1946b). Meritocratic appointment decisions can be understood as acting in accordance with the principle of impartiality when recruiting public officials. Yet, bureaucratic remuneration seems to reflect more closely the core of a modern state bureaucracy and more specifically its actual existence in first place. That its officials receive a fixed salary is one of the main characteristics of a modern state administration, in contrast with administrative officials in other types of rule, who are not salaried employees but figures like vassals, personal servants, disciples, followers, or party trustees (Weber 2019). A state bureaucracy that does not have salaried employees is thus not a modern state bureaucracy, whereas indicators of impartiality—whether in the general exercise of power or in the recruitment process—reflect the procedural quality of a modern state bureaucracy but undermine less its very existence. A state bureaucracy where officials are corrupt is common in many countries, but this does not undermine the very existence of the state. A similar logic applies to meritocratic recruitment. In contrast, a state bureaucracy where public officials are unremunerated cannot be considered a modern state bureaucracy in the Weberian sense.

As before, we also consider other indicators that have been used to measure the degree of state bureaucracy from other sources. Yet, again, alternative options appear to be inferior in terms of face validity and coverage. Conceptually relevant, perception-based indicators such as Bertelsmann Stiftung’s ‘basic administration’, Worldwide Governance Indicators’ ‘government effectiveness’, and ICRG’s ‘bureaucracy quality’ do not have an adequate time-series coverage to capture the long-term experience of a state bureaucracy. The first goes back in time until 2006, the second until 1996, and the third until 1984. Objective indicators of professional bureaucracy, in contrast, are in short supply. Some studies have used objective measures of taxation to reflect the state’s capacity to extract revenues, which is closely linked with professional bureaucracy. A modern state bureaucracy collects taxes and manages tax revenues, and in turn these revenues can ensure the functioning of a bureaucracy and that officials are salaried. But measures like total taxes as a share of GDP or income taxes as a share of total taxes are substantially affected by political choices and less to the point for our purposes.

Our stateness stock index is thus based on the above two indicators of stateness: monopoly of violence and professional bureaucracy. We consider these indicators in assessing stateness stock first by constructing an equally weighted index of both (‘aggregate stateness stock’); and second by considering each separately (‘monopoly of violence stock’ and ‘professional bureaucracy stock’). Originally, the two sub-indicators of aggregate stateness have opposite polarity: higher scores in political violence mean less monopoly of violence, whereas higher scores in bureaucratic remuneration mean more professional bureaucracy. Hence, we invert the scale of political violence so that higher scores mean more monopoly of violence. Because of V-Dem’s measurement process, these two indicators run on an interval scale and have originally both negative and positive values, similar to a normal Z-score. We ensure that the two indicators do not have negative values and rescale them by adding to every observation a constant—the absolute value of the lowest observed value in each indicator.

We then sum the yearly scores from 1900 to 2004 separately for each of the two indicators, weighted by an annual depreciation rate. It is reasonable to assume that experiences of stateness in the distant past matter less for current stateness stock compared with more recent experiences of stateness. Nevertheless, we do not know the ‘true’ depreciation rate for stateness. Persson and Tabellini (2009) and Edgell et al. (2020) use 1% and 6% yearly depreciation rates for their measures of democratic stock. Bernhard and Edgell (2022) argue that a 10% yearly depreciation rate is more appropriate for their civil society stock index, as civil society participation tends to be less persistent than democracy. As illustrated in Figure S1 (Supplementary Material), we also find evidence that stateness is less persistent than democracy. It thus seems appropriate to use a higher depreciation

rate for stateness than for democracy. Based on these considerations, we use a 10% depreciation rate for stateness in the main analysis and run robustness tests with a lower, 6%, depreciation rate.<sup>2</sup>

We also normalize (min–max) both sub-indicators to equalize their scales, so that they range from 0 to 5, low to high. At this stage of the procedure, the two indicators can be used to reflect the stocks of monopoly of violence and professional bureaucracy. Finally, we aggregate additively the data to quantify total stateness stock, simply computed as the sum of the two components. Total stateness stock is thus scaled from 0 to 10, low to high.

Last, it is important to discuss how we treat questions related to sample selection and missing data. In principle, our sample includes all available country-years in which a country is marked as independent by V-Dem coders (i.e. *v2svindep* = 1). A major complication, however, is caused by countries that have gaps in their time-series, for instance because of occupation by other countries (e.g. South Korea between 1910 and 1947) or because of exclusion from the V-Dem dataset (e.g. the Baltic states between 1940 and 1990). While experience of stateness is unlikely to just disappear during such a gap, it is also difficult to estimate whether it stops accumulating during these gaps or whether a certain degree of stateness can also be accumulated under the rule of an ‘external’ governing power (and if so, how much?). In prioritizing simplification over complexity, we add to our sample all country-years for countries that have gaps in their time series and recode them as 0. In other words, during the ‘gap’ years past experience of stateness continues to depreciate annually but no new experience is added to the stock.

As this choice is somewhat arbitrary, we run robustness tests with an alternative sample that includes all available country-years—regardless of whether a country is independent or not. In this alternative sample, instead of recoding the gaps as 0, we assign them the value of the occupying/governing power, following the recoding rules listed by Edgell et al. (2020). The results of these tests are presented in the Supplementary Material and briefly discussed in the Section 5.

Both sample selection strategies are further affected by the problem of missing data. Even if V-Dem’s indicators have extensive time coverage, there are a few countries with missing data at some point in time in our sub-indicators—even after filling the above-discussed gaps. These countries are generally excluded from our aggregate stock measure. We do not have information on their level of monopoly of violence and/or professional bureaucracy in years with missing values, so their stateness stock would be affected by this missingness rather than ‘true’ experience. In the alternative sample, however, we make an exception to this rule for countries that have just a small number of missing values. To avoid dropping out such countries, we recode all spells of consecutive missing values that last less than 20 years with the values of the first available year after the spell for that country. Country-years that are recoded and countries that are dropped because of missing data are listed in detail in Table S2 (Supplementary Material).

The two component indicators of our stateness stock measure are also used to capture the degree of current stateness in 2022. Our dataset thus allows us to differentiate between the degree of current stateness, the stock of stateness from 1900 to 2004, and the contemporary condition of state fragility (chronically fragile, temporarily fragile, or non-fragile) in 2005–20. Even though these different dimensions of stateness and state fragility have been highlighted in some studies, the

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<sup>2</sup> Figure S2 (Supplementary Material) illustrates how a different depreciation rate affects the stateness stock of a hypothetical country that has a maximum level of stateness in year 1900 but does not accumulate stateness in subsequent years.

cross-country empirical literature on the topic has not yet systematically explored their interlinkages.

### 4.3 Methods

We begin the empirical part of our study with a descriptive analysis of the data. The aim of this is to gain an initial understanding of the links between the different aspects of stateness and state fragility through observable patterns in the data. In doing so, in addition to the above-discussed measures of the state we select various indicators of social and economic development and analyse them in relation to our measures of the state. These ‘development indicators’ are GDP/capita, life expectancy, infant mortality, years of education, gender inequality, and democracy.

Then, to provide a more robust assessment of our two hypotheses, we carry out a set of multivariate regressions where we can control for the ‘effect’ of potential confounders. Importantly, our outcome variables are categorical. Regarding the first hypothesis, our outcome variable can take the following three values: 2 for chronically fragile, 1 for temporarily fragile, and 0 for non-fragile countries. Regarding the second hypothesis, our outcome variable can take the following two values: 1 for fragile countries and 0 for non-fragile countries. Our outcome variables are thus respectively nominal (with three categories) and dichotomous. As both outcome variables fail to meet the key assumptions of ordinary least squares (OLS), we run multinomial logistic regressions (for HP1) and logistic regressions (for HP2) (not presented here but available from the authors on request).

In line with previous studies, we control for factors that may be affecting the relationship between stateness stock and contemporary condition of fragility. Continuous control variables are measured as a 5-year average between 2000 and 2004. Even if the objective of our analysis is not to determine causality but association, doing so ensures that predictors are measured before  $y$ . Baseline models include ‘standard’ controls for GDP/capita and total population. Additionally, we run more complex models that control for other potential factors influencing the contemporary condition of fragility: democracy, colonial heritage, geographic location (i.e. whether a country is in sub-Saharan Africa), ethnic fractionalization, and natural resources rents.

According to Carment and Samy (2019), a lack of legitimacy might cause countries to remain trapped in fragility. Even though legitimacy and democracy are not completely equivalent concepts, the authors use democracy as a proxy for legitimacy. We follow their strategy and control for level of democracy.

Studies have shown that different colonial powers established different institutions in colonies and that this variation continues to shape institutions in former colonies today (Acemoglu et al. 2001; Gray 2014; North 1990). We thus control for whether a country is a former British colony or not, as the heritage of British rule has been seen as beneficial for later institutional quality (e.g. Bäck and Hadenius 2008; Treisman 2000).

We also control for whether a country is in sub-Saharan Africa or not. In particular, Herbst (2014) finds that state development in Africa differed from that in other parts of the world, since in a vast and sparsely populated territory, controlling people was more important than controlling land.

A country’s ethnic composition is another factor that has been argued to potentially play a role in fragility, although empirical findings on the consequences of different forms of ethnic complexity remain essentially inconclusive (e.g. Bates 2008). Hence, we control for within-country ethnic fractionalization.

Finally, it has been argued that abundant natural resources can cause fragility or impede exiting fragility. For instance, countries that can rely on revenues from natural resources have less need to collect taxes and build well functioning public institutions, and become more prone to conflict (Carment and Samy 2019). We thus control for natural resources rents.

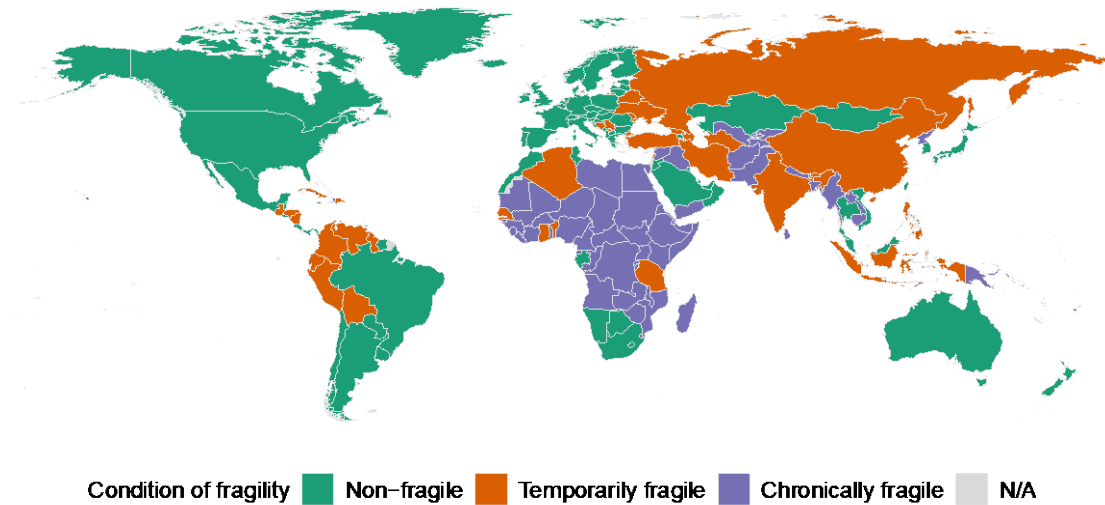
We first include each of these potential confounders separately, then control for all of them simultaneously in ‘full’ models. Results are discussed below. Previously discussed standard controls for GDP/capita and total population are included in every model.

## 5 Results and discussion

### 5.1 Descriptive analysis

The world map in Figure 2 presents our classification into chronically fragile, temporarily fragile, and non-fragile countries. As will be seen, chronically fragile countries are heavily concentrated in sub-Saharan Africa. Of the 57 chronically fragile countries, as many as 36 are in sub-Saharan Africa, while 12 are in Asia and the Pacific, 5 are in the Middle East and North Africa, 3 are in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and 1 country (Haiti) is in Latin America and the Caribbean. Temporarily fragile countries, in contrast, are more evenly scattered across the world.

Figure 2: Countries in the world according to their contemporary condition of fragility



Source: authors' construction.

Temporarily fragile countries perform considerably better than chronically fragile countries across various indicators of development (Table 1). On average, temporarily fragile countries have higher GDP/capita and life expectancy, more years of education, lower infant mortality, and less gender inequality than chronically fragile countries. They are also more democratic than chronically fragile countries. Temporarily fragile countries, in turn, perform worse than non-fragile countries across all these indicators. These numbers are hardly surprising and suggest that, while being temporarily fragile is better than being chronically fragile, being non-fragile is clearly the most advantageous contemporary condition of fragility in terms of development outcomes.



Table 1: Condition of fragility and development indicators

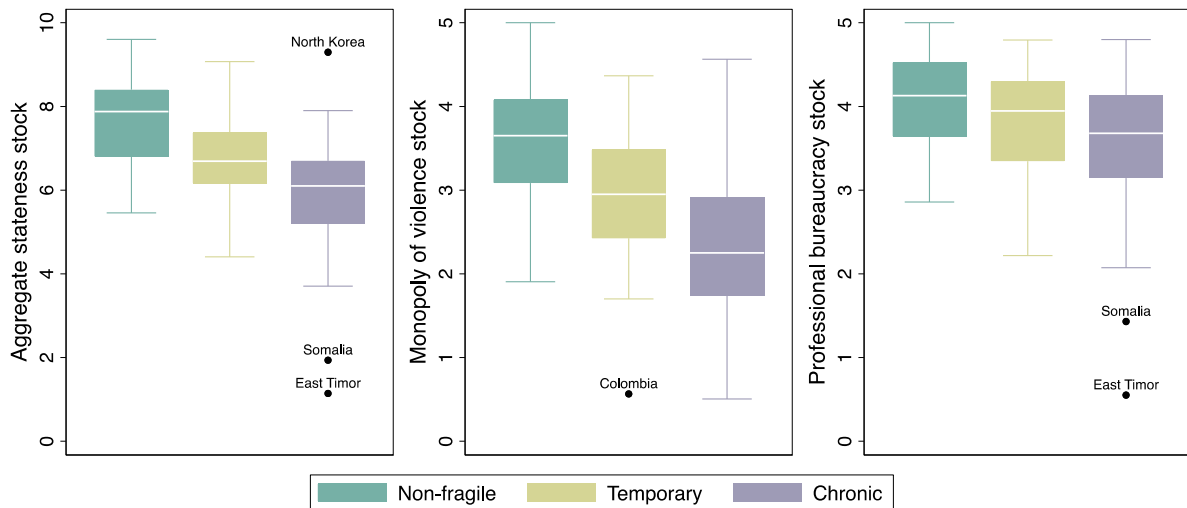
	Chronic			Temporary			Non-fragile		
	Mean	Median	N	Mean	Median	N	Mean	Median	N
GDP/capita*	4.73	3.02	53	10.63	10.17	36	31.18	27.57	71
Life expectancy	66.94	66.30	53	73.27	73.80	35	78.18	78.60	71
Infant mortality	53.26	51.50	53	21.22	19.50	35	8.53	6.19	71
Years of education	5.26	4.91	39	7.75	7.65	26	10.14	10.41	55
Gender inequality	0.52	0.50	51	0.36	0.33	35	0.19	0.10	71
Democracy	0.33	0.30	53	0.45	0.44	36	0.66	0.78	71

Note: \* latent variable estimate based on multiple GDP/capita figures (Coppedge et al. 2023).

Source: authors' construction.

We start by exploring our stateness stock measures—the aggregate index as well as its two sub-components—in relation to the contemporary condition of fragility. The box plots in Figure 3 show that our stateness stock measures closely reflect the contemporary condition of fragility. Non-fragile countries tend to have higher stateness stock than fragile countries, whereas, within fragile countries, stateness stock is higher in temporarily fragile countries than in chronically fragile countries. These results hold regardless of whether we use the aggregate stateness stock measure or one of its two sub-component indicators. Interestingly, on average, countries have a higher stock of professional bureaucracy than monopoly of violence—regardless of their contemporary condition of fragility. Also, differences between the three categories of contemporary fragility are smallest for the stock of professional bureaucracy. Variation between countries within the three categories (i.e. dispersion) tends to be particularly high for chronically fragile countries, as illustrated by the longer whiskers and/or multiple outliers.

Figure 3: Box plots of stateness stock, according to contemporary condition of fragility

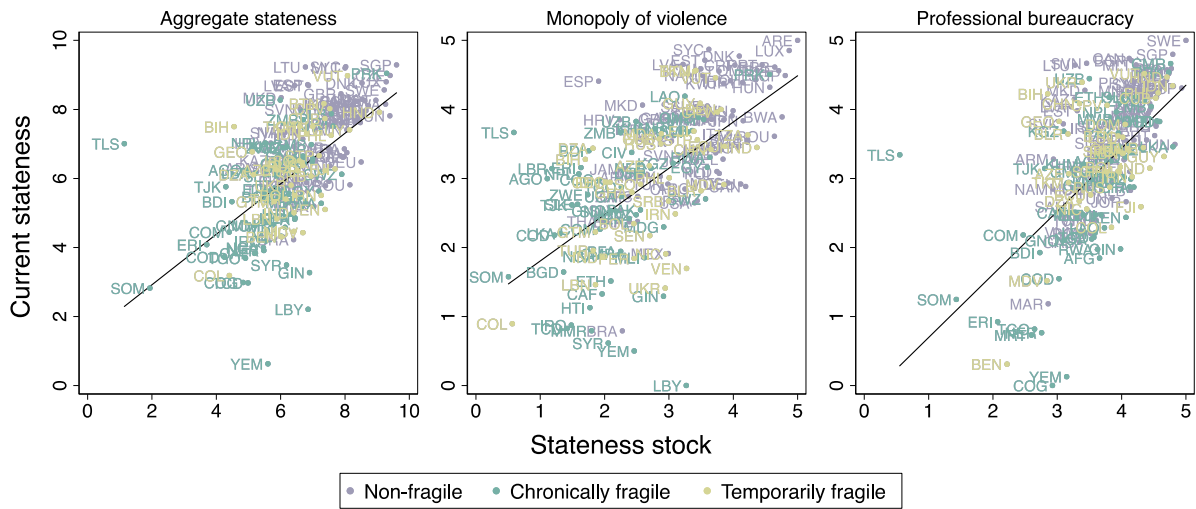


Source: authors' construction.

We continue our statistical exercise by analysing the bivariate association between current degree of stateness and stateness stock. The scatter plots in Figure 4 display the correlations between aggregate values (left panel), monopoly of violence (middle panel), and professional bureaucracy (right panel). Correlations are strong and positive ( $r = 0.62$  in all three cases), showing that higher stateness stock does indeed go together with a higher degree of current stateness. Most countries with low aggregate stateness stock and low aggregate present-day stateness are chronically fragile countries in sub-Saharan Africa like Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Burundi. Consolidated 'old' European states like Sweden, the United Kingdom, and Switzerland tend to

populate the upper-right corner of the plots, reflecting a combination of strong historical stateness and a high degree of stateness today.

Figure 4: Stateness stock, current stateness (2022), and contemporary condition of fragility



Note: from left to right: Pearson's  $r = 0.62$ ,  $0.62$ , and  $0.62$ . With a lower depreciation rate (6%) these correlation coefficients are  $0.47$ ,  $0.55$ , and  $0.48$ , respectively.

Source: authors' construction.

Yet, there are many countries in which the general pattern does not hold. Many of these 'atypical' countries are chronically fragile. Consider, for instance, Timor-Leste, Libya, and Angola—three chronically fragile countries. The first has one of the lowest stateness stocks in the world, in part because of its relatively recent independence, but has an average level of core stateness today. The second, despite having a higher level of stateness stock, suffers from a lack of core stateness today, especially due to insufficient monopoly of violence. And the third has an average level of core stateness today but a low stateness stock that is mainly driven by a lack of historical experience of monopoly of violence.

We also check whether these associations hold if our alternative annual depreciation rate is used to compute the stock measures. With a 6% depreciation rate (i.e. the influence of past stateness is more persistent) the correlations are slightly weaker but still positive: current aggregate stateness is positively correlated with aggregate stateness stock ( $r = 0.47$ ), current monopoly of violence is positively correlated with stock of monopoly of violence ( $r = 0.55$ ), and current professional bureaucracy is positively correlated with stock of professional bureaucracy ( $r = 0.48$ ). Put simply, historical stateness and present-day stateness tend to be positively associated, but when we give more weight to stateness in the distant past, the stock measures become slightly less related to current stateness.

As we did earlier with our classification of contemporary condition of fragility (chronic, temporary, and non-fragile), we explore how countries with high and low stateness stock (top 25% and bottom 25% of the data, respectively) perform in relation to common development indicators (Table 2). The numbers at hand indicate that stronger historical experience of stateness means better development outcomes today. Countries with low stateness stock tend to be poorer and less democratic than countries with high stateness stock. Gender inequality and infant mortality are considerably higher in countries with a weak experience of stateness. And people in countries with low stateness stock tend to have shorter lives and tend to be less educated than people in countries

with high stateness stock. The ‘development gap’ between countries with low stateness stock and countries with high stateness stock thus seems to be large in all aspects of development.

Table 2: Stateness stock and development indicators

		Low stock			High stock		
		Mean	Median	N	Mean	Median	N
Aggregate	GDP/capita*	7.47	4.14	40	34.42	31.56	40
	Life expectancy	69.51	69.65	40	77.89	80.25	40
	Infant mortality	45.51	40.65	40	9.05	5.78	40
	Years of education	6.12	5.75	28	10.53	10.95	33
	Gender inequality	0.49	0.50	39	0.15	0.07	39
	Democracy	0.37	0.33	40	0.69	0.79	40
Violence	GDP/capita*	7.94	4.22	40	34.59	28.81	41
	Life expectancy	70.06	70.10	40	78.34	79.90	41
	Infant mortality	44.11	40.65	40	10.35	6.19	41
	Years of education	5.92	5.91	28	9.95	10.53	31
	Gender inequality	0.49	0.50	39	0.17	0.10	41
	Democracy	0.38	0.32	40	0.67	0.78	41
Bureaucracy	GDP/capita*	12.18	10.07	41	30.91	28.42	40
	Life expectancy	71.22	71.40	41	77.40	79.05	40
	Infant mortality	34.46	20.90	41	13.17	5.78	40
	Years of education	7.34	7.49	28	9.70	10.27	36
	Gender inequality	0.42	0.40	41	0.18	0.10	40
	Democracy	0.38	0.32	41	0.65	0.78	40

Note: \* latent variable estimate based on multiple GDP/capita figures (Coppedge et al. 2023). Low stock means bottom 25% of observations; high stock means top 25% of observations.

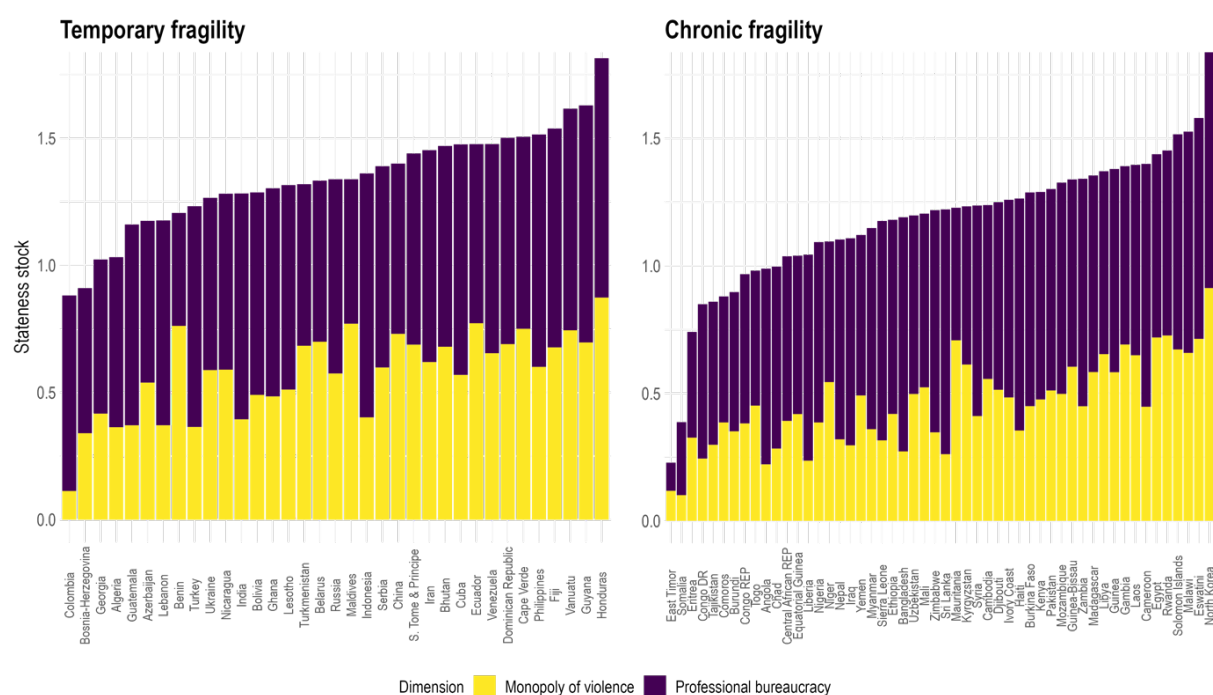
Source: authors’ construction.

We explore in more detail today’s temporarily and chronically fragile countries in relation to their aggregate stateness stock (Figure 6) and current aggregate degree of stateness (Figure 7). These bar plots highlight that there is considerable heterogeneity across countries, not only in terms of stateness stock or current degree of stateness, but also in terms of the two dimensions of stateness as well as the contemporary condition of fragility.

Heterogeneity notwithstanding, however, there are a few evident patterns in the data. Regarding stateness stock (Figure 6), first of all, fragile countries with particularly low stateness stock tend to be chronically fragile. There are 11 chronically fragile countries with an aggregate stateness stock level of less than 5 (mid-point of the scale), but only two temporarily fragile countries where aggregate stateness stock remains below this threshold—Colombia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

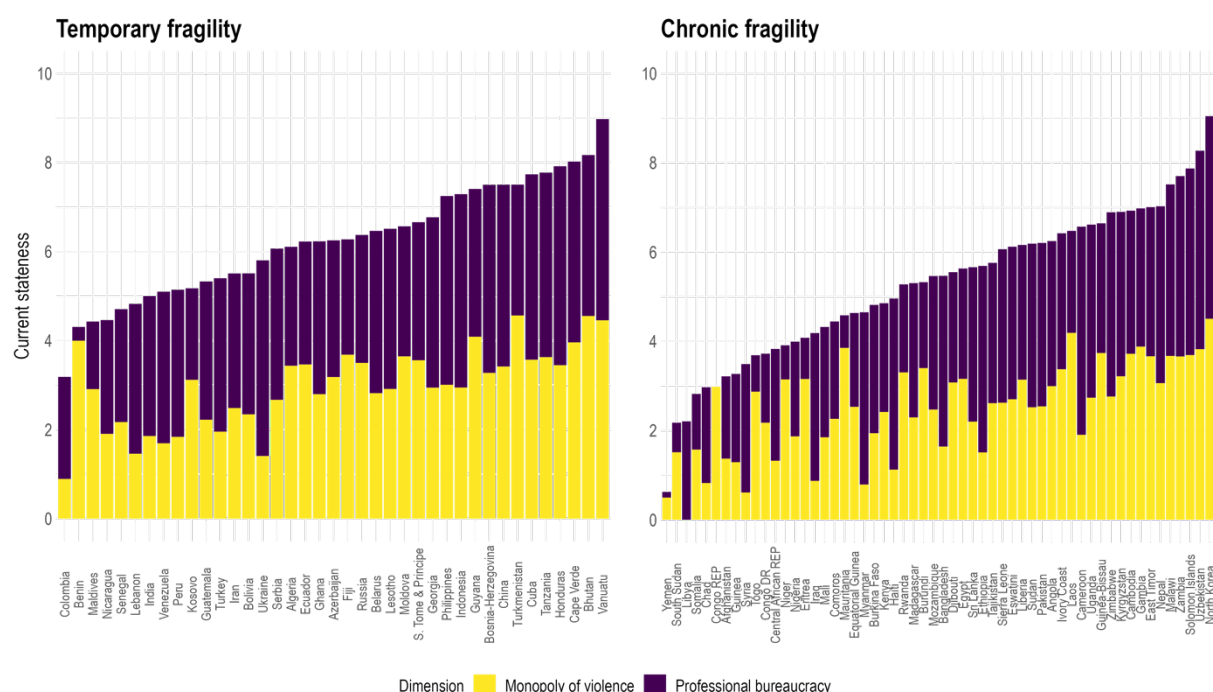
Second, historical experience of professional bureaucracy clearly outweighs the stock of monopoly of violence in most fragile countries. As for chronically fragile countries, the only exception is Mauritania. As for temporarily fragile countries, historical experience of monopoly of violence is substantially stronger than historical experience of professional bureaucracy only in Benin and Maldives.

Figure 6: Stateness stock (1900–2004)



Source: authors' construction.

Figure 7: Current degree of stateness (2022)



Source: authors' construction.

This means that countries that can be identified today as fragile have accumulated more experience of professional bureaucracy than monopoly of violence in the past century. Extreme discrepancies between the two aspects of stateness in terms of stock are more common in chronically fragile countries than in temporarily fragile ones. As many as 31% of the countries classified as chronically fragile have a difference of more than 1.25 ( $\frac{1}{4}$  of the scale) in the stock of the two core features

of stateness. Conversely, only 17% of countries classified as temporarily fragile show such a large difference between these two core features of stateness stock. These numbers suggest that, if the current condition of chronic fragility is driven by something, that something is more likely to be a lack of experience of monopoly of violence than a lack of experience of a state administration with professional civil servants.

The discrepancies between the two contemporary conditions of fragility are clearer if we move from the stock measures to the current level of stateness (Figure 7). All temporarily fragile countries except Benin have today at least a moderate degree (i.e. over  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the scale) of professional bureaucracy. Similarly, Colombia is the only temporarily fragile country where the current level of monopoly of violence is below  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the scale. On the contrary, there are eight chronically fragile countries where the level of present-day professional bureaucracy drops below  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the scale (Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Mauritania, Niger, Somalia, South Sudan, Togo, Yemen) and six chronically fragile countries where the current level of monopoly of violence is below  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the scale (Libya, Yemen, Syria, Myanmar, Chad, and Iraq). In terms of aggregate stateness, as many as 42% of chronically fragile countries score below half of the scale, whereas only 15% of temporarily fragile states have such a deficiency in present-day stateness. Unsurprisingly, then, today's chronically fragile countries seem to have weaker stateness than today's temporarily fragile countries, both in terms of aggregate stateness and separately in the two core dimensions of stateness. At the higher end of the scale, however, we do not find such sharp discrepancies between chronically and temporarily fragile countries.

## 5.2 Regression analysis

The above descriptive investigation provides an overview of the observable patterns in the data, suggesting that our two hypotheses may be correct. To address our questions more thoroughly, however, we next examine the data via a regression analysis. As discussed in the methods section, we run multinomial logistic and logistic regressions because our dependent variables are categorical.

In the first set of regressions, we assess the validity of HP1 (i.e. countries with a stronger stateness stock are less likely to be chronically fragile). Our outcome variable is a three-category classification of non-fragile (0), temporarily fragile (1), and chronically fragile countries (2). We use chronically fragile countries as the reference category, which means that we compare chronically fragile countries with temporarily fragile and non-fragile countries. First, we estimate the association between aggregate stateness and the probability of a country being temporarily fragile or non-fragile, versus chronically fragile. Then, we repeat this analysis with our two sub-component stock indicators of monopoly of violence and professional bureaucracy. Depending on the model, as discussed in greater detail in the methods section, we include controls for GDP/capita, total population, democracy, colonial heritage, sub-Saharan Africa, ethnic fractionalization, and natural resources rents. Full models include all these controls.

The results of the multinomial logistic regression analysis provide strong support to HP1 (Table 3). Aggregate stateness stock is a significant predictor of whether a country is temporarily fragile or non-fragile, compared with chronically fragile. Countries with a stronger stateness stock are less likely to be chronically fragile today, and the result is statistically significant at the 99% level or at the 95% level of confidence, depending on the model. In the full models this result is significant at the 99% level.

In substantive terms, the 'impact' of stateness accumulated from 1900 to 2004 is considerable. When chronically fragile countries are compared with temporarily fragile countries, a one-unit increase in aggregate stateness stock (i.e.  $\frac{1}{10}$  of the entire scale—similar to an increase from

Nigeria to Bolivia, Chad to Thailand, or Zambia to Malaysia) increases the likelihood of being temporarily fragile today by approximately 367% according to the full model (relative risk ratio: 4.665). When chronically fragile countries are compared with non-fragile countries, a one unit increase in aggregate stateness stock increases the likelihood of being non-fragile today by approximately 466% according to the full model (relative risk ratio: 5.661).

Additional regression models with the stock of monopoly of violence (Table 4) and professional bureaucracy (Table 5) as the main predictor—in lieu of aggregate stateness stock—paint a more nuanced picture on the relationship between accumulated historical experience of stateness and contemporary condition of fragility. As suggested in some measure also by our previous descriptive analysis, the association between stateness stock and contemporary condition of fragility is mainly driven by variation in experience of monopoly of violence, rather than professional bureaucracy.

Both a higher stock of monopoly of violence and a higher stock of professional bureaucracy decrease the probability of being chronically fragile across models. Nevertheless, the ‘impact’ of monopoly of violence stock is massive and statistically significant, whereas the ‘impact’ of professional bureaucracy stock is relatively weak and non-significant. A one-unit increase (i.e. 1/5 of the entire scale—similar to an increase from Madagascar to Italy in monopoly of violence or from Togo to Ireland in professional bureaucracy) in monopoly of violence stock and professional bureaucracy stock increases the likelihood of being temporarily fragile compared with chronically fragile by approximately 973% and 91%, respectively. And one-unit increase in these two ‘stock dimensions’ increases the likelihood of being non-fragile compared with chronically fragile by approximately 1,632% and 45%, respectively. The ‘impact’ of experience of monopoly of violence seems almost too large to be true, but as illustrated by the above country pairs, differences of one unit in the indicators can make a big difference. Coefficients for the stock of monopoly of violence are significant across models at least at the 95% level of confidence (99% in the full model). On the contrary, coefficients for the stock of professional bureaucracy do not reach statistical significance in any of the models.

Albeit not directly related to testing HP1, we also explore whether past experience of stateness affects the probability of being non-fragile compared with temporarily fragile. To do so, we run models where the reference category is temporarily fragile (Supplementary Material, Tables S3–S5). We find no robust evidence that past experience of stateness affects the likelihood of being non-fragile versus temporarily fragile. Even if the coefficients are mostly positive, suggesting that on average higher stateness stock increases the likelihood of being non-fragile compared with temporarily fragile, aggregate stateness stock and monopoly of violence stock are statistically significant only in some models, and never in the full models with all controls. The stock of professional bureaucracy, in contrast, does not significantly affect the likelihood of being non-fragile versus temporarily fragile in any of our models.

Next, we proceed in the regression analysis by assessing the validity of HP2 —i.e. whether states with a stronger stateness stock are less likely to be fragile. In doing so, we use a dichotomous variable, where the two categories are non-fragile (0) and fragile (1). As with the previous battery of regressions, we conduct the analysis first with our aggregate stateness stock index (Table 6), and then separately with the stock of monopoly of violence (Table 7) and the stock of professional bureaucracy (Table 8). We do not make changes to the set of included controls nor the sequence in which they are added into the models. ‘Fragile’ is the reference category.

The results of the logistic regression analysis show at best weak support for HP2. Although the estimated coefficients for our three measures of stateness stock are positive (i.e. with the expected sign) in most models, they are consistently significant only for monopoly of violence stock (but at a lower 90% level of confidence in the full model). Coefficients for aggregate stateness stock are

significant in all other models except the full model. And coefficients for professional bureaucracy stock are not significant in any model.

Simply put, when we control for all potentially confounding factors, stronger stocks of aggregate stateness and monopoly of violence substantially reduce the likelihood of being today chronically fragile versus temporarily fragile or non-fragile, and more historical experience of monopoly of violence may decrease the likelihood of becoming fragile versus non-fragile. Conversely, accumulated experience of professional bureaucracy does not seem to matter that much for today's condition of fragility, and we also find little evidence suggesting that aggregate stateness stock affects the likelihood of becoming non-fragile compared with fragile.

To test the robustness of our results we run a variety of alternative models that are reported in the Supplementary Material. To re-test the validity of HP1: first, instead of using a 10% annual depreciation rate for our three stateness stock measures, we use a lower, 6%, annual depreciation rate (Supplementary Material, Tables S6–S8). With a lower depreciation rate, experiences of stateness dissipate less quickly. Second, instead of using our main sample of independent countries, we use an alternative sample where missing values are recoded following Edgell et al.'s (2020) coding rules (Supplementary Material, Tables S9–S11). To re-test the validity of HP2, in contrast, we run a battery of logistic regressions where the stateness stock measures are computed with a 6% depreciation rate (Supplementary Material, Tables S12–S14).

The results of these robustness tests corroborate our previous findings regarding HP1 and do not change their interpretation. Using the alternative depreciation rate slightly decreases the impact of aggregate stock and monopoly of violence stock on the likelihood of being chronically fragile but results remain significant in the full models at at least the 95% level of confidence. The same happens with the alternative sample of country years but again results remain significant at at least the 95% level when all potential confounding factors are controlled for. As with the main regressions, robustness tests do not provide any clear evidence that experience of professional bureaucracy matters for the relative probability of being chronically fragile. Regarding HP2, our robustness tests confirm that there is no empirical evidence indicating that aggregate stateness stock or professional bureaucracy stock affects the likelihood of being non-fragile rather than fragile. Additionally, with a lower depreciation rate, the coefficient for monopoly of violence stock becomes non-significant, further suggesting that historical experience of aggregate stateness or its two dimensions does not affect the likelihood of being today non-fragile versus fragile.

The bottom line then remains that accumulating experience of the existence of the state—and in particular, with having strong monopoly of violence—drastically reduces the likelihood of becoming stuck in chronic fragility. On the contrary, whether a country becomes fragile or not in the first place might be driven by other factors than experience of the core features of stateness. Interestingly, our results underscore a sharp difference between the two core aspects of stateness, suggesting that past experience of monopoly of violence is a more crucial factor than past experience of professional bureaucracy in decreasing the probability of being chronically fragile in the future.

Table 3: Multinomial logistic regressions of contemporary condition of fragility on aggregate stateness stock

<i>y = contemporary condition of fragility (chronic, temporary, or non-fragile)</i>														
	Temporarily fragile countries (reference category: chronic fragility)							Non-fragile countries (reference category: chronic fragility)						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)
Stateness stock	0.703** (0.327)	1.164*** (0.383)	0.769** (0.330)	0.627** (0.300)	0.624** (0.298)	0.800** (0.408)	1.540*** (0.578)	1.328*** (0.411)	1.606*** (0.446)	1.389*** (0.392)	1.228*** (0.357)	1.060*** (0.397)	1.341** (0.538)	1.734*** (0.575)
Ln(GDP/capita)	1.879*** (0.538)	2.852*** (0.629)	1.947*** (0.543)	1.481*** (0.495)	2.301*** (0.678)	2.262*** (0.611)	2.752*** (0.908)	3.908*** (0.765)	4.942*** (0.870)	3.990*** (0.768)	3.580*** (0.687)	4.402*** (0.982)	4.586*** (0.895)	5.379*** (1.180)
Ln(Population)	0.037 (0.168)	0.140 (0.205)	0.061 (0.183)	-0.072 (0.164)	0.014 (0.181)	0.025 (0.163)	-0.023 (0.250)	-0.032 (0.201)	0.032 (0.246)	-0.041 (0.209)	-0.148 (0.191)	-0.192 (0.252)	-0.081 (0.213)	-0.202 (0.314)
Democracy		9.560*** (2.393)					11.043*** (3.056)		12.462*** (2.762)					13.867*** (3.634)
British colony			-1.254* (0.696)				-2.554** (1.259)			-1.461 (0.910)				-2.065 (1.363)
African countries				-1.506** (0.709)			-2.297 (1.469)				-1.562 (1.022)			-0.786 (1.504)
Ethnic fractional.					0.955 (1.023)		1.242 (2.293)					-1.777 (1.660)		-3.298 (2.655)
Natural res. rents						-0.050** (0.024)	-0.001 (0.037)						-0.099*** (0.033)	-0.030 (0.048)
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.48	0.60	0.50	0.50	0.51	0.53	0.66	0.48	0.60	0.50	0.50	0.51	0.53	0.66
Observations	157	157	157	157	144	154	141	157	157	157	157	144	154	141
Log pseudo likelihood	-85.91	-67.33	-83.53	-83.23	-74.28	-77.34	-51.37	-85.91	-67.33	-83.53	-83.23	-74.28	-77.34	-51.37
AIC	187.81	154.67	187.06	186.47	168.55	174.69	138.73	187.81	154.67	187.06	186.47	168.55	174.69	138.73
BIC	212.26	185.23	217.63	217.03	198.25	205.06	191.81	212.26	185.23	217.63	217.03	198.25	205.06	191.81

Note: robust standard errors in parentheses; \* p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\*p<0.01. Constant coefficient measured but not reported. Reported coefficients are in log-odds units. Stateness stock measured with a 10% annual depreciation rate.

Source: authors' construction.



Table 4: Multinomial logistic regressions of contemporary condition of fragility on monopoly on violence stock

	<i>y = contemporary condition of fragility (chronic, temporary, or non-fragile)</i>													
	Temporarily fragile countries (reference category: chronic fragility)							Non-fragile countries (reference category: chronic fragility)						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)
Monopoly of violence stock	0.874**	2.156***	0.869**	0.868**	0.820**	1.058**	2.373***	1.620***	2.832***	1.627***	1.593***	1.355***	1.766***	2.852***
	(0.356)	(0.601)	(0.348)	(0.399)	(0.342)	(0.425)	(0.767)	(0.478)	(0.659)	(0.481)	(0.478)	(0.453)	(0.554)	(0.787)
Ln(GDP/capita)	1.876***	3.063***	1.920***	1.436***	2.362***	2.311***	2.883***	3.829***	5.097***	3.876***	3.462***	4.433***	4.584***	5.469***
	(0.590)	(0.615)	(0.598)	(0.548)	(0.751)	(0.663)	(0.852)	(0.833)	(0.795)	(0.834)	(0.728)	(1.076)	(0.974)	(1.074)
Ln(Population)	0.120	0.294	0.138	0.020	0.094	0.131	0.034	0.093	0.251	0.087	-0.027	-0.097	0.062	-0.119
	(0.192)	(0.250)	(0.203)	(0.184)	(0.192)	(0.189)	(0.250)	(0.234)	(0.294)	(0.239)	(0.222)	(0.267)	(0.244)	(0.318)
Democracy		12.302***					13.124***		15.553***					16.033***
		(2.852)					(2.829)		(3.006)					(3.192)
British colony			-1.001				-1.791*			-1.161				-1.298
			(0.691)				(1.082)			(0.929)				(1.180)
African countries				-1.612**			-2.964*				-1.837*			-1.573
				(0.741)			(1.723)				(1.075)			(1.622)
Ethnic fractional.					0.922		1.308					-1.799		-2.956
					(1.086)		(2.697)					(1.672)		(2.978)
Natural res. rents						-0.056**	-0.013						-0.111***	-0.047
						(0.023)	(0.037)						(0.032)	(0.049)
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.48	0.62	0.49	0.50	0.51	0.53	0.67	0.48	0.62	0.49	0.50	0.51	0.53	0.67
Observations	157	157	157	157	144	154	141	157	157	157	157	144	154	141
Log pseudo likelihood	-86.88	-63.59	-85.37	-83.63	-74.34	-76.94	-49.13	-86.88	-63.59	-85.37	-83.63	-74.34	-76.94	-49.13
AIC	189.77	147.18	190.74	187.27	168.68	173.87	134.26	189.77	147.18	190.74	187.27	168.68	173.87	134.26
BIC	214.22	177.75	221.31	217.83	198.38	204.24	187.34	214.22	177.75	221.31	217.83	198.38	204.24	187.34

Note: robust standard errors in parentheses; \* p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\*p<0.01. Constant coefficient measured but not reported. Reported coefficients are in log-odds units. Monopoly of violence stock measured with a 10% annual depreciation rate.

Source: authors' construction.

Table 5: Multinomial logistic regressions of contemporary condition of fragility on professional bureaucracy stock

<i>y = contemporary condition of fragility (chronic, temporary, or non-fragile)</i>														
	Temporarily fragile countries (reference category: chronic fragility)							Non-fragile countries (reference category: chronic fragility)						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)
Prof. bureau. stock	0.480 (0.465)	0.299 (0.435)	0.674 (0.476)	0.442 (0.448)	0.354 (0.512)	0.355 (0.486)	0.648 (0.499)	1.194* (0.714)	0.542 (0.663)	1.435** (0.717)	1.133* (0.673)	0.836 (0.777)	0.801 (0.844)	0.368 (0.675)
Ln(GDP/capita)	1.851*** (0.525)	2.445*** (0.643)	1.916*** (0.535)	1.436*** (0.519)	2.241*** (0.642)	2.258*** (0.611)	2.437*** (0.652)	3.932*** (0.795)	4.497*** (0.925)	4.013*** (0.802)	3.576*** (0.746)	4.398*** (0.970)	4.635*** (0.954)	4.841*** (0.948)
Ln(Population)	-0.038 (0.161)	0.059 (0.197)	-0.033 (0.168)	-0.134 (0.166)	-0.011 (0.172)	-0.044 (0.153)	-0.009 (0.282)	-0.214 (0.192)	-0.116 (0.233)	-0.256 (0.201)	-0.317* (0.189)	-0.294 (0.239)	-0.232 (0.193)	-0.190 (0.322)
Democracy		7.680*** (2.009)					8.513*** (3.113)			10.917*** (2.392)				12.792*** (3.677)
British colony			-1.230* (0.662)				-1.973** (0.969)			-1.510* (0.902)				-0.966 (1.140)
African countries				-1.561** (0.695)			-1.584 (1.014)				-1.716 (1.061)			-0.734 (1.296)
Ethnic fractional.					0.464 (0.929)		-0.041 (1.707)					-2.590* (1.556)		-5.275** (2.289)
Natural res. rents						-0.056** (0.023)	-0.001 (0.031)						-0.102*** (0.032)	-0.009 (0.038)
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.45	0.55	0.46	0.47	0.49	0.49	0.62	0.45	0.55	0.46	0.47	0.49	0.49	0.62
Observations	157	157	157	157	144	154	141	157	157	157	157	144	154	141
Log pseudo likelihood	-91.95	-74.43	-89.42	-88.68	-77.98	-82.62	-56.92	-91.95	-74.43	-89.42	-88.68	-77.98	-82.62	-56.92
AIC	199.90	168.85	198.85	197.36	175.95	185.24	149.85	199.90	168.85	198.85	197.36	175.95	185.24	149.85
BIC	224.35	199.42	229.41	227.92	205.65	215.61	202.93	224.35	199.42	229.41	227.92	205.65	215.61	202.93

Note: robust standard errors in parentheses; \* p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\*p<0.01. Constant coefficient measured but not reported. Reported coefficients are in log-odds units. Professional bureaucracy stock measured with a 10% annual depreciation rate.

Source: authors' construction.

Table 6: Logistic regressions of contemporary condition of fragility (fragile vs non-fragile) on aggregate stateness stock

	<i>y = contemporary condition of fragility (fragile or non-fragile)</i>						
	Non-fragile countries (reference category: fragile countries)						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Stateness stock	0.769*** (0.247)	0.551** (0.241)	0.771*** (0.235)	0.729*** (0.233)	0.566** (0.256)	0.673** (0.306)	0.386 (0.279)
Ln(GDP/capita)	2.449*** (0.377)	2.358*** (0.409)	2.440*** (0.375)	2.435*** (0.387)	2.605*** (0.441)	2.716*** (0.463)	2.707*** (0.563)
Ln(Population)	-0.062 (0.145)	-0.097 (0.143)	-0.096 (0.148)	-0.099 (0.157)	-0.198 (0.188)	-0.097 (0.156)	-0.184 (0.211)
Democracy		3.778*** (1.176)					4.332** (1.931)
British colony			-0.508 (0.638)				0.094 (0.701)
African countries				-0.556 (0.786)			0.516 (0.932)
Ethnic fractionalization					-2.455* (1.377)		-4.035** (1.668)
Natural resources rents						-0.059*** (0.021)	-0.014 (0.026)
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.57	0.62	0.58	0.58	0.59	0.60	0.64
Observations	157	157	157	157	144	154	141
Log pseudo likelihood	-46.11	-40.74	-45.79	-45.85	-40.83	-41.94	-34.60
AIC	100.21	91.49	101.58	101.70	91.65	93.87	87.20
BIC	112.44	106.77	116.86	116.98	106.50	109.06	113.74

Note: robust standard errors in parentheses; \* p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\*p<0.01. Constant coefficient measured but not reported. Reported coefficients are in log-odds units. Stateness stock measured with a 10% annual depreciation rate.

Source: authors' construction.

Table 7: Logistic regressions of contemporary condition of fragility (fragile vs non-fragile) on monopoly of violence stock

	<i>y = contemporary condition of fragility (fragile or non-fragile)</i>						
	Non-fragile countries (reference category: fragile countries)						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Monopoly of violence stock	0.932*** (0.342)	0.838** (0.335)	0.934*** (0.339)	0.900*** (0.311)	0.714** (0.342)	0.873** (0.383)	0.692* (0.391)
Ln(GDP/capita)	2.365*** (0.369)	2.276*** (0.391)	2.360*** (0.362)	2.345*** (0.367)	2.565*** (0.453)	2.649*** (0.481)	2.645*** (0.570)
Ln(Population)	0.000 (0.158)	-0.018 (0.149)	-0.025 (0.159)	-0.052 (0.169)	-0.161 (0.194)	-0.043 (0.170)	-0.125 (0.214)
Democracy		4.155*** (1.168)					4.543** (1.914)
British colony			-0.386 (0.664)				0.250 (0.702)
African countries				-0.726 (0.813)			0.349 (0.930)
Ethnic fractionalization					-2.436* (1.354)		-3.939** (1.733)
Natural resources rents						-0.065*** (0.021)	-0.019 (0.028)
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.57	0.63	0.57	0.57	0.58	0.60	0.65
Observations	157	157	157	157	144	154	141
Log pseudo likelihood	-46.88	-40.11	-46.70	-46.43	-41.07	-41.93	-33.91
AIC	101.76	90.21	103.40	102.86	92.14	93.87	85.82
BIC	113.99	105.50	118.68	118.14	106.99	109.05	112.36

Note: robust standard errors in parentheses; \* p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\*p<0.01. Constant coefficient measured but not reported. Reported coefficients are in log-odds units. Monopoly of violence stock measured with a 10% annual depreciation rate.

Source: authors' construction.

Table 8: Logistic regressions of contemporary condition of fragility (fragile vs non-fragile) on professional bureaucracy stock

	<i>y = contemporary condition of fragility (fragile or non-fragile)</i>						
	Non-fragile countries (reference category: fragile countries)						
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Prof. bureaucracy stock	0.825 (0.534)	0.282 (0.442)	0.915* (0.525)	0.786 (0.500)	0.571 (0.559)	0.510 (0.631)	-0.125 (0.529)
Ln(GDP/capita)	2.564*** (0.393)	2.398*** (0.406)	2.563*** (0.394)	2.527*** (0.408)	2.714*** (0.457)	2.837*** (0.485)	2.746*** (0.578)
Ln(Population)	-0.183 (0.151)	-0.171 (0.146)	-0.234 (0.160)	-0.222 (0.156)	-0.280 (0.190)	-0.191 (0.153)	-0.224 (0.210)
Democracy		4.180*** (1.157)					5.377*** (2.010)
British colony			-0.607 (0.649)				0.483 (0.781)
African countries				-0.727 (0.816)			0.217 (0.946)
Ethnic fractionalization					-2.847** (1.332)		-4.632*** (1.667)
Natural resources rents						-0.059*** (0.019)	-0.004 (0.026)
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.54	0.60	0.55	0.55	0.57	0.58	0.64
Observations	157	157	157	157	144	154	141
Log pseudo likelihood	-49.25	-42.72	-48.78	-48.78	-42.44	-44.39	-35.32
AIC	106.49	95.44	107.56	107.55	94.89	98.78	88.65
BIC	118.72	110.72	122.84	122.84	109.73	113.96	115.19

Note: robust standard errors in parentheses; \* p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\*p<0.01. Constant coefficient measured but not reported. Reported coefficients are in log-odds units. Professional bureaucracy stock measured with a 10% annual depreciation rate.

Source: authors' construction.

## 6 Conclusions

Statebuilding efforts in fragile countries have often failed. Some scholars have suggested that these failures tend to be driven by poor understanding of contextual differences—in particular, differences regarding past and current state institutions. Extending beyond previous work, in this paper we explore this relationship systematically, drawing on available cross-country data. Our analysis shows that, in countries that are commonly identified today as being fragile, more experience of stateness in the past dramatically reduces the likelihood of their becoming stuck in fragility. The number of fragile countries in the world has steadily increased in the last decades. To improve the outcomes of statebuilding efforts, policy-makers must urgently start to consider more seriously these contextual differences in institutional legacies.

To empirically analyse the interplay between stateness and contemporary condition of fragility, we combine existing publicly available data on the state and state fragility to develop a new set of measures that captures these concepts more comprehensively than do current indicators. Based on theoretical considerations, we identify the two core dimensions of stateness—monopoly of the use of force and existence of a professional bureaucracy—and calculate the historical experience that contemporary countries have of these two core features from 1900 onwards. We also capture the current level of stateness through these two features. Additionally, drawing on some of the most frequently used fragility datasets, we classify countries as chronically fragile, temporarily fragile, and non-fragile. This classification allows us to distinguish countries according to the contemporary condition of fragility in terms of its persistence.

Our first hypothesis was that a deeper historical experience of state institutions decreases the likelihood of a state being chronically fragile today. Overall, our descriptive and inferential statistical analysis provides robust support to this hypothesis. A lack of past stateness tends to be a common characteristic of today's chronically fragile countries. It is important to note, however, that the association between low stateness stock and chronic fragility is probabilistic, and not by any means deterministic. As we have seen, there are many exceptions to the general pattern. It is thus entirely possible—albeit less probable—that a country with weak institutional experience in the past will avoid subsequent chronic fragility. Historical experience of the core state apparatus thus shapes future institutions but does not irrevocably determine a certain institutional trajectory or outcome.

This finding is consistent with what the literature has previously suggested, but to our knowledge the validity of this argument has never previously been confirmed in a large-N, long-time-series cross-country empirical study. In addition to filling this research gap, our analysis provides a more nuanced picture of the association between stateness and fragility. First, experience of monopoly of violence matters far more than experience of professional bureaucracy for whether a country is today chronically fragile as opposed to temporarily fragile or non-fragile. Second, we find no systematic evidence to support our second hypothesis that stateness stock in the last century matters for whether a country is today considered fragile or not.

Future research is needed to better understand these nuances in the relationship between stateness stock and contemporary fragility. Theoretical considerations do not shed light on why experience of stateness affects only the odds of becoming chronically fragile but not of being fragile or non-fragile to begin with. Moreover, our finding that experience of monopoly of violence matters more than experience of professional bureaucracy requires deeper investigation. On the one hand, most countries have had state bureaucracies with salaried officials for a long time, so it might be that this core aspect of stateness (or the absence of it) played a more relevant role in subsequent fragility

at an earlier time when cross-country variation in professional bureaucracies was larger. On the other hand, a state is not a state without the monopoly of the use of force. Our results may then suggest that ‘human communities’ do indeed need to accumulate experience (especially) of this quintessential aspect of the state in order to better safeguard themselves from falling into a chronic condition of fragility.

Either way, our findings have important implications for researchers and policy-makers alike. We contribute to the scholarly discussions by ‘bringing the past back in’ to the study of state fragility. As historical experience of state institutions matters for the condition of fragility beyond the immediate future, instead of focusing narrowly on present-day fragility, future studies on the topic need to take into consideration also fragility’s duration as well as historical legacies of stateness. We contribute to policy debates by underscoring that statebuilding interventions in fragile countries can no longer overlook contextual differences in past experiences of stateness and their impact on fragility. Although the importance of considering contextual factors has been recently advocated by others, our study clearly indicates *which* contextual factors should be considered. During the past decades, the international development community has internalized the idea that fragility matters. Now, to increase the effectiveness of statebuilding efforts, it needs to start internalizing also that the stock of stateness matters.

In practice, our findings indicate that statebuilding efforts in chronically fragile countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo are unlikely to become success stories by emulating the statebuilding processes of a country like Japan in the aftermath of the Second World War. Although it was a fragile country in the early postwar period, Japan had had a strong and effective state apparatus before the war, so statebuilding efforts could make use of the country’s institutional ‘memory’. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, in contrast, there is little memory of well functioning public institutions that current statebuilding efforts could draw upon. Lessons from a country like Japan are thus less likely to be useful than lessons from other chronically fragile countries with a similar (lack of) institutional legacy, like Sierra Leone and Timor-Leste, which have recently made progress on the road towards building more effective state institutions. Examples of successful statebuilding from temporarily fragile countries with low stateness stock may also provide useful insights for chronically fragile countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo, although, as we have seen in our analysis, most temporarily fragile countries have a higher stateness stock to begin with.

The matrix in Figure 8 illustrates more explicitly the possible combinations between different degrees of stateness stock and contemporary condition of state fragility. Countries in the bottom left cell have little historical experience of stateness and are today chronically fragile. Given that stateness stock matters, lessons from chronically fragile countries with high stateness stock like Egypt and Eswatini, or from temporarily fragile countries with high stateness stock like Philippines and Venezuela are unlikely to be useful. On the other hand, statebuilding efforts in countries in the bottom left cell might draw more beneficial lessons either from countries in the same cell (i.e. other chronically fragile countries with low stateness stock that have made progress) or countries in the first adjacent cell to the right (i.e. countries with low stateness stock that have managed to avoid chronic fragility). Even though low stateness stock typically means chronic fragility, there are exceptions, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, and Georgia, where past experiences of stateness are weak but where the current condition of fragility seems not to be permanent.

Figure 8: Stateness stock and contemporary condition of fragility



Source: authors' construction.

These considerations also lead to the question of whether a country can exit chronic fragility to become temporarily chronic (and vice versa) or whether a temporarily fragile country can become non-fragile (and vice versa). There is no reason to believe that changes in the condition of fragility cannot occur, even though past institutions tend to persist over time. Given that commonly used fragility datasets extend back only to the 2000s, in this study we focused only on the condition of fragility in the past couple of decades (i.e. more or less a generation). Future studies should extend fragility data further back in time to identify countries that have successfully transitioned between different conditions of fragility, as well as investigating in detail successful statebuilding processes in such countries.

Finally, our study contributes to the conceptual discussions on stateness. A flourishing body of academic research is debating what the main dimensions of the state are and how stateness should be conceptualized. We argue that monopoly of violence and professional bureaucracy are the features that are closest to the core of modern statehood. Other features, such as the state's ability to extract taxes, protect property rights, or acquire popular acceptance of the rule, are certainly relevant for characterizing contemporary states, but they also seem to be more contingent on political decisions and not to be of existential importance. At least in theory, modern statehood can exist without these 'secondary' functions. But a modern state is no state without a monopoly of violence and a professional bureaucracy. Scholars who are interested in analysing the core features of stateness should pay particular attention to these two aspects.

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