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**A
REVIEW**

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FRAGILE STATES INDEX 2016

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INTRODUCTION: ASSESSING THE INDEX

By

Derek Verbakel and Marie Pavageau

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Since its inception in 2005, the annual index produced by the Washington DC-based Fund for Peace has ranked 178 countries based on measures of their stability and the pressures they face. The vast amount of information acquisition and interpretation involved in such a project is no small task and the commendable objective of the Fragile States Index (FSI), aimed at policymakers and the wider public, is to inform political risk assessment and better policy responses. Called the Failed States Index when the IPCS last issued a report on it, the FSI has generated lively debate in South Asia and further afield. While it has received some qualified praise, it has also faced wide-ranging arguments by numerous scholarly and policy critics. The term 'failed state' and the FSI more broadly have been variously regarded as excessively biased and politicised, overly simplistic, and lacking analytical precision and predictive utility.

Conceptual Challenges

The title was amended in 2014, yet the term 'failed state' continues to be used in the text. The term replacing it in the title, "Fragile," remains little less problematic. There is a lack of clarity about what is meant by 'fragile', how a state is rendered fragile, or whether fragility is relative or absolute. It is uncertain whether such a condition is measurable in any meaningful way, particularly in relation to establishing security, providing services and other public goods, maintaining the rule of law, and other presumed state functions. Leaving aside that no universal understanding exists as to what exactly constitutes a state, the FSI presupposes a neat, linear, ideal-type, and assumes as straightforward the complex interface and interplay between state and society. As a result of persisting criticism for presenting an overly grim and sensationalist image of a world going up in flames, the FSI has in recent years de-emphasised rankings to allow greater appreciation of individual country contexts and adjusted their 'Heat Map' to incorporate cooler colours into their maps and rankings spectrum.

Situating the FSI

Worth noting is the political baggage on which the Fragile States Index rests. The FSI embodies a continuity of 'failed states' discourse formerly influential in US foreign policy-making circles in the mid-1990s to late-2000s. Fixated on security threats emanating from weak or 'failed' states, this called for US-led external interventions to address said threats through undertaking liberal democratic state-building projects. While its message has served to legitimise the exercise of US power abroad, the FSI has simultaneously worked to occlude the historical and contemporary impacts of external interventions affecting many states that it has depicted as 'failed' or 'fragile'. In identifying the problems it seeks to address, the 2016 FSI claims: "Since the end of the Cold War, a number of states have erupted into mass violence stemming from internal conflict." Yet almost all of these states were formerly colonised and/or destabilised by the superpower struggle, and so presenting given conflicts as simply arising endogenously is misguided.



The FSI only offers interpretations rooted in its particular US-centric provenance, and therefore any objectivity claimed by the FSI is unattainable. The text insists on its diagnostic and predictive utility, and the FSI model attempts to shed light on a common set of characteristics that engender a condition of state fragility or failure. According to this logic, the identification of patterns in terms of factors likely to precipitate specific problems could then lead to predicting emerging threats and creating policies to address them.

However, there are inherent difficulties in slicing and dicing the social world into variables slotted into such models, and there are methodological issues aplenty related to the 12 indicators comprising the FSI. Abstract indicators such as Group Grievance and State Legitimacy defy easy, intelligible measurement, and the sources and scoring methods for all 12 indicators are not transparent. Inter-relationships between indicators are left unexplored and it is unclear whether the indicators are adequately attuned to the impact of factors such as democratic processes, both formal and informal, which are stretched across or fall into the gaps between indicators. The equal weighting of all 12 indicators raises questions about whether such a one-size-fits-all approach fails to capture the contextual nuances of 178 diverse countries.

In simplistically categorising states, the FSI also fails to illuminate differentiations within states. For instance, in terms of governance at the provincial level, more capable states may have poorly managed provinces and less capable states better-run provinces. Unapparent too can be the reasons behind movements in the rankings, which are no more clearly due to state strengthening or weakening than to unfolding political vicissitudes. Consider the reduction of pressure on dissidents in Myanmar or Iran engaging in nuclear talks. It is not evident if these states become stronger or weaker, more or less fragile in each case. The FSI also struggles to account for the blurriness of some borders and transnational dynamics affecting states, such as amorphous, decentralised groups perpetrating terrorism. The FSI also slips into a tautological trap in presenting violence as an indicator to predict violence.

Issues and Implications Moving Forward

As such, is the FSI helpful in finding context-sensitive solutions to addressing instability and conflict? Or does it lend too readily to unhelpful generalising in place of more tailored, nuanced approaches to promoting sustainable security? Can a poor ranking lead to reprioritising, legislative change, or policy adjustments in a given country? Can or should the FSI be re-engineered?

As is to be expected, debate in various circles surrounding the Fragile States Index continues to be vibrant and vigorous. The following series of contributions offer timely and unique engagements with conceptual and empirical issues concerning the Fragile States Index 2016 as it relates to complex political, economic, and social dynamics in South Asia and beyond.



FSI'S BROADER CONCLUSIONS: METHODOLOGY, EMPIRICAL TRENDS, AND CURRENT REALITIES

By

TCA Raghavan

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The broad conclusions on India of the Fragile States Index are:

(a) 2016 as compared to 2015 has seen a significant worsening of India's fragility index based on a number of indicators. In contrast, China has performed much better over the past year. (b) Over the past decade India has become substantially more fragile. In other words, the worsening in India's fragility index in the current year is part of a longer secular trend.

How rigorous is this conclusion?

A comparative assessment, such as the Fragile States Index, has value at a general bird's-eye view level. The pictorial depiction of the globe entitled 'Fragility in the World 2016' is therefore a reasonably accurate – if impressionistic – depiction of global trends. However too close a scrutiny, which is what the rest of the report attempts, brings out numerous internal contradictions and often bizarre conclusions such as Saudi Arabia falling in the 'Elevated Warning' category, Bahrain in the more stable 'Warning' category, while UAE and Qatar are in the much superior grouping of 'More Stable'. Given that Saudi Arabia is de facto the net security provider to each of these three, the wide variation in their fragility index is questionable.

Given a natural strong correlation between the level of economic development and societal and political stability, one could of course ask how much value such a global ranking exercise brings. Most of Africa thus predictably falls in the 'Alert' category. India (and China) and its neighbourhood are similarly placed. The Fragile States Index is based on a 12-criterion scale. (**Social:** Demographic Pressures; Refugees and IDPs; Group Grievance; Human Flight and Brain Drain; **Economic:** Uneven Economic Development; Poverty and Economic Decline; **Political and Military:** State Legitimacy; Public Services; Human Rights and Rule of Law; Security Apparatus; Factionalised Elites; External Intervention.) Possibly if a single criterion index was constructed using just about any attribute of per capita economic performance it would have had a very large overlap with the present Fragile States Index.

A closer scrutiny of the comparative assessment throws up other difficulties. In 2016 China, India, Thailand, and Bhutan fall in 'Elevated Warning', Sri Lanka and Iran in a rank higher (i.e. more fragile) in 'High Warning', and Pakistan and Afghanistan even more fragile at 'High Alert'. This classification would possibly not lead to serious objections although some could well say both Sri Lanka and Iran have greater stability than their fragility index would suggest. But the value of this comparative assessment gets eroded somewhat when Maldives is depicted as having achieved the lowest fragility score, meaning most stable in the wider South Asian neighbourhood – including China, Thailand, and Iran.



Such considerations come to a head when the comparative ranking of fragility over a ten-year period is undertaken. In India's neighbourhood, the decade-long trend shows varying degrees of improvement (i.e. reducing fragility) in Bhutan, China, and Sri Lanka. On the other hand, Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, and India show increasing fragility to different extents. India tops the table - i.e. the increase in the fragility of India outpaces all its neighbours over the past decade. China outperforming India over the past decade in terms of growing stability may be a conclusion broadly acceptable to many. Nevertheless, the extent of the divergence between the two in this period may be questioned. In part the problem arises from the opaque character of the indices adopted. So India, Japan, and South Africa showing very significant increase in fragility as compared to China or Zimbabwe showing strong improvement raises questions about the validity of the methodology. Is this an accurate depiction of broad trends? The answer can only be in a specific analysis and this comparative assessment may not be very helpful. The latter in fact throws up far too many contradictory, if not bizarre – to common sense at least – conclusions.

The methodology leads to other conclusions that appear somewhat dubious. These include: (a) fragility in Iraq and North Korea has decreased, i.e. these states have become more stable; (b) in comparative terms Afghanistan and Pakistan have performed better than has India over the past decade; (c) the score assigned to Pakistan places it in the category of those who have only marginally worsened over 2007-16. It has therefore exhibited a declining fragility compared to Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and has substantially outpaced India. This is a conclusion at considerable variance from most country-specific analysis of Pakistan and the region over the past decade.

When a methodology throws up results at odds with empirical trends and realities, some course correction appears necessary.



FSI AND SOUTH ASIA

By

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The Fragile States Index (FSI) is an annual ranking of 178 nations, conceived with the core notion that weak and failing states pose a challenge to the international community and in a highly interconnected world, ‘pressures’ on one fragile state can have repercussions for the larger global community too. The FSI is based on the premise that the reasons for state weakness and failure are complex but not unpredictable, and can hence be quantified.

Furthermore, the FSI aims to take the understanding of weak and failing states beyond identifying and analysing broad social trends by adopting a mixed approach using qualitative and quantitative techniques to establish patterns and trends. The strength of the FSI is its ability to distil millions of pieces of information into a form that is suitable to analyse, easy to comprehend, and informative.

The FSI generated by the Fund for Peace (FFP) is based on its proprietary Conflict Assessment System Tool (CAST) analytical platform. The Index is designed to be a critical tool in not only identifying the normal pressures that all states experience, but also to provide an indication in the time domain when such pressures begin to impact the stability of a state.

The 2016 FSI is the 12th edition of the annual Index. In the case of stability of South Asian countries, it considers India along with Bhutan and the Maldives as being at an ‘elevated warning’ stage, as distinct from the six higher (and more stable) classifications that range from ‘very sustainable’ to ‘warning’.

The remaining South Asian countries find themselves evaluated at more alarming stages, with Sri Lanka at ‘High Warning’; Nepal, Bangladesh, and Myanmar at ‘Alert’; and Pakistan being graded even lower at ‘High Alert’. In terms of past performance, the Maldives is seen to show strong improvement and India is seen to be worsening.

These outcomes in the FSI raise a few questions about its methodology, gathering and processing of data, moderation of the value of parameters implemented for diversity, etc. For example, in the case of Pakistan, does the FSI take into account the complex nature of its insurgency before evaluating the fact that it is one of the few countries in the world that is using its air force against its own citizens and military courts with tentative jurisprudence to try captured/suspected insurgents? This fact is possibly recognised by the FFP itself, which has sought to remedy the lacunae by comparing a country with its own past parameters in addition to those of other states/countries. However even this adjustment to the FSI does not seem to adequately capture the context in each country individually.

When considering relative assessments, the question that comes to mind is whether the index gives an adequate representation of the South Asia region. However, the lack of detailed knowledge of



the FSI's assessment process limits the discourse to its outcomes. Therefore, since the FSI seeks to inform and address the global community and shape its outlook towards a country or a region, it would be appropriate to ask if it as a concept takes into account the contribution to global peace and development by the target country or region. Therefore, does it recognise the contribution of Bangladesh or India to UN peacekeeping while it penalises countries for having an UN mission or peacekeeper on its soil? Does it discount 'forced interventions' and the destabilising influence of certain countries to a country or a region? The FSI appears to penalise the country whose sovereignty is violated rather than the intervener.

The next question is whether the FSI takes into account new age threats/issues. Has the Maldives been penalised for its failure to prevent the outflow of jihadis of Maldivian nationality to Iraq and Syria, or should Belgium be penalised for a lax security setup which has caused certain elements to use its soil to launch attacks in France? On the other hand, does it accord merit to a country's efforts to combat climate change, which draws on its economic resources, or do those initiatives fall outside the evaluation framework?

The FSI appears to have an 'end of pipe' or a one-dimensional approach to evaluating the stability of a state. It is alright when one is informing the target state, but when the index is for the consumption of the global community, it needs to factor in more inter-related issues to aid balanced and informed decision making.



FRAGILITY IN PAKISTAN

By

Rana Banerji

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The US-based non-profit organisation, Fund for Peace (FFP), which works to prevent conflict and to promote sustainable security by building relationships and trust across diverse sectors, annually prepares a Fragile States Index (FSI). It has listed Pakistan in the 'High Alert' category, evaluating key aspects of the social, economic, and political environment there over time.

The FFP examines circumstances behind the conflict landscape worldwide. This includes a detailed study of social indicators such as demographic pressures and condition of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs); factors behind uneven economic development; and political and military conditions such as the impact of external intervention factors, including foreign aid.

Political & Military indicators

The recent (8 August 2016) terror attack in Quetta, Balochistan, Pakistan, provides the best illustration of how the Pakistani military elite continue to remain in denial. They described it as a conspiracy for subverting the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Such obfuscation not only trivialises the deaths of so many and loss of the cream of Baloch intelligentsia and its legal fraternity, which has been very vocal and active in raising issues like enforced disappearances: it also reflects a muddled approach towards meeting the challenge of terrorism.

The functioning of the parliament in Pakistan continues to remain superfluous or irrelevant, at the best of times a rubber stamp. In the aftermath of Quetta, when some important parliamentarians and political leaders from Balochistan questioned a possible security lapse and demanded that Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif make the heads of the security institutions accountable, they were viciously attacked from many sides, including by important members of cabinet.

Parliamentarians, particularly of non-Punjabi origin, feel they have no right to criticise the security agencies of the country on the floor of the house. As if that was not enough, high level meetings after the Quetta tragedy decided to appoint monitoring committees to oversee implementation of the National Action Plan (NAP).

These committees will be constituted from different government departments and agencies, without even any pretence of parliamentary oversight. The parliament is handy as a factory for producing draconian laws (a law for controlling cyber-crime is the latest example) but it has been unable to evolve into a forum for formulating policies or overseeing their implementation.

The security apparatus should have a monopoly on use of legitimate force. The social contract is weakened where affected by competing groups. Extremist ideologies such as Salafism and Takfirism that inspire religious extremism and terrorism were mainstreamed during the Zia martial law years

(1977-1988). These have yet to be fully and honestly confronted. So far, nothing seems to have changed in terms of the policy of selecting between 'good' and 'bad' Taliban. The civilian facade of the security state is too weak to assert itself. While carrying this baggage, how can the state implement any consistent anti-terrorist policy?

Corruption in government has persisted, both in its civilian and military complements. The initial furore over the leaked Panama Papers enquiry seems to have petered into a stalemate.

When human rights are violated or unevenly protected, the state is failing in its ultimate responsibility. In the context of refugee movements to Europe, Pakistan is listed at the high end with a rating of almost 9, with only Afghanistan among regional countries figuring at a higher score.

Economy

The government's economic policy remains largely debt-driven, with debt servicing and repayment taking increasing shares of the federal budget each year. Total public debt continues to be well above 60 per cent. Though Finance Minister Ishaq Dar announced Pakistan's intention to bid goodbye to International Monetary Fund (IMF) assistance very soon, with the IMF programme drawing to a close and earlier debts maturing, debts from the IMF increased by 54.5 per cent.

Budgetary allocations for debt servicing and repayment have seen a steady rise over the last few years. The provision of adequate budgetary allocations for health, education, and sanitation services – key roles of the state – remain stymied due to over-emphasis on defence and debt servicing. For the fiscal year 2016-17, total debt and liabilities have increased by 12.7 per cent, now making up 73 per cent of the GDP. Compared to the previous year, there has been a 12.4 per cent increase in the total debt stock during July-March (FY16). Debt accumulation has an inflationary impact, which is adverse for short-term financial stability.

On the revenue front, while both tax and non-tax revenue targets have been reportedly achieved during the outgoing year, there has been no significant shift in direct and indirect tax shares. Instead, there has been hefty rise in the use of withholding taxes to meet revenue needs. Little attention has been paid to expanding the tax base and alleviating poverty through a systemic shift to progressive taxation of rural and urban elites.

Though these parameters seem to justify the FFP's evaluation, we in India can hardly take any solace from the findings. India is listed at 'Elevated Warning' stage with a score of 79.6 compared to Pakistan's 101.7. Sri Lanka is shown as the most improved state in 2016 under the FFP's Conflict Assessment System Tool rating. India is behind Bangladesh and Bhutan as well. A sobering thought!



MEASURING FRAGILITY: A CASE STUDY OF PAKISTAN

By

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The review of a decade of reporting in the Fragile States Index (2007-2016) – previously known as the Failed States Index – issued by the Fund for Peace suggests fairly consistent trends and patterns in Pakistan. The Index shows only a minimal fluctuation in the overall status, ranking, and scores attributed to the country. Pakistan has been swinging between the 9th and 14th positions in the ‘Most Fragile States’ list, with scores ranging from 100.1 to 104.1. Moreover, Pakistan has consistently been placed in the ‘High Alert’ category of states. This year, the country apparently showed slight improvement in its rank by climbing down from 13th rank in 2015 to the 14th rank in 2016. However, Pakistan, placed 12th on the Failed States Index in 2007, scored better with 100.1 on the table than the present situation.

Discrepancy in ranks and scores raise fundamental questions about measuring fragility and assigning scores and ranks to states. Can fragility be measured with big data? Is the fragility of a state relative to fragility of other states? Or is fragility an intrinsic phenomenon that has its own peculiar course in each country?

Big Data: All That Glitters Is Not Gold

The FSI deserves credit for creating and maintaining a huge database that helps identify fault lines around the world. Undisputedly, there is some value in quantifying social problems – no matter how inadequately – to help policymakers understand the challenges they confront and address the gaps in the policy choices.

Discrepancies are natural in indexes that deal with big data concerning social and political issues. There are limitations both in terms of the electronically available information and its processing. This problem accentuates particularly in states like Pakistan that are still struggling with creating a culture of electronic record keeping.

This gap makes the veracity of reporting debatable. Take for example the case of public services at the provincial level in Pakistan. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has made notable progress at the grassroots level in fields of education, healthcare, and police reforms. But there is only limited data available to evaluate the progress made in the province. The FSI indicators of public service do not seem to take this into account.

On the other hand, Pakistan’s score for human rights has received a marginal but improved rating in 2016 as compared to 2015. It would be interesting to see the data and examine the process of data evaluation to understand how and why the revival of capital punishment, setting up of military courts that can also try non-combatant civilians, introducing stringent anti-terrorism legislations, and unreported episodes of violent excesses in conflict-ridden regions did not impinge upon the human rights rating.



Both cases indicate a perennial problem of underreported achievements and challenges due to the unavailability of data.

There is no gainsaying the fact that Pakistan is mired with challenges of governance and security, be it education, safe drinking water, health care, law and order, refugees, brain drain, IDPs, grievances of smaller provinces, ethnic and sectarian divides, deteriorating political culture, military courts, minority rights, honor killing, terrorism etc. Additionally, Pakistan has some delicate spots that could turn from bad to worse without prior alarm. It would be spurious to claim that the data used to analyse Pakistan is completely faulty. As long as the quantities are conveyed and consumed in the spirit of identifying trends and patterns to indicate problems and challenges, the indexes, despite various discrepancies, can help serve the purpose.

However, the problem emerges with drawing the linkage between ranks, scores, 'fragility' and international stability.

'Fragile': Anatomy of a Word

In October 2010 – just after the disastrous floods – this author was in Washington, DC, for meetings with people from the policy community and think-tanks. Whether or not Pakistan would survive that year's catastrophic floods was a question that was frequently asked. In Islamabad, there was no conversation about Pakistan falling due to a natural calamity. Unable to relate to the Western mindset, this author contained her desire to recite Ghalib, "*Mushkilein mujh per padi itni key aasan ho gayi,*" ["So many problems befell me that they became easy"].

Just as it happens to people, some manage to withstand tremendous pressures while others collapse. States too have their unique structures, with varying degrees of elasticity. Their responses to catastrophes, disasters, poor governance, or even use of force vary accordingly, setting their own unique threshold for fragility.

Take the case of corruption in Pakistan. It is one of the indicators measured in the FSI to determine the fragility of a state. But it remains to be seen whether corruption itself makes a state fragile, or if it is the resistance against corruption that does so. Interestingly, the Panama Papers issue caused a worldwide uproar. In Pakistan, the opposition parties, viewing it as a God-sent opportunity, made their best efforts to unseat the sitting prime minister and yet failed to mobilise the masses. Ironically, corruption – despite or because of being rampant at all levels of social life – fails to stir people's emotions in Pakistan. Consequently, many compromises are made, bargains struck, and power negotiated, not only among the elite but also between the masses and the elite. It, thus, keeps the system running.

In such circumstances, can fragility entail the same meaning as it would in countries like Iceland, where the public took to the streets over the same Panama Papers scandal, or states where human rights violations are vehemently challenged?

CHINA AND THE FSI: DECENNARY TRENDS, 2007-2016

By

Chao Xie

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The Fund for Peace has released its twelfth annual Fragile States Index (FSI). As with previous editions, it presents yearly scores and rankings based on the levels of stability and pressures each state faces. However, the changes in a year are hardly of any observable significance, especially for those not-so-fragile states; and even for the fragile ones, the situation should be considered in longer terms so as to acquire a more accurate understanding. What makes this year's report more useful is an included report on decade trends over 2007-2016. With the range of observation extended, one can take a deeper look into the data to see into FSIs and see how this world has changed over the last ten years, even though it might just provide a partial or biased representation of broad trends related to some countries: for instance, China and India.

First, light will be shed on the economic indicators. As per the FSI design, the parameters of scoring economic growth are supposed to influence each other in the FSI scoring system because for developing countries, rapid economic growth will inevitably mean a minus in Poverty and Economic Decline but a plus in Uneven Economic Development. In 2007, before the subprime mortgage crisis dragged the world financial markets into turbulence, the world was cheering emerging markets that were set to become new drivers of the world economy. China and India are on the anticipation list, and for this decade they are two leading states in terms of economic growth, but still on the road to balancing rural and urban development and easing tensions between the richest 10 per cent and the poorest. (It must be noted that the FSI chose the 10 per cent gauge over 5 per cent which is more favourable to developed countries.) Despite all their similarities in other areas, the FSI points for China and India should be a downward trend and the instinct is that their general situation is becoming better and better. But the final scores are divided. China appears to have experienced significantly greater improvement between 2007-2016 than India, which gets +8.8 in a worsening trend. This is of course not a sound assessment, and their ranking should be somewhat nearer to each other.

Social indicators with double weightage may present a bigger picture. In the past decade, both countries have had challenges on aspects of Refugees and IDPs and Group Grievance. Tension and violence between ethnic groups exists in both countries. China is trying to calm its northwestern frontier; the violence in northeast India and Jammu and Kashmir does not see a prospect of settling down in the coming years either. Despite all the challenges, a reasonable estimate is that no significant changes have occurred, and the change will be even less significant when starting the calculation from 2007. Taking a step back to assess the Index, should such challenges add more points to their fragility, their cores being about the same in these categories?

In the category of Demographic Pressure, the FSI implies that population growth is a bad thing, as the description about it is weighted with negative words such as malnutrition, food and water scarcity, and disease. What the FSI turns a blind eye towards is that nowadays countries are



increasingly aware of what demographic changes would bring about. For China, without a good supply of human labour, there would have had no economic miracle for three decades. With human dividends coming to an end, it has in a timely way terminated the single-child policy to curb the ageing curve. India, on the other hand, is set to become the youngest country by 2020 and is enjoying an outstanding advantage from its youth surge. But the FSI scoring design is again more favourable to Western countries, especially considering some countries are suffering from the demographic deficit and an ageing population. To make it simple, demographic structure can be a core element of state capacity rather than fragility – not to mention that countries like China and India, with stronger economies, are better equipped to counter demographic challenges.

What is concealed here? The composition of the Index's indicators shows that more weightage is given to political (and military) indicators, as it has six categories. If the FSI can be of any policy influence, it encourages states to imitate the Western path of development and suggests that they would have a brighter chance to better their ranking if they prioritise political over social and economic developments. Cuba has undertaken unprecedented political and economic reforms in the past few years, and has earned itself significant improvement in the trend ranking. However, some failed experiences have definitely proven the opposite as well: because states tend to become fragile in the process of political improvement and more fragile if domestic insurgency or external interventions are underway. Obvious cases are those countries affected in the Arab Spring. For example, Tunisia got 9 points in a worsening trend; and others, including Yemen, Syria, and Libya, went to a critical worsening stage. Therefore, for states like China and India, it will be wiser to put the FSI implications aside and insist on their own path of development.



BANGLADESH: A CONFLICT SHATTER ZONE

By

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The Fragile States Index (FSI), published annually by the Washington, DC-based The Fund for Peace has come out with its report for 2016, which covers the conflict events for the year 2015. This article analyses the indicators provided by the report for Bangladesh, which has seen incidents of spectacular violence in its recent years of political turmoil.

Bangladesh qualifies to be a classic conflict shatter zone (Robert Kaplan), owing to the peculiar conditions attributable to its geographical position, which has resulted in social, economic, political and environmental conflict. The FSI report marks Bangladesh in the 'Alert' category in state fragility for 2016, and in the category of 'Some Improvement' in the decade trends (2007-2016). Its neighbour Myanmar has a similar 'Alert' categorisation in 2016 and 'Marginal Improvement' between 2007-2016, while India has an 'Elevated Warning' ranking in 2016 and 'Worsening' between 2007-2016, according to the FSI Overview Report for the year 2016.

The Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League government assumed office in 2009, which was preceded by a period of intense domestic turmoil (2006-2008) under the military caretaker government in Bangladesh. This period saw extreme political polarisation and violence in the country, and the fractured political conditions sowed the seeds for continued violence during and after the Shahbagh protests of 2013. Therefore, the decadal index of 'Some Improvement' in Bangladesh is quite misleading in the FSI report, and does not co-relate to the 'Alert' sounded for 2016. The past ten years have been marked by increased violence in Bangladesh.

The 'Social Indicator' index of the FSI report does not accurately depict the intensity of the demographic pressures that Bangladesh is facing (8.0), which, when combined with the environmental pressures and population growth, is definitely higher than what has been depicted for India (8.1). Also, the intensity of refugees and IDPs depicted for Bangladesh (6.3) needs to be seen in context with the intensity for Myanmar (8.3), as the problems facing both the neighbouring countries are quite similar. The 'Group Grievance' depicted for Bangladesh (8.9) is also seemingly low given the intense political polarisation, whereas for Myanmar it is high (9.9).

Contextualising the above social indicators, the Bangladesh shatter zone is closely interconnected to the Rakhine region of Myanmar, and the state of Mizoram in Northeast India. Over 60,000 Rohingya migrants are believed to be living in Cox's Bazaar, in and around the registered camps of Bangladesh, and many are accused of illegal activities such as drug-running and other petty crimes. This has led to strong political debate in Bangladesh in the past. The continuing ethnic clashes between Rohingya Muslims and Rakhine Buddhists in the Rakhine state of Myanmar has led to more Rohingya migrants entering Bangladesh through the porous borders.



The Jamaat-e-Islami, a close ally of the main opposition party, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), led by Begum Khaleda Zia, seems to offer tacit support to the Rohingya migrants in Bangladesh. This is owing to commonality in religion, and easy indoctrination to their ideology, as most of these migrants are illiterate and do not have adequate livelihood means. There have been allegations that in attacks and road picketing during political protest rallies by the Jamaat and its youth wing, the Islami Chatra Shibir, the Rohingya migrants are used as the frontline human shield in confrontations with the police, in return for political patronage and money.

Looking at the rise in extremely violent incidents in Bangladesh, in particular the use of swords, sharp blades and machetes, especially during political protests and street confrontations, and the killings of liberal bloggers, LGBTQ+ rights activists, Hindu and Buddhist minorities in various parts of Bangladesh, it seems that 'Group Grievance' in Bangladesh would be alarmingly high. This in turn is directly translating into political violence, and there is a growing trend of the normalisation of brutalised violent means in the Bangladeshi political scenario. These conditions have led to human flight and brain drain from the country, and is having a severe impact on the young generation, specifically students.

The 'State Legitimacy' index under the political and military indicators of the FSI report is again misleading (8.0), as there is a far more serious decline of political legitimacy and democratic choice in Bangladesh, starting from the 2006-2008 period, and continuing to the parliamentary elections of 2014, which was boycotted by the main opposition parties. The political scenario is of extreme vendetta between the main political parties and the religious organisations, directly co-relating to the 'Factionalised Elites' index (9.6), which has deepened the political divide. The 'Human Rights and Rule of Law' index (7.6) does not fit in with the prevailing ground reality either.

Overall, the FSI report seems to have under-assessed certain indicators and the contradictions are evident within indicators of the same grouping. It will be interesting to note the shifts in the FSI report of 2017, which will have to take into account the protracted and violent events of the current year; 2016. The culmination of the actualities of the brutalisation over the past years has finally shown its ugly head in Bangladesh, with the homegrown terrorism and jihadi ideology. It is in the interest of India to see that the conditions present in Bangladesh and Myanmar do not affect the larger region.



FSI AFGHANISTAN: LIMITED SCOPE FOR USE

By

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In the 2016 edition of the Fragile States Index (FSI) brought out by the Fund for Peace (FFP), Afghanistan is listed in 'High Alert', scoring 107.9 points. It is placed 28.3 points behind India ('Elevated Warning'); and 6.2 points behind Pakistan (also in 'High Alert').

All these scores were based on an assessment made using values placed on various indicators: "Demographic Pressures, Refugees and IDPs, Uneven Economic Development, Group Grievance, Human Flight & Brain Drain, Poverty & Economic Decline, State Legitimacy, Public Services, Human Rights & Rule of Law, Security Apparatus, Factionalized Elites, and External Intervention."

However, the points of reference used for identifying, calculating or determining the values to be placed against each indicator for each country for each year, are unclear. Perhaps this is the bane of standardised reports on matters that cannot be truly standardised. While superficially, the report gives a general idea of the status of fragility of each country, the purpose and the use of the report ends there. The absence of specifics in the final report, particularly regarding how the parameters were evaluated in the contexts of their relationships with each other, sticks out jarringly.

An individual who is less informed regarding issues such as fragility of countries would be given an impression of a reality that is not always quite what it appears as on the surface – and that is intellectual disservice, and, needless to say, defeats the purpose of undertaking the task itself. Moreover, bringing out standardised reports to illustrate the fragility of states becomes further complicated when conflict-ridden states are assessed along with those who are not equally conflict-ridden or who may or may not share similarities in contexts vis-à-vis the persistence of conflict.

In cases such as Afghanistan or Iraq or Syria, the situation on the ground has been known to change rapidly – and almost even on a daily basis. That the report in question, which was published on 27 June 2016, is a collection of findings based on data collected between 1 January 2015 and 31 December 2015, means it does not entirely capture the current state-of-affairs in Afghanistan in a succinct manner, and is also outdated to an extent. Perhaps it is also because mere numbers and rankings can hardly ever deliver a contextual explanation of complex situations beyond a certain point.

However, the 2016 FSI does attribute 9.9 points under 'External Intervention', 8.8 points under 'Factionali[s]ed Elites', 10 points under 'Security Apparatus', 8.7 under 'Human Rights and Rule of Law', and 9.1 under 'State Legitimacy' categories. To a fair extent, these rankings can still hold true in the case of Afghanistan. Nonetheless, it still raises some questions such as: what all forms of external interventions were taken into consideration while assessing Afghanistan's 'External Intervention' rank? Was it just the foreign assistance, or were covert actions by some countries to undermine security in Afghanistan also considered? If only one of these were taken into account,



then the assessment would be incomplete. If both were taken into account, how were these two very different forms of interventions assessed? With regard to 'Rule of Law and Human Rights', the state-of-affairs requires to be assessed based on how much of it was brought about by the state and how much of it was brought about by non-state actors. This distinction is unclear in the rankings and in the text of the report, because Afghanistan was once completely under terrorist control and has moved forward to the current day status. Conversely, Pakistan, whose territory has never completely been under terrorist control, has deteriorated in many ways in that category. Yet, Afghanistan is ranked behind Pakistan in this category.

Moreover, Afghanistan scored +5.6 in the 2016 FSI's assessment of 'Decade Trends', thus falling in 'Some Worsening'. But at present – politically, economically, and security-wise – the country is in a situation that is far worse than what it was in 2006. 'Some Worsening' might not be an entirely appropriate term to describe the current situation in the country. Currently, according to reports, roughly 10 per cent of the country's territory is not under the Afghan government's control.

At present, in Afghanistan, political stability is a pipe dream; insecurity is at an all-time high; the army is extremely stretched, and experts have warned that the army runs a real risk of collapse in a year if circumstances do not change; election and electoral reform related roadblocks and problems still persist; power brokers all over the country have begun to align themselves; the geopolitics of this conflict has become further frustrated; the total outbound migration of Afghans was next only to those of Syrians; criminal activities are witnessing a surge; and governance is hostage to political tugs-of-war, retarding the pace of any attempt to improve..

Overall, although the report shows that Afghanistan is in 'High Alert', the assessment is useful only to the extent that the readers are made aware that it is in that category – which too is an update nonetheless, but one that is of not much use. Lastly, the lack of clarity on the relationships between parameters (and related questions) makes it difficult to use/quote the findings as compiled in the current form.



SRI LANKA: FAULT-LINES IN THE TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE PROCESS

By

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Sri Lanka is ranked 43rd (out of 178 countries) in the 2016 annual Fragile States Index, pointing to an improving trend in the country. The country has been moved from the 'Alert' category to 'High Warning' – a welcome improvement for people recovering from a three-decade long war. How much of this, however, is substantial and sustainable change, is yet to be seen.

It is one of the 78 countries to show improvement and the most improved country in 2015-2016. These uplifting numbers, however, belie the actual changes taking place within the country. As demonstrated by the graphs, group grievances remain largely unchanged and political elites are still old wine in new bottles.

Given that these factors are recognised by many analysts as the main sources of the conflict, it is difficult to begin celebrating immediately. Additionally, the rising brain drain from the country will continue to have significant adverse impacts on the overall growth in Sri Lanka.

In its brief analysis, the Index does acknowledge that though political and economic stability has improved the country's ratings, "deep schisms within society, remain perilously high." This schism is especially relevant when observing the ongoing reconciliation process in the country. The new government has been on a fast-track for transitional justice. The troubling methodology and the short time-frame indicate that there are many reasons to remain cautious while welcoming this process.

At the core of these doubts lies the fact the Government of Sri Lanka has so far not undertaken meaningful steps to outline a coherent policy for transitional justice. On the one hand, while Tamil and Muslim minorities remain doubtful regarding any tangible outcomes (given failures of past processes), the Sinhala majority community identifies the process itself as an initiative for Tamils and not a process that affects the whole country. This has serious consequences for the legitimacy of the process. While the Public Representations Committee made commendable efforts to reflect the desires of the Sri Lankan polity within a short time-frame, the subsequent rush to bring out a new constitution indicates that it may not be as inclusive as Sri Lankans would have wanted it to be.

The lack of institutional will is further revealed when critiques of the constitutional process are warned that trying to change structural issues of governance or justice will jeopardise the passing of a constitution of the country. Statements by executives, in their refusal to make linkages between transitional justice mechanisms and judicial mechanisms (such as showing linkages between the Office of Missing Persons with criminal proceedings), results in the creation of a false dichotomy between justice and peace. As the Bill for the controversial Office of Missing Persons was being passed, the independent Task Force on Reconciliation Mechanisms was still in the process of getting community feedback on what they thought of the bill. These contradictions are certainly not



promising. Furthermore, many submissions to the Task Force had criticised the title that refused to encompass the reality of enforced disappearances or bother to consult families of those disappeared, before it was passed. Such instances continue to alienate those most affected by the war and reveals that perhaps the process itself has become more of a foreign policy tool rather than a significant step towards reconciliation.

According to the IMF and the World Bank, Sri Lanka has recently reached the “middle-income country” status. While this may encourage investment, it cannot hide the challenges the country faces in – on one hand, providing basic services to marginalised communities and regions; and on the other, in curbing corruption and strengthening governance institutions. These are challenges that are not new in any way for the island state. While the end of military conflict provides opportunities, we certainly do not want it to be termed as “missed opportunities” after ten years.

In Sri Lanka, the drive for development, particularly the increase in infrastructure development, at the cost of forming a consensus on how economic benefits can be equally divided between different groups and communities, is a serious problem. Additionally, Sri Lanka has still not devised a clear long-term economic development strategy that takes into account the failed aspects of Western financial models (post the financial crisis in 2008). The FSI states that “weak and failing states” pose a serious challenge to the international community. Perhaps what the FSI fails to mention is that sometimes, standards imposed by the global community and financial instruments can seriously undermine small, developing states. Sri Lankans are at present only more in debt, and government deficits are continuing to increase (as more loans need to be paid back and grace periods end) – a fact that is only too apparent for its citizens in the form of growing taxation in the country.

Other than weaknesses in institutions and the prevalent political culture, another important determinant of struggles of the country is the inability to channel a wide scale grassroots movement for good governance and accountability. A meaningful, open and inclusive conversation between all parties is the first step towards this. In the transitional justice and reconciliation environment, the trend towards consultations has certainly begun to provide space for this shift. More commissions and tasks forces have helped bring stakeholders together to have this critical conversation.

It is now left to be seen whether the people’s voices are heard.

FSI AND NEPAL

By

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The Fund for Peace's (FFP) twelfth annual Fragile States Index (FSI) ranked 178 countries based on measures of their stability and the pressures they face. Initially called 'Failed States Index', it was renamed 'Fragile States Index' in 2014 following severe criticism from several quarters. However, the report still continues to use the term 'failed state' interchangeably. The 2016 FSI report looks at four 'Social Indicators' (Demographic Pressures, Refugees and IDPs, Group Grievance and Human Flight and Brain Drain), two 'Economic Indicators' (Uneven Economic Development and Poverty and Economic Decline) and six 'Political and Military Indicators' (Legitimacy of the State, Public Services, Human Rights and Rule of Law, Security Apparatus, Factionalised Elites and External Intervention) to rank countries around the world, intending to analyse their susceptibility towards being or becoming the fragile state.

The report is highly useful as it distills millions of pieces of information into a form that is suitable to analyse and easy to comprehend. It aims to take the understanding of weak and failing states beyond identifying and analysing broader social trends, by adopting the Conflict Assessment System Tool (CAST) analytical platform. Though there is lack of clarity in the report regarding what is meant by 'fragile'; how a state is rendered fragile; or whether fragility is relative or absolute, it has successfully generated lively debate in South Asia. This article analyses the indicators provided by the report for Nepal, where the country's ethnic groups carried out massive protests after the promulgation of the new constitution, leading to the disruption of the India-Nepal border for months right after the massive earthquake that took around ten thousand lives.

The 2016 FSI report can be contested as it gives equal weightage to all the twelve indicators - four social indicators, two economic, and six political and military indicators - even though not all the indicators have equal potential to demonstrate a state as 'fragile'. Similarly, the FSI has given more importance to the 'Political' and 'Military' indicators as it has six categories, while the 'Social' indicator has four, and the 'Economic' indicator has two.. In fact, there are different factors for different countries that could demonstrate it as a fragile state.

Nepal, a country that is going through multiple transitions, is ranked 33rd in the present report, as opposed to the 36th and 31st positions in 2015 and 2014, respectively. As in the 2015 report, Nepal is listed under the 'Alert' category. The report has rightly indicated the 'Worsening Situation' in Nepal since the promulgation of the new constitution in September 2015.

The report also correctly indicates a decline in categories like 'Demographic Pressure, Refugees, and IDPs' and 'Group Grievances', which are a result of the massive earthquake that shook Nepal in 2015. However, to note that there was some improvement in 'Human Flight and Brain Drain' is unconvincing, because there was a significant rise in outbound migration due to the continuous aftershocks following the earthquake..



There were strong protests by Madhesis, Janajatis and other marginalised groups after the promulgation of the new constitution, which led to an 'unofficial blockade' for several months, and which severely affected the economy of the country due to a severe shortage in fuel and other essential supplies. This has been reflected in the report, which shows an increase in uneven economic development, rise in poverty, and economic decline. There was also a worsening of the delivery of public services during the Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli government in 2015 - and the seems to be correct in this assessment.

Surprisingly, however, the report indicates an improvement in the 'Human Rights and Rule of Law' and 'Security Apparatus' categories despite the fact that Nepal witnessed severe protests by Madhesis, Janajatis and other marginalised groups, which claimed over 50 lives. Nepal failed to crack down on the protestors and ease tensions on the India-Nepal border though the Armed Police Force, and the Army was mobilised to control the situation. There were massive human rights violations in the southern plains of Nepal; an issue that has been raised by numerous human right organisations.

The report states that there was no change in the 'Factionalised Elites' category. However, the fact remains that like never before, there was massive polarisation among the elites of Nepal on the issues of the constitution. Similarly, Nepalese women protested against the citizenship provision that discriminates against them. The report should have considered this issue. Interestingly, unlike the Nepali media coverage, which reported massively about Indian interference in Nepal's internal affairs, the report states that there was a decrease in external intervention.

While the situation in Nepal was further complicated by the KP Sharma Oli government, causing a worsening in Kathmandu-New Delhi relations, with the change in government, the situation is gradually normalising. The new government led by Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' has promised to address the demands of Madhesi, Janajatis and other marginalised groups by amending the constitution – this is a challenging undertaking.



FSI AND MYANMAR: MORE CLARITY REQUIRED

By

Preet Malik

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To try to evaluate a democratic process on a uniform framework is fraught with problems of a structural nature. Just by way of an example, in a farewell call on the then Malaysian Prime Minister in August 1990, Mahathir Mohammed remarked that “in India, we had too much democracy.”

He was referring to the fact that the opposition could hold up the process of governance in India. In Malaysia, such possibilities were then contained by strong governmental action against any form of opposition to its policies. Myanmar is a case in point. How do you reflect in measureable terms the graduated move towards a democratic system that has to be viewed in positive terms, and thus be shown as an improvement over the past when the military held Myanmar in its authoritarian clasp, while the constitutional construct continues to place major hurdles in the way of attaining full democracy? The issue would remain as to how one establishes a purely scientific basis for measuring this change.

The 2008 constitution is the basis on which the system of administration that Myanmar today enjoys. The fact that today there is a non-military elected government in place is a very positive development; particularly as this is the first such government in place after 1962. However, this positive is constrained by the provisions of the constitution that places the Myanmar Armed forces as central to preserving the unity and integrity of the nation while significantly placing them outside the control of the civilian authority; and the home or interior ministries are headed by a nominee of the armed forces, ensuring that both domestic and external security remain in the domain of the military.

Accordingly, any measurement of the actual functioning of democracy would have to factor in the overwhelming controls that the military continues to enjoy in the governance of the country. The elected government has flexibility to determine the course of the economy within its programmes for socio-economic development. It has control to a large extent over the direction that it would take on foreign policy and of course the place of Myanmar in international and regional discourses. However on key domestic policy areas like the Rohingya issue, the general issue of communal peace and harmony, reconciliation processes with ethnic groups that fall within the purview of security, and on areas of strategic determination, the overbearing role of the armed forces remains centred on the veto over changes or policies that they disagree with.

The question therefore for the FSI is as to how it would determine accurately the weightage it would need to give to the different aspects of the technically limited democracy that has come to prevail in Myanmar. The essential fact is that while accepting the progress made, full democracy is far from being restored to Myanmar. Another significant negative is that the ethnic minority issue remains a



key factor to which a solution is still to emerge. This poses a threat to the stability of the country and could become an excuse as it did in the early 1960s to the prevalence of democracy.

The union governments, whether democratic or authoritarian, have so far failed to meet the demands and aspirations of the ethnic groups who have claimed that there has been a consistent failure to meet the provisions of the Panglong Agreement in letter and spirit. This has led to armed resistance and an exploitation of the situation, particularly by China. The Thein Sein regime succeeded in bringing the groups to the negotiating table with a universal ceasefire as a key component of the negotiations. Significantly, it also succeeded in including the Karens to join the process. However, there are certain key groups that have continued their armed insurrection, encouraged by China. Suu Kyi's recent visit to China has now resulted in the possibility of these groups also joining the process that the present government is following under the Panglong nomenclature. The key issue is the demand for structural changes that would establish a true federal structure with a significant undertaking on autonomy. This would involve amendments to the constitution that can only happen if the armed forces accept that changes pose no threat to the security and integrity of the country. Again, to satisfy the demands of autonomy, the role of the armed forces in the governance of the states would have to be curtailed, if not eliminated. This could pose a serious problem in evolving a solution that would satisfy the ethnic groups.

To conclude, the negatives in Myanmar to a large extent still continue to override the positives. Any true index would have to reflect that the situation remains far from ideal. The challenge posed by the ethnic groups and the systemic change that would have to take place to meet it is an area that imposes itself on any analysis of the direction in which Myanmar is moving. The 2016 FSI has taken these factors into account but the weightage that it would apply to these developments is not quite clear.



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