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The difficulty of measuring Governance and Stateness

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Abstract

Measures of governance and stateness have grown substantially in number over recent decade, and gained also greater importance in building public discourses and orienting decision-making processes. Yet there seems to be little agreement on what exactly these measures represent. This paper claims that the proliferation of metrics can only be understood against the conceptual hybridity and indeterminacy in which the notions of governance and stateness have entangled. To frame this 'creative disorder', the first part of the paper introduces the current debate on measuring governance and stateness. The second explores the semantic fields of the two concepts, while the third one provides an overview on existing measures and methodological questions. The fourth part explores normative demands and policy prescriptions linked to this production and the fifth section analyses in depth three different measures: The Rule of Law Index, the Sustainable Governance Indicators and the State Fragility Index. The sixth part concludes by summarising the relevance of exploring both conceptual and normative challenges in the use and production of these measures.

Keywords

Governance, Stateness, Measures, Indicators, The Rule of Law Index, Sustainable Governance Indicators, State Fragility Index.

1. Introduction¹

The academic discourse on governance became central in political science and international relations in the late 1980s, when the demise of the bipolar world order foreshadowed the emergence of new political structures, actors, and mechanisms of government bypassing traditional categories of the state and central authority. In this context, the term ‘governance’ gained prominence as a theoretical approach and concept that grasps the different aspects of this transformation of state power.

To differentiate governance from government and/or governing, many scholars emphasised the type of actors on whom steering functions are vested. Rosenau pointed out that, while governance was by definition ‘always effective in performing the functions necessary to systemic persistence’ (Rosenau & Czempiel, 1992), government succeeded only when the formal state authority was capable of enforcing decision-making. Following the network focus of governance, many scholars have also explored the role of corporations (Wilkes, 2004) or non-state/private authorities (Hall & Biersteker, 2002). Again others underlined that governance implied a plural framework of actors, in which it ‘is not what the state does that is different, but *how* it does it’ (Richards & Smith, 2002).

During the 1990s, the concept became particularly prominent within EU studies to describe the changing nature of the state under the conditions of supranational political integration. As such, it served as an antipode to classical notions of ‘government’ and hierarchical steering, i.e. to describe the emergence of largely non-hierarchical, co-operative decision-making structures including non-state actors. Table 1 summarises a way of differentiating between government and governance, considering differences on politics, policy and polity. This ‘governance turn’ (Rosamond, 2000, p. 110) was also accompanied by a strong focus on aspects such as administrative capacity, bureaucratic functioning, and institutional capacity.

Table 1 Government vs. governance

	Government State vs. market resp. society	Governance State, market and networks as complementary forms of steering
Polity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the state • Majoritarian democracy and hierarchy as most important institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional structure, which combines elements of hierarchy, negotiation systems and competition mechanisms • Networks
Politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competition between political parties for acquisition of power and between interest groups to gain influence • Conflict regulation by decision of responsible state organs and enforcement of official decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflicts between governing/leading and governed/affected actors • Steering and co-ordination within institutional steering systems • Negotiations between state and/or societal actors • Adaptation of institutional steering systems
Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legislation (order and prohibition) • Distribution of public goods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreement (within networks and communities), compromises, barter • Co-production of collective goods • Network management • Institution building (management of institutional change)

Source: (Umbach, 2007, p. 37); translated version of Benz 2004, p.21.

¹ This paper was prepared for the Workshop ‘Global Governance by Indicators: Measuring Governance and Stateness’ held at the European University Institute (13-14 November 2014). I thank the workshop participants, Nehal Bhuta and Gaby Umbach for their helpful comments.

While the concept of governance was especially prominent in the context of EU, administrative and public policy studies, it also found its way into the development discourse in the mid-1990s, and, later on, into the international organisation framework. Yet, despite its academic dispersion into IR studies, its related empirical and theoretical consolidation was missing and, like the concept of sustainable development, it rather seemed to turn into a catch-all phrase for political processes at global level and a ‘fetish’ (Levi-Faur, 2012) used to refer to everything and anything (Bevir, 2010; Finkelstein, 1995) in global policy-making .

The academic omnipresence of the term to some extent derives from the clime of transition and uncertainty in which the features of governance have emerged. Levi-Faur (2012) points out that the governance discourse was a functional reaction to a crisis of governability. Scott (2009) claims that the discourse of governance was stimulated by the need to create a new, pervasive and pragmatic approach to capitalism, marked by the ‘destatisation’ of the political system (Jessop, 1997). Governance in fact represents an important asset of the discourse on modernisation around the neo-liberal economic agenda. According to Fine (2009, p. 12) ‘in place of the amorphous but at least single notion of modernisation, there has been the proliferation of developmental terminology, from good governance through to corruption, each element of which has to be critically unpicked across rhetoric, etc, to make any sense of what is being said or, possibly more important, being done’.

Because of these numerous definitions, the conceptual consistency of governance remained blurred and the term gained various meanings and functions. Governance has been defined through categories such as ‘order and disorder’ (Levi-Faur, 2012) or forms of collective action, ‘inherently comprehensive of both government and civil society’ (Lynn, 2013, p. 13). Even if governance was meant to build a bridge between different disciplines (Kersbergen & Waarden, 2004), the governance literature did not actually bridge the gap between different discourses. Finally and particularly important in the context of this paper, the capacity of differentiating between proxies, types, qualities and categories of governance is still an open challenge. Two decades after the emergence of the governance concept on the academic agenda, a number of theoretical and methodological questions remain open to discussion.

Yet, over the life cycle of the concept, a new theoretical debate re-shaped the course of the ‘old’ governance debate. After a decade in which it theoretically replaced reflections on the role of classical state authority, the state re-emerged as a key conceptual reference point within international relations in the new millennium (Bhuta, 2012). With the escalation of the Global War on Terror, the international community began to address the problem of ‘state weakness’ and brought the academic discussion back to measuring the conditions for the survival of the state. The ‘collapse’ or ‘failure’ of states in Africa and the Middle East were considered a crisis of governance producing threats to the global security. The perception of these threats reinforced the search for good governance instruments and indicators and hence interlinked the two conceptual arenas of governance and stateness. As a result, many practitioners and scholars directly relate state weakness with the discourse on governance.

In view of these developments and challenges, also the proliferation of different measurement innovations further complicated the consistency of the governance-stateness nexus. Against this background, the present paper aims to map the literature on governance and stateness indicators in order to explore strengths and weaknesses of the current debate. It provides an overview on the production of governance and stateness indicators and explores the extent to which major methodological trends reflect a set of conceptual uncertainties. Its fourth part explores potential normative demands and policy prescriptions linked to their production. The fifth section analyses the conceptual construction of both governance and stateness indicators, considering three different measures (The Rule of Law Index, the Sustainable Governance Indicators and the State Fragility Index). The sixth part concludes by summarising the relevance of exploring the conceptual and normative context of these measures.

2. Measurements of governance

There are few terms in social science and in practice (Bovaird & Löffler, 2003, p. 316) that are as vague as the governance concept. Yet, definitions, theories, and measures of governance have still grown substantially in number over recent decade. The term governance has attracted a pluralist connotation both in the academic and public debate and scholars, institutions, and stakeholders have provided as many definitions as to turn the term into a mixed bag of notions, aspects, and attributes.

Also measures of governance have proliferated during the last decades. Also within the debate on measuring governance, there seems to be little agreement on what exactly governance means. Based on the conceptual cacophony, the present paper hence claims that the problem of measuring governance derives from the problem of defining governance and its boundaries. Therefore, it states that the proliferation of indicators can only be understood against the conceptual hybridity and indeterminacy in which the notions of governance have entangled. To frame and explore this ‘creative disorder’ (Kooiman, 2003), the present sub-chapter attempts to reconstruct the conceptual meaning of governance. Following Adcock and Collier (2001), it attempts to distinguish between background and systematised concepts. While the background concept captures a number of meanings *associated* with the terms (connotation), the systematised concept is the result of a theoretical selection and interpretation (denotation).

1.1 Episteme and definitions

In order to reconstruct the systematised meaning associated with the concept of governance, Table 2 illustrates a set of definitions of governance provided by international organisations. It shows the multiple interpretations of the term ‘governance’, in which the core essence of the concept substantially varies from one provider to the other. As a result of this multiplicity, measures of governance have been operationalised as diversely as processes (governance as a tool) and structures (governance as a form); inputs (governance as both structure and process, bureaucratic and administrative capacity), and outputs (governance as policies, outcomes, consequences and results).

Table 2 Definitions of governance

Institutions	Definitions	Characteristics
EC	‘Governance represents both the rules, process, and behaviour that affect the way in which powers are exercised at the European level, particularly as regard to openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence’ (European Commission, 2001).	Input (Process and Structure)
WB	Governance concerns ‘the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised. This includes (a) the process by which governments are selected, monitored and replaced; (b) the capacity of the government to effectively formulate and implement sound policies; and (c) the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them’ (Kaufmann, Kraay, & Mastruzzi, 2011, p. 222).	Input (Process and Structure)
OECD	‘Governance is the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority necessary to manage a nation’s affairs’ (OECD, 2014).	Input (Process)
UN	‘In the community of nations, governance is considered “good” and “democratic” to the degree in which a country’s institutions and processes are transparent’ (United Nations, 2014).	Input (as Quality of institutions and Process)

The European Commission, for instance, adopts a subjective (Curtin & Wessel, 2005) definition that sees governance as input that encompasses ‘both the rules, process, and behaviour that affects the way in which powers are exercised at the European level, particularly as regard to openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence’ (European Commission, 2001). For the OECD indeed, governance is more a process, i.e. ‘the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority necessary to manage a nation’s affairs’ (OECD, 2014). The World Bank adopts the systemic-input dimension to define governance as the procedural and structural set of ‘traditions and institutions by which authority...is exercised’ (Kaufmann et al., 2011, p. 222). The UN finally sees governance as a

process, and emphasises its instrumental function in promoting democracy: ‘In the community of nations, governance is considered “good” and “democratic” to the degree in which a country’s institutions and processes are transparent’ (United Nations, 2014).

Theoretically, governance is generally understood as a form of rule without formal government (Rosenau & Czempiel, 1992), i.e. as a set of regulatory mechanisms implemented without the classical tools of state regulation. However, the literature does not agree on whether governance is a process or a structure, neither whether it should be operationalised through input nor output indicators. As summarised by Umbach (2007) in Table 3, governance can be defined using either a process-related perspective or one that is focussed on structure.

Table 3 Governance- Structure vs. Process

	Process-oriented	Structure-oriented
In a broad sense	Hierarchical co-ordination <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authoritative instruction • Majoritarian decision-making 	Hierarchy/State/bureaucracy Independent regulatory authorities Supranational institutions
	Non-hierarchical co-ordination between public and private actors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negotiation • Conviction 	Networks Tripartite negotiation systems Public-private partnerships
	Regulated self-steering (in the shadow of hierarchy)	Neo-corporatist negotiation systems Federations, Interest groups
	Societal self-steering	Community/Clan Market (spontaneous order, anarchy)
In a narrow sense “New” modes of governance in networks	Non-hierarchical co-ordination between public and private actors within processes of arguing and bargaining	Networks Tripartite negotiation systems Public-private partnerships

Source: (Umbach, 2007, p. 37) translated and amended version of Börzel, 2005, p. 622.

In the process-oriented perspective, governance is understood ‘as the continuous political process of setting explicit goals for society and intervening in it in order to achieve these goals’ (Jachtenfuchs & Kohler-Koch, 2004, p. 99). In terms of activities it defines governance as ‘hierarchical coordination, non-hierarchical co-ordination between public and private actors, regulated self-steering and societal self-steering (cf. Börzel 2005:622)’ (Umbach, 2009, p. 40). ‘In a second understanding, governance encompasses the structural dimension of policy-making as a (new) ‘form of social order’ (cf. Börzel 2005:617)’ (ibidem, p. 41). The ‘structure-oriented perspective [indeed] includes different mechanisms of co-ordination and patterns of interaction of interdependent political and societal actors, institutionalised steering systems, collective action within institutions, strategic coalition-building and the implementation of decisions taken by networks, tripartite negotiation systems, public-private partnerships, and/or interest groups (cf. Benz 2004a:25; Börzel 2005:618ff.; Fürst 2004:48)’ (ibidem).

Both above governance perspectives have influenced the formation of governance indicators. Yet, the divergence between input and output perspective still represents a point of vivid discussion within (Rotberg, 2014) and beyond the literature. While input indicators refer to both the structure and process, i.e. how governance is implemented, output indicators indeed take into consideration the consequence of governance in a broad array of sectors. In terms of policy steering, over the past two decades, the measurement of governance has become highly significant in judgments about aid allocation to developing countries. While some actors lamented that output indicators provide very little guidance on why a given country is performing well or not, others criticised the attempt to approach governance through the bureaucratic setting of resources invested (ibidem). However, both

strategies are functional and serve different purposes (measuring the quality of governance or its systemic functioning). Instead of arguing about the legitimacy of one solution over the other, more attention should be paid to using these instruments according to their focus and scope. Many practitioners in fact evaluate the quality of governance by using indicators of the functioning or bureaucratic organisation of the state, while others, who aim at defining governance from the structural or process-oriented perspective, actually use performance indicators to operationalise their understanding of governance².

2.2 Measures of governance

During the 1990s, the measurement of governance has acquired a type of rationalising function, aiming to liberate the concept from both theoretical and conceptual uncertainties. Within this rationalisation process, as a result of the exponential increase of proxies (corruption, rule of law), attributes (good governance) and correlated variables (democracy, development) the term governance has accumulated a deep connotative capacity, but only a spurious denotative understanding (Levi-Faur, 2012). To summarise this plurality, Table 4 presents some of the most important measures of governance provided by international organisations and stakeholders. Two different strategies of measurement will be considered more closely in order to exemplify different approaches to governance indicator production.

2.2.1 Mono-dimensional measures

On the one side of the production, many indicator providers approximate the value of governance through indirect, mono-dimensional proxy measures. Mono-dimensional measures account for a single aspect or dimension of governance, while multi-dimensional indices integrate different representation of the same phenomena in the same measure. For instance, mono-dimensional metrics of governance include three typologies of measures focusing on: the administrative capacity (i.e. the World Justice Project's *Rule of Law*), the quality of political institutions (i.e. the Transparency International's *Corruption Perception Index*), and the relationship between state and society (i.e. Freedom House's *Freedom in the World*).

Freedom in the World, for instance, is an annual index of political rights and civil liberties, launched in 1972 by Freedom House. It represents the first measure of freedom used to capture the level of governance. Since 1995, Transparency International started producing *the Corruption Perception Index*, one of the most popular and widespread indicators of corruption used as proxy for measuring governance. Moreover, during the 1990s, the discourse on governance frequently merged with the discourse on poverty reduction, development, and anti-corruption. In 1997, the UN Development Programme launched the *Human Development Index*, broadly considered as either a measure of development and human wellbeing. This index is an aggregate measure of human development based on six variables and available for 187 countries (2012 edition). However, no clear specifications are made about the relationship between these variables. Given the ambiguity of the governance definition, no governance indicators had been included in the original Millennium Development Goals (MDG) context (Kaufmann & Penciakova, 2010).

Many mono-dimensional measures of governance also capture the quality of political institutions. The strengthening of (good) governance has been a key pillar of the democratisation process undergone by post-colonial states during the 1980s (Weiss, 2000). Within the UN agenda for democratisation (Boutros-Ghali, 1996) the 'right to democratic governance' established a sort of a 'global guarantee clause' (ibidem) according to which the international community should sponsor and

² This is the case of the World Bank, which conceptually emphasises the administrative and structural infrastructure of governance, but in practice, use performance indicators, to operationalise the *Worldwide Governance Indicators*.

support the diffusion and consolidation of constitutional democracies (Halperin & Lomasney, 1993). In light of these normative targets, the production of governance indicators was indispensable to measure the transition towards modern economic and political institutions (Cooley, 2014). However, governance was also instrumental to outline the path to modernisation and to guide the development aid strategies of donor countries. As result, governance indicators have focussed on measuring some of the most important aspects of democratic regimes.

Table 4 Measures of governance

Name	Producer	Mono/ Multi dimen sional	Focus	AIM	Cov erag e	No. of vari abl es
Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI)	Bertelsmann Foundation	Mono-	Quality of institutions	'The BTI is directed at the normative goal of a market-based democracy... The BTI emphasizes the same values that underlie the European Union's integration process: a representative democracy under the rule of law combined with a socially responsible and sustainable market economy (Stiftung, 2005, p. 4)'.	129	2
Corruption Perception Index	Transparency International	Mono-	Administrative capacity	'Raising public awareness of corruption' (Lambsdorff, 2007).	176	13
Freedom in the World	Freedom House	Mono-	Quality of institutions	'Analyse the challenges to freedom; advocate for greater political and civil liberties; and support frontline activists to defend human rights and promote democratic change' (Freedom House, 2014).	2	195
Global Integrity Index	Worldwide Governance Indicators	Multi-	Quality of institutions	'To assess the existence and effectiveness of mechanisms that prevent abuses of power and promote public integrity, as well as the access that citizens have to their government' (Global Integrity, 2014).	43	300
Legatum Prosperity Index	Legatum Institute	Mono-	Global wealth and wellbeing	'Assessment of global wealth and wellbeing' that attempt 'to understand how we move 'beyond GDP'' ("The 2013 Legatum Prosperity Index," 2014).	142	89
Sustainable Governance Indicators	Bertelsmann Foundation	Multi-	Sustainability	'SGI thus targets the spectrum of those individuals who formulate, shape and implement policies, from political decision-makers in centres of government and the democratic institutions of the OECD and EU states, to representatives of civil society and international organizations, to scholars and interested citizen' (Schraad-Tischler, & Seelkopf, 2014, p. 2).	41	67
The Country Policy and Institutional Assessment	World Bank	Multi-	State fragility	'The quality of a country's present policy and institutional framework. 'Quality' refers to how conducive that framework is to fostering poverty reduction, sustainable growth and the effective use of development assistance' (The World Bank Group, 2011, p. 1).	78	16
The Rule of Law	World Justice Project	Mono-	Administrative capacity (effective exercise of authority)	'The WJP Rule of Law Index is intended for a broad audience of policy-makers, civil society, practitioners and academics, and aims at identifying strengths and weaknesses in each country under review and at encouraging policy choices that advance the rule of law' (World Justice Project, 2014, p. 188).	99	43
Worldwide Governance Indicators	World Bank	Multi-	Quality of national governance	'Assessing a measure of governance originally devoted to create cross-country indicators of governance and to establish more effective instruments of government assistance' (The World Bank, 2007b).	215	340

Since 2003, also the Bertelsmann Foundation provides a *Transformation Index* (BTI) accounting for the political transformation towards democracy (129 countries). The BTI is made up of two indices: the Status and the Management Index. While the first accounts for economic and political transformation, the second is based on indicators of government performance.

2.2.2 Multi-dimensional measures

The production of governance indicators also resulted in multi-dimensional indices that summarise a large amount of data and information. The World Bank (WB) has created one of the first of these multi-dimensional measures of governance, the *Country Policy and Institutional Assessment* (CPIA). Launched at the end of the 1970s, the CPIA measures the quality of policies and institutional frameworks³, in order to guide the investments of the International Development Association, the US financial institution that offers loans to developing countries. In 1997, also Freedom House begun to calculate a multidimensional measure of governance, the *Nations in Transit* (NIT) index, a measure that aggregates data available on the transition toward democratic institutions undertaken by former communist states in Europe and Eurasia. One of the most widely used multi-dimensional composite measures of *governance* is the *Worldwide Governance Indicators* (WGI). It is created by the WB and aggregates different data sources within six dimensions⁴. The WGI were launched in 1996, on the eve of the baptism of the international discourse that interlinked development, governance, and democratisation. As result of this new emphasis on a combined perspective, the WGI aim to provide a more complete and actionable vision of governance. They are in fact based on strong policy-making objective, creating the diagnostic tools to steer foreign assistance, and to determine country eligibility to aid programmes. The latest version of the WGI is based on 340 variables, and it is available for 215 countries (edition 2013). With this measurement tool, the WB was the first to inaugurate multi-dimensional composite measures of governance⁵.

Other institutions have provided multi-dimensional measures of governance using a set of qualities, categories, or attributes (prosperity, sustainable and competitiveness) to better define the nature of governance. In 1980, a UK based commercial provider launched the *International Country Risk Guide* (ICRG), an index of risk assessment composed by 30 indicators and available for 140 countries. Since 2000, also the World Economic Forum (WEF) published the *Global Competitiveness Report* that, based on two indices (Business Competitiveness Index and the Growth Competitiveness Index) explores the relationship between governance and income. Since 2010, the Legatum Institute provides the *Legatum Prosperity Index*, a composite index of wellbeing and prosperity, calculated for 142 countries and based on 8 clusters of indicators. More recently, the Bertelsmann Foundation launched the *Sustainability Governance Indicators* that are build on three indices (the Policy Performance Index, the Democracy Index and the Governance Index) aggregating 67 indicators for 41 countries (edition 2014).

2.3 The semantic field of Governance

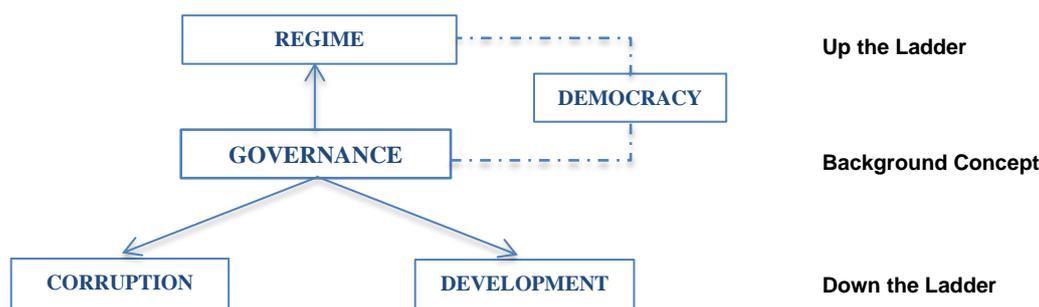
Moving into the semantic field of governance the relationship between indicators of governance and a set of associated phenomena (such development, government, state, and corruption) cannot be easily understood. Figure 1 presents Sartori's levels of abstraction (Sartori, 1970), applied to concept of governance.

³ The CPIA is based on 16 variables grouped in four clusters: (a) economic management; (b) structural policies; (c) policies for social inclusion and equity; and (d) public sector management and institutions.

⁴ Voice and Accountability, Political Stability/Absence of Violence, Government Effectiveness, Regulatory Quality, Rule of Law, Control of Corruption.

⁵ Since 2007, the WB has yet also introduced new 'Actionable Governance Indicators', based on mono-dimensional measures that, focusing on specific aspects each, are better designed to assist policy-making.

Figure 1 Governance: up and down the generality



Moving down the ‘ladder of abstraction’ (ibidem.), many indicators have tended to approach the ‘real’ meaning of governance focusing on sub-dimensions or specific sectors within which governance is supposed to operate. The *Corruption Perception Index* for instance is a mono-dimensional index of governance, and measures of a specific sub-dimension. However, the prescriptive function of the indicators often obfuscates their descriptive function. Many indicator providers and institutions in fact agree that fighting corruption and promoting development is instrumental to improve ‘good governance’. Yet, what is methodologically obscure is the operationalisation of governance through variables that are usually considered as explanatory or intervening variables within the semantic field. This misconception affects the clarity of the governance argumentation in a way that renders the relationship between governance and its sub-dimensions tautological.

Moving up the ladder of abstraction (Sartori, 1970), the concept of governance confronts the notion of democracy. While the UN define governance as functional to implement democracy, some scholars claim indeed that democracy is a form of governance (Schmitter & Karl, 1991). As result of this conceptual hybridity, the indicators of governance reproduce a hybrid vision of democracy⁶ and its relationship with governance. Indices of governance usually incorporate measures of democracy (the Democracy Index is one of three measures used by the Bertelsmann Foundation to build the *Sustainable Governance Indicators*) and indices of democracy equally include aggregate measures of governance. Hence, comparing the categories⁷ of which some measures of governance and democracy are composed, the same underlining conceptualisations (and pillars) are used to capture the essence of both basic concepts.

Continuing the move up the abstraction ladder, the concept of governance confronts the notion of international order and political regime. Yet, also the relationship between these concepts is unclear. The most important characteristic of governance should be the existence of most divers hierarchical and non-hierarchical modes of political steering as well as the non-centrality of the state. According to Rosenau, governance moreover underlies a form of political order (Rosenau & Czempiel, 1992), a ‘system of rules with transnational consequences’ (Rosenau, 1995). So, governance is also seen as a way of governmentalising international regimes (Zanotti, 2005) or even as the manifestation of a broader agenda composed of sectorial international regimes (Gehring, 1994). Within international relations, governance has also been defined as a by-product of the demise of traditional agency and authoritative rules (Finkelstein, 1995). However, there is no agreement on whether governance holds

⁶ The Figure 1 displays this hybridity locating democracy in the middle between the basic conceptualisation and te upper level of abstraction.

⁷ For instance, *the Democracy Index*, provided by Economist Intelligence Unit presents 60 indicators grouped into 5 pillars: electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, functioning of government, political participation, and political culture. The Sustainable Governance Indicators compiled by Bertelsmann, aggregate three indices (Policy Performance, Governance and Democracy).

an intrinsic global connotation, or whether ‘global’ should be considered only one of the potential ‘adjectives’⁸ of governance (Rosenau, 1995).

Governance indicators, as result, partially have established a contradictory relationship with the supranational characteristic of the concept. Few attempts have tried to differentiate between ‘global’ and ‘national’ governance and classical authoritative methods of regulation. So, contrary to the globalisation discourse, an important trend of measuring governance was the embracing of the regional level within many regional measures of governance⁹.

3. What do stateness indicators measures?

The term ‘stateness’ refers to ‘the institutional centrality of the state’ (Evans, 1997), i.e. to the two basic conditions: the organisational capacity to formulate independent policies (Nettl, 1968), and a coherent institutional framework indispensable to promote social cohesion (Jessop, 1990)¹⁰. The latter two conditions presuppose, of course, the classical attribute of decisive control over the application of authorized force within the territory. While theorising the state is an arduous enterprise challenged by conceptual and theoretical complexities, many scholars and practitioners have approached the problem of state weakness through the lens of empiricism. In less than two decades, the state failure discourse has produced, at least, four variants of ‘low stateness’ (Evans, 1997). As illustrated in Table 5, the notions of state fragility, weakness, failures, and collapse, are used in parallel to frame the meaning of non-consolidated, low, or precarious stateness. As result, a variety of definitions and notions compose the matrix of this background concept.

Table 5 Variants of low stateness: definitions

Variant of ‘low stateness’	Focus on	Definitions
Fragility	Core functions	‘A State is fragile if the government cannot or will not deliver core functions to the majority of its people, including the poor’ (DFID, 2005, p. 7).
Weakness	Critical government functions	‘Inherently weak because of geographical, physical, or fundamental economic constraints; basically strong, but temporarily or situationally weak because of internal antagonisms, management flaws, greed, despotism, or external attack; and a mixture of the two (Rotberg, 2003, p. 4)
Failure	The loss of the monopoly of violence	‘Failed states are tense, deeply conflicted, dangerous, and contested bitterly by warring factions. In most failed states, government troops battle armed revolts led by one or more rivals. Occasionally, the official authorities in a failed state face two or more insurgencies, varieties of civil unrest, different degrees of communal discontent, and a plethora of dissent directed at the state and at groups within the state’ (Rotberg, 2003, p. 5)
Collapse	Implosion	‘A collapsed state is a rare and extreme version of a failed state. Political goods are obtained through private or ad hoc means. Security is equated with the rule of the strong. A collapsed state exhibits a vacuum of authority. It is a mere geographical expression, a black hole into which a failed polity has fallen.’ (Rotberg, 2003, p. 5)

⁸ The expression ‘with adjectives’ is used her to recall the methodological concern advanced by Collier and Levitsky (1997), to differentiate between democracy and its sub-dimensions.

⁹ Regional initiatives based on public perception of governance, include for instance the *Eurobarometer*, the *European Values Study*, the *Asiabarometer*, the *Latinobarometer* and the *Afrobarometer*. Proper measures of governance on the regional scale include indeed the more recent Ibrahim Index of African Governance (2008), the Index of African Governance (2008), and the African Integrity Indicators (2011).

¹⁰ The Weberian monopoly on the legitimate use of force is the fundamental characteristic of the state. However, the term stateness has been used by political theorists like Evans (1997), Nettle (1968) and Jessop (1991) to indicate the *institutional* centrality of the state. As result, the monopoly on the use of force is essential to define the state. But to define the institutionalisation of this monopoly, we have to consider other two categories, the organizational capacity, and the institutional coherence (ibidem).

The term 'state fragility' describes a general incapacity to 'deliver core functions to the majority of its people, including the poor' (DFID, 2005, p. 7). 'State weakness' refers to the lack of essential capabilities to implement 'critical government responsibilities' (Rice & Patrick, 2008, p. 8). It yet also encompasses the incubation of 'ethnic, religious, linguistic, or other intercommunal tensions that have not yet, or not yet thoroughly, become overtly violent' (Rotberg, 2003, p. 4). 'State failure' instead is 'a serious political crisis' (Goldstone et al., 2000) marked by the escalation of a military conflict. The state fails when the central authority loses its monopoly on the legitimate use of force. Rotberg described failed states as 'tense, deeply conflicted, dangerous, and contested bitterly by warring factions' (Rotberg, 2003, p. 5). While 'state weakness' holds 'a temporal or situational' connotation (Goldstone et al., 2000), 'state failure' has a structural and enduring character. 'State collapse', finally, represents an extreme case of state failure, marked by the complete erosion of public authority and legitimacy. A collapsed state differs from a failed state in its institutional character (Milliken & Krause, 2002). When a state fails, the central authority is still existent, but extremely weak, whilst a state collapse reveals a 'complete vacuum of authority' (Rotberg, 2003, p. 5).

3.1 Measures of stateness

The connection between *governance* and democracy that informed the first generation of *governance* measures lost its centrality when the process of democratisation in Africa and Middle East revealed elements of uncertainty (Chesterman, Ignatieff, & Thakur, 2005). The production of *governance* indicators supported the positivist assumption of setting the benchmark and the stages of a linear pattern of development. Yet, the limited achievements of the third wave of democratisation led many scholars and stakeholders to rethink the *governance*-democratisation nexus. The failure of states in Africa and Middle East was considered a crisis of *governance* (ibidem.), which reinforced the search for good *governance* instruments and early-warning indicators of state weakness. However, whereas the category of the 'failed state' emerged in reaction with the uncertainties posed by the process of democratisation, it was only with the declaration of the Global War on Terror, that the state failure paradigm became increasingly dominant, in both the academic and public debate.

As result of these shifts, a number of new measures were produced and many projects focussed on measuring state capacities. While only little empirical evidence supported the formulation of the fragility-security nexus, a number of research projects tried to create early-warning instruments capable of bridging the gap between theory and practice (Carment, Prest, & Samy, 2009). Some of the most important measures of stateness are illustrate in Table 6.

Table 6 Measures of stateness

Index	Provider	Aim	No. indicators	Coverage
Country Indicators for Foreign Policy Fragility Index	Carleton University	Assist donor community.	83	183
Low-Income Countries Under Stress	World Bank	To secure the Bank investment in development countries affected by a set of government and governance endemic crises (Carment et al., 2009)	6	73
Fragile States Index (until 2013, Failed State Index)	Fund for Peace	'To have meaningful early warning, and effective policy responses to the emerging problem of state fragility'(The Fund for Peace, 2014).	12	178
Index of State Weakness in the Developing World	Brooking Institute	Cognitive function: analyse the world's most vulnerable countries.	20	141
State fragility Index	George Mason University	USAID's request to better monitoring and manage the sources of state fragility.	14	162
Political Instability Task Force	George Mason University	Formulating early warning instruments for the US Foreign Policy.	4 datasets, 1300 variables ca.	157

One of the first aggregated measures of state weakness was inaugurated by the CIA in the early 1990s and launched by the Centre for Global Policy at George Mason University (Goldstone et al., 2010). It was the *Political Instability Task Force* (until 1994 named State Failure Task Force). The Task Force was created in response to the need of formulating Early Warning Research for U.S. Foreign Policy, especially in Africa. The task force annually produces four datasets on internal wars that are conceptualised as both forms of political instability and governance failure.

In 2002, the WB started to rank fragile states within the *Low-Income Countries Under Stress* programme to identify countries that perform badly on two core dimensions (low income, and poor CPIA performances). The LICUS initiative was created to support WB decisions on investments in development countries affected by endemic crises (Carment et al., 2009).

Rotberg provided one of the most important qualitative categorisation of state failure. In 2003, after five years of research on the *Failed State Project* at Harvard University, he defined the dividing lines between state collapse and general phenomena of state weakness. In 2004, the Fund for Peace launched the *Failed States Index* (renamed in 2014 into *Fragile States Index*), an annual index published by Foreign Policy, to establish a meaningful early warning mechanism, and effective policy responses to the problems of state fragility (The Fund for Peace, 2014). The index is based on 12 indicators, created through means of content analysis, and calculated for 178 countries (edition 2014).

The production of state failure measures particularly gained attention between 2007 and 2009: In 2007, the Center for Systemic Peace and the Center for Global Policy at George Mason University jointly launched the *State Fragility Index*. In the same year, the Canadian International Development Agency commissioned the formulation of an *Index of State Fragility* by to the Carleton University in order to support capacity-building within the Canadian donor community. The index assesses the fragility of the state according to three criteria: the authority, the legitimacy, and the capacity of the state. The 2011 edition ranked 198 states using 83 indicators. In 2008, also the Brooking Institute published its first *Index of State Weakness in the Developing World* (Rice and Patrick, 2008), a multi-dimensional index composed of 20 indicators, including 141 countries, and oriented to target especially the wider public.

3.2 *The semantic field of stateness*

Analysing the relationship between state fragility and a set of associated phenomena, the boundaries of the semantic field raise important questions. The first problem is related to the lack of a systematised concept within which the variants of low stateness were to be located. The lack of systematisation is rooted in the inconsistent theoretical status of the literature. The notions of state fragility and state weakness are rather ‘orphan’ concepts, detached from vital contributions made by social and political analyses to the theory of the state. Only few attempts were made to define the relationship between stateness and its interrelated dimensions. As a consequence, the literature has developed prototypes of state performance (Sanín, 2011a) that incorporate causes, symptoms (The Fund for Peace, 2014), and consequences of fragility into the same definitions. At the same time, also the relationship between the variants of low stateness is subject to different interpretations, and different terms are used to identify the same phenomena. For instance, many providers (Batley & McLoughlin, 2010; DFID, 2005) use the term ‘fragility’ to define the ‘fundamental failure of the state’, without explaining why they use two different terms to represent, in the end, the same phenomenon. As a result of this differentiation and theoretical inconsistency, the academic literature has been trapped in subjective, judgemental (Gruffydd Jones, 2013; Menkhous, 2010; Sanín, 2011b) and political (Barakat & Larson, 2014) connotations.

Moving up the ladder of abstraction, the relationship between governance and stateness creates other problems. According to some scholars, the definition of good governance overlaps with the definition of state capacity (Hanson & Sigman, 2013), and the same dimensions or categories (Economic, Political, Social, Security) are employed to operationalise both the concepts. The *Global Governance Report*, recently released by the Hertie School of Governance (2014), for instance introduces the concept of ‘governance readiness’, to identify the ‘resilience and adaptiveness’ of private and public actors to create or maintain ‘the conditions in which problem-solving is possible as the resources of different state and non-state actors are brought together’ (2014, p. 20). With the exception of security, the report equates the conditions for statehood with the ‘object’ of governance. The four conditions that governance should fulfil are the provision of welfare, infrastructure, sustainability, and societal integration. Hence, the concept of governance remains fundamentally state- and authority-centred, focussed on auxiliary and administrative functions of the classical state mechanisms to exercise power.

As an overall consequence of the lack of theoretical specification, the semantic field of stateness remained opaque with both, its internal conceptual logics and its external definitional boundaries, especially in regional contexts, interpreted in different ways by different actor groups (Wolff, 2005).

4. ...How? Methodological considerations

The current literature on indicators profoundly questions the overall quality of measurement activities (Galtung, 2006; Giebler, 2012), the selection of variables and indicators, the capacity of the selected indicators to capture the core concepts and, in some cases, even the reliability of aggregation methods employed. Key difficulties in measuring governance and stateness arise from a number of methodological aspects. However, much of the methodological issues with governance and stateness indicators are rooted in the conceptual challenge of operationalising these concepts in a valid, representative, and reliable way.

The early measures of governance (WGI, ICRG, CPIA, CPI) faced the conceptual problem of measuring a phenomenon that was intrinsically ‘immeasurable’ (Bell & Morse, 2008). As a consequence, indicator providers created a set of methodological shortcuts to get to the ‘measurable’ core of governance. Yet, this way of proceeding was accompanied by two fundamental flaws: First, the use of proxies in itself questioned the measures’ capacity to fully capture the dimensions of governance. Second, also the use of subjective, i.e. perception data raised criticism. Subjective data were introduced into measuring governance in order to better frame the governance discourse, and to

solve the existent cognitive deficit. Governance emerged as an intangible concept and considering the difficulty of attributing to this concept a concrete and countable denotation, subjective indicators (such as perception surveys) were extensively used. Scholars however doubted the capacity of perception-based indicators to correctly represent the phenomena under observation (Galtung, 1998) without being themselves biased by the judgment of business elite or experts asked (Andvig, Amundsen, Søreide, & Sissener, 2000). Perception-based indicators have moreover been criticised for their failure to generate replicable data that is indispensable for cross-countries comparisons.

In response to these constraints of the first generation of governance indicators, the WB aimed for a second generation of indicators capable of creating more objective, nuanced, and contextualised solutions to the governance quests. According to Knack(2003), this second generation was foreseen to fill the gap between measures and policy decision-making, and to make indicators more politically acceptable and replicable. The methodological and ontological choices of that second generation hence emphasise the need to create more objective measures, the combination of multiple data sources, and the composition of multi-dimensional indices.

As outlined above, in the 2000s, the proliferation of stateness indices intersected with the further advancement of such second generation governance indicators. Following Mata and Ziaja (2009), two defining trends of that period need to be mentioned: First, maximalist definitions of state fragility included ‘ideas of good governance, democratic rule and extensive public service provision’ and complicated ‘considerably the measurement of the phenomenon – [as] the more the state functions considered, the greater the variables and interdependencies to be controlled’ (Mata & Ziaja, 2009, p. 14). Second, minimalist definitions oversimplified ‘the phenomenon and end[ed] up excluding elements that are crucial for validly representing a phenomenon’ (ibidem 2009, p. 14).

Moreover, many stateness indices aggregated existent indicators and data sources in order to operationalise new concepts. While the governance and development debate collected new data, the majority of indices of state fragility use the existent empirical data pool created by the first (and later on also the second generation) of indicators. As result, this third generation of indicators, i.e. the set of stateness indicators, which emerged in the ‘2000s, condensed the characteristics¹¹, virtues and fallacies of the *governance* and development measures in a dangerous mix of ontological and conceptual incongruences¹². So, as a result of the continuous overlap between state and governance, input and output perspectives, measures of stateness use (and abuse) existing indicators of governance to account for the robustness of state institutions. Many providers have operationalised the quality of the rule of law by evaluating the administrative infrastructure of states, or their legal framework (considering for instance the legislature infrastructure, the provision of specific constitutional norms or particular pieces of legislation). At the same time, measures of administrative capacity were used to account for the fragility of institutions, without any differentiation between administrative infrastructure and capacity. The *Failed States Index*, for example, uses both WGI and ICRG variables to measure the progressive deterioration of state functions. While the WB’s LICUS initiative utilises CPIA ratings to determine the degree of state fragility.

5. ...Why? Normative demands and policy prescriptions

Although development constitutes the key target of both initiatives to advance governance and stateness, measures of governance and state fragility have rarely been questioned in view of the

¹¹ Mata argues that the indicators used in these indices may also refer to input, process or outputs. They also comprehend subjective data based on experts’ opinion and objective data (Mata & Ziaja, 2009)

¹² On the one side many of the existing indices are based on confused conception of state capacity. Methodological problem arise from the fact that ‘most fragility indices barely satisfy scientific standards’. They rely on expert assessments, fail to make careful choices about aggregation, and provide little information about scoring. Second, most fragility indices are based on overly broad conceptions of state fragility.

normative and policy prescriptions they exert on the development agenda. Both types of indicators are donor-serving concepts (Barakat & Larson, 2014) supporting a normative model focussed on the overall value of promoting democracy. When this prescription became a policy imperative (Boutros-Ghali, 1995), the UN attributed the instrumental function of fostering good governance to democracy. This process was supported by the implementation of traditional regulatory instruments (adhering to international regimes), and by the formulation of new policy instruments, including ‘benchmarking, co-regulation, voluntary codes of conduct and negotiated agreements’ (Jordan, Wurzel, & Zito, 2005).

The formulation of indicators capable of capturing the principles (inclusiveness, accountability, transparency, responsiveness, equity) or attributes (good, democratic, economic, corporate) of governance has been of paramount importance for the creation of the global governance model, as well for the reform of contemporary institutions and practices. Yet, despite the fact that both indicators of governance and stateness support a normative model focussed on the value of democracy, two specific prescriptive orientations need to be considered.

5.1 Development prescriptions

Since the emergence of the new donor enthusiasm in the 1990s, institutions and practitioners have used governance indicators to guide aid allocation, business investments and donor priorities. Many governments of donor countries and risk rating agencies rely on the WGI (originally created to evaluate the eligibility of developing countries for International Development Association (IDA) loans). The ‘performance based allocation’ (PBA), the system used to allocate IDA assistance, is calculated as a function of the country performance rating¹³, population and GNI (The World Bank, 2007a). The country performance rating is built upon the aggregation of three indicators deriving from CPIA and the Annual Review of Portfolio Performance. The Millennium Challenge Account relies on 17 indicators of governance quality divided into three categories (Ruling Justly, Encouraging Economic Freedom, and Investing in People). Of the 17 indicators, five derive from the WGI.

Yet, doubts have been raised about the capacity of this ‘one-best-way model of governance’ (Andrews, 2010) to represent what good governance means, and requires, for different countries. Both the legitimacy and effectiveness of performance indicators and political conditionalities have been questioned as well. Developing countries have been the recipients of aid and loan strategies to improve their standards of governance. Nevertheless, in some cases the indicators employed to draft roadmaps to good governance lack the theoretical or empirical foundations to justify the recipes prescribed by the international organisations. In other cases, they are based on theoretical assumptions that have no relevance in developing countries (Andrews, 2008). Moreover, many have questioned whether the decisions taken based on governance indicators are more legitimate than decisions based on other processes. Throughout the 1990s, many influential practitioners such as the World Bank emphasised the role of political conditionalities in creating incentives for good governance. However, the empirical evidence forced scholars to recognise that conditionalities could have a potential and predictable negative impact on the integrity of the recipient countries (Knack, 2001), creating dependency syndromes and eroding the overall quality of governance (P. Collier, 1997).

5.2 Neo-trusteeship prescriptions

The model of democratic governance adopted in developing countries during the ‘90s, resulted in a ‘governance crisis’ (Börzel, Pamuk, & Stahn, 2008). The reduction of the state to market-based mechanisms in conditions of precarious administrative infrastructures inhibited the formulation of indispensable development plans. Poor economic infrastructure, low investments and weak state architecture contributed to power distortions in many transition countries, i.e. patrimonialism and

¹³ The Country performance rating is equal to $(0.8 * \text{CPIA} + 0.2 * \text{PORT}) * (\text{GOV}/3.5)$.

predatory rule. This crisis induced international institution and practitioners to formulate new development and aid strategies. As outlined above, within this reorientation, the formulation of stateness indicators has been pivotal to capture a set of new challenges.

If we yet consider the practice, and the rhetoric, of some of the most important development agencies or institutions, there is no agreement on the essence of state weakness (see above). However, there is agreement in assessing state weakness as a security problem for the stability of democratic and effective states (Carment, Samy, & Prest, 2008; Rice & Patrick, 2008). The USAID strategy, for instance, rather supports short-term solutions that mirror the strategic relevance fragile countries have for the US foreign policy (USAID, 2005). While USAID recognises the need to deal with long-term policy prescriptions, its operational choices seem to encourage shorter planning horizons to support rapid and effective responses (ibidem). DFID also focuses on short-term aims targeted at policy solutions for state fragility, or the delivery of essential state functions. DFID developed a guide for working in fragile contexts that substantially redefines assistance criteria towards peace-building and state-building concerns, supporting security reforms, as well as the development of formal systems of rules and laws. Since 2005, also the OECD Forum on Aid Effectiveness acknowledges the relevance of state fragility for aid effectiveness. Finally, a number of international organisation and 138 countries signed the *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness* that recognises the need to adapt aid strategies to post-reconstruction and capacity-building priorities.

In all of these contexts, indicators of stateness have been pivotal to capture the security risks and vulnerabilities of the state in context of fragility. Yet, they have also been of paramount importance to guide the formulation of specific priorities and donor methodologies (Paris Declaration, 2005). Indicators of state fragility have been especially essential to formulate a form of soft conditionality, using an ideal-type of state strength in order to guide aid and development policies. While classical forms of conditionality gradually lost importance, international practitioners promoted the use of flexible aid instruments that ‘mostly focus on objectives, policy actions and standards, but leaves government more discretion over what the aid is spent on and how it is managed’ (Manuel, McKechnie, King, Coppin, & Denney, 2012, p. 10) in fragile state contexts. This soft mode, or positive conditionality, is built upon the respect of a set of criteria, like the harmonisation, ownership, alignment, and mutual accountability of the process (Paris Declaration, 2005). Yet, as stated in Overseas Development Institute’s paper for the *OECD International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Working Group on Aid*, the entry conditionalities established under the Paris Declaration ‘may relate to ethical standards (respect for human rights or democracy), public financial management, or the content of overall or sectoral strategy. They can also relate to bilateral objectives (supporting donor foreign policy positions)’ (Manuel et al., 2012, p. 9). Addressing the normative context (‘ethical standards’), foreign policy decisions (‘supporting donor foreign policy positions’) and political economy choices (‘public financial management’), the new conditionalities hence also allow international stakeholders to preserve a significant control over domestic political authority.

Considering this normative background, measures of stateness have been defined as neo-colonial instruments with neo-trusteeship characteristics (Caplan, 2007; Fearon & Laitin, 2004a), or those of postmodern imperialism (Fearon & Laitin, 2004a). According to Laitin and Fearon, (Fearon & Laitin, 2004a) he postmodern attribute better underlines the temporal horizon of policy options targeted to intervene in fragile state contexts. According to them, ‘the agents of neutrusteeship want to exit as quickly as possible, after intervening to reconstruct or reconfigure states so as to reduce threats arising from either state collapse or rogue regimes empowered by weapons of mass destruction’ (Fearon & Laitin, 2004b, p. 7). The short-term horizon of policy interventions in the context of fragility reveals the extent to which the solutions to counter fragility are focussed on filling, rather than fixing, the respective sovereignty deficit.

6. The Rule of Law Index, the Sustainable Governance Indicators and the State Fragility Index

The present section analyses three distinct measures to describe some of the key characteristics of contemporary measures of governance and stateness. The measures under evaluation are *The Rule of Law Index* (World Justice Foundation), the *Sustainability Governance Indicators* (Bertelsmann Foundation), and the *State Fragility Index* (George Mason University).

As summarised in Table 7, the three indices differ in a number of technical questions (coverage, aim, focus, numbers of variable and methodology), but they also share important elements of continuity.

Table 7 Comparison between ROLI, SFI and SGI

Criteria	<i>State Fragility Index (SFI)</i> George Mason University	<i>Rule of Law Index (RoLI)</i> World Justice Project	<i>Sustainable Governance Indicators (SGI)</i> Bertelsmann Foundation
Object	'A country's fragility is closely associated with its <i>state capacity</i> to manage conflict; make and implement public policy; and deliver essential services and its <i>systemic resilience</i> in maintaining system coherence, cohesion, and quality of life; responding effectively to challenges and crises, and continuing progressive development' (Marshall & Cole, 2010, p. 7).	Rule of Law (proxy of governance, input): 'the system of rules and rights that enables fair and functioning societies' (The World Justice Project, 2012b).	Governance (input + output): the 'government's capacity to deliver sustainable policies (executive capacity) as well as the participatory and oversight competencies of actors and institutions beyond the executive branch (executive accountability)' (Bertelsmann Foundation, 2014, p. 14).
Purpose	Monitoring and managing sources of fragility	Cognitive function	Support OECD and EU sustainable policies
No. of variables	14	47	150
Coverage	162	99	41 (OECD and EU states)
Data	Objective	Subjective	Objective + Subjective
Method	Threshold standardisation	Min-Max value	Multilevel aggregation

6.1 Demands and Purposes

The three indices respond to different demands, and serve different purposes.

The *State Fragility Index* (SFI) is a metric of political and economic instability that provides data about the level of instability for 162 countries (2011 edition). The development of the SFI was stimulated by USAID's request to better monitor and manage causes of state fragility. The original initiative elaborated on the need to define the 'prevailing perceptions of increasing global disorder' (Marshall & Cole, 2008) that emerged in the 2000s. The SFI forms part of the *Global Report on Conflict Governance and State Fragility (Global Report)*, annually published by the Center for Global Policy at the George Mason University. The report claims that the Index is indispensable to define the challenges of the contemporary world order, and to analyse the overall systemic performance of states in the 'era of dynamic globalization' (ibidem). The index calculates state fragility through 14 indicators grouped under four dimensions: economic development, security, *governance*, and social development. Each indicator, however, is evaluated on the basis of two criteria (effectiveness and legitimacy) that are essential to capture the level of state strength or fragility.

In 2010, the World Justice Project launched the *Rule of Law Index* (RoLI), an aggregate measure of the effective exercise of authority that can be considered as an approximation to the value of *governance*. The RoLI looks at a nation's adherence to the rule of law from a societal perspective. This index also adheres to a cognitive function, i.e. the necessity to map the understanding and perception-based judgments of this concept. Yet, the Index also addresses a normative purpose, i.e. making 'rule of law advancement as fundamental to the *thinking* and work of other professionals as it

is to lawyers and judges' (The World Justice Project, 2012a). The key aim of the RoLI is to provide for a comprehensible and accessible diagnostic tool, capable to strengthen the rule of law worldwide and within states. It is not limited to the legal professional field, meaning that it does not exclusively targets lawyers and judges. The index is composed of 47 indicators grouped into nine clusters (Constraints on Government Powers, Absence of Corruption, Open Government, Fundamental Rights, Order and Security, Regulatory Enforcement, Civil Justice, Criminal Justice, Informal Justice), available for 99 countries.

Since 2012, the Bertelsmann Foundation produces the *Sustainable Governance Indicators* (SGI), a composite measure based on 43 *governance* indicators grouped in three dimensions/indices (Policy Performance, Democracy and Governance Indices). The indicators are available for the 41 OECD and EU countries. The 43 indicators used within the three indices are grouped in 13 clusters (Electoral process, Access to the information, Civil rights and political liberties, Rule of Law, Economic policies, Social Policies, Environmental Policies, Steering capability, Policy Implementation, Institutional Learning, Citizens, Legislature, Intermediary organisations). The SGI is a policy-oriented monitoring instrument with the specific aim to assist the EU and OECD in formulating and implementing sustainable policies (Bertelsmann Foundation, 2014). While the RoLI adheres to a normative priority, the SGI aims to configure precise policy solutions to *governance* issues.

6.2 Concepts and definitions

The three indices offer three different interpretations about what governance and stateness are, and about their interrelation.

First, the *Global Report* presents one of the most articulated and well-defined meanings of state fragility. According to Marshall and Cole (2009), in order to evaluate the integrity of states, scholars should consider the interconnections between governance, conflict, and development. The index also sponsors the need to enhance a systemic analysis of global trends, contrary to focussing 'exclusively on individual or dyadic (bilateral) analysis, that is, on the conditions relevant to a particular country or state or relative to the interactions of two' (Marshall & Cole, 2008, p. 3). The report thus sheds more light on the relationship between concepts and phenomena, rather than formulating new definitions. Indirectly, it promotes a vision of democracy and autocracy as forms of governance, located at the opposite sides of a virtual governance spectrum. Governance, here, is considered one of the main criteria to calculate the fragility of the state. The SFI introduces also the important methodological innovation of considering state performance in terms of effectiveness and legitimacy. The index is also able to take into consideration how global trends affect state performance.

Second, the RoLI represents a mono-dimensional measure of governance. Both the WB and Mo Ibrahim Foundation have incorporated the rule of law into their respective measures of governance (the WGI and the Ibrahim Index of African Governance). The World Justice Project has created a specific and innovative measure capable of capturing how the rule of law is experienced worldwide. It defines the rule of law as a system composed of four universal principles.¹⁴ Whereas the 'system of rules' implies that structural conditions are necessary to execute governance, the index actually systematises these four principles by exclusively using outcome indicators. It operationalises the index considering policy outcomes that the rule of law produces. These policy outcomes have been grouped in nine clusters¹⁵.

¹⁴ The four principles are: '1) individuals and private entities are accountable under the law; 2) the laws are clear, publicized, stable, and just; are applied evenly; and protect fundamental rights, including the security of persons and property; 3) the process by which the laws are enacted, administered, and enforced is accessible, fair; 4) Justice is delivered timely by competent, ethical, and independent representatives and neutrals' (World Justice Project, 2014, p. 4).

¹⁵ The constraints on government powers; absence of corruption; open government; fundamental rights; order and security; regulatory enforcement; civil justice; criminal justice; and informal justice (ibidem).

Third, for the Bertelsmann Foundation governance refers to the ‘government’s capacity to deliver sustainable policies (executive capacity) as well as the participatory and oversight competencies of actors and institutions beyond the executive branch (executive accountability)’ (Bertelsmann Foundation, 2014, p. 14). As result, governance is understood as part of the broader pattern of sustainability, which brings together both input and outcome indicators. The SGI is built on three indices of Democracy, Policy Performance, and Governance¹⁶. While the Democracy and Governance Indices use input and process measures of administrative capacity or democratic functioning, the Performance Index is based indeed on 16 policy outcomes variables (in matter of economic, social, and environmental policies).

6.3 Data gathering and the quality of data

Differences exist among the three examples also in view of the strategy adopted by the three providers to gather the necessary information and data. The RoLI is based on primary subjective sources, derived from two surveys (The *General Pollution Poll* and the *Qualified Respondent’s Questionnaire*), produced by the WJP for each country evaluated within the index. These two surveys collect a number of information concerning the experiences and perceptions of citizens and legal experts with the rule of law.

The SGI uses both subjective and objective data. Hard data derive from Eurostat and the OECD. Yet, quantification is balanced by the formulation of country reports that synthesise the information provided by a pool of country experts responding to a specific questionnaire. The SFI employs only hard data. Each dimension of state fragility (security, political, social, and economic) presents both an effectiveness and legitimacy score that result from the aggregation of different data sources¹⁷.

6.4 Standardisation

In order to normalise data, the SFI uses a simple standardisation method, which establishes threshold values based on quintile cut-points. Nevertheless, from the document available online it is not possible to appreciate the transparency of the process. The *Global Report* mentions that the fragility score has been normalised with a set of threshold values, formulated on the baseline year 2004. However, no other information is available to evaluate the consistency of this procedure. On the contrary, the Bertelsmann Foundation and World Justice Project offer complete information about their standardisation process and methodologies.

The RoLI relies on a simple normalisation, where the questions are first mapped by 47 indicators, and then codified by min-max values (0-1). Once normalised, the individual variables are integrated into sub-factors and factors, using simple averages. The same weight is assigned to questions (answers) formulated in the two datasets, the General Population Poll (QRQs) and the Qualified Respondents’ Questionnaires.

The SGI presents a ‘multilevel aggregation’ (Schraad-Tischler, & Seelkopf, 2014) that combines both qualitative and quantitative information. In order to ensure the comparability of the data, the index standardises all the components through a linear function that transforms the value into a scale

¹⁶ The Democracy Index is composed by 15 indicators grouped into 4 pillars (electoral process, access to information, civil rights and political liberties, Rule of Law). The Policy Performance Index is calculated on 16 variables grouped into three basic sectors (economic, social and environmental policy). The Governance Index is composed by 12 indicators, grouped into two pillars (Executive Capacity and Accountability).

¹⁷ Major Episodes of Political Violence dataset, the Political Terror Scales, Polity IV Project, Leadership Duration; Elite Leadership Coups datasets, World Development Indicators, Human Development Report; Structure of Trade; US Energy Information Administration, US Census Bureau and US Political Instability Task Force, UNDP Human Development Report, Religious Fractionalization dataset (Marshall & Cole, 2008).

ranging from 1 (min) to 10 (max). In order to ensure the comparability over time, also thresholds are calculated. The index is validated by adjusting the median (min and max value of the middle 50% of the distribution) by an amount equal to 1.5 times the interquartile range. The aggregation is made according to a scheme that aggregates data sources for each of the nine criteria (economic policies, social policies, environmental policies; electoral processes, access to information, civil rights and political liberties, rule of law; executive capacity, executive governance), attributing the same weight for both qualitative and quantitative data. In the same way, the score of each dimension, or index (the Policy Performance, Democracy and Governance) is produced.

6.5 Criticisms

Generally, the three indices face the common dilemma of measuring concepts that escape a clear conceptualisation, although they also contributed to filling parts of existent definitional and conceptual gaps. Yet, at the same time, they also contributed to complicating the ontological status of governance and stateness. The present section hence tests the validity (capacity of the indicator to represent the concept), reliability (the capacity to perform the required functions under different conditions and to returns the same results), and comparability (possibility to use the index for cross and within country comparisons) of these three measures. Table 8 summarises the major finding of this comparison, and the *subjective* values (on a 3-level scale) attributed to these findings.

Table 8 Measuring the measures

Criteria	State Fragility Index (SFI) George Mason University	Rule of Law Index (RoLI) World Justice Project	Sustainable Governance Indicators (SGI) Bertelsmann Foundation
Validity	Low (objective data flawed concept)	Medium (subjective data)	High (subjective and objective data)
Reliability	Low (effectiveness and legitimacy)	Medium (universal principles)	High (sustainable governance)
Comparability	Across countries Within Counties	Across countries	Across countries Within Countries
Updated information	2011	2014	2014
Transparency	Low	High	High

6.5.1 Internal Validity

First, both the SGI and RoLI face the common criticism of using subjective data. However, the SGI balances this potential subjectivity bias by using also hard data derived from Eurostat and OECD datasets. For the RoLI, '*sensitive questions* may be perceived as threatening by government officials or by respondents. In the first case, government officials of certain countries may censor or condition the administration of questions because they are perceived as challenges to the regime' (Botero & Ponce, 2011, p. 23). This tendency produces a sort of bandwagon effect according to which some opinion may obfuscate the sincerity of the answer provided. This distortion is particularly significant when practitioners have to provide answers on the effectiveness of government, or levels of corruption. However, the WJP introduced an innovative research method, based on the idea of capturing the citizen perceptions about the rule of law. Contrary to this broader group, many of the governance indicators of the first generation are based on polls of experts or businessmen that ignored the perception of many other societal components.

However, the use of 'soft' or 'hard' data is not sufficient to assess the internal validity of the indices. The SFI, for instance, relies exclusively on objective data, but the construction of the index relies on subjective assumptions, for two fundamental reasons. First, because state fragility is not a systematised concept, but remains entangled into judgemental (Gruffydd Jones, 2013; Menkhaus, 2010; Sanín, 2011) and policy-oriented (Barakat & Larson, 2014) connotations. Second, indicators of

state fragility have created new categories according to specific policy meaning and interests. As noted by Ziaja (2012), the SFI does not provide a descriptive definition of state fragility, but rather only an operational one, distinguishing between two criteria (effectiveness and legitimacy) and four fields of applications (and respective economic, security, social, and political indicators). This operational definition results from the conceptual uncertainty, but is influenced also by the difficulty of collecting specific data on fragility. The SFI, as many of the state capacity measures, aggregates measures on the basis of existing indicators of governance and development (Ziaja, 2012).

6.5.2 Reliability

The three measures present different levels of reliability, i.e. the ability of the index to perform its required functions under different conditions. In this context, both *statistical* and *conceptual* reliability should be considered. The conceptual reliability of *governance* and *stateness* measures is particularly important if we analyse the extent to which the operationalisation of concepts adhere to the reality of many developing countries. The Bertelsmann Foundation, for instance, does not provide evidence for the statistical reliability of the SGI. The index bypasses however, the potential problem of a low level of *conceptual reliability*, recognising that the challenge of *sustainable governance* rather affects the highly developed states of the OECD and the European Union. Therefore, the index is limited to the EU and OECD countries (41 states).

RoLI and SFI are indices of global scale that face the dilemma of whether the criteria used to construct the indicators reflect visions of governance and stateness that may have different meanings across countries. The SFI does not mention the statistical reliability of the index, but the conceptual understanding raises two issues. First, the notion of state fragility adopted by the SFI tends to objectivise two theoretical categories, legitimacy, and effectiveness. These two categories have been formulated to capture a particular model of sovereignty, according to which the state is the organisation capable of monopolising the legitimate use of violence. *Effectiveness* and *legitimacy* constitute ideal types of sovereignty indispensable to approach the reality of the modern states. Yet, the seductive attempt to use such ideal types to create ahistorical and invariant causal analyses is at odds with the conceptual rationale of Weberian methodology that attributes an *interpretative* function to ideal types (Weber, 1991). Second, the definition of state fragility also tends to parameterise the relationship between one ideal-type of low stateness (state fragility) and the empirical reality. But this conceptual operation does not define the relationship between the other ideal types (strong stateness, for instance) and the empirical data. As result, only one typology of low stateness (state fragility) has been parameterised and transformed into a new phenomenon (the fragile state), that has been isolated from the conceptual understanding and historical, philosophical connotation of its original category, the state.

From a methodological perspective, the WJP points out that the index holds a good level of reliability, because for seven of the nine dimensions, the statistical consistency measured with the Cronbach-alpha's coefficient is at 0.90 (the threshold for an affordable aggregation is 0.7). Yet, if we question the definition of the Rule of Law provided by the World Justice Project, we could come to different conclusions about the *conceptual* reliability of the index. The WJP approaches the Rule of Law 'in terms of the outcomes that the rule of law brings to societies – such as accountability, respect for fundamental rights, or access to justice' (The World Justice Project, 2012b). This definition indirectly assumes the existence of an agreed-upon definition of the rule of law, or at least, that the law brings to different societies always the same *kind* of outcome. A deep disagreement exists between theorists and legal experts about the existence of such a universal connotation. The WJP assumes that four universal principles derived from international standards can account for the rule of law in any society. However, the operationalisation in terms of outcomes raises some ontological incongruence. First, it ignores the 'tensions' faced in the 'overseas land' (Costa & Zolo, 2007) where the concept of rule of law is a product of colonial importation. Second, it ignores how different forms of law (i.e. the case of Customary Law) are not quantifiable according to the same criteria used to evaluate the

effectiveness in western societies. The WJP's definition indeed tends to standardise the outcomes that the rule of law brings in some countries (in the majority of them), without considering whether a universal principle is relevant or valid to capture the plurality of local information. As argued by Ringer, 'The commitment to a conception of the rule of law in terms, roughly, of the number of courts per capita overlooks the importance of the interaction of state (i.e., "official") courts with informal for a of dispute resolution, which are long-lived and vital parts of community life. Thus, "local" and "foreign" understandings of the rule of law will give rise to different descriptions and prescriptions for the problems' (Ringer, 2014, p. 183).

6.5.3 Comparability

The quality of data employed also affects the comparability of the instruments, i.e. the possibility to use the indices for cross- and within-country comparisons. While the three indices allow for comparisons across countries, the RoLI, for instance, does not allow for within-country comparisons because the scores do not capture absolute values.

The SGI allows for within-country comparisons. The methodology is supported by the implementation of the website's interactive interfaces through which data is displayed in a very intuitive manner.

The standardisation used for the SFI allows for comparisons over time, but the capacity of the index to provide for within-country comparison has been compromised by a set of factors. On the methodological side, many indicators are rescaled when new indicators are added, or new data for years became available. Moreover, scores of the matrix are not scaled according to a homogeneous numerical representation. While the majority of the indicators are rated according to a four-point scale (0= no fragility, 1= low fragility, 2 = medium fragility, and 3= high fragility), only one indicator (Economic Effectiveness) is rated on a five-point scale (the include also 4= 'extreme fragility'). While the total Legitimacy and Effectiveness score are numerically represented, the matrix displays only the colour icons (green= 0, yellow=1, orange = 2, red= 3, black= 4) for eight indicators. Other three indicators are rated on a nominal (Regime Type and Regional Effects) and alphanumeric scale (Net Oil Production or Consumption) that contributes to the erosion of both the comparability and intuitive understanding of this instrument.

7. Conclusion

While there has been a profusion of governance and stateness measures, the concepts of governance and stateness remain vague and narrowly interpreted. Therefore, this paper emphasised the relevance of evaluating both the normative demands and the conceptual validity of the current measures.

'The first question that should occupy potential users of any governance indicator is not the size of the margins of error, but whether the indicators are valid measurements of what they purport to measure' (Thomas, 2010, p. 37). On the contrary, many of the contemporary analyses hide behind technical issues a number of ideological and conceptual problems. This analysis shows that governance indicators do not always satisfy the standards of conceptual clarity, while stateness indicators are not theoretically defensible.

The second question to be addressed when analysing indicators is how policy demands and normative prescriptions inform the construction of indicators. The study of indicators of governance has been limited to find descriptive solutions that have rarely attempted to explore the normative reasons guiding the numerical representation of political phenomena. The paper showed that both indicators of stateness and governance are donor-serving concepts (Barakat & Larson, 2014) indispensable to steer how states and institutions deal with the political crises that challenge the stability of the political order. During the 1990s, the crisis of governing stimulated the emergence of

the governance debate. Here a minimalist vision of the state sponsored policy reforms focussed on expanding the role of the market in government functions. While the (good) governance agenda was about 're-structuring the polity and politics' (Börzel et al., 2008, p. 7), the state fragility discourse introduced the idea of re-structuring the state. The crisis of governance, in turn, forced the academic debate to rehabilitate the old state category, which has become the object of a new form of political conditionality.

In conclusion, the third question to be addressed concerns the use and the implications of these indicators. There is broad disagreement and scepticism about the concrete capacity of these instruments to guide policy-making. Yet, the paper shows that these indicators have the intrinsic function of constructing the public discourse about governance and stateness. This function, in turn, holds the important implication of transforming the Western liberal categories of governance and liberal democracy into parameters of functioning of the contemporary political order. This outcome is not a mere 'consolation prize'; it rather represents one of the most important materialisations of the soft form of power exercised by the indicators within the governance context.

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