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Civil Society’s Role in addressing State Fragility in Angola*

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Abstract

This paper starts with the premise that one of the possible solutions to state fragility is development from within, which is achieved partly through civil society and states’ self-help. It begins with the definitions used in this paper, and then tries to establish very briefly the relationship between civil society and state fragility. Then, it tries to determine what civil society could do to reconstruct fragile states in general. Finally, it applies parts of the latter to Angola, examining the successes and failures of its civil society, while focusing only on the role of NGOs. Through this methodology, it tries to answer the question “*To what extent is Civil Society successful in reconstructing/rebuilding Angola as a Fragile State?*”. This topic is significant because state fragility is on the rise, and is hard to control. The paper argues that although Angolan civil society is rather limited and weakened by the state and international organizations, there are opportunities for increasing its effectiveness. It might not be significantly successful today, but with all limitations considered, it is bringing about small positive changes that will impact the future of Democracy in Angola in the long run.

Relationship between Civil Society and State Fragility

‘Failed States’ is a term that gained resonance in the early 1990s (Nay, 2012, p. 1). Since then, it triggered

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academic debate over what it really means, who defines the degree of failure and whose agenda does the term serve. The hegemonic school is the North American school and it uses the term to specifically describe severe political crises that happened in the 1990s (Besada & Hannan, 2007, p. 2). Jean-Germain Gros (1996) categorized failed states into five types. There are 'anarchic states' that lack centralized government and 'phantom states' which have a semblance of authority but no real one. There are also 'anemic states' which are states that lack the state spirit, 'captured states' which are states dominated by insecure rivaling elites and finally, there is the 'in vitro' or aborted states which failed before the emergence of a state machine (Besada & Hannan, 2007, p. 2-3). In contrast to the North American school, the European and Institutional literature frown upon the term 'Failed State' (Besada & Hannan, 2007, p. 3). It is claimed that it's a term that refers to the periphery, providing a theoretical underpinning and a diplomatic justification behind the intervention of the Global North in the domestic affairs of the 'underdeveloped South' pushing for neoliberal policies.

According to William Zartman (1995) and Robert Rotberg (2003), whose school of thought is advocated in this paper, state fragility is simply an assessment of how a state is performing its tasks and responsibilities. The tasks vary from securing essential freedoms, building infrastructure, protecting territories and borders, maintaining internal security to sustaining economic growth and providing public goods such as sanitation

and education (Rotberg, 2003, p. 7). According to Rotberg, a state is fragile if it does not meet a ‘certain’ threshold (Rotberg, 2003, p. 1). Failure and collapse happen when the “structure, authority, law and political order” cease to be effective (Pegg, 1996, p. 238). A state does not have to meet its tasks to completion but if it fails to meet highly weighted and important fronts, then it is categorized as a fragile state (Rotberg, 2003, p. 4). In this paper, the Fragile State Index is used as a quantitative measure of fragility. Formerly known as the Failed State Index, the Fragile State Index is an annual index and report introduced by The Fund for Peace and was used by Foreign Policy magazine a little over a decade ago.

The literature asserts that fragile states do not develop overnight and hence reconstruction of fragile states takes time, partly because of the complexity of the problems causing the fragility (Pegg, 1996, p. 238). The international community needs to intervene and help in reconstructing those states because fragility overflows and the crisis they breed are transnational problems. We do not live in a vacuum and hence, countries should cooperate to reconstruct fragile states.

During the 1990s, and after the end of the Cold War, the world order shifted. The emergence of a new world order in addition to the already existing domestic problems induced by the war brought about drastic changes to which some states failed to cope with. These problems ranged from civil wars, to the inability to secure citizens, to economic recession and territorial losses (Nay, 2012, p. 1). Countries were expected to resolve conflict

through the UN (Tabbush, 2005, p. 10). However, the world witnessed series of the worst atrocities since the Holocaust in which UNSC stood helpless, failing those who were in dire need for help, as, for example, the Srebrenica massacre during the Bosnian genocide (1995). Before and parallel to the conflict in Kosovo, were the Somalia crisis (1992) and the Rwandan genocide (1994), amongst other traumatizing conflicts. With the exception of Bosnia-Herzegovina, most of the crises took place in Africa.

After the African wave of independence during the 1960s, there was a trend of constant military coups, instability, lack of state legitimacy, malnutrition and starvation, poverty, inequality, ethnic violence, brutal international intervention and breached mandates. Parallel to these deeply rooted problems was the HIV epidemic which was on the rise since the 1980s, worsening the situation further. All this qualified African countries to top the State Fragility Index, while the need for reconstruction became more grave and apparent.

The mechanism through which reconstruction was attempted during the 1990s was arguably limited because there is only so much the UN could do. UN members often cooperate through fiscal aid and supplying peacekeeping missions with a workforce. However, sometimes aid or foreign intervention are not enough in eradicating the roots of fragility especially in the case of a cultural crisis such as ethnic conflict or gender-based violence. This is where civil society or

reconstruction from within the fragile state factors in the equation.

The term ‘civil society’ dates back to the Greek era where it was defined as the realm parallel to but separate from the state (Carothers, 1999-2000, p. 18). It did not gain an edge until the post-World War Two era when Antonio Gramsci defined it as an entity that was politically independent from the state, directing all its efforts against totalitarian regimes (Carothers, 1999-2000, p. 19). Academically, the use of the term peaked in the post-Cold War period.

According to Maha Abdelrahman (2004), civil society is defined as the space that exists outside the market, the state and the family (Abdelrahman, 2004, p. 41). It is the ‘reservoir of formal and informal organizations’ such trade, labor unions and syndicates, state-independent Mosques and Churches, book clubs, blog spheres and alternative media as well as NGOs and associations. (Posner, 2004. p. 237; Carothers, 1999-2000, p. 19-20). In ‘*NGOs in the Contemporary World Order*’, Abdelrahman discussed the evolution of the definition across the decades starting with the premise that the definition is a negative residual category. It is basically what is automatically left out of the major three spheres of power: state, family and the market.

Although theoretically, civil society is commonly defined as a nonpolitical entity, it is not, because it needs the political sphere to manifest its work and channel its

efforts (Tabbush, 2005, p. 10). In simpler terms, civil society needs the state machine. Mike Davis argues that civil society even helps the state. It diverts attention from structural adjustment adopted by the government (Davis, 2007, p. 77). He also argued that civil society, and specifically NGOs, became a façade to perpetuate inequality, lack of wealth distribution and failure of the government to solve problems created by soft imperialism and the neoliberal model (Davis, 2007, p. 82; Ghaus-Pasha, 2005, p. 10).

Parallel to and partly as a result of neoliberal leaps in the 1980s and 1990s, the emphasis on civil society was more directed to NGOs and the role they ‘had’ to play in development and political change. This is when NGOs witnessed a surge in their duties and an evolution of their relationship with the state becoming more ‘embedded’. Their influence grew and they actively contributed in the development of different countries (Ghaus-Pasha, 2005, p. 4). According to Abdelrahman, civil society and specifically NGOs were promoted partly by the neoliberal model as less corrupt entities compared to the state and the market. They were perceived to be more efficient, less bureaucratic and more responsive and receptive to society’s demands and people’s needs than the state ever was (Abdelrahman, 2004, p. 51-58). They were also advertised to be ‘small’ structures which facilitates communication and delegation from within the structure as opposed to the nepotistic, inefficient bureaucracy governments rely on. They are deemed to be the ‘best’ way to overcome the shortcomings and limitations of the state (Posner, 2004. P. 237). According

to Daniel Posner, civil society is perceived to have ‘magical’ solutions to deeply rooted problems that states do not have the capabilities to solve (Posner, 2004. P. 237). This all contributed to the development of a romanticized version of civil society. It also led to the increasing significance of its work parallel to state shrinkage around the globe.

Fragile states have their share of the ‘deeply rooted problems’ Posner discussed. Civil society is automatically expected to seize the reins, figuratively and literally, solving these crises because not only is the state limited by its structure, but it’s ‘fragile’ and incapable of performing its tasks. There are two main mechanisms through which civil society works in general: substitution and advocacy (Posner, 2004. P. 239). Substitution is where civil society completely substitutes the state whereas advocacy is where it advocates its role, spearheading national projects while the state still maintains power over civil society. In the case of fragile states, it is not sufficient that civil society advocates the role of the state (Dowst, 2009, p. 6). It is expected to be strong, organized and capable of substituting the state complementing and customizing its effort to the level of fragility. This establishes a positive relationship between the two variables: state fragility and civil society.

Having civil society substitute the state machine shows how the former can significantly affect fragile states because it becomes civil society’s mission to perform the states’ tasks: protect its population and provide public

goods such as education, sanitation, public health and infrastructure. The shift of roles is arguably not easy and it is hard to pinpoint when it exactly happens. During times of crises, states' shrinkage and fragility becomes more apparent and civil society, normatively, fills in the vacuum. However, this is not always the case. Sometimes, fragile states deliberately weaken civil society through repression and alienation which results in a hectic, and often brutal and incomplete transition, leaving the state in a limbo like Somalia today. Also it depends on the level of fragility. This all affects the significance and span of power civil society has and it dictates its role to a high extent especially when civil society is not a solitary, homogenous unit.

How can Civil Society reconstruct fragile states?

One could argue that civil society organizations (CSO) do not use the same approach tackling different causes of fragility.. For instance, what a CSO could do in a fragile state where corruption and unemployment are the main concerns, is drastically different from what it could bring about when the state is plagued with ethnic conflict which require a certain maneuver in tackling because its scars run deeper. Hence, this section will briefly discuss possible opportunities for involvement of civil society within fragile states in general.

Also this paper adopts the post-conflict perspective which focuses on what could civil society do to reconstruct the 'already' fragile state. (Dowst, 2009, p. 8) (Santos, 2002, p. 43). It is where civil society is

involved in the peace and nation-building processes which follow the problems that partly contributed to the fragility. It is argued that civil society cannot work in a fragile state that lacks security and basic infrastructure (Posner, 2004, p. 46); even though this is debatable, this paper adopts this understanding. Angola was selected because it survived ethnic conflict and it is highly fragile. However it has not reached the fragility level where there is a lack of security or total destruction of infrastructure which gives civil society the 'space' to achieve reconstruction, as one could see in the appendix below.

One of the key steps that civil society needs to take is developing flexibility and operability with other state/nation-building institutions (Uvin & Cohen, 2006, p. 3). It is important for CSOs not to work in isolation or separate themselves from other institutions, because the complexity of the issues that contribute to fragility needs simultaneous tackling through several fronts. In fragile states, society is broken apart. Community-based projects are often what keeps it going (World Bank, 2005, P. 1). Working against them can be adding to the damage and cementing it. Civil society needs to cooperate and compliment other efforts to guarantee a level of consistency and possibly a faster, and a more efficient process of reconstruction because in the context of fragile states, time is usually not on civil society's side. Fragility is likely to be uncontrollable and the race downwards can be unstoppable and hence there is a need for an organized and a realistic plan that civil society can achieve in partnership with other institutions (Posner,

2004, p. 46). They do not need to have uniformity of mission statements and goals but they need to have the same vision and they need to cooperate (World Banks, 2005, p. 8). In fragile states, conflict between groups is likely to be high. If conflict spreads between civil society organizations, reconstruction becomes even harder to achieve.

As a result, civil society organizations need to be involved in the national dialogue tackling more than one front of the crises causing the fragility (Uvin & Cohen, 2006, p. 3). They need to communicate effectively through a 'national dialogue' that has a realistic end date and a clear agenda. National dialogues have tendencies to drag on and thus the need for clear planning. CSOs need a bottom-up approach where they work at the grassroots levels especially in countries suffering from sectarian and ethnic divides. They need to learn how to initiate transitional justice through culture change programmes and to be able to mediate the group grievances because they hurdle the reconstruction process.

Another thing civil society needs to do is to assist the efforts of the government empowering it rather than limiting its power (Uvin & Cohen, 2006, p. 3). Civil society needs to reassume its role as the 'watchdog' rather than the state substitute and it needs to shift again the executive power to the state. Once it regains its advocacy, it needs to monitor the state especially in regards to corruption and Human Rights violations for the grave risks associated with them. It needs to also

mobilize the social spheres to pressure the government to be more transparent and responsive to the masses' needs (Uvin & Cohen, 2006, p. 3). This can be hard to achieve amidst fragility but it is essential because both corruption and Human Rights violations have deep roots and are hard to eradicate. There has to be consistent supervision and monitoring which civil society is by default equipped to perform.

Civil society could also mediate between the society and foreign intervention (World Bank, 2005, P. 6). Fragile states' are often fertile ground for intervention. A strong civil society is likely to mitigate the extent of intervention and control it to some extent. It needs to be aware of what is expected out of this intervention and follow it through. Their contribution is significant because it is the voice of the local and assuming that the intervention has 'noble' intentions, its mandate and capabilities are likely to be limited if civil society is not capable of voicing its demands clearly, reflecting what the locals need.

Civil Society and State Fragility in Angola.

The post-conflict perspective starts in 2002 after the end of a brutal civil war that lasted on Angolan ground for almost 27 years (Vines & Weimer, 2011, p. 4). During the 1960s, battles against the Portuguese colonizer in Angola erupted (Vines & Weimer, 2011, p. 4). However the conflict quickly spiraled into a civil war between the liberation movements fighting to fill the power vacuum. The Portuguese colonizer did not prepare their colonies

for independence which left Angola unprepared for and exposed to the problems associated with transitional periods such as inflation, economic depression, unemployment and violence. What worsened the situation further was the ‘primordial’ ethnic tension between several groups (Rocha, 2002, p. 3). In 1975, Angola gained formal independence but was further submersed in ruthless fighting (Kibble & Vines, 2001, p. 538). It was mainly between The Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) who supported the government and the liberation movements: *The National Front for Liberation of Angola* (FNLA) and, most importantly, *The National Union for the Total Independence of Angola* (UNITA) (Vines & Weimer, 2011, p. 4; Rocha, 2002, p. 3).

The war was prolonged by foreign intervention, as the USSR supported UNITA and the ‘West’ supported the FNLA and the rebels. In 1977, there was a failed attempt to overthrow Angola’s first president who was a member in MPLA (Vines & Weimer, 2011, p. 5). The failed coup increased the instability, heightened the group grievances and severed the ties between the different groups (Vines & Weimer, 2011, p. 5). Demographically, the peasants and the poor were severely marginalized by the urban led MPLA (Vines & Weimer, 2011, p. 5). UNITA resorted to guerilla tactics to undermine MPLA’s power, worsening the divide between the urban and rural further as they aided the rural against MPLA’s urban masses which had devastating results.

The element of ethnicity is a significant contributor to Angola's fragility. Moreover, the civil war brought about other plagues to the already weakened society, maintaining the high fragility values. By 2007, there was over a million out of 17.7 million Angolans relying on the UN Food programme to stay alive, while 3.7 million were put on war-victims programmes (Kibble, & Vines, 2001, p.538). In addition, about 70,000 Angolans lost their limbs (Kibble, S., & Vines, A., 2001, P.538). Two to four million Angolans were internally displaced and hundreds of thousands fled their homes and sought refuge in other African states (Kibble & Vines, 2001, p.538).

Also, Angola was reported to be one of the worst countries in terms of health and sanitation. The mortality rate, in 2007, for children under five was 30 per cent (Kibble & Vines, 2001, p.538). Only one in every five could attain sanitation. Only one in three had access to clean water (Rocha, 2002, pp. 1-2). In 1999, the government spent only 1.5% of Angola's GDP on health programmes, which is appalling, and yet consistent with the mortality rates, and what was reported regarding health in 2007 (Kibble & Vines, 2001, p. 538). The annual inflation rate was set at 3,000 per cent which caused tension and added to people's misery and poverty because of the rising prices and the minimal wages (Kibble & Vines, 2001, p. 538). It was no coincidence to find that half of the Angolan children were not in schools, which is significant because 45% of the Angolan Population were below the age 14 back then (Kibble & Vines, 2001, p. 538). It is also interesting to

look at government budgets and how they were distributed: Before 2007, the Angolan government allocated 7% to education as opposed to 33% for security (Kibble & Vines, 2001, p. 538). Those are all manifestations of fragility which was represented in a fragility score of 84.9/100 in 2007 (see Appendix below).

It is important to establish that none of those problems are alien to African countries. Most African countries share the same problems, to different degrees. Angola's not an outlier, since it has maintained roughly the same levels of fragility since 2006. Figure number one, and the table in the Appendix below show the extent of variance of scores and how fragile Angola is.

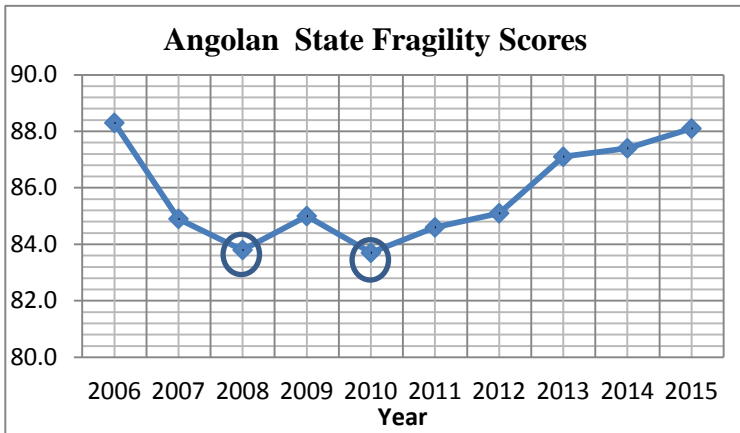


Figure 1: State Fragility Scores for Angola (x/100)

It might be argued that it is challenging to trace the outcomes of civil society efforts directly. However, these could be analyzed over a long term period. One could see, for instance, that in 2008 the degree of fragility decreased rather significantly which can be surprising after the statistics provided above for 2007. I thought it could be useful to trace civil society efforts before 2008 and 2010 (when another drop in fragility values happened) to understand what possibly could have induced the change.

One could argue that before 1990s, the Angolan state controlled all affairs in an iron grip. With the fall of the USSR, MPLA was no longer internationally backed up by a superpower and it was 'forced' to liberalize legally in 1991 which was an opportunity for civil society to grow (Chatham House, 2005, p. 9). The Angolan civil society witnessed the emergence of the FONGA (Forum of Angolan NGOs) as the umbrella for all 'authentic' Angolan voices (Chatham House, 2005, p. 9). It showcases one of the successes of Angolan civil society because it was able to guarantee some level of operability with other NGOs which was discussed above in the second section of this paper. It remained limited and subordinated though as an automatic result of the dominance of the international NGOs and their involvement. Compared to other African countries, the emergence of the Angolan civil society was slow yet steady. There were no sudden changes which is actually consistent with the trend describing Angolan fragility values which remained in the same range since the creation of the fragility index in 2006.

National NGOs in Angola focus mainly on human and political rights and social development. They allocate their focus to attain transparency and pressure the government to open up and declare their acknowledgement of basic human rights. They were successful to some extent, as they embedded a new set of values (Chatham House, 2005, p. 14). Today, there is consensus regarding the need for ‘democratization’. Angola had not held elections since 1992 (Chatham House, 2005, p. 14). Despite this, the masses are aware of how corrupt their government is. NGOs were successful in promoting the weaknesses of the government and how it can be malleable to liberalization in the beginning and then democratization later. One of the main reasons why there is hope for civil society to grow stronger and further contribute to the reconstruction of Angola, is the weak state. Angola has a very weak government that is decentralized and more interested in ‘formal’ power gains (Chatham House, 2005, p. 14). Angolan civil society has the capabilities and the opportunity to bring about full-fledged change because of the extent of state weakness. This all marks another sign of success because they have the awareness.

There are approximately about 100 International NGOs working in Angola and 300 national ones (Amundsen & Abreu, 2006, p. 10). This is a relatively high number keeping in mind that Angola does not have very high population density. It is significant to see a relatively high number of NGOs coming together and working cooperatively on political rights and awareness. They raise awareness about the need for transparency, justice,

constitutional reform, institutional meritocracy and freedom of expression and assembly (Amundsen & Abreu, 2006, p. 10). In 2000, Angola witnessed the emergence of two major organizations advocating justice. The first was *Mãos Livres*, supported by the UN Human Rights Division (Chatham House, 2005, p. 14). The other was AJPD which was founded by Angolan youth groups who had a catholic background and supported the penal system, constitutional reform and HIV legislations (Chatham House, 2005, p. 14). They used the media and street mobilization to put forward their beliefs. This reflects the success of domestic NGOs who accomplished operability with international organizations.

Another sign of relative success of NGOs' work in Angola is inducing harmony between different groups (Santos, 2002, p. 47). When looking at fragility index values (Appendix), one could see that the group grievances are relatively low. Sources assert that since 2002 onwards, the civil strife diminished and NGOs were able to encourage tolerance and acceptance of the *Other* to some extent (Santos, 2002, p. 47). There are other important factors contributing to the decreased ethnic tension such as its origins for instance, but NGOs are major actors that were able to stop such conflict from spiraling out of control again which is easy to achieve especially with Angola having its share of civil war for decades.

There might not be empirical results yet of NGOs work on the ground, as the government still has not held

elections. However, there is rising awareness in Angola which could be seen as weak progress but progress it is nonetheless because, besides raising awareness, CSOs managed to induce harmony between different groups and push for liberalization. Tangible achievements in social development include a better health programme (Affolter & Cabula, 2010, p. 277) that includes care for HIV and Malaria. There are also concrete results in education. Domestic NGOs have allocated their efforts to work parallel to UNDP in a campaign for Civic Education in order to bring Angolans together and to also spread awareness about their political rights (Affolter, & Cabula, 2010, p. 279). One could argue that Angola is still in the process of state-building which leaves a lot of opportunity for civil society to operate. However, domestic NGOs' capabilities are limited to some extent. When reading about the logistics of civics campaign, one would realize that UNDP is in control (Affolter & Cabula, 2010, p. 276). It is understandable that UNDP may have more experience with education on grounds than local NGOs, however it is arguably infringing on domestic NGOs' autonomy.

Also, the Angolan state does not acknowledge NGOs or civil society efforts in general (Santos, 2002, p. 48). Despite its weakness and fragility as a state that cannot protect its own nation, the Angolan regime still controls the legislative branch and they are legally restricting civil society. They are not drafting laws to stop NGOs deliberately but they are employing the rigid, nepotistic bureaucracy to impede their progress and stop their work (Santos, 2002, p. 48).

Conclusion

Angolan NGOs were successful on some fronts, one of which is the ethnic conflict. They were able to introduce peace, maintain it through civic education and raise awareness about the importance of essential freedoms, basic human rights and political rights, which was a relatively successful formula in fighting remnants of civil war. They were successful in working with each other, through merging the areas they tackle and they were also able to work with international organizations. One could see, though, that Angolan NGOs do not work parallel to UN bodies but under them. It could be argued that Angolan NGOs are not autonomous. They are heavily subordinated to some international organizations and subject to control by the Angolan state which limits NGOs' power and the extent of their influence. However, that does not mean that civil society is not effective in Angola. So far, it might not be significantly successful in reconstructing Angola as a fragile state. However it is inducing progress in terms of the civic duty. They are building what one might call 'the right things in the heart' which is the essence of democracy. They are not only educating the masses about their rights and responsibilities but also pressuring the government to hold elections. They are not only tackling economic growth but also democracy. They might not be democratizing yet, but they are slowly pushing for liberalization. In parallel to that they are building the bases for a full democracy. There is hope for civil society in Angola and there is hope that it achieves the

latter's reconstruction, it is arguably just a matter of time.

Appendix: Angola's State Fragility Values, 2006-2015

Year	Total	Demographic Pressures	Refugees and IDPs	Group Grievance	Human Flight	Uneven Development	Poverty and Economic Decline	Legitimacy of the State	Public Services	Human Rights	Security Apparatus	Factorialized Elites	External Intervention
2006	88.3	8.0	8.5	6.3	5.0	9.0	4.9	8.8	7.6	7.8	6.8	8.0	7.6
2007	84.9	8.5	7.5	5.9	5.0	8.7	4.2	8.6	7.7	7.5	6.2	7.5	7.6
2008	83.8	8.6	6.9	5.9	5.0	9.0	4.0	8.4	7.6	7.5	6.2	7.5	7.2
2009	85.0	8.6	7.0	6.1	5.5	9.4	4.5	8.0	8.0	7.2	6.2	7.3	7.2
2010	83.7	8.4	6.9	5.9	5.6	9.1	5.0	8.1	8.0	7.3	5.9	6.8	6.7
2011	84.6	8.6	6.6	6.2	5.9	8.8	4.5	8.5	8.2	7.5	6.2	7.0	6.7
2012	85.1	8.9	6.9	6.5	5.6	9.1	4.8	8.2	8.3	7.6	5.9	7.0	6.4
2013	87.1	8.9	7.2	6.8	5.9	9.4	5.1	8.6	8.4	7.3	6.1	7.3	6.1
2014	87.4	9.0	7.5	7.1	6.0	9.5	5.4	8.0	9.1	7.0	5.8	7.2	5.8
2015	88.1	8.7	7.6	7.3	6.0	9.6	5.6	8.3	8.9	7.3	6.0	7.2	5.6

Data compiled from: <http://fsi.fundforpeace.org/rankings-2015>

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