

BEYOND FRAGILITY OR FAILURE: A GROUNDED THEORY OF THE FALLOW STATE

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Abstract

Why are some states trapped in the struggle to translate potentials into sustainable development? This study is focused on developing a substantive grounded theory of the fallow state to describe and explain how protracted stagnation is produced and maintained persistently. Deploying the Straussian Grounded Theory (SGT) approach, data were drawn from 24 participants (n=24) in two focus group discussions that involved academics and governance experts in the social science disciplines, and also a theoretical sampling of 26 peer-reviewed governance literature published between 2010 and 2024 was consulted. Nigeria served as the empirical case for context in deconstructing the theory of the failed state. The analysed data showed that what participants designated as stagnation emerged from a set of interconnected and supporting processes of economic dormancy, institutional depletion, administrative paralysis, human capital attrition, and civic dislocation. As with fallow agriculture land, over time, these interactions contribute to a systematically under-cultivated national capacity. The study recommended institutionalizing mechanism to deepen the democratisation process to restrict abuse of state power, empower the judiciary to play an active role in enforcing the rule of law to protect against elite capture of state resources, and provide robust investment in education and incentives to engage a productive workforce.

Keywords: Administrative paralysis, civic dislocation, economic dormancy, grounded theory, human capital attrition, stagnation