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**WEAK STATES AND POLITICAL  
VIOLENCE IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA**

by Matthew F. Kirwin and Wonbin Cho

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by Matthew F. Kirwin and Wonbin Cho

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## **Weak States and Political Violence in sub-Saharan Africa**

### **Abstract**

Political violence has emerged as one of Africa's most pressing security issues and recent events in Kenya, Cote d'Ivoire and Nigeria point to the salience of the phenomenon. Existing studies argue that the weak and incapacitated nature of African states is a significant factor contributing to high levels of political violence. Yet this insight does not help us to understand which aspect of a weak state affects political violence. Using Afrobarometer survey data, this study identifies and measures citizens' perceptions of the dimensions of state weakness and explores how these popular attitudes shape perceptions of the use violence for political purposes. In order to test the robustness of our findings we use participation in demonstrations and protests as a second dependent variable. We find that widespread crime and insecurity, lack of state legitimacy, inadequate protection of private property and group grievances are strongly associated with both popular acceptability of political violence and higher levels of participation in demonstrations. However, we do not find any significant effect of weak presence of the state and poor provision of public goods on an individual's proclivity to engage in political violence.

## Introduction

Political violence in Africa has received much attention in academic as well as media circles. Political violence jeopardizes political stability, democratic reform, the prospects of economic development, and creates human suffering and in some cases may degenerate into civil war. In recent years large  $n$  cross national studies have examined the onset of civil war (Fearon and Laitin 2003, Collier and Hoeffler 2004). These studies find that poverty and primary resource dependence increase the likelihood of civil war and discount the role that ethnic diversity and group grievance have on the onset of conflict. However the highly aggregated measures used in these studies do not fully reveal the mechanisms that link sources to outcomes.

More recently a body of literature has emerged that looks beyond the macro level and endeavors to uncover the processes which foster violent conflict (Kalyvas 2003, Weinstein 2007). These cases focus on civil war which is a much less frequent event than instances of political violence. Political violence is typically the penultimate event that precedes full-scale civil war. If we look at a case such as Cote d'Ivoire, where armed rebellions took over large areas of the country, there were instances of political violence that occurred before armed insurgencies broke out. In other words civil wars do not happen spontaneously and instances of political violence typically precede it. Therefore it is worthwhile to take one step back in order to better understand the processes that precipitate large scale civil conflict. Moreover by identifying factors that predict political violence perhaps governments and donors can take steps to prevent conflicts from degenerating into civil war.

Rather than examine intense civil wars in Africa; we seek to understand individuals' views towards violence as a political option. There have been few studies that examine the relationship between the nature of the state and propensities for violent conflict. One exception is work by Cedarman and Girardin (2007) that finds that the state plays a major role in ethnonationalist conflict when an ethnic minority is in power and an ethnic majority is out of power. One drawback to their study is that they did not include sub-Saharan Africa because it was too difficult to code cases in the region. Moreover, Cedarman and Girardin's investigation focuses on the ethnicization of political positions and does not consider violence that may be instigated by features of the state that may not be related to ethnic identities. These limitations point to the importance of more extensive research on the topic.

Other studies consider how attributes of the state, such as level of democratization and economic strength, affect levels of violence. Gross Domestic Product (GDP), as reported by the World Bank, and democracy scores, such as those compiled by the Polity Project or Freedom House, are the main proxies used to measure how characteristics of the state affect levels of violence. Previous research shows that democracies have lower levels of political violence and are less likely to experience a civil war (Hegre et al 2005). Likewise, low levels of GDP are associated with violent conflict (Collier and Hoeffler 2004, Fearon and Laitin 2003, Sambanis 2004). Although GDP is not necessarily a state attribute it does allow inferences about how well a state is managing the national economy. Thus links between attributes of the state and levels of political violence have been clearly proposed. Missing from previous analyses, however, is a deeper consideration of the specific characteristics of the state and the distinctive roles each may play in affecting levels of political violence. Previous studies have not adequately specified the aspects of the state that give rise to higher levels of violence. We therefore propose to disaggregate the disparate components of the state that may have an effect on violence. The identification of aspects of state incapacity that increase individual proclivity for political violence could provide important lessons for policy planning tailored to prevent violence.

In addition, individual level data provide a unique lens through which to examine violent conflict in Africa. As such, we know very little about how ordinary people view political violence, especially their acceptability of the action. Bhavnani and Backer (2007) have found that higher levels of social capital, namely civic activism, reduce a person's approval of political violence. Humphreys and Weinstein (2004) have found that ex-rebels in Sierra Leone had little attachment to political parties prior to their engagement in violent conflict. They argue that political apathy and little interest in civic life predisposed rebels to violent action.

Using individual level survey data from Afrobarometer<sup>1</sup>, this study seeks to specify which specific aspects of weak states have a significant effect on increasing individuals' support for the use of political violence.

It is important to note that political violence may be manifest in a number of different ways. Civil war, armed rebellion, violent political rallies, coercion of voters, and post-election demonstrations or crackdowns are all potential manifestations of political violence. For the purposes of this study we regard political violence to be the use of force to achieve a political outcome. As such this study examines whether individuals consider political violence a viable and justifiable option in contemporary politics. This is opposed to examining actual personal participation in acts of political violence. It is very likely that respondents would under-report their involvement in political violence and we argue that support, or rejection, of political violence is a better indicator. Despite the confidentiality offered by most surveys, including the Afrobarometer, in many instances it is improbable that respondents would freely discuss their participation in political violence. Without the danger of incriminating themselves respondents are more at liberty to say whether or not they find political violence a justifiable act.

In this study, we find that widespread crime and insecurity, lack of state legitimacy, inadequate protection of private property and group grievances are strongly associated with both popular acceptability of political violence and higher levels of participation in demonstrations. However, we do not find any significant effect of weak presence of the state on both an individual's proclivity to engage in political violence and participation in demonstrations and protests. We also found that poor provision of public goods does not lead people to be more accepting of political violence. However people who are dissatisfied with the quality of public service from the government are more likely to have engaged in demonstrations.

### **The State**

The weak nature of many African states has been well documented and the literature on the subject is expansive. State incapacity has been cited as one of the obstacles to economic and political development. Observers of African politics attach descriptive monikers to highlight the ways in which African states do not adequately fulfill their duties as states; juridical states, shadow states, suspended states, collapsed states, predatory states, bed-ridden states and vampire states are just a few of the typological categories that Africanist political scientists have used to describe underperforming African states.<sup>2</sup> To use these adjectives to generalize the incapacity of all African states would be shortsighted but it does nevertheless point to prevalent institutional deficiencies.

Weak states are unable to adequately project power. According to Weber, an effective state is an organization which claims a monopoly of violence within its borders in order to maintain order. Weber posits that a state must make sure to "successfully claim the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory" (Weber 1921, p. 1). Herbst (2000) argues that the inability of African states to project power through a strong presence contributes to their weakness. Many African states are weak in the Weberian sense and as result they are, in some cases, unable to prevent violent conflict (Desjarlais and

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<sup>1</sup> The Afrobarometer is a collaborative effort of research partners in various African countries, numbering 12 in Round 1, 16 in Round 2, and 18 in Round 3. The sample size in each country is from 1200 to 2400 with respondents selected randomly to represent the country's adult population. All interviews were conducted by trained fieldworkers in face-to-face settings in the language of the respondent's choice. For access to data and information on sampling, see [www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org).

<sup>2</sup> In order of citation, Jackson, Robert and Carl Rosberg, "Why Africa's Weak States Persist," *World Politics* 1982, 35, 1-24; Reno, William. *Corruption and State Politics in Sierra Leone* (1995) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Hyden, Goran. *No Shortcuts to Progress: African Development Management in Comparative Perspective* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press (1983), Zartmann, William. *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority* Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers (1995), John Ayoade, *States Without Citizens: An Emerging African Phenomenon*, in *The Precarious Balance: State and Society in Africa*, Donald Rothchild and Naomi Chazan, Boulder: Westview Press, Robert Fatton Jr., *Predatory Rule: State and Civil Society in Africa*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers (1992), J.H. Frimpong-Ansah, *The Vampire State in Africa: The Political Economy of Decline in Ghana*, Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

Kleinman 1994, Brubaker and Laitin 1998). Violence becomes an option in stateless societies (Bates, Greif and Singh 2002).

For some observers, it is state weakness that has allowed violent conflict to emerge in the way that it has in Africa. In theory, “the existence of a government can adjudicate disputes and assure security for all citizens (Saideman 1998).” Clapham (1996) argues that the failure of African states to effectively navigate the passage from “quasi-statehood” to “empirical statehood” has resulted in economic stagnation, an expansion of refugee populations, and most notably in terms of our research question, a rise in armed insurgencies. Zartman (1997) argues that governance is, in and of itself, conflict management. If we consider the state to be the set of institutions through which citizenry is governed then we must examine the state in instances when governance fails, conflict prevention is mismanaged and political violence emerges. Characteristics of the state may be the prism through which we view and analyze why some people may be pre-disposed to participate in political violence.

### **Data and Dependent Variables**

In order to understand the relationship between a weak state and political violence, this study uses two different dependent variables: one is based on popular attitudes about political violence and the other refers to participation in a demonstration or a protest march. We use survey data from Round 3 of the Afrobarometer, conducted in 17 countries between March 2005 and February 2006.<sup>3</sup> The 17 countries included in this study have undergone some degree of political liberalization and experienced at least a few multiparty elections.

The object of explanation is an individuals’ proclivity to engage in political violence. It is drawn from a question that asked respondents whether they believe that political violence is acceptable under certain circumstances. It is measured on a five-point scale anchored at the bottom by the opinion that opinion that violence is never justified. We posit that this question gives us good insight into support for political violence. In most consolidated democracies, in which people abide by the formal institutional rules of the game, violence has been discounted as a political option. Yet in some countries, even those that have experienced political liberalization such as Kenya and Nigeria, citizens still consider political violence as an option. We make the assumption that people who view political violence to be justifiable and sometimes necessary are more likely to take part in political violence.

A test of association allows us to query if there is a strong correlation between people who view political violence to be justifiable and people who were more likely to take part in demonstrations. We find that the relationship is statistically significant and positive.<sup>4</sup> While we cannot be certain about the causal direction of this relationship, we suspect that acceptance of political violence is a precursor for participation in demonstrations; in order to engage in violence one must regard it as an acceptable act.

In addition, this study uses another measure to test the robustness of our findings pertaining to whether or not an individual approves of political violence. The Afrobarometer question asked a respondent whether he/she had personally attended a demonstration or a protest march during the previous year. Figure 1 shows the distribution of percentages of respondents agreeing that violence is sometimes necessary in support of a just cause and people saying that they engaged in a demonstration or protest march. On the average, 19 percent of respondents expressed positive attitudes about the acceptability of political violence. Specifically, the percentages of the acceptability of political violence range from 9 percent in Benin to 37 in Namibia. For personal engagement in demonstrations, on the average, 17 percent of respondents said that they personally participated in a demonstration or protest march during the previous year. The percentages also range from 7 percent in Mali to 31 percent in Mozambique.

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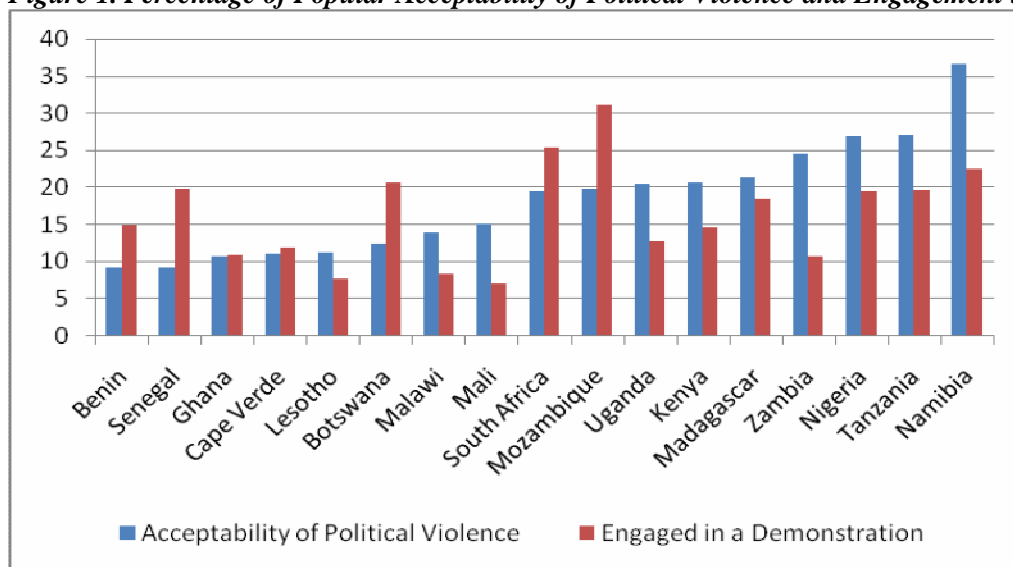
<sup>3</sup>Zimbabwe is excluded since key variables for this study are not available.

<sup>4</sup>Pearson correlation coefficient = 0.028 and  $p = 0.0001$ .

A cursory examination of the data allows us to draw some conclusions on how Africans view political violence. According to Figure 1, we see that in Namibia 37% of those interviewed either agree or strongly agree that political violence is sometimes necessary. It is somewhat surprising to see Namibia at the head of the field in light of the fact that the country has not endured high levels of civil conflict. On the other hand one could also argue that people who have experienced violence are less likely to want to use it. More understandable are the somewhat elevated numbers among countries that have experienced political violence or other forms of conflict such as Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, and Madagascar. Mozambique, the country to have most recently experienced a civil war, is near the middle of the pack which somewhat refutes the previously mentioned expectation. In the lower half are countries such as Benin, Senegal, Ghana, Lesotho, Botswana, Cape Verde, Malawi and Mali. It is also worth noting that these countries have had relative success with their experiments with democracy; most notably Benin, Senegal, Ghana and Botswana.

Although the information that the graph in Figure 1 offers is at the country level, it nevertheless does allow us to view the data and conclude on a superficial level whether or not the results are at least intuitively logical. Based on this examination we can conclude that the data appear to conform to conventional logic that states that have recently endured political violence have higher percentages of individuals who regard political violence as acceptable (with the exception of Namibia). We must also make sure to point out, however, that most of the countries in the Afrobarometer are countries that have liberalized their political systems. This, in turn, prevents us from making generalizations for Africa as a whole, since autocratic governments are excluded from our study.

**Figure 1. Percentage of Popular Acceptability of Political Violence and Engagement in Demonstrations**



Images of violent conflict in Africa are sometimes the only images of Africa that people in the West view. However, the data offered in the graph in Figure 1 offers an alternative image, moreover one that is based on the opinions of Africans themselves.

### Dimensions of State Weakness and Relevant Hypotheses

Some of the characteristics of weak states are lack of a command over sufficient resources, dependency on external funds, no concrete plan of development, lack of territorial control and lack of support and legitimacy with the population and the international community. It is difficult to disentangle the inherently weak nature of African states from the outbreak of violent conflict. In fact it can be argued that the attributes of a weak state not only fail to prevent violent conflict but that they also contribute to outbreaks of violence.

The paper seeks to explain what factors influence people's attitudes towards political violence. Inductively we can trace the relationship between a weak state and levels of violence. The puzzle however is specifying



which particular aspects of a weak state have an effect. As such the paper puts forwards six hypotheses. The following section presents attributes of weak states that may contribute to violence. In order to take the argument an additional step each characteristic concludes with a relevant hypothesis that will be tested with Afrobarometer data. The following presentation of aspects of weak states is in order of importance in terms of how we judge its effect on state strength.

### ***Popular Perceptions of State Weakness***

#### ***Order: Presence of the state***

Herbst (2000) argues that incomplete control over the hinterlands of African states is responsible for incidents of violence: the primary problem in terms of political violence is that African leaders are unable to govern and provide order throughout their entire territory. The inability of African countries to extend their writ of authority is responsible for the emergence of rebel movements and other forms of political violence. As an example, the Democratic Republic of Congo clearly has been plagued by violent conflict due to its government's inability to project power. In countries such as Sierra Leone and Liberia the state did not have a strong enough presence to enable it to discourage rival powers that were eventually manifested in rebel movements. In other words there are areas in African states where the states have very little presence. Hyden (2006) echoes the view of Herbst and sees the threat of conflict to be highest in instances of state disintegration whereby the nationalist movement has collapsed altogether or states are unable to project power so as to control all territory. Moreover, Kalyvas supports both scholars and argues that "poor non-modernized states have failed to penetrate their periphery effectively which could reduce the salience of local cleavages (2003: 481)."

Given the importance of broadcasting state power, this study seeks to test Herbst's argument in terms of the effect that limited power projection, or lack of a significant presence, affects an individual's proclivity to engage in acts of violence. We theorize that greater projection of state power will, on average, lower an individual's willingness to participate in political violence. In order to test this theory we construct a measure of state projection of power, which is based on the presence of infrastructure (electricity, piped water system, and sewage system) in the respondent's area.

*H1: The more significant presence of the state in an individual's life, the less likely the individual is to engage in violent acts.*

*Indicator: The presence of infrastructure (electricity, piped water system, and sewage system) in the respondent's area.*

#### ***Insecurity: Victim of crime***

One of the responsibilities of the state is to provide security for its citizens. Through police, and frequently by military forces, African states offer security to citizens. The security that a state provides should be predictable which differentiates it from roving warlords who are frequently unpredictable (Olson 1993). Moreover, Olson (567) convincingly argues that "anarchic violence cannot be rational for a society" which implies that a state must have a monopoly on violence. Other observers have pointed to the belief that the state must have a monopoly on the use of force and enforce laws for the mitigation of conflict (Stedman 1996; Walter 1997; Hartzell 1999). However in Africa much has also been made of the predatory state. As argued by Chabal and Daloz (1999):

"Since in most countries the 'state' not only fails to protect the population from crime but is itself responsible for a high level of violence, both through the direct abuse of power and because of its predatory nature, it is not surprising that ordinary men and women will seek to devise alternate strategies for coping with arbitrary force (p 77)."

The state monopoly over power may be challenged in several ways. First, coercive agents of the state may be viewed as highly inefficient or even untrustworthy. Secondly, the state authorities may be challenged by local militias or vigilante groups. One example of this is the Bakassi Boys who patrol their locale in southeastern Nigeria and have to some extent supersede the coercive authority of the state (Smith 2004). As another example, traditional hunters in Cote d'Ivoire, known as the *dozo*, emerged as a security apparatus for northern Ivoirians who felt threatened by the Gbagbo regime (Bassett 2003). Finally there are some instances where some groups view coercive agents of the state as instruments of discrimination and the situation deteriorates into a security dilemma. As noted earlier the case of Cote d'Ivoire could be used as an example for this case. Leading up to the civil conflict in Cote d'Ivoire, Northerners, typically of Senefou or Malinke extraction viewed the state security apparatus as discriminatory. In fact, at one point the national Gendarmes School was purposely stocked with members of the same ethnic group as President Laurent Gbagbo (Akinde 2004). In instances where state monopoly over the use of force breaks down or is brought into question citizens may be more inclined to resort to violence.

*H2: Individuals who feel a general lack of security are more likely to participate in violence.*

*Indicator: Reportedly being a victim of a crime in the past year.*

### **State Legitimacy**

States lacking legitimacy have difficulty collecting taxes and convincing citizens to play by the formal institutional rules of the game (Levi 1988). A lack of state legitimacy diminishes a country's potential for economic growth because it distorts its government's choice of policies and harms the quality of its governance (Englebert 2000). If the quality of governance is damaged it may have an adverse effect on the behavior of its citizens. Without positive perceptions about state legitimacy, people do not believe that they ought to follow rules or commands issued by their state. As legitimacy of the government decreases individuals become increasingly less likely to follow the rule of law which could lead to higher levels of violence.

*H3: Individuals who feel an unwillingness to recognize state legitimacy are more likely to participate in violence.*

*Indicator: Individuals' opinions of whether or not they must respect court decisions, pay taxes and obey the law. These three questions are scaled into a single index.*

### **Public Service Quality**

In Africa, the provision of basic services such as education and health care is typically one of the most important responsibilities of the state. Azam (2001) argues that states that do not ensure an equitable and competent distribution of public goods may be more susceptible to political violence. He found that public expenditure in health, as a percentage of GDP, has a significant negative impact on the occurrence of violent political events, and so too does the enrollment ratio in primary education. The logic is that if individuals do not feel that the state is sufficiently supplying public goods or services they will be more inclined to resort to violent means.

*H4: Individuals who believe that the state is satisfactorily providing public services with state resources are less likely to participate in political violence.*

*Indicator: Index of citizens' perception about how well or badly their government handles creating jobs, improving basic health services, and addressing educational needs.*

### **Lack of Protection of Private Property**

According to Goldsmith (2000) states should provide a sound set of rules for private economic activity. Protection of private property was one of the requisites for the emergence of state systems in Europe (North 1990). One of the central tenets of private economic activity is the right to and protection of private

property. If the government cannot guarantee this right then citizens may be more inclined to use violence. Most recently Boone (2007) has written about how property rights in Africa are complex and frequently contested by citizens. She finds that property rights disputes coupled with intense demographic and environmental stress could lead to conflict. Boone (2007) also argues that issues related to property rights are central to discussions about reform and reconstruction of the African state, which points to the responsibility that the state should have in managing private property disputes. Bates (2007) posits that one of the symptomatic patterns of the state failure syndrome is the stage when private property becomes insecure.

We operationalize this variable by looking at the options a state provides to its citizens to recover property when it is illegally expropriated. Strong states instill in citizens a greater confidence that such problems will be resolved or at the very least provide appropriate channels by which they may contest illegal seizure.

In weak states formal means to recover property are less evident and individuals are more inclined to rely on informal methods. Informal prescriptions include the use of connections with influential people, bribery, or public protest. In some cases citizens do not even resort to informal means but rather become resigned to the fact that there is nothing that can be done. This reliance on informal rather than formal means points to a state that offers little in guaranteeing that a state will protect a citizen's private property. An individual who believes that the state cannot credibly protect his private property may be more likely to participate in violence.

*H5: Individuals who doubt the ability of the state to protect their private property are more likely to participate in violence.*

*Indicator: The options that a state gives a citizen who had his or her own land wrongly seized by someone.*

### **Group Grievance**

Although the relationship between grievance and levels of violent conflict has been dismissed by Collier and Hoeffler (2004), it is nevertheless worthwhile examining the relationship between the two variables. Moreover, an armed insurgency typically justifies its cause with grievance issues, such as political marginalization or prejudicial treatment. The Forces Nouvelles in Cote d'Ivoire and Tuaregs in Mali and Niger couched their justifications for rebellion in language that called for better treatment from the national government. Other cases of political violence rooted in grievance need not be manifested in large scale rebellion. Localized political conflict can also be related to perceived political marginalization. Instances of communal conflict between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria under the Obasanjo regime can be viewed through the lens of national politics.

*H6: Individuals who are members of an ethnic group that they (respondents) perceive to be treated unfairly by the government are more likely to participate in violence.*

*Indicator: How often a respondent's ethnic group is seen to be treated unfairly by the government.*

### **Control Variables**

A number of control variables are also used in this study. The model controls for current economic conditions (as perceived by respondents both at the household and national levels), popular support for democracy, residential location (urban/rural), gender, level of education and age. All of these control variables, especially age, level of education and gender should be good predictors of attitudes towards participation in violence. Exact question wording and response categories for all items are given in Appendix A. Appendix B gives descriptive statistics for all of these variables.

## Results

In order to test the influence of people's perceptions of various dimensions of a weak state on an individual's proclivity to engage in political violence, we estimate a multivariate logit model with country fixed effects. Table 1 reports the results of estimations.

**Table 1. Acceptability of Political Violence**

<i>Independent Variables</i>	Coef.	Std. Err.	P-value
Order (presence of the state)	0.035	0.024	0.147
Insecurity (victim of crime)	0.099	0.032	0.002
State legitimacy	-0.142	0.023	0.000
Public service quality	-0.059	0.034	0.084
Lack of protection of private property	0.413	0.050	0.000
Group grievance	0.129	0.022	0.000
Personal economic condition	-0.002	0.020	0.906
National economic condition	0.016	0.017	0.372
Support for democracy	-0.253	0.043	0.000
Urban (= 1)	-0.046	0.055	0.405
Gender (female = 1)	-0.104	0.041	0.012
Age	-0.008	0.002	0.000
Education	0.010	0.013	0.437
Botswana	0.527	0.161	0.001
Cape Verde	0.222	0.300	0.459
Ghana	0.390	0.163	0.017
Kenya	0.990	0.148	0.000
Lesotho	0.349	0.170	0.040
Madagascar	1.196	0.149	0.000
Malawi	0.469	0.156	0.003
Mali	0.768	0.150	0.000
Mozambique	1.009	0.158	0.000
Namibia	1.645	0.149	0.000
Nigeria	1.042	0.136	0.000
Senegal	0.212	0.170	0.211
South Africa	0.743	0.144	0.000
Tanzania	1.441	0.149	0.000
Uganda	1.024	0.136	0.000
Zambia	1.197	0.147	0.000
Constant	-1.882	0.192	0.000
Log likelihood	-7822.468		
Pseudo R2	0.0505		
N	16731		

*Note:* Table entries are logit coefficients with country fixed effects.

Four of the six dimensions of a weak state have significant effects on popular attitudes about the acceptability of violence. First, with respect to presence of the state, we find that it is not strongly associated with the acceptability of political violence. This result is in contrast to our expectation from H1. Instead, state infrastructure can mitigate or incite violence among individuals. For example in some cases the presence of the state and broadcast of its power could engender greater peaceful compliance among citizens. On the other hand it could also be looked upon as an uninvited and perhaps menacing presence. If the latter is the case then individuals could be more likely to support violence. Finally, perhaps the effect is endogenous with the presence of the state being due to the fact of higher levels of political violence in the past.

Second, the lack of security has a significant, positive impact on the acceptability of political violence. Those who have been a victim of a crime are more likely to find violence justifiable. This demonstrates a vicious circle of insecurity; as an individual's environment becomes less secure he/she, on average, believes that violence is acceptable. If the state is no longer able to protect its citizens from violent crime individuals are more likely to find political violence justifiable.

Third, in terms of state legitimacy, as people find the state to be increasingly legitimate they become less likely to view political violence as acceptable. State legitimacy can force citizens to recognize their government policies as appropriate even though they disagree with those outputs of decision making. Even more strongly, citizens who perceive their state as legitimate may express their willingness to defend state institutions. This result bears some resemblance to Clark's (2007) finding that African states that are viewed as legitimate are less susceptible to military interventions, rebellions or violent manifestations.

Fourth, we find that the variable of public service quality has no significant impact on popular acceptability of violence. People who believe that their government is providing good public services are not less likely to accept violence as a justified method to express their interests. This null finding fails to confirm H4.

This result suggests that individuals no longer count on the state to effectively provide public goods as it had done in the past. Although the era of structural adjustment has most likely lowered expectations in terms of the role that the state will play in the provision of public goods to such a degree that it does not raise the likelihood that an individual approves of political violence. This suggests that individuals have lessened expectations and the saliency of the issue is no longer present.

Fifth, we find that lack of protection of private property had a significant and positive effect on acceptability of political violence. This can be interpreted in the light of the fact that, in Africa, people are very closely tied to land in both economic and spiritual terms. Through agricultural and pastoral use, land is also the primary means by which many Africans earn an income or, at the very least, live a life of subsistence. Moreover land use issues, manifested in programs such as land tenure reform or illegal seizure, can be incendiary.

With the case of Cote d'Ivoire this pattern is apparent. In the post Houphet Boigny era the Ivorian economy tumbled and arable land became more scarce. In some cases "immigrants," or *etrangeres*, typically of Malian or Burkinabe extraction, were forcefully coerced to turn over land that they legally owned and had worked on for generations to segments of the population who identified themselves as autochthones. In some cases state security forces were complicit or at least very indifferent to the illegal seizures. Instances such as these were some of the key motivational factors used to justify the rebellion launched by groups in the north of Cote d'Ivoire.

Finally, we find that group grievance is strongly associated with the acceptability of political violence. The more that an individual believes that his/her ethnic group has been discriminated against by the government the more likely he/she is to find political violence justifiable. This is an interesting finding in light of the recent greed versus grievance literature that dismisses grievance as a cause of civil war. Or, perhaps grievance may be an impetus for political violence, yet it is not motivation enough to spur acts that result in or sustain civil war.

The results also show that neither personal nor national economic condition has any significant effect on popular attitudes about the acceptability of political violence. Those who claim support for democracy are less likely to believe that political violence is acceptable under certain circumstances. Women are also less likely than men to express positive attitudes about the acceptability of political violence. Age is negatively associated with levels of approval of political violence.

**Table 2. Marginal Change in Variables of Interest**

	Acceptability of Political Violence
Order (presence of the state)	0.003
Insecurity (victim of crime)	0.005
State legitimacy	-0.010
Public service quality	-0.003
Lack of Protection of Private Property	0.012
Group Grievance	0.010

*Note: Change in predicted probability as an independent variable changes from ½ standard deviation below base to ½ standard deviation above, holding all other variables constant.*

For substantive interpretation, we estimate the marginal effects listed in Table 2 (Long 1997). We find an interesting result. Popular perceptions about the lack of protection of private property have the strongest impact on popular acceptability about political violence. State legitimacy and group grievance are the second and third strongest influences respectively. A ½ standard deviation increase in the level of individual doubt about the ability of the state to protect the private interests of citizens leads to an approximately 1.2% increase in popular acceptability of political violence as a justified tool to express their interests. A ½ standard deviation increase in popular attitudes toward state legitimacy corresponds with a 1% decrease in the acceptability of political violence. In addition, ½ standard deviation increase in the levels of popular perceptions of group grievance is associated with a 1% increase in the acceptability of political violence. Other dimensions of weak states have relatively marginal effects on popular view about political violence: 0.3 or 0.5% changes in support of political violence.

In order to test the robustness of our findings we test the effects of the various dimensions of the weak state on people's engagement in events that are frequently the penultimate acts preceding political violence, i.e., participating in a demonstration or a protest march. While the previous dependent variable is about popular attitudes about the acceptability of political violence, the dependent variable of participation in protests is behavioral. As evidenced in Table 3 all of the variables have the same effect on protest participation as they do on the acceptability of political violence. The only exception is the valence of the effect of public service quality. With respect to insecurity, lack of protection of private property, and group grievance, all coefficients are significant and as expected, associated with a greater likelihood of engaging in protests. People who believe that the state is legitimate are less likely to have engaged in demonstrations. Consistent with the model of popular attitudes about the acceptability of political violence, the presence of the state has no significant effect on people's engagement in political violence.

**Table 3. Engaged in a Demonstration**

<i>Independent Variables</i>	Coef.	Std. Err.	P-value
Order (presence of the state)	0.003	0.024	0.896
Insecurity (victim of crime)	0.222	0.031	0.000
State legitimacy	-0.096	0.025	0.000
Public service quality	-0.113	0.036	0.002
Lack of protection of private property	0.160	0.053	0.003
Group grievance	0.094	0.023	0.000
Personal economic condition	-0.019	0.021	0.361
National economic condition	0.266	0.018	0.135
Support for democracy	-0.005	0.046	0.911
Urban (= 1)	-0.145	0.055	0.008
Gender (female = 1)	-0.369	0.043	0.000
Age	-0.001	0.002	0.673
Education	0.093	0.013	0.000
Botswana	0.402	0.134	0.003
Cape Verde	-0.633	0.300	0.035
Ghana	-0.277	0.146	0.057
Kenya	-0.158	0.139	0.253
Lesotho	-0.755	0.172	0.000
Madagascar	0.255	0.137	0.062
Malawi	-0.644	0.159	0.000
Mali	-0.721	0.160	0.000
Mozambique	0.978	0.134	0.000
Namibia	0.314	0.138	0.023
Nigeria	0.114	0.121	0.348
Senegal	0.298	0.137	0.030
South Africa	0.522	0.124	0.000
Tanzania	0.243	0.140	0.082
Uganda	-0.298	0.125	0.017
Zambia	-0.449	0.148	0.002
Constant	-2.114	0.187	0.000
Log likelihood	-7501.595		
Pseudo R2	0.0514		
N	17365		

Note: Table entries are logit coefficients with country fixed effects.

## Conclusion

This paper has attempted to identify the characteristics of weak states that contribute to violence. We find that four of the six dimensions of weak states that we forwarded have a significant impact on the acceptability of political violence. Among them, we find, popular doubt about the ability of their state to protect private property rights has the strongest effect on citizens' view about political violence. This study can provide some lessons for observers of African politics as well as policy makers. The estimation of marginal effects allows us to assemble a rank ordering of the effects. From a policy perspective it distinguishes which aspects of weak states are most likely to result in higher levels of violence. As such it may help policy makers identify which policy reforms are most crucial for the avoidance of violent conflict. Perhaps the best approach would be to tackle characteristics of weak states that are associated with higher levels of violence first in order to at least establish stability in a newly democratizing state. For example, it would make sense to focus on issues such as private property protection, de-escalation of group grievances and reinforcement of state legitimacy. By the same token, many of these problems have already been identified. Nevertheless, in the era of donor fatigue it may be better to focus on one or two problems and those that are associated with lower levels of violence may be a good starting point. This is important for African states for it is difficult to pursue democratization and economic development in the midst of political violence, let alone deal with the human suffering that it ostensibly engenders.

In terms of future research there are several lines of inquiry that this paper leaves unresolved yet demand further examination. Intuitively, the presence of the state variable would be expected to have a negative effect on attitudes towards political violence. Yet we found that it has no statistically significant impact on the acceptability of political violence. It would be worthwhile examining this question in greater detail which could be achieved by more in depth interviews as opposed to survey interviews. Another important issue is to test for other aspects of weak states that predict individual views towards political violence.

It would also be useful to examine the role that informal institutions play in instances where they substitute for state institutions that are weak or non-existent. Previous research has demonstrated that informal institutions have the potential to fill this void (Helmke and Levitsky 2006; Bratton 2007). In situations where formal institutions remain weak, personal connections (ties of personal loyalty to an incumbent president, for example) can help to secure legitimacy for a fragile democratic regime (Helmke and Levitsky 2006). Moreover Helmke and Levitsky find that some traditional (informal) institutions can actually be complementary to formal institutions and thus support political stability. Due to data limitations we were unable to test for the effects of other aspects of weak states such as the degree to which it is clientelistic in nature. Finally another limitation is that we have looked primarily at states that have liberalized their form of governance, yet it would be worthwhile to look at states that remain more authoritarian. This would be particularly interesting given the argument that authoritarian governments may be more effective in controlling communal or political violence through repression of dissenting voices.

Another important outcome is the parallel that can be drawn between democratic consolidation and the dismissal by citizens of political violence as a political strategy. Linz and Stepan's (1996) classic definition refers to the moment when citizens and political actors agree that democracy is "the only game in town." As long as political violence is still viewed as potential option democracy will not be considered the "only game in town" and consolidation will be hampered. When citizens begin to regard political violence as a less viable option, they will demonstrate a greater adherence to democratic norms which should bode well for democratization on the continent. As long as the specter of political violence is present, democratization in Africa will always lag and expression through democratic practices will not be considered the only means of voicing one's opinion.



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## **Appendix A.**

### **Acceptability of political violence:**

Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement A or Statement B.

A: The use of violence is never justified in [your country] politics today.

B: In this country, it is sometimes necessary to use violence in support of a just cause.

0 = Agree with A; 1 = Agree with B

### **Participation in demonstrations:**

Please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year.

Attended a demonstration or protest march.

0 = No; 1 = Yes

### **H1. Presence of the state:**

Were the following services present in the primary sampling unit/enumerate area (electricity, piped water system, and sewage system)?

1 = Yes; 0 = No.

### **H2. Victim of crime:**

Over the past year, how often (if ever) have you or anyone in your family (Had something stolen from your house and Been physically attacked)?

0=Never; 1=Just once or twice; 2=Several times; 3=Many times; 4=Always.

### **H3. State legitimacy:**

For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree:

A. The courts have the right to make decisions that people always have to abide by.

B. The police always have the right to make people obey the law.

C. The tax department always has the right to make people pay taxes.

1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither Agree Nor Disagree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree

### **H4. Public service quality:**

How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters (creating jobs, improving basic health services, and addressing educational needs)?

1 = Very badly; 2 = Fairly badly; 3 = Fairly well; 4 = Very well.

### **H5. Protection of private property:**

What, if anything, would you do to try and resolve each of the following situations: someone wrongly seized your family's land?

1= Don't worry, things will be resolved given enough time, Lodge complaint through proper channels or procedures;

2= Use connections with influential people, Offer tip or bribe, Join in Public Protest, Other, and Nothing, because nothing can be done.

### **H6. Group grievance:**

How often are \_\_\_\_\_s [respondent's identity group] treated unfairly by the government?

0=Never, 1=Sometimes, 2=Often, 3=Always.

### **Economic conditions:**

In general, how would you describe:

The present economic condition of this country?

Your own present living condition?

1 = Very bad; 2 = Fairly bad; 3 = Neither good nor bad; 4 = Fairly good; 5 = Very good.

### **Support for democracy:**



Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion?

1 = A. Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.

0 = B. In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable.

0 = C. For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.

**Education:** "What is the highest level of education you have completed?" (0= "no formal schooling"; 1 = "informal schooling only"; 2 = "some primary school completed"; 3 = "primary school completed"; 4 = "some secondary school/high school"; 5 = "secondary school/high school completed"; 6 = "post-secondary qualifications, other than university"; 7 = "some university"; 8 = "university completed"; 9 = "post-graduate.")

**Age:** "How old were you at your last birthday?" (range from 18 to 130 years old)

**Gender:** (0 = male; 1 = female)

**Urban:** (0 = rural; 1 = urban)

### *Appendix B: Descriptive Statistics*

<i>Variable</i>	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Acceptability of Political violence	22965	0.19	0.39	0	1
Participation in demonstrations	24349	0.17	0.37	0	1
Presence of the state	24349	1.28	1.17	0	3
Victim of crime	24291	0.33	0.60	0	4
State legitimacy	21528	3.77	0.86	1	5
Public service quality	22392	2.45	0.67	1	4
Lack of Protection of private property	23547	1.18	0.39	1	2
Group grievance	21136	0.81	0.98	0	3
Personal economic conditions	24260	2.65	1.18	1	5
National economic conditions	24333	2.77	1.55	1	9
Support for democracy	24349	0.62	0.48	0	1
Urban	24349	0.38	0.49	0	1
Gender	24349	0.50	0.50	0	1
Age	24064	36.59	14.83	18	130
Education	24257	3.09	2.00	0	9

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