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978-0-521-71525-6 - When Things Fell Apart: State Failure in Late-Century Africa

Robert H. Bates

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Part One

Introduction

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Introduction

In late-century Africa, things fell apart. By way of illustration, consider Figure 1.1, which lists civil wars in African countries from 1970 to 1995, as judged by the World Bank.

As time passes, the list grows. Angola, Chad, Namibia, Nigeria, and Sudan enter the 1970s war-torn; in the mid-1970s, Sudan exits the list, but Equatorial Guinea and Zimbabwe join it; by 1980, Zimbabwe departs from the ranks of the war-torn, but is replaced by Mozambique, Nigeria, and Uganda. The pattern – a few dropping off, a larger number entering in – continues into the early 1990s. Only one country that was conflict ridden in 1990 becomes peaceful by 1992, while eleven others crowd into the ranks of Africa's failed states.

Humanitarians, policymakers, and scholars: Each demands to know why political order gave way to political conflict in late-century Africa. Stunned by the images and realities of political disorder, I join them in search of answers. In so doing, I – a political scientist – turn to theories of the state and

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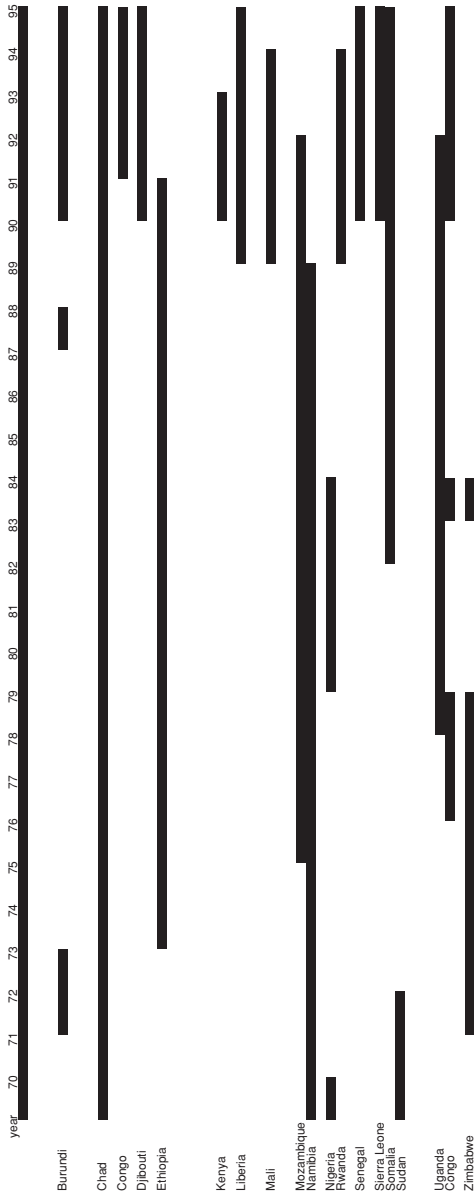


Figure 1.1. Civil wars, Africa 1970–1995. *Source:* World Bank (Sambanis 2002).

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locate the sources of political disorder amidst the factors that lead states to break down.

I anchor this book in the work of Weber (1958) and view coercion as the distinctive property of politics. As will become clear in the next chapter, I depart from Weber – and his “structuralist” descendants¹ – by turning to the theory of games. Driven by the realities of Africa, I view political order as problematic: In light of the evidence Africa offers, political order *cannot* be treated as a given. Rather, I argue, it results when rulers – whom I characterize as “specialists in violence” – choose to employ the means of coercion to protect the creation of wealth rather than to prey upon it and when private citizens choose to set weapons aside and to devote their time instead to the production of wealth and to the enjoyment of leisure.² When these choices constitute an equilibrium, then, I say, political order forms a state.³

To address the collapse of political order in late-century Africa, I therefore return to theory – the theory of the state – and to theorizing – the theory of games. I do so because proceeding in this fashion points out the conditions under which political order can persist – or fail. I devote Chapter 2 to an informal

¹ Evans, P., T. Skocpol, and D. Rueschmeyer (1985), *Bringing the State Back In*, Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press provides perhaps the best-known example.

² I am drawing on Bates, R. H., A. Greif, et al. (2002), “Organizing Violence,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46(5): 599–628.

³ The ambiguous phrasing is intended.

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derivation of those conditions. In the remaining chapters, I turn from deduction to empirics and explore the extent to which these conditions were to be found, or were absent, in late-century Africa. The evidence leads me to conclude that in the 1980s and 1990s, each of three key variables departed from the levels necessary to induce governments and citizens to choose in ways that would yield political order.

The Literature

Following the outbreak of conflict in Serbia, Somalia, Rwanda, and elsewhere, the study of political violence has once again become central to the study of politics. Familiar to many, for example, would be the attempts by Collier and Hoeffler (2004) and Fearon and Laitin (2003) to comprehend the origins of civil wars. Also familiar would be studies of the impact of ethnicity (Fearon and Laitin 2003), democracy (Hegre, Gates et al. 2001; Hegre 2003), and natural-resource endowments (e.g., Ross 2004). In my attempts to comprehend why things fell apart in late-century Africa, I draw upon these writings. But I also take issue with them, for virtually all share common properties from which I seek to depart.

Consider, for example, the assumption that civil war can be best treated as the outcome of an insurgency. When thinking about the origins of political disorder in Africa, I can find no way of analyzing the origins of insurrection without starting

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with the behavior of governments. The conditions that led to the breakdown of order in Africa include the authoritarian nature of its states and their rulers' penchant for predation. By rendering their people insecure, they provoked insurgencies. While both insurrectionaries and incumbents must necessarily feature in the analysis of political disorder, in this instance it makes sense not to focus exclusively on the rebels but to stress as well the behavior of those whom they seek to drive from power.

Recent contributions exhibit a second common feature: the methods that they employ. Utilizing cross-national data, they apply statistical procedures to isolate and measure the relationship of particular variables with the onset and duration of civil wars. I, too, make use of cross-national data; but rather than collecting data for all countries in the globe, I restrict my efforts to Africa. I do so in part because Africa provides an unsettling range of opportunities to explore state failure and because political disorder is so important a determinant of the welfare of the continent. I also do so because I find it necessary to draw upon my intuition. To employ that intuition, I need first to inform it, be it by immersing myself in the field or in qualitative accounts set down by observers. I have therefore made use of a selected set of cases – those from the continent of Africa – and my knowledge of their politics.⁴

⁴ The use of a subset of countries also eases the search for exogenous variables, and thus causal analysis. For example, given the small size of Africa's

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Lastly, if only because they are based on the analysis of cross-national data, contemporary studies exhibit a third property: Their conclusions take the form of “findings.” These findings are based upon relationships between a selection of key variables and the outbreak or duration of civil wars. Collier and Hoeffler (2004), for example, stress the importance of “opportunities,” that is, chances to secure economic rewards and to finance political organizations. Noting that the magnitude of primary product exports, the costs of recruiting, and access to funding from diasporas relate to the likelihood of civil war, they conclude that “economic viability appears to be the predominant systematic explanation of rebellion” (p. 563). Fearon and Laitin (2003), by contrast, conclude that “capabilities” play the major role: “We agree that financing is one determinant of the viability of insurgency,” they write (p. 76). But they place major emphasis on “state administrative, military, and police capabilities” (p. 76), measures of which bear significant relationships to the outbreak of civil wars in their global set of data.

In this work, I proceed in a different fashion. I start by first capturing the logic that gives rise to political order. While I, too, test hypotheses about the origins of disorder, I derive

economies, I can treat global economic shocks as exogenous – something that yields inferential leverage when seeking to measure the impact of economic forces on state failure.

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these hypotheses from a theory. By adopting a more deductive approach, I depart from the work of my predecessors.

Key Topics

Energized by such works as Kaplan's "The Coming Anarchy" (1994), students of Africa have focused on the relationship between ethnic diversity and political conflict. At least since the time that William Easterly and Ross Levine penned "Africa's Growth Tragedy" (1997), empirically minded social scientists have sought to capture the impact of ethnicity on the economic performance of Africa's states. Interestingly, however, they have found it difficult to uncover systematic evidence of the relationship between measures of ethnicity and the likelihood of political disorder.⁵

In this study I, too, find little evidence of a systematic relationship. And yet, the qualitative accounts – be they of the killing fields of Darfur or of the tenuous peace in Nigeria – continue to stress the central importance of ethnicity to political life in Africa. In response, I argue that ethnic diversity does not cause violence; rather, ethnicity and violence are joint

⁵ For a discussion, see Bates, R. H., and I. Yackolev (2002), *Ethnicity in Africa*, in *The Role of Social Capital In Development*, edited by C. Grootaert and T. van Bastelaer, New York: Cambridge University Press; and Fearon, J., and D. Laitin (2003), "Ethnicity, Insurgency and Civil War," *American Political Science Review* 97(1): 75–90.

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products of state failure. Their relationship is contingent: It occurs when political order erodes and politicians forge political organizations in the midst of political conflict.

The political significance of resource wealth has also attracted much attention. Analyzing their data on civil wars, Collier and Hoeffler (2004) report that “dependence upon primary commodity exports” constituted “a particularly powerful risk factor” for the outbreak of civil war (p. 593). Africa is, of course, noted for its bounteous natural endowments of petroleum, timber, metals, and gemstones. And scholars and policymakers have documented the close ties between the diamond industry and UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola) in Angola (Fowler 2000), the smuggling of gemstones and the financing of rebels in Sierra Leone (Reno 2000), and the mining of coltan and the sites of rebellion in eastern Zaire (present-day Democratic Republic of the Congo) (Kakwenzire and Kamukama 2000).

And yet, using Collier and Hoeffler’s (2004) own data, Fearon (2005) has demonstrated that their findings are fragile, depending in part on decisions about how to measure and classify cases. In this study, too, I fail to find a significant relationship between the value of natural resources and the likelihood of state failure.⁶ Once again, then, there arises

⁶ For both Fearon (2005) and myself (this work), only the value of petroleum deposits is related to political disorder. Even here the relationship is fragile, however.

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a disparity between the evidence from cross-national regressions and that from qualitative accounts. I shall argue that the disparity suggests that the exploitation of natural resources for war finance is a correlate rather than a cause of political disorder.

A third factor plays a major role in the literature: democratization. Qualitative accounts, such as those of Mansfield and Snyder (Mansfield and Snyder 1995; Snyder 2000) suggest that democratization produces political instability and leads to the mobilization of what Zakaria (1997) calls “illiberal” political forces. Careful empirical researchers, such as Hegre (Hegre, Gates et al. 2001; Hegre 2004), confirm that new democracies and intermediate regimes – those lying somewhere between stable authoritarian and consolidated democratic governments⁷ – exhibit significantly higher rates of civil war. As demonstrated by Geddes (2003), many of these intermediate regimes are the product of the “third wave” of democratization (Huntington 1991) and the collapse of communist regimes and are therefore themselves new and vulnerable to disorder.

In the 1980s and 1990s, many of Africa’s governments reformed. Regimes that once had banned the formation of political parties now faced challenges at the polls from

⁷ Using Polity coding. Available online at: <http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/polity/>.