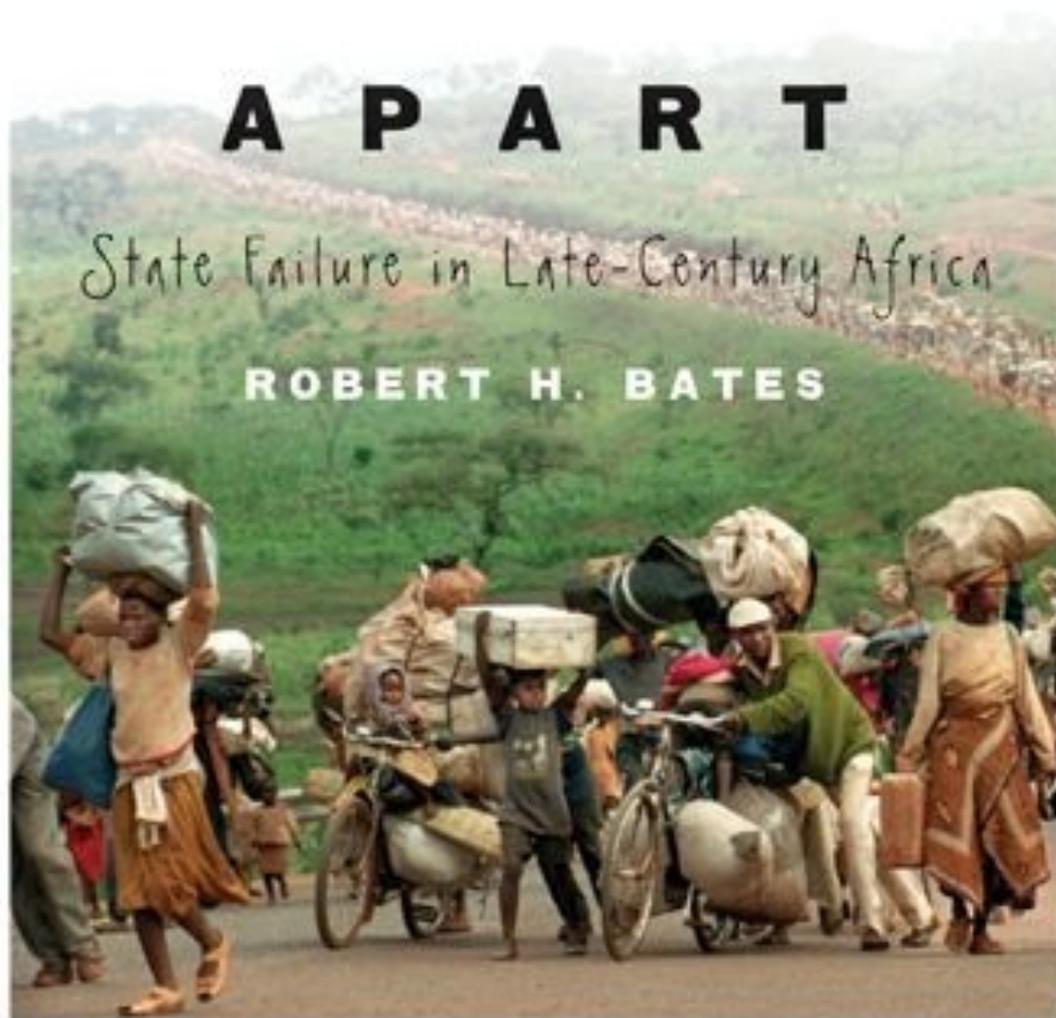


W H E N
T H I N G S
F E L L

A P A R T

State Failure in Late-Century Africa

ROBERT H. BATES



WHEN THINGS FELL APART

In the later decades of the twentieth century, Africa plunged into chaos. States failed, governments became predators, and citizens took up arms. In *When Things Fell Apart*, Robert H. Bates advances an exploration of state failure in Africa. In so doing, he plumbs the depths of the continent's late-century tragedy, the logic of political order, and the foundations of the state. This book covers a wide range of territory by drawing on materials from Rwanda, Sudan, Liberia, and Congo. Written to be accessible to the general reader, it is nonetheless a must-read for scholars and policymakers concerned with conflict and state failure.

ROBERT H. BATES has conducted field work in Zambia, Sudan, Uganda, Kenya, Colombia, and Brazil. Before coming to Harvard, he held faculty appointments at the California Institute of Technology and Duke University and worked as a researcher at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Nairobi, the Institute for Social Research at the University of Zambia, and Fedesarrollo in Bogota, Colombia. Bates currently serves as a researcher and resource person with the Africa Economic Research Consortium, Nairobi; as a member of the Political Instability Task Force of the United States government; and as Professeur Associe, School of Economics, University of Toulouse, where he has taught since 2000. Among his most recent books are *Analytic Narratives* with Avner Greif and colleagues (1999), *Prosperity and Violence* (2001), *Beyond the Miracle of the Market, Second Edition* (2005), and *The Political Economy of Economic Growth in Africa, 1960–2000* (2 vols.) with Benno Ndulu and colleagues (2007).

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When Things Fell Apart

State Failure in Late-Century Africa

Robert H. Bates

Harvard University



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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi

Cambridge University Press
32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521887359

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First published 2008

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Bates, Robert H.

When things fell apart : state failure in late-century Africa / Robert H. Bates.

p. cm. – (Cambridge studies in comparative politics)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-521-88735-9 (hardback) – ISBN 978-0-521-71525-6 (pbk.)

1. Failed states – Africa – History – 20th century. 2. Africa – Politics and government – 20th century. I. Title I. Series.

JC328.7.B38 2008

321.09–dc22 2007025539

ISBN 978-0-521-88735-9 hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-71525-6 paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party Internet Web sites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such Web sites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

To my mentors

Harvey Glickman

Haverford College

Martin Kilson

Harvard University

Richard Sklar

University of California, Los Angeles

Thayer Scudder

California Institute of Technology

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Acknowledgments

Working in Uganda in the early 1980s, I came to learn what it meant to live in a world of violence. Among the reasons my colleagues in the Ministry of Cooperatives welcomed the overthrow of Idi Amin was that with Uganda no longer a pariah state, they could now attend international conferences. And among the reasons they attended such conferences was that they could then sleep, for they need not fear the arrival of soldiers in the night. Insights like this reminded me of something of which I was but fleetingly aware: not only the fragility of life, but also its political premise. I knew then that I would some day have to return to the issues to which that recognition gave rise.

To gain a respite from the tensions of working amidst violence, I turned instead to the study of the international coffee industry. To write up my research into the coffee industry, I spent a sabbatical year at the Center for Advanced Study in Palo Alto, California. Research in Colombia had quickly taught me that conflict was not a phenomenon confined solely to Africa. I was therefore fortunate that Avner Greif was also in residence and that we could ponder together the roots of political order. The model that Avner, Smita Singh, and I produced underpins this work.

While I was laboring in archives in Latin America and at the Center for Advanced Study in California, governments in Africa were being overthrown by political reformers and decimated by political insurgents. When I returned to the study of Africa, I therefore had much ground to make up. Backed by funding from the Institute for International Development (HIID) at Harvard University, I assembled a collection of books and articles and, in conjunction with scholars from the African Economic Research Consortium (AERC), began a collaborative study of economic growth on the continent. I wish to acknowledge the support of Dwight Perkins and Jeffrey Sachs at HIID and that of my colleagues at AERC: Jean-Paul Azam, Paul Collier, Augustin Fosu, Jan Willem Gunning, Benno Ndulu, Dominique Nijinkeu, Stephen O'Connell, and the skilled stalwarts of the Secretariat.

A superb team of students made this study possible. I salute in particular the contributions of Karen Ferree and Smita Singh, who helped to launch it. Marc Alexander, James Habyarimana, Matthew Hindman, and Macartan Humphreys made major contributions. I wish also to thank Daron Haddass, Andy Harris, Kuisami Hornberger, Olivia Lau, Rebecca Nelson, Maria Petrova, Naunihal Singh, and Tsvetana Petrova.

Thanks to Nahomi Ichino and James Robinson for reading and commenting on earlier drafts, as well as members of Gov. 2227: Andrew Beath, Matthew Blackwell, Ryan Bubb, Deepa Dhume, Daniel Fetter, Amanda Garrett, Andy Harris, Jennifer Howk, Janet Lewis, Christopher Rhodes, Anna Vodopyanov, Jacqueline Jansen, and Subhasish Ray. Thanks, too, to the three superb readers, selected by Lewis Bateman and Margaret Levi. I have benefited from comments made by participants at seminars at Yale University, Stanford University, the California Institute of Technology, the University of Oxford, Harvard University, the Peace Research Institute in

Oslo, and the Rockefeller Foundation's villa in Bellagio; at the annual meetings of the Political Science and Economic History Associations; and at workshops in the Kenya Institute for Policy Research and Analysis and the Africa Economic Research Consortium in Nairobi. I am particularly grateful to the Division of Humanities and Social Sciences at Caltech for appointing me as a Moore Fellow, thus giving me the time to launch this book. Special thanks, too, to the Economics Faculty at Toulouse University, especially to Jean-Paul Azam and Bruno Biais, with whom I have shared many of the ideas that worked their way into my argument.

This project has been supported by the Center for International Development and the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs at Harvard University; by a Clark Fellowship from the office of the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Harvard University; and by the Africa Economic Research Consortium. Funding from the United States Institute for Peace (Grant No. USIP-02597S0), the Carnegie Corporation, and the National Science Foundation (Grant No. SES-09905568) brought the project to completion.

I wish as well to acknowledge the impact upon my thinking of the members of the Political Instability Task Force, in particular David Epstein and Jack Goldstone.

I dedicate this book to my mentors: those whose counsel eased my entry into this profession and whose scholarship has inspired my own.

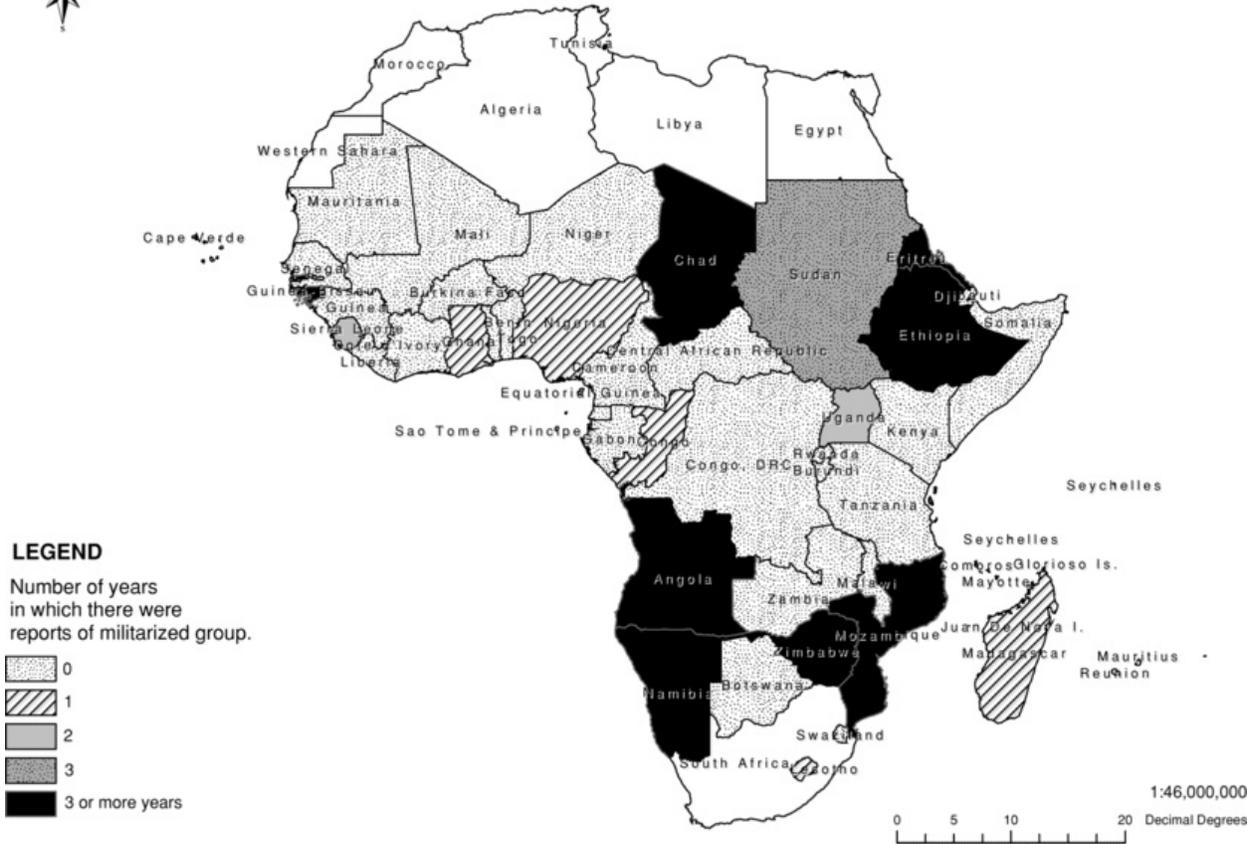
Portions of this study have previously appeared in the following publications and are employed with permission of the publishers:

Bates, R. H. (2006). "Institutions and Development," *Journal of African Economies* 15(1): 10–61.

Bates, R. H. (Forthcoming). State Failure: A Model with Tests from African Data. In *Political Violence*. Edited by Tarek Masoud and Stathis Kalyvas. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Bates, Robert, Avner Greif, and Smita Singh (2004). Tribal Societies. In *Politics from Anarchy to Democracy: Rational Choice in Political Science*. Edited by Morris Irwin, Joe Oppenheimer, and Karol Edward Soltan. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Ndulu, B., P. Collier, et al. (2007). *The Political Economy of Economic Growth in Africa, 1960–2000*. Vol. 1. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.



Reported presence of military groups, 1970–1974. Map compiled by Doran Haadass from data collected by the research team. Countries with white background were not included in the sample for which data were collected.

Part One Introduction

1 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.

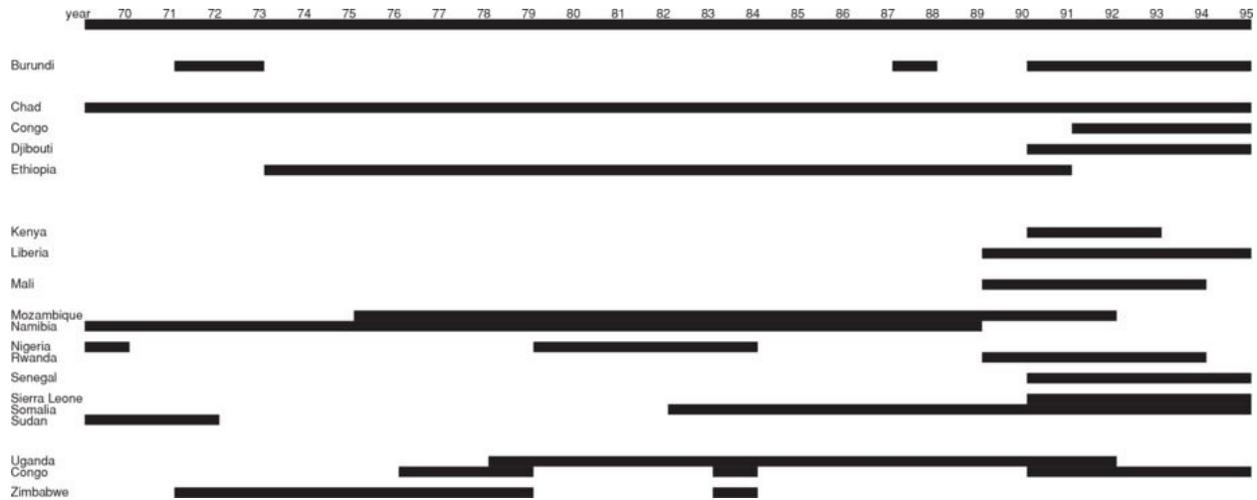


Figure 1.1 Civil wars, Africa 1970–1995. *Source:* World Bank (Sambanis 2002).

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 locate the sources of political disorder midst 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 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 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

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 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 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 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 candidates backed by an organized political opposition. And in the late 1980s and early 1990s, militias assembled, states failed, and Africa faced rising levels of political disorder. The experience of Africa thus appears to conform to what the literature has recorded: Electoral competition and state failure go together.

In analyzing the impact of political reform, I employ two measures: the movement from military to civilian rule and the shift from no- or one- to multiparty systems. In discussions of democracy, the followers of Schumpeter (1950) argue for the sufficiency of party competition; those of Dahl (1971) contend that party competition is necessary but not sufficient. Without an accompanying bundle of political and civil rights, the latter argue, contested elections are not of themselves evidence of democratic politics. In debates over the relationship between party systems and democracy, I concur with the followers of Dahl. When addressing political reform, I pay no attention to the number of political parties, their relative vote shares, or the conditions under which the opposition is allowed to campaign. I therefore address not the relationship between democracy and political conflict but rather the relationship between political reform and political disorder.

Lastly, there are those who emphasize the impact of poverty. That poverty and conflict should go together is treated as noncontroversial, as if disorder were simply an expected corollary of the lack of economic development.⁸ But consider: If, as many argue, lower per capita incomes imply lower wages and therefore lower costs of rebellion, so too do they imply fewer gains from predation; income thus cancels out the ratio between the costs and benefits. From the theoretical point of view, moreover, there is simply little that can be said about the relationship between the average level of income – or, for that matter, poverty – and incentives for violence. As I will argue in [Chapter 2](#), for our purposes, discussions of private income can be set aside; for the logic of political order suggests that the focus be placed not on *private* income but rather on *public* revenues. Economic shocks will indeed play a major role in this analysis, but the focus will be on their impact on the revenues of states, not on the incomes of individuals.⁹ In this work, when I measure the impact of income per capita, I treat it as a control variable, rather than as a variable of theoretical interest.

In [Chapter 2](#), I parse the logic of political order. I recount the theory informally, portraying the interaction between governments and citizens and among citizens as well. Presented as a fable, the argument is based upon rigorous foundations and points to the conditions under which governments choose to engage in predation and citizens choose to take up arms.¹⁰

[Chapters 3](#) through [5](#) set out the conditions that prevailed prior to the collapse of political order. They document the social and political configurations that were in place at the time of the impact of the economic and political shocks that dismantled the state in Africa. In [Chapter 6](#), states fracture and political disorder engulfs nations in Africa. [Chapter 7](#) concludes.

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.

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 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.

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.

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.

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

8 Indeed, see Sambanis, N., and H. Hegre (2006), "Sensitivity Analysis of Empirical Results on Civil War Onset," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50(4): 508–35. The authors point to per capita income as one of the very few variables that bears a robust relationship with civic violence.

9 See the arguments in Hirshleifer, J. (1995), Theorizing About Conflict, in *Handbook of Defense Economics*, edited by K. Hartley and T. Sandler, New York: Elsevier.

10 The informed reader will note the parallels between my analysis and that of Azam, J.-P., and A. Mesnard (2003), "Civil War and the Social Contract," *Public Choice* 115(3–4): 455–75; Snyder, R., and R. Bhavani (2005), "Diamonds, Blood and Taxes: A Revenue-Centered Framework for Explaining Political Order," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49(4): 563–97; and Magaloni, B. (2006), *Voting for Autocracy*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

2 From Fable to Fact

I devote this chapter to the exposition of a fable.¹ While diminutive, it is incisive: It captures the incentives that drive the choices that lead to the failure of states. It is also suggestive, for it points to the conditions under which political order should, or should not, prevail. After expositing this fable, I determine whether it is also informative. It can be so only insofar as the forces that animate its central characters find their parallel in late-century Africa. I devote the last portions of the chapter to arguing that they do and that the story communicated by the fable can therefore bear the weight of the tragedy that befell the continent. The fable can be used – with help – to explore the foundations of political disorder.

A Fable

Consider the following scenario: A community is peopled by a “specialist in violence” and two groups of citizens. Headed by powerful patrons, the groups can act in a unified manner.² The specialist in violence earns his living from the use of force; he either seizes the wealth of others or pockets funds they pay for their protection. Sheltered behind their patrons, the citizens generate incomes by engaging in productive labor; but they too can be mobilized either to seize the income of others – or to defend their incomes from seizure. The three personages in this drama repeatedly interact over time. The question is: Can political order prevail in such a setting?

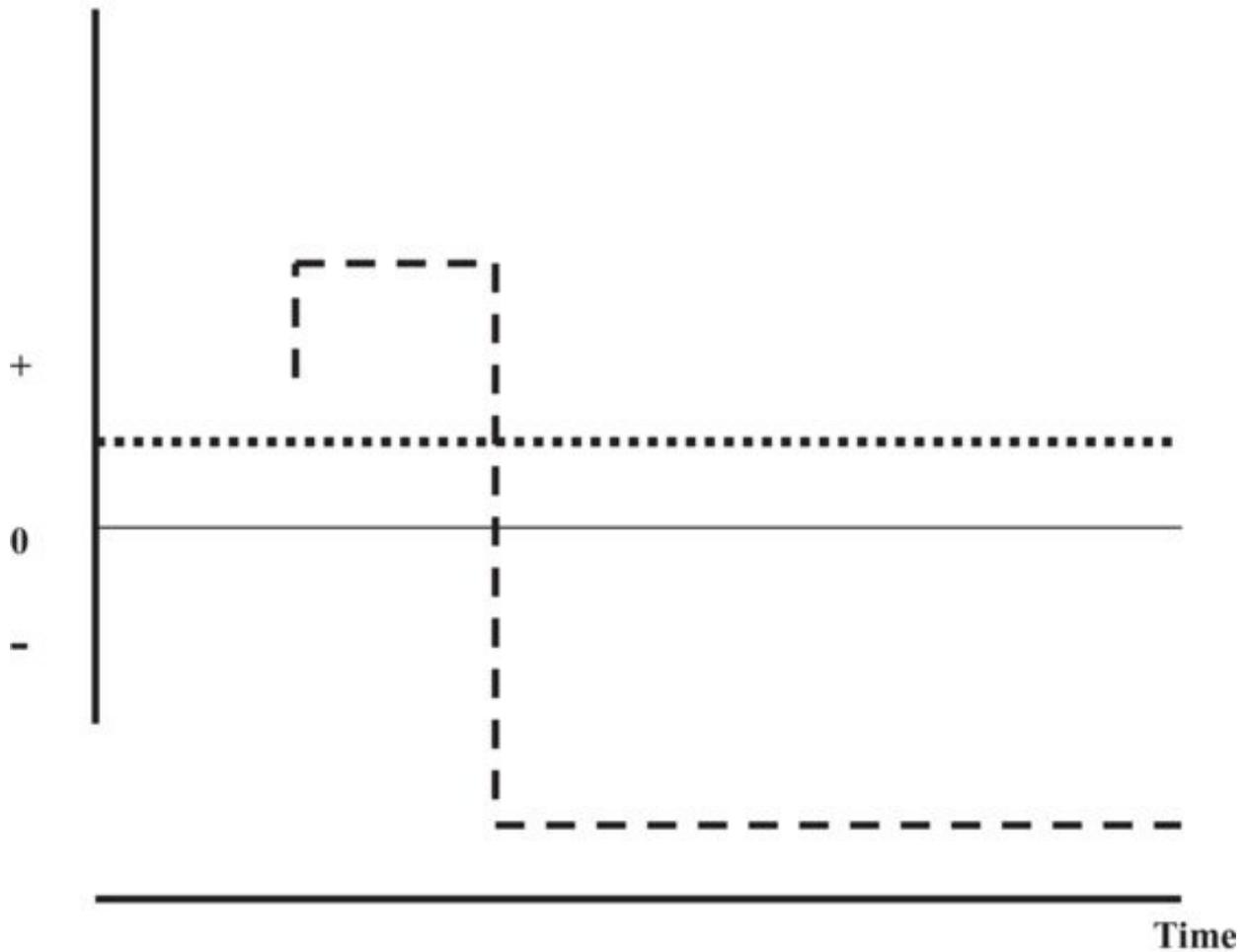
The answer is: Yes. Under certain circumstances, the specialist will chose to use his control of the means of violence to protect rather than to despoil private property. And the groups of citizens will chose to devote their time and energies to labor and leisure and forswear the use of arms, while rewarding the specialist in violence for protecting them against raids by others. In addition, under certain well-specified conditions, these choices will persist in equilibrium, rendering political order a state.

The primary reason for this outcome is that the players interact over time. The specialist in violence and political organizations can therefore condition their future choices on present behavior; that is, they can make threats and inflict punishments and thus shape the behavior of others. Should one group raid or withhold tax payments, the specialist can retaliate by changing from guardian to predator. And should the specialist opportunistically seize the wealth of the member of a group, his defection would trigger punishment by that citizen’s confederates: They can withhold tax payments or mobilize for fighting. If not sufficiently paid for the provision of security, the specialist in violence can pay himself: he can turn from guardian to warlord. And if preyed upon or left undefended, then the citizens can furnish their own protection; they can take up arms.

When both the specialist and the citizens turn to punishment, political order breaks down. People become insecure. They also become poor; having to reallocate resources to defense, they have fewer resources to devote to productive activity. The resultant loss of security and prosperity stays the hand of a specialist in violence who might be tempted to engage in predation or of a group that might be tempted to forcefully seize the goods of another or withhold tax payments, thus triggering political disorder.

To better grasp the incentives that animate this story, focus on the choices open to the specialist in violence, as communicated in [Figure 2.1](#). In this figure, the vertical axis represents monetary gains or losses. The further above zero, the greater the payoffs; the further below, the greater the losses. The horizontal axis designates time, with the more immediate payoffs occurring near the origin and the more distant ones further to the right. The dotted line represents the flow of payoffs that result from tax payments; the flow is steady, moderate, and positive in value. The dashed line represents the flow of payoffs that result from predation. Predation yields an immediate benefit: The dashed line leaps above the dotted line, indicating that the income from predation significantly exceeds that from tax payments. But that one period spike then gives way to a stream of losses, as illustrated by the plunge below the zero point that separates gains from losses. Insofar as a decision maker is forward looking, the losses that accrue in the punishment phase cast a shadow over the returns from defection and so temper any wish to engage in predation.

Payoffs



Payoffs on the equilibrium path

.....

Payoffs from defection and subsequent punishment

Figure 2.1. Payoffs from strategy choices.

If summed over time, each line – that representing the returns to taxation and that the returns to predation – yields an expected payoff. What would determine their magnitudes? In particular, what would determine whether the value of the variable path, generated by predation, will be more or less attractive than that of the steady path, generated from tax payments? The factors that determine the relative magnitude of these payoffs determine whether the specialist in violence will adhere to the path of play and continue to behave as guardian or veer from that path, engage

in predation, and trigger the re-arming of the citizenry and subsequent disorder.

The Conditions of Political Order

One factor is the level of tax revenue. If too low, the benefits of predation may be tempting despite the subsequent costs.³ A second is the magnitudes of the rewards that predation might yield. If sufficiently bounteous, the specialist in violence might choose to deviate despite the losses. A third is the specialist's rate of discount. A specialist in violence who is impatient, greedy, or insecure will discount the future payoffs that accrue along the path of play; and she will also discount the penalties that follow an opportunistic deviation. She may therefore find the prospect of predation more attractive than if she were patient, prosperous, or secure.

The fable thus suggests that *the possibility of political order rests on the value of three variables: the level of public revenues, the rewards from predation, and the specialist's rate of discount*. The interplay of these forces helps to determine whether governments safeguard or prey upon the wealth of the land; whether groups of citizens take up arms; and whether there is political order – or state failure.

The tale may be engaging; elsewhere it has been shown to be logically consistent (Bates, Greif et al. 2002). But it is informative only insofar as it captures and incorporates key features of Africa's political landscape. Only insofar as it does so will it offer insight into the tribulations of that continent.

Features of Late-Century Politics

Recall that the scenario was populated by a specialist in violence and by citizens who could, should they choose, take up arms. Now note a characteristic feature of late-century politics in Africa: A significant portion of Africa's states were ruled by their military. Turning to [Figure 2.2](#), we find that from the beginning of the 1970s to the end of the 1980s, in more than 30 percent of the observations, Africa's heads of state came from the armed forces.⁴ In the 1990s, U.S. president William Clinton and British prime minister Tony Blair heralded the emergence of a "new generation" of African rulers – Yoweri Museveni in Uganda, Paul Kagame in Rwanda, Meles Zenawi in Ethiopia, and Isaias Afwerki in Eritrea – while failing to mention that each had come to power as the head of an armed insurgency. In many states, then, power came from the barrel of a gun (Ottaway 1999).⁵

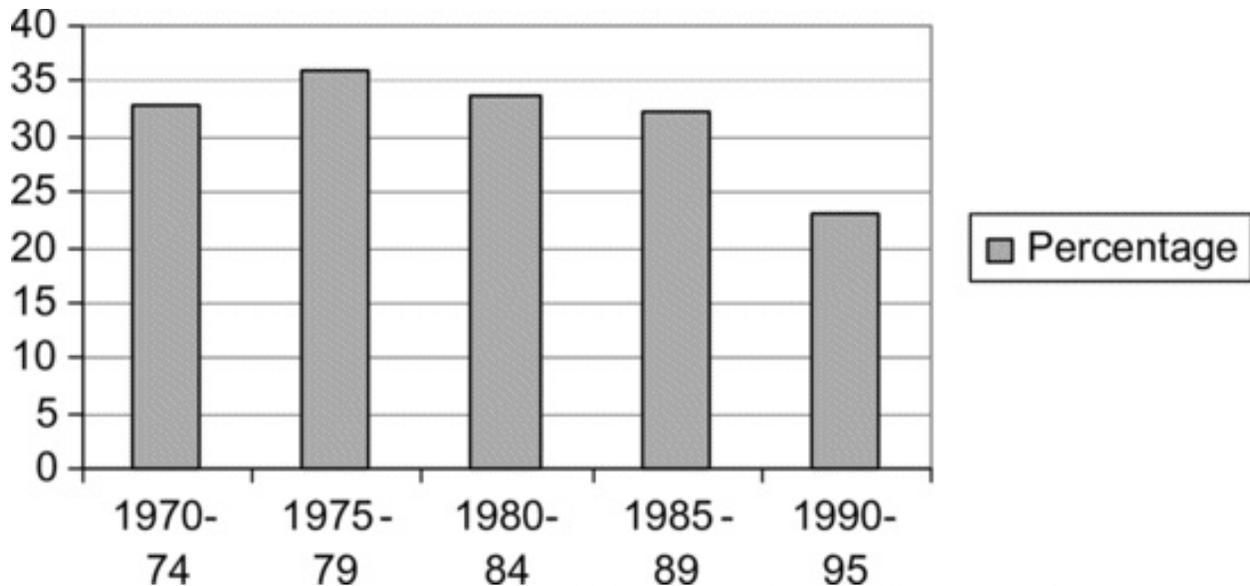


Figure 2.2. Percentage country years in which country ruled by military head of state.

Not only were heads of states specialists in violence, the citizens, too, frequently took up arms. By way of illustration, consider the case of Chad. At the beginning of our sample period, 1970, Francois Tombalbaya, head of the Parti Progressive Tchadien (PPT), was president of Chad. Tombalbaya belonged to the Sara, an agriculturalist people in the southern portions of the country; the eastern and northern portions were populated by pastoralist peoples. As Tombalbaya consolidated his rule, he posted administrators from the south to govern these other regions. There they imposed policies designed to propagate Sara culture and imposed new taxes on cattle. In response, the pastoralists mounted protests, fomented riots, and formed militias: the Front for the Liberation of Chad (FLT) in the east and the Front for National Liberation (FROLINAT) in the north. It was only by calling for military assistance from France that Tombalbaya remained in power.⁶

Whereas the militarization of Chad marks the opening of the sample period, conflict between militias in Congo (Brazzaville) marks its end. In 1992, a southerner, Pascal Lissouba, became president of Congo(B); in the run up to the next presidential election, the strongman and former president, Denis Sassou-Nguesso, declared his candidacy. As political tensions mounted, each politician mobilized a private army: the Cobras, who supported Sassou-Nguesso, and the Zulus, who supported Pascal Lissouba. Kindled in the provincial towns, fighting between these groups erupted in the capital where the mayor, Bernard Kolelas, had organized his own militia, the Njinjas. Combat between these militias lay waste to one of the major cities of French-speaking Africa.⁷

As seen in [Figure 2.3](#), over the course of the sample period 1970–1995, reports of the formation of militias became more common. With increasing frequency, citizens took up arms and states lost their monopoly over the means of violence.

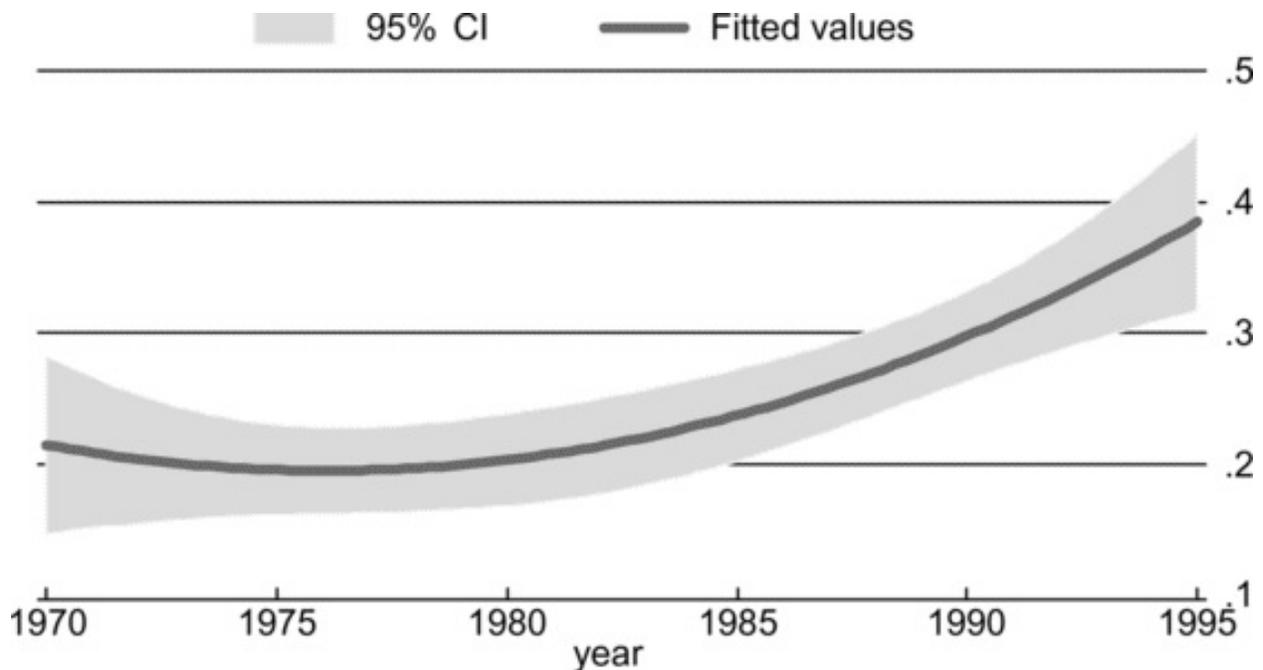


Figure 2.3. Reports of militias by year, percent of observations.

The scenario depicted at the outset of this chapter thus incorporates two major features of the politics of late twentieth-century Africa: rule by specialists in violence and the militarization of civic society. In accounting for political disorder, it pointed to three key variables: the level of public revenues received by governments; the magnitude of temptations they face, as determined by the rewards for predation; and the relative weight placed upon them. A moment's reflection leads to the recognition of the possible significance of these variables for the politics of late-century Africa.

Revenues

In the 1970s, a sharp increase in the price of oil triggered global recession. The increased price of energy led to higher costs of production in the advanced industrial economies, resulting in the laying off of labor and a lowering of incomes. For Africa, the result was a decrease in the demand for exports.

In Africa, as in many other developing regions, taxes on trade constitute one of the most important sources of public revenue. As the value of exports from Africa declined, so too did the taxes collected by Africa's governments. In the latter decades of the twentieth century, then, while Africa's people faced a "growth tragedy" (Easterly and Levine 1997), its states faced a crisis of public revenues. The break in the global economy was sharp and unanticipated; and the recovery of public finance required comprehensive and protracted restructuring, involving changes not only in tax rates but also in policies toward trade and industrial development.

The economic forces at play in late-century Africa thus aligned with the conditions in the fable, reducing the revenues of governments. Within the framework of the fable, the decline in public revenues represents a decline in the rewards from public service. In the face of such a reduction, those who control the means of violence find the income derived from the protection of civilians declining relative to the returns from predation. By the logic of the fable, they would therefore be more likely to turn to predation. Rather than providing security, those who controlled the state would become a source of insecurity, as they sought to extract revenue from the wealth of their citizens.

Discount Rate

In the fable, if the government becomes more impatient or insecure, the rewards that accrue to those who act as guardians decline in value; so, too, the penalties that would be imposed were they to revert to predation. As the “shadow of the future”⁸ thus dissipates, the level of temptation rises: Immediate benefits weigh more heavily than future losses, and incumbents may become more predatory, provoking state failure.

Returning to the empirical record, in the late 1980s, Africa underwent a period of political reform. With the end of the Cold War, the “third wave” of democratization⁹ swept across the continent and governments that in the 1980s had been immune to political challenges now faced organized political opponents. As seen in [Figure 2.4](#), whereas from the early 1970s to the mid-1980s, more than 80% of the country-year observations contained no- or one-party systems, by the mid 1990s, more than 50% experienced multiparty systems. With the shift to multiparty politics, those who presided over Africa’s authoritarian governments faced an unanticipated increase in the level of political risk. Few had prepared themselves to compete at the polls; some surely would have chosen to govern with more restraint had they known that they might someday be forced from political office and shorn of the protection it afforded. Incumbents became less secure. And by the logic of the fable, they would therefore find the modest rewards that accrue to political guardians less attractive, and the fear of future punishment less daunting, increasing the temptation to engage in predation.

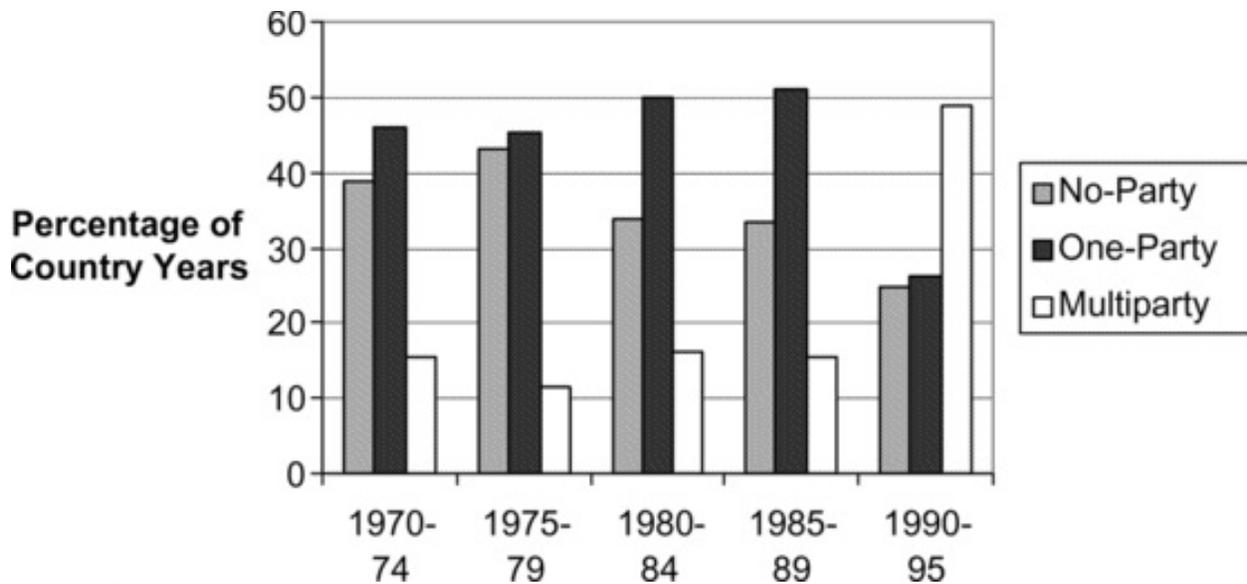


Figure 2.4. Political competition over time.

Resources

To a degree that exceeds any other region of the world, the economies of Africa are based on the production of precious minerals, gemstones, petroleum, and other precious commodities. These resources pose a constant temptation to those with military power. Were they to shift from guardian to predator, their future prosperity would nonetheless be ensured, underpinned by the income generated by natural resources.

Consider the case of Nigeria, where, in the words of Bill Dudley (1982, p. 92): “[T]he oil boom was a disaster . . .” – one made worse by military rule. As Dudley states:

[T]he effect of the oil boom was to convert the military political decision-makers . . . into a new property-owning, rentier class working in close and direct collaboration with foreign business interests with the sole aim of expropriating the surpluses derived from oil for their private and personal benefit

(Dudley 1982, p. 116).

Consider, too, the Sudan or Chad, following the discovery of oil. In both, incumbent regimes turned to repression, the one harrasing the Dinka and the other the Sara. Resource wealth thus appears to shape the behavior of elites. In the face of dwindling public resources or insecure political futures, given the availability of wealth from appropriable resources, they could greet with equanimity a future of political disorder. Those immersed in environments richly endowed by nature would therefore be willing to take actions that rendered others insecure, thus triggering state failure.

Conclusion

The logic of the fable highlights the importance of public revenues, democratization, and natural resources and the manner in which they impinge upon the possibility of political order. As we have seen, the elements that affect political order in the fable parallel political forces that shaped the politics of the continent in the later decades of the twentieth century.

While many who have studied Africa have emphasized the political importance of economic collapse, the “resource curse,” and the relationship between political competition and political conflict, this account focuses on the logic that systematically links these forces to the political incentives that underlie state failure. Being abstract, the logic is also adaptable; it can play out in a variety of forms. Consider the nature of the groups that may – or may not – transmute into militias. In one setting, they may be the youth wings of political parties; in another, regional coalitions; and in a third, ethnic groups. The same applies to the specialists in violence. In some settings, the military rule; clearly the military specialize in the use of violence. In other instances, it is civilians who govern. Even a civilian head of state presides over police, public prosecutors, and a prison system; by bringing them to bear upon citizens, he too can transform the state into an instrument for predation. In still other instances, the civil service assumes the role of a specialist in violence, using its command of the bureaucracy to redistribute income from the citizens to themselves. Different actors can thus fulfill the major roles in the fable, but their parts are inscribed in a common script. By the choices they make, they animate the sources of political order, induce state failure, thereby enacting the tragedy that engulfed late-century Africa.

1 A rigorous presentation appeared as Bates, R. H., A. Greif, et al. (2002), “Organizing Violence,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46(5): 599–628.

2 That is, they have solved the collective action problem.

3 But they may also be if too high. See the discussion in Bates, R. H., A. Greif, et al. (2002), “Organizing Violence.”

4 For details of the sample, see [Table A.1](#) in the Appendix.

5 Lest readers regard the link between coercion and politics to be distinctive of politics in Africa, they might first recall the note sent by the father of Frederick the Great to the young man’s tutors: “[I]n the highest measure . . . instill in my son a true love of the military . . . and impress on him that nothing in the world can give a prince such fame and honor as the sword and that he would be the most despicable creature on earth if he did not revere it and seek glory from it. . . .” (p. 18 of Asprey, R. B. (1986), *Frederick the Great*, New York: Ticknor and Fields).

Recall, too, the rueful words of the dying Louis IV: “I have loved war too much.” (<http://encarta.msm.com>).

6 For accounts, see Buijtenhuijs, R. (1989), Chad, in *Contemporary West African States*, edited by D. B. Cruise O’Brien, J. Dunn, and R. Rathbone, Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press; May, R. (2003), Internal Dimensions of Warfare in Chad, in *Readings in African Politics*, edited by T. Young, Oxford: James Currey; Lemarchand, R. (1981), “Chad: The Roots of Chaos,” *Current History* (December); Nolutshungu, S. C. (1996), *Limits of Anarchy*, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia; and Azam, J.-P. (2007), The Political Geography of Redistribution, Chap. 6 in *The Political Economy of Economic Growth in Africa, 1960–2000: An Analytic Survey*, edited by B. Ndulu, P. Collier, R. H. Bates, and S. O’Connell, Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.

7 One of the best accounts appears in Bazenguissa-Ganga, R. (2003), The Spread of Political Violence in Congo-Brazzaville, in *Readings in African Politics*, edited by T. Young, Oxford: James Currey.

8 The phrase comes from Axelrod, R. (1985), *The Evolution of Cooperation*, New York: Basic Books.

9 Huntington, S. P. (1991), *The Third Wave*, Norman, OK: Oklahoma University Press.