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On the Origins of Direct Rule: Armed Groups and Customary Chiefs in Eastern Congo • Social Origins of Militias: The Extraordinary Rise of "Outraged Citizens" • Seeing like a Citizen: Experimental Evidence on How Empowerment Affects Engagement with the State

Based on BFI Working Paper No. 2024-86, "On the Origins of Direct Rule: Armed Groups and Customary Chiefs in Eastern Congo," by Soeren J. Henn, Newcastle University; Gauthier Marchais, University of Sussex; Christian Mastaki Mugaruka, Marakuja Kivu Research; and Raul Sanchez de la Sierra, University of Chicago; BFI Working Paper No. 2024-87, "Social Origins of Militias: The Extraordinary Rise of "Outraged Citizens," by Marchais, Mugaruka, Sanchez de la Sierra, and David Qihang Wu, Harvard University; BFI Working Paper No. 2024-88, "Seeing like a Citizen: Experimental Evidence on How Empowerment Affects Engagement with the State," by Henn; Laura Paler, American University; Wilson Prichard, University of Toronto; Cyrus Samii, New York University; and Sanchez de la Sierra

In recent decades, civil unrest in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), including armed rebellion that threatens to expand regionally, has raised numerous challenges for the state and its citizens, from how a weakened state can effectively manage security and otherwise continue to function, to how and whether citizens can trust the state to adequately provide security and deliver basic services. These three papers, from Raul Sanchez de la Sierra, assistant professor at UChicago's Harris School of Public Policy and his colleagues, offer insights into recent challenges facing the DRC and its citizens, and suggest possible solutions.

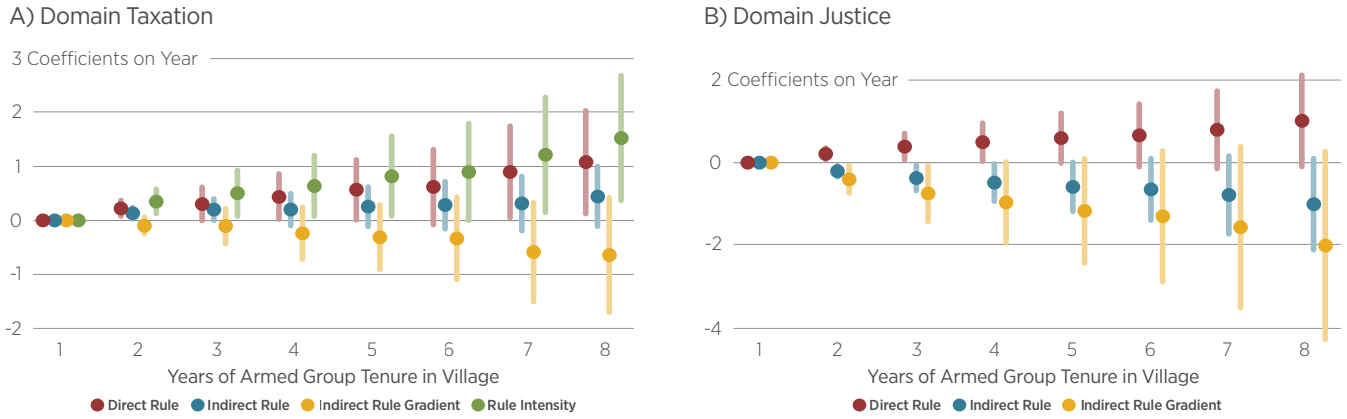
ON THE ORIGINS OF DIRECT RULE: ARMED GROUPS AND CUSTOMARY CHIEFS IN EASTERN CONGO

Foreign rulers, whether monarchies, colonialists, or non-state armed groups, often delegate aspects of rule to pre-existing, or indigenous, authorities. These indigenous authorities are more likely to induce compliance among the local population, owing to their legitimacy and their understanding of local custom. On the other hand, such indirect rule could induce local authorities to collude with the population against the ruling foreign party.

These power dynamics are not limited to issues regarding ruling authority, they also extend to economic development. To date, efforts to measure such economic effects have been restricted by a lack of data that distinguishes between direct and indirect rule. The authors address this gap by developing such a dataset on armed groups and chiefs in 106 ethnically diverse villages in North Kivu, situated in eastern DRC, where armed groups have governed since the 1990s with a reliance on local chief power. A local chief's effectiveness correlates with ethnic identity, including cultural, customary, and spiritual beliefs; those rulers who don't share such beliefs are perceived as weaker than others.

North Kivu provides a rich opportunity for the authors to address questions related to: (1) whether and how armed groups delegate to indigenous chiefs, (2) when and why those groups may impose

Figure 1 · Ultimately, Armed Groups' Institutions Converge to Direct Rule



Note: This figure shows the yearly coefficients from Equation 2. The analysis is at the village-year level and all years when a village is occupied by an armed group are included. The dependent variables are the corresponding indices of taxation in Panel A and justice administration in Panel B.

their own administration, and (3) how armed groups acquire the experience to change the ruling structure. Among other facts, the authors' dataset reveals that armed groups frequently delegate taxation, justice, village administration, combatant recruitments and, in some cases, political power, among other roles. Ultimately, the choice of direct vs. indirect rule reflects a ruler's response to local conditions. What is the status, in other words, of an indigenous chief's role?

To examine local conditions, the authors develop an index to inquire how delegation to a local chief varies dependent on that chief's power over a local population. They find the following:

- When the chief's local power is large, armed groups are more likely to delegate various aspects of rule to the chief (notably justice, administration, and political power).
- Indirect rule is more likely when the chief and the villagers are co-ethnic, and when the chief and the armed group are not co-ethnic. Overall, this means that groups delegate rule when the chief has more power over the villages, and especially so when compared to the power of the armed group over the villagers.
- Regardless of the initial institution, armed groups eventually improve their skills, which allows them to take over direct rule, including tax collection and the administration of justice.

Bottom line: Just because armed factions (whether they are perceived as good or bad) have the guns does not mean that they are equipped to govern. This work suggests that armed factions do not rule in a vacuum; rather, they often enlist indigenous political institutions into indirect rule, most often as a temporary solution. Eventually, armed factions develop the fiscal capacity (via tax collection) and legal capacity (by substituting the indigenous rulers' administration of justice).

What happens when foreign-led armies face local resistance? The next paper examines how local citizens respond when their governing state abandons them in response to the presence of foreign troops.

SOCIAL ORIGINS OF MILITIAS: THE EXTRAORDINARY RISE OF "OUTRAGED CITIZENS"

The development of militias, or citizen-formed and armed groups, has vexed researchers for years, with studies focusing on the role of society and community, including social emotions, as well as on the role of economic trade-offs, that is, whether to join a militia reflects choices made by rational, armed, actors who already exist and are prepared to join a military movement.

In 2011, the emergence of the Raia Mutomboki ("Outraged Citizens") in the DRC offers a stark example illustrating the role of social emotions and communities in the rise of militias. That year, the violence perpetrated on DRC civilians by the Front de Libération du Rwanda (FDLR), a Rwandan armed group that has preyed on civilians in eastern DRC since the nineties, had reached a breaking point. Local citizens demanded security from the state. Instead, under a process known as "regimentation," those citizens were told to secure themselves, a declaration that spurred the formation of a large militia, the Raia Mutomboki (Raia). Soon, the Raia had achieved what state forces never could—the ability to not only defend DRC citizens, but to also pursue the FDLR.

What explains the sudden and, on some levels, successful rise of the "outraged citizens" in 2011 and the formation of the Raia? How does the Raia

compare to other militias and their relationships to community? What was the role of social motivation and how did those motivations originate? Finally, what role do informal community institutions play in social motivations and, ultimately, in militias' rise?

To answer these questions, the authors employ a unique dataset and a series of surveys. In the first case, the authors amass data on armed groups, institutions, and households from 1990 onward, reconstituting historical events in 239 villages, in two of the most conflict-affected provinces of the DRC. The dataset contains 707 episodes of armed groups' governance in 239 villages, and details on each of 874 violent events and recruitment campaigns. These data also contain histories of 7,454 individuals, including details on armed group participation by 640 combatants. In addition to this trove of data, the authors received permission from local authorities to survey local citizens, which revealed, among other things, that participation in the Raia was not considered taboo. These qualitative findings corroborate the data.

To begin, the authors present three descriptive facts that underscore how the Raia phenomenon is emblematic of situations where community and militia have intimate ties:

1. Militias predominate the conflict and the Raia is a major militia. Of 76 armed groups for which the authors have data, 63% were a militia. While militias account for 31% of estimated attacks against villages, they account for 96% of the combatants. Similarly, while the Raia only account for 15% of the militias' attacks (a significant number given they are only one of 48 militias), half of the militiamen in the sample were Raia.
2. The militias' stated objectives were to protect their communities against violence by foreign-led armed groups, and their chapters were supported by the communities from which they emerged, with communities actively encouraging militia participation among its citizens.
3. Citizens were rarely motivated to join the militia for economic return; rather, volunteers mainly came from households that had been victimized by foreign-led armed actors; this was also true for the Raia.

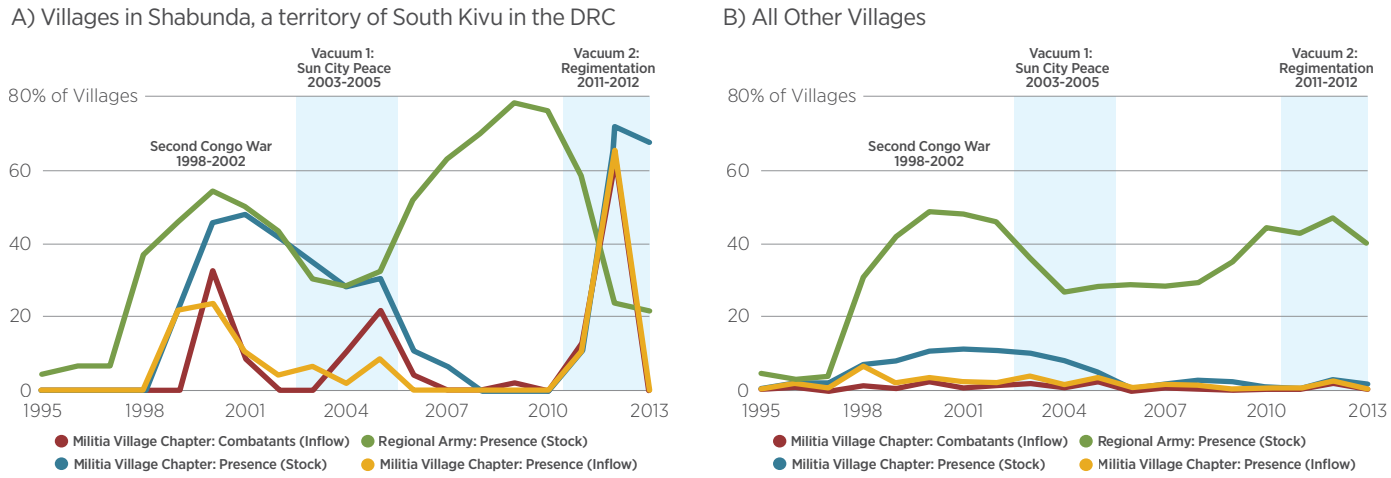
With these facts established, the authors then analyze the rise of the Raia in 2011 by first documenting the effects of the state's withdrawal, analyzing volunteers' motivations and the role of insecurity as an incentive, and finally how community institutions responded to this insecurity. They find the following:

- The removal of the state army is the likely cause for the rise and growth of the Raia, fueled by a range of social motivations, but predominated by revenge and community protection. Compared to similar events in previous years, the authors find this level of motivation and the rise of the Raia as extraordinary in recent DRC history. That insight motivates their next finding.
- The Raia's rise was fired by the desire for revenge from past foreign-led victimization, and by a sharp rise in insecurity when the state abandoned the territory. Regarding revenge, the authors find economic evidence for this powerful incentive: citizens' willingness to pay to join a militia for the purpose of revenging past victimization. Even so, revenge is outweighed by the desire to ensure community security. For example, the authors find that the Raia's emergence is entirely concentrated in the villages in which the state vacuum caused a rise in insecurity. That said, such extrinsic motivations as social status and social pressure are prevalent, which leads to the authors' final finding.
- Community institutions increase militia participation by upholding community norms, which motivate citizens to join. For example, in response to the insecurity created by the vacuum of 2011, traditional village chiefs organized more militia recruitment campaigns, with evidence suggesting that elite-driven community responses were partly accountable for the rise. Most notably, the differential rise in these communities is entirely driven by individuals who join and who are motivated by social status or social pressure.

Bottom line: Social motivation matters. This work suggests that militias are not only a central actor of the conflict within the DRC, but also a successful violent collective action sparked by elite-driven community responses and bottom-up intrinsic social emotions. Their success resembles revolutionary movements, since they are responses to external threats wherein individual actions prioritize community security over personal safety. That said, the authors caution that the role played by revenge and violence can lead to xenophobia akin to that of ethno-nationalist, far-right movements.

Turning from military action to state and civic engagement, but sticking with the theme of social motivation, the authors' third paper examines incentives for how and why citizens choose to engage with government institutions.

Figure 2 · State Vacuum and the Birth of The Raia



Note: This figure shows the yearly coefficients from Equation 2. The analysis is at the village-year level and all years when a village is occupied by an armed group are included. The dependent variables are the corresponding indices of taxation in Panel A and justice administration in Panel B.

SEEING LIKE A CITIZEN: EXPERIMENTAL EVIDENCE ON HOW EMPOWERMENT AFFECTS ENGAGEMENT WITH THE STATE

Among the many challenges facing governments in low-income countries, raising revenue and building state capacity (the latter depends on the former), are ever-present. Known as a "fiscal contract," leading theories describe how the need for revenue induces states to not only create monitoring and collective bureaucracies, but to also provide public goods, which can elicit more voluntary taxpayer compliance. To "receive," in other words, governments must also "give."

These efforts by governments are challenged by the informal nature of citizens' relationship to the state. Many citizens maintain an uncertain, undocumented, and irregular relationship to the state, foregoing identity documents, and opting for private over public services. Similarly, small businesses often fail to register with the state. A principal incentive for these citizens is distrust of state agents, that is, citizens fear manipulation and abusive treatment from those agents. However, these efforts to avoid state agents mean that citizens do not avail themselves of state benefits, like better access to services, legal protections, and economic opportunities.

How can a state encourage citizen engagement in the face of costly interactions and, thus, move from a low-revenue, low-engagement equilibrium to a steady-state that reflects higher tax revenues and better government services? This paper examines the role of citizen empowerment in this dynamic; in particular, the authors focus on citizens' daily interactions with state agents. What happens when citizens are protected from street-level agents who demand informal payments to, for example, register property, acquire licenses, or access public services?

To address these and related questions, the authors investigate the effects of two randomized interventions designed to empower citizens in their interactions with opportunistic or predatory state agents: one intervention focuses on *information*, the other on protection. In the first case, the intervention provided individualized guidance to help households and businesses navigate such processes as statutory payment amounts for a wide range of tax and fee payments. The protection intervention connected people to an influential civil society organization that advocated on their behalf.

Before describing the authors' interventions and findings, it is useful to note the results of a survey of over 1,000 households and businesses in Kinshasa, DRC's capital, which reveals that: (a) few citizens make any payments to the state; (b) when they do occur, formal and informal payments are complements rather than substitutes; and (c) households and businesses that do make payments also tend to enjoy more benefits. All told, the survey provides baseline confirmation of the information and power deficits that citizens face when negotiating with state agents.

To motivate their interventions, the authors first develop a model that examines two key decisions facing citizens: (1) whether to engage with the state by making an initial payment to access benefits, and (2) whether to make a collusive (informal) payment to a state agent or insist on a formal, legal payment. Even citizens making formal payments may still face demands for bribes. The model's innovation lies in incorporating both decisions, allowing for analysis of how empowering citizens—through better information or protection—can reduce bribe payments and increase engagement with the

state. This empowerment can lead to two effects: a reduction in informal payments for those already engaged, and an increase in citizens' willingness to engage or switch to formal payments. Interestingly, while empowerment can increase engagement with the state, it may also lead to more informal payments, but overall, it enhances welfare by improving access to benefits.

The authors take their model to their intervention to test predictions on 271 households and businesses from neighborhoods in Kinshasa, which were randomly assigned to either a control group that only participated in data collection, or to treatment groups that received either information or protection, or both. They collected post-treatment data on a weekly basis for up to 19 weeks, to find the following:

- The protection treatment increased the number of citizens making payments for the first time. These results were largely driven by households rather than businesses.
- There is also suggestive evidence that the protection treatment reduced payment amounts for those already engaged, consistent with the model's prediction that empowerment should reduce informal payment amounts.
- These effects were also present in the information treatment, but to a lesser extent.

Bottom line: Low-income states can increase revenue by empowering citizens; in particular, by strengthening citizens' ties to a civil society actor that can offer protection against unscrupulous state agents. This protection increases citizens' willingness to make formal payments. Importantly, for some citizens, these interventions represent their first formal engagement with the state.

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