

# Midway Evaluation Prospectus (updated)

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## **Abstract**

***Keywords***— Artificial states, contentious politics, civil conflict, historical states, state entities, state formation, civil war, ethnic conflict, pre-colonial states, long history

# 1 Introduction

Based on the first article of the thesis, research interests, plans for articles 2-4 and the ARC and Geo-ISD projects, I pose the following overarching research question for my thesis: How do historical and pre-colonial states affect current contentious politics?

States have been some of the largest and most powerful organizations in the world ever since they first appeared (Tilly 1990). Nevertheless, surprisingly little research has gone into what happens to states after they disappear from the international system of states, and what happens to states incorporating the such historical states. In the first article of this thesis we show multiple examples of states surviving on a sub-state (no longer sovereign) level, even decades after disappearing from the international system of sovereign states. Other states are dismantled by conquering states, yet live on in identities and histories of the inhabitants of the bygone state. This thesis will add to a growing literature exploring long histories, how differences in the past experiences affects recent or current outcomes, by examining the long history of statehood and its effect on contentious politics (both violent and non-violent).

## 2 Beyond Ethnicity: Dead States and Modern Conflict

This paper started from the overarching research question: How do historical state entities (states that are more or less ‘dead’) affect post World War 2 levels of conflict?

The emerging/existing literature on the subject of pre-colonial and historical (no longer sovereign states has reached differing conclusions. Some scholars find that ethnic groups with more centralized pre-colonial institutions experience less conflict with the central government (Wig 2016) and that regions with longer histories of statehood are more peaceful (Depetris-Chauvin 2016). However, others have found that the conflicts of prior states can leave legacies of ethnic tension (Besley & Reynal-Querol 2014). In a recent article Paine (2019) found that ethnic

groups who lack a history of statehood/centralized ethnic institutions, and find themselves within a country that has a group with such history, are more conflict prone than ethnic groups living in countries where no groups has such histories. Paine (2019) argues that this is because ethnic groups with a history of statehood or centralized ethnic institutions were more likely to inherit the state apparatus after decolonization. These groups would then more effectively (*ceteris paribus*) exclude other groups from political power, leaving the excluded groups few channels to political power other than violence. He also finds that in those instances where the group prior state history did not inherit 'the keys to the kingdom' they would also be more likely to engage in violence to achieve political power.

Our paper makes three main contributions to the literature. First, we do not assume that prior statehood necessarily affects conflict through ethnic groups. Not all pre-colonial states were ethnic states in any meaningful sense, while other were multi-ethnic in nature. Some were even the foundations of current ethnic identities (the paper gives multiple examples). Second, we employ new data that improves upon previous sources on pre-colonial statehood by identifying far more states than without compromising the pre-requisites for statehood and by having global coverage. Most of the literature has relied on either the Murdock (1967) map of ethnic groups in Africa, the state antiquity data (which is global but covers relatively few states) or other incomplete data. Third, we propose/construct a new measure of 'artificial statehood' that is more in line with theory than existing measures such as the straightness of boundaries (Alesina et al. 2011) or the variance in pre-colonial ethnic centralization (Englebert et al. 2002). We measure 'artificial statehood' – the degree to which a state overlaps with the pre-existing topology of statehood – as the number of historical state entities within its current boundaries. We propose 4 mechanisms through which more historical state entities (HSEs) increase the chance of civil conflict: HSEs (1) created networks useful for insurgency, (2) were symbols of past sovereignty, (3) generated modern ethnic groups that activated dynamics of ethnic inclusion and exclusion and (4) resisted western colonialism and specific values it brought with it.

Our hypothesis is:

*H<sub>1</sub>: More historical states in the territory of a state increases the number of*

*internal armed conflicts.*

We find a robust positive association between more HSEs inside a modern state and the number of civil conflict onsets between 1946-2019. This relationship is not driven by common explanations of state-formation that also drive conflict such as the number of ethnic groups, population density, colonialism, levels of historical warfare, or other region specific factors. Using mediation analysis we find some moderate support for the colonialism mechanism, although a strong independent effect of more historical state entities on civil conflict onsets remains across all models.

Status: Awaiting response from JPR.

### **3 Geo-ISD Project**

Together with Charles Butcher and research assistant Eirin Haugseth the project aimed to create geocoded information for the African historical state entities in the original ISD data set. Specifically, on the locations and borders of these historical state entities. The resulting data provides a far clearer view of not just how many pre-colonial states there were in Africa, but also where these were and – so we argue – over what areas they had more or less control.

The data has been collected, compiled and cleaned (mostly), and has been integrated not just with the original ISD, but with the PRIO-GRID system of geo-data as well.

The resulting papers using this data (covered in the subsections below) will form the bulk of my thesis.

#### **3.1 The data**

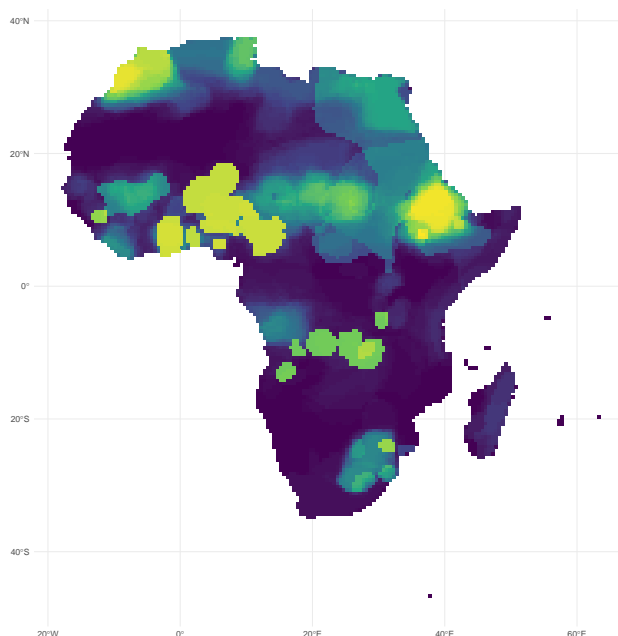
To get the locations of different historical state entities we used a combination of maps from the time period covered by the ISD and maps found in historical atlases compiled by historians in our own time. The historically contemporary maps were collected from the David Rumsey project at davidrumsey.com. We

then georeferenced the maps and traced polygons for the states included in both the map and the ISD. Similarly the historical atlases were scanned, georeferenced and relevant state entities were traced.

In the end we were left with over 3400 polygons covering the period 1800 to 1914 for continental Africa and Madagascar. For some HSE's in the ISD we have no maps for any years, some are covered only for some of the years they are in the ISD, but a substantial number of them are covered by multiple maps for many years. When maps disagreed on where the various borders were in a given year, we take it as an indication of the ambiguity of where a given state had *de facto* or *de jure* control in that year. In some areas all the maps would overlap (at the very least in the immediate surroundings of the capital), while in other areas they would not. In the areas where all the maps agree we could be quite sure that the given state entity had real presence. While in areas where only one map indicated that the state was present, this could either be wrong, an indication of *de jure* as opposed to *de facto* presence or some other form of limited presence. The coding process of looking at hundred of maps strengthened this initial intuition, and the resulting figures of state presence drawn from the complete data lends it further credence.

The data from this project can be aggregated and used in many ways and to produce many variables. Initially, I have opted on 14 slightly different measures of state presence, 3 of which are considered the main measures of three unique aspects of state presence, the rest are more or less conservative versions of these three. All of these indicators are aggregated over all years for individual PRIO-GRID cells in Africa. The first indicator is a measure of the presence of one state over time 1. It is measured by the number of maps that indicate that a state was present there, counting only those of the state most often present in that cell. The second is a measure of overlapping sovereignty and is the number of times that two or more maps in a year disagrees on which state was present in that grid cell, summed over all years 2. The third is a measure of the degree to which a grid cell was a frontier-, or border region 3. It counts the number of maps that indicate that a border ran through the grid cell.

Figure 1: State presence



### 3.2 Historical states and civil conflict

Based on the Geo-ISD data I plan to write a paper testing some of the key theories and assumptions surrounding state presence, pre-colonial statehood and civil conflict.

There is a considerable literature focusing on the pacifying effect of state presence over time leading to more peaceful societies. Bockstette et al. (2002) argued that states through fostering a sense of nationhood and common language can prevent civil war and political instability. In support of this view they find that their State Antiquity Index correlates positively with several measures of political stability. Tilly (1990) argues that over time the state monopolizes the use of violence and over time out competes any challengers to this monopoly. Pinker (2012) synthesised a lot of this literature and shows empirically that societies tend to get less violent at every level after the advent of states and increasingly so with the increasing penetration of the modern state into the societies it governs.

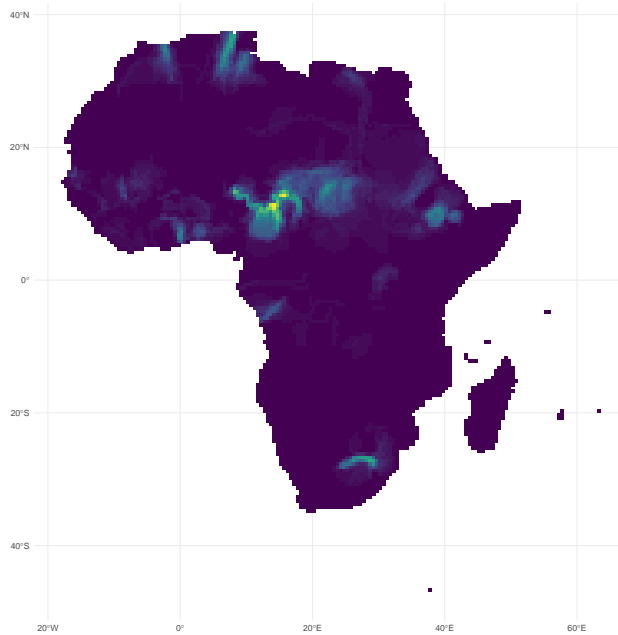


Figure 2: Overlapping state presence

The literature that focuses more the special case of HSE's or pre-colonial states, and conflict has drawn more mixed conclusions. Some scholars find that HSE's are locally peace inducing (Depetris-Chauvin 2016, Wig 2016), while others find that grid cells that had been part of historical kingdoms were more likely to have legacies of conflict that in turn increased the likelihood of modern conflict. At the national level as well pre-colonial statehood can lead to conflict, by making ethnic groups with a history of statehood better able to exclude others from power, or better equipped to violently challenge a dominant group should they themselves be excluded (Paine 2019). In the first paper of the thesis we found a positive association between the number of HSE's and civil conflict, and proposed some potential mechanisms through which they could be related. The Geo-ISD will allow me to test these mechanisms further. However, that could prove to be outside the scope of this paper.

The overall prediction of the literature at a grid cell level would be that increased exposure to statehood, should decrease the likelihood of civil conflict, after

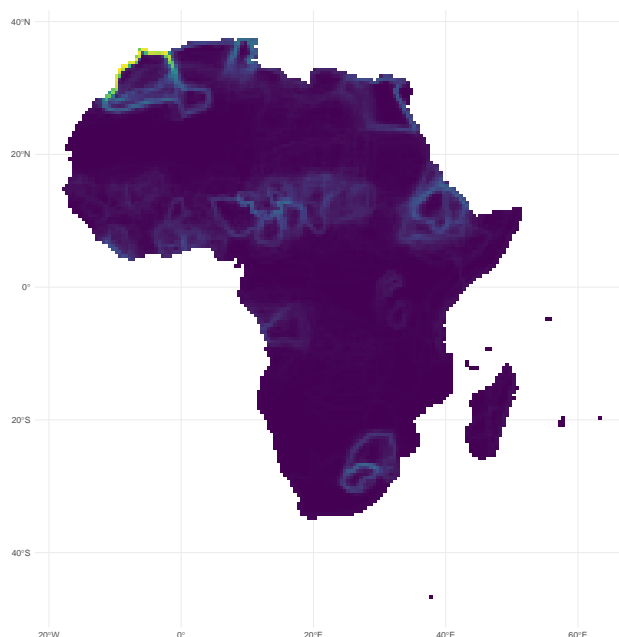


Figure 3: Borders

controlling for factors that could affect both local conditions for state formation and conflict.

### 3.3 Historical states and communal violence

Ole Magnus Thiesen had the idea to use the Geo-ISD data to look into the relation between HSE's and communal violence (a topic he is familiar with). The following is a rough outline of the idea for that paper as it currently stands.

The level of violence in non-state societies is qualitatively different from that of within states with rates of violence often being several orders magnitude higher in the former (Pinker 2012). Part of this can be explained by that one of states' primary objectives and defining characteristics is to solve the security dilemma (Lake & Rothchild 1996). Several states in contemporary sub-Saharan Africa are judicially effective, but empirically less so (Jackson & Rosberg 1982), in particular when it comes to solving the security dilemma. This has resulted in pockets where resolution of violent conflicts is frequently left to local traditional conflict resolu-



tion mechanisms, where there is no neutral arbiter to mediate or enforce peace should things get out of hand. While most of the time being able to resolve conflicts relatively peacefully, these institutions rely on the very real threat of deadly violence in itself in order to be credible (Eaton 2007, 2008, Fearon & Laitin 1996). In areas where feuding has remained an accepted way of resolving disputes between communities, large-scale inter-ethnic violence is more likely to occur (Witsenburg & Zaal 2012) as the state is unable to ‘contain fear’ in an effective and unbiased manner (Lake & Rothchild 1996).

There might be variations in this semi-anarchic situation, however, as some areas have a long pre-colonial legacy of statehood which previously have addressed the security dilemma between ethnic groups. While it is an open question of how effective such institutions are in resolving disputes that have escalated into violence between communities, they have proven effective in reducing the number of less serious disputes that could escalate, thereby reducing the overall number of disputes that could escalate. In general therefore, where states existed prior to colonization, the risk of inter-communal violence should be lower. Indeed, Wig & Kromrey (2018) found that ethnic groups that were recorded as having more centralized institutions by the Murdock (1967) were less likely to experience communal violence.

Pre-colonial state-structures can reduce conflict potential in at least three partly separate ways. First, in some instances these institutions are present in themselves to a greater or lesser extent in modern states, but operate outside formal state structures. This could represent an efficient way of resolving low-level disputes that have escalatory potential. Case studies from South Saharan Africa indicate that if a resource dispute arises...locals prefer to turn first to friends, neighbours and relatives, before resorting to traditional authorities like village elders or a chief (Turner et al. 2012). Formal institutions are at this stage often shunned. They are seen as less in touch with the local context, thus making inflexible judgements; being more costly and corrupt; and creating long-standing grievances between families. The presence of pre-colonial institutions today can therefore represent a more trusted venue for resolving disputes, in turn reducing the pool of incidences with escalatory potential.

Second, and partly in contrast to the above hypothesis, in some settings, pre-colonial institutions have been formally integrated into the state, the prime example being the integration of chiefs and kingdoms in contemporary Ghana. Studies using Afrobarometer data show that trust in traditional institutions translates into trust in modern institutions (Logan 2009). This relation arguably also goes the other way, as informal institutions are more fragile if not recognized by the state (Ostrom 1990). As there is some notion of British rule effectively being more indirect (thus not only in name) than former French and Lusophone colonies and therefore in the former pre-colonial states have been more effectively been incorporated in colonial and post-colonial states.

Third, pre-colonial states have left an imprint in terms of norms of intergroup behaviour that is different from areas without a legacy of pre-colonial statehood. By having reduced the security dilemma in past times, pre-colonial states have often facilitated the co-habitation of different ethnic groups in the same settlements, hence reducing the kind of segmentation often found in feuding societies (see e.g. Diamond 2012).

### **3.4 Historical states and non-violent resistance**

An idea for a potential third paper using the Geo-ISD (among many other ideas) could be looking for a potential relationship between HSE's and non-violent resistance. The benefit of following this idea for me is that it would help tie the PhD together as a whole, by providing a 'missing link' between my research on HSE's and the work I have done on the ARC project in general and the data release paper in particular.

Potential mechanisms: HSE's leave networks that facilitate mobilization (for non-violent resistance as well). Familiarity of interaction with state institutions (however changing). Parallel much of the literature that suggests that HSE's are locally peace inducing, as they imply that conflicts and potential conflicts are resolved in non-violent ways, perhaps some of these are picked up by measures of non-violent resistance. The implication would be that areas with a 'thicker' state presence would be more likely to experience non-violent rather than violent resistance to the state.

A different avenue to approach this could be that HSE's could leave behind non-state institutions, or foundations on which modern institutions could be built. The testable implication of this would be that grid cells with 'thicker' state presence would be more likely to see activity be more highly organized organisations such as trade unions or political parties.

This is only one of several possible options as the data I have now has opened a lot of opportunities for potential papers. By the time I have finished the papers that I have started on, I will probably have a clear idea of exactly what I want to do for the last paper.

## 4 ARC data release paper

Finally, I will also co-author the data release paper from the Anatomy of Resistance Campaigns (ARC) project. The paper introduces the ARC data set on groups participating in violent and non-violent maximalist dissent in Africa over the period 1990-2015.

## 5 Progress

In terms of the articles that will form part of the thesis, the first one was rejected by International Organization. We tried to implement some of the feedback from reviewers as well as our colleagues, and have now submitted the paper to JPR where we are awaiting a response.

The next step is finishing the last little bits of clean-up on the Geo-ISD, and of course write the remaining articles, beginning with the ones on HSE's and civil conflict and communal violence.

I have begun writing about the Geo-ISD project, about the process, motivation, choices along the way, strengths and weaknesses of the data, and so on. Similarly, I have started writing a literature review on statehood and internal conflict. Both of these are primarily intended to be used for the articles sketched out above, but might become separate articles in their own right.

Overall I am content with the rate of progress so far, despite only having

submitted one article for review. This is because I believe I now have a clearer idea of what the rest of the thesis will look like, and how I will go about writing it. Additionally, all of the duties to the department are done. After this semester there will only be approximately 30 hours remaining. I have also finished the requisite methods and philosophy of science courses that are part of the PhD Program. 10 ETC points worth of substantive course(s) remain.

Lastly, I plan to go on parental leave for 15 weeks from early November.

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