

I have reviewed this paper for consideration in APSR.

First, the good news. This paper is admirably data rich. The effort to construe maps of pre-colonial states was obviously laborious. These data could, I believe, make a big contribution to comparative historical analysis and historical sociology. At the end of the day, as Robert Solow put it, theories are cheap and data dear.

Now, the bad news. This paper does not make a strong case enough, either theoretically or empirically, that these new data on precolonial statehood explain anything of importance. I cannot recommend it for publication.

The author should consider these points:

- 1) *What is the dependent variable?* The paper claims that pre-colonial states affect the intensity or severity of violence during conflict. The severity of conflict is etiologically and conceptually different than the incident or outbreak of civil wars.<sup>1</sup> Some measure it by looking solely at number of deaths. Others look at deaths per capita. Yet the theory section discusses conflict generally without any discussion specifically to conflict severity per se. Intensive conflicts require intensive organization.<sup>2</sup> But the theory offers no explanation about the IV is plausibly connected to organizational capacity. The statistical analysis is of little help. Table 4 shows that precolonial states presence is correlated with fatalities AND with conflict events. Table 5 shows that precolonial states presence is correlated with fatalities, but not with conflict events.
- 2) *What are the mechanisms?* In the analysis part the paper introduces some new claims that prior statehood enables state to do more repression. This is hardly an exhaustive discussion of plausible mechanisms or channels. It could be that prior statehood inspires more robust rebel movements that pushes against central state.<sup>3</sup> Or that states with a history of divided legacies suffer debilitating legitimacy deficits that prevents them from building effective institutions.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Lacina, Bethany. "Explaining the severity of civil wars." *Journal of conflict resolution* 50.2 (2006): 276-289.

<sup>2</sup> Malešević, Siniša. "Forms of brutality: Towards a historical sociology of violence." *European Journal of Social Theory* 16.3 (2013): 273-291.

<sup>3</sup> Roeder, Philip G. "Where nation-states come from." *Where Nation-States Come From*. Princeton University Press, 2012; Siroky, D. S., & Cuffe, J. (2015). Lost Autonomy, Nationalism and Separatism. *Comparative Political Studies*, 48(1), 3–34.

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<sup>4</sup> Englebert, Pierre. "Pre-colonial institutions, post-colonial states, and economic development in tropical Africa." *Political research quarterly* 53.1 (2000): 7-36.

- 3) *What about rival hypotheses?* The paper doesn't control for many of the obvious factors who normally associate with civil wars. There is no control for country-level effects like wealth or regime type. While there is a lot of work to measure pre-colonial boundaries, but there's no discussion of \*colonial boundaries. The republic of Cameroon incorporates former French, British and German colonial possession. Somalia was divided between Italy and Britain (France had Eritrea). Surely these more proximate factors need to be considered to explain civil war intensity or occurrence
- 4) *What's so special about Africa?* The paper claims that there is a general relationship between precolonial statehood and post-independence civil wars. I am broadly sympathetic to area studies approaches that address questions of regional and specificity. I'm skeptical, though, when authors try to leverage these claims to generalize. The author isn't content to work with bounded theory, but never considers whether these same relationships hold up in Latin America or Southeast Asia.
- 5) *What's so special about North Africa?* I'm really skeptical when an author brings in a regional dummy variable seemingly out of the nowhere. This author fails even to explain which countries should be included in the N. Africa (Mauritania? Sudan? South Sudan?)
- 6) *What is happening in Somalia?* In the conclusion, the author mentions that Puntland, the self proclaimed federal entity of Somalia was linked to a prior state. The author fails to mention that Somaliland is a de facto states..

A final point to the author: WRITE BETTER! This paper uses the kind of stilted verbiage and syntax that brings disrepute to social sciences. Sentences are jargony and confusing. Overreliance on the passive voice makes me wonder if the author even believes her own claims. A few examples of abysmal sentences from just the opening pages:

- "This paper addresses the apparent puzzle by arguing that effect of pre-colonial states on civil conflict, at the local level, is conditioned by the relationship between the pre-colonial and post-independence estates."
- "I argue that whether a pre-colonial state looks more like the former than than the latter can be proxied by the distance to the post-independence capital."
- "There is also evidence that pre-colonial or traditional institutions could be conflict reducing improving local state capacity..."

These are just three of many sentences that must be shorter, clearer, and more direct.