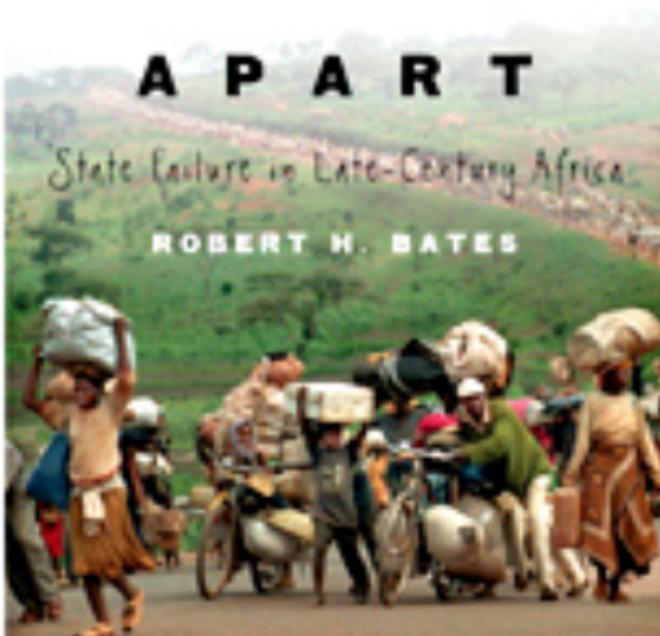


W H E N  
T H I N G S  
F E L L  
A P A R T

*State Failure in Late-Century Africa*

ROBERT H. BATES



# 6

## Things Fall Apart

This chapter gathers together the threads of the argument. It highlights the impact of changes in key variables – the level of public revenues and the elite’s rate of discount – arguing that sharp, exogenous shocks helped to drive their value into ranges that threatened the underpinnings of political order. That these changes took place in an environment richly endowed by nature meant that the payoffs to the incumbent elites from defection could rapidly become more attractive than those to good governance. In the context of Africa’s resource endowments, the value of these variables needed to alter but little before predation became more attractive than stewardship, thus leading to choices that triggered state failure.

The changes in the values of these variables resulted in part from the impact of previous choices: the forging of

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The title purposely echoes Achebe, C. (1975), *Things Fall Apart*, New York: Fawcett Crest.

## Things Fall Apart

authoritarian political institutions and the choice of control regimes. It also resulted from sharp external shocks, the first economic recession, resulting from the rise of energy prices, and the second political, resulting from the geo-political realignment that followed the end of the Cold War.

### The Decline of Public Revenues

In late-century Africa, governments faced a decline in public revenues, resulting from past policy choices, changes in the global economy, and the predatory behavior of political elites.

#### *The Untaxed Economy*

Emizet (1998) notes the web of regulations and controls that Zaire (present-day Congo) imposed upon the producers of primary products. “The goal of these institutional arrangements was to expropriate economic surplus . . . ,” he writes (Emizet 1998, p. 105). But, he notes,

Citizens . . . reacted to the existing institutional arrangements by exiting the official economy, especially in coffee growing and gold regions of Kivu, Upper Congo (*Haut Congo*) and Lower Congo (*Bas Congo*), as well as in the diamond regions of Eastern Kasai (*Kasai Oriental*) . . . . The central bank reported that these activities in the second half of the 1970s cost the government an annual average of 15 percent equivalent in tax revenues. (Emizet 1998, pp. 105–6)

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In 1982 Zaire had exported 2,000 kg of gold to Belgium; neighboring Burundi had exported less than 1,000. By 1990, it was Zaire that exported less than 1,000 kg of gold to Belgium and Burundi that exported 2,000. Evidence from the diamond industry also suggests high levels of smuggling, with the amount exported illegally being “50 to 100 percent of recorded exports” (Emizet 1998, p. 122). The regulation and taxation of economic activity thus led to the flight of the real economy from the reach of the government.

### *The Global Economy*

In response to sharp increases in energy prices and the costs of capital, in the early 1980s, the level of unemployment in the advanced industrial (OECD; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) nations rose by 50% and the rate of economic growth fell to less than 1%. The demand for imports therefore plummeted and the value of Africa’s exports declined. So too, did the revenues generated by taxes on trade, the single largest source of public revenues for most of Africa’s governments (see Figure 6.1).

As producers of oil, several African states in fact gained from the rise in petroleum prices; producers of coffee and cocoa also benefited from a late-century price rise, resulting from a sharp drop in exports from Latin America. The governments of the nations that thus prospered launched new

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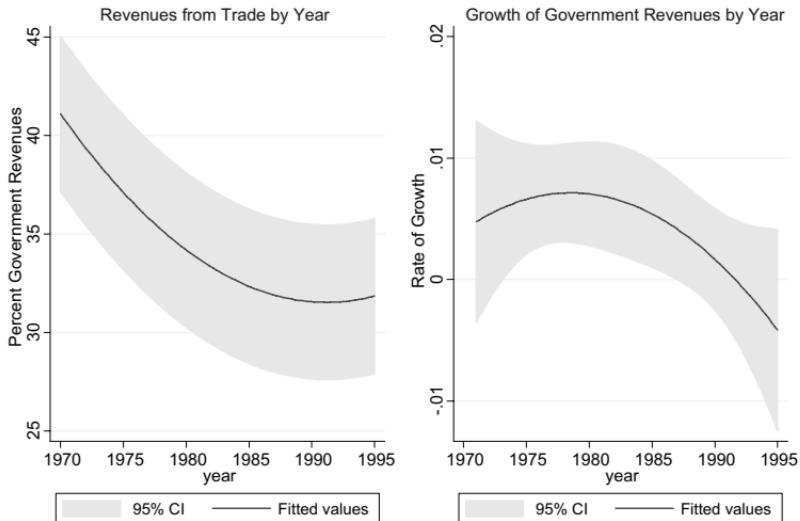


Figure 6.1. Government revenues.

projects, but following the later return of petroleum prices to normal levels, they then found themselves burdened by the costs of these ventures. Many then borrowed, finding willing lenders among banks now flush with deposits from the oil-producing states. When the commodity booms receded, these governments were then faced with the costs of servicing their debts. As had the governments of nations whose export earnings had declined, governments in nations that initially benefited from changes in the global economy therefore found themselves financially strapped.

The late twentieth century marked a time of fiscal crisis for the state in Africa.

### *Predation*

As stated by Sahr John Kpundeh (1995, p. 24), “during the period 1983–1986, it was difficult to distinguish the Sierra Leone government from a private enterprise. . . .” Resisting any attempt to form an independent central bank, Siaka Stevens, its president, pegged the national currency at an artificially high level and began rationing access to it. He allocated a major portion to the National Trading Company, to which he assigned the exclusive rights to import of nearly 100 commodities. As joint owner of the company, Stevens shared in its monopoly profits. Had foreign exchange been allocated by the market rather than by discretion, its sale would have swelled the coffers of the state rather than the bank account of its president.<sup>1</sup>

Even more dramatic was Stevens’s plundering of the diamond industry (Reno 1995). Sierra Leone’s diamond deposits lay in a region that supported the Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP), the political opposition, and were worked by a private corporation, the Sierra Leone Selection Trust. As a member of De Beers, the international diamond cartel, Selection Trust tightly regulated diamond production so as to underpin prices

<sup>1</sup> See also Reno, W. (1995), *Corruption and State Politics in Sierra Leone*, Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press; and Reno, W. (2003), Sierra Leone: Warfare in a Post-State Society, in *State Failure and State Weakness in a Time of Terror*, edited by R. I. Rotberg, Cambridge, MA, and Washington, DC: The World Peace Foundation/Brookings Institution: 71–100.

in the global market. The taxes it paid constituted a major portion of the public revenues of Sierra Leone.

Siaka Stevens reconstituted Selection Trust as the National Diamond Mining Company, however. Ostensibly representing the nationalization of the industry, the restructuring instead represented its privatization: Stevens and his cronies dominated both the board and management. By dismantling the controls imposed by Selection Trust, Stevens permitted the working of the alluvial deposits by private individuals, taking care to allocate licenses to political loyalists. Those who entered diamond production formed political colonies in the heartland of the opposition. Serving as local units of the ruling party, they helped to convert – or to intimidate – those about them into supporting the government in power.

Stevens thus benefited financially and politically from the transformation of the diamond industry; the state lost out. Indicative of the magnitude of the diversion of funds is the magnitude of the decline of reported diamond production, which fell from 595,000 carats in 1980 to 48,000 in 1988 (Smiliee, Giberie et al. 2000). Also indicative is the decline in tax payments, which fell from \$200 million in 1968 to \$100 million in 1987 (Musah 2000).

As indicated in Figure 6.2, the share of central government revenues in Sierra Leone's gross domestic product eroded, falling to less than 5% at one point in the 1990s.

## Things Fall Apart

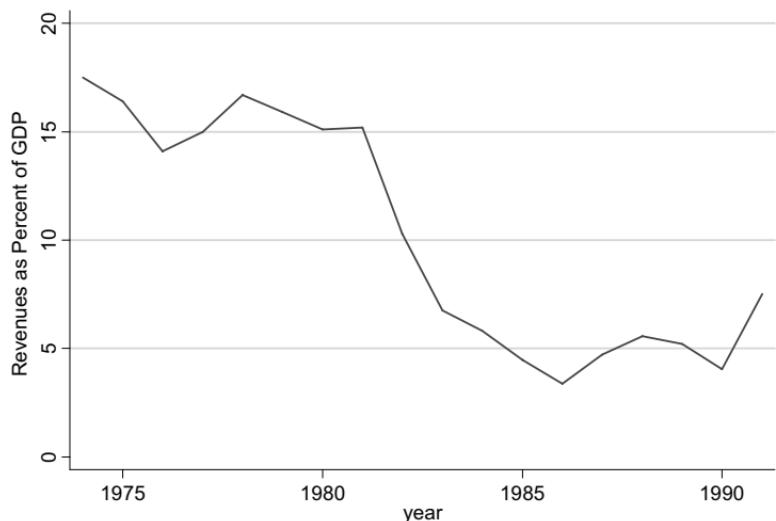


Figure 6.2. Fall of government revenues, Sierra Leone.

### The Impact of Declining Revenues

The decline in public revenues adversely impacted the incomes of public employees. Returning once again to Sierra Leone, Sahr Kpundeh provides a vivid example. Interviewing the Freetown Commissioner of Taxes in the mid-1980s, he “was shown his pay stub.... If he buys a bag of rice ... to feed his family [or] pays ... for transportation to and from work every day, his expenses exceed his earnings” (Kpundeh 1995, p. 67). The commissioner therefore worked fewer hours in his public office and more in the private economy. Janet MacGaffey reports similar findings for Kinshasa in 1986. Employees

simply could not survive on the salaries paid them by the government, she concludes (MacGaffey 1991).

Given the erosion of public sector salaries, the quality of public services declined. Teachers abandoned their classrooms, nurses left clinics untended, and offices stood empty while public servants turned to private trade in search of income. In addition, the level of corruption rose. In economies in which the government regulated prices, goods disappeared from the shelves; those in charge would sell the product to those willing to pay the market as opposed to the official price. The same was true in post offices, where stamps might be scarce at the window but be available on the street; or in medical or veterinary offices, where pharmaceuticals might be in short supply but available in private clinics. In schools, children found themselves paying for supplies that once were freely provided; in hospitals, patients found it necessary to “tip” to secure a towel, a washcloth, or a bed pan.

A bureaucracy that had been created to facilitate the lives of the citizens began instead to undermine their welfare. Its members began to feed themselves by consuming the time and money of those they once had served.

The most visible of those endowed with the power to coerce was, of course, the military. Their salaries, too, eroded or fell into arrears. Their uniforms became tattered, the quality of food declined in their mess halls, and their equipment

malfunctioed and, for want of funds, could not be repaired. In his account of the events leading up to the attempted coup in Kenya in 1982, James Dianga (2002) stresses the lack of such basics as proper clothing, palatable food, and affordable housing. The soldier “has signed a contract with the State,” he argues (p. 48). The soldier will defend the state; the state will ensure a decent life for the soldier. But with the “decline in the supply of uniforms,” Dianga writes, soldiers began “to wonder why the contract was not being honored” (Dianga 2002, p. 49).

As the value of their salaries declined, soldiers began to pay themselves. Like doctors and nursing aides, they sold services to which the citizens were formally entitled. Most commonly, they regulated access to public thoroughfares. As Kasozi states for Uganda in the mid-1980s:

Any soldier who needed money... would just pick an isolated, strategic part of the road, put logs or chains across it, and wait for unfortunate travellers. These twentieth-century highwaymen would rob everyone of anything they fancied: cash, watches, cassette radios, clothes, and the like. (Kasozi 1994, p. 152)

In Zaire, soldiers turned to looting. In the early 1990s, Mobutu attempted to draw Étienne Tshisekedi, the leader of the opposition, into his ruling clique. Tshisekedi sought not only an illustrious title – that of prime minister – but also power

and therefore demanded control over the military and the central bank. Mobutu conceded to Tshisekedi's demands, but he pressured him to direct the bank to pay off long-standing debts: arrears built up with utility companies, bills submitted by suppliers of petroleum, transport services, and government stores, and salaries owed civil servants and soldiers. When Tshisekedi refused, Mobutu fired him and then ordered the central bank to pay. The result was a flood of emissions. Soldiers received their salaries in the form of new banknotes; but local merchants, knowing the government to be bankrupt, refused to accept them. Having been paid in scrip deemed to be worthless, the armed forces responded by going on "looting sprees" (Lemarchand 2003), p. 40.<sup>2</sup> They demolished downtown Kinshasa, the national capital, cordoning off commercial blocks, chasing shopkeepers from their premises, smashing windows, and carting off food, clothing, furniture, and appliances. Similar disturbances broke out in Lubumbashi in 1991; in Mbanzu-Ngungu, Goma, and Mbandika in 1992; and in Kisangani, Goma, and Rutshuru in 1993. On the one hand, these "pillages," as they were called, signaled the paucity of the resources with which to pay public servants; on the other they heralded the breakdown of the state.

<sup>2</sup> See also Pech, K. (2000), The Hand of War: Mercenaries in the Former Zaire 1996–97, in *Mercenaries: An African Security Dilemma*, edited by A.-F. Musah and J. K. Fayemi, London: Pluto Press; and Nzongola-Ntanjala, G. (2002), *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila*, London: Zed Books.

### *Managing Regionalism*

The decline of public revenues also made it more difficult to manage regional tensions. In Cote d'Ivoire, for example, political order rested on a series of pacts negotiated between regional elites and the center (see Azam 1994; Boone 2003). Southerners, and in particular the Akan, controlled the center. Prominent in the periphery were the Senoufo, who possessed a well-organized polity in the north. "The complaint of the northerners," Boone writes, was that "their region was impoverished and relegated to backward status in the national political economy...." (2003, p. 263). To counter mounting discontent, President Houphouët-Boigny launched a series of public initiatives starting projects that led to the opening of paras-tatal agencies, the construction of roads, and the founding of cotton and livestock industries in the region. Channeling a massive flow of benefits to the area dominated by the Senoufo, the government recruited members of the ruling clans into the agencies that managed these projects (Boone 2003, pp. 267ff).

Should revenues fall, however, the government would be unable to fulfill the periphery's demands. And indeed with the end of the coffee boom of the late 1970s, those in the center could no longer credibly pledge to target the north with largesse (Rapley 1993). The north therefore began to organize against the central government. After the death of Houphouët-Boigny, the forces of the north gathered about Allasane

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Outtara; once prime minister, he now sought to become president. Led by Laurent Gbagbo, southern politicians rallied to check the rise of Outtara, portraying him as a non-national and therefore ineligible for high office. The courts agreed. Following a coup by soldiers, whom the government had failed to pay, the rival politicians transformed their political organizations into armed militias. Côte d'Ivoire collapsed.<sup>3</sup>

When public revenues begin to decline, then, the likelihood of political disorder increases. When poorly reimbursed, public servants use political power to raise their own pay; they become more predatory. Fiscal dearth also renders it more difficult to induce those who are dissatisfied to continue to participate in the political game, rather than withdraw from it; regional tensions therefore rise, and with them, threats to the integrity of the state. As a result, political order is threatened by the conduct of the elite in the core and of politicians in the periphery of Africa's states.

## Political Reform

The decline of public revenues not only triggered efforts by public employees to pay themselves, it also incited popular opposition to those in power. In response to the declining

<sup>3</sup> For an incisive analysis, see Azam, J.-P. (2001), "The Redistributive State and Conflicts in Africa," *The Journal of Peace Research* 38(4): 429–44.

quality of public services – and public life – in Africa, people demanded political reform. Citizens called for changes in the institutions that structured political life. They sought to render government the servant of the citizen, rather than her master, and viewed the introduction of multiparty politics and competitive elections as the way of achieving that end. While the impulse for reform originated within Africa itself, it also arose among the continent's creditors, as those who held its debt sought ways to alter the policy choices of its regimes. By rendering governments accountable to their people, they sought to create incentives for them to choose policies that would promote the growth of Africa's economies and bring greater prosperity to its people.

While the reforms were designed to secure political accountability and economic prosperity, they also contributed to political disorder. By raising the level of insecurity for those in power, they strengthened the incentives for them to defect, engaging in predation and thus provoking their citizens to take up arms.

### *The Local Impulse*

Quayye (1980), writing about life in Ghana, recalls blackouts because of the “breakdown of... electricity supply” (p. 38). Children, he writes, had to drink “from filthy pools” ... and “septic tanks remained un-flushed,” raising the risk of disease

(ibid., p. 38). Shortages of petrol led to the breakdown of the transport system, resulting in increased prices for food (ibid.). Life in Sierra Leone traced a similar trajectory, as roads and railways in the interior fell into disrepair (Richards 1995); publicly owned companies shut down for lack of power and maintenance (ibid., p. 26). Most galling, Richards reports, was the decline of the educational system, which deprived youths of what their families had regarded as their “birthright” (ibid., p. 177): the chance to acquire skills, to improve their future prospects, and to enhance the quality of their lives. Again and again students rallied in protest against the low quality of their schools. In some instances, their parents joined in these demonstrations. And in reaction, the government dispatched troops to beat, arrest, and detain those taking part (ibid., pp. 54ff).

Growing dissatisfaction with the quality of public services – and punitive response to calls for their improvement – generated calls for political reform. Benin provides an apt illustration. In 1975, the ruling party had endorsed “Marxist-Leninism” and the government had expanded the range of its services and the size of its civil service accordingly. By the late 1980s, however, the government lacked the resources to pay its workers. The result was wave after wave of demonstrations by government employees and increased indiscipline amongst soldiers. While unable to meet the salaries of those it employed,

the political elites did manage to find ways to pay itself: In 1988, the issuance of \$500 million in unsecured loans to the president and his cronies led to the collapse of three state-owned banks. Such acts inspired further demonstrations, encouraged and cheered on by ambitious challengers to the incumbent regime.

Paralyzed by the mounting waves of protest, the president of Benin, Mathieu Kerekou called for a “*Conference Nationale des Forces Vives*... at which business, professional, religious, labor, and political groups, together with the government, would be given an opportunity to draw up a new constitutional framework” (Meredith 2005, p. 388).<sup>4</sup> Kerekou had expected to dominate the proceedings of the conference, but he failed to do so. Declaring themselves a sovereign assembly, the conferees dissolved the government, appointed a new prime minister, and laid down a schedule for new elections – elections that Kerekou lost to Nicephone Soglo, the assembly’s preferred candidate.

An intriguing feature of the reform movement in Africa was the tendency for events in one country to respond to, or to trigger, events in another. Benin’s national conference opened February 19, 1990; February 25, a second opened in Congo.

<sup>4</sup> See also Heilbrunn, J. (1993), “Social Origins of National Conferences in Benin and Togo,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 31(2): 227–99.

Table 6.1. The spread of political reform

Country	Conference Date	Duration	Election			Outcome: Incumbent	
			Month	Free and Fair	Ousted	Retained	
Benin	Feb-90	1 week	Feb-91	yes	✓	✓	
Congo	Feb-91	3 months	Mar-96	yes	✓	✓	
Gabon	Mar-90	3 weeks	Aug-92	yes	✓	✓	
Mali	Jul-91	2 weeks	Dec-93	no			✓
Niger	Jul-91	6 weeks	Apr-92	yes	✓	✓	
Burkina Faso	Aug-91	2 months	Feb-93	yes	✓	✓	
Ghana	Aug-91	7 months	Dec-91	no			
Togo	Aug-91	1 month	Dec-92	yes	✓	✓	
Zaire	Aug-91	1 year	Aug-93	no			
Central African Republic	Oct-91	2 months	Aug-92	yes	✓		
Chad	Jan-93	3 months	Jun-96	no			✓

The national conference of Benin closed on February 28, 1990; on March 1, that of Gabon opened (Robinson 1994).

As shown in Table 6.1, following five of the first six national conferences, the incumbent head of state was compelled to leave office. The climax came in Zambia, where the national conference called for multiparty elections. News of Kaunda's defeat in these elections (October 1991) resounded throughout the continent: The forces of political reform had claimed one of Africa's "founding fathers." On the one side, those still in office found reason to revise upward their assessment of the magnitude of the threat posed by those clamoring for political reform. On the other, the reformers took heart, finding reason to redouble their efforts.

### *External Forces*

By the end of the 1970s, the international community was fully aware of Africa's economic plight. Emboldened by the reformist mandate bestowed by its president, Robert McNamara, the World Bank had financed a dazzling array of small-farmer and community-level projects. As recounted in its official history, the World Bank's own evaluations revealed a distressingly low rate of return for its Africa projects: "More than any other task the Bank had undertaken, its engagement with Sub-Saharan Africa sapped the institution's... confidence," it reports (Kapur 1997, p. 720). When seeking

reasons for the failure of its projects, the Bank found them in “the policy environment.” In its famed “Berg Report,”<sup>5</sup> the Bank documented the tendency of Africa’s governments to adopt policies that distorted market prices and undermined economic incentives and so crippled growth and development.

In addition to being a financer of projects, the World Bank then became an advisor to governments. In pursuit of policy change, it drew upon two sources of strength. The first was expertise. Through publications, seminars, and the training of public servants, the Bank sought to expose the economic costs of prevailing policies and to offer alternatives. The second was capital. In any given country at any given time, the Bank would normally finance a multitude of projects, the cancellation of any one of which would go largely un-noticed by the national government. To gain the attention of policymakers, Please (1984) writes, the Bank therefore began to bundle its projects into sectoral programs; more would then be at risk were the Bank to suspend its lending. Sectoral programs soon gave way to country programs and to conditionality, as the Bank sought to strengthen further its leverage over policymakers in debtor nations and to sharpen the incentives for policy reform.

<sup>5</sup> World Bank (1981), *Accelerated Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Agenda for Action*, Washington, DC: The World Bank.

As Africa's creditors focused on the behavior of African governments, they struggled with the question: Why would these governments adopt policies that undermined economic prosperity? Over time, a consensus emerged: that the behavior of these governments reflected their lack of political accountability. Not being accountable, governments in Africa could adopt policies that conferred concentrated benefits on the elites while imposing widely distributed costs on others. Increasingly, then, the World Bank focused not only on policy choice but also on political reform.<sup>6</sup>

Among the most active of those championing political reform was Keith Jaycox, vice president of the World Bank. In meeting after meeting, conference after conference, and interview after interview, he called for the introduction of political reforms. As reluctant as he may have been to call openly for the introduction of democratic institutions, he left but little doubt that Africa's creditors would welcome the legalization of opposition parties and the holding of competitive elections for political office.

The economic crisis that alienated Africa's citizens thus impelled Africa's creditors to champion political reform as well. Lending further impetus to the two political currents

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, World Bank (1989), *Sub-Saharan Africa: From Crisis to Sustainable Growth*, Washington, DC: The World Bank; and World Bank (1991), *Governance and Development*, Washington, DC: The World Bank.

was a second shock at the global level. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, diplomats and security specialists who during the Cold War had been disinclined to unseat authoritarian regimes no longer had reason to object to efforts of economic technocrats to displace them.<sup>7</sup>

The disintegration of the Soviet Union strengthened the position of those inclined to bully rather than to cajole Africa's governments. By way of illustration, consider the demise of Desire Mobutu, president of Zaire. In the midst of the Cold War, foreign observers had averted their gaze from Mobutu's depredations, largely because of his support in fighting "communism" in southern Africa. Following the fall of the Soviet Union, the hands of those pushing for political reform in Zaire were no longer stayed by those seeking Mobutu's political services. To receive further financial aid, Mobutu – like other tyrants – had now to reform.

In the 1980s, changes in the international environment thus amplified the impact of local political forces that had been calling for reform, and the grasp of Africa's authoritarians on political power became less secure. Abandoned by foreign patrons and facing increasing threats at home, incumbents had increased reason to fear for their political futures. Their time horizons therefore shortened. In the long run, repression

<sup>7</sup> See the discussion in Dunning, T., "Conditioning the Effects of Aid: Cold War Politics, Donor Credibility, and Democracy in Africa," *International Organization* 50(2): 409–23.

might increase the level of political disorder, but incumbents had less reason to place great weight on the long run. That even a founding father like Kenneth Kaunda could be turned out of office wondrously focused their minds.

### *Elite Responses*

In response to the call for multipartyism, wily cynics, like Mobutu, sponsored the formation of political parties, rather than banning their formation. Where plurality voting prevailed, the incumbent could then prevail against a fragmented opposition. Others, like Daniel arap Moi of Kenya, took more sinister measures. The shift from Jomo Kenyatta to arap Moi had entailed a shift from a political base centered in the Central Province to one located in the Rift Valley and from an old guard, largely Kikuyu, to a new guard, largely Kalenjin-speaking. The rise of the reform movement imparted new energy to those who had been marginalized. To counter their attacks on his regime, Moi increasingly made use of the coercive powers at his command. Invoking the Preservation of Public Security Act, he jailed his political opponents. His security services were implicated in the killing of a cleric, who was an outspoken proponent of political reform, and a civil servant, who appears to have been too diligent in his enquiries into corruption. When opposition politicians called for an end to the bullying tactics of Moi and his henchmen, they, too, were arrested, tortured,

and detained (Hempstone 1997; Anguka 1998; Nnoli 1998; Mwakikagile 2001; Meredith 2005).

Moi was not the only incumbent to bring the powers of the state to bear upon his challengers. So, too, did Étienne Eyadema, the longtime president of Togo. Inspired by events in neighboring Benin, parliamentarians in Togo had also called for a national assembly; to the surprise of many, they succeeded in stripping the president of many of his powers, transferring them to the office of the prime minister – a figure whom they, as legislators, would install in office. As befits a military man, Eyadema fought back. His artillery shelled the palace of the prime minister; his infantry trampled upon those who took to the streets in protest; his police closed newspapers and jailed professionals, party workers, and priests. Eyadema forcefully repressed those who had challenged him and re-appropriated the powers of the presidency (Heilbrunn 1997).

As intimidating as Moi or Eyadema might have been, neither matched the ferocity of the elites of Burundi or Rwanda. While officially a one-party state, throughout the last decades of the twentieth century, Burundi in the 1980s was ruled by its army, and indeed by a small coterie of officers from the province of Bururi. Pressured by donors abroad and, it would appear, misperceiving his popularity at home, Pierre Buyoya, army major and president, agreed to legalize the formation of opposition political parties and to call for elections.

The Front pour la démocratie du Burundi (FRODEBU) constituted the largest challenge to the incumbent regime. Headed by Melchior Ndaye, FRODEBU appealed to the majority Hutu and defeated Buyoya, a Tutsi, in the 1993 elections, winning close to two-thirds of the vote. The elections took place July 10, 1993; on October 2, 1993, Ndaya was assassinated and the military, slaying tens of thousands of Hutu, returned to power (Lemarchand 1993; Ngaruko and Nkurunziza 2000; Ould-Abdallah 2000).

The slaughter in Burundi resonated ominously with events in neighboring Rwanda. Rwanda, itself divided between Hutu and Tutsi, was also ruled by its military, clothed in the guise of a political party, the Mouvement révolutionnaire national pour le développement (MRND). But whereas Burundi's political elite was drawn largely from the minority Tutsi, that in Rwanda came from the Hutu, the ethnic majority. More precisely, it came from the portion of the Hutu who originated in Ruhengiri, a prefecture in the northwestern portion of the country. The danger posed by reform in Rwanda, then, was not, as in Burundi, revolution by those long suppressed; rather, it was that the Hutu majority would split, with the "moderates" aligning with the Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF) – the militarized political movement that championed the interests of the Tutsi – to dislodge their northern brethren from power. And indeed, as the process of political reform proceeded, such an

alignment became more likely. In the transition government, negotiated under international auspices in Arusha, both the MRND and the RPF gained eleven seats. Should the RPF draw support from one of the minor parties included within the transitional government – the Liberal, the socialist, or the Christian Democratic parties – it could then form a government. The allocation of posts generated at Arusha thus left the hardliners insecure, and they determined to render any alliance between Tutsi and Hutu infeasible.

In neighboring Burundi, the Tutsi-led military had returned to power by assassinating the leadership of the opposition and slaughtering their Hutu supporters. The incumbent regime in Rwanda broadcast these facts widely and portrayed them as foreshadowing the fate of the Hutu, should the RPF come to power. They also launched massacres of their own. By attacking Tutsi in the name of the Hutu, they rendered improbable the forging of political alliances between the RPF and other political parties and incredible the promises of good faith necessary for their construction. In Rwanda, as in Burundi, attempts to introduce political reform thus triggered vindictive reprisals and incumbents inflicted terror and pain upon their citizens in an effort to forestall the loss of power (Prunier 1998; Jones 1999; Jones 2001). Figure 6.3 suggests the level of co-variation between political reform on the one hand and the militarization of civic society on the other.

## Things Fall Apart

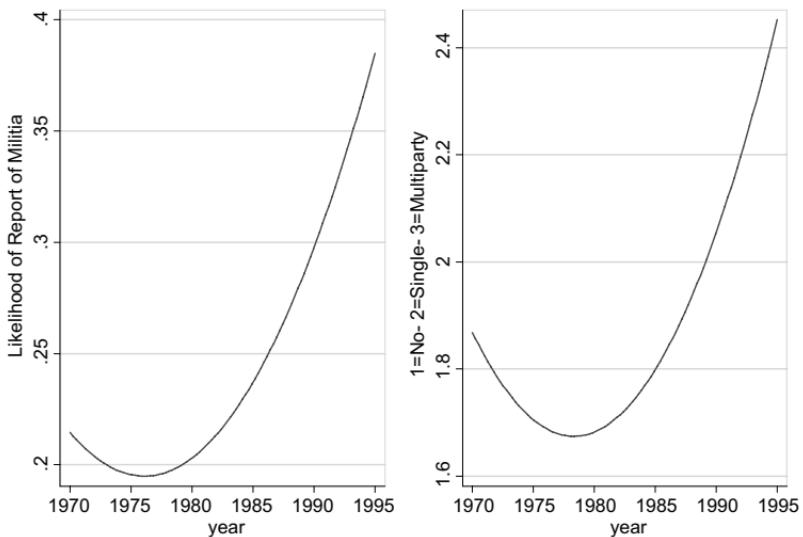


Figure 6.3. Political reform and militarization.

### Natural Resources

With the loss of public revenues, governments became more predatory. With the loss of their political monopolies, they became less secure. Recall, once again, the opening fable and the third and last of the variables whose values define the possibility of political order: the level of temptation. Because of their rich endowment of natural resources, many governments in Africa were tempted to abandon their role as guardian and to embrace the role of predator, employing the power of the state to extract wealth from the continent's natural resources.

In the midst of economic decline, an alternative source of income lay close at hand: the continent's rich deposits of petroleum, gemstones, and precious metals. To seize such prizes might require the use of force; it might provoke resistance, particularly in the region in which the resources lay. But the short-term benefits would readily outweigh the long-term costs, particularly at a time when governments were finding increasing reason to discount their political futures.

Consider, for example, the Sudan. In 1962, politicians and military from the south rebelled against the central government, protesting its refusal to agree to a federal form of government and its forced incorporation of southern troops into the national army. When Jafar Numeri seized the presidency in 1969, he negotiated an end to the conflict. But in 1978, oil was discovered in a region lying in the south. Numeri then redrew the provincial boundaries of Sudan, effectively placing the oil fields in the portion of the country controlled by the central government. The south's perception of Numeri abruptly changed; once regarded as a guardian of their interests, he now appeared a threat. The south soon took up arms again.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> See Johnson, D. H. (1995), The Sudan People's Liberation Army and the Problem of Factionalism, in *African Guerillas*, edited by C. Clapham, Oxford, U.K.: James Currey; Johnson, D. H. (2003), *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil War*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press; and de Waal, A., and A. H. A. Salam (2004), Islamism, State Power, and *Jihad* in Sudan, in *Islamism and its Enemies in the Horn of Africa*, edited by A. de Waal, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Consider, too, the case of the Democratic Republic of Congo (previously Zaire). A centralized state under Belgian rule, it fragmented soon after independence. At the forefront of those who sought to dismantle the state was Katanga, a region richly endowed with copper, cobalt, and other minerals. Following Katanga's forceful reintegration into Congo, however, the profits from the mines accrued to the central government – a government presided over by Joseph Desire Mobutu.<sup>9</sup> Succumbing to the temptations offered by these riches, Mobutu became one of the wealthiest men in the world while presiding over the disintegration of Zaire.

For a last example, turn to Angola. In the 1960s, a group of intellectuals, some based in Lisbon and others in Angola's capital city, Luanda, formed the Popular Movement for the

<sup>9</sup> See Gould, D. (1980), *Bureaucratic Corruption and Underdevelopment in the Third World: The Case of Zaire*, London: Pergamon Press; Blumenthal, E. (1982), "Zaire: Rapport sur sa Credibilité Financière Internationale," *La Revue Nouvelle* 77(November 11): 360–78; MacGaffey, J. (1991), *The Real Economy of Zaire*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press; Weiss, H. (1995), *Zaire: Collapsed Society, Surviving State, Future Policy*, in *Collapsed States*, edited by I. W. Zartman, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner; Thom, W. G. (1999), "Congo-Zaire's 1996–1997 Civil War in the Context of Evolving Patterns of Military Conflict in Africa in the Era of Independence," *The Journal of Conflict Studies* 19(2): 93–123; Otunnu, O. (2000), An Historical Analysis of the Invasion of the Rwanda Patriotic Army, in *The Path of a Genocide: The Rwanda Crisis from Uganda to Zaire*, edited by H. Adelman and A. Suhreke, London: Transaction Publishers; and Pech, K. (2000), The Hand of War: Mercenaries in the Former Zaire 1996–97, in *Mercenaries: An African Security Dilemma*, edited by A.-F. Musah and J. K. Fayemi, London: Pluto Press.

## Things Fall Apart

Liberation of Angola (MPLA). Part political party, part military force, the MPLA were well positioned when the Portuguese retreated from Africa. Its leaders quickly seized the national capital, the central bureaucracy – and Angola's oil fields. As described by Birmingham (2002), Chabal (2002), and others (Dietrich 2000; Meredith 2005), while the MPLA speaks of serving “the needs of the people,” it in fact channels little of Angola's oil wealth to them. The president has retreated to his palace; the party elite to their villas; and their Mercedes and Land Cruisers course through streets of Luanda, which is strewn with garbage and broken glass and inhabited by maimed soldiers.

Other cases could be adduced, each suggesting the manner in which the temptation to defect – that is, to employ the means of violence to engage in predation – can overpower the incentives to employ the means of violence to safeguard life and property. In the midst of fiscal crisis, the temptation increased. So great are the riches offered by Africa's natural resources that, in these instances at least, the rewards to be gained by seizing them appear to have outweighed the prospects of living in the midst of political disorder.

## Reverberations

Public revenues declined, political elites became insecure, and the temptation to engage in predation therefore rose in

Africa, amidst abundant opportunities to do so. In the face of increased threats from above, citizens found reason to search for patrons who could help them to safeguard life and property. While inflicting widespread costs, disorder also offered attractive prospects for those willing to invest in the building of political organizations.<sup>10</sup> Among the strategies they could employ, one stood out: the championing of claims to land.

To illustrate the process, we return to the politics of eastern Zaire. During the colonial period, Rwandans settled in the district of Masisi in the northern part of the region, attracted by jobs in the coffee farms and mines of the area. Local chiefs conferred land rights on the aliens in exchange for the payment of tribute. By the 1990s, the Bahunde – the local population – comprised a mere 15% of the population of Masisi and realized that they now constituted a minority, disadvantaged politically by their small numbers and economically by the appropriation

<sup>10</sup> This is, of course, a central argument in the work of David Keen. See, for example, Keen, D. (1998), *The Economic Functions of Violence in Civil War*, *Adelphi Paper 320*, Oxford, U.K.: International Institute for Strategic Studies; Keen, D. (2000), *Incentives and Disincentives for Violence*, in *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars*, edited by M. Berdal and D. Malone, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner; and Keen, D. (2001), *The Political Economy of War*, in *War and Underdevelopment: The Economic and Social Consequences of Conflict*, Vol. 1, edited by F. Stewart, V. Fitzgerald, and Associates, Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press.

of their lands. They therefore began to organize. The Bahunde demanded the dismissal of immigrants from local government offices; some had become chiefs. They demanded a change in the land laws, claiming their rights as “sons of the soil” for the return of properties sold to “strangers.” And when Rwanda disintegrated in the east and Zaire beneath them, they took up arms. They grouped their local militias into a loose but armed coalition, called Mayi-Mayi, and backed the fortunes of local politicians who championed the expulsion of the Rwandan immigrants from eastern Zaire (Pech 2000; Mamdani 2001; Nzongola-Ntanlaja 2002; Lemarchand 2003).

Further south in Kivu, the thread that tied the region to Kinshasa, the national capital, had long run through the hands of one Barthélémy Bisengimana, chief of staff for President Desiré Mobutu. Kivu was the home of the Banyamulenge, a group that had migrated from Rwanda and Burundi and taken residence in Zaire. Bisengimana was himself a Tutsi and championed the rights of the Banyamulenge, defending in particular their claims to citizenship and land. But when in the 1980s nationality became a prerequisite for citizenship, Bisengimana became vulnerable. Labeled a Rwandan and therefore a foreigner, he was squeezed out of Mobutu’s inner circle. And with the downfall of their advocate in Kinshasa, the Banyamulenge, too, became vulnerable. After the fall of Bisengimana, his enemies – many in search of wealth and power in the frontier territories of eastern Zaire – revoked the

citizenship of the Banyamulenge. Because they now could not vote, they could not secure representation on the local councils. Gladly taking their place, others allocated to themselves the perquisites of office: licenses for vehicles, permits for shops, and housing. More important still, given the density of settlement in the region, by labeling the Banyamulenge foreigners, they deprived them of land rights and so themselves gained access to one of the most valuable of resources in Kivu's agrarian economy (Nzongola-Ntanlaja 2002; Lemarchand 2003).

As aliens, the Banyamulenge were thus left exposed to the whims of those with access to power. In response, they took up arms. And when Rwanda invaded Zaire in 1996, their militias joined in the crossing of Zaire, the entry into Kinshasa, the toppling of Mobutu – and the dismembering of the Zairian state.

### Conclusion

In late-century Africa, external shocks and forces set in motion by previous decisions led to the erosion of the fiscal foundations of the state. In response to the declining quality of public life, citizens called for political reform, Africa's creditors echoed their demands; and in the early 1990s, both were able to slip the restraints formerly imposed by foreign powers, now less motivated by concerns arising from the Cold War.

## **Things Fall Apart**

In the latter decades of the twentieth century, then, the values of the variables that define the possibility of the state altered. Order gave way to disorder, as elites attacked their own citizens, the latter sought to provide their own security, and states failed in late-century Africa.

## Conclusion

In the last decades of the twentieth century, the sinistrily clownish garb of teenage killers in Liberia, the theatrical rage of mobs in Mogadishu, and the dignified suffering of refugees in camps throughout Africa vividly underscored the significance of political order. The power of these images cried out for a response from humanitarians and policymakers. It challenged scholars as well by posing that most innocent and unsettling of questions: Why? Why in late twentieth-century Africa did states fail and things fall apart?

To address these questions, I have retreated to the foundations of my field, which focus on coercion and the properties of the state. I have also re-immersed myself in the politics of Africa. From the first came a theory; from the second, the evidence with which to explore – and to test – its answers.

The realities of contemporary Africa compel us to realize that political order is not a given; it is the product of decisions. There is political order when citizens choose to turn away from

military activity and to devote their energies to productive labor and when those who govern – specialists in violence – choose to employ their power to protect rather than to prey upon the wealth that their citizens create. Political order becomes a state when these choices persist as an equilibrium. The foundations of the state lie in the conditions that support that equilibrium; so, too, then, must the origins of state failure.

The fable that framed this analysis highlights the conditions that rendered possible political order. It also suggests the importance of forces unleashed in the late twentieth century. Changes in the global economy and economic mismanagement at home resulted in fiscal dearth: The decline in public revenues led to predation by those in positions of power and to resistance by those whom they ruled. The fall of communism permitted erstwhile patrons to abandon abusive incumbents and enabled those who had protested the quality of governance to lay claim to the rights of political opposition. Loosing support from abroad and facing new threats from within, incumbents faced a sharp and unanticipated increase in the level of political risk. And in many states, the political elite dwelt in the midst of resources bestowed by nature. Those in power could seize control of petroleum deposits or diamond fields and be better off, even though bearing the costs of fighting, than had they continued to subsist on the salaries paid to those who served the public. It was within this ambience of temptation that the value of public finances and the

## Conclusion

time horizons of elites sharply altered. And it was within the ambience of local tensions, arising from competition over land rights and over the power to allocate them, that political disorder rapidly spread. The conditions that rendered political order an equilibrium no longer prevailed and states collapsed in late-century Africa.

### Changing Perspectives

In advancing this argument, I depart in several ways from the current literature on political violence. Rather than focusing on the protest from below – as do Collier and Hoeffler (2004), Fearon and Laitin (2003), Kalyvas (2006), Weinstein (2007), and their predecessors, such as Popkin (1979) and Scott (1976) – I explore its origins “at the top.” Rather than probing the motives of rebels or the nature of their organizations, I instead ask: Why would governments adopt policies that impoverish their citizens? Why would they “overextract” wealth from their domains? Why would they alter the distribution of income so grossly that it would become politically unsustainable? By addressing such questions, I explored the ways in which incumbent regimes prepared the field for the forces of political disorder.

Not only do I thus change the point of entry, focusing on the behavior of incumbents rather than insurgents, but I also recast the role of the economic forces. In this work, I did not

focus on national income, as do Fearon and Laitin (2003), Collier and Hoeffler (2004), and Sambanis and Hegre (2006)<sup>1</sup>; by the same token, neither did I focus on the impact of poverty, as do the contributors to the World Bank studies of civil war (Collier, Hoeffler et al. 2003). Rather, I traced political disorder to crises in public revenues.

Not only does this work thus depart from contemporary treatments of the role of economic forces. It also offers new perspectives on ethnicity, the resource curse, and democratization, several of the central topics addressed in studies of violence.

### *Ethnicity*

The level of ethnic diversity is greater in the African continent than in other regions of the world.<sup>2</sup> The level of disorder is high. Many therefore hold ethnicity responsible for Africa's political conflicts. To this line of reasoning, I offer two alternatives. The first flows from the inherently expansionary nature of local societies in rural Africa. Because the search for economic well-being underpins a strategy of territorial expansion, groups file competing claims for land rights and political

<sup>1</sup> But see Alexander, M. (2007), *Is Poverty to Be Blamed for Civil Wars?* Cambridge MA: Department of Government, Harvard University.

<sup>2</sup> See the regional comparisons offered in Easterly, W., and R. Levine (1997), "Africa's Growth Tragedy: Policies and Ethnic Divisions," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 112(4): 1203–50.

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fissures crisscross the nations of Africa. When states are stable, property rights are secure; when states begin to fail, citizens turn to other sources for their protection. At times of state failure, politicians can therefore marshal political followings and recruit armed militias by championing the defense of land rights. In the midst of state failure, ethnicity may therefore come to the fore. But by this reasoning, it is the product rather than the source of political disorder.

Secondly, given that in most African countries some regions are better endowed than others and that ethnic groups tend to occupy distinct territories, demands for regional redistribution take on an ethnic coloring and regional conflicts assume the guise of ethnic discord. Ethnic conflict is not a “clash of cultures,” then, but rather a struggle over the regional allocation of resources.

In discussing ethnicity, I have also noted – and stressed – the disparity between the conclusions drawn from qualitative accounts of political disorder and those drawn from cross-national studies of the relationship between ethnicity and state failure.<sup>3</sup> The first emphasizes the significance of ethnicity; the other, its failure to correlate with measures of political disorder.

<sup>3</sup> See also the evidence that the scale of measurement employed in quantitative measures – that is, the use of national averages – fails to capture the variability of interest, which occurs at the subnational level. When such variability is captured in the measurements, then statistical estimates of the relationship between ethnic differences rise. See Murshed and Gates (2003) and Cederman and Girardin (2007).

Rather than arguing for the superiority of a particular method of research, however, I choose instead to combine the two sets of findings. Ethnic tensions do in fact relate to political conflict in Africa, I would argue, but they do so at times of state failure.

### *The Resource Curse*

Just as Africa is the continent most blessed with ethnic diversity, so, too, is it the continent most blessed with natural resource wealth: By one reckoning, 30% of Africa's population live in resource-rich economies, as opposed to 11% elsewhere in the developing world.<sup>4</sup> It is natural, then, that its politics is frequently employed to illustrate the power of the "resource curse": the link between natural resource wealth and political disorder (Collier 2000; Herbst 2000).

Just as observational data for the importance of ethnicity is contradicted by statistical evidence, so, too, do qualitative accounts of the role of precious metals and gemstones contradict the quantitative findings. While Collier and Hoeffler (2004) suggest a close link between the value of primary products and civil wars, their findings have been called into question

<sup>4</sup> Collier, P., and S. O'Connell (2007), Opportunities, Choices and Syndromes, Chapter 2 in *The Political Economy of Economic Growth in Africa, 1960–2000*, edited by B. Ndulu, P. Collier, R. H. Bates, and S. O'Connell, Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.

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by Fearon (2005). They are also called into question by my research, which, like that of Fearon (2005), finds only oil production to be significantly related to the likelihood of political disorder (see Appendix). But just as a combination of the two kinds of evidence generates a deeper understanding of the relationship between ethnicity and conflict, so, too, does it teach us more about the political importance of natural resources.

Qualitative accounts repeatedly link rebel movements to the working of deposits of minerals, gemstones, and other commodities. Statistical investigations largely find little by way of a relationship between natural resource wealth and political violence.<sup>5</sup> The conflicting evidence suggests to me, at least, the importance of the temporal course of political disorder. The first step involves the disintegration of the state; the second, the turmoil that follows. The quantitative evidence bears upon the first; it indicates that states whose economies have been richly endowed are no more likely to fail than are others. The case materials pertain to the subsequent period of disorder. At this stage rival forces seek to seize control over timber, metals,

<sup>5</sup> See Fearon, J. D. (2005), "Primary Commodities Exports and Civil War," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49(4): 483–507. See also 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): 563–597; and Snyder, R. (Forthcoming), "Does Lootable Wealth Breed Disorder? A Political Economy of Extraction Framework," *Comparative Political Studies*.

and gemstones, and to employ the resources that flow from their possession. Resource wealth and political conflict then co-vary.

On the one hand, this revision stands as a critique: Implicitly it charges the earlier literature with having mistaken a symptom of state failure for a cause. On the other, it stands as a positive contribution, suggesting an important feature of the consequences of state failure.

### *Democratization*

In the broader literature on political conflict, scholars treat political reform with caution. New democracies, they find, are politically unstable; far more secure are authoritarian regimes and “consolidated” democracies.<sup>6</sup> By contrast, in the literature on Africa, political reform is widely celebrated and democratization viewed as valuable, both inherently and instrumentally.

<sup>6</sup> See Hegre, H., S. Gates, et al. (2001), “Toward a Democratic Civil Peace? Democracy, Political Change and Civil War, 1816–1992,” *American Political Science Review* 95(1): 33–48; Hegre, H. (2003), Disentangling Democracy and Development as Determinants of Armed Conflict, paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Studies Association, Portland, Oregon; Goldstone, J., R. Bates, et al. (2005), *A Global Forecasting Model of Political Instability*, McClean, VA: State Failure Task Force, SAIC; Bates, R., D. Epstein, et al. (2006), *Political Instability of Task Force Report, Phase IV Findings*, McLean VA: SAIC; and Epstein, D. L., R. Bates, et al. (2006), “Democratic Transitions,” *American Journal of Political Science* 59(3): 551–69.

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Clearly, this book can be read as supportive of the arguments of those who are skeptical of the benefits of political reform. By provoking a sharp, upward revision in the level of political insecurity of incumbent regimes, I have argued, political reform provoked political disorder. But further reflection suggests an alternative reading. Recall that it was authoritarianism that lay the foundations for state failure; multiparty political systems would have been less likely to impose control regimes as governments that advocated such policies could not have retained the support of the political majority. Insofar as authoritarian governments can champion policies that undermine their economies, political reform thus removed a major source of political instability. Moreover, because the evidence linking political reform to political disorder derives from less than a decade of data, it may be misleading. We need further evidence before we can determine whether the relationship between political reform and political disorder reported here represents the turbulence associated with transitional dynamics or constitutes, as the skeptics would have it, the properties of a new steady state.

## **State Failure**

In the late twentieth century, the political foundations of Africa were hit with shocks, both economic and political, and subject

to forces that eroded political order. Posed dispassionately, Africa was subject to an experiment, as these forces pushed the value of key variables into ranges in which the possibility of political order became vanishingly small. It was the misfortune of Africa's peoples to be caught in a perfect storm – one in which political fundamentals were so altered that the foundations of the state lay nakedly revealed: a sight that was both horrible – and instructive.

In closing, we return one last time to the fable and turn to a portion that, until now, has remained un-read. The state has collapsed. And in the midst of the disorder that then engulfs the specialist in violence and the citizenry, the government turns to predation while the citizens enlist behind champions who offer protection in exchange for political services. People now dwell in a world wherein the government has turned into a warlord and where they themselves have picked up arms.

Following the logic delineated by Bates, Greif et al. (2002), we can learn more about the subsequent fate of these people. Among the insights we achieve is that in the midst of political disorder, they must trade off between peace and prosperity. When private individuals provide their own protection, one way they can achieve security is by being poor: They can “deter” attacks by having few possessions worth stealing. In the midst of state failure, then, poverty becomes the price of security. Cruelly, the opposite also follows: The price of prosperity is being prepared to fight. In a world in which people provide

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their own protection, if they wish to accumulate wealth, they must be prepared to defend it. They must be willing to pick up arms.

Whereas those who live in states can enjoy both security and prosperity, those who live where states have failed must choose whether to be wealthy or secure; without being willing to fight, they cannot be both. The formation of militias amidst diamond fields is thus emblematic of the way in which people must live when states fail.