

LET'S STICK TOGETHER: UNDERSTANDING AFRICA'S SECESSIONIST DEFICIT

PIERRE ENGLEBERT AND REBECCA HUMMEL

ABSTRACT

Over the last 40 years, Africa has experienced relatively fewer secessionist conflicts than most other regions of the world, even though it is otherwise plagued with political violence and its countries tend to display a higher prevalence of many of the factors usually associated with separatism. After empirically establishing Africa's secessionist deficit, this article reviews the few existing explanations for it before articulating a theory which singles out the benefits to African regional elites (and those who depend on them) of weak sovereign states. In Africa as elsewhere, the article argues, regional leaders can be expected to capitalize on local grievances and promote secession if the potential rewards of a separatist state, in the absence of international recognition, outweigh the potential rewards associated with control or partial control of institutions of the sovereign national state. What distinguishes African elites is the relatively greater material returns to sovereignty that they face. Given the continent's poverty, the undiversified nature and commodity dependence of its economies, and the relative lack of accountability of state power, Africa offers a significant material premium to internationally recognized sovereignty, tilting the odds for elites in favour of staying within the state, even if they do not immediately benefit from power at the centre. The article then tests the argument against actual African cases of secession, showing that they are usually a function of variations in the relative rewards of sovereignty. In conclusion, it argues that Africa's weak sovereignty equilibrium has contributed to its failure to develop.

IN ABOUT 40 YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE, only ten of sub-Saharan Africa's 48 states have experienced a secessionist conflict, and most of these have been short-lived, quite minor in scope, and unsuccessful. In contrast, over the same period, 30 African states have provided the stage for at least one non-secessionist domestic conflict, many of which have been drawn out and quite

Pierre Englebert is Associate Professor of Politics at Pomona College in Claremont, CA. Rebecca Hummel graduated from Pomona College in 2003 with a major in politics. The authors are grateful for their feedback, comments or inspiration to Katie Boyle, Bryan Ferry, Carol Graham, Dean McHenry, Will Reno, Michael Ross, Nita Rudra, Denis Tull, Peyton Young, an anonymous *African Affairs* referee, participants in Pomona College's 'Pizza and Politics' luncheon series, and members of the Working Group in African Political Economy. Research for this article was made possible thanks to a grant from the Smith Richardson Foundation and the excellent assistance of Monica Boduszynski and Sinéad Hunt.

significant. Most other regions of the world display a greater propensity for separatist activity: since 1960, 44 percent of domestic conflict years in the Middle East and North Africa, 47 percent of those in Asia, and 84 percent of those in Europe have had separatist content, as against 27 percent in sub-Saharan Africa.¹ The relative scarcity of African separatism is particularly puzzling since African states are youthful and very heterogeneous, they dispose of large and decentralized reserves of natural resources, which could sustain separatist groups, and they have a poor record of providing for their citizens. They are also more culturally alien to their populations than most states in other regions of the world. Moreover, politics on the continent often amounts to zero-sum games, as states are captured by one ethnic group or coalition, which frequently exerts its domination over others, largely excluding them from state benefits if not persecuting them. That these dominated groups do not resort to separatism with greater frequency is perplexing, especially given the continent's propensity for other types of violent conflict.

What accounts for Africa's secessionist deficit? What explains the resilience of its otherwise decrepit states? We offer one possible answer, which singles out the benefits to African regional elites (and those who depend on them) of weak sovereign states. Constrained by prevailing international norms of state recognition and their continent's widespread poverty and undiversified economic structure, local political elites, ethnic leaders and other communal contenders face compelling material incentives to avoid strategies of regional self-determination, and compete instead for access to the national and local institutions of the weak sovereign state, irrespective of the latter's history of violence towards them. As a result, not only do failed African states reproduce instead of falling apart, but an increasing number of them maintain a unified legal existence, while factional groups, brought together by Western-sponsored power-sharing agreements, exert effective control over different segments of their territory. This new type of juridical unity *cum* empirical partition characterizes recent political outcomes in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Sudan, for example. There, as in most other African states, we argue, the nationalist preference of politicians is essentially instrumental.

We begin by establishing the empirics of Africa's secessionist deficit. We then review the few existing theories on the persistence of African states before further articulating our idea of weak sovereign territorial integrity as equilibrium in African politics. Next, we confront our argument with actual cases of secession across the continent and see how much of a challenge to our theory they represent. To conclude, we look at the consequences of Africa's weak sovereignty equilibrium on its development.

1. Based on data from Nils Petter Gleditsch *et al.*, 'Armed conflict 1946–2001: a new dataset', *Journal of Peace Research* 39, 5 (2002), pp. 615–37.

Separatism in Africa

One can count Africa's wars of secession on one's fingers. The break-up of Eritrea from Ethiopia in 1993, after some 30 years of warfare, was the only ever successful one, and it amounted as much to a case of decolonization as to one of separatism (see below). Other attempts have included Katanga and South Kasai in the DR Congo, Biafra in Nigeria, Casamance in Senegal, Southern Sudan, and several regions of Ethiopia. Although Somaliland has *de facto* seceded from collapsed Somalia since 1991, it has yet to be recognized by any other state (see Table 1 for a complete listing).

Africa's frequency of separatist conflict lies well below that of most other regions, despite the fact that African states reached independence more recently than their counterparts elsewhere and could have been expected to face challenges to their territorial reach or legitimacy. Only the Americas

Table 1. African Secessionist Conflicts

<i>Where?</i>	<i>Who?</i>	<i>Begin-End Violence</i>
Angola	Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda	1992-7
Comoros	Anjouan People's Movement	1997
Congo	Katanga	1960-63
	South Kasai	1960-62
Ethiopia	Eritrean Liberation Front, Eritrean People's Liberation Front	1962-91
	Western Somali Liberation Front, Ogaden National Liberation Front	1975-ongoing
	Afar Liberation Front, Afar Revolutionary Democratic Unity Front	1989-96
	Islamic Union (Somali)	1996-9
	Oromo Liberation Front	1999-ongoing
Mali	Azawad People's Movement, Islamic Arab Front of Azawad	1990-94
Niger	Air and Azawad Liberation Front, Coordination of the Armed Resistance, Union of Forces of the Armed Resistance	1990-97
	Democratic Front for Renewal, Revolutionary Armed Forces of the Sahara (Toubou)	1996-7
Nigeria	Biafra	1967-70
Senegal	Movement of the Democratic Forces of the Casamance	1990-2001
Somalia	Somaliland Republic	1991
Sudan	Southern Sudanese Liberation Movement, Sudanese People's Liberation Movement, National Democratic Alliance	1963-2003

Source: Gleditsch *et al.* 'Armed conflict'. (Somaliland added by authors).

Note: Timing of violence corresponds to at least 25 reported deaths per year.

end up with a smaller proportion of territorial civil conflicts than Africa. But most American countries have more homogeneous populations and have exerted domination over them based on class more often than race, ethnicity or regionalism.² Large segments of their indigenous populations have been almost wiped out, and their remnants tend to be more evenly distributed within their borders, in contrast to the regional concentration of some African ethnic groups. More importantly, most American countries have been independent for almost two centuries. If one were to compare Africa's first 40 years of independence with Latin America's, the latter would look more unstable.³

The probability of a secessionist conflict in any given year is actually similar among Africa, Europe and the Middle East (6–8 percent, as against 16 percent for Asia). But, as mentioned earlier, Africa has had more instances of conflict altogether (46 in all) than any other region since 1960. As a result, the proportion of secessionist conflicts among all instances of domestic warfare is significantly smaller in Africa than it is in Asia, Europe or North Africa and the Middle East (see Table 2).

Is Africa's scarcity of secessions easily accounted for? Is it less separatist than other regions because it also differs from them along the variables that are typically associated with secessions? Or does this scarcity truly reflect a paradoxical deficit? If so, how does one account for it? To answer these

Table 2. The likelihood of secession, 1960–2001

<i>Region</i>	<i>Probability of secessionist conflict</i>	<i>Probability that a conflict is secessionist</i>
Asia	0.16	0.47
Europe	0.06	0.84
Latin America & Caribbean	0.00	0.00
North Africa & Middle East	0.08	0.44
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.06	0.29

Source: Authors' data set. The probability of secessionist conflict is calculated in proportion to all available country/years ($n = 7,886$). The probability that a conflict is secessionist is calculated in proportion to all years of conflicts ($n = 1,040$).

2. Kalevi Holsti, *The State, War and the State of War* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996), pp. 150–82.

3. There were border fights between Bolivia, Venezuela and Colombia in the 1820s, following Bolivar's failed unification of these countries. In 1830 Venezuela and Ecuador seceded from Gran Colombia, while Panama left Colombia in 1903. There were separatist movements in the Tarija and Santa Cruz regions of Bolivia in the nineteenth century. Between 1904 and 1942, Ecuador lost parts of its territory to its neighbours. The United States took half of Mexican territory in 1848. Guatemala claimed Belize for a long time. In Mexico, the white settlers in Chiapas wanted to form their own country but were kept in the Mexican Republic. The people of Yucatan also rejected belonging to Mexico for some time. (We are grateful to Heather Williams for bringing some of these cases to our attention.)

questions we seek to identify the determinants of separatist conflicts around the world, and observe the extent to which Africa deviates from the trend.

The causes of secessions

A secessionist conflict is an act of demand by a group for sovereignty over a territory. Sovereignty is achieved when a separatist entity is given diplomatic recognition and eventually joins the United Nations. The conditions under which sovereignty is supplied are complex and constitute an important part of our argument to which we shall return. In this section, we focus on the determinants of the demand for sovereignty, i.e., the decision by regional political elites to pursue separatist strategies and their capacity to mobilize populations to this effect.

We use data for all available countries of the world covering the period 1960–99 in five-year intervals (1960–64, 1965–9, etc.). Our dependent variable is derived from Gleditsch *et al.*'s 'domestic conflicts based on territorial incompatibility', corrected for non-violent instances of actual secession (for example, Somaliland, the Czech Republic, etc.).⁴ When there is no secessionist conflict, the variable takes on a value of 0. Secessionist activity is then ranked from 1 (non-violent but successful) to 4 (secessionist conflict with at least 1,000 deaths in a given year). For each segment, we add up the value of the variable for each year in the five-year period. We chose this joint measure of instances and intensity of conflict over the more common measure of onset because separatist efforts in Africa appear not only fewer but also more lukewarm and shorter-lived than elsewhere.⁵ However, because conflict intensity is partly a function of the response of the state to the separatist threat — a response which may be stifled by the general weakness of African states — we also use a dummy version of this variable, which records a 1 in each year of secessionist activity, irrespective of its intensity.⁶

There are three types of variables commonly identified as related to separatism. The first comprises structural variables about the nature of the

4. Gleditsch *et al.*, 'Armed conflict'.

5. For studies using the onset of conflict as the dependent variable, see Nicholas Sambanis, 'Partition as a solution to ethnic war: an empirical critique of the theoretical literature', *World Politics* 52, 4 (2000), pp.437–83; and Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, 'The political economy of secession', (World Bank Development Research Group and Center for the Study of African Economies, Washington, DC, June 2002), mimeo.

6. We use random effects generalized least square (GLS) regressions. We found consistent results with different specifications, including Prais-Winsten regressions, regressions on group means and conventional ordinary least square regressions based on a cross-sectional version of the data set, where the dependent variable is the number of onsets of secessionist conflict per country over the whole period and the explanatory variables are expressed as averages or initial values. We report the random-effects GLS results because they have the weakest Africa effects.

country, including its age, its geographical features, and the size and configuration of its population. Intuitively, the younger a country, the less likely it is to have already passed through the growing pains of nation-building and national integration and the more vulnerable it may be to dismemberment.⁷ Countries that are constituted of two or more distinct land masses (as was Pakistan before the secession of Bangladesh) may also provide more favourable geographies to would-be separatists. Similarly, the larger a country's population, the greater the potential for break-up. Finally, the more culturally heterogeneous a country's populations, the more likely they may be to wish for separate paths of self-determination. There are different versions of this latter argument but they all rely on the basic notions of social heterogeneity and polarization.⁸ Ethnic diasporas may also contribute to secessionist sentiment as they tend to keep grievances alive, offer irredentist support, magnify beliefs in ethnic purity, and provide funding to local organizations.⁹ Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers and Somaliland have both benefited from diasporic support.¹⁰

Although cultural heterogeneity is the most commonly cited cause of secessionist movements, a second set of factors, highlighted by recent scholarship, points to the impact of economic and other material variables, including the distribution and level of per capita income, stocks of human capital, and the availability of natural resources. There seems to be no consensus as to what aspects of income distribution may be most strongly associated with secessionist tendencies, with some authors stressing that poorer regions are likely to break up and others that secessionist sentiments develop in regions that are wealthier than the rest of the state.¹¹ There are examples of both, Bangladesh figuring among the former, and Katanga among the latter. Irrespective of the direction of the inequality, secessions seem to arise from a 'perception of economic injustice', which leads a region to reassess the 'relative cost or benefits of belonging to a national union'.¹² The question of the relationship between separatism and a country's

7. James Fearon and David Laitin find a positive effect of being a 'new state', that is, one within the first two years of its existence, on the onset of civil wars. See James Fearon and David Laitin, 'Ethnicity, insurgency and civil war', *American Political Science Review* 97, 1 (2003), p.84.

8. Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 1985); Sambanis, 'Partition'; Collier and Hoeffler, 'The political economy'.

9. Liisa Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, memory and national cosmology among Hutu refugees in Tanzania* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1995); Collier and Hoeffler, 'The political economy'.

10. Rajesh Venugopal, 'The global dimensions of conflict in Sri Lanka' (Oxford University Queen Elizabeth House Working Paper QEHWPS99, 2003); William Reno, 'Somalia and survival in the shadow of the global economy' (Queen Elizabeth House Working Paper QEHWPS100, 2003).

11. For an example of the former, see Michael Hechter, 'The dynamics of secession', *Acta Sociologica* 35 (1992), p.275; for the latter Henry E. Hale, 'The parade of sovereignties: testing theories of secession in the Soviet setting', *British Journal of Political Science* 30 (2000), p.33.

12. Milica Z. Bookman, *The Economics of Secession* (St Martin's Press, New York, 1992), p.39.

absolute income level is somewhat more complex, as secession drives seem to occur at all levels of development, from Punjab to Quebec. Yet, some authors suggest that overall low per capita income and slow growth rates are major secessionist 'risk factors', for they exacerbate the grievances of various groups and reduce the opportunity costs of warfare.¹³

Along the same reasoning lines, Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler suspect a negative relationship between schooling and the ability of nationalist leaders to mobilize populations, convincing them to 'buy into' the rhetoric driving the secessionist movement. Less educated citizens are believed more likely to embrace manufactured nationalist sentiments, and less educated young males are more likely to be recruited into secessionist movements for lack of better lifestyle alternatives, reducing the opportunity costs of violence. In their words, 'wars are more likely to be secessionist the smaller the proportion of the male population that has secondary education'.¹⁴ This argument is consistent with Horowitz's contention that groups with low skills are unable to compete and more likely therefore to seek a protectionist advantage by seceding.¹⁵

The availability of natural resources, mainly oil and other mineral products, also appears to be an important, albeit somewhat ambiguous, factor in separatist conflicts. Oil seems particularly prevalent in secessionist civil wars. Michael Ross identifies several case studies linking oil and other minerals to separatist conflicts, including Cabinda in Angola, Burma independence movements, Katanga in Congo, Aceh and West Papua in Indonesia, Bougainville in Papua New Guinea, and South Sudan.¹⁶ Ross contrasts natural resources for the extraction of which foreign investments are needed, and those that require little or no foreign investments, such as alluvial diamond mining. The former, he argues, heightens the likelihood of secession 'since locals can only attract this investment if their territory achieves recognition as a sovereign state'. With the latter, however, people may prefer to back a local warlord and not bother with outright independence.¹⁷ These nuances make it hard to assess the expected impact of non-oil natural resources on separatism. Resources such as diamonds may well foster non-separatist warlords, whereas those requiring greater infrastructure and investment, such as oil, could promote secessions.

13. Collier and Hoeffler, 'The political economy', p.5.

14. *Ibid.*, p.7.

15. Donald Horowitz, 'Patterns of ethnic separatism', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23 (1981), pp.165-95.

16. Michael Ross, 'Natural resources and civil war: an overview' (UCLA, Department of Political Science, August, 2003), pp.11-12; see the bibliography after the present paper for the published version. See also Philippe Le Billon, 'Angola's political economy of war: the role of oil and diamonds, 1975-2000', *African Affairs* 100, 398 (2001), pp.55-80. It should be stressed, however, that oil did not originally play a role in the Sudanese conflict, which predates its discovery and exploitation in Southern Sudan.

17. Ross, 'Natural resources', p.12.

The third type of factor deals with the nature and dynamics of the political system. The persistence of separatist movements in Canada, France, India, Spain and the United Kingdom suggests that there may be little relationship between the level of democracy and secessions. However, rather than the nature of the regime, the extent and intensity of political change may matter a great deal for would-be separatists. Political transitions often make states vulnerable and can create climates that foster separatist movements.¹⁸ Furthermore, when the central state is weakened, overthrown or collapsed, its ability to resist and prevent a secessionist drive is greatly reduced. Stephen Saideman notes, for example, that periods of democratization and economic transition have an impact on internal ethnic dynamics, leading to intensified ethnic identities and security dilemmas which ultimately 'drive' secessionism.¹⁹

The extent to which a system is prone to political violence in general may also herald a greater separatist propensity. Non-secessionist conflicts can have secessionist effects, or both types of conflict may result from similar factors. Donald Horowitz writes, for example, that 'riots are a common forerunner of secessionist movements'.²⁰ The secession of Somaliland amid continued clan-based fighting in the rest of Somalia provides an example of the parallel dynamics of factional and separatist politics. Finally, the international climate may also inhibit or encourage self-determination movements. The rigidities of the Cold War probably froze more than one separatist ambition, while the end of the Soviet Union signalled new possibilities for sub-nationalist movements, at least in eastern Europe, central Asia and the Balkans.²¹

In Table 3, we model the effects on secessions of as many as possible of these variables, together with dummies for Africa and Latin America (including the Caribbean). In the first column, the dependent variable is the compound of instances and intensity of secessionist conflicts, whereas the second column looks at instances alone. The results are by and large consistent across the two specifications. Among the first type of variables, the recent origins of a state do not appear to exert an effect on the chances of separatist conflict (we use a dummy variable that scores '1' for states that have existed for no more than two years, '0' otherwise; results were similarly insignificant when we simply entered the age of countries). The

18. David Laitin, 'Secessionist rebellion in the former Soviet Union', *Comparative Political Studies* 34, 8 (2001), pp. 839–61.

19. Stephen Saideman, 'Is Pandora's box half-empty or half-full? The limited virulence of secessionism and the domestic sources of disintegration', in David Lake and Donald Rothchild (eds), *The International Spread of Ethnic Conflict: Fear, diffusion and escalation* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1998), pp. 127–50.

20. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups*, pp. 12–13.

21. In 'The parade of sovereignties', Henry Hale identifies a robust demonstration effect in the pursuit of sovereignty by former Soviet regions.

Table 3. Regression estimates of Africa's secessionist deficit

<i>Dependent variable</i>	<i>Effect on instances and intensity of secessions</i>	<i>Effect on instances of secessions</i>
New state	Positive Not significant	Negative Not significant
Non-contiguous territory	Negative Not significant	Positive** Very significant
Population size	Positive*** Very significant	Positive* Significant
Cultural heterogeneity	Positive** Very significant	Positive*** Very significant
GDP	Negative Not significant	Negative Not significant
Male secondary education	Positive Not significant	Negative Not significant
Oil	Positive Not significant	Positive Not significant
Regime change	Positive Not significant	Positive Not significant
Non-separatist political violence	Positive*** Very significant	Positive** Very significant
Post-Cold War	Positive Not significant	Positive* Significant
Latin America and Caribbean	Negative Not significant	Negative Not significant
Africa	Negative* Significant	Negative*** Very significant
% of variation in separatism explained (R^2)	16	16
N/number of countries	759/153	759/153

Note: Model estimated with random-effects generalized least squares. Constants omitted. Significance relates to the probability (two tails) that the given variable actually has no effect on secessions. * means less than 10% probability; ** less than 5%; *** less than 1%.

non-contiguous nature of a state's territory has a positive impact on the instances of secessions, but this effect is not robust and only occurs when the dependent variable measures instances alone. To some extent, the intensity measure may blur the separatist message here, as separatist conflicts in distant and distinct territories may encounter less resistance from the centre and therefore display lesser intensity. In contrast, population size is an unambiguous and systematic predictor of secessions, as is cultural heterogeneity, measured here by an index of linguistic diversity.²² We did not find significant effects of other measures of ethnic polarization,

22. This index is derived from Alberto Alesina *et al.* 'Fractionalization'. *Journal of Economic Growth* 8 (2003), pp. 155–94.

including the population share of the dominant group, and found no credible and systematic measure of diasporas.

On the other hand, all three economic indicators — GDP, male secondary education and oil — appear uncorrelated to secessionist conflicts, a finding which contrasts with recent empirical research on the causes of civil wars in general.²³ We did not have a reliable measure of regional income disparities within countries. The only widely available measure of income inequality, the GINI index, does not capture regional economic imbalances, and has few available observations. Nevertheless, if income inequality is a predictor of separatism, it would lead us to expect more separatism in Africa, as the available data suggest an average GINI score of 45 for sub-Saharan Africa as opposed to 35 for the rest of the world. Because oil resources tend to be located in specific regions, this variable could also proxy for the effects of regional inequalities. Yet, the insignificance of its coefficient does not provide any support for this hypothesis.

Among the third type of variables, measuring characteristics of the political system, regime transition has no discernible effect on separatism (nor does a measure of weak statehood which is available for a smaller sample of countries). However, as suggested by Horowitz, political violence is contagious, as conflicts over control of the government ('non-separatist political violence') display a strong association with separatist ones. The effects of the post-Cold War environment are positive, as expected, but only significant in the second column.

Most interesting for our purpose, however, are the coefficients of the Latin America and Africa dummies. Although Latin America appeared at first in this article as a greater outlier than Africa in terms of secessions, it has no significant effect of its own in either model. This suggests that the other variables (type of territory, population size, linguistic heterogeneity, etc.) appropriately capture what may make Latin America less prone to separatism. In contrast, despite the controls provided by the other variables in the model, the Africa dummy systematically displays a statistically significant negative effect on secessionist conflicts. In both models, being an African country reduces the likelihood and intensity of separatist conflict by about half a standard deviation. This finding implies that there is something else about Africa, not captured by the main theories of separatism, which minimizes the chances for secessionist conflict on the continent.

In summary, the model highlights the rather robust separatist effects of population size, cultural heterogeneity, other forms of political violence and location in Africa. It also identifies more ambiguous associations with territorial contiguity and the post-Cold War era. For our purposes here,

23. Collier and Hoeffler, 'The political economy'; Fearon and Laitin, 'Ethnicity, insurgency'.

Table 4. Actual and predicted values of separatism in Africa

	<i>Actual</i>	<i>Predicted</i>
Average value of secession index (combining instances and intensity)	0.96	3.38
Average value of secession index (measuring instances only)	0.26	0.86

Note: Predicted values are calculated based on the regression model of Table 3 (without the regional dummies). The model is first run for all non-African countries. Using the coefficients it generates, predicted values are established for the entire world. Reported here are the predicted values for African countries.

the significant negative effect of being an African country on the propensity for secession is the most crucial finding. African countries do not seem to fit traditional explanations of separatist activity. Table 4 illustrates the extent of Africa's misfit. Predicting from the regression models of Table 3, without the regional dummies, the expected values of the secession variables for Africa are more than three times as big as the actual values. This is a large and significant deficit. We now turn to explaining it.

Theoretical building blocks

Few scholars have pondered Africa's secessionist deficit or the reasons for it. One claim heard occasionally is that, although Africa displays high levels of social heterogeneity and polarization, specific regions are not sufficiently homogeneous to warrant separatist collective action by local ethnic groups, justifying the existence of, and attachment to, African states as rational by default.²⁴ Certainly there rarely are clear cultural lines of demarcation along which African countries could be partitioned. While this is true, there usually are no clear cultural lines of demarcation between African states either, making this argument merely a matter of inertia. More importantly, actual secessionist movements, while occasionally driven by specific ethnic groups, are rarely a matter of cultural unity.²⁵ Neither Eritrea nor Somaliland is ethnically or culturally more uniform than Ethiopia or Somalia, and the Baluba of Katanga could do little in the 1960s to prevent Lunda elites from declaring the secession of their province. Nor are any of the former Soviet republics that proclaimed their independence in the 1990s ethnically homogeneous. In fact, Daniel Treisman has found that 'primordial ethnicity did not seem decisive in determining which

24. Donald Horowitz, 'The cracked foundations of the right to secede', *Journal of Democracy* 14, 2 (2003), pp.5-17.

25. Joshua B. Forrest, *Subnationalism in Africa: Ethnicity, alliances, and politics* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, CO, 2003).

of Russia's ethnic regions staged active separatist campaigns', and that 'there was no evidence to suggest that separatism was more likely to occur in regions where primordial attachments to language were more intense or where the size of the minority nationalist community was greater'.²⁶ Africa's experience with separatism seems consistent with this assessment.

Another argument highlights the depth and territorial specificity of nationalist feelings generated in Africa over the last 40 years and throughout the colonial episode. According to Crawford Young, African nationalism originates in the shared experience of 'common colonial subjugation'. For this reason, he contends, there has been no real confrontation between territorial nationalism and political ethnicity. Furthermore, the affective ties of territorial nationalism appear impervious to negative popular perceptions of the state and its behaviour and have so far shielded states torn by civil strife or prolonged economic crises from disintegrating completely.²⁷

There is much that is appealing about Young's argument – not least its focus on territoriality. But if territorial nationalism is the cause of territorial resilience in Africa, its own origins in turn remain unclear. If colonialism really shaped identity through shared misery, how is one to explain the partition of India and other non-territorial separatisms in post-colonial environments? How does one also account for nationalism in Africa's former French colonies, since the latter were ruled under two distinct administrative entities — *Afrique occidentale française* and *Afrique équatoriale française* — until the late 1950s? And what is one to do with the exclusive character of some of Africa's nationalisms, such as *Ivoirité*, which purports to exclude large segments of Ivoirians from the benefits of belonging to the state? Young's argument is also hard to reconcile with the salience of sub-national conflicts in Africa, which tend to be simultaneous to professions of nationalism. In the DR Congo, for example, where nationalism is rampant, Katangans have fought Kasaians, Lundas have opposed Lubas, Hemas and Lendus are killing each other, each region has 'autochthonous' populations discriminating against newcomers, and the whole country seems unified in its hatred of its Banyarwanda minorities. It remains to be explained why territorial nationalism co-exists with political ethnicity in Africans' quest for identity and trumps it when it comes to providing the foundations for statehood.

Robert Jackson and Carl Rosberg also asked, back in 1982, 'Why Africa's weak states persist.'²⁸ And, like Young's, their answer constitutes

26. Daniel Treisman. 'Russia's "ethnic revival": the separatist activism of regional leaders in a postcommunist order', *World Politics* 49, 2 (1997), p.231; see also David Laitin, 'Secessionist rebellion'. Note, however, that Henry Hale found a significant effect of regional linguistic homogeneity on the will to secede of Soviet regions (Hale, 'The parade of sovereignties').

27. Crawford Young, 'Nationalism and ethnicity in Africa', *Review of Asian and Pacific Studies* 23 (2002), pp.7–17.

28. Robert H. Jackson and Carl G. Rosberg. 'Why Africa's weak states persist: the empirical and the juridical in statehood', *World Politics* 35, 1 (1982), pp.1–24.

an important building block towards explaining Africa's secessionist deficit. They focused on the international dynamics of the survival of Africa's states, suggesting that the granting of 'juridical statehood' by the international community to former colonial entities allowed their reproduction despite their empirical shortcomings, because it froze African states in their inherited colonial jurisdictions and impeded self-determination movements. Their argument was about the resistance of the African juridical state, thanks to its international legitimacy, against domestic challenges. What they did not explain (or identify), however, was the relative lack of such challenges to the state. This is a matter of agency. Although they pointed to a relationship between juridical statehood and continued poverty, they did not explain why Africans do not reject the poverty, chaos and institutional weakness perpetuated by juridical statehood. How do international norms of recognition of sovereignty translate into the actions of Africans, especially those excluded from power? The existence of a 'benevolent international society' is half the explanation, establishing the international legitimacy of the African state. But the African half, explaining the domestic legitimacy of the state, is still missing. We turn to it now.

The weak-sovereignty equilibrium

We agree with Jackson and Rosberg's emphasis on the role of international recognition of Africa's post-colonial sovereignty, and with Young's attention to the structuring constraints of post-colonial territoriality. We argue, however, that the former do not explain the lack of challenge to the state, and that the latter's concept of 'territorial nationalism' does not fully account for the simultaneity of communal polarization. Any elite attachment to post-colonial territoriality, we suggest, is largely a consequence of its material rewards. African elites do not embrace their state out of nationalist sentiments, but out of necessity. They then produce nationalist discourses to legitimate this choice and to undermine opponents, thereby simultaneously generating nationalism and sub-national polarization.

Our departure point is the now well documented weakness of the African state, and the advantages that such weakness can represent for African elites and regular citizens.²⁹ The capacity to appropriate privately the resources of the weak state or to use it as an instrument of predation, because of its widespread lack of accountability, are crucial elements of the

29. On the benefits of state weakness to elites, see William Reno, 'The changing nature of warfare and the absence of state-building in Africa', in Diane Davis and Anthony Pereira (eds), *Irregular Armed Forces and their Role in Politics and State Formation* (Cambridge University Press, New York, 2003), pp. 322–45; on the ability of Africans at large to live with weak state institutions, see Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa Works: Disorder as political instrument* (James Curry, Oxford and Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN, 1999).

logic of its survival and reproduction.³⁰ At many levels of society, people with parcels of state authority, however limited, can market them and extract resources from their fellow citizens, while others, not directly associated with the state, can also benefit from these practices through the networks that link them to their political patrons.³¹

Yet, if weak statehood alone mattered, one would expect widespread separatism as regional elites, particularly those who are kept out of power at the centre, attempt to establish their own states. A common explanation for the prevailing lack of such centrifugal tendencies among Africa's regional elites points to the low odds of international recognition of breakaway states as a deterrent to these elites. However, while recognition is indeed elusive, as the example of Somaliland demonstrates, its absence is not always an impediment to separatist initiatives (as Somaliland again demonstrates), even if it may end up as a significant factor in their eventual failures (for example, Biafra, Katanga). African states face, by and large, a similar distaste for secession on the part of the international system as other regions do, yet they refrain from separatism with greater frequency.³²

In Africa as elsewhere, regional leaders can be expected to capitalize on local grievances and promote secessions if the potential rewards of a separatist state, in the absence of international recognition, outweigh the potential rewards associated with control or partial control of institutions of the sovereign national state. Assuming African would-be separatists face similar odds of recognition as those in other parts of the world, what essentially distinguishes African elites is the relatively greater material returns to sovereignty that they face. Given the undiversified nature of Africa's economies, their lack of industrialization, their dependence on commodity extraction, and their small and parasitic private sectors, the continent offers a significant material premium to internationally recognized sovereignty, tilting the odds for elites in favour of staying within the state, even if they do not immediately benefit from power at the centre.

How does the weak sovereign state offer such returns in Africa? First of all, sovereignty facilitates the reproduction of the weak state, making strategies of predation and private appropriation of state resources and

30. See Richard Joseph, 'Class, state and prebendal politics in Nigeria', in Nelson Kasfir (ed.), *State and Class in Africa* (Cass and Co, London, 1984), pp.21–38; see also Jean-François Bayart, *The State in Africa: The politics of the belly* (Longman, London, 1993).

31. For a detailed case study of the predatory logic of a weak state, see Pierre Englebert, 'Why Congo persists: sovereignty, globalization and the violent reproduction of a weak state' (Oxford University, Queen Elizabeth House Working Paper QEHWPS95, February 2003).

32. It can plausibly be argued, however, that the OAU set rules of territorial integrity that were more stringent than elsewhere. Yet, the continent-wide nature of these rules fails to account for the few actual instances of African separatism. In addition, the incapacity of weak African states to enforce them suggests that they may not *per se* be an impediment to separatist action.

institutions feasible. The juridical guarantee of the state's existence that is the by-product of international sovereignty reduces pressures for capacity-building. International sovereignty allows the state to enforce itself upon its citizens without having to resort to continuous violence, and without the capacity to truly penetrate society. To refer to Joel Migdal's classic terminology, sovereignty shields political elites from the penalties associated with the 'weak state-strong society' dichotomy.³³ It prevents failed institutions from disappearing and allows them to outlive their functional existence. The weaker the state, and the greater the reliance on it in the strategies of accumulation of elites, as in Africa, the more important is this dimension of sovereignty.

Secondly, state agents derive domestic power from the evidence of their international legitimacy, which facilitates their instrumentalization of the state and predatory activities. Sovereignty, with its international sanction, gives state institutions and personnel substance, structure and power, and makes them hard to escape for grass-root Africans. This is in part why visits of African heads of state abroad and their meetings with other heads of state tend to receive such disproportionate coverage in the African media. For sure, external recognition is not the only source of control over local populations. In the absence of such recognition, rebel groups are occasionally able to develop strong local control based on local legitimacy or social structure. The cases of Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Army in Uganda in the 1980s or of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front in Ethiopia until the early 1990s are cases in point. Yet, in the absence of such strong domestic legitimacy, the evidence of international legitimacy provided by the recognition of the sovereign status of a government can be used as an instrument of political control. One of its main benefits is to allow governments to present predation as policy, which shields it somewhat from challenges. The capacity to act as sovereign ruler has allowed individuals in the DR Congo government, for example, to engage in what the United Nations has called 'asset stripping'. According to the UN, an 'elite network' of Congolese and Zimbabwean state and military interests 'transferred ownership of at least US\$5 billion of assets from the state mining sector to private companies under its control in the past three years with no compensation or benefit for the state treasury of the Democratic Republic of Congo'.³⁴ In this case, sovereignty is a legal artifice which protects the exploitation of Congo's resources by state elites and their allies. African governments' capacity to act as sovereign rulers confers the seal of legality

33. Joel Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-society relations and state capabilities in the third world* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 1988).

34. United Nations. *Final Report of the Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of Congo* (United Nations Security Council S/2002/1146, New York, 2003).

on robbery and persecution, and contributes to the elites' strategies of accumulation. The instruments of predation are policy instruments which are reserved to states, irrespective of their own empirical weakness.

While the relevance of this mechanism is particularly striking at the national level of government, it is also at work at regional levels where it largely accounts for the satisfaction of local elites with the central state, even when they are not directly associated with its networks of resource redistribution. Local elites want access to sovereign state institutions (such as provincial governments, regional bureaucratic agencies, parastatals, or recognized chiefdoms), in order the better to establish their hegemony over local populations. Association with the sovereign state provides for cheap avenues of control, predation and exploitation, with few demands for actual use of force. In the Western Province of Zambia, for example, which is culturally and geographically distinct from the rest of the country and has its own separate pre-colonial and colonial past, the Barotse royal establishment does not seek separatism (despite its province's poverty-driven grievances) because it benefits locally from the recognition by Zambia of its powers over land and natural resources, which allows the Barotse king to use regional assets, such as timber, in apparently private business deals, and enforce his hegemony over his subjects.³⁵

International sovereignty is not only a domestic currency. It also shields weak governments from outside interference, as they can raise the principle of non-intervention in their domestic affairs against outside attempts to check their excesses. Only in the most outrageous cases of genocide and crimes against humanity is this principle bent in international law, and even then barely so (as witnessed by the lack of serious intervention on behalf of Rwanda's Tutsis in 1994). For daily economic exploitation at the hands of a sovereign state, however, there is no international legal recourse for domestic populations. When they do in fact end up accused of abuses, governments can still hide behind their sovereignty to dodge the bullet, with the likely sympathy of many other governments, as attested by most of Africa's failure to condemn Zimbabwe's recent predatory policies and electoral frauds. As the Congolese government spokesman, Kikaya Bin Karubi, told the BBC in reference to accusations against members of the government in the UN report, 'The Congolese government is the legitimate government of this country... Whatever we do is legitimate'.³⁶

35. It was only when the Zambian government decided to nationalize land in 1995 that the Barotse royal establishment began to grumble about separatism. In the end, the government's continued implicit recognition of their rights over land placated local elites. See Pierre Englebert, 'Compliance and defiance to national integration in Barotseland and Casamance', *Afrika Spectrum* 39, 1 (2005), pp. 29–59.

36. BBC News, 'DR Congo plunder denied', <http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/africa/3161034.stm> (2003).

Of course, this does not imply that this line of reasoning is always successful. Yet, it is a line of defence that other actors do not have. Although it can be overturned, there is therefore a presumption in favour of sovereign governments. There are also few recourses in international law against the validity of the contracts passed by governments with foreign companies for the exploitation of natural resources.

Beyond these adjuvant roles to state predation, sovereignty also represents intrinsic value to holders of state power. In extreme cases, states can market their very sovereignty to the rest of the world. The example of Liberia's 'flag of convenience' stands out, as income from the Liberian shipping registry represents about \$20m annually in government revenue. Carnival Cruise Lines and 35 percent of all oil tankers operate under the Liberian flag.³⁷ The exchange of votes in the UN General Assembly or Security Council for material benefits or foreign patronage is another form of marketing of sovereignty.

More commonly, international sovereignty entitles regimes to official development assistance, which fuels their networks of patronage and funds the transformation of the state into a resource.³⁸ While they may appear restricted to political elites, aid flows benefit a cross-section of African societies, who appropriate them through government budgets and the clientelistic networks of political elites. Civil servants on payrolls can be fictitious and budgets make large room for discretionary funds. Foreign aid is thus a highly valuable resource for power holders and it is conditioned by norms of sovereign statehood and territorial integrity, as only recognized countries receive development aid, beyond humanitarian assistance and small NGO projects.

International sovereignty also facilitates foreign direct investments, which are typically conditional upon guarantees of insurance and arbitration, access to which depends on the sovereign status of the recipient country.³⁹ The World Bank's Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA) works only with sovereign entities. The United States' Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) offers insurance only to investors operating in entities recognized by the US government. As a result, internationally legitimate governments are much more likely to attract foreign operators in the regions under their control than are rebel authorities in their regions. The more a country depends on the extraction or production

37. Alex Hoyos, 'Shipping replaces diamonds in Liberia war chest', *Financial Times*, 24 October 2001, p.16; Alex Vines, 'Vessel operations under "flags of convenience" and national security implications', Hearing before the House Armed Services Committee (13 June 2002), <http://armedservices.house.gov/openingstatements> and press releases/107thcongress.

38. On the patronage dimension of the foreign policy of African states, see Christopher Clapham, *Africa and the International System: The politics of state survival* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996).

39. Reno, 'The changing nature of warfare'.

of primary commodities, the more important are foreign investors, and the greater the consequent premium on sovereignty.

William Reno has shown how the commercial benefits of sovereignty are particularly important for the rulers of weak states who capitalize on their sovereign status to embark on transactions with international firms for their own benefit. Firms play the game because the rulers' sovereign status offers them some guarantees. For rulers, the weakened sovereign state offers new opportunities which paradoxically compensate for their loss of internal control. Yet, the system is also beneficial to local elites who can capitalize both on their official status in representing the state with foreign investors and on the state's weakness, which allows them to appropriate privately the benefits of their official status. Reno notes that even rebel leaders, attracted by the resources of sovereignty derived from international contracts, will fight to wrest control of the state away from the ruler rather than secede: 'Apparently international recognition of sovereignty offers material and political advantages to insurgents that exceed the resources that come with *de facto* control over a specific territory.'⁴⁰ Michael Ross argues that the need for sovereignty in mineral exploitation favours the adoption of a separatist outlook by rebel movements.⁴¹ Yet, in a world where the supply of sovereignty is by and large fixed, regional reliance on primary commodities may be more likely to promote national unity and subdue separatist grievances. The taming of secessionist demands in Southern Sudan following the beginnings of oil production in 1997 and culminating with the 2005 peace agreement that guarantees southern rebels a share of oil revenues and participation in a national government, supports this view.

Altogether, the benefits of weak sovereign statehood promote the adoption of a nationalist, rather than secessionist or revolutionary, outlook by most Africans, despite the failures of the African state and the multiple polarizations of African societies. Political elites maintain the failed sovereign state because it represents a resource, the private benefits of which they can reap. The neopatrimonial logic of rule implies that a large number of non-elites also benefit from the transformation of the nation-state into a private resource because of their participation in the elite's clientelistic networks, and fail to challenge its existence and its domination. Many people also find income opportunities in assisting others in negotiating the arbitrariness of state regulations. In addition, the state's intrinsic value as a relatively predictable structure of power makes it appealing to individuals

40. William Reno, 'How sovereignty matters: international markets and the political economy of local politics in weak states', in Thomas Callaghy, Ronald Kassimir and Robert Latham (eds), *Intervention and Transnationalism in Africa: Global-local networks of power* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001), p. 203.

41. Ross, 'Natural resources'.

despite, and even because of, the ongoing simultaneity of centrifugal experiments in peripheral provinces and rebel-controlled territories, such as in Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, the DR Congo or Sudan.

For elites, the nationalist discourse provides the ideological legitimation of their strategy of institutions-as-resources, a tool for reinforcing and reproducing the state, and a means to counteract and disenfranchise the political expression of alternative public identities. This explains Henri Konan Bédié and Laurent Gbagbo's predilection for *Ivoirité* in Côte d'Ivoire, as well as the questioning of the Zambian citizenship of Kenneth Kaunda or of the Congolese citizenship of the Banyarwanda. For citizens in general, nationalism is the political expression of a preference for established, if dysfunctional, state institutions over unpredictable reconfigurations of power and economic life.

In Africa, political violence usually provides the means of fighting for (re)insertion into the system by marginalized and excluded groups. It does not represent attempts to challenge, reform, revolutionize, or break away from the state. The association of political violence with a universal nationalist discourse is thus only superficially paradoxical. While competing for state access for the benefit of the particularistic interests of their own group, political elites use a nationalist discourse as a platform to build a minimum winning coalition, and to define others as non-patriotic and keep them on the outside. Competition in the display of nationalism can thus be perceived as competition for power. The nationalist discourse becomes the foundation for the reproduction of the state's otherwise failed and predatory institutions, denying legitimacy to alternative scenarios and confining challenges to military factionalism for control of the state itself, or to the non-threatening realm of 'civil society'. By reinforcing the reproduction of the state, it guarantees the predatory potential of its institutions.

Leaders of culturally distinct, oppressed, or otherwise polarized groups or regions may well initially prefer to go their own way but find it hard to pursue sustainably separatist strategies in Africa's commodity-dependent and sovereignty-constrained environment. With international recognition elusive, they face a greater problem of time inconsistency than would-be separatists in more developed or industrialized regions, deriving greater benefits from joining 'national unity' governments than from continuing their original struggle. To borrow from a popular typology, 'grievance' has a greater propensity to turn to 'greed' in Africa than elsewhere.⁴² Such outcomes are further facilitated by the recent tendency of Western governments to foster power-sharing agreements as a solution to civil conflicts in

42. Mats Berdal and David M. Malone (eds), *Greed and Grievance: Economic agendas in civil wars* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, CO, 2000).

Africa (for example, Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire, DR Congo, Burundi). In these agreements, the integrity of the state usually trumps other considerations.⁴³

Explaining African secessions

If this article's argument holds true, how are we to account for the few instances of secessionist conflict in Africa? We suggest two possible explanations. First, some of Africa's secessionist movements make a historical claim to a separate colonial existence from the state to which they are now deemed to belong. To some extent, these movements may attempt to use the norms of international recognition of sovereignty in their favour. Indeed, while the international system is in general opposed to the recognition of new states through secession, it considers decolonization an acceptable form of self-determination.⁴⁴ Both the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity enshrined this principle, with the explicit stipulation that colonies have a right to sovereign independence within their colonial boundaries only, which are considered intangible.⁴⁵ This principle of post-colonial sovereignty was, of course, largely an act of reciprocal insurance by insecure African leaders.⁴⁶ Yet, it may have had the consequence of a perception that an ambiguous colonial status raises the odds of regional recognition, thereby offering an opportunity for local elites to make a claim for separate sovereignty. Eritrea provides the textbook example of this type of secession. In their war against the Ethiopian government, the Eritrean Liberation Front and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front clearly articulated their separated status under Italian colonial rule.

43. Denis Tull and Andreas Mehler, 'The hidden costs of power-sharing: reproducing insurgent violence in Africa', *African Affairs*, 104, 416 (2005).

44. Other accepted instances of secession are the peaceful and consensual break-up of existing states, cases where the stump state recognizes first the secessionist one, the break-up of empires (of which decolonization is a subset), previous recognized sovereign existence as a state, and — in the quite unique case of Yugoslavia — complete violent dissolution of the original state. See Lee C. Buchheit, *Secession: The legitimacy of self-determination* (Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 1978); Bruno Coppeters and Richard Sakwa (eds), *Contextualizing Secession: Normative studies in a comparative perspective* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003); and James Crawford, 'State practice and international law in relation to unilateral secession', http://canada.justice.gc.ca/en/news/nr/1997/factum/craw_pt4.html (19 February 1997).

45. United Nations, 'Declaration on the granting of independence to colonial countries and peoples', General Assembly Resolution 1514 (XV) (14 December 1960), www.gibnet.com/texts/un1514.htm; Organization of African Unity, 'The Organization of African Unity (OAU) charter', Addis Ababa (25 May 1963), www.africa-union.org/Official_documents/Treaties_Conventions_Protocols/OAU_Charter_1963.pdf; Organization of African Unity, AHG/Resolution 16(I), 'Border disputes among African states', First Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government held in Cairo, UAR (17 to 21 July 1964), www.africa-union.org/Official_documents/Treaties_Conventions_Protocols.

46. Clapham, *Africa and the International System*, pp.110–17.

The historical validity of this argument eventually guaranteed their success and their recognition by the international community.

Although Eritrea stands alone as a successful case of secession in Africa, several other movements have used similar claims of past existence as a distinct colony to legitimate separatist claims. To some extent, Western Sahara's war against Morocco derives from the same principle, as it was a colony of Spain, which accounts for the support of a majority of OAU states for the Saharawi government, although its accession to fully-fledged international sovereignty remains so far elusive. The Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda (FLEC) has also used the history of Portuguese colonization as justification for its secessionist drive from Angola. The FLEC notes that the Portuguese administered Cabinda separately from the rest of Angola until it was formally incorporated in 1956. In Somalia, the northern secessionist territory that emerged in 1991 as the Somaliland Republic also traces its claim to sovereignty to the fact that it was once a British colony, whereas the south was administered by Italy.

Although their cases are weaker, Southern Sudan, Senegal's Casamance region and Congo's Katanga province have at times made similar historical claims. It is indeed part of the Sudan People's Liberation Army's (SPLA) argument for independence that the three southern provinces of Sudan were administered by the British separately from the rest of the country, and that the options of annexation by another East African colony or of outright independence were considered by the British.⁴⁷ Rebels from the Movement of Democratic Forces of Casamance (MFDC) have also argued that historical differences in colonial administration justified their claim for separate independence from Senegal. A 1994 French arbitration found no definitive evidence, however, of Casamance's separate status during the colonial era.⁴⁸ Since then, the civilian leadership of the MFDC has repeatedly professed its intention to bring an end to the conflict, which endures mainly because the movement's armed wing hopes to leverage better terms of integration into the state for its members and may find material benefits in continuing low-intensity warfare throughout the region.⁴⁹ Although it was by and large an affair of traditional Lunda chiefs and Belgian settlers, Katanga's secession from Congo in 1960–63 also partly relied on the argument that the province had been integrated late into the rest of Congo and

47. Francis Deng, 'Beyond cultural domination: institutionalizing equity in the African state', in Mark R. Beissinger and Crawford Young (eds), *Beyond State Crisis? Postcolonial Africa and post-Soviet Eurasia in comparative perspective* (Woodrow Wilson Center Press, Washington, DC, 2002), pp.359–84.

48. Republic of Senegal, *Historical Testimony of Casamance* (Ministry of Education, Dakar, 1994).

49. Geneviève Gasser, "'Manger ou s'en aller": que veulent les opposants armés casamançais?', in Momar-Coumba Diop (ed.), *Le Sénégal contemporain* (Khartala, Paris, 2002), pp.459–98.

had been for the most part administered by Belgium separately from the rest of the colony.⁵⁰

In all these cases, regional political elites embarked on separatist strategies based upon the claim that their region should qualify for post-colonial sovereign status. The fact that none of them has so far obtained any international recognition, however, suggests that the past existence of a region as a separate colonial entity does not really raise its odds of recognition. As a consequence, the reasons for adopting such a strategy must be sought elsewhere. We suggest that these claims may be aimed at regional domestic audiences more than at the rest of the world. The fact that a region had colonial status at some point provides remnants of institutions — such as borders, administrative agencies, or public buildings — a skeletal institutional framework for local elites to work with, making popular mobilization easier by providing symbolic appeal and credibility to a claim for statehood. Writing about ethnic nationalism in the Russian Federation, Dmitry Gorenburg argues that existing institutional resources facilitated mobilization around ‘real’ demands for autonomy, by which he implies that such demands were made more credible to the local populations as they could witness the real, albeit incomplete, institutional expression of the state.⁵¹ Henry Hale’s evidence that already autonomous Soviet regions were more likely to demand sovereignty supports Gorenburg’s argument and our interpretation of post-colonial claims by African separatist movements, as these regions benefited from a more developed institutional apparatus.⁵²

One can take this point even further in the case of Africa, based on our earlier theoretical argument regarding the relative absence of separatism in Africa. Indeed, not only are remnants of colonial institutions useful for mobilization, but in fact they represent quasi-sovereign resources for regional elites. If local populations recognize some historical validity to these formerly colonial state institutions, or remember their effective presence, they can be used by regional elites as instruments of power over these populations, competing in this respect with the recognized sovereign state and altering the cost-benefit calculations of separatism versus nationalism. This will be particularly true if these regional elites are otherwise prevented from access to official state institutions, as was, for example, the case among the Lunda of Katanga, and still is among the Diola of Casamance.⁵³

50. J. Gérard-Libois, *La sécession katangaise* (CRISP, Brussels, 1963); René Lemarchand, ‘The limits of self-determination: the case of the Katanga secession’, *American Political Science Review* 56, 2 (1962), pp.404–16.

51. Dmitry Gorenburg, ‘Nationalism for the masses: popular support for nationalism in Russia’s ethnic republics’, *Europe-Asia Studies* 53, 1 (2001), pp. 73–104.

52. Hale, ‘The parade of sovereignties’, p.49.

53. Moïse Tshombe was kept out of the ruling Congolese coalition in 1960. Regarding the failure of Senegalese co-optation with Casamance’s Diola, see Catherine Boone, *Political Topographies of the African State: Territorial authority and institutional choice* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003), pp. 94–6.

Our second explanation deals with the timing rather than the substance of secessionist claims. As Figure 1 indicates, there appear to be two secessionist moments in Africa: in the 1960s, immediately following the main decolonization period; and in the 1990s, after the end of the Cold War and the break-up of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. We suggest that time variations in the benefits of sovereign statehood in Africa and in the norms of recognition of states account for these two peaks of separatism.

In the early 1960s, the principle of post-colonial sovereignty was not yet fully entrenched, and the benefits of weak sovereignty not yet fully apparent. The future of the African nation-state was still uncertain. It made sense, therefore, for regional elites to hedge their national bets with alternative local strategies. Congolese secessions fit such a model. The fragility of the new Congolese state in 1960, the army mutinies, and the stalemate opposing Prime Minister Lumumba and President Kasavubu in Leopoldville, made it rational for Moïse Tshombé to declare the secession of Katanga, especially as he hoped to benefit from Western support, given the large proportion of expatriates in his province. The 'Great Mining State of South Kasai' followed suit in 1961. But the UN intervention in Congo and the lack of foreign recognition of the breakaway states affirmed the principle of the territorial integrity

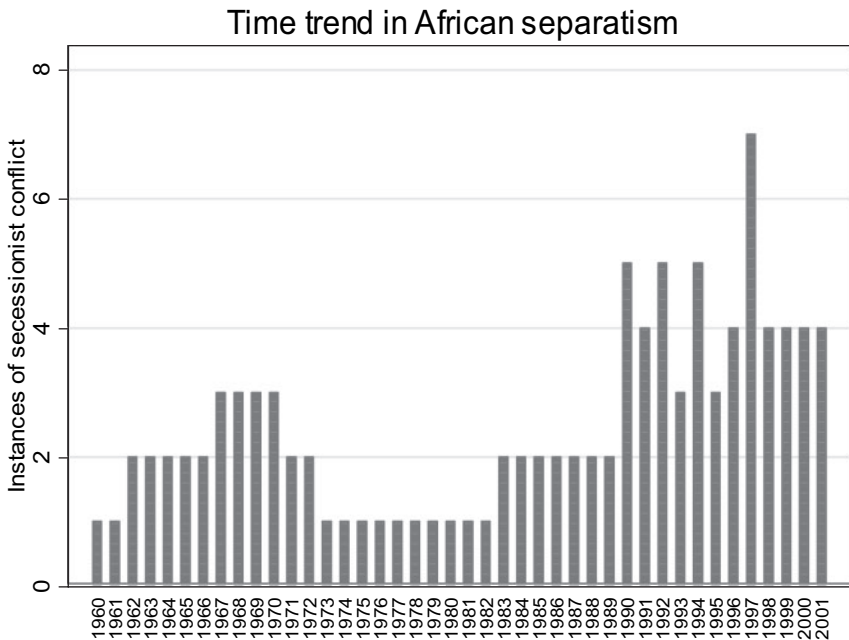


Figure 1.

of Africa's post-colonies and doomed these experiments. It is not surprising, in view of our argument, that Tshombe later became prime minister of Congo and that Albert Kalonji, the leader of Kasai's secession, ended up minister of agriculture in the national government. These were elites who adjusted their strategies of access to power as a function of the opportunities and constraints they identified at different levels of political action.

As international support confirmed the sovereignty of Congo, the secessionist momentum of the early 1960s subsided. Following the Congolese stabilization, the international community's display of its willingness to intervene on behalf of territorial integrity, and the proclamation of the principle of territorial integrity by the Organization of African Unity in 1963, challenges to state authority no longer took on separatist dimensions. The only exception is Biafra, which fought a war of secession against the Nigerian federal government as late as the period 1967–70. It should be noted, however, that for the Igbo leaders of the secession, it was clearly a second-best option. Their first choice had been to take over power in Nigeria as a whole. It was only after the Igbo officers' coup of January 1966 had been reversed by the counter-coup of northerner General Gowon in July (followed by numerous massacres of Igbos throughout the north), that the military governor of the Eastern Region, Lt.-Col. Ojukwu, proclaimed its independence as the Republic of Biafra.

The period from the end of the Biafra secession to 1990 was characterized by the virtual absence of separatism from Africa (with Sudan and Ethiopia the lone exceptions). This was a period when African regional elites could no longer entertain hopes for favourable rules of self-determination on the continent and when the benefits of collaborating in the weak post-colonial state project became more appealing. The global changes in the 1990s as a result of the end of the Cold War, the partition of the Soviet Union, and the ideological push by the West for the spread of electoral democracy combined to affect, and in many cases undermine, the existing international legitimacy of African states. The perception of changing international norms regarding territorial integrity led to a resurgence of autonomy-seeking activities by regional political leaders around the world, Africa included. The secession of Somaliland, which occurred in 1991 after Somalia had all but collapsed as a functional state (not unlike Yugoslavia), provides a case in point. Senegal's Casamance conflict, although it had begun in 1982, also took on renewed military vigour in 1990. In Mali, the Azawad People's Movement and the Islamic Arab Front of Azawad concentrated their fighting for Tuareg separatism during the 1990–94 period.⁵⁴ In Niger too,

54. The last Malian Tuareg revolt before that dated back to 1964, during the first separatist phase.

Table 5. Comparing propensities to secede in three different periods, Africa and the rest of the world

	<i>Africa (n)</i>	<i>Others (n)</i>	<i>t value</i>
<i>1960–1964</i>			
Average number of secessions, per year	0.08 (138)	0.07 (464)	0.19
Average intensity of secessions, per year	0.19 (138)	0.19 (464)	0.01
Proportion of secessions	0.06 (138)	0.03 (464)	1.38*
<i>1970–89</i>			
Average number of secessions, per year	0.05 (898)	0.09 (2263)	3.46***
Average intensity of secessions, per year	0.17 (898)	0.25 (2263)	1.95**
Proportion of secessions	0.04 (898)	0.06 (2263)	2.90***
<i>1990–99</i>			
Average number of secessions, per year	0.10 (487)	0.11 (1361)	0.43
Average intensity of secessions, per year	0.24 (487)	0.32 (1361)	1.50*
Proportion of secessions	0.07 (487)	0.09 (1361)	1.40*

Note: Based on two-sample *t* tests with equal or unequal variances. Absolute *t* values. Probabilities, based on one-tailed tests: * = 10%; ** = 5%; *** = 1%.

Tuareg secessionism emerged as a violent political project in the early 1990s and subsided by 1997. By the mid- to late 1990s, however, Western donors, faced with increasing conflicts in the developing world, returned to policies supporting state integrity rather than democratization and contributed to closing this second window of separatist opportunity.

Table 5 illustrates these trends in Africa compared with the rest of the world. In the early 1960s, there are no significant differences in secessionist activity between Africa and other regions. Yet, once rules of recognition and the neo-patrimonial African state become entrenched in the 1970s and 1980s, Africa's propensity for separatism evaporates. It emerges again in the 1990s as a consequence of a perceived relaxation in the rules of state recognition, yet remains significantly below that of other regions. This enduring deficit could be the consequence of the fact that, as opportunities for recognition of self-determination movements seemed to increase around the world in the 1990s, so the African state reached new depths of weakness, turning ever more into a privately appropriable resource and increasing the elite incentives for state reproduction.

Conclusions and policy implications

Our findings suggest that population size, territorial discontinuity, cultural heterogeneity, and a predisposition for political violence contribute to separatism. It is also possible — though we found no robust evidence for it — that the regional availability of natural resources, regional income disparities, the level of national development, regime transitions

and the newness of states play a role. Apart from population size, most of these variables would indicate a greater disposition to separatism in Africa than in other regions. Yet, the opposite occurs.

With the effective rules of recognition of new states by and large similar around the world, we argue that Africa's secessionist deficit derives from the greater relative returns to sovereignty which prevail on the continent. Given the presence in their region of factors contributing to separatism, local elites everywhere compare the rewards of seceding without recognition to those associated with control or partial control of institutions of the recognized sovereign state. Because there are few opportunities in Africa for controlling and exploiting resources and people outside the realm of the sovereign state, the continent offers a significant material premium to internationally recognized sovereignty, tilting the odds for political elites in favour of staying within the state.

Our evidence and argumentation about Africa's secessionist deficit are not gratuitous, for Africa's weak sovereignty equilibrium may well contribute to its underdevelopment. This is so for at least three reasons. First, the irony of nationalism and anti-secessionism in Africa is that they create a context that is favourable to the dismemberment of these countries' wealth. African countries are maintained so that they can be taken apart. The United Nations reports on the illegal exploitation of Congo's assets confirmed that African politicians use weak but sovereign institutions as instruments to appropriate wealth. The conditions under which many African states are reproduced guarantee their institutional weakness. This weakness facilitates, in turn, the exploitation of state power by political elites for their own personal strategies of accumulation. In essence, the failure of the public domain engenders the private successes of political entrepreneurs. Sovereignty exonerates states from the consequences of robbing their societies.

Second, the sovereign reproduction of African states undermines the emergence of forces that could contribute towards greater institutional accountability and better governance. The stigmatization of alternative solutions to the nation-state deprives Africans of credible exit options. It matters little in the end whether Africans would avail themselves of such options if they were given to them. But making territorial partition politically feasible by altering the norms of recognition would at least modify the parameters of African elites' political calculus. Should the international community substitute a norm of institutional effectiveness for the currently prevailing one of post-colonial territorial continuity, as suggested by Jeffrey Herbst, African elites could find benefits in the promotion of regional rather than national levels of societal aggregation.⁵⁵ Theoretically, elites

55. Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: Comparative lessons in authority and control* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2000).

would then choose the level of political action that maximizes the development of state capacity to the extent that this level would also maximize the revenues from aid and other benefits from sovereignty. Although political elites can be expected to continue to seek the appropriation of the rents from state control for their own private advantage, they would now do so in a context that would neutralize the benefits of sovereignty associated with weak statehood and make such pursuits compatible with public welfare. This context could be sub-national, could promote the adoption of a new developmental social contract at the national level, or could even encourage regional integration. It is not likely, however, that such a normative shift would open a Pandora's Box of territorial realignments, as is often feared, if only because of the high costs associated with this option for political elites, not least the uncertainty with respect to the dynamics unleashed by such realignments.

Third, post-colonial nationalism dialectically produces ethnic polarization, which results in social conflicts and retards development. Power strategies that transform the state into a resource, and their accompanying nationalist discourses, repress the political expression of local cultural identities, which find outlets in 'tribal' clientelism, differentiation and ethnic polarization. This is why Africans express nationalist views while simultaneously complaining of their compatriots' tribalism. Hence, the perpetuation of the African state in its current alienating form reinforces micro-identity formation as a cultural escape to the anomie of the public domain. African nationalism engenders ethnicity. The ethnic differentiation process is thus utilized not so much to challenge the nation-building exercise of state elites but as justification for access to the benefits of the system. This leads to local ethnic competition and conflict and to economic and social policies biased towards the groups whose elites have access to the state. In both instances, state capacity and economic development come out on the losing side.

These arguments combine to suggest that the sovereign reproduction of weak African states comes at a high price for Africans. The continued deterioration of Africa's economic conditions, despite a litany of policy reforms, may provide the opportunity for a reconsideration of the merits of territorial integrity. As a first step, and while there is no contesting the short-term benefits of pacifying countries, donors may want to revisit their systematic emphasis on state reconstruction, which further contributes to the reproduction of dysfunctional states.

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