WHEN STATE CAPACITY DISSOLVES: EXPLAINING VARIATION IN VIOLENT CONFLICT AND CONFLICT MODERATION

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Abstract: When state capacity dissolves, we ordinarily assume that violent conflict will break out, and then spiral toward a high degree of intensity. However, this is not always the case. Rather, on occasion, states suffer a sharp and severe loss of capacity, but little or no collective violence follows. And, on other occasions, violent conflict erupts, but that conflict does not escalate into civil war; rather, it plateaus, and then recedes. This article offers an analytic framework for explaining such variation in the presence, absence, and intensity of violent conflict following a dissolution of state capacity. I argue that the strength of state and societal organs *prior* to a loss of state capacity shapes the broad trajectory of violence *after* such a loss. In making that claim, I associate three state-society dynamics before state dissolution with three levels of violent conflict, post-dissolution. Drawing on multi-country fieldwork, I illustrate the proposed framework by presenting three, diverse cases of dissolving state capacity and conflict: Georgia (1991-93), Albania (1991-92), and Yemen (2011-13).

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WHEN STATE CAPACITY DISSOLVES: EXPLAINING VARIATION IN VIOLENT CONFLICT AND CONFLICT MODERATION

When states suffer a sharp and severe drop in capacity, it is often assumed that violent conflict will break out, and then escalate to a high level of intensity. After all, the logic goes, if states use their coercive capacities to close down opportunities for violence, then a dissolution of state capacity will open up opportunities for non-state actors to organize, arm, and fight. Over the past two decades, a significant body of work has given empirical weight to this claim, and so we now recognize that a dissolution of state capacity does indeed increase the danger of armed conflict, generally.[1] However, our understanding of outliers and variation remains poor. For example, we cannot explain why states sometimes become dysfunctional, but there is little or no escalation of collective violence -- as was the case in Albania when the state folded alongside the end of communist rule in 1991.[2] Nor can we explain why a dissolution of state capacity sometimes triggers an increase in violent conflict, but that violence does not spiral to unfettered war. When state organizations collapsed in Somalia following the fall of Siad Barre in 1991, for example, there was an upswing of conflict in Somaliland, but the region escaped the intense violence that engulfed much of rump Somalia at the time.[3]

This article offers a framework for understanding cross-case variation in the intensity of violent conflict following a dissolution of state capacity. Taking a historical institutionalist approach, I argue that the strength of state and societal organs *before* a severe loss of state capacity shapes the broad trajectory of violence *after* such a loss. Since diverse, context-dependent factors also inform the likelihood, and level, of violence in any given case, I do not claim that this framework is sufficient to explain all variation. Rather, I argue that it offers a useful starting point for onward analysis. In making that case, I propose that three sets of state-society arrangements before a loss of state capacity lay the structural foundations for three, varying levels of subsequent collective violence.

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[1] Nick Grono, 'Fragile States and Conflict', *Speech to Institut Royal Supérieur de Défense* (Brussels, 27 March 2010): http://old.crisisgroup.org/en/publication-type/speeches/2010/fragile-states-and-conflict.html (accessed 23 September, 2016); David Sobek, 'Masters of Their Domains: The Role of State Capacity in Civil Wars', *Journal of Peace Research* 47:3 (2010), pp. 267–71.

[2] For an overview, see Blendi Kajsiu *et al.*, *Albania - a Weak Democracy, a Weak State* (Tirana: Albanian Institute for International Studies, 2003).

[3] Ariel I. Ahram, 'Learning to Live with Militias: Toward a Critical Policy on State Frailty', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 5:2 (2011), pp. 175–92; Ken Menkhaus, 'International Peacebuilding and the Dynamics of Local and National Reconciliation in Somalia', *International Peacekeeping* 3:1 (1996), pp. 42–67.

I first argue that the most intensely violent conflicts are likely to break out where state and societal organizations have both previously been strong ('State *and* Society'). Where that is the case, a sharp drop in state capacity will open up opportunity space for violence. Individuals then look beyond the state for protection and, given the abiding strength of societal organizations, armed groups may form around ready-existing networks of social trust and communication. In the absence of state regulation and mediation, however, relations between emerging militias are likely to turn violent, and escalate to an *unfettered* level of conflict.

While the above scenario is often seen as the 'typical' outcome when states dissolve, I also argue that two -- polar -- state-society arrangements before state dissolution can give rise to two alternate security outcomes. In one such arrangement, powerful and pervasive state authorities have previously dominated an atomized society ('State *over* Society'). Should the dominant state then fold, opportunities for violence will open up. Given the fragmentation of society, however, prospective rebels or racketeers may not have access to the kinds of societal organizations and associated networks of trust that ordinarily underwrite militia mobilization. Consequently, armed groups may not form in such an environment -- and where there are few (or no) violent groups, there will be *limited* (or no) violent conflict.

In a contrasting arrangement, state structures have previously been extremely frail and, as such, state authorities have ceded certain governance and security responsibilities to powerful societal actors, such as tribal or religious leaders ('Society *over* State'). If fragile state organs should then fail altogether, diverse societal actors are likely to take up arms, with a view to protection and/or predation. Such a situation is evidently insecure. Importantly, however, armed groups may be partly constrained by existing customary laws and non-state structures of governance, which are likely to persist in the face of a dissolution of state capacity. Where that is indeed the case, informal governors can mediate between armed groups, monitor agreements, and threaten social sanctions for violating non-aggression pacts -- all of which facilitate the peaceful resolution of conflicts in the absence of a state. Thus, although some violence can be expected when fragile state structures disintegrate altogether, informal governance may also ensure that conflict is *moderated* in the short-term.

In the sections that follow, I develop this argument in five steps. I first outline current thinking on the relationship between low state capacity and violent conflict. I then define the outcome under investigation and delimit the scope of the study. In the third section, I develop my claim that the strength of state and societal actors prior to a loss of state capacity provides a starting point for explaining variation in the intensity of subsequent violence. In the fourth section, I illustrate that claim by presenting brief studies of disintegrating state capacity and

varying levels of conflict in Georgia (1991-93), Albania (1991-92), and Yemen (2011-13). I then conclude by suggesting how the explanatory framework proposed here might shape the way we think about responses to the dissolution of state capacity.

CURRENT THINKING ON STATE CAPACITY AND VIOLENT CONFLICT

How do we currently explain variation in the presence, absence, and intensity of violent conflict when states lose all capacity? In practice, not very well -- simply because such variation is rarely considered. That neglect does not reflect a lack of scholarly and policy interest in the relationship between low capacity states and violence, broadly speaking. To the contrary, there have been numerous studies of security issues in so-called 'failed states' in recent years[4] -- partly as a response to the perception that such territories constitute threats to international security,[5] and partly due to recognition that the international community has a 'responsibility to protect' individuals who live in states that do not protect their own citizens.[6] But, despite the large body of work on security issues in fragile and failing states, few scholars have tried to explain *variation* in levels of violent conflict when states lose all capacity.[7]

One group of authors has not even considered the possibility of varying levels of violence "when states fail".[8] Instead, they have simply assumed that dysfunctional states play host to unfettered violent conflict.[9] This thinking builds on Weberian logic; if a functional state successfully monopolizes the legitimate use of force in a given territory, then a dysfunctional state must be a territory in which there is no such monopoly -- a land "consumed by internal violence", in the words of Robert Rotberg.[10] This logic has underwritten works by Rotberg

[4] See, for example, James Putzel and Jonathan Di John, 'Meeting the Challenges of Crisis States', *Crisis States Research Centre Report* (London: London School of Economics, 2012); Jack A. Goldstone *et al*., 'A Global Model for Forecasting Political Instability', *American Journal of Political Science* 54:1 (2010), pp. 190–208; Anthony Vinci, 'Anarchy, Failed States, and Armed Groups: Reconsidering Conventional Analysis', *International Studies Quarterly* 52:2 (2008), pp. 295–314.

[5] See, for example, Ray Takeyh and Nikolas Gvosdev, 'Do Terrorist Networks Need a Home?', *The Washington Quarterly* 25:3 (2002), pp. 97-108.

[6] See Gareth Evans, *The Responsibility to Protect: Ending Mass Atrocity Crimes Once and For All* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2008).

[7] Important exceptions, which have asked related (but distinct) questions, include Bethany Lacina, 'Explaining the Severity of Civil Wars', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50:2 (2006), pp. 276–89; William Reno, 'Explaining Patterns of Violence in Collapsed States', *Contemporary Security Policy* 30:2 (2009), pp. 356–74.

[8] Phrase taken from Robert Rotberg (ed.), *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

[9] For a related critique, see David Carment *et al*., *Security, Development and the Fragile State: Bridging the Gap between Theory and Policy* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), Ch. 2.

[10] Robert Rotberg, 'The Failure and Collapse of Nation-States: Breakdown, Prevention, and Repair', in *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*, ed. Robert Rotberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 1.

himself, Robert Bates,[11] Tiffiany Howard,[12] and members of the State Failure Taskforce,[13] all of whom effectively equate the dissolution of state capacity with a condition of sustained armed conflict. Although widely-accepted, such an equation is limiting.[14] After all, if we simply assume that states which lose all capacity play host to large-scale violent conflict, it becomes impossible to even consider the idea that state capacity could collapse *without* triggering a large-scale escalation of violence. Consequently, it becomes impossible to recognize -- much less explain -- variation in the intensity of conflict within such a context.

Rather than assuming that low-capacity states are necessarily characterized by high-level violence, a second set of scholars has investigated that assumption. Specifically, Fearon and Laitin,[15] and Collier *et al*.,[16] have looked at whether there is a correlation between state incapacity and civil war. Both sets of authors find that to be the case. This conclusion is evidently important, but the cited studies give us limited insight into whether a *decrease* in state capacity leads to an *increase* in the likelihood of violent conflict, and similarly little insight into variation in the intensity of any such conflict. These limitations stem from the fact that both sets of authors use proxies of state capacity that show little or no variation over time (ranging from topography to colonial history and per capita income), and measures of violent conflict that are similarly static (civil war, defined by a threshold of 1000 battle deaths). Recognizing that static measures produce static findings, Gleditsch and Ruggeri have since adopted a more dynamic proxy for state capacity (i.e. changes of regime and leadership) and a lower threshold for measuring armed conflict (25 battle deaths), in order to investigate whether a weakening of the state increases the probability of violent conflict.[17] They find that it does.

The work of Gleditsch and Ruggeri certainly advances our thinking, but their quantitative study only aims to identify the general relationship between enfeebled states and the incidence of armed conflict. As such, they do not isolate or explain outliers; that is, they do

[11] Robert H. Bates, 'State Failure', *Annual Review of Political Science* 11 (2008), pp. 1–12.
[12] Tiffiany O. Howard, 'Revisiting State Failure: Developing a Causal Model of State Failure Based Upon Theoretical Insight', *Civil Wars* 10:2 (2008), pp. 125–46.
[13] State Failure Task Force, 'State Failure Task Force Report: Phase III Findings' (30 September 2000).
[14] See discussion in Natasha Ezrow and Erica Frantz, 'Revisiting the Concept of the Failed State: Bringing the State Back In', *Third World Quarterly* 34:8 (2013), p. 1324.
[15] James D. Fearon and David D. Laitin, 'Ethnicity, Insurgency, and Civil War', *American Political Science Review* 97:1 (2003), pp. 75–90.
[16] Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler, 'Greed and Grievance in Civil War', *Oxford Economic Papers* 56:4 (2004), pp. 563–95; Paul Collier *et al*., 'Beyond Greed and Grievance: Feasibility and Civil War', *Oxford Economic Papers* 61:1 (2009), pp. 1–27.
[17] Kristian Skrede Gleditsch and Andrea Ruggeri, 'Political Opportunity Structures, Democracy, and Civil War', *Journal of Peace Research* 47:3 (2010), pp. 299–310.

not consider cases in which state capacity suddenly drops but there is little or no subsequent violence. If we are to address the question of variation, however, then outliers demand attention. Qualitative scholars have arguably been best-placed to examine such puzzling cases, but have rarely done so until now -- possibly because we tend to suffer from something of a 'violence bias'. That is, we typically focus on cases in which large-scale violence is present, rather than cases in which violent conflict is unexpectedly limited or absent. In the discussion that follows, I aim to counter that bias by not only considering cases in which a severe loss of state capacity triggers *unfettered* violent conflict, but also cases in which violence remains *limited* or *moderated*.

TERMS AND (SCOPE) CONDITIONS

Any study of the relationship between state capacity and violent conflict is a conceptual minefield because each of the core terms under investigation is contested. This is not the place to contribute to that contestation in a meaningful way. It is the place, however, to clarify ground rules for the discussion at hand by identifying the outcome under investigation, delimiting the scope of the study, and defining the explanatory factors.

The outcome to be explained is variation in the *intensity of an episode of violent conflict*, where the latter term is understood as a forceful confrontation between two or more domestic belligerents, within the boundaries of a state. The start of a violent episode is marked by a significant escalation in the number and scale of violent clashes, and its end is marked by a significant de-escalation of violence. Building on the work of Nicholas Sambanis,[18] I assume that violent episodes differ more in magnitude than form and, as such, our task should be to understand why some civil conflicts remain limited in scope, while others escalate to varying degrees of intensity. To meet that task in a parsimonious fashion, I distinguish between just three levels of conflict intensity: *limited*, *moderated*, and *unfettered*. These categories map onto the tripartite classification of violent conflict intensity that has been used by the Heidelberg Institute in their annual 'Conflict Barometer'. I detail the attributes of each category in the methodological section, below.

The study is limited to contexts in which there has been a *sharp and severe dissolution of state capacity*, to such an extent that key state organs have ceased providing basic public

[18] Nicholas Sambanis, 'What Is Civil War? Conceptual and Empirical Complexities of an Operational Definition', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48:6 (2004), pp. 814–58.

services.[19] In operationalizing that scope condition, I accept the emerging consensus that state capacity -- and the loss thereof -- can be best assessed by considering indicators under three categories: coercive capacity, financial capacity, and administrative capacity.[20] With these categories in mind, the universe of cases for the study is restricted to states in which: (1) Security forces have become dysfunctional; (2) State authorities have become incapable of raising meaningful levels of state revenue; (3) Legislators have become incapable of producing laws and administrators have become incapable of providing basic public services. While I recognize that diverse shocks can trigger a sudden loss of capacity on each of these fronts, I do not address the causes of incapacity here. Rather, I offer a framework for understanding the consequences of a dissolution of state capacity for security. To facilitate observation and assessment of those consequences, the study is restricted to cases in which state organs fold over the course of one year or less.

As suggested above, my explanatory framework is built around consideration of the *strength of state and societal organs prior to a dissolution of state capacity*. In offering such a consideration, I assess state strength before dissolution by considering states' coercive, financial, and administrative capacities -- in line with the logic outlined above. My understanding of societal capacity, meanwhile, builds on Joel Migdal's definition of society as "a mélange of social organizations" that exercise some kind of influence over a given population.[21] Those organizations can be diverse in form, ranging from socio-cultural associations through to private economic institutions. While I recognize that, in practice, the distinction between state and society is sometimes blurred, I also assume that societal organs can be structurally and functionally independent from the state. That assumption then informs the way in which I assess the strength of society, which combines two approaches.[22] I first follow Robert Putnam and his advocates, by accepting that strong societies are characterized

[19] On occasion, I use the terms 'dissolution of state capacity' and 'collapse of state capacity' interchangeably. These terms should not be conflated with Robert Rotberg's very specific use of the term 'collapsed state' (Rotberg, 2004, 9-10).

[20] See Jonathan K. Hanson and Rachel Sigman, 'Leviathan's Latent Dimensions: Measuring State Capacity for Comparative Political Research' (Working Paper, Syracuse University, 2013); Daniel Lambach *et al.*, 'An Anchor for a Dazzling Debate: Conceptualizing State Collapse' (Working Paper, University of Duisburg-Essen, 2013); Hillel David Soifer, 'Measuring State Capacity in Contemporary Latin America', *Revista de Ciencia Política* 32:3 (2012), pp. 585–98.

[21] Joel S. Migdal, *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 28.

[22] For overviews of the approaches, see Marc Morjé Howard, *The Weakness of Civil Society in Post-Communist Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 44-46; Jan Kubik, 'How to Study Civil Society: The State of the Art and What to Do Next?', *East European Politics and Societies* 19:1 (2005), pp. 105–20.

by a high density of non-state associations and, by extension, a high degree of intra-communal trust.[23] And I complement this focus on 'social capital' with the more functional approach taken by historical institutionalists, who see that a strong society is one in which non-state organizations have significant and autonomous impact on social, economic, and political outcomes within a given territory.[24]

THEORIZING DISSOLVING STATE CAPACITY AND LEVELS OF VIOLENT CONFLICT

In this section, I combine insights from the literatures on state-society relations, state fragility, social mobilization, and insurgency to argue that the broad trajectory of insecurity following a severe loss of state capacity is shaped by the strength of state and societal organizations *before* state structures disintegrate. In so doing, I offer an analytic framework that ties three state-society arrangements before a dissolution of state capacity to three levels of conflict, after dissolution.

Arrangement 1: From 'State *and* Society' to Unfettered Violent Conflict

Prior to a dissolution of state capacity, the most common state-society dynamic is one in which state and societal organizations are both strong sets of actors, albeit to varying degrees across cases. In such an arrangement, state organs and various non-state actors compete and/or cooperate to provide security, manage the economy, and shape social norms throughout a given territory.[25] Ordinarily, interactions between state and societal actors on these fronts give rise to an informal division of labor. On one side, strong state forces claim a right to monopolize violence, and they generally succeed in exercising that right. At the same time, well-organized societal groups often exercise considerable control over the economic and socio-cultural spheres. For example, private economic actors use their control of financial capital to shape markets, inform consumer behavior, and influence economic policy. And societal actors such as religious groups, educational institutions, and advocacy networks use their social capital to generate and diffuse norms about 'appropriate' behavior.

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[23] See Robert Putnam, 'Tuning In, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America', *PS: Political Science and Politics* 28:4 (1995), pp. 664-83; Michael Woolcock and Deepa Narayan, 'Social Capital: Implications for Development Theory, Research, and Policy', *World Bank Research Observer* 15:2 (2000), pp. 229-31.

[24] Theda Skocpol and Morris Fiorina, 'Making Sense of the Civic Engagement Debate' in *Civic Engagement in American Democracy*, ed. Theda Skocpol and Morris Fiorina (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1999/2004), pp. 14-16.

[25] Joel S. Migdal, *State in Society: Studying How States and Societies Transform and Constitute One Another* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

As long as states remain functional, the co-existence of strong state and societal actors is unproblematic. In fact, where both sets of actors retain significant degrees of autonomy and capacity, state and society can provide mutual checks on one another's activities and, in so doing, offer layers of protection against despotism.[26] That said, although a balance between state and society can be a source of stability while an equilibrium is in place, a shock to the system can be a source of instability, and violence. One such shock can come through a sudden dissolution of state capacity.

Post-Dissolution: Opportunities, Motives, and Organizational Resources for Collective Violence

When a previously strong state suffers a sharp loss of capacity, we typically assume that opportunities and motives for armed conflict will crystallize. On the opportunity side, the collapse of a state's coercive capacity is seen to make it possible for actors to mobilize for, and realize, acts of coordinated violence without fear of state sanction.[27] And on the motives side, 'predators' are assumed to develop an interest in exploiting those opportunities for reasons of power and/or profit,[28] while 'protectors' become interested in organizing to defend against such predation.[29] As motives and opportunities take shape in this way, armed conflict becomes a possibility -- but *not* a certainty, contrary to the assumptions of those who understand violent conflict as essentially greed-driven opportunism within enabling environments.[30] After all, armed conflict involves armed groups, and we know that there are considerable collective action / free-rider barriers to the formation of such groups following a collapse of state capacity (and indeed, more broadly).[31] Thus, even when opportunity space for violence opens up

[26] See Howard (2003), Ch.3.

[27] Sobek (2010); Vinci (2008).

[28] See Željko Branović and Sven Chojnacki, 'The Logic of Security Markets: Security Governance in Failed States', *Security Dialogue* 42:6 (2011), pp. 553–69; Vadim Volkov, *Violent Entrepreneurs: The Use of Force in the Making of Russian Capitalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002); Mark R. Beissinger and Crawford Young, 'Convergence to Crisis: Pre-Independence State Legacies and Post-Independence State Breakdown in Africa and Eurasia', in *Beyond State Crisis? Postcolonial Africa and Post-Soviet Eurasia in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Mark R. Beissinger and Crawford Young (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2002).

[29] See Barry Posen, 'The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict', *Survival* 35:1 (1993), pp. 27–47; Nelson Kasfir, 'Domestic Anarchy, Security Dilemmas, and Violent Predation: Causes of Failure', in *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*, ed. Robert Rotberg (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004). Note that, in practice, it is often difficult to draw a clear line between predatory and protective motives.

[30] See, for example, John Mueller, 'The Banality of "Ethnic War"', *International Security* 25:1 (2000), pp. 42-70; Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

[31] Paul Collier, 'Economic Causes of Civil Conflict and Their Implications for Policy', in *Leashing the Dogs of War: Conflict Management in a Divided World*, ed. Chester A. Crocker *et al*. (Washington DC: United States

alongside state dissolution, motivated actors will not exploit that space collectively unless they are able to organize.

Despite the barriers to militia mobilization, recent studies of the micro-mechanisms of insurgency[32] have demonstrated what scholars of contentious politics have long known,[33] which is that the likelihood of mobilization increases when societal organizations are strong, and associated social networks are dense, for two reasons. First, members of tight-knit societal associations -- such as ethnic groups, trade unions, sports clubs and beyond -- tend to share high levels of within-group trust and mutual commitment, which increase the will and capacity of individuals to cooperate in the realization of high-risk collective actions, such as armed insurgency.[34] Second, well-endowed societal organizations sometimes provide potential militants with access to funds and/or networks of communication, both of which are seen to facilitate the formation and maintenance of armed groups, in practice.[35] Thus, where society has been strong prior to a dissolution of state capacity, and it remains so as a state folds, barriers to the formation of armed groups will be lowered, and the possibility of militia mobilization will rise commensurately.

The Expected Outcome: Unfettered Violent Conflict

When the dissolution of previously-strong state organs creates opportunities for violence, and persistently-strong societal organizations are on hand to provide the scaffolding around which gangs/militias can mobilize, there is a strong likelihood that violent conflict will erupt, and escalate. The best-known articulation of that escalation has come from scholars who

Institute of Peace Press, 2007); Mark Irving Lichbach, *The Rebel's Dilemma* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995); Will H. Moore, 'Rational Rebels: Overcoming the Free-Rider Problem', *Political Research Quarterly* 48:2 (1995), pp. 417–54.

[32] See, for example, Jesse Driscoll, *Warlords and Coalition Politics in Post-Soviet States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Sarah Elizabeth Parkinson, 'Organizing Rebellion: Rethinking High-Risk Mobilization and Social Networks in War', *American Political Science Review* 107:3 (2013), pp. 418–32; Paul Staniland, 'Organizing Insurgency: Networks, Resources, and Rebellion in South Asia', *International Security* 37:1 (2012), pp. 142–77; Jeremy M. Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Roger Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion: Lessons from Eastern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[33] See, in particular, Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978).

[34] Victor H. Asal *et al.*, 'Building Terrorism from Social Ties: The Dark Side of Social Capital', *Civil Wars* 16:4 (2014), pp. 402–24; Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy M. Weinstein, 'Who Fights? The Determinants of Participation in Civil War', *American Journal of Political Science* 52:2 (2008), pp. 436–55; Donatella della Porta, 'Recruitment Processes in Clandestine Political Organizations: Italian Left-Wing Terrorism', *International Social Movement Research* 1 (1988), pp. 155–69.

[35] Parkinson (2013); Omar Shahabudin McDoom, 'Antisocial Capital: A Profile of Rwandan Genocide Perpetrators' Social Networks', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 58:5 (2014), pp. 865–93.

have adapted the logic of the 'security dilemma' to the context of intrastate conflict.[36] For these authors, a dissolution of state capacity generates fear, which drives individuals to seek out non-state (i.e. societal) sources of protection. As non-state groups mobilize and arm, however, they have no reliable way of identifying which emerging groups have predatory goals and which are arming for self-defense. Within such a context of uncertainty, mistrust increases until one group takes pre-emptive action against perceived rivals. The conflict that follows is then difficult to contain because there are no state actors on hand to mediate relations between armed collectives. Thus, when strong state organizations fold and strong societal organs persist, the expected trajectory of insecurity is a spiral toward an *unfettered* level of violent conflict -- as was the case in the Caucasus following the collapse of the Soviet Union (detailed below),[37] in post-socialist Yugoslavia[38] and, more recently, in Libya alongside the dissolution of the Gaddafi regime.[39]

Arrangement 2: From 'State *over* Society' to Limited Violent Conflict

While state and societal actors are typically locked in a struggle for authority and control, states occasionally win that struggle and, thus, completely dominate society.[40] Under such an extreme -- and rare -- arrangement, state organs and ruling elites accrue vast quantities of what Michael Mann calls "despotic power", or the ability to act without consulting civil society.[41] The most dominant states actually try to render such consultation impossible by crushing all non-state economic and socio-cultural organizations.[42] To do so, the state may take control of economic production, trade, and distribution. And in the social sphere, repressive authorities may colonize civic associations and make them clients of the state. Where colonization efforts fail, the most repressive state authorities simply dissolve societal

[36] See Posen (1993); William Rose, 'The Security Dilemma and Ethnic Conflict: Some New Hypotheses', *Security Studies* 9:4 (2000), pp. 1–51; David. A. Lake and Donald Rothchild, 'Containing Fear: The Origins and Management of Ethnic Conflict', *International Security* 21:2 (1996), pp. 41–75.

[37] Christoph Zürcher, *The Post-Soviet Wars: Rebellion, Ethnic Conflict, and Nationhood in the Caucasus* (New York: New York University Press, 2007).

[38] Susan L. Woodward, 'Bosnia and Herzegovina: How Not to End a Civil War' (New York: Institute on War and Peace Studies, Columbia University, February 1997). Later version published in *Civil Wars, Insecurity, and Intervention*, ed. Barbara F. Walter and Jack Snyder (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

[39] Peter Cole, 'Borderline Chaos? Securing Libya's Periphery', *The Carnegie Papers* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012).

[40] Some describe such an arrangement as 'totalitarianism'. See definitions discussed in Juan J. Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000), pp. 65-66.

[41] Michael Mann, 'The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms and Results', *European Journal of Sociology / Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 25:2 (1984), pp. 185–213.

[42] Francis Fukuyama, 'The Imperative of State-Building', *Journal of Democracy* 15:2 (2004), p. 19.

organizations. No matter the strategies of domination, however, where pervasive and powerful states suppress all autonomous economic and associational activity, the outcome is the same: a breakdown of societal trust and a complete atomization of society.[43]

Post-Dissolution: Opportunity Space without Organizational Resources for Collective Violence

Dominant states and their repressive governments tend to be vulnerable because they intertwine the political structures of the regime with the administrative and security structures of the state. Thus, if a totalizing regime should crumble under the weight of its own illegitimacy, then state structures will also dissolve,[44] opening up opportunities for violence. Such an opening, however, will not automatically trigger an outbreak of collective violence. Rather, as argued above, violent conflict involves violent groups, and such groups only tend to form in the presence of strong societal associations and related networks of trust.

Given the centrality of societal organizations to militia mobilization, armed groups may *not* form where structures of society are highly fragmented -- and this may be the case immediately after a dominant state folds. After all, totalizing states repress societies with the express aim of undermining independent collective action and, although a collapse of state capacity will bring an end to state repression, the fabric of a decimated society will not regenerate immediately. Rather, years of repression can leave a legacy of social atomization that persists for days, months, or years thereafter.[45] Where that is indeed the case, the mistrust and social fragmentation that acted as barriers to mobilization under the previously dominant state will also persist, and continue to place a brake on collective action even after the state seizes up. Problematically, this will undermine the potential for 'civil' society to develop and contribute to post-collapse reconstruction. At the same time, however, it may also undermine the potential for 'uncivil' societal groups -- such as gangs and militias -- to mobilize and contribute to post-collapse destruction.

[43] Hannah Arendt in Rosemary H. T. O'Kane, *Terror, Force, and States: The Path from Modernity* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 1996), pp. 79–80.
[44] John Gledhill, 'Assessing (In)security after the Arab Spring: Editor's Introduction', *PS: Political Science and Politics* 46:4 (2013), p. 711.
[45] Howard (2003).

The Expected Outcome: Limited Violent Conflict

Armed conflict involves armed groups and, so, where societal atomization effectively blocks the formation of such groups, the likelihood of violent conflict will be low -- even when a state has become dysfunctional. That said, there may be an increase in *individual*-level, criminal violence, as unorganized actors exploit the collapse of state sanctioning for opportunistic ends. Such individual violations are certainly grave, but they are unlikely to trigger high-intensity violent conflict. After all, in the words of Nelson Kasfir, "Unorganized individuals…cannot create a security dilemma."[46] Consequently, when a previously dominant state folds alongside a fragmented society, the expected trajectory is for any violent conflict to be disorganized in form, and *limited* in intensity.

In practice, this outcome is likely to be rare, simply because few states totally dominate society in the manner described, and so few societies are wholly atomized when a state loses all capacity. That said, the lack of collective violence in post-totalitarian Albania, detailed below, can be seen as a paradigmatic example of this outcome. The case of Burma/Myanmar, where there was little or no increase in violent conflict when the state weakened alongside the devastation of Cyclone Nargis in 2008,[47] could also be understood through these lenses.[48]

Arrangement 3: From 'Society *over* State' to Moderated Violent Conflict

While the atomization of society by a dominant state sits at one end of the state-society continuum, the opposite end of that spectrum sees powerful societal actors regularly challenge -- and sometimes trump -- the power of chronically fragile states. In such an arrangement, weak state organizations perform only the most basic functions, such as providing a minimal degree of security. And, even then, state control may be limited to the capital city.[49] Outside of urban centers, state authorities delegate -- or simply default -- governance to strong societal actors.[50]

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[46] Kasfir (2004), p. 62.

[47] For a chart reflecting conflict escalation and de-escalation in Burma/Myanmar, see http://ucdp.uu.se/?id=1#country/775 (accessed 30 September 2016). For a general discussion of the relationship between natural disasters, state capacity, and armed conflict see Philip Nel and Marjolein Righarts, 'Natural Disasters and the Risk of Violent Civil Conflict', *International Studies Quarterly* 52:1 (2008), pp. 159-85.

[48] For discussions of Burma/Myanmar that are respectively consistent with, and contrary to, this understanding, see Lee Jones, 'Explaining Myanmar's Regime Transition: The Periphery Is Central', *Democratization* 21:5 (2014), pp. 781–82; Donald M. Seekins, 'State, Society and Natural Disaster: Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar (Burma)', *Asian Journal of Social Science* 37:5 (2009), pp. 717–37.

[49] See Hillel Soifer, 'State Infrastructural Power: Approaches to Conceptualization and Measurement', *Studies in Comparative International Development* 43:3/4 (2008), pp. 242-44.

[50] For discussions of non-state governance in frail states see, for example, Ken Menkhaus, 'Governance without Government in Somalia: Spoilers, State Building, and the Politics of Coping', *International Security* 31:3 (2007), pp. 74–106; Alexandra Lewis, *Security, Clans and Tribes: Unstable Governance in Somaliland, Yemen and the*

Such non-state 'governors' vary greatly in form.[51] Gangs and warlords, for example, tend to rule over finite territories in an extortionate fashion, offering few public services.[52] Tribal or religious customary governors, by contrast, often function more like quasi-states; they collect 'taxes' from populations under their control and use those funds to support the provision of a wide range of public goods -- ranging from education and health care, through to security and justice.[53] It is the delegation of security and justice functions to non-state actors that most clearly distinguishes the dominance of 'society *over* state' from the first arrangement described above ('state *and* society'), where a strong state monopolizes the provision of security, while strong societal actors only assert influence within the economic and socio-cultural domains.

Post-Dissolution: Constrained Opportunity Space for Collective Violence

To be sure, the security forces of fragile states do place *some* constraints on violence. Thus, when the capacity of such feeble states dissolves altogether, opportunity space for violence expands. Importantly, however, the resulting environment is unlikely to be anarchic.[54] Rather, since fragile states share governance responsibilities with non-state actors, the collapse of a low-capacity state may only have a limited impact on the overall provision of governance; formal structures of government will dissolve, but informal and customary forms of governance will persist. In fact, non-state governance is likely to strengthen following a dissolution of state capacity because non-state actors will no longer need to compete with the state for authority, and there will be increased popular demand for their services in the absence of the state, particularly in the key domains of security, conflict management, and justice.

Where customary, traditional, or religious governors take the lead in providing security and justice following a dissolution of state capacity, they can constrain violence in least three

Gulf of Aden (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2015); Thomas Risse, 'Governance in Areas of Limited Statehood', in *Oxford Handbook of Governance*, ed. David Levi-Faur (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[51] Zachariah Cherian Mampilly, *Rebel Rulers: Insurgent Governance and Civilian Life During War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

[52] See treatments of racketeers in William Reno, 'Mafiya Troubles, Warlord Crises', in *Beyond State Crisis? Post-Colonial Africa and Post-Soviet Eurasia in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Mark Beissinger and Crawford Young (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2002); Volkov (2002).

[53] Menkhaus (2007); Laila al-Zwaini, 'State and Non-State Justice in Yemen', *Proceedings of Conference on the Relationship between State and Non-State Justice Systems in Afghanistan* (Kabul: United States Institute of Peace, 2006); Volker Boege, *Traditional Approaches to Conflict Transformation - Potentials and Limits* (Berlin: Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management, 2006).

[54] I. William Zartman, 'Introduction: Posing the Problem of State Collapse', in *Collapsed States: The Disintegration and Restoration of Legitimate Authority*, ed. I. William Zartman (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1995), p. 1.

ways.[55] First, where disputes emerge within, or across communities, those conflicts can be managed through customary channels of negotiation, rather than violent confrontation. Second, when disputes turn violent, non-state governors can provide forums for mediation and arbitration, thereby limiting the escalation of violence.[56] And third, in the wake of violence, societal leaders may arrange for compensation and promote forgiveness, with a view to preventing a relapse of conflict.[57]

The Expected Outcome: Moderated Violent Conflict

Notwithstanding the promise of non-state governance, environments in which formerly fragile states have ceased functioning altogether are still insecure because there are no formal constraints on collective violence, and there are strong societal organizations on hand to underwrite the mobilization of armed groups. Indeed, where society has previously dominated the state, it is likely that a number of well-armed non-state militias already exist. As those extant groups compete with any new armed actors that form when state capacity dissolves, collective violence is likely to break out. But it may not spiral -- at least not immediately. Rather, where non-state actors are able to provide a degree of "governance without government"[58] along the lines described above, there will be institutionalized checks on the escalation of violence. Consequently, although the collapse of an already-frail state and the persistence of strong societal structures is likely to trigger an episode of violent conflict, the intensity of that episode may be *moderated*. Below, I argue that this dynamic played out in Yemen, as the state folded with the Saleh regime in 2011. Non-state governance also arguably checked violence in Mali, for example, when the already-fragile state weakened alongside the coup that ousted President Amadou Toumani Touré in 2012,[59] and in Somaliland following collapse of the central Somali state in 1991.[60]

A note of caution. While non-state governance may limit the intensity of violent conflict, it should not be valorized. After all, the principles upon which some forms of

[55] For overviews, based on the Afghan case, see Erica Gaston *et al.*, *Lessons Learned on Traditional Dispute Resolution in Afghanistan (*Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2013); Noah Coburn and John Dempsey, *Informal Dispute Resolution in Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2010).
[56] Menkhaus (1996).
[57] Boege (2006), p. 7; Dionísio Babo-Soares, '*Nahe Biti*: The Philosophy and Process of Grassroots Reconciliation (and Justice) in East Timor', *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 5:1 (2004), pp. 15-33.
[58] Menkhaus (2007).
[59] See Baz Lecocq *et al.*, 'One Hippopotamus and Eight Blind Analysts: A Multivocal Analysis of the 2012 Political Crisis in the Divided Republic of Mali', *Review of African Political Economy* 40:137 (2013): 343–57.
[60] Ahram (2001); Menkhaus (1996).

customary rule are based, the structures of deterrence upon which they rely, and the mechanisms of punishment that customary laws prescribe can be illiberal and harsh.[61] Also, on a purely practical front, customary governors often have few means of enforcing their rulings beyond threats of social sanction for non-compliance.[62] These limitations mean that, although non-state governance may check the escalation of violence in a fragile-turned-dissolved state, such an institutional environment is ultimately unstable.

ILLUSTRATING THE MECHANISMS: THREE CASES, THREE TRAJECTORIES

Having sketched a logic that connects three state-society dynamics before a dissolution of state capacity with three subsequent trajectories of violent conflict, I now present three, "diverse" case studies,[63] which illustrate each of the proposed causal dynamics (see Table 1).

Table 1: Logic of the Argument and Case Studies

Before Dissolution		**After a Dissolution of State Capacity**			
State-Society Arrangement	**Dissolution of State Capacity**	**Opportunity Space for Violence**	**Organizational Resources for Mobilization**	**Intensity of Violent Conflict**	**Case Study**
State *and* Society		Yes	Yes	Unfettered	Georgia (1991-93)
State *over* Society		Yes	No	Limited	Albania (1991-92)
Society *over* State		Constrained by informal governance	Yes	Moderated	Yemen (2011-13)

The first study details the strength of both 'state *and* society' in late-era Soviet Georgia, the collapse of state structures alongside the end of Soviet rule, and a subsequent slide into *unfettered* violent conflict between 1991 and 1993. The second case gives an account of the

[61] Fergus Kerrigan, ed., *Informal Justice Systems: Charting a Course for Human Rights-Based Engagement* (New York: United Nations Development Program, 2012); Thomas Barfield *et al.*, *The Clash of Two Goods: State and Non-State Dispute Resolution in Afghanistan* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2006).
[62] Gaston *et al.* (2013); Boege (2006).
[63] Jason Seawright and John Gerring, 'Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options', *Political Research Quarterly* 61:2 (2008), pp. 300–01.

dominance of 'state *over* society' in communist Albania, the dissolution of state capacity during the transition from communist rule in 1991, and the *limited* level of subsequent violent conflict. And the third narrative details the long-term strength of 'society *over* state' in Yemen, the collapse of state capacity alongside the end of Ali Abdullah Saleh's regime, and the development of violent conflict that was *moderated* by informal governance between 2011 and 2013.

The case studies are illustrative, rather than probative. Indeed, theory-testing would not be possible because I followed a 'pragmatic' approach to research.[64] That is, I combined deductive reasoning with an inductive reading of the cases as I formulated the theoretical framework introduced above, and the measures specified below. Thus, the theory, measures, and cases are not sufficiently independent from one another to allow for theory-testing. That said, the cases do allow me to illustrate the theoretical framework offered above and, in so doing, explore whether theory-testing would be warranted.

Each case study is necessarily brief, given space constraints, and this is acknowledged as a limitation. However, the three studies draw on extensive, and diverse, sources -- including interviews gathered through multi-country fieldwork.[65] I use these sources to present narratives that each follow the same, tripartite structure. In the first section, I gauge the respective strengths of state and societal organs before the dissolution of state capacity. In the second section, I sketch how the state in question lost capacity, and indicate how that loss shaped opportunities for violence. In the third section, I show how the abiding capacity of societal actors informed the potential for armed groups to mobilize, I detail the evolution of conflict among such groups, and conclude by measuring the intensity of violent conflict.

When considering the capacity of state organs prior to their dissolution, and assessing the extent to which those organs later became dysfunctional, I provide a qualitative measurement of the three categories of state capacity that I identified in the earlier conceptual discussion: security, finance, and administration. I assess security capacity by considering the internal organizational coherence of the armed forces and the material resources available to those forces.[66] Financial capacity is gauged by considering the ability of state authorities to

[64] Jörg Friedrichs and Friedrich Kratochwil, 'On Acting and Knowing: How Pragmatism Can Advance International Relations Research and Methodology', *International Organization* 63:4 (2009), pp. 701–31.

[65] Interviews were conducted on the ground in Tbilisi (Georgia), Tirana (Albania), London (UK), and also by telephone, between June 2014 and January 2015. Interviewees were purposively chosen for their experience and/or knowledge of the phenomena under investigation. All interviews were conducted by the author, sometimes in the presence of a translator.

[66] This draws on Hanson and Sigman (2013), pp. 6-7.

generate the level of public funds needed to provide basic public services.[67] And I measure administrative capacity by assessing the ability of legislators to generate and enforce laws, as well as the ability of state organizations to provide basic public services.[68]

When evaluating the outcome of each case -- understood as the intensity of violent conflict -- I first note the number of conflict fatalities reported by the Uppsala Conflict Database Program (UCDP), as well as further sources, for verification.[69] To facilitate comparison across cases, I also calculate the average annual number of fatalities for the duration of the conflict episode, relative to population size. Finally, I combine these data with a qualitative assessment of the dynamics of violence, and then categorize the outcome as a *limited, moderated,* or *unfettered* episode of violent conflict. As suggested above, these categories echo the three levels of violence intensity that have been used by researchers from the Heidelberg Institute, in their annual 'Conflict Barometer'. Specifically, my understanding of *limited* intensity violent conflict matches what they have called a "crisis", when "at least one of the parties uses violent force". My category of *moderated* violence is equivalent to their concept of a "severe crisis", understood as a condition in which "violent force is used repeatedly in an organized way". And my category of *unfettered* violent conflict is akin to their category of "war," which sees "violent force…used with a certain continuity in an organized and systematic way…[such that] the extent of destruction is massive…".[70]

Case 1: From 'State *and* Society' to Unfettered Violent Conflict in Georgia (1991-93)

The Conditions: Strong State and Strong Society in Soviet-Era Georgia

As a constituent part of the Soviet Union, the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia initially played host to one of history's most powerful and pervasive states.[71] Under Stalin, in particular, Soviet authorities used the coercive power at their disposal to extend the reach of the state into the local economy (through nationalization and central planning), and local society (through a complex and politicized nationalities policy).[72]

[67] For a discussion of how extractive capacity can be measured, see Soifer (2012), pp. 594-95.

[68] See discussion in Hanson and Sigman (2013), p. 4.

[69] Since the UCDP has not recorded any conflict fatalities in the case of Albania (due to the very low level thereof), I do not report UCDP figures for that case.

[70] Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research, *Conflict Barometer 2008* (University of Heidelberg, 2008), p. ii.

[71] Beissinger and Young (2002), pp. 26–27.

[72] Rogers Brubaker, 'Nationhood and the National Question in the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Eurasia: An Institutionalist Account', *Theory and Society* 23:1 (1994), pp. 47–78.

After Stalin's death triggered a degree of liberalization across the Soviet Union, however, civil and 'uncivil' societal groups increased in Georgia -- both in number, and in power. Soviet forces continued to dominate the security sector, to be sure, but Georgia's economy moved steadily out of the influence of local state actors, who proved unable (and perhaps unwilling) to stem the growth of an underground market, to such an extent that the informal economy rivalled the formal sector for size by the 1980s.[73] Vast networks of illicit private exchange flowed through the close kin and communal ties that had been at the heart of Georgian society for centuries.[74] Where informal trade deals broke down, a group of highly-organized criminals (known as 'thieves-in-law') were on hand to offer contract enforcement services,[75] providing a kind of parallel judicial system.[76] Born out of the Soviet prison system, these bandits had a particularly large presence in Georgia during the 1970s and 1980s.[77] Civil society activists were also beginning to organize in Georgia at that time, as intellectuals such as Merab Kostava used human rights-based claims to advance Georgian nationalist agendas.[78] Minority nationalities within Georgian territory -- particularly Abkhazians and South Ossetians -- responded to those claims by starting their own ethno-nationalist movements.[79]

Thus, by the late 1980s, the famously strong Soviet state had become counterbalanced by an equally strong set of societal actors in Soviet Georgia.

The Dissolution of State Capacity in Georgia, 1990-91

Across the course of 1990 and 1991, the Soviet Union unraveled and fifteen new republics were born, most of which had no previous experience of statehood. While authorities in all of the new states struggled to establish functional state organizations, Georgia faced three particular challenges on that front. First, the rupture between Tbilisi and Moscow was faster

[73] Pavel K. Baev, 'Civil Wars in Georgia: Corruption Breeds Violence', in *Potentials of Disorder : Explaining Conflict and Stability in the Caucasus and in the Former Yugoslavia*, ed. Jan Koehler and Christoph Zürcher (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 129.

[74] Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 315–16; Gerald Mars and Yochanan Altman, 'The Cultural Bases of Soviet Georgia's Second Economy', *Soviet Studies* 35:4 (1983), pp. 546–60. Also, interviews with a parliamentarian from Georgia's transitional government, and a Georgian writer, Tbilisi.

[75] Interview with a local political analyst, Tbilisi.

[76] Interview with a Georgian political activist, Tbilisi.

[77] Gavin Slade, 'Georgia and Thieves-in-Law', *Global Crime* 8:3 (2007), pp. 271–76. Also, interview with a Georgian expert in organized crime, Tbilisi.

[78] Suny (1994), pp. 309-10. Also based on an interview with a former parliamentarian / political analyst, Tbilisi.

[79] Stephen Jones, *Georgia: A Political History since Independence: Nation, State and Democracy, 1991-2003* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2012), pp. 41–45; John M. Cotter, 'Cultural Security Dilemmas and Ethnic Conflict in Georgia', *Journal of Conflict Studies* 19:1 (1999) (Online publication).

and deeper than elsewhere because Soviet authorities had previously lost all popular legitimacy in Georgia after they ordered a crackdown on unarmed demonstrators on the streets of Tbilisi in April 1989, killing 19.[80] Second, when independence was declared in April 1991, Georgia faced a "stateness problem".[81] That is, the territorial reach of the new state was unclear because Soviet Georgia had housed several autonomous regions and, after independence, the status of those regions was disputed. Specifically, Tbilisi claimed sovereignty over Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but local officials there refused to recognize Georgian authority.[82] Third, leaders who took responsibility for guiding the country through its transition from Soviet rule lacked political experience. In particular, the state's first chief executive, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, was an anti-Soviet dissident who had few skills as a manager, administrator, or state-builder. In the words of one interviewee, he "was a destroyer…[rather] than a builder."[83]

Under the watch of Gamsakhurdia and his coalition government, state officials failed to establish any meaningful financial, administrative, or coercive capacity across the course of 1991. On the economic front, sources of state revenue dried up as output from state-owned industry fell by 19%,[84] and overall productivity dropped by almost 16%.[85] Also, as trade links were broken with the Soviet Union, exchange shifted over to the already-large underground economy, where revenue fell out of the reach of the state's collectors.[86] Drained of resources and lacking experience, Georgia's new legislators struggled to translate their laws and decrees into effective administration.[87] Indeed, according to a senior bureaucrat from the period of transition, Gamsakhurdia was the president in name, but he was not able to realize any policy outcomes, in practice.[88] That said, he did manage to deconstruct the Soviet security apparatus

[80] Jonathan Wheatley, *Georgia from National Awakening to Rose Revolution: Delayed Transition in the Former Soviet Union* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2005), pp. 41–43; Svante E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus* (Surrey: Curzon, 2001), pp. 148–49.

[81] Monica Toft, 'Multinationality, Regions and State-Building: The Failed Transition in Georgia', *Regional & Federal Studies* 11:3 (2001), pp. 123–42.

[82] Jones (2013), pp. 43–45; Cotter (1999).

[83] Interview with a senior member of the transitional government, Tbilisi.

[84] Joint Economic Committee, Congress of the United States, *The Former Soviet Union in Transition, Vol. 1* (Washington DC: United States Congress, 1993), p. 25.

[85] Jones (2013), pp. 59-60.

[86] It is estimated that the shadow economy accounted for 24.9% of Georgia's GDP in 1989-90, and that this figure increased to an average of 43.6% between 1990 and 1993. Friedrich Schneider and Dominik Enste, 'Shadow Economies Around the World: Size, Causes, and Consequences,' *IMF Working Paper WP/00/26* (Washington DC: International Monetary Fund, 2000), p. 10.

[87] Despite assumptions of a legislative void in Georgia, a member of Gamsakhurdia's government told the author that he and his colleagues did pass a significant number of laws during their limited time in power. Interview, Tbilisi.

[88] Interview with a former Unit Director of the Supreme Soviet, Tbilisi.

by banning conscription to Soviet armed forces,[89] and cutting funding to the intelligence services.[90] Deconstruction was not matched by reconstruction, however. Gamsakhurdia's lack of experience in governing no doubt played a part in that failure, but even the most seasoned leader would have struggled to manage the security sector as paramilitary groups began to mobilize alongside the dissolution of the Soviet state.[91]

The Outcome: Unfettered Violent Conflict

The collapse of state capacity created opportunity space for violence in Georgia, but it was the country's strong societal organizations that provided the frameworks around which criminal gangs and militias mobilized to collectively exploit that space. Kinship networks were a particularly common basis for mobilization. As Jesse Driscoll notes, familial ties had been "necessary for everyday life" during the Soviet era, and the "dense networks of social capital" that developed around those ties then underwrote militia mobilization when Soviet power dissolved.[92] Regional kinship ties were central to the formation of so-called *Zviadist* militias,[93] for example, which rallied around Gamsakhurdia when his presidential power was challenged by two paramilitary organizations: the *Mkhedrioni* (Horsemen) and the National Guard.[94] Since the leader of the Mkhedrioni -- Jaba Ioseliani -- had been a prominent thief-in-law, his organization drew on the "thieves' traditions",[95] and on the personnel of various criminal organizations.[96] The Mkhedrioni and National Guard also reinforced their ranks by absorbing smaller, volunteer militias that initially formed around local community ties in Tbilisi, on a street-by-street basis.[97] And, outside Tbilisi, governing elites in Abkhazia and South Ossetia combined residual Soviet forces with local kinship groups to form their own paramilitaries,

[89] Baev (2003), p. 131.
[90] Driscoll (2015), p. 67.
[91] See Elizabeth Fuller, 'Paramilitary Forces Dominate Fighting in Transcaucasus', *RFE/RL Research Report* 2:25 (1993), pp. 74–82.
[92] Driscoll (2015), p. 100. In this statement, Driscoll is referring to militia mobilization in both of the cases he discusses: Georgia and Tajikistan.
[93] Vicken Cheterian, *War and Peace in the Caucasus: Russia's Troubled Frontier* (London: Hurst & Co, 2008), p. 186.
[94] Formally, the National Guard was a state institution. In practice, however, it functioned as an autonomous paramilitary under the command of Tengiz Kitovani.
[95] Ioseliani in Gavin Slade, 'No Country for Made Men: The Decline of the Mafia in Post-Soviet Georgia', *Law & Society Review* 46:3 (2012), pp. 637-38.
[96] Interviews with a Georgian expert in organized crime, and a local political analyst, Tbilisi.
[97] Based on author interviews with a former senior defense official, and local political analysts, Tbilisi. Also see discussion in Driscoll (2015), Ch. 4.

which were bolstered by members of sympathetic societal organizations from across the northern Caucasus and, allegedly, material support from Russia.[98]

Given the rapid proliferation of armed groups in post-Soviet Georgia, it is not surprising that collective violence soon erupted. Most immediately, it took the form of organized, violent criminal activity, which spiraled as the country fell into a condition of functional anarchy.[99] Alongside (and interwoven with) this criminal activity, tensions between the country's organized paramilitary groups also gave rise to three, discrete armed confrontations. One dynamic saw the Mkhedrioni and National Guard challenge Gamsakhurdia and his supporters on the streets of Tbilisi in December 1991, eventually ousting the elected president.[100] Zviadists then relocated to Gamsakhurdia's home region of Samegrelo (in the west), where they continued a low-level insurgency until October of 1993.[101] A second confrontation saw various Georgian paramilitaries, led by the Mkhedrioni[102] and National Guard,[103] repeatedly clash with South Ossetian-aligned forces across the course of 1991 and 1992, when a ceasefire was agreed and peacekeeping forces were deployed.[104] And, just as the Ossetian conflict was drawing down, a third -- and particularly brutal -- confrontation escalated between various Georgian paramilitaries and armed groups aligned with the Abkhaz regional government.[105] War raged in Abkhazia until late 1993, when the Georgian paramilitaries were expelled.

Combined casualty estimates for Georgia's post-Soviet episode of violent conflict vary enormously, running between a low-end estimate of 2,660 fatalities from 1991 through to the end of 1993 according to the UCDP,[106] to higher-end estimates of around 12,700 deaths from

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[98] Human Rights Watch, 'Georgia/Abkhazia: Violations of the Laws of War and Russia's Role in the Conflict', *Human Rights Watch Arms Project* 7:7 (1995).

[99] Spyros Demetriou, 'Rising From the Ashes? The Difficult (Re)Birth of the Georgian State', *Development and Change* 33:5 (2002), p. 876.

[100] For contemporaneous accounts of the clashes of December 1991, see Leslie Shepherd, 'Rival Troops Battle in Georgian Capital', *Associated Press*, 22 December 1991; AP Writer, 'Gamsakhurdia Flees Tbilisi; Residents Return to Shattered Homes', *Associated Press*, 6 January 1992.

[101] For an overview of the resistance in Samegrelo, see Suzanne Goldenberg, *Pride of Small Nations: The Caucasus and Post-Soviet Disorder* (London: Zed Books, 1994), Ch.5. For a selection of contemporaneous reports, see The Guardian, 'Separatist Unrest Corrodes Georgia's Hope for Future', *The Guardian*, 22 August 1992; Liam McDowall, 'Georgian Troops Clash on Retreat from Abkhazia', *Associated Press Worldstream*, 1 October 1993.

[102] Dodge Billingsley, 'Interviews with Tengiz Sigua and Jaba Ioseliani', *The Harriman Review* 13 (2001), p. 27.

[103] Zürcher (2007), pp. 125–26.

[104] Stefan Wolff, 'Georgia: Abkhazia and South Ossetia', *Encyclopedia Princetoniensis: The Princeton Encyclopedia of Self-Determination*, http://pesd.princeton.edu/?q=node/274 (accessed 26 May 2016).

[105] See Zürcher (2007), Ch.5; Baev (2003); Human Rights Watch (1995).

[106] http://ucdp.uu.se/#country/372 (accessed 27 September 2016).

area-specialist Christoph Zürcher,[107] and an estimated 13,300 fatalities in data compiled by Nicholas Sambanis.[108] Given that Georgia's population at the time was just 4.85 million, these figures suggest an annual average of between 18 and 91 conflict fatalities per 100,000, for each of the three years that spanned Georgia's post-Soviet episode of violence.[109] Conflict also displaced an estimated 350,000 civilians during that period.[110] When the scale of that displacement is combined with recognition of the wide geographic spread of conflict, and the high intensity of criminal violence that gripped Georgia at the time, the dissolution of previously strong state structures in the presence of strong societal networks can be seen to have triggered an *unfettered* episode of violent conflict in Georgia.

Case 2: From 'State *over* Society' to Limited Violent Conflict in Albania (1991-92)

The Conditions: State Domination of Society in Communist-Era Albania

During Albania's period of communist rule (1944-91), state actors dominated society to a far greater degree than was the case in neighboring communist regimes.[111] Indeed, the state's repression of society was so complete that some commentators now describe communist Albania as "the North Korea of its time".[112] To establish such absolute control, long-term dictator Enver Hoxha constructed a vast coercive apparatus around the principle of "people's war",[113] which held that the masses should be mobilized to protect the social revolution from external and internal enemies -- and Hohxa saw enemies everywhere. Fearing foreign invasion, specifically, the dictator forced Albanians to participate in bizarre schemes, such as building 700,000 concrete bunkers around the country for civil defense, and fixing spikes to trees as a

[107] Zürcher (2007, pp. 142-43), reports that the Abkhaz conflict cost up to 10,000 lives, the South Ossetian war saw 500-600 deaths, and the confrontation between Zviadists and the Mkhedrioni / National Guard saw around 2120 fatalities.

[108] See Tishkov and BKZ in supplementary material for Sambanis (2004): http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/suppl/10.1177/0022002704269355/suppl_file/Sambanis_Data.zip (accessed 13 December 2016).

[109] http://data.worldbank.org/country/georgia (accessed 27 September 2016).

[110] Cited in Thomas Greene, 'Internal Displacement in the North Caucasus, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia' in *The Forsaken People: Case Studies of the Internally Displaced*, ed. Roberta Cohen and Francis M. Deng (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1998), p. 284.

[111] Fatos Tarifa, 'The Human Dimension of De-Communization in Post-Communist Societies', *Helsinki Monitor* 5:2 (1994), p. 62.

[112] Julie Gonce, 'Anne-Marie Autissier: "Albania Was the North Korea of Its Time"', *Cafebabel*, 2009, http://www.cafebabel.co.uk/society/article/anne-marie-autissier-albania-was-the-north-korea-of-its-time.html (accessed 26 May 2016).

[113] Bernd J. Fischer, 'Enver Hoxha and the Stalinist Dictatorship in Albania', in *Balkan Strongmen: Dictators and Authoritarian Rulers of South Eastern Europe*, ed. Bernd J. Fischer (London: Purdue University Press, and C. Hurst & Co., 2007), p. 263.

makeshift form of protection against invading paratroopers. To prevent internal insurrection, Hoxha set up a highly repressive secret service known as the *Sigurimi*, which crushed dissent by establishing complex surveillance networks, purging party leaders, imprisoning dissidents, and controlling public information.[114]

State authorities also used their massive coercive power to close down all private space in Albania. On the economic front, industry and agriculture were nationalized, private trade was banned,[115] and authorities refused to countenance any underground economic activity.[116] Nor did they allow independent socio-cultural associations.[117] Religious organizations were outlawed in 1967,[118] for example, and other social spheres were brought under state control through the establishment of state-run 'mass organizations', such as artists' leagues, youth movements, and trade unions. Although these organs officially encouraged civic life, they were effectively tools for the vertical dissemination of party doctrine and surveillance, rather than the development of horizontal ties and social capital.[119] Consequently, over time, family became the only private space in Albania. But such was the level of mistrust within a heavily-monitored society that even familial bonds became strained.[120] Thus, by the time communism folded, society had effectively disintegrated in Albania.

The Dissolution of State Capacity in Albania, 1991

As communist regimes fell across Central and Eastern Europe in 1989, Albania's (communist) Party of Labor initially dug in its heels and insisted that Albania would "go [its] own way".[121] But the writing was on the wall for the regime and so, when students and intellectuals hit the streets to call for change in late 1990, Hoxha's successor, Ramiz Alia, responded by agreeing to reforms, including elections in March 1991. The Party of Labor

[114] Library of Congress, Federal Research Division, *Albania: A Country Study*, ed. Raymond Zickel and Walter Iwaskiw (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1994), 227–28. Also, according to a former government minister now writer, Albania was the only European state in which the communist party controlled all newspapers. Interview with the author, Tirana.

[115] Helga Turku, *Isolationist States in an Interdependent World* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p. 88; Julian Birch, 'The Albanian Political Experience', *Government and Opposition* 6:3 (1971), p. 366.

[116] Interviews with a former ambassador, and two former government ministers now economists, Tirana.

[117] Turku (2009), p. 85.

[118] Russell King and Nicola Mai, *Out Of Albania: From Crisis Migration to Social Inclusion in Italy* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008/11), p. 35.

[119] Interviews with a local journalist, and a former ambassador, Tirana.

[120] Interview with a local journalist, Tirana.

[121] Nigel Hawkes, 'In the Stalinist Deep Freeze', *The Globe and Mail*, 5 January 1990.

actually won those ballots on the back of the rural vote,[122] but it struggled to govern in the absence of urban support. Thus, following protests and a general strike, the communist government stood down in June 1991 and was replaced by successive provisional governments.[123]

Since regime and state had been wholly intertwined under communist rule, collapse of the communist system precipitated a complete dissolution of the Albanian state's financial, administrative, and coercive capacities. In the words of provisional Minister of the Economy, Gramoz Pashko, Albania's economic situation in 1991 was "catastrophic."[124] Industrial and agricultural output dropped massively between 1989 and the end of 1991, for example, as worker absenteeism skyrocketed and collective farms spontaneously decollectivized. Together, these dynamics triggered a 25% drop in GDP between 1991 and 1992 alone,[125] which led to a massive short-fall in state revenue.[126] With few resources at its disposal, the state became incapable of providing basic services: electricity stopped regularly;[127] water supplies dried up;[128] sewerage festered;[129] and garbage was not collected.[130]

In the security sector, the military, secret services, and police all suffered from divisions and desertions. In the army, specifically, a schism developed among those from the Military Academy who supported political reform, and those who opposed it.[131] Morale and discipline also collapsed among active army infantry after provisional governments repeatedly failed to come good on promises of a pay rise and improved conditions for troops.[132] Meanwhile, the much feared *Sigurimi* became dysfunctional, as secret service officers withdrew from public life -- possibly out of fear of prosecution for past repressions.[133] In July 1991, the agency was

[122] Tony Smith, 'Communists' Win Leaves Albania More Polarized, Violence Possible', *The Associated Press*, 1 April 1991.
[123] Artan Fuga, *Les mots dans la communication politique en Albanie* (Paris: Harmattan, 2003), pp. 138–41.
[124] United States, Department of State, 'Acting Secretary Kimmitt Meets with Albanian Democratic Leaders Berisha and Pashko' (State 094948, March 1991). Supplied to the author following a Freedom of Information request.
[125] Gramoz Pashko, 'Obstacles to Economic Reform in Albania', *Europe-Asia Studies* 45:5 (1993), p. 907.
[126] Instituti I Statistikes, 'Statistika nr. 1: Njoftime, analiza e te dhena statistikore periodike' (Tirana: Government of Albania, 1993), p. 16.
[127] Miranda Vickers and James Pettifer, *Albania: From Anarchy to a Balkan Identity* (London: Hurst, 1997), p. 75.
[128] Brenda Fowler, 'Albania Searches for a Stable Future', *The New York Times*, 16 February 1992.
[129] Helena Smith, 'Feuding Albania Destroys Itself', *The Guardian*, 24 September 1991.
[130] Interview with a former government minister now economist, Tirana.
[131] Interview with an Albanian academic specializing in national defense, Tirana.
[132] Interview with a senior figure from the Ministry of Defense from the period of transition, Tirana.
[133] Based on an interview with a former ambassador, Tirana.

disbanded and replaced by the National Intelligence Service.[134] The regular police forces remained organizationally intact, but the overt police had never been as well-resourced as their covert colleagues, and so they could not cope with the rising disorder. Indeed, such was their frailty that Police Chief Fadil Canaj admitted by early 1992 that "the general situation in Albania [had become] anarchic."[135] That condition was most evident in the failure of Albania's security forces to control the country's borders, which were the scene of massive, unregulated refugee flows in 1991; west to Italy, and south to Greece.[136]

The Outcome: Limited Violent Conflict

Collapse of the state's coercive power opened up opportunity space for violence in Albania. However, no armed groups went on to exploit that space by using violence as a tool for gaining power or profit. The most common explanation for the lack of organized violence in transitional Albania is that no collective actors were willing to use violence to realize political or criminal ends at that time.[137] While this certainly seems to have been the case, framing the argument solely in terms of a lack of motives for violence may mask another cause: No social groups were willing to use violence simply because there were no tight-knit social groups in existence. Rather, Albanian society remained atomized and fragmented after decades of totalitarian repression and, as such, there were no societal structures and associated networks of trust around which high-risk (violent) collective action could have been organized[138] -- be it predatory, protective, or otherwise.

The impact of atomization on (the lack of) mobilization can be indirectly gauged by noting several conspicuous absences that characterized Albania as state capacity dissolved. Although crime quickly spiraled, for instance, neighbors did not organize community protection groups, as may have been expected.[139] Rather, in the words of one interviewee, "There was no community protection…because we…didn't have a sense of community."[140] In contrast with the Georgian case, at least, there was little organized crime to fight -- simply

[134] Elez Biberaj, 'Albania' in *Eastern Europe: Politics, Culture, and Society since 1939*, ed. Sabrina Ramet (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), p. 271.
[135] Reuters, 'Official in Albania Sees Anarchy as Rioting and Looting Continue', *The New York Times*, 1 March 1992.
[136] Louis Zanga, 'A Crisis of Confidence', *RFE/RL Report on Eastern Europe* 2:16 (1991), pp. 1–4.
[137] The author was given such an explanation in interviews with diverse actors, Tirana.
[138] The author was given related explanations in an interview with a local university professor, and in written communication with a former government minister, now economist, Tirana.
[139] Interview with a local expert in international affairs, Tirana.
[140] Interview with a local journalist, Tirana.

because there had been no organized criminal groups under communist rule and, thus, there were no such groups on hand to exploit the opportunities for racketeering that arose as state organs folded in 1991.[141] Nor did armed groups mobilize along regional lines at that time, despite the existence of ethno-regional identities (Gheg and Tosk) that could have become subject to manipulation and mobilization, as was the case in neighboring countries. In fact, the only social ties that seem to have offered bases for mobilization in the wake of communist rule were political party allegiances -- to the outgoing communists, or to incoming reformists. To that end, there were early rumors that party-aligned militants were actually trying to organize and arm themselves in early 1991.[142] But if those rumors were true, then it seems that ringleaders failed to bring atomized Albanians together in support of insurgency, since there is little evidence of armed activity by such groups.

While the absence of armed actors in transitional Albania meant that there was no armed conflict, belligerent individuals did take advantage of the lack of state sanctioning capacity. Thus, over the course of 1991 and into 1992, there was a spree of unorganized looting, which led to the destruction of hospitals, schools, shops, and even nurseries.[143] Interpersonal violent crime also increased by an estimated 70%,[144] and there were up to 50 deaths in riots that broke out as individuals fought to access limited food reserves or flee the country.[145] Together, these unorganized violent incidents generated a deep sense of insecurity and deprivation in Albania. Importantly, however, they did not trigger an outbreak of sustained violent conflict, despite occasional provocations from dissolving state forces.[146] Rather, the violence that unfolded across 1991 and early 1992 was largely restricted to individual-level, criminal attacks. Thus, although the near-complete dissolution of state capacity in transitional

[141] Interviews with a member of parliament, and with an early figure in the Democratic Party, Tirana.

[142] See reports in Ian Traynor, 'Albanian Tanks on Streets as the Protests Continue', *The Guardian*, 22 February 1991; Mark Frankland, 'Riot Deaths Deepen Crisis in Albania', *The Observer*, 24 February 1991; David Binder, 'Albania's Hard-Liners and Democracy Backers Battle for Control', *The New York Times*, 24 February 1991.

[143] Fuga (2003), pp. 138–39; Liam McDowall, 'President Empowers Army To Stop Food Riots', *The Associated Press*, 7 December 1991; AFP, 'Food Riots in Albania Leave Two Dead', *Agence France Press*, 7 December 1991.

[144] Mary Battiata, 'Albania's Post-Communist Anarchy; Crime, Looting Spread in Balkan Land Once Ruled by Terror', *The Washington Post*, 21 March 1992.

[145] Anthony Clunies Ross and Petar Sudar, *Albania's Economy in Transition and Turmoil, 1990-97* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), p. 61; Liam McDowall, 'New Prime Minister Installed as 32 Die in Albanian Food Riot', *The Guardian*, 11 December 1991.

[146] Ian Traynor, 'Coup Rumours Sweep Tirana as Four Reported Killed in Clashes', *The Guardian*, 23 February 1991; Tony Smith, 'Shkodra and Tirana Tense after Post-Election Violence', *The Associated Press*, 3 April 1991; United States, Department of State, 'Albanian Post-Electoral Unrest' (State 107860, April 1991).

Albania give rise to a sharp rise in human insecurity, the country played to host to a *limited* level of collective violence.

Case 3: From 'Society *over* State' to Moderated Violent Conflict in Yemen (2011-13)

The Conditions: Societal Strength and State Fragility in Saleh-Era Yemen

The state has never been strong in Yemen. Colonial powers that moved through the region failed to assert authority over strong societal groups, and subsequent efforts to build modern state structures in the (northern) Yemen Arab Republic and (southern) People's Democratic Republic of Yemen were challenged by tribal and religious authorities. In 1990, there was a hope that state structures would consolidate after the north and south were merged into a unified Yemeni state, under Ali Abdullah Saleh. However, that hope proved illusory, and, instead, the country fell into civil war in 1994.[147]

Throughout the war and beyond, Saleh used patronage politics to hold Yemen together, but he never managed to establish the supremacy of state authority. State fragility was rooted in the inefficacy of the security services, which had limited capacity, particularly outside of urban areas.[148] Although there were vast numbers of troops on the books, the security forces were racked by patronage politics, internal divisions, and inter-agency competition -- all of which were encouraged by Saleh as means of coup-proofing his regime.[149] Funding was also a challenge for the state in the security sector and beyond; oil provided almost all government revenue,[150] but global oil prices were fickle and the country's reserves were limited.[151] Moreover, when public funds were available, Saleh distributed those resources according to a logic of patronage, rather than need.[152]

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[147] See Paul Dresch, *A History of Modern Yemen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Ch.7.

[148] Sarah Phillips, *Yemen's Democracy Experiment in Regional Perspective: Patronage and Pluralized Authoritarianism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), Chs. 3 & 4.

[149] Adam C. Seitz, 'Ties That Bind and Divide: The "Arab Spring" and Yemeni Civil-Military Relations', in *Why Yemen Matters: A Society in Transition,* ed. Helen Lackner (London: Saqi Books and SOAS, 2014); International Crisis Group, 'Yemen's Military-Security Reform: Seeds of New Conflict?', *Middle East Report No. 139* (Sanaa/Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2013), pp. 2–12.

[150] Peter Salisbury, 'Yemen's Economy: Oil, Imports and Elites', *Middle East and North Africa Programme Paper 2011/02* (London: Chatham House, October 2011), p. 2.

[151] In 2010, oil production in Yemen was only around 280,000 barrels per day. Sarah Philips, 'What Comes Next in Yemen? Al-Qaeda, the Tribes, and State-Building', *Middle East Program, No. 107* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2010), p. 2.

[152] April Longley Alley, 'The Rules of the Game: Unpacking Patronage Politics in Yemen', *The Middle East Journal* 64:3 (2010), pp. 385–409.

Where Saleh could not buy support, societal actors -- mainly tribes and religious groups -- remained the dominant local authorities.[153] This was particularly the case in the north of the country. In those tribal regions, customary authority was underwritten by a rich set of traditional laws, known as *'urf*.[154] According to this code, non-state actors played a variety of governance roles, particularly in the provision of protection and justice.[155] On a day-to-day basis, for example, tribal militias offered security in areas they designated as 'safe havens', such as markets, mosques, and hospitals.[156] Where inter-personal disputes arose in those areas, tribal sheikhs served as mediators and arbitrators, aiming to restore balance within communities by having parties responsible for violations acknowledge their responsibility and offer compensation.[157] Often, that aim was realized.[158] Thus, in contrast with the case of Soviet Georgia described above, non-state actors in Saleh-era Yemen regularly played key roles in providing security in territories that fell outside of state control.

The Dissolution of State Capacity in Yemen, 2011

Given their abiding weakness, state organs in Yemen effectively folded when capacity "dropped tremendously"[159] alongside the collapse of Ali Abdullah Saleh's regime in 2011.[160] Saleh's fall triggered a dissolution of state capacity because he had systematically intertwined the political structures of his regime with the administrative and security structures of the state. Thus, when his regime came to an end in late 2011 -- following months of protests, defections, and confrontations on the streets of Sanaa -- the patronage networks that he had used to prop

[153] Phillips (2008), Ch.4; Shelagh Weir, *A Tribal Order: Politics and Law in the Mountains of Yemen* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006/7).
[154] Lisa Wedeen, *Peripheral Visions: Publics, Power, and Performance in Yemen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 172.
[155] See Weir (2006/7); Paul Dresch, *Tribes, Government, and History in Yemen* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).
[156] National Democratic Institute, 'Yemen: Tribal Conflict Management Program', *Research Report* (Washington DC: National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, 2007), pp. 17–18; Dresch (1989), pp. 124–28.
[157] See Najwa Adra, 'Tribal Mediation in Yemen and Its Implications to Development', *AAS Working Papers in Social Anthropology 19* (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences, 2011); Daniel Corstange, 'Tribes and the Rule of Law in Yemen', *Annual Conference of the Middle East Studies Association* (Washington DC, 2008); Derek Miller, 'Demand, Stockpiles, and Social Controls: Small Arms in Yemen', *Occasional Paper No. 9* (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2003).
[158] For example, a 2006 report found that 90% of conflicts were prevented or resolved through the application of customary law. Nadwa al-Dawsari, *Tribal Governance and Stability in Yemen* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012).
[159] Interview with a Yemeni tribal governance expert, via telephone.
[160] See April Longley Alley, 'Yemen Changes Everything… And Nothing', *Journal of Democracy* 24:4 (2013), pp. 74-85.

up state organs weakened. And, as they did, competition for the spoils of the state intensified, which enfeebled state structures.

Across the course of 2011, all indicators of state capacity plunged. On the financial front, sources of government revenue shrank rapidly, as oil production dropped by around 35% in 2011.[161] Other sources of revenue also fell when the economy contracted by nearly 13% that year.[162] Where taxes were owed, meanwhile, the government struggled to collect those levies.[163] As state coffers dried up, the government risked defaulting on the payment of state salaries,[164] which undermined the confidence of state officers in their employer and, thus, their compliance with directives. Consequently, the writ of the government began to run thin outside of Sanaa; electricity, oil, and communications grids came under attack;[165] the south of the country became restive;[166] and the state simply ceded governance to the Houthi movement in the far north.[167]

As regions slipped out of state control, security forces seemed powerless to stop the rot. The military was racked by factional strife after the powerful general, Ali Mohsen, and his supporters split with forces that remained loyal to Saleh.[168] The police, meanwhile, were simply ineffective, as shown by a poll taken in 2012, which revealed that 60% of the population had little or no confidence in the police forces. In the southern region of Abyan, in particular, 98% of respondents suggested they did not even know of a police station in their area.[169]

The Outcome: Moderated Violent Conflict

As the Yemeni state unraveled across the course of 2011, opportunity space for violence expanded, and a host of armed non-state actors soon stepped into that void. Many of the groups that mobilized had previously existed in some form, typically as tribal militias. But new armed

[161] Bernard Haykel, 'The State of Yemen's Oil and Gas Resources', *Policy Brief* (Oslo: Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, 2013), p. 1.
[162] http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?locations=YE (accessed 20 January 2017).
[163] Ali Saeed, 'Economists: Government Must Collect Taxes, Better Manage Oil Revenues', *Yemen Times*, 5 November 2013.
[164] International Crisis Group, 'The Huthis: From Saada to Sanaa', *Middle East Report No.154* (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2014), p. 18.
[165] Dimitis Soudias and Mareike Transfeld, *Mapping Popular Perceptions: Local Security, Insecurity and Police Work in Yemen* (Sanaa: Yemen Polling Center, 2014), pp. 17 & 39.
[166] International Crisis Group, 'Yemen's Southern Question: Avoiding a Breakdown', *Middle East Report No.145* (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2013b).
[167] ICG (2014).
[168] ICG (2013), p. I.
[169] Soudias and Transfeld (2014), 45.

groups were also able to form, given the density of social ties in Yemen and the wide availability of weapons.[170]

As established and emerging groups tested the boundaries of their power in the emerging institutional environment, violent conflicts broke out. While the intricacies of those conflicts are too complex to effectively relay here, three broad dynamics can be identified. First, there was a violent struggle for national-level power between forces that remained loyal to Saleh, on one side, and a loose alliance of militias led by Ali Mohsen and the powerful al-Ahmar family, on the other.[171] Second, at the sub-national level, there was low-level violence from regional movements in the north and south,[172] as well as a series of more intensive attacks perpetrated by al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and its affiliate, *Ansar al-Sharia*.[173] Those attacks triggered the mobilization of so-called 'Popular Committees', which were tribal militias that worked with government forces to repel Ansar from the southern region of Abyan.[174] And finally, at the local level, there were a number of low-level clashes between tribes over land, loot, access to water, and family honor.[175]

Together, these three layers of armed conflict generated deep insecurity in Yemen between 2011 and 2013. However, violence at that time did not escalate to a condition of unfettered civil war, despite early predictions to that effect.[176] In fact, although conflict fatalities increased in 2011, they then decreased over the two years that followed. Given the vast number of armed actors in Yemen, this pattern would be puzzling if Yemen had been void of governance. However, it was not. Rather, although formal state governance and security became limited in 2011, institutions of customary governance remained intact, and those non-state structures provided a check on the escalation of violent conflict.

The capacity of tribal governors to constrain violence varied across the cited levels of conflict. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, customary governors proved most effective at managing

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[170] In 2001, there were almost 5.6 million small arms in the hands of Yemeni tribesmen. Miller (2003), p. 28.

[171] See Sheila Carapico, 'Yemen Between Revolution and Counter-Terrorism', in *Why Yemen Matters: A Society in Transition,* ed. Helen Lackner (London: Saqi Books and SOAS, 2014); Ahmed al-Haj and Lee Keath, 'Rocket Wounds Yemen President, Escalating Fight', *Associated Press Online*, 4 June 2011; Alley (2013).

[172] April Longley Alley, 'Assessing (In)security after the Arab Spring: The Case of Yemen', *PS: Political Science & Politics* 46:4 (2013b), pp. 721–26.

[173] International Crisis Group, 'Yemen: Enduring Conflicts, Threatened Transition', *Middle East Report No. 125* (Brussels: International Crisis Group, 2012).

[174] Alley (2013b), p. 722. Also, interview with a former foreign diplomat, London.

[175] See treatments in Soudias and Transfeld (2014).

[176] See, for example, Khaled Fattah, 'Yemen: A Social Intifada in a Republic of Sheikhs', *Middle East Policy* 18:3 (2011), pp. 79–85; Samia Nakhoul and Mohammed Ghobari, 'Yemen on Brink of Civil War as Clashes Spread', *Reuters*, 27 May 2011; J. Dana Stuster, 'In Yemen, Both Leadership and Opposition Face Possible Collapse', *The Atlantic*, 6 June 2011.

local-level, tribal conflicts, which actually seem to have dropped in number from 2011.[177] At the city level, meanwhile, tribal mediators made efforts to broker deals with AQAP and its affiliates. On occasion, those efforts met with success -- most notably in the city of Radaa, where tribal leaders were repeatedly able to negotiate the withdrawal of AQAP forces over several years.[178] At the provincial level, some tribal leaders sought to limit the diffusion of violence that broke out in Sanaa, by agreeing that tribes in their regions would not take sides in the national-level conflict.[179] And at the national level itself, tribal leaders went even further by trying (albeit with limited success) to broker deals between government and opposition forces as violence continued in the capital throughout 2011.[180]

Overall, then, tribal governance seems to have played a role in checking the escalation of violence in parts of Yemen following the dissolution of state capacity in 2011,[181] alongside international mediation efforts and a formal domestic-level negotiation process known as the National Dialogue. There were, however, still large numbers of conflict fatalities between 2011 and 2013. The UCDP reports a total of 4212 deaths for the conflicts they identify in Yemen at that time.[182] The International Institute for Strategic Studies, meanwhile, offers a higher overall estimate for the period, reporting 3000 conflict fatalities in 2011, then a decline to 2300 in 2012, and a further decline to 950 in 2013 (which was nearing the level of pre-dissolution violence), for a total of 6250 conflict-related deaths during the three-year post-Saleh episode of violence.[183] In a country of 24.2 million (2011),[184] these two estimates suggest an annual average of between 6 and 9 conflict fatalities per 100,000, over each of three years. When these figures are combined with recognition of the human insecurity that characterized Yemen between 2011 and 2013, and population displacement within the country at that time, the episode of violence that followed the 2011 dissolution of state capacity in Yemen can be described as an extremely grave, but *moderated*, episode of violent conflict.

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[177] Erica Gaston and Nadwa al-Dawsari, 'Waiting for Change: The Impact of Transition on Local Justice and Security in Yemen', *Peaceworks Report No. 85* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2013); al-Dawsari (2012), p. 1.

[178] Yemen Post Staff, 'Tribal Mediation Ceases Battles between Army, Militants in Yemen', *Yemen Post*, 30 January 2013; AFP, 'Al-Qaeda Fighters Agree to Pull out of Yemen's Rada "Without Resistance"', *Alarabiya.net English*, 25 January 2012.

[179] Gaston and al-Dawsari (2014), p. 13.

[180] BBC Online, 'Yemen: Hashid Tribal Fighters in Ceasefire with Saleh', *BBC News Online*, 28 May 2011.

[181] Interviews with a Yemeni expert in tribal governance, via telephone, and with a former foreign diplomat, London.

[182] http://ucdp.uu.se/#country/678 (accessed 12 December 2016)

[183] https://acd.iiss.org/en/statistics/selectreporttype (accessed 27 September 2016)

[184] http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=YE (accessed 27 September 2016).

In 2014, a new -- and more intense -- conflict episode erupted in Yemen, after Houthi rebels from the north began to move steadily southwards, taking control of Sanaa, and beyond. As they headed down to Aden, local coping mechanisms initially seemed to mitigate the intensity of violence. However, when Saudi Arabia intervened by air, the Yemeni conflict became part of a regional struggle. As it did, informal governance could no longer contain the conflict, which then escalated to an *unfettered* level of intensity.

CONCLUSION

This study has proposed that the strength of state and societal organizations before an acute drop in state capacity sets parameters for variation in the presence, absence, and intensity of violent conflict after state capacity dissolves. Since context-specific dynamics following a dissolution of state capacity also shape the likelihood and scale of violence, the framework provided does not offer a sufficient explanation of all observed variation in levels of post-dissolution violence. That said, on the assumption that structural factors narrow the scope of possible outcomes, I have argued that consideration of state and society prior to a dissolution of state capacity can provide a good starting point for analysis.

To illustrate that claim, I have explored three cases, which span the full range of variation in levels of violence "when states fail".[185] In Georgia, both state and society had previously been strong sets of actors. When dissolution of the Soviet state then opened up opportunity space for collective violence, societal actors used their organizational networks as bases for militia mobilization. As armed groups competed for power and position over a three year period, violence escalated to an *unfettered* level. In Albania, pervasive state structures folded alongside the end of communist rule, creating opportunities for violence. However, since society had been atomized under the outgoing regime, there were few societal frameworks around which militias could mobilize. Consequently, although there was a high degree of unorganized criminal violence and human insecurity in transitional Albania, violent conflict was *limited*. Finally, when the Yemeni state became dysfunctional in 2011, expanding opportunity space for violence was exploited by existing and emerging armed groups. Despite early predictions, however, the episode of conflict that played out between 2011 and 2013 did not spiral into civil war. Rather, partly due to the interventions of societal governors, violence was *moderated*, and then receded.

[185] Rotberg (2004).

Given the exploratory nature of this study, it would be premature to use the arguments presented here as a basis for making clear policy recommendations. Nevertheless, perhaps it is worthwhile to close by reflecting on how the proposed arguments could shape the way we think about responses to 'state failure', if those arguments are explored further and found to be convincing. With that in mind, the logic presented above points to three post-dissolution contexts of insecurity, and three associated frameworks of conflict response.

First, where previously strong states fold and previously strong societies remain in place, a case could be made for the early deployment of robust external security guarantees (i.e. peacekeeping forces), with the aim of preventing well-organized societal actors from taking up arms and then competing violently for power and profit. The potential merits of such a preventive deployment were seen in Macedonia from 1993, when a small United Nations force was able to contribute to the prevention of violent conflict in the new, feeble state -- even as Yugoslavia dissolved and surrounding regions fell into civil war.[186]

Second, where a previously dominant state becomes dysfunctional and society remains atomized, low-level external security guarantees may be necessary to assure basic order in the face of rising criminal violence. Those guarantees, in turn, may need to be complemented by significant levels of humanitarian aid. After all, years of state repression and economic mismanagement under totalizing rule are likely to produce extreme levels of human insecurity. In view of this, Bruce Bennett and Jennifer Lind have argued that vast humanitarian assistance would be needed in case of regime collapse in North Korea, even though physical security conditions on the ground *could* remain relatively benign.[187]

Finally, where a previously fragile state folds altogether, but customary systems of governance are left standing, external efforts to provide stability may benefit from working closely with traditional governors, rather than pushing against customary rule or simply ignoring traditional authorities -- as has occasionally been the case.[188] Such cooperation would ensure that local stakeholders have an interest in ensuring the success of a state reconstruction effort. By contrast, failure to include local governors in processes of state-building could run the risk of transforming potential peacemakers into potential peace spoilers.[189]

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[186] Alice Ackermann, 'The Prevention of Armed Conflicts as an Emerging Norm in International Conflict Management: The OSCE and the UN as Norm Leaders', *Peace and Conflict Studies* 10:1 (2003), p. 10.

[187] Bruce W. Bennett and Jennifer Lind, 'The Collapse of North Korea: Military Missions and Requirements', *International Security* 36:2 (2011), pp. 84–119.

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