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# Complicit States and the Governing Strategy of Privilege Violence: When Weakness Is Not the Problem

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## Keywords

democracy, violence, homicide, repression, conflict, inequality

## Abstract

This article seeks to explain why some high-capacity democracies have high levels of internal violence. These regimes present a puzzle: Why are bureaucratically capable states that ostensibly answer to voters failing to provide security? Challenging the "weak states" paradigm, we argue that states with high capacity and significant violence within marginalized populations exhibit a governance pattern in which governing factions deliberately weaken security services and collude with nonstate violent actors to maintain power and ensure extreme levels of privilege and impunity. Although these states do not feature ideal-type institutions, they are not weak. Instead, economic and political elites are complicit in enforcing a system of material inequality and uneven democratic incorporation maintained by violence. As politicized security agencies become incapacitated and repressive, citizens turn to nonstate security providers for protection, from private firms to criminals and insurgents, increasing social violence and obscuring the state origins of what we term privilege violence.

## INTRODUCTION

**Elites:** actors with access to political agenda-setting power and/or concentrated economic wealth

**Marginalized population:** individuals whose economic or other traits renders them physically vulnerable and subject to significant institutional and/or informal barriers to social mobility

Countries facing high levels of internal violence are commonly described as weak, an undertheorized category that combines deficits in capacity, legitimacy, and will. Most political science inquiry has focused on the relationships between violence and capacity, poverty, and regime type. Little research has attempted to unpack the problem of will.

This article begins with a review of the literature on weak states and violence. We then use a few simple quantitative findings to illuminate a puzzle: Why are so many democratic or quasi-democratic countries with relatively strong capacity unable to prevent widespread violence against marginalized members of their societies? We draw on extant literature and field research Kleinfeld conducted in Colombia, the Republic of Georgia, Italy, Northern India, and West Africa, and oversaw in Mexico, Honduras, and Bihar, India, to inductively portray a particular pattern of governing reliant on violence. We develop a theoretical model of this governing pattern, which we term privilege violence, in which factionalized elites use violence to maintain power and extreme privilege within a quasi-democratic context by creating a bounded democracy that restricts the policy choices of the middle class and severely restricts those of the socioeconomically marginalized. States employing privilege violence are more accurately viewed not as weak but as complicit in the violence that binds their governing system.

## WEAK STATES

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, policy makers in the United States, Britain, and Europe began to see weak states—governments whose militaries and police were poorly trained and resourced, whose writ did not extend across their entire territories, whose bureaucracies seemed inept—as enabling terrorist activity, spurring civil wars, and encouraging insurgencies. In an introduction to the US National Security Strategy, President George W. Bush wrote: "The events of September 11, 2001, taught us that weak states, like Afghanistan, can pose as great a danger to our national interests as strong states. Poverty does not make poor people into terrorists and murderers. Yet poverty, weak institutions, and corruption can make weak states vulnerable to terrorist networks and drug cartels within their borders" (Bush 2002).

Thomas Hobbes first posited the idea that weak governments with weak institutions cause or enable violence. Surveying the English civil war and the interpersonal violence of the mid-1600s, he advocated for a leviathan government. The way out of a "war of all against all" was through a strong state that could gain a monopoly on force.

Hobbes' insight into the importance of a strong state to end violence remains central to political science. An early voice on weak states, Rotberg (2003), argues that the state's provision of a security guarantee is essential for the other elements of a state to function. Fearon & Laitin (2003) suggest that the financial and bureaucratic poverty of states makes insurgency attractive because rebels can potentially take over the state and reap its benefits. Scholars who believe that insurgents are motivated by greed (Collier & Hoeffler 2004) and those who find grievance more central (Cederman & Girardin 2007) agree that state weakness enables the perpetuation of violence. Several researchers have found that weak institutions play a crucial role in civil war and the violent implosion of a state (Goldstone 1993, Goldstone et al. 2010, Goodwin 2001, Hegre et al. 2001, King & Zeng 2001, Skocpol 1979). Their work suggests that many countries have groups harboring serious grievances, but those with stronger militaries and united, competent governments can deter or overcome challengers.

## When Capacity Is Not the Problem

The consensus view holds that when democratic countries are beset by conflict, violence, and developmental challenges, a weak state is the core of the problem. However, empirical evidence is thin. In their assessment of indicators of food rioting, Natalini et al. (2015) find that only three of the ten state weakness indices they evaluated had greater predictive or descriptive power than a raw measure of gross domestic product per capita. Menkhaus (2003) finds that organized crime and terror groups avoid chaotic environments lacking government presence. The RAND Corporation has found that providing training and equipment to address government weakness failed to increase stability in all of Africa, the Middle East, and other more fragile states globally (McNerney et al. 2014, Watts et al. 2014).

Loose theorization drives some of these meager empirical results. Indices attempt to quantify state weakness and to compare it between countries on the basis of gaps in capacity, legitimacy, and security (Rice & Stewart 2016). The Brookings Institution's definition, typical of the field, combines the problems of capacity and will, defining weak states as

> countries that lack the essential capacity and/or will to fulfill four sets of critical government responsibilities: fostering an environment conducive to sustainable and equitable economic growth; establishing and maintaining legitimate, transparent, and accountable political institutions; securing their populations from violent conflict and controlling their territory; and meeting the basic human needs of their population. (Rice & Stewart 2016, p. 3)

Incapacity is often attributed to poverty—but the findings on poverty as a driver of violence are troubled. Poverty is correlated with civil war, but causality is unclear. Low-level violence tends to precede civil war and lower income (Sambanis 2005). Since 90% of civil wars now recur in the same countries (Walter 2015), conflict is more likely to be causing poverty than poverty is to be causing conflict. Collier & Rohner (2008) finds that poor democracies tend toward civil war more than wealthier democracies. Yet for autocracies, greater wealth yields only a slight reduction in the probability of war (Collier & Rohner 2008, Hegre & Nome 2010). The differences across regime types challenge the thesis that poverty-weakened institutions encourage rebellion by making insurgents perceive a greater likelihood of success. Statistics on criminal violence further strain the hypothesis of poverty's causal role. While high-income countries have the lowest rates of homicide, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime homicide data consistently show that middle-income countries have greater homicide rates than low-income states. Crime, of course, has different causes than political violence—but deterrence theory suggests that whatever risk factors could motivate individuals toward violence, a wealthier state with stronger institutions has greater opportunities to deploy police and other interventions that reduce opportunities for criminal behavior while increasing the costs through sentencing regimes (Ehrlich 1975).

Repression and poverty are so highly correlated (Davenport 2007, p. 14; Poe & Tate 1994) that poverty is used as a control for repression (Hill & Jones 2014). Yet why poor countries would be more repressive goes unaddressed. Since repression is also highly correlated with insurgency, political violence, civil war, and criminal violence, poverty seems less likely to be causing the state to respond with repression than these other forms of violence.

## Complicit States: The Data

To test the causality of poverty and weak institutions as a driver of violence, we created a scatter plot of democracies and anocracies (regimes with democratic and autocratic features) after the

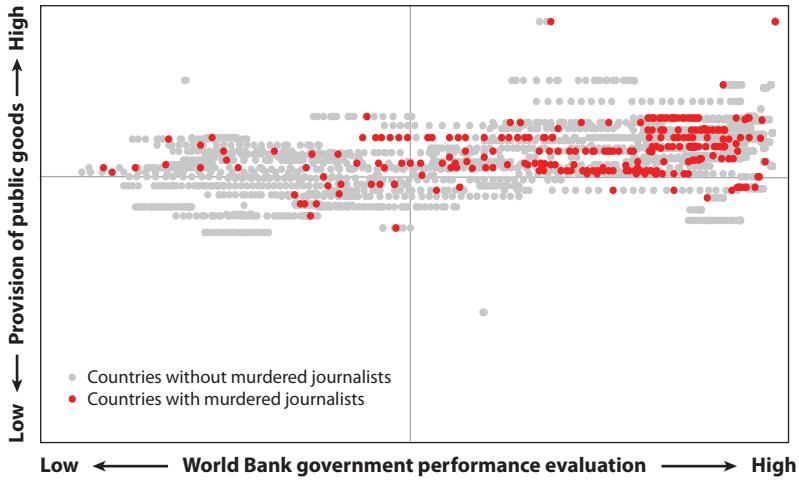


**Figure 1**

Known murdered journalists and state capacity. Conventional weak state theory would predict very few, if any, murdered journalists in the upper right quadrant of the graph. See data from the Committee to Protect Journalists (2017), World Bank annual report data, and project performance evaluation data from the World Bank Independent Evaluation Group.

Cold War (1992–2015), with country–year pairings of public goods provision and evaluations on World Bank project performances by the Bank's Independent Evaluation Group. We created our universe of cases by dropping country–year observations from the Polity IV data set that scored −6 or less on the Polity2 indicator, a standard cut-off point to eliminate autocracies. We used a state's ability to provide access to public goods such as electricity, water, and sanitation, as well as its ability to implement World Bank projects, as indicators of a baseline level of state capacity.[1] We would, then, expect countries in the upper right-hand corner of this scatter plot to have robust enough institutions for security guarantees. Yet overlaying data on murdered journalists, we find a cluster of such homicides in these otherwise capacious states, many of which demonstrate a consistent pattern of journalist homicides, not a year or two of bad luck (**Figure 1**).[2]

Violence against minority populations presents another puzzle for these otherwise high-functioning states. The Minorities at Risk data set measures violence against both peaceful civilians and nonviolent minority group organizations between 2004 and 2006. We coded countries with

[1]The indicator for public goods provisions creates an average across access to electricity, improved water supply, and improved sanitation variables, drawn from World Bank annual-level data. We calculated project performance evaluation data as an average of Independent Evaluation Group, the World Bank's monitoring body, evaluations assessing the borrowing government's implementation and project management performance over the time period. Significant variations in project length, differences between evaluation dates and project end dates, and inconsistent project activity levels in a given year made it impossible to construct comparable annual-level data.

[2]The data from the Committee to Protect Journalists omit journalists killed as a direct result of an ongoing conflict in which death occurred in crossfire. Magnitude of murders and frequency both matter, but given varied population sizes, frequency is more salient. In at least 15 years out of 23, Colombia, Brazil, Mexico, and Russia had at least one murdered journalist, a consistency mirrored in Pakistan and the Philippines (13 years), and to a lesser extent Sri Lanka, Thailand, Turkey, the Ukraine, and Venezuela (5–8 years with murdered journalists). Magnitude and frequency appear related: In the Philippines in 2009, there were 33 known murdered journalists; in Turkey in 1992 there were 9; in Pakistan there were 7 murdered each year from 2010 through 2012, and in most years, this set of countries witnessed at least 2–4 journalists killed in years in which any were murdered.

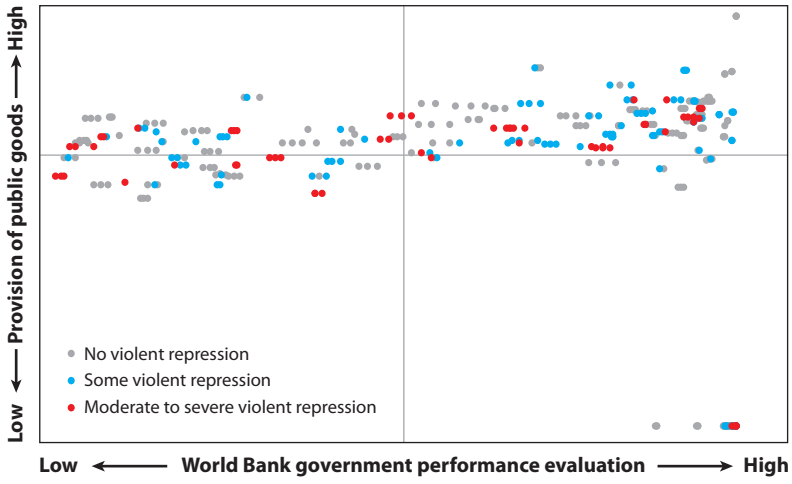


**Figure 2**

Government capacity and violence against minority groups. Weak state theory maintains that governments repress as a result of their weakness, and the repressive cases plotted on the left may demonstrate such dynamics. However, the governments to the far right of the figure, which provide 85–99% of their populations with public goods, clearly have the capacity to engage peaceful minority populations in nonrepressive ways. See Minorities at Risk Project (2009) for repression data.

significant repression against one group or some repression against many groups as "moderate to severe repression," and countries with some repression against one group or minor repression against more than one group as "some repression." **Figure 2** displays a similar cluster of cases where states possess significant institutional capacity but nonetheless repress minority groups.

Subsetted descriptive statistics, as shown in **Table 1**, reveals that violent and discriminatory democracies and anocracies are united by broader governance patterns.[3]

These countries display higher levels of corruption at both executive and bureaucratic levels. Their courts are less independent at both high and low levels, and their judiciaries experience more frequent political and rhetorical attacks from other branches of government. The decrease in judicial quality scores outpaces that of their corruption scores, indicating some heterogeneity in institutional dysfunction. Similarly, the incidence of political terrorism increases substantially as violence against minorities increases, and political terror exhibits a particularly strong increase where journalists are being murdered. Rural populations are consistently more underserved in these countries in terms of access to public goods such as water, electricity, and sanitation, as compared to both their urban counterparts and rural populations in nonviolent countries.[4] Interestingly, World Bank project outcomes improve with increased levels of violence.

[3]These tables rely on the same underlying data used throughout, complemented by corruption and judicial indicators from the Varieties of Democracy dataset (V-DEM YEAR) and Political Terror data from the Global Terrorism Database (START 2017).

[4]It does not seem logically plausible that ungoverned spaces or difficult terrain (Fearon & Laitin 2003) are causing both the violence and the lack of public goods provision. If a government was unable to get to these areas, we would expect less repression along with scarcer services; moreover, it does not seem plausible that numbers of journalist homicides are driven by a lack of ability to reach certain areas.

**Table 1 Governance characteristics of complicit states experiencing privilege violence**

| Measure | No murdered journalists | 1+ Murdered journalists | No repression | Some repression | Moderate to severe repression |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Polity2 | 5.79 | 5.82 | 6.63 | 5.71 | 3.82 |
| Executive corruption | 0.44 | 0.55 | 0.39 | 0.48 | 0.61 |
| Low-level corruption | 0.45 | 0.58 | 0.39 | 0.49 | 0.62 |
| High court independence | 0.64 | 0.54 | 0.83 | 0.51 | 0.20 |
| Low court independence | 0.79 | 0.41 | 1.00 | 0.58 | 0.27 |
| Court attacks | 0.34 | −0.12 | 0.50 | 0.03 | −0.12 |
| Judicial purges | 0.89 | 0.69 | 1.02 | 0.92 | 0.35 |
| Political terror | 12.56 | 38.90 | 0.237 | 1.96 | 3.04 |
| World Bank project outcomes | 3.10 | 3.84 | 3.11 | 3.64 | 3.79 |

The study of violence and regime type has a history of measurement challenges (Vreeland 2008; Hill & Jones 2014, p. 677). Scholars who have overcome these problems nevertheless find linkages between internal violence and governance. Walter (2015) finds that, all else being equal, countries where politics are closed to new entrants and where rule of law is weakly institutionalized are two to ten times as likely to relapse into civil war. Goldstone et al. (2010) have determined that civil war, state failure, democratic failure, and genocide can be predicted by partial democratization and high levels of elite factionalization. While failure to deliver services and regional instability increased predictive power, inequality and the governance measure were particularly potent. Instability was 30 times higher in these factionalized democracies than in autocracies, other variables being equal. The Global Terrorism Database finds that countries whose governments conduct violence against their citizens are more than 150 times more likely to experience terror than states at peace with strong human rights records (START 2017). Governance also impacts criminal violence: Homicide rates rise in democracies that are corrupt or have poor governance (Fearon 2011). Income inequality is correlated with homicide in multiple studies, though the causal pathways are unclear (Fajnzylber et al. 2002, Hsieh & Pugh 1993). Roth's (2009) historical studies of the United States and Europe find homicide to be highly correlated with distrust in government as well as with high levels of inequality.

## THE DYNAMICS OF PRIVILEGE VIOLENCE

Why are some democracies and anocracies with otherwise high capacity unable to quell significant violence against journalists and marginalized portions of their populations? We propose that a subset of countries currently classified as weak are more usefully viewed as complicit. We suggest a more robust theorization drawn from field research illuminating the four dynamics that characterize these complicit governing systems:

1. Elites abdicate the monopoly on force and employ nonstate violence to gain political power and increase economic privilege;
2. To ensure impunity, politicians deliberately politicize and weaken the security sector, increasing state brutality and reliance on progovernment, nonstate militias;
3. The public turns to nonstate violent actors for protection;
4. As violence proliferates, a subset of the polarized middle class joins elites in supporting repression, which reinforces the political settlement.

The increase in social bloodshed unconnected to the governing system (though enabled by the abdication of the monopoly on force and the deliberate hobbling of security agencies) obscures the governing origins of what we term privilege violence.

## Factionalized Elites Rely on Nonstate Violent Actors to Maintain Power and Privilege

The complicit political system is founded on an elite bargain that guarantees inordinate privilege and state rents to a few. In a factionalized country, losing such privilege does not simply return one to middle-income status or private life. It can mean jail, exile, or death. To maintain such unequal power, resources, and rents, elites face two choices: whether to use nonviolent or violent means, and if the latter, whether to pursue state repression or use nonstate armed groups.

Peaceful strategies include restricting the ability of citizens to organize and coordinate opposition, as with the recent spate of legislation in scores of countries restricting civic space (Carothers & Brechenmacher 2014). Other methods include altering democratic structures to create small "winning coalitions" despite large selectorates (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003) by manipulating rules that restrict voting, competing for office, and election finance to narrow the coalition needed to win. In Colombia from the 1950s to the 1990s, for instance, the two main political parties formed the National Front and explicitly chose to divvy up ministries and appointments 50–50, regardless of election results, while ensuring that public ballots, private financing, and electoral restrictions made it impossible to run as an independent. Elites may also rely on corruption to bind a coalition to the state (North et al. 2009). In the Republic of Georgia, President Shevardnadze ended the chaotic civil war and urban criminal violence of the early 1990s by providing fiefdoms within the Interior Ministry and police for warlords and their lieutenants. Shevardnadze also "gave properties, regions, authorities, and state agencies away" to the intelligentsia and economic elites, explained the former legal advisor during those years. "He used corruption to keep the balance of power" (David Usupashvili, unpublished interview with Rachel Kleinfeld, November 2014).

Lindberg & van Ham (2015) theorize that pressure to maintain openness to the press, civil society, and international opinion make direct state violence difficult in democratic states, leading democracies to choose more costly vote buying and clientelism over violence. Similarly, Collier & Rohner (2008) claim that state violence is likely to drive away votes and invite international scrutiny, limiting its usefulness within democracies. However, democratic conditions also make nonviolent manipulation less robust, particularly in countries more densely linked to consolidated democracies, because restrictions are vulnerable to local and international scrutiny and political protest. Colombia's cozy parties were disrupted by a massive mobilization for constitutional reform in 1991; the Rose Revolution overthrew Shevardnadze's government in 2003.

Nonstate violent actors offer elites the benefits of retaining power while reducing the costs of international criticism and voter dissatisfaction incurred by state repression. A host of studies demonstrate that governments strategically abdicate the monopoly on violence and employ militias to muddy the waters of blame (Ahram 2011; Alvarez 2006; Byman & Kreps 2010; Carey et al. 2015, p. 852; Kirschke 2000; Mitchell et al. 2014; Staniland 2012, p. 17)—thus, employing nonstate violence enables greater state repression (Cohen & Nordas 2015). By providing enough confusion that governments can evade accountability to their voters and the international public, nonstate violent groups offer a low-cost, high-reward strategy for power maintenance (Carey et al. 2013, p. 250; Carey et al. 2015, p. 852; Cohen 2001, p. 62). While some literature claims that these organizations are also used to provide logistical advantages during wartime (Eck 2015) or as a force multiplier (Alvarez 2006, Jentzsch et al. 2015), this does not illuminate their frequent use

during periods of peace. Although conflict does increase the use of nonstate proxies, quantitative correlations suggest that the ability to evade accountability significantly improves statistical fit, demonstrating that politicians may consider reputational costs or government stability in addition to military strategy when seeking connections with violent proxies (Carey et al. 2015, p. 861). Indeed, the progovernment militia data set of Carey et al. (2015) demonstrates that weak democracies and countries that receive aid from democracies are most likely to have informal militia ties.

Elites within complicit states build supportive relationships with nonstate violent actors to buttress their power through electoral violence, campaign financing, and self-enrichment. Enabling economic elites to use nonstate violence binds economic and political elites into a community of shared interest while increasing wealth concentration.

The prevalence of political parties turning to gangs, militias, and their own violent youth wings to intimidate opposition voters and secure winning coalitions by closing polls, stealing ballot boxes, and catalyzing pre-election pogroms is well documented. Party-driven electoral pogroms using militias and street gangs occur in Nigeria, Bihar, Pakistan, Kenya, and Bangladesh (Anderson 2002, International Crisis Group 2012, Jaffrelot 1998, Klopp 2001, LeBas 2013, Paden 2013, Wilkinson 2006, Yusuf 2012). Throughout Africa, Mares & Young (2016) show (contra Lindberg & van Ham 2015) that Afrobarometer respondents are far more likely to face negative inducements such as violence, rather than bribes and other positive inducements, to vote. This is not a new phenomenon: in the post–Civil War US South, the Democratic Party colluded with night riders such as the Ku Klux Klan, whose violence against blacks and Republicans grew before elections (Calhoun 2010, p. 54; Epperly et al. 2016; Kleinfeld 2018). In Tennessee, the Democratic Party and Ku Klux Klan conventions were conveniently held at the same time and place in the year before the 1868 election (Trelease 1971, p. 14).

The common explanation for such political violence is that countries with weak punishment institutions face fewer constraints on coercive strategies (Hafner-Burton et al. 2014). Yet such an explanation fails to explain both why institutionally capable countries face electoral violence and why countries like Bangladesh and Kenya face radically different levels of violence in proximate elections in which courts, police, and other institutions are virtually unchanged (Anderson 2002, International Crisis Group 2012, Klopp 2001).

Nonstate violent actors operating with state consent multiply as governments privatize the use of force for economic elites. An example occurred in Sicily in the late 1800s, when landholders hired private guards who formed the beginnings of Sicily's *Cosa Nostra* mafia (Dickie 2005). In Colombia following La Violencia, landholders were allowed to maintain private armies to fend off bandits and guerrillas, a situation that was legalized in 1965, declared illegal in 1989, and legalized again in 1994 (Porch & Rasmussen 2008, pp. 520–40). Facing threats from Maoists in the 1960s, the government of Bihar, India, sent clerks across the state to offer landlords convenient gun permits (Kumar 2008, pp. 69–70). While government weakness provided the original motive for arming in these three cases, weak governments did not legalize equal access to violence for nonlandholders.

In each case, economic elites began to build private armies, which they used for worker repression in addition to security. In Bihar, landlord militias murdered low-caste workers to suppress wages (Human Rights Watch 2009, p. 51). In Colombia, self-defense militias became paramilitary groups, which fought guerillas but also used violence to drive peasants off land and reduce land prices. The consolidation of arable land in the hands of a small economic elite was described by the Colombian ombudsmen as a land reform in reverse, taking place at gunpoint (Andreu-Guzman 2012, pp. 4–6; Dudley 2004, p. 99; Saab & Taylor 2009, p. 466). Vigilante violence and lynchings were also used by plantation owners in the post–Civil War US South to suppress the wages of former slaves (Beck & Tolnay 1990), and by Sicilian landlords to suppress labor organizing as late as 1947 (Stille 1995, p. 18).

Politicians were willing to ignore the economic uses of force by the wealthy because they formed communities of shared interest. In Sicily in the years after World War II, the mafia could ensure 75,000 to 100,00 votes in the province of Palermo alone (Schneider & Schneider 2003). In Bihar, near-feudal practices enabled landlords to compel their workers to vote for the Congress Party until 1990.[5] Bihari politicians also relied on landlord militias for electoral violence (Anish Ankur, unpublished interview with Rushda Majeed in conjunction with Kleinfeld; see also Human Rights Watch 2008, Kumar 2008). Economic coercion occurs in multiple contemporary and historical contexts, and violent economic coercion in a few, such as modern-day Bulgaria (Mares et al. 2016). Future research could illuminate the circumstances under which such coercion turns violent.

Political elites are also driven into complicit relationships with nonstate wielders of violence to pay for elections. Political parties in countries with strong organized criminal groups may turn to the criminals for financial support, as did multiple US party machines during the years of state and federal Prohibition (Kleinfeld 2018). Ernesto Samper's 1994 Colombian presidential campaign was so riddled with Cali cartel money that he was banned from entering the United States. India's lax campaign finance rules have allowed criminal mafias to serve as major campaign backers for years (Vaishnav 2017). Personal corruption can also drive these illicit relationships. Determining how campaign costs and rules drive relationships between politicians and violent groups and disaggregating the effects of personal corruption require further investigation.

Violent groups are, of course, independent actors themselves, with their own agendas. Although they may have financial relationships with political parties or officials, violent groups also have a stake in preserving their own power, controlling territory, pursuing their other financial interests, and cultivating their long-term institutional survival, among other possible aims. Perhaps the most important questions, therefore, are when and how do relationships between nonstate violent groups and elites become so significant that violent groups control political power or otherwise begin to comprise parts of the political establishment. In the early 2000s, a third of Colombia's Parliament had their campaigns paid for by paramilitary groups, who provided both money and muscle to help candidates get elected (Acemoglu et al. 2013). Italy's Parliamentary Anti-Mafia Commission described the Camorra as having "merged" with Naples' local administration (Direzione Investigativa Antimafia 1993, p. 166). Schneider & Schneider (2003, p. 34) describe Sicily's *intreccio*, which "signifies more than a simple reciprocity between the Mafia and the State; it points to a vast gray area where it is impossible to determine where one leaves off and the other begins."

In extreme cases, violent actors become politicians themselves. As one politician-criminal explained to Vaishnav (2017, p. 87):

> Politicians make use of us for capturing the polling booths and for bullying the weaker sections. But after the elections they earn the social status and power and we are treated as criminals . . . . Why should we help them when we ourselves can contest the elections, capture the booths, and become MLAs and enjoy social status, prestige, and power? So I stopped helping the politicians and decided to contest the elections.

In 2009–2010, 168 candidates running for Bihar's state parliament had been charged with attempted murder (Vaishnav 2017). In Colombia, Pablo Escobar was elected to the Medellín

[5] Bihar broke with one-party rule for one tumultuous year following Indira Gandhi's national emergency, when voter backlash was strong enough to deliver a low-caste party into power—but elite anger with the new government undermined its rule within a year, and Congress otherwise ruled the state continuously from independence through 1990.

City Council and then to Parliament. In Bihar, Colombia, and Italy, serving criminal-politicians continue to direct criminal gangs for personal enrichment. This evolution of paramilitaries from a force mobilized or permitted by politicians to a political faction with direct control over private muscle entrenches violence as a fact of political competition.

## Security Agencies and Courts Are Politicized and Become Violent Actors on Behalf of the State and in Their Own Right

To maintain impunity while benefitting from violent electoral manipulation, violent enforcement of economic power, and funding from violent groups, elites politicize courts, law enforcement, and security agencies. A report on Bihar, India, titled "State Incapacity by Design" (Mathew & Moore 2011) illustrates that the state becomes weak because it is deliberately weakened. In Colombia under the National Front, the military was kept small to avoid coups (Dudley 2004); similarly, Nigeria's military leaders kept Lagos's police force small because it was not under the military's direct command (Harnischfeger 2003). Politicization often takes the form used in Colombia from the 1970s to the 1990s, when budgets were manipulated and made subject to political whims while security leaders who became too independent were moved to obscure regions or sent out of the country for training (Kleinfeld 2018). More blatantly, in Bihar under Lalu Yadav's government, political party cadres waited in police stations to ensure that fellow Yadav caste members were not arrested, enabling the Yadavs to run massive kidnapping rings protected by political cover (Witsoe 2013).

One might imagine that the politicization of courts and security agencies could be kept to enclaves, creating isolated guarantees of impunity while otherwise allowing the bureaucracies to function normally. In the cases studied, the process of politicization broke down lines of hierarchy and control, disrupting systems of merit across the board so that the inherent corruption of the system disabled professionalism and spread. The problem is described in a 1980 report by India's National Police Commission that begins by listing a host of citizen complaints regarding police violence, extortion, corruption, and other malpractices:

> The reward and punishment mechanism of the system has become totally ineffective because of increasing political interference and, therefore, the senior officers, however, determined and committed they might be . . . find themselves unable to deal with corrupt officers who have political contacts and are able to draw political intervention on their behalf whenever anything is attempted to be done to discipline them. The patent inability of a superior officer to deal with a known corrupt subordinate immediately lowers his prestige in the department and induces other subordinates also to seek and develop political contacts as a protective cover to escape punishment for their malpractices. (India National Police Commission 1980)

Politicized security agencies filled with patronage appointees thus become inept at providing security. They also become violent.

Some violence may emerge from a frustrated sense of professionalism among security agencies. When such agencies are used as a holding pen for patronage positions, without adequate resources for real police or military work, so that agents are unable to arrest or fight people they know are culpable, some turn to violence out of a perverse sense of duty to enforce the law (Kleinfeld & Majeed 2016). In Uttar Pradesh, India, a policeman known for his extrajudicial killings explained:

> I do not kill for personal gain, but for the greater good . . . . [The people] queued up by the thousands at the station to thank me for doing what the courts could not . . . this man had been arrested and charged

> and acquitted dozens of times, because he could pay off the judges and police! This time he was not acquitted . . . . The really bad criminals, they cannot be disciplined. And the legal system has completely degenerated, so it cannot stop them. But they must be stopped. (Jauregui 2009, pp. 176–77)

Such violence is only possible, however, because politicians incentivize repression under the banner of improving security—as long as it targets those who challenge the regime, or marginalized portions of the population. Multiple studies have found that rather than substituting nongovernmental for state violence, governments employing progovernment militias are also more violent themselves (Cohen & Nordas 2015, Mitchell 2004, Mitchell et al. 2014, Stanton 2015). In Rio de Janeiro, where one-fifth of all homicides are committed by state security, a military officer explained, "My initial experience of policing was to kill criminals. Killing was required as good performance by my supervisors" (Human Rights Watch 2016, p. 38). Incentives to kill Maoists in Bihar have led to hundreds of so-called encounter killings, in which suspects and many innocent Dalits are shot during engineered "encounters." In the early 2000s, the Colombian military's new evaluation regime incentivized the killing of guerrillas, leading soldiers to lure thousands of young men from poor barrios with promises of jobs, kill them, and dress them as guerrillas (Volkmann 2012).

Repression is augmented by nonstate violent actors colluding with state actors. In Mexico, for instance, journalists are harassed by security services three times more often than by the next most commonly reported harasser—but they are killed by criminal groups, suggesting a possible division of labor or possible police corruption in attributing the murders to criminal groups (Edmonds-Poli 2014, pp. 148). In Colombia, police and military officers moonlighted with a group known as Los Pepes, formed from disgruntled members of the Medellín Cartel, to track down and kill Pablo Escobar and all those connected to his faction of the cartel (Bowden 2001, Civico 2012; Sebastian Escobar, personal communication with Rachel Kleinfeld 2017). A Colombian government investigation into the cartel-connected vigilante militia known as Death to Kidnappers (MAS) found that by 1983, 59 of the murders attributed to MAS had actually been committed by police and military officers on duty (Hristov 2009, p. 65). In 2003, just after President Uribe took power, he demanded that troops clear Communa 13, a neighborhood in Medellín riddled with gang, drug, and guerrilla violence. According to investigative journalist Jeremy McDermott (unpublished interview with Rachel Kleinfeld 2015), the paramilitary leader was believed to be working closely with General Montoya of the Fourth Army Brigade and the Chief of Police of Medellín:

> At night, after police finished operations [Don Berna's paramilitary] would drive through the streets with guerrilla deserters in their trucks. The deserters would point out guerrillas, and Berna's boys would snatch them off the streets and often kill them. So the paramilitaries were acting as death squads for the police and army and doing their dirty work.

Francis (2005) argues that such violent, nonstate fighters are a low-cost form of security employed by weak states. Yet Campbell & Brenner's (2002) study of such groups in capable countries from Weimar Germany to the Philippines, Indonesia, apartheid South Africa, and elsewhere leads them to argue that weakness is an inadequate explanation. The Pro-Government Militia database created by Carey et al. (2013) finds that both weak and strong states use violent nonstate proxies, which encompass more formalized relationships such as civil defense forces, and informal, deniable relationships with groups such as death squads and vigilantes, findings supported by Klare (2004) and Reno (1999). Since informal proxies are linked to excessive violence against civilians (Alvarez 2006, Carey et al. 2015, Kirschke 2000, Rudbeck et al. 2016), and since current studies

do not consider complicit states in assessing use of these proxies, the circumstances under which complicit governments turn to informal proxies deserve further inquiry.

Once violence has become normalized and the state has turned a blind eye to violence against some groups, it is a small step for security personnel in these complicit systems to use violence to serve their personal interests—running extortion rings, serving as contract assassins, or colluding with nonstate violent actors for personal gain. Police in Honduras have been known to commit assassinations for drug cartels; more than 60 police officers were found to be on the payroll of the MS-13 gang in 2016 (Chayes 2017). After the death of 43 student-teachers in 2014, the Mexican government found that the local drug cartel sent $45,000 per month to be distributed through a senior police commander to keep the local police on its payroll (Sherman 2015). In Naples, more than 600 police officers were on the mafia payroll in 1997 (Jamieson 2000, p. 85).

To ensure impunity for the nonstate violence they support, complicit states deliberately weaken state security forces so that they become corrupt and brutal. Capable but complicit democratic states encourage security force repression and collusion with informal nonstate violence to create more plausible deniability, enabling greater government repression of those who may wish to alter the status quo through direct and proxy methods. These politicized security agencies enable political, criminal, and economic agendas to be accomplished through state and collusive nonstate violence.

## The Marginalized Turn to Violent Self-Help

State failure to provide security is most likely to affect the poor (Koonings & Kruijt 2007, Schuberth 2015). Kleinfeld's (2018) field research suggests that the marginalized receive the brunt of violence from state security forces and progovernment militias. This is not necessarily intuitive. Theoretical models of electoral intimidation suggest that swing voters should be targeted (e.g., Robinson & Torvik 2009, Collier & Vicente 2014). Some empirical findings support this model: Bratton (2008) finds that Nigerian violence was typically directed at opposition voters regardless of wealth, and Gutierrez-Romero (2014) finds that Kenyan violence targeted opposition voters in potentially decisive districts (Klopp 2001). Yet Mares & Young's (2016) study of Afrobarometer data finds that electoral violence in Africa was not strongly targeted at partisan preferences, while in seven out of ten countries, poorer voters were consistently more afraid of electoral violence. Further research, looking at a broader time period than the immediate pre- and post-election moment, could clarify targets of violence.

Whether abandoned or targeted by the state, the weakening of law enforcement and incentives for repression against the marginalized enable vigilantes, insurgents, and criminal groups to bid for legitimacy by claiming to offer protection, justice, and social services to marginalized, underserved populations (Felbab-Brown 2012, Kilcullen 2013). Citizen vigilantism for self-defense in response to unpoliced violence has been documented in Mexico (Asfura-Heim & Espach 2013), South Africa (Burr & Jensen 2004), Indonesia (Lindsey 2001), Nigeria (Pratten 2008, Harnischfeger 2003), Pakistan, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Kenya, India, and the United States (Pratten & Sen 2008). Many vigilante groups established for self-defense later become criminal (Rodgers 2007). Meanwhile, existing criminal groups gain popularity by taking on policing roles in the absence of effective law enforcement, as documented in Mexico (Felbab-Brown 2016). The same phenomenon occurs in poorly policed neighborhoods within the United States. "We police our own," said a gang member in Southeast Los Angeles. "Why are we called gangsters," he asked, when "[s]oldiers are heroes"? (Leovy 2015, p. 234). In states that have corrupt courts, violent political and criminal groups also compete by offering more honest, effective, and swift justice and dispute resolution, a role played by both Sicily's mafia (Gambetta 1993) and Georgia's organized criminals in the late 1990s (Kukhianidze 2009). In Afghanistan, the Taliban gained inroads not by ideology alone but

often by delivering justice that was perceived as cheaper, swifter, and less corrupt than the state courts provided (Felbab-Brown 2012).

Both criminals and political insurgents invest in Robin Hood–style charity and public relations to deepen legitimacy among populations whose political and economic exclusion make these violent actors more appealing (Kleinfeld 2018). While Pablo Escobar's Medellín Cartel made that city the most violent in the world in the early 1990s, he also built soccer fields and a neighborhood of low-income housing. Many saw his criminal war on the state as a form of political protest against an unjust system. "We are 100% with Pablo—he fought a lot for the people," exclaimed a young man quoted in the *New York Times* (Brooke 1993). What makes insurgency attractive to some populations and criminality to others is not obvious and deserves further research.

Literature on progovernment militias suggests that vigilante groups with local support are less violent (reviewed by Carey & Mitchell 2017). This literature, by definition, ignores criminal groups and gangs that are antigovernment or apolitical. The violent criminals and vigilantes who thrive among the marginalized act in their own self-interest and do not necessarily remain loyal to or controlled by a community base. These groups may start as gangs that claim to protect their neighborhoods, or as self-defense forces, but they tend to become violence professionals who turn to extortion, as well as subcontracting for organized criminals and politicians (Felbab-Brown 2016, Schuberth 2015). Politicians may also coopt the vigilantes, gangs, and other violent actors of the marginalized for electoral violence. The Bakassi Boys of Southern Nigeria, for instance, emerged in response to violent crime but were subsequently backed by state governors who used them for electoral violence (Harnischfeger 2003). The gangs of Karachi, Pakistan, are similarly supported by political parties who offer impunity (Gayer 2007). While the violent nonstate groups fostered by the elites rarely prey on their patrons (Carey & Mitchell 2017), further study is needed on the violent groups of the marginalized, who conduct massive violence against one another and against marginalized populations, for whom there is little recourse or government protection (Leeds 1996).

As violence becomes normalized, vast impunity and normative change within society allow violence to spread from a governing strategy to social and opportunistic uses. In Bihar, landlords have been known to hire Maoists to kill rival landlords, making the murders appear to be typical guerrilla killings (Bhatia 2005, p. 1541). Harnischfeger (2003, p. 42) documented similar contract killings by businesspeople hiring the Bakassi Boys vigilante group in Nigeria. In Colombia from the 1990s onward and in the US South during Reconstruction, interpersonal violence also skyrocketed (Kleinfeld 2018). The tendency of ordinary citizens to turn to violence amid significant bloodshed within countries nominally at peace mimics similar opportunistic violence during civil wars to settle local rivalries (Peterson 2002), for greed (Weinstein 2007), and to seek revenge, particularly as retaliatory spirals of violence take hold (Kalyvas 2006, Midlarsky 2005).

For marginalized citizens targeted by a repressive state and brutal state-sanctioned violent actors, self-help appears more viable than recourse to a justice system seen as absent at best, predatory at worst. The outcome, sadly, is further violence.

## The Middle Class Chooses Exit and Repression

Middle classes rarely appear to be targets of this systemic violence unless they organize for change, a path hampered by collective action challenges and a justified fear of repression. Instead, they generally opt out by hiring private security to address the extortion or kidnapping that does affect them (Schuberth 2015). As Mexico faced a surge in kidnappings in the 1990s, private security companies proliferated. By 1997, Mexico City alone had 587 such companies employing tens of thousands of guards (Manaut 2000, p. 153). In El Salvador, by 2001, private security agents hired by the middle class and business owners outnumbered police by 70,000 to 20,000 (Melara 2001).

Middle-class quiescence is also abetted by the widespread belief that the marginal are perpetrators of violence more than victims. In places with significant opportunistic crime and violence, it is easy for such a partial truth to gain a hold. In Mexico, as murder rates skyrocketed in the early 2000s, the Calderon administration claimed that 90% of those killed in the drug war were criminals (Villagran 2014, p. 128). This narrative was accepted by middle-class Mexicans, who, despite 20,000 murders in 2006, would still frequently comment, "*Sólo se matan entre ellos*"—they must have had something to do with organized crime, because criminals only kill other criminals (Villagran 2014, p. 129). In the late 1890s, when an African American was being lynched every two or three days in the US South, Ida Wells, who would become a prominent anti-lynching campaigner, accepted the general belief among the black middle class that most lynchings were extrajudicial executions of criminals. Only the lynching of two close friends, grocery store owners who challenged the market dominance of the local white store, altered Wells's view (Silkey 2015).

Ironically, the violence loosed by the governing system leads many middle-class voters to support repressive measures that free the government's hand. In El Salvador, *mano dura*, or iron fist, policies of mass incarceration, often accompanied by state violence, have been consistently electorally successful (Holland 2013, Wolf 2012). Popular support for *mano dura* actually increases in states perceived as being more corrupt or ineffective (LAPOP 2010, Perreira & Ungar 2004). In mid-2011, as violence, kidnapping, and extortion began to affect the business class in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, the police chief began to arrest people with a "suspicious appearance," eventually detaining nearly a tenth of the city's population, most of them poor young men. Only 3% of the detainees were charged with a crime, but as violence diminished, the business community cheered (Conger 2014). From 1979 to 1990 the police in a particularly crime-ridden part of Bihar gouged out the eyes of 33 young men who had been accused of theft, and poured acid into their eye sockets. When the case became public, residents protested and struck—in support of the police (Bobb & Ahmed 1980). Such support occurs in consolidated and strong democracies as well: Northern Irish Unionists supported the killings of suspected members of the Irish Republican Army, while a majority of Spanish citizens favored the use of death squads against ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna) (O'Leary & Silke 2007). Majorities and large pluralities of US citizens have claimed to support torture for terrorism suspects since 2001 (Lyte 2014), with a January 2017 Pew poll finding that 48% of Americans support torture, as compared with 64% in Nigeria, 66% in Kenya, and 75% in India in Amnesty International polling (2014).

Law-and-order rhetoric thus provides the government with grounds for increasing targeted repression while claiming to be protecting citizens from violence (Rudbeck et al. 2016). Voters themselves give politicians and economic elites a means to buttress the governing system by suppressing activists, protestors, investigative journalists, and other opponents to their power and control.

The governments of El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, for instance, portray their countries' violence as stemming from drug cartels and vicious gangs that overwhelm the government (Dudley 2017). Reporters unwittingly feed this narrative. The risk in covering state violence is so great that covering cartel and gang members is, ironically, less dangerous. Thus, gangs are blamed for most murders, although the independent Honduran Violence Observatory at the National University attributed only 5% of homicides in 2015 to gangs, and a similar percentage in previous years. A United Nations study found that in 2000, only about 14% of El Salvador's killings could be attributed to gangs (United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime 2007). A 2017 analysis of violence in Guatemala attributed only 28% of the country's murders to cartels in the major drug-trafficking corridor, and in the neighborhoods most renowned for gang violence, nearly 60% of murders could not be attributed to gangs (Dudley 2017). Gang violence is real, and horrific—but it also obscures political collusion with gangs, as well as elite repression. For instance, more than 120 environmental activists were killed in Honduras between the 2009

coup and 2017. Such rural activists are not normal targets of (generally urban) gang violence, but they do threaten government and business development ventures (Global Witness 2017).

Repression deepens the vicious cycle of privilege violence by fostering support for criminals and insurgents. The finding that repression radicalizes formerly nonviolent populations has been repeated in Central America (Booth & Walkers 1993, Walton 1984), Italy (Della Porta 2006), the Philippines (Kerkvliet 1977, pp. 192–93, 227, 238, 240–41), Northern Ireland (O'Leary & Silke 2007), and even the United States, where Lipset (1983) and Bendix (1977) found that political repression, rather than just inequality or exploitation, tended to radicalize workers to join revolutionary groups. Although many states have dissatisfied subpopulations, widespread and indiscriminate violence drives citizens to abandon moderate groups and support more violent action (Goodwin 2001, pp. 48, 143, 162, 178; Gurr 1986, pp. 45–72; Mason & Krane 1989, pp. 175–98).

Repressive policing and sentencing that incarcerate many people for low-level offenses also increase the power of violent groups by overcrowding prisons and leading to greater inmate violence. In prisons the world over, including in the United States, gangs rather than guards provide security, grant access to coveted contraband, and move messages to loved ones (Skarbek 2011). Greater need for gang security and other prison services augments their money and power in prison and on the street (Lessing 2016). Mass imprisonment also transforms prisons into schools of violence. In Mexico, Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, iron fist policies that arrested people for wearing gang clothes or engaging in low-level criminal behavior strengthened gangs, as gang members in prison learned from more sophisticated organized criminals, developing more mature forms of criminality as different criminal groups connected (Gledhill 2013, Jutersonke et al. 2009, Meyer & Seelke 2012, Osorio 2013, Rivera 2010, Seelke 2014). Researchers who studied the trajectory of the Irish Republican Army after increased British arrests, and the terrorist cells that emerged from Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, have observed a similar phenomenon with political insurgents, who harden and deepen their affiliations when placed together in prisons (Dingley 2012, Shanker 2006).

Abdicating the monopoly of force and outsourcing suppression of opponents to nonstate groups allow elites to depict violence as conflict within society that the state is too weak to police. As opportunistic social violence proliferates, it contributes to the perception that violence is a social or cultural phenomenon. Although the middle class would likely prefer to live in a less violent country, the simpler strategies of embracing private security and authorizing government repression entrench the dynamics of privilege violence while obscuring governance as the root of the problem.

## THEORIZING STATE COMPLICITY

These cases enable us to develop a theory of how violence is used to order the governing system of this subset of anocracies and democracies that have high levels of both capacity and violence. Complicit states use violence to buttress a political settlement based on maintaining extreme privilege for a few. These states rely on a specific elite bargain, which underpins the political settlement. Within a state that outwardly resembles a competitive party system, factionalized elites compete among themselves for power, courting the votes of the upper and middle classes. While parties and factions may differ on policies or ideologies, the elite share a commitment to maintaining the status quo political settlement of extreme inequality. The enrichment and concentrated power elites receive through the system lead them to act collectively to maintain stratification while competing within these bounds for political power.

The extreme wealth and power concentrated in the elite are mirrored in the poverty and political exclusion of a marginalized portion of the population. In addition to class, these groups may be disadvantaged by geography (Colombia), race (the US South post–Civil War), caste (Bihar),

ethnicity (Jharkhand, India), religion, or a mix of these—no particular trait is common across countries. Viable parties rarely serve the political interests of these groups, as there is very little scope for their situation to be improved within the prevailing system.

The middle class occupies a middle ground. They do not enjoy the extreme material privilege of the elite class and often face higher property crime, but they experience little violence or repression and are able to vote for a range of their preferences. Political candidates and parties from within the middle class may have some capacity to organize and be elected to public office, although attempts to change the political settlement while the system is stable will be undermined.

Democratic political participation in these states occurs within two bounds. One bound is defined by the extent to which the underlying political settlement limits issues and agendas that diverge from those of the elites. The extent to which an individual's preferences can be meaningfully expressed through political participation narrows as marginalization increases. While the upper middle class may be able to vote for most of their key preferences, marginalized populations will see almost nothing within the political debate that meaningfully addresses their interests. The political settlement relies on middle-class complacency, and elites will therefore court the middle class as needed. However, the elite bargain restricts meaningful political competition to issues unrelated to the political settlement. When the system is at equilibrium, reforms to increase education, opportunity, or power of marginalized groups may be debated but will rarely be meaningful.

The likelihood of experiencing political violence creates a second bound on the system. The middle and upper middle classes will rarely face electoral violence or be coerced into political participation, abetting their complacency. Economic and political elites may face violence due to extreme intra-elite competition or occasional reprisals from disaffected groups. Marginalized populations face frequent violence to coerce voting, mute political participation, and prevent parties and candidates undesirable to the ruling elite from gaining power. Activists from any class who challenge the political settlement also face violence; this explains the higher rates of violence against journalists, labor and human rights activists, and community organizers.

Although these states are classified as democracies and anocracies, they are class-responsive, tiered regimes. They essentially function as oligarchies for the factionalized elites and as bounded democracies for the bulk of the population, while approximating repressive autocracies for the most marginalized subpopulations. The dynamics of what we call privilege violence emerge from the incentives faced by different groups within the state.

Citizens face a choice regarding whether or not they will participate in the political system, guided by the benefits and costs of participation. In violent countries, citizens must decide whether the opportunity to advance their preferences is worth the risk of participation-related violence. In these cases, middle-class citizens accurately assess a greater political benefit from participation and a lower risk of violence than members of the marginalized population. The marginalized population, in contrast, sees little in the political debate that addresses their needs, combined with a higher likelihood of violence. As a result, they may self-select out of the voting base. However, they will also more often be coerced into voting, leading to potentially significant variation in levels of political participation by marginalized populations due to varying levels of elite coercion.

Political and economic elites must likewise choose how to pursue their interests. In determining whether to repress, elites base their cost–benefit analysis on the identity of the population targeted. Elites will avoid targeting their voter base, groups on which their power rests, and populations that would provoke widespread outrage against the system of governance if harmed.

Nonstate violent actors, from paramilitaries to vigilante groups, are independent actors. When considering whether to attack a given population, these groups must consider the degree of impunity they will be afforded. Targeting marginalized populations will bear a relatively low cost to nonstate groups, whereas targeting the middle class will more frequently be punished, as relative

middle-class security is part of the political settlement. The nonstate actors' degree of interest in preserving the system affects their choice set; insurgent groups, for example, may have such a negative stake in the system that they are willing to pursue violence even if it is highly costly or possibly destabilizing. Groups mobilized by the upper and middle classes for protection have a financial and existential stake in the system, and their violence is more likely to follow elite preferences.

These decisions, structured by the system of privilege violence, manifest a set of rational choices for different actors that collectively result in a toxic equilibrium. Since the upper middle and middle classes have a reasonably robust range of policies designed to court their interests, they vote and participate politically in ways that make these countries look like democracies. Marginalized populations, assessing a lower rate of return and higher risk of violence from voting, may self-select out—unless they face coercion, in which case they vote under duress in the interests of the compeller. In either scenario, there is a low likelihood that marginalized groups are able to vote for their interests. Any collective opting out adds an additional barrier for political parties and activists representing marginalized communities. Since policies offering significant social justice are not on offer within the bounded democracy, activists are pushed toward the fringes. Marginalized groups may look to insurgents and other nonstate violent groups to exercise political voice, but such groups provoke retaliatory state and nonstate violence toward the broader marginalized community.

While the middle and upper classes are generally able to vote for their interests, their political expression is bounded by the threat of violence. Activists who push back against the distribution and use of power and resources routinely face violence. Middle- and upper-class citizens correctly perceive that they risk violence if they pursue such actions. Middle-class interest in pursuing antiviolence or social justice–oriented collective action may be hampered by the perception that violence arises from criminality in marginalized communities. Elites may exploit this narrative and other social rifts to prevent collective action. When violence does affect the middle or upper classes, elites employ repression against the marginalized and their violent groups while espousing a legitimating rhetoric of law and order, reinforcing privilege violence dynamics.

Government and elite actors may pursue violence to further personal ends that do not necessarily abet their faction or the political settlement as a whole. As they compete among themselves, there may be considerable violence within the elite class. However, in the privilege violence equilibrium described in this model, intra-elite violence does not decimate the class nor undercut its ability to maintain the broader political settlement. Extreme episodes of intra-elite violence, such as a mafia war, tend to destabilize the system more broadly.

## CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This article has added to the small but growing literatures on state-sanctioned nonstate violence by offering an inductive analysis and a deductive theory for how violence is used by political and economic elites within a subset of states we term complicit. Through violence, the complicit state creates a bounded democracy that enables a highly unequal political settlement to be upheld by voters within an ostensibly democratic system. Our research offers empirical and theoretical advances on the existing "weak state" literature, which conflates problems of capacity and will. The violence against journalists and minorities in otherwise high-capacity states suggests that in a subset of states, the problem resides in will rather than capacity. We have developed a theory of how nonstate violence can be used as a governing strategy and have painted a picture, rooted in inductive field research, of how this strategy requires governments to weaken security agencies and incentivize repression. Increased social violence is not explicitly part of the governing strategy, but it is enabled by the sheer amount of violence and impunity and is used by politicians to justify increasing repression. Violence is not a bug in these systems but a crucial component of the algorithm—and the fuel for a truly vicious cycle.

This analysis highlights multiple directions for future research. Scholars have long siloed criminal and political violence, as well as state and nonstate violence. Thus, in the progovernment militia data set of Carey et al. (2015), groups stop being coded if they move from assisting the government to self-interest. Our analysis suggests a need for further research across silos to gain a more textured understanding of the interactions of criminal, political, state, and nonstate violence. Further study is also needed on pro-party militias, whether the party is in government or not; on criminal gangs and organized criminals that are used as progovernment militias but undercategorized by the current progovernment militia data set; and on criminals, gangs, and vigilantes who are apolitical or antigovernment. Another area requiring inquiry is the choice of some marginalized communities affected by violence to support vigilantes, while others place their security in the hands of criminal mafias, cartels, and gangs, and still others choose to support insurgency. What characteristics of violence, the state, or the marginalized groups lead some to choose a more political and others a more criminal form of self-help? Finally, scholarship such as the context-dependent typology of Raleigh (2016) has drawn bright lines between war and peace. Group-based research could illuminate continuities between war-time politics, democratic politics, and violent groups, as well as enabling deeper inquiry into countries that are clearly not peaceful but may not meet various criteria for war. Undertaking such research requires far better data on homicide, conflict violence, and state violence, comparable across countries and with greater longitudinal reach than is currently available.

Our analysis focuses on high-capacity states that face violence. It is possible, however, that states could begin as weak and be further weakened by this governing structure. Bihar, India, fits that categorization, for example. Further quantitative research is needed on the distribution of this governing pattern of privilege violence vis-à-vis measures of governance capacity. Comparable indicators for state capacity, uncoupled from measures of will, would facilitate such analyses. We have worked with a somewhat broader definition of the state than is conventional; we include violent groups as a branch of the state to more accurately capture the dynamics of governance for this set of countries. With the rise in nonstate groups, especially those that transcend national boundaries and hold significant power, further research could untangle the relationships between these groups and the state, as well as how their ascendance ought to impact our understanding of a significant number of modern states.

More finely grained analysis is needed to consider why governments turn to privilege violence as a strategy, and equally important, why they are able to do so despite (or perhaps because of) voter and international accountability mechanisms. Not all intra-elite competition requires violence; positive inducements of patronage, giveaways of goods, and other methods may build an electoral base. What relationships exist between positive and negative techniques for maintaining power? What explains national and subnational variations in the use of violence? Does it vary in tandem with, or in opposition to, other forms of nonviolent electoral manipulation, including coercive economic measures (Mares et al. 2016)? Do structural factors within pre-existing violent groups render them more likely to be turned to political purposes? The problem of government collusion in violence is an understudied phenomenon, not a new one. Understanding the systemic role of violence against citizens in crafting a bounded, inegalitarian democracy is the first step toward asking better questions and locating solutions.

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