More Security, More Legitimacy?
Effective Governance as a Source of State Legitimacy in Areas of Limited Statehood

Eric Stollenwerk
Freie Universität Berlin

William G. Nomikos
Washington University in St. Louis

Abstract

What explains the legitimacy of state institutions in areas of limited statehood? In order to ensure effective governance, it is critical for states with limited capacities to establish the legitimacy of state authority. Yet the sources of institutional legitimacy are not well understood in areas of limited statehood where legitimacy is often the only mechanism for the state to ensure compliance and cooperation of citizens. This article argues that in areas of limited statehood a state’s legitimacy among the domestic population depends chiefly on whether that population feels safe and secure. We test this argument with an original survey fielded with 2,000 respondents from Liberia using multilevel modeling. Our results demonstrate that security perceptions of the population play a key role in strengthening state legitimacy at both the community and county level. We also find that explicit attribution of security to specific institutions is key for linking more effective governance with more legitimacy. However, security is not enough to acquire state legitimacy. Our analysis also reveals that states gain legitimacy when locals perceive institutions as just and elections as free and fair. The results demonstrate that the sources of state legitimacy are multifaceted and that the provision of security is an important component. Thereby, our study speaks to theoretical debates on output- and input-based legitimacy as well as to discussions on procedural justice.

Please contact William Nomikos at wnomikos@wustl.edu for full draft.

*This is one of several joint articles by the authors; the ordering of names reflects a principle of rotation. Both authors contributed equally to the writing of the article.