

PERCEPTIONS OF SECURITY AND THE SOURCES OF STATE LEGITIMACY IN AREAS OF LIMITED STATEHOOD

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Abstract

What explains the legitimacy of state institutions in areas of limited statehood? Establishing the legitimacy of its authority is a critical task for any state. Lacking capacity, states in areas of limited statehood must rely on the legitimacy of their institutions in order to govern effectively. Yet, the onset of local violence and citizens perceptions of insecurity may undermine this legitimacy. Theories of output-based legitimacy hold that effective service provision increases the legitimacy of a state. This paper analyzes the extent to which perceptions of security among the local population foster state legitimacy in Liberia. We leverage data from an original SMS survey that yielded a nation-wide sample of 2,000 Liberians from all 15 counties. Using this survey data we are able to compare the legitimacy of state institutions on the local and on the county level. We find that security perceptions of the population play a key role in strengthening state legitimacy in Liberia, especially at the county-level. We also find that explicit attribution of security to specific institutions is key for linking more effective governance with more legitimacy. Moreover, citizens perceptions of procedural justice and democratic input foster legitimacy on the local and the county level. The results demonstrate that the sources of state legitimacy are multifaceted and that output-based theories of legitimacy may provide weaker explanations for state legitimacy than input- and throughput based theories.

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*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.