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Indirect Rule and State Weakness in Africa: Sierra Leone in Comparative Perspective
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ABSTRACT

A fundamental problem for economic development is that most poor countries have ‘weak state’ which are incapable or unwilling to provide basic public goods such as law enforcement, order, education and infrastructure. In Africa this is often attributed to the persistence of ‘indirect rule’ from the colonial period. In this paper we discuss the ways in which a state constructed on the basis of indirect rule is weak and the mechanisms via which this has persisted since independence in Sierra Leone. We also present a hypothesis as to why the extent to which indirect rule has persisted varies greatly within Africa, linking it to the presence or the absence of large centralized pre-colonial polities within modern countries. Countries which had such a polity, such as Ghana and Uganda, tended to abolish indirect rule since it excessively empowered traditional rulers at the expense of post-colonial elites. Our argument provides a new mechanism which can explain the positive correlation between pre-colonial political centralization and modern public goods and development outcomes.

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1 Introduction

It is now widely recognized that the ‘weakness’ or lack of ‘capacity’ of states in poor countries is a fundamental barrier to their development prospects. Most poor countries have states which are incapable or unwilling to provide basic public goods such as the enforcement of law, order, education and infrastructure. Different scholars use different terminology for this. Acemoglu and Robinson (2012), following the work of political anthropologists such as Evans-Pritchard and Fortes (1940) refer to the lack of ‘political centralization,’ indicating that centralized states do not exist and that political power is wielded by other entities.¹ Others, like Migdal (1988), use the word ‘weak’ to refer to states that lack capacity. Mann (1986, 1993) instead broke down the concept into two dimensions distinguishing between *infrastructural power* which is “institutional capacity of a central state to penetrate its territories and logistically implement decisions” and *despotic power* which refers to (1986, p. 59) “the distributive power of state elites over civil society. It derives from the range of actions that state elites can undertake without routine negotiation with civil society.” O’Donnell’s (1993) and Acemoglu, García-Jimeno and Robinson’s (2014) conceptualize state weakness in a related way as the physical absence of state institutions and functionaries. Others use terminology which is based more closely on particular practices which characterize different types of states. For example, Bratton and van de Walle (1997) and Herbst (2000), following Weber’s (1978) classification of different types of authority, call weak states in Africa neopatrimonial, which stresses their patrimonial or clientelistic organization that precludes the provision of public goods. Evans (1995) argues that strong states exhibit the property of ‘embedded autonomy’ having bureaucracies which are both embedded in society, understanding its needs, but also autonomous from it and therefore beyond capture. More recent analytical work by Acemoglu (2005) and Besley and Persson (2011) focuses on the idea that a weak state is one that cannot raise taxes. Finally, Acemoglu, Robinson and Santos (2013), once again building on Weber, emphasize the issue that a weak state lacks the monopoly of violence.

There is as yet little agreement in this literature as to why poor countries do not make their states stronger when there appears to be such obvious benefits from doing so. Nevertheless, several lines of work emphasize certain benefits to those currently holding political power from the continued weakness of the state. The research on neopatrimonialism, for example, sees this as a result of a political strategy used to buy support and control power, and this strategy

¹This partially follows the classification scheme suggested by anthropologists distinguishing between band, tribe, chiefdom, and state (e.g., Service, 1962).

naturally becomes a fundamental impediment to making the state stronger. For instance, appointments in the bureaucracy are made on the basis of political criteria, as rewards for support, rather than on the grounds of competence for the job.² This makes for a weak state, but it is politically attractive. Making the state stronger entails a change in the nature of politics, and Acemoglu and Robinson (2012) argue that this creates the “fear of losing political power” which impedes the creation of a stronger state.

What could explain variation in the intensity of the “fear of losing political power”? Herbst (2000) emphasizes the role of Africa’s geography and ecology, which led to very low population densities and discouraged state building.³ From this perspective the benefits of state building in Africa are intrinsically low. For Evans (1995), the differential incidence of embedded autonomy is related to idiosyncratic historical processes (such as Confucian bureaucratic legacy in East Asia). Acemoglu, Robinson and Santos (2013) develop a different argument and suggest that in situations where national elections are important for the allocation of political power, state elites may not wish to establish a monopoly of violence of the state and make it stronger in peripheral areas because this may reduce the support they receive from local elites controlling society and politics. Acemoglu, Ticchi and Vindigni (2010), relatedly, suggest that national elites may refrain from establishing the monopoly of violence in certain parts of the national territory because this would empower the military or other armed branches of the government as potential rivals to them.

One of the most important ideas about the origins of modern weak states in Africa is that rather than reflecting some deep fundamental difference between Africa and the rest of the world, they are a path-dependent outcome of the nature of colonial governance.⁴ There are many different versions of this argument. Young (1994) argued that the authoritarianism of the colonial states set role models and political practices which transferred themselves to post-colonial politicians. Cooper (2002) proposed that the typical colonial state was a “gate-keeper state” which sat on the coast and was only interested in ruling and extracting natural resources, not building the institutions required to develop the colony. Such states persisted after independence when they were taken over by Africans.

Perhaps the most prominent version of a path-dependent thesis in the context of African politics is that modern state weakness is a legacy of the type of ‘indirect rule’ particularly

²Robinson and Verdier (2013) provide a theory of why such patronage would take the form of employment.

³Though Osafo-Kwaako and Robinson (2013) point out that pre-colonial political centralization and population density in Africa are in fact uncorrelated in the Standard Cross-Cultural Sample.

⁴See Acemoglu and Robinson (2010) present a general path-dependent explanation of African institutions.

practiced in English colonies. Indirect rule was a system where colonial powers used traditional rulers ('chiefs') as the local level of government, empowering them to tax, dispense law and maintain order. Chiefs often maintained police forces, prisons and were in charge of providing public goods like roads and garnering the resources and manpower necessary to build them. Even during the colonial period there was unease about the impact this system was having on African society. Mamdani's important work (1996) built on this earlier literature (for example, the essays in Crowder and Ikime eds., 1970) to emphasize that indirect rule had serious negative effects on the nature of political institutions in Africa. Mamdani's argument was that indirect rule, by making chiefs accountable to the colonial power, rather than local people, made them much more despotic. This despotism persisted after independence, influencing both local and national governance. It also played a significant role in the collapse of democracy in post-colonial Africa. There is a mounting body of empirical evidence which indeed suggests that the persistence of indirect rule institutions does have adverse effects on contemporary African development (e.g. Goldstein and Udry, 2008, Acemoglu, Reed and Robinson, 2014).

Nevertheless, Mamdani's argument leaves open a great many issues. For one, it does not make precise the mechanisms via which indirect rule persisted and why post-independence African leaders continued to rely on it in some places but not in others. In Guinea, for example, the first government of Sékou Touré completely abolished traditional rulers and traditional mechanisms of social control (McGovern, 2013). Similar moves against previous indirect rulers took place against Mossi chiefs in Burkina Faso, the Buganda chiefs in Uganda, and the Asante chiefs in Ghana (Rathbone, 2000a,b). Yet in Sierra Leone something quite different happened. Chiefs were not abolished and their powers not attacked. Rather, the powers they had acquired during the colonial period were further institutionalized (e.g., as recently as 2009, the passing of a national Chieftaincy Act froze the institution in the form it had existed at the end of the colonial period). Mamdani's thesis does recognize this variation, positing a distinction between radical reactions such as in Uganda, and conservative ones such as Sierra Leone, but he also argues that this was relatively inconsequential for the main dependent variables of interest, particularly the extent to post-colonial democracy. Just as important, he does not advance an explanation for the variation between radical and conservative reactions. Mamdani's book also does not make precise in what sense a state governed indirectly is weak or lacks capacity. Indeed, in more recent work (2012), Mamdani denies that indirect rule created weak states because it so powerfully shaped identities.

In this paper we use a detailed study of the Sierra Leonean case to examine the specific

mechanisms via which indirect rule persisted in Sierra Leone and the sense in which it created or contributed to the weakness of the post-colonial state. We also propose a new explanation for the variation in the extent to which the institution of indirect rule persisted in post-colonial Africa.

We argue that indirect rule persisted in Sierra Leone because the post-colonial state was the “bottom up” creation of the traditional rulers who ran the indirect rule system. They formed the first political party and dominated late colonial and post colonial politics. Thus in Sierra Leone, the institutions of indirect rule created a political movement that captured the central state at independence in 1961. The system persisted, however, because even when the central state was captured by new movements after 1967, indirect rule mutated into a generalized form of incumbency bias.

The state that indirect rule created was weak in several well defined ways. First, indirect rule by traditional (and gerontocratic) rulers has made it difficult for the state to establish a monopoly of violence both because it had created an underclass of ‘lumpen youths’ alienated from the society and because it mitigated against the construction of a national identity so that politics stayed local and parochial. Second, as emphasized by Mamdani (1996), traditional rulers were relatively unaccountable and thus able to extract rents and under-provide public goods. This feature was not compensated for by other types of accountability, for example via a representative national parliament, in large part because of the role chiefs played in managing these higher level elections. Third, the fact that the local state was based on lineages and ruling families made it an intrinsically patrimonial and non-bureaucratized structure—a defining property of weakness. These factors interacted with others to create huge negative economic consequences from state weakness. For example, the nature of the traditional instruments of control, such as the role of chiefs as ‘custodians of the land,’ led to large economic distortions. Finally, though this is harder to measure, logically the model of indirect rule implies that externalities across local areas in the construction of the state or the provision of services will not be properly internalized (Acemoglu, García-Jimeno and Robinson, 2014).

But this did not happen everywhere in Africa. A key difference between a colony like Sierra Leone and one like Uganda was that in the latter there were several large, indeed one dominant, pre-colonial state—Buganda. This meant that the distribution of power within the system of indirect rule was very different than in Sierra Leone. As Reid (2002) shows, British colonialism in Uganda even allowed the kingdom of Buganda to expand, and British forces helped it defeat its long-term rival, Bunyoro, and annex land from that and other kingdoms. At independence

the King of Buganda, the Kabaka, became the President of Uganda, a country named by the British after the pre-colonial state. Yet the drive towards independence was typically not led by such traditional elites, but rather by more educated, urban and professional groups. In Uganda the first Prime Minister Milton Obote was not a Ganda (from Buganda), but a Langi from the north of the country. Ruling indirectly via the Buganda chiefs was infeasible or unattractive for him because the Kabaka was too powerful. So when he had the opportunity, he forced the Kabaka into exile in 1966 and changed the constitution to strip him of his powers. It was only in 1986 that a new Kabaka was allowed to return from exile and was much less powerful thereafter. Thus the greater power of traditional elites in Uganda, perhaps at first paradoxically, led to their sidelining and to the weakening of the vestiges of indirect rule after independence. The situation was similar in Ghana.

This contrasts with post-independence dynamics in Sierra Leone. There were no large powerful pre-colonial states, and though some of the chieftaincies that the British created were directly linked to pre-colonial polities (such as Banta, Kpa-Mende or Tikonko), unlike Buganda these got smaller rather than larger and there was little continuity in their political institutions (see Abraham, 2003, for Mendeland, or Wylie, 1977, for Temneland). This enabled post-independence leaders, even those like Siaka Stevens who had no connection to traditional rulers, to control the traditional rulers.

This theory can help explain the findings of Gennaioli and Rainer (2007) and Michalopoulos and Papaioannou (2013). In their work, the extent of pre-colonial centralization is positively correlated with current development outcomes today, such as light intensity at night and various measures of public good provision. Phillips (2011) and Bandyopadhyay and Green (2012) find similar things using different data within Nigeria and Uganda. However, it is not clear why pre-colonial centralization leads to greater state capacity today. Our argument suggests one potential mechanism: where there were important pre-colonial centralized states, indirect rule tended to be overthrown after independence and its negative legacies ameliorated, making it less likely that the modern state would be dysfunctionally weak, and there would be endemic under-provision of public goods. Our argument can also explain the within-country variation, since it is likely that post-independence states would have intervened and administered more intensely in precisely those parts of the country where the pre-colonial states were located.⁵

Though Ghana, Uganda and several other African countries abandoned indirect rule, this

⁵There could also be elements of selection here in the sense that if one considers both Uganda and Ghana, it is clear that the states formed in the ecologically more attractive parts of the country, and may have intrinsically higher agricultural productivity today.

does not imply they became development miracles or in fact developed strong effective states. In both countries the abandonment of indirect rule set off other dynamics with other adverse effects. In both cases, in the absence of traditional authority, the state had to rely more on the military, and in both countries the military then overthrew the civilian governments, leading to cycles of violence, predatory rule and economic decline under Ignatius Kutu Acheampong in Ghana and Idi Amin in Uganda. In Sierra Leone, the persistence of the institutions of indirect rule had different implications for post-war political dynamics and ones which turned out to be perhaps even more violent. For instance, as Richards (1996) argues, the civil war in Sierra Leone can be interpreted as a reaction by alienated youth against the institutions of indirect rule, while neither Ghana nor Uganda have experienced this type of conflict.

The paper proceeds as follows. In the next section we place the institution of indirect rule within the broader literature on state formation and the forces that make states weak or strong. We discuss what the literature says about the types of incentives and forces which make indirect rule persist and the mechanisms which lead it to be the basis of a weak and ineffective state. In section 3 we describe the history of indirect rule in Sierra Leone, and how it persisted after independence in 1961 and the reasons why it has lasted until today despite many challenges. Section 4 examines in more detail the sense in which the post-independence state in Sierra Leone is weak. Section 5 examines the two contrasting cases of Uganda and Ghana, arguing that the very different dynamics they experienced at independence was due to the fact that both countries were potentially dominated by a very large pre-colonial polity. Section 6 concludes.

2 Weak and Strong States

Though analysis of the importance of the state in providing public goods might be traced back to Hobbes, the most important root of its modern academic study is Weber. A state is obviously made up of many institutions and practices. Weber pointed to several key dimensions of states which he thought were critical. His most basic definition of a state emphasized the monopoly of violence:

“A state is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory” (1946, p. 78).

Weber also pointed to the emergence of rational bureaucracy as another defining process in state formation, noting that

“In the pure type of traditional rule, the following features of a bureaucratic administrative staff are absent: a) a clearly defined sphere of competence subject to impersonal rules, b) a rationally established hierarchy, c) a regular system of appointment on the basis of free contract, and orderly promotion, d) technical training as a regular requirement, e) (frequently) fixed salaries, in the typical case paid in money” (1978, p. 229).

Of these two key features of the state, Weber’s emphasis on bureaucratization has received the most attention by scholars, particularly in Africa. Many scholars see what Weber described as the transition from a state based on patrimonial lines to a ‘rational-legal’ one to be the defining moment in state formation (e.g. Silberman, 1993). Evans’s (1995) work is squarely in this tradition and the empirical work of Evans and Rauch (1999, 2000) suggests that states with ‘Weberian’ characteristics, e.g. a non-patrimonial organization, have better public policies and higher rates of economic growth. Africa has yet to undergo this transition.

The issue of the monopoly of violence, or perhaps more generally territorial control, has also been studied in this context. Implicitly, much of the literature on civil war is concerned with this topic. Fearon and Laitin (2003), for example, interpret their finding that income per capita is the dominant determinant of civil war incidence in terms of state capacity (though they do not measure this directly). A more recent literature in political science has considered what it calls ‘subnational authoritarianism,’ meaning the presence of regions that the central state does not rule and are instead controlled by local power-holders (e.g. Gibson, 2005, for examples from Argentina and Mexico).

Other elements of the state that have received recent attention, especially from economists, include the development of a fiscal system, for example, in Acemoglu (2005) and Besley and Persson (2011).

Bearing in mind these different dimensions, we could say that a weak state is one which does not possess a monopoly of violence, does not have a modern bureaucracy and is unable to raise taxes, particularly direct taxes. In principle, states may be strong in some dimensions and weak in others. However, in reality these three things do seem to co-vary quite positively, suggesting that the type of forces that keep a state weak make it weak in all three dimensions. For example, if a state lacks a monopoly of violence, it seems likely that it will have a hard time collecting taxes, at least from areas it does not control. Further, we would expect a patrimonial bureaucracy to be very bad at collecting taxes or providing public goods.

There is much less consensus, however, about why all states do not become rational-legal, particularly when there appears to be such large advantages to becoming so. Weber saw the development of such states in Western Europe as deeply bound up with and co-evolving with the processes of capitalist modernization driven by, amongst other things, the Protestant reformation. To the extent that other parts of the world did not undergo similar processes, one would not expect such states to emerge. More recent research has stressed a plethora of mechanisms which may prevent the development of Weberian rational-legal states. They have also stressed other senses in which a state may be weak. The most dominant idea, due originally to Hintze (1975) and developed more fully by Tilly (1975), is that strong states emerge as a consequence of inter-state warfare. In other parts of the world, where there has been less inter-state warfare, such as Africa (Herbst, 2000), rational-legal states have not emerged. Tilly's idea is widely accepted in social science, and even in the recent work by economists on this topic (Besley and Persson, 2011, Gennaioli and Voth, 2012).

Other scholars have suggested very different mechanisms. Migdal (1988) and Scott (2009), for example, develop the idea that the state may be weak because society is highly organized and refuses to concede authority to a state. This could be for various reasons. For instance Lebanon does not have an income tax because it is divided into powerfully organized communities, the Sunnis, Shias, Maronites, Druze and Orthodox, and all are worried that any state might be controlled by another of the groups and such things as tax policy used against their interests. Similarly Lebanon has not had a census since 1932. Collecting data on its population might be regarded as a basic function of the state, but in Lebanon each community fears that changes in the relative population shares will destabilize the equilibrium between them (for example through the intricate electoral system). Hence nobody dares to collect such information. In Scott's view the mechanism is that people simply do not want to subject themselves to the coercion of the state and the reduction in autonomy involved with having a strong state. But it might also be local elites vigorously resisting the authority of the central state to protect their own privileges.

The work on patrimonialism and why it does not transition to a rational-legal state focuses on the idea that patrimonialism is, at root, a method of organizing power and exercising control over society. In any society, some rule and some are ruled, but the practice and methods of rule can take many forms, as can the extent of autonomy of the rulers and the extent to which the ruled can participate in decision-making. These forms have huge consequences for economic development. If society is organized in a patrimonial way, then the rulers become patrons and

the ruled become the clients of the patrons. Patrons typically control scarce resources that they allocate at their discretion to clients in exchange for services and particularly loyalty and support. If a client gets access to resources, such as a job, a school place for their children or essential medical treatment, this does not happen on the basis of some well defined criteria. Rather, it comes because one's patron has access to the resources. It comes as a reward for loyalty.

As an example of why states become organized in a patrimonial way, consider the political problem facing Joseph Mobutu when he took over the Congolese state in 1965. His first objective was to consolidate his power. He was confronted by a factious "nation" with powerful independence movements bubbling in Katanga and Kasai. The Simba Revolt had already taken over the Kivus and most of the eastern half of the country in 1964-65. The state was not only short on legitimacy, it was woefully short of human capital and experience. The top echelon of the civil service had been staffed by Belgians who left in 1960 and the first Congolese university graduate arrived only four years before that in 1956.

In 1965 Mobutu therefore faced a difficult political problem: how to control the society he had taken over and how to organize political institutions to ensure this. He had a bureaucracy and army of sorts, but he could not rely on anybody's loyalty and he was short of resources. Most of the vast mineral wealth of the country was still controlled by foreigners. Mobutu saw the key to establishing his control as creating a vast web of informal patron-client relationships. Dispensing resources and favors to people who in turn dispensed them to others below them, creating a vast pyramid of favors and obligations ultimately flowing from his office and covering the entire state. Such a strategy for consolidating power would work only up to the point where clients couldn't coordinate on a new patron so Mobutu also brilliantly sidelined any such candidates. Ministers and political elites were "shuffled" from one position to another, thrown into prison, rehabilitated, and cast into exile, only to be rehabilitated again. Particularly distinctive about the organization of the Mobutu state was, as he himself put it

"In a word, everything is for sale, anything can be bought in our country. And in this flow, he who holds the slightest cover of public authority uses it illegally to acquire money, goods, prestige, or to avoid obligations. The right to be recognized by a public servant, to have one's children enrolled in school, to obtain medical care, etc. ... are all subject to this tax which, though invisible, is known and expected by all" (Gould, 1980, p. 485).

Not only was corruption acceptable, within limits, so was preying on society. This apparently perverse organization of the state was actually a brilliant way of allowing Mobutu to extend his vast patronage machine to incorporate far more people than his public finances would otherwise have permitted. A key tool of patronage was employment in the government. People could be hired by the state without payment because just working for the state came with the “option value” of being able to predate on the rest of society. So what looked like—and was of course—corruption was the usual way the politics of the state operated. Naturally, this organization of the state came at huge costs in terms of social welfare and economic development.

The more analytical work in this area also proposes various mechanisms that can account for why weak states persist. For example, in Besley and Persson’s (2011) canonical model, it is more attractive to build state strength in the fiscal and legal spheres when the incumbent does not fear losing power (as this makes it less likely that state capacity can be used against itself in the future); when society is more cohesive, so that losing power is not so bad; and when the value of public goods is high (perhaps because of external warfare). In Acemoglu, Ticchi and Vindigni (2011) an initial political elite facing the threat of democratization creates a weak patrimonial state where bureaucrats extract rents to create a coalition against redistribution, which would entail state reform and a reduction of rents for bureaucrats. Here a weak state is specifically a method of controlling political power and forging a particular coalition. In Acemoglu, Robinson and Santos (2013), the central state decides not to create a monopoly of violence because warlords provide votes at a lower price than political elites would otherwise have to pay. In Acemoglu, Ticchi and Vindigni (2010), a state without the monopoly of violence and endemic civil wars persists because the elite controlling the central state are afraid of strengthening the military that can compete against them in the future.

None of the analytical work on state weakness has focused on the idea that indirect rule creates weak states, though both Lange (2004, 2009) and Iyer (2010) present empirical evidence of the impact of indirect rule.

3 The Creation, Persistence and Consequences of Indirect Rule in Sierra Leone

3.1 History of the Institution

The Sierra Leonean state is built around the system of indirect rule created by the British in 1896, which is based on a symbiotic relationship between national politicians and local

‘traditional’ (though the tradition is to a large extent invented—see Hobsbawm and Ranger eds. 1986) rulers. This system has lasted 118 years, though with some notable adaptations after independence in 1961. It may even have in some sense become stronger after the civil war ended in 2002, when real political competition emerged for the first time since the 1960s. The longevity of the system and the way it was re-created after the civil war suggests that it has quite robust features—even if it leads to a severe underprovision of public goods.

To understand the nature of the current state in Sierra Leone and why it is weak, it is critical to understand the history of how the state was created during the colonial period and what kind of institutional architecture was imposed at the time. In 1896, when the British established a protectorate over what would be the modern territory of Sierra Leone, they set up a canonical version of indirect rule. Local government was to be delegated to the Paramount Chiefs (PCs) who collected poll taxes and administered justice. PCs are elected for life and to be a candidate one must come from a ruling family or ruling house. Chieftaincies, of which there are currently 149, have anywhere between 1 ruling house (around 10%) to a maximum of 12. The ruling houses are roughly the elites which were recognized by the British in the 19th century, possibly descendents of those who signed treaties with the British. In practice, establishing today that a particular family is a ruling house is done by showing that an ancestor of the house was allowed by the British to contest to be PC during the colonial period. There is no formal or written list of ruling houses—the set of acceptable lineages is entirely ‘local knowledge,’ and this aspect of the system has never really been institutionalized (Acemoglu, Reed and Robinson, 2014, constructed the list of ruling families by administering a national survey). PCs are elected from eligible candidates by a secret ballot, where the electorate are the members of the chieftaincy council (formally, the Tribal Authority). Today there is one member of this council for every 20 taxpayers in the chieftaincy, but the members are selected—not chosen by the taxpayers, let alone ordinary citizens—and are essentially composed of local elites. Underneath the PC is a whole structure of subordinate chiefs, village chiefs, and section chiefs, all of which are automatically members of the council, along with a member of parliament who comes from the chieftaincy and other elites.

This system evolved during the colonial period (Abraham, 1978, is the best treatment of the system in action prior to independence). It is in operation today and is still the main way that the national government in Freetown governs the countryside. There are several reasons for this longevity. First, PCs were given disproportionate influence in early representative institutions during the late colonial period. In 1924 the British decided to allow African representation

on the Legislative Council. The Protectorate could elect three representatives on a franchise restricted to wealthy adult males (consisting of around 5% of adult males, Kilson, 1966, p. 125) which ended in the election of three paramount chiefs. In 1951 the British promulgated a new constitution which opened up the Legislative Council further. In consequence the first national political party, the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), formed around Dr. Milton Margai, the Protectorate's first doctor and longstanding adviser to the paramount chiefs. Of the 14 elected representatives, 8 were themselves paramount chiefs, the other six included Milton Margai, his brother Albert, and Siaka Stevens who later formed the opposition All People's Congress party (APC). Margai was a scion of a 'ruling family' which had controlled the paramount chieftaincy of Lower Banta since the creation of indirect rule in 1896 and his brother George was the PC of this chieftom in the 1950s. Apart from Stevens, all of the non-paramount chiefs came from ruling families. As Cartwright puts it (1970, p. 56)

“Dr. Margai's wide range of acquaintances enabled him to go to leading men in most towns of the Protectorate and enlist them as the local leaders of the SLPP. But beyond enlisting a few “big men” in each locality ... the SLPP undertook little political activity.”

They controlled elections and got themselves elected to the legislative council and formed the SLPP, which elected the first prime minister at independence, Milton Margai, whose power base rested almost entirely on the paramount chieftaincy. Legislative electoral districts, for example, coincided almost precisely with chieftaincy boundaries. One chief, one member of parliament (Cartwright, 1970, p. 141).

The SLPP then entered into a symbiotic relationship with the chiefs in rather the same way as the British colonial state had done. Cartwright (1970, p. 88) explains thus:

“While the SLPP leaders negotiated with the British new constitutional arrangements which protected the interests of the chiefs as a class, but at the same time retained for themselves the ability to impose sanctions on any individual chief, the chiefs ensured that their people supported the SLPP.”

The local control of PCs over land, the justice system, and forced labor was used to deliver votes in elections. The ability of PCs to use selective punishments and rewards at the local level and their control over resources gave huge political leverage to the SLPP, who had no interest in constructing a national state that might have interfered with this political resource.

For the 1957 elections, the last before independence in 1961, there were further changes in the Legislative Assembly with a broadened franchise. Of the 50 elected members (7 others were nominated by the governor) 12 seats were guaranteed to PCs (one per district) and of the remaining MPs, 6 were the sons of PCs and of the other 32 members, 64% were from ruling houses. Forty four out of 50 supported the SLPP including all of the PCs.

Therefore, at independence the SLPP created a political strategy deeply rooted in the colonial institutions. Though the national state constructed by the British was a bureaucratic one, it was primarily staffed by Krios, the Creole people of Freetown who lost out politically as the majority of the electorate was in the interior (see Clapham, 1976, on the failed attempt by Krio elites to maintain their power). After independence, the Krios were replaced by supporters of the SLPP from the interior and the national state was ‘patrimonialized’.

It was a liability for the SLPP, however, that all its elites such as the Margais hailed from the south of the country. The APC, formed by Siaka Stevens of Limba ethnicity from the north of the country, to contest the 1962 election, took advantage of this liability. Once in power Stevens reconstructed and operated the same model (Reno, 1995, is the best study of the Stevens regime). The APC won the 1967 general election, largely because the SLPP split over whether or not to form a one-party state. Stevens then took over the institutions of indirect rule and continued to use them in the same way, including using the PCs as a way of governing the countryside and mobilizing political support. Stevens even strengthened their powers by abolishing in 1972 the District Councils that the British had set up in 1945. At the same time, he aggressively intervened to remove chiefs he did not like (recall the Cartwright quote above on how the SLPP worked), and moulded them to be an electoral arm for the APC. With Stevens, and ever since, it is customary for the paramount chiefs to declare loyalty to the government in power and that government expects the PCs to deliver electoral support.

This strategy is still in use today.⁶ Chiefs also still appear to be heavily involved in politics. Wyrod (2008, p. 79) notes that in the 2007 elections when the SLPP was once again the incumbent, “paramount chiefs tried to deliver votes for the SLPP.”⁷

The resilience of indirect rule in Sierra Leone has had both ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ roots. If at the national level a political equilibrium emerged where the central state had no

⁶Though there is controversy today about the extent to which PCs can control elections, everyone claims they have a major impact. One PC in Kono district, when asked by us whether he was able to influence the way people voted replied “if I say left they go left, if I say right they go right.” A senior member of the SLPP party told us that PCs could control between 20-30% of the votes in an election. In our fieldwork we found all rural people willing to talk about how the PCs attempt to sway voting and elections.

⁷See Baldwin, 2013, one of the very few real studies of the electoral impact of African chiefs. Burrows, 1976, is a valuable study which covers some of this ground for Kenema district.

incentive to invest in making itself stronger (since this might have jeopardized the incumbency advantage delivered by chiefs), the equilibrium also featured local support for the institution. The issue of local attitudes towards chiefs is a complex one because there is a long history of resentment over abuses by chiefs. In 1955-56 there were extensive riots across the country, fueled by complaints about extortionate taxation and the arbitrary use of powers by paramount chiefs and local authorities. More recently, grievances against the chiefs have been seen by some as crucial to both the start of the civil war and the popularity of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) with youths (Richards, 1996, Mokuwa, Voors, Bulte and Richards, 2011). Barrows (1976) and Tangri (1976), however, have shown that the rural riots in the mid-1950s were not, in large part, popular revolts against the institution of Paramount Chieftaincy itself, but were rather mobilizations by elite opponents against incumbent chiefs. Tangri, for instance, writes that

“Ruling house competition, amalgamation differences, ethnic antagonisms, personal enmities, and other conflicting interests, all involving men of influence, constituted the underlying causes of the various chieftom riots of 1955-6. And these divisions among ‘big men’ were expressed within the context of a popular malaise arising from the corrupt, extortionist, and authoritarian behaviour of [incumbent] chieftom rulers. A symbiotic relationship emerged between opponents of the local establishment, who wanted to further their own interests, and discontented ‘youngmen’, who demanded an end to the abuse of power by the ruling elite. For the ‘youngmen’ [violence] was a means of ending misrule by a particular ‘ruling’ family, while for the elders it was an instrument for unseating and replacing opponents in order to obtain a more equitable share of chieftom offices and resources between personal rivals, different areas, and various ethnic groups.” (Tangri, 1976, p. 318).

As for the arguments about acute current resentment against paramount chiefs, there is the overwhelming finding from recent surveys that chiefs retain legitimacy at the local level. Fanthorpe (2004, pp. 6-7) sums up a large amount of research he conducted for DFID after the end of the civil war on the topic by arguing that

“Long experience of state corruption has left many Sierra Leoneans extremely distrustful of bureaucracy ... In an environment where ruthless pursuit of self-interest among the comparative wealthy and well educated is perceived to be the norm, chiefs continue to be seen as a lesser evil: there is at least some chance that

rulers with the appropriate hereditary credentials can be prevailed upon to protect the hereditary rights of the rural populace.”

Indeed, while certain reforms of the chieftaincy have had some degree of popular support (for example, the introduction of universal suffrage in elections for PC), other reforms, such as getting rid of the ruling houses, have not. Rural people in Sierra Leone have tended to be suspicious of reforms that might lead to ‘natives’ losing control of the chieftaincy and local institutions.⁸ Acemoglu, Reed and Robinson (2014) argue that this also likely reflects the specific investments that local people make in the patronage networks which have the paramount chief at the apex. It may also be the case that there are local institutions, such as secret societies like the Poro, that act as constraints on PCs (see Little, 1965, 1966); moreover, rural Sierra Leoneans see themselves as having far more influence over these local institutions than they do over the central state.

This perspective shows us something interesting about the demand side for state building in Sierra Leone. It is not just that national elites not consider it to be in their best interest to construct a more effective and stronger central state, but also that rural dwellers feel threatened by the central state. This is reminiscent of Scott’s (2009) thesis that state formation is a fundamentally coercive process, which is strongly resisted. Such arguments resonate with a wide swath of the literature in African studies (see MacIntosh, 1999), even if in some cases the resistance comes not from the regular rural dwellers but the local elites.

3.2 Indirect Rule and State Weakness

Does this system of governance necessarily make the state in Sierra Leone weak, and if so in what ways? For the British, indirect rule was a low cost method for pacifying the periphery of Sierra Leone. The colonial state had little interest in providing public goods or developing the country (particularly after the Hut Tax rebellion, when initial ideas about British settlement were abandoned, see Lange, 2009). However, it did need a way of guaranteeing order and stability, and of collecting enough taxes for the state to be self-financing (recall, for example, Cooper’s, 2002, ‘gatekeeper state’). The institution of the PC achieved this without entailing any investment in the construction of a national state.

We have already emphasized several ways that a state could be weak: it could lack a monopoly of violence, a modern bureaucracy and a modern fiscal system. Sierra Leone is weak

⁸In field work in Kenema, we were forcefully told that it could never be allowed for a stranger to become PC because then strangers could get control over the land - the PC being traditionally the ‘custodian of the land’.

in all these senses today. The most obvious evidence that it lacks a monopoly of violence is the civil war, initiated by the RUF, that ravaged the country between 1991 and 2002 and which the national army was incapable of fighting. Keen (2005, p. 34) reproduces a quote from Abu Turay, capturing the extent to which central authority had collapsed in the early 1990s:

“by the end of Momoh’s rule he had stopped paying civil servants, teachers and even Paramount Chiefs. Central government had collapsed, and then of course we had border incursions, ‘rebels’ and all the automatic weapons pouring over the border from Liberia. The NPRC, the ‘rebels’ and the ‘sobels’ [soldiers-turned rebels] all amount to the chaos one expects when government disappears. None of them are the causes of our problems, but they are symptoms.”

The outbreak of the civil war was the outcome of a long process. Stevens, not trusting the national army which had initially stopped him becoming Prime Minister in 1967 by mounting a coup to keep the SLPP in power, privatized violence. He created a private security force initially named the Internal Security Unit (the ISU— which was apparently referred to by his long-suffering people as ‘I Shoot U’) and afterwards the Special Security Division (SSD—or ‘Siaka Stevens’ Dogs’, see Jackson, 2004, p. 63, Keen, 2005, p. 17 on these acronyms). The APC also recruited marginalized (mostly urban) youth as professional thugs. Kandeh (1998), for instance, has noted how political elites before the war had taken advantage (and fostered the growth) of a class of urban “lumpen youth” as a cheap source of coercive power :

“APC violence and thuggery relied almost exclusively on the recruitment of urban thugs and rural drifters. As Ismail Rashid (1997) points out, most of the thugs recruited by APC patrons in the 1960s and 70s came from peri-urban enclaves like Sawpit, Magazine and Kannikay - all in Freetown” (p. 359).

These lumpen youth were “specialists in political violence”—readily called upon by patrons to intimidate (or eliminate) opponents, raze uncooperative villages, and cow voters during elections (pp. 359-362).⁹

This lack of the monopoly of violence is indirectly linked to the nature of indirect rule in two ways. PCs had the responsibility for local order and maintaining police, and yet the

⁹These lumpen youth formed the bulk of RUF recruits after the initial phase of the war, and specialists believe that the bloody, highly predatory Armed Forces Revolutionary Council regime (an RUF-lower army ranks alliance) was essentially the result of these professional, lower class thugs becoming independent from their elite patrons. See Kandeh (1998, pp.361-362) and Abdullah (1998).

way that they achieved this and the nature of traditional institutions played an important part in marginalizing youths. As argued in Fanthorpe (2001, p. 385), this system—whereby rural dwellers depend on a highly exclusionary set of traditional institutions if they want to access property and gain political rights—has historically created a large class of people (mostly young, low-status men) who are practically obligated to become rural drifters or join marginalized populations in the cities. That is, they cannot access political rights by appealing to the modern state, for it is nearly non-existent in rural areas. But for all intents and purposes, they also cannot do so by appealing to traditional authorities if they lack patronage by those higher up in the chiefdom hierarchy. For example, in many chiefdoms, only those who can validly claim native status are allowed to plant long-term crops. Fanthorpe cites research on a chiefdom in a diamond-mining area, where

“Farmland was allocated according to age and pedigree, forcing newcomers to make farms at a considerable distance from the main settlement. Young people who lacked patronage often faced the prospect of a lifetime’s hard labour on a relative’s behalf. Yet independent initiatives in wealth-creating among women and low-status men elicited strong disapproval, and were sometimes ruthlessly suppressed” (p. 384).

Moreover, Fanthorpe notes

“In recent times the population obliged to attach itself to a rural settlement in order to obtain a tax receipt, a vote, and other privileges of citizenship has often far exceeded that which is actually resident, and economically supportable, at any given time. The young and those of low inherited status inevitably find themselves in attenuating orders of precedence in access to these privileges. Sierra Leone may therefore represent a case in which alarming numbers of people have become neither ‘citizen’ nor ‘subject’.” (p. 385)

For this population of young men, being recruited as the brawn behind a political entrepreneur has offered a much easier, readily accessible route to patronage.

The other obvious implication of this system is that it made it very difficult for a national identity to emerge. As Fanthorpe puts it (2005, p. 4)

“even today, the vast majority of rural Sierra Leoneans obtain primary rights of residence, land use, and political/legal representation as ‘natives’ of chiefdoms

rather than as citizens of the state. It is the prerogative of the chief to recognize and guarantee ‘native’ status. While ‘native’ identities are rooted in history, they have been reshaped by regimes of colonial governance, notably the registration of villages for annual poll tax. In practice ‘native’ status is a privilege conferred by membership of land and title holding groups and attached to villages in which chiefs reside.”

Being a native of a chieftaincy, as opposed to a non-native, referred to as a ‘stranger’ by the locals, confers many benefits. As we noted, typically only natives can grow permanent crops such as cocoa, palm or coffee. Acemoglu, Reed and Robinson (2014) show that strangers have weaker property rights than natives. This institution has clearly influenced the extent to which a national identity can emerge and can help explain why voting patterns in elections are still rooted in region and ethnicity and why soldiers in the army identify with their region or ethnicity, not with Sierra Leone. The only option to really establish civilian control over the military is to keep it weak and risk giving up on the monopoly of violence.

Indirect rule does seem to have made the state weak in other well defined ways as well, which we mentioned in the introduction. As emphasized by Mamdani (1996), traditional rulers were and still are relatively unaccountable. They are able to extract rents and under-provide public goods. Acemoglu, Reed and Robinson (2014) argue that PCs in Sierra Leone are more powerful in situations where they face less competition and this occurs when there are fewer ruling families. They show, for example, that in chieftaincies with fewer ruling families the paramount chieftaincy is indeed concentrated in fewer families. Using this idea, they then show that in places with fewer ruling families and more powerful paramount chiefs, a whole series of development outcomes are significantly lower. This includes all levels of educational attainment, the proportion of people working outside agriculture, child health and different measures of asset ownership. The likely mechanism is indeed that more powerful chiefs can extract more rents to the detriment of public good provision. Acemoglu, Reed and Robinson (2014) present evidence that a potential channel is through the extra ability of powerful chiefs to control people’s access to land. This feature was not compensated for by other types of accountability, for example via members of the national parliament, because of the role chiefs played in managing these higher level elections.

Moreover, the fact that the local state is based on lineages and ruling families made it intrinsically patrimonial and non-bureaucratized. This patrimonial nature filtered up to the national state after independence and is evident in many dimensions. For example, when

the APC returned to power in December 2007, they systematically removed from the civil service over 200 people from the south and east (Africa Confidential 2009, p. 5). Some of these people were certainly closely connected with the outgoing SLPP government, but others were just competent and dedicated Mende who had to make way for northerners. They were often replaced by people who were not competent, but to whom political favors were owed. For example, an Anti-Corruption Commission was formed in 2000 with a great deal of donor support and pressure and the post war SLPP government launched its Anti-Corruption strategy in February 2005. However, when the head of the commission, Val Collier, attempted to do his job too vigorously, he was replaced by Henry Joko-Smart, the brother-in-law of the then President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah. The International Crisis Group (2007, p. 9) notes

“While Collier brought charges against ministers, an Appeals court judge and several senior civil servants, Joko-Smart has focused almost exclusively on junior and mid-level officials.”

Many appointments in the bureaucracy appear to have been made on the basis of dispensing patronage and they often feature the relatives of powerful people. The new Human Resources Management Office found in 2007 that there were no records for 60% of civil servants (9,300 of 16,000) and that there was a huge problem of ghost workers. For example, salaries were paid to 236 people of the senior civil service list but only 125 were found to actually be at their posts (International Crisis Group, 2008). The patrimonial nature of the state extends to the military. Evidence for this surfaced in the anonymous ‘Dream Team’ letter to president Koroma on January 1, 2009.¹⁰ The Dream Team is the “Detective Reconnaissance Emergency Action Mission Team ... is a network of over 850 officers and men in all bases of the Sierra Leone Armed Forces cutting across tribal and political party lines.” This report made a series of claims about inappropriate political interventions in the military. For example it starts by demanding that “the decision to handpick [some named] cadet officers ... to go to Uganda for training be reversed with immediate effect. Eighty percent of these officers are from the Limba ethnic group, the ethnic group of the Minister of Defence.” It next demands that the “Government reverses the commissioning of the following [named] officers ... Again majority of these officers are Limbas, the Minister of Defence’s and the President’s tribesmen, many of whom could not read or write. Commissioning these officers flouted all requirements and acceptable procedures of the RSLAF. Their commissioning was done because they were trained

¹⁰ Available at <http://www.sierraherald.com/dream-team-letter.htm>

in alongside the Minister of Defence in 1977.” The report contains a very worrying threat “As these injustices persist and our DREAM Team grows in numbers day by day this pregnant moment in Sierra Leone’s history might lead to a tragic birth of something else.” Just as in the past, the loyalty of the army could not be assured and the current strategy of the regime is a patrimonial one of filling it with people from the ethnicity of president Ernest Koroma.

4 The Diverging Paths of Ghana and Uganda

The particular path of persistence and institutionalization of indirect rule in Sierra Leone has not been the norm even in British Africa. Sierra Leone firmly deviated from other British colonies, most notably from the Gold Coast (Ghana) and Uganda. In both cases, attempts by the British to set up legislative councils which were dominated by traditional elites had to be withdrawn because of strong opposition from urban and middle class groups.¹¹ In Uganda, however, the Buganda monarchy was so powerful that they were able to have a large initial impact on post-independence political institutions. However, in both Ghana and Uganda, this made post-independence leaders even more unwilling to rule via traditional chiefs or work with traditional elites, ultimately leading to the sidelining of the traditional elites. We now provide a brief account of these political paths.

4.1 Ghana

In Ghana, as the British colonial office began moving the country towards independence,¹² the opposition to chiefs and indirect rule was led by Kwame Nkrumah’s Convention People’s Party (CPP). Rathbone (2000a,b) (see also Crook, 1986) documents in great detail how the pre-colonial governments led by Nkrumah between 1951 and 1966 attempted

“to break, co-opt and coerce chieftaincy” (2000b, p. ix).

The CPP, founded in June 1949, was formed of people lacking membership in ruling families, so-called ‘verandah boys’. In this they were quite like large segments of Siaka Stevens’s APC in Sierra Leone. Stevens was mayor of Freetown in the 1960s when he was building his political machine and a trade unionist, not a traditional elite. But in Ghana, the power of Asante Chiefs and particularly of the king of Asante, the Asantehene, created a context very different from the one that Stevens faced. These chiefs had very powerful bases of support in the Asante

¹¹ Austin (1964) pp. 49-152 discusses this process in the Gold Coast, Coleman (1958) pp. 271-318 on Nigeria.

¹²See Crook (1986) for different views of the British with respect to the chieftaincy in late colonial Ghana.

country and were much less dependent on the central state than the chiefs of Sierra Leone. As Dunn and Robertson (1973, p. 93) put it

“[chieftaincy] neither behaved as an instrument in the hands ... of the colonial rulers nor ... drew its political power solely from its capacity to elicit the support of the colonial regime”.

Krono Edusei, Nkrumah’s lieutenant in the Asante region, had led the Ashanti Youth Association in vehement opposition to the traditional authorities, and he had been fined and imprisoned many times by chiefly courts. Rathbone notes “the CPP’s struggle against chieftaincy in southern Ghana was, by its own reckoning, at least as important as its dramatic, much better known and ultimately much more successful combat with the British” (2000b, p. 7).

By January 1950 Nkrumah himself was on the offensive, writing that “Chiefs in league with imperialists who obstruct our path ... will one day run away and leave their stools” (Rathbone, 2000b, p. 23) (a stool being the symbol of royal office in Asante). The newspaper of the party, the Accra Evening News, began to adopt a Marxist language to talk about the chiefs, referring to their “oppression of the masses” and their “collaboration with the imperialists” (Rathbone, 2000b, p. 22). In particular and very interesting for the comparison with Sierra Leone, the CPP focused on the mobilization of ‘youths’ or ‘youngmen’. These words are translations of the Twi words ‘nkwankwaa’ and ‘mmerante,’ which also have the connotation of a commoner, someone outside the traditional royal lineages.

These were not just idle words. Rathbone (2000a, p. 54) argues that

“There is little doubt that the CPP’s Central Committee had every intention to scrap chieftaincy as soon as possible. Several prominent members of the Party were widely reported as having made just that commitment before the first general election of 1951”.

Rathbone documents how the CPP intervened to take judicial powers away from chiefs (p. 56)

“The substitution of dependable party [in place of] discarded court panel members who were demonstrably royal or clients of chiefs is consistent throughout this long trail of evidence.”

Rather than solidifying the judicial powers of chiefs, as happened in Sierra Leone, in Ghana they were stripped away.

Though the CPP dominated the first elections to the legislative council in 1951, its opponents coalesced around a new political party, the National Liberation Movement (NLM), formed in central Asante. Rathbone (2000a, p. 58) argues

“the NLM was, at heart, an Asante party. It made a patriotic case and underlined it by making common cause with the beleaguered Asante chiefs.”

The response by the CPP was to aggressively go after the chiefs and create all sorts of pretexts for removing ones who did not cooperate from office. Rathbone writes of this

“The lists of ‘destooled’ and then de-recognised chiefs, and government-preferred and thus recognised substitutes for the latter part of 1957 and 1958, quite literally involve hundreds of people” (2000a, p. 62).

Compared with this, the few instances when Stevens’s parachuted illegitimate chiefs into power was of marginal importance.¹³ Brempong (2006, p. 30) sums the situation up by noting that

“The Nkrumah government ... minimized the political and judicial roles of traditional rulers, broke their financial backbone and made them passive appendages to the central government.”

After Nkrumah was thrown from power by the military in 1966, there was some change in this. Nevertheless, chiefs have never re-gained the roles or powers that they had in the colonial period. For example, (Rathbone, 2000a, pp. 62-63) concludes that

“After its fall in 1966, the military government dismissed all of those chiefs installed or promoted by the CPP ... and it re-installed the deposed. But it and its successor governments were never to return to chiefs the access to resources which had allowed them to exercise such authority in the later colonial period.”

Chiefs did gradually regain more status in the 1969, 1979 and 1992 constitutions but even this was hedged around with restrictions. For instance, the 1992 Constitution (276.1)

¹³Interestingly, as Reed and Robinson (2012) document, in no case was Stevens able to actually create a legitimate new ruling family using this tactic. Since 2002, the legacies of this period have been completely eradicated.

bans chiefs from taking part in “active” party politics and stipulates that those who wish to do so should abdicate. There are both regional and national houses of chiefs but their mandate is restricted to overseeing elections for chiefs and making sure they follow the correct traditional procedures. The 1992 Constitution did allow for the representation of chiefs on local government bodies but only with limited powers. Brempong (2006, p. 35) sums it up as

“In effect, the clause meant no consultations with the chiefs or at most only with respect to chiefs supposed to be favorable to the party in power.”

A long cry from the situation in Sierra Leone.

4.2 Uganda

In the British protectorate of Uganda, the role of the Buganda state was even more institutionalized than the Asante state was in Ghana (see Fallers, 1964). Not only was the protectorate named after the state, but the state had expanded with British help to annex surrounding territories, particularly the so-called ‘lost counties’ of Bunyoro, and during the protectorate Ganda governors were appointed by the British in some of the contiguous, previously stateless, societies, for example Tesoland.

After World War II, Britain began to move its African colonies towards independence (see Mutibwa, 1992, and Mwakikagile, 2012, for overviews of the relevant history). The new governor of Uganda, Andrew Cohen (appointed in 1952) had the job of opening up the legislative council to elections for Africans. This prospect was seen by the Kabaka of Buganda, Frederick Walugembe Mutesa II, as seriously diluting the power of Buganda, since its population was in a minority in the entire protectorate. In response he demanded that Buganda be separated from the protectorate. Cohen exiled the Kabaka to London. But his rising popularity in Uganda led to his re-instatement, and in exchange for agreeing not to oppose the creation of a unified Uganda as a state, he was to become the president at independence. The 1950s saw the emergence of a string of new political parties, the most significant being Milton Obote’s Uganda People’s Congress (UPC). As the 1961 legislative elections approached, the Kabaka became more discontented from the institutional arrangements which the British were proposing for an independent Uganda. He then instructed his people to boycott the election. This strategy not only failed to de-legitimize the election but had the perverse result of allowing the Democratic Party (DP), which had formed in the 1950s to oppose Buganda dominance, to dominate the Buganda homeland on the basis of non-Ganda votes. In response the Kabaka helped to found

a new party, the Kabaka Yekka ('king only') party which went into a coalition with Obote's UPC party at independence. The deal they made included autonomy for Buganda, the right of the Kabaka to nominate the members of the national assembly from Buganda, and assured his position as head of state of Uganda.

However, Obote had no intention of allowing the Kabaka to be either the head of state or to maintain the autonomy of Buganda. He immediately started to strengthen the army and undermine the coalition, which culminated in the 1962 referendum on returning the lost countries to Bunyoro, using it as a way to induce Bunyoro members of the DP to join the UPC. In response the Kabaka tried to create disunity within the UPC, promoting Obote's rivals who on February 4, 1966, passed a "no confidence" vote against Obote's leadership. Obote's response was to turn to Idi Amin, the young military commander he had been promoting, who helped him to mount a coup d'état and suspend the constitution. The Kabaka ordered that the government quit Buganda territory, but instead Obote ordered Amin to attack the Kabaka's palace on Mengo Hill, forcing him into exile. The new constitution that Obote then introduced in 1967 abolished the autonomy enjoyed by Buganda and the Kabaka's position as head of state.

As in the case of Ghana, the considerable power wielded by the king of a large pre-colonial state made the continuation of institutions of indirect rule infeasible after independence. Just as it was not possible for Nkrumah to make the Asantehene and other powerful Asante chiefs instruments of his rule, it was not feasible for Obote to govern Uganda in the way the British had done via the king and chiefs of Buganda and the other pre-colonial states. They had to be abolished.

5 Conclusions

In this paper we have attempted three tasks. We have tried to explain the mechanisms that led the colonial state based on indirect rule to persist to the present day in Sierra Leone. We have also studied the sense in which indirect rule creates state weakness in Sierra Leone. Finally, we provided a hypothesis which has the potential to explain the differential persistence of indirect rule in Africa.

We argued that the persistence of indirect rule after the independence of Sierra Leone was initially caused by the fact that those empowered by indirect rule were able to capture and indeed to structure the post-colonial state. Yet the system persisted after these initial elites lost power because Siaka Stevens, Prime Minister and then President between 1967 and 1985,

was able to exploit the huge advantage that a sitting president had in the system and turn it into a tool of incumbency bias.

Yet indirect rule did make the state weak in at least three clear senses. First, it made it difficult to establish a monopoly of violence because traditional rule created a class of alienated youth who could be easily recruited by politicians or armed groups. This monopoly was further impeded by the fact that the system made it difficult for a national identity to emerge, which made the issue of civilian control over the military harder. The only solution was to keep the military weak, further jeopardizing the monopoly of violence. Second, as developed by Mamdani (1996), traditional rulers were relatively unaccountable and thus able to extract rents and under-provide public goods. This feature was not compensated for by other types of accountability, for example via a representative national parliament, in large part because of the role chiefs played in managing these higher-level elections. Third, the fact that the local state was based on lineages and ruling families recognized by the British made it an intrinsically patrimonial and non-bureaucratized structure—a defining property of weakness.

We then showed that indirect rule, though it was practised in all British colonies, persisted very differently across different colonies. Indeed, in both Ghana and Uganda, the political elites who captured the state after independence overthrew the institutional structure of indirect rule rather than reinforcing or reshaping it. We argued that the main reason for this was that these countries had large powerful centralized pre-colonial states, Asante and Buganda, which had chiefs that were too powerful to be controlled by post-independence elites. This made indirect rule infeasible for post-colonial political elites.

In explaining the variation in the persistence of indirect rule we are not claiming that this led Ghana and Uganda to move onto radically better development paths. In both cases the civilian governments, which had abolished indirect rule, were overthrown by the army which they had strengthened as part of their state building projects. Moreover, in most cases they substituted the patrimonialism of the traditional institutions with the patrimonialism of the political parties, as our discussion of the Ghanaian case illustrated. Nevertheless, we also argued that the persistence of indirect rule in Sierra Leone has had significant consequences, in particular generating a pathologically weak state and paving the way to a deadly civil war unseen in either Ghana or Uganda.

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