

# State Capacity and Violence: Evidence from the Rwandan genocide\*

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October 2013.

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## Abstract

Exploiting local variation in state capacity in Rwanda I investigate the link between state capacity and violence. Using a disaggregated measure of the intensity of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, I establish that greater local state capacity led to greater conflict intensity. I proxy modern state capacity with its precolonial counterpart, measured by the total time a district was incorporated in the precolonial kingdom. This ‘duration of incorporation’ measures the cumulative effect of the centralizing forces in the kingdom and acts, therefore, as a proxy for state capacity. Since the kingdom expanded through conquest and consolidated through patronage relations revolving around cattle, I instrument the duration of incorporation with the geographical suitability for cattle. This strategy confirms the above result. State capacity, while usually associated with greater public good provision and higher GDP, played a central role in the mass killings in Rwanda.

**Keywords:** State capacity, violence, Rwanda.

**JEL classification:** O10, A10, N4.

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\*I would like to thank my supervisors Bob Allen and James Fenske for their guidance and support. I would like to thank James Robinson for conversations that lead to this project as well as for helpful comments. I would like to thank Faisal Ahmed, Suresh Naidu, Jean-Philippe Platteau, Simon Franklin and David Yanagizawa-Drott for helpful conversations. Finally, I would like to thank Sophie Mukatizoni and David Yanagizawa-Drott for kindly sharing their data.

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