

How do conflict, violence and livelihood trajectories affect the legitimacy of the state in South Kivu (DRC)?

Key messages:

- Perceptions of government are on the whole very negative, including for non-state actors.
- Female-headed households and displaced households' perceptions of government actors are significantly more negative than those reported by other groups.
- It is not the armed conflict itself that make people feel unsafe, it is the behaviour of armed groups which commit crimes against civilians that is a key factor in the loss of state legitimacy.

This brief presents findings on conflict, violence, shocks (both security-related and other), livelihoods and state legitimacy from the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC) panel survey. This survey was conducted in 2012 and 2015 in nine villages in Nyangezi, Nzibira and Bunyakiri in South Kivu (DRC).

Context

After decades of misrule by President Mobutu Sese Seko and the subsequent wars, the economy, service provision and administration of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has largely collapsed (Marivoet and De Herdt, 2014). The administrative and political system that remains is best described as an efficient kleptocracy and rule by the strongest (Bailey, 2011; Rudolf, Jacobs and Nguya, 2015).

Although a peace agreement was signed and an election held in 2002, the situation in South Kivu province is 'neither peace nor war'. The highly volatile security situation forces large parts of the population to periodically move to safe areas and back (Beytrison and Kalis, 2013; Rudolf, Jacobs and Nguya, 2015), and there were an estimated 322,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) in 2015 (OCHA, 2015). Levels of conflict and violence remain extremely high, but there are substantial differences within the province and also between the three research areas in this study.

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Birds-eye view of Bukavu
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Methods

The SLRC survey is a panel survey—a longitudinal survey that provides information on changes and trajectories over time by following the same individuals over a succession of survey waves.

From September to November 2012, a sample of 1,243 households in nine villages in three areas across South Kivu (Nyangezi, Nzibira and Bunyakiri) were interviewed. A second wave of interviews was conducted with 1,045 (83%) of these respondents from August to December 2015. The sampling was based on a combination of purposive and random sampling to achieve a representative sample at village level and to account for attrition between 2012 and 2015. To minimise attrition bias, non-response weighting adjustments were made in the wave-2 analysis. Both descriptive statistical analysis and econometric analysis were conducted. For the econometric analyses, fixed effects models were used for most of the variables. For variables that are constant over time (i.e. gender), random effects models were used.

We acknowledge that livelihoods and state legitimacy are very complex processes that cannot be captured meaningfully by a single indicator, or even a few indicators. However the wide scope of the study required us to limit the number of indicators for each of the key trajectories. To measure changes in livelihoods the Morris Score Index was used for household assets (a proxy for wealth), and the Coping Strategies Index captured changes in food insecurity. The literature suggests that respondents' perceptions of government actors constitute a valid proxy measure of state legitimacy. The survey used five perception-based questions to measure trust and confidence in a range of actors in central government, local formal government and customary governance institutions.

Key findings

1) Conflict, safety and shocks

Although levels of armed conflict and crime declined substantially after 2012 and safety inside and outside the villages improved, over 40% of respondents still reported armed conflict in 2015. Over 40% also assessed their immediate living environment as unsafe or quite dangerous. There were marked differences between the regions: only 3% of the respondents in Nyangezi observed armed conflict and 28% felt unsafe outside the village, compared with 60% observing armed conflict and 56% feeling unsafe outside the village in Nzibira.

In the three years between the surveys the conflict landscape changed notably in the area of Bunyakiri. Before 2012 the Rwandan rebel group the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) had a heavy and destructive presence in the area. Then several grassroots self-defence groups called Raia Mutomboki ('Children of the Community'), supported by the local leadership and the national army (FARDC), were successful in pushing the FDLR out of the area. However, this success was followed by clashes between the FARDC and the

Raia Mutomboki (Stearns et al., 2013). Though 70% of the respondents in Bunyakiri had observed armed conflict in 2015, the survey data show a very strong reduction in physical violence against the civil population and in perceived threats, and people felt substantially safer after the expulsion of the FDLR.

The security of both men and women is still low, although it improved substantially between the survey waves. There was a small (but statistically significant) difference between men and women: women felt less safe than did men, but only slightly. Physical violence was reported as a threat to both men and women, but these numbers dropped from 47% to 17% for men and from 42% to 27% for women. Women's fears of sexual violence dropped substantially from the extremely high level of 34% reporting it as a threat to 5% within the village, and from 33% to 15% outside the village. These findings reflect a positive trend in sexual violence and run counter to the findings of research commissioned by the Swedish Embassy (Davis et al., 2014), which suggests that sexual violence against women may be increasing in eastern DRC.

In the areas directly affected by conflict a very high number of households have been displaced at least once. Many of these households continue to move back and forth between their original homesteads and safer places, depending on the security situation.

Conflict and violence account for only some of the many risks faced in South Kivu. The survey data show a very high—and increasing—share of households (62% in 2012 and 73% in 2015) facing livestock or crop diseases. This poses obvious threats to livelihoods and food security. Sudden and long-term health problems as well as economic shocks (such as inflation) also affected most households in the sample.

2) Livelihood trajectories

The households surveyed are extremely poor, possessing a minimum number of assets, living in bad-quality housing, and having high levels of food insecurity and poor diets. In the past three years, household assets have generally increased, and housing conditions have improved. However these positive developments have not coincided with better food security. The gap between the poorest and better off strata of the population has shrunk in recent years, but this research found no explanation for this levelling-off effect.

As expected in a predominantly agricultural society, over 85% of the households are involved in cultivation or keeping livestock (mainly small or medium sized animals). They are confronted with increasing levels of animal and plant disease, small landholdings, decreasing soil fertility and labour shortages. The last factor is particularly notable in certain areas, where young people are adopting a more modern lifestyle and entering non-agricultural occupations. The role of the public sector remains very small, with less than 10% of households involved. The income of public servants is also very low and provides, on average, less than 40% of the family income.

Household economies diversified between 2012 and 2015. The number of income sources per household increased slightly, and household income was increasingly generated by the sale of produce and goods, casual labour and business ownership. This may point to the improved functioning of local markets. Production for the market might have been at the expense of growing food for household consumption, which potentially accounts for the trend of increased asset ownership but stagnant food insecurity.

Households did not improve their means of production, such as securing better transportation, larger landholdings or increased livestock holdings. Mining incomes were important for 20% of the households in the survey, but these incomes decreased after 2012 and involvement in this sector did not increase. Households have also generally become more indebted. Most debts are related to consumption, household articles and the costs of health and education rather than to productive investments.

Female-headed households (FHHs) in the sample were statistically significantly worse off compared with male-headed households in terms of asset and land ownership as well as housing quality. FHHs were not more food insecure, probably because these households tend to assign priority to food above assets.

Internal displacement undermined socioeconomic conditions and access to resources for recovery. Displaced households had significantly fewer assets, were less likely to own land or a house and were substantially more food insecure. Consequently, displaced people were more dependent on working for others for their income and were more involved in casual labour and selling goods. However, the data indicate that the relative position of FHHs and displaced families improved over time. They are catching up, which might indicate further integration of IDPs into host communities.

One in three respondents in the sample received some form of livelihood assistance in 2012. This had dropped to only one in five in 2015, with particular reductions in food aid. In 2012, over half of the displaced households sampled received livelihood support, but by 2015 they were no more likely to receive this support than other households. FHHs were on equal footing with male-headed households in 2012. As the decline in livelihood support was much more substantial for male-headed households than for FHHs, FHHs were comparatively better off in 2015. Despite respondents generally reporting negatively on the reliability of the delivery process, they indicated that their livelihood activities had been impacted positively by the support in 2015. The overall reduction in livelihood assistance is surprising considering that overall food insecurity has hardly changed.



Making flour by hand

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3) State legitimacy

Perceptions of government actors (a proxy measure of state legitimacy) were not at all positive. On an index assessing people's perceptions of the authorities, in 2015 customary actors scored only 39/100 points on average, and local government administrators scored only 24/100 points. Both these results were similar to their 2012 scores. Central state actors scored significantly lower, at 18/100 in 2012, dropping to only 13/100 in 2015.

Assessing the association with individual characteristics, we found that women and IDPs had less access to political processes (measured as being informed and participating in meetings) and were more negative, especially towards customary actors. The elderly were slightly more positive. Neither education level nor ethnicity had a significant association with perceptions of the government.

No relationship was identified between the occurrence of armed conflicts and perceptions of government actors. However there was a relationship with the number of crimes experienced and perceived threats: if these increased it had a strong negative association with how respondents perceived government actors. This shows it is not the armed conflict itself but the behaviour of the armed parties that is the key factor. If crimes, physical attacks and threats, including the threat of sexual abuse, are directed towards the population then the state loses legitimacy.

The reverse could also be observed in Bunyakiri, where a very substantial decrease in physical violence and perceived threats had a positive effect on perceptions of the government actors associated with providing security. In this case, perceptions of customary authorities improved substantially whereas perceptions of the central government worsened.

Environmental and health shocks did not seem to be associated with people's perceptions of the state, but economic shocks such as inflation and employment were. Surprisingly, these factors mainly affected perceptions of customary authorities, who do not have much influence over the economy.

Hardly any relationships were found between perceptions and livelihood indicators. Positive changes in asset ownership did not have a strong or consistent positive association, except with perceptions of local government actors. Changes in food insecurity had no association at all. Households involved in their own businesses were, on average, significantly more negative about government actors as a whole. This can be understood in the context of substantial formal and informal obstacles for self-owned businesses created by the administration and army.

Respondents who started receiving livelihood support, or who became aware of and/or participated in community meetings for the first time, were not statistically significantly more positive about any government actor.

Conclusions

South Kivu is still seriously affected by conflict. The province is characterised by high levels of violence and crime. It has an extremely poor population who display low levels of trust and confidence in government actors, especially central government.

Although generally armed conflict and crime decreased and socioeconomic conditions improved slightly, there were substantial variations within relatively small areas. South Kivu is not homogenous, and province-wide figures and trends can be misleading because they do not necessarily reflect realities in different parts of the province.

It is not enough to monitor the number of armed conflicts to evaluate the impact of insecurity. Livelihoods and state legitimacy are affected by changes in the levels of crime, including physical and sexual assault, committed by

combatants, as well as the threats perceived by the population. Providing protection against atrocities seems to be an important factor in state legitimacy, even if this is performed by self-defence groups supported by local chiefs.¹

We have found that violence against women suggest that the conflict in South Kivu is framed disproportionately around sexual violence against women. These findings should not be considered the new truth on violence against women in the DRC, but rather as a starting point for further—and perhaps more gender-balanced—reflection and studies on how sexual violence is articulated in international discourse and development programming in South Kivu.

FHHs and displaced households are catching up, but both are still disadvantaged in many aspects, and it is not surprising their perceptions of government actors are significantly more negative than those reported by other groups.

Time is an important factor in changing livelihoods and building trust and confidence, and three years is a relatively short period in which to identify positive changes. It might well be the case that variables that do not show a significant relationship in this analysis would do so if the information were collected over a longer period.

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1. This does not imply that the Raia Mutomboki in Bunyakiri did not commit crimes or engage in physical attacks on the population.

Changes in the levels of crime affect livelihoods and state legitimacy

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