

# Contesting State Fragility in Hybrid Regimes: Early Warnings in Malawi

Lecture presented at the Friday Seminar of the Political Science Department,  
Stellenbosch University,

by  
George Abel Mhango,  
Centre for Security Studies,  
Mzuzu University,  
Malawi

# Outline of Presentation

- Background
- Fragile States
- Hybrid Regimes
- Are Hybrid Regimes Fragile?
- Early Warnings of Fragility
- Early Warnings in Malawi
- Conclusion

# Background

- 2004 – 2009 a period of unprecedented economic growth that earned international recognition for Malawi
- Success attributed to sound economic and political governance
- However, since 2010 - Political and economic problems linked to deteriorating governance and economic mismanagement
- Situation worsened on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2011, by indiscriminate shooting of 20 civilians during nationwide protest against deepening economic and political ill-governance.

# Background Cont'd

- Condition labelled 'crisis' by some analysts raising fears that Malawi may become a 'failed' state (Cammack,2011).
- Sudden turnaround challenges the assumptions of stability of hybrid regimes.

# What Are Fragile States?

A sample of definitions

- **DFID:** those where the government cannot or will not deliver core functions to the majority of its people, including the poor (DFID, 2005)
- **CSRC:** a state that is susceptible to crisis in one or more of its subsystems particularly shocks and conflicts (CRSC, 2006)
- **OECD DAC:** states unable to meet their population's expectations or manage changes in expectations and capacity through the political process (OECD, 2009)
- **CRISE:** those that are failing or at risk of failing with respect to authority, comprehensive service entitlements and legitimacy (CRISE, 2009)

# Hybrid Regimes

- **Hybrid regimes:** combine democratic and authoritarian practices. Existence of formally democratic political institutions, such as multiparty electoral competition, masks the reality of authoritarian domination
- Key elements (Menocal 2007; Diamond 2002; Carothers 2002):  
Neopatrimonialism and bigman politics, weak institutions, feckless populism, dominant power politics, shallow political participation, contested rules of the game, corruption, elite reversals
- Hybrid regime and fragile state not the same (Menocal 2007; Cammack, 2006). However, factors behind their existence overlap.

# Characteristics of Fragile States and Hybrid Regimes

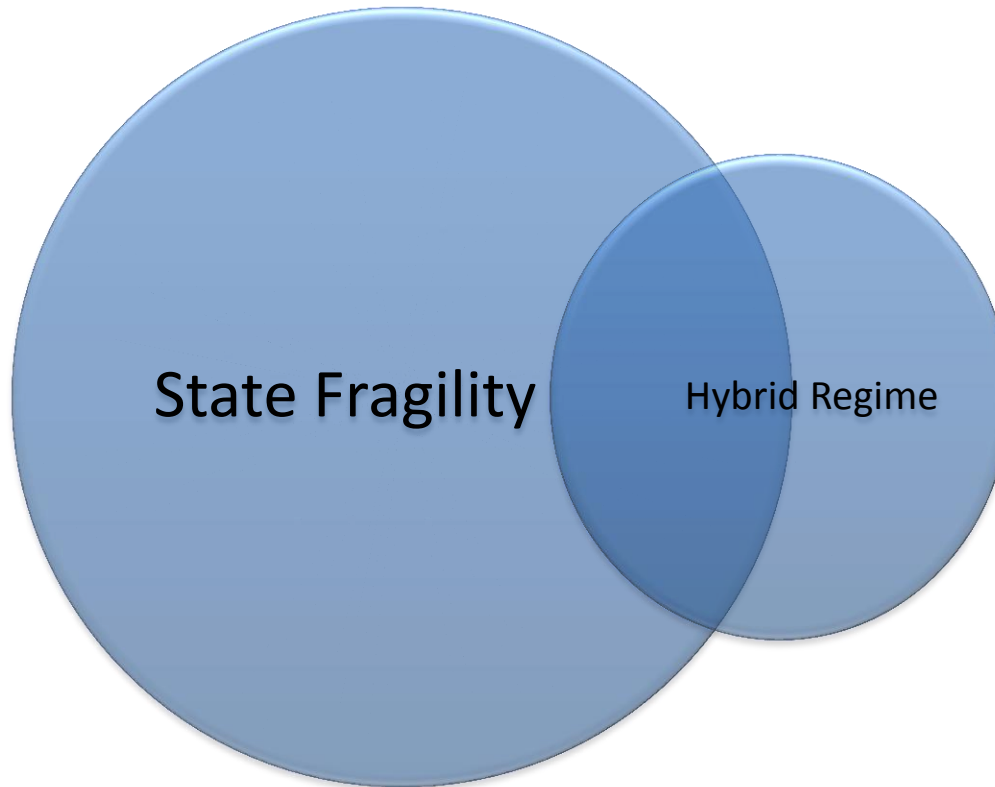
Factors	Fragile State	Hybrid Regime
Structural and Economic	Poverty, low income, economic decline, violent conflict demographic stress	Rent maximization, corruption
Political and Institutional	Crises of legitimacy and authority, bad governance, repression of political competition, weak (formal) institutions, hybrid political orders, institutional multiplicity, state predation, lack of institutional reform, state predation, neopatrimonial politics,	Neopatrimonialism and bigman politics, weak institutions, feckless populism, dominant power politics, shallow political participation, contested rules of the game, elite reversals.
Social factors	Horizontal inequalities, identity fragmentation, lack of social cohesion,	weak civil society

# Are Hybrid Regimes Fragile? (2011 Data)

Country	Average FH Score	SFI&M Score	SFI&M Condition
Tanzania	3.0	12	Serious
Senegal	3.0	9	Moderate
Sierra Leone	3.0	19	High
Lesotho	3.0	11	Moderate
Zambia	3.5	15	Serious
Mozambique	3.5	14	Serious
Malawi	3.5	16	High
Liberia	3.5	18	High
Kenya	3.5	12	Serious
Nigeria	4.0	17	High
Guinea	4.0	17	High
Burkina Faso	4.0	17	High
Uganda	4.5	17	High
Burundi	5.0	18	High
Madagascar	5.0	14	Serious



# Zone of Interaction Between State Fragility and Hybrid Regime



# Early warnings of Fragility

- Depends on whether fragility is considered a condition, a process or both

1) **Global Tools:** US' Political Instability Taskforce (PITF) – regime type, infant mortality, interstate conflict, state-led political discrimination.

2) **Continental:** APRM?

## In Hybrid regimes:

- Focus on how factors that perpetuate the regimes can also impinge on peace, security and development, hence serving as triggers of instability.

# Early Warnings in Malawi

- The 2009 General elections: a critical juncture – Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) gets overwhelming majority in Parliament (Reward of effectiveness or Sympathy vote?).
- Ruling Party begins to push for unpopular laws in parliament (eg Local Government amendment Act, Restriction on publication of materials critical of government (Section 46 of the Penal Code), Injunctions Bill,
- Followed by serious Cabinet + party reorganization (Veterans sidelined for inept youthfuls).

# Early Warnings in Malawi (Cont'd)

- A succession wrangle sets in as early as 2010 – incumbent begins selling his younger brother as heir apparent through state media programs (Road to 2014).
- Crisis in the Presidency. Mutharika threatens to fire his Vice after she forms her own party with a good support base from the middle class. VP protected by law. Effectiveness of authority questioned.
- Civil Society criticism grows – argue that president does not listen.
- President urges his party to protect him by silencing dissenting voices. Entrenching patronage (Big man) politics

# Early Warnings in Malawi (Cont'd)



# Early Warnings in Malawi (Cont'd)

- Abuse of donor funds amidst serious socio-economic pressures: Purchase of a presidential jet using EU funds. Donors withhold aid.
- Increasing import costs for fuel coupled by forex shortage putting pressure on fuel availability
- Government adamant about devaluation of the local currency which was overvalued by almost 20% by 2010. This leads to a parallel forex market.

# Early Warnings in Malawi (Cont'd)

- Government tramples on academic freedom. Dismisses 4 academics for inciting a labor action in defense of academic freedom.
- President ignores repeated concerns by 8 heads of foreign missions over deteriorating governance. Considers this stance imperialist.
- Expels a British High Commissioner, Fergus Cochrane Dyet for describing him as “becoming ever intolerant to criticism”

# Early Warnings in Malawi (Cont'd)

- Govt uses monopoly of force against unarmed citizens in mass protests (20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> July 2011). Police and army deployed.
- Protests unmask a deep-seated security question (At what point should the army intervene in internal security matters?)
- President remains defiant even in the midst of international condemnation of the mass killings (He vowed to '**smoke out**' opponents).



# Early warnings in Malawi (Cont'd)

- Donors aid withdrawal (40% of Malawi's national budget comes from aid).
- Malawi on a zero-deficit 'recurrent budget' financed by increased government taxes and fees. Development budget in limbo.
- Continued state predation regardless.
- Govt complains that donors, opposition and civil society engineering regime change.
- UN led mediation talks break bown.

# Early Warnings in Malawi (Cont'd)

## **Regional dimension:**

- Angola SADC Summit (Aug, 2011) fails to discuss a Malawi report after Mutharika stays away. A missed opportunity

# Concluding Reflections

- Malawi account reflects important flash points of a regime under stress.
- Further demonstrates that the very building blocks of hybrid regimes may become sources of its instability.
- Thus, stability of hybrid regimes should not be taken as a foregone conclusion on the assumption of their democratic process.

**Thank You!**