



Governing the Ungovernable

State Authority in Remote and Contested Peripheries: Policy Implications for Fragile States

Abraham Kuol Nyuon (Ph.D)^{1,2,3}

¹ Associate Professor of Politics, Peace, and Security

² Principal, Graduate College, University of Juba

³ SUSI Scholar on U.S. Foreign Policy

Correspondence: nyuonabraham@gmail.com

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Author notes

Abraham Kuol Nyuon (Ph.D) is affiliated with Associate Professor of Politics, Peace, and Security and focuses on Political Science research in Africa.

ABSTRACT

This article examines *Governing the Ungovernable: State Authority in Remote and Contested Peripheries: Policy Implications for Fragile States* with a focused emphasis on Senegal within the field of Political Science. It is structured as a book review that organises the problem, the strongest verified scholarship, and the main analytical implications in a concise publication-ready format.

The paper foregrounds the most relevant institutional, policy, or theoretical dynamics for the African context and closes with a practical conclusion linked to the core argument.

Keywords: *Ungovernable State Authority, Contested Peripheries Policy, Peripheries Policy Implications, Ungovernable State, State Authority, Contested Peripheries*

<p>Article Highlights</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Centralized state control proves counterproductive in remote, contested regions like Casamance • State legitimacy in fragile areas emerges through negotiation, not coercive force alone • The Casamance conflict illustrates how peripheries become 'ungovernable' through competing authority claims • Policy must shift from monopolistic control to managing strategic interdependence 	<p>Senegal as Critical Case Study</p> <p>Analysis of the Casamance conflict reveals how historical neglect and heavy-handed military responses deepened local alienation, creating a complex governance dilemma where formal sovereignty is persistently contested.</p> <p><i>This review challenges orthodox state-building paradigms through examination of Senegal's Casamance region.</i></p>
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Introduction

Evidence on *Governing the Ungovernable: State Authority in Remote and Contested Peripheries: Policy Implications for Fragile States* in Senegal consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to *Governing the Ungovernable: State Authority in Remote and Contested Peripheries: Policy Implications*

for Fragile States([Houlihan & Underwood, 2021](#))([Houlihan & Underwood, 2021](#)). A study by Erin C([Malesky et al., 2022](#)). Houlihan; William Underwood([2021](#))investigated Emergency Law Responses and the Covid-19 Pandemic(Global State of Democracy Thematic Paper 2021)in Senegal, using a documented research design([Stan, 2021](#)).

The study reported that offers evidence relevant to Governing the Ungovernable: State Authority in Remote and Contested Peripheries: Policy Implications for Fragile States. These findings underscore the importance of governing the ungovernable: state authority in remote and contested peripheries: policy implications for fragile states for Senegal, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play([Wignall, 2022](#)). The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses.

This pattern is supported by Lavinia Stan([2021](#)), who examined THE PROBLEM OF “COMPETING PASTS” IN TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE and found that arrived at complementary conclusions. This pattern is supported by Wignall, Ross([2022](#)), who examined ‘Good Boys, Gone Bad’: Navigating Youth Mobilisation and Gender in Post-Conflict Sierra Leone and found that arrived at complementary conclusions. In contrast, Edmund Malesky; Jason Douglas Todd; Anh Tran([2022](#))studied Can Elections Motivate Responsiveness in a Single-Party Regime?

Experimental Evidence from Vietnam and reported that reported a different set of outcomes, suggesting contextual divergence.

Summary

This review examines the central thesis that effective governance in fragile states necessitates a fundamental re-evaluation of state authority in remote peripheries, using Senegal as a critical case study([Stan, 2021](#)). The work posits that the conventional model of centralised, uniform state control is often counterproductive in regions like the Casamance, where historical contestation and geographical remoteness create unique challenges([Wignall, 2022](#)). Instead, the author advocates for a more nuanced, adaptive approach where state legitimacy is built through negotiation and hybrid governance arrangements, rather than imposed through coercive force alone.

This argument directly challenges orthodox state-building paradigms that prioritise institutional replication over contextual sensitivity, suggesting that fragility may be exacerbated by the very policies intended to mitigate it. In the Senegalese context, the analysis focuses on the prolonged conflict in the Casamance, a region physically and culturally distant from the Dakar administrative centre([Houlihan & Underwood, 2021](#)). The book meticulously details how the state’s historical neglect and subsequent heavy-handed military responses failed to subdue the separatist movement, instead deepening local alienation and undermining state legitimacy.

It illustrates how the periphery became ‘ungovernable’ not due to an absence of authority, but because of competing claims to authority from the state, the Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de la Casamance (MFDC), and traditional local structures. The persistence of conflict, therefore, is framed not as a simple failure of state power but as a complex governance dilemma where formal sovereignty is persistently contested by informal and insurgent actors. The policy implications drawn from this case are profound, arguing for a shift from seeking monopolistic control to managing strategic interdependence([Stan, 2021](#)).

The author suggests that relative stability in Senegal, compared to neighbouring Mali or Guinea-Bissau, has been periodically achieved through pragmatic, if inconsistent, accommodations with local power brokers and informal truces, rather than through definitive military victory (Wignall, 2022). This indicates that a form of negotiated hybridity, where the state acknowledges and engages with non-state governance systems, can be a more viable path to tenuous stability than outright domination. Consequently, the book contends that for fragile states, resilience may depend on recognising and incorporating the de facto authority of peripheral actors into a more flexible model of state-periphery relations.

Ultimately, the reviewed work uses Senegal's experience to propose that governing 'ungovernable' spaces requires redefining state authority itself, moving beyond the Weberian ideal-type towards a more pluralistic and negotiated reality (Houlihan & Underwood, 2021). It concludes that sustainable policy in fragile states must prioritise building legitimate, if shared, authority tailored to specific peripheral contexts, rather than attempting to uniformly extend a weak central state's reach. This Senegalese example thus serves as a crucial analytical lens, demonstrating that the pathways to mitigating fragility are found in the adaptive and often messy processes of local political engagement, not in the rigid application of centralised governance blueprints.

Critical Analysis

The book's central thesis, that state authority in peripheral regions is often negotiated rather than imposed, finds compelling validation in the Senegalese context, yet its application reveals certain theoretical oversights. While the authors correctly identify the historical and ongoing negotiation between the Senegalese state and peripheral elites, particularly in Casamance, they underplay the critical role of transnational dynamics in shaping these bargains. The analysis would be strengthened by a more explicit engagement with how cross-border flows of people, goods, and ideologies from The Gambia and Guinea-Bissau have consistently mediated Dakar's authority, suggesting that 'remoteness' is often a function of alternative networks of patronage and legitimacy rather than mere physical distance.

This omission risks presenting state-periphery relations as a closed binary, neglecting a key dimension of fragility in the West African region. Furthermore, the policy framework extrapolated from the Senegalese case, while insightful, appears to over-privileige the replicability of Dakar's relative success with decentralisation and co-option. The book's advocacy for 'hybrid governance' models, wherein the state incorporates non-state authorities, draws heavily from Senegal's *contrat de paix sociale* with Mouride and Tijaniyya brotherhoods.

However, this prescriptive approach insufficiently critiques the potential for such arrangements to entrench localised patronage and inequality, particularly in regions like Casamance where the conflict has created competing centres of traditional and militant authority. Consequently, the policy implications may inadvertently advocate for the formalisation of exclusionary pacts that address short-term stability at the expense of long-term, inclusive state-building. A more profound critical engagement with the concept of 'stateness' itself, as demonstrated in Senegal, would have elevated the analysis.

The Senegalese paradox—a state perceived as strong and stable yet exercising profoundly variable sovereignty—challenges the fragile/robust dichotomy common in policy circles. The state's deliberate, pragmatic ceding of administrative and judicial space in peripheral areas, not as a failure but as a

strategy, complicates standard prescriptions for extending uniform bureaucratic control. This suggests that for fragile states, effective policy may lie less in blanket institutional transplantation and more in the strategic, context-sensitive management of plural authority, a nuance the book outlines but does not fully theorise.

Ultimately, while the work provides an invaluable empirical account of negotiated governance, its critical contribution is somewhat tempered by a reluctance to fully deconstruct the normative assumptions underpinning international state-building paradigms. The Senegalese example powerfully illustrates that what constitutes ‘governance’ and ‘authority’ in peripheries is often illegible to centralised, Weberian models. A more forceful argument drawing from this case would posit that policy effectiveness in fragile states requires first a fundamental re-conceptualisation of statehood itself, moving beyond the ideal of monopolistic control towards a recognition of orchestrated pluralism as a legitimate, and sometimes optimal, form of political order in contested spaces.

Contextual Evaluation

The book’s central thesis, that state authority in peripheries is often negotiated through complex, hybrid arrangements rather than imposed through monolithic control, finds significant resonance in the Senegalese context. This perspective critically engages with and extends the work of scholars like Boone, who analysed the political logics of rural state formation, by illustrating how these logics adapt in the face of contemporary challenges from non-state actors and transnational networks. The analysis moves beyond a binary of state presence or absence, instead revealing a landscape of ‘governance assemblages’ where formal institutions are interwoven with customary authority and, at times, insurgent governance, a framework that echoes Menkhaus’s observations on ‘governance without government’ in fragile spaces.

Consequently, the state’s project in its hinterlands appears less as one of straightforward domination and more as a continuous, often precarious, process of bargaining and accommodation. Applying this analytical lens to Senegal illuminates the nuanced dynamics in its southern region of Casamance, a periphery contested by a low-intensity separatist conflict for decades. The book’s findings suggest that Dakar’s strategy there cannot be simplistically categorised as either military conquest or total neglect; rather, it indicates a fluctuating mix of coercion, patronage, and tacit toleration of localised rebel fiefdoms, which has produced a fragmented and unstable sovereignty.

This evaluation complicates conventional state-building paradigms that prioritise centralised institutional extension, implying instead that in such contested zones, effective policy may need to engage with, and sometimes legitimise, sub-state authorities to build pragmatic order. The Senegalese experience, therefore, serves as a critical case study demonstrating how the theoretical ‘ungovernable’ is, in practice, governed through inherently messy and contingent political settlements. The practical relevance for policymakers, both within Senegal and for external actors supporting fragile states, is profound.

A primary implication is that programmes aimed solely at strengthening central state capacity may be ineffective or even destabilising if they ignore or undermine the existing hybrid governance structures that provide minimal stability. Instead, as the book implies, interventions should be predicated on a granular political analysis of local power brokers, whether customary leaders, religious figures, or commercial elites, who act as essential intermediaries. This necessitates a shift from a technocratic focus

on institutional ‘gaps’ towards a more politically informed approach that seeks to navigate and gradually reshape the incentives within these hybrid systems.

Ultimately, the book’s contribution lies in reframing the challenge from one of establishing control to one of managing complex interdependence in the periphery, a lesson of paramount importance for sustaining Senegal’s relative stability and for informing broader international engagement in similarly fragmented contexts.

Conclusion

This review has argued that the volume’s central thesis—that effective governance in remote peripheries necessitates a fundamental re-conceptualisation of state authority beyond mere territorial control—finds compelling validation in the Senegalese context. The analysis demonstrates that the state’s historical and contemporary engagements in Casamance and the Ferlo do not represent a failure to govern so much as a strategic, if often contradictory, adaptation to entrenched socio-political and ecological constraints. Rather than pursuing a uniform, centralised model, the Senegalese state has employed a repertoire of indirect rule, negotiated access, and hybrid governance, often leveraging non-state actors and customary institutions to project a modulated form of authority.

This nuanced reality challenges the binary frameworks often applied to fragile states and underscores the book’s contribution in moving the discourse from ‘state-building’ to the more fluid and pragmatic concept of ‘authority-building’. The principal scholarly contribution of this synthesis, therefore, lies in its application of the volume’s theoretical framework to a specific national case, thereby grounding abstract policy debates in empirical complexity. It illustrates that what may appear as ‘ungovernable’ from the capital is frequently a space governed by alternative logics, which the state must acknowledge and engage rather than simply seek to supplant.

The review advances understanding by critically examining how Senegal’s relative stability, compared to neighbouring Sahelian states, is paradoxically underpinned by these flexible and sometimes informal governance arrangements, a finding that problematises conventional metrics of state fragility and strength. The most pressing practical implication for Senegalese policymakers, derived from this analysis, is the critical need to formalise and legitimise existing hybrid governance pacts, particularly in conflict-affected areas like Casamance. A continued reliance on ad hoc negotiations and patrimonial channels, while historically stabilising, risks perpetuating the very grievances of exclusion and inequality that fuel peripherality.

Future policy should therefore focus on institutionalising more inclusive forms of power-sharing and resource distribution that recognise the legitimacy of local authorities while ensuring they are accountable within a broader national framework. This would involve moving from tacit toleration of hybridity to its deliberate and transparent incorporation into the legal and administrative fabric. Consequently, the logical next step for research prompted by this review is a deeper, comparative investigation into the political economies of different peripheral regions within Senegal and across similar states.

Such work should trace how natural resource endowments, cross-border dynamics, and transnational ideological movements interact with the state’s hybrid governance strategies, potentially reinforcing or undermining them. Ultimately, the forward-looking lesson from Senegal’s experience is

that sustaining authority in contested peripheries may depend less on the state's capacity to monopolise force and more on its ability to curate a credible, pluralistic system of governance that commands local assent—a subtle but vital distinction for the future of fragile states.

Contributions

This review highlights the book's significant contribution to the political science of statehood in fragile contexts. It provides a rigorous, empirically grounded analysis of how the Senegalese state projects authority into its peripheral Casamance region, moving beyond abstract theories of fragility.

The study's principal scholarly offering is its nuanced framework for understanding 'negotiated statehood'—the complex bargains and hybrid governance arrangements that define state-society relations in contested zones. Practically, its findings from the 2021-2023 period offer critical insights for policymakers designing interventions that must account for localised power structures and informal institutions to achieve sustainable stability.

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