

Civil violence is a reflection of troubled relations between state and society. Peaceful state-society relations rest on the ability of the state to respond to the needs of society — to provide, in other words, key components of the survival strategies of the society's members — and on the ability of the state to maintain its dominance over groups and institutions in society.⁴ Civil society — groups separate from but engaged in dialogue and interaction with the state — present the demands of their constituents.⁵ Grievances against the state will remain low if groups within society believe the state is responsive to these demands. Opportunities for violence against the state will rise when the state's ability to organize, regulate, and enforce behaviour is weakened in relation to potential challenger groups. Changes in state character and declining state resources increase the chances of success of violent collective action by challenger groups, especially when these groups mobilize resources sufficient to shift the social balance of power in their favor.⁶

Environmental scarcity threatens the delicate give and take relationship between state and society. Falling agricultural production, migrations to urban areas, and economic decline in regions severely affected by scarcity often produce hardship, and this hardship increases demands on the state. At the same time, scarcity can interfere with state revenue streams by reducing economic productivity and therefore taxes; it can also increase the power and activity of rent-seekers who become evermore able to deny tax revenues on their increased wealth and to influence state policy in their favor. Environmental scarcity therefore increases society's demands on the state while decreasing its ability to meet those demands.

Severe environmental scarcity causes groups to focus on narrow survival strategies, which reduces the interactions of civil society with the state. Society segments into groups, social interactions between groups decrease, and each group turns inwards to focus on its own concerns.⁷ Civil society retreats, and as a result, society is less able to effectively articulate its demands on the state. This segmentation also reduces the density of "social capital" — the trust, norms, and networks generated by vigorous, cross-cutting exchange among groups.⁸ Both of these changes provide greater opportunity for powerful groups to grab control of the state and use it for their own gain. The legitimacy of the state declines, as it is no longer representative of or responsive to society.

⁴ Joel Migdal, "The State in Society," in *State Power and Social Forces*, Joel Migdal, Atul Kohli, Vivienne Shue eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) p. 27.

⁵ Both Robert Putnam and Naomi Chazan emphasize the importance of interactions between civil society and the state for effective state policy. See Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civil Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Naomi Chazan, "Engaging the State: Associational Life in Sub-Saharan Africa," in *State Power and Social Forces*, Joel Migdal, Atul Kohli, and Vivienne Shue eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) pp. 255-292.

⁶ Ted Robert Gurr, *Minorities at Risk: A Global View of Ethnopolitical Conflicts*, (Washington: United States Institute of Peace, 1993) p. 130.

⁷ Chazan, "Engaging the State," p. 269. Chazan argues that under conditions of economic strain, both state and society become more insular.

⁸ Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, p. 167.