

Predatory Leaderships, Predatory Rule and Predatory States

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As the development community moves towards a better understanding of, and engagement with, the political economy and politics of development, it is important to ensure the clarity of the concepts and terms used for analytical and policy purposes. This series of DLP Concept Papers is intended as a contribution to that effort. We also hope that this series will provide guidance to students and early career researchers about operationally useful concepts that are not the standard fare of academic courses. Written as short essays, the Concept Papers will focus mainly on concepts used in DLP research and policy messages (for example, leadership, coalitions, structure and agency). But they will also deal with wider issues in the political analysis of development processes, such as 'political settlements', 'collective action' and 'political economy'.

Abstract

Although the *notion* has been around for a long time, the term 'predatory' leadership has only recently been used by researchers and policy-makers, but often in loose, varied or inconsistent ways. This Concept Brief sets out to sharpen the concept by pinning down some of the defining characteristics of 'predatory' rule. This is important in order to help policy-makers, researchers and students differentiate predatory rule from other forms of rule, such as authoritarian or 'patrimonial' rule, or the regimes of 'weak', 'failed' or 'failing' states.

In conceptual terms, 'predatory' rule can be regarded as the extreme opposite of 'developmental', 'accountable', or 'responsive' forms of rule. However, as with all other social forms, the real-world manifestations of predatory rule seldom correspond in all forms and particulars to the concept that seeks to describe them. Moreover,

predatory regimes are seldom *completely* predatory but may be more or less predatory in practice, though it is usually still possible to recognise the presence of some of their defining characteristics.

Though the literature on predatory leadership, rule and states emphasises different elements of the phenomenon, the following appear to be the common characteristics identified in most accounts: (a) a high degree of political power concentrated in personal rule, mediated through, and sustained by, what is in effect a narrow 'predatory coalition', without traditional, 'customary' or coherent ideological justification or legitimacy; (b) the use of this power to control economic resources, accompanied by wide discretion in their use or distribution; (c) the failure to use such resources for any observable developmental purpose; (d) the absence of any plausible or practical evidence of a vision or commitment to promote long-term and sustainable growth, development or the systematic

provision of public goods; e) a ruthless application of coercion and repression to gain and especially maintain power; (f) the use of a mixture of fear and reward as a means of retaining the loyalty of immediate followers and supporters; (f) the use of often considerable brutality and exclusion as the means for punishing opponents or competitors; (g) the systematic erosion of both public institutions and the rule of law, and the transgression of customary institutions; and (h) a consequent degradation of the economy.

Executive Summary

- 'Predatory' leaderships and states are characterised by an extreme form of autocratic rule, accompanied by institutional decay, failure or deficit, and corruption, and with adverse economic and developmental consequences.
- 'Predatory' rulers, states and regimes are not new and have been identified across history, though in the modern era they have tended to be found in post-colonial contexts.
- Predatory regimes are seldom 'purely' predatory, but are generally more or less predatory in practice.
- 'Predatory' states need to be thought of as conceptually distinct from 'fragile', 'failed' or 'weak' states, as well as the different forms of 'patrimonial' states, though all the latter may – to some degree - share some of the predatory characteristics.
- Predatory leaderships accumulate and deploy a high degree of concentrated political power and economic discretion; and they both gain and keep power through a combination of ruthless coercion and material inducement.
- Predatory leaderships, however, exhibit little evidence of any developmental vision or commitment in practice.
- Loyalty to predatory rulers is seldom based on either tradition or ideology, but on fear and the prospect of rewards. Those that support the leadership in turn enjoy power and status, and help to perpetuate the status quo.
- This wider group of individuals and organizations forms a suspicious, unstable, narrow and exclusive *de facto* 'predatory coalition' around the leadership.
- Formal or customary political processes are affected too, for in effectively replacing law or custom (or both) with force and arbitrariness, predatory leaders suppress politics. In Haiti, for example, a country long governed by a 'winner takes all' game of power, the legitimacy of any formal democratic process is routinely undermined by endemic fraud and corruption.
- Predatory behaviour by leaders and elites erodes a country's central public institutions and as these institutions disintegrate, corruption becomes the norm. In Zimbabwe, for example, well-functioning state institutions at all levels, including the rule of law, were progressively undermined by a predatory civil-military coalition's pursuit of private enrichment and survival.
- As well as being institutionally and politically degraded, predatory states are economically degraded by their regimes. Significant amounts of otherwise investable wealth tend to be extracted, and little is returned to the populace by way of investment in public goods. This occurs not only at the top, but also extends throughout the economy and society, where predation and corruption in all spheres and at all levels, including the bureaucracy, destroys the prospects for any long-term productive investment, as occurred in Zaire under the Mobuto regime.
- As a consequence of all these factors, transforming predatory states and forms of rule in a more developmental direction represents one of the most difficult challenges in the politics of development. Predatory regimes and leaderships also represent a serious challenge to state-building. For the people and politics of a country concerned, and especially reform or developmental coalitions, it is not just a matter of reforming or changing a government, leadership or regime, but it also entails the slow and intensely complex process of establishing a new 'political settlement', and consolidating the institutional arrangements that will both make it workable and that will constitute the sinews of the state.

Introduction

The concept of 'predatory leadership', the 'predatory state' or 'predatory rule' is often used as a stark counter-point to 'accountable', 'responsive' or, especially, 'developmental' governance and forms of politics. In general, the adjective 'predatory' refers to the characteristics of a state, its leadership and its typical patterns of rule. Often, the politics of predation are closely identified with both despotic and corrupt rule. Certain aspects of predatory rule overlap with aspects of patrimonial rule, though there is some evidence that some patrimonial states can indeed – for a time, at least – be developmental (Kelsall and Booth, 2010). However, it is hard to find any examples of a *developmental* predatory state since that would be a contradiction both in terms and in practice.

Analytic categories and conceptual classifications do not have a simple one-to-one correspondence with the empirical realities they seek to describe and differentiate. This is especially true of the many attempts to classify and define different forms of the state. Nonetheless, concepts – in Weber's sense of 'ideal types' (1947: 13 ff) – are important tools for thought and analysis: the clearer they are, the more useful they are.

Accordingly, this concept brief offers:

1. A brief survey of some of the ways in which the idea and concept of predatory rule has evolved and been used in development discourse; and
2. A working conceptual definition based on the common elements found in the literature and in some of the recent empirical studies of specific predatory states.

Antecedent theory on predatory rule: Aristotle, Locke and Weber

The terms 'predatory' leadership, rule and states have not been widely applied in modern political analysis and theory, though other concepts – for example 'tyranny' – have long been used to conceptualise the practices described here as predatory. For example, Aristotle in *The Politics* (1962) describes what we call predatory behav-

iours as 'tyranny', and he refers to this as the "most extreme" type of absolute kingship which is "despotically exercised" and in which the ruler rules over his subjects "to suit his own interests and not theirs" (ibid: 169-70). John Locke defined tyranny in a similar fashion as "*the exercise of Power beyond Right*" where the use of power by the ruler is:

... not for the good of those, who are under it, but for his own private separate Advantage. Where the Governor, however intituled, makes not the Law, but his Will, the Rule; and his Commands and Actions are not directed to the preservation of the Properties of his People, but the satisfaction of his own Ambition, Revenge, Covetousness, or any other irregular Passion (Locke, 1988: 398; 398-399).

Max Weber did not use the term 'predatory rule' as such in his classification of types of political authority, but its modern intellectual origins as an analytic category can probably best be traced to his 'ideal type' concept of 'sultanism', an extreme expression of patrimonialism. Under *patrimonial* rule, Weber argued, authority is exercised "on behalf" of the community and is both legitimated and limited by tradition. However, what he referred to as 'sultanism' represented an "extreme development of the ruler's discretion" where domination no longer operated on the basis of traditional authority, but was exercised largely on the basis of a ruler's whim (Weber, 1947: 347 and 1978: 232; see Lewis, 1996: 80, fn 82). This represents the worst form of the tyranny Aristotle and Locke both described.

Thus neither the phenomenon nor the concept of predatory rule are new, but have been identified and 'named' differently over time. However, the particular concept 'predatory rule' in the political science or development studies literature first appeared in the 1970s and 1980s and has since been used, and developed, in a number of ways.

Contemporary conceptualisations of predatory rule

The first use of the term 'predatory' in a contemporary analytical context appears to have been by

the political sociologist, Barrington Moore Jr. (1966, 1972 and 1978). He used the term to distinguish between the 'predatory' and 'rational' authority that elites in a society can have – a distinction which, he said, should be understood "in terms of the misery they cause" (Moore, 1978: 446). The more misery an elite causes, the less rational authority it has; at the limit, "a truly predatory elite is one that renders very few services to the underlying population and extracts for its own purposes a big enough surplus to create poverty on a massive scale that would not exist if the subordinate population were left to their own devices" (ibid: 445-446).

Another early use of the concept in modern political analysis occurs in the work of Margaret Levi, though she did not use it in a developmental context, but rather as part of an ambitious attempt to construct a formal "deductive and testable theory of the state that combines the behavioural assumptions of microeconomics with the macro-historical and sociological contributions of Marxism" (Levi, 1981: 437-8). Simply stated, Levi's model of the state starts from the now standard assumption of micro-economics that "all individuals are rational and self-interested" and thus, she reasons, rulers will necessarily and by definition seek to maximise wealth and power. This means, again by definition, that *all states* are predatory in that their rulers seek to extract resources to advance their wealth and power, even if it is to enable them to do positive things. However, what is interesting and important about her theory of the (by definition) predatory state is that the diverse institutional arrangements, the variety of resources and forms of power that other groups and classes bring to political processes, and the formal procedures for taking decisions in different states are what account for the differences between states. In this respect, Levi offers a good starting point for understanding the factors which, on her analysis, explain why and how all states and rulers may be more or less predatory, and thus how important institutional arrangements and political actors and processes are in containing its extent and endurance.

However, the notion of the 'predatory state' as a *distinct* category, different from other forms of

state, emerged in subsequent literature. Peter Evans (1989), for example, targeted the then pre-eminent 'neo-utilitarian' market exchange explanatory model which too often labelled a range of Third World states as 'predatory' and 'rent seeking'. Evans' argument suggests a vital distinction between the "incoherent absolutist domination" and "klepto-patrimonial" fate of true predatory states – such as Zaire under Mobuto – on the one hand, and the East Asian developmental state – such as Taiwan and [South] Korea – on the other. Though the latter have experienced predatory features, Evans attributes their relative success to what he calls "embedded autonomy": a bulwark against predatory rule found in a "well-developed, bureaucratic internal organization with dense public-private ties" (ibid: 581; but see also Kelsall and Booth, 2010, for especially interesting insights into what they describe as 'developmental patrimonialism').

An important objection to the idea of a predatory state is put forward by Mancur Olson (1993). For Olson, the idea of predation does not properly apply to states, but only to 'roaming banditry', where mobile groups engage in "uncoordinated competitive theft" against stationary, settled groups, plundering their goods and providing nothing in return. Predation is an inefficient arrangement, Olson argues, and leaves both bandit and populations worse off than they could be, though this claim has been challenged by Moselle and Polak (2001). The bandit, in particular, is always better off remaining in one place – being 'stationary' in Olson's terms – and setting up as ruler in order to "rationaliz[e] theft in the form of taxation" (Olson, 1993: 567). In so doing, 'stationary bandits' will in turn provide goods to the subjects of their rule. This, on Olson's account, is the origin of the state and it follows from his argument that models emphasizing *predation* at state level will be misleading. They fail to account for the fact that at a basic level the state is a form of 'stationary', not 'roaming', 'banditry', and as such there is *always* some incentive for "the rational autocrat" "to provide public goods at the same time [as extracting] the largest possible net surplus" (ibid: 569). This argument supports the earlier point that few states are 'purely predatory' – states can be more or less predatory. In this case

the more incentives the 'rational autocrat' has to provide public goods, the less predatory he or she becomes (though, as explained later, other predatory elements may remain).

The notion upon which Olson's critique depends – that of a 'rational autocrat' naturally incentivised to provide public goods – has been challenged a good deal since (see Chakravarti, 1999). Peter Lewis (1996), for example, isolates a key feature of 'predatory' rule in his examination of Nigeria (from 1985 to 1994). Here, the explicit connection is drawn between the economic hardships caused by the Babangida regime and the more important change during this period: the "shift from prebendalism, or decentralized patrimonial rule, towards predation" (ibid. Predation, here, is characterised not as an instance of rational autocratic or patrimonial rule but as the consolidation of avaricious, debilitating and arbitrary control by a single ruler (ibid).

The debilitating nature of the predatory state is expanded upon in more recent work. In a wide-ranging study of the political causes of humanitarian emergencies, Kalevi Holsti (2000) identifies the predatory state as a significant potential cause. Predatory rule, he says, tends to generate weak states; so much so that it can lead to state breakdown and anarchy. In the wake of the Sierra Leone military coup in 1992, for example, the ousting of Momah's corrupt regime led to three years of violence and lawlessness (ibid: 251). Holsti attributes this tendency to weakness, in part, to the two ways in which predatory regimes "seriously compromise" their legitimacy: by systematically excluding specific groups from access to policy-making processes and government services, and also by using the "captured state" to "plunder the national economy through graft, corruption, and extortion" (ibid). This in turn leads to extreme political insecurity as predatory states, "often as a matter of policy, undermine the sources of their own legitimacy by undermining the autonomy of, plundering, threatening, and killing distinct communities of their own citizens". This insecurity, in turn, "feeds further repression, and often massive retaliation against dissenters" (ibid: 254).

As well as causing humanitarian emergencies and

insecurity, predatory regimes have been associated with social and political decay within their borders. For Larry Diamond (2001; 2008) the worst predatory states cause 'predatory societies' – societies in which predatory behaviour permeates social and political life at all levels. Within this sort of society, every transaction is "manipulated to someone's immediate advantage" (2001: 13; 2008: 44). The rich, for example, have not engaged in productive activity or honest risk taking; they have manipulated power and privilege in order to steal from the state and plunder from the weak, all the while "shirking the law". Indeed, according to Diamond, in such societies the line between the forces of law and criminality is always a thin one: "[t]he police do not enforce the law, judges do not decide the law, custom officials do not inspect goods" (2001: 13; 2008: 44). As a result, predatory societies are, for Diamond, the polar opposite of a 'civic community' (Putnam, 1994) – the sort of society which has the institutions to ensure people can generally trust one another; combine in various forms of association, and "cooperate for larger, collective ends" (Diamond, 2001: 9). For this reason, predatory societies "cannot sustain democracy, for sustainable democracy requires constitutionalism and respect for law" (ibid: 12). In predatory societies, by contrast, political actors "use any means necessary and break any rules possible in their quest for power and wealth" (ibid: 12; 2008: 43).

This conclusion is reflected in Robert Fatton Jr's (2006) study of Haiti. Haiti, he says, is a 'predatory democracy' – a country where there appear to be formal democratic institutions, but where these institutions ('rules of the game') are neither legitimate nor robust enough amongst the different factions which make up the ruling class to ensure their *commitment* to democratic political processes, or for managing the relations between that class and civil society. For Fatton Jr., the history of Haiti shows that when this shared commitment to key institutional processes is lacking, politics becomes "predatory and chaotic" (ibid: 116). Indeed, Haitian politics is characterised by failure at all levels. As a 'predatory democracy', it is "a system of governance based on a zero-sum game of power in which factions of the political class fight for

supremacy: elected officials at the highest level are controlled by opaque private forces; elections are held regularly and are usually fraudulent; and public administrators claim to save the constitution by continuously violating its spirit and its laws” (ibid).

Key Features of Predatory Rule

- Extreme autocratic rule
- Personality politics and the use of violence, fear and repression
- Erosion of formal public institutions
- Disregard or distortion of ‘customary’, ‘traditional’ ‘informal’ institutions.
- Pervasive corruption
- Rewards for key collaborators and elites
- Leaders and associates use power for personal ends; and form a *de facto* ‘predatory coalition’.

Emerging themes

Though the use of the term ‘predatory’ in the literature varies across a range of development topics, we can discern a common set of emerging themes.

- The term ‘predatory’ invokes a metaphor of predator and prey: in such states, “[t]hose who control the state apparatus seem to plunder without any more regard for the welfare of the citizenry than a predator has for the welfare of its prey” (Evans, 1989: 562). Nor do predatory rulers show any signs of long-term developmental aims. Predation is a phenomenon most frequently identified in post-colonial states. In several African countries in the ‘80s and ‘90s – Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Zaire and Liberia, for example – a combination of political decay,
- negative growth and ethnic and regional competition for the state’s resources were said to be closely associated with a predatory state (Nafziger and Auvinen, 2000: 114). The predatory state is characterised by an extreme form of autocratic rule with distinct characteristics and is often juxtaposed to the developmental state in East Asia (Robinson, 2001).
- In defining the predatory state, analysts have often looked to the role of the *predatory leader* as a central feature. For most analysts, the predatory leader operates in a particularly brutal and often destructive way in order to secure and maintain wealth and power, and will do so with a combination of ruthless coercion, material inducement to key elites and the employment of personality politics (Nafziger and Auvinen, 2000: 111). These leadership methods come to define politics in a predatory state, and set expectations for its practice at all levels.
- However, it is also important to point out that predatory regimes do not turn only on a single ‘predatory’ leader (though he or she may be a necessary element), but depend critically on the support and active collaboration of others: both individuals and organizations (especially the military and security services and key parts of the bureaucracy). As in the Zimbabwean case, the predatory regime has consisted of a coalition of civil and military participants (Bratton and Masunungure, 2011). In short, predatory regimes are run by predatory coalitions. Indeed, the fate of predatory leaders is often very much in the hands of the uneasy and suspicious coalition that surrounds them (Frantz and Ezrow, 2011).
- Predatory leaders characteristically see power, and employ power, as if it were ‘winner-take-all’ – “a brutal, indivisible quantity” to be “kept individually and exercised absolutely” (Fatton, 2006: 118). Babangida, for example, sought and achieved an unprecedented level of concentrated political authority and economic discretion in Nigeria (Lewis, 1996: 101). Similarly in Iraq, power was concentrated in the person

of Saddam Hussein, who occupied “the apex of a clientelist pyramid” (Alnasrawi, 2000: 111). This determines the leader’s relationship to elites in the state. Loyalty to the ruler is based neither on tradition nor ideology, nor on him having a unique personal mission or charismatic qualities, but instead on a mixture of fear and rewards to collaborators (Linz, 1975: 259). These collaborators – typically a small group of “cronies and family members” (Holsti, 2000: 254) or other “personalistically interconnected individuals” – then in turn enjoy power and status, and the “absolutist domination” of the predatory state becomes self-reinforcing (Evans, 1989: 570; 575).

- Such behaviour by leaders and elites tends to erode a country’s central public institutions. In Zimbabwe, for example, the ‘predatory civil-military coalition’ used the state apparatus to pursue its own enrichment and survival, but in so doing “undermined the capacity of formal state institutions, including the rule of law, and alienated the labour movement, which formed the basis of a rival opposition coalition” (Bratton and Masunungure, 2011: 3). All formal political processes are affected too, as the example of Haiti demonstrates. Termed a “predatory democracy”, Haiti is a country long governed according to a zero-sum game of power, where entrenched factions of the political class fight for supremacy against each other, rather than pursue any shared good for the country. In Haiti, “[c]ontrolling the state [is transformed] into a fight to the death to monopolise the sinecures of political power” (Fatton, 2006: 123) which in turn means that corruption and fraud are endemic (ibid: 125) and any formal democratic process is destabilized.
- At their worst, predatory states (such as Iraq under Hussein) systematically exclude, repress and kill their own citizens; often feeding political insecurity and leading to “conspiracies, purges and counter purges, [...] and ruthless suppression of dissent” (Alnasrawi, 2000: 2-3, Holsti, 2000: 254). Michael Bratton and Eldred Masunungure have argued that this “proclivity of leaders to unleash violence against (to “prey” upon) their own people” is actually a necessary feature of a state being identified as predatory. What distinguishes a predatory leadership is not only a failure to deliver developmental outcomes; “it is [that it] also kills, maims and terrorizes its citizens” (Bratton and Masunungure, 2011: 5).
- Institutional and civil insecurity goes hand in hand with economic degradation. In a predatory system, “public and private resources are melded and public office serves as a means for the creation of private wealth” (Alnasrawi, 2000: 111). As has often been the case in a post-colonial context, in a country where poverty is the norm and where private avenues to wealth are rare, politics and power appear as an entrepreneurial vocation – as the only means by which to gain private wealth. This means that large amounts of otherwise investable surplus tend to be extracted by leaders and elites, and little in the way of collective public goods is returned to the populace. The ruling elite and their clients “use their positions and access to resources to plunder the national economy through graft, corruption, and extortion, and to participate in private business activities” (Holsti, 2000: 251). This ‘predatory corruption’, as the ODI has termed it, is the “most damaging to development and to the prospects for sustainable poverty reduction” (ODI, 2006: 2). In Zaire under Mobutu, for example, this occurred at two levels. First, Mobutu and his associates extracted vast personal fortunes from the country’s mineral wealth, estimated to be more than US\$10 billion (Ergas, 1987: 299, 320, cited by Holsti, 2000: 251). Second, this “plundering at the top” extended throughout the whole economy and society, destroying any possibility of “rule-governed behaviour” at even the lower levels of the bureaucracy. This gave individuals the incentive simply to maximise their own short-term gain, and long-term profit-based productive investment became almost impossible (Evans, 1989: 570). As a consequence during the first two decades of Mobutu’s rule Zaire’s GDP fell by 2.1 percent annually (World Bank, 1988, cited by Evans, 1989: 569).

In Zimbabwe, the economic collapse was perhaps even more dramatic. Starting from a position of relative strength in 1980, by 2008 Zimbabwe had a GDP growth rate of -14.5 percent and inflation running at (a minimum estimate) of 231 million percent (Bratton and Masunungure, 2011: 28).

Working Definition and Conclusion

Drawing together these themes, we can begin to settle on the defining elements of a predatory state and its pattern of rule and leadership.

- The terms 'predatory state', 'predatory rule' or 'predatory leadership' are analytic categories that refer to the characteristics of a state and the typical patterns of its rule.
- Though rarely 'purely' predatory in practice, predatory patterns of rule are to be distinguished from those that are 'accountable', 'developmental' or 'responsive', as well as from 'patrimonial' ones, which also come in a variety of forms.
- These characteristics may be present to a greater or lesser degree (states may be more or less predatory).
- Such states, though by no means new in history, tend in the modern era to be found in post-colonial contexts.
- They are characterised by autocratic rule which is established, and maintained, through a combination of violence, fear, material reward to key collaborators and personality politics which means that the institutionalisation of politics as an open, consensual and non-violent process is not present.
- Eschewing processes of accountability and developmental goals, predatory leaders tend to pursue and acquire high levels of political and economic discretion, and wield this power primarily in order to enrich themselves and their allies.
- Predatory leadership seldom, if ever, constitutes a one-person regime, but depends on a predatory coalition for its survival.
- Frequently, the combination of political

repression and the rapacious private enrichment of a leader and his cronies will erode a country's central public institutions, as well as its customary ones, and degrade its economic fortunes.

The developmental implications of this are stark and severe. Transforming predatory rule into a political order that is more developmental and that can address issues of growth, stability and poverty reduction is a challenging political process. It is unlikely to happen quickly. For the people and politics of a country under predatory rule, and especially for its reform or developmental leaderships, it is not simply a matter of reforming or changing a government or a regime. It will also entail the slow and intensely complex process of establishing a new 'political settlement' and devising the locally appropriate institutional arrangements that will make the settlement workable and that will create the basic conditions for stable politics in a viable and effective state.

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