

# Legitimacy and Accountability in Weak States: Elements in Political Economy

Weak states are characterized by a lack of effective authority, instability, and a limited capacity to provide basic services and enforce the rule of law. In such states, legitimacy and accountability are often weak or non-existent. This article explores the relationship between legitimacy and accountability in weak states, examining the political economy factors that contribute to state weakness and undermine accountability mechanisms. It also discusses potential policy measures to address these challenges and strengthen governance in weak states.

Legitimacy is the belief that a government has the right to rule. It is based on the perception that the government is fair, just, and responsive to the needs of the people. In weak states, legitimacy is often weak or non-existent. This is due to a number of factors, including:

- **A lack of effective authority:** Weak states often lack the capacity to provide basic services, enforce the rule of law, and protect citizens from violence. This can lead to a loss of confidence in the government and a decrease in legitimacy.
- **Instability:** Weak states are often plagued by instability, including civil war, political violence, and coups. This can further erode legitimacy and make it difficult for the government to establish a strong foundation.
- **Corruption:** Corruption is a major problem in weak states. It undermines trust in the government and makes it difficult for citizens to

hold their leaders accountable.

- **Patronage and clientelism:** Patronage and clientelism are political practices that involve the distribution of favors and resources to supporters in exchange for political support. These practices can undermine legitimacy by creating a system of unequal access to resources and opportunities.

Accountability refers to the ability of citizens to hold their government accountable for its actions. In weak states, accountability is often weak or non-existent. This is due to a number of factors, including:



## Lynching and Local Justice: Legitimacy and Accountability in Weak States (Elements in Political Economy) by Dara Kay Cohen

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- **A lack of transparency:** Weak states often lack transparency in their operations. This makes it difficult for citizens to access information about how the government is using their resources and making decisions.

- **Weak institutions:** Weak states often have weak institutions, such as a free press, an independent judiciary, and a strong civil society. These institutions are essential for holding the government accountable and ensuring that it is responsive to the needs of the people.
- **A culture of impunity:** In weak states, there is often a culture of impunity, in which those in power are not held accountable for their actions. This can lead to a lack of trust in the justice system and make it difficult for citizens to seek redress for grievances.

Legitimacy and accountability are closely related concepts. A government that is legitimate is more likely to be accountable to its citizens. Conversely, a government that is accountable to its citizens is more likely to be perceived as legitimate. This relationship is particularly important in weak states, where both legitimacy and accountability are often weak.

There are a number of policy measures that can be taken to strengthen legitimacy and accountability in weak states. These include:

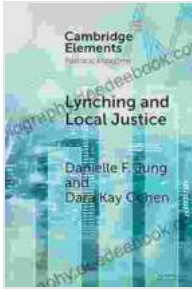
- **Improving security and stability:** One of the most important steps that can be taken to strengthen legitimacy and accountability in weak states is to improve security and stability. This can be done through a variety of measures, including increasing the capacity of the security forces, improving the rule of law, and promoting reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts.
- **Fighting corruption:** Corruption is a major threat to legitimacy and accountability in weak states. It can be addressed through a variety of measures, including strengthening anti-corruption laws and enforcement, promoting transparency and accountability in

government operations, and empowering citizens to report and fight corruption.

- **Building strong institutions:** Strong institutions are essential for holding the government accountable and ensuring that it is responsive to the needs of the people. These institutions include a free press, an independent judiciary, and a strong civil society.
- **Promoting transitional justice:** Transitional justice is a process that seeks to address past human rights abuses and promote reconciliation in post-conflict societies. It can play an important role in strengthening legitimacy and accountability in weak states by providing victims with a sense of justice and closure and helping to build trust between citizens and the government.
- **Negotiating political settlements:** Political settlements are agreements between different factions in a society that aim to end conflict and establish a new political order. These settlements can play an important role in strengthening legitimacy and accountability by providing a framework for the distribution of power and resources and establishing mechanisms for holding the government accountable.

Legitimacy and accountability are essential for effective governance in weak states. By addressing the political economy factors that contribute to state weakness and undermine legitimacy and accountability mechanisms, it is possible to strengthen governance and improve the lives of citizens. The policy measures discussed in this article provide a starting point for strengthening legitimacy and accountability in weak states.

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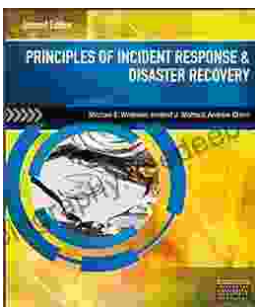
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