Perspectives on State Governance, Undergovernance, and Alternative Governance

Chapter Four

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In the popular imagination and in many policy analyses, ungoverned spaces bring to mind Thomas Hobbes’s depiction of life outside the Leviathan: a place of “continuall feare, and the danger of violent death,” where “the life of man [is] solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short.”\(^1\) Ungoverned spaces are thought of as blank spaces on the map, defined primarily by what they lack: no peace, no prosperity, no order, no security, no government, no state. But this focus on absence ignores a reality on the ground that is often far more complex. The world cannot be neatly divided into two spheres—governed and ungoverned. Most of the world falls somewhere in between. Yet this in-between zone is often disregarded in favor of simple binary models of governance.

One way to conceptualize the spaces that fall between governed and ungoverned is as undergoverned.\(^2\) The concept of undergoverned spaces (UGS) calls attention to the territories, populations, and issues that are neither black nor white but shades of gray. Yet the spectrum that runs from governed through undergoverned to ungoverned is only one dimension of governance. In addition to this quantitative dimension focused on how much governance

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2. Some earlier U.S. Department of Defense conceptualizations of *ungoverned spaces* used the term as a general category that included *undergoverned spaces*. However, as this chapter argues, it is more useful to separate the two terms. See, for example, Robert D. Lamb, who defined *ungoverned areas* as follows:

A place where the state or the central government is unable or unwilling to extend control, effectively govern, or influence the local population, and where a provincial, local, tribal, or autonomous government does not fully or effectively govern, due to inadequate governance capacity, insufficient political will, gaps in legitimacy, the presence of conflict, or restrictive norms of behavior. For the purposes of this report, the term “ungoverned areas” encompasses under-governed, misgoverned, contested, and exploitable areas as well as ungoverned areas. In this sense, ungoverned areas are considered potential safe havens. (Robert D. Lamb, *Ungoverned Areas and Threats from Safe Havens*, Washington, D.C.: Ungoverned Areas Project, 2008, p. 6)
there is, a qualitative dimension exists that focuses on the nature of governance. Thus, the category of *undergoverned* operates on only one plane—one that is primarily appropriate for comparison and analysis along the quantitative dimension. A more complete view of governance requires attention to both the quantitative and qualitative dimensions—to both the amount of governance and who provides it, how, and to whom. This requires moving from a unidimensional to a two-dimensional conception of governance.

The qualitative dimension reveals the limitations of conventional state-centric notions of UGS. In much of the world, the state is not the only governance provider. Thus, deviations from the idealized model of absolute state sovereignty are quite normal. Alongside state undergovernance, we often observe alternative forms of governance. Many actors working in many configurations provide governance, resulting in a diverse array of outcomes for the population.

This chapter explores these alternative governance arrangements around the world, filling in the qualitative dimension and providing a more realistic view of governance as it actually exists. I start with a discussion of concepts and definitions. Then, I discuss undergovernance and alternative governance and how to distinguish between them. I end with some concluding thoughts about the two.

**Defining Two Key Terms: The State and Governance**

Before identifying governance systems, it is crucial to briefly define and differentiate two key terms: the *state* and *governance*. The *state*, for our purposes here, is defined, very minimally, as “the functioning of executive branches and their bureaucracies.” This definition presupposes no notion of the strength of the state or what goods or services it provides.

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3 Francis Fukuyama, “What Is Governance?” *Governance*, Vol. 26, No. 3, 2013. Although much of my discussion here draws on Stephen D. Krasner and Thomas Risse, I prefer Fukuyama’s definition of the state to theirs. Following Max Weber, Krasner and Risse conceptualize “statehood as an institutionalized structure with the ability to rule authoritatively (Herrschaftsverband) and to legitimately control the means of violence” (Stephen D. Krasner and Thomas Risse, “External Actors, State-Building, and Service Provision in Areas of Limited Statehood: Introduction,” *Governance*, Vol. 27, No. 4, 2014, p. 549). This definition relies too heavily on outcomes rather than institutions. In particular, it refers to the key outcome that we often want of the state: legitimate control of the means of violence. Weber, of course, looms large in any discussion of the modern state, but his conception is often aspirational rather than descriptive—“monopolizing violence,” as Nicholas Rush Smith puts it, is a “Weberian fantasy” (Nicholas Rush Smith, *Contradictions of Democracy: Vigilantism and Rights in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2019, p. 192). Weber’s canonical statement on the state is as follows: “Today . . . we have to say that a state is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory” (Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., New York: Oxford University Press, 1948, p. 78; italics in the original). Two vital features of Weber’s view are that the violence must be legitimate and that the state’s claim to the monopoly of violence must be successful. (These points are ignored in the common truncation of Weber’s view as simply “the monopoly of violence.”) Both of these features are relational outcomes—that is, they result from the interactions of rulers and the ruled. It is a mistake, therefore, to treat Weber’s view as a definition of the state, as many analysts do (especially in the definition’s truncated form). Weber’s state is an ideal type and should, therefore, be treated
Thus, stateness, or statehood, can vary from “consolidated” to “limited” to “fragile, failing, or failed.” Governance, by contrast, is “the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs.” Put a bit more concretely, to govern is to “make and enforce rules and regulations, and to provide services.” This broad definition covers a wide variety of activities involved in the “process of ruling and managing territories and populations” and is agnostic to the identity of the provider. Distinguishing between the state and governance is important because (1) the state is not the only governance provider and (2) states vary widely in the variety and quality of their governance. The degree of statehood does not even necessarily correlate with governance provision. What is more, while the sovereign nation-state is the preeminent governance institution, this is a fairly recent phenomenon, and it might not be the case in the future. Well into the 20th century, several other types of governance institutions prevailed around the world, such as colonies, trusteeships, and protectorates. Another important point is that while the state is a territorially based institution, governance is not only a territorial matter. We often think of governance in spatial terms (e.g., Denmark is governed, rural Afghanistan is ungoverned), but it also applies to policy issues. Both within a territorial unit and as an outcome, not a definition. This perspective opens up a key empirical question: Why are some states Weberian while others are not?

4 Krasner and Risse, 2014, p. 549. They define these concepts as follows:

- “Consolidated states possess the ability to authoritatively make, implement, and enforce central decisions for a collectivity”
- “Limited statehood concerns those areas of a country in which central authorities (governments) lack the ability to implement and enforce rules and decisions and/or in which the legitimate monopoly over the means of violence is lacking. The ability to enforce rules or to control the means of violence can be differentiated along two dimensions: (1) territorial, that is, parts of a country’s territorial space, and (2) sectoral, that is, with regard to specific policy areas”
- “Failed or failing states are those that have more or less lost the state monopoly on the use of force and/or do not possess effective capacities to enforce decisions” (p. 549).


across it, policy issues—tax collection, water resource management, etc.—carry different degrees and types of governance and can be governed by different actors.\textsuperscript{10}

Having separated statehood and governance, we can turn to thinking about governance in spaces where statehood is not consolidated or institutionalized.\textsuperscript{11} This is not a trivial matter. More than 70 percent of countries, according to one calculation, have “significant areas of limited statehood.”\textsuperscript{12} In these territories and policy sectors, the state is only one of the relevant actors and state governance is only part of the governance landscape. This reality lies in contrast to the Western ideal of state-dominant governance in consolidated states, yet many observers condition their analyses of governance everywhere on this “fictional” ideal.\textsuperscript{13} In such thinking, any place that does not fit the assumed model of governance is considered ungoverned. But given that the statist ideal only applies to a minority of places, we must do better than conceptualizing governance in much of the world as simply an aberration from the norm.

**State Governance Relative to Undergovernance and Alternative Governance**

One way to sharpen our thinking about governance outside “domestically sovereign” states is to shift our perspective from a focus on what is absent to a focus on what is present.\textsuperscript{14} This section does that by looking at the alternative governance systems that exist in places and policy arenas that are undergoverned by the state. Alternatively governed spaces are conceived of as all the territories and policy sectors that are neither governed by a consolidated state nor entirely ungoverned, by which I mean characterized by disorder.\textsuperscript{15} Thus, alternative governance is a broad category that covers all kinds of actors, structures, and circumstances. This breadth is deliberate. The concept is meant to call attention to the commonalities among systems of governance that are often thought to be dissimilar.


\textsuperscript{11} Lee usefully distinguishes between state consolidation, the degree to which the state can govern evenly over its territory, and state institutionalization, “the power and strength of state administrative institutions” (Lee, 2020, p. 20).


\textsuperscript{14} Krasner defines domestic sovereignty as “the formal organization of political authority within the state and the ability of public authorities to exercise effective control within the borders of their own polity” (Stephen D. Krasner, *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999, p. 4).

\textsuperscript{15} Disorder is a situation in which the rulers, the ruled, or both “fail to abide by a set of defined rules” (Ana Arjona, “Wartime Institutions: A Research Agenda,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 58, No. 8, December 1, 2014, p. 1374).
The focus on alternative governance arrangements is not intended as necessarily laudatory. It is important to consider both state governance and its alternatives, not because the alternatives are always better than the state, but because alternative governance is the day-to-day reality for much of the world’s population. To promote such a focus, as Paul Stacey and Christian Lund argue, is “not to romanticize” alternative governance or to view it as the consummation of an emancipatory project of popular rule. For many, life in places like Old Fadema [an informal settlement in Accra, Ghana] remains nasty, brutish, and short, despite efforts at self-governance and information regulation. Yet, as actual governance, it deserves actual attention. 16

Alternative governance is important not because it is desired or desirable but because it shapes the lives of many millions of people around the world. 17 We cannot understand the dynamics of these places without understanding the alternative arrangements that govern them. Therefore, we ignore alternative governance at our own peril.

Alternative governance has identifiable forms, many of which have been conceptualized and theorized as distinct phenomena. For instance, in recent years scholars have published excellent studies on hybrid governance; 18 rebel governance; 19 criminal governance; 20 human-


itarian governance, and more, demonstrating the specific circumstances under which each arises and the unique logics that they follow. In some of these forms, the state is among the governance providers, operating alongside nonstate providers. For this reason, it is not appropriate to subsume alternative governance under the label nonstate governance.

The remainder of this chapter builds on the existing scholarship to develop a more general framework for understanding governance outside consolidated statehood. To do that, I discuss the following questions: Who governs alternatively? What is governed alternatively? What spaces are governed alternatively? What is the interaction between alternative governance and state governance?

Who Governs Alternatively?

Alternative governance can involve a wide array of actors. It has been observed that a diverse cast provides governance in settings around the world—from international humanitarian nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and transnational corporations to traditional ethnic organizations and religious institutions to criminal organizations and rebel groups. These actors might appear to have little in common, and some of them appear to have little to do with governance—or might be better known for undermining governance—but they all govern territory or issues, even if their governance is not readily apparent when viewed through a state-centric lens. This diversity of actors is a hallmark of alternative governance: It can be provided by anyone who can provide it.

Alternative governance providers vary along many dimensions, such as their level of personalization (from formal and rules-based to informal and personalized), locus of operation (from local to international), profit orientation (from not-for-profit to for-profit), and eligibility criteria (from inclusive to exclusive). Here, I focus on how much alternative governors rely on force or threats of force. Importantly, although I present armed and unarmed alternative governors as a dichotomy, they are actually two ends of a continuum.

Unarmed alternative governance providers take many shapes and forms, such as community-based organizations, religious institutions, ethnic organizations, international


22 The role of the state can vary widely in alternative governance arrangements, from no state provision to quite a great deal. The state just cannot be the exclusive governance provider, because then it would no longer qualify as alternative governance.
23 Although this section describes various nonstate actors that provide some form of governance, it is important to keep in mind that the alternative governance arrangement of a particular place or issue is constituted by the governance provided by all actors involved, including, at times, the state.
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NGOs, and private-sector firms. 25 Take, for example, the work of Old Fadama Development Association, a community-based organization that delivers varied and important governance functions in an informal settlement in Accra, Ghana, which is home to 80,000 people but “legally invisible” to the state:

They look out for new constructions that block pathways; they call on emergent businesses; they ensure broader access roads are kept clear of containers and vehicles; they caution young people riding motorbikes carelessly; if they spot leaky pipes they contact volunteer plumbers; they identify fire hazards and endeavour to “keep the rubbish moving” to minimise problems with vermin; they look in on recurring domestic disputes and shoo children to school; they follow up on complaints of theft and damage to property, and pursue disagreements over rental payments; they give newcomers advice on building; after heavy rain they inspect low-lying areas for flooding; they rally communal labour to clear blocked waterways and ensure unsafe buildings are demolished after outbreaks of fire; they also organise the collection of contributions to cover medical bills, funeral expenses and support to families when a deceased person must be returned to what is often a remote northern village; and in some instances they cover bail money when it cannot be raised by relatives.26

In the absence of state-provided governance, residents are compelled to “make an active and conscious effort beyond their own doorsteps” to “uphold common standards to make life bearable” in the community. 27 Unarmed actors can even sometimes play this role in places where armed actors dominate governance provision. 28 This is particularly the case when unarmed actors have access to authority rooted in economic, social, cultural, or charismatic power.

Nonstate armed groups are not often known for their governance provision, but many of them provide it. Armed actors have an advantage when it comes to governance provision: the ability to use force to enforce their rules and regulations. As Lessing explains,

In our workplaces, civic organizations, and even families we are subject to the rules, impositions, and decisions of those vested with authority. But in all these cases, as Weber pointed out, the state is the final enforcer and enabler of such authority. No such backstop underlies governance by non-state armed groups: their authority rests on their own coercive capacity, in at least nominal opposition to the state’s. 29

26 Stacey and Lund, 2016, pp. 592, 600.
27 Stacey and Lund, 2016, p. 600.
While these groups have the ability to resort to coercion, not all of their governance is provided at gunpoint. As with state governance, the use of force can fade from immediate view and operate more as a background condition for day-to-day governing.

Most rebel groups and criminal organizations do not govern people and territory or only do so in limited ways—such as armed groups that extract taxes from civilians but provide little in return. But some offer a wide array of rules, public goods, and services. Armed groups provide some of the most comprehensive governance of any alternative governors. This is particularly the case for rebel governors, who, Mampilly argues, must “replicate[s] some of the functions and forms of the nation-state...[in order] to derive support for [their] political authority and achieve some form of legitimacy” from the civilian population. Having displaced the state from the territory that they control, rebel groups are able to provide any amount of governance they are capable of and choose to provide. Some go so far as to create de facto states with all the characteristics of a state except for international legal recognition. For example, Somaliland, a de facto state within the borders of Somalia, has its own government, legislature, court systems, and police. The enclave engages in regularized taxation, provides public services such as health and education, conducts trade with international partners, and even boasts a separate central bank that issues currency (the Somaliland shilling).

Criminal organizations rarely have exclusive control of territory; thus, their governance provision does not reach the same heights as the most-comprehensive rebel governors. Nev-

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32 Political scientists generally agree that armed groups govern civilians when it is in their self-interest to do so, but they debate which factors increase and decrease their self-interest. For example, Arjona argues that rebel groups govern when they have long time horizons and do not face strong resistance from local civilian institutions; Jeremy M. Weinstein argues that rebel groups’ governance improves when they rely on local civilians for resources and support rather than relying on natural resources or external patrons; Nicholas Barnes argues that criminal gangs provide more governance when their primary security threat is the government rather than other gangs; and Enrique Desmond Arias argues that gangs govern "to build local legitimacy and facilitate their illicit business." See Arjona, 2016; Jeremy M. Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Collective Violence*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006; Nicholas Barnes, *Monopolies of Violence: Gang Governance in Rio de Janeiro*, Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2017; and Enrique Desmond Arias, “The Impacts of Differential Armed Dominance of Politics in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil,” *Studies in Comparative International Development*, Vol. 48, No. 3, September 1, 2013.

ertheless, as with rebel groups, the quantity and quality of governance provided by criminal organizations ranges from minimal to fairly expansive. A few gangs have even responded to the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic by delivering welfare services and enforcing quarantines in their areas of control. One counterintuitive way that criminal organizations have increased the governance provision within their territory is to specifically forbid crimes against state social service providers to encourage those providers to return to work in the community.

What Is Governed Alternatively?

Alternative governance can, likewise, govern a wide variety of behaviors, both quantitatively and qualitatively. That is, some alternative governance structures govern many aspects of life, while others govern a very limited set (the quantitative dimension). And the behaviors that the structures govern run the gamut (the qualitative dimension), covering many of the things that states do—even if in a somewhat different way. For instance, Lessing lists six governance functions that are widely found to be provided by criminal organizations: policing and enforcement; emergency response; and judicial, fiscal, regulatory, and political operations. But not all criminal organizations or other nonstate actors that govern people or territory perform all of these functions; they can strategically select which functions to carry out and to what degree. Even taxation, a function that we might assume all alternative governors would take part in, is not universal. Some alternative governors certainly collect a tax from the people and activities that they govern, while others eschew taxation and gain revenue in other ways.

At times, even the same alternative governor governs different features of life in different places. For example, civilian behaviors governed by the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) could vary from village to village. In one village, the FARC

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36 Lessing, 2021.

37 Lessing, 2021.

38 In Brazilian favelas (or slums), gangs generally prohibit, at minimum, the following transgressions: “No theft in the community; No physical fighting between residents; No rape of women; No sexual abuse of children; No wife beating” (Luke Dowdney, Children of the Drug Trade: A Case Study of Children in Organised Armed Violence in Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: Child Rights Resource Centre, 2003, p. 64).

“came here, walked by, told us things, asked that we did certain things like not talking to the army . . . We had to obey them in certain ways, of course, because they have the weapons. But [the peasant leaders] are the authority here . . . They didn’t rule us.” But in a village just two kilometers away, a resident recalled, “The FARC were everything . . . They had the last word on every single dispute among neighbors. They decided what could be sold at the stores, the time when we should all go home, and who should leave the area never to come back . . . They also managed divorces, inheritances, and conflicts over land borders. They were the ones who ruled here, not the state.”

While the degree of governance by the FARC was clearly geographically uneven, taken together,

the insurgent administration provided substantial services to the inhabitants of its territory, including health and education systems, a police force to maintain stability, courts to adjudicate civil and criminal disputes, and even loans to farmers and small businessmen. It also engaged in extensive public works projects such as building roads and other infrastructure construction.

Places that look from the outside to be chaotic can contain strong alternative governance structures that rule and regulate various aspects of political, social, and economic life.

What Spaces Are Governed Alternatively?
Alternatively governed spaces are found all over the world, and not only in places considered to be weak or failed states. They exist in low-income, middle-income, and high-income countries; in the global south and north; and in rural peripheries and urban centers. These spaces can be vast, such as much of the Sahel Desert and Amazon Rainforest, or very small, such as a single neighborhood or village. And they can border spaces of entirely different governance structures. While it is useful to think of governance as a spectrum, in terms of quantity and quality, on the ground, the transition between governance systems can be abrupt. For instance, in Brazilian cities, such as Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, neighborhoods where state governance predominates can sit right next to favelas governed alternatively.

In the wealthy countries of the global north, alternatively governed spaces are not only relegated to marginal areas where we might expect to find them. In the United States, the state’s limited presence in low-income urban areas, prisons, and sparsely populated rural areas has allowed for the emergence of alternative governance structures for the often poor and marginalized people who live there. Less recognized is how wealthier citizens create alterna-

41 Mampilly, 2011, p. 2.
42 See, for example, David Skarbek, The Social Order of the Underworld: How Prison Gangs Govern the American Penal System, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014; and Harel Shapira, Waiting for José: The
tively governed spaces for themselves. American private security companies, for instance, employ 1.1 million people, nearly double the national number of state-provided police and sheriff’s patrol officers. Beyond security, many wealthy Americans opt out of many of the state’s governance functions, from education to emergency response, relying instead on alternative sources. Gated communities, in this sense, constitute sites of alternative governance right in the heart of spaces of strong state control. While different in many ways from alternatively governed spaces that operate among marginal populations, these spaces share an underlying structure that lies outside fully consolidated state governance.

However, alternative governance is more common in middle- and low-income countries, where the state is often not fully consolidated or institutionalized. As in the global north, there is a two-tiered system of alternative governance—one for the wealthy and one for the poor—but the divergence is even starker. For the upper and (at times) middle classes, this means opting for privately provided governance arrangements: paying private suppliers for a regulatory order and service delivery that is superior to the state’s. This is perhaps most notable with security. The perceived inadequacy of the state’s security provision has led to the proliferation of walls, barricades, high-tech surveillance systems, and private security companies throughout the global south. These private security providers “interact, cooperate and compete” with state security services “to produce new institutions, practices, and forms of security governance.” The alternative governance arrangements that emerge from these

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46 This often occurs in parallel with tax avoidance by many of the same people, which further restricts the state’s capacity for governance. Gabriel Zucman estimates that while 8 percent of total global financial wealth is held offshore, in Latin America, 22 percent of financial wealth is moved out of view of national tax authorities; in Africa, that number is 30 percent; in Russia, 52 percent; and, in the Gulf countries, 57 percent (Gabriel Zucman, The Hidden Wealth of Nations: The Scourge of Tax Havens, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan, Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2015, p. 53). See also Néstor Castañeda, David Doyle, and Cassilide Schwartz, “Opting Out of the Social Contract: Tax Morale and Evasion,” Comparative Political Studies, Vol. 53, No. 7, June 1, 2020.

47 Abrahamsen and Williams, 2009, p. 3. See, for example, Teresa P. R. Caldeira, City of Walls: Crime, Segregation, and Citizenship in São Paulo, Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2001; and Tessa G.
encounters of nonstate security providers and state security providers “are neither public nor private, but . . . are the outcome of the imbrication of these two domains.”

While those with the means in UGS often have the ability to create bespoke alternative governance structures, those without the means often have far less choice. For the millions of people who live in UGS of the global south, alternative governance arrangements are the only governance arrangements. Importantly, however, residents living under alternative governance arrangements, even fairly coercive ones, are not passive recipients of order imposed from the top down. Residents help determine the structure of the alternative governance. The residents of gang-controlled favelas in Rio de Janeiro, for instance, can pursue strategies, such as avoidance, collaboration, or denunciation, that influence the gangs’ governance outcomes.

In low- and middle-income countries, certain places still stand out as the classic cases of undergovernance and alternative governance: borderlands; rural regions; mountainous areas, forests, and other rugged terrain; war zones; and informal urban settlements, or slums. These places, as James C. Scott puts it, are particularly “illegible” to the state and its bureaucracies. It is here where citizens and organizations ranging from churches to warlord militias, and, at times, the state, work to regulate behavior and allocate goods and services in often difficult circumstances. Yet these alternative governance arrangements cannot be simply dismissed as failures by the state. At times, they are the result of choices by the population to deliberately avoid and evade the state to live under less exploitative, more-responsive governance institutions.

What Is the Interaction Between Alternative Governance and State Governance?

Alternative governance can emerge where the state is weak or absent, but it does not have to. Alternative governance is not an automatic response to insufficient state governance. In some cases, alternative governance structures do not or cannot emerge, and disorder reigns. Similarly, it does not only emerge where the state is weak or absent. Alternative governance, as noted already, can also exist in spaces of relative state strength. Like most aspects of alterna-

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48 Diphoorn, 2015, p. 23.


51 Scott, 2009.

52 Arjona, 2016.
tive governance, its relationship to the state can vary widely, and there are multiple observed relationships between alternative governance and state governance. As Lessing remarks about criminal governance, “States may actively contest [it], but just as often they ignore, deny, or even collaborate with it.”

Scholars have offered interesting typologies that emphasize different dimensions of the relationship between state and alternative governance, such as the type of cooperation between state and nonstate governors; the relative capacity of state and nonstate actors to provide governance; and state penetration and methods of state involvement in governance provision. Variation along these dimensions yields different patterns of state and nonstate actor relations. But broadly speaking, these relationships range from active cooperation to active (often violent) contestation, though the breakdown is not neatly linear. At one end are cooperative relationships between states and alternative governance providers. Cooperative relationships can take various forms; for example, active or passive, willing or reluctant. A mundane example is the role of NGOs bolstering state capacity—for instance, a clinic offering free health care or mutual aid societies aiding neighbors after a disaster.

But the most-interesting examples of cooperation are the most-counterintuitive ones: cooperation among actors engaged in armed conflict against each other. For instance, criminal organizations in Brazil “often collaborate with a variety of state actors to create varied systems of localized order that perpetuate criminal power and undermine most policy efforts to control crime and violence.” In Afghanistan, the government’s service delivery ministries have struck deals with local Taliban; most provincial or district-level government health or education officials interviewed said they were in direct contact with their Taliban counterparts, and some have even signed formal memoranda of understanding with the Taliban, outlining the terms of their cooperation.

And in Italy, “the Italian state has developed specific links, both political and ideological, with the [Sicilian] mafia.”

At the other end of the spectrum are contested relationships between the state and nonstate governance providers. In these cases, the governors see their governance projects as mutually

55 Cammett and MacLean, 2014.
57 Arias, 2013, p. 263.
58 Ashley Jackson, Life Under the Taliban Shadow Government, Denmark: Overseas Development Institute, June 2018.
incompatible. This is most clear in the case of governance provided by rebel groups who are actively contesting—and are actively contested by—the state. Rebel governance is thus often “a process of competitive state building” targeting the existing state.60 For instance, some rebel groups have established fairly robust institutions for providing a variety of governance functions and services in the areas they control. These institutions are designed to replace, not merely supplement, the state. Therefore, they are often confined to territories that have been “liberated” by a rebel group.61 When the state attempts to implement state governance in these areas, the effort generally requires the use of force and is often a deeply destabilizing process.

Yet there are many relationships that fall somewhere between cooperation and contestation. For instance, there are alternative governance structures where nonstate actors have essentially replaced state governance in certain areas or for certain issues, yet the state does not contest the alternative governance. The state might be happy to outsource this governance to other actors, it might simply tolerate alternative governance, it might be too weak to stop alternative governance, or it might opt to abdicate its provision of governance as a political strategy. Rachel Kleinfeld and Elena Barham find that even some high-capacity, democratic states choose not to provide order and security to certain segments of the population as a strategy to maintain power.62

In other situations, the relationship between state and nonstate actors is so entangled that the governance that emerges is described as a hybrid of the two. Hybrid governance sometimes refers to arrangements where both state and nonstate actors provide governance functions,63 but there is also a narrower meaning promoted by such scholars as Colona and Jaffe. For them, hybrid governance refers not merely to situations where nonstate actors perform state-like functions but to “contexts in which state and non-state actors are highly intertwined and merged, often to the extent that we can speak of a new or emergent political formation that is neither state nor non-state.”64 This formation of alternative governance thus blurs the line, often thought to be quite rigid and clear, between state and nonstate actors and governance.65

61 As with so much about alternative governance, this is not absolute and there is a spectrum. Governance provided by the Taliban, for instance, often precedes territorial control rather than follows from it (Jackson, 2018).
64 Colona and Jaffe, 2016, p. 176; Gupta, Verrest, and Jaffé, 2015; Jaffé, 2013.
Diagnosing Undergoverned and Alternatively Governed Spaces

How can one know whether a place is undergoverned and, if it is, what the alternative governance arrangements are? Answering the first question requires paying attention to the state and its institutions, while answering the second requires a more expansive focus. For ease of analysis, the questions can be answered sequentially. For any place of interest, one must ask:

1. Who makes the rules and regulations that are actually obeyed?
2. Who provides the goods and services that are actually received?

If the answer to both questions is the state and only the state, the place in question is likely not undergoverned. The state is consolidated and institutionalized and projects its authority throughout the space. The state governs. There will almost always be other actors involved in the process—from subcontractors hired to implement governance to criminals seeking to undermine it—but the state is the ultimate authority.

If the answer to either question is not the state or not only the state, then the place is undergoverned. In this case, the actors identified in the answer to the two “who” questions are the alternative governance providers. In UGS, however, answering the question of who governs can be difficult. Alternative governance can take forms that are recognizably state-like or share many characteristics with state governance. But alternative governance arrangements need not align with preconceived visions of governance—as hierarchical, bureaucratic, stable, definitive, etc.—and one must be comfortable with ambiguities or even contradictions. For instance, governance in any given place is the total of all rules, regulations, goods, and services provided by all governors, but the total is not necessarily cumulative. Because some overlapping providers act competitively, the total can be less than the sum of all the parts.

Scholars have developed numerous metrics of state capacity that can be used to identify governed and undergoverned spaces. The recent turn to collecting subnational measures of state capacity provides analysts with especially useful data. For instance, Lee and Zhang calculate the state’s ability to collect accurate age data in national censuses. Inaccurate data collection, which can be measured at national and subnational levels, suggests that the state’s

66 If the answer is that no one obeys any rules or regulations and no one receives goods and services, the place in question is ungoverned.

presence is limited.\textsuperscript{68} Luna and Soifer suggest using surveys to ask populations directly about their experiences of several aspects of state capacity, in particular “the state’s reach across territory, its ability to impose taxation, and its effectiveness in the provision of property rights.”\textsuperscript{69}

However, identifying the alternative governance arrangements is a more fraught endeavor, one for which consistent measures that are valid cross-nationally or even across a single country are difficult to come by. Alternative governance arrangements, as this chapter has discussed, are often highly localized and temporally specific. For this reason, empirical studies of alternative governance are often based on fieldwork, and ethnographic research in particular. With fine-grained, locally specific data, whether quantitative or qualitative, analysts can gain a clear understanding of the forms and functions of alternative governance structures. Getting to know UGS can be difficult and costly, but, ultimately, they are not unknowable.

\section*{Concluding Thoughts}
UGS are often seen as marginal places set apart from modernity. Because they lack key elements of state-based order that are a hallmark of Western modernity, UGS are thought of as outside modernity, perhaps even untouched by it: Such terms as \textit{traditional} and \textit{barbaric} often come up in descriptions of UGS. This is not the case. UGS are as much a part of the contemporary global order as places of consolidated state governance. They are not cut off from the rest of the world; they are highly embedded in national and international political, economic, and social orders. They enable, are connected to, and are created by these local, national, and global orders.\textsuperscript{70} Some UGS are directly and deliberately created by foreign actors.\textsuperscript{71}

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{69} Juan Pablo Luna and Hillel David Soifer, “Capturing Sub-National Variation in State Capacity: A Survey-Based Approach,” \textit{American Behavioral Scientist}, Vol. 61, No. 8, July 1, 2017, p. 892.
  \item \textsuperscript{70} See Nils Gilman, Jesse Goldhammer, and Steven Weber, eds., \textit{Deviant Globalization: Black Market Economy in the 21st Century}, New York: Continuum, 2011. One strong view is that governed spaces would not function (at least as they currently do) without undergoverned and ungoverned spaces. What Alena Ledeneva argues regarding the relationship between formal and informal institutions has implications for the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of governance: “formal institutions would not work without informal relationships supporting them and making things happen by the book or by declared principles. This is . . . to suggest that formality can only be enacted in practice in conjunction with informality, both played as appropriate in a given context, seeming opposite but interconnected and interdependent . . . Informality is central for maintaining order” (Alena Ledeneva, “Introduction: The Informal View of the World—Key Challenges and Main Findings of the Global Informality Project,” in Alena Ledeneva, Anna Bailey, Sheelagh Barron, Costanza Curro, and Elizabeth Teague, eds., \textit{Global Encyclopaedia of Informality}, Vol. 1, London, United Kingdom: UCL Press, 2018, p. 5). See also Lessing’s argument on the symbiotic relationship between criminal governance and the state (Lessing, 2021).
  \item \textsuperscript{71} Lee, 2020. More broadly, many of today’s UGS in the global south are the product of centuries of exploitation by states in the global north, from the slave trade and colonial rule to more-recent austerity policies promoted by international lenders and military interventions.
\end{itemize}
At the same time as these spaces are considered outside the bounds of modern institutions, it is often assumed that the governance arrangements that exist within them are a pathway to modern statehood. Alternative governance is commonly framed as state-making, and the institutions that are developed are considered “states in waiting.” While this is sometimes true, especially among rebel governors, it is not always the case. Alternative governance arrangements can be proactive and constructive without necessary being geared toward creating a state or state-like institutions. As this chapter has highlighted, some alternative governors are quite content to only govern certain aspects of life and have no interest in taking on all the responsibilities of statehood. Others create new governance structures where state and nonstate actors are so entangled that the hybrid state that emerges barely resembles a state as classically conceived. These forms of governance are not always stepping-stones to statehood; they can be endpoints themselves. Analysts based in the global north typically assume that everyone wants to be like “us” (Western), but not everyone does. There are “multiple modernities” and many ways to govern people and territories in the modern world.

The concept of UGS still carries a statist bias. As a result, UGS are often looked for within the borders of states. But there are several critical, global issues that inherently transcend state boundaries, such as climate change and pandemics. These global issues are undergoverned, but not because states lack consolidation or institutionalization. Rather, the nature of these problems is fundamentally global in a way that makes state governance insufficient; states are an inadequate institution to govern such issues as global climate change at the planetary scale. Governing these issues requires finding alternative arrangements to the international system of sovereign states. However, what those alternative governance arrangements must look like is an open question.

72 Jaffe, 2013.


74 As Rosa Brooks argues, “Indeed, from the perspective of an alien observer from another planet, ‘the international community’ of the planet Earth must surely appear like a failed state writ large. The existing international order has proven consistently unable to control the violence of powerful actors (whether states or nonstate entities such as terrorist organizations), manage environmental catastrophe such as global warming, remedy astronomically large economic inequities between individuals and societies, constrain the devastating scramble to exploit the Earth’s dwindling natural resources, or address crises such as the global AIDS epidemic . . . If there is any sense in which all the world’s people constitute a society (and why not insist on that, in this era of globalization and human rights?), it is hard not to conclude that the international community is simply a failed state on a global scale” (Rosa Brooks, “Failed States, or the State as Failure?” University of Chicago Law Review, Vol. 72, No. 4, September 1, 2005, p. 1167). See also Jonathan Blake and Nils Gilman, “Governing in the Planetary Age,” Noema Magazine, March 9, 2021.
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Abbreviations

- FARC: Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
- NGO: nongovernmental organization
- UGS: undergoverned spaces

References


