

Legitimacy in Rebel-dominated Northern Côte d'Ivoire

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Processes of legitimization/de-legitimization are at the core of domination and governance. Rebels as power holders must legitimize their authority in order to gain acceptance and recognition from those they govern. How do rebel groups gain legitimacy and under which conditions do they lose it?

After a failed coup d'état in September 2002 northern Côte d'Ivoire fell under rebel control whereas the southern part of the country stayed under the rule of the government of President Gbagbo. The rebel forces seized control over around 55% of the territory where, at the same time, state administration and security forces were no longer present. After the most violent period, the *Forces Nouvelles* have consolidated their power and have developed a more stable civil and military organisation. Local governance was characterized by a parallel presence of competing actors with the *Forces Nouvelles* as only one actor amongst many, engaging in governance but not dominating it.

From a legalist legitimacy perspective, rebel domination in northern Côte d'Ivoire was illegitimate. But from a social and empirical legitimacy perspective the *Forces Nouvelles* were legitimate violent actors drawing legitimacy from a variety of sources. For instance, the ability to provide security and restore order is a key source of legitimacy. At the beginning, the rebels were able to accumulate and claim legitimacy, mainly the basic legitimacies of superior force, of ordering power and of cultural belonging. But after the signature of the Ouagadougou peace accord, which was signed in Burkina Faso's capital in March 2007, the *Forces Nouvelles* lost legitimacy and trustworthiness in the eyes of the population, which has fundamentally affected social interactions.

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, the paper discusses the process of legitimization and de-legitimization in rebel-dominated northern Côte d'Ivoire. As local particularities shape the local modes of domination and governance my contribution will restrict itself to the sub-region of Ferkessédougou, Korhogo, and Kong. How did the *Forces Nouvelles* in this area succeed in accumulating legitimacy, how and why did they lose it after the peace agreement? Distinguishing between different types of legitimacy and different legitimacy communities, the paper analyzes how this process was related to the gain and loss of trust, because trust and mistrust have a crucial impact on how people perceive and evaluate the performances of actors. Thus, the paper aims at contributing to a better understanding of the link between governance, legitimacy and trust in areas of precarious statehood.