This project explores how variation in the micro-dynamics of state legitimacy—which we define as rightful rule—affects public perceptions around accountability, particularly the emergence and approval of local, extra-legal justice practices. We argue that deviations away from state authority in this realm are evidence of deteriorating legitimacy in contexts where state consolidation is most tenuous. We theorize that when neither the state nor its challengers has a monopoly, community-based, extra-judicial justice emerges. This practice is observed in many parts of the world, in which groups of civilians mete out what often amounts to excessively violent capital punishment for a range of (often quite minor) crimes. The use, acceptance, and persistence of community-based, extra-judicial justice are all clear indications of a de facto loss of legitimacy, and a challenge to state consolidation.

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