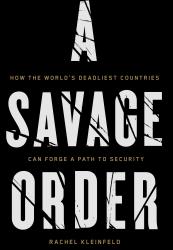# A Savage Order

by Rachel Kleinfeld

"A brilliant analysis of societies that appear to be intractably violent but in fact are not – including our own. A Savage Order is original, penetrating, and filled with gripping history and reporting."

– Steven Pinker

ABOUT THE BOOK

The most violent places in the world today are not at war. More people have died in Mexico in recent years than in the wars in Iraq or Afghanistan. These places are instead buckling under a maelstrom of gangs, organized crime, political conflict, corruption, and state brutality. Such devastating violence can feel hopeless, yet some places – from Colombia to the Republic of Georgia – have been able to recover.

In this powerfully argued and urgent book, Rachel Kleinfeld examines why some democracies, including our own, are crippled by extreme violence and how they can regain security. Drawing on fifteen years of study and firsthand field research – interviewing generals, former guerrillas, activists, politicians, mobsters, and law enforcement in countries around the world – Kleinfeld tells the stories of societies that successfully fought seemingly ingrained violence and offers penetrating conclusions about what must be done to build governments that are able to protect the lives of their citizens. A blistering, yet inspiring investigation into what makes some countries peaceful and others war zones, and a blueprint for what we can do to help.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rachel Kleinfeld is a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and was the founding CEO of the Truman National Security Project. From 2011-2014 she served on the Foreign Affairs Policy Board, which advises the Secretary of State. She regularly advises officials in the United States, United Kingdom, and other allied governments. Kleinfeld is the author of two previous books and has been featured in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and international television, radio, and print media.

Introduction

War is no longer the main cause of violent death. Since the end of the Cold War, wars within and between countries have plummeted. Though warfare has increased slightly since 2013, about 83% of violent deaths in 2017 occurred outside conflict zones. The main causes of violent deaths today are homicides, governments killing their unarmed people, and, increasingly, fights between rival criminal or rebel groups. Violence is worth understanding because it is not intractable – war deaths and homicides have dropped precipitously all over the world. This book looks at places that have successfully recovered from extreme violence to understand what works in reducing it. The book is based on cases grounded in natural experiments, considering:

- The U.S. West vs. the U.S. South after the Civil War;
- India's states of Bihar and Jharkhand's differential success in tackling crime and Maoist rebellion;
- The Republic of Georgia's escape from anarchy to democracy vs. Tajikistan's movement from civil war to authoritarian kleptocracy;
- Ghana's peacefulness despite state failure vs. Nigeria's myriad of violent groups; and
- Sicily's successful fight against the mob vs. Naples' lack of success.

The book is guided by five core ideas:

1) Violence occurs in weak states, but is often a governing strategy in which politicians deliberately weaken state agencies. Rather than fighting the violence afflicting their citizens, politicians are often complicit in the violence perpetrated by non-state groups.

2) Ubiquitous violence starts with the government but changes society. As violence becomes normalized and impunity grows, a great deal of violence is perpetrated by normal people rather than criminals.

3) Violence generally afflicts the poor and marginalized. But only when the middle class begins to be affected does change occur.

4) Governments require double-edged swords to fight violence. Deals with violent groups, centralization of power, and surveillance are all key tools – but easily slip into authoritarianism and greater state violence.

5) Neither the government nor society can fight violence alone; they must recivilize together as politicians create a more inclusive state that protects its people, and communities trust the state enough to enforce social norms against violence.

Discussion Questions:

- How have warfare and violence changed in recent decades?
- Why did the author choose the cases she used? Explain the author's methodology.

Chapter I: Violence Today

Violent death is highly concentrated in a handful of countries. Some are at war or are failed states, but the majority are middle-income democracies that are ostensibly at peace, with highly unequal distributions of income and significant political polarization. Why are these countries so dangerous? The chapter considers and discards a number of popular theories: Islam and political Islam cannot be the main cause, in part because two of the most populous Muslim countries are among the world's most peaceful. Ancient ethnic and religious hatreds have actually been in decline. Culture does matter, but is a product of governing institutions. Weak governments with weak institutions, particularly semi-democracies with authoritarian and democratic characteristics, are highly correlated with violence. Some of these states are simply weak. Yet the chapter suggests that more common are countries with a democratic veneer that allows power to be contested, but in which real power is held by a small oligarchy with a highly polarized power structure and significant inequality. In these countries, a small elite fights within itself for access to the state's spoils as the main way to maintain power and wealth.

Discussion Questions:

- What characteristics unite the countries with the most violent deaths?
- What are some common assumptions about violent death today that are incorrect? Why might this be interesting in today's policy context?
- Why does the author argue that Islam, political Islam, and other religious or ethnic hatreds are not the main causes of violent death today?
- The author makes a distinction between the true power structure of a country, and the type of regime a country claims to have. What do you see as the relationship between American democracy and its power structure? Is there a distinction to be made?

Chapter 2: Privilege Violence

The chapter introduces the term "Privilege Violence" to describe countries in which elites who face competition at the polls allow violent, non-state groups to operate in exchange for help maintaining political and economic control. Politicians politicize and weaken security agencies so that these violent groups are not brought to justice. Faced with a brutal or absent state, marginalized citizens turn to vigilantism, criminal, or rebel groups for protection, so that violence that began with the state becomes normalized across society.

To clarify the difference between weak states and those deliberately weakened in order to be governed through a system of Privilege Violence, this chapter contrasts the American West and South in the decades after the Civil War. The "Wild West" was a weak state with a very high death rate. Yet as population demographics became less skewed and state capacity strengthened, violence fell quickly. In contrast, the U.S. South was characterized by local governments complicit in violence; violent death increased as local governments grew stronger. After African-

Americans were enfranchised, the previous white elite could no longer be assured that they would win fair elections. So, former confederate politicians allowed white supremacist groups to operate and mobs to carry out lynchings to terrorize African-American and Republican voters, in exchange for implicit promises of impunity. Deterring these voters allowed formerly confederate politicians to regain political power. Congress fought the terror for years, voiding over thirty elections won by violence or fraud. Yet it gradually gave up as the legislature filled with politicians who supported white supremacy backed by violence whose votes were needed to pass other pieces of national legislation.

Discussion Questions:
- What was the difference between the violence in the U.S. West and U.S. South in the years after the Civil War?
- The author describes Privilege Violence as a "three-headed hydra". Why? What governing characteristics describe a society facing Privilege Violence?
- What metrics might indicate whether a country is governed by Privilege Violence, or whether it in fact has a weak government actively working to fight violence?
- How might greater governmental violence lead to more violence committed by citizens?

Chapter 3: Decivilization

This chapter traces the concept of decivilization through the case of Colombia and the theories of Norbert Elias, author of *The Civilizing Process* and Randolph Roth, author of *American Homicide*. It argues that when a government can't or won't enforce order and deliberately chooses to relinquish the monopoly of force, regular people polarize over how to address the growing violence. As citizens split into opposing camps, each normalizes violence committed by "their" side – with some making excuses for state violence and others for criminal or rebel groups. Repression from the state increases violence from the portions of society targeted by the state. As society begins to dehumanize first the opposing side, and then other members of society, regular people begin to commit a greater percentage of murder. Domestic violence, killings of neighbors, bosses, or strangers in sudden arguments all grow as violence becomes normalized. Once violence has thus spread to society, addressing the governing order of the state alone can only reduce a portion of the death. Society itself must become involved in the solution.

Discussion Questions:

- The author argues that polarized societies may be more likely to face violence, because each side forgives breaches of democratic norms including violence, committed by "their" side. Describe examples of this tendency in the United States. What might this lead to?
- Is violence ever justifiable, in your belief? When? What might cause you to lower your bar on when violence is justifiable? What do you see as the role of friends, politicians, and the media – including social media – in setting that bar? Do you believe this bar shifted in American society overtime? Why, and what is your evidence?

PART II: THE SOLUTION

Chapter 4: Dirty Deals

Grounded in the work of Charles Tilly, Mancur Olson, and Douglas North, John Wallis, and Barry Weingast, this chapter describes how the first step out of violence when governments themselves are complicit in supporting violent groups is to make deals with those groups. These deals are necessary because states and security forces have been so weakened and compromised by corruption – often deliberately – that they cannot simply fight the violent forces. These "dirty deals", described through the case study of the Republic of Georgia's escape from civil war, usually involve trading some amount of impunity for past crimes and the chance to make money from the state for a promise to end or reduce future violence.

Dirty deals provide breathing room, not a cure. If a state does not quickly take action to become stronger and more just, the dirty deal often intensifies injustice, deepens the corruption and weakening of the state, and leaves a population even more alienated than before. The author labels the period after a dirty deal the "false peace" because they can reduce violence quickly – but only because they leave the violent groups in control of the pace of violence, creating a pattern of violent spikes followed by lulls. Because criminals gain power over parts of the state, these deals also often lead to an increase in other crimes, such as extortion. Dirty deals are necessary beginnings, but they do not alter the system of Privilege Violence – they simply buy time for the state and society to improve. They must be unraveled quickly to reduce violence.

Discussion Questions:

- What does the author mean by a "dirty deal" and what is the relationship between her concept and the theory of Douglass North, John Wallis, and Barry Weingast's *Violence and Social Orders*?
- The author argues that "Dirty deals don't buy peace. They purchase time." What does she mean by that? Can you think of examples in your own study of contemporary issues?
- Why do dirty deals work to reduce violence in some cases, but not in others?
- The concept of dirty deals is controversial. Why might people object to them? Are there circumstances in which such deals might be unnecessary? What could make them more or less palatable to a country facing violence and corruption?

Chapter 5: The Middle Class

In countries governed by a system of Privilege Violence, the middle class is the only group with enough voice and power to change the system. However, because most violence affects those who are poor, marginalized, and often characterized as "part of the problem", voters who see themselves as the "mainstream" of society can ignore the pervasiveness of violence for a long time. Usually, they begin to feel personally threatened only if internal stressors between violent groups cause violence to intensify and accidentally spill over. The chapter contrasts Sicily's

history with that of Naples to explain why change does not occur if mainstream society remains unroused.

When violence begins to affect mainstream populations, politicians who want to maintain their power often try to convince voters to support a more repressive government policy to fight the violence. A country that adopts authoritarianism can reduce internal violence, as it did in Tajikistan – but at the cost of a far more repressive and often corrupt state, and one that may spread violence to neighboring countries, as Rwanda has done in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Repression tends to shift violence from killings by criminals and rebels that appear in media reports to state violence. Government use of extrajudicial killings or mass imprisonment can be concealed through manipulated statistics, claims of sovereignty, and because government imprisonment of supposed lawbreakers rarely makes news. Because these tactics also tend to protect the middle class while targeting state repression at poorer and more marginalized demographics, the middle class may keep supporting these policies for years. However, repressive policies generally increase overall violence. Mass imprisonment of minor lawbreakers and indiscriminate government attempts to quell rebellion both strengthen criminal and rebel groups, while preventing governments from focusing on the most violent individuals.

Discussion Questions:

- The author argues that the middle-class often tolerates violence against others. Thinking about your home state or town (or other familiar places), do you agree or disagree?
- What stimulates the middle class to take action?
- The author argues that repressive policing backfires. What is her proof for this argument? Do you agree or disagree, and why? What would convince voters – or your classmates – of your argument?
- It is a common argument that authoritarianism, such as Paul Kagame's government in Rwanda, can end serious violence. Is this true? Are authoritarian countries less violent than democracies? What evidence does the book bring to bear on this question?
- Why does having accurate statistics matter to preventing or combatting violence? Why and how would governments skew their numbers?

Chapter 6: Political Movements

Social movements are necessary to rouse the middle class to change a social order built on Privilege Violence. These movements must explain why building a more just and inclusive state will reduce violence better than simple repression. To win over mainstream opinion in highly polarized countries, such movements succeed when they work within as many existing social tropes as they can in order to gain a broad-based following across social and political groups. Apolitical efforts can train leaders and soften societies for reform – but ultimately, movements must gain political power in order to change the levers of power. At the same time, they must remain nonpartisan to avoid triggering half of a highly polarized society to reject the movement itself. Uniting people across traditional fissures allows broad-based social movements to

overcome the polarization endemic to societies split by Privilege Violence. The chapter tells the story of the civil rights movement in America and the Rose Revolution in Georgia to show how social leaders and entrepreneurial politicians can capture social momentum to fundamentally alter societies.

Discussion Questions:

- Why is the middle-class so important to combating mass violence? Is the U.S. middle-class similarly important to inducing policy change?
- The author argues that activists need to make moral compromises in order to achieve their goals, from working with problematic politicians, to working within mainstream social norms to the extent possible - often known as the "politics of respectability". What do you think about this thesis? Are there exceptions to this idea
- The author cites Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan's scholarship as well as psychological research to describe why broad-based, nonpartisan movements are necessary to change polarized countries. What are the author's arguments? Do you agree that movements need to be broad-based in order to achieve success in polarized countries? Is this true in the U.S.?
- The "Great Man" theory of history suggests that individuals move history forward. More modern scholarship has focused on the role of social forces and structures in creating change. What are examples of major changes in your own country over the last few decades? How did these changes come about? What was the role of individual politicians, social organizations, the media, and structural or demographic forces?

Chapter 7: Politicians

The politicians who were able to dismantle systems of Privilege Violence were rarely outsiders who remained pure, clean-handed reformers. They needed vision and a commitment to reform, along with strong management skills to hire and support talented technocrats, and an ability to work with the media to use its reach to tell a new story about where the country was going. But they also needed to be skilled politicians who, unlike rational technocrats, had moral flexibility to make dirty deals with violent groups and were able to work with the many other compromised and complicit politicians and other elected and appointed bodies to accomplish reform. While some outsiders could succeed as mayors of Bogota and Medellin, a complicit system can close ranks and make it difficult for political novices to achieve reform. Most of the politicians who altered their countries were lifelong politicians and compromised individuals whose course of reform was morally grey. The chapter details the cases of Colombia, Bihar, and Georgia to illustrate how these politicians took the first steps towards fighting violence.

Discussion Questions:

- Describe the kinds of people the author describes who were able to reform their violent societies.

- Why does the author argue that political outsiders and technocrats have trouble changing countries characterized by corruption and violence? Do you agree?
- What is the role of the media in helping fuel change? When do media stories become propaganda? How can you tell when the media is being manipulated?
- The author argues that politicians working for compromise – even compromise with violent individuals or corrupt forces within their legislatures – are necessary to pull their countries out of violence. Why? When you hear politicians talking about compromising with people who you see as wrong, corrupt, or violent, how do you feel? What would it take for you to support this sort of politician?

Chapter 8: Recivilization

Privilege violence cannot be fought by the government alone, because violence and corruption have woven themselves into the social fabric. A successful politician thus has to inspire the public to play a role in self-policing their communities by rebuilding a sense of personal efficacy founded on social trust; which allows communities to solve their own problems. Both "bridging" trust that cuts across communities and "bonding" trust that works within communities are crucial to reducing violence. Trust-building requires politicians to prove that they are governing inclusively and enforcing laws equally. But it also necessitates that the government prove it has retaken the monopoly of force and will swiftly punish lawbreakers, so that people know that merit will be rewarded and those who break laws will be punished. When the government does these jobs, it becomes easier for communities to cooperate and trust each other.

Because governments wracked by Privilege Violence tend to have weak, corrupt bureaucracies, judiciaries, and police, politicians who wish to jumpstart this virtuous circle must rely on personal accountability and act quickly, in many areas at once, using highly symbolic changes, arrests, and constant media coverage to prove to citizens that change is afoot. As governments enforce the laws and demonstrate their commitment to all their citizens, society increases its trust and tends to pay taxes – enabling stronger government institutions to further fight violence. Thus, societies and governments together propel a virtuous, recivilizing cycle.

Discussion Questions:

- The author claims that "Greater trust allows communities to fight problems before they grow and enables the informal social controls that keep violence down. Trust is a society's immune system." What are "bridging" and "bonding" trust, and why are they so important to fighting pervasive violence?
- What do you see as the level of social trust within your own community, and across communities in our country today? What do you see as the level of "collective efficacy"? What accounts for this? What might this mean for societies across the U.S.?
- What barriers prevent social trust and community action? How might they be overcome, based on examples in this book and those you have observed?

- What does the author mean by "governments and societies propel each other forward like two wheels on a cart" (paraphrasing the former Mayor of Palermo)? What can governments do to increase social trust? What are the things that regular people can do?

Chapter 9: Centralization and Surveillance

Enforcing the law against corrupt and complicit members of the government who are working with violent groups is essential to fighting Privilege Violence. Centralizing power to sideline these powerful actors is thus crucial. Governments must also make use of intelligence and surveillance, informants, and asset seizure – the tools needed to fight criminal conspiracy globally. Yet these powers, combined with a stronger, more centralized state, are also dangerous. In multiple cases, politicians who were first lauded as reformers became authoritarians or human rights abusers. This chapter describes the abuses in Colombia and the Republic of Georgia as well as the laws used by Italy to fight the mafia. It ultimately argues that the politicians who lead their countries out of Privilege Violence are often best seen as both Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, who must eventually be removed from office and whose crimes against democracy must be reversed to keep their countries on track.

Discussion Questions:

- The author argues that a series of policies – intelligence and surveillance, informants and amnesties for some criminals and rebels, and criminal asset seizure – are necessary to fight Privilege Violence. Yet she claims that each policy can go too far. How can democracies walk the line between safety from fellow citizens, and safety from an intrusive or abusive government? Where should the line be drawn?
- What are examples of these policies being useful, and of going too far, in the U.S.?
- Are these policies perceived differently by different communities? Why? How does that affect their efficacy?
- Explain why the author argues that politicians who reduce Privilege Violence are often best seen as both Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. What are examples of such leaders?
- How might you distinguish between a politician interested in reform, and one who wishes to preserve the status quo?

PART III: NEXT STEPS

Chapter 10: Society Maintains the Peace

This chapter tells the story of how the United States' failure to accept the changes of the civil rights revolution led to a "decivilizing" period of major violence from the 1960s through the 1990s before a "recivilizing" period began, to show that the path out of Privilege Violence is not linear, nor is it ever complete. Societies that have once faced Privilege Violence retain higher

levels of overall violence and social fissures that can easily be cracked again by exploitative politicians. Yet the chapter also discusses the major improvements that have been achieved in the U.S. and in each of the book's cases. These countries are not just facing different degrees of violence, but have altered their power structures. Though violence can easily reoccur, it would do so in a fundamentally altered social context in which more people are empowered to demand better from their governments.

Discussion Questions:

- This chapter cites evidence that the United States has become less violent over time, and that it still has far to go. Did you believe these statistics? Why or why not? How do they square with politicians' or media representations of violence in the U.S. today?
- In discussing the success levels of the countries profiled in the book, the author describes nearly all as poised at a juncture in which they could choose to become more or less violent. How do you see the current political climate as affecting the direction in the United States?

Chapter 11: What Can We Do?

The final chapter distills lessons that outside countries, organizations, and individuals can use to help empower those within a country facing Privilege Violence. It suggests a number of policies:

- Help societies mobilize against violence by broadening the pool and improving the efficacy of local leadership. This can be accomplished through broad education and incubation of social movements through programs that help groups of leaders across societal divides, rather than single individuals.

- Rather than solely focusing on the moment of peace negotiations, work to craft the implementation of peace agreements and more explicit agreements with criminal actors so that initial dirty deals can be transformed into more legitimate governments.

- Reform financial systems in finance hubs such as the United States and the United Kingdom to increase transparency and fight the money laundering and corruption that is often at the root of Privilege Violence.

- Recognize that governments in countries facing Privilege Violence are playing a role in fueling the violence, and modify security assistance policies to ensure that lethal assistance and kinetic training are provided only to countries not complicit in supporting the non-state violent actors that they are claiming to fight. A percentage of security assistance should also be allocated to independent monitoring by local organizations and to fund the creation of greater local civilian security expertise and oversight.

- Use development aid to build social momentum for reform through building a middle class, rather than simply increasing GDP (which can increase inequality and fuel

Privilege Violence), infusing money directly into the budget of a criminal state, or funding only programs that address the symptoms rather than the causes of violence.

- Where security and development aid is deemed necessary in countries governed by Privilege Violence, submit such aid to a vote of the recipient public through a deliberative democracy model. This would ensure that the press and public were aware of the aid that was being provided and what it was supposed to achieve, that the public was broadly in agreement with its desirability, and that they could measure progress.

- Focus on supporting a vibrant small and medium sized business sector in countries facing Privilege Violence, since huge employers – especially those in industries with significant, immobile infrastructure – are often forced into complicity with the power structures that abet Privilege Violence.

- Tourists and investors in places facing significant violence should pay attention to where they are spending their money to steer clear of funding the oligarchs and cartels that fuel Privilege Violence. Even better, the travel industry could work with investigative journalists to create a certification process for businesses that are not collusive with violence to assist this process, as has begun to occur in Sicily.

Discussion Questions:

- What are the actions outside actors might take that are <u>unhelpful</u> in fighting Privilege Violence? What common threads unite the author's policy recommendations for outside actors?
- What should other countries such as the United States, the UK, or Australia responsibility be for these problems?
- This chapter cites the refrain common in policy circles that "what gets measured is what gets done". What data or measurements could help the U.S. government determine whether its security or development aid was working to fight privilege violence?
- The chapter suggests an incubator model for developing social leaders who create change in their societies. Take an issue you care about and consider what such an incubator would look like and who it would include for that issue in the country of your choice.