

an imbalance bound to stick in the Kurdish crowd. And after a new pipeline to Turkey begins operation later this year, Kurdistan won't have to depend on the ones running south.

## Unrest in the Middle East, particularly in Syria, is pressing the issue of a Kurdish state.

Meanwhile, Iraq's Shia-dominated government has been growing more authoritarian, even as the United States has continued to beef up the Iraqi military, outfitting it with tanks and F-16 fighter jets. This trend alarms the country's Kurds, who are moderate Sunnis. They also "fear that Iraq's Shia and Sunni communities are sliding toward war."

Unrest in the Middle East, particularly in Syria, is also pressing the issue of a Kurdish state. Many of northeastern Syria's two million Kurds, who are aligned with the rebels fighting the Shia-backed regime of Bashar al-Assad, are pouring into Iraq's Kurdish north. Meanwhile, Kurdistan is enjoying "dramatically improved relations" with predominantly Sunni Turkey, which has bridled at any

notion of a Kurdish state and brutally suppressed its own Kurdish population in the past, but is now loosening its hold on the ethnic group. Finally, U.S. influence is waning with the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq.

As various cultural, economic, and political puzzle pieces snap in place, some analysts believe the picture emerging looks a whole lot like an independent Kurdish republic. ■

## THE ONCE AND FUTURE CHIEF

**THE SOURCE:** "The Roots of Resilience" by Carolyn Logan, in *African Affairs*, Summer 2013.

ONE DAY LAST YEAR IN A VILLAGE IN SOUTH Africa, a court heard two different cases. A man whose wife had run off demanded that her father return the cows he had provided as a bride price. Another man stood accused of letting his cows graze on public land marked for conservation. Presiding over the court was not an official magistrate but Chief Luthando Dinwayo and a tribal council of four women and five men. This arrangement was no anomaly. The council's word was law, and the villagers paid it heed. Similar stories could be told in much of Africa, where traditional authorities wield considerable power in some areas of life.

That's disastrous, say critics. Many see the survival of traditional authorities as a troubling sign of governmental weakness, especially in Africa's young democracies. Some argue that unelected tribal chiefs wield power only because they control land or other valuable resources, and that they are prone to abusing their authority. Anthropologist Mahmood Mamdani of Columbia University, perhaps the harshest critic, argues that traditional authorities were willing tools of the European powers during the colonial era and have an equally corrupt relationship with central authorities today.

But Carolyn Logan, a political scientist at Michigan State University, draws on a wide-ranging survey of African countries in arguing that traditional authorities enjoy popular legitimacy and play an important role in resolving local conflicts and allocating land in their communities.

Indeed, in 17 of the 19 nations polled, a majority of those surveyed said traditional leaders wield "significant influence," and in 16 of those countries, most respondents believed that the influence of traditional authorities should *increase*. Support wasn't limited to the hinterlands, the usual bastion of tradition: Relatively affluent urbanites didn't differ from poor farmers in their support.

And although traditional institutions are commonly assumed to be detrimental to the interests of women, men and women were equally likely to praise them—at least in the presence of pollsters.

Africa is an enormous and diverse landmass, of course, and the tribal councils of South Africa wouldn't find exact counterparts in, say, Mali. "The nature, scope, and sources of their authority, as well as their titles, their official status, and the perks of office that they enjoy, vary widely across communities and countries," explains Logan, writing in *African Affairs*. They do, however, enjoy broad popular support in only two roles, solving local disputes and allocating land.

Traditional authorities have had to overcome the taint of their collaboration with colonial-era European rulers as well as the animosity of dictatorships. In Tanzania, for instance—one of the two countries Logan surveyed that reported weak influence from traditional authorities—the independence leader Julius Nyerere long ago reshaped society by forcibly relocating rural people into artificial, *ujamaa* villages in which tribal leaders had no power.

Today, there's little competition between government and the traditional authorities. And there's no evidence that embracing tribal leaders means rejecting

the central government or democracy. Logan found that the more likely people were to view the government as legitimate, the more likely they were to view traditional authorities as legitimate, too. “Rather than being a zero-sum commodity, popular legitimacy appears to be mutually reinforcing.”

There is an important lesson for Africa’s national leaders in the continued popularity of their erstwhile rivals, Logan says. The surveys revealed that people value tribal leaders simply because they *listen*. “African governments may be doing a much better job of protecting individual freedoms . . . but their ability to interact with and respond to popular needs, priorities, and demands lags far behind.”

**Many Africans value tribal leaders simply because they *listen*.**

“That said,” Logan admits, “idealizing chiefs will be no more helpful than demonizing them.” They’re as prone to corruption, human rights abuses, and incompetence as the next authority figure. Plus, there is always the danger that they will play tribal favorites and exacerbate ethnic tensions.

Still, the fact that traditional authority figures possess an “enduring worth in the eyes of a sizable majority of Africans” suggests that they will—and should—continue to play a role in Africa’s democratic development. ■

## INDIA’S CAN-DO AUTOCRATS

**THE SOURCE:** “The Rise of the Rest of India: How States Have Become the Engines of Growth” by Ruchir Sharma, in *Foreign Affairs*, Sept.–Oct. 2013.

IN THE EARLY 1990S, INDIAN FINANCE MINISTER Manmohan Singh championed a host of reforms that started his country on a 20-year streak of economic growth. But when Singh became prime minister in 2004, he seemed to leave his reformist magic behind. India, which once promised to challenge China as the developing world’s most dynamic economy, has faltered badly and now threatens to sink back into its old role as a chronic economic underperformer.

Not to worry, writes Ruchir Sharma, a Wall Street emerging markets specialist and author of *Breakout Nations: In Pursuit of the Next Economic Miracles* (2012). The secret to India’s revival lies far from New Delhi, in the nation’s 28 state capitals.

As late as the mid-1990s, state governments were fragile and largely