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Perils of Pluralism: Electoral Violence and Competitive Authoritarianism in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Perils of Pluralism: Electoral Violence and Competitive Authoritarianism in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Abstract:

Why do some multi-party elections lead to political violence while others do not? Despite extensive literatures on democratization and civil war, electoral violence has received much less attention. We develop a set of theoretical propositions to explain variation, and we test these against an original dataset on Africa's grand democratic experiment after the Cold War. Contra existing research, we find most violence takes place before the election and is committed by incumbents. We also demonstrate different causal dynamics of violence before and after election day. Pre-existing social conflict and the quality of founding elections shape pre-vote violence, while the stability of democratic institutions and weaker economic growth shape post-vote violence. When incumbents seek reelection, electoral violence is more likely, and when civil wars occur simultaneously with voting, electoral violence is less likely, before and after elections. We provide region-specific and global interpretations.

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Perils of Pluralism: Electoral Violence and Competitive Authoritarianism in Sub-Saharan Africa^{*}

Introduction

In the past two decades, the study of democratization and political violence, especially civil war, have been dominant themes in comparative politics. However, despite an important line of inquiry on whether regime characteristics contribute to the onset of civil war (Carey 2007; Fearon and Laitin 2003; Hegre et al. 2001; Saideman et al. 2002; Snyder 2000), the topic of electoral violence has received much less empirical and theoretical attention (Dunning 2011). Yet elections in multi-party systems, especially in states that recently transitioned to more competitive politics, often trigger violence during electoral campaigns or after results are announced. Such violence is often short of civil war but nonetheless can claim many lives and can severely undermine the legitimacy of electoral processes and the governments formed in their aftermath. Electoral violence is one of the perils of political pluralism, and understanding its dynamics has important theoretical and practical implications. Yet, while some excellent studies of electoral violence exist (Boone and Kriger 2010; Klopp and Zuern 2007; Mueller 2008; Wilkinson 2004), the topic remains significantly understudied compared to the now large literatures on civil war and democratization (Dunning 2011). Even the growing research agenda on competitive authoritarianism, with which the study of electoral violence should have an affinity, has not focused explicitly on electoral violence (Levitsky and Way 2010; Magaloni 2008).

This article contributes to that research gap in several ways. First, the article isolates a central analytical puzzle in the study of electoral violence: why do some multi-party contests in recently transitioned states lead to electoral violence while others do not? As we demonstrate, there is extensive variation in the empirical record, and that variation is not yet explained by

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existing theory. Second, the article isolates a set of hypotheses about the determinants of electoral violence. Given the relative absence of established comparative theory about why some elections produce violence while others do not, the hypotheses are designed to help establish a research agenda on electoral violence.

Third, we introduce a new conceptualization and a unique dataset on electoral violence in sub-Saharan Africa from 1990 to 2008, the African Electoral Violence Database (AEVD; see Salehyan et al. 2012). The region offers an unusual opportunity to hold a number of factors constant given a nearly region-wide transition from single-party to multi-party rule starting in the early 1990s. The African democratization process since the end of the Cold War has been the subject of a number of studies (Bratton and Van de Walle 1997; Diamond and Plattner 2010; Harbeson, Rothchild, and Chazan 1994; Lindberg 2006). While there is common recognition that the cumulative record on Africa's grand democratic experiment is mixed (Carothers 2006; Lynch and Crawford 2011; Reddy 2008), the specific issue of electoral violence has not been theorized or studied extensively and cross-nationally, with some exceptions (Basedau, Erdmann, and Mehler 2007; Bekoe 2012; Collier 2009; Scarritt et al. 2001). Our study thus contributes to the extensive literature on democratization in sub-Saharan Africa. And, while our study is not global, it subscribes to a tradition of mid-range studies that develop focused comparative findings based on cross-national, intra-regional analysis (Bunce and Wolchik 2010).

A descriptive analysis of the data finds that nearly two-thirds of African elections experienced some form of violent intimidation and harassment or worse, while about 20 percent of the elections witnessed more significant electoral violence in the form of targeted assassinations or deaths of 20 or more people. Contrary to the thrust of some existing studies (Collier and Vicente 2008), incumbents commit the majority of violence. Most violence occurs before the voting, but violence after election day is on average of greater magnitude. Some countries hold consistently non-violent elections, some countries hold consistently violent elections, and some countries have violent elections followed by non-violent ones, or vice versa.

Fourth, we subject the hypotheses and data to a number of statistical tests. Of particular note, our models show that a number of plausible relationships do not hold. Poorer countries, multiple elections, the presence of international observers, first elections after a civil war, and

elections during ongoing civil wars do not make African countries more vulnerable to electoral violence. In fact, the opposite holds true with civil wars – those conditions on average produce less electoral violence. For both pre-and-post-vote contexts, whether an incumbent is running for reelection is a robust predictor of electoral violence. But for the former, the key variables are whether there existed violent social conflict outside an electoral cycle and whether the founding elections were free and fair. There is some, though mixed, evidence that the incumbents' pathway to power matters. For post-electoral violence, the key variables are the quality of democratic institutions and weaker economic growth.

We draw two main conclusions. First, the dynamics of pre-vote and post-vote violence are different and analyses of electoral violence should disaggregate them. Second, the probability of electoral violence is shaped by incumbency (especially in neo-patrimonial, clientelistic, presidential political systems), democratic institutionalization (in particular, the legitimacy of electoral management bodies), path dependence (in particular, how founding elections shape future expectations), and grievance instrumentalization (in particular, how elites and citizens capitalize on electoral campaigns to act on pre-existing grievances). The conclusions are based on the Africa sample, but the theoretical implications are more general.

The article proceeds as follows. In the next section, we develop a set of hypotheses, explaining different plausible logics and conditions behind the use of electoral violence. In the following two sections, we describe the dataset and report key descriptive findings. Thereafter, we present the multivariate model, introducing additional variables to control for alternative hypotheses and to check the robustness of our findings. We conclude by discussing implications and avenues for further research.

Hypotheses on Electoral Violence

Why do politicians employ a strategy of electoral violence? One likely possibility is that they will do so when they risk losing. By extension, the closer the expected margin of victory (or defeat) the more likely is the use of violence. Unfortunately, finding an adequate proxy for chance of losing is difficult. Nearly any measure will create endogeneity concerns or suffer from post-treatment bias.¹ In the tests that follow, therefore, we do not attempt to control for the

closeness of the election, but we assume that the incentives for committing violence are greater when there is risk of losing.

The logic behind why close elections should be more violent than uncompetitive ones suggests a straightforward observable implication: the dynamics of electoral violence before a vote are different from the dynamics of violence after a vote. Before an election, the logic of violence is to shape voting behavior and the conditions in which the vote takes place. But once the vote takes place, the issue is no longer shaping preferences or voting conditions, but accepting or rejecting the announced results. The most likely post-vote election violence scenario is that opposition parties and candidates contest the announced results, triggering repression from the security forces and counter-reaction. Although the 2008 electoral violence in Kenya and Zimbabwe seem comparable, for example, they followed different logics. In Zimbabwe, the violence was principally between the first and second rounds of voting, and there the ruling party deliberately targeted neighborhoods where returns for the opposition had been strong in the first round (HRW 2008). By contrast, in Kenya the violence took place after the announced results; there, the opposition protested, the security forces repressed, and then the conflict devolved into inter-citizen violence (CIPEV 2008).

For nearly all of the hypotheses that follow, the logic of the causal process differs as to whether one considers the electoral dynamics pre-vote or post-vote. Rather than interact a pre/post-vote variable with most of our key independent variables, we estimate our model on two samples, one consisting of a measure of pre-vote violence, and another consisting of a measure of post-vote violence. We can then compare the relative magnitude and statistical significance of these non-nested estimates to glean whether particular variables matter differently pre- or post-vote.

Our first hypothesis (H1a) revolves around current office holders: recourse to violence will be more common when an individual incumbent is seeking reelection. We expect that the mechanism is pronounced in personalized, clientelistic, presidential political systems that characterize most African states (Bratton and van de Walle 1997; Lynch and Crawford 2011). In these cases, during a prior term, the incumbent will have cultivated a network of clients who depend on the person of the incumbent to secure their political or commercial advantages. That

network of clients will be more likely to use whatever means necessary to continue to secure their privileged access. The mechanism will be especially salient in regimes with weaker degrees of democratic institutionalization, where entrenched elites cannot expect a fair shot at the executive in future elections, and where property rights protections are weak (Boone and Kriger 2010). The mechanism should operate in both pre-vote and post-vote settings.

A related hypothesis (H1b) is that while incumbent political parties are more likely to commit electoral violence before elections, challengers' incentives to use violence increase after election day. In the pre-vote period, incumbents have greater facility and less to lose from electoral violence than challengers do. Incumbents have greater facility because they have access to state security forces. Challengers have more to lose because if they commit violence, an incumbent will seek to disqualify an opposition candidate. By contrast, perpetrators acting on behalf of incumbents can expect to be shielded from prosecution, especially in weakly democratized states. Why would incumbents use violence? Incumbents may use intimidation to signal to voters the costs of supporting opponents, thereby depressing turnout. They may use violence to change electoral constituencies by driving out voters from opposition strongholds to ensure victory in a particular electoral district. Incumbents may use violence to goad the opposition to boycott, or incumbents (or challengers) might use violence to eliminate physically popular electoral rivals. In the most general sense then, electoral violence is one tactic, among several including fraud, to secure victory (Fahoucq 2003; Schedler 2002). These incentives may appeal to the opposition in some cases, but the opposition on average should have greater to lose and less capacity than incumbents.

But these dynamics change after election day. In the post-election context, challengers have less to lose if they believe that the results were rigged. The challengers' calculus becomes less about shaping voting behavior and more about disrupting the legitimization of an electoral process that they contend is flawed. Moreover, even if a challenger loses a fair election, the "sore loser" problem could arise: having lost at the ballot box, a determined challenger will take their fight to the street. Of course, incumbents still possess incentives to commit violence in the post-election period. Either they have committed electoral misconduct and would want to intimidate those who would challenge the result or they would feel justified in repressing challengers who

(in their eyes) are challenging legitimate results. Given these incentives of incumbents and challengers, we expect that incumbents and challengers are equally likely to commit electoral violence after the vote in contrast to pre-vote setting, in which incumbents are the more likely violent actors.

Our second set of hypotheses turns on the question of democratization. We in general contend that electoral violence is predominantly a feature of competitive authoritarianism, which is the dominant polity form globally (Magaloni 2008). In purely authoritarian states, in which there is no competition and therefore almost no chance that an election will unseat an incumbent person or party, there would seem little strategic need to resort to the use of violence. By contrast in purely democratic states, in which leaders are committed to respecting the will of the electorate and election management bodies are deeply institutionalized and legitimate, leaders will not use extra-legal means to stifle voting preferences. These claims are close to assumptions in our study, but we treat them as hypotheses nonetheless – more specifically, we hypothesize (H2a) that electoral violence is more likely in anocratic states, both before and after the election.

At the same time, it is possible (H2b) that the more authoritarian a state is before an election the greater the risk of electoral violence, in particular before a vote when the idea is to shape the voting outcome. Authoritarian states are patterned to use violence when they perceive even small threats. Moreover, the more democratic and independent are the election management bodies, the greater the credibility of the costs that they can impose on parties that commit violence, hence decreasing the payoff for parties to commit violence, in particular before a vote takes place. In short, H2b expects a linear relationship between degree of democratic institutionalization and electoral violence.

Prominent work has now also examined the question of whether the *process* of democratization might lead to more violence (Snyder 2000). According to this argument the process of institutional change and the resulting creation of winners and losers will lead to intense competition for electoral votes among all politicians. As a result, those states that have moved from solid authoritarian institutions to more democratic institutions could be more likely to experience electoral violence. One version of the hypothesis (H2c) is that these mechanisms are more likely to be at work in the pre-election period as politicians attempt to mobilize and

sway voters. But another version (H2d) is that the mechanisms might be in play after a vote when the credibility of the result is in question. In states that recently have become more democratic, the electoral management bodies are young, and political parties, especially in the opposition, may have little trust in those institutions. Hence the opposition would be more likely to contest the results when the democratization process is relatively recent, triggering state repression, and a counter-reaction from the opposition.

We hypothesize further that, based on a logic of path dependency, founding elections shape future expectations. When states transitioned to multi-partyism, the first elections held were critical. Those founding elections set the tone for future elections, which in turn created normative expectations among the electorate and the political class about the conduct of politics during the multi-party era. We hypothesize (H3) that if the first election of the new regime era was conducted in a free and fair manner voters will punish those who engage in violence in subsequent contests; in other words, if founding elections were free and fair, there will be strong incentives for politicians not to engage in violence in the campaign cycle. We suspect the dynamic is more likely in pre-vote settings since in post-vote contexts voting has already taken place. After the vote, how parties react to the conduct of the election management is key, and in those instances founding elections should not be as important to the calculus of political actors.

Our fourth set of hypotheses turns on grievance instrumentalization. Countries that have greater amounts of social conflict prior to an election are more likely to experience violence during electoral periods. Several causal mechanisms are plausibly at work, including social distrust and elite manipulation. The greater the mistrust between the most salient social groupings in the country, in particular ethnic and religious groups, the greater is the likelihood that the electoral contests will generate additional tensions and therefore greater violence. Moreover, as our hypothesis concerning democratization argues, politicians may seek to instrumentalize the grievances of the electorate; in those cases where there exists pre-existing conflict, the electoral process will aggravate those processes, leading to more violence. We expect the mechanism to be especially dominant in pre-vote settings (H4a) in the event that politicians seek to instrumentalize pre-existing grievances to capture votes. That instrumentalization in turn increases tension and distrust, leading potentially to violence among

the electorate. But the mechanism could also work in post-vote settings (H4b) in the sense that partisans of the announced loser may feel endangered and seek to protect themselves through violence.

Finally, in the same way that prior practices of political repression create patterns of political behavior, the pathway to power of an incumbent may matter in the likelihood of the use of violence to secure elections. We hypothesize (H5) that if an incumbent comes to power through violent, non-constitutional means (civil war victory or coup), that incumbent will be more likely to use violence to secure victory. We expect that the mechanism should operate in both pre-vote and post-vote settings.

The African Electoral Violence Database (AEVD)

In this section, we specify the details of the database we created to study electoral violence in sub-Saharan Africa. To the best of our knowledge, there is not another published database that specifically codes for electoral violence with the level of detail in the AEVD. One limitation of existing studies is an inconsistent definition of “electoral violence.” In one study of how democratization in poor states makes violence more likely, for example, “violence” includes civil wars, riots, political strikes, and assassinations (Collier 2009). In Bates’ (2008: 147) analysis of state failure in Africa, the dependent variable for violence is the formation of militias. Lindberg’s (2006) database on democratization in Sub-Saharan Africa is similar to ours. Lindberg codes (among many other factors) for whether an election was peaceful, whether there were isolated incidents of violence, or whether there was a campaign of violence. While that work is seminal, we seek to improve on it by creating further distinctions in the dependent variable. A new important events database codes a variety of types of violent, non-war related, social conflict in Africa using media sources (Salehyan et al. 2012). One dimension on which events are coded is whether elections are mentioned as a source of the violence in media descriptions. While the dataset is very valuable (and we use it below), the advantage of our data is a specific focus only on electoral violence, whether war-related or not and whether election issues are mentioned in media accounts.

We define “electoral violence” as physical violence and coercive intimidation directly tied to an impending electoral contest or to an announced electoral result.² One problem with this seemingly straightforward definition is that it can be difficult to know whether violence is *directly* related to an election. While in most cases we were able to determine whether violence was directly related to an electoral contest, for ambiguous cases, we consider any politically related violence that occurred six months prior to an election or three months after an election to be “electoral violence.”³

We further disaggregate violence along three dimensions. First, we code who committed the violence – incumbents (referring to any state agent, militia, political party member, or hooligan who acts on behalf of the political party that controls the executive) or challengers (which refers to any party member, militia, or hooligan acting on behalf of the political party that does not control the executive). The categories are not mutually exclusive – in some election cases, incumbents and challengers both commit violence in an election. Second, following our hypotheses, we code for whether violence occurred before or after elections are held. Third, we code for level of violence using four categories: 0=no reported violence; 1=violent harassment⁴; 2=violent repression⁵; and 3=generalized violence.⁶

In choosing a data source to code cases cross-nationally, we sought a single source that was reliable and that had comprehensive coverage for African states. One limitation of non-governmental human rights organization reporting, for example, is that documentation is uneven across African countries. The same is largely true for international newspaper coverage as well as for available electoral observer reports. We thus wanted to avoid any type of systematic reporting bias by selecting a single source that would report on as many cases in the sample as possible.

The main source on which we rely is therefore the US State Department annual Human Rights reports.⁷ The State Department began issuing annual reports on all countries in 1993, and we consulted every report for a country with an election between 1993 and 2008. For the years 1990–1992, we combined three major sources, in particular the Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch annual human rights reports as well as journalism coverage in *Africa Report*. The data are not flawless, and in many cases the State Department reports are not highly

detailed; we also note that the reports may be subject to diplomatic manipulation, given their source. However, the State Department reports provide a level of detail sufficient to code elections into the categories outlined above.⁸ For cases where the State Department reports yielded an ambiguous result, we consulted election observer reports and those by Human Rights Watch, where available; we also contacted country experts for clarification.

The AEVD codes only presidential and parliamentary elections, not local elections, for which sufficiently detailed cross-national data do not exist. Many countries hold parliamentary and presidential elections at different points in time, and one important question is whether violence is more or less frequent in one type of election (a question we tackle below). However, in practice, many elections are held in close temporal proximity and distinguishing whether any violence relates to the presidential and parliamentary elections can be difficult. Thus, if parliamentary and presidential elections are held within three months of each other, even if in different years, we code the case as a single electoral case. This leaves us with 221 election cases in the dataset between the years 1990 and 2008.

Patterns of Electoral Violence

Using this new dataset, we find that the most serious incidents of widespread, generalized electoral violence are about 10 percent (N=23) of all elections held in sub-Saharan African between 1990 and 2008. We find nearly the same proportion of elections that involved repressive violence that entailed targeted assassinations and long-term high-level detentions combined with occasional cases of torture: also 10 percent (N=22) of elections. By contrast, violent harassment occurred in about 38 percent (N=84) of cases. There is no reported electoral violence in 42 percent (N=92) of cases. These descriptive results stand in contrast to claims that democratization routinely instigates major violence in poorer, weakly institutionalized countries (Collier 2009; Snyder 2000). Rather, the findings suggest there is considerable variation among African electoral campaigns.

The dataset indicates longitudinal consistency. The mean level of violence in the dataset is around .89 (on a 0–3 scale), and 12 of the 18 years in the dataset show an average violence level between .5 and 1. There are two years in the early 1990s (1992 and 1993) when African

states were holding first elections after transitioning from one-party regimes and when there was a concentration of highly violent electoral periods. But the years 2000 and 2005 were as or more violent, on average, as 1992 and 1993 were. The result runs contrary to one implication of Lindberg (2006), who finds that multi-party elections will improve over time in terms of decreasing levels of violence.

In terms of timing, violence primarily occurs before election day. Of the 129 cases with some electoral violence, 122 cases (94.6%) took place during the electoral campaign before the polling date while 38 cases (29.5%) had violence after the voting. Only seven cases had any form of post-vote electoral violence *and* no pre-vote electoral violence. Of the 45 total cases of the highest levels of electoral violence – 36 (80%) occurred before voting took place, and 16 (36%) occurred after the voting took place (seven cases had high levels of violence before and after the vote).

In terms of the authors of the violence, our data show that incumbent actors are the dominant perpetrators of electoral violence before and after the election. If challengers are involved in violence, it is marginally more likely to be after the election. In pre-vote violence, incumbents were involved 98 percent of the time, and they were the unique perpetrators nearly 80 percent of the time. In post-vote violence, incumbents were involved 92 percent of the time, and they were the unique perpetrators 74 percent of the time. By contrast, challengers were involved in 20 percent of the pre-vote cases and 32 percent of the post-vote cases. The percentages are similar if only high violence cases are examined. The only exception concerns the level of violence for the opposition after the vote: 36 percent of pre-vote challenger violence resulted in repressive violence or worse, compared to 58 percent of post-vote cases. In other words, if challengers are violent after the vote, the level tends to be higher. These descriptive statistics provide mild support for hypotheses 1a and 1b.

Models and Independent Variable Data

Having examined our violence data descriptively, we now investigate our hypotheses using multivariate analysis. In these models, we use the 4-category AEVD data as the dependent

variable. Because the values of violence are ordered from less to more severe, we use ordered probit (with clustered standard errors) as our estimator.

We operationalize a number of independent variables to evaluate our hypotheses. First, to further examine the effect of incumbency (H1a and H1b) on the propensity for violence, we code whether an incumbent is running in each election. The variable (*Incumbent*) takes on a value of 1 if an incumbent leader is standing in the election, 0 otherwise. We expect this variable to have a positive influence on electoral violence in the pre-vote model. Because of H1b, however, we expect this effect to be attenuated in post-vote settings: if challengers are increasingly likely to use violence after elections, the effect of *Incumbency* should be smaller in that context.

Second, to assess the relationship between regime type, regime change, and electoral violence, we introduce two variables. First, *Regime Type* measures the regime type of the state under observation (in year $t-1$). We use the 21-point regime type index from the Polity IV data as our measure of regime type (Marshall, Jaggers, and Gurr 2011). We hypothesize that either anocratic or autocratic states may be more predisposed to violence elections.

The second regime variable is *Democratization*, which measures changes in regime type in a democratic direction. If a state moves from below the +7 regime score in the Polity IV data to that level or above between years $t-5$ and t , we code this variable as a 1.⁹ Otherwise, the variable is coded 0.

Third, to examine whether the presence of a first free and fair elections lays the foundation for non-violent elections in subsequent years, we code an indicator variable, *Founding Election*; it is coded 1 if the country's first election was non-violent and generally considered to be free and fair, and coded 0 otherwise. To code these elections, we rely on our own research and Bratton and van de Walle (1997).

Fourth, to measure for pre-existing social conflict we use the Social Conflict in Africa Database (*SCAD*) and count the average duration of social conflict events in countries in previous non-election years (Salehyan et al. 2012). This variable allows for a systematic test of Hypothesis 4.

Finally, to evaluate Hypothesis 5, we introduce *Path to Power*, which is coded 1 if the incumbent running in the election came to power through violent means (Goemans, Gleditsch, and Chiozza 2009). If the incumbent took a peaceful pathway to power (or there is no incumbent running), the variable is coded as 0.

Control Variables

In addition to these principal variables, we include several control variables. We include two economic indicators. A large literature on the causes of civil war links the onset of civil war to low per-capita gross domestic product (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Blattman and Miguel 2010). The hypothesized mechanisms vary from low-state capacity to repress rebellion, to lower opportunity costs for would-be rebels, to increased frustration due to poor living conditions. For the study of electoral violence, the first two mechanisms are less operative – states are not facing threats to their sovereignty, and recruits into political parties do not have to give up their livelihoods to join political organizations. However, the third mechanism, absolute poverty or declining economic conditions could yield greater frustration and a greater willingness to engage in violence in order to contest elections or announced results. Of course, higher levels of income decrease the chances of a slide from democracy back to authoritarianism (Przeworski et al. 2000) influencing other independent variables such as durability and democraticness. Thus, to help control omitted variable bias, we include *Per Capita GDP* as well as the logged economic growth rate (*Growth*), both measured in year $t-1$.

We also introduce four additional control variables. Large-scale violence in the form of a civil war could influence the prospects for peaceful elections. At the same time, it is not clear in which direction civil war might influence electoral violence. As Dunning (2011) argues, civil war fighting and electoral violence could be strategic substitutes or strategic complements. To this end, we rely on PRIO data (Gleditsch et al. 2002) to code an indicator variable, *Civil War*, if the state under observation is experiencing a civil war in year t .

In the same vein, we introduce an indicator variable (*Post War*) for whether the election being held is the first after a civil war termination. Again, the direction of how recently ended civil wars shapes electoral violence is unclear. It might be that after wars end there are weapons in circulation and tensions between previously fighting factions remain high, thereby increasing

the prospects of electoral violence. It could also be that political elites and citizens are exhausted from wars and want to avoid violence.

Next, it is also possible that the older the country, the more stable its institutions and therefore less likely to both experience electoral violence (and experience regime change). We thus introduce *Durable* as a control variable. To compute this variable, we count the years since the state experienced its last regime change (of any type). Finally, we include a variable (*Previous Election Violence*) that counts the number of years since previous electoral violence to control for any temporal dependence in the model.¹⁰

Model Estimation and Results

We estimate the model using ordered probit with clustered standard errors. Table 1 shows results looking at pre-vote violence. Table 2 shows results looking at post-vote violence. Due to missing data on some variables, the estimation sample falls to 173 elections for most of our models.

First, the regressions results strongly support the idea that pre- and post-election periods are fundamentally different. While two variables are consistently significant in both settings – whether an incumbent is running and whether there is an ongoing civil war – the results indicate that the effects of different variables matter depending on whether the context is violence before or after election day.

For pre-vote violence, the consistently significant variables, in addition to whether an incumbent is running and whether a civil war is ongoing, is the freeness and fairness of the founding elections, the presence of previous pre-electoral violence, and the level of social conflict in non-election years. We discuss each of these in turn.

An incumbent running in the election increases the probability of pre-election violence in the election significantly. Indeed, the probability of having a moderately violent pre-election period (dependent variable=2) increases by roughly 35 percent when an incumbent is running.¹¹ The finding provides some insight into a case such as Kenya where three of the four national elections since the onset of multi-partyism in 1992 resulted in violence. The one election that had much less violence than the others, in 2002, did not have an incumbent running for reelection.

Table 1. Estimated influences on the Probability of Pre-Election Violence.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Per Capita GDP	-0.030 (0.185)	0.002 (0.191)	-0.035 (0.189)	-0.005 (0.184)
Growth	-0.030 (0.020)	-0.030 (0.021)	-0.030 (0.020)	-0.026 (0.018)
Path to Power	-0.180 (0.247)	-0.207 (0.253)	-0.181 (0.248)	-0.043 (0.257)
Post War	-0.313 (0.337)	-0.347 (0.341)	-0.299 (0.338)	-0.301 (0.330)
Incumbent Running	0.347* (0.186)	0.348* (0.183)	0.355* (0.187)	0.328* (0.195)
Civil War	-0.486* (0.256)	-0.488* (0.253)	-0.484* (0.257)	-0.409 (0.268)
Free/Fair First Election	-0.496* (0.276)	-0.481* (0.274)	-0.485* (0.277)	-0.479* (0.275)
Regime Type	-0.021 (0.027)	0.058 (0.094)	-0.022 (0.027)	-0.023 (0.030)
Regime Type Squared		-0.003 (0.004)		
Democratization	0.209 (0.220)	0.228 (0.220)	0.213 (0.222)	0.300 (0.221)
Previous Violence	-0.081*** (0.030)	-0.082*** (0.029)	-0.081*** (0.030)	-0.074** (0.032)
SCAD	0.004*** (0.001)	0.004*** (0.001)	0.004*** (0.001)	0.003*** (0.001)
Monitors			-0.071 (0.251)	
Pol. Relevant Ethnic Groups				1.116** (0.496)
Constant – cut 1	-0.773 (1.473)	-0.194 (1.572)	-0.856 (1.570)	-0.179 (1.529)
Constant – cut 2	0.738 (1.448)	1.322 (1.535)	0.655 (1.543)	1.401 (1.507)
Constant – cut 3	1.248 (1.428)	1.834 (1.530)	1.164 (1.533)	1.928 (1.494)
Observations	173	173	173	166

Robust standard errors in parentheses.

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 2. Estimated influences on the Probability of Post-Election Violence.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Per Capita GDP	-0.093 (0.140)	-0.013 (0.138)	0.001 (0.141)	-0.007 (0.134)
Growth	-0.052*** (0.018)	-0.053*** (0.020)	-0.052** (0.021)	-0.052** (0.021)
Path to Power	-0.352 (0.268)	-0.439 (0.280)	-0.412 (0.286)	-0.401 (0.291)
Post War	-0.142 (0.254)	-0.261 (0.267)	-0.296 (0.266)	-0.251 (0.269)
Incumbent Running	0.604** (0.290)	0.619** (0.294)	0.598** (0.298)	0.595** (0.298)
Civil War	-0.550* (0.317)	-0.643** (0.318)	-0.646** (0.310)	-0.617* (0.322)
Free/Fair First Election	-0.323 (0.260)	-0.295 (0.249)	-0.335 (0.265)	-0.268 (0.271)
Regime Type	-0.008 (0.020)	0.261** (0.124)	0.242* (0.131)	0.250** (0.124)
Regime Type Squared		-0.011** (0.005)	-0.010* (0.006)	-0.011** (0.005)
Democratization	0.653*** (0.244)	0.717*** (0.239)	0.699*** (0.251)	0.673*** (0.244)
Previous Violence	-0.018 (0.027)	-0.024 (0.028)	-0.022 (0.030)	-0.022 (0.028)
SCAD	-0.000 (0.001)	-0.000 (0.001)	-0.000 (0.001)	-0.000 (0.001)
Monitors			0.308 (0.322)	
Pol. Relevant Ethnic Groups				0.165 (0.448)
Constant – cut 1	0.170 (1.138)	1.954 (1.311)	2.209 (1.371)	2.004 (1.321)
Constant – cut 2	0.763 (1.124)	2.565** (1.267)	2.822** (1.318)	2.632** (1.290)
Constant – cut 3	1.002 (1.117)	2.812** (1.285)	3.068** (1.339)	2.835** (1.306)
Observations	173	173	173	166

Robust standard errors in parentheses.

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

The presence of a civil war and having a free and fair founding election decrease the probability of pre-election violence. The estimate of *Civil War*, a control variable, is negative and statistically significant, suggesting elections held during ongoing wars are less likely to be violent (on the order of a 50 percent decreased chance of moderate-scale violence). This could be due to a substitution effect, whereby perpetrators of violence in the civil war do not then conduct violence at the polls. Or it could be a selection effect: only in those states still embroiled in civil wars where participants are sure elections will not escalate the war are elections held in the first place. Those elections are indeed less violent, leading to the observed outcome.

By our hypothesis 3, the founding elections create expectations among the electorate and among the political elite about the proper code of electoral conduct. The founding elections in effect create expectations about the rules of the game in the new multi-party era. When the founding elections were free and fair, voters come to expect a non-violent electoral process. If they perceive parties violate that norm, they will punish them by withholding votes, thereby increasing the costs to candidates who use violence before elections. The 2012 presidential elections in Senegal, in which the electorate voted against the incumbent after state forces used violence, would be an example. The estimates of the probability for moderate levels of violence fall by nearly 50 percent if the founding election in the country was free and fair.

Similarly, our estimates suggest that the electoral campaign can increase tensions and lead politicians to instrumentalize wedge issues, as per H4a. In doing so, politicians encourage their supporters to act on their grievances and to settle scores. Our data find that where greater preexisting social conflict is greater, the chances are greater that the electoral campaign period will result in violence. For example, an increase of one standard deviation in the *SCAD* variable leads to an increase in the predicted probability of moderately violence conflict by nearly 70 percent.

Still, a number of variables that plausibly would affect the chances of pre-vote electoral violence do not achieve statistical significance. These include the democratic-ness of the country, the presence of a recent democratization process, the pathway to power of the incumbent, or whether the elections were the first held after a civil war.

In our estimates of the determinants of post-vote violence, *Incumbent* and *Civil War* have similar statistical effects: increasing and decreasing the probability of violence respectively. In the case of *Incumbent*, his/her presence in an election increases the odds of post-electoral violence two-and-a-half fold, while elections held during a civil war experience a nearly 65 percent drop in probability of violence.

In terms of violence after the elections, the uniquely (compared to pre-vote violence) statistically significant variables are the recentness of the democratization process and less economic growth in the years before the election. The first result supports the general proposition that after the elections the critical determinant of violence is how much confidence the electorate and the political class have in the political institutions to manage elections. The main scenario here is that challengers protest the announced result, leading to state repression, often leading to generalized violence between incumbents and challengers. The opposition is on balance more likely to protest when they lack confidence in the electoral management bodies, which are proxied here by how recent the democratic process was. Indeed, the presence of democratization over the past five years approximately doubles the probability of post-election violence.

We have a less good interpretation for why slower or negative growth would matter for shaping violence after elections but not before them. Our proposition is that the dynamics of violence after an election are less controlled than before an election. In the former, political parties will seek to use or encourage violence to shape the voting result, but their aim will always be to control the process. By contrast, after a vote, the violence may have more independent momentum, a kind of bandwagon effect of violence. Challengers wish to disrupt the process; states seek to squelch the opposition, which leads to street fights between police and protestors. In that context, we expect opportunistic recruits to join the fighting, perhaps motivated by poor future economic prospects.

In addition to these variables, the results do not support a number of hypothesized relationships. On average, poorer (or richer) countries do not have more electoral violence, whether before or after a vote. That result is surprising. Given the literature on the onset of civil war, the expectation would be that it would be easier to recruit thugs in poorer countries or that

institutions would be weaker, leading to less confidence in them. But neither is the case, and indeed the most recent worst bouts of electoral violence in sub-Saharan Africa took place in the comparatively wealthier countries of Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Côte d'Ivoire. Both this finding, as well as the one about first elections after civil war and the one about ongoing civil wars, suggests that the causal dynamics of civil war are quite different from the causal dynamics of electoral violence.

To assess the robustness of our model, we introduce three additional variables. First, to more adequately evaluate hypothesis 2a, that it is more “anocratic” regimes that experience electoral violence, we re-estimate each model adding a squared term of the *Regime Type* variable. This should capture whether regimes in the middle of the Polity scale are more or less prone to either type of violence. As shown in column 2 of Table 1, it does not appear that there is a non-linear effect of regime type.

In column 2 of Table 2, however, both the linear and squared *Regime Type* term achieve statistical significance and are of the predicted sign: states that score both high and low on the Polity scale are much less likely to experience post-electoral violence, while those in the middle are the most likely to suffer from violence. This suggests that hypothesis 2a is partially correct, while 2b receives no support: highly autocratic states do not seem to suffer from pre- or post-election violence, but mixed regime types are the most likely to suffer from post-election (but not pre-election) violence. Finally, we note that the addition of this additional term makes no difference in the remainder of our statistical estimates.

Second, while we have underlined some of the potential domestic costs of electoral violence, similar costs may generate from outside pressures. Electoral observers are now common in most contests in newly democratic states. We hypothesize that the presence of external observers makes electoral violence less likely. Electoral observers are more likely to report and publicize electoral violence. Moreover, electoral observers who domestic parties fear carry a heavier stick (i.e., non-regional electoral observers) may depress electoral violence. To this end, we code a variable indicating the presence of electoral observers (*Monitors*) and add it to our original model (Hyde and Marinov 2012). However, as can be seen in column 3 of Tables

1 and 2, the addition of the variable has little influence: it does not achieve statistical significance, nor does it substantially alter the previous estimates.

Third, while we principally measure pre-existing social conflict as violent incidents in non-electoral years, we also expect that greater political tensions around social identity – ethnicity, religion, region, or some combination – would increase the chances of electoral violence. As a robustness check, we introduce Daniel Posner's (2004) coding for the fractionalization of *Politically Relevant Ethnic Groups* (PREG). While we are not convinced that measures of fractionalization capture the hypothesized mechanism (Posner 2004; Chandra and Wilkinson 2008), we nonetheless introduce the variable to ensure this ethnic heterogeneity is not responsible for our previous findings on pre-existing social conflict.

As shown in column 4 of Table 1, this new variable has little influence on our previous findings (the statistical significance of *Civil War* attenuates), while the new variable is itself statistically significant and positive. More politically relevant ethnic groups are associated with more pre-election violence. Note, however, that the measure for pre-existing social conflict (*SCAD*) remains statistically significant despite this additional variable and a reduced sample size. Interestingly, the final column of Table 2 shows this new variable is not statistically related to post-election violence, while its inclusion has no influence on the other estimates.

Finally, we want to insure that there are not underlying selection effects influencing the post-election violence period. To that end, we re-estimate the post-election violence model including a predicted probability from the pre-election violence model. This predicted probability should capture the underlying propensity of violence from the pre-election period to see if any unobserved characteristics of the general electoral period influence the propensity for post-election violence. There is little evidence that these unobserved characteristics influence the prospects for post-electoral violence, as the variable does not achieve statistical significance, nor does its presence change the estimates of the previous model (specifically, column 2 of Table 2).¹²

To summarize our findings: in all cases, if an incumbent is running for reelection, he or she has access to the security forces, and, because clientelism is a central feature in most African

states, key advisors, senior government officials, and security personnel use violence to support an incumbent, thereby protecting their positions. In addition, in all cases, elections and wars are strategic substitutes, not complements. In other words, the political arena in which elections are fought represent different strategic dynamics from the battlefield where states fight insurgents. That finding leads to a more general finding that the onset of electoral violence has different causes than does the onset of civil war.

Furthermore, we find that the dynamics of electoral violence differ in pre-vote and post-vote contexts. In pre-vote contexts, politicians instrumentalize salient electorate concerns. Where there is pre-existing social conflict, for example over access to land, and in the presence of weak property rights in African (Boone and Kriger 2010), the electoral campaign increases fears or creates opportunities for citizens to gain or protect vital resources using violence. Moreover, in pre-vote contests, founding elections create electorate expectations about proper norms of electoral conduct. Where founding elections were free and fair, electorates expect non-violence and will withhold support for candidates and parties that use violence. By contrast, where elections were never free and fair, electorates have less confidence in the fairness of the process and will not punish candidates and parties who use violence.

By contrast, in post-vote environments, the issue at stake is the legitimacy of the institutions that manage disputes. The most common post-vote scenario is that incumbents rig or are perceived to have rigged results. In places with more durable democratic institutions, politicians and electorates have greater faith in the ability of the relevant institutions – courts, electoral commissions, the police – to manage the discrepancies. But in places where such institutions are fairly new, or thought to be unfairly stacked with partisans of the ruling party, opposition candidates, parties, and supporters will protest, triggering in turn a crackdown from the security forces and often a counter-response from the opposition.

Conclusions

Understanding the sources of electoral violence is centrally important for policymakers, who often invest heavily in democratic processes in developing countries. Given the scholarly attention to democratization and political violence, the topic of electoral violence also has

significant theoretical stakes. In this paper, we take a step toward generating insights about the patterns and dynamics of electoral violence. The analysis is based on a region-specific sample, but there are more global implications. First, our results show that pre-vote and post-vote electoral violence have distinct dynamics, and going forward the two periods should be disaggregated. Electoral violence is different from civil wars in that electoral violence clusters around a specific event, election day, which we argue changes the calculations for why political actors would employ electoral violence as a strategy. Second, following from this point, the dynamics of electoral violence and civil war are different. Our findings clearly indicate that ongoing civil wars make electoral violence less likely, and elections following civil wars are not more likely to be violent than elections that do not follow war termination. The finding is counterintuitive but nonetheless significant: these are different forms of violence. Civil wars are non-constitutional means of taking power; they fracture sovereignty (Kalyvas 2006). By contrast, electoral violence takes place within a codified constitutional process, elections, but in which actors seek to manipulate illegally who wins or who is recognized as the winner. Moreover, key variables that make electoral violence more likely differ from those that typically trigger the onset of civil war.

Our region-specific analysis shows that incumbency, democratic institutionalization, path dependence, and grievance instrumentalization matter for shaping electoral violence. These findings may or may not travel to other regions. Incumbency we argue matters in particular in personalized, clientelistic, presidential systems, but in other systems where different informal rules dominate whether the incumbent individual runs for reelection may not matter. We also find that where preexisting social conflict exists electoral violence is more likely. That finding should travel, but in other regions the focus may be less about access to land in the context of weak property rights and more about other vital resources that are in contestation. The idea that democratic institutionalization and path dependence matter should extend to other regions. Electoral management bodies are critical to dispute resolution, and whether opposing parties accept the setup of these institutions should be important globally, especially for post-vote violence. Finally, the rules of the game established during critical transitions should affect the dynamics of future electoral contests globally.

There are a number of important topics we have not addressed. One is electoral rules. Across Africa, electoral rules are fairly similar, but a clear extension of the analysis with a global sample should evaluate how different electoral rules shape the likelihood of electoral violence. Another key topic is whether presidential, legislative, or local elections are typically most violent. We also have a four-point measure of violence – others are clearly possible. These and other research possibilities suggest an ambitious research agenda on a topic that deserves more attention.

Notes

¹ Violence shapes turnout, and incumbent violence may prompt opposition boycotts. Using the margin of victory in previous electoral cycles also does not work, as there may have been violence or the candidates may have been different. Using the parties' legislative share only works in those countries where the two contests are not at roughly the same period and where there are stable parties across electoral cycles.

² By announced result, we refer mostly to the announcement of electoral returns, rigged or not, which in turn trigger a chain of events that lead to violence. By "announced result," however, we also include the possibility that an election was annulled, leading in turn to violence, as it did in the 1993 Nigerian elections.

³ We choose a longer time horizon prior to an election date to reflect the fact that electoral campaigns usually take place for a substantial period before an election. We choose a shorter period after an election to reflect that responses to an electoral result will usually occur within a few months of an announced result.

⁴ Indicated as police or security forces breaking up rallies, party supporters fighting, street brawls, opposition newspapers being confiscated with violence, candidate disqualifications, and limited short-term arrests of political opponents.

⁵ Indicated by high-level assassinations and targeted murder, combined with long-term high-level arrests of party leaders, the consistent use of violent harassment or torture.

⁶ Indicated by repeated, widespread physical attacks leading to a substantial number of deaths over time, which we measure as 20 or more deaths.

⁷ Available at <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt>.

⁸ We note too that the data source is also used in other prominent datasets on violence, notably the Political Terror Scale and the Cingranelli and Richards Human Rights Data Project (see Cingranelli and Richards 2010; Wood and Gibney 2010). Both of these data collection projects also consult Amnesty International annual reports. In some ambiguous cases, we also consulted Amnesty reports; however, we generally found the State Department and Amnesty reports to be highly correlated, in part because the former relies on the latter to write their annual assessments (see also Cingranelli and Richards 2010: 406, who find a similar correlation).

⁹ This is the identical coding used in Mansfield and Snyder (2002).

¹⁰ This would be the equivalent to the base of a natural cubic spline function as suggested by Beck, Katz, and Tucker (1998). If the observation is the first election, this variable is coded as 0.

¹¹ All marginal effects are calculated assuming continuous variables at their mean values and categorical variables at their modal values.

¹² We bootstrap the standard errors for this coefficient to adjust for any bias in its estimation.

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