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The aftermath of an election crisis: Kenyan attitudes and the influence of individual-level and locality violence

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A B S T R A C T

How does violent conflict affect social and political attitudes? To answer this question I pair Kenyan survey and violence data for the time period following the country's December 27th 2007 national election. I find that respondents who personally experienced electoral violence are less likely to express certain forms of inter-personal and institutional trust than those individuals who did not. The association is not universally powerful, however. First, noteworthy differences emerge between populations who relocated as a result of post-election conflict and those who did not. Differences between these groups suggest that internal migration in the wake of tragedy influenced the Kenyan social landscape. In addition to personal exposure to electoral conflict, I test how local level violence may indirectly condition Kenyan political attitudes. Across all models, individual-level exposure to violence has the most consistent influence upon opinions, although district level effects emerge in analyses without survey respondent ethnicity controls. This finding suggests that living in a setting of regional insecurity does not have as important an effect on certain political views as personal victimization.

Introduction

Since the introduction of multiparty politics in 1992, each Kenyan election cycle has been marred by varying degrees of politically motivated violence. Despite the regularity of such conflict, the severity and scope of the fighting that followed Kenya's 2007 general election took many by surprise. Lindberg (2006) emphasizes the systematic prevalence of violence surrounding African elections, and Kenya was no exception on the eve of 2008. Sadly, the death toll of approximately 1300 represents only the immediate effect of the skirmishes. While burnt buildings and graves may remain as a visceral scar on the physical landscape in some areas of the country, the less tangible effects of political violence on Kenyan attitudes and perceptions are not as clear. By georeferencing Kenya's Afrobarometer Round Four (R4) respondent locations in my analysis of Kenya's social fabric, I place post-election violence views back on the map. Doing this allows me to test the potential effects of local level violence (e.g. within a district) alongside individual exposure to electoral conflict. Below I address the relationship between this research and the peaceful election on 4 March 2013.

My goal is uncovering any relationship between exposure to electoral violence and opinions about Kenyan political life in the wake of tragedy. The indicators that I use include measurements of social and political trust, attitudes about the use of violence, and views about Kenyan institutions at the time of the Afrobarometer survey. Uncovering how violence affects social opinion and behavior is an emerging area of interest in conflict studies and this work therefore represents an important geographic contribution to the study of violence (e.g. Balcells, 2012; Barron, Kaiser, & Pradhan, 2008; Bellows & Miguel, 2008; Blattman, 2009; Deininger & Castagnini, 2006; Dyrstad, Buhaug, Ringal, Simkus, & Listhaug, 2011; Hutchinson & Johnson, 2011; Justino, 2011; Voors et al., 2010). The Afrobarometer R4 survey data used in this research were gathered in October 2008, after the end of the post-election violence period (defined here as 27 December, 2007–22 February, 2008). I identify victims of post-election violence by a broad set of criteria, including home destruction and eviction, damage to personal property or a business, and loss of employment in addition to personal injury (for a similar definition, see Becchetti, Conzo, & Romeo, 2011, p 11). Incorporating broad experiences with conflict into my definition of exposure is important for capturing the many manifestations of political violence, which as I explain below include territorial practices such as "domicide", meaning the destruction of home (e.g. see Dahlman & ÓTuathail, 2005).

There is cause to view social phenomena as rooted in particular histories and social conditions (Agnew, 1987; Johnston, 1991; Pattie & Johnston, 2000). Alongside other local level socio-economic and structural conditions, political violence and instability may constitute a potent influence upon attitudes. Political violence is

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experienced both personally and also indirectly. Because of the general effects that violence could have on the area where a person lives; I consider the that both types of exposure to violence may influence political opinions. Throughout this research I refer to the first form of violence as "individual-level" and the second type of exposure as "local-level." Lifting survey respondents out of their location for statistical analysis is somewhat common in the social sciences, but the practice risks excluding from the analysis some characteristics (here the level of political violence) of what we know to be place-contingent processes that define social attitudes. I adopt two main approaches to capturing so-called "place influences" (O'Loughlin, 2010) in this study of African electoral conflict. Place-based social forces are understood to be a function of interactions at the local level, and existing research in many countries has provided important guidance for adopting local political and social dynamics into our understanding of violence (Kalyvas, 2006; Varshney, 2002; Wilkenson, 2004; and others).

First, I compare the measurable effects of election violence between respondents who had relocated as a result of post-election violence to those who did not migrate. Spatial relocation has removed individuals from their prior settings, which may have implications for their views and behavior - the importance of place might be evident as a function of change. A relocated population has been lifted from these surroundings, and estimating any differences in the effect of violence between groups who have relocated and those who have not may reveal intriguing trends. Secondly, I examine the degree to which local-level exposure to conflict may be different than individual-level experiences. Witnessing in intimate proximity the terrible violence that took place across Kenya may change a person's views about politics in the country in addition to only individual victimization. In terms of how conflict affects social life, both approaches constitute a move toward the "recovery of context" in the study of social attitudes (Secor & O'Loughlin, 2005, p. 67).

For this analysis I define local-level violence - as distinct from personal victimization - in two ways. First, I use geographic buffers of 20 km around a survey location (I test the effect of expanding and constricting their definition in a closing section of my analysis) to aggregate media-reported conflict events to survey respondents. Second, I use hospital records of the violence that are recorded for Kenyan districts. This changes the definition of "local" from a circular spatial buffer surrounding a location to an administrative unit boundary (the area of some is quite large). Beyond providing a different definition of "local", there is additional benefit to using hospital records because these data are not limited by potential urban bias that exists in media reports of conflict.

The paper proceeds as follows. In a second section following this introduction I provide an overview of the Kenyan election violence. Third, I elaborate the territorial and geographic character of electoral conflict in Kenya. The fourth section introduces the use of political attitudes, including inter-personal and institutional trust, as an important consideration for understanding the effects of violence in cases of electoral conflict. In section five, I describe the empirical data that I use to test the social effects of violence. My quasi-experimental estimation procedure is explained in section six. In the seventh section I present results from the analysis and in the eighth I conclude the study.

The 2007 Kenyan poll and subsequent violence

Hailed initially as a model for other African states to follow (Economist, December 19, 2007), Kenya's 2007 presidential contest took place mainly between incumbent Mwai Kibaki of the Party of National Unity (PNU), and Raila Amolo Odinga, leading the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM). Kibaki was elected in 2002 under the banner of the National Alliance and Rainbow Coalition (NARC), and his success ended the nearly four-decade long reign of the Kenya African National Union (KANU). NARC's victory was initially welcomed as a sign of change by many Kenyans, but the party failed to follow through with many reforms that it promised while campaigning. Harnessing discontent, Odinga's ODM had enough support by the fall of 2007 to genuinely threaten president Kibaki's control.

When the Electoral Commission of Kenya first announced initial election returns from the 27 December poll, only 159 of 210 constituencies had been counted. With 3.7 million votes Odinga was ahead of Kibaki, who reportedly had received only 3.4 million. After the remaining 51 constituencies had been counted the following day, Kibaki was leading with 4.6 million to Odinga's 4.4 million. Of the remaining ballots, Kibaki achieved over 60% support, and to the surprise of many his victory was publicly announced on December 31st. As soon as the announcement was made, violence erupted across the country. Gruesome attacks against the Kikuyu raged immediately, as is it was believed that this community had stolen the election from ODM supporters. A reprisal wave of attacks was then carried out by some Kikuyu against the Luo community and other ethnic groups who were believed to have supported ODM. The ethnic character of Kenya's election violence, according to Wamwere (2008, p. 95), is a direct result of "negative ethnicity," or the intentional manipulation of communities against one another by entrepreneurs of violence at the national level. Political leadership may have planned some attacks in advance, but local vernacular radio stations spread hateful messages that fueled the outbursts (Ismail & Deane, 2008). According to estimates by the Kenyan Human Rights Commission (KHRC, 2008, p. 15) 1300 people were killed and as many 600,000 displaced from their homes before former United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan mediated a settlement between Odinga and Kibaki on 22 February. Stipulations of the agreement included Odinga assuming the role of Prime Minister and supervising the National Assembly as well as cabinet positions, which are allocated according to the size of parties in Parliament.

On 4 March 2013, Kenyans voted in the first national election to be held within the institutions outlined in the country's new 2010 constitution. This election was largely peaceful, in contrast to the 2007–2008 bloodshed. Despite the decidedly positive security atmosphere surrounding the most recent poll, this research is important for several reasons. First, the 2007-2008 violence followed a peaceful election in 2002; a single calm election does not indicate an end to the potential for conflict in the future. Second, my analysis concerns how election violence may harm broader attitudes that affect Kenyan political life. Issues related to social trust and institutional democracy are as important today as they will be years into the future. Third, the outcome of International Criminal Court proceedings against many influential politicians (including the current president) are still underway. Due to the ongoing hearings, issues related to the election violence will appear in political discourses for some time to come. Finally, a peaceful election in 2013 may have been the consequence of political alliances (mainly that the Kikuyu and Kalenjin leadership agreed to share the Jubilee party ticket), which could easily change during future electoral contests. For these main reasons, among others, the study of Kenyan electoral conflict has direct relevance to contemporary social life in the country.

Arguably, election violence is a distinct form of conflict. The Central Depository Unit (CDU) was formed in 2001 with the goal of overseeing elections in Kenya and preventing violence. The CDU (2002, p. vi) defines election violence as: "any act or series of acts that cause, or are likely to cause harm or threat of harm to an individual or group of people, or damage to property; if the act or