

Triggers and Characteristics of the 2007 Kenyan Electoral Violence

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Summary. — Following the disputed 2007 Kenyan Presidential election unprecedented levels of violence erupted across the country adding to the history of troubled elections in Africa. This paper offers quantitative and qualitative evidence on the issues that triggered the electoral violence, its incidence, and impacts. Using two surveys conducted before and after the election we find that one out of three Kenyans was affected by the violence regardless of their ethnicity and wealth. The chances of being a victim of violence were higher in areas with land conflicts and where politically-connected gangs operated. Violence, which was mainly triggered by the perception that the election had been rigged, increased support toward lawlessness, reduced trust and social capital among communities.
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1. INTRODUCTION

Kenya was left with deep scars by the violence that erupted in the aftermath of the disputed Presidential election of December 27, 2007. In just a matter of weeks, Kenya was transformed from one of Africa's most stable democracies into chaos. Political and ethnic violence left more than a thousand people dead and over 350,000 people were forced to flee their homes as violence and machete-wielding gangs roamed the streets (Amnesty International USA, 2008; CIPEV, 2008). A coalition government was agreed 3 months after the disputed elections ending the electoral violence, but the underlying triggers, extent, and consequences of electoral violence in Kenya have still to be fully addressed.

Since the 1990s many African autocracies have engaged in various efforts toward democratization, with the aim of achieving accountability, installing broadly legitimate governments, and helping in mediating disputes among the diverse ethnic groups. These institutional efforts have been expected to improve economic performance and reduce proneness to political violence (Carothers, 2007; Fearon & Laitin, 2003; Soudriette & Pilon, 2007). However, with a few exceptions the recent record of African elections has raised concerns that in ethnically divided societies, competitive electoral processes could in fact be destabilizing (Bardhan, 1997; Eifert, Miguel, & Posner, 2007; Mansfield & Snyder, 2005; Snyder, 2000; Wilkinson, 2004). There are several likely reasons for the frequent failure of African elections, but perhaps the main underlying cause is that no democratic means have been found to mediate the struggles over access to land and the resources controlled by the state (Bratton, 2008; De Smedt, 2009; Peters, 2009). Given these high stakes, politicians resort to a variety of means including vote buying, intimidation, electoral violence, and the old trick of stuffing ballot boxes, tampering with vote tallies and ballot stealing (Bratton, 2008; Lindberg, 2003; Schaffer, 2007; Throup & Hornsby, 1998; Vicente, 2007; Wilkinson, 2004).

The article seeks to shed light on the sort of issues that triggered the Kenyan electoral violence, its incidence, whom

it affected and how, and what were the consequences at community level. The majority of existing studies on conflict have tended to focus on cross-country comparisons, or in the case of country studies, to gather scant evidence, often anecdotal, which limits the understanding of what are the risk factors for violence. This paper aims to contribute to the emerging field of micro-quantitative studies on conflict (Barron, Kaiser, & Pradhan, 2009; Bellows & Miguel, 2009; Collier & Vicente, 2008; Kalyvas, 2008) by assessing the individual and local factors that increased the risk of being a victim of electoral violence. The quantitative and qualitative data used allow us to draw a nationally representative perspective, with enough data at small area-level, to be able to assess how violence emerged and affected people at community level. Although the paper focuses on the experience of Kenya, its findings have broader relevance as they reveal what sort of institutional failures lead to violence and what sort of policies could be used to reduce the recurrence of civil conflict.

To explore our research questions two surveys were conducted, one just 2 weeks before the general elections in December 2007 and a second one in August 2008, which re-interviewed previous respondents. The pre-election survey asked about voter intentions, vote-buying, intimidation, and activities of violence among other themes and the post-election survey revisited previous respondents to find out about their experiences in the aftermath of the election. As we follow

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our previous respondents of December 2007 over time rather than drawing a complete new sample of respondents we are able to analyze how electoral violence affected them.

To complement the information on when and where electoral violence originated and how rapidly this evolved over time we also monitored the major media outlets across the country *on a daily and 24 h basis* from December 1, 2007 until March 31, 2008. Collating the panel-survey data and the instances of electoral violence reported in media helped us build a more comprehensive picture of how violence emerged, where and when it spread, and what consequences violence and other electioneering practices had on Kenyans.

We find that violence affected one out of three Kenyans in terms of personal injury, being displaced from home, destruction of property, loss of jobs or earnings, or having a friend or relatives that died in the elections. The likelihood of being a victim of violence was not affected by the respondent's ethnicity or wealth but by where respondents lived. Respondents living in urban areas and in areas which had suffered land disputes before the election had a higher likelihood of being victims of violence. Violence was directly instigated by political actors and by politically connected gangs even before the elections. Nonetheless, the majority of respondents believe that violence erupted *mainly* because it was perceived the election had been rigged.

The ordeal of the disputed election reduced trust across ethnic groups and deteriorated social capital among communities. International experience has shown that in situations where (ethnic) groups distrust each other and are afraid of being victimized, this fear might drive them to resort to violence first in a preemptive move to minimize damage (Bardhan, 1997). Taking into account that having experienced conflict in the recent past is a good predictor for future conflict (Collier, Hoeffler, & Söderbom 2008). Kenya is at risk of experiencing violence in the forthcoming 2012 general elections if institutions are not strengthened to cope with the underlying grievances, the need for justice, and the mistrust among ethnic groups.

The article proceeds as follows: Section 2, we provide a brief overview of Kenya's transition toward democracy and the 2007 political campaign. Section 3 presents some highlights of the survey and media data. Section 4 explores in detail the profile of the victims of violence and how violence changed some of Kenyans' perceptions. The conclusions and discussion of the results are presented in Section 5.

2. KENYAN ELECTIONS

Kenya gained independence from Great Britain in 1963 and from then up until 2002 was ruled by one political party, the Kenya African National Union (KANU). KANU's dominance was achieved by banning opposition parties in 1969, leaving Kenya a *de facto* one-party state to a *de jure* one-party state when a constitutional amendment in 1978 ruled that no other party was able to contest in the elections. In 1991 after much pressure from Kenyan activists and the international community multi-party elections were re-introduced. Several opposition parties emerged. Nonetheless KANU remained in power winning the general elections of 1992 and 1997 amid violence and allegations of electoral irregularities. Much of the violence occurred during the pre-elections period and was concentrated in the Rift Valley and Western provinces. The government described the violence as ethnically motivated clashes that erupted spontaneously as a result of multi-party politics. Analysts though, have argued that the source of the strong ethnic attachments and conflict had been a political

construct which political parties have continued to exploit to mobilize voters in exchange of promised access to land or public services (Barkan, 1979; Court & Kinyanjui, 1980; Miguel, 2004; Mozaffar, 1995; Mozaffar, Scarritt, & Galaich, 2003). In particular some politicians have instigated violence exploiting people's need for land as has happened in other troubled elections in Africa (Peters, 2009). Land disputes in Kenya can be tracked back to the land settlements devised in the Rift Valley when the country moved toward independence. Leo (1978, 1981, 1984) explains that these land schemes were intended to transfer settler occupied land to the Kikuyu whom the British identified as the backbone of support for *Mau Mau* (a militant movement whose main aim was to remove British rule and European settlers from the country) and a political threat if they were not landed. Land then became a source of grievance for the Rift Valley locals, in particular the Kalenjin and Maasai, as many were unable to buy or have access to land in their own region. Since then the Kalenjin and Maasai were allowed to occupy land abandoned by displaced groups to ensure their political alliance (Boone, 2008; Kagwanja, 2001). The Kenyan elite aiming to suppress opposition political parties also recruited and sponsored "tribal militias" and gangs to terrorize and instigate ethnic violence in the same vein as other African countries have done such as Cameroon, Malawi, Nigeria, South Africa, and Sudan (Kagwanja, 2003). Hence, contrary to the government's description of the violence as "spontaneous ethnic clashes", the evidence suggests that much of the violence was in fact sponsored by the state whose actions did little to contain it (Human Rights Watch, 1993, p. 1).

The Kenyan Human Rights Commission (2001) estimates that state-sponsored or state-condoned violence killed 4,000 people and displaced 600,000 others over the period 1991–2001. Much of this violence was sponsored in the Rift Valley and in urban areas, especially in Nairobi where the opposition held sway since 1992 (Kagwanja, 2003). The end result of this violence was the retribalization of politics and the erosion of civic nationhood (Kagwanja, 1998, 2003; Throup & Hornsby, 1998).

In the general elections of 2002, all the opposition parties for the first time united under the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) and behind a single presidential candidate. Kibaki's Presidential election success in 2002—declared free, fair, and the most peaceful elections that Kenya has had in recent years by international observers—was hailed at the time as a step forward for Kenyan democracy. The democratic achievement was much owed for having formed a multi-tribal NARC coalition, unlike the previous multi-party elections where political parties formed seeking to target a specific ethnic group (Oyugi, 1997).

During Kibaki's administration economic growth increased from a rate of close to zero to more than 6% annually and free primary school education was introduced. Less progress was achieved in tackling corruption, widespread poverty, simmering ethnic/land tensions, and in delivering a reformed constitution. Kibaki's defeat in the 2005 referendum on a revised constitution failed to reach a consensus on how Kenya should be run. Among the policy issues in the referendum were the settling of land rights, the sharing of political power among ethnic groups—possibly between a President and Prime Minister—and how to decentralize resources across regions.

The failed referendum also split Kibaki's cabinet. Ministers Raila Odinga and Kalonzo Musyoka, who led the group against the approval of the referendum, formed the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) party. In September 2007 Kibaki declared that he would stand again in the presidential

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