# EDGS WORKING PAPER

Number 22

"Ethnic Parties, Political Coalitions, and Electoral Violence: An Analysis of Kenya's Presidential Elections from 1992 to 2013"
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June 3, 2014

# Ethnic Parties, Political Coalitions, and Electoral Violence: An Analysis of Kenya's Presidential Elections from 1992 to 2013[1]

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## ABSTRACT

Since the restoration of multiparty competition in the country in the early 1990s, three of Kenya's five presidential elections—1992, 1997, and 2007—have been accompanied by severe violence in the form of ethnic clashes. However, the elections of 2002 and 2013 were relatively peaceful. What explains this variation? Through sub-national comparisons and on-site fieldwork in the Rift Valley and the Coast, this paper develops a two-stage argument to account for the puzzle at hand. First, it posits that elite choices about the ethnic composition of electoral coalitions set the stage for whether or not violence will accompany any particular election. More specifically, when politicians build alliances between hostile communities, election-related conflict is unlikely to occur even in places where there has been a history of such violence. The second stage of the argument, then, identifies factors that influence politicians' decisions about the ethnic make-up of electoral alliances. With regard to this meta-puzzle, the article argues that peaceful elections in Kenya have not been a product of leaders' commitments to peace per se. Instead, they have occurred when unique circumstances drove politicians to unite rival ethnic groups in coalitions of convenience.

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INTRODUCTION

Under the 'third wave', Kenya, like many other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa was pressured into reinstating competitive multiparty elections in the early 1990s. Since then, five different presidential elections have been contested in the country. Three out of five of these elections—1992, 1997, and 2007—have been accompanied by severe electoral violence in the form of ethnic clashes. While the conflicts of the 1990s largely took place before the elections, the 2007-2008 violence occurred exclusively after the results of the election were announced. The post-election violence (PEV) of 2007-2008 was also the worst incident of election-related conflict in Kenya's history: it engulfed 'all but two provinces and was felt in both urban and rural parts of the country' (Republic of Kenya 2008, p vii). By the time the clashes that started in late December 2007 finally came to an end in February 2008, over 1 000 Kenyans had perished and countless others had been displaced from their homes (Anderson and Lochery 2008).

The consensus on the incidents of the 1990s is that these clashes were organized and sponsored by the state—and particularly by elites in the ruling Kenya African National Union (KANU) party. In fact, both human rights groups and academic experts have highlighted the fact that the 1992 and 1997 episodes were incited by then President Daniel arap Moi and his senior party members as a means to hold on to power in an increasingly competitive political environment (Africa Watch/ Human Rights Watch 1993; Kenya Human Rights Commission 1998; Klopp 2001a and 2001b). As one notable report states, 'to ensure the political survival of the ruling party', the violence of the 1990s targeted 'entire groups perceived as pro-opposition' (Kenya Human Rights Commission 1998, p i). The objective of these clashes, therefore, was to discourage Kenyans from voting against KANU and supporting opposition parties.

Contrary to 1992 and 1997, in 2007-2008, pre-election conflict did not take place. Stated differently, this time around, politicians did not attempt to use violence to influence voters' preferences before they went to the polls. Rather, the clashes that broke out occurred as a reaction to what many Kenyans perceived as being a 'stolen election'. After all, pre-election polls conducted by five different organizations had showed that the opposition candidate Raila Odinga and his ODM party had a distinct advantage over the incumbent Mwai Kibaki and his PNU coalition (Wolf 2009). Therefore, when Kibaki was declared victorious and his second term in office was hurriedly inaugurated at State House in Nairobi, many Kenyans reacted violently.

Irrespective of whether electoral conflict occurs before or after a particular election, such violence can have important effects on who wins and who loses. In the 1992 and 1997 Kenyan presidential elections, for instance, the instigation of ethnic clashes served as an effective tactic in fragmenting the opposition. As a result, KANU emerged as the victorious party even though it had only won thirty six per cent and forty per cent of the vote, respectively (Arriola 2012). Although post-election violence of the form that took place in Kenya in 2007-2008 cannot 'influence how people vote, it can be used to change the outcome of an election by putting pressure on the incumbent government to bargain over that outcome' (Cleven 2013b, p 13). In fact, this is exactly what occurred in Kenya in 2007-2008: Kibaki was forced to negotiate with ODM leaders and the result of these negotiations was the creation of a post of Prime Minister for Raila Odinga.

While the 1992, 1997, and 2007 Kenyan elections, therefore, stand out as periods of high-intensity electoral violence, the presidential elections of 2002 and 2013 were relatively peaceful. Furthermore, elites competing for power in 2002 and 2013 refrained from mobilizing their supporters to engage in ethnic clashes. Taking note of these longitudinal variations, this article

investigates the following questions. First, what accounts for the temporal variances in the levels

of electoral violence observed in Kenya's five presidential elections between 1992 and 2013?

Sub-nationally, moreover, in places where there has been a history of election-related conflict,

what explains the escalation versus de-escalation of such violence over time?

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. The subsequent section offers a brief

literature review about the existing theories regarding election-related ethnic conflict. Based on

existing work in the field, I suggest that while this scholarship has put forth a number of

powerful explanations to account for spatial variations in the outbreak of electoral and communal

violence, we still know remarkably little about the temporal aspects of such conflict. In the third

section, I then offer my own conceptualization and theory about the longitudinal variations

observed in regards to the outbreak of electoral violence around Kenya's presidential elections.

Subsequently, the article introduces the research design and methodology that was employed by

this project. The fifth section then discusses my results and deals with rival explanations. Finally,

I conclude the article by describing the value-added by this project to the extant literature on

electoral violence.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Much of the existing research on electoral violence is descriptive in nature (Fischer 2002; Bekoe

2012; Straus and Taylor 2012). Furthermore, of the few theories that have been offered to

account for this phenomenon, most of them come out of the study of Hindu-Muslim riots in India

(Brass 1997 and 2003; Wilkinson 2004). And yet, such conflict is by no means limited to India:

it has occurred in many parts of Africa, Southeast and South Asia, and Eastern Europe.

Commenting specifically on the lack of research on election-related conflict in Africa, Scott

Straus (2012, p 193) has stated, 'in contrast to the research on civil wars and mass killing, there

has been little systematic cross-national data collection on the frequency and variation of levels

of electoral violence in Africa… More research into electoral violence in Africa is needed'.[2]

Apart from the fact that there has been relatively little theoretical and empirical work on

electoral violence in Africa, the existing literature on this topic has also specifically honed in on

the question of spatial variation. For instance, a number of scholars on communalism in India

have proffered explanations to account for why certain places in the country are 'riot-prone'

while other demographically similar sites are relatively peaceful. As a result of this focus, our

ideas about the issue of temporal variation are still underdeveloped.

In response to the spatial variance question, five key answers—four of them based on

analyses of Hindu-Muslim violence in India—have emerged. First, Paul Brass (1997 and 2003)

has argued that the activation of networks he terms 'institutionalized riot systems' (IRS) are a

necessary condition for communal riots to occur and reproduce themselves. In other words, he

posits that the key factor that distinguishes 'riot-prone' sites from peaceful places is the presence

of an active local riot industry that has a collective interest in organizing such violence. Brass

(2003, p 258) defines an IRS as

> …a perpetually operative network of roles whose functions are to
> maintain communal hostilities, recruit persons to protect against or
> otherwise make public or bring to the notice of the authorities

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[2] With regard to data collection, more recently, a number of scholars and organizations have begun to construct cross-national and sub-national datasets on electoral violence. For instance, Scott Straus and Charlie Taylor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison have put together the African Electoral Violence Database (AEVD). Similarly, Leornado Arriola, at the University of California, Berkeley is working on a dataset on electoral violence in Africa. Megan Reif at the University of Michigan and the University of Gothenburg in Sweden has published the Global Violent Elections Dataset (GVED) covering the period between 1945 and 2012, which has been incorporated into the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project. In 2009, she also published the Elections Violence Incidents Database (EVID), which includes data on election-related violence in Algeria, Egypt, Ghana, Newark, NJ, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka between 1954 and 2008. Finally, for this project, I constructed a dataset on election-related local ethnic clashes in Kenya between 1991 and 2013.

> incidents presumed dangerous to the peace of the city, mobilize crowds to threaten or intimidate persons from the other community, recruit criminals for violent actions when it is desired to 'retaliate' against persons from the other community, and, if the political context is right, to let loose widespread violent action.

Through an extensive study of the production of riot violence in Aligarh city between 1925 and 1995, Brass finds that such conflict is deeply connected to electoral politics. On the relationship between inter-party competition and Hindu-Muslim violence, he states that in India on the whole, 'there is a continuum from political rivalry leading to communal riots to political rivalry feeding on communal riots' (Brass 2003, p 220). In Aligarh specifically, 'communal riots have preceded [elections] and have led to an intensification of interparty competition' (Brass 2003, p 220).

In contrast, Ashutosh Varshney—while also tackling the spatial variation question—pays greater attention to factors that constrain Hindus and Muslims from engaging in communal riots. By building a dataset on Hindu-Muslim riots in India between 1950 and 1995, he finds that these disturbances are city-centric phenomena. In fact, between 1950 and 1995, eight cities accounted for over 40 percent all deaths in incidents of Hindu-Muslim violence (Varshney 2002, pp 6-7). To explain why riotous conflict is this highly concentrated, Varshney designed a dyadic study of six Indian cities. He argues that the feature that distinguishes violent places from stable sites is the presence of local inter-ethnic civic associations. In other words, he makes the case that where city-level civil society organizations have effectively bridged the gap between Hindus and Muslims and facilitated inter-group communication, ethnic riots have not occurred. Contrariwise, 'riot-prone' towns are those where local associational life is ethnically segregated. Therefore, his

theory proposes that even when faced with triggers that can incite communal conflict, cities that

are home to a vigorous inter-ethnic associational life can maintain peace.[3]

Third, Steven Wilkinson, while agreeing with Varshney that riots in India are an urban

phenomena, argues that the answer to the spatial variations puzzle is located at the state-level

rather than the town-level. He finds that the electoral incentives of incumbent politicians most

directly account for where riots regularly occur versus where they are contained. More

specifically, Wilkinson holds that states with uncompetitive (i.e., unipolar) or very competitive

(i.e., multipolar) electoral environments are likely to be free of communal conflict.[4] This is

because in the former situation where the government is in a dominant position, politicians from

the incumbent regime do not stand to gain any electoral benefits from the incitement of Hindu-

Muslim violence. In contrast, in multipolar party systems where there is high inter-party

competition, politicians realize that it is likely that they will have to appeal to the minority

Muslim community for vote-seeking purposes. In sum, then, the incentive structures in both

these situations do not support the production of communal violence. However, states marked by

bipolar party systems with moderate levels of political competition (2-3.5 ENPV) can be violent

or peaceful depending on whether or not the minority vote is salient for the incumbent regime.

To summarize, then, Wilkinson (2004, pp 6-7) contends

> … politicians in government will increase the supply of protection
> to minorities when either of two conditions applies: when
> minorities are an important part of their party's current support
> base, or the current support base of one of their coalition partners in
> a coalition government; or when the overall electoral system in a

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[3] Although this theory turns on civic associations as the main independent variable, by including political parties as constituents of civil society, Varshney does make some place for the role of electoral politics in his work, albeit in a limited manner.

[4] Wilkinson categorizes states where the effective number of parties (ENPV) is less than 2 as unipolar while those with ENPV scores greater than 3.5 are classified as being home to multipolar party systems.

state is so competitive—in terms of the effective number of parties—that there is therefore, a high probability that the governing party will have to negotiate or form coalitions with minority-supported parties in the future, despite its own preferences.

More recently, Ward Berenschot (2011a and 2011b) has proffered a fourth theory to account for the spatial variation question. Through neighborhood-level comparisons of riot-ridden and peaceful localities in Ahmedabad city during 2002 Gujarat riots, his work found that violence largely occurred in those areas where a) politicians stood to gain from communal violence and b) inhabitants depended on patronage networks as a means to access state institutions. For instance, he skillfully demonstrates that where residents were dependent on the discretion of the local MLA (member of Legislative Assembly) to fulfill their everyday needs such as obtaining a death certificate, getting a ration card, or improving the supply of water or electricity in their area, they were more easily mobilized into carrying out riotous violence than those who were comparatively free of such elite control.

Joining these four notable voices on Hindu-Muslim violence in India, Erik Cleven's (2013a) doctoral dissertation has considered the issue of spatial variation in the context of Kenya's post-election violence (PEV) of 2007-2008 and the March 2004 riots in Kosovo. Through sub-national comparisons and field research in eight different towns in Kenya and four different towns in Kosovo, Cleven asserts that the presence or absence of 'violence specialists' explains why some towns fell prey to conflict while others did not. For example, in the Kenyan context he shows that areas of high violence were those where either criminal gangs operated— such as in the Kibera slum in Nairobi—or where those tribes were present in large numbers whose traditions emphasized training youth to become warriors—such as the Kalenjin warriors

in the Rift Valley. Contrariwise, in places where these groups were absent, relative peace was maintained.

## CONCEPTUALIZATION AND THEORY

This paper develops a theory to explain *temporal* variations in election-related conflict by studying the patterns of five Kenyan presidential elections. Whereas existing analyses of the spatial variation question have made important contributions to the scholarship on electoral and communal violence, in their current form, none of the five theories discussed above offers an explanation for temporal variances in the outbreak of such conflict. In fact, the very term 'riot-prone' and Varshney's identification of India's eight most 'riot-prone' cities indicates that to some degree, this literature expects violence to endlessly reproduce itself in certain places.[5] By specifically addressing the issue of temporal variation through the selection of sub-national sites where the frequency and intensity of electoral conflict have fluctuated over time, the present analysis offers an important counter to this orthodoxy.

The value added by a longitudinal approach, then, is that it is uniquely capable of explaining how and why patterns of violence evolve over time. Put differently, although analyses of spatial variation (Varshney 2002; Brass 2003; Wilkinson 2004; Berenschot 2011a and 2011b; Cleven 2013a) generate important ideas about the causes and specifically the *maintenance*—of local ethnic peace vis-à-vis ethnic violence—temporally oriented arguments provide crucial clues for understanding the sources of quiescence in previously 'conflict-prone' communities and also for avoiding the outbreak of violence in peaceful sites.

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[5] This is one of the issues on which Varshney's work has faced considerable criticism. For instance, as Vinod K. Jairath (2005, p 453) has argued, by delineating a distinction between 'riot-prone' and peaceful cities in India, 'the variance[s] become frozen in time for Varshney and he ends up with a kind of essentialism [that] prevents him from seeing and explaining the possibility for change'.

CONCEPTUALIZATION

This research conceptualizes the differences between persistent electoral violence and relative peace by proposing a classificatory typology based on two dimensions of such conflict: its frequency and its intensity. Thus, I develop four ideal types, which are shown in Figure 1 below. *Recurring and severe violence* is characterized by high intensity and high frequency conflict. Places marked by high frequency but low intensity conflict are categorized as cases of *mild* violence while *unrepeating* violence is low both in its frequency and in its intensity. These 'near-miss' or 'borderline' cases are particularly important to make better sense of the transformation of electoral violence over time (Horowitz 2001, pp 478-479). The fourth category of electoral violence—which I term *episodic violence*—entails sporadic or irregular conflict of a high intensity. This category, then, applies to those cases that have historically been free of electoral violence but suddenly and unexpectedly explode into conflict around an election.

**Figure 1**

**Typology of Electoral Violence (studied over time)**

|  | **Low Frequency** | **High Frequency** |
|---|---|---|
| **Low Intensity** | *Unrepeating Electoral Violence* | *Mild Electoral Violence* |
| **High Intensity** | *Episodic Electoral Violence* | *Recurring and Severe Electoral Violence* |

In addition to these four ideal types, a fifth category that this article considers is when complete peace is maintained during an election cycle and *no electoral violence* occurs. My theory posits that whereas quiescence can be gleaned when recurring and severe electoral violence turns into mild, unrepeating, episodic, or no violence, conflict escalation involves the reverse trajectory.

THEORY

By tracing the evolution of patterns of electoral violence in Kenya through sub-national

comparisons, the ultimate aim of this article is to identify the conditions under which elections

can spark violence and differentiate these circumstances from situations in which electoral

violence is unlikely to occur. In accounting for this variation, my work presents a two-stage

argument. First, it posits that elite choices about political coalition-building most proximately

explain changes in the frequency and intensity of electoral violence over time. More specifically,

this article argues that when politicians yoke or coalesce previously antagonistic ethnic groups—

such as Kikuyus and Kalenjins in the Rift Valley or Luos and Mijikenda in the Coast—and build

alliances between these communities, election-related violence is unlikely to occur even in those

places where there has been a history of such conflict. Second, my research contends that

politicians' decisions to unite historically rival communities do not reflect their commitments to

ensuring the conduct of a peaceful election per se. Instead, I find that these alliances have

typically emerged when unique domestic and international developments drove elites to unite

ethnic antagonists in coalitions of convenience.

THE POLITICS OF COALITION-BUILDING IN KENYA

The term 'political coalition', as employed by this article, refers to a range of formal and

informal alliances that political parties build among themselves. As Svetlana Chrenykh has

posited, generally speaking, political coalitions can take the form of policy coalitions, legislative

coalitions, or electoral coalitions and this study, in particular, focuses on electoral coalitions in

Kenya.[6] Contrary to legislative coalitions that are often formed through post-election pacts,

electoral coalitions tend to be put together and solidified prior to going to the polls. The March

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[6] Chernykh, S. 2013. 'The Tools Presidents Use to Manage Coalitions;' talk delivered at The
Nairobi Safari Club on 9 December 2013.

2013 Kenyan presidential election, for instance, involved a contest between eight presidential

candidates. Three of these candidates, who were indeed the main competitors in the race, vied for

the presidency using electoral coalitions: Uhuru Kenyatta led the Jubilee Alliance, Raila Odinga

commanded the Coalition for Reform and Democracy (CORD), and Musalia Mudavadi was at

the helm of the Amani Alliance. Although Mudavadi, who comes from the Luhya community,

was initially allied with Jubilee, he eventually broke away from this coalition and formally

established Amani on January 4, 2013. In the presidential polls that followed, Mudavadi finished

in third place behind Kenyatta, an ethnic Kikuyu, and Odinga, an ethnic Luo, respectively.

Like the elections of 1992, 1997, and 2007, the 2013 elections were also fought in an

environment in which leaders from different ethnic groups with distinct tribal support bases

competed for the presidency.[7,8] However, in contrast to these three violent elections, the 2013

contest was a peaceful one. Why was this the case? The subsequent sections of this paper will

demonstrate that the lack of violence is attributable to the fact that Kikuyus and Kalenjins, who

have long been ethnic antagonists, united to support the Jubilee Alliance and, thus, the

possibilities for conflict in 2013 were greatly diminished.

At a broader level, furthermore, the birth of this unlikely union aligns with the

conventional wisdom on parties and electoral politics in Kenya. As Sebastian Elischer (2013, p

95) has argued, ever since independence 'all significant parties in Kenya' have been 'ethnic in

nature' and have been overwhelmingly tied to the identity of the party leader. Consequently, the

creation of electoral alliances has been dictated by 'ethnic-strategic considerations' rather than

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[7] This is in contrast to the 2002 election in which both the presidential candidates—Mwai Kibaki
of NaRC and Uhuru Kenyatta of KANU—belonged to the Kikuyu community. In the subsequent
sections of this article, I trace how this situation came about and also consider its implications for
the maintenance of peace around the 2002 election.
[8] Following convention in Kenya, this article uses the terms 'tribe,' and 'ethnic group,' and
'ethnic community' interchangeably.

ideological commonalities (Elischer 2013, p 95). In 2013, furthermore, these considerations were such that they favored yoking rather than dividing Kikuyus and Kalenjins as had been the case in 1992, 1997, and 2007.

None of this meant to suggest, however, that uniting members of different communities and building multiethnic electoral alliances in Kenya is an easy task to achieve. On the contrary, and as existing work on this topic has persuasively argued, due to the fact that there are forty-two different tribes in the country, political parties that make exclusive ethnic appeals to any one group stand no chance of winning national office (Horowitz 2012). Stated differently, in order to be competitive, Kenyan parties must engage in 'mobilization (seeking to increase turnout among existing supporters) and persuasion (seeking to increase vote share by converting powerful swing voters)' simultaneously (Horowitz 2012, p 11).

In this regard, Jeremy Horowitz's work finds that while parties tend to rely on lower-ranking officials for mobilizing members of their own ethnic communities, party leaders typically focus on the goal of persuading swing voters to rally behind them. Along similar lines, Eric Kramon's (2013, p 118) work on vote-buying in Kenya has shown that politicians tend to target their handouts at male supporters of 'somewhat marginal' parties and that they do so particularly in electorally competitive locations. In other words, his research highlights that vote buyers in Kenya 'reach outside their core constituencies to attract new voters' (Kramon 2013, p 118). As the empirical discussion in this article will reveal in greater detail, the distribution of handouts around election season constitutes a distinct element of politics in Kenya' patronage-based democracy. For the moment, however, my point is simply to make the case that the changing ethnic faces of electoral alliances in Kenya are at the heart of the temporal variations in election-related violence that have been observed in the country since the early 1990s.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND CASE SELECTION

The research design for this analysis involved three main components that together comprise a mixed-methods approach. First, I identified variations in the dependent variable through the construction and use of a quantitative dataset on ethnic clashes in Kenya. Second, I collected electoral data through the records of the Electoral Commission of Kenya (ECK) and the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC). Third, over period of five months of fieldwork in Nairobi, Mombasa (in the Coast), and Nakuru and Eldoret (in the Rift Valley), I conducted over 90 elite interviews with politicians and political party leaders, police, civil society leaders and political activists, ethnic and religious elites, civil servants, journalists, and academics. However, because the police in Kenya proved to be particularly difficult to access, I interviewed a number of policy and security sector experts. In addition, I also conducted two interviews with internally displaced persons (IDPs) who were forced to flee their homes in the wake of the 2007-2008 post-election violence (PEV). Due to the sensitive nature of this project, however, when citing an interview, I withhold the name and position of the respondent so as to maintain his or her anonymity.

The dataset constructed for the purposes of this project contains information on ethnic clashes that was collected from reports of NGOs such as Amnesty International, documentation produced by the Kenyan Human Rights Commission (KHRC) and the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR), official commission reports such as the 2008 Commission of Inquiry into Post-Election Violence (also known as the Waki report), the scholarship of experts on electoral and ethnic conflict in the country, and Kenyan newspaper sources. The analysis of this dataset revealed three important findings that guided my case selection.

First, I found that although electoral violence has been a recurring phenomenon in Kenya since 1992, the dynamics of this violence have been neither temporally nor spatially uniform. In fact, while three of Kenya's presidential elections—1992, 1997, and 2007—have been accompanied by high-intensity conflict, the elections of 2002 and 2013 were largely free of violence. Moreover, even during violent election periods, there has been notable sub-national variation as to where ethnic clashes have occurred. Whereas certain provinces—such as the Rift Valley—have experienced conflict each time around, others such as the Coast, Western, and Nyanza provinces have fallen prey to inter-ethnic conflict only during particular elections.

**Figure 2**

**Provinces affected by Electoral Violence in Kenya's Presidential Elections (1992-2013)**
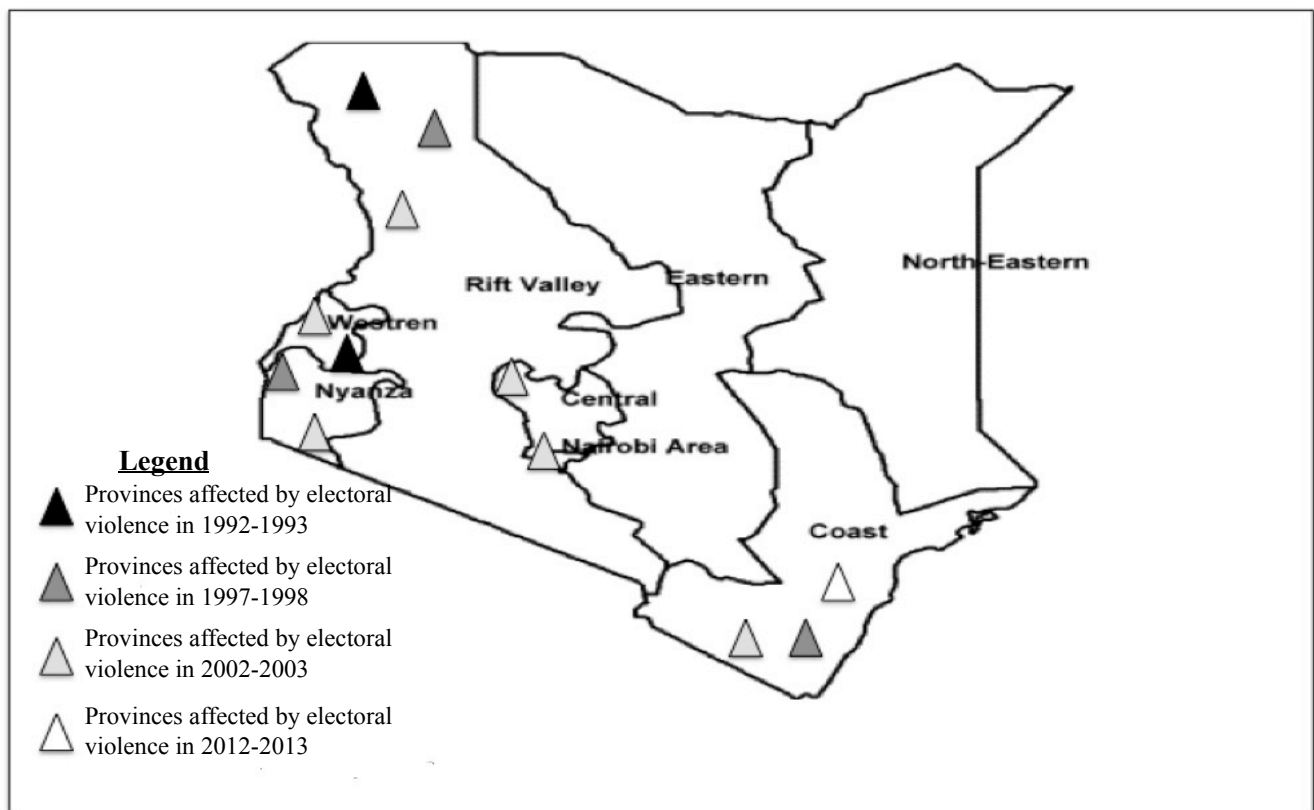


Second, based on key indicators included in my dataset, namely, death tolls, injury counts, displacement figures, and the number towns and villages in which violence occurred, the

province emerged as the relevant unit of analysis.[9] Third, and finally, upon comparing these

measures over time, the patterns of violence in the Rift Valley vis-à-vis the Coast brought to

light an important variation (*see* Figure 3). While 127 people died in the Coast in the 1997-1998

clashes and another 100 000 were displaced in violence that engulfed three of the province's

former seven districts, in 2007-2008, this area remained relatively quiet—recording death tolls

and displacement counts of 27 and 1 200 respectively. Moreover, the violence in 2007-2008 was

restricted to Mombasa. Thus, even though it was the epicenter of election-related conflict in

1997-1998, ten years later, the Coast was marked by *mild* electoral violence. More recently,

however, this trajectory has changed once again: prior to the 2013 presidential elections, ethnic

conflict in the Coast escalated—particularly in the Tana River county—where over 100 people

were killed between August 2012 and January 2013.

Meanwhile, longitudinal data analysis suggests that the Rift Valley is an area that has

repeatedly witnessed deadly clashes in each of Kenya's violent elections. Furthermore, in the

post-election violence (PEV) of 2007-2008, over 700 people died, 330 000 were displaced, and

conflict occurred in numerous towns and villages, making the Rift Valley the worst affected

province in the country.

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[9] Admittedly, with the implementation of a new county system in Kenya, the province is now a defunct unit in the country's administration. However, all three violent elections took place when the provincial system of government was still in force. Additionally, the patterns of election-related conflict during these periods varied at the level of the province. Thus, constructing a comparative study with the province as the unit of analysis is a defensible choice. Nonetheless, in my dataset, for cases of violence that occurred under the new county system, I categorize these incidents as such rather than referring to previous administrative categories such as provinces, districts, and divisions that are no longer in use.

**Figure 3**

**Longitudinal Data on Death Tolls and Displacement Figures during Episodes of Electoral Violence in the Rift Valley and Coast Provinces, Kenya (1992-2013)**
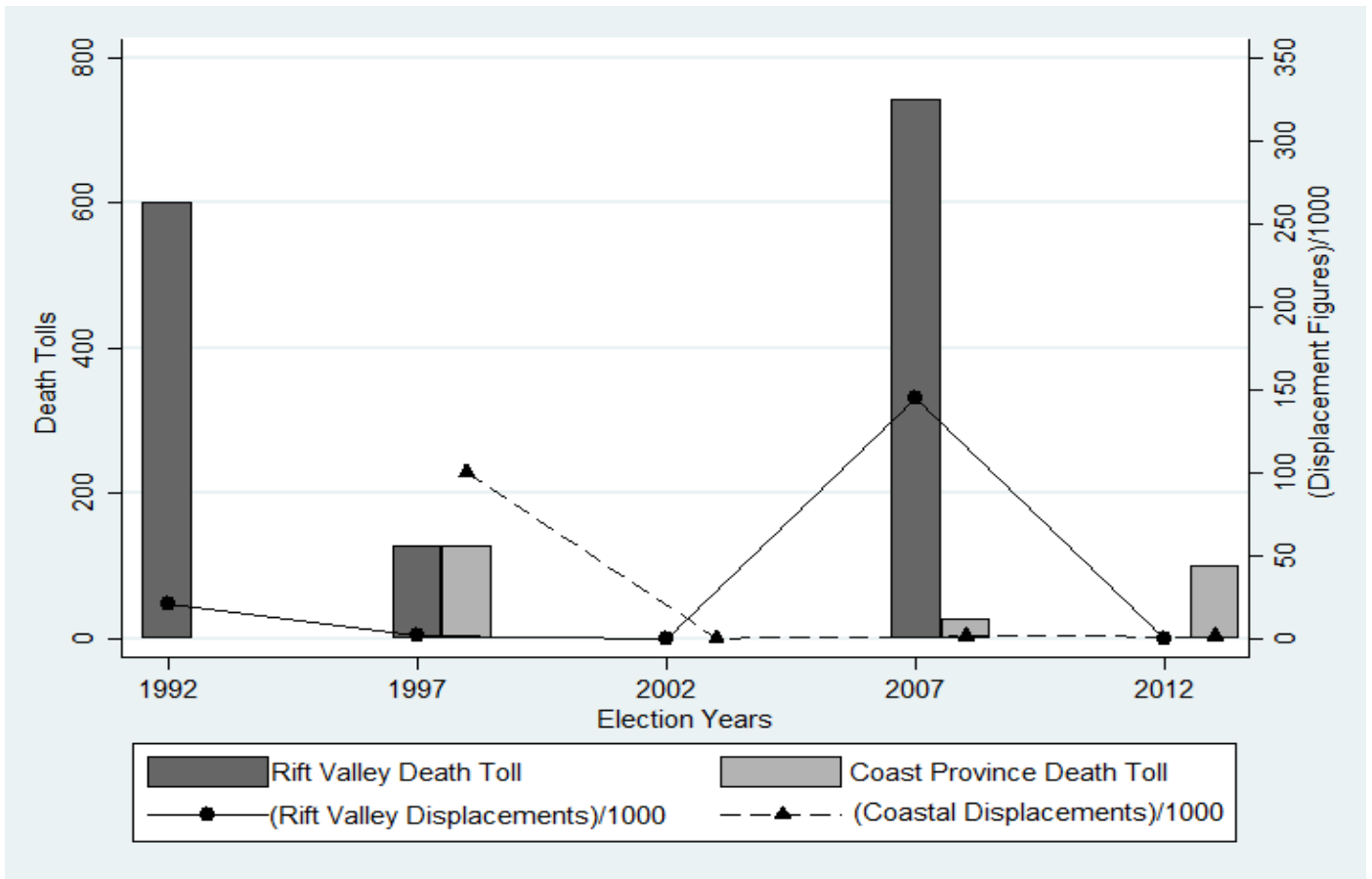


What explains the fluctuating levels of election-related violence—and the recent escalation in conflict—in the Coast compared to the Rift Valley? In presenting the empirical data to account for this variation, the forthcoming analysis begins by making the case for an interpretation of Kenya as a 'patronage-democracy' in which both elites and voters engage in distinct types of behaviors (Chandra 2004, p 6). Generally speaking, these behaviors are marked by voting along tribal lines among the citizens and the construction of ethnic rather than ideologically grounded parties among politicians. The paper then proceeds to highlighting how, at notable critical junctures in Kenya's political history, elites have gone about transforming existing ethnic fault-lines and building new alliances they believe will offer them an electoral

advantage at the polls. When these coalitions have yoked rather than separated rival ethnic groups, moreover, I find that presidential elections in the country have been peaceful.

## ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

## KENYA AS A PATRONAGE-DEMOCRACY

In her work on ethnic parties in India, Kanchan Chandra (2004, p 6), defined a patronage-democracy as 'a democracy in which the state monopolizes access to jobs and services, *and* in which elected officials have discretion in the implementation of laws allocating the jobs and services at the disposal of the state'. She further states, 'the key aspect of a patronage-democracy is not simply the size of the state but the power of elected officials to distribute the vast resources controlled by the state to voters on an *individualized* basis, by exercising their discretion in the implementation of state policies' (Chandra 2004, p 6). Based on this conceptualization, her book then traces the unique elite and voter behaviors that typify India's clientelistic democracy. She also argues that in patronage-based democracies, 'individual voters and elites…are motivated by a desire for either material or psychic goods or some combination of the two' (Chandra 2004, p 11).

Drawing on evidence collected through field interviews in Kenya, this article proposes that it would be fair to cast the country as a patronage-democracy, where the logic of clientelism operates as follows. First, politicians rely on patronage means to ascend to power. According to a report produced by the Kenya Episcopal Conference and the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (2007: p 62), for instance, handouts function 'as a very important tool [as they are] used by aspiring as well as incumbent politicians (MPs and councilors) to influence voters'. Second, individual voters are driven by a desire to see their own co-ethnics in office. This is because having leaders from their own communities occupying cabinet positions is 'construed by

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many citizens as a way of rewarding loyalty and more importantly, as a mechanism for accessing

more of the national cake' (KEC-CJPC and Dan Church Aid 2007, pp 65-66). As one

interviewee told me, 'we vote tribally so that we can also have our turn to eat'.[10]

Even under the newly-elected Jubilee government—which campaigned heavily on the

platforms of ethnic peace and national unity—it doesn't appear that the politics of patronage is

going to disappear from Kenya anytime soon. A politician in Mombasa, for instance, stated:

> The politics of issues has not yet taken root in Kenya. The politics
> of patronage are still very strong. So everybody knows that if the
> President is a Kikuyu, the Kikuyus will get the plum appointments
> but if the President is a Luo, the Luos will get the plum
> appointments. Look at Ruto. Ruto is the Deputy President now and
> he is a Kalenjin. Look at his ministerial appointments:
> Agriculture—Koskei (Kalenjin), Finance—Kalenjin, Energy—
> Kalenjin. You see, the pattern is continuing.[11]

It seems, therefore, that ethnicity plays a critical role in the distribution of portfolios among the

political class in Kenya. Whether or not benefits from such appointments percolate down to the

voters, however, is a matter of debate. In conducting interviews in the Rift Valley, for instance,

while some Kalenjin interviewees told me that their community was still impoverished even

though their co-ethnic Moi had served as President for twenty-four years, others opined that

unless he had been in power, the airport in Eldoret in the North Rift would never have been built.

Nonetheless, on balance, existing research on this issue has suggested that there is no

significant positive correlation between being appointed into cabinet and the subsequent level of

development in a particular area or among a particular community (KEC-CJPCA and Dan Aid

2007). In fact, according to Jacqueline Klopp (2001a, p 30), since the early 1990s a situation of

'patronage inflation' has emerged in Kenya under which the promises of patronage resources

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[10] Interview with a civil society leader, Mombasa, 25 September 2013.

[11] Interview with a Wiper Democratic party official, Mombasa, 5 October 2013.

have exceeded their actual distribution. It also appears that presently, ordinary Kenyans are

aware of the fact that politicians only reach out to them during election time. For instance, Eric

Cleven's (2013a, p 91) interviews among Kenyan youth found that their involvement in politics

was 'connected with the expectation of getting "something small", a handout of Ksh 100-200' or

$ 1.25-2.50. As one Nairobi youth told him, 'We don't talk much about politics. People aren't so

involved. Youth go [to political rallies] because they know they will get money' (Cleven 2013a,

p 91).

These inducements have also proved effective in mobilizing election-related conflict in

Kenya in the past. For instance, in the context of the post-election violence of 2007-2008, Cleven

(2013a, p 156) found that Luo youth in Kibera were paid as little as KSh 500-800 to burn down

the houses of PNU supporters (particularly Kikuyus). In sum, then, it appears that while

politicians in Kenya rely on patronage as a means to gain the material goods associated with

being in power, the voting behavior of citizens is motivated by a combination of material (small

handouts) and psychic or perceived benefits associated with having leaders from their ethnic

communities in office.

### 'IN KENYAN POLITICS, THERE ARE NO PERMANENT ENEMIES'[12]: THE CHANGING ETHNIC FACES OF ELECTORAL COALITIONS IN KENYA'S MULTI-PARTY ELECTIONS (1992-2013)

Against this background, multiparty elections in Kenya should be understood as periods in which

politicians have used ethnicity and tribal loyalties as tools to rise to power. Owing to the

negotiation and re-negotiation of ethnic fault-lines, furthermore, not only have there been

temporal variations in frequency and intensity of ethnic clashes around elections, but even during

the elections that have been violent, the parties to such conflict have varied. Nonetheless, when

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[12] Interview with a senior police officer, Mombasa, 3 October 2013.

one studies those elections around which conflict has occurred, some important commonalities

come to light. Consider the evidence offered below.

First, in the violence in 1992-1993, the electoral playing field was such that Kalenjin and

Maasai, who were allied with KANU, attacked local Luos and Kikuyus, who were supporting

their co-ethnic candidates Oginga Odgina of FORD-Kenya, and Kenneth Matiba and Mwai

Kibaki of FORD-Asili and the Democratic Party, respectively.

**Table 1**

**The 1992 Election: Candidates, Major Political Parties, and Adversaries[13]**

| Candidate[14] | Political Party | Ethnicity | Support[15] |
|---|---|---|---|
| Daniel arap Moi (Incumbent) | KANU | Kalenjin | 93% Kalenjin, 79% Mijikenda, 78% Somali, 78% Maasai, 35% Luhya |
| Kenneth Matiba | FORD-Asili | Kikuyu | 58% Kikuyu, 40% Luhya |
| Mwai Kibaki | Democratic Party | Kikuyu | 35% Kikuyu, 73% Meru, 25% Kisii, 5% Luhya |
| Raila Odinga | FORD-Kenya | Luo | 95% Luo, 22% Luhya |
| | **Attackers** | **Victims** | |
| | Maasai, Kalenjin | Kikuyu, Luo, Luhya | |

Similar patterns also characterized the outbreak of electoral violence in the Coast around the

1997 election. The main victims of these ethnic disturbances—popularly known as the *kaya*

*bombo* clashes—were members of the *wabara* or up-country Luo community in Likoni and the

Kikuyus in Kwale who were attacked by the indigenous Mijikenda and particularly by members

of the Digo sub-tribe (Mazrui 1997). Looking more closely at the electoral preferences of the

Digo, Luo, and the Kikuyu once again helps us explain the lines along which conflict took place:

the Digo—and the Mijikenda more generally—supported the incumbent Moi and his KANU

party, while the Luos and Kikuyus rallied behind their co-ethnic leaders Raila Odinga (Oginga

[13] Source: Cleven 2013a, p 34.
[14] Organized by vote share from highest to lowest.
[15] Source: Approximate estimates based on Hornsby, 2012.

Odinga's son) of the National Democratic Party and Mwai Kibaki of the Democratic Party,

respectively. The simultaneous violence that took place in the Rift Valley followed a comparable

logic. As in 1992, KANU won the support of local Kalenjins and Maasais. Meanwhile, like their

co-ethnics in the Coast, the Kikuyus here aligned with Kibaki and the Luos rallied behind

Odinga.

**Table 2**

**The 1997 Election: Candidates, Major Political Parties, and Adversaries[16]**

| Candidate[17] | Political Party | Ethnicity | Support[18] |
|---|---|---|---|
| Daniel arap Moi (Incumbent) | KANU | Kalenjin | 90% Kalenjin, 70% Mijikenda, 73% Simali, 77% Maasai, 40% Luhya |
| Mwai Kibaki | Democratic Party | Kikuyu | 85% Kikuyu, 48% Kisii, 60% Meru |
| Raila Odinga | National Democratic Party | Luo | 84% Luo |
| Michael Wamalwa | FORD-Kenya | Luhya | 52% Luhya |
| Charity Ngilu | Social Democratic Party | Kamba | 64% Kamba |
| | **Attackers** | **Victims** | |
| | Maasai, Kalenjin, Kuria, Samburu | Kikuyu, Luo, Kisii | |

Despite this troubling correlation between presidential elections and the outbreak of

ethnic violence in Kenya, the country's third election of 2002 was remarkably peaceful. Contrary

to the contests of 1992 and 1997, in which the leaders from different ethnic groups with distinct

support bases had vied for the presidency, this time around both the main candidates—Uhuru

Kenyatta and Mwai Kibaki—came from the Kikuyu community. Consequently, as one of my

interviewees stated, 'the ethnic character of politics was neutralized in 2002'.[19] Elsewhere, Peter

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[16] Source: Cleven, 2013a, p 34.
[17] Organized by vote share from highest to lowest.
[18] Source: Approximate estimates based on Hornsby, 2012.
[19] Interview with a political analyst, Nairobi, 15 October 2013.

Kagwanja has argued that the 2002 Kenyan election was fought on generational terms rather than on the basis of ethnic identities.

Apart from being a largely calm contest, this election was also unique because it was the first one since the restoration of multipartyism in Kenya in which the opposition parties united and succeeded in ousting KANU from power. Having served two terms as President, Moi was constitutionally barred from standing from re-election and had to appoint a successor who would be KANU's presidential candidate. He made the controversial decision of putting his faith in the young and relatively inexperienced Uhuru, which, in turn, led to the departure of a number of senior politicians, including Raila Odinga and George Saitoti, from the party. These men then joined hands with opposition leaders Mwai Kibaki, Charity Ngilu, and Michael Kijana Wamalwa to create the multi-ethnic National Rainbow Coalition (NaRC). In other words, while the appointment of Kenyatta 'conflated Kikuyu-Kalenjin elite interests' within KANU, it also led to its defeat in the election (Kanyinga 2009, p 338). In the words of one interviewee:

> Moi by appointing Uhuru destroyed KANU [because in 2002] KANU was a coalition of many tribes. KANU brought in Kalonzo, which brought in the Kambas; it brought in Mudavadi and Ratangula, which brought in the Luhyas. At that point in time he even had the Luos and with Uhuru there, he even had the Kikuyus or some of the Kikuyus. So it was a very nice fabric of Kenya. In 2002, KANU was the most representative party in Kenya tribal wise. So when he forced Uhuru on these people, overnight it went from being the strongest party to being a shell.[20]

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[20] Interview with a Wiper Democratic Party official, Mombasa, 3 October 2013.

**Table 3**

**The 2002 Election: Candidates, Major Political Parties, and Adversaries[21]**

| Candidate[22] | Political Party | Ethnicity | Support[23] |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mwai Kibaki | NaRC | Kikuyu | 68% Kikuyu, 77% Luhya, 93% Luo, 78% Kamba, 25% Kalenjin, 65% Mijikenda, 73% Somali, 50% Maasai |
| Uhuru Kenyatta | KANU | Kikuyu | 30% Kikuyu, 67% Kalenjin, 64% Somali, 45% Maasai |
| Simeon Nyachae | FORD-People | Kisii | 85% Kisii |
| | **No Violence** | | |

As the preceding discussion illustrates, however, the emergence of NaRC and the subsequent peaceful election did not come about because politicians were particularly committed to maintaining ethnic calm. Rather, a unique set of circumstances—the fact that Moi could not stand for re-election and his controversial appointment of Kenyatta as his successor—set into motion a number of domestic developments that when combined, precluded the outbreak of electoral violence.

Unfortunately, however, the peace of 2002 was not to be a lasting one and at the heart of the devastating post-election violence (PEV) of 2007-2008 was once again a Kikuyu-Kalenjin electoral divide. Despite having been loyal to KANU in the past three elections, in 2007, the Kalenjins of the Rift Valley got swept up in what Gabrielle Lynch (2008, p 541) has termed 'the ODM wave'. The ODM or the Orange Democratic Movement party—headed by Raila Odinga— competed in the 2007 elections against the fragmented Party of National Unity (PNU) coalition that was led by the sitting President Kibaki. Even though Odinga was a Luo and thus came from a group that the Kalenjins had attacked in 1992-1993, this time by making two key moves, he succeeded in amassing widespread Kalenjin support.

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[21] Source: Cleven, 2013a, p 36.
[22] Organized by vote share from highest to lowest.
[23] Source: Approximate estimates based on Hornsby, 2012.

First, he tapped into issues that Kalenjins cared about—such as decentralization and land reform—and by doing so, he put ODM in a position where it was able to mount a locally relevant campaign in the Rift Valley. Second, by integrating a notable Kalenjin politician, William Ruto, into the top leadership of the party, Raila Odinga was able to credibly suggest to Kalenjin voters that should he win, he would ensure that their leaders and interests would be represented in government.

Overall then, as in 1992 and 1997, elite choices in 2007 drew a line in the sand between the Kalenjin and the Kikuyu. When Kibaki was declared victorious, therefore, Kikuyus—being PNU supporters—were seen as being responsible for perpetuating and participating in electoral fraud. This time, moreover, rather being attacked by Kalenjins, they were also attacked by Luos who had supported Odinga.

As opposed to the Rift Valley that fell prey to its previous patterns of electoral violence, the Coast proved to be relatively resilient in 2007-2008. The clashes that did occur, furthermore, were patently mild in nature, both compared to the violence that had occurred here a decade earlier and compared to the contemporaneous violence of the Rift Valley. In this area too, Odinga appointed a local ethnic leader, Najib Balala, to a senior leadership position within ODM and relied on his appeal to win the confidence and support of the coastal communities. He also promised to address their grievances regarding land. Much like in the Rift Valley, then, ODM's success in the Coast in 2007 came down to two key factors. First, the party mobilized Luos to support it in the election. Second, it was able to successfully persuade indigenous coastal groups to put their faith in Odinga.

When the election results were announced, therefore, the subsequent clashes exclusively targeted Kikuyus. In other words, the *wabara*-indigenous fault-line of 1997 had been

transformed into a Kikuyu-non-Kikuyu divide by 2007; this re-negotiation of ethnic divisions,

furthermore, ultimately protected this region from violence of the scale that occurred in the Rift

Valley.

**Table 4**

**The 2007 Election: Candidates, Major Political Parties, and Adversaries[24]**

| Candidate[25] | Political Party | Ethnicity | Support[26] |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mwai Kibaki (Incumbent) | PNU | Kikuyu | 93% Kikuyu, 34% Luhya, 50% Somali, 30% Maasai, 15% Kalenjin, 53% Kisii, 30% Mijikenda |
| Raila Odinga | ODM | Luo | 99% Luo, 85% Kalenjin, 63% Luhya, 63% Mijikenda |
| Kalonzo Musyoka | ODM-Kenya | Kamba | 83% Kamba |
| | **Attackers** | **Victims** | |
| | Luo, Kalenjin, Mijikenda | Kikuyus, Kisii | |

Between August 2012 and January 2013, however, the Coast once again proved to be

vulnerable to conflict and this time, ethnic clashes erupted in the Tana River county. Because the

official reports on this matter have not been released to researchers, however, reaching any

conclusions about whether or not these disturbances were akin to previous incidents of electoral

violence in Kenya would be premature. Nonetheless, by looking at the 2013 county election

results for Tana River, it is possible to make some preliminary assessments about why the

clashes may have occurred.

The Tana River area is inhabited by three main ethnic groups: the agricultural Pokomo,

and the pastoralist Orma and Wardey. Until 2012, most of the elites who had been elected into

government from Tana River had come the Pokomo community. Following the 2013 election,

however, all of the leadership positions fell to the Orma and Wardey groups.

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[24] Source: Cleven, 2013a, 35.
[25] Organized by vote share from highest to lowest.
[26] Source: Approximate estimated based on Hornsby, 2012.

**Table 5**

**Elected Representatives in Tana River County after the 2013 Election**[27]

| Name | Position | Ethnicity |
|------|----------|-----------|
| Tuneya Hussein Dado | Governor | Orma |
| Ali Andi Bule | Senator | Wardey |
| Duri Halima Ware | Woman's Representative | Orma |
| Sani Ibrahim Ahmed | Member of Parliament | Wardey |
| Wario Ali | Member of Parliament | Orma |
| Dukicha Hassan Abdi | Member of Parliament | Wardey |

According to civil society leaders who have conducted research on these disturbances and interviewed residents from the area, in the clashes that occurred in 2012, members of the Orma community purportedly attacked Pokomos who then retaliated violently (KNCHR 2012). It is also alleged that as a means to foment these clashes and mobilize their respective ethnic communities, elites on either side of the conflict politicized local grievances about resource distribution including the issue of accessing water from the river.[28]

It appears, then, that the violence in Tana River is indicative of an additional facet about voter behavior in Kenya. Specifically, in multiethnic areas where there is overwhelming support for a particular presidential candidate (in this case Raila Odinga of CORD), local-level violence can nevertheless occur if citizens from different ethnic communities are keen about having members of their own tribe elected to local government. By removing the Pokomo from government positions, therefore, the two pastoralist groups in Tana may have hoped that they would have a greater chance at accessing state resources.

In contrast to this episodic violence in Tana River, the Rift Valley remained peaceful during the 2013 elections. Unlike the elections of the 1990s and 2007, moreover, this time around an alliance was built between the Kikuyus and Kalenjins. At the heart of this union was

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[27] Source: Data collected by the Kenya National Commission for Human Rights (KNCHR) Coast Office, accessed by the author on 25 September 2013.

[28] Interview with a civil society leader, Nairobi, 8 February 2013.

an elite partnership between two leaders, Uhuru Kenyatta (Kikuyu) and William Ruto (Kalenjin), who had joined hands following a number of important domestic developments. First, Ruto had fallen out with Raila over the issue of evicting Kalenjins from the Mau Forest complex in the Rift Valley. Second, following the 2007-2008 post-election violence (PEV), elders from the Kalenjin and Kikuyu communities had pressured these leaders to join hands.[29] Owing to the fact that like many other politicians in Kenya, both Kenyatta and Ruto rely on local ethnic leaders such as the community elders to win them favor among their constituents, these demands to come together had to be taken seriously.

Overall, moreover, the birth of the Jubilee alliance seemed like a good idea in theory as it offered Kenyatta and Ruto a promising opportunity to ascend to power by consolidating their populous ethnic communities behind them.[30] However, given the long-standing history of violence and inter-ethnic grievances between these two groups, actually winning the support of Kikuyus and Kalenjins was not going to be an easy task.

It is precisely at this juncture that the ICC investigations and indictments against Uhuru and Ruto entered the scene. In January 2012, the Pre-Trial Chamber of the International Criminal Court confirmed charges against the two leaders for allegedly organizing the violence in the Rift Valley in 2007-2008. Ruto was accused of 'forming a hierarchical network to inflict crimes against humanity, principally among Kikuyu supporters of Kibaki's PNU in the North Rift Valley' (Mueller 2014, p 27). Kenyatta, on the other hand, was charged 'with creating an organization that hired a Kikuyu militia, the Mungiki, to inflict retaliatory violence against

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[29] Interview with a Kikuyu elder, Nakuru, 25 October 2013 and interview with a Kalenjin elder, Eldoret, 5 November, 2013. Also, refer to Gabrielle Lynch's (2014) work for more details on this matter.

[30] After all, according to the 2009 Kenyan census, Kikuyus make up seventeen per cent of the national population while Kalenjins account for thirteen per cent (International Crisis Group 2013, p 13).

ODM's Luo supporters in Nakuru and Naivasha towns in the central Rift Valley' (Mueller 2014,

p 27).

Once they came together, 'Uhuruto', as they came to be known, used the intervention by

the ICC as a campaign tool to mobilize their supporters behind Jubilee. Not only did they attack

the court for going after African leaders, but they also argued that if they were to be found guilty

at the Hague, it would be tantamount to their entire communities being punished.[31] As one

political party leader in Nairobi told me,

> Their [Kenyatta and Ruto's] main message during the campaigns
> was, 'We are being sacrificed. We are being sacrificed. So vote us
> in'. So they mobilized their tribes. They said, 'It's the tribes that
> are on trial. It is not the individuals. It is the Kalenjins who fought
> so they are on trial. It is the Kikuyus who defended themselves so
> they are on trial'…So what happened is that the Kalenjins were not
> voting for Uhuru; they were voting for Ruto to save him as their
> leader from the ICC and vice-versa for Kikuyus.[32]

As in 2002, therefore, and despite many statements to the contrary made by the Jubilee

leadership, the 2013 election was not relatively peaceful because politicians were dedicated to

achieving this goal. On the contrary, because of the fallout between Odinga and Ruto and the

subsequent community-level pressures on him and Kenyatta to come together, Jubilee was born

in a distinctive context that favored uniting Kikuyus and Kalenjins in what many respondents

referred to as 'a marriage of convenience'. In the words of on scholar on the subject, then, the

Jubilee coalition was merely the presentation of an old wine in a new skin because, as in the past,

the electoral alliances in 2013 had been expediently cobbled together so as to obtain 'control of

the state' (Shilaho 2013, p 89).

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[31] Refer to Lynch (2014) for a detailed discussion about how the Jubilee Alliance used the ICC issue to consolidate Kikuyu and Kalenjin support in the Rift Valley.
[32] Interview with a United Democratic Forum (UDF) party official, Nairobi, 18 October, 2013.

ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS

While the preceding section put forth the empirical data bolster the theoretical claims presented

in this article, I now turn to evaluating the salience of some important rival explanations about

the outbreak of election-related conflict. Specifically, the forthcoming discussion will consider

the relevance of Wilkinson's argument about the relationship between inter-party competition

and communal violence, Varshney's thesis about civil society, and Catherine Boone's work on

politically-allocated land rights and electoral violence in Kenya. It will then also assess the

relevance of a rival hypothesis that I heard during many field interviews: that peaceful elections

in Kenya have occurred in those periods when the incumbent has *not* been competing for the

presidency.

In regards to Wilkinson's work on the electoral incentives for the outbreak of communal

violence in India, he has argued that changes in the level of political competition or party

fractionalization (measured by the effective number of parties) account for alterations in the

ethnic composition of political coalitions. However, in Kenya, it appears that the level of

electoral competition is a *consequence* rather than a *cause* of alliance-building. Consider the data

presented in Table 6 below.[33]

Based on Wilkinson's categorization (2-3.5 ENPV), the levels of political

fractionalization in the Coast in 1992, 1997, and 2007 and those is the Rift Valley in 2002

represent bipolar party systems, in which, depending on the incumbent regime's reliance on

votes from communities outside its own ethnic support base, violence may or may not occur. The

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[33] The effective number of parties or ENPV score is calculated by the formula proposed by
Laasko and Taagepera (1979). $ENPV = 1/\Sigma v_i^2$ where $v_i$ is the vote share of the *i*th party
(Wilkinson 2004: 7; footnote 17 and Laasko and Taagepera 1979).

remaining cells, however, are instances of unipolarity (ENPV <2), where Wilkinson's theory

would stipulate that it is unlikely for electoral violence to occur.

**Table 6**

**Party Fractionalization in Kenya's Rift Valley and Coast Provinces (1992-2013)[34]**

| Election Year | ENPV Score (Rift Valley Province) | ENPV Score (Coast Province) |
|---|---|---|
| 1992 | 1.985 | 2.195 |
| 1997 | 1.881 | 2.300 |
| 2002 | 2.120 | 1.977 |
| 2007 | 1.887 | 2.142 |
| 2013 | 1.829 | 1.775 |

And yet, electoral conflict in Kenya has often taken place in unipolar party settings as in

the Rift Valley in 1992, 1997, and 2007 and in the Coast in 2013. The present analysis argues

that these inconsistencies in the portability of Wilkinson's theory outside India can actually be

explained when one takes into account the fact that in the Kenyan context, the strategies of

political parties over matters such as coalition-building *structure* rather than emerge out of the

competitiveness of the electoral race. In 1992 and 1997, for instance, by driving ethnic wedges

amongst voters of different ethnic communities in the Rift Valley and by successfully

fragmenting the opposition, KANU garnered 67.8 and 69.5 per cent of the total votes cast in the

province, respectively. In contrast, the parties that finished in second place in each of these

elections—FORD-Asili and the Democratic Party—only amassed 18.7 and 21 per cent of the

votes.

Similarly, in 2013, by joining together Kikuyus and Kalenjins—who are the two largest

groups in the Rift Valley—Jubilee attained a majority of 68.9 per cent of the total votes cast in

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[34] The ENPV scores have been calculated using data from Throup and Hornsby (1998, p 435) for the 1992 election, the records of the Election Commission of Kenya (ECK) for the 1997, 2002, and 2007 elections, and the records of the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) for the 2013 election.

this area. Contrariwise, with the support of 71.5 per cent of the electorate, the Coast fell to

CORD, whose electoral strategy was based on building a bridge between Luos and the

indigenous coastal communities. In fact, several interviewees in Mombasa told me that from

their perspective, voting for CORD in 2013 was an easy decision to make: supporting Jubilee

wasn't an option because the coalition was led by a Kikuyu whose community—and family—is

widely perceived as being responsible for displacing the local Mijikenda from their ancestral

lands. In other words, 'the prospect of having Uhuru as President pulled at long-held anxieties

among the coastal people of having a Kikuyu in power'.[35] The remaining six candidates,

moreover, had little to no appeal in the region.

When considered in the context of Kenya, Varshney's argument about the potential for

local civil society associations to bridge communal divides also finds little explanatory purchase

for the puzzle at hand. This is because unlike in India, where civic associations are comprised of

voluntary, membership-based organizations, the composition of civil society in Kenya is

considerably wider. International and local NGOs, community-based organizations (CBOs),

traditional tribal structures and practices, and some voluntary organizations all make up the arena

of civil society in Kenya.

In regards to Kenyan NGOs and CBOs specifically, these organizations are typically

comprised of paid professionals and thus don't correspond with the voluntary associations that

Varshney is concerned with in his work. Perhaps more importantly, the vast majority of

employees of these organizations come from the larger and more educated ethnic groups in the

country, such as the Kikuyus and Luos. In other words, NGOs in Kenya do not provide

opportunities for building horizontal networks between members of different communities,

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[35] Interview: Wiper Democratic Party politician, Mombasa, 27 September 2013.

which Varshney argues is necessary for the emergence and maintenance of communal harmony.

Finally, as Adam Branch's (2011) work on NGOs in Uganda has persuasively shown, most

NGOs in Kenya are also engaged in perpetuating their own agendas. Speaking about human

rights and development NGOs in particular, one interviewee, for example, told me, 'these groups

pick up an issue and harp on it. They target the hot topics where they feel they will get benefits.

That is the name of the NGO game in Kenya'.[36] In sum, then, this evidence suggests that NGOs

fail to perform the inter-communal bridging roles that one would expect to see if Varshney's

argument was to hold in Kenya.

As far as the more voluntary organizations are concerned, these associations also do not

function as they do in India. While Erik Cleven's work found that certain membership-based

organizations such as associations of *boda-boda* (motorcycle taxi) drivers and landlord

associations did contribute to the de-escalation of post-election violence in some parts of Kenya,

contrary to Varshney's research in India, these organizations were mono-ethnic rather than

multiethnic in their composition. For instance, the *boda-boda* drivers who mobilized to prevent

Luos from escalating riots in Kakamega came predominantly from the Luhya community.

Similarly, the landlord associations in the Kangemi area of Nairobi were comprised mainly of

Kikuyus and their tenants primarily came from the Luhya community. Cleven writes that

because the Luhyas did not vote as a bloc in the 2007 election, neither community had an interest

in organizing violence in Kangemi. On the contrary, the Kikuyu landlords in this area took an

active part in setting up night patrols to keep attackers from other locations such as Kibera from

spreading violence in their neighborhood. Therefore, it appears that while Varshney's research

has provided an important explanation to account for spatial variations in Hindu-Muslim

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[36] Interview: Academic Expert, Nairobi, 9 February 2013.

violence in India, it does not much explicatory power in regards to the issue of temporal variations in election-related ethnic clashes in Kenya.

A third account that has been put forth to make sense of the patterns of electoral violence in Kenya is Catherine Boone's work on land tenure regimes. By first going through reports and articles on the violence that accompanied the 1992 election, Boone identifies the places where ethnic clashes occurred. She then examines data on where the government sponsored land settlement schemes. Her work finds that in 1992, 'the property regime centered on state-allocated land rights structured the geographic pattern of land-related grievances, defined rival constituencies of land claimants, and created opportunities and incentives for ruling elites to manipulate existing land grievances and land-tenure relationships for electoral gain' (Boone 2011, p 1313).

Undoubtedly, grievances about land distribution cannot be removed from any persuasive tale of electoral violence in Kenya. Indeed, the organization and mobilization of ethnic fault-lines in the 1992, 1997, and 2007 elections involved politicizing long-standing land-based grievances between local communities. Furthermore, both in the Rift Valley and in the Coast, conflicts and disaffections about the distribution of land date back to the immediate post-independence years of Jomo Kenyatta's presidency. Coastal communities, such as indigenous Mijikenda for instance, hold that they were reduced to squatters by the arrival of 'up-country' groups such as the Kikuyu and the Luo. The Kalenjin and Maasai of the Rift Valley also claim that the non-indigenous Kikuyus and Luos dispossessed them of their lands. Given these pre-existing grievances, in the era of multiparty politics, leaders learned how and when to strategically wield the land question as an electoral tool. As one interviewee told me:

> During elections, the question of historical land injustices is
> brought up in order to displace these [non-indigenous] communities

> so that they don't affect the outcome. Sometimes in the Rift Valley, for example, you have areas where Kikuyus combined with the other tribes are more than the Kalenjin. So this issue of historical land injustices is brought up in order to remove these groups from the voting process.[37]

Nonetheless, while land has—and continues to be—a volatile issue in Kenya, there are considerable problems with directly connecting the inequalities in the distribution of this resource with the outbreak of election-related conflict. First, contrary to the violence of 1992 and 1997, the violence of 2007-2008 also spread to urban areas in Kenya where land-related grievances are considerably weaker. More importantly, however, and in light of the fact that the 'land question' is yet to be resolved, one would expect politicians to continually exploit this issue for the purposes of inciting election-related conflict. And yet, this has not happened. In fact, as interviewees in Kenya repeatedly told me, land was a non-issue in the run-up to the 2002 and 2013 elections: while the rhetoric around the 2002 election revolved around ousting KANU from power, the 2013 campaigns placed much greater emphasis on the ICC than they did on land grievances. As one interviewee put it,

> The Kalenjin and the Kikuyu are at each other's throats over the issue of land but when it suits the leaders who have a common interest—which Ruto and Uhuru clearly have now with the ICC indictments against them—then those community interests can become secondary.[38]

In sum, then, directly connecting land disputes with the outbreak of electoral violence in Kenya fails to take into account the antecedent variable of precisely where political parties and electoral coalitions go about creating and relying upon existing fault-lines between different ethnic groups in Kenya. When this factor is included, moreover, it becomes clear that disputes around land have not been *causative* election-related conflict in the country; rather these issues have been

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[37] Interview with a civil society leader, Eldoret, 1 November 2013.
[38] Interview with a Wiper Democratic Party official, Mombasa, 5 October 2013.

appropriated at particular moments when politicians stood to make electoral gains from their politicization.

A final rival hypothesis that I heard a number of times during field interviews—and one that is worth considering—is that Kenya's relatively peaceful elections of 2002 and 2013 occurred when the incumbent was not contesting for the presidency. More specifically, then, this account holds that because Moi was constitutionally barred from standing from re-election in 2002, the subsequent was peaceful. Similarly, in light of Kibaki's non-candidature in the 2013 election, violence did not occur. In other words, then, the idea behind this explanation is that the incumbent's desire to hold on to power and re-enter office for a second term is causative of electoral violence in Kenya; when the incumbent is not vying for the presidency, in contrast, a peaceful election can be expected to occur.

While the incumbency account does identify a notable correlation about when ethnic clashes have accompanied presidential elections in Kenya, as in the case of Boone's argument discussed above, this explanation, too, suffers from a number of analytical weaknesses. First, there is no reason to assume that power-seeking ambitions are unique to incumbent leaders. In fact, as Danielle Resnick (2011, p 743) has written, 'the frequency by which coalition members consist of old foes who suddenly become new allies illustrates that ideology is rarely central to coalition-building' in Kenya and that parties and politicians are largely driven by office-seeking ambitions instead. A second weakness of the incumbent factor explanation is that it also fails to pay attention to the ethnic divides that electoral alliance-building engenders among the voters. Put differently, then, this article contends that regardless of whether or not an incumbent is vying for the presidency, the outbreak of electoral violence around any particular election in Kenya stems first and foremost from how the electorate is ethnically sliced up by competing coalitions.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have argued that in order to explain fluctuations in local-level electoral violence in Kenya, one needs to look more closely at the role of political parties and electoral alliances and specifically at how and why these organizations divide certain ethnic communities in some periods but yoke them in others. Although in other contexts, the altering ethnic makeup of political alliances can plausibly be explained by changes in the levels of political fractionalization, for the Kenyan provinces considered herein, the present analysis has demonstrated that coalition-building actually affects inter-party competition rather than the other way around. At the same time, however, I would like to make the point that while alliance-building of a certain type—that latches upon pre-existing divisions between rival communities—is necessary for electoral violence to occur, it is not a sufficient condition for such conflict to break out. Instead, as the preceding discussion has illustrated, the violent elections of the 1990s occurred when politicians accentuated these electoral divides by politicizing locally-held land grievances in the Rift Valley and the Coast. Similarly, in 2007-2008, elites exploited the 'stolen election' sentiment and organized and mobilized certain groups of voters into committing violence against their ethnic antagonists.

Additionally, the second stage of the argument presented in this article has found that in regard to the vagaries of elite behavior about the ethnic composition of electoral alliances, peaceful elections in Kenya have not been a product of politicians' keenness to ensure calm. Rather, elections have gone off peacefully when unique constellations of factors have created conditions under which it made sense to unite historically antagonistic ethnic groups in coalitions of convenience. Interestingly, in these elections, moreover, the topic of land did not make an appearance. Put differently, then, this contentious issue has been on the campaign agenda 'only

when rival communities in the Rift Valley and the Coast have been backing different candidates'.[39]

In proposing these overall claims, the present analysis makes some important contributions to our existing theoretical and practical knowledge on the subject of electoral violence. First, by looking in detail at the alliance-building strategies of elites to better explain why the communities they yoke, coalesce, and divide vary over time, this research creates a dialogue between the literatures on political parties and ethnic conflict and thus contributes to theory-building. Second, by challenging the conventional wisdom that electoral violence of a high intensity and high frequency can be expected to recur in the same places, it also has valuable implications for policy circles. To those interested in practically contributing to bringing about a decline in conflict, I suggest that it is time we paid attention to the processes—including those of coalition-building—that play into the escalation and de-escalation of violence over time. Only then will we have good ideas and approaches for containing electoral conflict in the future.

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[39] Interview with a political expert, Nakuru, 29 October 2013.

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