

Elite Competition, Social Movements, and Election Violence in Nigeria

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Recent scholarship on election violence has revealed how different national-level economic, institutional, and contextual factors increase a country's risk for violence during elections.¹ To be sure, these studies have yielded valuable insights into cross-country variation in election violence. Yet, like other forms of political violence, election violence is not spread evenly across a country, but is concentrated and reoccurs in specific localities within countries.² For example,

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1. On the role of weak institutions, see Hanne Fjelde, "Political Party Strength and Electoral Violence," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (January 2020), pp. 140–155, doi.org/10.1177/0022343319885177; Emilie M. Hafner-Burton, Susan D. Hyde, and Ryan S. Jablonski, "When Do Governments Resort to Election Violence?" *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (January 2014), pp. 149–179, doi.org/10.1017/S0007123412000671; Yonatan L. Morse, *How Autocrats Compete: Parties, Patrons, and Unfair Elections in Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019); and Idean Salehyan and Christopher Linebarger, "Elections and Social Conflict in Africa, 1990–2009," *Studies in Comparative International Development*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (March 2015), pp. 23–49, doi.org/10.1007/s12116-014-9163-1. On institutional design, see Hanne Fjelde and Kristine Höglund, "Electoral Institutions and Electoral Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa," *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (April 2016), pp. 297–320, doi.org/10.1017/S0007123414000179. For the role of different contextual factors, see Johan Brosché, Hanne Fjelde, and Kristine Höglund, "Electoral Violence and the Legacy of Authoritarian Rule in Kenya and Zambia," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (January 2020), pp. 111–125, doi.org/10.1177/0022343319884983; Ursula E. Daxecker, "All Quiet on Election Day? International Election Observation and Incentives for Pre-Election Violence in African Elections," *Electoral Studies*, Vol. 34 (June 2014), pp. 232–243, doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2013.11.006; Charles Fernandes Taylor, Jon C.W. Pevehouse, and Scott Straus, "Perils of Pluralism: Electoral Violence and Incumbency in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (May 2017), pp. 387–411, doi.org/10.1177/0022343316687801; and Inken von Borzyskowski, *The Credibility Challenge: How Democracy Aid Influences Election Violence* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2019).

2. Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Mimmi Söderberg Kovacs, "Introduction: The Everyday Politics of Electoral Violence in Africa," in Söderberg Kovacs and Jesper Bjarnesen, eds., *Violence in African Elections: Between*

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despite having the same electoral institutions, some areas of a country are peaceful after election results are announced, whereas others are marred by postelection riots.³ Where interparty competition is high in national elections, political parties intimidate voters in some regions, but not others.⁴ Voters engage in deadly clashes in certain districts, but not elsewhere, despite shared national historical legacies.⁵ Because the economic, institutional, and contextual risk factors studied in previous work are constant across subnational units, they cannot explain within-country variation. To understand where, how, and why election violence is organized, attention to local politics is essential. This article helps to advance current scholarly understanding of subnational variation in election violence by asking: Under what conditions do local political elites recruit nonstate groups to carry out preelection violence on their behalf?⁶

To answer this question, I study elite recruitment of popular reformist groups during gubernatorial elections in Nigeria. In countries such as Nigeria,

Democracy and Big Man Politics (London: Zed, 2018), p. 6; and Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2002).

3. Joe Brock, "Nigeria Post-Election Violence Killed 800: Rights Group," Reuters, May 16, 2011, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nigeria-violence/nigeria-post-election-violence-killed-800-rights-group-idUSTRE74F71S20110516>.

4. Human Rights Watch, "Kenya: Rift Valley Violence Threatens Voting," July 11, 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/07/11/kenya-rift-valley-violence-threatens-voting-0#>.

5. Subrata Nag Chowdhury, "Soldiers Patrol Kolkata After Election Violence," Reuters, May 15, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/india-election-violence/soldiers-patrol-kolkata-after-election-violence-idUSKCN1SL1B7>.

6. The article joins a growing body of recent work that addresses subnational variation in election violence. For voter participation in election violence, see Ward Berenschot, "Patterned Pogroms: Patronage Networks as Infrastructure for Electoral Violence in India and Indonesia," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (January 2020), pp. 171–184, doi.org/10.1177/0022343319889678; Kathleen Klaus, *Political Violence in Kenya: Land, Elections, and Claim-Making* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020); and Kathleen Klaus and Matthew I. Mitchell, "Land Grievances and the Mobilization of Electoral Violence: Evidence from Côte d'Ivoire and Kenya," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 52, No. 5 (June 2015), pp. 622–635, doi.org/10.1177/0022343315580145. On the role of paramilitary groups in election violence, see Daron Acemoglu, James A. Robinson, and Rafael Santos, "The Monopoly of Violence: Evidence from Colombia," *Journal of the European Economic Association*, Vol. 11, Issue suppl_1 (January 2013), pp. 5–44, doi.org/10.1111/j.1542-4774.2012.01099.x. For spatial variation in election violence, see Ursula Daxecker, "Unequal Votes, Unequal Violence: Malapportionment and Election Violence in India," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (January 2020), pp. 156–170, doi.org/10.1177/0022343319884985; and Michael Wahman and Edward Goldring, "Pre-Election Violence and Territorial Control: Political Dominance and Subnational Election Violence in Polarized African Electoral Systems," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (January 2020), pp. 93–110, doi.org/10.1177/0022343319884990. On the relationship between elections and ethnic riots, see Aditi Malik, "Parties and Political Violence: Elites and Ethnic Riots in Kenya and India," unpublished manuscript; and Steven I. Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence: Electoral Competition and Ethnic Riots in India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

where incumbents hold a significant electoral advantage because they enjoy outsized resources, elite politics within the ruling party is essential to understanding the competitiveness of elections and therefore the incentives to engage in violence. I find that when governors and local party elites—often called “godfathers” in Nigeria—are in conflict, gubernatorial elections become intensely competitive, creating strong incentives to recruit popular reformist groups for preelection violence, echoing previous findings on the relationship between violence and the competitiveness of elections.⁷ Elites recruit popular reformist groups to carry out targeted assassinations, disrupt their opponents’ campaign rallies, and intimidate opposition supporters and poll workers in the months leading up to and on election day. Additionally, elites turn to these groups because of their broad base of support and ability to mobilize voters. Conversely, when elites in the local ruling party are aligned, gubernatorial elections are uncompetitive, and the outcome is decided well in advance. In this scenario, there is little incentive to engage in the costly project of recruiting popular reformist groups for preelection violence, as doing so could signal weakness and create future security threats.

There is a history of popular reformist groups in the Niger Delta region and northern Nigeria.⁸ The Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) was a prominent actor in the movement for resource control and regional autonomy in the Niger Delta in the late 1990s and early 2000s. The 1999 gubernatorial election in Rivers State, though heavily manipulated, was peaceful. In contrast, the 2003 election was marred by preelection violence carried out by the IYC. In early 2001, the alliance between the governor and the godfather in the local ruling party collapsed, and conflict continued over the next two and a half years. Leading up to the 2003 election, both individuals tried to recruit the IYC. The governor prevailed, and IYC members organized preelection violence in support, helping to secure his re-election. Prior to becoming an insurgent organization, Boko Haram was a local actor in a grassroots movement advocating the adoption of sharia in northern Nigeria.⁹ During the 2003 gubernatorial election in Borno

7. Acemoglu, Robinson, and Santos, “The Monopoly of Violence”; and Wilkinson, *Votes and Violence*.

8. Brandon Kendhammer and Carmen McCain, *Boko Haram* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2018), pp. 39–56; and Ukoha Ukiwo, “The Nigerian State, Oil, and the Niger Delta Crisis,” in Cyril Obi and Siri Aas Rustad, eds., *Oil and Insurgency in the Niger Delta: Managing the Complex Politics of Petro-Violence* (New York: Zed, 2011), pp. 17–27.

9. Broadly, sharia is set of Koran-based principles for living an Islamic life. For a broader discussion, see Asifa Quraishi-Landes, “Five Myths About Sharia,” *Washington Post*, June 24, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/five-myths-about-sharia/2016/06/24/7e3efb7a-31ef-11e6-8758-d58e76e11b12_story.html. In contemporary northern Nigeria, sharia politics refers to applying Islamic principles to criminal and civil cases. For a more in-depth discussion, see

State, the governor and the godfather competed for Boko Haram's support. The local godfather's recruitment efforts proved successful, and he convinced Mohammad Yusuf, Boko Haram's founder, to mobilize voters and have his followers carry out preelection violence on his behalf. In the 2007 election, the godfather—and now governor—facing an all but certain re-election, did not turn to Boko Haram for election violence. The comparison of elite recruitment efforts during different elections in each state yields most similar cases that allow me to inductively build my argument while holding constant rival explanations. The comparison of Rivers and Borno States focuses on most different cases, demonstrating the power of the argument in different contexts.¹⁰

In addition to explaining subnational variation in preelection violence, the article makes two other contributions to scholarship on political order and violence. The theory and evidence highlight the consequences of competition within the ruling party for election violence, whereas previous work has largely paid attention to interparty competition to explain violence during elections.¹¹ In Africa, 50 percent of elections since 1990 have turned violent, yet interparty competition is low in many countries because incumbents have significant resources and authority that allow them to skew the electoral playing field heavily in their favor, undermine opposition parties, and remain in power.¹² Competition is not eliminated, however; instead, it takes place largely within the ruling party.¹³ Recent work from sub-Saharan Africa finds that intraparty violence makes up 20 percent of overall election violence and occurs in ruling and opposition parties alike, but is more common in the former.¹⁴ Internal ruling party politics, therefore, is important for understanding election violence and intimidation in many countries in Africa and beyond, but is

Brandon Kendhammer, *Muslims Talking Politics: Framing Islam, Democracy, and Law in Northern Nigeria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

10. Jason Seawright and John Gerring, "Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options," *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (June 2008), pp. 304–306, doi.org/10.1177/1065912907313077.

11. For an overview, see Sarah Birch, Ursula Daxecker, and Kristine Höglund, "Electoral Violence: An Introduction," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (January 2020), pp. 3–8, doi.org/10.1177/0022343319889657.

12. Jaimie Bleck and Nicolas van de Walle, *Electoral Politics in Africa since 1990: Continuity in Change* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 125–132; and Stephanie M. Burchard, *Electoral Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa: Causes and Consequences* (Boulder, Colo.: FirstForum, 2015), p. 3.

13. Bryce W. Reeder and Merete Bech Seeberg, "Fighting Your Friends? A Study of Intra-Party Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Democratization*, Vol. 25, No. 6 (September 2018), pp. 1034–1035, doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2018.1441291.

14. *Ibid.*; and Merete Bech Seeberg, Michael Wahman, and Svend-Erik Skaaning, "Candidate Nomination, Intra-Party Democracy, and Election Violence in Africa," *Democratization*, Vol. 25, No. 6 (September 2018), pp. 959–977, doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2017.1420057.

underexplored in the existing literature. The article helps address this gap by showing how local ruling party politics create incentives for local elites to recruit nonstate actors for preelection violence.

Lastly, the article speaks to broader questions about the relationship between political order and violence. Although the IYC and Boko Haram had radically different political agendas, both began as nonviolent movements, condemned patronage politics, called for transparency and accountability, and gained popular support in their early years. Yet, the very political practices that these groups railed against—and laid fertile ground for their emergence and initial support—also incentivized political elites to recruit and arm them for preelection violence.¹⁵ The theory and evidence reveal how the dynamics of personal rule in Nigeria produced both the supply for election violence—popular reformist groups—and elite demand for election violence. In doing so, the article advances scholarship on the relationship between political order and violence.¹⁶

The remainder of the article proceeds as follows. After providing some background on Nigerian politics and a discussion of likely scope conditions, the article lays out my argument about how the breakdown of elite alliances in the local ruling party creates incentives to recruit popular reformist groups for preelection violence and voter mobilization. Next, the article explains the case selection strategy, operationalization of key variables, and qualitative data used to inductively develop the argument. The IYC case study shows how elite alignment in the local ruling party led to a peaceful gubernatorial election in 1999, whereas elite conflict marred the 2003 gubernatorial election. In Borno State, the 2003 gubernatorial election turned violent because of the collapse of elite alliances within the local ruling party. In contrast, the 2007 election was peaceful thanks to elite alignment. The conclusion discusses the article's contributions and limitations, avenues for future research, and the findings' policy implications.

Scope Conditions

Nigeria is Africa's most populous country and biggest economy, and it has a recent history of violent elections.¹⁷ Popular reformist groups that pursue insti-

15. William Reno, *Warfare in Independent Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 206–241.

16. Stathis N. Kalyvas, Ian Shapiro, and Tarek Masoud, eds., *Order, Conflict, and Violence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

17. John Campbell and Matthew T. Page, *Nigeria: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York: Oxford

tutional or policy changes in reaction to poor governance, state violence, and limited accountability are also common.¹⁸ An overview of the country's politics suggests that regime type and the nature of political authority are important scope conditions of my argument.¹⁹ Since the 1999 transition, Nigeria has had a competitive authoritarian regime, where winning multiparty elections is the pathway to power, but incumbents use the authority and resources of their office to give themselves an electoral advantage.²⁰ Incumbents in Nigeria manipulate formal institutions, including election management bodies, the courts, and anti-corruption authorities, to tilt the electoral playing field in their favor and handicap the opposition.²¹ The ruling party uses public funds to finance its campaign, buy votes, and co-opt opposition leaders.²² Those in power are unable to render elections a mere façade, however, or do away with them entirely. Opposition parties remain legalized; ruling and opposition parties invest resources in mobilizing voters; and elections are not meaningless, even if not free and fair.²³ Although the playing field is heavily skewed, opposition parties still stand a chance of winning, as in 2015 when the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) was defeated after sixteen years in power.

Nigerian governors have significant power and resources to build an extensive clientele that allows them to personalize control over formal institutions

University Press, 2018), p. 1; and Scott Straus and Charlie Taylor, "Democratization and Electoral Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa, 1990–2008," in Dorina A. Bekoe, ed., *Voting in Fear: Electoral Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2012), p. 27.

18. Kendhammer and McCain, *Boko Haram*, pp. 39–56; and Ukiwo, "The Nigerian State, Oil, and the Niger Delta Crisis."

19. It is important to distinguish between regime type and the personalization vs. institutionalization of power. See Morse, *How Autocrats Compete*; and Anne Pitcher, Mary H. Moran, and Michael Johnston, "Rethinking Patrimonialism and Neopatrimonialism in Africa," *African Studies Review*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (April 2009), pp. 125–156, doi.org/10.1353/arw.0.0163.

20. Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, "Elections without Democracy: The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (April 2002), p. 52, doi.org/10.1353/jod.2002.0026. See also Jennifer Gandhi and Ellen Lust-Okar, "Elections Under Authoritarianism," *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 12 (June 2009), pp. 303–422, doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.11.060106.095434; and Andreas Schedler, "Elections without Democracy: The Menu of Manipulation," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (April 2002), pp. 36–50, doi.org/10.1353/jod.2002.0031.

21. Rotimi T. Suberu, "Prebendal Politics and Federal Governance in Nigeria," in Wale Adebawo and Ebenezer Obadare, eds., *Democracy and Prebendalism in Nigeria: Critical Interpretations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 79–101.

22. *Ibid.*; and Chris Albin-Lackey and Ben Rawlence, "Criminal Politics: Violence, 'Godfathers,' and Corruption in Nigeria" (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2007), <https://www.hrw.org/report/2007/10/11/criminal-politics/violence-godfathers-and-corruption-nigeria>.

23. Peter Lewis, "Nigeria: Elections in a Fragile Regime," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (July 2003), pp. 131–144, doi.org/10.1353/jod.2003.0054; and Peter Lewis, "Nigeria Votes: More Openness, More Conflict," *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (October 2011), pp. 60–74, doi.org/10.1353/jod.2011.0058.

and mobilize voters during elections, making them “provincial chiefs in a decentralized patrimonial order.”²⁴ Governors appoint a cabinet, special assistants, advisers, senior civil servants (known as “permanent secretaries”), state judges, and board members of commissions, agencies, and parastatals. Their control over state election management bodies, which oversee local government elections, gives them a tight grip on local politics.²⁵ Governors also have wide control over state budgets. Most infamously, they enjoy what is known as a “security vote,” a budget item they spend with little transparency or accountability.²⁶ State governments also enjoy constitutionally mandated fiscal transfers from the federal government, and rising oil prices in the 2000s—the main source of government revenue—have endowed governors with budgets that rival those of neighboring countries.²⁷

The office of governor is highly sought after, and enormous sums of money are poured into gubernatorial campaigns.²⁸ While some aspirants rely on their personal wealth, others must find powerful and influential sponsors from party elites, commonly referred to as “godfathers” in Nigeria and elsewhere in West Africa.²⁹ In the Nigerian context, godfathers are midlevel power brokers, positioned between the federal center and the state level. Their influence stems from their immense personal wealth, extensive patronage networks, and connections to the national party leadership. They occupy influential positions in the internal party hierarchy, such as state or regional party chairman, and their support is generally needed to win state and local elections.³⁰ In exchange for their support, those who aspire to the governorship make preelection promises granting godfathers postelection control over political appointments, civil

24. Richard Joseph, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 72.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

26. Obiamaka Egbo et al., “Security Votes in Nigeria: Disguising Stealing from the Public Purse,” *African Affairs*, Vol. 111, No. 445 (October 2012), pp. 597–614, doi.org/10.1093/afraf/ads060.

27. Chris Albin-Lackey, “‘Chop Fine’: The Human Rights Impact of Local Government Corruption and Mismanagement in Rivers State, Nigeria” (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2007), p. 76, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2007/01/31/chop-fine/human-rights-impact-local-government-corruption-and-mismanagement-rivers>.

28. Adebowale Olorunmola, “Costs of Politics in Nigeria” (London: Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 2017), p. 9, <https://www.wfd.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Cost-of-Politics-Nigeria.pdf>.

29. Abdul-Razak Lukman, “Godfatherism in Ghanaian Political Space,” *Modern Ghana*, January 21, 2020, <https://www.modernghana.com/news/980527/godfatherism-in-ghanaian-political-space.html>.

30. Albin-Lackey and Rawlence, “Criminal Politics”; and A. Carl LeVan, “Reciprocal Retaliation and Local Linkage: Federalism As an Instrument of Opposition Organizing in Nigeria,” *African Affairs*, Vol. 117, No. 466 (January 2018), p. 3, 16, doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adx040.

service jobs, the state budget, and government contracts. These agreements are regularly acknowledged publicly and, in some cases, put in writing.³¹ Godfathers make such demands to further entrench their political authority, enrich themselves, and, most importantly, keep governors under their control.³² Once in office, however, governors often renege on preelection promises to build their own network of dependents, consolidate power, and dislodge godfathers and eliminate their influence over them.³³

Competitive authoritarianism relaxes constraints on elites to organize election violence, and personal rule creates strong incentives to do so. Where elites are reined in by the rule of law and the costs of organizing violence (even behind the scenes) are high—including removal from office, prosecution, and imprisonment—they are unlikely to turn to violence to try to win elections.³⁴ In contexts characterized by personal rule, competitive elections become do-or-die affairs, because defeat means losing access to state patronage and authority, both of which are essential to building a clientele that constitutes elites' powerbase.³⁵ Where access to elected office is determined by transparent rules that are regularly and impartially enforced by political parties, the courts, election management bodies, and other institutions, there is less incentive to engage in violence because politicians can count on fair opportunities in the future to compete for office.³⁶ A recent report finds that a global wave of "autocratization" is accelerating, where those in power increasingly personalize control over formal institutions to create an uneven electoral playing field. Approximately 34 percent of the world's population, or 2.6 billion people, live in countries that are becoming less democratic and moving closer to competitive authoritarianism. At the same time, protests and reformist social movements against "strong man" rule and shrinking democratic space are on the rise.³⁷ This global trend suggests that Nigeria is not unique, but representative of a larger population of countries.

31. Albin-Lackey and Rawlence, "Criminal Politics," pp. 113–120.

32. Albin-Lackey and Rawlence, "Criminal Politics"; and LeVan, "Reciprocal Retaliation and Local Linkage," p. 16.

33. Albin-Lackey and Rawlence, "Criminal Politics."

34. Salehyan and Linebarger, "Elections and Social Conflict in Africa."

35. Reno, *Warfare in Independent Africa*, pp. 217–218; and Mats Utas, "Introduction: Bigmanity and Network Governance in African Conflicts," in Mats Utas, ed., *African Conflicts and Informal Power: Big Men and Networks* (London: Zed, 2012), pp. 1–31.

36. For a broader discussion of party tactics in competitive authoritarian regimes, see Morse, *How Autocrats Compete*.

37. Anna Lüthmann et al., "Autocratization Surges—Resistance Grows," Democracy Report

Ruling Party Politics and Preelection Violence

Political elites' primary goal is to win elections, which in turn shapes their cost-benefit calculations in recruiting popular reformist groups for preelection violence.³⁸ Although some seek to win elections themselves (e.g., governors), others (e.g., party elites such as godfathers in Nigeria) work to put others into elected office to ensure their access to state patronage. Personal rule has direct implications for how elites win elections, specifically, building a clientele to personalize control over formal institutions that in turn allows elites to tightly control the electoral process and mobilize voters.³⁹ Local bureaucracies staffed with members of the clientele deny permits to hold campaign rallies to opposition parties and intraparty rivals; journalists working for state media ensure biased news coverage; anti-corruption authorities selectively target their patron's rivals; judges regularly rule in their patron's favor in election cases; and clients in the party machinery ensure that nominations and primaries are manipulated to advance their patron's preferred candidates as well as distribute cash and goods to mobilize voters.⁴⁰ Investing significant resources in voter mobilization is also critical to winning elections.⁴¹ If a clientele is essential to elites' power and their ability to win elections, it follows that elite competition will heavily revolve around maintaining one's clientele and undermining a competitor's.⁴² Additionally, the fact that clients cultivate ties with multiple patrons, given that these relationships are pathways to scarce economic and political opportunities and resources, introduces instability into the politics of personal rule.⁴³ As argued by Philip Roessler, "Maintaining loyalty . . . is by

2020, Varieties of Democracy Institute (V-Dem), March 2020, https://www.v-dem.net/media/filer_public/f0/5d/f05d46d8-626f-4b20-8e4e-53d4b134bfcf/democracy_report_2020_low.pdf.

38. Barbara Geddes, *Politician's Dilemma: Building State Capacity in Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), p. 12.

39. Nic Cheeseman, "Introduction: Understanding African Politics: Bringing the State Back In," in Nic Cheeseman, ed., *Institutions and Democracy in Africa: How the Rules of the Game Shape Political Developments* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 1–38; Anders Themnér, "Introduction: Warlord Democrats: Wartime Investments, Democratic Returns?" in Anders Themnér, ed., *Warlord Democrats in Africa: Ex-Military Leaders and Electoral Politics* (London: Zed, 2017), pp. 9–16; and Utas, "Introduction: Bigmanity and Network Governance in African Conflicts."

40. Bleck and van de Walle, *Electoral Politics in Africa since 1990*, pp. 78–96; Gandhi and Lust-Okar, "Elections Under Authoritarianism"; and Schedler, "Elections without Democracy."

41. Eric Kramon, *Money for Votes: The Causes and Consequences of Electoral Clientelism in Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

42. Ibid. See also Philip Roessler, *Ethnic Politics and State Power in Africa: The Logic of the Coup-Civil War Trap* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 44–59; and Utas, "Introduction: Bigmanity and Network Governance in African Conflicts."

43. Alex de Waal, *The Real Politics of the Horn of Africa: Money, War, and the Business of Power*

no means guaranteed. . . . There is the risk that in this political marketplace the patron will be outbid or outmaneuvered by a rival . . . fracturing the network and undermining his power."⁴⁴

To win elections, subnational elites also need to keep one eye on local politics and the other on the center. It is not only the potential for horizontal conflict—challenges within their province—that they must undermine to remain in power, but also the potential for conflict with the capital.⁴⁵ Presidents have authority over state security agencies and can deploy the police and military against rivals in the periphery. They also dominate the national-level counterparts of the formal institutions that subnational elites seek to control, including election management bodies, the courts, and anti-corruption authorities, and can similarly turn the power and resources of these institutions against rival subnational elites.⁴⁶ Subnational rivals are just as likely to be co-partisans of the president, if not more so, in dominant party systems. Intra-party factions are common in these contexts where competition largely takes place within, rather than between, parties.⁴⁷ Building a local powerbase gives subnational elites greater leverage vis-à-vis the center and keeps the center out of local politics.⁴⁸

When elites in the local ruling party are allied with one another and in agreement over the distribution of state patronage, elections are uncompetitive and the outcome is determined well in advance. Alignment does not necessarily mean an equal partnership in sharing control over state patronage and formal institutions; indeed, most elite alignments are asymmetrical in that one actor enjoys outsized authority and other elites can be thought of as aligned underneath him. A defining feature of alignment is noncompetition among elites—that is, they do not seek to dislodge one another from their current position, whether it be an elected office or a prominent political party position, such as regional chairman. When elites are aligned, there is little benefit to re-

(Malden, Mass.: Polity, 2015); David Pratten, "The Precariousness of Prebendalism," in Adebunwi and Obadare, *Democracy and Prebendalism in Nigeria*, pp. 243–260; and Utas, "Introduction: Bigmanity and Network Governance in African Conflicts."

44. Roessler, *Ethnic Politics and State Power in Africa*, p. 49.

45. Edward Goldring and Michael Wahman, "Fighting for a Name on the Ballot: Constituency-Level Analysis of Nomination Violence in Zambia," *Democratization*, Vol. 25, No. 6 (September 2018), p. 997, doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2017.1394844.

46. Bleck and van de Walle, *Electoral Politics in Africa since 1990*, pp. 62–100.

47. LeVan, "Reciprocal Retaliation and Local Linkage"; and Reeder and Seeberg, "Fighting Your Friends?"

48. Edward L. Gibson, *Boundary Control: Subnational Authoritarianism in Federal Democracies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

cruiting popular reformist groups for preelection violence. First, elites—whether running for office themselves or simply being high-profile party figures—have an interest in holding peaceful elections. Peaceful elections (those in which manipulation still occurs, but are peaceful) advertise strength. Manipulating formal institutions to bias the electoral process signals authority, whereas repression communicates weakness.⁴⁹ The ability to create an uneven playing field by manipulating local election management bodies to selectively enforce election rules and miscount the vote in local elections, exploiting the local party machinery to sidestep internal party rules, and using public funds to finance campaigns and buy votes, among other manipulation strategies, puts incumbents' power on display.⁵⁰ In contrast, the use of violence by those in power advertises weakness and helps galvanize opposition.⁵¹ Second, when elites are aligned and agree to the election outcome in advance, their clientele is not under threat, and they are able to easily mobilize voters on their own.⁵²

Third, elites create future security threats by arming popular reformist groups over which they wield limited control. Weapons are rarely returned after the election; they typically remain in the hands of the perpetrators. By arming popular reformist groups for election violence, elites empower militant leaders and violence-prone members, giving them the capacity to pursue their political projects with violence and carry out sustained attacks. The group's engagement in election violence may also attract new members willing to use violence and drive away those who reject violent tactics. Recruiting originally nonviolent groups for preelection violence significantly alters their trajectory and membership.

When ruling-party elite alliances over the distribution of state patronage collapse, elections become intensely competitive affairs. In contexts of personal rule, elite competition largely revolves around maintaining or stealing away a competitor's clientele. Elites wrestle to install their clients in local election management bodies, the courts, and state agencies and commissions. They struggle over the awarding of government contracts, state budgets, and development projects. Party primaries become hotly contested, as elites fight to ensure that their clients receive the nomination for local elections and occupy key

49. Alberto Simpser, *Why Governments and Parties Manipulate Elections: Theory, Practice, and Implications* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 1–30.

50. Beatriz Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy: Hegemonic Party Survival and Its Demise in Mexico* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006) pp. 8–9.

51. Bleck and van de Walle, *Electoral Politics in Africa since 1990*, p. 97.

52. Kramon, *Money for Votes*.

positions in the local party machinery.⁵³ Elites also make strong appeals to voters and work to show they have greater resources than their rival.⁵⁴ As elites struggle for control over these institutions and clientele, they are unable to tightly control the electoral process and elections become highly competitive. In this environment of electoral uncertainty where their political survival is at stake and defeat means permanent marginalization, elites have strong incentives to recruit popular reformist groups for preelection violence.⁵⁵

First, reformist groups can be armed and funded to carry out political assassinations, violently disrupt campaign rallies, coerce and intimidate rivals' supporters, and harass election officials and poll workers leading up to and on election day, all while providing their elite sponsors with plausible deniability. While state security services can be used to perpetrate election violence, non-state actors are more appealing partners because they offer elites plausible deniability, helping them mitigate the reputational costs of repression.⁵⁶ In Africa, in particular, voters overwhelmingly demand free and fair elections.⁵⁷ In the third round of the Afrobarometer, a pan-African organization that conducts public opinion research, 80 percent of people surveyed across eighteen countries agreed that the use of political violence is never justified.⁵⁸ There is increasing evidence that voters punish politicians rumored to engage in election violence by withdrawing their support or not showing up to the polls.⁵⁹ Given that elites' power stems directly from their supporters and clientele, voter backlash is a serious risk of preelection violence, because it creates opportunities for rival elites to convince voters to shift their support.⁶⁰ As Rachel

53. Bleck and van de Walle, *Electoral Politics in Africa since 1990*, pp. 78–96; Morse, *How Autocrats Compete*, p. 77; and Schedler, "Elections without Democracy."

54. Kramon, *Money for Votes*.

55. Reno, *Warfare in Independent Africa*, pp. 217–218.

56. This logic is not unique to election violence. See Ariel I. Ahrar, *Proxy Warriors: The Rise and Fall of State-Sponsored Militias* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2011); Daniel Byman and Sarah E. Kreps, "Agents of Destruction? Applying Principal-Agent Analysis to State-Sponsored Terrorism," *International Studies Perspectives*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (February 2010), pp. 1–18, doi.org/10.1111/j.1528-3585.2009.00389.x; and Sabine C. Carey, Michael P. Colaresi, and Neil J. Mitchell, "Governments, Informal Links to Militias, and Accountability," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 59, No. 5 (August 2015), pp. 850–876, doi.org/10.1177/0022002715576747.

57. Michael Bratton and Sadhiska Bhoojedur, "Africans Want Open Elections—Especially If They Bring Change," Policy Paper No. 58 (Accra: Afrobarometer, 2019), <https://afrobarometer.org/publications/pp58-africans-want-open-elections-especially-if-they-bring-change>.

58. Roxana Gutiérrez-Romero and Adrienne LeBas, "Does Electoral Violence Affect Vote Choice and Willingness to Vote? Conjoint Analysis of a Vignette Experiment," *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (January 2020), p. 80, doi.org/10.1177/0022343319892677.

59. *Ibid.*

60. Roessler, *Ethnic Politics and State Power in Africa*, p. 49.

Kleinfeld and Elena Barham write, nonstate “actors offer elites the benefits of retaining power while reducing the costs of international criticism and voter dissatisfaction incurred by state repression.”⁶¹ Recruiting popular reformist groups to violently disrupt elections allows elites to distance themselves from such acts while orchestrating violence from behind the scenes. Moreover, subnational elites do not have full control over the police, much less the military.⁶² The police, therefore, are often an unreliable partner for subnational elites in carrying out preelection violence.

Second, elites turn to popular reformist groups to mobilize voters; in other words, they recruit these actors to use “carrots” as well as “sticks.”⁶³ The leaders of popular reformist groups carry influence among local populations, and sit atop of organizations that can mobilize voters for campaign rallies, helping put a politician’s popularity on display and signal strength.⁶⁴ Similarly, reformist group leaders can get voters to the polls and have group members “watch over” the voting process, effectively pressuring voters to cast a ballot for a particular party or candidate.⁶⁵ Leaders also can endorse and campaign for their elite sponsors, using their ties and legitimacy with local communities to convince voters to support certain candidates. The next section discusses the case selection strategy, methods, and data used to support the argument presented here.

Most Similar and Most Different Cases in Nigeria

This article combines most similar and most different cases from Nigeria to inductively develop and offer evidence for my argument.⁶⁶ A comparison of the

61. Rachel Kleinfeld and Elena Barham, “Complicit States and the Governing Strategy of Privilege Violence: When Weakness Is Not the Problem,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 21 (May 2018), p. 222, doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-041916-015628.

62. This is true of Nigeria where, constitutionally, governors are the chief security officers in their states and issue orders to local police forces, but the police are a federal institution and ultimately report to the president. See Campbell and Page, *Nigeria: What Everyone Needs to Know*, p. 140.

63. Ezequiel Gonzalez-Ocantos et al., “Carrots and Sticks: Experimental Evidence of Vote-Buying and Voter Intimidation in Guatemala,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (January 2020), pp. 46–61, doi.org/10.1177/0022343319884998.

64. Magaloni, *Voting for Autocracy*, pp. 8–9.

65. Enrique Desmond Arias, *Criminal Enterprises and Governance in Latin America and the Caribbean* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 174–181; and Anders Themnér and Mats Utas, “Governance through Brokerage: Informal Governance in Post-Civil War Societies,” *Civil Wars*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (2016) p. 263, doi.org/10.1080/13698249.2016.1215639.

66. Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005), pp. 3–36.

behavior of governors and godfathers toward popular reformist groups across elections in the same state illustrates examples of most similar cases. These temporal comparisons provide a helpful context for studying the conditions under which subnational elites recruit local actors for preelection violence while holding rival explanations constant. In Rivers State, the governor and godfather recruited the Ijaw Youth Council for preelection violence in 2003 (the governor successfully), but neither individual sought the IYC's support in 1999. In Borno State, Boko Haram was recruited by the governor and the godfather in 2003, but not in 2007. A comparison of the 1999 and 2003 elections in Rivers State yields one set of most similar cases; a comparison of the 2003 and 2007 elections in Borno State offers a second set.

By design, most similar cases hold constant alternative explanations.⁶⁷ One rival argument is that when elites and local groups share a politically salient identity, they are more likely to organize election violence together. The logic is that where resources are distributed and representation is organized around identity, elites are more likely to recruit coethnics for election violence. Because of how identity shapes access to resources, politicians assume that coethnic groups have an incentive to put "one of their own" into elected office because these groups expect to be rewarded with state patronage afterward. In contrast, political elites perceive non-coethnic groups as having little reason to want to help them win elections, and so are unlikely to turn to them for election violence.⁶⁸ The Nigerian Constitution recognizes indigenous citizenship and distributes access to government jobs, land, and scholarships according to indigenous identity.⁶⁹ In Rivers State, neither the governor nor the godfather shared an indigenous identity with the IYC.⁷⁰ In Borno state, the governor, the godfather, and Boko Haram's leadership and many of its members identified with the Kanuri ethnic group.⁷¹

A second rival explanation for elite recruitment of nonstate groups for election violence comes from studies of South Asia that find that governments and armed groups are more likely to partner with one another when their political projects overlap, and they are more likely to view one another as enemies

67. Seawright and Gerring, "Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research."

68. Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

69. Laura T. Vinson, *Religion, Violence, and Local Power-Sharing in Nigeria* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

70. Sufuyan Ojeifo, "Harry Marshal Alters Political Calculations in Rivers," *Vanguard*, March 16, 2003, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200303180886.html>.

71. Scott MacEachern, *Searching for Boko Haram: A History of Violence in Central Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 10, 39–40.

when they do not (i.e., communist governments view Marxist militias as potential allies, whereas religious militias are considered enemies).⁷² Governors and godfathers may similarly be willing to recruit popular reformist groups for preelection violence when the group's political projects do not challenge the Nigerian Constitution's commitment to multiethnic, secular democracy. Conversely, groups with political agendas that reject multiethnic, secular democracy are more likely to be viewed as threats. In Rivers State, the IYC deployed the language of self-determination, democracy, and indigenous rights to press forward its agenda.⁷³ In contrast, Boko Haram was a Salafi group, demanding a sharia state and rejecting multiethnic, secular democracy.⁷⁴ Although for strategic reasons a number of northern governors endorsed establishing sharia criminal courts in the early 2000s in response to popular demands, many, including in Borno State, failed to follow through and, importantly, relied on the language of federalism and states' rights—rather than religion—to justify their support.⁷⁵

A third rival explanation for when elites turn to nonstate groups for election violence is that subnational elites' relationship to the national ruling party shapes their recruitment of popular reformist groups, though how is ambiguous. On the one hand, subnational elites who belong to the national ruling party may be more likely to recruit local groups for election violence because they assume that they will go unpunished given that their party is in power nationally. They expect their national-level co-partisans to turn a blind eye to election violence if it means keeping party control over the region or province.⁷⁶ On the other hand, opposition elites may be more likely to turn to local groups for election violence in an effort to counter the superior resources of the national ruling party. The national ruling party can divert public funds to finance the campaigns of their local candidates, buy votes, use national-level institutions such as anti-corruption authorities to target opposition leaders, and exert their control over the police to maintain an electoral advantage.

72. Paul Staniland, "Militias, Ideology, and the State," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 59, No. 5 (August 2015), pp. 770–793, doi.org/10.1177/0022002715576749; and Paul Staniland, "Armed Groups and Militarized Elections," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 59, No. 4 (December 2015), pp. 694–705, doi.org/10.1111/isqu.12195.

73. Jennifer M. Hazen, "From Social Movement to Armed Group: A Case Study from Nigeria," *Contemporary Security Policy*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (2009), pp. 281–300, doi.org/10.1080/13523260903059906.

74. Alexander Thurston, *Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), pp. 1–141.

75. Alexander Thurston, "Muslim Politics and Shari'a in Kano State, Northern Nigeria," *African Affairs*, Vol. 114, No. 454 (January 2015), pp. 28–51, doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adu077.

76. Straus and Taylor, "Democratization and Electoral Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa," p. 21.

Table 1. Most Similar and Most Different Cases in Nigeria

Case	Ethnicity	Political Project	Political Party	Elite Politics	Outcome
Ijaw Youth Council, 1999	non-coethnics	pro-constitution	ruling party	alignment	no recruitment
Ijaw Youth Council, 2003	non-coethnics	pro-constitution	ruling party	competition	recruitment
Boko Haram, 2003	coethnics	anti-constitution	opposition party	competition	recruitment
Boko Haram, 2007	coethnics	anti-constitution	opposition party	alignment	no recruitment

Therefore, opposition elites may have greater incentive to engage in election violence to protect their strongholds.⁷⁷ The most similar case selection strategy holds constant governors' and godfathers' relationship with the national ruling party. In Rivers State, the governor and the godfather were members of the national ruling party while their counterparts in Borno State belonged to an opposition party.

Table 1 summarizes the case selection strategy. The comparison of "Ijaw Youth Council, 1999" and "Ijaw Youth Council, 2003" is one set of most similar cases; "Boko Haram, 2003" and "Boko Haram, 2007" is a second.⁷⁸ The comparison across states focuses on most different cases. The second, third, and fourth columns from the left show the rival explanations that the most similar cases hold constant; because they are constant across elections in each state, these factors do a poor job of explaining changes in elite recruitment over time. "Ethnicity" refers to whether the governor, the godfather, and the local group shared an indigenous identity. "Political Project" indicates whether the reformist group's political project accepted or rejected secular, multiethnic democracy. "Political Party" refers to whether the governor and the godfather belonged to the national ruling party. The second to last column displays my argument. The last column, "outcome," shows whether political elites tried to recruit the IYC or Boko Haram for preelection violence. Exhibiting similar elite behavior toward popular reformist groups in disparate contexts lends further support to the argument and speaks to questions about generalizability.⁷⁹

The outcome of interest is whether governors and godfathers recruited pop-

77. Wahman and Goldring, "Pre-Election Violence and Territorial Control."

78. The year refers to the election, though I trace intraparty elite politics in the years before.

79. Seawright and Gerring, "Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research," pp. 304–306.

ular reformist groups for preelection violence. I code a case as “recruitment” when elites offer material resources to reformist group leaders, specifically money, weapons, vehicles, or lucrative positions in the state government. The assumption is that governors and godfathers expect preelection violence and voter mobilization in return. When elites do not offer at least one of these resources, I code the case as “no recruitment.”

“Godfatherism” is an openly discussed and prevalent feature of Nigerian party politics. Governor-godfather agreements over political appointments, government contracts, and control over state revenue are publicly spoken of, and sometimes put in writing.⁸⁰ I look to these publicly acknowledged relationships as indicators of godfather-governor competition or alignment. When governors and godfathers do not seek to (1) uphold these agreements and (2) dislodge each other from their current political position, I code the case as “alignment.” The observable implications of godfather-governor competition are (1) both actors publicly acknowledge an end to their godfather-godson relationship or a falling out, (2) fight to populate state-level institutions with their own clientele, and (3) fight to control state budgets and spending.

The dynamics I seek to observe are highly personal and involve mapping elites’ network of dependents—which clients are loyal to which patrons—in formal institutions as well as elites’ recruitment of reformist group leaders. Qualitative data offer key advantages here and help boost internal validity. Local newspaper accounts that follow godfather-governor preelection agreements; their struggles over political appointments; their influence over the state legislature, state budgets, and government contracts; local party politics; and efforts by governors and godfathers to ally with popular reformist groups are essential.⁸¹ I also use detail-rich histories, publications of local and international nongovernmental organizations, election observer reports, and semi-structured interviews to corroborate the sequence of events and observable implications of the argument. In-country interviews were conducted in 2011 in Jos, Plateau State; in 2013 in Abuja, the federal capital; and in May 2019 in Port Harcourt, Rivers State and in Nigeria’s largest city, Lagos. I interviewed a range of actors, including civil servants in state and federal election management bodies, state and federal legislators, civil-society activists, human rights

80. Albin-Lackey and Rawlence, “Criminal Politics,” pp. 113–120; and LeVan, “Reciprocal Retaliation and Local Linkage,” pp. 3, 16.

81. William Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1998), pp. ix–xi.

lawyers, journalists, local academics, ordinary voters, and original members of the IYC. Each interview was assigned a random, three-digit number to protect the identities of the interviewees.⁸²

The Ijaw Youth Council

The IYC, founded in December 1998, was part of a larger social movement focused on resource control and self-determination in the Niger Delta.⁸³ Its founding document, the Kaiama Declaration, condemned the decades-long oppression of the Ijaw people—the largest ethnic group in the Niger Delta region—claimed that the region’s resources belonged to the Ijaw and other indigenous groups, called for a Sovereign National Conference to restructure the federal system and weaken the powers of the federal government, and demanded the immediate withdrawal of multinational oil companies and the Nigerian military.⁸⁴ Although these demands were far from new, the creation of the IYC “marked a watershed moment and became the vehicle through which a new generation of youth leaders took up the struggle.”⁸⁵ Five hundred communities and twenty-five civil-society organizations adopted the Kaiama Declaration, signaling that “sentiments for greater resource control” were “deeply popular across all sectors of Niger Delta society.”⁸⁶ In the IYC’s early years, former members recall hosting “mobile parliaments,” traveling across the region to spend several weeks in rural communities, dialogue with local leaders, and recruit members.⁸⁷ The IYC also organized mass rallies, such

82. For a summary of my in-country research, see the online appendix at doi.org/10.7910/DVN/NG50B2.

83. Omolade Adunbi, *Oil Wealth and Insurgency in Nigeria* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015), pp. 183–196; and Ukiwo, “The Nigerian State, Oil, and the Niger Delta Crisis,” pp. 17–27.

84. Ruben Eberlein, “On the Road to the State’s Perdition? Authority and Sovereignty in the Niger Delta, Nigeria,” *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (December 2006), pp. 586–590, doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X06002096; “Ijaws Condemn Court Action,” *Vanguard*, February 12, 2001, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200102120476.html>; and United Nations Development Programme, *Niger Delta Human Development Report* (Abuja: United Nations Development Programme, 2006), p. 87, http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/nigeria_hdr_report.pdf.

85. Michael Watts, “Blood Oil: The Anatomy of a Petro-Insurgency in the Niger Delta,” *Focaal—European Journal of Anthropology*, Vol. 2008, No. 52 (December 2008), p. 30, doi.org/10.3167/fcl.2008.520102.

86. Darren Kew and David L. Phillips, “Oil. Seeking Peace in the Niger Delta: Oil, Natural Gas, and Other Vital Resources,” *New England Journal of Public Policy*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (2007), p. 160. See also Adunbi, *Oil Wealth and Insurgency in Nigeria*, pp. 183–196; and Suleiman, “Drumbeats of War.”

87. Two former IYC members elaborated on “mobile parliaments” as a mobilization and recruitment mechanism. Author interview, Port Harcourt, May 22, 2019, 937; and author interview, Port

as one in September 2000 that drew more than 5,000 participants, using the language of democracy and federalism to advocate its political project.⁸⁸

A long history of state violence, environmental damage, and severe underprovision of basic goods is important for understanding the IYC's founding and initial popularity.⁸⁹ There is broad consensus among scholars that corruption, high-income inequality, military violence, and environmental destruction have spurred the creation of reformist groups such as the IYC and driven broad support for them.⁹⁰ One journalist explained that "jobless graduates have watched for years how Nigeria's oil money is being taken to develop other parts of the country while modern infrastructures are nonexistent in their own communities. Their demands have remained consistent; greater percentage in the revenue allocation, development of infrastructural facilities, establishment of industries and environmental control among others."⁹¹

Next to a popular agenda, the IYC also had a charismatic leader in Asari Dokubo (hereafter, Asari). As the IYC's first vice president, Asari led a militant faction willing to use violence, insisting that the nonviolent tactics of their predecessors had failed.⁹² Repression of peaceful social movements has a history in the region; most notoriously, Ken Saro-Wiwa and other political activists mobilizing for similar demands were executed by the Nigerian military government in 1995.⁹³ Some IYC leaders insisted that the group should refrain from violence, as such tactics would undermine their support with domestic and international audiences.⁹⁴ Former members recall that disagreements over peaceful versus violent strategies eventually led to a deep divide, splitting the

Harcourt, May 25, 2019, 867. See also Sam Onwuemeodo, "IYC Wants Law on Self-Determination," *Vanguard*, July 21, 2000, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200007210506.html>.

88. "Ijaws Condemn Court Action," February 12, 2001; Samuel Oyadongha, "Ijaws Hold Rally On Resource Control," *Vanguard*, September 14, 2000, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200009140083.html>; and Samuel Oyadongha, "No Going Back On Struggle to Control Resources, Says Youths," *Vanguard*, December 5, 2000, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200012050186.html>.

89. Michael J. Watts and Ibaba Samuel Ibaba, "Turbulent Oil: Conflict and Insecurity in the Niger Delta," *African Security*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2011), pp. 1–19, doi.org/10.1080/19392206.2011.563181.

90. Jennifer M. Hazen and Jonas Horner, "Small Arms, Armed Violence, and Insecurity in Nigeria: The Niger Delta in Perspective," Occasional Paper No. 20 (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2007), p. 16, <http://www.smallarmssurvey.org/fileadmin/docs/B-Occasional-papers/SAS-OP20-Nigeria.pdf>.

91. Tajudeen Suleiman, "Drumbeats of War," *News*, January 11, 1999, <https://allafrica.com/stories/199901110183.html>.

92. Eberlein, "On the Road to the State's Perdition?" pp. 586–590.

93. Adunbi, *Oil Wealth and Insurgency in Nigeria*, p. 193.

94. Author interview, 937; Hazen, "From Social Movement to Armed Group," pp. 290–291; and Samuel Oyadongha, "Ijaw Youths Vow to Resist Acts of Destabilisation," *Vanguard*, July 21, 2001, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200107230565.html>.

IYC into two camps.⁹⁵ In 2001, Asari became IYC president with the help of then Governor Peter Odili in a controversial election that former IYC members described as a violent takeover, described in greater detail below.⁹⁶ Asari's skillful use of the media, along with the IYC's popular demands, did much to maintain, if not increase, the group's following and influence.⁹⁷ As described by scholars of the region, "Asari become something of a folk hero in the Niger Delta based on his charismatic nature, proclaimed political ideology (e.g., promoting Ijaw rights through demanding control over the Delta's oil resources), and his ability to tap into widespread local grievances."⁹⁸

THE 1999 ELECTION IN RIVERS STATE: ELITE ALIGNMENT

In Rivers State, as across Nigeria, the 1999 elections were peaceful, although there was clear evidence of widespread manipulation.⁹⁹ The IYC leadership condemned election fraud, expressed skepticism of the incoming governors and president, and declared that it would "continue to mobilise our people for direct mass actions aimed at convoking the Sovereign National Conference and actualising self-determination and resource control."¹⁰⁰ There is no evidence that the IYC carried out election violence in 1999 or was recruited to do so by any politician.¹⁰¹ Significantly, former IYC members did not recall being approached by Governor Odili, his godfather, Chief Marshal Harry, or any other politician in 1999 to engage in violence or mobilize voters.¹⁰²

95. Three former IYC members recall a debate over nonviolent versus violent tactics dividing the organization. Author interview, 937; author interview, Port Harcourt, May 24, 2019, 180; and author interview, Port Harcourt, May 26, 2019, 282. See also Samuel Oyadongha, "Killing of Student: Ijaw Youth Council Asks Shell to Stop Work," *Vanguard*, August 13, 2001, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200108130353.html>.

96. Three former IYC members recalled Asari's forceful takeover of the IYC in the middle of 2001. Author interview, 937; author interview, 180; and author interview, 282. Asari's takeover was described in local newspapers as well. See Oyadongha, "Ijaw Youths Vow to Resist Acts of Destabilisation."

97. Tony Nwankwo, "On Kaiama We Stand—Ijaw Youth Leader," *Vanguard*, August 2, 2002, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200208020026.html>.

98. Hazen, "From Social Movement to Armed Group," pp. 290–291.

99. Lewis, "Nigeria: Elections in a Fragile Regime," p. 133; and Carter Center and National Democratic Institute for International Affairs [NDI], *Observing the 1998–99 Nigerian Elections: Final Report* (Summer 1999) p. 8, <https://www.cartercenter.org/documents/1152.pdf>.

100. Onwuemeodo, "IYC Wants Law on Self-Determination." See also Ignatius Chukwu, "Ijaw Youths Back South-South Governors' Position on Resource Control," *Post Express*, July 20, 2000, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200007210033.html>.

101. Carter Center and NDI, *Observing the 1998–99 Nigerian Elections*; and Hazen and Horner, "Small Arms, Armed Violence, and Insecurity in Nigeria," p. 12.

102. Seven former IYC members did not recall being recruited by local politicians for election violence during the 1999 election. Author interview, Lagos, May 14, 2019, 197; author interview,

The reason is that elite alignment rendered the 1999 gubernatorial election uncompetitive.

Odili, governor of Rivers State from 1999 to 2007, easily won the PDP primary in December 1998 and the gubernatorial election the following month. Key to these victories was the support of Harry.¹⁰³ As Rivers State PDP chairman, Harry was integral to demobilizing Odili's main competitor, Chief Sergeant Awuse. Another prominent political figure and former secretary of the defunct United Nigeria Congress Party, Awuse had spent years building his elite connections, patronage networks, and personal wealth, making him a serious contender in the PDP primary. Harry used his authority as state party chairman to disqualify Awuse, accusing him and his supporters of thuggery and intimidation. Awuse appealed the disqualification to the party leadership in Abuja, but was unable to match Harry's political influence.¹⁰⁴ Local observers speculated that Harry backed Odili over Awuse because Odili had less political experience, wealth, and weaker patronage networks, making him more dependent on Harry's support and easier to control once in the governor's office.¹⁰⁵

Many observers commented that had it not been for Harry's support, Odili would not have won the PDP nomination in 1998; Odili himself acknowledged Harry's critical role as "godfather" and his tight grip on Rivers State's politics and the party machinery.¹⁰⁶ According to a local journalist, "Harry was the political kingmaker of the South-South. He played a key role in the 1998 PDP primaries in the state which Odili won. Sources said that but for Harry's insistence, Odili would have lost the primaries. And having won the primaries, victory at the polls became easy because of the party's structures on ground, which Harry also helped to build."¹⁰⁷ Awuse stepped aside after the

Lagos, May 17, 2019, 332; author interview, Lagos, May 19, 2019, 280; author interview, 937; author interview, 180; author interview, 282; and author interview, Port Harcourt, May 27, 2019, 381.

103. Albin-Lackey and Rawlence, "Criminal Politics," p. 33.

104. Yakubu Abubakar, "Rivers: The Mafia Against Odili," *Weekly Trust*, June 6, 2002, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200206070344.html>; Jide Ajani and Sam Owuemeodo, "I Don't Need 100 Percent for a Second Term, Says Governor Odili," *Vanguard*, July 20, 2001, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200107230386.html>; Okafor Ofiebor, "Who's Afraid of Odili's Score Card?" *News*, April 9, 2001, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200104050323.html>; and Sunday Orinya, "Crises Dog Guber Primaries Nationwide," *P.M. News*, December 24, 1998, <https://allafrica.com/stories/199812240116.html>.

105. Ojeifo, "Harry Marshal Alters Political Calculations in Rivers."

106. Ademola Adegbamigbe, "Ticking Time Bombs," *News*, August 13, 2001, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200108070095.html>; and Ajani and Owuemeodo, "I Don't Need 100 Percent for a Second Term, Says Governor Odili."

107. Bala Dan Abu, "Many Enemies, Many Friends," *NewsWatch*, March 23, 2003, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200303240575.html>. The south-south refers to the Niger Delta region.

primary and did not contest the general election, making Odili's only opponent Chief Eric B. Aso from the Alliance for Democracy (AD). Being a regional opposition party from the southwest, however, the AD had a weak presence and poor support in Rivers State. Many exclaimed at the time that "Aso has no chance."¹⁰⁸ The 1999 gubernatorial election was an easy victory for the PDP.

Harry's extensive patronage networks and tight grip on the PDP party machinery all but guaranteed the outcome of the election, creating few incentives to take on the costs of recruiting and arming the IYC for election violence. Not only was there little sense in arming the IYC just to target a weak competitor—Chief Aso, the AD candidate—but violence would have suggested that Harry had a weak hold on the electoral process. Reflecting on the 1999 election, a local activist commented, "Who would Harry have sent thugs after anyways? We all knew it was going to be Odili, Harry made sure of that."¹⁰⁹ He added that "politicians only use thugs when they are weak." A journalist expressed that the 1999 Rivers State's gubernatorial race was a sham, albeit a peaceful one.¹¹⁰ One former IYC member explained that Odili's victory was secured well in advance of Election Day and local politicians had no need to organize election violence.¹¹¹ A scholar of Nigerian politics explained the risks of recruiting groups such as the IYC: "Politicians are playing with fire when they use thugs. You don't know what these guys are going to do after the election. And now you have just given them weapons and money to do whatever they want."¹¹²

THE 2003 ELECTION IN RIVERS STATE: ELITE COMPETITION

In contrast to the 1999 gubernatorial election, the 2003 gubernatorial race in Rivers State was marred by significant violence.¹¹³ Reports from nongovernmental organizations document that Asari and the IYC were "the PDP's primary instruments in using violence to rig the 2003 polls in Rivers," and "worked on behalf of the state government . . . to intimidate voters, attack their sponsors' opponents or rig the voting directly in favor of then-Governor Peter Odili."¹¹⁴ Individuals interviewed by Human Rights Watch admit to engaging

108. "Governorship: The Candidates, Their Chances," *This Day*, January 3, 1999.

109. Author interview with political activist, Port Harcourt, May 22, 2019, 743.

110. Author interview with journalist, Port Harcourt, May 27, 2019, 048.

111. Author interview, 282.

112. Author interview with academic, Lagos, May 16, 2019, 915.

113. Karen Stauss and Carina Tertsakian, "Nigeria's 2003 Elections: The Unacknowledged Violence" (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2004), p. 6, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2004/06/01/nigerias-2003-elections/unacknowledged-violence>.

114. Albin-Lackey and Rawlence, "Criminal Politics," p. 81.

in violence and intimidation to secure the election for their sponsor, Governor Odili.¹¹⁵ At the time, Asari was immensely popular, and local politicians courted him both to obtain his endorsement and to organize election violence for them.¹¹⁶ Journalists observed that Asari “was the bride of the contending political forces in Rivers State . . . he became the most sought-after political thug in the Ijaw nation. As the leader of IYC, he wielded enormous influence.”¹¹⁷ Former IYC members claimed that both the governor and his ex-godfather tried to recruit the IYC for preelection violence.¹¹⁸ One journalist recalled that each sought to partner with the IYC leading up to the 2003 election.¹¹⁹ The governor’s recruitment efforts ultimately proved successful, and he “spearhead a strategy of violent vote-rigging . . . with the help of Asari Dokubo” for his 2003 campaign.¹²⁰

In an effort to recruit the IYC, Governor Odili backed Asari’s bid to become its president. With money, vehicles, and weapons from the governor, Asari ousted his predecessor in a controversial and violent election in July 2001.¹²¹ Commenting on Asari’s takeover, a local journalist noted that “his relationship with the PDP administration gave him the muscle and bones and the wherewithal to amass an impressive armory.”¹²² Former IYC members recall Asari arriving the day of the IYC presidential election with weapons and jeeps

115. *Ibid.*, p. 86.

116. Hazen and Horner, “Small Arms, Armed Violence, and Insecurity in Nigeria,” p. 77.

117. Okafor Ofiebor and Michael Mukwuzi, “Rivers of Rage,” *News*, September 13, 2004, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200409072116.html>.

118. Seven former IYC members recalled brokers from Governor Odili and Marshal Harry offering the group money and other resources in exchange for election violence. Author interview, 197; author interview, 332; author interview, 280; author interview, 937; author interview, 180; author interview, 282; and author interview, 381.

119. Author interview with journalist, Lagos, May 15, 2019, 679.

120. Morten Bøås, “‘Mend Me’: The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta and the Empowerment of Violence,” in Obi and Rustad, *Oil and Insurgency in the Niger Delta*, p. 119. See also Olalekan Bilesanmi and Jimitota Onoyume, “‘Asari’s Release Not Enough,’” *Vanguard*, June 17, 2007, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200706181174.html>; and Oghenekevwe Laba, “Ijaw Youth Leader Blames Piracy on Politicians,” *This Day*, September 4, 2003, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200309050041.html>.

121. International Crisis Group [ICG], “Fuelling the Niger Delta Crisis,” Africa Report No. 118 (Brussels: ICG, 2006), pp. 4–5, <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/118-fuelling-the-niger-delta-crisis.pdf>; Sofiri Joab-Peterside, “On the Militarization of Nigeria’s Niger Delta: The Genesis of Ethnic Militia in Rivers State, Nigeria,” Niger Delta Economies of Violence Working Paper No. 21, 2007, pp. 16–17, <http://geog.berkeley.edu/ProjectsResources/ND%20Website/NigerDelta/WP/21-Joab-Peterside.pdf>; and Oyadongha, “Ijaw Youths Vow to Resist Acts of Destabilisation.”

122. Ibiba DonPedro, *Oil in the Water: Crude Power and Militancy in the Niger Delta* (Lagos: Forward Communications, 2006), p. 32.

and declaring himself the new president through force and intimidation.¹²³ In exchange, Asari helped the governor win re-election: "In 2001, with the financial support of the state government, Asari became president of the IYC and subsequently used this position to . . . recruit youths to help ensure Odili's re-election in 2003."¹²⁴ In addition to carrying out preelection violence, Asari was an outspoken supporter of the governor. He used his popularity and the IYC's ties with local communities to convince voters to support the governor, insisting that the governor was an ardent supporter of the IYC and committed to its political agenda.¹²⁵

The collapse of the alliance between Governor Odili and Harry fractured the ruling party in Rivers State and rendered the 2003 election intensely competitive.¹²⁶ In early 2001, divisions between the governor and the godfather began to emerge. Harry complained that the governor reneged on his preelection promises, refusing to grant him state contracts and control over key appointments in the state government.¹²⁷ On March 3, 2001, the PDP Rivers State Congress adopted the governor as the party's gubernatorial candidate, in violation of party rules, which required a primary election.¹²⁸ The godfather protested the party's adoption of Odili in the absence of a primary and demanded that the national party leadership reject the nomination. However, President Olusegun Obasanjo, as leader of the PDP, backed the governor. After becoming national vice-chairman for the South-South Zone for the PDP, Harry began to campaign for a presidential nominee from the Niger Delta in 2003, publicly calling on Obasanjo to step down after his first term. Obasanjo refused to step aside, generating a rift between Harry and the president. Harry worked to build a coalition of southern PDP politicians to try to force Obasanjo

123. Three former IYC members recalled Asari's forceful takeover of the IYC in the middle of 2001. Author interview, 937; author interview, 180; and author interview, 282.

124. Human Rights Watch, "Rivers and Blood: Guns, Oil, and Power in Nigeria's Rivers State" (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2005), p. 6, <https://www.hrw.org/legacy/backgrounder/africa/nigeria0205/nigeria0205.pdf>.

125. "Our Links with Biafra," *News*, September 20, 2004, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200409131267.html>.

126. Casmir Igbokwe, "Odili's Ordeal," *Tempo*, May 17, 2001, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200105140267.html>; Lucky Imafidon and Boniface Okoro, "2003 Polls: South-South Governors Back Obasanjo," *Post Express*, January 21, 2001, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200101220249.html>; Ofiebor, "Who's Afraid of Odili's Scorecard?"; and Sam Onwuemeodo, "Political Undertones of Obasanjo's Visit to Rivers State," *Vanguard*, October 18, 2000, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200010180036.html>.

127. Ofiebor, "Who's Afraid of Odili's Scorecard?"

128. Sam Onwuemeodo, "2003: Odili's Adoption Put Rivers on Edge," *Vanguard*, March 11, 2001, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200103110107.html>.

not to contest in 2003 by denying him southern support. Harry's efforts proved unsuccessful, and he later endorsed a candidate from an opposition party. Harry's politicking, however, gave the president good reason to support the governor in the nomination dispute, and the national party leadership quickly accepted the state party congress' "adoption" of the governor as the PDP candidate.¹²⁹

Once it was clear that Odili would be the PDP nominee, Harry turned to Awuse, whom he disqualified in the 1999 PDP primary, and other prominent local politicians to form a coalition to defeat the governor in 2003. Harry founded the Rivers Democratic Movement (RDM) in April 2002 for the sole purpose of ensuring that Odili was a one-term governor.¹³⁰ The RDM gathered strength as 2003 approached, adding powerful politicians, including the deputy speaker of the House of Representatives in the National Assembly, Prince Chibudom Nwuche from Rivers State.¹³¹ Journalists described how "campaigns for the office heightened recently after Governor Odili's declaration for a second term. Eleven of the candidates in other political parties outside the ruling PDP have formed a coalition to ensure that Odili does not come back. The coalition is called Rivers Democratic Movement."¹³²

Odili had a narrow pathway to re-election, incentivizing him to use violence in an attempt to remain in power.¹³³ On March 5, 2003, Harry was murdered in Abuja. The governor denied any involvement, and the police determined that

129. Ben Agande, Ben Kingsley Omonobi, and John Ighodaro, "ANPP Chieftain, Harry Marshal Shot Dead—IG Orders Probe," *Vanguard*, March 6, 2003, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200303060227.html>; Okon Bassey, "Suspended Officer Carpets PDP," *This Day*, April 30, 2001, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200104300397.html>; Durolu Elijah, "Marshal Harry: Lessons On Political Violence," *Vanguard*, March 23, 2003, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200303240359.html>; and Chukwudi Nwabuko and Chuks Akunna, "Marshall Harry: One Death Too Many," *This Day*, March 6, 2003, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200303060241.html>.

130. Theresa Nya, "Movement Accuses Odili of Terrorism, Petitions Obasanjo," *This Day*, April 16, 2002, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200204160199.html>; Paul Odili, "South-South: United By Oil, Divided By Party," *Vanguard*, May 29, 2002, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200205290713.html>; and Sam Onwuemeodo, "2003: Opposition to Odili Gathers Momentum," *Vanguard*, January 30, 2002, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200201300580.html>.

131. Tobs Agbaegbu, "Governorship Race: The Scramble, the Intrigues, the Looming Crisis," *Newswatch*, December 1, 2002, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200212030104.html>; John Ighodaro, "2003: Opposition Regroups Against Odili," *Vanguard*, November 14, 2002, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200211140093.html>; Okon Bassey, "Polls: Nobody Intimidated Me to Step Down—Nwuche," *This Day*, February 24, 2003, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200302240563.html>; Umar Bature, "Nwuche Challenges Odili's Nomination in Court," *This Day*, January 15, 2003, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200301150445.html>; and Warees Oki, "Nwuche And Rivers Guber Race," *This Day*, January 3, 2003, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200301030281.html>.

132. Agbaegbu, "Governorship Race."

133. Amanze Obi, "Odili And the Sergeant-At-Arms," *This Day*, March 4, 2003, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200303040250.html>.

Harry was killed by armed robbers.¹³⁴ The RDM rejected the police's conclusions, insisting that Harry's role in mobilizing opposition against the governor, as well as his stance against Obasanjo's second term, had made him a target.¹³⁵ Harry's assassination did not seem to improve the governor's chances, however; days before the election, many observers insisted it was a tight race: "Governorship candidates of parties are also fighting hard to out-do each other in Rivers State. . . . The battle for supremacy is between two political parties, the PDP and the ANPP [All Nigerian People's Party]. Even with his power of incumbency, Odili will find re-election an uphill task," thanks to the opposition uniting under RDM.¹³⁶ Others similarly commented on the competition: "But by far the biggest hurdle Odili would need to scale in 2003 is the threat of political war promised by his former political godfather, Chief Marshal Harry. Repeatedly, Harry had claimed that he installed Odili as governor but regretted that he had not been rewarded for his efforts. . . . For this and other reasons, Harry, who prides in playing the kingmaker role in Rivers politics, has sworn that Odili would not be re-elected by 2003."¹³⁷

In this environment of intense competition, Governor Odili and Harry, his godfather, turned to the IYC for preelection violence described at the start of this section. It was the governor, though, who won Asari's support. Local observers considered Asari's backing critical to the governor's re-election: "Rather than exploring the means of ridding the society of the menace of secret cults, Rivers politicians decided to cultivate them for their own reprobate political ends. These cults . . . were largely responsible for the incumbent Governor, Dr. Peter Odili, scoring about 97 per cent of the vote, despite the obvious popularity of his closest rival, Sergeant Chidi Awuse of the All Nigerian People's Party (ANPP)."¹³⁸ When asked why the governor recruited the IYC in 2003, a former IYC member responded, "Harry and RDM was a real threat to Odili. Odili didn't stand a chance and he knew this. Of course he armed those guys for violence to stay in power."¹³⁹

Subsequent gubernatorial elections in Rivers State have remained intensely

134. Chuks Akunna, "PDP to ANPP: Apologise Over Marshall Harry," *This Day*, April 10, 2003, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200304100158.html>; and Okon Bassey, "Harry: Odili Clears Self, PDP," *This Day*, March 31, 2003, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200303310633.html>.

135. Agande, Omonobi, and Ighodaro, "ANPP Chieftain, Harry Marshal Shot Dead—IG Orders Probe"; and Elijah, "Marshal Harry."

136. Tobs Agbaegbu, "Last Minute Dirty Deals," *Newswatch*, April 20, 2003, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200304200067.html>.

137. Adegbamigbe, "Ticking Time Bombs."

138. Ochereome Nnanna, "Port Harcourt in the Grip of Warlords," *Vanguard*, September 9, 2004, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200409090789.html>.

139. Author interview, 937.

competitive and violent. In 2007 and 2011, elite competition in the PDP again motivated elites to recruit pro-resource control and pro-regional autonomy groups for preelection violence. Given the insurgency in the region and the proliferation of weapons in the region from 2004 to 2009, many of these actors had by then taken up arms but continued to enjoy a broad support base.¹⁴⁰ The 2015 and 2019 elections were also competitive, as former PDP elites defected to form a new opposition party, the All Progressives Congress (APC). Both PDP and APC elites turned to militants for preelection violence. By then, however, the militants had amassed greater resources and developed their own interests in the electoral process.¹⁴¹

Boko Haram

In 1999, a grassroots movement to adopt sharia gathered momentum across northern Nigeria. Echoing earlier Islamic movements, religious leaders cast sharia as a solution to corruption, poverty, and state violence.¹⁴² Many Nigerians lack basic goods and access to essential services in the north; in Borno State, Boko Haram's birthplace, 54.7 percent of the population do not have access to primary education, health care, or essential goods such as clean water and sanitation.¹⁴³ Next to this extreme poverty, elites have built mansions in gated communities, drive expensive cars, and travel abroad for health care. This extreme inequality has put corruption on public display, generating mass frustration and anger with federal and state governments and creating a receptive audience for those offering political alternatives. Many religious

140. Chris Albin-Lackey, "Politics as War: The Human Rights Impact and Causes of Post-Election Violence in Rivers State, Nigeria" (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2008), pp. 15–16, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2008/03/27/politics-war/human-rights-impact-and-causes-post-election-violence-rivers-state>; and Hazen, "From Social Movement to Armed Group," p. 293.

141. Eromo Egbejule, "High-Stakes Rivers State Vote Ends in Violence," *Africa Report*, March 12, 2019, <https://www.theafricareport.com/10209/high-stakes-rivers-state-vote-ends-in-violence/>; Tarila Marclint Ebiede, "Ex-Militants and Electoral Violence in Nigeria's Niger Delta," in Söderberg Kovacs and Bjarnesen, *Violence in African Elections*, pp. 135–155; ICG, "Nigeria's 2019 Elections: Six States to Watch," *Africa Report* No. 268 (Brussels: ICG, 2018), pp. 4–7, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/268-nigerias-2019-elections-six-states-watch>; and Fund for Peace, "Time Is of the Essence: Preventing Election Violence in Rivers State" (Washington, D.C.: Fund for Peace, 2018), <https://fundforpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Conflict-Briefing-Preventing-Election-Violence-in-Rivers-State-FINAL.pdf>.

142. Kendhammer and McCain, *Boko Haram*, pp. 39–56.

143. See Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), "Global Country Briefing 2020: Nigeria (Sub-Saharan Africa)," Multidimensional Poverty Index Data Bank (Oxford: OPHI, University of Oxford, 2020), www.ophi.org.uk/multidimensional-poverty-index/mp-i-country-briefings/.

leaders have blamed secular democracy for corruption and offered sharia as a solution to the country's political and economic ills, promising accountability and moral leadership.¹⁴⁴ Mass support for sharia grew rapidly, and pro-sharia rallies were held across the north in the 2000s. These rallies largely targeted state governments, pressuring governors to establish sharia courts and making sharia a major election issue in 2003.¹⁴⁵ Scholars of northern Nigeria explained that "sharia's popularity was rooted in the hope it might force Nigeria's notoriously corrupt political class to address their demands for economic development, social justice, and political rights."¹⁴⁶

Mohammed Yusuf was a local leader in the larger sharia movement. Prior to founding Boko Haram in 2002, Yusuf was a charismatic, up-and-coming cleric and leader of the youth wing, Shababul Islam (Islamic Youth Vanguard), of the Salafi group Ahl-Sunnah.¹⁴⁷ By 2001, he had gained a sizable following among the urban poor in Borno's state capital, Maiduguri, as well as migrants, religious students, and even a few of the city's elite.¹⁴⁸ After breaking with his mentor over doctrinal disagreements, in 2002 Yusuf founded Jama'atu Ahlus-Sunnah Lidda' Awati Wal Jihad (the Association of the People of the Sunna for Proselytization and Armed Struggle) or, as it quickly became popularly known, Boko Haram.¹⁴⁹ Yusuf established his own mosque and became "a very popular magnet for various disaffected youth, in search of an Islamic solution to the problems of life."¹⁵⁰ According to one report, "Youth had joined because they believed in the movement, and many joined after attending preachings led by Boko Haram members in Maiduguri. One male youth in

144. Kendhammer, *Muslims Talking Politics*, pp. ix–x; and Thurston, "Muslim Politics and Shari'a in Kano State, Northern Nigeria."

145. Thurston, "Muslim Politics and Shari'a in Kano State, Northern Nigeria," p. 29.

146. Kendhammer and McCain, *Boko Haram*, p. 27.

147. ICG, "Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II): The Boko Haram Insurgency," Africa Report No. 216 (Brussels: ICG, 2014); p. 7, <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/curbing-violence-in-nigeria-II-the-boko-haram-insurgency.pdf>.

148. Kendhammer and McCain, *Boko Haram*, pp. 58–60; Hilary Matfess, *Women and the War on Boko Haram: Wives, Weapons, Witnesses* (London: Zed, 2017), pp. 9–21; Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, "Boko Haram and Politics: From Insurgency to Terrorism," in Pérouse de Montclos, ed., *Boko Haram: Islamism, Politics, Security, and the State in Nigeria* (Leiden, Netherlands: African Studies Centre, 2014), pp. 135–57; and Thurston, *Boko Haram*, pp. 83–141.

149. Adam Higazi, "The Origins and Transformation of the Boko Haram Insurgency in Northern Nigeria," *Politique Africaine*, Vol. 130, No. 2 (2013), pp. 137–164, doi.org/10.3917/polaf.130.0137.

150. Anonymous, "The Popular Discourses of Salafi Radicalism and Salafi Counter-radicalism in Nigeria: A Case Study of Boko Haram," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (2012), p. 136, doi.org/10.1163/15700666-12341224; Abdul Raufu Mustapha, "Understanding Boko Haram," in Mustapha, ed., *Sects & Social Disorder: Muslim Identities and Conflict in Northern Nigeria* (Woodbridge, U.K.: James Currey, 2014), p. 148; and Thurston, *Boko Haram*, p. 88.

Yobe described being drawn to the revolutionary aspect of Boko Haram. He said, 'I thought it was a revolution to sanitize the system of government.'¹⁵¹ Although it is difficult to ascertain exact figures, scholars estimate that Yusuf had a core following of more than 500 people and a sympathetic audience of 10,000.¹⁵² According to Mercy Corps' interviews with former members, about half reported that their communities were largely supportive of Yusuf and the sharia movement during the 2000s.¹⁵³

THE 2003 ELECTION IN BORNO STATE: ELITE COMPETITION

Both Governor Mala Kachalla and the local godfather, Ali Modu Sheriff, worked to recruit Mohammed Yusuf and his followers for preelection violence and voter mobilization during the 2003 gubernatorial election. Governor Kachalla first sought Yusuf's support in 2001. There was mass demand for sharia in Borno State, as elsewhere in the north, and many governors sought to cast themselves as pro-sharia in an effort to court a largely Muslim electorate.¹⁵⁴ In February 2001, the governor appointed Yusuf to a high-profile sharia implementation committee. The majority of committee members advised the governor to proceed slowly given the significant challenges of reconciling the proposed sharia courts with state and federal law and educating Borno's residents on sharia itself.¹⁵⁵ Yusuf disagreed not only with the committee's recommendations, but also with their interpretation of religious texts and deference to the Nigerian Constitution. Disillusioned and frustrated, Yusuf resigned the government post after several months and became a vocal critic of Governor Kachalla.¹⁵⁶

Where the governor failed to win Yusuf's support, the local godfather succeeded.¹⁵⁷ Scholars of Boko Haram's history note that "Ali Modu Sheriff not only . . . recruited members of Yusuf's group as thugs during his 2003 election campaign but also sought out Yusuf's personal endorsement."¹⁵⁸ Brandon

151. Mercy Corps, "'Motivations and Empty Promises': Voices of Former Boko Haram Combatants and Nigerian Youth" (Portland: Mercy Corps, April 2016), p. 12, https://www.mercycorps.org/sites/default/files/2019-12/Motivations_and_Empty_Promises_Mercy_Corps_Full%20Report.pdf.

152. Thurston, *Boko Haram*, p. 89.

153. Mercy Corps, "'Motivations and Empty Promises'," p. 2.

154. MacEachern, *Searching for Boko Haram*, p. 178.

155. Thurston, *Boko Haram*, pp. 118–119. See also Abubakar Sadiq, "Sharia: Borno Sets Up Council of Ulama," *Vanguard*, December 12, 2000, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200012120324.html>.

156. ICG, "Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II)," p. 7; and Thurston, *Boko Haram*, pp. 116–120.

157. ICG, "Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II)," p. 11; and Thurston, *Boko Haram*, p. 120.

158. Kendhammer and McCain, *Boko Haram*, p. 37.

Kendhammer elaborates that, “during the contentious 2003 Borno State gubernatorial campaign, candidate Ali Modu Sheriff recruited Yusuf’s followers to participate in his campaign (primarily as thugs) in exchange for financial support and future cooperation, and following Sheriff’s victory, Buji Foi, a member of Yusuf’s circle, was appointed state Commissioner of Religious Affairs.”¹⁵⁹ To defeat the incumbent governor—his former “godson”—Sheriff recruited Yusuf to deliver votes by persuasion or (the threat of) force, and in return, promised Yusuf control over sharia courts after the election.¹⁶⁰ Other accounts corroborate this story, observing that “Sheriff courted Yusuf, providing a lucrative position in the state religious affairs ministry to one of the group’s most zealous members, a man named Buji Foi . . . through this, the group accessed state patronage directly.”¹⁶¹ Sheriff won a plurality in a three-man race with 46 percent of the vote and overwhelmingly in Maiduguri with a total of 145,620 votes, more than the combined totals of his two opponents.¹⁶²

Why did the governor and the local godfather compete for Boko Haram’s support during the 2003 election? The answer is that both faced strong incentives to court Yusuf and arm his followers for preelection violence because they were in competition with each other for the governorship. Sheriff and Kachalla won their elections for federal senator and governor, respectively, in 1999. Both individuals were members of the ANPP, but Senator Sheriff was widely acknowledged as Borno’s godfather. He used his immense personal wealth to fund not only his campaign and those of several state legislators, but also Kachalla’s bid for governor. In return for Sheriff’s sponsorship in 1999, Kachalla promised not to seek re-election and to give Sheriff control over political appointments in the Borno State government as well as the state budget and government contracts.¹⁶³ Once in office, Kachalla wielded wide political authority as governor and had access to state patronage and resources independent of his godfather, which he used to build his own power and clientele. The governor passed over Sheriff’s picks for political appointments and started to bring state bureaucracies under his control by installing his own clientele. He also made clear his intention to run for re-election early in his first

159. Kendhammer, *Muslims Talking Politics*, p. 227.

160. Matfess, *Women and the War on Boko Haram*, p. 17.

161. Andrew Walker, “Eat the Heart of the Infidel”: *The Harrowing of Nigeria and the Rise of Boko Haram* (London: Hurst, 2016), p. 153.

162. Thurston, *Boko Haram*, pp. 120–123.

163. ICG, “Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II),” p. 11; Kendhammer and McCain, *Boko Haram*, p. 61; and Thurston, *Boko Haram*, pp. 120–123.

term. Such moves ignited fierce competition between the governor and the senator, making for a highly competitive gubernatorial race in 2003.¹⁶⁴ This godfather-godson competition played out largely in the state legislature, bureaucracies, and the party machinery of the ANPP.

Shortly after assuming office, Kachalla submitted to the legislature for approval the names of five individuals to head state commissions: Women's Affairs, Local Government, Tourism and Culture, Agriculture and Natural Resources, and Justice.¹⁶⁵ The senator, having funded the campaigns of many state legislators, used his influence over the state assembly to block the governor's nominees and deny them legislative approval. When the governor refused to replace his nominees with Sheriff's, the legislature impeached the governor on charges of misconduct and misappropriation of state funds. The governor's five nominees then withdrew their names, either on their own accord or under pressure from Sheriff.¹⁶⁶

In retaliation for the impeachment, the governor directed the state's election management body—staffed by his appointees who did not require legislative approval—to carry out recall initiatives against legislators loyal to Sheriff. These were attempts to reduce Sheriff's influence over the legislature and pressure legislators into shifting their support to the governor.¹⁶⁷ One journalist noted that Kachalla's control of the Borno State election management body gave him an important advantage, and that his ability to threaten the legislators with recall initiatives "may sabotage the success of the contract allegedly entered into between the legislators and Senator Sheriff."¹⁶⁸

The fight between the governor and the godfather continued into the ANPP state party congress in June 2002. As in the legislature, Sheriff wielded wide influence over state party politics and convinced the state executive committee to refuse to support Kachalla's re-election bid.¹⁶⁹ At the end of the party congress, Sheriff made something of a victory speech, specifically calling out Kachalla and naming his loyal clients in the party: "He is on his own. You can find out the facts for yourself, you have seen me here, I am the ANPP

164. Ben Aidokanya and Innocent Atabo, "Borno Boils," *News*, November 10, 2000, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200011100345.html>; ICG, "Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II)," pp. 11–13; and Thurston, *Boko Haram*, pp. 83–141.

165. Aidokanya and Atabo, "Borno Boils."

166. *Ibid.*

167. *This Day*, "Borno: When the Governor and Assembly Are at Loggerheads," *This Day*, January 23, 2002, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200201230226.html>.

168. *Ibid.*

169. Thurston, *Boko Haram*, pp. 120–121.

Senate leader, here is the Speaker of Borno State House of Assembly. Here is the House of Representatives minority leader, all members of the House of Representatives and House of Assembly members all elected under the ANPP. Every chairman that has won election under this party, they are all here, what are we talking about? People should learn to recognise the facts. He is on his own," referring to Kachalla.¹⁷⁰ Journalists corroborated Sheriff's analysis of the party congress: "Resplendent in an all white outfit, black shoes and hand knitted cap, Sheriff did not show signs of the tension welling up within the party. Sitting with him on the podium were all the elected office holders elected on ANPP's platform. . . . It all seemed to be a parade of loyalty."¹⁷¹

Although Sheriff controlled the ANPP party machinery and state legislature, Kachalla possessed the advantage of incumbency, state patronage, and control over key institutions, such as the state election management body.¹⁷² The governor sought re-election as the Alliance for Democracy candidate.¹⁷³ Kachalla and Sheriff were not the only gubernatorial candidates, however. There was also the PDP candidate, Ibrahim-Imam. While the ANPP was the ruling party in the state, the PDP was the national ruling party and, as such, had significant resources that it could pour into local campaigns. Moreover, Ibrahim-Imam enjoyed the support of Borno State's traditional Muslim establishment.¹⁷⁴ To win in 2003, Sheriff turned to Boko Haram, both for assistance with voter mobilization and for preelection violence and intimidation.¹⁷⁵

THE 2007 ELECTION IN BORNO STATE: ELITE ALIGNMENT

While Yusuf was a virulent critic of secular government from the beginning—even arguing that it was sinful for Muslims to take government jobs—he was clearly willing to work with politicians, first by serving on Governor Kachalla's sharia implementation committee, campaigning and engaging in preelection violence for Sheriff in 2003, and then allowing one of his top lieutenants to serve in Sheriff's government.¹⁷⁶ The relationship between Yusuf

170. "Ali Sheriff Battles Kachallah in Borno," *This Day*, July 17, 2002, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200207170034.html>.

171. *Ibid.*

172. ICG, "Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II)," p. 11; and Thurston, *Boko Haram*, p. 121.

173. Tashikalmah Halla, "Senator Sheriff Joins Borno Guber Race," *Daily Trust*, December 12, 2002; and Tashikalmah Halla, "Why I Decamped to AD, by Gov Kachalla," *Daily Trust*, December 26, 2002, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200212260131.html>.

174. Thurston, *Boko Haram*, p. 122.

175. Kendhammer, *Muslims Talking Politics*, p. 227.

176. Thurston, *Boko Haram*, pp. 83–141.

and Governor Sheriff became increasingly strained after the 2003 election, however. Although he kept his promise to create a ministry of religious affairs, Governor Sheriff delayed implementing sharia law and establishing sharia courts. After repeated delays and growing frustration, Yusuf finally ordered Foi to resign his government post in 2007, marking the end of Yusuf's partnership with the governor.¹⁷⁷ As he moved further into his first term, the governor became careless in his relationship with Boko Haram and invested little effort in maintaining Yusuf's support. Where he eagerly courted Yusuf's endorsement in 2003, the governor no longer prioritized this partnership and ignored Yusuf's repeated criticisms.¹⁷⁸ The reason is that by his 2007 re-election campaign, Governor Sheriff dominated state politics, and local elites were aligned under him; a journalist explained that Sheriff "no longer had any use for Yusuf."¹⁷⁹ He had little incentive to maintain Yusuf's support and thus let the alliance fall apart.¹⁸⁰

Governor Sheriff consolidated his control over the state government and local party politics during his first term (2003–07). While he had wide influence over the state legislature and party machinery as senator, he now had a firm grip on the executive branch as governor. There was also little chance of Kachalla making a comeback, as he was too ill to contest the 2007 elections; he died shortly thereafter. With the legislature, state bureaucracies, and party machinery in his hands, Governor Sheriff "won a smashing reelection" against his only opponent, PDP candidate Ibrahim-Imam, the same nominee from 2003.¹⁸¹ Along with tightening his grip over key institutions, there was widespread speculation that the governor made a secret deal with President Obasanjo that the PDP would not mount a serious challenge in 2007 and would restrict resources to their gubernatorial candidate.¹⁸² According to Alexander Thurston, "Despite Sheriff's continued membership in the ANPP, he cultivated ties with President Obasanjo in the lead-up to the election," helping to undermine local PDP candidates.¹⁸³ The governor had "become a political institution in the

177. ICG, "Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II)," p. 12; Mustapha, "Understanding Boko Haram," p. 149; and Thurston, *Boko Haram*, pp. 127–129.

178. Kendhammer and McCain, *Boko Haram*, p. 62; and Thurston, *Boko Haram*, pp. 117–130.

179. Author interview with journalist, Abuja, October 16, 2013, 990.

180. Two interviewees separately explained that Governor Sheriff lost interest in his partnership with Yusuf after he consolidated his power as governor. Author interview with scholar, Jos, July 7, 2011, 043; and author interview with federal civil servant, Abuja, October 29, 2013, 25. See also Thurston, *Boko Haram*, pp. 127–130.

181. Thurston, *Boko Haram*, p. 128.

182. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

183. *Ibid.*, p. 128.

state” and stood at the “helm of affairs of Borno.”¹⁸⁴ Closer observers noted the absence of a serious opposition in Borno State.¹⁸⁵ Journalists claimed that in “Borno politics . . . everything revolves around Sheriff” and that “politics in Borno State is all about loyalty to the governor.”¹⁸⁶

Thus, as Thurston summarizes, “Sheriff’s strategy in 2007 differed from his 2003 campaign. As a challenger in 2003, he wanted the support of radicals such as Yusuf. As an incumbent governor four years later, it was the machinery of the party and the relationship with Abuja that counted, along with the powers of incumbency.”¹⁸⁷ While there was significant violence surrounding the Boko Haram insurgency from 2009 onward, which led Nigeria’s national election management body to delay the 2015 elections by six weeks, there was limited violence organized by elites before the 2011, 2015, and 2019 elections. The ANPP, which joined the APC after 2011, continued to dominate state politics, and Sheriff’s successors and other party elites remained aligned with one another.¹⁸⁸

Conclusion

This article offered a theory and evidence of when local political elites recruit popular reformist groups for preelection violence. I argued that when elite alliances within the local ruling party collapse, gubernatorial elections become highly competitive. Under these conditions, elites have strong incentives to recruit popular reformist groups for preelection violence and to mobilize voters. Conversely, when local ruling party elites are aligned, the election outcome is agreed to well in advance. In this scenario, there is little incentive to engage in the costly project of recruiting popular reformist groups for preelection violence, as doing so could not only signal weakness, but also create future security challenges.

184. Michael Olugbode, “Borno—Younger Sheriff’s Guber Bid Creates Tension,” *This Day*, July 6, 2010, <https://allafrica.com/stories/201007070371.html>.

185. Ahmad Salkida, “Different Strokes for Governor Sheriff’s Second Term,” *Daily Trust*, February 8, 2009, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200902090506.html>.

186. Usman Aliyu Duhade, “Borno 2011- Who Succeeds Governor Sheriff?” *Daily Trust*, February 9, 2009, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200902090320.html>. See also Ahmed Mari, “Borno-PDP, ANPP in Uncommon Guber Battle,” *Daily Champion*, December 21, 2009, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200912210456.html>.

187. Thurston, *Boko Haram*, p. 128. See also Kendhammer and McCain, *Boko Haram*, p. 73.

188. Isa Gusau, “Godfatherism—Shettima, Zulum and the New Protocol of ‘Tada-Gana,’” *Daily Trust*, March 24, 2019; and Naziru Mikailu, “Why Ex-Governors Cannot Control Successors—Kashim Shettima,” *Daily Trust*, January 24, 2020, <https://allafrica.com/stories/202001240511.html>.

The article makes three contributions to scholarship on political order and violence. First, a rapidly growing literature on election violence has focused on national-level economic, institutional, and contextual risk factors.¹⁸⁹ To be sure, these studies have yielded important insights. Yet, as with other forms of political violence, election violence is not spread evenly across a country; rather, it is concentrated in specific localities within countries.¹⁹⁰ Close attention to local politics is essential to understanding the conditions under which election violence is organized and carried out. The article contributes to a small but growing body of work that studies subnational variation in election violence by explaining local elite decisions to outsource preelection violence to nonstate actors, specifically popular reformist groups.

Second, existing scholarship on election violence focuses heavily on interparty competition, overlooking intraparty competition as a driver of election violence.¹⁹¹ Where the ruling party holds an outsized advantage because of its superior resources and ability to create an uneven playing field, intraparty dynamics are essential for understanding where and why election violence is organized.¹⁹² The article's second contribution to the election violence literature is in offering an explanation of how elite alliances and conflict with the local ruling party over state patronage create incentives to recruit popular reformist groups for preelection violence. In doing so, it calls for greater attention to intraparty politics among scholars and the policy community.

Third, the article contributes to a broader literature on the relationship between political order and violence in revealing how the dynamics of personal rule generate the supply for election violence in the form of groups that call for political reforms as well as elite demand for preelection violence. The Ijaw Youth Council and Boko Haram, though with radically different political agendas, similarly began as nonviolent movements, condemned corruption and state violence, and developed mass followings. The formation of these groups, like other reformist movements in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa, is a reaction to poor governance and insecurity, and articulate popular demands for political reforms.¹⁹³ The same dynamics of personal rule that generate popular

189. For an overview of existing work, see Birch, Daxecker, and Höglund, "Electoral Violence."

190. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*; and Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*.

191. Birch, Daxecker, and Höglund, "Electoral Violence," pp. 3–8. For an exception, see Seeberg, Wahman, and Skaaning, "Candidate Nomination, Intra-Party Democracy, and Election Violence in Africa."

192. Bleck and van de Walle, *Electoral Politics in Africa since 1990*, pp. 125–132.

193. William Reno, "The Politics of Insurgency in Collapsing States," *Development & Change*, Vol. 33, No. 5 (November 2002), pp. 837–839, doi.org/10.1111/1467-7660.t01-1-00251.

reformist groups, however, also create elite demand for preelection violence.¹⁹⁴ Thus, the underlying political order is closely connected to the organization and production of preelection violence.¹⁹⁵

The article's limitations point to a number of avenues for future research. One is generalizability: Does the argument developed here shed light on elite recruitment of nonstate actors for election violence elsewhere? The most different cases examined in the article provide initial evidence of the strength of the argument in places with different ethnic politics, reformist group political projects, and elite membership in the national ruling party. A few cursory examples suggest its utility elsewhere. In southwestern Nigeria, the O'odua People's Congress, a grassroots movement that advocates for self-determination for the Yoruba, has been connected to intraparty elite conflict and preelection violence.¹⁹⁶ A governor in southeastern Nigeria recruited the Bakassi Boys, a popular vigilante group, to carry out violence against his political opponents leading up to a competitive election in 2003 after a falling out with his former godfather. That the Bakassi Boys were not a popular reformist group but a vigilante group with mass support and broad legitimacy suggests that the argument may extend to other nonstate actors with strong ties with local communities.¹⁹⁷ In Kenya, Mungiki, part-grassroots movement, part gang, partnered with local politicians in carrying out election violence during the competitive 2002 and 2007 elections.¹⁹⁸ Similarly, political parties in Pakistan have recruited student organizations to perpetrate election violence during competitive elections.¹⁹⁹ These examples offer initial evidence that the argument made in this article extends beyond Nigeria to other nonstate actors with broad support bases.

A second question to emerge from the article is: Under what conditions do reformist group leaders, and nonstate actors more broadly, agree or refuse to carry out election violence for political elites? The IYC and Boko Haram cases suggest a few hypotheses. One is that internal leadership struggles may moti-

194. Reno, *Warfare in Independent Africa*, pp. 206–241.

195. Kalyvas, Shapiro, and Masoud, *Order, Conflict, and Violence*.

196. Carina Tertsakian, "Nigeria: The O'odua People's Congress: Fighting Violence with Violence" (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2003), p. 10.

197. Kate Meagher, "Hijacking Civil Society: The Inside Story of the Bakassi Boys Vigilante Group of South-Eastern Nigeria," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (January 2007), pp. 89–115, doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X06002291.

198. Jacob Rasmussen, "Parasitic Politics: Violence, Deception, and Change in Kenya's Electoral Politics," in Söderberg Kovacs and Bjarnesen, *Violence in African Elections*, pp. 176–196.

199. Staniland, "Armed Groups and Militarized Elections," p. 700.

vate group leaders to ally with elites and carry out election violence for them, in exchange for money, weapons, and other resources, to defeat their rivals. By 2001, the IYC had factionalized into two camps, one camp headed by then Vice President Asari and the other by President Felix Tuodolo.²⁰⁰ The case evidence suggests that Asari allied with the governor to access money and weapons to oust Tuodolo and take over the IYC. The Boko Haram case points to a second potential explanation. Groups with limited resources have greater incentives to partner with elites.²⁰¹ In his work on civil war, William Reno notes that reformist rebels “end up trying to gain as much utility from the existing political society as possible, even when members hold personal ideological convictions and critiques that contradict such accommodations.”²⁰²

Third, the article points to the need for more research on public opinion on election violence. Recent studies show that voters withdraw support for politicians rumored to engage in election violence and that politicians recruit nonstate actors to reduce reputational costs.²⁰³ Yet, it is unclear whether these findings extend to other perpetrators of election violence. Voters did not seem to punish reformist group leaders for preelection violence in the cases here. Asari maintained his “folk hero” status after the 2003 election, and Yusuf’s popularity and following only continued to grow after he partnered with Sheriff in 2003.²⁰⁴ Questions about public opinion on election violence—how voters differentiate among various perpetrators, targets, and forms of election violence—and how this shapes the strategies of different actors is another important avenue for future research.

Preventing election violence is an urgent task for the policy community.²⁰⁵ In terms of policy implications, the findings in this article point to the importance of managing intraparty conflict for advancing peace and democracy.

200. ICG, “Fuelling the Niger Delta Crisis,” p. 4.

201. Reno, “The Politics of Insurgency in Collapsing States,” pp. 837–839.

202. *Ibid.*, p. 839.

203. Carey, Colaresi, and Mitchell, “Governments, Informal Links to Militias, and Accountability”; and Guitérrez-Romero and LeBas, “Does Electoral Violence Affect Vote Choice and Willingness to Vote?”

204. Hazen, “From Social Movement to Armed Group,” pp. 290–291; and Thurston, *Boko Haram*, pp. 131–132.

205. Creative Associates International, “Best Practices in Electoral Security: A Guide for Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance Programming” (Washington, D.C.: United States Agency for International Development, 2013), http://www.creativeassociatesinternational.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Electoral_Security_Best_Practices.pdf; and Timothy Sisk and Chris Spies, “Elections and Conflict Prevention: A Guide to Analysis, Planning, and Programming” (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2009), http://content-ext.undp.org/aplavs_publications/2431678/Elections-Conflict-Prevention.pdf.

While more countries than ever hold multiparty elections, about a quarter of these are marred by violence, often with devastating consequences.²⁰⁶ Beyond the loss of human life, election violence erodes democratic legitimacy,²⁰⁷ lowers turnout,²⁰⁸ undermines representative government,²⁰⁹ limits access to essential services,²¹⁰ increases support for violence within the population,²¹¹ and can trigger civil war.²¹² Many democracy-building programs and interventions have focused on managing interparty competition.²¹³ While this attention is not misplaced, especially in countries with a viable opposition, these recommendations make less sense where intraparty competition in the ruling party drives a fair amount of election violence. The findings suggest the need to devote greater attention to peacefully managing intraparty dynamics, such as nomination processes, primary elections, and internal procedures that determine who holds party leadership positions.

Finally, the findings illustrate that election violence can be a dress rehearsal for civil war. In the cases studied here, elite recruitment altered the trajectory of popular reformist groups by empowering militant leaders, supplying them with weapons to pursue their cause, and attracting members willing to use violence while alienating those committed to nonviolence. Following the 2003 elections in Rivers State, former IYC leader Asari Dokubo founded the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force and declared war on the federal government in September 2004, marking the beginning of a five-year insurgency.²¹⁴ In July 2009, Boko Haram launched a violent uprising in northeastern Nigeria, which

206. von Borzyskowski, *The Credibility Challenge*, p. 3.

207. Burchard, *Electoral Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa*, pp. 156–157.

208. Michael Bratton, "Vote Buying and Violence in Nigerian Election Campaigns," *Electoral Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (December 2008), pp. 621–632, doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2008.04.013; and Paul Collier and Pedro C. Vicente, "Votes and Violence: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Nigeria," *Economic Journal*, Vol. 124, No. 574 (February 2014), pp. F327–F355, doi.org/10.1111/econj.12109. For a challenge to this view, see Dorina A. Bekoe and Stephanie M. Burchard, "The Contradictions of Pre-Election Violence: The Effects of Violence on Voter Turnout in Sub-Saharan Africa," *African Studies Review*, Vol. 60, No. 2 (September 2017), pp. 73–92, doi.org/10.1017/asr.2017.50.

209. Dorina A. Bekoe, "Introduction: The Scope, Nature, and Pattern of Electoral Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa," in Bekoe, *Voting in Fear*, pp. 4–7.

210. Lee D. Pyne-Mercier et al., "The Consequences of Post-Election Violence on Antiretroviral HIV Therapy in Kenya," *Aids Care*, Vol. 23, No. 5 (May 2011), pp. 562–568, doi.org/10.1080/09540121.2010.525615.

211. Roxana Gutiérrez-Romero, "An Inquiry into the Use of Illegal Electoral Practices and Effects of Political Violence and Vote-Buying," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 58, No. 8 (December 2014), pp. 1500–1527, doi.org/10.1177/0022002714547902.

212. Paul Collier, *Wars, Guns, and Votes: Democracy in Dangerous Places* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009).

213. Creative Associates International, "Best Practices in Electoral Security," pp. 17–19.

214. Watts and Ibaba, "Turbulent Oil," pp. 1–19.

was met with a brutal military crackdown that resulted in 800–1,000 deaths, including that of its leader, Mohammed Yusuf.²¹⁵ Boko Haram went underground and reemerged in 2011 as a violent insurgency that continues today. That both insurgencies began as nonviolent reformist groups that were later recruited by political elites for electoral advantage powerfully demonstrates the downstream consequences of election violence and the importance of pursuing questions about the joint production of election violence by elites and nonstate actors.

215. Higazi, "The Origins and Transformation of the Boko Haram Insurgency in Northern Nigeria," p. 141.