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The spread and recurrence of deadly riots in Jos, Nigeria
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Frontiers of Ethnic Brutality in an African City:
Explaining Violent Conflict’s Spread and Recurrence in Jos, Nigeria

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Abstract
There is considerable consensus among scholars of ethnic riots that ethnically mixed areas are more prone to collective violence than segregated ones. The conclusion is based on studies that compare levels of violence between segregated and mixed localities. While this addresses disparities between settlements of dissimilar ethnic composition, variations in spread of violence across ethnically mixed areas remain a mystery. Seeking to explicate these variations, we propose an approach that not only examines the ethnic composition of a neighbourhood, but also its location in relation to adjoining neighbourhoods of similar or dissimilar ethnic makeup and their shared boundaries. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in Jos, a violence-ridden Nigerian city, we demonstrate that ethnically mixed areas located between segregated ones experience more incidents of violence than mixed neighbourhoods not comparably located. Our findings have both academic and practical implications.

Keywords: Ethnic conflict, mobilization, territoriality, collective violence, wars, neighbourhoods

* This chapter is based on an article that is currently under review. It was written in collaboration with Floris Vermeulen, see page 144 for statement of author contributions.
Introduction

Once considered one of Nigeria’s most peaceful regions, the city of Jos recently became troubled by ethnic violence of enormous scale. Over one thousand people were killed in a series of Christian-Muslim riots that lasted six days in September 2001. After a momentary calm within the city – during which hundreds were massacred in the rural districts of Plateau South – urban violence resumed in November 2008.65 This time it claimed over 700 lives within two days. Hostilities once again engulfed the city in January 2010, during which at least 200 people were killed within Jos metropolis and, from March onwards, over 400 were murdered by armed militias in the outlying Local Government Areas (LGA) of Jos South, Barking Ladi, and Riyom. Overall, more than 5,000 people were killed between 2001 and 2010, distinguishing the Jos riots as some of the most atrocious and persistent in Nigeria’s modern history.

Experts on Jos have quite exhaustively analysed the political and social factors that led to these hostilities (see Best 2007; Higazi 2007; Ostien 2009). At the heart of the conflict are contestations over indigene rights and political representation between the predominantly Christian ethnolinguistic groups of Berom, Afizere and Anaguta collectively considered indigenes and the mainly Muslim settler Hausa.66 Against a background of intensifying ethnic competition following Nigeria’s transition from military rule to democratic system in 1999, discriminatory policies, weak institutional capacity and apathy on the part of government led to the infamous “Jos crises” in 2001 and subsequently (Ostien 2009; Krause 2011; Higazi 2011). Though the conflict is essentially between so-called indigenes and settlers, violence took on a religious colouration because tribal and religious boundaries tend to overlap. As a result, many groups that are not part of the indigene-settler dispute became entangled in the riots.

65 Plateau South is one of the three senatorial zones into which Plateau State is subdivided into. The other two are Plateau North and Plateau Central.
66 Hausa in Jos is a social category that in addition to the original Hausa includes Fulani, BeriBeri, Nupe, Kanuri and other groups from northern Nigeria that have adopted the Hausa language and culture and are mainly Christian.
Besides these underlying causations, Jos-focused researchers, like their counterparts in other violent cities, have become interested in the spatial dimension of riots. The general discourse on demography and collective violence highlights ethnic segregation as an important variable in a neighbourhood’s vulnerability to violence. Views are conflicting, however, on how this relationship works. One perspective emanating from contact theory holds that ethnically segregated environments are more prone to violence (Boal 1972). An argument from conflict theory runs in the opposite direction, maintaining that ethnically mixed areas are more prone to violence (Kauffman 1996). Empirical evidence is conflicting, supporting one position in some contexts and suggesting contrary in other instances (Bhavnani et al. 2014: 226).

In trying to address this puzzle, experts on Jos have turned to poverty, civilian-violence prevention networks and power-sharing as explanatory factors for violence and nonviolence (Krause 2017; Bunte and Vinson 2016; Nyam and Ayuba 2016; Madueke 2014, 2015; Scacco 2012). These works provide useful insights on violence and nonviolence in particular areas. However, they still do not account for variations in the spread of violence in many demographically similar neighbourhoods. Moreover, some of the ideas are suitable for explaining variations at higher spatial scales such as cities, towns and districts but not across neighbourhoods.

Building on these works, we propose that in addition to a neighbourhood’s ethnic composition, its location in relation to adjoining neighbourhoods of similar or dissimilar ethnic composition account for its vulnerability to violence. Specifically, we argue that ethnically mixed neighbourhoods that are sandwiched between rivalling segregated settlements experience more incidents of violence than mixed areas not comparably located. We develop our argument in four steps. First we discuss relevant perspectives in related literature and then situate our argument. Second, we provide a sketch of incidents of violence from 2001 to 2010 followed by a note on research methods. Third, we scrutinise the case of Ali Kazaure and how its ethnic composition and location contribute to making it a site of recurrent collective violence. Specifically, we show how spatial adjacency and social networks that crisscross the shared boundaries of Ali Kazaure and the rivalling
adjoining neighbourhoods make it easy for external actors to infiltrate the neighbourhood transforming it into a frontier of sorts. In doing this, we also show that despite the changing ethnic composition of the neighbourhood, levels of violence remained fairly constant, indicating that ethnic composition alone cannot account for variations. Fourth, we cross-validate our findings in Ali Kazaure by surveying four other ethnically mixed neighbourhoods, two of which are sandwiched between rivalling segregated areas.

Related Literature

Scholars agree that a locality’s ethnic composition affects its susceptibility to violence, but they disagree on how the two variables interact. One perspective holds that ethnic segregation promotes violence (Peach 2007); the other maintains that ethnic diversity is the culprit (Kaufman 1996). Empirical evidence is conflicting, supporting one perspective in some instances and disproving the same in other contexts. For example, according to Bhavnani et al. (2014: 1), increased levels of segregation that followed frequent violent unrests in the 1960s and 1970s in Belfast helped prevent resurgence in the coming years. In Baghdad, Weidmann and Salehyan (2013) similarly noted that a sharp decline in group violence corresponded to a sharp rise in residential segregation. But evidence from other cases suggests the opposite. It was in ethnically diverse areas that race riots in the UK were found to be more prevalent (Peach 2007) and, in Afghanistan, that the occurrence of violence was more likely (Bhavnani and Choi 2012).

In Jos, both ethnically segregated and mixed settlements experienced some form of violence as the riots raged. Higazi (2007: 17) and Krause (2011: 34) highlight how Christians were attacked and driven out of predominantly Muslim neighbourhoods and Muslims out of areas with majority Christian populations. Evidence also suggests violence was particularly horrendous in partially segregated areas where the dominant group felt it needed to “prove” who owned the neighbourhood (Madueke, 2014, 2015). But there was also violence in mixed neighbourhoods. Human Rights Watch (2001: 9) described violence in some mixed localities as being waged “along improvised front lines.” Higazi (2007: 17) and Krause (2011:32) point out instances of violence in mixed areas. However,
incidents of violence significantly declined in segregated neighbourhoods as they became over time totally homogenous (Krause 2011: 32). This indicates that complete ethnic segregation does curb violence, at least in the short term, if not permanently. Moreover, it in some way addresses the variations in spread of violence between ethnically mixed and homogenously segregated settlements as far as Jos is concerned.

Nonetheless, a good part of the puzzle related to ethnic composition and collective violence is still unsolved. There is no adequate explanation for why some mixed neighbourhoods become perpetual battlegrounds while other equally diverse areas remain relatively peaceful. Experts on Jos have made important contributions towards understanding this enigma. In her analysis of variations in levels of violence, Krause (2017) found that what distinguished nonviolent neighbourhoods from those that experienced violence was the presence of a civilian violence-prevention network. In other words, neighbourhoods that were equally vulnerable but stayed unscathed have civilian networks to thank. Based on a paired comparison of a violent and a nonviolent violent neighbourhood, she empirically demonstrated how a joint Christian-Muslim patrol and influential community leaders contributed to making Dadin Kowa an oasis of relative calm even when nearby areas were boiling. Varshney (2001) has similarly noted the role of interethnic civic engagement in dousing tensions and preventing violence in India.

Further, Jos-focused literature emphasises power-sharing and poverty as important explanations for violence and nonviolence. Comparing Jos and Chikun, Bunte and Vinson (2016) observed how localities with a power-sharing arrangement are less likely to experience ethnic violence because the tone of politicians is more conciliatory and there is more mutual trust among members of the public than in areas without such arrangements. Similar observations have been made regarding the spread of violence in India (Wilkinson 2006). Krause (2011) and Higazi (2007: 18) stress the role of poverty in shaping the spread of violence noting that violence mainly happened in poor neighbourhoods while ‘wealthier areas such as Rayfield and the GRA where the elite live were unaffected.’ Explaining why poor neighbourhoods of Jos experienced higher levels
of violence than the wealthier ones, Scacco (2012) empirically illustrated how poverty increases the likelihood of riot participation, arguing that in circumstances where authorities cannot protect their citizens, poor residents of deprived areas will pick up arms to defend themselves in the face of riots.

Such perspectives advance our understanding of factors affecting spread of violence, but there is still room for investigation. To start with, while presence of a civilian-violence prevention network does suggest why some neighbourhoods were violence-free during some riots, an unanswered question is why other neighbourhoods with similar civilian violence-prevention arrangements, though initially non-violent, at some point did experience riots. For example, reports indicate that “in some areas, Christians and Muslims set up joint patrols in a bid to limit the spread of violence, but it became difficult to maintain these once the fighting had escalated” (Human Rights Watch 2001: 9). Such civilian networks fall within Keegan’s (1993) “contingent” factors as opposed to “permanent” operating factors like physical terrain. Contingent factors are important for determining violence and nonviolence circumstantially. For example, Anglo Jos is considered to have experienced violence in 2010 because an influential neighbourhood leader who contributed to preventing violence during previous episodes of riots left the neighbourhood (Krause 2017: 272). We propose that neighbourhood location and boundaries affect vulnerability to violence in a more permanent sense. In relation to power-sharing, we agree with Bunte and Vinson’s (2016) argument that it explains variations in spread of violence at the levels of LGAs and districts. However, there are also variations within LGAs and districts (e.g. across neighbourhoods and even streets) that power-sharing at these higher spatial scales cannot account for. We consider poverty, as argued by Scacco (2012), a crucial factor to consider in accounting for riot participation; for our purpose, however, it serves more as a control variable than an explanatory one.

We maintain that variations in spread of violence across demographically identical neighbourhoods remain a mystery because research has not adequately considered the location of a neighbourhood in relation to adjoining areas. Bridging perspectives in the broader literature on ethnic composition, location, and collective violence, we propose that when considering susceptibility to violence, it is not just
the neighbourhood’s ethnic composition that matters, but also its location in relation to surrounding neighbourhoods of similar or dissimilar ethnic composition.

We are not the first to consider how locational attributes affect a neighbourhood’s propensity for collective violence (see Calame and Charlesworth 2011). Jarman and O’Halloran (2001) observed that in Belfast the “buffer zone” – a type of interface where a mixed settlement falls between two segregated neighbourhoods – is more violence-prone than homogenous neighbourhoods divided by sharp boundaries. This is consistent with findings in New York where Legewie and Schaeffer (2016) found mixed neighbourhoods sandwiched between rivalling segregated neighbourhoods to be more disposed to conflict than fully segregated neighbourhoods with clearly defined boundaries. Apart from being sites of contestation over shared resources, such boundary neighbourhoods are contentious because they are spatial contexts where the homogenous community life that characterises the segregated neighbourhood is threatened (Legewie and Schaeffer 2016). Although the horrendous violence in Jos does not neatly parallel “The Troubles” of Belfast or New York’s neighbourhood scuffles, the dynamic that underlies buffer zones and contested boundaries is similar.

The notion of the frontier sheds light on the sociospatial setting discussed in this article. Defining the frontier, Kotek (1999) noted that, first, the frontier is an area located “on fault-lines between ethnic, religious or ideological wholes” (Kotek 1999: 228). Second, it is characterised by contestations and struggles for political control between rival groups (Kotek 1999: 229). Third, the frontier symbolises bigger conflicts, being “emblematic of larger disputed areas or zones” (Kotek 1999: 231). To these distinctive features, we add a fourth: at the frontier, the struggle for control is not restricted to residents within the neighbourhood, but also involves actors from adjoining areas. Although Kotek’s frontier originally referred to higher spatial levels such as cities and regions, it has gained currency in characterising battleground neighbourhoods or settlements known to experience intense violence in conflict-ridden cities. Boal (2002) used the concept to explain Belfast’s contentious geography and the spatial patterns of Catholic-Protestant violence.

Figure 4.1 shows segregation and diversity across neighbourhoods in Jos city centre. As a result of political developments, violence over the years, increased
segregation and militarization of the populace, many of these neighbourhoods have transformed from mundane residential areas to strategic spaces of ethnic dissent and combat. This transformation led to the emergence of two types of sociospatial settings: ethnic strongholds and frontiers. Strongholds, referred to in Jos as either “New Jerusalem” or “Saudi Arabia” (Trovalla, Adetula, and Trovalla 2014: 67) depending on the dominant group, are locales of ethnic exclusivity, characterised by ethnic homogeneity and territorial dominance. Frontiers are sites of fierce competition, contestations, and tussle for territorial and political control (Kotek 1999). The central argument of this article, thus, is that frontiers are not only subject to internal wrangling – they also become more strained as external social networks in the adjoining strongholds exploit their trans-neighbourhood ties to extend the frontier of their territorial and political control. The ethnically mixed neighbourhood located between rivaling segregated areas serves as a frontier for competing political and territorial interests. It is highly vulnerable to violence because ethnopolitical networks from the adjoining segregated areas compete to dominate it. The key objective is to expel rival group members so as to establish territorial and electoral dominance. Using violence to expel residents who are likely to vote for an opponent has been well documented in Kenya (see Kasara 2014). Through their connections with co-ethnics in the ethnically mixed areas, ethnopolitical networks from segregated areas may invade the mixed localities when violence erupts. Riots, moreover, present opportunities, as well as cloaks, for individuals to commit atrocities based on economic, personal, and other motivations (Kalyvas 2003).

Recounting a Bloody Decade
Different scholars have examined the underlying causations of violence in Jos (Best 2007; Higazi 2007; Ostien 2009; Krause 2011). As such, before explicating patterns of violence, this subsection provides just a sketch of the events that precipitated the three major incidents of violence in Jos within this period. Although the trajectory of deadly violence in Jos dates back more than half a century (see Plotnicov 1971), September 2001’s fatal riots are what caught world attention. In July that year, LGA-level coordinators were appointed for the National Poverty
Eradication Programme (NAPEP), a federal government agency for economic empowerment schemes. For Jos North, Alhaji Mukhtar Usman Mohammed, a Hausa, was appointed. The indigenes vehemently opposed the appointment. They insisted such a critical position belonged to the indigenes. The Nikki Tobi commission of enquiry report recounts ensuing inflammatory exchanges between indigenes and Hausa.⁶⁷

Figure 4.1: Ethnic Segregation and Diversity in Jos City Centre (Source: created by author).

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In response, the state government scheduled 10 September for an intergroup dialogue to find a consensual solution to the fracas. But the dialogue did not transpire, as the city exploded in violence on 7 September, a Friday. The riots started in Congo-Russia, a deprived, densely populated and ethnically mixed neighbourhood. The incident that sparked the violence involved a young Christian woman trying to gain passage while a group of Muslim worshippers were praying on the road. There are different versions of how it all started but what is important is that violent clashes soon ensued, and within a very short period spread elsewhere in the city in response to exaggerated accounts of killings going viral (Human Rights Watch 2001).

The violence of 2008 began over an elective position, the chairmanship of Jos North LGA. For background, local elections were held across the 17 LGAs of Plateau State on 27 November 2008. The ruling PDP’s candidate and that of the main opposition ANPP were the foremost candidates for the Jos North LGA chairmanship. Christians mainly aligned with the PDP and Muslims with the ANPP based on the candidates’ religions. The elections were largely peaceful, with no major disturbances recorded. Later, however, skirmishes began at the collation centre, which was at the last minute relocated to a Christian suburb. ANPP party agents and loyalists started protesting what they suspected was an attempt to rig election results by PDP officials who doubled as top government officers at the time. The police used teargas to disperse the crowds of protesters. As they made their way back to their neighbourhoods, the crowd looted and destroyed shops while alerting co-ethnics via phone and word of mouth to come out and fight (Ostien 2009). Before dawn, many neighbourhoods had erupted in violence (Human Rights Watch 2009).

The violence of 2010 was sparked by an event seemingly trivial in comparison to that of 2001 and 2008, which were both related to political positions (whether elective or appointive). On 17 January, a Muslim arrived with labourers to start renovations on his home, which was destroyed during the 2008 violence in Dutse Uku. Accounts differ on how the violence started. The Muslim-sympathetic version claims the brawl began when neighbourhood Christians attempted to stop the Muslim labourers from renovating the house and threatened to destroy it again
if they did. Shortly afterwards, the Christians allegedly started throwing stones and calling other Christian residents to come out and fight. The Christian-sympathetic version claims that the Muslim labourers blocked the road and that morning called churchgoing passers-by derogatory names, such as “infidels.” Allegedly, the Muslim labourers had sophisticated weapons and started the fight (Higazi 2011: 24-25). Whoever started it, wild tales of massacres and killings soon went viral, presumably after Plateau State’s police commissioner went on state television to blame “some Muslim youths” for starting the attack (Higazi 2011: 25). Other neighbourhoods erupted in violent clashes.

In each of these incidents, the scale and intensity of the violence was astonishing. Rampaging mobs moved around the city, killing or maiming anyone of another faith. Youth mounted roadblocks and killed motorists who could not prove themselves co-ethnics (Human Rights Watch 2009). People were killed if unable to recite a particular prayer (Krause 2011). In other situations, they were killed on the basis of their dress (Trovalla, Adetula, and Trovalla 2014). Landed property with homes, offices, and business was massively destroyed. Religious institutions were disproportionately targeted. Cumulatively, over 5,000 people were killed (including casualties in the villages), over 200,000 displaced, and an incalculable worth of property destroyed.

**Research Design and Data**

This article is based on an in-depth case study of levels and patterns of violence in Ali Kazaure. This ethnically mixed neighbourhood in the city centre of Jos is located between two segregated settlements, bordered on the north by the large Muslim area of Angwan Rogo and on the south by the Christian settlement of Apata (See Figure 4.2). Inasmuch as this in-depth study zooms in on one neighbourhood, we pay close attention to Ali Kazaure’s adjacent neighbourhoods. In addition, we worked with a selection of four ethnically mixed areas that are demographically, socially, and economically similar though differ in terms of location and the ethnic composition of the adjoining settlements.
Like Ali Kazaure, two of these neighbourhoods are sandwiched between segregated settlements; the other two, although also ethnically diverse, are not. These secondary cases are only briefly examined to achieve the kind of control required to avoid spurious claims and to cross-validate findings. The populations of all the neighbourhoods considered fall between 15,000 and 25,000.

We started by comparing recurrence and persistence of violence across all the aforementioned ethnically mixed neighbourhoods. We did this by scanning official reports of violence and hospital records to determine which of the neighbourhoods experienced violence and which did not. We did this for each neighbourhood for all three episodes of ethnic riots. To identify and differentiate patterns and levels of violence, we relied on extensive interviews and discussions with participants of riots, surviving victims, eyewitnesses, and other residents. Comparing and combining information from the official reports, hospital records, and our interviews, we created three categories for classifying each neighbourhood’s distinct experience of violence: MV = major violence, prolonged clashes lasting several hours and involving a large group of people; NV = no violence; and SV = sporadic violence, isolated and often sporadic violent incidents.
involving much smaller groups and lasting only a short while. Table 4.1 presents two neighbourhood samples.

Table 4.1: Samples of Violence Levels in Two Neighbourhoods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighbourhood</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farin Gada</td>
<td>Not sandwiched</td>
<td>NV</td>
<td>SV</td>
<td>SV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasarawa Gwong</td>
<td>Sandwiched</td>
<td>MV</td>
<td>MV</td>
<td>MV</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1 shows how Nasarawa Gwong, an ethnically mixed neighbourhood sandwiched between rivalling segregated settlements, experienced major (persistent) violence in all three episodes of ethnic riots. Contrastingly, Farin Gada, an ethnically mixed neighbourhood not sandwiched between segregated settlements, experienced no violence in 2001 and only isolated, short-lived incidents of violence in 2008 and 2010. Based on this, we can say Nasarawa Gwong experienced more recurrent and persistent violence because it was violence-ridden in all three episodes of riots; in all three instances, fighting was prolonged and involved a large number of people.

We relied on a variety of datasets from fieldwork conducted in Jos between 2015 and 2017. During this time, besides gathering significant archival materials and official reports of violence, research visits were frequent to Ali Kazaure, its adjoining areas, and several other neighbourhoods. The many interviews and other forms of formal and informal discussions conducted with a diverse group of informants are elaborated later in this section.

We used the ethnic composition of public primary schools as a proxy for the ethnic composition of the neighbourhood in which they are located. We analysed common entrance examination registers for the graduating classes of 1990, 1995, 2000, 2005, and 2010 as representative samples of the school since these pupils all sit for the common entrance examination, a final written test taken in order to graduate from primary school and gain admission into secondary
school. The class register carries the full names of the pupils, year of graduation, and other information. To analyse the data, we scanned the names and categorised them as either “Muslim” or “Christian.” In Jos and across much of Nigeria, an individual’s name is usually an indicator of his or her religion.

The choice of public primary schools was informed by two considerations. First, children who attend them come from poor families unable to afford to drive their children to school. These pupils thus reside in the neighbourhood where the school is located. Private primary schools would not have been an apt data source because their pupils tend to have parents with cars and can therefore be driven to school elsewhere. Secondary schools, public or private, would also be unsuitable because their students usually converge from different neighbourhoods. As a second consideration, public primary schools have very comprehensive records that go back decades, whereas most private schools in Jos are recently established.

We also collected hospital records of victims of violence and police reports to determine spread of violence. Hospital records of violent clashes comprise demographic information such as the name, ethnicity, religion, and address of a victim. They also contain forensic information on the nature and severity of injuries, sites on the body where injury occurred, and any weapon used. For this study, we collected records from four hospitals that received and treated victims of violence within and around the city of Jos from 2001 onwards. Police records specify dates, times, and neighbourhoods or streets where violence occurred; sometimes, numbers of casualties and arrested suspects are also included.

For the purpose of this article, we conducted and analysed about 86 interviews concerning the three episodes of violence that occurred in the city between 2001 and 2010: 23 in the ethnically mixed neighbourhood of Ali Kazaure; 19 in the Christian stronghold of Apata; and 24 in the Muslim stronghold of Angwan Rogo. Five interviews were conducted in each of the four other ethnically mixed areas: Nasarawa Gwong, Congo-Russia, Farin Gada, and Mister Ali. Most of the interviews were conducted between 2015 and 2017, but others were conducted between 2010 and 2013. Interviewees and informants were sampled mainly through snowballing because of the sensitive nature of the study. However,
geographical representation, length of residency, and proximity to and knowledge of the issues discussed were important considerations in the sampling process. Because violence forms the core of the study, we were particularly interested in hearing directly from riot participants, victims, and eyewitnesses.

The interviews stemmed from three main discussion prompts: 1) describe how you experienced violence in your neighbourhood; 2) tell us about the main participants in the violence and where they came from; 3) describe how the violence affected your neighbourhood in terms of social networks (inter-ethnic/intra-ethnic relations, neighbourhood associations, etc.). Each of these discussion points was complemented with several follow-up queries that sought to dig beyond ritualised narratives that may have been rehearsed and told over the years. The duration of the interviews varied, with the longest just under 90 minutes and the shortest only 15 minutes.

We employed a thematic system in analysing the data. On the basis of the data and existing literature, we created four coding categories: how violence started (the main instigators and their origin – from within or outside the neighbourhood); patterns of violence (pogroms, clashes, or sporadic isolated incidents); and effects on intergroup and intragroup relations (civic and quotidian networks). After disaggregating the transcribed text into these categories, we ordered them into themes. We then identified patterns where they exist before sequencing them in a chronological account.

The datasets are not without some biases and limitations. In relation to ethnic composition, it is possible for a group to be overrepresented or underrepresented in a school or a class simply by chance. We believe, however, that these chance possibilities have a way of balancing each other out. There are widespread allegations that the police force favours Christians since it is controlled by the state government. But since we are not interested in casting who is the aggressor and who is the victim, but rather being able to corroborate the spread of violence, police bias has little consequence for the outcome of our study. Ultimately, to circumvent these problems – and recognising the possibility of memory fuzziness or deliberate mischief in interviews – we conducted a “ground
truthing” exercise that involved visits to the neighbourhoods and extensive informal discussions with residents.

**Location and Cross-Boundary Violent Networks in Ali Kazaure**

Shortly after violence started in Congo-Russia on the afternoon of 7 September 2001, Ali Kazaure became engulfed in the pandemonium. Muslim residents barely completed the Juma’at prayers before having to hurry home. As crowds scurried through the neighbourhood streets, they took with them news of riots, killings, and the burning of a mosque by Christian youth in Congo-Russia. Christian residents frantically poured out of their homes to gather what was happening. Near the area’s Catholic church, two traders described how they narrowly escaped being killed by Muslim mobs around New Market. One of them had a cut on his arm, proving the ordeal they experienced in the hands of their Muslim assailants. A small group of Christians clustered to listen anxiously, and soon, angrily.\(^{68}\)

Two older Christian residents immediately took control of the situation before it got out of hand. Youth leaders were rallied, amongst them one of this study’s informants. They were told not to engage in any form of violence and ensure that potential troublemakers from outside the neighbourhood would be prevented from coming in. A large joint patrol was immediately organised. Although there was tension in the air and some people were seen leaving the neighbourhood out of fear, there was no fighting throughout that day.\(^{69}\)

Before dawn on Saturday, gunshots were heard around where the neighbourhood shares a boundary with Apata, a large Christian settlement. One resident said when he came out of his house, he saw four men. Three of them whom he identified as “fake soldiers” were dressed in military fatigues and were shooting randomly. The other persons were reportedly helping the “fake soldiers” identify Muslim homes. He knew them quite well. Both of them were Apata residents who had friends in and frequently visited Ali Kazaure. They were known troublemakers who had been in and out of police custody. On hearing the gunshots, other residents came out, some of them also armed, but by then the

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\(^{68}\) Interview with neighbourhood leader, 16 May 2016.

\(^{69}\) Interview with neighbourhood leader 16 May 2016.
“fake soldiers” and their accomplices had fled. At least four people were left wounded when the attackers retreated.\(^70\) Shortly after, another incident occurred farther north. Four men attacked a Christian trader near his home. An eyewitness identified two of the men who did the beating as “bad boys from Yan Kaji” and the two others who stood by as residents of Ali Kazaure. Some residents claimed that following these predawn events, calls for Muslims to come and fight were made through loudspeakers of the mosque around the Eid Square. Others claim that the calls came from a nearby church and it was for Christians to come out and kill Muslims.\(^71\) It is difficult to verify if these calls really happened. However, judging by the people who were out on the street before sunrise, some form of mobilisation took place.

At dawn, at least 500 people were out on the street, many of them armed.\(^72\) Christians kept to the southern end of the neighbourhood and Muslims to the north. There was no joint patrol. Tales of “fake soldiers” and infiltrators and their inside accomplices fed discussion on both sides. According to one informant, “people were running in and out of the nearby neighbourhoods and calling their friends to come and help them defend their homes.” By sunrise, fighters from the Christian areas of Apata, Chorbe Junction, and Busa Buji had marched into the neighbourhood and staged a front near the Catholic church.\(^73\) Muslims from Angwan Rogo and Yan Kaji camped on the other side of the neighbourhood around the Eid Square. As one man described it:

The real fighting started when some well-armed young men from the Christian side started shooting and killing the Muslims near them. That was when the Muslims here and from Angwan Rogo and Yan Kaji also started killing the Christians near them. It was a terrible sight. Even women and children were attacked and killed. I watched many people shot, stabbed, or beaten to death with big sticks, but there was nothing I could do. I was also busy trying to stay alive.\(^74\)

Some months after the incident, a woman described the day’s events in an interview with Human Rights Watch (2001:10):

\(^70\) Interview with resident of Ali Kazaure, 14 July 2016.
\(^71\) Interviews with residents, 17 May 2016.
\(^72\) Interview with neighbourhood leader, 17 May 2016.
\(^73\) Interview with youth leader, 16 May 2016.
\(^74\) Interview with resident, 17 May 2016.
Muslim youths from Angwan Rogo came to Ali Kazaure. They set fire to the Fatima Catholic Cathedral near our house. They had guns and petrol bombs in bottles. Youths from Apata were fighting those from across the street. When the Muslims came with guns, most of them ran away. Some Christians then also got guns and launched a counter-attack. In Ali Kazaure both Christian and Muslim houses were burnt. There was a battleground in the middle. In Apata, most of the houses burnt were Muslim.

Like those in 2001, the riots of 2008 spread with remarkable speed. They started before sunrise on 28 November, in a suburb south-west of the city centre. Ali Kazaure was one of the first neighbourhoods to be hit and it formed the battleground for some of the fiercest clashes (Human Rights Watch 2009: 9). Residents were first awoken by sounds of gunshots around 4:30 am. 75 One man said he heard the loud speakers from the nearby mosque around 4:45 a.m. calling on Muslims to come out. Another resident countered this, saying there were no such calls but there were sounds of whistles from all directions after the gunshots were heard. Whatever the case, large mobs armed with sticks, machetes, and firearms were already out on the street by the break of dawn, reminiscent of that Saturday morning in September 2001.

Some older residents intervened and violence was prevented at this stage. Obeying neighbourhood leaders, most of the youth returned to their section of the neighbourhood and kept vigil. Around 9:00 am, loud gunshot sounds were heard from Angwan Rogo. A Christian youth said they soon remobilised for fighting, having learnt that the gunshots were fired by a large group of youth from Angwan Rogo and Yan Kaji who were advancing to attack. 76 One Muslim young man said they decided to fight when they saw mobs of Christians from Apata coming to attack them. Who struck first is unclear, though perhaps it is not as important as the fact that Christian and Muslim fighters from adjoining neighbourhoods had formed battlefronts within Ali Kazaure by late morning. 77

Armed with machetes, sticks and firearms, Christian and Muslim groups stood some distance apart and shot at each other. Fighting was a series of attacks

75 Interview with resident, 18 April 2017.
76 Interview with Christian resident, 16 February 2017.
77 Interview with youth leader, 13 May 2016.
and counterattacks between the two camps. One side would charge forward and gain the upper hand over the opponent only until the retreating side regrouped and push back. At every advance and retreat, casualties were incurred. “It is when you stop running and turn back that you notice many people are lying on the ground bleeding, some alive some already dead,” said a man in the centre of the riots.78

While these clashes were taking place, another form of attack also ensued. Some fighters snuck through the narrow alleys behind the buildings and ignited houses. These people were also heavily armed and when they set houses on fire, they killed and maimed the occupants.79 On both sides, informants said, many of the arsonists were from the surrounding areas though they seldom worked without a local guide – a resident of the neighbourhood who told them which houses to burn and which to spare.80 A woman explained how one of the five men who burnt her house was a former neighbour.81 A man who narrowly escaped death but had two of his siblings killed said two of his former neighbours were among those who attacked his home.82

There is no official figure of how many people were killed in Ali Kazaure, but some riot participants and eyewitnesses estimate more than 50 people could have been killed in the two days of the fighting. Many of these deaths – at least 27 – resulted from arbitrary killings by security forces. Aside these deaths and hundreds of injuries, some 133 buildings were destroyed, making the neighbourhood one of the most physically devastated (Human Rights Watch 2009: 19-20).

The same pattern of violence was repeated during the 2010 riots. Word about the violence came to Ali Kazaure around 11 am on Sunday, 17 January. Christian and Muslim mobs marched in from the adjoining segregated settlements. Earlier, some prominent individuals had intervened, and Christian and Muslim residents had agreed that peace should be maintained at all costs. Muslim youths were to watch their own part of the settlement to prevent troublemakers from the

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78 Interview with riot participant, 27 May 2016.
79 Interview with riot participant 27 May 2016.
80 Interview with residents, 16 May 2016.
81 Interview with resident of Ali Kazaure, 14 April 2016.
82 Interview with former resident of Ali Kazaure, 27 May 2016.
Muslim neighbourhoods of Angwan Rogo and Yan Kaji from coming in. Christian youth were to prevent potential fighters from Apata, Chorbe Junction and Busa Buji from penetrating. These efforts worked at first, but the barricades on both sides of the neighbourhoods collapsed and fighters from the surrounding neighbourhoods invaded. Christians claimed the Muslim residents were the first to let their co-ethnics from surrounding areas in. One Christian resident said some of his Muslim neighbours assisted the invading fighters by identifying the homes of Christians for attack. Muslims also made similar accusations. A Muslim resident said he saw two Christian residents of the neighbourhood leading fighters from Apata.83

There is no indication that the change in ethnic composition in Ali Kazaure affected levels of violence. As indicated in Table 4.2, one outcome of the several episodes was an increasing level of ethnic segregation. Between 2001 and 2010, many Christians either fled the neighbourhood or relocated further south, closer to the Christian stronghold of Apata. From a fairly mixed area with a Christian-Muslim percentage ratio of 52-48 in 2000, the population became 91 per cent Muslim in 2010. Despite this huge change in ethnic composition, nothing indicated lessening or heightening ethnic violence. Levels of violence remaining fairly constant despite the change in ethnic composition point to factors beyond ethnic composition. The conspicuous role external groups played in instigating violence within Ali Kazaure suggests its location between two segregated settlements is crucial in explaining levels of violence.

Beyond the shift in ethnic composition, Ali Kazaure remains contested politically and territorially. The quest for territorial dominance hinges on the desire to control more polling units, among other things. Apart from this, one of the oldest and largest Catholic churches in Jos still stands there, attracting worshippers from nearby and distant areas to congregate there every Sunday. This Christian edifice stands within only two hundred metres of Eid Square where Muslims gather to pray. Ali Kazaure therefore remains a frontier, despite its ethnic composition becoming more segregated, its location between segregated settlements and what its religious institutions mean for people inside and outside the neighbourhood.

83 Interview with former resident of Ali Kazaure, 16 May 2016.
Table 4.2: Ethnic Composition of Ali Kazaure, 1992 – 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of pupils</th>
<th>Number of Christians</th>
<th>Percentage of Christians</th>
<th>Number of Muslims</th>
<th>Percentage of Muslims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From all indications, the different incidents of violence in Ali Kazaure were both instigated and sustained by external forces. Although residents of the area also contributed, the violence could have been managed and possibly mitigated before it got out of hand if not for the “bad people from these other areas that kept attacking,” according to a resident who was part of the joint patrols in 2001 and 2008. Several other residents also emphasise the role of external armed groups in fuelling violence in the area.84 Through alliances with co-ethnics in the frontier, politicians and local criminals from the adjoining segregated settlements found it easy to infiltrate and even invade whenever violence erupted.85 The boundaries Ali Kazaure shares with adjacent settlements make it easy for external groups to sneak in and out with the tacit support of their co-ethnics within.

Cross-Validating with Other Ethnically Mixed Areas

Juxtaposing official reports on incidents of riots, hospital records of victims, and interviews with riot participants, survivors, and eyewitnesses gives us a fair idea of spread and levels of violence across the neighbourhoods of Jos. Table 4.3 shows the recurrence and persistence of violence across five ethnically mixed neighbourhoods. The frontier settlement of Ali Kazaure is among the most violent areas of Jos. Along with Congo-Russia and Nasarawa Gwong – ethnically mixed

84 Interview with residents, 13 March 2017.
85 Interview with politician, 13 February 2017.
areas that are similarly sandwiched between segregated settlements – it experienced major violence during all three episodes ethnic riots.

Table 4.3: Recurrence and Persistence of Violence across Ethnically Mixed Neighbourhoods
* MV = major violence NV = no violence; SV = sporadic violence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighbourhood</th>
<th>Location of neighbourhood</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ali Kazaure</td>
<td>Sandwiched</td>
<td>MV</td>
<td>MV</td>
<td>MV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congo-Russia</td>
<td>Sandwiched</td>
<td>MV</td>
<td>MV</td>
<td>MV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farin Gada</td>
<td>Not sandwiched</td>
<td>NV</td>
<td>SV</td>
<td>SV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. Gwong</td>
<td>Sandwiched</td>
<td>MV</td>
<td>MV</td>
<td>MV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mister Ali</td>
<td>Not sandwiched</td>
<td>NV</td>
<td>NV</td>
<td>SV</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To further allay possible concerns that these claims were spurious, we crosschecked how dynamics played out in other ethnically mixed settlements. The two goals here were to check whether ethnically mixed areas that fit the profile of the frontier also experienced the same level of violence as Ali Kazaure and, conversely, that other ethnically mixed that are not frontiers did not experience similar levels of violence.

The frontier areas of Nasarawa Gwong and Congo-Russia show patterns of violence similar to those experienced in Ali Kazaure. To start with, these neighbourhoods, not unlike Ali Kazaure, experienced major incidents of violence in all three riot episodes. In all of them, Christian and Muslim residents had peace pacts and these arrangements prevented violence at some initial point, but later collapsed largely due to infiltrations by external groups. In our interviews with residents of Dutse Uku in Nasarawa Gwong, Christian residents blamed Muslims for allowing Muslim fighters from Yan Shanu and Filin Ball to enter the settlement. Muslims claimed the Christians first gave way to mobs of Christian fighters from Tina Junction and Angwan Rukuba. \(^{86}\) Figure 4.3 shows how fighters marched into

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\(^{86}\) Interviews with residents of Dutse Uku, 13 March 2017.
Nasarawa Gwong from the surrounding areas. Congo-Russia also attracted large numbers of external fighters. Mobs of Muslims marched from Bauchi Road, Filin Ball, and Duala while many Christians came from Angwan Rukuba and parts of Dogon Dutse.\footnote{Interviews with residents of Congo-Russia, 14 March 2017.}

Figure 4.3: Directions of movement by fighters from Angwan Rukuba to Nasarawa Gwong (Source: created by author).

The second category of neighbourhoods in the crosschecking process includes mixed neighbourhoods that are not sandwiched between segregated areas. Farin Gada and Mister Ali fall in this group. These areas are either bordered by other mixed settlements or physical (natural and artificial) boundaries in the form of main roads and open spaces. Comparatively, these neighbourhoods experienced far less violence than Ali Kazaure or any of the other frontier areas. Apart from looting and destruction around the market area, Farin Gada only experienced isolated attacks in 2008, which were quickly contained. There was also some low-level violence in 2010, but nothing compared to what happened in the frontiers.\footnote{Interviews in Farin Gada, 31 March 2016.} Mister Ali experienced a lot of tension and low-level violence in 2010, but this was as far
as the riots affected the area. Neither settlement ridded itself of internal rancour. Many residents wanted to fight, but intergroup dialogues and joint patrols successfully prevented would-be troublemakers from plunging the area into chaos. However, more crucial to explaining the relative calm that reigned in these areas while other parts of the city burned was the absence of external influence because of their location.

**Conclusion**

This article explored the dynamics of ethnic conflict in one of the most violent areas of Jos. In doing so, we demonstrated that besides its ethnic composition, a neighbourhood’s location in relation to adjacent settlements is crucial for understanding why violence persists more in some areas. The article used the metaphor of the frontier to explain why Ali Kazaure, an ethnically mixed neighbourhood sandwiched between segregated rivalling Christian and Muslim settlements, experienced more recurrent and persistent violence than others. This concluding section reiterates some essential aspects of the argument, highlights their academic and practical relevance, and suggests possible directions for further study.

We found ethnically mixed areas located between rivalling segregated settlements to be particularly violence-prone not only because they are mixed, but also because rival groups in the adjoining segregated settlements compete to dominate the area, generally considered a “no man’s land” waiting to be conquered. This insight can contribute to more effective responses to ethnic violence. On the basis of this understanding, authorities can predict where violence is likely to occur and act proactively.

Another key contribution of the article lies in showing that different sociospatial contexts – ethnic strongholds and frontiers – contribute differentially in the production of violence. Neither, arguably, plays a lesser role. Behaviour patterns of groups differ in the two settings, but it is difficult for violence to be instigated – much less sustained – without actors from the two contexts playing

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89 Interview with resident in Mister Ali, 30 March 2016.
90 Interviews with vigilante in Mister Ali, 30 March 2016.
complementary roles. In the contested political landscape of Jos, the segregated settlements were conducive to forging ethnic solidarity and marshalling foot soldiers. The ethnic strongholds of Jos proved to be territories where ethnic egotism thrives and both formal and quotidian social networks fuse into fronts for pushing ethnic interests, both politically and violently. Complementarily, the frontier was a setting for whetting rivalry and contestations, and consequently became the battleground.

We also observed that although joint patrols by Christian and Muslim residents in some ethnically mixed parts of Nasarawa Gwong such as Duala and Angwan Keke initially helped keep the peace, these arrangements could not stand the heat when the violence escalated. The sustainability of joint patrols and other ad hoc civilian violence prevention efforts depends on the intensity of violence, with the success rate diminishing as violence intensifies. As such, civilian-violence prevention networks determine nonviolence only circumstantially. Neighbourhood location and shared boundaries are more permanent operating factors that explain vulnerability to violence in a more fundamental sense.

This article is an initial step in exploring how the ethnic composition of a neighbourhood, combined with its location in relation to adjoining areas of similar or dissimilar ethnic composition, affects its vulnerability to violence. We used the metaphor of the frontier to explain why ethnically mixed areas sandwiched between rivalling segregated areas experience more recurrent and persistent violence. To better understand riots at the frontier, we also need to examine the micro-level mechanics of violent networks. This would require looking at trans-neighbourhood social networks, their spatial patterns, and implications for the mobility of armed networks within and across neighbourhoods during riots.

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