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# DECENTRALIZED DESPOTISM

## SUBNATIONAL INCUMBENTS AND ELECTORAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA



Maureen A. Fubara



# **Decentralized Despotism**

Subnational Incumbents and  
Electoral Violence in Nigeria

Maureen Asehtongha Fubara

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Cover photo: Maureen Asehtongha Fubara and Shedrach Awodi. A visual illustration of a triumphant Nigerian politician, standing atop a bloodied ballot box marked "VOTE," pointing forward as violence specialists stand behind him and ordinary citizens cower around him, visually capturing the violent domination of elections by subnational powerholders.

Back cover photo: Maureen Asehtongha Fubara and Shedrach Awodi. Visual illustration of the Nigerian flag in a foggy landscape.

# **Decentralized despotism**

## **Subnational incumbents and electoral violence in Nigeria**

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## List of Abbreviations

APC	All Progressives Congress
IGR	Internally generated revenue
INEC	Independent National Electoral Commission
IPOB	Indigenous People of Biafra
LEVD	Lethal Electoral Violence Dataset
LP	Labour Party
NURTW	National Union of Road Transport Workers
OLS	Ordinary least squares
OPC	O'odua People's Congress
PDP	People's Democratic Party
PSI	Practical Sampling International
SDP	Social Democratic Party

# 1

## Introduction

*As the acclaimed largest democracy in Africa, every electoral cycle reminds us of the work we still have ahead, and that is because what we call elections here negate every known precept and principle of what a democratic election should be. And by that, I mean, we have electoral violence at the height of it...*

Interview, CSO, Rivers, April 25th, 2022.

On March 23rd, 2023, election day in Rivers State, an oil-rich state in southern Nigeria, ended in tragedy for Lennard, a local All Progressives Congress (APC) party leader. Lennard was killed by gunmen who came to steal ballot boxes (George, 2023). After refusing to step aside, standing his ground to protect the ballot box, he was dragged away and shot in front of his community. Neighbors tried in vain to save him (George, 2023). Apart from Lennard, two other young APC supporters were killed that day, along with an election worker who was also shot dead while trying to stop ballot snatchers. In total, more than 11 people lost their lives: they included party agents, voters, and election officials, all casualties of a governorship election (George, 2023). That day in Rivers, the cost of political power was paid with human lives, leaving behind broken families, shattered communities, and the painful truth that in some parts of Nigeria, people still die for democracy (George, 2023).

Meanwhile in Nasarawa, an agricultural state located in central Nigeria, violence also occurred during the polling. In a polling unit in Angwan Nungu, a clash between People's Democratic Party (PDP) and APC supporters escalated, leading to the destruction of election materials (Attah, 2023). The clash started due to a disagreement over where to set up polling units, but quickly spiraled out of control, fueled by political rivalries (Attah, 2023). By mid-morning, the situation had turned violent. Youth and women hoping to vote stood by helplessly as election materials, including ballot papers, were torn, soaked, and destroyed by angry party supporters, while election officials and security agents narrowly escaped harm (Attah, 2023). Although no one died in Angwan Nungu, this violence nevertheless left the community unsettled (Attah, 2023).

These examples indicate that both Rivers State and Nasarawa State struggled with electoral violence during elections in 2023. However, there was significant variation in the lethality and the perpetrators of this violence,

which raises important theoretical and empirical questions. In Rivers, armed men affiliated with the incumbent party killed several people, including voters and election officials. This constituted a deliberate effort to coerce rather than to peacefully obtain an advantage for the ruling party. Why was violence so much more lethal in Rivers State? And how was the incumbent party in Rivers, the PDP, capable of orchestrating this violence? In contrast, while Nasarawa State also experienced violence, this violence did not lead to any deaths, and it involved only clashes between incumbent and opposition party supporters. This comparison suggests that while violence is common in Nigerian elections, its lethality and the perpetrators involved vary in significant ways; some states experience much more lethal violence perpetrated by violence specialists, while others experience less severe violence engaged in by ordinary citizens. These two vignettes illustrate the dissertation's main question: *What explains subnational variation in the lethality and the perpetrators of electoral violence?* I answer the question by developing a political economy theory of electoral violence, which explains both who perpetrates electoral violence in Nigeria, and how lethal it is.

Elections in Nigeria are characterized by extensive violence, which takes the form of clashes and killings (Albin-Lackey, 2008; Centre for Democracy and Development, 2023; Human Rights Watch, 2004). Data across elections confirm this: in the 2003 general elections, 100 deaths were recorded, while 300 were recorded in 2007, and over 800 were recorded in 2011, mainly concentrated in northern Nigeria (Adebajo, 2022; Angerbrandt, 2018; Human Rights Watch, 2011). Similarly, over 100 deaths were recorded in the 2019 general elections (Adebajo, 2022), while in the 2023 elections, the Centre for Democracy and Development recorded 109 deaths during the campaign period, across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2023).

Violence is endemic in Nigerian elections because the country's decentralized federal system grants incumbents access to extensive resources, making political office highly attractive, with political office-holders being comparable to elected autocrats (Angerbrandt, 2020; Oyewole and Omotola, 2022; Turnbull, 2021a). In Nigeria, subnational incumbents wield significant control over local politics, including budgets, expenditure, and states electoral commissions, and are largely immune from prosecution. Governors thus act as kingmakers, leveraging state resources to sponsor electoral violence (Adams, 2019; Angerbrandt, 2020; Gbadamosi, 2021; Watts, 2004).

The European Union Election Observation Mission Nigeria report confirms this pattern, revealing that electoral violence during the 2019 elections was largely sponsored by governors (European Union Election Observation Mission Nigeria, 2019). Moreover, since subnational incumbents do not have control over the military or police in Nigeria, they typically outsource violence to perpetrators like members of transport unions, cult groups, and ethnic militias (Agbiboa, 2018; Albin-Lackey, 2008; Joab-Peterside, 2007; LeBas, 2013; Turnbull, 2021a, 2021b). While observers have noted this diversity in violence perpetrators, it has neither been theorized nor systematically analyzed in prior studies.

The prevalence of lethal electoral violence and its outsourcing to non-state perpetrators is not unique to Nigeria. In India, for example, lethal violence sponsored by the incumbent is experienced during elections in states such as West Bengal (Das, 2025; Daxecker, 2025; Daxecker and Fjelde, 2022; Daxecker and Prasad, 2025b; Ruggeri et al., 2025). In Zambia and Malawi, incumbents also engage in violence across subnational units (Wahman, 2023). Similarly, in Sudan, militias like the Janjaweed perpetrate electoral violence (Brosché and Höglund, 2016; Raleigh, 2014), while in Pakistan, politicians outsource violence to violence specialists like the People's Aman Committee (PAC) (Siddiqui, 2022) and in Kenya, violence specialists like the Mungiki and ordinary citizens carry out electoral violence (Klaus, 2020a; Raleigh, 2014). These examples point to a broader pattern that exists both within and beyond Nigeria: electoral violence sponsored by incumbents varies in its lethality but also in regard to who the perpetrators are. This dissertation aims to make sense of subnational patterns in the lethality and perpetrators of electoral violence in Nigeria.

## **1.1 What Do We Know about Incumbent-Sponsored Electoral Violence?**

Electoral violence occurs in much of the Global South, particularly in emerging democracies and authoritarian regimes (Angerbrandt, 2018, 2020; Berenschot, 2020; Birch et al., 2020; Daxecker, 2020; Daxecker and Rauschenbach, 2023; Klaus, 2020a; Malik, 2018; Ruggeri et al., 2025; Siddiqui, 2023; Turnbull, 2021a). Scholars have developed theoretical and empirical frameworks to understand its incidence, mechanisms and manifestations (Birch et al., 2020; Daxecker and Rauschenbach, 2023; Höglund, 2009; Klaus, 2020a; Siddiqui, 2023; Sudduth and Gallop, 2023; Turnbull, 2021a; van Baalen

and Gbala, 2023; Wahman, 2024). Although conceptualizations vary slightly, scholars view electoral violence as a subtype of political violence (Birch et al., 2020; Fischer, 2002; Höglund, 2009; Wahman, 2023).

A major point of agreement in the literature is that incumbents are the main sponsors of electoral violence (Das, 2025; Flores and Nooruddin, 2023; Fubara, 2025; Hafner-Burton et al., 2014, 2018; Onapajo, 2014; Straus and Taylor, 2009). Incumbent-sponsored violence manifests in diverse forms, ranging from intimidation to displacement and killings (Birch et al., 2020; van Baalen and Gbala, 2023). Its main triggers have been linked to political vulnerability and material incentives for rent-seeking. First, vulnerable incumbents facing competitive elections and the strong likelihood of defeat are likely to use violence to skew the playing field (Flores and Nooruddin, 2023; Taylor et al., 2017). Second, material resources incentivize incumbents to use violence to maintain their hold on power, so they can maximize the economic benefits they thereby obtain (Okoye and Taylor, 2021; Taylor et al., 2017).

Literature studying the incidence of lethal electoral violence is of particular relevance for this dissertation. Work on lethal electoral violence is mainly linked to two main factors: competitive elections and institutions. First, research shows that incumbents are more likely to use lethal violence in competitive, high-stakes elections, especially when competition overlaps with ethnic cleavages in patronage-based systems (Berenschot, 2020; Boone, 2011; Bulutgil and Prasad, 2023; Fjelde and Höglund, 2016; Salehyan and Linebarger, 2015; Wilkinson, 2004). This pattern is intensified in majoritarian systems, where winners monopolize patronage and losers are excluded (Eifert et al., 2010; Fjelde and Höglund, 2016). Second, Daxecker (2020) further links lethal violence to institutional features like malapportionment, with underrepresented incumbents more likely to resort to violence when there is high uncertainty about the outcome of elections. However, studies on lethal violence largely fail to theorize subnational incumbents' capacity to sponsor it. Prior work assumes that subnational incumbents have equal capacity to sponsor violence, yet in contexts where access to resources varies at the subnational level, this assumption is problematic. Insights from the resource-conflict literature, for instance, suggest that access to natural resources enhances financial capacity to sponsor "large-scale" violence (Basedau et al., 2014; Collier and Hoeffler, 2005; Le Billon, 2001). If access to resources varies at the subnational level, incumbents' financial capacity may differ, leading to variation in their capacity to sponsor lethal violence, despite having similar incentives.

Prior work on the perpetrators of electoral violence is of crucial importance to the dissertation. Existing studies show that incumbents rarely engage in violence themselves but rather outsource it to non-state violence perpetrators. These studies highlight the need for plausible deniability as a rationale, arguing that incumbents delegate violence to avoid potential domestic and international costs (Daxecker, 2014; Roessler, 2005; Rosenzweig, 2021; Staniland, 2014, 2014). Scholars identify these non-state electoral violence perpetrators as both ordinary citizens and violence specialists and propose three main explanations for how incumbents recruit them: material incentives, polarization, and availability (Boone, 2011; Klaus, 2020a; Klaus and Mitchell, 2015; Matanock and Staniland, 2018; Roessler, 2005; Staniland, 2015b, 2015b; Turnbull, 2021a, 2021b). First, the material incentives perspective suggests that incumbents hire violence perpetrators by promising them economic rewards (Berenschot, 2020; Boone, 2011; Boone and Kriger, 2010; Klaus, 2020a; Klaus and Mitchell, 2015; Matanock and Staniland, 2018; Staniland, 2015a, 2015b; Turnbull, 2021b). In such contexts, participation in violence becomes both a signal of political loyalty and a survival strategy. Yet, while material rewards are a common motivator, such arguments cannot explain why some incumbents privilege violence specialists over citizens, and vice-versa. Second, the polarization perspective emphasizes the role of ethnic and partisan identities in perpetrator recruitment. Scholars argue that in highly polarized contexts, incumbents mobilize co-ethnic or partisan citizens by framing outgroups as threatening to group interests (Boone, 2011; Boone and Kriger, 2010; Brass, 2004; Bulutgil and Prasad, 2023; Klaus, 2020a; Klaus and Mitchell, 2015; LeBas, 2006; Wilkinson, 2004). Yet empirical evidence shows that even in such contexts, politicians often recruit violence specialists rather than citizens (Siddiqui, 2022, 2023), suggesting that identity-based explanations are insufficient. Finally, the availability perspective argues that the presence of non-state armed groups determines recruitment (Staniland, 2015b; Sterck, 2020). It may be that incumbents turn to violence specialists when citizens or state agents are unavailable or unsuitable. However, availability does not guarantee collaboration as violence perpetrators can resist participation (Turnbull, 2021b), pointing to an important gap in the literature: availability of armed actors alone does not fully explain incumbent choices of violence perpetrators.

The dissertation identifies two gaps in prior work. First, understanding variation in the lethality of, and perpetrators of, electoral violence requires moving beyond incumbents' incentives to also consider their capacity

for violence. Existing work overlooks relevant subnational variation, particularly in federal or decentralized systems where access to the financial and institutional resources necessary to organize violence varies significantly. Second, although prior studies recognize that incumbents hire violence perpetrators to manipulate elections (Matanock and Staniland, 2018; Staniland, 2015a; Turnbull, 2021a, 2021b, 2024), they do not account for variation in perpetrator type. In some contexts, certain perpetrators dominate the subnational electoral violence landscape, while in others they are underutilized even when incentives, availability, and polarization conditions are present. This gap suggests that additional factors are shaping perpetrator selection beyond those currently examined in the literature. The theory developed in the next section addresses these gaps.

## **1.2. Main Argument in Brief: A Theory of Rents and Electoral Violence**

I develop a political economy theory to answer the question: *what explains subnational variation in the lethality and the perpetrators of electoral violence?* My theory proposes that rents incentivize and enable subnational incumbents to sponsor violence.<sup>1</sup> Theorizing the conditions under which subnational incumbents use lethal violence, and their capacity to hire distinct violence perpetrators, I provide a novel understanding of the dynamics of subnational electoral violence.

In many Global South countries, access to political power is the most viable pathway to financial security and social mobility. The pursuit of political office incentivizes rent-seeking by incumbents, who prioritize economic benefits gained through political connections rather than productive activities (Khan et al., 2003; Kovacs and Bjarnesen, 2018). Because access to power is determined through elections, and holding office provides access to rents – conceptualized throughout the dissertation as unearned income – elections become high-stakes competitions (Farzanegan et al., 2018; Klaus, 2020b; Kovacs and Bjarnesen, 2018; Mehler, 2007). Thus, politicians adopt

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1 My theory focuses on subnational incumbents, rather than opposition politicians, which is reasonable given that prior work emphasizes the dominant role of incumbents in sponsoring electoral violence. In empirical chapters, I remain open to information about violence sponsored by the opposition, but I find little evidence that it is prominent in Nigeria.

various strategies to win elections, ranging from cooptation to vote buying, issue-based campaigns, and violence. However, cooptation is sometimes ineffective, vote buying presents a monitoring problem regarding voters' compliance, and issue-based campaigns are undermined by incumbents' credibility deficits (Bratton, 2008; Klašnja, 2015, 2016; Mohamed, 2024; Nichter, 2008; Thesen et al., 2020). This leaves violence as a feasible and frequently used strategy in contexts where rent-seeking is prominent.

The central claim of the theory is that variation in rents enhance incumbents' capacity to sponsor lethal electoral violence. While decentralization, particularly fiscal decentralization, expands access to rents at the subnational level, its implications for electoral strategies, particularly violence, remain underexplored (Caselli and Michaels, 2009; Centellas, 2000; Idemudia, 2012; Manzano and Gutiérrez, 2019; Monteiro, 2009). I argue that uneven rents distribution across subnational units explains variation in the lethality of electoral violence and in its perpetrators.

Subnational incumbents may have the incentive to sponsor lethal violence to gain and retain access to rents, but only high-rents incumbents have the capacity to do so extensively. Note that by lethal violence, I mean violence that results in deaths during election periods. Drawing on Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood's (2017) conceptualization, I focus on the frequency of violence, manifesting as a pattern of incumbents' demobilization of opposition candidates, voters, electoral officials, through frequent deaths during elections (Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood, 2017). I argue that incumbents strategically use lethal violence to access and maintain control over rents. These rents not only raise the stakes of political competition but also provide the material capacity to sponsor violence. I expect that high-rents incumbents use lethal violence, like killings, to demobilize opposition candidates. Although lethal violence entails risks, including backlash, sanctions, or loss of legitimacy, weak institutions and low accountability reduce these costs in many contexts in the Global South, making violence a feasible strategy for high-rents incumbents (Bleck and Van de Walle, 2019; Hafner-Burton et al., 2014; Przeworski, 1991; Van de Walle, 2003). In contrast, I argue that low-rents incumbents are limited in their capacity to sponsor lethal violence. While they still have incentives to engage in it, their limited rents restrict their capacity to demobilize opposition candidates with lethal violence.

Moreover, this argument has implications for incumbents' choice of electoral violence perpetrators. I argue that high-rents incumbents have flexibility in the violence perpetrators they can choose given their financial capacity. They have three main options in regard to violence perpetrators: state agents, ordinary citizens, and non-state violence specialists. To define these terms, I conceptualize state agents as police and military, ordinary citizens as co-ethnics or co-partisans, and non-state violence specialists as organized groups that routinely engage in violence for profit (Fubara, 2025). While state agents pose risks of attribution and may be beyond the control of subnational incumbents (Bleck and Van de Walle, 2019; Hyde, 2007; Staniland, 2014), citizens are a less desirable option due to their general aversion to violence (Littman and Paluck, 2015). Non-state violence specialists, in contrast, although expensive, have operational qualities, such as their reputations for violence and their organized structures, that are relevant to the execution of lethal violence (Asuni, 2009; Ebiede, 2018; Staniland, 2015a). Thus, I argue that high-rents incumbents hire violence specialists, despite their high recruitment costs, for their operational qualities, like their reputations for violence and their organized structures (Fubara, 2025). Such qualities are relevant for demobilizing opposition parties through lethal violence, which helps high-rents incumbents achieve their objectives. However, outsourcing carries risks of losing control, especially as violence specialists may evolve into autonomous actors or political threats (Matanock and Staniland, 2018; Siddiqui, 2022). To manage outsourcing risks, I expect that incumbents hire semi-autonomous violence specialists with partial autonomy, or "*proxies*," with strong ties to ruling party networks (Staniland, 2015a). These proxies not only perpetrate violence during elections but also operate in illicit economies sustained by incumbent protection, reducing their tendency to defect and sustaining mutual long-term relations. This reciprocal relationship mirrors dynamics in contexts like Mexico, where criminal groups collaborate with political elites in exchange for electoral violence and protection (Acemoglu et al., 2013; Ley, 2018).

Conversely, I argue that low-rents incumbents are unable to hire violence specialists and rely instead on cheaper alternatives like citizens. I argue that they rely more on ordinary citizens drawn from their ethnic or party support networks who may be motivated by poverty, or unemployment, to engage in violence. Consequently, citizen groups tend to be loosely organized,

lacking an organized structure and a reputation for violence, and are often assembled temporarily for elections. Their local embeddedness makes it possible to engage in targeted violence, but their effectiveness is limited, and they are generally risk-averse (Littman and Paluck, 2015). However, the unpredictability of citizen violence introduces the risk of mob violence or escalation beyond the incumbent's control (Angerbrandt, 2018; Brass, 2004; Wilkinson, 2004). To manage such risks, I argue that low-rents incumbents recruit citizens on an ad hoc basis and disband them after elections to avoid long-term maintenance costs and outsourcing risks.

Based on the argument set out above, the dissertation examines the following four hypotheses;

- H1: High-rents incumbents sponsor more lethal electoral violence than low-rents ones.
- H2: High-rents incumbents are more likely to recruit violence specialists to perpetrate violence than low-rent incumbents.
- H3: Low-rents incumbents sponsor less lethal electoral violence than high-rents incumbents.
- H4: Low-rents incumbents are more likely to recruit ordinary citizens to perpetrate violence than high-rents incumbents.

### **1.3 Research Design, Case Selection, and Data**

To answer the research question *What explains subnational variation in the lethality and the perpetrators of electoral violence?* the dissertation uses a within-country design focusing on Nigeria. It employs a multi-method research design that combines quantitative and qualitative techniques to understand the association between rents, lethality of electoral violence and electoral violence perpetrators, and the processes through which this association emerges. This integrated approach incorporates statistical analysis of observational data, and insights from in-depth qualitative interviews in four Nigerian states. The states represent the most relevant units of analysis at the subnational level as they possess fiscal autonomy and financial independence, unlike local government units (Abdulhamid and Chima, 2016; Onuigbo and Eme, 2015).

I selected Nigeria as the case because it fits the theory's scope condition. First, the theory applies to contexts where rents are distributed unevenly at the subnational level. This applies to Nigeria, which instituted a fiscal decentralized system of government after returning to a democratic regime and multiparty politics in 1999. This fiscal decentralization is based on an uneven rent-sharing formula that directly allocates rents to subnational governments. These rents are largely derived from oil revenue, giving incumbents access to substantial amounts of unearned revenue. Moreover, even though all states receive a fixed percentage of rents, in the form of federal allocations, some receive higher allocations based on factors like population size and the presence of crude oil, leading to an uneven distribution (Iledare and Suberu, 2010).

Second, the theory explains variation in the lethality of violence and in the perpetrators of violence, therefore it applies in contexts where electoral violence is common. Violence has been a common feature of both national and subnational elections in Nigeria since independence. This electoral violence is typically manifested in clashes between rival groups, political assassinations, and physical attacks (Adebajo, 2022; Albin-Lackey, 2007; Oyewole and Omotola, 2022). For example, between November 2006 and mid-March 2007, at least 70 events of election-related violence were reported across 20 of Nigeria's 36 states (Albin-Lackey, 2007). More recently, following the 2023 general elections, the European Union Election Observation Mission condemned widespread violence and voter harassment in 16 states (European Union Election Observation Mission Nigeria, 2023). These patterns are often enabled by regional governors, particularly influential ones who collaborate with non-state violence perpetrators to demobilize opposition parties (Agbibo, 2018; LeBas, 2013; Turnbull, 2021a, 2021b). Since state security agents are under federal centralized control, subnational incumbents (like governors) frequently turn to private networks to carry out electoral violence. Thus, this dissertation focuses on elections in the Fourth Republic (1999–2023). This period represents Nigeria's longest democratic regime, after decades of authoritarianism, and saw the reintroduction of fiscal decentralization (Elaigwu, 2002; Omotola, 2010a).

Third, the theory applies to countries with weak democratic institutions, like Nigeria, where weak parties and patronage dominate politics (Olarinmoye, 2008; Omotola, 2010). In such patronage democracies, parties are transient and weakly institutionalized, functioning without programmatic or ideological linkages, and relying instead on patronage networks to organize electoral campaigns and violence (Agbiboa, 2018; Omobowale, 2011; Omobowale and Fayiga, 2017; Omobowale and Olutayo, 2007).

The dissertation relies on a multi-method approach to study the relationship between rents, lethal violence, and violence perpetrators. To explore the implications of rents for variation in the frequency of lethal electoral violence, I rely primarily on quantitative data. The quantitative data allow me to test the association between rents (the independent variable) and the lethality of electoral violence (the dependent variable). To measure the dependent variable, lethal electoral violence, I used a self-compiled cross-sectional time-series Lethal Electoral Violence Dataset (LEVD). The dataset consists of lethal electoral violence events in Nigeria's 36 states during the 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 elections. The data was gathered from national and regional newspapers archived in the Nigeria Watch database (Nigeria Watch, 2021).<sup>2</sup> The dependent variable counts the number of events in which lethal violence was reported.<sup>3</sup> In figure 1.1., I show the variation in lethal electoral violence events in the dataset. While Rivers, Borno and Lagos states have high numbers of events, Nasarawa, Sokoto and Jigawa states experience lower numbers of events.

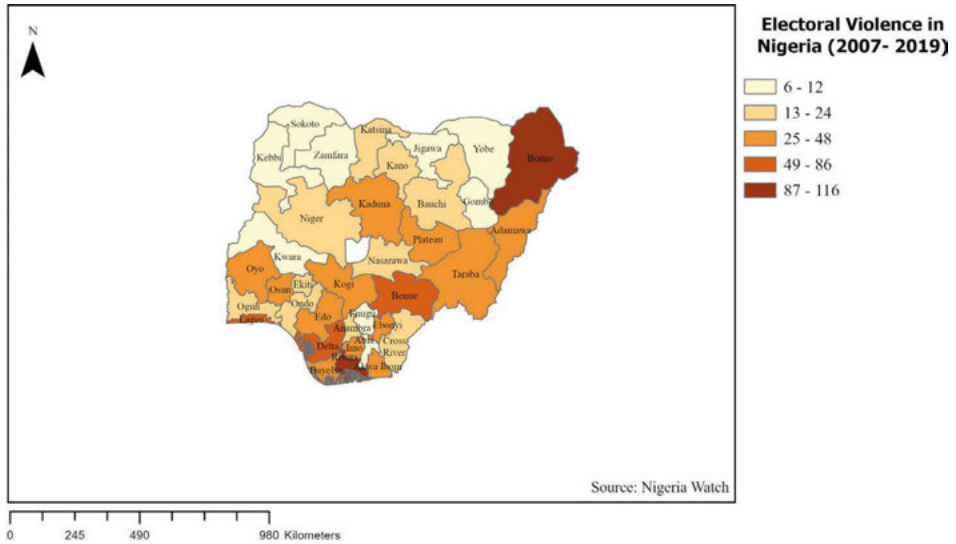
I collected data on rents – the primary independent variable - from the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics using federal allocations. These federal allocations are the total share of states' revenue, which is largely derived from crude oil exportation (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021b).

To explore the theory's implications for violence perpetrators, I rely primarily on qualitative data. Given that it is very challenging to quantitatively gather information about the perpetrators of electoral violence, a qualitative approach is appropriate. The aim of the qualitative analysis is twofold; first, to establish

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2 Nigeria Watch is an organization that monitors lethal violence, conflicts, and human security in Nigeria.

3 I operationalize lethal violence by counting the number of events with deaths reported, rather than the number of deaths itself.



**Figure 1.1:** Electoral violence in Nigeria

whether there appears to be an association between variation in rents and violence perpetrators, and second, to demonstrate that it is the availability of rents – rather than other factors – that influences incumbents’ decisions to recruit different violence perpetrators. That is, the qualitative analysis allows me to establish whether theoretical intuitions about the association between rents and violence perpetrators hold empirically, and whether rents play an important role in determining perpetrator selection. The qualitative analysis focuses on four states selected to capture variation in rents, while also accounting for important variation in alternative explanations (such as material incentives, polarization, and the availability of perpetrators), and holding country-level factors constant. These states are Rivers, Lagos, Plateau, and Nasarawa. While Rivers and Lagos are high-rents states, Plateau and Nasarawa are low-rents states. I draw on 126 in-depth interviews with local politicians, journalists, civil society organizations (CSOs), and regular voters gathered over eight non-consecutive months between February 2022 and July 2023 in Nigeria, and secondary sources, such as news and policy reports produced by local and international organizations/scholars.

## 1.4 Ethical Considerations

The fieldwork was conducted with careful attention to ethical considerations. During fieldwork, prior to each interview, I took deliberate steps to prioritize the safety, privacy and autonomy of respondents. Potential participants were contacted through phone calls, emails, and WhatsApp messages, and were informed about the purpose of the research. I sought their consent to conduct interviews at a time and location of their choosing. Most interviews were conducted in private settings, such as homes, offices, or private booths in cafes; even when interviews took place in public spaces, I ensured privacy was maintained, to the greatest extent possible. After explaining the research objectives and addressing any concerns, respondents gave their oral consent to participating in the research, with a clear understanding that they could withdraw at any time. Participation was entirely voluntary and uncompensated. Only a small number of respondents declined participation: specifically, four in Rivers State, three in Lagos, and one in Nasarawa. Additionally, all but one respondent consented to audio recording.

To protect respondents' anonymity, I replaced personal identifiers in all transcripts with pseudonyms. In addition, I deliberately avoided using respondents' names during interviews to prevent any exposure of personal information in the event of device loss or theft. I labeled all interviews using mnemonic codes. I personally transcribed 65 interviews, particularly those containing sensitive information, such as when respondents mentioned the names of violence perpetrators, and I outsourced the remaining 61 to professional transcribers affiliated with a reputable Lagos-based survey company. Transcription was outsourced only for interviews containing less sensitive information, thereby ensuring additional protection of confidentiality.

Despite careful planning, I encountered challenges in attempting to interview violence specialists. My initial plan to engage directly with such groups proved impractical, primarily due to unethical demands for financial compensation. For example, a self-identified reformed violence specialist offered to organize a group interview with violence specialists in exchange for \$100. I declined his offer not only on ethical grounds but also to avoid incentivizing staged or exaggerated responses. Nonetheless, I was prepared to report to and consult the ethics committee in the event that these demands escalated or became recurrent.

## 1.5 Findings

The empirical analysis provides support for the dissertation's main theoretical proposition: high rents increase an incumbent's capacity to sponsor lethal electoral violence, and incumbents in high-rent states more often recruit violence perpetrators. In contrast, low-rents incumbents are less able to sponsor lethal electoral violence, and given their limited financial resources, recruit lower-cost perpetrators, like ordinary citizens. These expectations are corroborated with quantitative and qualitative evidence. The cross-sectional time-series analysis demonstrates a positive and statistically significant association between rents and lethal electoral violence, implying that incumbents in high-rents states are capable of producing lethal electoral violence, while low-rents incumbents are less able to do so. Moreover, the qualitative findings show that incumbents' choice of violence perpetrators is linked to rents. The comparative case study analysis reveals that in high-rents states such as Lagos and Rivers, the predominant perpetrators are violence specialists, including organized cult groups and members of the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW). In contrast, in low-rents states like Plateau and Nasarawa, citizen perpetrators are more prevalent, consistent with their relatively lower mobilization costs. In my interviews in Lagos and Rivers, respondents highlight the importance of rents for contracting and maintaining relationships with violence specialists, while interviews in low-rent states mention that incumbents are limited to recruit perpetrators from their own supporters and in ad-hoc ways. The qualitative analysis shows support for additional empirical implications of the argument. For instance, my interviews show that violence specialists in Lagos and Rivers produce more lethal violence. In contrast, citizens' recruited for violence in Nasarawa and Plateau produce less severe violence. Similarly, findings reveal that relationships with violence perpetrators vary in ways consistent with the theory. In Lagos and Rivers, incumbents sustain relationships with violence specialists through access to illicit markets, whereas in Nasarawa, citizen groups are typically disbanded after elections, likely reflecting the high cost of long-term maintenance. However, the evidence from Plateau is less definitive, indicating within-group variation among low-rents cases.

Table 1.1 summarizes the findings of the dissertation, including the chapter extending the theory beyond violence, discussed in more detail in the next section.

**Table 1.1:** Summary of findings

Dependent variable	Methodology	Findings	Chapter
Lethal electoral violence	Quantitative	Positive and significant association between rents and lethal violence	4
Selection of violence perpetrators	Qualitative	Incumbents in high-rents states select violence specialists, while those in low-rents states recruit citizens; interviews mention rents as an important consideration for incumbents	5
Non-violent and violent campaign strategies	Multi-method	The availability of rents and brokers conditions variation in canvassing, vote buying, and violence	6

Source: Author, 2025.

## 1.6. Extending the Theory: Rents, Brokers, Violent and Non-violent Campaigning

While my political economy theory of rents and electoral violence focuses on how incumbents sponsor violence to demobilize opposition parties, research shows that politicians often combine violent and non-violent strategies during elections (Rauschenbach and Paula, 2019). This is consistent with additional insights that emerged during my fieldwork, where conversations on violence often extended to how rents and broker networks, not limited to violence specialists, enable politicians to campaign. I therefore extend the argument by explaining how rents and broker networks are linked to politicians' campaign strategies. This extended analysis aims to answer the following question: *How do rents and broker networks explain variation in politicians' campaign strategies?* I argue that variation in campaigning can be explained by two forms of capacity: material capacity, in the form of rents; and organizational capacity, in the form of broker networks. Together, these capacities shape how politicians mobilize voters through canvassing, vote buying, or coercion.

First, rents – conceptualized as unearned income (Faguet, 2014), as previously stated – expand politicians' financial capacity to fund campaign activities. Second, brokers mediate the relationship between politicians and voters, supplying the “know-how” for organizing and the “know-whom” that makes it possible to identify persuadable voters credibly (Costalli and Ruggeri, 2015; Hicken et al., 2022; Holland and Palmer-Rubin, 2015; Stokes et al., 2013). I focus

on two types of brokers: interest and identity brokers (Costalli and Ruggeri, 2015; Holland and Palmer-Rubin, 2015; Koter, 2013). Interest brokers are rooted in organizations, such as market associations, transport unions, and slum committees, and can facilitate both violent and non-violent strategies like vote buying, canvassing and coercion (Holland and Palmer-Rubin, 2015). Identity brokers, such as traditional rulers and religious leaders, rely on moral and symbolic authority to mobilize, mainly through non-violent strategies like canvassing and vote buying (Gottlieb, 2017; Koter, 2013).

The extended theory distinguishes three campaign strategies, linking them to rents and brokers. First, brokers facilitate canvassing by enabling face-to-face persuasion and localized mobilization, even in the absence of rents. Second, where both rents and brokers exist, politicians engage in vote buying, with brokers identifying persuadable voters, and rents financing handouts. Third, where rents are high, but broker networks are weak, politicians turn to coercion, recruiting violence specialists to intimidate opposition voters. Thus, politicians choose canvassing, vote buying, and coercion not as isolated strategies, but as strategic responses to their material and organizational capacity.

Empirically, the extension of the main theory to violent and non-violent electoral campaign strategies relies on a two-part research design that combines Afrobarometer survey data and qualitative interviews. The Afrobarometer survey assesses the effect of rents and broker networks on canvassing, vote buying and coercion within Nigeria. While the quantitative analysis allows for testing the relationship between rents, broker networks and campaign strategies, the analysis relies on proxies of key concepts. To complement the study with data better suited to capture key concepts, such as broker presence, I rely on 50 in-depth interviews with party brokers and non-party brokers in Lagos state, such as market and transport union leaders, as well as ethnic/religious leaders. The qualitative data provides a detailed understanding of party elites' campaign strategies and how brokers facilitate campaigning for incumbent and opposition parties. The findings show that rents and broker networks are linked to politicians' violent and non-violent campaign strategies. Strong broker networks are associated with non-violent strategies. When brokers are strong and rents are high, politicians use non-violent strategies, such as canvassing and vote buying; when rents are low and brokers are strong, they rely on canvassing; and when brokers are

weak but rents are high, politicians use coercion. Thus, the findings suggest that strong broker networks increase the likelihood of non-violent strategies, while rents, consistent with the dissertation's main argument, enhance the likelihood of coercion.

## 1.7 Contribution

The dissertation contributes to three literatures. First, I contribute to the literature on electoral violence by demonstrating the importance of subnational variation in capacity for patterns of electoral violence. Prior work has largely assumed that incumbents have equal capacity for violence; my study shows this is incorrect in contexts where resources are distributed unevenly. Moreover, the dissertation contributes to our understanding of the joint production of electoral violence. Prior work has primarily focused on incumbents' collaboration with ordinary citizens (Berenschot, 2020; Boone, 2011; Klaus, 2020a), outsourcing versus directly perpetrating violence (Siddiqui, 2023), and alliances with violence specialists (Matanock and Staniland, 2018; Raleigh, 2016; Staniland, 2021; Turnbull, 2021a, 2021b), in different contexts. In contrast, my argument explains why and how subnational incumbents collaborate with distinct violence perpetrators within the same context, holding country factors constant.

Second, I contribute to the literature on the resource curse. Prior work has focused on the national-level effects of the resource curse on more aggregate forms of conflict, such as civil war; I show that it also affects electoral violence. Although the connection between rents and violence is well-established, (Collier and Hoeffler, 2005; Conrad et al., 2019; Di John, 2007; Farzanegan et al., 2018; Fetzer and Kyburz, 2024; Ross, 2003), little is known about how violence perpetrators contribute to more or less lethal violence within the same context. Moreover, the dissertation demonstrates that rents not only incentivize violence (Di John, 2007; Le Billon, 2001; Okoye and Taylor, 2021), but also provide capacity for it.

Third, the dissertation adds to the literature on campaign strategies in the Global South. The extension analysis to rents and brokers systematically analyzes violent and non-violent strategies of both incumbent and opposition politicians (Bratton, 2008, 2008; Brierley and Kramon, 2020; Rauschenbach

and Paula, 2019b). The theory demonstrates that rents and broker networks significantly influence campaign strategies, including canvassing, vote buying, and coercion. The study highlights the relevance of organizational brokers in facilitating electoral campaigns in the Global South, where weak party structures and limited public financing shape electoral competition.

## 1.8 Outline of Chapters

This dissertation is divided into seven chapters. Following the introduction, **Chapter Two** develops the political economy theory of electoral violence. The chapter first reviews what we know about electoral violence, showing that it is dominated by incumbents, that explanations for it focus on institutional and material incentives, and that it prioritizes plausible deniability, which explains why violence is often delegated to non-state actors. It then develops the theoretical framework, advancing a political economy argument that links variation in rents to incumbents' financial capacity to sponsor lethal violence. Additionally, the theory explains how unevenly distributed rents affect incumbents' choices of electoral violence perpetrators, with high-rents incumbents being able to recruit violence specialists, while low-rents ones rely on co-ethnics or co-partisans.

**Chapter Three** provides the historical background of the Nigerian case. It traces Nigeria's political trajectory from colonialism through cycles of military and democratic regimes. Relying on secondary sources, the chapter examines the evolution of fiscal federalism in Nigeria, showing how fiscal decentralization is linked to electoral violence. Additionally, the chapter broadly highlights the diversity among violence perpetrators in Nigeria.

**Chapter Four** analyzes variation in the lethality of electoral violence across Nigerian states, focusing on how rents are linked to lethality. Building on the theoretical argument that rents enhance incumbents' capacity to sponsor violence the chapter tests the hypothesis that high-rents incumbents sponsor more lethal electoral violence than low-rents ones and that lethality varies by the type of perpetrator involved. Using a cross-sectional time-series analysis with state and year fixed effects, the results confirm that rents have a positive and significant effect on lethal electoral violence, accounting for controls and robust standard errors.

**Chapter Five** investigates incumbents' choice of violence perpetrators. This chapter demonstrates that variation in incumbents' choice of electoral violence perpetrators is shaped by variation in rents across subnational units. It shows that rents enhance incumbents' financial capacity to "rent" violence by outsourcing it to non-state electoral violence perpetrators. Using comparative case study analysis based on 126 in-depth interviews, existing literature, and domestic and international election observation reports from four Nigerian states (Lagos, Rivers, Plateau and Nasarawa), the chapter finds that high-rents incumbents hire and maintain non-state violence specialists such as transport unions and cult groups, while low-rents incumbents rely on ordinary citizens for ad hoc violence, due to these incumbents' limited financial capacity. Such relationships vary not only in recruitment cost but also in durability and autonomy: armed groups in high-rents states receive substantial payments and retain partial independence, while citizens in low-rents states depend on small stipends and short-term relationships with incumbents.

**Chapter Six** extends the theoretical argument to campaign strategies beyond violence. This chapter develops a theory that explains how politicians in weakly institutionalized and resource-constrained party systems choose among diverse campaign strategies: canvassing, vote buying, and coercion, based on their material and organizational capacity. The chapter further distinguishes between interest brokers (such as market and transport unions) with the capacity for coercion and persuasion, and identity brokers (such as traditional and religious leaders) who mainly mobilize through persuasion. To examine how rents and broker networks are associated with vote buying, canvassing, and coercion, I analyze Afrobarometer Rounds 5 and 8 survey data (N = 3,800) on Nigeria, and 50 in-depth interviews conducted in Lagos. The findings shows that high rents and strong broker networks enable vote buying and canvassing, high rents without brokers lead to coercion, and low rents with strong broker networks sustain canvassing as a low-cost strategy.

**Chapter Seven** concludes the study. The chapter first summarizes the main findings and highlights their theoretical, empirical and policy implications; it then elaborates on the dissertation's limitations, outlines the generalizability of the argument beyond the Nigerian context, and highlights recommendations for future research on electoral violence.

# 2

## A Theory of Rents and Electoral Violence

This chapter presents the dissertation's theory, which seeks to answer the following central question: *What explains subnational variation in the lethality and the perpetrators of electoral violence?* To address this question, I develop a political economy theory that centers on incumbents' financial capacity. The theory focuses on subnational incumbents, which is reasonable given that prior work has emphasized the dominance of incumbents in sponsoring electoral violence. I argue that resources in the form of rents not only incentivize subnational incumbents to organize electoral violence, but also, to an even greater degree, influence their capacity to do so. My argument is twofold. First, I explain how the uneven distribution of rents is linked to incumbents' capacity to sponsor lethal electoral violence. Second, I show how rents influence incumbents' choice of electoral violence perpetrators.

## 2.1 What Do We Know about Electoral Violence?

Electoral violence occurs across much of the Global South, particularly in emerging democracies and authoritarian regimes (Birch et al., 2020; Daxecker, 2020; Daxecker and Jung, 2018; Daxecker and Rauschenbach, 2023; Fjelde and Höglund, 2016). Countries such as Kenya, Zimbabwe, India, Pakistan and Nigeria frequently experience violence during elections (Angerbrandt, 2018, 2020; Berenschot, 2020; Daxecker, 2020; Daxecker and Rauschenbach, 2023; Klaus, 2020a; Malik, 2018; Siddiqui, 2023; Turnbull, 2021a). Thus, scholars have developed theoretical and empirical frameworks to understand the mechanisms and manifestations of electoral violence (Birch et al., 2020; Daxecker and Rauschenbach, 2023; Höglund, 2009; Klaus, 2020a; Siddiqui, 2023; Sudduth and Gallop, 2023; Turnbull, 2021a; van Baalen, 2023; van Baalen and Gbala, 2023; Wahman, 2024).

Although conceptualizations vary slightly, scholars generally agree that electoral violence is a subtype of political violence that is distinguished by its actors, targets, timing and motives (Birch et al., 2020; Fischer, 2002; Höglund, 2009; Wahman, 2024). While pre-election violence deters participation, election-day violence reduces turnout and post-election violence protests outcomes based on perceptions of fraud (Angerbrandt, 2018; Bhasin and Gandhi, 2013; Burchard, 2020; Collier and Vicente, 2012; Daxecker, 2012; Daxecker and Jung, 2018; Siddiqui, 2023; Taylor et al., 2017; Wahman and Goldring, 2020). While pre-election violence is more common, post-election violence (although uncommon) is more lethal (Angerbrandt, 2018; Burchard, 2020; Daxecker, 2012; Taylor et al., 2017; Wahman, 2023; Wahman and Goldring, 2020). Drawing on insights from the literature, I conceptualize electoral violence as violence organized by political actors, like incumbents, to undermine elections.

### The Dominance of Incumbent-Sponsored Electoral Violence

Studies largely identify incumbents as the main sponsors of electoral violence in democratic and authoritarian regimes (Das, 2025; Flores and Nooruddin, 2023; Frantzeskakis and Park, 2022; Fubara, 2025; Hafner-Burton et al., 2014, 2018; Onapajo, 2014; Taylor et al., 2017; Turnbull, 2021a, 2021b). Straus and Taylor (2009), for example, find that between 1990 and 2008, incumbents were responsible for 80% of pre-election violence and 74% of post-election violence in Sub-Saharan Africa (Straus and Taylor, 2009). Such violence is manifested

in diverse forms, ranging from intimidation to displacement and killings (Birch et al., 2020; Davenport, 2007; Roessler, 2005; Turnbull, 2021a; van Baalen and Gbala, 2023; Wilkinson, 2004).

Notably, incumbent-sponsored violence is prevalent even in democracies. As democratization does not necessarily reduce repression, in weak institutional contexts it may exacerbate violence, particularly when incumbents fear electoral defeat (Davenport, 2007; Hafner-Burton et al., 2014; Turnbull, 2021a). For example, in Kenya and Rwanda, external democratization pressures have led incumbents to privatize repression, outsourcing violence to non-state violence perpetrators in order to maintain plausible deniability (Roessler, 2005). Scholars have identified two main triggers for incumbent-sponsored violence. First, rent-seeking incentivizes incumbents to use violence to gain access to extensive resources (Okoye and Taylor, 2021; Taylor et al., 2017). Second, vulnerable incumbents who are unwilling to risk electoral defeat sponsor violence to demobilize opposition parties (Flores and Nooruddin, 2023; Hafner-Burton et al., 2014, 2018; Straus and Taylor, 2009; Taylor et al., 2017; Turnbull, 2021a).

Research links the motivation to engage in incumbent-sponsored violence to electoral demobilization. While violence is rarely used to mobilize supporters, incumbents frequently use it to demobilize opposition parties and reduce voter turnout in rival strongholds (Bhasin and Gandhi, 2013; Burchard, 2020; Hafner-Burton et al., 2018; Onapajo, 2014; Rauschenbach and Paula, 2019). For example, Rauschenbach and Paula (2019) find that politicians mainly target opposition supporters with violence. Such findings are consistent with other research indicating that swing districts and, even more commonly, opposition strongholds are the hotspots of electoral violence (Collier and Vicente, 2012; Hafner-Burton et al., 2018; Robinson and Torvik, 2009; Wahman and Goldring, 2020)

While numerous studies broadly examine incumbent-sponsored violence, fewer studies focus specifically on lethal electoral violence. Birch and Munchlinski's (2020) *Countries at Risk of Electoral Violence (CREV)* dataset reveals that African countries, despite holding fewer elections, experience more lethal violence than countries on other continents (Birch and Muchlinski, 2020). While non-lethal violence manifesting in the form of intimidation is a significant form of electoral coercion, it is more challenging

to measure than lethal violence, which is easier to observe and measure (Bob-Milliar, 2014; Wahman, 2023, 2024; Fjelde and Höglund, 2022). However, studies focusing on lethal electoral violence are limited, and have mainly focused on its links to competitiveness and electoral institutions.

Research linking lethal violence to competitiveness shows that incumbents are likely to use lethal violence in competitive high-stakes elections (Fjelde and Höglund, 2016; Salehyan and Linebarger, 2015; Turnbull, 2021a; Wilkinson, 2004). This likelihood further increases when competition overlaps with ethnic cleavages, particularly in patronage systems (Berenschot, 2020; Boone, 2011; Boone and Kriger, 2010; Bulutgil and Prasad, 2023; Eifert et al., 2010; Klaus, 2020a; Wilkinson, 2004). This dynamic is particularly evident in majoritarian systems, where winners maximize patronage while losers are politically marginalized (Eifert et al., 2010; Fjelde and Höglund, 2016). Furthermore, Daxecker (2020) finds that the likelihood of lethal electoral violence increases when institutional factors like malapportionment put incumbents from underrepresented districts at greater risk of losing elections (Daxecker, 2020).

However, less is known about incumbents sponsoring lethal electoral violence at the subnational level. Work on subnational electoral violence shows that competition for territorial control between strong and weak parties (Wahman and Goldring, 2020), electoral competitiveness (Reeder and Seeberg, 2018; Turnbull, 2021a), and exclusionary access to patronage goods (Angerbrandt, 2018; Berenschot, 2020) increase the likelihood of violence in subnational elections. While we know that lethal violence occurs in subnational elections, we know much less about how subnational incumbents sponsor it. Research from the resource-conflict literature provides some relevant insights here. It shows that natural resources increase the stakes of state control, thereby incentivizing violence (Basedau et al., 2014; Collier and Hoeffler, 2005; Le Billon, 2001). In particular, civil war studies highlight that resource revenues enhance the state's capacity to finance and sustain large-scale lethal violence (Basedau et al., 2014; Fearon and Laitin, 2003; Le Billon, 2001). Applied to electoral violence, this suggests that while resources generate strong incentives to sponsor violence, the ability of incumbents to act on such incentives depends on their material capacity. Thus, given that subnational resources often vary (Harbers and Steele, 2020), subnational incumbents are unlikely to have similar financial capacity, leading to variation in subnational incumbents' capacity to sponsor lethal violence.

Having reviewed the literature on incumbent-sponsored violence, I next review the literature on electoral violence perpetrators.

### **Understanding the Selection of Violence Perpetrators**

Incumbents are the main sponsors of electoral violence, yet they rarely execute it themselves (Hafner-Burton et al., 2014; Matanock and Staniland, 2018; Onapajo, 2014; Turnbull, 2021b). Instead, they mainly rely on violence perpetrators to carry out violence during elections. Although non-state actors are frequently the primary perpetrators, state agents, such as police or security forces, continue to be used in some contexts, particularly in authoritarian or hybrid regimes (Davenport, 2007; Harbers et al., 2023; Young, 2020). For instance, in countries like Zimbabwe and India, incumbents still deploy state agents to influence electoral outcomes (Harbers et al., 2023; Sudduth and Gallop, 2023; Young, 2020). However, the direct involvement of state actors appears to be declining in many settings, especially where such actions could threaten incumbents' legitimacy.

Violence perpetrated by state security agents poses significant risks for incumbents. Unlike non-state violence perpetrators, state agents visibly link violence to the ruling regime, making it harder to deny responsibility (Bhasin and Gandhi, 2013; Davenport, 2007; Hafner-Burton et al., 2014; Staniland, 2014). Such exposure can undermine incumbents' domestic legitimacy, invite backlash from voters and opposition parties, and trigger sanctions or condemnation from international observers (Borzyskowski, 2019; Daxecker, 2014; Hyde, 2007; Rosenzweig, 2021). Thus, to avoid political and reputational costs, incumbents often outsource violence to non-state violence perpetrators, thereby maintaining plausible deniability (Roessler, 2005; Staniland, 2014).

Studies examine the variety of violence perpetrators incumbents hire to perpetrate electoral violence. These include paramilitaries, militias, insurgent groups, gangs, ethnic militias, criminal organizations, and ordinary citizens (Agbibo, 2018; Angerbrandt, 2020; Bob-Milliar, 2014; Boone, 2011; Harbers and Steele, 2020; Klaus, 2020a; Ley, 2018; Matanock and Staniland, 2018; Raleigh, 2016; Siddiqui, 2023; Staniland, 2015a, 2015b; Turnbull, 2021a, 2021b, 2024). Thus, scholars broadly categorize non-state violence perpetrators as ordinary citizens and violence specialists, and propose three main explanations for how incumbents recruit them: incentives, polarization and availability (Boone, 2011; Klaus, 2020a; Klaus and Mitchell, 2015; Matanock

and Staniland, 2018; Roessler, 2005; Staniland, 2015b, 2015b; Turnbull, 2021a, 2021b).

The first explanation, incentives, reveals the strategic motivations behind incumbents' collaboration with violence perpetrators. Research highlights how incumbents hire violence perpetrators by offering them material incentives (Berenschot, 2020; Boone, 2011; Boone and Kriger, 2010; Klaus, 2020a; Klaus and Mitchell, 2015). For instance, Berenschot (2020) finds that in India, incumbents incentivize citizens to participate in electoral violence by promising them access to patronage resources. In such contexts, participation in violence becomes both a signal of political loyalty and a survival strategy. Similarly, Boone (2011) argues that in rural Kenya, where the state controls land allocation, incumbents use land rights both to mobilize supporters and to punish non-supporters, transforming property into both a carrot and a stick.

It is not only ordinary citizens that incumbents incentivize with material rewards: they also incentivize violence specialists in this way. Studies show that incumbents entice violence specialists, such as militias and criminal organizations, with promises of financial gain and political protection (Acemoglu et al., 2013; Agbibo, 2018; Ley, 2018; Matanock and Staniland, 2018; Staniland, 2015a, 2015b; Trejo and Ley, 2020; Turnbull, 2021a, 2021b). Staniland (2015a, 2015b) characterizes the relationship between incumbents and violence specialists as "business partnerships," through which they demobilize incumbents' political rivals for political leverage and material benefits. Such dynamics mirror civil war contexts in which rebel recruitment is driven by material incentives rather than ideological commitment (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004, 2005; Weinstein, 2006). Yet, despite the literature's emphasis on incentives, they do not fully explain why incumbents privilege certain perpetrators over others, in contexts in which diverse perpetrators can be recruited with the same material incentives. The second explanation focuses on polarization. Scholars argue that in highly polarized contexts, politicians often outsource violence to co-ethnics or partisans (Boone, 2011; Boone and Kriger, 2010; Brass, 2004; Bulutgil and Prasad, 2023; Klaus, 2020a; Klaus and Mitchell, 2015; LeBas, 2006; Wilkinson, 2004). This practice is more common during elections, when politicians frame contentious narratives of marginalization to polarize the electorate and instigate their own supporters to engage in violence against rival supporters (Boone and Kriger, 2010; Brass,

2004; Chandra, 2005; Klaus, 2020a; Klaus and Mitchell, 2015; Wilkinson, 2004). Whether during elections or outside of them, partisan polarization functions similarly to ethnic polarization: parties may justify violence as a defense mechanism to protect electoral interests, with voters endorsing such violence when it aligns with their partisan identity (Daxecker and Fjelde, 2022; Daxecker and Prasad, 2025a; Deglow and Fjelde, 2024; LeBas, 2006).

Much of the literature on polarization, particularly studies like that by Klaus (2020), focus on how polarization facilitates the mobilization of ordinary citizens for electoral violence. However, subnational evidence suggests that incumbents do not always rely on citizens alone (Siddiqui, 2023; Turnbull, 2021a, 2021b). Thus, if polarization alone explains incumbents' choice of perpetrators then we would expect them to only rely on citizens for electoral violence in polarized contexts. However, in some polarized contexts, studies show that incumbents opt to hire non-state violence specialists, such as gangs or militias, indicating that considerations beyond identity-based polarization also shape their choice of perpetrators (Siddiqui, 2023; Turnbull, 2021b). Siddiqui (2023), for instance, argues that organizational capacity influences whether parties carry out violence directly or delegate it to external actors. While this is an important insight, it is less applicable in weakly institutionalized party systems, where the capacity of political parties often diverges significantly from the capacity of incumbents.

The third explanation links incumbents' choice of violence perpetrators to availability. According to this argument, incumbents are more likely to choose available violence specialists, especially when their preferred options are absent or inaccessible (Staniland, 2015b). While ideological alignment may shape initial collaboration, incumbents often prioritize operational utility, choosing to work with non-aligned but strategically effective violence perpetrators (Staniland, 2015b; Sterck, 2020). Similarly, when there is a surplus of violence specialists, incumbents are likely to recruit them to carry out electoral violence (Sterck, 2020). Studies in this area emphasize that incumbents' choices are shaped by the supply of violence perpetrators. However, availability does not automatically lead to recruitment. Turnbull (2021b) shifts the focus to violence specialists themselves, showing that violence specialists, despite their availability, can refuse to perpetrate violence for incumbents. This shows that the presence of violence specialists does not guarantee their participation in electoral violence. While scholars

have identified the conditions that shape incumbents' recruitment of violence perpetrators, we know less about their preferences between distinct perpetrator types.

### **What is Missing? Gaps in Understanding the Lethality and the Perpetrators of Electoral Violence**

As my review of prior work demonstrates, understanding variation in the lethality and the perpetrators of electoral violence requires moving beyond incumbents' incentives to also consider their capacity for violence. Existing research overlooks important subnational differences, particularly in federal or decentralized systems, where access to the financial and institutional resources necessary to organize violence varies significantly. In addition, although prior studies recognize that incumbents hire violence perpetrators to manipulate elections (Matanock and Staniland, 2018; Turnbull, 2021a, 2021b), they do not account for variation in perpetrator type. In some contexts, certain perpetrators dominate the subnational electoral violence landscape, while in others they are underutilized even when incentives, availability and polarization conditions are present. This gap suggests that additional factors are shaping perpetrator selection beyond those currently emphasized in the literature.

To address the highlighted gaps, I propose a political economy theory that centers on the role of incumbent capacity, shaped by unevenly distributed rents, in driving variation in the lethality and the perpetrators of electoral violence (Fubara, 2025). My theory focuses on subnational incumbents rather than opposition parties which is valid given that prior work emphasizes the dominance of incumbents in sponsoring electoral violence. The theory developed in the following section argues that subnational variation in rents explains why incumbent-sponsored violence is more lethal in some contexts and why certain types of violence perpetrators are chosen over others. I argue that rents, rather than incentives, availability or polarization, alone enable incumbents to not only sponsor lethal electoral violence but also to hire expensive violence perpetrators.

## 2.2. Rents and Electoral Violence

In many Global South countries, access to political power remains the most viable avenue for achieving financial security and social mobility. Incumbents are motivated to maintain their hold on political power: they aim to secure economic benefits through political connections rather than productive economic activities (Khan et al., 2003; Kovacs and Bjarnesen, 2018; Le Billon, 2001; Paler, 2011; Watts, 2004). Since access to power is allocated through competitive elections, and since holding office is attractive, this means that elections turn into high-stakes contests in which incumbents compete over rents (Klaus, 2020b; Kovacs and Bjarnesen, 2018; Mehler, 2007). By rents, I mean unearned income, broadly derived from natural resources, foreign aid and external loans (Farzanegan et al., 2018; Gaddy and Ickes, 2005). I follow existing work in centering my theory around incumbents, who are the main sponsors of electoral violence.<sup>4</sup>

When rents are derived from unearned income, rather than earned income (like taxation) that demands fiscal accountability, elections turn into intense power struggles (Alayli, 2005; Sala-i-Martin and Subramanian, 2013).<sup>5</sup> Thus, political power becomes highly valuable as winning elections provides access to rents, leading politicians to adopt diverse electoral strategies in the hopes of achieving electoral victory. When competing for power, they can choose from non-violent and violent strategies. We know from prior research that incumbents sponsor violence to win elections (Bratton, 2008; Hafner-Burton et al., 2014; Onapajo, 2014). While they may also use cooptation as a strategy to appeal to some rivals (Kruck and Zangl, 2025), cooptation can fail to persuade rivals or their supporters (Mohamed, 2024).<sup>6</sup> Incumbents may then choose to rely primarily on vote buying as a campaign strategy. However, vote buying is inherently linked to a monitoring problem. Once voters receive the benefit, incumbents cannot reliably ensure compliance,

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4 Although the main focus is on incumbents, I acknowledge the role of opposition parties in the empirical chapters.

5 The type of rents determines its utility. Natural resource rents, such as crude oil and foreign aid, are particularly prone to mismanagement, fostering corruption in governance (Auty and Gelb, 2001; Isham et al., 2005; Svensson, 2000). Unlike tax rents, which are subject to stricter institutional oversight, rents outside of citizen contributions allow incumbents to avoid accountability for mismanagement (Manzano and Gutiérrez, 2019; Martin, 2014; Watts, 2004).

6 In Chapter Six, I extend the theory to examine how rents shape a broader portfolio of violent and non-violent campaign strategies.

as recipients may abstain from voting or choose to vote for the opposition (Bratton, 2008; Nichter, 2008). Alternatively, incumbents might attempt to run issue-based campaigns, but this strategy is also limited by what can be termed the incumbent disadvantage (Klašnja, 2015). In many contexts, especially in the Global South, incumbents suffer from credibility deficits linked to corruption, unfulfilled policy promises, and bad governance, which undermine their appeal to voters (Klašnja, 2015, 2016; Thesen et al., 2020). This leaves violence as an attractive electoral strategy.

The core insight of my theory is that rents enhance subnational incumbents' capacity to sponsor lethal electoral violence. Subnational incumbents, like their national counterparts, may use violence to gain access to state patronage (Agbibo, 2018; Turnbull, 2021a; Wahman, 2024). Although democratization and the introduction of elections often coincide with decentralization, including fiscal decentralization, the implications of fiscal transfers to subnational actors remain underexplored in relation to how such transfers shape electoral strategies like electoral violence (Caselli and Michaels, 2009; Centellas, 2000; Idemudia, 2012; Manzano and Gutiérrez, 2019; Monteiro, 2009). Thus, I argue that decentralization gives subnational incumbents direct access to public resource rents, which provides them with incentives and capacity for lethal electoral violence (Fubara, 2025). Decentralization, however, implies that not all subnational incumbents are equally endowed with rents (Canavire-Bacarreza et al., 2012; Manzano and Gutiérrez, 2019). This unevenness in rents at the subnational level is what explains the extent to which incumbents can sponsor lethal violence and hire violence perpetrators.<sup>7</sup> Hence, the uneven distribution of rents is directly associated with incumbents' incentives and capacity to sponsor lethal electoral violence, while also affecting their choices in terms of perpetrators. While high-rents incumbents possess the financial resources to sustain long-term relationships with violence specialists who are capable of lethal violence, low-rents incumbents must rely on the more affordable, ad hoc recruitment of ordinary citizens.

To further develop these intuitions, I next explain how rents affect the incentives and capacity for lethal electoral violence for subnational incumbents. I then discuss the implications for perpetrator choice. Thereafter,

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7 I use the terms "sponsoring" and "organizing" violence interchangeably. Here, sponsoring violence means the act of organizing, funding or facilitating violence.

I present separate discussions of the expectations regarding variation in the lethality and the perpetrators in high and low-rents contexts, respectively.

### **2.3 Subnational Incumbents and Lethal Electoral Violence**

Subnational incumbents with high rents possess both the incentives and the capacity to engage in electoral violence. Rents constitute a highly valuable political “prize,” motivating politicians to invest significant time and resources in capturing and retaining state power (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). As such, rents do not merely raise the stakes of political competition: they also provide the material means to fund and sustain violence. This dynamic creates a mutually reinforcing relationship, with rents creating both the incentives and the financial capacity for violence (Basedau et al., 2014; Basedau and Lay, 2009; Collier and Hoeffler, 2005; Le Billon, 2001). However, incentives alone are insufficient for lethal electoral violence if incumbents lack the capacity to organize and sponsor it.

I conceptualize lethal electoral violence as violence that results in deaths during election periods. To clarify my conceptualization, I draw on Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood’s (2017) study, which characterizes political violence in terms of diverse configurations of repertoire, targeting, frequency and technique (Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood, 2017). My focus emphasizes the frequency element of their framework, but situates it within a pattern involving incumbents’ demobilization of opposition parties through frequent killings during elections. Thus, I focus on the frequency of lethal electoral violence within the strategic context of electoral manipulation (Gutiérrez-Sanín and Wood, 2017).

Lethal electoral violence involves both costs and benefits. On the cost side, it can provoke backlash from voters and opposition candidates (Rosenzweig, 2021). It may also attract sanctions or condemnation from international organizations, thereby damaging the legitimacy of the incumbent government (Daxecker, 2014; Hyde, 2007). However, incumbents weigh such potential costs against the strategic benefits of violence, particularly in contexts where weak institutional oversight lowers the likelihood of accountability or punishment (Hafner-Burton et al., 2014). In such contexts, the benefits of violence, such as reducing the probability of electoral defeat and securing continued access to

power, may outweigh the risks. In contrast, the risks are higher in established democracies where strong formal institutions increase the costs of violence and increase politicians' acceptance of electoral defeat (Przeworski, 1991). However, in many Global South contexts, clientelism and political corruption undermine democratic norms and weaken accountability institutions (Bleck and Van de Walle, 2019; Van de Walle, 2003). Hence, competition for power becomes a high-stakes, zero-sum contest, in which the personal and financial costs of losing are substantial. Under such conditions, politicians may be more inclined to reject formal democratic rules by engaging in violence. To clarify, I do not claim that the risk of lethal violence is not detrimental to incumbents. Rather, in regard to understanding why they use lethal violence, my claim is that incumbents are more willing to accept the risks when violence offers access to extensive resources.

We know that subnational incumbents use lethal violence, but what are their available choices of violence perpetrators to execute it? By violence perpetrators, I mean individuals or groups that carry out electoral violence on the ground, such as state agents, non-state violence specialists, and ordinary citizens. In the next section, I explain subnational incumbents' choice of violence perpetrators.

## **2.4 Incumbents' Choice of Violence Perpetrators**

State actors may seem like the natural first choice for subnational incumbents' seeking to use lethal violence. However, there are two main drawbacks to using state actors for electoral violence. First, subnational incumbents do not necessarily control the security agents at the subnational level: while this is context-specific, it is not unusual for national incumbents (and not subnational incumbents) to control electoral institutions and security agents (or both) at the subnational level, even in federal systems (Bleck and Van de Walle, 2019). Second, relying on the state makes it challenging to plausibly deny responsibility for violence, exposing incumbents to voter backlash or international condemnation (Hyde, 2007; Rosenzweig, 2021). Thus, rather than relying on state agents, subnational incumbents may wish to rely on their own private networks for organizing electoral violence.

Regular citizens are a second set of actors that can be recruited for violence. Yet there are drawbacks here too. First, and most importantly, regular citizens are likely to be less capable of carrying out violence than those who are experts in violence (Littman and Paluck, 2015). Second, it is difficult to overcome people's natural aversion to violence (Littman and Paluck, 2015).

This leaves non-state violence specialists as the third and, in my account, the most strategically attractive set of perpetrators that high-rent incumbents can recruit (Siddiqui, 2022; Staniland, 2015a). I conceptualize non-state violence specialists as organized groups that routinely engage in violence for profit. Examples include the People's Aman Committee (PAC) in Pakistan (Siddiqui, 2023), the Janjaweed militia in Sudan, the Young Patriots in Côte d'Ivoire (Raleigh, 2016) and the Ijaw Youth Council in Nigeria (Turnbull, 2021b). As Matanock and Staniland (2015) note, non-state violence specialists are distinct from the state. While they may collaborate with state actors, their involvement in violence is not purely political (Matanock and Staniland, 2018): it is part of their broad portfolio of illicit violent activities, like drug trafficking (Trejo and Ley, 2020). Given their background, I argue that violence specialists largely seek to profit from violence, which increases their recruitment costs (Fubara, 2025).

Compared to the drawbacks of relying on the state or citizens, non-state violence specialists offer two main advantages. First, non-state violence specialists have operational qualities that are relevant for the execution of lethal violence. Second, as non-state actors, they provide a shield for incumbents, allowing them to avoid a direct connection to electoral violence, thereby making accountability less likely (Staniland, 2014). But outsourcing to violence specialists also creates risks, since non-state violence specialists may have their own interests and incumbents may eventually lose control over them (Matanock and Staniland, 2018; Siddiqui, 2022; Turnbull, 2021a).

Having broadly explained why subnational incumbents may sponsor lethal violence, and their options of violence perpetrators, I turn to explaining the variation in lethality and violence perpetrators, starting with high-rents incumbents.

## 2.5 High-Rents Subnational Incumbents: Lethal Violence and the Recruitment of Violence Specialists

I argue that high rents enable subnational incumbents to sponsor lethal electoral violence. Their use of lethal electoral violence functions as a strategic tool for demobilizing opposition parties. Given the higher financial stakes associated with high rents, incumbents seeking to preserve are willing to resort to extreme means, frequently sponsoring lethal violence to lower their risk of losing and maintain continued access to high rents. Thus, I expect that incumbents in high-rents areas, seeking to maintain access to rents, frequently sponsor lethal violence during elections.

**H1:** *High-rents incumbents sponsor more lethal electoral violence than low-rents ones.*

Having established that high-rents incumbents have the capacity to sponsor lethal electoral violence, the question arises: how do they organize it? The answer is that they outsource it to violence perpetrators, mainly violence specialists.

### High-Rents Incumbents and Violence Specialists

I argue that high rents give incumbents the flexibility and capacity to hire diverse violence perpetrators. Although high-rents incumbents can hire ordinary citizens, I argue that they prefer to hire expensive violence specialists. This preference, as I gathered from my first round of fieldwork, is largely shaped by the operational qualities of violence specialists as regards executing lethal electoral violence.

Non-state violence specialists' desirable operational qualities make them especially attractive to high-rents incumbents. Such qualities are broadly categorized into two dimensions: organizational structure and violent reputation. Structurally, violence specialists often operate through hierarchical command chains, with clearly defined leadership and well-organized networks. This internal coherence enables efficient coordination and discipline, making them readily available for violence. Moreover, non-state violence specialists typically establish horizontal networks that cut across geographic, social and local boundaries (Staniland, 2015a). Their localized networks are electorally significant as they equip

violence specialists with local knowledge that allows them to identify political rivals, opposition supporters and electoral officials (Fubara, 2025). Leveraging this knowledge, they can deploy targeted and lethal forms of violence, including the assassination of opposition candidates, voters and election officials.

Reputation is another relevant dimension of non-state violence specialists' operational capacity. Their violent reputation enhances their credibility and perceived willingness to carry out lethal violence, making them particularly valuable to high-rents incumbents. Their reputation is created over time, through the systematic use of violence to assert control within their areas of influence (Asuni, 2009; Ebiede, 2018). Hence, violence specialists enter electoral contexts with an established capacity for violence, an asset that incumbents can exploit. During elections, their expertise in violence is manifested in targeted violence, such as the killing of voters, opposition candidates and even election officials. Furthermore, their reputation can also serve as a deterrent in and of itself. Because their history of violence is widely known, their presence or the threat of their involvement can coerce voters. However, not all voters or opposition candidates can be easily coerced, leading violence specialists to turn to lethal violence. Thus, I argue that non-state violence specialists' reputation is useful for both action and deterrence.

However, outsourcing violence to non-state violence specialists carries significant risks for incumbents. As Siddiqui (2022) notes, a major risk is that incumbents may eventually lose control over such groups. In the early stages of democratization, when institutions are weak and party systems remain fluid, subnational incumbents often enjoy broad discretion in recruiting non-state violence specialists (Chacón, 2018; Manzano and Gutiérrez, 2019). However, over time, such groups can accumulate power and autonomy, evolving into formidable political actors who are capable of contesting elections independently, refusing to collaborate with incumbents, or even coercing incumbents into continued partnerships through the threat or use of violence (Matanock and Staniland, 2018; Siddiqui, 2022, 2023; Turnbull, 2021b).

Thus, incumbents must carefully navigate the risks associated with outsourcing violence to specialists. I argue that incumbents navigate these

outsourcing risks by strategically hiring non-state violence specialists who have only partial autonomy, or *proxies* as Staniland (2015a) describes them. Proxies are semi-autonomous violence specialists who are legally distinct from the state but who maintain strong linkages to ruling party networks (Staniland, 2015a). During electoral periods, proxies are mobilized to demobilize opposition parties through violence. However, their political relevance often extends beyond the electoral cycle, as they remain embedded within patronage and violent networks (Staniland, 2015a). Because of their partial autonomy, proxies are not mere instruments, they are strategic violence perpetrators who are capable of negotiating substantial benefits in exchange for violence. Such benefits may include large financial payouts, political protection, or post-election appointments, suggesting that their relationship with incumbents is long-term.

The mutual dependence between incumbents and proxies encourages loyalty, while preserving a degree of control by incumbents over their proxies. Incumbents sustain these relationships by strategically leveraging their extensive resource wealth through the informal allocation of access to illicit markets (Fubara, 2025). By offering protection from prosecution and granting control over illicit economies, such as drug trafficking or informal taxation routes, incumbents enable proxies to generate sustained revenue outside of electoral periods. Such material incentives reinforce loyalty, making proxies reliant on the incumbent's continued political dominance for both protection and profit. In return, incumbents benefit from their supply of violence during elections. This reciprocal arrangement in which access to illicit markets underpins political loyalty mirrors dynamics observed in Latin America. In Mexico, for example, drug cartels and criminal organizations have historically maintained – albeit sometimes unstable – relationships with political elites, securing protection for their operations in exchange for political allegiance and electoral violence (Ley, 2018; Trejo and Ley, 2020). Similarly, in high-rents subnational contexts, I argue that control over illicit markets becomes a cornerstone of mutual collaboration between incumbents and violence specialists, sustaining long-term alliances that extend beyond single elections. Thus, I expect that high-rents incumbents rely on violence specialists for electoral violence.

**H2: *High-rents incumbents are more likely to recruit violence specialists to perpetrate violence than low-rent incumbents.***

Having established the capacity of high-rents incumbents to sponsor lethal electoral violence, and their strategic selection of violence specialists, I now turn to low-rents incumbents.

## **2.6 Low-Rents Subnational Incumbents and the Recruitment of Ordinary Citizens**

Compared to their high-rents counterparts, low-rents subnational incumbents face significant constraints on their capacity to sponsor frequent lethal electoral violence. In low-rents contexts, while the availability of (limited) rents still generates incentives for both incumbents and opposition politicians to compete for state control, resource scarcity diminishes incumbents' capacity to sponsor lethal violence. Hence, I argue that low-rents incumbents use lethal violence less frequently than high-rents incumbents. This pattern does not indicate an absence of incentive to use violence but rather reflects financial limitations that constrain an incumbent's capacity to sponsor lethal violence. In contrast to high-rents incumbents, who may use frequent lethal violence to preempt electoral defeat, while low-rents incumbents may face similar electoral threats, they lack the resources to respond with lethal violence. While Wahman (2024) highlights that the fear of electoral defeat may motivate incumbents to use lethal violence, I argue that capacity conditions matter: even politically vulnerable incumbents may be unable to sponsor lethal violence if they lack rents. Thus, in low-rents contexts, we should expect less frequent lethal violence.

**H3: *Low-rents incumbents sponsor less lethal electoral violence than high-rents incumbents.***

### **Low-Rents Incumbents and Citizens**

My political economy approach also has implications for the types of violence perpetrators recruited by low-rents incumbents. While their limited financial resources diminish their flexibility in regard to choice of perpetrators, especially compared to their high-rent counterparts, I argue that low-rents incumbents are still able to recruit some perpetrators, mainly ordinary citizens, such as co-partisans and co-ethnics (Fubara, 2025). To be clear, I do not suggest that any citizen is readily available for recruitment into violence. Rather, I expect that citizen participation in electoral violence

is shaped by structural conditions, particularly unemployment, poverty and dependence on patronage in contexts where access to state resources is mediated by political loyalty (Berenschot, 2020; Kovacs and Bjarnesen, 2018; Laakso, 2007; Sambanis, 2004). In such contexts, economic vulnerability may increase the susceptibility of individuals to engage in violence at the request of incumbents. Nevertheless, despite their limited options, low-rents incumbents must still weigh the costs and benefits of citizen violence, which I turn to next.

Similar to the insights on violence specialists I gained from my fieldwork, engaging citizens as violence perpetrators presents some trade-offs for incumbents, particularly in terms of their limited structure and reputation. First, in terms of organizational structure, I argue that citizens hired for electoral violence are typically ad hoc formations, assembled temporarily during election periods (Fubara, 2025). As such, they lack formal hierarchies, established leadership, and internal coordination mechanisms. This structural weakness limits their horizontal connections and their ability to identify targets both of which are restricted to those within their immediate communities. On the other hand, their local embeddedness enhances their utility during elections because they possess local knowledge that allows them to identify opposition supporters, enabling targeted localized violence even in the absence of extensive horizontal networks. Second, citizens generally lack a violent reputation, which diminishes their coercive capacity. Citizens also tend to be more risk-averse, making them less likely to engage in lethal violence (Littman and Paluck, 2015). Psychological research shows that individuals operating outside of violent networks are less desensitized to violence, whereas those embedded within such groups are more tolerant of, and proficient in, using violence (Littman and Paluck, 2015). Thus, I argue that the absence of a violent reputation limits citizens' effectiveness in perpetrating lethal violence.

Despite their operational limitations, incumbents derive important benefits from hiring citizens as violence perpetrators. One major advantage is that citizens are significantly cheaper to hire than non-state violence specialists. Their alignment with incumbents, often rooted in shared ethnic or partisan identities, lowers their material expectations. Some citizens are willing to perpetrate violence in exchange for petty cash, food or other in-kind benefits. However, citizen violence is associated with the potential risk of spontaneous

escalation. While most citizens are unlikely to engage in lethal violence due to their general risk aversion (Littman and Paluck, 2015), in highly polarized contexts, citizen violence can rapidly escalate into mob violence that spirals beyond the control of incumbents (Angerbrandt, 2018; Brass, 2004; Wilkinson, 2004). Thus, citizens can be unpredictable, more volatile, and harder to control, making them strategically risky perpetrators, despite their financial appeal.

I argue that low-rents incumbents manage outsourcing risks by leveraging citizens' dependence on state patronage while privileging short-term relations (Fubara, 2025). Citizens' dependence on low-rents incumbents enables them to navigate the risks associated with outsourcing. I argue that ad hoc citizen groups are dependent on state patronage for access to basic goods and services (Staniland, 2015b), hence citizens remain politically and economically subordinate. This dependence allows incumbents not only to set the terms of compensation but also to determine the limited scope of their involvement. Thus, low-rents incumbents temporarily recruit citizens for electoral violence, and disband them afterwards to avoid long-term maintenance costs and outsourcing risks. In contrast to high-rents incumbents, who can afford to grant proxies access to illicit markets, low-rents incumbents operate in resource-constrained environments, where such strategies are less viable and are riskier. For such incumbents, offering control over illicit markets in such low-rents contexts may be counterproductive, because it further diminishes the scarce resources in low-rents states. Thus, I expect that low-rents incumbents rely on ordinary citizens for electoral violence.

**H4:** *Low-rents incumbents are more likely to recruit ordinary citizens to perpetrate violence than high-rent incumbents.*

## **2.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have presented the dissertation's political economy theory to electoral violence. I argue that variation in rents plays a central role in shaping subnational incumbents' capacity to sponsor lethal violence, as well as the types of perpetrators they are able to recruit. In the next chapter, I provide background on the Nigeria case to contextualize the theoretical expectations.



# 3

## Elections, Violence and the Politics of Fiscal Decentralization in Nigeria

In the previous chapter, I argued that rents enable subnational incumbents to sponsor lethal violence and recruit distinct violence perpetrators. This chapter provides historical background on electoral violence and fiscal decentralization in Nigeria. It highlights how colonial legacies, political transitions and, most importantly, decentralization transformed the dynamics of electoral politics in the country. This background sets the stage for the analysis in subsequent chapters. In particular, it shows how fiscal decentralization created both the incentives and capacity for subnational incumbents to gain political relevance and become autocrats in Nigeria's Fourth Republic.

In particular, the chapter describes the evolution of federalism and electoral politics from the First to the Fourth Republic. Situating Nigerian politics within the context of its shifting republics is relevant for identifying patterns over time, especially given the country's recurring episodes of democratic breakdown. This historical perspective is essential for understanding how fiscal decentralization, particularly after the beginning of the Fourth Republic in 1999, has shaped subnational politics.

The chapter is divided into seven sections. Section one discusses politics and decentralization before 1999. Section two describes the post-1999 period, focusing on the institutional and fiscal dynamics of the Fourth Republic. Section four highlights the structure of fiscal decentralization in the Fourth Republic. Section five focuses on violence in Nigeria. Section six focuses on electoral violence and perpetrators in Nigeria. The final section concludes.

### **3.1 Politics and Decentralization before 1999**

The historical foundations of Nigerian federalism were shaped by colonial decisions that introduced regionalism and centralized authority simultaneously. The British colonial administration merged the Northern and Southern Protectorates in 1914, creating a single political entity (Elaigwu, 2002). In preparation for independence, the colonial government introduced the Richards Constitution in 1946, formalizing regionalism by dividing the country into three distinct regions – North, West and East – while retaining centralized British authority (Elaigwu, 2002; Faluyi, 2023; Suberu, 2009). By 1946, federalism had gained traction, with the establishment of regional assemblies in the West and East Regions. The Phillipson Commission of 1946 solidified inter-governmental fiscal relations by formalizing the derivation principle for revenue allocation, laying the foundation for Nigeria’s fiscal federalism (Akpan, 2011).

The regional structure was further modified by the Macpherson Constitution of 1951, which granted legislative powers to the three regions, effectively laying the foundation for federalism (Elaigwu, 2002; Faluyi, 2023). By 1954, Nigeria was officially recognized as a federal state under the Lyttleton Constitution, which allowed increased regional autonomy (Elaigwu, 2002; Faluyi, 2023). In 1958, the discovery of oil in eastern Nigeria marked a turning point in fiscal federalism, shifting emphasis from the derivation principle, which previously incentivized regional innovation and self-reliance, to centralized revenue allocation (Uche and Uche, 2004). This restructuring diminished regional fiscal autonomy and redirected focus from revenue generation to equitable distribution at the federal level (Uche and Uche, 2004).

Subsequent constitutional developments led to Nigeria’s independence in 1960 and the adoption of a British-style parliamentary system. While the transition to a Republican Constitution in 1963 reinforced regional autonomy,

it simultaneously aggravated inter-ethnic polarization due to inequalities in regional representation (Elaigwu, 2002). In particular, the North's demographic and territorial advantage raised fears of domination among leaders in the east and west.

Ethnic politics were central in shaping electoral dynamics and the military takeover in Nigeria's First Republic. Elections in this period were heavily influenced by ethnic sentiments (Anyika and Ani, 2021; Olakunle et al., 2019; Olowojolu et al., 2019). The 1964 general elections, in particular, were marked by salient ethnic polarization, with major political parties representing distinct ethnic groups: the Action Group (AG) represented the Yoruba, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) was aligned with the Igbo, and the Northern People's Congress (NPC) represented the Hausa-Fulani (Olakunle et al., 2019). Hence, competition for regional dominance fueled intense electoral violence, as rival ethnic groups clashed in pursuit of political power (Olakunle et al., 2019). Moreover, violence was worsened by weak institutions, especially a compromised electoral commission that failed to ensure free and fair elections (Anyika and Ani, 2021). Given the regional competition for power and resources, the Binns Commission was established in 1964 to review Nigeria's revenue allocation system, but the 1966 military coup resulted in the abolition of the federal structure and the centralization of power (Uche and Uche, 2004). To justify their intervention, the military cited political instability, electoral fraud, and salient ethno-regional polarization as evidence that civilian governance had become unsustainable (Olakunle et al., 2019; Olowojolu et al., 2019).

The aftermath of the 1966 coup marked a significant shift in Nigeria's federal structure, as the military sought to centralize authority and repress regional dissent. The first military coup in 1966 led to the establishment of a temporary unitary system under Eastern-born General Aguiyi-Ironsi. However, resistance from Northern elites, who viewed Ironsi's centralization policies as a threat to regional autonomy, resulted in his overthrow by General Yakubu Gowon (Elaigwu, 2002). In response to tensions, Gowon abolished the regional structure in 1967 and introduced a state system, creating 12 states to dilute regional power bases (Elaigwu, 2002). Despite Gowon's restructuring, ethnic polarization, resource conflict and the Eastern region's secession threat escalated into the Nigerian Civil War in 1967 (Elaigwu, 2002; Uche and Uche, 2004).

Following the end of the Civil War in 1970, the military reinforced federal authority to consolidate control and maintain national unity (Elaigwu, 2002). In 1975, Gowon revised revenue allocation, giving 60% to the central government, further limiting the financial autonomy of states (Elaigwu, 2002). Following General Gowon's overthrow in the same year, the Murtala Mohammed regime created more states, increasing the number from 12 to 19. Although the revenue-sharing formula remained unchanged, the restructuring further diluted state power (Uche and Uche, 2004). Hence, many states became increasingly reliant on federal allocations for basic administrative needs. However, Murtala Mohammed's administration fulfilled its commitment to a power transition by initiating the handover to democratic regime, marking the beginning of the Second Republic in 1979 (Uche and Uche, 2004).

The adoption of the 1979 Constitution marked the beginning of the Second Republic (1979–1983), introducing a presidential system and leading to the election of Alhaji Shehu Shagari as President (Elaigwu, 2002). Shagari appointed a committee to review the revenue allocation formula, considering factors such as the national interest, derivation, population and equitable development (Uche and Uche, 2004). Notably, the 1979 Constitution, for the first time, formally included local governments in revenue sharing, allocating 58.5% to the federal government, 31.5% to the states, and 10% to local governments (Uche and Uche, 2004). However, as during the First Republic, elections during this period were characterized by fraud and violence, which undermined democratic legitimacy (Olakunle et al., 2019; Olowojolu et al., 2019). Ultimately, the flawed 1983 electoral process triggered another military coup, ushering in an extended period of military rule that lasted until 1992 (Elaigwu, 2002). During this time, successive military regimes upheld the centralized revenue allocation system (Uche and Uche, 2004).

Extended military rule was only briefly interrupted by an unsuccessful attempt at civilian transition in 1992. The aborted Third Republic (1992–1993) reflected both the potential for democratic progress and the persistence of military dominance in Nigeria's political system. During this period, the 1993 elections, widely regarded as the most credible in Nigeria's history, were presumed to have been won by Chief Moshood Abiola of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) (Olakunle et al., 2019). However, the military annulled the election results. Although then-Head of State General Ibrahim Babangida introduced a series of political reforms, revenue allocation remained highly

centralized, and his annulment of the June 12 election triggered violence, leading to a coup by General Sani Abacha (Anyika and Ani, 2021; Olowojolu et al., 2019). After the abolition of the Third Republic, successive military governments maintained centralized control in administration and revenue allocation (Elaigwu, 2002).

The political instability of the 1990s set Nigeria on the path to democratic transition. By 1996, the number of states in Nigeria had expanded to 36, with weak regional influence and an overly powerful central government (Elaigwu, 2002). Following Abacha's death in 1998, his predecessor, General Abdulsalami Abubakar, initiated a transition program to restore democracy (Olowojolu et al., 2019). To facilitate the transition process, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was established to oversee electoral administration, making the beginning of the Fourth Republic in 1999 (Olowojolu et al., 2019).

### **3.2 Politics and Decentralization After 1999: The Fourth Republic**

While the establishment of the Fourth Republic marked a new era of democracy in Nigeria, the republic nevertheless continues to carry the institutional legacies of authoritarianism (Egobueze and Ojirika, 2017; Yagboyaju, 2011). Decades of military rule have left a lasting imprint on Nigeria's fiscal federalism structure (Elaigwu, 2002). Although the 1999 Constitution aimed to decentralize power, granting more financial autonomy to subnational units, it ultimately reflects strong federal control of revenue allocation (Elaigwu, 2002; Suberu, 2009).

The post-1999 era has been marked by conflict over federalism, particularly regarding the distribution of power and resources between the center and subnational units. Nonetheless, fervent demands from subnational actors led to increased calls for the devolution of power and revenues (Elaigwu, 2002). Of such demands, the distribution of oil revenues has emerged as a particularly contentious subject, with oil-producing states – especially those in the Niger Delta – demanding a fair revenue-sharing formula (Elaigwu, 2002; Suberu and Diamond, 2003). In many cases, states' demands for higher revenue derivation have resulted in conflict (Elaigwu, 2002). Hence, the struggle to redefine the balance of power within Nigeria's federal system has

remained a central feature of its post-military democratic regime (Elaigwu, 2002).

### **Subnational Identities and Federalism in the Fourth Republic**

The Fourth Republic provided a renewed platform for subnational identities to reassert themselves, triggering increased agitation for regional autonomy (Elaigwu, 2002). Ethnic and religious groups sought to leverage the federal system to advance their political and economic interests, sometimes resulting in conflicts (Elaigwu, 2002). To avoid the ethnic polarization that had contributed to the collapse of the First and Second Republics, political leaders in the Fourth Republic implemented constitutional reforms aimed at fostering national unity and reducing ethnic polarization (Bogaards, 2010). Among the main reforms was the prohibition of ethnic parties and the adoption of a majoritarian electoral system (Bogaards, 2010). Specifically, the 1999 Constitution established electoral requirements mandating that a winning candidate must secure both a plurality of votes and at least 25% of votes in two-thirds of states and local governments (Bogaards, 2010). The new reforms were designed to promote cross-regional political alliances and discourage the formation of ethnically exclusive parties.

Nevertheless, ethnic politicking remains a defining feature of Nigeria's Fourth Republic, as party politics continues to be shaped by ethnic and regional cleavages (Egobueze and Ojirika, 2017). In addition to strong ethno-regional cleavages, political parties in Nigeria are weakly institutionalized and highly unstable (Omotola, 2010b; Uwaifo, 2016). This party instability is manifested in short organizational lifespans and frequent party switching, resulting in the recycling of the same political elites across different party platforms (Joseph, 1978; Olarinmoye, 2008a; Omotola, 2010b). Lacking clear ideologies, parties largely rely on patronage linkages centered on elites, commonly referred to as *godfathers*, and tend to be active mainly during electoral periods (Joseph, 1978; Olarinmoye, 2008a; Omotola, 2010b). Such patterns of patronage are closely linked to the neo-patrimonial nature of Nigerian politics, in which politicians switch party allegiance in pursuit of rent-seeking opportunities (Joseph, 1978; Olarinmoye, 2008a; Omotola, 2010b).

At the subnational level, oil politics intensifies this rent-seeking among political elites. With the introduction of fiscal federalism, subnational incumbents began to mirror the systemic corruption in the center (Idemudia,

2012; Ushie, 2012). By granting significant financial autonomy to states, fiscal federalism enabled the spread of clientelism and rent-seeking into subnational politics (Idemudia, 2012; Ushie, 2012; Watts, 2004). As the oil industry began to expand, subnational elites competed over oil rents (Onyeukwu, 2007; Osaghae, 2015). This rent-seeking, coupled with corruption, political patronage, conflict over resources, institutional weaknesses, and economic underdevelopment, are all characteristics of the resource curse (Olarinmoye, 2008b; Onyeukwu, 2007).

Two major characteristics of the resource curse in Nigeria are weak institutions and systemic corruption. The absence of effective institutional oversight allows state governors to divert public funds by exploiting institutional weaknesses (Ushie, 2012). Moreover, legislators, who are constitutionally mandated to hold the executives accountable for revenue mismanagement, often become complicit in resource misappropriation, as they too benefit from the patronage networks maintained by incumbents (Ushie, 2012). Such compromised accountability agents reduce the incentive to uphold fiscal transparency, thereby reinforcing corruption within subnational governance (Ushie, 2012). Hence, subnational units have become hotspots of elite capture, with control over resources viewed as a central mechanism for consolidating political power (Osaghae, 2015; Ushie, 2012; Watts, 2004). Consequently, subnational politics within Nigeria's federal structure of fiscal decentralization are largely characterized by competition for resources.

### **3.3 The Structure of Fiscal Decentralization in the Fourth Republic**

The fiscal structure in the Fourth Republic grants governors substantial political and economic autonomy at the subnational level (Akande, 2000). Building on the Second Republic, the 1999 Constitution in the Fourth Republic grants political, fiscal and administrative autonomy to states and local governments, to strengthen subnational governance (Akande, 2000). Thus, Nigeria operates a three-tier federal structure characterized by fiscal, economic and political decentralization, with subnational governments having autonomy in policymaking and budgeting (Akande, 2000; Onuigbo and Eme, 2015). Through the Federation Account Allocation Committee (FAAC), the federal government distributes revenues to subnational units

(Iledare and Suberu, 2010). Crude oil revenue accounts for 95% of foreign exchange earnings and 80% of budgetary revenue (World Bank, 2022). The FAAC shares revenues among states and local governments using a formula-based allocation system based on statutory allocations, value added tax (VAT), and exchange rate differences (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021b). The process involves first sharing revenues vertically between the federal and subnational units, and then horizontally among subnational units.

### **The Vertical Allocation Formula**

The Vertical Allocation Formula (VAF) distributes rents from the Federation Account as follows: the federal government receives 52.68%, the 36 states receive 26.72% and the 774 local governments receive 20.6% (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021b). However, the allocation to local governments is managed by state governments as local governments in Nigeria are not fiscally or administratively autonomous (Abdulhamid and Chima, 2016). This means that the allocations to subnational units (states and local governments) accrue to the state, and their distribution is determined by the state governors (Abdulhamid and Chima, 2016). While the federal government's share is allocated to the federal capital, stabilization funds, and natural resource development, subnational governments use their allocated shares to fund public services (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021b). In addition to their statutory percentage, oil-producing states receive a 13% derivation fund directly from crude oil exports, calculated based on production levels. This ensures they receive a proportional share of rents according to their contributions (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021b). The derivation fund is allocated to compensate oil-rich states for managing environmental pollution, maintaining social amenities, and fostering local economic development (Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, 2021). Of Nigeria's 36 states, nine are recipients of the derivation fund, split based on individual states' crude oil production levels (Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, 2021).

### **The Horizontal Allocation Formula**

The Horizontal Allocation Formula (HAF) determines how the vertically allocated rents for states and local governments are distributed, based on five factors (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021b). First, 40% of the states' allocation is equally distributed among all 36 states. Second, 30% is allocated based on population figures provided by the National Population

Commission. Third, 10% is allocated based on landmass/terrain, considering states' land area relative to Nigeria's total landmass. Fourth, states contribute 10% of their internally generated rent (IGR) to a joint account, which is then redistributed equally (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021b). Finally, there is the social development factor: 10% of the allocation is distributed based on states' needs in relation to education, health and water (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021b).

In Nigeria's fiscal decentralization, the horizontal and vertical distribution facilitate uneven revenue allocation across states.

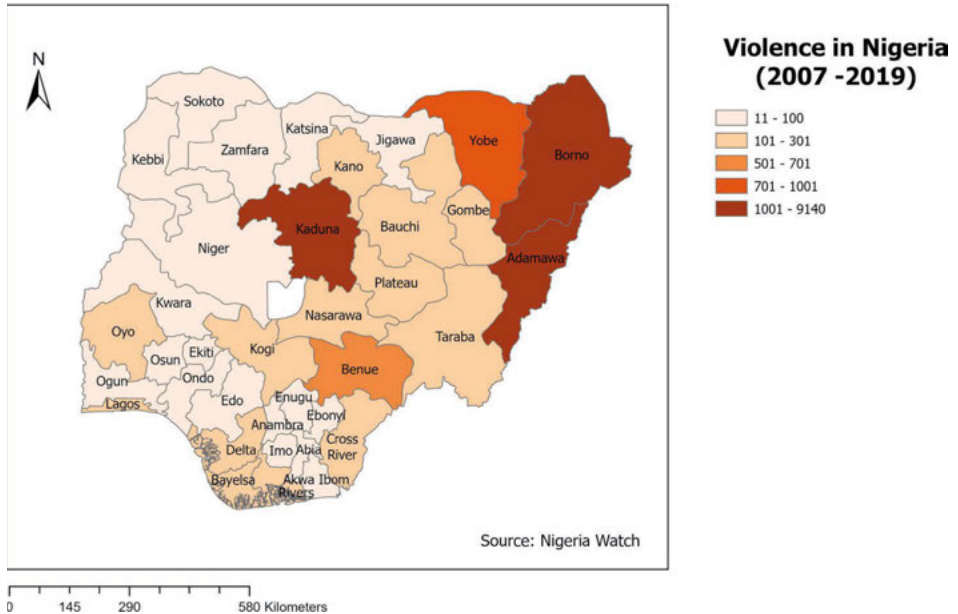
### **Fiscal Decentralization and the Democratization of Violence**

Nigeria's system of fiscal decentralization was designed to enhance governance by granting subnational governments greater autonomy over policy implementation and resource allocation (Suberu and Diamond, 2003). However, despite fiscal reforms, the Fourth Republic has maintained the centralized security framework that characterized the First and Second Republics (Faluyi, 2023). As a result, state governors exercise limited control over security agents (Akor, 2021). Although governors are formally designated as the Chief Security Officers of their states, their operational authority is largely symbolic (Akor, 2021; Faluyi, 2023). For instance, while a governor can instruct the state commissioner of police on matters of state security, the commissioner can choose to defer action until they receive approval from the Inspector General of Police, who reports to the President (Akor, 2021; Faluyi, 2023). This bureaucratic arrangement limits the ability of state governments to independently manage security challenges within their jurisdictions (Akor, 2021; Faluyi, 2023).

Although fiscal decentralization in Nigeria was originally intended to address regional inequalities and promote local development, it has produced significant unintended consequences. One of the most contentious aspects of Nigeria's decentralization is the 13% derivation fund, which allocates a direct share of crude oil revenues to oil-producing states. In principle, this fund was designed to compensate for environmental degradation, improve infrastructure, and promote economic development in the Niger Delta (Watts, 2004, 2007). In practice, however, it has largely empowered subnational political elites to sponsor violence, fostered corruption, and increased competition over resources (Turnbull, 2021a, 2021b; Watts, 2007).

Furthermore, decentralization has significantly enhanced the power and influence of state governors. It has transformed governors from largely administrative leaders into dominant political elites capable of mobilizing and/or withholding support – even from the federal or presidential elites (Watts, 2007). State governors not only manage local government allocations but also frequently interfere in local politics, as they are responsible for organizing local elections through the State Independent Electoral Commission (Oluwasuji and Okajare, 2021). This institutional control allows governors to consolidate control at the local level, giving them the power to refuse to organize elections by appointing loyalists to local offices as caretaker chairman, or organizing but manipulating local elections to ensure that co-partisans win all available seats (Albin-Lackey, 2007; Oluwasuji and Okajare, 2021; Sunday and Chinedum, 2014). With control over local patronage networks, governors have emerged as kingmakers who exert considerable influence in subnational and national politics (Aliyu, 2021; Angerbrandt, 2020). Additionally, decentralization has weakened the federal government’s monopoly on violence, enabling governors to create alliances with non-state violence specialists and to use them as instruments for political control (Osaghae, 2015; Watts, 2007). Through fiscal autonomy, powerful governors are able to hire violence specialists (LeBas, 2013; Turnbull, 2021a). These dynamics have contributed to the prevalence of electoral violence in the Fourth Republic. However, before describing electoral violence in Nigeria in more detail, it is essential to describe the broader context of violence in the country. This is relevant for understanding why violence during elections is both common and geographically widespread. Fig. 3.1 illustrates the distribution of violence events across the 36 states between 2007 and 2019.

Figure 3.1, above shows an overview of political violence in Nigeria, including communal clashes, farmer–herder conflicts, terrorism and electoral violence. The highest number of violent events in this period occurred in Borno, followed by Kaduna, Adamawa, Yobe and Benue. The regional pattern is clear, with northern states recording higher levels of violence. This is unsurprising given that northern states – Borno, Yobe and Adamawa – witness significant terrorist attacks carried out by Boko Haram, as well as banditry and farmer–herder crises. Additionally, violence in the North-Central states like Benue is linked to farmer–herder conflicts.



**Figure 3.1:** Violence in Nigeria (2007–2019)

### 3.4 Violence in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic

Since Nigeria’s return to democratic regime, diverse types of political violence have led to widespread insecurity and extensive loss of life (Albin-Lackey, 2007). Violence is endemic in Nigeria’s political landscape, manifesting in diverse forms across the country’s six geopolitical zones. In the South-South zone, the Niger Delta has experienced insurgency, particularly in Rivers, Delta, Edo and Bayelsa states. The Niger Delta insurgency emerged in response to regional grievances over oil revenue distribution and was led by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) in the early 2000s (Oluwaniyi, 2010). Before the federal government’s Amnesty Programme ended the insurgency, it had already resulted in numerous deaths in the Niger Delta region (Watts, 2008). Despite the end of the insurgency, militancy and communal violence are still prevalent in the region (Asuni, 2009; Joab-Peterside, 2007; Joab-Peterside et al., 2021; Watts, 2007).

In the South-East, political violence has increasingly been shaped by the rise of secessionist groups like the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) (ACLED, 2022). IPOB's demand for the creation of an independent Biafran state, framed around claims of political and economic marginalization of the Igbo ethnic group, has fueled political instability in the region (ACLED, 2022; Ugwu, 2025). Violence associated with IPOB has escalated, with attacks targeting politicians, and ordinary citizens resulting in over 700 deaths across Anambra, Imo and Enugu states (Ugwu, 2025).

The South-West has historically experienced less insecurity compared to the northern regions but remains affected by other forms of political and criminal violence. The region has witnessed an increase in thug violence, largely perpetrated by the NURTW (Adedigba, 2021; Adejoh and Ajayi, 2020; Olorunfemi et al., 2024). Additionally, the South-West has faced rising insecurity related to farmer–herder conflicts, particularly in the border communities of Ogun, Oyo and Ondo states (Anthony, 2024; Oluwole, 2022; Reporters, 2025). Such conflicts are typically driven by competition over land, with periodic attacks and violent reprisals leading to displacement and casualties (Peace, 2017).

Terrorism is most prevalent in the North-East (ACLED, 2022; Mantzikos, 2014), which remains the country's hotspot in regard to lethal conflict, with over a thousand deaths – primarily driven by the insurgencies of Boko Haram and its splinter group, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) (ACLED, 2022). Boko Haram, which initially emerged in the early 2000s with an anti-Western ideological stance, had evolved into a full-fledged terrorist organization by 2009 (Iyekepolo, 2016). The group remains active in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states, and is expanding into Niger and Taraba states (ACLED, 2022).

The North-West is characterized by armed banditry and violent extremism. Armed bandit groups, residing in forested hideouts, have been responsible for severe rural violence, including mass killings, abductions for ransom, and community displacement (ACLED, 2022; Buba, 2023). In states like Zamfara and Katsina, bandit attacks lead to hundreds of deaths annually and the displacement of tens of thousands (ACLED, 2022). In addition to banditry, the North-West is home to Ansaru, an Al-Qaeda-affiliated group that is an offshoot of Boko Haram, which remains active in parts of Kaduna and surrounding areas (ACLED, 2022). The presence of such extremist groups

complicates security in the North-West zone, with targeted attacks on state officials, religious institutions and security agents (ACLED, 2022).

The North-Central zone is a major hotspot for political and communal violence, characterized by farmer–herder conflicts, banditry and ethno-religious conflict (ACLED, 2022). The zone experiences frequent violence between nomadic pastoralists and farming communities, largely driven by competition over land, water resources, and the effects of climate change (France-Presse, 2024; Nwankwo, 2024; Olufemi, 2024). In states like Benue, Plateau and Nasarawa, herdsmen attacks on farmers and subsequent reprisal killings have resulted in numerous deaths, population displacement and property damage (Egbuta, 2018; Nwankwo, 2024; Peter Yikwab and Tade, 2022). Similarly, Plateau State continues to experience occasional riots triggered by communal conflict over land ownership, compounded by religious polarization (Krause, 2011). In addition to the ethno-religious violence, the North-Central zone is experiencing increasing insecurity due to banditry (France-Presse, 2023; Henry-Chinedu, 2024).

From the above, it is clear that violence is prevalent across Nigeria’s six geopolitical zones, manifesting in diverse forms, such as insurgency, banditry and terrorism.<sup>8</sup> It is within this broader context of insecurity, where violence is a constant feature of the political landscape, that elections are conducted. Against this background, the following section describes electoral violence in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic.

### **3.5 Electoral Violence in the Fourth Republic**

Elections are the cornerstone of Nigeria’s democratic system, yet credibility challenges continue to undermine their legitimacy (Udu, 2015). Nigeria operates a multi-party system, although political competition is largely dominated by two major parties: the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the People’s Democratic Party (PDP). Under the current system, elected officials are permitted to serve a maximum of two four-year terms. While elections

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8 Given the prevalence of violence across Nigeria, the availability of violence perpetrators cannot account for the variation observed. This rules it out as an alternative explanation to the theory proposed in Chapter Two, which attributes differences in electoral violence perpetrators to variation in rents.

are now conducted regularly, their integrity often falls short of democratic standards (Udu, 2015). INEC, which is responsible for administering elections, has faced criticism due to its presidentially appointed leadership, which raises concerns about its institutional independence and impartiality (Adibe, 2015). Elections overseen by INEC have been associated with fraud, intimidation and violence (Momah, 2016; Omotola, 2010a).

While the 1999 elections, which marked Nigeria's return to democratic regime, were largely non-violent, subsequent elections have been characterized by increasing levels of violence (Anyika and Ani, 2021). In the years that followed, elections became progressively more violent than those held during previous republics (Adesote, 2022). (Adesote, 2022). The 2003 and 2007 elections were characterized by lethal violence and fraud (Aondowase, 2015; Nwolise, 2007). Although the 2011 elections were considered relatively more credible, they were still marred by lethal violence, with the election results triggering riots in several northern states, leading to 800 deaths and the displacement of about 65,000 people (Bamgbose, 2012).

The 2015 elections marked a significant political milestone, as the opposition APC defeated the incumbent PDP for the first time in Nigeria's history (Olowojolu et al., 2019b). General Muhammadu Buhari, representing the APC, won against President Goodluck Jonathan, signaling a new era of political competition. Nevertheless, the elections were not devoid of violence. INEC

### Lives Lost to Election Violence in Nigeria Since Independence

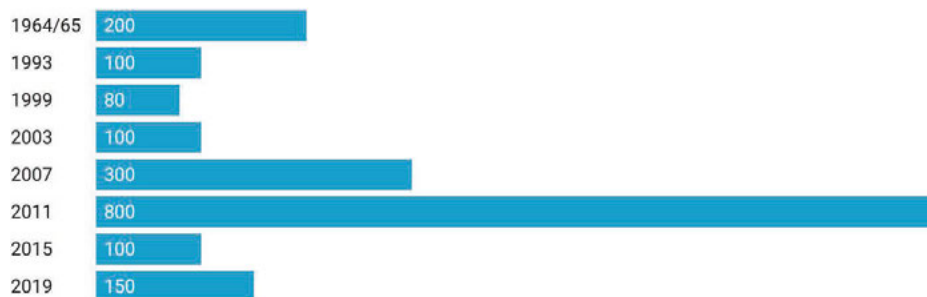


Chart: Kunle Adebajo/HumAngle • Source: HRW, ICG, CD, Africa Watch • Created with Datawrapper

**Figure 3.2:** Electoral violence lethality in Nigeria (1964–2019)

Source: Adebajo, 2022.

recorded 66 incidents of electoral violence nationwide, with Rivers State recording the highest number of cases (Anyika and Ani, 2021; Blesswing, 2015). Similarly, the 2019 subnational elections were characterized by lethal violence, resulting in numerous deaths (Oyewole and Omotola, 2022). Violence was particularly concentrated in battleground states such as Lagos, Kaduna and Rivers, where voters were subjected to intimidation and physical attacks by violence perpetrators (Angerbrandt, 2020; Ubanagu, 2024).

The above chart shows the prevalence of electoral violence in Nigeria from 1964 to 2019, with the most intense violence recorded in 2011 and the least in 1999. The 2023 elections followed the established pattern of violence at national and subnational levels (Times, 2023). States such as Kano, Kaduna, Kogi, Rivers and Lagos particularly experienced highly lethal violence (Times, 2023). As discussed in detail earlier, to perpetrate, politicians hire violence perpetrators, usually either citizens or violence specialists (Anyika and Ani, 2021; LeBas, 2013; Turnbull, 2021a, 2021b). In the following section, I highlight the diverse violence perpetrators that exist across Nigeria.

### **3.6 Violence Perpetrators in Nigeria**

As described in the theory chapter (Chapter Two), violence perpetrators can be divided into three categories: security agents, citizens and non-state violence specialists. These categories align with the Nigerian case, which I elaborate on below.

The first set of perpetrators are state security agents. Security agents in Nigeria, including the police and military, play an active role in electoral violence. They are most active during presidential elections, but they tend to feature less in subnational elections (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2023). As stated earlier, the centralized control of security institutions by national incumbents leads subnational politicians to rely on private violent networks (Akor, 2021; Turnbull, 2021a, 2021b).

The next set of perpetrators are citizens. Subnational incumbents rely on ordinary citizens for violence. Citizens can be recruited through ethnic and partisan rhetoric (Bello, 2015; Krause, 2011; Naku, 2023). In states such as Kaduna and Plateau, where ethno-religious cleavages are highly salient,

politicians have been known to use divisive narratives to recruit citizens (Bello, 2015; Krause, 2011).

The final set of perpetrators is non-state violence specialists. Non-state violence specialists contract their services to politicians in exchange for financial compensation, protection and access to illicit markets (Madueke et al., 2023). Examples of such specialists include cult groups, transport unions, and militant groups, many of which function as proxies for state actors. In the Fourth Republic, non-state violence specialists have embedded themselves as violence perpetrators, supplying violence and protection to politicians in exchange for financial support and political protection (Florquin and Berman, 2005; Turnbull, 2021b). Currently, Nigeria hosts over 100 non-state violence specialist groupings, ranging from small, localized gangs to well-organized militias with the capacity to directly confront state security forces (Florquin and Berman, 2005). In the following section, I highlight some of the non-state violence specialists in Nigeria.

### **Cult groups in the Niger Delta**

Cult groups are popular non-state violence specialists in the Niger Delta region (Florquin and Berman, 2005; Joab-Peterside, 2007). They originally emerged on university campuses, but by the early 1990s they had expanded their presence to rural communities (Nyiayaana, 2011). Their involvement in electoral violence became more pronounced in 1999, when politicians began recruiting them (Madueke et al., 2023). Since then, cult groups have solidified their reputation as prominent violence perpetrators in the Niger Delta region, functioning as foot soldiers for political elites (Joab-Peterside, 2007; Madueke et al., 2023).

### **Ethnic and regional militias in the east, west and north**

Ethnic polarization has fueled the emergence of numerous ethnic militias across the country. In the South-West, the O'odua People's Congress (OPC) was initially formed as a Yoruba nationalist militia advocating for ethnic self-determination (Guichaoua, 2006). Over time, OPC evolved into a powerful vigilante force that engages in violent clashes and extrajudicial killings (Guichaoua, 2006). Although the OPC initially emerged due to ideological motivations, its activities have increasingly turned violent and criminal (Guichaoua, 2006).

In northern Nigeria, the Arewa People's Congress emerged due to ethnic rivalries (Florquin and Berman, 2005). Alongside the Congress, the region has witnessed the rise of criminal gangs, like the Yandaba, a well-known gang in Kano with roots in drug trafficking (Madueke et al., 2023). Beyond their involvement in illicit drug markets, incumbents hire the Yandaba to perpetrate electoral violence (Madueke et al., 2023).

In the South-East, the Bakassi Boys emerged as a vigilante group in response to widespread insecurity and the state's failure to enforce law and order (Harnischfeger, 2003; Smith, 2004). Gaining public support amid distrust in formal security institutions, the Bakassi Boys were initially celebrated for their swift and brutal justice (Harnischfeger, 2003). However, their role shifted significantly as political elites coopted them, using them for electoral violence (Florquin and Berman, 2005; Harnischfeger, 2003; Smith, 2004).

### **The National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW)**

Violence perpetrators in Nigeria extend beyond ethnic and regional militias and also permeate social institutions, most notably the NURTW. The NURTW has evolved into a powerful violence perpetrator, largely due to its entrenchment in a deregulated transport sector and its strong linkages to political elites (Agbibo, 2022; Fourchard, 2022; Omobowale and Fayiga, 2017). However, its greatest source of power stems from its political connections, which date back to the Second Republic (1979–1983), when subnational politicians began to hire its members to engage in electoral violence (Agbibo, 2018; Fourchard, 2011). Since the return to civilian rule in 1999, the NURTW's role in politics has expanded: it has deepened its alliances with subnational elites (Fourchard, 2011). In the South-West, for example, the NURTW functions as a notable violence perpetrator for politicians from the ruling party (Agbibo, 2018; Fourchard, 2023; Omobowale and Fayiga, 2017).

## **3.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has highlighted how fiscal decentralization has created both the incentives and capacity for subnational incumbents to sponsor electoral violence. A central focus of the chapter has been the uneven nature of Nigeria's fiscal federalism, which promotes variation in financial capacity among states. Furthermore, the chapter has traced the evolution of Nigerian politics from the colonial era through military regimes to the current

democratic regime (Fourth Republic). While earlier periods of centralization concentrated resources at the national level, the Fourth Republic has enabled subnational incumbents to gain unprecedented relevance. Through decentralization, they acquired access to rents, empowering them to act as subnational despots capable of sponsoring electoral violence. Additionally, the chapter has highlighted how the weak democratic institutions, which is intensified by the resource curse, reduces the costs of violence for incumbents.

Chapters Four and Five build on this foundation by analyzing how incumbents in Nigeria sponsor electoral violence and recruit the violence perpetrators discussed in this chapter.

# 4

## Rents and Lethal Electoral Violence in Nigeria

In the previous chapter, I presented the background of the Nigerian case, showing the pattern of electoral violence from the First to the Fourth Republic. This chapter seeks to answer the question: *What explains subnational variation in the lethality of electoral violence?* In this chapter, I test the argument that high-rents incumbents sponsor more lethal violence compared to low-rents ones. I use quantitative data to analyze the effect of rents on lethal electoral violence. I test the following hypotheses developed in chapter 2:

- **H1:** High-rents incumbents sponsor more lethal electoral violence than low-rents incumbents
- **H3:** Low-rents incumbents sponsor less lethal electoral violence than high-rents incumbents

The next section describes the construction of the dataset used to measure the dependent variable. I then describe the unit of analysis and variables employed in the state-year dataset that allows me to test H1&H3. I then present the results.

## 4.1 Constructing the Lethal Electoral Violence Dataset (LEVD)

The main dependent variable is lethal electoral violence. I focus on lethal violence because it allows me to more precisely and systematically compare violence across time and space (Fjelde and Höglund, 2022). To measure the dependent variable, I first construct the Lethal Electoral Violence Dataset (LEVD). LEVD records events of lethal electoral violence in Nigeria between 2007 and 2019.

Data for LEVD were sourced from Nigeria Watch. Nigeria Watch is an archive of national and regional newspapers like the *Guardian*, *This Day* and *Punch* (Nigeria Watch, 2021). For the time period under analysis, LEVD contains 1,487 events across the 36 states. In LEVD, each observation is a lethal event, involving at least one death.<sup>9</sup> This implies that events could involve more than one death; unfortunately, information on the number of deaths was not coded with sufficient precision for me to construct an indicator counting the number of deaths.

Figure 1.1 in the Introduction showed the geographical representation of lethal electoral violence events across Nigeria in the 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 elections. As the figure showed, Rivers, Borno and Lagos states recorded more lethal violence events, while other states, such as Nasarawa, Sokoto and Jigawa states recorded lower event numbers.

### Coding Procedure Used to Construct the Lethal Electoral Violence Dataset

The LEVD data were coded using the same procedure as that applied for the Electoral Contention and Violence (ECAV) dataset by Daxecker et al. (2019). The coding process involved two main steps. First, I identified events reported in news articles. Second, each event was coded according to the criteria outlined in the codebook. To ensure inter-coder reliability, my coding was periodically reviewed and validated by my dissertation supervisor, Ursula Daxecker. Reliability was assessed based on our ability to identify the

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9 Nigeria Watch only provides data from 2007 onward, which is why the coding begins with that year. Despite extensive efforts, I was unable to identify an alternative data source covering earlier election years, such as 1999 and 2003. Additionally, at the time of coding (2020–2021), the 2023 elections had not yet taken place and were therefore excluded from the analysis.

same events consistently and similarly interpret them, thereby minimizing subjective bias and enhancing the credibility of the dataset (Ruggeri et al., 2011).

The events coding was guided by the conceptualization of electoral violence established in this dissertation. I conceptualize electoral violence as violence organized by political actors like incumbents to undermine elections. I establish intent based on reporting in articles or statements by the actors/targets involved (Daxecker et al., 2019). An electoral event involves at least one actor and target and has the following two components: i) the actor disagrees on an issue related to campaigns or election results; ii) the actor uses violence against the target linked to campaigns or election results (Daxecker et al., 2019). The above criterion implies that the violence is publicly observable and is linked to an electoral process in both timing and substance (Daxecker et al., 2019). Thus, there is evidence of actual violence in the form of attacks, bombings, clashes, protests and riots, leading to death(s).

I infer the relationship between events and elections using both substantive and temporal criteria. Substantively, an event must be linked to the electoral process: the specific election must be identifiable, and reports must explicitly reference the election or related activities as the context for the violence (Daxecker et al., 2019). For example, an event reported as *“three people died when supporters of the All Progressives Congress (APC) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP) clashed during a door-to-door campaign”* meets these criteria (Nigeria Watch, 2021).<sup>10</sup> Similarly, a report from 20 November 2006 states that *“cultists from the Icelanders Outlaws attacked the AAPW, a forum for peaceful elections,”* which also qualifies as election-related violence due to its direct connection to electoral activities (Nigeria Watch, 2021).<sup>11</sup> Events related to non-electoral issues are included in the dataset only when there is sufficient basis to infer a connection to the electoral process. Other types of political violence, such as communal conflicts, market disputes, cattle grazing disputes, and land issues, are included in the dataset if they overlap with electoral events (Birch et al., 2020). For instance, the following communal clash event was coded as electoral: *“the Alagos community, supporting the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) candidate Chief Solomon Ewuga, clashed with the Eggons community, backing the*

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10 Vanguard Newspaper, March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2015.

11 Punch Newspaper, November 20<sup>th</sup>, 2006.

*People's Democratic Party (PDP) candidate Alhaji Aliu Akwe Doma, leading to the razing of 4 villages"* (Nigeria Watch, 2021).<sup>12</sup>

Finally, I exclude anti-systemic violence from the analysis. Such violence is per definition not sponsored by the incumbent, and therefore falls outside the scope of this study. As defined by Staniland (2014), anti-systemic violence is intended to entirely sabotage the electoral process. This form of violence is largely perpetrated by terrorists affiliated with the Boko Haram group, mainly in the North-East zone of Nigeria. Thus, I only code events involving Boko Haram as anti-systemic if there is a broad range of targets (both ordinary citizens and political actors), and if the motive is somewhat linked to the Nigerian state. For example, an event reported as *"30 people including Alhaji Salatu, Alhaji Bulakaye, and a traditional ruler, Ba Mallam Wasak,...were killed barely 24 hours after a ceasefire agreement was signed by the Federal Government and the insurgents,"* is categorized as anti-systemic due to its anti-democratic context (Nigeria Watch, 2021).<sup>13</sup>

Hence, all violence included in the dataset is intra-systemic violence. This means that violence can be perpetrated by nonstate actors, but could be sponsored by incumbents aiming to influence electoral outcomes (Staniland, 2014). Before they attacked the Nigerian state and Western ideals of democracy, Boko Haram members/affiliates had carried out violence for incumbent governors (Turnbull, 2021a). Thus, I code events perpetrated by Boko Haram as intra-systemic if I can broadly infer a link to elections: for instance, based on the targets of the violence. For example, I code a 2011 event described as *"Boko Haram gunmen killed a cleric, Sheikh Goni Tijjani, who was close to the state governor's father, Galadima Modu Sheriff,"* as intra-systemic electoral violence due to the target's link to a political actor (Nigeria Watch, 2021).<sup>14</sup>

Regarding temporal links, I code events that occur between six months before and three months after elections. This timeframe is designed to broadly capture violence, including campaign, election day, and post-election violence. According to Section 94(1) of the Electoral Act 2022, public campaigns officially begin five months before election day (Federal Republic

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12 The Guardian Newspaper, March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

13 The Guardian Newspaper, October 17<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

14 Punch Newspaper, April 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011.

of Nigeria Official Gazette, 2022).<sup>15</sup> This extended window thus ensures that both official and unofficial campaign violence is captured in the LEVD.

### Variables in the LEVD

LEVD includes several variables for each event. The first set of variables provides identifying information, including an event ID, election ID, date, state name, date, local government area, coordinates, and a location precision variable. The next set of variables focuses on actors and targets. I distinguish between state and non-state actors/targets and further disaggregate non-state actors/targets into party members, party supporters, and non-state violence specialists. To code the actors and targets of electoral violence, I rely on information explicitly stated in, or which can be reasonably inferred from, the article. If the article explicitly describes the perpetrators as party supporters, I code the actor accordingly. For instance, in this event, *“Known PDP youth died in a clash between PDP (George Akume) and AC (Dr. Azeze Lim) supporters in a bar. Clash grew at PDP headquarters where the corpse has been taken,”*<sup>16</sup> the actor is coded as party supporters/citizens because the description directly attributes the violence to citizens affiliated with political parties. In contrast, if the article identifies perpetrators as members of violent groups, I code them as violence specialists – as in the event described as follows: *“Some cultists believed to be loyal to a political party hacked a motorcyclist, Segun Atupa, to death, and took away his hand.”*<sup>17</sup>

If the article mentions the name of the actor and target in each event – for example “PDP supporter,” “Icelanders Cult group,” or “APC politician,” – I note it under actor/target name. The dataset also includes additional categories for actors or targets that are unknown or do not fit any other category. Among such, there were 26 events initiated by unknown perpetrators which are excluded from the analysis. Other participant variables include the number of participant deaths.

I code several event-related variables. For each event, I code an event name based on how it is described in the source article, such as a killing, bombing or attack. I also code the nature of the event as either intra-systemic or anti-systemic, depending on the context. The most frequently occurring event

15 Federal Republic of Nigeria, *Electoral Act 2022*, Federal Government Printer, Lagos, Nigeria.

16 This Day Newspaper, March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2007

17 Guardian Newspaper, October 24<sup>th</sup>, 2014

types in the dataset – attacks, clashes, bombings and killings – are defined in the codebook included in the appendix.

### **Limitations of the LEVD**

One of the limitations of the events dataset is reporting bias. Although event datasets are relevant for capturing spatial and temporal variation in violence (Daxecker et al., 2019), they are also prone to systematic measurement errors, particularly reporting bias (Borzyskowski and Wahman, 2021). This reporting bias arises when media outlets prioritize coverage based on their target audiences and regional focus, potentially misrepresenting local realities (Baum and Zhukov, 2015). Aware of this bias, I leveraged Nigeria Watch’s archives.

Reporting bias is evident in Nigeria. Despite Nigeria’s relatively advanced media, reporting is still uneven as national coverage tends to focus on the south, while regions like the Middle Belt and the north are often underreported (Yusha’u, 2010). Furthermore, media sources may exaggerate deaths, while police reports typically underreport them (Nigeria Watch, 2021). To improve accuracy, Nigeria Watch contains northern news articles and triangulates information from diverse sources, such as police, hospitals, human rights organizations, private firms, embassies and newspapers, allowing for data averaging and a consistent margin of error across time and space. When only state-level data are available, verified deaths are subtracted, and the remainder are distributed proportionally across local governments. In a few cases (<20), where different articles reported varying death tolls for the same event, I used the casualty figures published in Nigeria Watch’s event summary as the authoritative source.

Having described the LEVD, I next describe the unit of analysis and dependent, independent and control variables.

## **4.2. Unit of Analysis and Variables**

The unit of analysis for the quantitative dataset is the state-election-year. That is, each observation refers to a Nigerian state and a particular election-year. I select states as the units of analysis because, as discussed in Chapter Three, states have fiscal autonomy over rents, with governors managing subnational revenue, including local government allocations (Onuigbo and Eme, 2015).

This means that states are key places where decision making over rents, including how to access and distribute them, takes place.

### **Dependent Variable**

The measure of lethal electoral violence comes from LEVD, the dataset just described. Excluding anti-systemic violence for the reasons discussed above, the dataset consisted of 1,144 events of lethal electoral violence.<sup>18</sup> I collapse events by state and election year (2007, 2011, 2015, and 2019) to create a count variable that aggregates lethal violence across the four election years and Nigeria's 36 states. As mentioned earlier, the measure counts the number of events with lethal violence, rather than the number of deaths, because of concerns about reporting accuracy on death tolls.

### **Independent Variable**

#### *Rents*

Data on rents comes from Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics and was gathered from Dataphyte, a media and data analytics company (Dataphyte, 2021). To operationalize rents, I use gross federal allocations, which is the annual share of revenue allocated by the federal government to each state. As discussed in chapter 3, federal allocations are largely derived from crude oil revenue in Nigeria, which accounts for over 60% of government income (Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, 2021). I lag federal allocations by the year preceding an election year. Given that incumbents prepare for elections months in advance, they are likely to use the rents accumulated before elections. I standardize rents by population, using the logarithmic values of standardized rent (rent per capita) as the independent variable. Given significant variation in population across states, with Lagos having more than four times the population of Nasarawa, standardization ensures that states are comparable on an even scale.

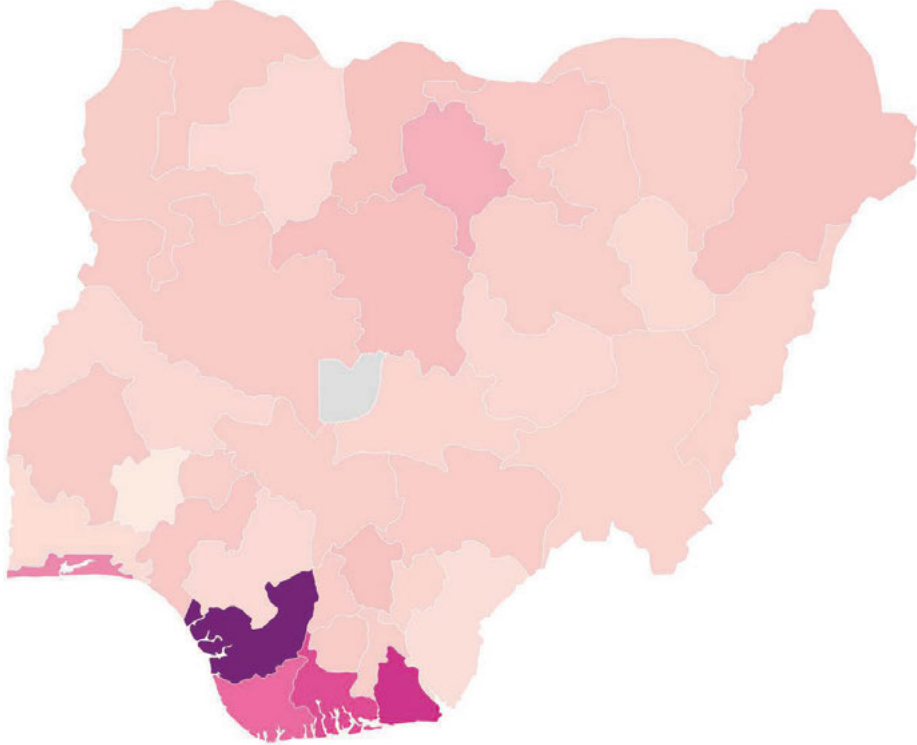
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18 The analysis draws exclusively on intra-systemic events after removing anti-systemic cases from the dataset. Although the initial coding identified both intra- and anti-systemic events, yielding 1,487 observations, the exclusion of 343 anti-systemic events resulted in a final sample of 1,144 intra-systemic events used for analysis.

## Spatial variation in rent

Federal Allocation\_2019

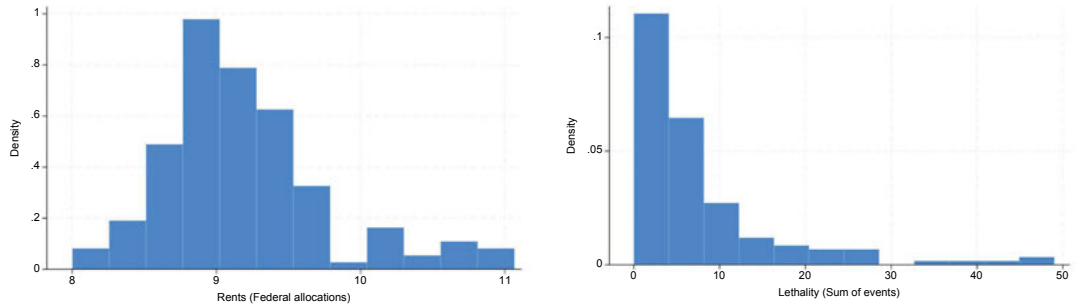
low high



Map: researcher • Source: National Bureau of Statistics • Created with Datawrapper

**Figure 4.1:** Spatial variation in federal allocation distribution

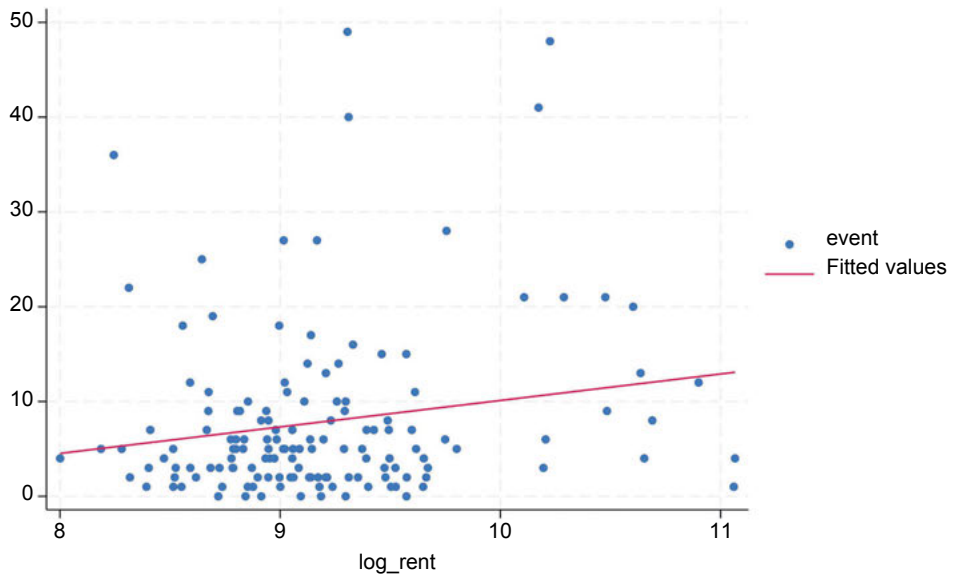
Fig. 4.1., shows significant regional differences in rents across Nigeria, with higher rents concentrated in the southern oil-producing regions, as indicated by darker purple shades. Northern and central regions have lower rent, as shown by lighter shades, showing variations in the federal allocation.



**Figure 4.2:** Histograms of the independent and dependent variables

Source: Author, 2025.

In Fig. 4.2., in the chart on rents (*left*), the distribution suggests that most Nigerian states receive a moderate amount of federal allocation, with some receiving significantly higher or lower amounts. The skewness to the right indicates that while most states cluster around a median federal allocation, there are outliers that receive disproportionately higher amounts. Similarly, the descriptive statistics in the lethality chart (*right*) show that lethality varies among states.



**Figure 4.3:** Scatterplot showing the correlation between rents and lethal electoral violence

Source: Author, 2025.

Fig.4.3., shows that lethal violence has a highly skewed distribution, with many observations clustering around lower values (near zero) but a few outliers reaching very high levels (e.g., above 40). The presence of extreme outliers in the dependent variable (e.g., events above 30 and 40) indicates overdispersion, as these values result in variance being much larger than the mean.

### **Control Variables**

I include five control variables to account for confounders that could affect rents and lethal electoral violence in the analysis. First, I control for poverty per capita using data retrieved from the National Bureau of Statistics (National Bureau of Statistics, 2010). I use the 2010 data, given that these are the most recent available data. Controlling for poverty is relevant, given that in Global South countries like Nigeria, socio-economic factors are likely to trigger politicians to sponsor electoral violence in order to leverage economic benefits from political office (Yusuf, 2019).

Second, I include a control for population using 2019 data from the National Population Commission, sourced from the National Bureau of Statistics (2021a). Given that the dataset relies on event-based media reports, population size may introduce reporting biases as electoral violence in densely populated areas may be overreported while sparsely populated ones may be underreported (Borzyskowski and Wahman, 2021).

Third, I include a variable for the distance to the national capital in kilometers. This control accounts for geographic location, as states closer to the capital may be less prone to violence given their proximity to national security agents. This distance to capital variable is sourced from the National Bureau of Statistics (2010).

Fourth, existing research establishes a positive association between competitiveness and electoral violence (Birch et al., 2020; Salehyan and Linebarger, 2015; Wilkinson, 2004). Thus, I control for competitiveness using turnover. I use party turnover as an alternative measure to the margin of victory due to the lack of granular data for most elections in Nigeria, except 2019 and 2023.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> I sourced data on turnover from numerous online newspapers, such as the *Daily Times*, the *Guardian* and *Arise News*.

Finally, I include a lagged violence variable to account for historical trends, as states with a history of electoral violence are more likely to experience it in subsequent elections. As the Nigerian Watch database only contains violence events from 2007, I use violence in the 2003 elections as the lagged variable. Using the Human Rights Watch observer report for the 2003 elections, I code states mentioned in the report as recording lethal violence as 1 (Human Rights Watch, 2004). Before presenting the results, in Table 4.1., I show the descriptive statistics of all the variables.

**Table 4.1:** Descriptive statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Lethality (events)	144	7.847	9.06	0	49
log rent	144	9.19	.587	8.001	11.066
Lethality (lag)	144	5.903	8.317	0	48
Population (log)	144	15.44	.393	14.689	16.473
Turnover	144	.285	.453	0	1
Distance to capital	144	522.778	198.256	156	957
Poverty 2010	144	63.35	14.384	37.5	88.5

Source: Author, 2025.

## 4.3 Results

### Rents and Lethal Electoral Violence

This section examines the hypotheses that high-rents incumbents sponsor more lethal electoral violence while low-rents incumbents sponsor less lethal electoral violence. I present the results using three model specifications to show the robustness of the findings. Since the dependent variable is a count variable and the data indicate overdispersion, as shown in Fig. 4.3., I use negative binomial and Poisson regression models, which are ideal for analyzing count variables with overdispersion (Ver Hoef and Boveng, 2007), while including robust standard errors in model specifications. I also include an ordinary least squares (OLS) model for consistency and ease of interpretation.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> StataNow /MP 18.5 was used for the analysis and graphs.

**Table 4.2:** Effects of rents on lethal electoral violence

	OLS (1) <i>Lethality</i>	Negative Binomial (2) <i>Lethality</i>	Poisson (3) <i>Lethality</i>
Rent	3.624 (2.350)	0.369** (0.168)	0.394** (0.198)
Lethality (lag)	0.143 (0.194)	0.018 (0.011)	0.008 (0.014)
Population (log)	7.117** (3.004)	0.732*** (0.240)	0.805*** (0.279)
Election turnover	-2.233* (1.192)	-0.225 (0.162)	-0.241 (0.164)
Poverty_2010	-0.074* (0.045)	-0.010* (0.006)	-0.010* (0.006)
Distance to capital	0.004 (0.004)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.001)
Constant	-132.965** (62.558)	-12.199** (4.770)	-13.708** (5.652)
L $\alpha$		-0.454*** (0.120)	
N	144	144	144

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Source: Author, 2025.

Table 4.2., shows the results of three models: OLS, Poisson, and negative binomial, estimating the relationship between rents and the lethality of electoral violence. Across the count models (Poisson and negative binomial), rents are consistently and significantly associated with higher levels of violence lethality. Specifically, in the negative binomial model (which is appropriate when overdispersion is present, as indicated by a significant  $\ln\alpha$  term), a one-unit increase in rents is associated with a 0.369 increase

in the expected log count of lethal events, holding other variables constant ( $p < 0.05$ ). The Poisson model shows a similar effect (0.394,  $p < 0.05$ ), supporting the robustness of this finding. Although the OLS estimate is larger (3.624) and not statistically significant, the direction of the relationship is consistent. The negative binomial model is preferred due to the presence of overdispersion (as indicated by the significant  $\ln\alpha$ ), suggesting that the Poisson model may underestimate the variance. The results align with the argument that high rents enable incumbents to sponsor lethal violence.

Other covariates show a mix of consistent and inconsistent effects across models. Population (logged) is a strong and statistically significant predictor of lethality across all specifications, indicating that more populous states are more prone to lethal electoral violence. The negative relationship between poverty and lethality is statistically significant at the 10% level in all models, implying that poorer states tend to experience slightly less lethal violence. Election turnover has a significant negative association in the OLS model ( $p < 0.10$ ), but this relationship weakens and becomes statistically insignificant in the count models. Similarly, the lag of violent events does not significantly predict lethality in any model, suggesting that the lethality of violence may not be strongly path-dependent over time. Distance to the capital city has no meaningful effect across specifications.

Having shown the association between rents and lethal electoral violence, I proceed to show the fixed effects results in Table 4.3., I use the fixed effect models to control for unobserved, time-invariant characteristics unique to each state and each election year, such as historical political dynamics or institutional variation.

**Table 4.3:** State and year fixed effects of rents on lethal electoral violence.<sup>21</sup>

	OLS (1)	Negative Binomial (2)	Poisson (3)
	<i>Lethality</i>	<i>Lethality</i>	<i>Lethality</i>
Rents	10.064 <sup>*</sup> (6.055)	0.369 <sup>**</sup> (0.168)	0.394 <sup>**</sup> (0.198)
Lethality (lag)	-0.252 <sup>**</sup> (0.099)	0.018 (0.011)	0.008 (0.014)
Population (log)	0.000 (.)	0.732 <sup>***</sup> (0.240)	0.805 <sup>***</sup> (0.279)
Election turnover	1.071 (1.660)	-0.225 (0.162)	-0.241 (0.164)
Poverty_2010	0.000 (.) (.)	-0.010 <sup>*</sup> (0.006) (0.000)	-0.010 <sup>*</sup> (0.006) (0.001)
Constant	-79.768 (53.352)	-12.199 <sup>**</sup> (4.770)	-13.708 <sup>**</sup> (5.652)
L $\alpha$		-0.454 <sup>***</sup> (0.120)	
<i>N</i>	144	144	144

Standard errors in parentheses

<sup>\*</sup>  $p < 0.10$ , <sup>\*\*</sup>  $p < 0.05$ , <sup>\*\*\*</sup>  $p < 0.01$

Source: Author, 2025.

Table 4.3., presents the results of three models – OLS, Poisson and negative binomial – estimating the relationship between rents and lethal violence, while controlling for both state and year fixed effects. Across the count models (Poisson and negative binomial), rents are consistently and significantly associated with higher levels of lethality. Specifically, in the negative binomial model, a one-unit increase in rents is associated with a 0.369 increase in lethal violence, holding other factors constant ( $p < 0.05$ ). The Poisson model shows a nearly identical effect (0.394,  $p < 0.05$ ), showing the robustness of this relationship. The OLS estimate is larger (10.064) and only marginally significant ( $p < 0.10$ ), but the direction of the relationship remains consistent across all three models. This show that with state and

<sup>21</sup> Additional results with random effects are also in the appendix.

year fixed effects, rents consistently predict lethal violence in high-rents states, supporting the theoretical expectation.

While the time-invariant variable *distance to capital* is omitted from the fixed-effects model, other covariates show varying levels of significance and consistency across the models. Logged population is a strong positive and statistically significant predictor of lethal violence in both count models, suggesting that more populous states are more likely to experience lethal electoral violence. Poverty indicates a negative and statistically significant relationship with lethal violence in the count models ( $p < 0.10$ ), suggesting that poorer states may experience slightly less lethal violence. The lagged electoral violence variable is negatively associated with lethal violence in the OLS model ( $p < 0.05$ ), indicating that more lethality in the previous elections may slightly reduce subsequent lethality. However, this relationship does not hold in the Poisson and negative binomial models, which show small and statistically insignificant effects. Election turnover shows no consistent pattern, with a positive but insignificant coefficient in the OLS model and negative but also insignificant results in the count models. Distance to the capital city has no meaningful effect across any of the specifications.

Overall, the consistent positive and statistically significant association between rents and lethality across the Poisson and negative binomial models provides strong evidence to support the argument that high-rents incumbents sponsor more lethal violence.

## 4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has systematically tested the theory's hypothesis: that rents are associated with lethal electoral violence. Findings from the quantitative analysis confirm the hypotheses, showing that rents have a positive and significant effect on lethal violence. Rents' effect on lethal violence remains significant with the inclusion of control variables, robust standard errors, and state and year fixed effects. Having analyzed the effects of rents on electoral violence lethality, in the next chapter I use qualitative evidence to examine how rents enable incumbents to hire the perpetrators that carry out this lethal electoral violence. Thus, the next chapter examines incumbents' choice of violence perpetrators.



# 5

## Renting Violence: Rents and Electoral Violence Delegation in Nigeria

In Chapter Four, I analyzed the association between rents and the lethality of electoral violence in Nigeria. I observed that lethal violence is more common in high-rents states compared to low-rent ones. In this chapter, I explore the implications of rents for the choice of violence perpetrators, addressing the question: *What explains subnational variation in electoral violence perpetrators?* To answer the question, I show that variation in electoral violence perpetrators is largely shaped by incumbents' choices, and that these choices are determined by their financial capacity to hire them rather than alternative explanations. While high rents provide incumbents with the capacity to hire expensive violence specialists, low-rents incumbents rely on citizens due to their limited financial capacity. Hence, the chapter aims to explore the following hypotheses presented in chapter 2:

- **H2:** High-rents incumbents are more likely to recruit violence specialists to perpetrate violence than low-rent incumbents.
- **H4:** Low-rents incumbents are more likely to recruit ordinary citizens to perpetrate violence than high-rents incumbents.

I use qualitative data gathered from interviews to conduct a structured and focused comparative case study (George and Bennett, 2005). This approach is appropriate because it is challenging to quantitatively examine whether and how rents enable incumbents to hire electoral violence perpetrators. Qualitative data allow me to probe the implications of the argument for perpetrator recruitment. Moreover, qualitative data are well-suited for demonstrating that rents play a key role in incumbents' decision-making and allow me to establish additional empirical implications of the argument, such as demonstrating that relationships between incumbents and violence specialists are distinct in low-and high-rents states.

### **Qualitative Data**

My primary data consist of 126 in-depth interviews conducted with local politicians, journalists, CSO electoral observers and voters.<sup>22</sup> These interviews were conducted in two fieldwork trips in 2022 and 2023. In total, I spent eight months in the field. Fieldwork covered the four states selected for analysis, as described in the next section. I complement interview data with observer reports, international non-government organization reports, and news articles. These data are used to examine whether and how rents influence incumbents' choice of violence perpetrators.

To find respondents, I partnered with several CSOs in Nigeria, such as Situation Room, YIAGA Africa, Women in Politics, and Stakeholder Initiatives. The CSOs were important in facilitating access to respondents, as they readily provided referrals and assisted through personal networks. Based on their referrals, I used purposive sampling to select initial respondents. As fieldwork progressed, I transitioned to snowball sampling, which allowed existing respondents to identify additional participants (Parker et al., 2019). I also supplemented snowballing with personal contacts and cold emailing. By diversifying sampling techniques, I tried to reduce selection bias and ensure broad variation in perspectives beyond any single referral pool.

The interviews averaged 30 to 45 minutes and contributed to theory-building in distinct ways. Despite being unable to interview incumbents and violence specialists due to a lack of connections, I gained valuable insights from local politicians, who were forthcoming with information. From interviews with local politicians, especially those in opposition parties, I learned about how

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22 The full list of interviews is included in the section on Chapter Five in the appendix.

rents enhance incumbents' capacity for violence. The local politicians were knowledgeable about the financial architecture of state rents, which enabled them to give detailed information about the source of rents, as well as how subnational incumbents are able to access them. From the interviews with local journalists, civil society members, and regular voters, I learned about how incumbents recruit violence perpetrators. Local journalists and civil society members shared information about the primary violence perpetrators in their states, and the financial aspect of their recruitment. However, interviews and secondary sources are third-party reports that cannot reveal incumbents' direct involvement in violence, thus I infer a governor's choice from the primary violence perpetrators identified in interviews and secondary sources. Similar to Chapter Four, I operationalize rents with federal allocations, sourced from the National Bureau of Statistics. Recall that federal allocations are the total share of states' revenue, and are largely derived from crude oil exportation (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021b).

### **Case Selection and Inferences**

Since the political economy theory of electoral violence is presented at the subnational level, my primary interest is to compare incumbent strategies in perpetrator selection at the state level. To select states for interviews and analysis, I prioritized variation in the values of the independent variables. Selecting cases based on variation of the independent variable – that is, rents – is an effective strategy for qualitative research aimed at uncovering patterns (Seawright, 2016).<sup>23</sup> I selected four states – Nasarawa, Plateau, Lagos and Rivers – with Lagos and Rivers being high-rents states and Nasarawa and Plateau being low-rents states (see **Table 5.1**). I acknowledge that before embarking on fieldwork – also because I know the Rivers State context well - I already had some theoretical intuitions about variation in the dependent variable, such as understanding the importance of violence specialists in Rivers. However, this case selection strategy is appropriate in low-information settings.<sup>24</sup> Low-information settings are those in which the researcher must engage in substantial and challenging research in order to ascertain the values of all relevant variables (Gisselquist, 2014), which applies to research on sensitive topics like violence, where subnational data may be limited, unreliable or unavailable. Thus, Gisselquist (2014)

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23 This method is much more informative than traditional methods like typical cases, which tend to offer limited insight into cases (Seawright, 2016).

24 I use the terms areas, cases and states interchangeably.

recommends selecting cases based on theoretical propositions and known characteristics of available cases, to avoid indeterminate research designs in low-information settings (Gisselquist, 2014). These theoretical priors do not imply that my findings were a foregone conclusion. I knew much less, for instance, about one high-rent state, Lagos, and the low-rent states chosen for analysis. Importantly, variation in alternative explanations – incumbent party identities, polarization, and availability of violence perpetrators – does not overlap precisely with variation in rents in these states, which allows me to account for alternative explanations (see Table 5.1). Finally, a core aim of the chapter is to not only show that variation in rents and violence perpetrators is broadly consistent with the theory, but to show that rents play a crucial role in the selection of perpetrators, rather than other factors.

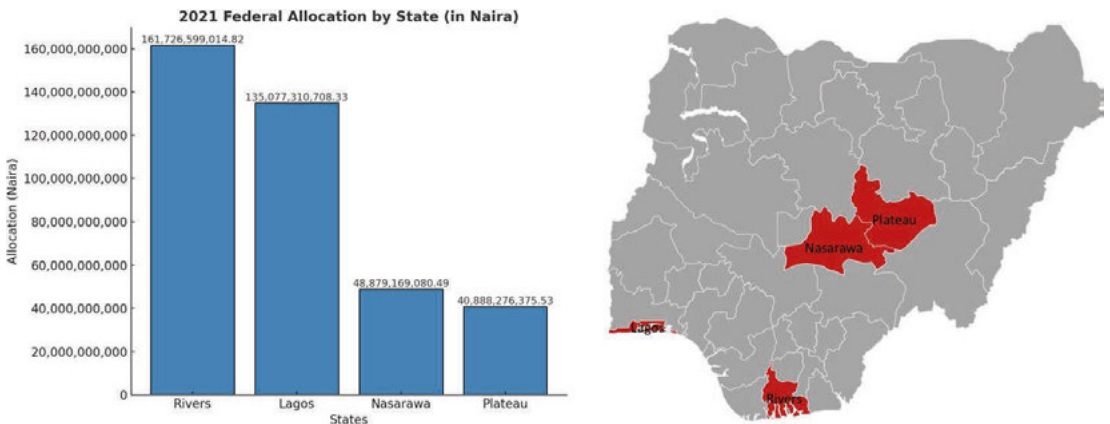
My interviews and secondary data aimed to cover all elections in the Fourth Republic, Nigeria’s longest democratic regime. The logic of inference relies on structured and focused comparison, which is a cross-case method designed to enable comparison across multiple cases using a shared set of analytical questions (George and Bennett, 2005). It is focused because it only deals with certain aspects of the analyzed case as they relate to the theory (George and Bennett, 2005). Thus, I used similar interview guides in the four cases and structured the analysis to examine whether my theoretical expectations broadly reflect empirical realities in Nigeria, while also exploring alternative explanations.

**Table 5.1:** Overview of the theoretical expectations and alternative explanations

	Lagos	Rivers	Plateau	Nasarawa
Rents	High	High	Low	Low
Primary violence Perpetrator	Violence specialists (NURTW)	Violent specialists (Cult groups)	Ordinary citizens (Ethnic/party supporters)	Ordinary citizens (Ethnic/party supporters)
<b>Alternative Explanations</b>				
Availability of violence specialists	High	High	High	High
Ethnic/ party polarization	High	High	High	High
Ruling party	APC	PDP	PDP	APC

**Source:** Author, 2025.

Table 5.1., provides a summary of the variation in the four subnational cases: Lagos, Rivers, Plateau and Nasarawa. The cases vary in rents and electoral violence perpetrators, and this variation does not overlap with the variation in alternative explanations (which will be discussed at the end of the chapter on pp. 129-132). The table shows that in high-rents states (Lagos and Rivers), incumbents rely on violence specialists such as the NURTW and cult groups, while in low-rents states (Plateau and Nasarawa) they depend on ordinary citizens, including party and ethnic supporters. Across all cases, violence specialists are available, and polarization is present; implying that the lack of variation in these factors cannot tell us why violence perpetrators would be different across these states. Finally, the identities of ruling parties vary, with the APC governing Lagos and Nasarawa, and the PDP governing Rivers and Plateau. This helps address the identity of parties, including affiliation with the national incumbent and party capacity, as an alternative explanation.<sup>25</sup> In Fig 5.1., below, I show the variation in rents (federal allocations) across the cases, along with a map of Nigeria.



**Figure. 5.1:** Federal allocation distribution (2021), and Map of Nigeria

Source: National Bureau of Statistics and MapChart.<sup>26</sup>

25 Detailed information regarding the scale of comparison can be found in the section on Chapter Five in the appendix.

26 National Bureau of Statistics (2023). Retrieved from <https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/> on October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023. MapChart (2024). Retrieved from <https://www.mapchart.net/> on September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

Fig.5.1., shows that Rivers and Lagos receive significantly higher federal allocations than Plateau and Nasarawa states, while the map shows the geographical locations of the cases.<sup>27</sup> As mentioned in Chapter Three, these allocations are mainly derived from crude oil revenue and are distributed using an established formula based on population, resource wealth and social development, which leads to uneven distribution (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021b). This means that despite fluctuations in global oil prices, Lagos and Rivers consistently receive higher rents than Nasarawa and Plateau states.

Before presenting the qualitative findings, it is necessary to restate relevant contextual points that guide the interpretation of this chapter's discussion. First, as explained in Chapter Three, rent-seeking is widespread across Nigeria and occurs in both high-rents and low-rents states. Second, Nigeria's weak institutions allow incumbents to access and use rents at their discretion (Egbo et al., 2012; Onwumere and Uche, 2010). Third, interviews conducted across all four states revealed that governors collude with signatories to government accounts to release public funds at will, reinforcing the discretionary control of rents.

Having clarified the contextual points, the chapter now proceeds to the empirical findings, beginning with the high-rents states and then turning to the low-rents ones.

## **5.1 Governors, High Rents and Violence Specialists**

I structure the case discussion along the theoretical claim that high rents enable incumbents to hire violence specialists. I begin with a discussion of patterns in Rivers State, then continue to Lagos State.

### **Background of Rivers State**

Rivers State is a high-rents state. Situated in the Niger Delta region within the South-South geopolitical zone, Rivers is renowned for its vast reserves of natural gas and crude oil (Rivers State Government, 2023). Contributing to

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27 The low-rents states of Plateau and Nasarawa are located in the North-Central zone, while the high-rents states of Rivers and Lagos are located in the South-South and South-West zones, respectively.

over 40% of Nigeria's crude oil and gas resources, the state plays an essential role in the national economy, with approximately one-third of Nigeria's GDP, national income, and foreign exchange emanating from its rich resources (Rivers State Government, 2023). It is one of the beneficiaries of the 13% derivation fund, which is the additional revenue allocated to resource-rich states on the basis of crude oil production.

Rivers State has remained a PDP stronghold since 1999. For over 16 years, up until 2023, governors came from the Ikwerre ethnic group. In that year, an Ijaw governor was elected. During fieldwork, local journalists, politicians and regular voters noted that partisan, rather than ethnic, polarization is prevalent in Rivers.<sup>28</sup> They mentioned that politics often splits even family members along partisan lines, with citizens strongly identifying with either the PDP or opposition parties like the APC.<sup>29</sup>

Rivers State has a violent history. Similar to other resource-rich contexts, resource conflicts frequently escalate into violence. The most prominent of these conflicts is the Niger Delta insurgency, which began when youths, resisting the federal monopoly on oil revenue distribution, and demanding a fairer share, mobilized violently against the state (Ebienfa, 2011; Joab-Peterside, 2007; Oluwaniyi, 2010). Although the federal government initially responded with repression, that approach was ineffective, leading to a shift toward negotiations. This transition led to the introduction of an amnesty program, which contributed significantly to ending the insurgency (Oluwaniyi, 2010).

However, the insurgency is only one major part of Rivers' violence story. In addition, ethnic polarization occasionally triggers communal violence, leading to the creation of ethnic militias and vigilantes as a means of self-defense (Joab-Peterside, 2007). Alongside communal violence, cults and criminal gangs involved in illicit activities further contribute to violence (Joab-Peterside, 2007; Nyiayaana, 2011; Ogele et al., 2020). According to Nigeria Watch, there are over 100 cult groups in Rivers State alone. Within this context of prevalent violence, there are diverse violence perpetrators (Nigeria Watch, 2021), but interviews and qualitative sources reveal that governors

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28 Interviews, Rivers: 001, 002, 004, 017, 019, 025, 028, 029, 030, 031, 040, 043, 044, 045, 045, 046. March 2022; April 2023

29 Ibid.

primarily outsource electoral violence to cult groups (Albin-Lackey, 2008; Human Rights Watch, 2005b; Joab-Peterside et al., 2021; Madueke et al., 2023; Niger Delta Partnership Initiative, 2018).<sup>30</sup>

### **From Decentralization to Delegation: How Rents Enable the Strategic Use of Cultists in Rivers**

As indicated earlier, the 1999 Constitution granted fiscal autonomy to subnational units (Elaigwu, 2002; Idemudia, 2012; Uche and Uche, 2004). The return to democracy in 1999 marked a turning point in Rivers State, not only politically but also in regard to how hiring violence specialists became embedded in incumbents' electoral strategies (Human Rights Watch, 2005b; Madueke et al., 2023). Under military rule, subnational elites had limited fiscal autonomy, which reduced their financial capacity (Elaigwu, 2002; Uche and Uche, 2004). However, the 1999 Constitution introduced both multi-party competition and fiscal decentralization, allocating additional revenue to oil-producing states (Elaigwu, 2002; Idemudia, 2012; Uche and Uche, 2004; Ushie, 2012). This fiscal windfall transformed subnational incumbents into powerful actors with both the incentive and the means to entrench themselves in office (Madueke et al., 2023).

This institutional shift created the structural conditions under which electoral violence could be outsourced. As rents increased, so too did the value of holding office and, with it, the willingness of incumbents to use violence to secure electoral dominance. Consistent with the theoretical expectation that high rents enable the recruitment of violence specialists, River's politicians, particularly those in the ruling PDP, began sponsoring their supporters and cult groups to engage in electoral violence (Madueke et al., 2023). By the time of the 2003 elections, cultists had moved from the periphery of electoral politics to its core, operating as coordinated violence specialists (Albin-Lackey, 2008; Madueke et al., 2023). For example, a Human Rights Watch (2005) report documented how the then-Governor Peter Odili and his associate, Minister Abiye Sekibo, directly collaborated with cultists to manipulate the 2003 elections (Human Rights Watch, 2005b). While PDP members and supporters engage in violence during elections, cult groups are often highlighted as the main electoral violence perpetrators in Rivers

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30 Interviews, Rivers 003, 004, 006, 0012, 0016, 0020, 0021, 0023, 0024, 0026, 0027, 0028, 0029, 0030, 0031, 0032, 0034, 0035, 0036, 0040, 0042, 0043.

(Albin-Lackey, 2008; Human Rights Watch, 2005b; Madueke et al., 2023; Niger Delta Partnership Initiative, 2018).

### **The Dominance of Cult Groups in Rivers Elections**

The dominance of cultists as the primary violence perpetrators in Rivers State is established in reports by the Human Rights Watch, the Niger Delta Partnership Initiative, and the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime (Albin-Lackey, 2008; Human Rights Watch, 2005b; Madueke et al., 2023; Niger Delta Partnership Initiative, 2018). Corroborating these reports, respondents across interviews, including local journalists, CSO members and opposition politicians, confirmed that incumbents repeatedly hire cults during election periods. Several respondents were able to identify them, mentioning specific groups such as the Icelanders, Greenlanders, Dey-bam, and Dey-Well.

To understand why cult groups became politically instrumental in Rivers, we must first examine their historical trajectory. Cultism in Nigeria began as campus-based intellectual movements, such as the Pyrates Confraternity founded in 1953 at University College, Ibadan (Rotimi, 2005; Ajayi et al., 2010). Originally ideologically driven, these groups shifted toward violence by the 1980s due to internal fragmentation and growing political linkages (Rotimi, 2005; Eguavoen, 2008). This transformation was not limited to campuses. In Rivers State, cult groups spilled into communities and evolved into organized networks involved in criminal markets and violence (Nyiayaana, 2011; Ogele et al., 2020; Madueke et al., 2023). By the 1990s, they had become well-established violence specialists, preceding their integration into the electoral space (Madueke et al., 2023). This background matters because it shows that cults were not created by politicians. Rather, they were pre-existing and already functioning as violence specialists before incumbents began to hire them. Thus, cult groups align with the conceptualization of violence specialists advanced in this dissertation, as organized groups that routinely engage in violence during and outside elections.

Cults have a hierarchical structure, similar to militia groups (Oyibo, 2020). Each group has a clear chain of command (Oyibo, 2020). Members use coded language and symbols, associated with weapons or colors that represent their group's identity (Oyibo, 2020). While cults give their members protection and a sense of belonging, their main purpose is to gain power, influence and notoriety among peers (Oyibo, 2020). They have strong horizontal connections

and a violent reputation. In Rivers, their influence is particularly strong in areas such as Ogba, Emuoha, Port Harcourt, and Oneh (Joab-Peterside et al., 2021). They operate within defined territories, which they guard fiercely. Each group has its sphere of influence and any attempt by rivals to cross into these zones is resisted with violence (Joab-Peterside et al., 2021). This fierce protection of their spheres of influence aligns with their popular violent reputation, as cultists are known for brutal killings, including beheadings and dismemberment (Eguavoen, 2008; Joab-Peterside et al., 2021; Ogele et al., 2020; Oyibo, 2020). While some cults are viewed as more extreme than others, they are all notorious for their violence (Oyibo, 2020). Having established cultists as violence specialists, I now move on to examine how high rents enable incumbents to hire them.

### **How High Rents Facilitate the Hiring of Cult Groups**

Here, I examine how high rents enable incumbents to hire cult groups. As proposed by the theory, the cost of hiring violence specialists like cult groups is high and only incumbents with high rents can afford them. A 2023 report by the Global Initiative Against Transnational Crime supports this argument, revealing that cultists were paid from 15 to 20 million naira (10 to 15 USD) to carry out electoral violence (Madueke et al., 2023). This aligns with findings from interviews, in which respondents repeatedly emphasized that incumbents' campaign budgets included "cult recruitment costs," which are expensive.<sup>31</sup> Local journalists and CSO electoral observers alleged that some cultists are paid millions of naira monthly, with their earnings spiking significantly during election periods.<sup>32</sup> This financial asymmetry also explains variation between incumbents and opposition. According to the opposition politicians I interviewed, their lack of rents limits their capacity to hire cult groups.<sup>33</sup> During an interview with an opposition politician from the SDP, he openly acknowledged that the ability to hire cultists was less a matter of political will and more a question of who had the capacity to do so.<sup>34</sup> He noted that if opposition parties had access to similar resources to those enjoyed by the PDP, they would also likely hire cult groups. This view

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31 Interviews, Rivers: 0003, 004, 0005, 006, 0007, 0012, 0013, 0026, 0027, 0028, 0029, 0036, 0038.

32 Interviews, Rivers: 0003, 004, 0005, 006, 0007, 0012, 0013, 0026, 0027, 0028, 0029, 0036, 0038.

33 Interviews, Rivers: 017, 019, 025, 028, 029, 030, 031, 040, 043, 044, 045, 045, 046. March 2022; April 2023.

34 Interview, Rivers: 0045, April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

was echoed by another opposition politician from the APC, who highlighted the financial variation between incumbents and opposition parties. He noted:

Sponsorship of this violence, thuggery and voter intimidation was heavily funded by the incumbent. Of course, it is difficult for opposition members to fund violence because it is actually expensive, so they do not do it on their own or they do not do it alone. They, of course, outsource. There are some merchants of violence in town, so they procure these persons to execute attacks in opposition camps, and that's why the violence becomes so pronounced. It is expensive because it entails the doling out of "free money" money from government coffers that is likely unaccounted for, and which comes directly from the proceeds of corruption. That's why it is easier for the ruling party to fund such illegalities.<sup>35</sup>

In the APC politician's account, because outsourcing violence is financially costly, only incumbents can afford to do it. Local journalists, CSO electoral observers, and politicians noted that the amount and consistency of these payments vary by the size and perceived utility of the cult group.<sup>36</sup> Smaller groups may receive one-off payments, while larger, more influential groups receive monthly stipends or other benefits based on their agreements with the incumbent.<sup>37</sup>

Here, the patterns become clear: high rents are diverted into hiring cultists as financial resources determine who can afford violence. Given that Rivers governors have sufficient resources to hire multiple violence perpetrators, I wanted to understand why they choose cult groups. Originally, I assumed that incumbents would hire any violence specialists, without strategic considerations. However, my fieldwork revealed additional findings that added to my theory-building. Two features – organizational structure and violent reputation – emerged from interviews as qualities that influence incumbents' preference for cultists compared to other violence perpetrators like ethnic militias and other criminal organizations.

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35 Interview, Rivers: 0039. April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2023

36 Interviews, Rivers: 003, 004, 006, 0012, 0016, 0020, 0021, 0023, 0024, 0026, 0027, 0028, 0029, 0030, 0031, 0032, 0034, 0035, 0036, 0040, 0042, 0043.

37 Ibid.

### **Strategic Selection Based on Structure and Reputation**

I revised the theory after my second fieldwork trip to account for the operational qualities of cults, which influence incumbents' choices. These insights extended the theory, leading to the integration of additional dimensions, including how horizontal cult networks facilitate efficient violence coordination across space, and how the violent reputation of cults enhances their effectiveness in carrying out electoral violence.

Although cult groups are everywhere in Rivers, they are not loose mobs. They have an organized structure with hierarchical command, coded communication and clear territorial jurisdiction (Oyibo, 2020). These features mirror those of militia organizations. Interviews with local journalists revealed that governors contact cult leaders through trusted intermediaries or encrypted communication platforms like WhatsApp.<sup>38</sup> These groups' horizontal connections across both rural villages like Ndoni and major cities like Port Harcourt make them ideal for perpetrating widespread violence (Joab-Peterside et al., 2021). This structural embeddedness enables another main function: identification and targeting. Journalists, CSO members and regular voters noted that cultists know who lives where, who supports whom, and how to enforce violence in their spheres of influence.<sup>39</sup> This micro-level information advantage is relevant for targeting incumbents' rivals and voters during elections.

The second quality of cult groups that leads incumbents to choose them is their violent reputation. Cultists are feared not just for the potential violence they may inflict, but also for their public displays of brutality, including killings and dismemberment (Joab-Peterside et al., 2021; Ogele et al., 2020).<sup>40</sup> Respondents largely affirmed that cultists execute lethal violence, causing panic and fear during elections.<sup>41</sup> For example, cultists' execution of violence led to low voter turnout in the 2023 Rivers governorship elections (Madueke et al., 2023). This aligns with the argument that cults' operational qualities like reputation and structure, enhances their effectiveness as violence perpetrators, which in turn increases their hiring costs. Thus, Rivers'

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38 Interview, Rivers: 0011, 0020, 0023, 0032, 0034, 0040, and 0044,

39 Interviews, Rivers: 003, 004, 006, 0012, 0016, 0020, 0021, 0023, 0024, 0026, 0027, 0028, 0029, 0030, 0031, 0032, 0034, 0035, 0036, 0040, 0042, 0043.

40 Interviews, Rivers: 002, 007, 019, 023, 027, 028, 040, 044, 045, 049. March 2022 / April 2023.

41 Interviews, Rivers: 015, 019, 020, 0023, 0025, 027, 0029, 032, 033, 0034, 0040 0042, 0044, 049. March 2022 / April 2023.

governors strategically hire cultists because their execution of violence is strategically effective during elections, despite the high financial costs.

### **Reward System and the Management of Outsourcing Risks**

While structure and reputation explain *why* cults are chosen, reward systems explain *how* incumbents navigate outsourcing risks like losing control over cultists. Initially, I assumed that violence specialists would be selected based on their coercive strength, without considering outsourcing risks and switching loyalties. However, my fieldwork revealed that post-election reward systems, including illicit market access, stabilize otherwise risky alliances. Interviews with local journalists, CSOs and opposition politicians revealed that the relationship between governors and cultists is transactional, durable and carefully managed.<sup>42</sup> Such insights enabled me to revise the theory to account for criminal governance of illicit markets in the theory.

Interviews with local journalists, CSO members, and opposition politicians identified a consistent pattern: governors navigate outsourcing risks with cult groups by compensating them with financial rewards and access to illicit markets.<sup>43</sup> Electoral observers explained this as follows:

Every month the Rivers State Government dishes out money to different cult groups through their heads. I can also tell you like I said before, some of them after fighting for the government, they are made caretaker chairman to eventually favored by the handpicked chairman and become local government chairman, members of board, one task force or the other.<sup>44</sup>

The relationship between these guys is a symbiotic relationship. While these criminals are supporting them, helping them create the atmosphere needed to rig effectively, the criminals themselves get heavily paid. In fact, some of them have made confessional statements in the media about how they worked for this outgoing governor in 2015, helped enthrone him, and

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42 Interviews, Rivers: 0023, 0026, 0034, 0037.

43 Interviews, Rivers: 015, 019, 020, 023, 025, 027, 029, 032, 033, 034, 040 042, 044, 049. March 2022 / April 2023.

44 Interviews, Rivers: 0034. April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

the promises he made to them. Some were promised monthly payments once he won.<sup>45</sup>

As the respondents highlight, incumbents pay cultists during elections. However, short-term monetary rewards alone are insufficient to ensure loyalty. Several local journalists and CSO members, and opposition politicians, emphasized that the long-term payments take the form of granting cultists protected access to highly lucrative illicit markets, including oil bunkering, kidnapping, and sea piracy.<sup>46</sup> This local journalist explained this as follows:

They empower these boys and allow them in other dirty businesses like kidnapping and illegal bunkering. That's their reward system, a violent means of amassing wealth. These boys have the money; they can buy all the guns. I spoke with one of them in the bush, saying one AK-47 costs N4m. You'll see them having it in numbers. Imagine an 18-year-old with over 10 AK-47s!<sup>47</sup>

Oil bunkering in particular emerged across sources as the central axis of post-election compensation. Human Rights Watch (2003) has identified oil theft and informal refining as a multi-billion naira enterprise in the Niger Delta (Human Rights Watch, 2003). A report by the Global Initiative for Transnational Crime (2023) also acknowledges the salience of oil bunkering in Rivers governors' relations with cult groups (Madueke et al., 2023). Additionally, local journalists and CSO members confirmed that governors "allow" some cult groups to operate in bunkering zones as part of their reward for electoral services.<sup>48</sup> Others were said to receive impunity in regard to engaging in sea piracy and kidnapping, creating a dual-layered compensation structure: one financial and the other territorial.

Despite this mutual independence, the Rivers case also reveals important variation and potential points of breakdown. Similar to the situation in Mexico, governors' alliances with cultists remain fluid and sometimes

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45 Interview, Rivers: 0026. April 17<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

46 Interviews, Rivers: 015, 019, 020, 023, 025, 027, 029, 032, 033, 034, 040, 042, 044, 049. March 2022/April 2023.

47 Interview, Rivers: 0030. April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

48 Interviews, Rivers: 003, 004, 006, 0012, 0016, 0020, 0021, 0023, 0024, 0026, 0027, 0028, 0029, 0030, 0031, 0032, 0034, 0035, 0036, 0040, 0042, 0043.

unstable. However, the sources of instability vary from the patterns observed in Mexico, where criminal organizations sometimes weaponize violence against politicians to expand illicit market control or eliminate rivals (Gutiérrez-Romero and Iturbe, 2024). In Rivers, local journalists and CSO members noted that unstable relations between incumbents and cultists are caused by unfulfilled political agreements, particularly regarding financial transfers or appointments. A CSO member shared the example of former cult leader, the late Don Wane, who reportedly threatened to expose his political patrons after post-election promises were broken.<sup>49</sup> Yet this case appears to be the exception rather than the norm as additional examples did not emerge during interviews. Most respondents emphasized that governors rarely sever ties with cult groups, given their mutual utility. This finding supports the theoretical claim that high-rents incumbents do not merely outsource violence: they strategically select proxies with partial autonomy, building mutual dependence through illicit market agreements.

In this section, I have examined how high rents empower incumbents to recruit violence specialists. In sum, cult groups dominate Rivers' elections as the main violence perpetrators because Rivers' incumbents can afford to hire them, using rents to manage the risks of this strategic outsourcing. This pattern sustains the dominance of cult groups as primary violence perpetrators in Rivers' electoral politics and supports the theory that financial power begets coercive power in Nigeria's high-rents subnational states. Having analyzed incumbents' choice of violence perpetrators in Rivers State, I now proceed to analyze the situation in Lagos State.

### **Lagos State**

Located in the South-West geopolitical zone, Lagos, although the smallest state in terms of landmass, is the center of the country's economic activities and the largest commercial hub in Nigeria (Wahab, 2025). Contributing 26.7% to Nigeria's overall GDP, Lagos is characterized by its Yoruba heritage and is a melting pot of Nigerians of diverse ethnicities, as well as foreigners (Lagos State Government, 2023). Lagos has 20 Local Government Areas and has experienced a significant population surge due to a high influx of immigrants, reaching over 15 million residents in 2015 (Lagos State

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49 Interview, Rivers: 0033. April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2023.

Government, 2023). Due to its dense population, Lagos, which is a non-oil-producing state, receives huge amounts of federal allocations.

Lagos has remained an APC stronghold since 1999, with all governors consistently drawn from the Yoruba ethnic group. Although the Yorubas are the majority, other ethnic groups, particularly the Igbos, maintain a significant presence in the state (Kolawole, 2023). As a result, ethnic polarization between the Yoruba and the Igbos is prevalent, with both groups using ethnic sentiment in electoral campaigns, as was observed in the 2023 elections (Kolawole, 2023; Nwabuikwu, 2023).

Lagos experiences high levels of insecurity. While violence by transport workers is broadly prevalent across Lagos, cult violence is localized in remote areas like Ikorodu (Adejoh and Ajayi, 2020; Agbiboa, 2018). Hence, to protect themselves from insecurity, citizens have created self-defense groups, such as ethnic militias and vigilante groups like the Odua People's Congress (OPC) and the Onyaboa (Guichaoua, 2006; Mudasiru and Fatai, 2020). Although ethnic militias and vigilante groups initially protected communities, some have become active violence perpetrators themselves (Guichaoua, 2006; Mudasiru and Fatai, 2020).

Thus, with the numerous violence perpetrators in the state, Lagos governors have diverse options for electoral violence. However, existing research establishes the NURTW as their preferred choice, given their dominance in electoral violence in Lagos (Agbiboa, 2018, 2018; Anudu, 2021; Fourchard, 2011, 2023).

### **From Decentralization to Delegation: The Dominance of the NURTW as Electoral Violence Perpetrators in Lagos**

Nigeria's oil boom in the 1970s contributed to Lagos' development. The oil boom catalyzed rapid urbanization and infrastructural development, turning the state into Nigeria's commercial capital under military rule (Sheposh, 2024; The Africa Report, 2019). Although Lagos is not an oil-producing state, its growing population and economic significance positioned it as a major beneficiary of federal allocations. When Nigeria briefly returned to democracy in 1979, the constitutional formula for revenue distribution based on population (among other parameters) allowed populous states like Lagos to receive higher rents (Elaigwu, 2002; Uche and Uche, 2004). This shift led to a critical juncture whereby the reintroduction of multi-party politics and

fiscal decentralization incentivized incumbents to win elections. It is within this context that the alliance between Lagos politicians and the NURTW emerged. During the Second Republic, the union, under Ogundare's leadership, was first mobilized not just for political support, in the form of voter mobilization, but also for electoral violence (Agbibo, 2018; Fourchard, 2011).<sup>50</sup> This alliance, temporarily subdued under military rule, was reignited in 1999 with the return to democracy and the continuity of the 1979 fiscal principles under the 1999 Constitution (Agbibo, 2018; Fourchard, 2011). Since then, Lagos has become Nigeria's most populous and economically dominant state (Wahab, 2025). Consistent with the theoretical expectation that high rents facilitate the hiring of violence specialists, Lagos incumbents rely on the NURTW as primary violence perpetrators.

### **The Emergence of the NURTW**

To understand why Lagos incumbents rely on the NURTW for electoral violence it is essential to trace the group's historical emergence. The union was formally established in 1978 as a trade union for transport workers. However, it quickly acquired a dual role in Lagos, functioning simultaneously as a labor union and as a violence specialist (Agbibo, 2018; Fourchard, 2011, 2023). As early as the 1979 Second Republic, Lagos politicians had already begun recruiting union members for electoral violence. Then, led by Alhaji Rafiu Ogundare, the Lagos branch of the NURTW became known not only for its control of transport logistics but also for its routine violence in the form of thuggery in motor parks otherwise known as bus stations, making the union an ideal choice for politicians seeking to use violence during elections (Fourchard, 2011, 2023; Agbibo, 2018). When Nigeria returned to democracy in 1999, the union resumed its function as an electoral violence perpetrator (Agbibo, 2018; Fourchard, 2011, 2023). Thus, the NURTW's existence prior to its involvement in electoral violence indicates that it already operated as a violence specialist before incumbents began recruiting it for electoral violence.

Over time, the NURTW embedded itself in the urban political economy of Lagos. As Lagos expanded in population and political salience, the union became more locally entrenched. Presently, the NURTW plays a central role in Lagos politics and its influence goes far beyond labor advocacy (Fourchard,

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50 In the next chapter, I examine the NURTW's dual capacity for electoral mobilization and demobilization in Lagos State.

2022). With over a million members, the union controls the majority of the city's transportation network, including exercising control over 75,000 commercial bus drivers and 50,000 tricycle operators (Anudu, 2021).

Although the NURTW is formally recognized as a trade organization, its militant wing, the *agberos*, are popularly known as violence perpetrators (Agbibo, 2018). *Agbero*, a Yoruba word meaning "thug," refers to the men who dominate Lagos motor parks and bus terminals. They are a constant presence in the city's transport hubs, where they are known for their mafia-like behavior (Adejumo, 2016). Their reputation for extortion, harassment and brutality has made them feared by drivers and commuters alike (Agbibo, 2020; Anudu, 2021). In public discourse, they are described as "illiterate thugs, extortionists, murderers, and highway robbers" (Adejumo, 2016).

### **How High Rents Facilitate the Hiring of the NURTW**

CSO members and local journalists noted that hiring the NURTW for electoral violence requires significant financial investments.<sup>51</sup> To afford this, incumbents allegedly draw directly from rents, through their access to trusted signatories to government accounts. As one local APC politician put it, the governor has "100% access to spend the money," and does so by colluding with signatories to government accounts.<sup>52</sup> During our conversation, the same politician, an APC insider, stated that "*the union is the instrument the APC uses for violence.*"<sup>53</sup> His view was not unique: several journalists, CSO members and regular voters echoed the same perception.

Field evidence suggests that payments to NURTW leaders are substantial and include both cash and in-kind incentives.<sup>54</sup> In an attempt to describe the financial benefits, journalists and CSO members cited the extravagant lifestyle of union executives as evidence.

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51 Interviews, Lagos: 063, 067, 068, 075, 076, 077, 079, 080, 089, 085, 098.

52 Interview, Lagos: 070, 21<sup>st</sup> April 2022.

53 Ibid.

54 Interviews, Lagos: 063, 067, 068, 075, 076, 077, 079, 080, 089, 085, 092, 098, 101. April 2022/ May–June 2023.

As one local journalist put it:

It is money they give them. Tinubu pays millions, do you know that Oluomo who is simply an *agbero*, all his children are studying in the US, just a motor park tout [local thug]. He gets the best medical attention, he travels, where does he get the money from? So they benefit a lot in terms of money, they also get properties and all that... so government keep them because they patronize them during elections, use them to steal votes, intimidate people especially the opposition.<sup>55</sup>

For this respondent, the lavish lifestyle of MC Oluomo, the Lagos NURTW chairman and longtime ally of the ruling party, was evidence of the union's value to the APC. Other respondents added that payments come not only in cash but also in kind, with buses, tricycles, scholarships and jobs regularly distributed to union members.<sup>56</sup>

The interview findings are supported by existing scholarship on the NURTW in Lagos. However, these studies do not reveal exact payment details, only suggesting that the union gains large monetary benefits, in the amount of billions of naira (Agbiboa, 2018; Anudu, 2021; Fourchard, 2022).

Opposition parties lack the capacity to hire the NURTW, which explains why regular voters, local journalists and members of opposition parties like the Labour Party (LP) and PDP all make that electoral violence outsourcing in Lagos is largely monopolized by the ruling APC. Hence, similar to Rivers, in Lagos high rents are a necessary condition for incumbents to reliably outsource violence to violence specialists.

During fieldwork in Lagos, I found myself returning to one question: why the NURTW? My question was answered by local journalists, CSO members and politicians, who claimed that the union's structure and reputation make it more desirable than other violence specialists that are of less strategic importance.<sup>57</sup>

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55 Interview, Lagos: 075. May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2022.

56 Interview, Lagos, 063, 067, 068, 075, 076, 077, 079, 080, 089, 085, 092, 098, 101. April 2022/ May–June 2023.

57 Interview, Lagos: 0092, June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

### Strategic Selection Based on Structure and Reputation

Since high rents enable outsourcing, organizational structure and violent reputation shape whom incumbents outsource violence to. In Lagos, as in Rivers, field evidence indicates that the selection of the NURTW is not incidental but follows a logic consistent with strategic outsourcing. During my fieldwork, two attributes emerged as recurrent explanations for the union's privileged position: (1) its organized structure; and (2) its violent reputation.<sup>58</sup> Such qualities do not merely co-exist with outsourcing, they activate the conditions under which outsourcing to the union is desirable for incumbents.

The NURTW's organizational structure functions as a foundational mechanism enabling the coordination and execution of electoral violence. Interviews with APC politicians, civil society actors and journalists consistently identified the union's vertical command and local embeddedness as a relevant quality.<sup>59</sup> Simply put, respondents noted that the union is everywhere: given the union's local embeddedness across Lagos, *agberos* are knowledgeable about voters' preferences. The NURTW's structure spans from state to local executives, with clear chains of instruction and accountability. The literature corroborates this view, framing the union as a parallel institution in Lagos (Fourchard, 2011; Agbibo, 2022).

As one APC politician explained:

They have a kind of central arrangement; they give instructions and say make sure you try and deliver your area? They have some of these *keke* (tricycles) that they give them, all these smaller buses they buy for them, they buy bikes, motor bikes, they settle them a lot with those kinds of things. What they do is that if you deliver your area you stand to gain this and that. And they normally do it, if you don't deliver your area, you don't even have anything to ask.<sup>60</sup>

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58 Interview, Lagos: 063, 064, 065, 067, 068, 069, 070, 071, 072, 073 075, 076, 077, 079, 080, 089, 085, 092, 094, 095, 098, 101.

59 Interview, Lagos: 063, 064, 065, 067, 068, 069, 070, 071, 072, 073 075, 076, 077, 079, 080, 089, 085, 092, 094, 095, 098, 101.

60 Interview, Lagos: 101, July 4<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

Here, the term “deliver” is not metaphorical, it reveals incumbents’ expectation that the NURTW will ensure the APC’s victory through violence. Thus, the interviews also revealed that *agberos* are usually able to “deliver” their areas by manipulating the voting through violence, consistent with the theoretical expectation that violence specialists are effective in the execution of violence.<sup>61</sup>

Complementing structure is the NURTW’s violent reputation, which functions as both a deterrent and an instrument of voter demobilization. Adejumo (2016) and Agbibo (2020) describe the union as a mafia organization composed of murderers, thieves and highway robbers. Such characterizations were affirmed during my interviews with local journalists, CSO members, and regular voters, who described *agberos* using similar terms.<sup>62</sup> They noted that during the 2023 elections, the union’s violent reputation was useful in demobilizing LP and PDP members and supporters in opposition strongholds.<sup>63</sup> Such claims were triangulated with reports from the International Centre for Investigative Reporting and *This Day Live* newspaper reports, which support the interview findings that the union’s violent reputation is not merely symbolic but is operationalized during elections in the form of targeting opposition party supporters with violence (Abe, 2023; Inyang, 2023). While the union’s structure enables the coordination of violence, in terms of identifying opposition strongholds, its reputation ensures that voters comply with the union’s instructions to vote for the APC or refrain from voting. While the NURTW’s violent reputation is effective in scaring away voters, opposition voters who resist threats are physically attacked by *agberos* during elections. Thus, the union’s operational qualities enhance its capacity to demobilize opposition voters, increasing its desirability for incumbents, despite its high financial costs.

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61 Interviews, Lagos: 063, 064, 065, 067, 068, 069, 070, 071, 072, 073 075, 076, 077, 079, 080, 089, 085, 092, 094, 095, 098, 101.

62 Interviews, Lagos: 063, 064, 065, 067, 068, 069, 070, 071, 072, 073 075, 076, 077, 079, 080, 089, 085, 092, 094, 095, 098, 101.

63 Interviews, Lagos: 0063, 0068, 0075, 0077, 0080, 0085, 0087, 0088, 0091, 0098, 101.

## Reward Systems and the Management of Outsourcing Risks

The durability of the APC–NURTW alliance hinges not only on strategic selection but also on a reciprocal reward structure that mitigates outsourcing risks.<sup>64</sup> As the theory suggests, outsourcing risks can take the form of incumbents losing control over violence specialists. In Lagos, this risk is offset by governors granting the union access to lucrative illicit markets specifically, control over motor parks, and street-level toll collection. As an opposition PDP politician noted:

You know, it is an investment sort of so rub my back I rub your back. So, give them tools, pay them so they can disturb election to their advantage. If they win, they will allow them to start taking toll on the streets so that's how they pay them back.<sup>65</sup>

This arrangement functions as a post-election reward system that ensures loyalty and future compliance. As Fourchard (2011) notes, the state government provides the NURTW with illegal but exclusive control over motor parks and road transport operations in Lagos (Fourchard, 2011). Such informal concessions are both illegal and central to the union's post-election strategy. This model aligns with theories of transactional illicit economies like those in Latin America, where violence specialists are compensated with control of illicit markets (Ley, 2018; Trejo and Ley, 2020). The illicit toll market in motor parks in Lagos is extensive, estimated by existing research and investigative journalism to be worth billions of naira annually (Agbiboa, 2020; Anudu, 2021; Fourchard, 2022, 2023).

What makes this reward system functionally significant is that it sustains a mutual relationship that is capable of navigating risks. The outsourcing of violence becomes low risk because it is embedded in a durable exchange system. Field interviews confirmed that incumbents and NURTW leaders avoid conflict precisely because of their mutual dependence and utility.<sup>66</sup> Thus, alliances between governors and the union are not episodic but operate in what Fourchard (2023) calls "the shadow of the state." Rather than respect local governments' constitutional right to control motor parks, Lagos

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64 Interviews, Lagos: 063, 067, 068, 069, 070, 071, 072, 073, 075, 076, 077, 079, 080, 089, 085, 092, 098, 101. April 2022/May–June 2023.

65 Interview, Lagos: 0084. May 13<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

66 Interviews, Lagos: 084, 075, 076, 077, 078, 079, 084, 085, 093, 100, 101.

governors subvert that right, granting control to the NURTW instead, to solidify their alliance (Fourchard, 2011, 2022, 2023).

The Lagos case reinforces the theoretical expectation that high rents enable subnational incumbents to hire violence specialists. By showing how Lagos governors leverage their substantial resources to sustain a transactional alliance with the NURTW, this section has demonstrated that incumbents do not randomly select violence perpetrators. Rather, they strategically invest in groups like the union that have operational qualities like an organized structure and a violent reputation. This alignment between empirical patterns and theoretical claims strengthens the argument that financial resources are a critical enabling condition for the recruitment of violence specialists in Nigeria's subnational elections.

This discussion on Lagos concludes the analysis of high-rent states. I now turn to explaining how I navigated disconfirming evidence for theory-building during my fieldwork.

## **5.2. Navigating Disconfirming Evidence during Fieldwork in High-rents States**

To strengthen the case studies, I allowed space for disconfirming evidence that could have invalidated the claim that incumbents in Rivers and Lagos hire violence specialists for electoral violence. If this claim were invalid, I would have expected to find that incumbents primarily rely on alternative perpetrators, such as state security forces or ordinary citizens. I also looked for evidence by asking direct questions regarding whether violence specialists act independently or against the interests of the incumbent, or that opposition parties, despite lacking high rents, are able to hire cultists or the NURTW. Finally, I remained attentive to signs that violence specialists are disloyal, or counterproductive, such as instances where their alliances became detrimental for incumbents. However, across interviews, observer reports, and existing research, none of these alternative patterns consistently emerged. Instead, the evidence revealed repeated reliance on cult groups in Rivers and the NURTW in Lagos by subnational incumbents. The absence of disconfirming evidence thus strengthens the plausibility of the theory.

This section concludes the discussion on high-rents states. Next, I turn to low-rents states, beginning with Plateau.

### 5.3 Low-rents Incumbents and Ordinary Citizens

This case discussion is structured around the theoretical claim that low rents constrain incumbents' choice of violence perpetrators, leading them to hire citizens. Similar to high-rents states, the analysis focuses on broad patterns across elections since 1999, not single elections. However, secondary sources on perpetrators in low-rents states are limited, likely due to reporting bias in favor of more politically prominent states. Thus, I rely primarily on interviews with local journalists, CSO members, politicians and citizens, supplemented by a few reports from Human Rights Watch, the Institute for Integrated Transitions, and a handful of academic research and news articles. While the analysis for low-rents states lacks triangulation, it supports the argument that low rents limit incumbents' financial capacity. Although the bulk of the analysis is informed solely by interview data, these data are sufficient for identifying patterns consistent with the theory, even if future research could strengthen or revise these findings through additional sources. Next, I turn to the analysis, beginning with Plateau State.

#### Background of Plateau State

Plateau State is centrally located in the Middle Belt region of the country. Plateau State is home to more than 40 ethnic groups such as the Berom, Anaguta and Fulani, who are mainly engaged in farming (Plateau State Government, 2022). In 2022, Plateau State ranked 33<sup>rd</sup> among the 36 states in Nigeria in terms of economic size, positioning it as a low-rents state (BudgIT, 2022).

Plateau State is a swing state. Since 1999, the PDP held power up until the APC's Solomon Lalong won the governorship in 2015; Lalong was then re-elected in 2019 (Eribake, 2015; Independent National Electoral Commission, 2019). However, the PDP regained control in the 2023 elections (Independent National Electoral Commission, 2023). While party polarization is relatively less salient in Plateau, religious polarization is more salient, being manifested in divisions between Muslims and Christians that frequently escalate into deadly riots (Krause, 2011).

Plateau is a hotspot for violence. Over the past decade, Jos, the capital city, has become a hotspot for communal riots, mainly fueled by ethno-religious conflict surrounding "indigene" rights and representation (Krause, 2011). In the rural areas, banditry is more prevalent. Villages such as Bokkos, Barkin

Ladi, and Mangu are plagued by banditry, which takes the form of cattle rustling, kidnapping and displacement of communities, and increasing gun violence (France-Presse, 2023, 2024; Olufemi, 2024). Additionally, ethnic militias also contribute to the violence, organizing coordinated attacks in rural communities (West Africa Network for Peacebuilding, 2023).

Before presenting my findings on this case, it is important to briefly reflect on the challenges I encountered during fieldwork in Plateau. Many of my conversations with respondents shifted away from electoral violence and toward discussions of religious riots. I came to understand that religion in Plateau is not merely a political issue, it was deeply personal and emotional for my respondents. This presented a theoretical challenge: if polarization alone shapes incumbents' choices of violence perpetrators, it would undermine my argument, suggesting that religious cleavages, even in the absence of material incentives, could be sufficient to mobilize violence perpetrators. However, my findings suggest otherwise. While polarization is indeed salient in Plateau, it does not undermine the importance of rents. Incumbents still have to pay citizens to perpetrate violence according to CSO members and citizens.<sup>67</sup>

### **Governors, Citizens and Electoral Violence in Plateau State**

Despite frequent communal violence in Plateau State, elections have largely remained non-violent. For example, the 2011 governorship elections in Plateau State were peaceful, in contrast to the experience in neighboring states (Krause, 2011). Consistent with theoretical expectations, incumbents in Plateau do not rely on violence specialists but instead hire co-ethnic citizens through their support networks.<sup>68</sup> Although the interviews did not reveal how incumbents mobilize support networks, journalists, voters and CSO members alleged that during elections, governors in Plateau rely on local support groups composed of citizens, including partisans and co-ethnics.<sup>69</sup> A local politician summarized the logic as follows: *"Support groups mostly are the ones that do the politicking."*<sup>70</sup> This aligns with findings from a Human Rights Watch (2005) report, which reveals that violence in Plateau is often carried out

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67 Interviews, Plateau: 0049, 0053, 0054, 0061, 0050.

68 Interview, Plateau: 052, 053, 054, 055, 068. May, 2022.

69 Interviews, Plateau: 0049, 0053, 0054, 0061, 0050.

70 Interview, Plateau: 0049. May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

by co-ethnic citizens unaffiliated with organized gangs or militias (Human Rights Watch, 2005a).

According to a local journalist:

The tribes [ethnic groups] are thugs for themselves... It is not like in the Niger Delta, I grew up there. There, there are thugs' people who have put themselves in that level to say "I can die for Mr A" so anything that happens to Mr A they take it personal and then there are cultists who also promote their interest. Anybody can use them for one purpose or another they can even fight within their community but in Plateau it is not like that.<sup>71</sup>

As highlighted by the journalist, the recruitment of citizens aligns with theoretical expectations in low-rents contexts, where incumbents lack the resources to form long-term alliances with violence specialists and instead opt for cheaper options for violence perpetrators. Here, CSOs and local journalists reported that politicians compensate citizens with petty cash, alcohol and drugs, reflecting a transactional model based on minimal financial investment.<sup>72</sup> As one CSO member noted:

Giving them five naira or 10 naira and giving them all kinds of drugs and drinks given to them and they are ready to kill. So, the foot soldiers are usually these young boys who don't have anything doing and the politicians who are the perpetrators now see them as already made instruments in their hands, so they want to use them by all means. So, believe you me this is exactly what is happening. So, every politician has his group of thugs and so they train these thugs in order to defend them and some of them even snatch ballot boxes and do all kinds of things during elections.<sup>73</sup>

As explained by this respondent, politicians pay citizens petty cash to carry out violence. This perception was echoed by other civil society actors and journalists.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, respondents acknowledged that they know the citizens involved in violence, as regular co-workers and neighbors. However,

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71 Interview, Plateau: 0057, May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

72 Interview, Plateau: 052, 053, 054, 055, 068. May 2022.

73 Interview, Plateau: 0054, May 26<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

74 Interview, Plateau: 052, 053, 054, 055, 068. May 2022.

contrary to the theory, the interviews did not reveal whether citizens' ineffectiveness in carrying out violence is linked to their risk aversion.

As the theory suggests, citizens may be cheaper to hire, but they are also harder to control. The Plateau case exemplifies this dynamic by drawing attention to the risks embedded in citizen-based outsourcing. Although the theory anticipates that violence perpetrated by citizens will carry lower long-term risks due to their ad hoc formation, Plateau shows that this logic is conditional. In deeply polarized contexts, like Plateau, minor citizen violence can inadvertently escalate into major riots. For example, during the 2008 Jos North local government election a minor inter-party clash escalated into widespread communal riots, resulting in deaths and displacement (Krause, 2011).<sup>75</sup> This episode illustrates that the risk of citizen violence in Plateau comes from the inability of politicians to manage spontaneous escalation. Contrary to theoretical expectations that incumbents manage this risk by disbanding citizen groups after elections, one CSO member noted that they try to avoid the risk altogether by refraining from activating religious cleavages because, as she notes, *"If they start it, they don't know when it will end."*<sup>76</sup> Given the strong salience of religious cleavages in Plateau, other CSO members also noted that politicians avoid fully instrumentalizing citizens, aware that such violence may spiral beyond their control.<sup>77</sup>

While the theory expects low-rents incumbents to maintain short-term, transactional relationships with citizen perpetrators, the evidence from Plateau remains inconclusive in this regard. My fieldwork did not yield sufficient data to determine whether governors in Plateau sustain relationships with citizen perpetrators after elections. This empirical gap introduces a potential limitation to the theoretical claim that low-rents incumbents disband ad hoc groups once elections end due to high costs of maintaining them. Thus, while it is well substantiated that citizens are the primary violence perpetrators in such contexts, without sufficient evidence from interviews and secondary sources, the Plateau case offers only partial support for the argument. However, clearer evidence emerges from Nasarawa, where local journalists and CSO members reported that incumbents disband ad hoc citizen groups after elections due to high maintenance costs.

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75 Interviews, Plateau: 0053, 0054, 0061, 0050.

76 Interview, Plateau: 061. June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022.

77 Interviews, Plateau: 0058, 0059, 0056

## **Background of Nasarawa State**

Nasarawa has an ethnically diverse population of less than 3 million, mainly comprising the Wandara, Alago, and Eggon (Nasarawa State Government, 2023). With agriculture as the mainstay, Nasarawa's economy ranks low compared to other states (Ejechi, 2024). Coupled with its low population and lack of crude oil, Nasarawa receives lower federal allocations. Its political landscape is characterized by the absence of one-party dominance, with power rotating among parties such as the PDP, Congress for Progressive Change, and APC.

Nasarawa is a hotspot for violence. Farmer–herder conflicts frequently escalate into deadly clashes, resulting in the loss of life, farmland and livestock (Nwankwo, 2024). Additionally, rural areas also experience widespread banditry, which contributes to deaths and mass displacement (Nwankwo, 2024). In response to insecurity, citizens create ethnic militias (Institute for Integrated Transitions, 2022). One notable example is the Ombatse ethnic militia, which is a religious cult that advocates for a return to traditional spiritual values as a form of societal purification (Dahida, 2015). Unlike the cult groups in Rivers State, Ombatse is mainly religious and identifies as non-violent (Dahida, 2015). Despite the presence of violence specialists, including bandits, and ethnic militias, interviews with local journalists and citizens indicate that incumbents in Nasarawa predominantly hire ordinary citizens to carry out electoral violence.<sup>78</sup>

## **Low-Cost, Ad Hoc Recruitment: Citizen Violence in Nasarawa State**

The Nasarawa case offers stronger support for the theoretical expectation that in low-rents states, incumbents rely on ad hoc, low-cost citizen recruitment for electoral violence. Interviews with local journalists and citizens revealed that incumbents in Nasarawa predominantly choose to hire ordinary citizens for electoral violence.<sup>79</sup> A report by the Institute for Integrated Transitions (2022) confirms the interview findings, showing how politicians recruit citizens using petty incentives, such as small cash payments or drugs (Institute for Integrated Transitions, 2022).

The interviews revealed that citizen participation in electoral violence in Nasarawa is primarily transactional. Local journalists, citizens and

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78 Interviews, Nasarawa: 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 110, 115, 118, 119, 120. May 2023.

79 Ibid.

politicians noted that poverty and the opportunity to earn income during elections incentivize citizens' participation in violence.<sup>80</sup> This is consistent with the theoretical expectations that in low-rents contexts, economically vulnerable citizens like the poor are likely to be recruited for violence. As a party supporter explained, even citizens unaffiliated with a candidate's ethnic group will "follow" if they are paid, implying that economic incentives, more than ethnic identities, drive citizen recruitment. A party supporter described the citizens engaged in violence as *Yabragada*, a slang term for delinquents.<sup>81</sup> Interviews with citizens, civil society members, politicians and voters revealed that citizen violence rarely causes deaths or influences voting behavior because citizens lack a violent reputation that would inspire fear. They also emphasized that perpetrators are known personally, as neighbors, classmates or relatives, further diminishing their capacity for violence.<sup>82</sup> While this evidence supports the claim that citizens lack a violent reputation, interviews offered no conclusive proof that their restraint from lethal violence stems from risk aversion, leaving this part of the argument inconclusive.

Unlike Plateau, interviews in Nasarawa provided insights into recruitment dynamics. According to local journalists and CSO members, citizen recruitment is initiated by party agents, who organize individuals from the incumbent's ethnic or partisan networks but also broadly from local communities. A local journalist described the process:

They recruit these thugs, they give money to some of their boys to go and recruit these thugs from various communities, then they will be moving with them. So, anything that has to do with that candidate, once they are called upon, they will just go... then you'll see that the next election, maybe that candidate is not contesting but because they know you, that if it's the issue of thuggery, you're very good in it, they will look for you. A candidate will look for you. So that is just it.<sup>83</sup>

This pattern reflects ad hoc recruitment, rather than organized recruitment. A local politician summarized the dynamic as follows: "*The violence landscape*

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80 Interviews, Nasarawa: 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 114, 115 117, 118, 121, 122. May 2023.

81 Interview, Nasarawa: 120. June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023.

82 Interviews, Nasarawa: 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 114, 115 117, 118, 121, 122. May 2023.

83 Interview, Nasarawa: 113, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2023.

*in Nasarawa can be summed up as supporters against supporters. We attack your supporters, they defend. That's how it is here.*<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, interviews revealed that the affordability of citizen-perpetrated violence enhances its appeal to incumbents. Local journalists, CSOs, politicians and citizens noted that citizens earn petty cash, supplemented with alcohol or narcotics.<sup>85</sup> One local politician compared Nasarawa to Rivers State:

When you say thugs...political thugs, they are members of that political party... even at the polling unit, like Gudi; that is where the governor was born and brought up, that is his hometown. His polling units, when they discover he is not winning in that polling unit, members of APC who now become thugs, went and carry the box and scatter it. So, the scenario in Nasarawa State is a little bit different from that of Rivers where they recruit people to kill people to get what they want. Here, they are members of that political party that were trained. Their purpose is to go polling units where they will not win election to destroy the ballot boxes... and at the end the only thing they will give them is 10k (\$10) 5k (\$5), nothing much, unlike that of Rivers if you have done that you are in money they can give you billions and millions of naira but here you can't get more than 20k (\$20).<sup>86</sup>

As the respondent highlighted, citizens earn petty cash for carrying out violence. This low-cost model aligns precisely with the theoretical expectation that low-rents incumbents opt for cheaper violence perpetrators. Importantly, the Nasarawa case also shows that while violence specialists are present, they are not typically involved in elections. A CSO electoral observer noted that even though cultists exist in tertiary institutions in Nasarawa, incumbents do not hire them.

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84 Interview, Nasarawa: 122, June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023.

85 Interviews, Nasarawa: 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 114, 115 117, 118, 121, 122. May 2023.

86 Interview, Nasarawa: 112, June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2023.

He explained:

I heard that sometimes all these cult boys. Since I've been living in poly, I kind of know most of them. There are some that if you're saying political thugs, they will tell you that if they see; they will follow but none of them will come to them. Like South-South now, you'll see a politician will buy guns for boys and say "ok go and do this". Later they will now say "we're looking for guns, gun is now in the hand of boys, they use it to operate". In this state here, we don't see something like that.<sup>87</sup>

The respondent's views indicate that despite the availability of violence specialists, low-rents incumbents do not hire them. This aligns with the theoretical expectation that affordability, rather than availability, influences incumbents' choice of violence perpetrators. Furthermore, the Nasarawa case provides strong support for the theory's claim that these alliances are ad hoc. Local journalists and CSO members revealed that citizen groups are disbanded after elections due to financial costs.<sup>88</sup> As a CSO member explained: *"It is difficult to have thugs on standby...the reason is that fueling these thugs is quite expensive."*<sup>89</sup> Thus, the low cost of citizen recruitment aligns with the theoretical expectation that low-rents incumbents opt for short-term alliances with citizens. Hence, as explained by local journalists, politicians and CSOs, in the absence of financial capacity to maintain citizen groups, citizens return to their everyday life after elections.

This ad hoc pattern of recruitment supports the theoretical expectation that short-term outsourcing in low-rents contexts is primarily cost-driven. However, the Nasarawa case offers limited support for the related claim that incumbents disband citizen perpetrators to avoid escalation risks. Neither interview data nor secondary sources provided evidence that concerns about post-election violence or loss of control explicitly shape incumbents' decisions to dissolve ad hoc citizen groups. As such, while the cost rationale is well substantiated, the escalation-avoidance mechanism remains theoretically plausible but empirically unverified in this case.

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87 Interview, Nasarawa: 126, June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

88 Interviews, Nasarawa: 102, 103, 104, 109, 110, 112, 113, 115, 118. May 2023.

89 Interview, Nasarawa: 109. May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2023.

This section on Nasarawa concludes the discussion on low-rents states. Next, I proceed to explain how I addressed disconfirming evidence in low-rents states.

## **5.4 Navigating Disconfirming Evidence during Fieldwork in Low-Rents States**

Despite the lack of extensive qualitative sources, I allowed space for disconfirming evidence that would invalidate the claim that incumbents in Nasarawa and Plateau hire citizens for violence. If this claim were invalid, I would expect to find that incumbents primarily rely on alternative perpetrators, such as state security forces or violence specialists. I also looked for evidence by asking direct questions regarding whether incumbents hire violence specialists. However, the scarcity of secondary qualitative data largely limits triangulation with interview findings, which could potentially challenge the plausibility of the theory.

This section concludes the discussion on low-rents states. In the next section, I compare the findings across cases.

## **5.5 Comparing the Cases**

The case comparison in this section draws from the individual case studies. I structure the case comparison along three main dimensions, consistent with the theory: first, how rents enable incumbents to hire violence perpetrators; second, incumbents' strategy in hiring violence perpetrators; third, how rents enable incumbents to navigate outsourcing risks.

First, as proposed in the theory, rents enable incumbents to hire violence perpetrators. In high-rents states like Lagos and Rivers, interviews revealed that incumbents invest substantial financial resources to recruit and retain organized perpetrators, specifically the NURTW in Lagos and cult groups in Rivers.<sup>90</sup> These alliances are not only forged through large upfront cash

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90 Interviews, Rivers and Lagos: 002, 005, 008, 011, 014, 015, 016, 017, 020, 025, 026, 029, 030, 034, 035, 036, 037, 038, 042, 051, 062, 063, 064, 065, 066, 067, 070, 084, 075, 076, 077, 078, 079, 084, 085, 093, 100, 101.

payments, but also maintained through post-election access to lucrative illicit markets, such as motor park tolling in Lagos and oil bunkering in Rivers. In both cases, high rents serve as the necessary condition that allows incumbents to hire expensive violence specialists. In contrast, in low-rents states such as Nasarawa and Plateau, incumbents operate under fiscal constraints and compensate ordinary citizens with small, ad hoc payments.<sup>91</sup> While the findings should not be interpreted as a systematic test of the argument, given the reliance on four states, the evidence is consistent with expectations in H2 and H4.

Second, consistent with the theoretical expectation, high-rents incumbents choose violence specialists based on their operational qualities. Across Lagos and Rivers, the choice of perpetrators reflects more than just availability: it reveals a strategic choice. Governors in both states consistently opt for expensive violence specialists with a strong organizational structure and a violent reputation: the NURTW in Lagos and cult groups in Rivers. The union operates as a vertically integrated organization with an embedded local presence across Lagos, while cult groups in Rivers maintain wide territorial control over both urban and rural areas. In contrast, in low-rent states like Nasarawa and Plateau, incumbents rely on ordinary citizens because of the cheaper financial costs. Although citizens lack an organized structures or violent reputations, their value lies in their affordability. Hence, their use is limited to the short term, and the rewards they receive are minimal.

Third, incumbents must navigate the risks inherent in outsourcing violence perpetrators. As Siddiqui (2022) notes, electoral violence outsourcing has strategic benefits for incumbents but introduces risks like loss of control or defection. In low-rents states, outsourcing risks seem less pronounced but are not entirely absent.<sup>92</sup> Neither in Nasarawa nor Plateau did I find evidence that incumbents' disband citizen groups to manage outsourcing risks. .

Nevertheless, in high-rents states, consistent with the theory, interviews revealed that incumbents manage outsourcing risks through providing violence perpetrators with partial autonomy and access to illicit markets.

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91 Interviews, Nasarawa and Plateau: 061, 063, 064, 070, 102, 103, 108, 107, 109, 110, 114, 115, 117, 118.

92 Interviews, Nasarawa and Plateau: 061, 063, 064, 070, 102, 103, 108, 107, 109, 110, 114, 115, 117, 118.

In Lagos and Rivers, incumbents manage outsourcing risks through post-election reward systems grounded in partial autonomy. However, the modalities vary. In Lagos, the NURTW's access to illicit markets, particularly control over motor parks and street tolls, is conditional on state government approval. This arrangement produces a tightly managed form of partial autonomy whereby the union operates independently on the streets but remains structurally reliant on the state for its authority. The relationship is reciprocal: governors need the union for electoral demobilization, and the union needs governors for legal cover and revenue extraction (Fourchard, 2023). In Rivers, the reward structure is more fluid and risk-prone. Cult groups gain access to lucrative illicit markets, especially oil bunkering, kidnapping and sea piracy. However, unlike the NURTW, cultists can often engage in these markets without direct state authorization. This independence introduces variation in outsourcing risks. Yet local journalists, CSOs and politicians in Rivers emphasized that mutual utility frequently outweighs friction. Governors need cultists to ensure electoral success, and cultists benefit from state protection and expanded illicit opportunities. Hence, most cult groups accept informal partial autonomy arrangements despite their capacity for independent action.

This comparison of violence specialists' autonomy aligns with Staniland's (2015a) typology of armed groups–state relations. The NURTW in Lagos exhibits the characteristics of a semi-autonomous proxy, strongly aligned with governors and embedded in ruling party networks. In contrast, cult groups in Rivers resemble independent proxies, operating under looser and more volatile terms of engagement (Staniland, 2015b). In contrast, Nasarawa reflects a short-term contracting model whereby governors keep citizens dependent and disposable, dissolving ad hoc citizen groups once elections end. There is no evidence in this area from Plateau.

This section concludes the case studies analysis. Next, I turn to addressing a lingering question that emerges from the analysis, regarding the limits of illicit market bargains as a payment option for low-rents incumbents.

### **The Limits of Illicit Market Bargains in Low-Rents States**

I argue that low-rents incumbents disband ad hoc citizen groups after elections. This raises the question: if access to illicit markets stabilizes outsourcing in high-rents states, why do low-rents incumbents not offer

the same incentives to violence specialists? This contrast aligns with the theoretical expectations that resource constraints shape the range of viable political bargains available to incumbents. To answer the question, I draw on interviews, existing literature, and data on rents (federal allocations). As shown in Fig. 5.1, Lagos and Rivers receive significantly higher rents compared to Plateau and Nasarawa. While Lagos and Rivers benefit from dense commercial hubs, extractive industries and expansive tax bases, Nasarawa and Plateau remain largely agrarian, with limited economic diversification and a smaller pool of taxable citizens (BudGIT, 2022; Lagos State Government, 2023; Nasarawa State Government, 2023; National Bureau of Statistics, 2021b; Plateau State Government, 2022; Rivers State Government, 2023; Wahab, 2025).

Thus, I infer that variation in resources constrains the revenue options available to low-rents incumbents. This makes it unlikely that they can engage in illicit markets bargains under limited resource conditions. This is not to say that extensive rents legitimize the existence of illicit markets in high-rents states; rather, the aim is to explain why some incumbents can offer access to illicit markets as part of outsourcing bargains, while others cannot. While Lagos and Rivers incumbents can afford to tolerate or enable illicit markets, given the extensive resources generating options, low-rents incumbents must instead repress them. In Nasarawa, for instance, academic research and policy reports show that recent banditry, including cattle rustling, kidnapping and village raids, has been detrimental to local livelihoods and agricultural productivity (Henry-Chinedu, 2024; Institute for Integrated Transitions, 2022; Nwankwo, 2024). This contrast reveals a crucial reversal in the logic of dependence. In high-rents states, incumbents can afford to integrate violence specialists into long-term alliances by granting partial access to illicit markets, confident that the underlying economy will remain resilient. In low-rents states, however, the survival of the formal economy depends on the repression, not integration, of violence specialists. Rather than create mutual dependence, illicit markets in these contexts threaten the state's already weak fiscal foundation. The case of Nasarawa illustrates this point. While high-rents incumbents tolerate and even protect violence specialists from criminal prosecution for electoral gain, Nasarawa's response has been the opposite, with state incumbent-led crackdowns against violence specialists (Olarinoye, 2025; Sodeeq, 2025).

## 5.6 Alternative Explanations

While this chapter cannot entirely rule out all alternative explanations for every instance of perpetrator variation, it provides a more detailed account of the alternative explanations highlighted in Table 5.1. The first alternative explanation is related to the availability of violent perpetrators. This perspective aligns with scholars who argue that, in the absence of ideologically compatible groups, incumbents may collaborate with ideologically incompatible ones, leveraging the available perpetrators for electoral violence (Staniland, 2015b; Sterck, 2020). However, the availability of violence perpetrators in some low-rents states, such as Plateau, suggests that availability is a necessary but insufficient condition to explain high levels of lethal electoral violence. Although violence specialists are available in the selected states, they do not act as electoral violence perpetrators in low-rents states. For instance, the NURTW has a national presence, and cults are available in tertiary institutions across the country. Similarly, bandits and herdsmen are widely prevalent in Nasarawa and Plateau states (Henry-Chinedu, 2024; Nwankwo, 2024). It has been documented that these bandits perpetrate massacres and orchestrate frequent violent raids and ambushes on local communities (Reuters, 2023). However, from the findings, incumbents in low-rents states, despite the availability of violence specialists, choose to hire citizens, due to low hiring costs.

A second explanation links electoral violence to polarization.<sup>93</sup> Scholars argue that politicians activate salient cleavages to mobilize citizens for electoral violence (Birch et al., 2020; Klaus, 2020a; Wilkinson, 2004). Across Nigeria, polarization is evident in all four cases, but it aligns with rather than challenge the rents argument. In Plateau, salient ethno-religious cleavages between Christian indigenous ethnic groups and Hausa–Fulani–Muslims occasionally results in recurrent deadly riots and communal violence (Krause, 2011). In Nasarawa, ethnic divisions between the majority Eggon and the minority Fulani also indicate polarization. Such cleavages have largely remained non-violent, although Eggon-militias have emerged to contest perceived Fulani hegemony in politics (Dahida, 2015). Furthermore, in Lagos, polarization is also evident in elections, with many Yorubas supporting

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93 While polarization is most convincingly demonstrated with quantitative evidence, there is no such data available for Nigeria. As a result, I cannot empirically quantify polarization, but I rely on qualitative sources to demonstrate where polarization is present.

the APC and steady Igbo support for opposition parties like the PDP and LP producing ethnically-targeted electoral violence as observed during the 2023 elections (Kolawole, 2023; Sylvester, 2023). Notwithstanding, in Rivers, ethnic divides exist but are overshadowed by intense partisan polarization between the PDP and APC, which routinely escalates into violent clashes during elections (Joab-Peterside, 2015). Overall, polarization is present across all cases, but not all incumbents heavily exploit such cleavages to recruit citizens for electoral violence. This shows that high-rents incumbents, despite being able to recruit citizens through polarization, choose to use their extensive resources to hire violence specialists, due to their electorally valuable qualities. Conversely, in low-rents state, even when incumbents use polarization to recruit citizens, they incentivize them with material rewards, albeit limiting their choices to citizens rather than violence specialists. The findings indicate that financial capacity offers a flexibility of choice to high-rents incumbents and explains the variation in violence perpetrators.

The final explanation relates to party strategies. This explanation suggests that parties' identity or organizational capacity could determine their choice to outsource to citizens or armed groups (Siddiqui, 2023, 2023). While parties with strong organizational capacity rely on party members for electoral violence, weaker ones outsource to violence specialists (Siddiqui, 2023; Siddiqui, 2022). Similarly, some might argue that particular parties more often produce lethal violence, while others do not, such as depending on their affiliation with national incumbent. Nevertheless, the cases were selected to have variation in party strategies within low-and high-rents states, and the findings show that both PDP and APC governors in high-rents states choose violence specialists. Similarly, in low-rents states with switching party identities, interviews did not reveal a change in perpetrator type due to turnover, as ordinary citizens were identified as the primary violence perpetrators. Thus, the findings support the argument that rents, rather than party strategies/identities, explain the variation in electoral violence perpetrators.

As mentioned elsewhere in this chapter, I am unable to rule out every alternative explanation. Thus, a limitation of the case selection is that it does not allow me to rule out national incumbent agency vis-à-vis subnational incumbents as an alternative explanation. Although national incumbents occasionally interfere in subnational elections in Nigeria, their interventions typically occur through the deployment of state security agents, given the

centralized control of security institutions in Nigeria. For instance, during the 2019 Rivers State elections, the APC-led federal government was accused of using “federal might,”<sup>94</sup> by deploying hundreds of soldiers to polling units to intimidate the PDP governor (Jeremiah, 2019). In response, the governor, with the support of the Rivers people and his private violent networks, resisted federal interference and secured re-election (Jeremiah, 2019; Usaini, 2022; vanguard, 2019). Similarly, in the 2014 elections in Ekiti State, a low-rents state, the PDP, then the ruling party at the national level, allegedly used a heavy security presence to manipulate elections in favor of its gubernatorial candidate, resulting in a PDP victory (Omilusi, 2021). However, while federal agency did not appear to alter the Rivers governor’s choice of hiring violence specialists in Rivers, it is unclear (due to lack of information) whether the Ekiti governor hired other violence perpetrators besides his supporters to resist federal interference. Hence, given the few examples in Nigeria, and the challenge of observing federal interference outside of visible state security presence, I am cautious about ruling out federal agency as an alternative explanation.

## 5.7 Conclusion

This chapter has examined the variation in incumbents’ choice of violence perpetrators. Drawing on evidence from observer reports, newspaper articles, existing literature, and original interviews, I find that rents significantly enhance the financial capacity of incumbents in Lagos and Rivers, giving them flexibility in choosing violence perpetrators. Thus, incumbents in these high-rents states can afford to hire expensive violence specialists. Conversely, low rents in Plateau and Nasarawa limit incumbent choices, leading them to rely on citizens to minimize hiring and maintenance costs. Although I found no evidence of incumbents’ post-election relations with citizen perpetrators in Plateau, findings from Nasarawa offer some insight, revealing that ad hoc citizen groups are typically disbanded after elections due to high maintenance costs. However, it remains unclear whether this is part of a deliberate strategy by incumbents to manage the risks of outsourcing violence. During fieldwork, while my focus was on incumbents, I remained open to additional insights about other political actors, but I found little

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94 Federal might refers to the unique powers and advantages of the central government in a federal system, particularly regarding control over major institutions (eg security) and other constitutional privileges in relation to subnational units (Ekpo et al., 2019).

evidence regarding opposition parties involvement in sponsoring electoral violence.

Having examined incumbents' choice of violence perpetrators, in the next chapter I extend the dissertation's focus to non-violent campaign strategies, analyzing how rents shape politicians' financial and organizational campaign capacity.



# 6

## Extending the Theory: Rents, Brokers, and Violent and Non-Violent Campaigning in Nigeria

This dissertation has argued that subnational incumbents use violence to demobilize opposition parties. The previous chapters established that rents shapes incumbents' capacity to sponsor lethal violence and recruit violence perpetrators. This chapter extends the theory of violence presented in Chapter Two and analyzes how rents also shape non-violent campaign strategies in resource-constrained party systems. During my fieldwork, conversations often extended to how rents enable politicians to sponsor non-violent campaign strategies. Moreover, the role of various brokers – including, but not limited to, violence specialists – was frequently mentioned in interviews. Thus, while the political economy of rents and electoral violence theory compares the coercive capacity of subnational incumbents, this chapter examines how rents and broker networks broadly shape campaign strategies. Hence, the central question guiding this chapter is: *How do rents and broker networks explain variation in politicians' campaign strategies?*

I focus on violent and non-violent strategies, such as canvassing, vote buying and coercion. The analysis is based on a two-part research design. First, I draw on data from two rounds (5 and 8) of the Afrobarometer survey to show the effect of rents and broker networks on canvassing, vote buying and coercion, across Nigerian states. Second, I supplement the quantitative analysis with a case study of Lagos, drawing on in-depth interviews conducted with both party and non-party brokers. These interviews provide direct insight into how incumbents and opposition brokers use rents and brokers to implement canvassing, vote buying and coercion.

The chapter is structured as follows. I first review the relevant literature on campaigning, highlighting gaps this study seeks to address. I then introduce the theoretical framework, explaining how rents and broker networks shape politicians' capacity to sponsor violent and non-violent strategies. I then outline the quantitative research design and present the results. Thereafter, I turn to the qualitative evidence, drawing on in-depth interviews in Lagos to unpack elites' campaign strategies. I conclude by drawing out the broader implications.

## **6.1 What Do We Know about Campaigning?**

Diverse campaign strategies, such as canvassing, vote buying and violence, are broadly prevalent in the Global South (Bratton, 2008; Kramon, 2019; Rauschenbach and Paula, 2019). Politicians employ a combination of persuasive and coercive strategies, targeting their own supporters with non-violent strategies and rival supporters with coercion (Brierley and Kramon, 2020; Golden, 2024; Kramon, 2019; Mares and Young, 2016; Rauschenbach and Paula, 2019a). While vote buying is used to mobilize core supporters in strongholds, ensuring high turnout (Bratton, 2008; Brierley and Kramon, 2020; Gutiérrez-Romero, 2014; Mares and Young, 2016; Rauschenbach and Paula, 2019), canvassing is selectively deployed in party strongholds and swing areas, but rarely in opposition strongholds (Brierley and Kramon, 2020; Horowitz, 2016). Politicians in such contexts recognize the significance of the "ground game," a strategy that involves direct voter engagement aimed at persuading or "positively inducing" support for a specific candidate (Mares and Young, 2016).

However, non-violent strategies have received varying attention in the literature. On the one hand, canvassing, which involves more individualized voter outreach, has received relatively little attention (Kramon, 2019). Vote buying, on the other hand, has been extensively studied, although debates persist regarding its motivations: whether it aims to secure votes, reward loyal supporters, or redistribute resources (Bratton, 2008; Golden, 2024; Hicken and Nathan, 2020; Kramon, 2019).

Studies on vote buying establish it as a dominant campaign strategy that signals candidates' commitment to their supporters (Kramon, 2019; Mares and Young, 2016). However, vote buying alone is rarely sufficient to guarantee votes, due to monitoring challenges (Mares and Young, 2016). Hence, politicians often combine vote buying with other strategies, including violence. While vote buying is concentrated in strongholds, intimidation and violence are targeted at voters in swing areas and opposition strongholds (Bratton, 2008; Rauschenbach, 2015, 2015). For example, Gutiérrez-Romero's (2014) survey of Kenyan elections shows how strong parties combine vote buying and intimidation, strategically targeting both core and rival supporters along ethnic lines. Similarly, Bratton's (2008) analysis of Nigeria's 2007 presidential elections finds that vote buying has a stronger effect on voters than violence, reinforcing partisan support among incumbent supporters. However, Onuoha and Ojo (2018) argue that the financial burden of vote buying raises the costs of electoral competition, further disadvantaging opposition candidates with limited funds.

Beyond the variation in voter targeting, evidence suggests that incumbents and opposition parties employ distinct campaign strategies (Kramon, 2019). However, few empirical studies explicitly examine these variations. Brierley and Kramon (2020) address this gap by investigating campaign strategies in Ghanaian presidential elections, arguing that parties that are confident in their support base tend to refrain from using targeted strategies in their core districts. While incumbents rely on broad-based campaign strategies, opposition parties limit campaigning to strongholds. However, most research assumes that incumbents generally have equal capacity and can dominate campaigns due to their access to resources and control of power (Bratton, 2008; Brierley and Kramon, 2020; Rauschenbach and Paula, 2019a). However, this assumption overlooks the fact that opposition parties, while structurally disadvantaged, are able to campaign effectively and occasionally

win elections. Thus, excluding opposition strategies from campaign studies overlooks important variation and limits our understanding of campaigning.

## **6.2 A Theory of Rents, Brokers and Persuasive Campaign Strategies**

Political parties in the Global South engage in diverse forms of campaigning, such as canvassing, vote buying and violence (Bob-Milliar and Paller, 2023; Brierley and Kramon, 2020; Rauschenbach, 2015). These campaigns demand substantial investments in the “ground game,” making their prevalence surprising in contexts where parties are poorly financed and weakly resourced (Erdmann, 2004; Holland and Palmer-Rubin, 2015; Krönke et al., 2022; Rakner, 2016; Uddhammar et al., 2016). These constraints raise relevant questions about how politicians in weak party systems organize electoral campaigns.

This theory explains variation in canvassing, vote buying and coercion through two distinct forms of capacity: material capacity (rents) and organizational capacity (brokers). Politicians seek to maximize electoral advantage while balancing the costs and feasibility of various strategies. Material capacity, in the form of rents, supplies the financial means to undertake resource-intensive strategies, while organizational capacity, in the form of brokers, provides the networks necessary for on-the-ground mobilization. When broker networks are strong, politicians rely on them to pursue non-violent strategies like canvassing and vote buying; when broker networks are weak, rents are used to finance coercion.

The theory operates on two levels: first, across contexts (among high- and low-rents incumbents); and second, within contexts (between incumbents and opposition candidates). As discussed in Chapter Two, rents are unevenly distributed, leading to subnational variation in financial capacity. Consistent with the broader argument of this dissertation, rents refer to unearned income broadly derived from resources (Faguet, 2014). Incumbents can divert rents into campaigning, while opposition parties depend primarily on private contributions (Ichino and Nathan, 2012). High-rent incumbents thus have the resources to finance intensive and expensive campaigns, unlike low-rents ones and opposition politicians.

Brokers constitute the second dimension of organizational capacity.<sup>95</sup> They mediate relationships between politicians and voters, translating resources into ground-level mobilization (Stokes et al., 2013). Brokers possess the “know-how” for organizing and the “know-whom” for mobilizing or demobilizing voters effectively (Costalli and Ruggeri, 2015; Holland and Palmer-Rubin, 2015; Mares and Young, 2016). I further separate broker networks into interest and identity brokers.<sup>96</sup> Interest brokers, such as slum committees and market associations, seek to maximize collective benefits, and have dual capacity for mobilization and demobilization, while identity brokers rely on moral and symbolic authority and are more suited to mobilization (Gottlieb, 2017; Holland and Palmer-Rubin, 2015; Koter, 2013). Thus, I argue that politicians’ rents and broker networks are linked to violent and non-violent campaign strategies.

### **Violent and Non-violent Campaign Strategies**

Politicians do not simply choose from a menu of vote buying, canvassing, or coercion. Rather, they select strategies based on the campaign infrastructure available to them, which is shaped by the availability of rents and broker networks. Incumbents use rents and broker networks to carry out campaign strategies such as coercion, vote buying and canvassing.

The first strategy I consider is vote buying. Vote buying is a resource-intensive and organizationally intensive strategy. I conceptualize vote buying as a dyadic relationship between politicians, brokers and voters in which electoral support is exchanged for handouts, including cash, gifts, or favors (Allen Hicken, 2011; Mares and Young, 2016). Vote buying is both financially and organizationally demanding, requiring substantial rents to fund handouts and diverse interest and identity brokers to identify persuadable voters and ensure the delivery of handouts such as cash, food or favors (Aspinall et al., 2017; Rauschenbach and Paula, 2019a). Thus, while high-rents politicians can fund vote buying, weak broker networks undermine the logistical effectiveness of the strategy. In contrast, low-rents politicians with strong broker networks may be able to identify recipients for vote buying but lack

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95 To be clear, while broker networks enhance the effectiveness of campaign strategies by providing organizational capacity, politicians may still engage in vote buying, canvassing and coercion using weak party machines like party members/ workers (Brierley and Kramon, 2020). Nevertheless, brokers provide essential campaign support in such contexts.

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the resources to make credible offers. Hence, I expect that vote buying is most likely when politicians have both high rents and strong broker networks.

The second strategy I consider is canvassing. I conceptualize canvassing as face-to-face mobilization designed to sway voters' opinion in favor of a candidate or party (Bochel and Denver, 1971; Gerber and Green, 1999). It is a relatively low-cost but labor-intensive form of mobilization (Green et al., 2003). Despite being a low-cost strategy, party workers are sometimes reluctant to canvass given the intensive organizational investment (Bochel and Denver, 1971). I argue that canvassing depends primarily on politicians' access to broker networks, rather than on rents. Brokers provide the organizational capacity necessary to mobilize local supporters, convey campaign messages, and identify persuadable voters. Both identity and interest brokers are important for canvassing. Thus, I expect that where broker networks are strong, politicians can engage in extensive canvassing even with limited rents, since the embeddedness of brokers reduces the transaction costs of canvassing. This makes canvassing an attractive strategy for both low-rents incumbents and opposition candidates seeking to campaign without high rents.

The third strategy I consider is coercion. Consistent with the rest of the dissertation, coercion is conceptualized as violence or intimidation intended to undermine elections. I argue that coercion becomes an option when non-violent strategies like canvassing or vote buying are unavailable or unreliable. Unlike canvassing or vote buying, coercion can be used even in cases of organizational weakness. Thus, I expect that high-rents politicians sponsor interest brokers who are capable of demobilization to coerce voters in opposition strongholds. In such contexts, interest brokers lack the social embeddedness and mobilizational capacity of identity brokers, but their capacity for demobilization allows politicians to manipulate elections where mobilization is infeasible. This circumvents the monitoring problem inherent in non-violent strategies like vote buying, as politicians can directly deter opposition participation, rather than attempting to ensure compliance among voters (Bratton, 2008; Nichter, 2008). Thus, I expect that coercion is more likely to be pursued by high-rents politicians with weak broker networks, given that their organizational capacity is insufficient for non-violent mobilization.

The above discussion suggests the following hypotheses:

- H5: Politicians with high rents and strong broker networks are more likely to engage in vote buying
- H6: Politicians with strong broker networks are more likely to engage in canvassing, regardless of rents.
- H7: Politicians with high rents and weak broker networks are more likely to engage in coercion.

Having explained the theory and highlighted the hypotheses, I proceed to discuss the research design for the quantitative study.

### **6.3 Quantitative Study: Afrobarometer Survey**

#### **Data Collection and Sampling Strategy**

The purpose of the Afrobarometer survey is to establish associations rather than causal relationships. The unit of analysis in this study is citizens. I leverage the 3,800 observations in the Nigeria component of the Afrobarometer country survey (Rounds 5 and 8) to assess whether the survey findings align with our theoretical expectations across states. I selected Rounds 5 and 8 because they contain questions related to the variables of interest: vote buying, canvassing and coercion (Afrobarometer, 2013, 2021).

This study uses data collected through Afrobarometer's standardized methodology to ensure quality and representativeness (Afrobarometer, 2021).<sup>97</sup> The survey employs a nationally representative, clustered, stratified, multi-stage sampling design covering all regions and both urban and rural areas. Random selection is applied at each stage, with probability proportionate to population size (PPPS) used in more populous areas. Sampling typically involves four to five stages, from primary sampling units to individual respondents, with gender balance maintained by alternating between male and female participants.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Interviewers receive five days of training and conduct confidential, face-to-face interviews in respondents' preferred languages.

<sup>98</sup> Stratification by subnational units ensures inclusion of key demographic and ethnic groups. The results have a 95% confidence level, with a 2–3% margin of error.

## Variables

### *Dependent variables*

There are three dependent variables: vote buying, canvassing and coercion. Data on the dependent variables is sourced from Afrobarometer surveys (Rounds 5 and 8). However, a challenge of the Afrobarometer data is that the survey is not explicitly designed to study campaign strategies, but rather citizens' exposure to them. Nevertheless, I expect citizens' reporting to be broadly reflective of parties' investments. The first dependent variable, vote buying, refers to instances where voters are offered material incentives in exchange for their votes. This is operationalized using this question: "*During the last national election, how often, if ever, did a candidate or someone from a political party offer you something, like food, a gift, or money, in return for your vote?*" Responses are measured as a binary variable, with a value of 1 indicating that the respondent received a material offer for their vote.

The second dependent variable, canvassing, captures efforts by political parties to persuade voters to vote for them, or to invite them to attend campaign events. It is measured using this survey question: "*Did any representative of a political party contact you during the campaign?*" This variable is also measured as binary, with 1 indicating that the respondent was approached by a political party for canvassing.

The third dependent variable, coercion, refers to a party using violence/intimidation to coerce voters. It is based on this survey question: "*During the last national election campaign in 2019, how much did you personally fear becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence?*" This variable is measured as a binary variable, with 1 indicating that a political party attempted to coerce the respondent.

### *Independent variables*

The main independent variables in this analysis are *rents* and *broker networks*. These are more challenging to capture at the level of citizens and are likely to vary at the level of states. I therefore use proxy variables to capture these concepts at the level of states.

Consistent with the operationalization used in Chapters Four and Five, rents are measured using federal allocations, which is the share of oil revenue

distributed to each state by the federal government. Federal allocation data are sourced from the National Bureau of Statistics (Dataphyte, 2021).

As a proxy for broker networks, I employ IGR as a construct-valid measure. Following Adcock and Collier's (2001) work, construct validity requires a theoretically grounded association between a concept and its indicator, such that the observable outcome accurately captures the underlying construct (Adcock and Collier, 2001). Moreover, broker networks are difficult to observe, but are expressed through economic and civic organization at the local level. This is evident in Nigeria's political economy, where brokers dominate market associations, transport unions, and civic groups that mediate taxation and collect taxes and levies (Fourchard, 2022; Lund, 2006; Meagher, 2011). Such roles embed brokers in local economies, meaning that areas with strong broker networks are likely to have higher IGR. Because brokers are directly involved in organizing and taxing economic activity, IGR functions as a proxy that shows the extent to which brokers represent market and civic life within the state.

While both IGR and fiscal allocations (rents) from the federal government capture aspects of subnational capacity, they vary in regard to both source and mechanism. Federal allocations represent rents: resources transferred from the federal government. In contrast, IGR represents capacity, based on locally generated economic and civic activity organized through broker networks. Although both variables may correlate, especially in urbanized states, they capture distinct dimensions of capacity: federal allocations are top-down resource flows, whereas IGR involves bottom-up local revenue flows. Empirically, IGR therefore measures the organizational capacity of brokers within the state, while fiscal allocations capture the financial capacity of incumbents.

### *Control variables*

Standard demographic control variables from the Afrobarometer survey data are included in the models. Age is derived from Q1, with non-responses recoded as missing. Gender is based on Q101 and is coded as a binary variable (male/female). Education is constructed from Q97, with invalid responses recoded as missing; the variable reflects the highest level of formal education attained, ranging from no formal schooling to postgraduate qualifications. Poverty is measured using Q7E, which records the frequency of living

without cash income; responses are recoded to exclude invalid values and range from “never” to “always.”

To determine respondents’ support for incumbent or opposition parties, I use self-reported vote choices in the 2023 elections. Drawing on the official results of the 2023 governorship elections from INEC, I classify the APC as the incumbent party and the LP and PDP as opposition parties (Independent National Electoral Commission, 2023).

## 6.4 Results

This section presents the results of the statistical regression analysis. The results show across-states variation in brokers and rents in Nigeria using proxy measures derived from Afrobarometer data. The aim of this analysis is not to make causal claims, but rather to examine whether statistical associations within Nigerian support the theoretical argument. As such, the findings should be interpreted with caution and seen as indicative rather than definitive.

Table 6.1 examines various campaign strategies as a function of broker networks and rents. In Columns C1–C6, I observe that vote buying and canvassing are positively correlated with broker networks, while only coercion and vote buying (albeit only for incumbent voters) are positively associated with rents. Specifically, this means that political parties are more likely to reach out to voters in areas where there are strong broker networks and politicians have access to rents. This is consistent with the theoretical expectations. Below, I discuss each dependent variable in detail.

In Table 6.1., Columns C1 and C2 examine the relationship between rents, brokers and vote buying. Across both models, broker presence remains positively and significantly associated with the likelihood of vote buying, indicating that strong broker networks facilitate the exchange of handouts for electoral support. While rents alone are not significantly correlated with vote buying in Column C1, the inclusion of interaction terms in Column C2 reveals a statistically significant and positive coefficient for the *Rents × Incumbent* interaction. This implies that higher rents amplify the effect of broker presence for incumbents, enabling them to engage in vote buying more effectively. This result supports the theoretical expectation in

**Table 6.1:** Variation within Nigeria using Afrobarometer surveys.

Variables		Vote Buy (C2)	Canvass Incumbent (C3)	Canvass Co-partisan (C4)	Coercion (C5)	Coercion (C6)
Rents	0.047 (0.027)		-0.054 (0.079)	-0.077† (0.033)	0.062† (0.030)	
Broker	0.383*** (0.089)	0.382*** (0.090)	0.955*** (0.277)	0.328** (0.114)	-0.257† (0.101)	-0.270** (0.103)
Rents × Opposition		0.047 (0.027)				0.062† (0.031)
Rents × Incumbent		0.057† (0.027)				0.053 (0.031)
Age	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.003 (0.002)	-0.002 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)
Gender	-0.018 (0.015)	-0.017 (0.015)	-0.099† (0.044)	-0.051** (0.018)	0.058*** (0.017)	0.057*** (0.017)
Poverty	0.001 (0.007)	0.002 (0.007)	-0.015 (0.022)	-0.016 (0.009)	0.010 (0.008)	0.009 (0.008)
Constant	-3.151*** (0.682)	-3.176*** (0.695)	-6.691*** (2.023)	-1.905† (0.834)	1.956† (0.773)	2.076** (0.796)
N	3800	3800	1522	1522	3800	3800
Wu-Hausman F	35.62	34.44	42.44	15.88	7.87	8.37

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. †  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ . Dependent variable indicated in column header.

Source: Author, 2025.

hypothesis 5, which is that high-rents incumbents, leveraging strong broker networks, are best positioned to sponsor clientelist exchanges. In contrast, the *Rents × Opposition* interaction is not significant, suggesting that access to rents primarily benefits incumbents, rather than opposition parties, in facilitating vote buying.

Columns C3 and C4 examine canvassing as an alternative campaign strategy. I separate whether citizens were contacted by the incumbent party or by a co-partisan party. The results consistently show a positive and statistically significant relationship between broker presence and canvassing, highlighting the relevant role of intermediaries in sustaining this organizationally demanding form of voter contact. In contrast, rents show weak or negative coefficients that are not significant. These findings, in line with the theoretical expectations specified in hypothesis 6, indicate that canvassing relies more on organizational capacity than on financial

capacity. Where brokers are active, but rents are limited, parties appear to substitute vote buying with intensive personal contact and persuasion, in the form of canvassing. This substitution pattern supports the expectation that in low-rents contexts, broker-mediated canvassing becomes the primary means of mobilization, allowing parties to use this strategy without the financial demands required for vote buying.

Columns C5 and C6 turn to coercion as a campaign strategy. Broker presence is negatively and significantly associated with coercion, implying that where broker networks are stronger, coercion is less likely to be used. In contrast, rents show a positive and significant association with coercion, consistent with the theory that financial resources, in the absence of brokers, enable parties to rely on coercion. In Column C6, the positive and significant *Rents* × *Opposition* interaction further indicates that coercion tends to be directed at opposition supporters in high-rent contexts, whereas the *Rents* × *Incumbent* interaction is not significant in this model. This pattern aligns with hypothesis 7, specifying that high-rents incumbents without a broker presence sponsor coercion rather than canvassing or vote buying.

However, the quantitative analysis has its limitations. Although IGR serves as a proxy for broker presence, it does not capture distinctions between broker types, and the Afrobarometer survey is not specifically designed to measure campaign strategies. To address these limitations, the analysis is supplemented with data from elite interviews from a rents- and broker-saturated state, which provide more direct insight into how rents and brokers jointly shape politicians' campaign strategies.

## **6.5 Qualitative Study: Elite Interviews in Lagos State**

While the quantitative analysis identifies broad statistical patterns across Nigerian states, the qualitative evidence provides case study insights into how politicians implement campaign strategies, such as canvassing, vote buying and coercion. To complement the survey findings, I draw on elite interviews that examine both incumbent and opposition campaign strategies. Because public data on political parties' finances in Nigeria are unavailable, interviews are useful for assessing parties' financial capacity, as well their linkages with distinct broker types. By revealing how financial (rents) and organizational capacity (brokers) shape parties' campaign strategies, the

qualitative evidence supplements the quantitative results and strengthens the overall analysis of the study.

### **Case Selection and Interviews**

I selected Lagos as the case for interviews for two reasons. First, it is the wealthiest state in Nigeria, given its high IGR and federal allocations (BudgIT, 2022). Such resources make Lagos a high-rents state, providing incumbents with extensive financial capacity. Variation in rents is achieved by comparing opposition party campaigning with the incumbent; the opposition lacks access to rents. Lagos has remained an APC stronghold since 1999. This longstanding dominance has left opposition parties such as PDP and LP comparatively weak and under-resourced. To ensure variation in political affiliations – and thus rents – within Lagos, I used the 2023 election results, and I purposively selected three incumbent strongholds (Alimosho, Agege and Lagos Mainland) and two opposition strongholds (Amuwo Odofin and Ajeromi-Ifelodun).

The second reason I selected Lagos as the case for interviews is because Lagos has an extensive network of non-party brokers. Examples include the pepper sellers' union, vulcanizers' association, hairdressers' associations, the mechanics' union, the union of motorcycle riders, transport unions, as well as religious and ethnic associations.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in June 2023, three months after the general elections. Interviewer recruitment and data collection were managed by Practical Sampling International (PSI). In total, 40 elite interviews were conducted: 20 with party brokers (10 from the ruling APC, and five each from the opposition PDP and LP) and 30 with non-party brokers, evenly distributed across three categories (10 ethnic, religious and political community leaders; 10 market association leaders; and 10 transport union leaders).

Interviews were conducted using two tailored interview discussion guides: one for party brokers and another for non-party brokers. Although I outsourced the interviews to a research organization in Lagos, PSI, I supervised 10 pilot interviews and accompanied their interviewers to ensure compliance with the discussion guide and ethical protocols. Interviews with party brokers explored (i) the strength of party networks for campaigning; and (ii) the nature of party collaboration with non-party brokers. Party

brokers were asked about the sources of campaign funding, how funds were distributed, and how campaign responsibilities were delegated. Interviews with non-party brokers focused on their organizational roles, linkages to political parties, and specific responsibilities during campaigns.

The interviews were carried out under strict quality control procedures. They averaged 45 minutes in duration, and all interviews were completed over three weeks. Interviews were conducted in English and also in the three main languages in Lagos (Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo), depending on respondents' preferences. Despite challenges such as heavy rainfall and the withdrawal of one respondent, fieldwork was completed successfully and yielded rich data on campaign strategies in Lagos. Afterwards, PSI transcribed the interviews, and I coded and analyzed them thematically. Examples of the code include: "broker roles" and "electoral incentives". Such codes emerged into themes that enabled me to examine how party linkages and campaign strategies vary by rents and broker type.

### **Parties' Campaign Strategies in Lagos**

Preliminary interviews with academic experts in Lagos highlighted market unions and transport unions, as well as religious and ethnic associations, as the most active brokers in Lagos for electoral campaigning. Thus, the interviews focused on such brokers.

#### ***Interest brokers***

Market unions are the first category of interest brokers. Market unions are associations of the traders located in local markets (Grossman, 2020). They are intermediaries between traders and the state, enforcing market rules and communicating grievances to the government.<sup>99</sup> The market union leaders also negotiate taxes with the government, resolve grievances, and sanction traders (Grossman, 2020).

The second category of interest brokers is transport unions. As mentioned in Chapter Five, the NURTW represents commercial road transport workers in Nigeria (Agbibo, 2022; Fourchard, 2022; Omobowale and Fayiga, 2017). In Lagos, the NURTW (with over 1 million members) holds significant power (Anudu, 2021). While Chapter Five mainly examined the union's coercive capacity, this chapter highlights its dual capacity for coercion and persuasion.

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99 Interviews, Lagos: 4001, 4008, 4009, 4018, 4019. June 2023

The union's ability to combine both coercion and persuasion supports the conceptualization of brokers advanced in this chapter, as non-state actors capable of coercion and persuasion (Costalli and Ruggeri, 2015).

### *Identity brokers*

The first category of identity brokers is ethnic brokers. Ethnic brokers are ethnic group leaders. The *Baales* are Yoruba ethnic leaders, the *Sheikhs* are Hausa, and the *Ohaneze* are the Igbos. These leaders govern local communities, uphold ethnic norms, and mediate minor domestic conflict.<sup>100</sup>

Religious leaders form the second category of identity brokers. Christian and Muslim brokers are drawn from various denominations, including Pentecostal and Protestant churches, and the Sheikh Islamic sect. Similar to ethnic brokers, religious brokers command significant authority and influence spiritual life.<sup>101</sup>

## **6.6 Brokers, Rents, the APC, and Campaign Strategies in Lagos**

The APC's campaign strategies is facilitated by its linkages to rents and brokers. Leveraging state rents, the APC uses broker networks to finance and implement vote buying, canvassing and coercion. Interviews with party brokers reveal that campaign financing is largely drawn from public resources controlled by state and local government officials. As one APC party broker explained: "*During campaign normally, Lagos State Government and local government, it is their duty to do finances....*"<sup>102</sup> This statement highlights how governors and other elected officials divert rents to sponsor the APC's campaign activities. Furthermore, APC party brokers noted that the campaign funds are specifically allotted to interest and identity brokers to incentivize their support in canvassing, coercion and vote buying.<sup>103</sup>

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100 Interviews, Lagos: 4021, 4024, 4020, 4023. June 2023

101 Interviews, Lagos: 4010, 4006, 4026, 4007. June 2023.

102 Interview, Lagos: 3010. June 21<sup>st</sup>, 2023.

103 Interviews, Lagos: 3007, 3008, 3010, 3014, 3009. June 2023.

### Vote Buying through Rents and Brokers

The APC implements vote buying through identity and interest brokers. During interviews, brokers described how campaign “gifts,” such as caps, vests, bags, and food items are packaged and shared during elections. Such gifts are branded with APC symbols and financed through rents. One APC party broker described this process as follows:

Those are just souvenirs. Sometimes it is the party that will buy and print; if someone is contesting, it might be the governor that will give them money to print, and they will distribute across each local government. Sometimes the council chairman can sponsor such and they will distribute<sup>104</sup>

This statement, revealing that the governor sponsors vote buying, was supported by a market union broker. According to another respondent:

We packaged *garri*, rice, exercise books, biros and the likes that we were distributing to people. We did vests and bags with the image of the President and APC on it, which we distributed to people.<sup>105</sup>

While many respondents insisted on labeling handouts as souvenirs or gifts, rather than vote buying, the timing and targeting of the exchange indicate otherwise.<sup>106</sup> This is because handouts are distributed to incentivize support, mainly during campaign periods.

Furthermore, identity brokers like the Yoruba and Hausa ethnic leaders affirmed their strong linkages to the APC. They noted that such linkages are sustained through handouts sponsored by the ruling party.<sup>107</sup>

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104 Interview, Lagos, 3003, June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023

105 Interview, Lagos: 4015, June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

106 Interviews, Lagos: 4018, 4008, 4002, 4023.

107 Interviews, Lagos: 4017, 4003, 4020, 4023.

As one Yoruba *Baale* (ethnic leader) stated:

For instance, I want to give an example of our first lady, Remi (wife of the former governor), she is the most preferred senator that we have ever had, her eight years was a memorable one, we enjoyed it, she will give us gifts three times in a year, and I will tell my people to share it one derica each... we were about 90-something *Baales* and she bought all of us a mini bus, that she is going and she has established us with a bus.<sup>108</sup>

This account illustrates how identity brokers are incentivized to support the APC. As the respondent recounts, in addition to their personal handouts, *Baales* are given bags of rice for their subjects. Citing such material incentives, other identity brokers admitted that they use food items, money and even promises of welfare benefits to incentivize their subjects to vote for the APC.<sup>109</sup> Unlike interest brokers, who mobilize collective participation based on organizational interest, identity brokers rely on persuasion rooted in moral authority. However, some religious leaders, particularly Christians, stated that they maintain political neutrality during elections. By contrast, Muslim leaders signaled their alignment and support for the ruling party<sup>110</sup> Thus, the insights from the interviews are consistent with the theory and with the quantitative results, suggesting that incumbents with high-rents and broker networks are able to sponsor vote buying.

### **Canvassing and Brokers**

The interviews revealed that APC party members actively engage in canvassing, and that they also rely on transport and market unions for extensive canvassing. Thus, interest brokers mobilize their members to canvass for the APC.<sup>111</sup>

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108 Interview, Lagos: 4003, June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

109 Interviews, Lagos: 4010, 4006, 4026, 4007. June 2023.

110 Interviews, Lagos: 4007, 4026, 4032, 4014, 4003. June 2023.

111 Interviews, Lagos: 4018, 4008, 4002, 4023.

A transport broker noted:

When election is approaching, our branch chairman can print cap for all of us and he will tell us who to support. If there is rally anywhere, he will tell us, and we select people from each unit to attend the meeting.<sup>112</sup>

As highlighted above, transport union brokers actively canvass for the APC. This is similar to market associations, as one market broker recounted: “During election we go out in vehicles to campaign and we tell them to come and vote for APC.”<sup>113</sup> Thus, interest brokers canvass for votes from neighbors, friends and colleagues, with transport brokers revealing that they actively participated in the 2023 APC’s massive canvassing rally.

For identity brokers, Muslim leaders noted that they engage in group canvassing during religious meetings for the APC, while Christian brokers explained that they do not reveal their partisan affiliation to their congregants.<sup>114</sup> Thus, consistent with the theoretical expectation, the findings show that brokers facilitate canvassing.

### **Coercion in Opposition Strongholds**

Consistent with the findings in Chapter Five, the interviews reveal that the APC uses coercion in opposition strongholds. In the PDP and LP strongholds, the APC uses NURTW members, otherwise known as *agberos*, to coerce opposition supporters. This is consistent with the theoretical expectation that opposition voters who are unlikely to be persuaded through canvassing or vote buying are targeted with coercion.<sup>115</sup> Opposition party brokers recounted how *agberos* intimidate and attack voters in opposition strongholds, targeting the main minority ethnic group, the Igbos.<sup>116</sup>

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112 Interview, Lagos: 4028, June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

113 Interview, Lagos: 4015, June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

114 Interviews, Lagos: 4010, 4006, 4026, 4007. June 2023.

115 Interviews, Lagos: 3020, 3011, 3013, 3017, 3001.

116 Ibid.

According to a PDP broker:

They [the APC] brought boys carrying guns and machete, they were macheting people, especially non-indigenes because they know the non-indigenes...it was an intimidation if not there is no how APC would have won the governorship.<sup>117</sup>

These accounts were corroborated by other opposition brokers, who described how the APC uses coercion to reduce voter turnout in opposition strongholds.<sup>118</sup> This pattern highlights how the APC uses rents not only to persuade but also to demobilize the opposition, as discussed in Chapter Five. This is also consistent with findings in Chapter Five that highlight that the union *agberos* are the main violence perpetrators in Lagos State. While the Afrobarometer results show that broker networks are negatively correlated with coercion, the analysis does not capture variation in broker type. Thus, the interviews provide further nuance to the quantitative finding that incumbents in Lagos use the NURTW to carry out coercion in opposition strongholds. The interviews further revealed that the incumbents have weak linkages with Igbo and Christian leaders in such areas and thus deploy *agberos* to demobilize opposition voters through coercion.<sup>119</sup>

Having discussed incumbents' party campaign strategies, I turn to opposition parties' strategies.

## **6.7 Opposition Parties and Campaign Strategies in Lagos**

Opposition parties like the LP and the PDP also engage in campaigning.<sup>120</sup> However, without access to state rents, they depend on membership dues, donations and nomination fees, leading to a relatively weaker financial capacity.<sup>121</sup> Given such limitations, the LP and PDP are largely unable to gain the support of market and transport unions. This is because such interest

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117 Interview, Lagos: 4015, June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

118 Interviews, Lagos: 3020, 3011, 3013, 3017, 3001.

119 Ibid.

120 Interviews, Lagos: 3000, 3020, 3019, 3013, 3017, 3021, 3015, and 3005. June 2023.

121 Interviews, Lagos: 3020, 3019, 3018, 3011, 3017, 3021, 3013. June 2023.

brokers have become accustomed to the APC's instrumental relationship, which opposition parties are unable to sustain. Nevertheless, a few market and transport union brokers still support opposition parties out of shared political conviction. As one LP broker noted: *"The selected ones that believe in Labor party and they also believe in moving the country forward, those ones usually don't ask for anything... so some people just follow the vision."*<sup>122</sup> As noted by the respondent, opposition parties are only able to mobilize brokers whose support is not contingent on material exchanges.

### **Canvassing through Identity Brokers**

Opposition brokers noted that party members and supporters extensively engage in canvassing. Given their low rents, opposition parties in Lagos have shifted toward issue-based campaigning, particularly targeting identity brokers using shared ethnic sentiments, leading to more support from Igbo ethnic leaders.<sup>123</sup> Thus, opposition parties leverage religious associations to canvass for votes. As a PDP broker described: *"We try and go and see them to solicit for votes, we try to sell our idea to them, we try to market our candidate"*<sup>124</sup>

Ethnic identity, in particular, plays a central role in opposition canvassing.<sup>125</sup> During the 2023 governorship elections, LP's Yoruba Igbo governorship candidate was able to gain the support of the *Ohaneze*, a council of Igbo ethnic leaders, given his maternal ethnic affiliation with the Igbos. According to an LP broker, the *Ohaneze* is central for campaigning in opposition strongholds: *"the most important is the Ohaneze because of the peculiarity of our locality."*<sup>126</sup> The *Ohaneze* extensively engages in group canvassing, enabling the LP to gather support among voters in opposition strongholds. This finding is consistent with the theoretical expectation that opposition parties with broker networks can engage in canvassing, despite their lack of rents.

### **Vote Buying**

Unlike the APC, opposition parties are largely unable to engage in vote buying as a campaign strategy. The LP and PDP brokers acknowledge the prevalence of vote buying by the APC during electoral campaigns but admit

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122 Interview, Lagos: 3011, June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2023.

123 Interviews, Lagos: 3000, 3020, 3019, 3013, 3017, 3021, 3015, and 3005. June 2023.

124 Interview, Lagos: 3018. June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2023.

125 Interviews, Lagos: 3000, 3020, 3019, 3013, 3017, 3021, 3015, and 3005. June 2023.

126 Interview, Lagos: 3015. June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2023.

that financial constraints make this strategy infeasible for them.<sup>127</sup> This is consistent with the theoretical expectation that vote buying is financially costly and mainly sponsored by high-rents politicians like incumbents.

### **Coercion**

Opposition brokers, in contrast to incumbent ones, are unable to sponsor coercion. Unable to rely on brokers with coercive capacity, like NURTW, they are typically the targets of coercion. In interviews, both LP and PDP brokers emphasized their commitment to non-violent campaigning and condemned the coercion sponsored by the APC against voters in opposition strongholds.<sup>128</sup> This inability to engage in coercion is consistent with the theoretical argument and quantitative findings that suggest that coercion is linked to politicians with high rents and extensive financial capacity.

### **Additional Fieldwork Findings**

Additional findings unrelated to the theoretical expectations emerged from the interviews. The interviews reveal that the APC maintains long-term relations with interest and identity brokers beyond campaign seasons.<sup>129</sup> Such relations are maintained through the frequent participation of non-party brokers in the APC's events.<sup>130</sup> The interest brokers emphasized that their alignment with the ruling party guarantees extensive collective benefits for their members.<sup>131</sup> Similarly, the APC maintains post-election relationships with identity brokers, particularly Muslim and traditional leaders.<sup>132</sup> In contrast, interviews with opposition brokers suggest that the PDP and LP tend to form short-term relations with non-party brokers.<sup>133</sup> Without high rents, opposition parties are unable to maintain broker loyalty.<sup>134</sup> Hence, their linkages with brokers is limited to the campaign season, contingent on ethnic or religious affiliation.<sup>135</sup>

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127 Interviews, Lagos: 3000, 3020, 3019, 3013, 3017, 3021, 3015, and 3005. June 2023.

128 Interviews, Lagos: 3000, 3020, 3019, 3013, 3017, 3021, 3015, and 3005. June 2023.

129 Interviews, Lagos: 4031, 4016, 4038, 4037, 4029. June 2023.

130 Ibid.

131 Interviews, Lagos: 4031, 4014, 4015, 4001, 4016, 4038, 4037, 4029. June 2023.

132 Interviews, Lagos: 4010, 4006, 4026, 4007. June 2023.

133 Interviews, Lagos: 3000, 3020, 3019, 3013, 3017, 3021, 3015, and 3005. June 2023.

134 Ibid.

135 Interviews, Lagos: 3000, 3020, 3019, 3013, 3017, 3021, 3015, and 3005. June 2023.

## 6.8 Conclusion

This chapter has examined how rents and broker networks are linked to campaign strategies such as vote buying, canvassing and coercion in Nigeria. Quantitative evidence from Afrobarometer survey data reveals that broker networks are strongly associated with canvassing and vote buying, while rents are mainly associated with coercion. The survey results are complemented with qualitative interviews, which show that rents and brokers are linked to campaign strategies. While incumbents can sponsor vote buying, canvassing and coercion using high rents, as well as interest and identity brokers, opposition parties with low rents rely on identity brokers for canvassing.

The findings in this chapter link to the broader dissertation. The theory of rents and electoral violence set out in Chapter Two explains how rents are linked to lethality and perpetrators. Variation in rents determines whether incumbents hire violence specialists or depend on ordinary citizens. Thus, the logic advanced in this chapter extends to non-violent mobilization. The same resources that allow incumbents to “rent” violence perpetrators also enable them to outsource canvassing and vote buying. Rents therefore enable both coercion and persuasion. The political economy of rents, working through the broader logic of outsourcing sustains both violent and non-violent campaigning in Nigeria and beyond.

The argument is relevant beyond Nigeria. I expect the argument to apply to patronage democracies like Mexico (Larreguy et al., 2016), India and Indonesia (Berenschot, 2019), where politicians rely on broker networks to mobilize electoral support using material benefits. Second, the findings also apply to weak party contexts like Kenya and Ghana (Bob-Milliar and Paller, 2023), where weak parties limit parties’ campaign capacities, leading them to leverage non-party brokers for campaigning. Finally, consistent with the rest of the dissertation, the findings in this chapter can be generalized to countries with weak institutional limitations, where this very weakness leads to the illicit diversion of public resources for campaigning.

Having examined how rents and broker networks shape campaign strategies, I proceed to the final chapter of this dissertation, where I present the overall conclusion.

# 7

## Conclusion

Elections occur in democracies and authoritarian regimes around the world. In some Global South countries, like India, Nigeria, Zambia and Kenya, elections are very often accompanied by violence (Daxecker, 2020; Daxecker, 2012; Daxecker and Fjelde, 2022; Taylor et al., 2017; Turnbull, 2021b; Wahman, 2023). However, we lack sufficient knowledge about the lethality and the perpetrators of this electoral violence, leading to the question: *What explains subnational variation in the lethality and the perpetrators of electoral violence?* To answer this question, I adopted a subnational approach, using observational data to quantitatively analyze how rents are associated with lethal electoral violence in the 36 states of Nigeria, and four in-depth qualitative case studies to compare how rents shape subnational incumbents' choice of electoral violence perpetrators. In the extension chapter, I extended the analysis to non-violent campaign strategies, using survey data from Afrobarometer Rounds 5 and 8 and in-depth interviews to examine how rents and broker networks shape canvassing, vote buying and coercion. This final chapter outlines the main conclusions of the study, and highlights implications for future research.

## 7.1 Main Findings and Conclusions

The study has three main findings. First, the study highlights the unintended consequences of fiscal decentralization. While decentralization promotes development, diffuses power, and fosters inclusive governance, it also carries profound risks (Faguet, 2014). Specifically, it empowers subnational incumbents and violence specialists by providing them with resources (Chacón, 2018; Eaton, 2006). However, decentralization rarely empowers people uniformly, and it can be equally despotic or predatory as centralized governments (Christensen, 2021). This dissertation reinforces the view that subnational incumbents leverage decentralized authority to access rents, which they use to sponsor electoral violence. Thus, in Nigeria, subnational incumbents have emerged as despotic leaders, wielding substantial authority within their states (Adams, 2019). As shown in Chapters Three, Four and Five, decentralization enables them to dominate subnational politics and create private networks of violence specialists.

A second conclusion is that subnational variation in financial capacity has been overlooked in the literature. While incumbents may have an incentive to organize violence, decentralization means the resources at their disposal influence the capacity to use lethal violence and hire costly violence perpetrators. High-rents incumbents, who are incentivized to maintain rents, are more likely to sponsor lethal violence and hire violence specialists, given their extensive financial capacity. In contrast, low-rents incumbents, despite having similar incentives, often lack the financial capacity to sponsor lethal violence or hire violence specialists, and instead rely on ordinary citizens. This is not to say that only violence specialists can perpetrate lethal violence. For instance, the 2011 post-election riots led by citizens resulted in the most lethal election violence in Nigeria's history (Angerbrandt, 2018; Human Rights Watch, 2011). However, the 2011 election is only one episode, and the qualitative insights show that lethal violence is frequently linked to high-rents states where violence specialists are the primary perpetrators.

Finally, findings from the extension chapter on violent and non-violent campaign strategies show that even in the absence of strong party machines, rents and broker networks allow politicians to sponsor canvassing, vote buying and coercion. While high-rents politicians with strong broker networks campaign through canvassing and vote buying, where they are without broker networks they use rents to sponsor coercion. In contrast,

politicians without rents but with broker networks are largely limited to low-cost strategies like canvassing. This finding highlights how rents and brokers in weak party contexts shape the strategies through which politicians' campaign.

Overall, the dissertation shifts the focus of the study of rent-seeking and electoral violence from incentives to capacity, showing how rents finance lethal violence and shape incumbents' choice of violence perpetrators across states within the same context. It extends the logic of rent-seeking to the subnational level, revealing that rents enable both violent and non-violent forms of campaigning. The same resources that allow incumbents to "rent" violence perpetrators also allow them to outsource canvassing and vote buying, showing that the political economy of rents foster both coercion and persuasion in weak party systems across new and emerging democracies.

## 7.2 Limitations

One limitation of this study is the absence of direct insights from incumbents and violence specialists. Given limited access and the low likelihood of candid responses about their involvement in violence, I was unable to interview either group. While interviews with governors were especially unlikely, access to violence specialists was contingent on material compensation, which would have breached ethical standards. To avoid incentivizing responses through payment, I declined to pursue these interviews. However, while I was unable to speak to those who directly perpetrate election violence, I interviewed many people in close proximity to it, including citizens, journalists and CSOs active in violence prevention. As a result, the dissertation relies primarily on third-party accounts from these respondents. These sources offer valuable perspectives. Journalists and CSO representatives had either interviewed perpetrators directly, witnessed events firsthand, or gathered accounts from credible eyewitnesses. Opposition politicians, actively engaged in the electoral arena, also provided informed perspectives on incumbents' motivations and strategies for electoral violence

Another limitation is linked to the study's methods. While the quantitative data enable me to test the lethality of electoral violence and assess the broader applicability of the argument across Nigeria, it has weaknesses. The analysis is limited to four electoral cycles – 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019 – due to

the lack of reliable data for earlier elections such as 1999 and 2003. Moreover, the dataset does not include the 2023 elections, as coding was completed prior to their occurrence. Nonetheless, the temporal scope from 2007 to 2019 provides a sufficiently robust basis for the analysis as it covers majority of the elections in the Fourth Republic. Finally, the quantitative data cannot capture incumbents' choice of violence perpetrators as their preferences are difficult to measure quantitatively. This is where the qualitative method is important as it offers the contextual depth necessary to understand the logic of incumbents' choice of electoral violence perpetrators. Additionally, the qualitative method based on field research insights enables a comparative case study of how rents influence incumbents' choice of violence perpetrators. However, the strength of the qualitative analysis relies on the availability of rich secondary sources for efficient triangulation. While such sources were adequate for Lagos and Rivers, they were insufficient for Nasarawa and Plateau.

### **7.3 Academic and Policy Implications**

The findings of this dissertation align with existing research linking resource wealth to conflict (Collier and Hoeffler, 2005; Conrad et al., 2019; Farzanegan et al., 2018). They also support scholarship demonstrating that incumbents frequently outsource violence to non-state violence perpetrators (Klaus, 2020a; Siddiqui, 2023; Staniland, 2015b; Turnbull, 2021a, 2021b). However, existing research argues that incumbents avoid direct involvement in violence to maintain plausible deniability and minimize domestic and international costs such as voter backlash or international condemnation (Hyde, 2007; Rosenzweig, 2021; Staniland, 2014). In contrast, the findings show that subnational incumbents in Nigeria frequently sponsor lethal violence, suggesting that concerns about voter backlash may be minimal in this context. As such, the dissertation's findings closely align with studies showing that in context with weak democratic institutions, incumbents are more likely to sponsor violence due to minimal accountability (Hafner-Burton et al., 2014; Malik, 2024).

The findings have important policy implications regarding decentralization. As highlighted in Chapters Three, Four and Five, decentralization in Nigeria provides subnational incumbents with access to extensive financial resources that enables them to sponsor electoral violence. Thus, decentralization

has obvious downsides in Nigeria. However, this does not mean that centralization is the solution; such a suggestion would be reductive. Indeed, centralized systems are not immune to electoral violence. National incumbents in such contexts monopolize violence through state actors, as observed in Uganda (Garbe, 2024; Sjögren, 2018). The more fundamental issue is that decentralization without strong institutions is conducive for subnational despotism and corruption (Christensen, 2021). Thus, effective decentralization depends on transparency and institutional accountability at the subnational level (Kahkonen and Lanyi, 2001). In the absence of such conditions, decentralization risks being undermined by despotic subnational political elites.

Another important policy implication is related to the perpetrators of electoral violence. This study highlights the subnational variation in perpetrator types, showing that violence specialists dominate in high-rents states, while citizens are prevalent in low-rents states. Recognizing this variation is important because it enables national executives to design targeted policies for sanctioning electoral violence perpetrators. Such variation improves the precision of sanctions and aligns institutional policy responses with the specific types of perpetrators operating in a given context. Moreover, policy interventions are more likely to succeed when they are informed by an understanding of who perpetrates violence, what motivates them, and how they are recruited.

## 7.4 Generalizability

The dissertation focuses on the subnational level. A subnational focus allows contextual variation by holding country-level factors as constant as possible (Snyder, 2001). First, I expect the theory to apply not only in natural resource-rich countries, such as Angola and Venezuela, but also in non-resource-rich contexts, where other forms of rents exist, like India (Berenschot, 2020).

Second, the findings are generalizable to contexts with weak parties. While it is likely that voters may impose retrospective accountability and international actors may sanction incumbents for sponsoring electoral violence (Daxecker, 2014; Rosenzweig, 2021), such costs are unlikely to materialize in weak party systems (Malik, 2024). In such contexts, like Kenya, politicians largely operate

within short time horizons and are less incentivized to moderate behavior in anticipation of future electoral consequences (Malik, 2024). In weak party contexts the costs of violence are further reduced when formal and informal oversight institutions are unable to sanction politicians for electoral violence (Hafner-Burton et al., 2014; Wantchekon, 2002). This aligns with Birch's (2021, 5) claim that "when weak democratic institutions are combined with dysfunctional informal institutions, the scene is set for violent elections (Birch, 2021)." Thus, party weakness reduces the reputational costs of violence by enabling politicians to abandon or rebrand parties between electoral cycles, unlike in contexts with stable or strong parties, which increase the salience of long-term reputational concerns, thereby discouraging violence (Fjelde, 2020; Malik, 2024).

Third, the findings also apply to patronage democracies. In such contexts, political parties often lack ideological or programmatic networks (Randall and Svåsand, 2002). Hence, elections tend to be dominated by patronage rather than programmatic linkages. These patronage linkages function as the primary networks through which parties' campaign and organize violence (Berenschot, 2020). In such contexts, although parties formally participate in elections, candidates typically rely on informal patron–client linkages to implement coercive and illicit campaign strategies (Berenschot, 2020; Boone, 2011; Boone and Kriger, 2010). Empirical studies from Indonesia, Peru, India, Brazil and the Philippines demonstrate the central role of patronage networks in facilitating violent and illicit forms of campaigning (Berenschot, 2020; Cruz et al., 2017; Hicken et al., 2022; Novaes, 2018).

## **7.5 Recommendations for Future Research**

This study's findings suggest three main directions for future research. The first is investigating the interaction between national and subnational incumbents, to better understand how national support or constraints affect subnational incumbents' financial capacity. While this study does not rule out national incumbency as an alternative explanation for variation in electoral violence perpetrators, future research could explore two specific questions. First, can low-rents incumbents sponsor lethal violence and hire violence specialists if they receive financial support from national incumbents? Second, can national incumbents limit the capacity of high-rents subnational incumbents to sponsor lethal violence and hire violence specialists? While

it is plausible that low-rents incumbents backed by national elites may achieve financial capacities similar to high-rents ones, the ability of powerful subnational incumbents to create authoritarian regimes that are resilient to national pressures within democracies complicates this assumption (Gibson, 2005). Thus, future research could unpack such dynamics.

A second area for future research concerns the audience costs of violence. Although emerging scholarship suggests that incumbent supporters are less likely to sanction violence than opposition supporters (Davis and Turnbull, 2024; Daxecker and Fjelde, 2022; Deglow and Fjelde, 2024; Fjelde and Olafsdottir, 2025), further research is needed to move beyond citizen responses to incumbent-sponsored violence and toward examining their reactions to distinct perpetrators. Future work could investigate when and how voters push back against violence specialists or fellow citizens. Such research would offer valuable insight into whether voter responses influence incumbents' perpetrator selection.

Finally, studies on non-party brokers and electoral campaigning have mainly focused on new and emerging democracies (Koter, 2013; Bob-Milliar and Paller, 2023; Brierley and Kramon, 2020). Future research could broaden the scope, by analyzing the campaign involvement of non-party brokers in established democracies, and whether this varies across parties. Such studies would allow for systematic comparisons of broker involvement in electoral politics across strong and weak party systems.



## English Summary

This dissertation investigates subnational variation in the lethality and perpetrators of electoral violence. Although elections in advanced democracies are largely peaceful, research on new and emerging democracies in the Global South indicates otherwise. While elections are regularly held across the Global South, many are marred by violence. This dissertation argues that financial capacity, in the form of rents, enhances the ability of incumbents to sponsor lethal electoral violence. Pitched at the subnational level, the theory argues that rents influence both the lethality of violence and incumbents' choice of violence perpetrators. High-rents incumbents, with stronger financial capacity, are more likely to sponsor lethal violence by hiring non-state violence specialists, whereas low-rents incumbents, constrained by limited resources, rely on ordinary citizens. The dissertation is guided by the main question: *What explains subnational variation in the lethality and the perpetrators of electoral violence?*

To establish and explain the association between rents, lethality, and electoral violence perpetrators the dissertation systematically reviews existing literature, develops a political economy theory of violence, and relies on both qualitative and quantitative research. The dissertation takes decentralization reforms as a starting point for developing the argument, suggesting that fiscal decentralization produces an unequal distribution of rents, with variation in incumbents' financial capacity across states. From this point of departure, the study develops an argument linking the uneven distribution of rents to variation in lethal violence, conceptualized as the frequency of deaths that occur during election periods. It proceeds to investigating whether rents influence incumbents' strategic choice of non-state violence perpetrators, focusing on how financial capacity enables some to hire specialists while limiting others to a reliance on citizens. Finally, the argument is extended to a broader set of violent and non-violent campaign strategies to explore whether variation in rents is relevant beyond coercive campaigning.

Empirical studies on electoral violence have examined its causes, manifestations and perpetrators. Existing studies highlight incumbents as the main sponsors of lethal electoral violence, linking their motives to rent-seeking, political survival, and the consolidation of power. They show that incumbents frequently sponsor violence to manipulate electoral outcomes, and that such violence intensifies in contexts of competitive elections, polarization, and weak institutions. However, prior research does not explain how incumbents organize lethal violence or why some can sponsor it more than others. In addition, existing work assumes that all incumbents have similar capacities to sponsor violence, overlooking the subnational variation in fiscal resources generated by decentralization in federal systems such as Nigeria. This assumption ignores the empirical reality that high- and low-rents incumbents have distinct financial capacity. This dissertation addresses this gap by theorizing that rents enable or limit incumbents' ability to organize lethal electoral violence.

Using a self-compiled cross-sectional and time-series dataset on lethal electoral violence drawn from the Nigeria Watch archives, covering elections between 2007 and 2019, the dissertation finds that high-rents incumbents sponsor more lethal violence than low-rents incumbents. Despite the reputational and institutional risks of engaging in lethal violence, including domestic backlash and sanctions from the international community, high-rents incumbents

privilege the material and political rewards of retaining power over the potential costs. Having established that high-rents incumbents use lethal violence to demobilize opposition and consolidate power, and that perpetrators are associated with lethality, the dissertation turns to explaining variation in the types of violence perpetrators across cases. Previous research shows that incumbents outsource violence to non-state perpetrators, such as armed groups, gangs, ethnic militias, and citizens, in order to maintain plausible deniability, yet it does not explain why some incumbents recruit violence specialists while others rely on citizens, despite having similar incentives in regard to rent-seeking. Existing studies propose three explanations for how incumbents recruit violence perpetrators – incentives, polarization, and availability – but each has limitations. The incentives perspective highlights material rewards as motivators but does not explain why some incumbents prefer specialists over citizens. The polarization perspective links recruitment to ethnic or partisan loyalties yet cannot explain cases where specialists dominate even in polarized contexts. The availability perspective emphasizes that the available supply of violence specialists enhances the likelihood of recruitment but overlooks that availability does not necessarily ensure outsourcing. Collectively, these explanations do not sufficiently address how violence perpetrators vary across subnational contexts, leaving an empirical and theoretical gap that this dissertation fills.

To address this gap, the dissertation focuses on variation in violence perpetrators within the same context. It employs a structured and focused comparative case study across four Nigerian states – Rivers, Lagos, Plateau and Nasarawa – representing high- and low-rents contexts. Drawing on 126 original in-depth interviews conducted with politicians, civil society members, journalists and voters, as well as on secondary data sources, the study identifies variation in the recruitment and maintenance of violence perpetrators. In high-rents states such as Lagos and Rivers, incumbents have the financial capacity to hire violence specialists, including cult groups and transport unions. Violence specialists have an organized structure, a violent reputation, and partial autonomy, enabling them to bargain for high financial rewards, like large payouts. In contrast, incumbents in low-rents states such as Plateau and Nasarawa rely on ad hoc citizen groups comprising party and ethnic supporters. Such citizen groups lack an organized structure and a violent reputation, and are heavily dependent on incumbents', which reduces their hiring costs, leading incumbents to pay them mainly in petty cash.

The findings show that incumbents must navigate the risks inherent in outsourcing electoral violence. In high-rents contexts, incumbents manage the risk of losing control over violence specialists by granting them access to illicit markets, thereby creating mutually dependent relationships. Violence specialists depend on incumbents for political protection and access to revenue streams, while incumbents rely on specialists to supply electoral violence. In contrast, incumbents in low-rents contexts cannot sustain such relationships. Their limited resources lead them to dissolve citizen groups after elections. Although citizen- violence carries risks of escalation, the dissertation did not find evidence that incumbents dissolve them to avoid such escalation. However, the dissertation finds evidence in only one low-rents state that incumbents dissolve citizen groups to avoid maintenance costs after elections.

After demonstrating the relationship between rents and lethal electoral violence and its perpetrators, the dissertation extends its theoretical framework to account for a broader portfolio of campaign strategies. This extension draws on insights that emerged during fieldwork interviews, where discussions about violence naturally expanded into conversations about campaign financing and mobilization. Respondents emphasized how rents enable incumbents and politicians more broadly to sponsor violent and non-violent campaign strategies. Such discussions revealed not only the relevance of rents but also the important role of a category of actors (broker networks), which include and extend beyond non-state violence specialists, in facilitating campaign strategies. This aligns with existing research showing that politicians in the Global South, despite weak party structures, rely on non-party brokers to mobilize voters. However, most studies not only assume that incumbents in such contexts have equal campaign capacity, they also overlook opposition parties. This dissertation challenges that assumption by examining how rents and broker networks broadly shape politicians' capacity to implement campaign strategies. Drawing on survey data from the Afrobarometer Nigeria survey (Rounds 5 and 8) and 50 original in-depth interviews with party and non-party brokers in Lagos State, the dissertation

finds that strong broker networks are associated with canvassing even in contexts with limited rents. When high rents and strong broker networks are present, incumbents use both vote buying and canvassing. In contrast, high rents and weak broker networks are linked to coercion, particularly among incumbents. The findings show that rents provide the financial capacity to fund campaign activities, while broker networks provide the organizational capacity to implement them. Notwithstanding this, the qualitative findings show how distinct broker types – interest brokers and identity brokers – aid incumbent and opposition parties to implement canvassing, vote buying and coercion.

Overall, this dissertation shifts the focus of the study of rent-seeking and electoral violence from an emphasis on incentives to a focus on capacity, showing how rents finance the organization of lethal electoral violence and shape the selection of perpetrators. It extends the logic of rent-seeking to the subnational level, demonstrating that rents not only incentivize but also enable lethal electoral violence. It further explains within-country variation in perpetrator type, highlighting how incumbents convert financial resources into coercive power. By linking fiscal decentralization to the organization of electoral violence, the dissertation provides a systematic explanation of why some elections become highly lethal while others remain comparatively less so. Furthermore, the extension chapter connects the main findings to a broader theory of campaign outsourcing. The theory of rents and electoral violence demonstrates how rents influence both the lethality of electoral violence and perpetrator selection, and this same logic extends to non-violent mobilization. The same resources that allow incumbents to “rent” violence perpetrators also enable them to outsource canvassing and vote buying. Rents therefore underpin both coercion and persuasion. This broader logic of outsourcing shows how the political economy of rents sustains both violent and non-violent campaigning in Nigeria and beyond. By understanding this logic, we can integrate financial and organizational capacity within a unified study of campaigning in weak party contexts in new and emerging democracies, yielding a more holistic view of this important subject.



## Nederlandse Samenvatting

Dit proefschrift onderzoekt de variatie in de dodelijkheid en daders van door zittende machten gesponsord verkiezingsgeweld. Hoewel verkiezingen in ontwikkelde democratieën grotendeels vreedzaam verlopen, resulterend in een vreedzame machtsoverdracht, wijst onderzoek in het Globale Zuiden anders uit, met name in nieuwe en opkomende democratieën. Hoewel er in het Globale Zuiden regelmatig verkiezingen worden gehouden, worden veel ervan ontsierd door geweld. Dit proefschrift betoogt dat financiële draagkracht in de vorm van huurprijzen de mogelijkheid van zittende machten vergroot om dodelijk verkiezingsgeweld te sponsoren. De theorie, gepresenteerd op subnationaal niveau, stelt dat huurprijzen zowel de dodelijkheid van het geweld als de keuze van de geweldplegers door zittende machten beïnvloeden. Zittende machten met hoge huurprijzen, met een sterkere financiële draagkracht, sponsoren vaker dodelijk geweld door niet-statelijke geweldspecialisten in te huren, terwijl zittende machten met lage huurprijzen, beperkt door beperkte middelen, afhankelijk zijn van gewone burgers. De hoofdvraag van dit proefschrift is: *Wat verklaart de subnationale variatie in de dodelijkheid en daders van verkiezingsgeweld?*

Om het verband tussen huurprijzen, dodelijke slachtoffers en daders van electoraal geweld vast te stellen en te verklaren, analyseert het proefschrift systematisch bestaande literatuur, ontwikkelt het een politiek-economische theorie over geweld en baseert het zich op zowel kwalitatief als kwantitatief onderzoek. Het proefschrift neemt decentralisatiehervormingen als uitgangspunt voor de argumentatie en suggereert dat fiscale decentralisatie leidt tot een ongelijke verdeling van huurprijzen met variatie in de financiële draagkracht van zittende machten over staten. Vanuit dit uitgangspunt ontwikkelt de studie een argument dat de ongelijke verdeling van huurprijzen koppelt aan variatie in dodelijk geweld, geconceptualiseerd als de frequentie van sterfgevallen tijdens verkiezingsperiodes. Vervolgens wordt onderzocht of huurprijzen de strategische keuze van zittende machten voor niet-statelijke geweldplegers beïnvloeden, waarbij de nadruk ligt op hoe financiële draagkracht sommigen in staat stelt specialisten in te huren, terwijl anderen gedwongen worden om op burgers te vertrouwen. Ten slotte wordt het betoog uitgebreid naar een breder scala aan gewelddadige en niet-gewelddadige campagne strategieën om te onderzoeken of variatie in huurprijzen relevant is buiten dwangcampagnes.

Empirische studies naar verkiezingsgeweld hebben de oorzaken, manifestaties en daders ervan onderzocht. Bestaande studies benadrukken dat zittende machthebbers de belangrijkste sponsors zijn van dodelijk verkiezingsgeweld, en koppelen hun motieven aan winstbejag, politieke overleving en machtsconsolidatie. Ze tonen aan dat zittende machthebbers vaak geweld sponsoren om verkiezingsuitslagen te manipuleren en dat dergelijk geweld intensiveert bij competitieve verkiezingen, polarisatie en een zwakke institutionele context. Eerder onderzoek verklaart echter niet hoe zittende machthebbers dodelijk geweld organiseren of waarom sommigen het meer kunnen sponsoren dan anderen. Bovendien gaat bestaand onderzoek ervan uit dat alle zittende machthebbers vergelijkbare capaciteiten hebben om geweld te sponsoren, waarbij de subnationale variatie in fiscale middelen die decentralisatie genereert in federale systemen zoals Nigeria over het hoofd wordt gezien. Deze aanname ondermijnt de empirische realiteit dat zittende machthebbers met hoge en lage rentes een verschillende financiële draagkracht hebben. Dit proefschrift pakt deze lacune aan door te theoretiseren dat rentes het vermogen van zittende machthebbers om dodelijk verkiezingsgeweld te organiseren, mogelijk maken of beperken.

Aan de hand van een zelf samengestelde cross-sectionele en tijdreeksdataset over dodelijk verkiezingsgeweld uit de archieven van Nigeria Watch, die verkiezingen tussen 2007 en 2019 bestrijkt, concludeert het proefschrift dat zittende machthebbers met een hoog inkomen meer dodelijk geweld sponsoren dan zittende machthebbers met een laag inkomen. Ondanks de reputatie- en institutionele risico's van dodelijk geweld, waaronder binnenlandse tegenreacties en sancties van de internationale gemeenschap, geven zittende machthebbers met een hoog inkomen de voorkeur aan de materiële en politieke voordelen van machtsbehoud boven de potentiële kosten. Nadat is vastgesteld dat zittende machthebbers met een hoog inkomen dodelijk geweld gebruiken om de oppositie te demobiliseren en de macht te consolideren, en dat daders geassocieerd worden met dodelijk geweld, richt het proefschrift zich op het verklaren van de variatie in de soorten geweldplegers in verschillende gevallen. Uit eerder onderzoek blijkt dat gevestigde machten geweld uitbesteden aan niet-statelijke daders, zoals gewapende groepen, bendes, etnische milities en burgers, om het te kunnen ontkennen. Dit verklaart echter niet waarom sommige gevestigde machten geweldspecialisten rekruteren, terwijl anderen juist burgers inzetten, ondanks vergelijkbare prikkels om winst te maken. Bestaande studies suggereren drie verklaringen voor hoe gevestigde machten geweldplegers rekruteren: prikkels, polarisatie en beschikbaarheid, maar elk heeft beperkingen. Het incentivesperspectief benadrukt materiële beloningen als motivatoren, maar verklaart niet waarom sommige gevestigde partijen specialisten verkiezen boven burgers. Het polarisatieperspectief koppelt rekrutering aan etnische of partijgebonden loyaliteit, maar kan geen gevallen verklaren waarin specialisten zelfs in gepolariseerde contexten domineren. Het beschikbaarheidsperspectief benadrukt dat het aanbod van geweldspecialisten de kans op rekrutering vergroot, maar negeert dat beschikbaarheid niet noodzakelijkerwijs outsourcing garandeert. Gezamenlijk behandelen deze verklaringen onvoldoende hoe geweldplegers variëren tussen subnationale contexten, waardoor een empirische en theoretische lacune ontstaat die dit proefschrift opvult. Om deze lacune te vullen, richt dit proefschrift zich op de variatie in geweldplegers binnen dezelfde context.

Het maakt gebruik van een gestructureerde en gerichte vergelijkende casestudy in vier Nigeriaanse staten, Rivers, Lagos, Plateau en Nasarawa, die contexten met hoge en lage huurprijzen vertegenwoordigen. Op basis van 126 originele diepte-interviews met politici, leden van het maatschappelijk middenveld, journalisten en kiezers, evenals secundaire databronnen, identificeert de studie variatie in de rekrutering en het behoud van geweldplegers. In staten met hoge huurprijzen zoals Lagos en Rivers hebben zittende machthebbers de financiële draagkracht om geweldspecialisten in te huren, waaronder sektes en transportvakbonden. Geweldspecialisten hebben georganiseerde structuren, een gewelddadige reputatie en gedeeltelijke autonomie, waardoor ze kunnen onderhandelen over hoge financiële beloningen zoals grote uitbetalingen. Daarentegen vertrouwen zittende machthebbers in staten met lage huurprijzen zoals Plateau en Nasarawa op ad-hoc burgergroepen die bestaan uit aanhangers van partij en etnische groeperingen. Dergelijke burgergroepen missen een georganiseerde structuur, een gewelddadige reputatie en hebben een onafhankelijke autonomie die hun aanwervingskosten verlaagt, waardoor zittende machthebbers hen voornamelijk kleine bedragen betalen. De bevindingen tonen aan dat zittende partijen de risico's moeten beheersen die inherent zijn aan het uitbesteden van verkiezingsgeweld. In contexten met hoge huurprijzen beheersen zittende partijen het risico van verlies van controle over geweldspecialisten door hen toegang te verlenen tot illegale markten, waardoor wederzijdse afhankelijkheidsrelaties ontstaan. Geweldspecialisten zijn afhankelijk van zittende partijen voor politieke bescherming en toegang tot inkomstenstromen, terwijl zittende partijen vertrouwen op specialisten om verkiezingsgeweld te leveren. Daarentegen kunnen zittende machthebbers in lage-huurcontexten dergelijke relaties niet in stand houden. Hun beperkte middelen leiden ertoe dat ze burgergroepen na verkiezingen ontbinden. Hoewel burgergeweld risico's op escalatie met zich meebrengt, vond het proefschrift geen bewijs dat zittende machthebbers deze ontbinden om een dergelijke escalatie te voorkomen. Het proefschrift vindt echter slechts in één staat met lage huurprijzen bewijs dat zittende machthebbers burgergroepen ontbinden om onderhoudskosten na verkiezingen te vermijden.

Na de relatie tussen huurprijzen en dodelijk electoraal geweld en de daders ervan te hebben aangetoond, breidt het proefschrift zijn theoretische kader uit om een bredere portfolio van campagne-strategieën te belichten. Deze uitbreiding is gebaseerd op inzichten die naar voren kwamen tijdens veldwerkinterviews, waar discussies over geweld zich op natuurlijke wijze

uitbreiden naar gesprekken over campagnefinanciering en -mobilisatie. Respondenten benadrukten hoe huurprijzen zittende politici en politici in bredere zin in staat stellen om gewelddadige en niet-gewelddadige campagnestrategieën te sponsoren. Dergelijke discussies onthulden niet alleen de relevantie van huurprijzen, maar ook de belangrijke rol van een categorie actoren, makelaarsnetwerken, die specialisten in niet-statelijk geweld omvatten en verder reiken dan dat, bij het faciliteren van campagnestrategieën. Dit komt overeen met bestaand onderzoek waaruit blijkt dat politici in het Zuiden, ondanks zwakke partijstructuren, vertrouwen op niet-partijgebonden makelaars om kiezers te mobiliseren. De meeste studies gaan er echter niet alleen van uit dat zittende politici in dergelijke contexten over een gelijke campagne-capaciteit beschikken, maar negeren ook oppositiepartijen. Dit proefschrift betwist die aanname door te onderzoeken hoe huurprijzen en makelaarsnetwerken in brede zin de capaciteit van politici om campagnestrategieën te implementeren beïnvloeden. Op basis van gegevens uit de Afrobarometer Nigeria-enquête (ronde vijf en acht) en vijftig originele diepte-interviews met partij- en niet-partijbemiddelaars in de staat Lagos, concludeert het proefschrift dat sterke netwerken van bemiddelaars verband houden met campagnevoering, zelfs in contexten met beperkte huren. Wanneer hoge huren en sterke netwerken van bemiddelaars aanwezig zijn, gebruiken zittende politici zowel stemmenkoop als campagnevoering. Daarentegen worden hoge huren en zwakke netwerken van bemiddelaars in verband gebracht met dwang, met name onder zittende politici. De bevindingen tonen aan dat huren de financiële capaciteit bieden om campagneactiviteiten te financieren, terwijl netwerken van bemiddelaars de organisatorische capaciteit bieden om deze uit te voeren. Desalniettemin laten de kwalitatieve bevindingen zien hoe verschillende typen bemiddelaars, zoals belangenbemiddelaars en identiteitsbemiddelaars, zittende en oppositiepartijen helpen bij de implementatie van campagnevoering, stemmenkoop en dwang.

In het algemeen verschuift dit proefschrift de studie van rent-seeking en verkiezingsgeweld van een nadruk op prikkels naar een focus op capaciteit, door te laten zien hoe huurprijzen de organisatie van dodelijk verkiezingsgeweld financieren en de selectie van daders beïnvloeden. Het breidt de logica van rent-seeking uit naar het subnationale niveau, door aan te tonen dat huurprijzen niet alleen dodelijk verkiezingsgeweld stimuleren, maar ook mogelijk maken. Het verklaart verder de variatie binnen landen in het type dader en benadrukt hoe zittende machthebbers financiële middelen

omzetten in dwingende macht. Door fiscale decentralisatie te koppelen aan de organisatie van verkiezingsgeweld, biedt het proefschrift een systematische verklaring voor waarom sommige verkiezingen zeer dodelijk zijn, terwijl andere relatief minder dodelijk zijn. Bovendien verbindt het uitbreidingshoofdstuk de belangrijkste bevindingen met een bredere theorie over campagne-outsourcing. De theorie van rents en verkiezingsgeweld laat zien hoe rents zowel de dodelijkheid als de selectie van daders beïnvloeden, en dezeselfde logica strekt zich uit tot niet-gewelddadige mobilisatie. Dezelfde middelen die het voor zittende machten mogelijk maken om geweldplegers te 'huren', stellen hen ook in staat om het werven van stemmen en het kopen van stemmen uit te besteden. Huren vormen dus de basis voor zowel dwang als overreding. Deze bredere logica van outsourcing laat zien hoe de politieke economie van huurprijzen zowel gewelddadige als niet-gewelddadige campagnes in Nigeria en daarbuiten ondersteunt. Door deze logica te begrijpen, kunnen we financiële en organisatorische capaciteit integreren in een uniforme studie van campagnevoering in zwakke partijcontexten in nieuwe en opkomende democratieën, wat resulteert in een meer holistische kijk op dit belangrijke onderwerp.

# Appendix

## Descriptive Statistics and Additional Results (Chapter Four)

**Table 4.4 :** Summary statistics: N mean sd min max by (States)

States	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Abia	4	2	1.633	0	4
Adamawa	4	7	7.394	0	16
Akwalbom	4	8	5.228	3	13
Anambra	4	4.75	1.258	3	6
Bauchi	4	5.75	4.113	1	11
Bayelsa	4	8.5	8.813	1	21
Benue	4	17	7.616	9	27
Borno	4	27.25	21.282	2	49
CrossRiver	4	5.75	2.872	4	10
Delta	4	19.5	7.853	9	28
Ebonyi	4	6.75	3.775	2	11
Edo	4	8.25	3.862	3	12
Ekiti	4	4	2.944	1	8
Enugu	4	2.25	1.708	0	4
Gombe	4	3	1.826	1	5
Imo	4	7.25	2.630	5	10
Jigawa	4	1.5	1.291	0	3
Kaduna	4	12	9.626	2	25
Kano	4	3.75	2.500	1	7
Katsina	4	4.25	2.217	1	6
Kebbi	4	2	2.160	0	5
Kogi	4	7.5	5.447	2	15
Kwara	4	2.5	1.915	1	5
Lagos	4	21.5	12.923	6	36
Nasarawa	4	5	2.160	2	7
Niger	4	4	1.414	2	5
Ogun	4	6	2.582	3	9
Ondo	4	5	6.055	1	14
Osun	4	7.5	8.062	1	19
Oyo	4	10.75	7.805	4	22
Plateau	4	8.5	4.435	3	13
Rivers	4	29	19.131	6	48
Sokoto	4	2.75	2.217	1	6
Taraba	4	7.75	5.377	2	15
Yobe	4	2.75	2.217	0	5
Zamfara	4	1.5	1.291	0	3

Source: Author, 2025.

The summary statistics in Table 4.4., present descriptive measures of lethality in the thirty-six states. The statistics reveal significant variation in the dependent variable across Nigerian states, with states like Borno (Mean = 27.25) and Rivers (Mean = 29) having the highest averages. In contrast, states such as Zamfara (Mean = 1.5) and Kebbi (Mean = 2) show consistently low values, indicating less lethality.

**Table 4.5:** State and Year Random effects of rents on lethal violence

	OLS (1)	Negative Binomial (2)	Poisson (3)
Rent	10.064 <sup>*</sup> (6.027)	0.657 (0.420)	0.683 <sup>***</sup> (0.240)
Lethality (lag)	-0.252 (0.355)	-0.012 <sup>*</sup> (0.007)	-0.010 <sup>***</sup> (0.004)
Population (log)	29.380 <sup>***</sup> (8.735)	2.978 (3.367)	2.890 (2.472)
Turnover	1.071 (1.857)	0.093 (0.162)	0.072 (0.104)
Poverty 2010	1.611 <sup>***</sup> (0.304)	0.261 <sup>**</sup> (0.127)	0.278 <sup>***</sup> (0.089)
Distance to Capital	-0.104 <sup>***</sup> (0.019)	-0.017 <sup>**</sup> (0.008)	-0.018 <sup>***</sup> (0.005)
1.Abia	0.000 (.)	0.000 (.)	0.000 (.)
2.Adamawa	-5.492 <sup>**</sup> (2.176)	-0.741 (1.212)	-0.484 (0.869)
3.Akwa-Ibom	-4.245 (10.939)	0.992 (0.855)	1.222 <sup>**</sup> (0.542)
4.Anambra	-16.989 <sup>***</sup> (3.432)	-2.117 (1.839)	-2.223 <sup>*</sup> (1.321)
5.Bauchi	-70.864 <sup>***</sup> (14.424)	-10.720 <sup>*</sup> (6.496)	-11.102 <sup>**</sup> (4.607)
6.Bayelsa	31.329 <sup>***</sup> (11.733)	5.500 (3.663)	6.035 <sup>**</sup> (2.619)
7.Benue	-52.766 <sup>***</sup> (10.807)	-8.945 (5.616)	-9.447 <sup>**</sup> (3.941)
8.Borno	45.482 <sup>***</sup> (8.604)	5.618 <sup>***</sup> (1.449)	6.293 <sup>***</sup> (0.967)
9.Cross River	10.939 <sup>***</sup> (2.141)	2.000 <sup>***</sup> (0.676)	2.128 <sup>***</sup> (0.463)
10.Delta	-15.017 (10.208)	-2.116 (2.045)	-2.142 (1.422)
11.Ebonyi	-43.320 <sup>***</sup> (8.097)	-7.213 <sup>**</sup> (3.413)	-7.774 <sup>***</sup> (2.326)

12.Edo	-21.317*** (4.019)	-3.496 (2.347)	-3.674** (1.636)
13.Ekiti	-6.752*** (1.399)	-1.116 <sup>c</sup> (0.656)	-1.121*** (0.422)
14.Enugu	-31.987*** (5.205)	-4.981** (2.344)	-5.292*** (1.628)
15.Gombe	-36.117*** (6.997)	-5.892** (2.776)	-6.340*** (1.920)
16.Imo	18.684*** (2.884)	3.638*** (1.188)	3.962*** (0.817)
17.Jigawa	-73.958*** (14.333)	-11.569* (6.238)	-12.270*** (4.423)
18.Kaduna	-61.025*** (11.620)	-9.507 (6.224)	-9.743** (4.409)
19.Kano	-72.217*** (14.614)	-9.967 (7.181)	-10.289** (5.174)
20.Katsina	-53.879*** (10.899)	-7.561 (5.435)	-7.855** (3.910)
21.Kebbi	-34.185*** (6.848)	-5.433 <sup>c</sup> (2.851)	-5.663*** (2.018)
22.Kogi	-56.006*** (10.432)	-8.889* (4.557)	-9.412*** (3.143)
23.Kwara	-32.766*** (6.269)	-5.482** (2.272)	-5.937*** (1.544)
24.Lagos	35.732*** (12.117)	5.987*** (2.148)	6.716*** (1.543)
25.Nasarawa	-67.359*** (12.499)	-11.150** (4.843)	-12.005*** (3.279)
26.Niger	-45.339*** (8.144)	-6.722 <sup>c</sup> (3.949)	-7.076** (2.779)
27.Ogun	9.448*** (1.344)	2.107** (0.918)	2.348*** (0.672)
28.Ondo	-26.529*** (4.898)	-3.650 <sup>c</sup> (2.129)	-3.638** (1.494)
29.Osun	20.648*** (3.919)	3.045** (1.189)	3.423*** (0.827)
30.Oyo	9.886*** (3.627)	2.030 (1.331)	2.464** (1.000)

31.Plateau	-50.566*** (9.564)	-8.103* (4.412)	-8.550*** (3.062)
32.Rivers	22.358 (15.661)	2.924** (1.272)	3.257*** (0.880)
33.Sokoto	-41.243*** (9.055)	-6.033 (3.745)	-6.363** (2.682)
34.Taraba	0.000 (.)	0.000 (.)	0.000 (.)
35.Yobe	0.000 (.)	0.000 (.)	0.000 (.)
36.Zamfara	0.000 (.)	0.000 (.)	0.000 (.)
1.2007	0.000 (.)	0.000 (.)	0.000 (.)
2.2011	-4.665 (3.402)	-0.469** (0.229)	-0.537*** (0.127)
3.2015	-5.653 (3.523)	-0.290 (0.275)	-0.379** (0.156)
4.2019	-4.443 (3.870)	-0.232 (0.283)	-0.299* (0.163)
Constant	-561.005*** (182.194)	-55.169 (54.648)	-53.852 (39.814)
ln_r		17.470 (415.226)	
ln_s		18.106 (415.226)	
lnalpha			-21.807 (344.749)
N	144	144	144

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Source: Author, 2025.

The statistical results in Table 4.5., demonstrate a strong positive relationship between rents and the lethal electoral violence, particularly under the Poisson model where the State and Year random effect of rents is statistically significant at the 1% level. While the OLS and Negative Binomial models

have less consistent findings, showing significance at only the 10% level and not at all, respectively, the direction of the relationship remains positive across specifications. Additionally, lagged lethality appears to have a small but significant negative effect in the Poisson and Negative Binomial models, suggesting some regression to the mean in lethal violence over time. Control variables such as population size and poverty are also positively associated with lethal violence, while distance from the capital consistently exhibits a negative relationship, indicating spatial variation in the intensity of violence. State and year fixed effects confirm substantial heterogeneity, with certain states (e.g., Borno, Lagos, Bayelsa) displaying significantly more lethal violence, likely driven by state-specific political or economic conditions. Overall, the findings provide empirical support for the theory that high rents enhance the capacity of incumbents' to perpetrate lethal violence.

### **Lethal Electoral Violence Dataset Codebook (Chapter Four)**

Data source: Nigeria Watch

#### ***STEP 1: Search procedure in Nigeria Watch***

- Go to the database, then go to advanced
- Select dates before and after national elections using Election Dates Excel sheet
- For each election, search for all events with cause as “cattle grazing”, “land issue”, “market issue”, “political issue”, “religious issue”, “sorcery”
- For 2007 elections (2006-10-14 until 2007-07-21), should produce 352 results, 2011 elections (2010-10-16 until 2011-07-26), 275 results, 2015 elections (2014-09-28 until 2015-07-11), 591 results, 2019 elections (2018-08-23 until 2019-05-23), 433 results
- Code chronologically, starting with the oldest events first, this can be helpful for understanding the context

#### ***STEP 2: Event coding***

While coding each event, make sure to read the articles linked by Nigeria Watch. They often include helpful additional information.

#### ***Identifier and Coordinate Variables***

##### **Nigeria Watch ID [required]**

Record the unique event ID from Nigeria Watch. If a report contains more than one event (=killings in more than one precise location are reported in

the articles/event description), make sure to add a suffix of .01, e.g. record as "PAR000823.01." Code as many new events as reported, as long as distinct locations can be established.

**Not Political Violence (PV) [required]**

Code as 1 if the event does not appear political in nature at all, do not proceed with coding if coded 1.

**Election ID [required]**

List the election year, list already prepared.

**Date [required]**

Codes the date of the event.

**Location [required]**

Records the location name of the violent event. To avoid misspellings, copy and paste location names from the report rather than typing it manually.

**Location Precision [required]**

- 1 = exact location is known (village, town, city, or more precise location within an LGA)
- 2 = event can be related to the LGA
- 99 = exact event location or LGA cannot be identified

**Longitude and Latitude**

[Record longitude and latitude of the event-day location.

- For locations where have more precise information than the LGA name, use one of the following tools: <https://itouchmap.com/latlong.html>, <https://www.latlong.net>, or Wikipedia. Be sure to store these coordinates as numbers in Excel.
- For local government areas, it probably makes sense to use Stata or GIS software to identify the centroids of LGAs. But we first need to check that the list of LGAs in GADM is complete and correct. Global Administrative Areas project GADM (<http://www.gadm.org/>.)]

**Administrative unit 2 [required]**

Record name of the local government area (make sure to use commonly used name)

**Administrative unit 1 [required]**

Record name of the state (make sure to use commonly used name)

## Participant Variables

**Actor 1 Type [required]**

Record the actor in the event.

- 1 = state actor
- 2 = nonstate actor, party
- 3 = nonstate actor, citizens
- 4 = nonstate actor, armed group
- 5 = other
- 99 = unknown

[Note:

1. A contentious event involves at least two actors on opposite sides of each other. The event direction variable below codes whether an event was directed or not (i.e., did one actor initiate the event). For directed events, put the initiator of an event as the actor (type, side, and name), and the targeted actor as the target (type, side, name). For undirected events, you can designate either actor as actor or target since no direction can be established.
2. Actors are coded as state actors if they are national or local government actors (including police and the military).
3. Actors are coded as citizens if the article mentions actors as “people, persons, citizens, party citizens, mob, or crowd.” Actors should also be coded as citizens if it is reasonable to infer that they were either actors or targets of an event. Event type may provide hints regarding identity, for example, protests and demonstrations usually involve citizens as actors. Similarly, a terrorist attack may not specifically mention that civilians were targeted, but it is reasonable to code them as targets if individuals were injured or killed in an attack.
4. Actors are coded as party actors if the article mentions individuals as “activists, members, or workers” of a party. If an article states or mentions actors as “citizens” or “followers” of a party, they are coded as citizens. Individuals competing as independent candidates are coded as party actors. Party militias are coded as armed groups.
5. Actors are coded as armed group if events are carried out by nonstate actors engaged in violent campaigns against a government or on behalf of a government. We thus code events by rebel groups opposing the government, but also those by paramilitary or militia groups friendly to governments, as involving armed group actors. If an article identifies the group or mentions “militants, armed thugs, cult groups, insurgents, rebels, militias, or paramilitaries” as actors, they should be coded as armed group. We also code criminal groups as armed groups if the article highlights that criminal actors did in fact as part of a group.
6. Actors are coded as other if we can infer the identity of the actor or target, but it does not fit into any of the existing categories. For example, international actors should be coded as other.
7. Actors are coded as unknown (-99) if the article contains no information on the identity of the actors, nor can we reasonably infer their identity. For example, events by “unidentified attackers” or “unknown assailants” should be coded as unknown.]

**Actor 1 Side [required]**

- 0 = progovernment  
 1 = antigovernment  
 -99 = unknown

[Note:

1. Actor Side codes whether an actor is acting in support or against the government in an event.
2. If the incumbent or his/her party is ousted following an election, the actor side variable should be coded as -99, or unknown, from the time of the election until the swearing in of a new government.
3. Example of antigovernment actor: "Protesters exploded several bombs during the third day of a general strike against the government." Example of progovernment actor: "Shots were fired at the motorcade of Bangladesh's main opposition leader"]

**Actor 1 Name [required]**

Records the name of the actor in the event (e.g. students, police, opposition party members, ...). If the article states the names of actors involved, they are recorded as such (e.g. BNP party).

Additional Actor Variables [as applicable]

**Target 1 Type [required]**

Records the target of an event. Note that coding an actor as target does not imply that the actor is the victim in an event, the direction of each event is coded separately in the variable Event direction.

- 1 = state actor  
 2 = nonstate actor, party  
 3 = nonstate actor, citizens  
 4 = nonstate actor, armed group  
 5 = other  
 -99 = unknown

Please see note for Actor 1 Type to inform the coding of various categories

**Target 1 Side [required]**

- 0 = progovernment  
 1 = antigovernment  
 -99 = unknown

1. Target Side codes whether an actor is acting in support or against the national government in an event.
2. If the incumbent or his/her party is ousted following an election, the target side variable

should be coded as -99, or unknown, from the time of the election until the swearing in of a new government.

3. Example of antigovernment target: "Police used tear gas against opposition citizens on the third day of a general strike against the government." Example of progovernment target: "Opposition citizens tried to disrupt a pro-government rally held by the PDP"]

### **Target 1 Name [required]**

Records the name of the target in the event (e.g. students, police, opposition party members, ...). If the article states the names of actors involved, they are coded them as such (e.g. BNP party).

Additional target variables [as applicable]

### **Event Variables**

#### **Event Name [required]**

A string variable that records the form of violence used by an actor against a target during an event. The categories are defined as follows:

**Clashes:** Deaths resulting from confrontations between rival groups, such as party members, ethnic groups, or violence specialists.

**Attacks:** Deaths resulting from an actor deliberately initiating violence against a target.

**Killing:** Deaths resulting from an actor initiating a deliberate or accidental act of violence, such as assassinations.

**Bombing:** Deaths resulting from the use of explosives by an actor against a group, state agents, or government buildings.

#### **Event Direction [required]**

Records whether information allows for establishing whether an event was directed (who initiated an event, and who was targeted in it can be established) or undirected (actor and target in an event cannot be established). If coded as directed, participants coded in "actor" fields are the initiators of an event.

0 = Undirected (Actor and target in an event CANNOT be established)

1 = Directed (Actor and target in an event CAN be established)

[Note: Example for undirected event: “The two cult groups linked to Ogoni politicians, Dewell and Debam, engaged themselves with firearms”  
 Example of directed event: “The cult group Dewell attacked members of the Debam cult group”]

### **Event Deaths [required]**

Codes the total number of deaths in the event, record the actual number or -99 if unknown.

### **Other Issue [as applicable]**

If the article identifies a second issue as a source of disagreement, they are recorded as one of the following:

- 1 = land
- 2 = cattle grazing
- 3 = market issue
- 4 = crime
- 5 = religious
- 6 = armed conflict (e.g. part of Niger Delta militancy, Boko Haram)
- 7 = oil or other natural resource

### **Primary Violence**

A dummy variable that records whether violence occurred during party primary elections

- 0 = No
- 1 = Yes

### **Violence Aim**

A variable for events if electoral violence is democratic or anti-democratic;

- 0 = Intra-systemic (violence used to win an election within a democratic systemic)
- 1 = Anti-systemic (Violence used to destroy the electoral process itself)
- 99 = Unknown (Unable to establish whether intra- or anti-systemic)

**Doubt Election Violence proper? [required]**

A dummy variable for events where there are doubts if the violence was election-related.

- 0 = no
- 1 = yes

**Event description [required]**

A brief description of the event. Copy and paste sentences from the event description that accurately capture what the event was about. If information is sparse, add additional relevant material from the articles.

**Other Variables**

Notes [as applicable]

Notes any irregularities or difficulties encountered.

**Table 5.2.** Overview of Case Comparison (Chapter Five)

States	Population <sup>95</sup>	Non-state violence perpetrators <sup>96</sup>	Ethnicity	Natural Resources <sup>97</sup>
Nasarawa	2,632,239	Herders and farmers, militias of ethnic groups, armed robbers, vigilante groups & cult groups <sup>98</sup>	<i>Multi-ethnic</i> <i>Dominant ethnic groups;</i> Eggon, Alago, and Fulani. <sup>99</sup>	Amethyst (Topaz Garnet), Barytex, Barite, Cassirite, Chalcopyrite, Clay, Columbite, Coking Coal, Dolomite/Marble, Feldspar, Galena, Iron-ore, Limestone, Mica, Salt, Sapphire, Talc, Tantalite, Tourmaline Quartz & Zireon
Lagos	12,772,884	Bandits, ethnic militias (OPC), cultists, hooligans, armed robbers & transport unions. <sup>100</sup>	<i>Multi-ethnic</i> <i>Dominant ethnic groups:</i> Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa. <sup>101</sup>	Bitumen, Clay & Glass-sand
Rivers	7,034,9737	Criminal gangs, cult gangs, communal militias, vigilante groups, and IPOB/ESN.	<i>Multi-ethnic</i> <i>Dominant ethnic groups;</i> Ogoni, Ijaw, and Ikwerre. <sup>102</sup>	Oil/Gas, Clay, Glass-Sand, Lignite,& Marble
Plateau	3,206,531	Bandits, cults, transport union, herdsmen	<i>Multi-ethnic</i> <i>Dominant ethnic groups;</i> Anaguta, Berom, Jawara, Mango, Hausa	Tin, barite, bauxite, bentonite, bismuth, cassiterite, clay, coal,

95 National Bureau of Statistics (2020) *Demographics Statistics Bulletin*. Available at: DEMOGRAPHIC BULLETIN%202020.pdf (accessed 15 November 2024).

96 European Union Agency for Asylum (2021) *Country Guidance Nigeria: Assessment by State*. Available at from <https://euaa.europa.eu/country-guidance-nigeria-2021> (accessed 15 November 2024).

97 Nigeria Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2024). *Nigeria Natural Resources*. Available at: <https://foreignaffairs.gov.ng/nigeria/natural-resources/> (accessed 15 November 2024). Although Nasarawa has numerous solid minerals, much of it remains untapped. With no crude oil deposits, the state does not benefit from additional oil revenue.

98 National Accord (2023) *Nasarawa LG imposes curfew over cult clashes*. Available at: <https://www.nationalaccordnewspaper.com/nasarawa-lga-imposes-curfew-over-cult-clashes/> (accessed 15 November 2024).

99 About Nasarawa State (2024) Retrieved from <https://nasarawastate.gov.ng/about-nasarawa-state/> (accessed 15 November 2024).

100 Adetayo, O (2020) *Nigeria's bus drivers battle thugs, a union and police in Lagos*. *Aljazeera*. Available at <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/10/14/thugs-cops-and-unions-the-trials-of-public-bus-drivers-in-Lagos> (accessed 15 November 2024).

101 About Lagos State (2024) Available at <https://lagosstate.gov.ng/about-lagos/> (accessed 15 November 2024).

102 About Rivers State (2024) Available at <https://www.riversstate.gov.ng/about/> (accessed 15 November 2024).

The Table 5.2. provides a scale for case comparison contained in Chapter Five. The table shows that Nasarawa, Lagos, and Rivers state are comparable in terms of ethnicity, and presence of solid minerals but vary in population and oil wealth. While Lagos is more populated than Rivers and Nasarawa with Nasarawa being the least populated, only Rivers state has crude oil.

### Anonymous Respondent List (Chapter Five)

ID	State	Portfolio	Designation	Date
RIV0001	Rivers	SDN	CSO	1-3-2022
RIV0002	Rivers	TTN	Journalist	1-3-2022
RIV0003	Rivers	IM	Journalist	3-3-2022
RIV0004	Rivers	CHERD	CSO	3-3-2022
RIV0005	Rivers	PDP	Politician	4-3-2022
RIV0006	Rivers	Daily Independent	Journalist	4-3-2022
RIV0007	Rivers	APC	Politician	5-3-2022
RIV0008	Rivers	PDP	Politician	7-3-2022
RIV0009	Rivers	APC	Politician	7-3-2022
RIV0010	Rivers	ANRP	Politician	9-3-2022
RIV0011	Rivers	TT	Journalist	11-3-2022
RIV0012	Rivers	YIAGA	CSO	11-3-2022
RIV0013	Rivers	Citizens Trust	CSO	17-3-2022
RIV0014	Rivers	Sun	Journalist	19-3-2022
RIV0015	Rivers	PDP	Politician	24-3-2022
RIV0016	Rivers	Guardian	Journalist	27-3-2022
RIV0017	Rivers	PDP	Politician	29-3-2022
RIV0018	Rivers	PDP	Politician	30-3-2022
RIV0019	Rivers	PDP	Politician	30-3-2022
RIV0020	Rivers	RIVCSO	CSO	2-4-2023
RIV0021	Rivers	APC	Politician	7-4-2023
RIV0022	Rivers	PDP	Politician	13-4-2023
RIV0023	Rivers	YIAGA	CSO	13-4-2023
RIV0024	Rivers	Accord	Politician	14-4-2023
RIV0025	Rivers	Gada	CSO	14-4-2023
RIV0026	Rivers	Engenni Youths Federation	CSO	17-4-2023
RIV0027	Rivers	Human Rights Defenders	CSO	13-4-2023
RIV0028	Rivers	EYF	CSO	25-4-2023
RIV0029	Rivers	Super FM	Journalist	17-4-2023
RIV0030	Rivers	Naija FM	Journalist	29-4-2023
RIV0031	Rivers	Raypower	Journalist	19-4-2023
RIV0032	Rivers	Super FM	Journalist	9-4-2023
RIV0033	Rivers	Boue Youth Association	CSO	21-4-2023
RIV0034	Rivers	Ogoni development	CSO	17-4-2023
RIV0035	Rivers	AA	Politician	8-4-2023

RIV0036	Rivers	YIAGA	CSO	8-4-2023
RIV0037	Rivers	AA	Politician	27-4-2023
RIV0038	Rivers	SDP	Politician	11-4-2023
RIV0039	Rivers	APC	Politician	26-4-2023
RIV0040	Rivers	Elizou Youths Federation	CSO	12-4-2023
RIV0041	Rivers	Rumuewhara Youth association	CSO	9-4-2023
RIV0042	Rivers	RIVSCO	CSO	12-4-2023
RIV0043	Rivers	TMG	CSO	21-4-2023
RIV0044	Rivers	East West reporters	Journalist	4-4-2023
RIV0045	Rivers	SDP	Politician	4-4-2023
RIV0046	Rivers	Independent researcher/ resident	Resident	10-4-2023
RIV0047	Rivers	Engenni Youths Federation	CSO	20-4-2023
PLA0048	Plateau	PDP	Party supporter	20-5-2022
PLA0049	Plateau	JAYFM	Journalist	20-5-2022
PLA0050	Plateau	JAYFM	Journalist	21-5-2022
PLA0051	Plateau	APC	Politician	24-5-2022
PLA0052	Plateau	NUJ (National Union of Journalists)	Journalist	24-5-2022
PLA0053	Plateau	NUJ (National Union of Journalists)	Journalist	24-5-2022
PLA0054	Plateau	Unique Centre for Peace Building and Trauma Healing (UCPBTH)		26-5-2022
PLA0055	Plateau	APC	Party supporter	26-5-2022
PLA0056	Plateau	PDP	Party supporter	27-5-2022
PLA0057	Plateau	VR	Journalist	28-5-2022
PLA0058	Plateau	TEKAN	CSO	1-6-2022
PLA0059	Plateau	ANN	Politician	1-6-2022
PLA0060	Plateau	Freelancer	Journalist	4-6-2022
PLA0061	Plateau	YIAGA	CSO	4-6-2022
LAG0062	Lagos	APC	Politician	5-4-2022
LAG0063	Lagos	Media Institute	Journalist	5-4-2022
LAG0064	Lagos	PDP	Politician	7-4-2022
LAG0065	Lagos	PDP	Politician	9-4-2022
LAG0066	Lagos	WardC	CSO	10-4-2022
LAG0067	Lagos	RULAAC	CSO	14-4-2022
LAG0068	Lagos	YIAGA	CSO	19-4-2022
LAG0069	Lagos	Jordan FM	Journalist	19-4-2022

LAG0070	Lagos	APC	Politician	21-4-2022
LAG0071	Lagos	TV.360	Journalist	21-4-2022
LAG0072	Lagos	LTTV	Journalist	24-4-2022
LAG0073	Lagos	EIE (Enough is Enough)	CSO	24-4-2022
LAG0074	Lagos	NURTW	Transport worker	27-4-2022
LAG0075	Lagos	International Press Centre	Journalist	3-5-2022
LAG0076	Lagos	APC	Politician	4-5-2022
LAG0077	Lagos	International Press Centre	Journalist	10-5-2022
LAG0078	Lagos	PDP	Party supporter	13-5-2022
LAG0079	Lagos	YIAGA	CSO	14-5-2022
LAG0080	Lagos	RULAAC	CSO	5-5-2023
LAG0081	Lagos	APC	Politician	10-5-2023
LAG0082	Lagos	NURTW	Garage leader	10-5-2023
LAG0083	Lagos	NURTW	Member/tricycle rider	4-5-2023
LAG0084	Lagos	PDP	Politician	13-5-2023
LAG0085	Lagos	LP	Politician	12-5-2023
LAG0086	Lagos	APC	Politician	15-6-2023
LAG0087	Lagos	International Press Centre	Journalist	2-7-2023
LAG0088	Lagos	YIAGA	CSO	25-6-2023
LAG0089	Lagos	YIAGA	CSO	14-6-2023
LAG0090	Lagos	International Press Centre	Journalist	14-6-2023
LAG0091	Lagos	International Press Centre	Journalist	4-5-2023
LAG0092	Lagos	APC	Politician	17-6-2023
LAG0093	Lagos	PDP	Politician	1-7-2023
LAG0094	Lagos	Mitv	Journalist	26-6-2023
LAG0095	Lagos	PDP	Party supporter	27-6-2023
LAG0096	Lagos	APC	Politician	27-6-2023
LAG0097	Lagos	APC	Politician	21-6-2023
LAG0098	Lagos	School of Journalism	Journalist	13-6-2023
LAG0099	Lagos	Freelancer	Journalist	20-6-2023
LAG0100	Lagos	PDP	Politician	20-6-2023
LAG0101	Lagos	APC	Politician	4-7-2023
NAS102	Nasarawa	APC	Party supporter	18-5-2023
NAS103	Nasarawa	APC	Party supporter	18-5-2023
NAS104	Nasarawa	PDP	Politician	18-5-2023
NAS105	Nasarawa	PDP	Politician	18-5-2023
NAS106	Nasarawa	PDP	Party supporter	19-5-2023
NAS107	Nasarawa	APC	Party supporter	20-5-2023

NAS108	Nasarawa	Election observer (Person with Albinism)	CSO	22-5-2023
NAS109	Nasarawa	Election observer	CSO	22-5-2023
NAS110	Nasarawa	Freelancer	Journalist	22-5-2023
NAS111	Nasarawa	PDP	Politician	22-5-2023
NAS112	Nasarawa	APC	Politician	23-5-2023
NAS113	Nasarawa	Freelancer	Journalist	23-5-2023
NAS114	Nasarawa	PDP	Party supporter	30-5-2023
NAS115	Nasarawa	APC	Party supporter	30-5-2023
NAS116	Nasarawa	YIAGA	CSO	30-5-2023
NAS117	Nasarawa	APC	Party supporter	30-5-2023
NAS118	Nasarawa	APC	Party supporter	1-6-2023
NAS119	Nasarawa	APC	Politician	2-6-2023
NAS120	Nasarawa	PDP	Party supporter	3-6-2023
NAS121	Nasarawa	Election observer (PWD)	CSO	3-6-2023
NAS122	Nasarawa	Election observer (PWD)	CSO	3-6-2023
NAS123	Nasarawa	APC	Party supporter	4-6-2023
NAS124	Nasarawa	PDP	Party supporter	4-6-2023
NAS125	Nasarawa	APC	Party supporter	5-6-2023
NAS126	Nasarawa	YIAGA	CSO	5-6-2023

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## Interview Guide: Electoral Violence in Nigeria (Chapter Five)

### 1. *Local politicians*

- What are your motivations for joining politics?  
(Probes; Are your motivations ideological or personalist? Do they influence your current party membership? Are there links between your party ideology and your personal motivations? Would you say that other politicians share the same views as you?)
- How would you describe elections in your state?  
(Probes; are elections free and fair? What are the causes of violence or fraud? Who are the instigators of illicit electoral activities? What kinds of politicians are likely to engage in illicit vs licit campaign strategies)
- Let us talk about the actors of violence.  
(Probes; have you experienced intimidation from rival parties? What form of intimidation? Who are the actors behind the intimidation? Can you identify the direct perpetrators of intimidation? Are those actors paid to carry out intimidation? Who pays them? What is the source of the payment? How do you respond to such intimidation? Is your response different or similar to that of your party?)
- Given the likelihood of intimidation in this electoral climate, how does your party handle such occurrences?  
(Probes; do supporters protect the party from external intimidation? If protection is not provided by party supporters or state security agencies, does your party rely on other actors? Who are these actors? How are they hired and paid?)

### 2. *Party supporters/Ordinary voters*

- How long have you supported your party?  
(Probes; what is the motivation for party support; ideological, personal, or programmatic? Would you say that other party members share this same ideology? Describe the process of becoming a party member. Do you attend regular meetings? How is the turnout in those meetings? Are party meetings frequently organized? Is membership based on sentiments such as ethnicity or partisanship? How would you describe the social

composition of your party? Are members treated equally regardless of ethnic identities?)

- How would you describe elections in the state?  
(Probes: Ask about violence if the respondent does not mention it, what areas are the hotspots of violence? If the respondent mentions lethal events, ask about non-lethal events; ask how individuals can distinguish election violence from other kinds of violence?)
- What kinds of violence occur during electoral periods?  
(Probes; Are the patterns similar to violence outside elections? Is it clear to locals that such violence is election violence? Who are the actors? Who pays the actors? How are they recruited and paid? Are they different or similar? Are the actors of violence affiliated with parties? Have these actors changed over time? Are voters able to identify the actors?).
- Who are the targets of violence during electoral periods?  
(Probes; Do party members face harassment from other parties? Who instigates the harassment? How do party members react? When are such occurrences more or less frequent? Are those harassment limited to the electoral period? Is it individual or aggregate targeting? Are party supporters more likely to be targeted than non-card-carrying party members? How do community members react to harassment? Please give an example of such occurrences; What are the consequences of violence on voters? Is there retaliation? If yes/no, why?).
- Let's talk about the financial aspect of campaigning.  
(Probes; do politicians incentivize party members to campaign for them? With what kinds of incentives? What is the source of such incentives? Has the financial value of incentives remained consistent over time? Who distributes these incentives? Would you say the incentives are effective enough to generate support? Are these distributed randomly to all locals or targeted at party supporters? Do co-ethnics or non-party supporters receive similar incentives? When are the incentives distributed? Do all candidates distribute incentives? What is the purpose of the incentives to mobilize or demobilize? Please give an example).

### 3. Journalists

- What kinds of events do you cover?
- How would you describe election violence in the state?  
(Probes: Using two LGAs as an example, describe the forms of violence you have observed. Why do patterns of violence vary across LGAs? What forms of violence are prevalent during elections? If the respondent mentions lethal events, ask about non-lethal events; ask how individuals are able to distinguish election violence from other kinds of violence?)
- Let's talk about the actors of violence  
(Probes: Who are the actors of violence? Why do those actors participate in violence? Are the actors of violence affiliated with groups? What kinds of groups? What roles do those groups perform during elections? How are the actors recruited and paid? Who brokers the payment, politicians or their agents? Is the payment contingent on their performance during elections? What is the source of the payment? Which parties/candidates are likely to use those actors (incumbent vs opposition)?)
- How would you describe the relationship between politicians and the actors of violence?  
(Probes; Do politicians have direct interactions with violence specialists? What kinds of interactions? Would you describe the relationship as symmetric or asymmetric? Have you observed any overtime changes in the relations? How about spatial variations in relations? For example, do politicians develop stronger relations with urban than rural-based violence entrepreneurs?).
- How does targeting play out during electoral periods?  
(Probes; What motivates their targeting? Do politicians instruct them on where to target? How do the actors identify targets? Does it change over time? do the actors target differently or similarly in incumbent vs opposition strongholds? How does targeting differ? Could you give a comparison of two LGAs where you have observed different targeting patterns? Is there any backlash from targets? What are the costs of violence?)

#### **4. Civil society Organization members**

- How would you describe elections in this area?  
(If the respondent fails to mention it, ask about election violence; what forms of violence are common in your area? If the respondent mentions lethal events, ask about non-lethal events; ask how individuals are able to distinguish election violence from other kinds of violence?)
- How does election violence vary across the state?  
(Probes; Please give some examples from your observations in the 2023 elections. Did violence vary across election types? If yes, what do you think explains such variation?).
- Who are the actors of violence?  
(Probes; do the actors of violence vary across elections? What kinds of actors do politicians partner with? How do these actors vary across politicians? How are the actors hired? What is the payment method? Where is the source of the payment method? How would you describe the relationship between politicians and violent actors? Does that relationship vary for incumbents vs opposition candidates?).
- What kinds of targeting did you observe in the just concluded elections?  
(Probes; What kinds of individuals are vulnerable to targeting during elections? What areas are vulnerable to targeting? Does targeting follow ethnic or partisan lines? Or is it more diverse?).
- What are the consequences of violence on voter turnout?  
(Probes; Do voters or rivals retaliate? If they do, what does the retaliation look like? Does it affect the future occurrence of violence? How does the state respond to such retaliation? If there is no retaliation; ask about why voters do not retaliate?).

## Respondent List (Chapter 6)

### Non-Party brokers

Respondent ID	Designation	Location
4031	Market leader	Ajeromi-Ifelodun
4014	NURTW leader	Agege
4009	Market leader	Agege
4006	Religious leader	Lagos Mainland
4032	NURTW executive	Amuwo-Odofin
4002	Market leader	Lagos Mainland
4018	Market leader	Amuwo-Odofin
4010	Religious leader	Ajeromi-Ifelodun
4019	Market leader	Amuwo-Odofin
4030	NURTW leader	Ajeromi-Ifelodun
4008	Market leader	Alimosho
4021	Ethnic leader	Amuwo-Odofin
4015	NURTW executive	Agege
4026	Religious leader	Alimosho
4003	Ethnic leader	Lagos Mainland
4024	Ethnic leader	Ajeromi-Ifelodun
4020	Ethnic leader	Agege
4023	Ethnic leader	Alimosho
4022	Market leader	Alimosho
4007	Religious leader	Lagos Mainland
4033	NURTW leader	Amuwo-Odofin
4001	Market leader	Lagos Mainland
4017	Ethnic leader	Agege
4031	NURTW leader	Lagos Mainland
4023	Market leader	Ajeromi-Ifelodun
4037	NURTW leader	Alimosho
4034	NURTW leader	Lagos Mainland
4016	Market leader	Agege
4028	NURTW leader	Alimosho
4029	NURTW leader	Ajeromi-Ifelodun

## Party brokers

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<b>Respondent ID</b>	<b>Designation</b>	<b>Location</b>
3002	APC	Lagos Mainland
3014	APC	Lagos Mainland
3000	PDP	Amuwo-Odofin
3005	APC	Alimosho
3020	LP	Amuwo-Odofin
3003	APC	Lagos Mainland
3004	APC	Alimosho
3010	APC	Agege
3019	PDP	Ajeromi-Ifelodun
3018	PDP	Ajeromi-Ifelodun
3011	LP	Ajeromi-Ifelodun
3009	APC	Agege
3017	LP	Ajeromi-Ifelodun
3006	APC	Alimosho
3021	PDP	Amuwo-Odofin
3013	LP	Amuwo-Odofin
3007	APC	Alimosho
3001	LP	Ajeromi-Ifelodun
3015	PDP	Amuwo-Odofin
3008	APC	Agege

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**Afrobarometer Survey Questionnaire (Chapter Six)**

The survey instrument is not included here due to its length and the word count limitations of this dissertation. Find the questionnaire links for Round Five and Round Eight. The corresponding codebooks for Round Five and Round Eight are also linked.

## Interview Guide Broker Interview in Lagos (Chapter Six)

Before the start of the interview

1. Record name of interviewer, date, time, location of the interview
2. Introduce the project and aims
3. Follow the consent protocol to establish informed consent

### Section I: Party brokers

We aim to interview 20 party brokers, representing the main political parties APC, LP, and PDP. We aim to interview 10 APC brokers and 10 opposition brokers (5 LP and 5 PDP).

1. We have reached out to you because of your work for party [APC/LP/PDP]. We have read a lot about the party, but are interested in knowing more about it and your work for it.
  - a. What is your role in this party?
  - b. How long have you been a member of this party?
2. When organizing campaign activities, how do you go about organizing rallies?
  - a. Follow up to ask which neighborhoods or areas they prioritize for rallies
  - b. Follow up to ask how they finance rallies
3. When organizing campaign activities, how do you go about organizing small tokens and gifts to share with voters?
  - a. Follow up to ask what kinds of gifts they share
  - b. Follow up to ask which neighborhoods or areas they prioritize for gifts
  - c. Follow up to ask how they finance gifts
4. Do you work with non-party organizations for campaign activities?
  - a. If yes, which organizations do you work with? How do you select the organization, or do they approach you?
  - b. If yes, what do these organizations receive in exchange for their help? E.g. cash, loans, jobs?
  - c. If yes, why do you work with these organizations?
  - d. Has this changed over time? Did you always work with this organization, or also others in the past?
5. Do you work with non-party organizations outside of election campaigns?
  - a. If yes, which organizations do you work with?

- b. If yes, what kind of work do you with them outside of election periods?
6. How does your party finance election campaigns?
  - a. Follow up to ask about various sources of campaign funds – mention e.g. the party, the candidates’ own funds, third parties (e.g. godfathers), or use of state funds.
  - b. Follow up to ask how the party distributes funds for campaigning.
7. Sometimes there is violence during elections. Why do you think this happens?
  - a. Follow up to ask if they think candidates or political parties incite, sponsor, or engage in violence.
  - b. Follow up to ask which parties are responsible.
  - c. Follow up to ask how candidates or parties go about executing violence. Do they have people or groups to rely on for violence? If so, who are these groups, and how are they recruited?
  - d. Follow up to ask about the logic of targeting. Who is exposed to violence, and why are they targeted?

## **Section II: Non-party brokers**

We aim to interview 30 brokers, representing the following three broker types: (1) market associations, (2) cultural or religious associations, (3) NURTW/transport unions. We aim for an approximately equal number of respondents across these three categories.

1. We have reached out to you because of your work for organization [market association /cultural or religious organization/ NURTW or transport union]. We have read a lot about your organization’s work but are interested in knowing more about it and your work for it.
  - a. What is your role in this organization?
  - b. How long have you been a member of this organization?
  - c. What are the organization’s most important goals?
  - d. How does the organization achieve these goals?
2. Do you or others in your organization work with candidates or political parties and offer support before or during elections?
  - a. If so, what types of parties do you work with? How do you select the party, or does the party approach you?
  - b. If so, why do you work with parties? Do they offer support, or something else? What are parties offering?

- c. Do you also work with candidates or parties outside of elections? If so, what work do you do with parties outside of elections?
  - d. Has this relationship changed over time? Did you always work with this party, or also others in the past?
  - e. When you work with political parties, how do you select the political party to work with? Do you approach political parties, or do political parties approach you? Why do you think this happens?
3. How do you or others in your organization mobilize support for candidates or political parties in elections? What kinds of activities do you get involved in?
    - a. Follow up to ask about rallies, handouts, and other campaign strategies they assist with.
  4. Other than mobilizing support, what other benefits do political parties receive from you?
  5. How does your organization benefit from links with political parties?
    - a. Follow up to ask about different kinds of benefits – cash, in-kind gifts, loans, jobs.
    - b. Follow up to ask how the organization’s members benefit from these linkages with political parties.
  6. Are you interested in a career in politics?
    - a. If yes, follow up for more information about their aspirations.
    - b. If no, ask if others in the organization have gone on to pursue a career in politics.
  7. Sometimes there is violence during elections. Why do you think this happens?
    - a. Follow up to ask if they think candidates or political parties incite, sponsor, or engage in violence. If yes, why do you think parties incite violence?
    - b. Follow up to ask about the logic of targeting. Who is exposed to violence, and why are they targeted?
    - c. Follow up to ask if they would ever associate with a candidate or party that is allegedly linked to violence. Why, or why not?
    - d. What if non-party workers incite violence in the name of a political party? Do you think it is the party’s responsibility? Will you work with such a party?

**Concluding questions**

1. Can we record your name and contact information for potential follow-ups? [Explain that contact information will be kept separate from the interview details at all times, and that the two files will be linked only through an ID variable.]
2. We are looking to gather as many perspectives as possible. Could you recommend other potential sources for us to reach out to?

Thank the respondent for their contribution and let them know their answers were helpful. Offer to share results of the study when available.

**Final questions filled in by the interviewer**

Record the interview end time. Then, record the following information:

- Were others present during the interview?
- Did the respondent check with others for information to answer any question?
- Do you think anyone influenced the respondent's answers?
- Did you feel threatened?
- What was the respondent's attitude during the interview? Were they:
  - o friendly or hostile
  - o interested or bored
  - o cooperative or uncooperative
  - o patient or impatient
  - o ease or suspicious
  - o honest or misleading
- What proportion of questions did the respondent have difficulty answering?
  - o None, few, some, most, or all



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