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Come Ballots or Bullets: An Analysis of Violence, Elections, & Ethnic Diversity

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Abstract

Elections are a chance for the people to decide who will have access to political power and allocate public economic opportunities and resources. The high stakes that may accompany elections raises the question: When do electoral regimes generally experience more state-sponsored violence? This paper argues that during election years countries will experience an increase in political violence. Additionally, this paper advances a theory that such political violence will be exacerbated in ethnically diverse countries. Most studies on ethnic conflict attribute polarization as being the cause of violence. However, this study will consider both ethnic fractionalization and polarization as a catalyst for violence. An empirical implication of these theories is that there should be an increase in state-sponsored violence during election years, while ethnically diverse countries will experience more of an increase in state-sponsored violence in election years, relative to non-election years. Results from testing these hypotheses using data on state-sponsored violence across time and country are not definitive. As such, this paper suggests avenues for further research.

1. Introduction

On December 29, 2007, Mwai Kibaki was declared the winner of Kenya's presidential election. In response to the news, violence erupted in all corners of the country as thousands of opposition supporters took to the streets. Prompted by the protests, truckloads of heavily armed police were commissioned to contain the demonstrators. As violence worsened over the succeeding days, shoot-to-kill orders were issued by authorities, contributing to mass displacement and a death toll upwards of 1,000 people.[1] Kenya is a highly fragmented country with many social cleavages. However, only one group has remained close to power since independence: the Kikuyus. The 2007 Kenyan election presented a chance to end Kikuyu political dominance which attracted support of excluded ethnic groups all across Kenya. For those who expect democracy to alleviate political violence, the 2007 Kenyan election must have been dismaying. This example of an election marred by violence raises questions about whether Kenya's experience is the norm across electoral regimes. The tensions that accompany election years could be an explanatory factor to the central question of this paper: When do electoral regimes experience more state-sponsored violence?

The events that took place as a result of the 2007 Kenyan election are important to understand in order to support free and fair elections around the world. Determining if and when countries are likely to experience political violence during an election year can allow for preparatory measures, such as contracting independent observers, allocating funds towards the electoral process, and implementing policies that will better represent and protect the people from violent outbreaks. While experienced and stable democracies may be able to withstand violence as a result of an election, fragile democracies might not be able to do the same without running the risk of backsliding into authoritarianism.

To understand why countries experience an increase in state-sponsored violence, this study assumes that elections are accompanied by societal tensions and unrest due to the political power and economic resources at stake.

Specifically, during election years, dissent may be expected to increase and manifest into protests, provoking government crackdowns and increased state repression. This paper argues that countries will experience an increase in state-sponsored violence during election years. Further, this paper posits that since resource allocation in ethnically diverse countries tend to follow ethnic lines, there will be more of an increase in state-sponsored violence. This is because voters are rational and recognize that elections are the time to decide who will allocate resources. If voters feel like they will be excluded from political power and economic resources, they will object and protest.

To test these claims, data was collected on state-sponsored violence and levels of ethnic diversity across countries from 1982-2018. The results suggest that violence is not more pronounced in countries during election years, contrary to expectations, but does show a nominal increase in violence in ethnically polarized countries during election years, relative to non-election years. Furthermore, the results show that political violence is more pronounced in illiberal democracies since such countries oftentimes have less of a mandate and resources to protect against human rights abuses.

The following section introduces existing literature on state repression and ethnic conflict in order to understand why such violence takes place throughout various parts of the world. From there, relying on mechanisms in existing literature, this study hypothesizes and puts forth a number of theoretical arguments on why countries experience more state-sponsored violence during election years and the effects of ethnic diversity on political violence during election years. To support these claims, an empirical analysis is provided that explores the relationship between state-sponsored violence, elections, and ethnic diversity. Lastly, this paper concludes with a discussion on the implications that ethnicity and democratization have on state-sponsored violence and with recommendations for future research.

2. Literature on State Repression & Ethnic Violence

It is commonly assumed that political violence decreases as democracy increases. Davenport argues that "the level of democracy in a given nation-year decreases repression in the same period; in short, democracy pacifies contemporaneously."[2] In other words, democracies have a better human rights track record than autocracies. Additionally, consolidated democracies are better at protecting against human rights violations than transitional democracies. In regards to elections, this is indirectly supported by the claim that although repression stemming from election year violence — which in this study is limited to physical integrity violations perpetrated by the state and its agents — is detrimental to democracy in the short term, elections and competitions are important for democracy in the long term.[3] In essence, transitional democracies have to go through what may be considered "growing pains" before consolidating and pacifying repression in the long term. For the purposes of this study, consolidated democracy are considered as regimes with firmly established essential characteristics of the structures and norms inherent in democracy, while transitional democracies are considered as regimes that have some of the essential features and characteristics of a democratic institution but not all.

However, some scholars suggest that consolidated democracies may not necessarily be better at protecting against certain human rights abuses than transitional democracies or authoritarian regimes. Further, in some contexts, violence in democracies may even be the norm rather than the exception.[4] Not only is the difference between regime type and the protection against physical integrity rights marginal, in certain instances it would be rational for consolidated democracies to repress dissidents. In times of domestic threat and unrest, repression is extended in the direction of political control and can be a source of legitimacy for authorities as it is framed under "law and order" measures.[2] Unlike transitional democracies that are still developing politically and economically, fully consolidated democracies have the resources and means to repress and exert political control over the people. Therefore, regime type will be an important factor to consider when testing for variation in violence across time and country.

The phenomenon of election year violence is not new to academia. There is a wealth of discourse regarding the matter in both the political and social context.[3] [5] [6] However, literature explaining broad concepts such as state repression can also be useful in uncovering why state-sponsored violence happens in the first place. For instance, some argue that political dissent typically increases repressive responses from the state.[2] Using existing literature on state repression in the context of elections, it can be expected that dissent will increase when political power and economic resources are at stake. Dissent that manifest as protests, such as sit-ins, strikes, and demonstrations, encourages state repression.[2]

Additionally, scholars have suggested that a country's electoral system also affects the likelihood of violence during election years. For instance, "majoritarian systems tend to reward larger parties disproportionately and impose high barriers for political participation," making election violence more likely in ethnically diverse countries.[5] Moreover, ethnic attachments are expected to be strongest during national elections.[7]

The literature also suggests that ethnicity plays a role in political violence. In ethnically diverse societies, ethnic identities tend to reflect traditional loyalties to "kith and kin."[7] In other words, ethnic identities are intrinsically part of who people are and their salience follows that natural makeup. In ethnically diverse countries, such as those in Sub-Saharan Africa, the perceived costs of electoral defeat and the fear of permanent exclusion oftentimes gives rise to violence.[5] If and when the allocation of resources in ethnically diverse countries follows ethnic lines elections are certain to be highly contested because elections determine who will allocate these resources.[7] This is an important concept to consider when asking whether and why protests and violence takes place in ethnically diverse countries during election years.

Most scholars writing on violence in ethnically diverse societies have primarily focused on ethnic polarization and not fractionalization.[6 7 8] Daniel Posner argues that ethnic groups are only rendered useful when they are large enough to constitute viable coalitions in the competition for political power and that groups too small to serve as viable bases for political support will go immobilized and will remain politically irrelevant.[8] In other words, ethnically polarized countries are more inclined to experience elections marred by violence than ethnically fractionalized countries. Similarly, the "ethnic balance" argument states that protests occur most frequently when ethnic groups approach parity, but declines in frequency as one group establishes an overwhelming numerical dominance.[6] While the mechanisms presented in the polarization argument can be rendered useful, this study explores the correlation between political violence, election years, and ethnic fractionalization, as well as polarization. For instance, Wilkinson does not address the situation that may arise when there is not a single ethnic group that constitutes a significant simple majority. For instance, in Uganda the largest ethnic group represents less than 20 percent of the population, while the second largest constitutes less than ten percent. As such, the number and size of ethnic groups present across countries will be an important factor to account for when testing for violence conditional on it being an election year. In summary, this study will address and analyze variations in violence across time and country and the effect that ethnic fractionalization and polarization has on the level of state-sponsored violence conditional on election years.

3. Explaining Political Violence

Because political power and economic resources are at stake, elections can generate intense competition. During election years countries are more likely to experience an increase in dissent and an increase in state-sponsored violence. Political violence and repression can be exacerbated in ethnically diverse countries. These dynamics are critical to understand because elections and the peaceful transition of power are at the foundation of any healthy democracy. If public dissent is repressed during elections, a time when freedom of speech and assembly are essential, then individual rights and the democratic institutions of that country could be in peril.

3.1. State Repression in Election Years

The fervor that often accompanies elections stem from the fear of being excluded from the political process and the prospect of one's voice being silenced. Thus elections create an environment ripe for dissent, which sometimes manifest in protests and even riots, as well as through peaceful means. Political dissent in an election year may take a "form of protest against specific policies, political decisions, or even a political system and culture in general."[9] Political dissent is aimed at incumbent regimes since, after all, they are the ones perceived to be controlling and regulating the flow of policy. The rise in political dissent frequently inspires a repressive response from the state. Scholars on state repression note that "in every statistical examination of the subject, dissent increases repressive behavior."[2] State repression infringes upon individuals' rights to freedom of speech and assembly, key pillars of democracy and human rights. In fact, repression may fulfill one of the state's primary objectives (i.e. political control) and thus serves as a major source of legitimacy for the authorities. Related to this, protest decreases the costs of repression by providing political leaders with a legal mandate to coerce."[2] Essentially, repressive behavior by the state can be framed as an effort to maintain peace at home, legitimizing the authorities' actions and ultimately making political violence an attractive tool. Based on the assumption that dissent increases repressive behavior and asserting that election years increase dissent, I hypothesize that:

Hypothesis 1: During election years, electoral regimes will experience an increase in state-sponsored violence.

3.2. Ethnic Diversity & Elections

During an election year, countries are inclined to experience an increase in state-sponsored violence. Ethnically fractionalized countries are more likely to experience an increase in state-sponsored violence conditional on it being an election year. In fractionalized countries, ethnic identities are deeply woven into the fabric of society. Further, the allocation of resources tends to follow these ethnic lines and voters recognize that elections are the time to decide who will allocate resources – a friend or foe.[7] Dissent and protests are compounded in ethnically fractionalized countries as groups make an effort to boost their party's chance of winning and capturing vital economic resources. Dissent, in turn, increases repressive behavior on behalf of the state as a means to reduce domestic threat and establish political control. Thus, this study expects that:

Hypothesis 2a: Ethnically fractionalized electoral regimes will experience more of an increase in state-sponsored violence during election years than will homogenous electoral regimes.

Alternatively, some scholars argue that ethnic groups are only politically influential when they are large enough to constitute viable coalitions in the competition for political power.[6 8] Consequently, ethnically polarized, rather than ethnically fractionalized, countries are more inclined to experience elections marred by violence. A related but distinct hypothesis follows:

Hypothesis 2b: Ethnically polarized electoral regimes will experience more of an increase in state-sponsored violence during election years than will homogenous electoral regimes.

4. Data & Measurement

This study takes a quantitative approach to testing the hypotheses of interest. The sample used is a global analysis of electoral regimes between 1982 and 2018. In this study, an electoral regime is considered as any country whose government is formally chosen by the citizens of that country. Even when governments are elected, they are not necessarily democracies; instead, the data includes a variety of regimes. The unit of analysis is the country-year. Given this, the sample size of the study is 4,378 country-years, with 124 countries represented in the data. Countries that were part of the former Soviet bloc and those with relatively recent claims to autonomy and independence are excluded from the sample due to a lack of consistent data. Additionally, while most countries in the sample are observed between 1982 and 2018, not all countries are observed under an identical time period due to data constraints.

4.1. Political Terror Scale

In this study, the Political Terror Scale (PTS) is the response, or dependent, variable.[10] The primary goal of the PTS is to measure violations of physical integrity rights carried out by state-actors or their agents across time and country. In other words, it measures violence that is sanctioned or perpetrated by the state – e.g., politically motivated killings, torture, police brutality, etc. The level of violence a country experiences in a particular year is based on a 5-point ordinal scale. Each score is described as follows:[10]

1. Countries under a secure rule of law, people are not imprisoned for their views, and torture is rare or exceptional. Political murders are extremely rare.
2. There is a limited amount of imprisonment for nonviolent political activity. However, few persons are affected, torture and beatings are exceptional. Political Murder is rare.
3. There is extensive political imprisonment, or a recent history of such imprisonment. Execution or other political murders and brutality may be common. Unlimited detention, with or without a trial, for political views is accepted.
4. Civil and political rights violations have expanded to large numbers of the population. Murder, disappearances, and torture are a common part of life. In spite of its generality, on this level terror affects those who interest themselves in politics or ideas.
5. Terror has expanded to the whole population. The leaders of those societies place no limits on the means or thoroughness with which they pursue personal or ideological goals.

The data used to code for the PTS relies on the annually published U.S. State Department Country Reports on Human Rights Practices.

The average PTS score in the sample is 2.43, while the modal score is a 2. Paraguay and Papua New Guinea are examples of countries that represent the average and mode for the overall sample. Figure 1 depicts the distribution of PTS scores over the time period under observation.

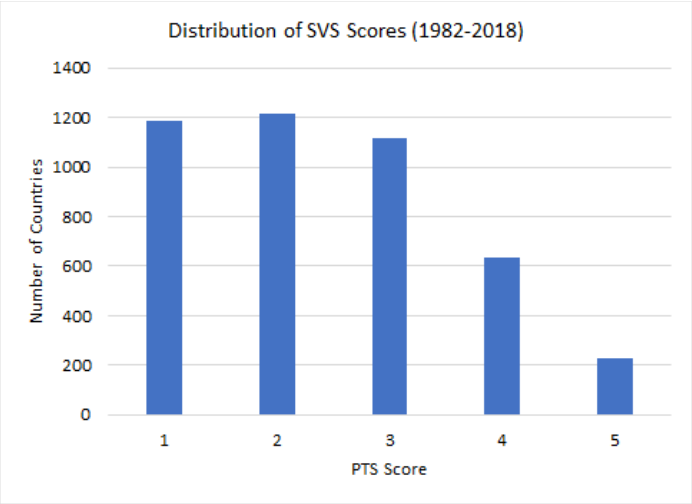

Figure 1: Distribution of PTS scores.

As depicted by Figure 1, 28% of countries have a PTS score of 2. Denmark and Iceland represent countries that have a modal score of 1 in the sample, while Sudan and Afghanistan represent countries that have a modal score of 5.

4.2. Independent Variables of Interest

The first independent variable in this study is a dichotomous, or dummy, variable for election years. It is coded as a 1 for election years; 0 otherwise. This variable will allow me to determine whether or not there is any variability of PTS scores between election years and non-election years. In the sample of 4,378 country-years, there were 1,212 elections. It is worth noting that the number of elections varied greatly from country-to-country. For instance, the United Arab Emirates only hosted three elections between the years 1982 and 2018, while El Salvador hosted 18 during the same time period.

A variable of interest that corresponds with my second hypothesis is an index of ethnic fractionalization. Ethnic fractionalization is measured on a 0-1 interval scale. The scholars who developed the ethnic fractionalization index that is used in this study relied on data from the *World Christian Encyclopedia*.[11] Any index of fractionalization can be written as:

$$FRAC = 1 - \sum_{i=1}^{N} \pi_i \ (1 - \pi_i) \qquad (1)$$

where π_i is the proportion of people who belong to the ethnic group i, and N is the number of ethnic groups. Using this equation, one can interpret the index of ethnic fractionalization to be the probability that two randomly selected individuals from a given country will not belong to the same ethnic group.[11] It is also worth noting that ethnic fractionalization varies across countries but is stagnant across time. The countries from the sample have an average ethnic fractionalization index of 0.445. Spain, with an ethnic fractionalization index of 0.436, represents the median country in terms of ethnic fractionalization. The least fractionalized country in the sample has an index of 0.010, which is Portugal. On the other end of the spectrum, the most fractionalized country in the sample has an index of 0.959, which is Tanzania.

The alternate measure of ethnic diversity to ethnic fractionalization is ethnic polarization, which I cover in hypothesis 2b. Many studies use the Reynal-Querol index of polarization which takes the form:

$$RQ = 1 - \sum_{i=1}^{N} \left(\frac{\frac{1}{2} - \pi_i}{\frac{1}{2}} \right)^2 \pi_i$$

$$RQ = 4 \sum_{i=1}^{N} \pi_i^2 (1 - \pi) \tag{2}$$

The index of polarization is also measured on a 0-1 interval scale and is an alternative way to summarize ethnolinguistic heterogeneity in a single indicator. As such, the index of polarization reaches the highest level when two groups are approaching parity and covers the whole population.[11] The difference between ethnic fractionalization and polarization is both theoretical and actual since the two indices represent quite different concepts.[11] This difference is shown in Figure 2. For high levels of ethnic diversity the correlation between the two measures is negative, while for low levels of ethnic diversity the correlation between the two measures is nearly perfect along the 45° line.[11] The countries from the sample have an average ethnic polarization index of 0.510. Bahrain, with an ethnic polarization index of 0.569, represents the median country in the sample in terms of ethnic polarization. Madagascar, with an ethnic polarization index of 0.017, is the least polarized country in the sample, while Jordan is the most polarized country in the sample with an ethnic polarization index of 0.982.

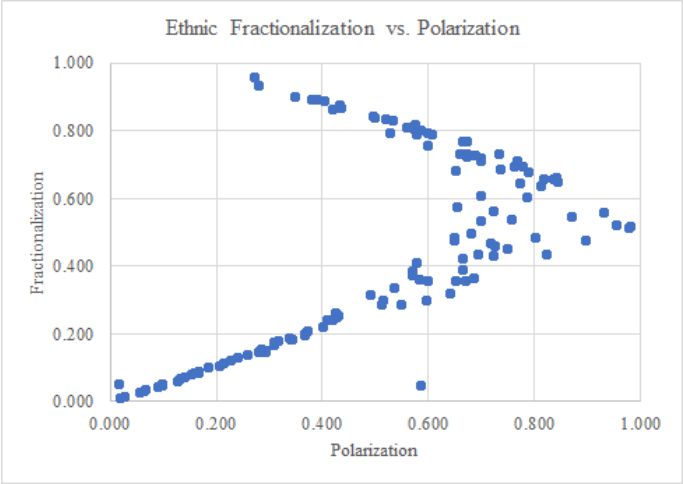

Figure 2: Ethnic fractionalization versus polarization.

4.3. Controls

The first control variable included is a measure of liberal democracy. This study utilizes a measure from the Varieties of Democracy project (V-Dem) which is a 0-1 interval-based scale that varies across time and country. The liberal principle of democracy emphasizes the importance of protecting individual and minority rights against the tyranny of the state and the majority. The liberal model takes a "negative" view of political power insofar as it judges the quality of democracy by the limits placed on government which is protected by a number of democratic pillars.[12] In the context of this study, the liberal democracy index will help determine whether or not consolidated democracies are better at protecting against human rights violations than transitional democracies. In the sample, the average liberal democracy index score is 0.421 and the median score is 0.376. Additionally, Sweden with a liberal democracy index score of 0.914 is the most liberal democracy in the sample, while Sudan with an index score of 0.013 represents the most illiberal democracy in the sample.

Presidential elections are believed to be more violent than legislative elections.[7] By nature, presidential elections use a majoritarian electoral system and not a proportional system like those used in many legislative elections around the world. It is the high stakes imposed by the majoritarian system that theoretically make presidential elections more violent.[5] As such, I control for the electoral system of a country using a dichotomous variable, in which 0 denotes majoritarian systems and 1 denotes proportional representation, mixed, and single non-transferable voting systems. In

the sample, electoral systems vary across countries but remain static across time unless a country reformed its electoral system. There were 1,842 majoritarian systems and 2,536 proportional systems observed in the sample. Furthermore, 39 countries used a majoritarian system, 58 used a proportional system, and 27 reformed their electoral system at some point during the time period under analysis.

Civil conflict can also have a major influence on the amount of state-sponsored violence that countries experience. During conflict, state authorities tend to operate with impunity and restrict certain liberties. Using data from the Ethnic Power Relations Core Dataset, this study controls for which country-years experienced civil conflict at any point during 1982 and 2018.[13] As such, there were 833 observations of civil conflict in the sample, 210 of which overlapped with election years.

The last variable controlled for is an indicator of national wealth of the countries in the sample. The economic conditions of a country can exacerbate political violence by contributing to internal tensions between government and people. In the context of this study, the economic indicator of national wealth is determined by GDP per capita, which varies across time and country. Data provided by the International Monetary Fund shows that the average GDP per capita in the sample is USD$9,469.99.[14] In terms of GDP per capita, the wealthiest country in the sample is Luxembourg in 2014 with a GDP per capita of $120,449.50. On the flip side of the coin, the poorest country in the sample is Haiti in 1992 with a GDP per capita of $72.42. That being said, there are major variations in GDP per capita between the countries in the sample. Therefore, it is worth mentioning that the median GDP per capita in the sample is $2,466.29, much less than what is portrayed by the average level of national wealth across the sample.

5. Data Analysis

To analyze the hypotheses of interest, this study estimated a series of regressions. The first model shown in Table 1 depicts the relationship between political violence, election years, and ethnic fractionalization. The second model in Table 2 replaces fractionalization with polarization in the analysis. All control variables are included in both analyses. Further, both models include interaction terms between election years and ethnic diversity to get at the conditional nature of hypotheses 2a and 2b. While the results from the series of regressions may not be substantively significant, many of the variables hold the anticipated relational effects.

5.1. Model 1: Ethnic Fractionalization

In Model 1, the intercept term tells us that if all the other variables in the study were equal to zero, then we would expect a PTS score of 2.55 as a result of state-sponsored violence. The coefficient on election year is positive and, therefore, agrees with the first hypothesis that election years lead to more state-sponsored violence. However, it is not statistically significant. Specifically, a one-unit increase in election year – i.e. going from a non-election year to an election year – is associated with a 0.0311 increase in state-sponsored violence, ceteris paribus. In addition to not being statistically significant, this finding is not substantively significant, despite the fact that it agrees with hypothesis 1 in the direction of the effect. A 0.03 increase on a 5-point scale is quite modest. In terms of the direction of the effect, the coefficient on ethnic fractionalization is positive and statistically significant, telling us that we can expect more state-sponsored violence. Specifically, a one-unit increase in ethnic fractionalization – i.e. a change from no fractionalization to full fractionalization – is associated with a 0.6078 increase in state-sponsored violence, ceteris paribus. Since ethnic fractionalization is measured on an interval scale, it is helpful to look at the effects that a one-tenth of an increase in fractionalization has on the level of state-sponsored violence. As such, a 10% increase in ethnic fractionalization is associated with a 0.0608 increase in state-sponsored violence. While this finding may be statistically significant, it does not result in a large effect on state-sponsored violence. This is essentially the effect of ethnic fractionalization on state sponsored violence in a non-election year. Although the coefficient on ethnic fractionalization is positive and significant, it does not speak to hypothesis 2a, which posits that the effect of ethnic fractionalization is conditional on it being an election year.

Table 1: Regression Analysis, Ethnic Fractionalization

	Model 1 Coefficient	Standard Error	P-Value
Intercept	2.5521	0.0395	< 0.05
Election year	0.0311	0.0483	0.5198
Ethnic fractionalization	0.6078	0.0535	<0.05
Election x Fractionalization	-0.0205	0.0936	0.8265
Liberal democracy	-1.5029	0.0561	< 0.05
Electoral system	0.1605	0.0259	< 0.05
Civil conflict	1.2788	0.0318	< 0.05
GDP per capita	-0.00001	0.0000009	< 0.05
N = 4,378			

These estimates show the relationship between political violence, election years, and ethnic fractionalization with the included control variables.

The coefficient on the interaction term, however, can get at the conditional nature of the variables. The coefficient shows that for every one-unit increase in ethnic fractionalization, a 0.02 decrease in state-sponsored violence is expected in election years, relative to non-election years. This result is contrary to expectations. It was expected that violence would increase, not decrease, in election years. The result, however, is not substantively or statistically significant. A 0.02 change on a 5-point scale is not a large difference. As such, it does not appear that there is much of a conditional relationship at all between the variables of interest. Figure 3 depicts this relationship by showing that ethnic fractionalization does not have a substantial effect on state-sponsored violence in election years, relative to non-election years. In fact, the slopes of the lines are nearly identical, contrary to expectations. The plot in Figure 3 holds all the other variables in Model 1 constant; specifically, it assumes average levels of liberal democracy and GDP per capita and modal scores on the dichotomous variables – i.e., 1 on electoral system and 0 on civil conflict.

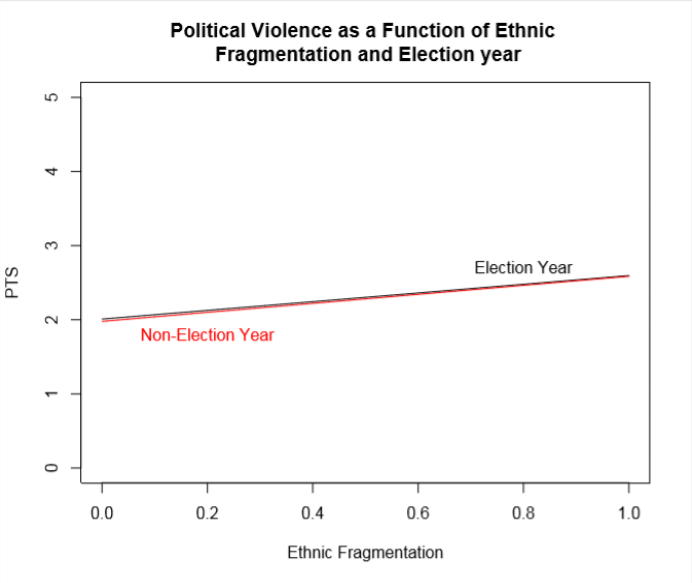

Figure 3: Political violence as a function of ethnic fractionalization and election year.

In addition to the variables of interest, Table 1 contains the effects of the control variables on violence. The coefficient on liberal democracy is negative and is statistically significant, which is the expected effect on state-sponsored violence. Specifically, a one-unit increase in liberal democracy is associated with a 1.5 decrease in state-sponsored violence. However, since liberal democracy is an interval scale based index, it is useful to put it in the perspective of the effect that a one-tenth of an increase in liberal democracy has on the level of state-sponsored violence. As such, a 10% increase in liberal democracy is associated with a 0.15 in state-sponsored violence. These results are consistent with the belief that established democracies are better at protecting against human rights abuses than autocracies.

Majoritarian systems are hypothesized to be more apt to experience state-sponsored violence during election years due to the high barriers they imposed on citizens' access to political power and resources. However, the regression results show that the coefficient on proportional electoral systems is positive, contrary to expectations. Specifically, a one unit increase in proportional systems – i.e. moving from a majoritarian system to a proportional system – is associated with a 0.16 increase in state-sponsored violence. The effect is statistically significant. Although this is not substantively significant, there still may be an explanation for why this is the case. Countries under a majoritarian electoral system may experience less violence because voters under such a system may simply accept their fate of being excluded from the political process, prompting them not to participate. On the other hand, under a proportional system voters may recognize that every vote matters in increasing their party's vote percentage and, therefore, representation. If political power is more accessible, as it is under a proportional system, voters are more likely to be politically active and dissent, possibly leading to more state repression and a gateway for state-sponsored violence.

The coefficient on the control variable for civil conflict is positive and statistically significant, which is the expected relational effect. Specifically, a one unit increase in civil conflict – i.e. a country going from not being in civil conflict to being in a civil conflict – is associated with a 1.28 increase in state-sponsored violence. This is a large effect. Furthermore, the coefficient on the control variable for GDP per capita is negative, which is the expected effect. Specifically, a one unit increase in GDP per capita – i.e. $1 – is associated with a 0.00001 decrease in state-sponsored violence. It is helpful to put this effect into the perspective of a larger increase in GDP per capita. For instance a $10,000 increase in GDP per capita is associated with a 0.1 increase in state-sponsored violence. Or if you went from the poorest country in the sample – i.e. Haiti with a GDP per capita of $72.42 – to the wealthiest country in the sample – i.e. Luxembourg with a GDP per capita of $120,449.50 – the expected result would be a 1.2 decrease in state-sponsored violence. While these changes may not appear substantive, it can make the difference between the people of a country experiencing limited and extensive state-sponsored violence.

5.2. Model 2: Ethnic Polarization

Model 2 considers ethnic polarization in the place of ethnic fractionalization. The results of this model are found in Table 2. In Model 2, the intercept term tells us that if all other variables were equal to zero, then we would expect a PTS score of 2.7. In this model, the coefficient on election year is negative, telling us that election years lead to less state-sponsored violence. Specifically, a one-unit increase in election year – i.e. going from a non-election year to an election year – is associated with a 0.06 decrease in state-sponsored violence, ceteris paribus. The negative relationship is contrary to the expectations in hypothesis 1; however, it is neither a substantively or statistically significant finding, so we cannot reject the null hypothesis of no relationship. The coefficient on ethnic polarization is positive and statistically significant, telling us that we can expect more state-sponsored violence as a result of ethnic polarization. Specifically, a one-unit increase in ethnic polarization is associated with a 0.3 increase in state-sponsored violence, ceteris paribus. Since ethnic polarization is measured by an interval scale, it is helpful to look at the effects of a one-tenth of an increase in ethnic polarization on the level of state-sponsored violence. As such, a 10% increase in polarization is associated with a 0.03 increase in state-sponsored violence. This finding is statistically significant; however, it does not result in a large effect on state-sponsored violence. This is the estimated effect of polarization in a non-election year. While this finding may be statistically significant, it does not speak to hypothesis 2b, which posits that the effect of ethnic polarization is conditional on it being an election year.

As shown in Table 2, the coefficient on the interaction term in Model 2 is positive, meaning ethnic polarization has a stronger effect on violence in election years compared to non-election years. Figure 4 depicts this relationship. The plot in Figure 4 holds all the other variables in Model 2 constant. As such, it assumes average levels of liberal democracy and GDP per capita and modal levels on the dichotomous variables – i.e., 1 on electoral system and 0 on civil conflict. Specifically, for every one-unit increase in ethnic polarization, we expect to see a 0.15 increase in state-sponsored violence in election years, relative to non-election years. Although the coefficient on the interaction term is positive and agrees with hypothesis 2b, it is not substantively or statistically significant. While the election year

slope is steeper in Figure 4, consistent with expectations, the two lines are largely indistinguishable, meaning that ethnic polarization does not have a meaningful effect on violence between election and non-election years.

Table 2: Regression Analysis, Ethnic Polarization

	Model 2 Coefficient	Standard Error	P-Value
Intercept	2.7198	0.0428	< 0.05
Election year	-0.0591	0.0603	0.3277
Ethnic polarization	0.3090	0.0595	<0.05
Election x Polarization	0.1549	0.1077	0.1505
Liberal democracy	-1.5262	0.0570	< 0.05
Electoral system	0.0938	0.0258	0.0003
Civil conflict	1.3358	0.0318	< 0.05
GDP per capita	-0.00001	0.000001	< 0.05
N = 4,378			

These estimates show the relationship between political violence, election years, and ethnic polarization with the included control variables.

The return on all control variables in Model 2 are nearly identical to those in Model 1. The coefficient on liberal democracy is positive and is statistically significant. Specifically, a one-unit increase in liberal democracy is associated with a 1.5 decrease in state-sponsored violence. The coefficient on electoral system is positive, contrary to expectations, and is statistically significant. However, the effect is not substantively significant. Specifically, a one-unit increase in electoral system is associated with a 0.09 increase in state-sponsored violence. The coefficient on civil conflict shows a large positive effect and is statistically significant. Specifically, a one-unit increase in civil conflict is associated with a 1.3 increase in state-sponsored violence. Lastly, the coefficient on GDP per capita is negative but is statistically significant. Specifically, a one-unit increase in GDP per capita is associated with a 0.00001 decrease in state-sponsored violence. These results are shown in Table 2.

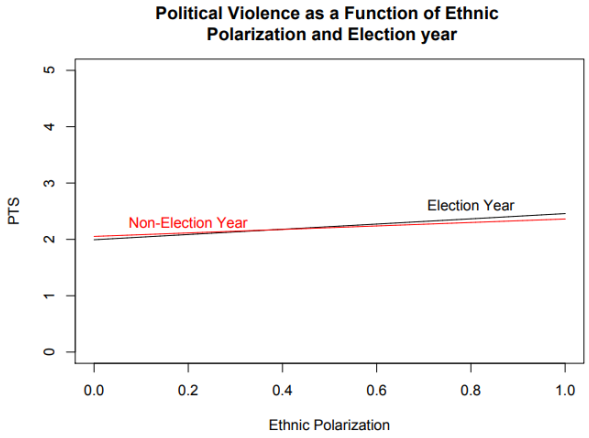

Figure 4: Political violence as a function of ethnic polarization and election year.

Despite mixed results for the theoretical claims this study made, there are still some findings to highlight. Although the finding was not substantively or statistically significant, the coefficient on election year in Model 1 was positive, as put forth by hypothesis 1. Similarly, although not substantively or statistically significant, the interaction term on election year and ethnic polarization in Model 2 did return a positive relationship as shown in Figure 4, which is in

line with hypothesis 2b. Further, all control variables returned very well in both models. Specifically, the effect democratization has on state-sponsored violence and the protection against human rights abuses. It is also worth noting that additional regression analyses show essentially no relationship between state-sponsored violence and ethnic diversity in pre- and post-election years.

6. Conclusion

This paper set out to address the phenomenon of what causes countries to experience an increase in state-sponsored violence from one year to another and from one country to another. It was argued that during election years, when political power and allocation of economic resources are at stake, voters are more likely to dissent and states are more likely to respond with repression, resulting in an increase in state-repression and violence. This problem is exacerbated in ethnically diverse countries. Ethnically diverse countries would be prone to experience more state-sponsored violence during an election year than homogenous countries. In countries where political power and resources follow ethnic lines, voters recognize that elections are the time for deciding who will be allocating such resources.[7] As such, if voters recognize that a political opponent may be in power, dissent is likely to follow. Prolonged dissent oftentimes manifest as protests that results in sit-ins, strikes, and demonstrations. In times of such domestic threat and unrest, state authorities can be expected to exert their political control via repressive measures.[2] Gross human rights violations are oftentimes the result.

Taking a quantitative approach in testing these hypotheses, this study estimated a series of regressions in order to determine whether countries do in fact experience an increase in state-sponsored violence during election years, and even more so in ethnically diverse countries. However, results showed there is essentially no relationship between state-sponsored violence and election year. Similarly, results showed essentially no relationship between state-sponsored violence, election years, and ethnic diversity. Although not substantively or statistically significant, the relationship between state-sponsored violence, election years, and ethnic polarization was positive as expected.

Despite the lack of findings for the hypotheses of interests, there are still some noteworthy findings. For instance, both models show that as a country democratizes, state-sponsored violence decreases substantively. Such a finding was expected and reinforces the popular belief in academia that "democracy pacifies contemporaneously."[2] Furthermore, civil conflict had the expected positive relational effect on state-sponsored violence. Lastly, an interesting finding stemmed from the relationship between GDP per capita and state-sponsored violence. An increase in GDP per capita does have the expected relation effect of decreasing state-sponsored violence; however, this effect is not a large one. Although the result cannot be disregarded, it suggests that the difference in the level of violence between developed and developing countries is not necessarily a result of national wealth.

Due to data constraints, this paper leaves plenty of room for further research opportunities. As more comprehensive and uniform data becomes available, findings will likely become more reliable. In previous research, scholars have theorized that only ethnically polarized countries experience increased levels of violence since ethnically fractionalized countries lack political salience. However, further understanding of ethnic fractionalization and why certain events occur, such as those that took place in Kenya during the 2007 election, in ethnically fractionalized countries could shed light on ethnicity as a factor of political violence. Furthermore, as data becomes more available with time, exploring implications of ethnic diversity on societal levels of violence in election years can provide an avenue for further research.

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