

Who Riots? Explaining Individual Participation in Ethnic Violence

— Dissertation Outline —

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Why do ordinary people decide to participate in ethnic violence, given the potentially high risks involved in fighting? The main argument advanced in the dissertation is that poor people who are centrally located within neighborhood-level social networks are more likely to riot than others once a conflict has begun. I use multiple methods—statistical analysis of an original survey dataset, data from in-depth interviews with riot organizers and participants, and archival data on violent events gathered from Nigeria—to support this argument.

Chapter 1

Introduction: Understanding Ethnic Violence

The introduction opens by building the case that, while the literature to date has produced rich insights into elite incentives to foment ethnic violence, the problem of explaining mass participation on a local scale remains under-explored. I argue that, counter to the implicit assumption across the literature, willing riot participants cannot always be found, suggesting that the question “who riots?” is an important one. Although ethnic riots are highly chaotic events, participation can be studied systematically across riot episodes.

Chapter 2

Poverty, Local Networks and Riot Participation

Following a discussion of scope conditions, this chapter develops a theory of riot participation focusing on neighborhood- and individual-specific characteristics of potential rioters. The theory contains two main components: (i) “push” factors in the form of individual-level poverty, and (ii) the “pull” associated with neighborhood-level networks. The first stage of the theory highlights individual-level traits, such as age, that should predict riot participation. Beyond these features, poverty provides a powerful motivator for rioting, given the opportunity. Once a trigger occurs, however, only a small number of poor people actually does participate in violence. At this point, the “pull” of local networks becomes crucial. People are pulled into street battle if they are embedded in social networks linking them to neighborhood security providers. In contexts of weak state capacity, where riots are especially likely to occur, local leaders are often forced to delegate grassroots policing

to well-connected neighborhood residents. Security providers are the first people to react in the wake of a riot trigger, and mobilize ordinary citizens in their neighborhood to fight. In the uncertain environment of the earliest phase of a riot, security providers become de facto riot organizers and, often over the heads of the leaders who appointed them, call upon people they know to come to the defense of their neighborhood. Ordinary people who are already willing to fight and who are connected to local security providers are especially likely to riot.

Chapter 3

Survey Design: Finding Rioters and Ensuring Reliable Survey Responses

Understanding why people riot requires precise and direct measures of both riot behavior and individual motivations for violence. This chapter describes the design and implementation in 2007 and 2008 of a large-scale survey of former riot participants (and non-participants) in two deadly Christian-Muslims riots in Nigeria: one in Kaduna in 2000, and one in Jos 2001. After a discussion of site selection, this chapter presents novel sampling and question-design strategies to overcome three empirical challenges: (i) What distinguishes a riot participant from a non-rioter?; (ii) How can representative members of the hidden population of rioters be found; and (iii) Once found, how can we obtain reliable responses about their participation in violence? Rioters were located through a unique combination of random and respondent-driving sampling. Participation was measured by asking a series of questions about concrete behavior during discreet riot events. A novel questionnaire design was used to protect anonymity and test for the reliability of answers.

Chapter 4

Survey Evidence: Determinants of Rioting in Kaduna and Jos, 2000-2001

This is the main empirical chapter of the dissertation. Drawing on an original survey of over 800 respondents, and a survey of the universe of neighborhood chiefs in Kaduna and Jos, I first present descriptive evidence comparing rioters and non-rioters in terms of demographic characteristics. This evidence suggests that, contrary to the popular conventional wisdom, riot participants cannot be distinguished on the basis of objective indicators of poverty alone. Because the argument developed in Chapter 2 suggests that both individual- and neighborhood-level characteristics should predict riot participation, I use multi-level regression to test the “push” and “pull” sides of the dissertation’s theory, and to demonstrate that, considered jointly, poverty and network participation are the strongest predictors of rioting. In contrast, alternative explanations that focus on top-down manipulation by political elites, political exclusion at the group level, or levels of pre-riot civic engagement receive only limited empirical support.

Chapter 5

Ethnographic Evidence: Local Networks and Recruitment for Violence

Survey data suggests correlations between individual poverty, local network membership and riot participation. In order to convince the reader that my interpretation of these relationships is correct, I probe qualitative accounts of riot participation gathered during 37

semi-structured interviews with former riot organizers, rioters and non-rioters during July and August 2008. Interview subjects were recruited from a diverse set of neighborhoods, in order to build a fine-grained picture of the way mobilization for fighting worked in different micro-contexts. In this chapter, I use their stories to trace the way in which particular people were recruited to fight in a series of large-scale street battles during the early stages of the riots. The interview data is also used to describe the role of neighborhood security providers in recruiting people to fight, and to make the case this process was opposed by higher-level political actors.

Chapter 6

External Validity: Violent Demonstrations across Nigerian Local Government Areas

This chapter provides an additional test for the main hypotheses developed in Chapter 2, drawing on Nigeria-wide data on a similar but not identical outcome: participation in violent demonstrations. Individual involvement in localized violence is explored using survey responses from the Nigerian Living Standards Survey (NLSS), data on self-reported participation in violent demonstrations collected by Afrobarometer, and data on local government characteristics from a random sample of Nigeria's 773 Local Government Areas (LGAs). Strong support is found for a joint effect of poverty and centrality in local social networks on the likelihood of participation in violent demonstrations and, as in my own survey data, little support is found for arguments linking group-level political exclusion, levels of informal inter-ethnic civic engagement, and other alternative explanations.

Chapter 7

Riot Dynamics

The above chapters treat riot participation as a largely static problem, assuming that the same forms of violence and types of participants are active throughout riots as they unfold. Drawing on interview data, this chapter suggests that the nature of the fighting shifts dramatically from early to late phases of the Kaduna and Jos riots. Early riot fighting takes the form of highly organized, large-scale pitched battles, along major roads and at locations of symbolic importance. Much later in the riots, once military personnel have intervened, the fighting more closely resembles violent crime, as small bands of rioters target particular houses and individuals, fearful of punishment by the armed forces as they continue to fight. The general profile of a rioter also begins to change as the riots unfold. Using survey questions on the timing of violent behavior to identify "early" and "late" rioters, I show that the variation in motives increases as time passes, and ordinary people get drawn into the fighting for a variety of highly context-specific reasons.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

The final chapter concludes with a summary of findings, a discussion of implications for research on ethnic conflict more broadly, and offers suggestions for linking micro-level research on riot participation with macro-level research on riot onset.