

# Statement of Future Research

Alexandra Scacco\*

## Research Interests and Objectives

My research stems from a desire to understand the causes of ethnic conflict, political violence, and other forms of high-risk collective action. While the relevant literature provides an extensive treatment of the macro-level causes of ethnic conflict, research on micro-level dynamics and the causes of *participation* in violence is relatively sparse. Why would ordinary people voluntarily engage in actions that are often fraught with extreme risk? Several recent studies suggest growing scholarly interest in decision-making by everyday individuals during wartime.<sup>2</sup> Building on this work, my dissertation explores the motivations for participation in large-scale ethnic riots from close-range, using ethnographic techniques and the first (to my knowledge) large-scale micro-level survey of riot participation.

Explaining participation in violence often requires the researcher to collect data on highly sensitive topics in data-poor environments. Conducting research in contexts where violence occurs is a difficult task. Reliable quantitative data on the location and timing of conflict events is often in short supply and even basic census figures and socio-economic indicators may be unavailable. My research agenda suggests that these need not be insurmountable obstacles, however, and that we should not shy away from asking difficult questions about participation in violence.

In the sections that follow, I describe two projects in the planning stages that explore the internal dynamics of violence from different angles. The first follows directly from my dissertation research on ethnic riots in Nigeria and investigates theoretical and empirical links between the potential causes of riot onset and participation. The second project examines participation in the context of an ongoing civil war in the Niger Delta.

## Linking the Micro and Macro: Riot Onset and Participation

I argue in my dissertation that a focus on individual motivations is crucial in order to understand the causes of participation in violence. In the case of ethnic riots, willing rioters and coordination through grassroots social networks are important drivers of mass participation. Micro-level studies face important limitations in attempting to explain why conflicts begin, however. In particular, we should ask how factors contributing to riot *onset*

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\*Ph.D. Candidate, Columbia University. als2110@columbia.edu

<sup>2</sup>Researchers in comparative politics have offered explanations for participation in acts of rebellion (Peterson 2001, Wood 2003), genocide (Straus 2006), and non-battle violence during civil wars (Kalyvas 2006).

relate to the determinants of participation and think carefully about the implication of such links for the dissertation's theory about grievances and networks (described in "Current Research"). Do the causes of participation "aggregate up" in a way that offers insight into the question of why riots start in the first place? For example, do localities with certain types of social network structures or certain underlying distributions of economic grievances face a greater risk of riot onset? If micro-macro linkages are more complex, or the causes of onset and participation are only indirectly related, are models of participation that fail to account for the correlates of riot onset incomplete?

To address these questions, I am currently constructing a database of riot events across Nigeria on the basis of a comprehensive record of riot-related articles that were published between 1993 and 2006 in a set of Nigerian newspapers I retrieved from an archive in Abuja. In combination with household demographics data collected by the World Bank through their Nigerian Living Standards Survey (NLSS) and nation-wide survey data from Afrobarometer, this events dataset will allow me to explore the correlates of riot onset and the correlates of participation within the same empirical framework. More specifically, Afrobarometer and the NLSS surveys contain questions about grievances, network participation, and a range of other individual-specific characteristics that can be used to create estimates of these features at the town level. Data on the timing and location of riots can then be used to create outcome variables related to onset, an important subject of study on its own. Findings from the onset study may also prove important in identifying additional predictors that may be missing from my earlier study of riot participation.

## **Violence in the Niger Delta**

During qualitative interviews for my dissertation, I was often asked whether my research on participation in ethnic riots in northern Nigerian cities like Kaduna and Jos offered clues for understanding the ongoing civil war in the Niger Delta region. In addition to its empirical interest, this comparison pushed me to think more concretely about the roles of micro-level dynamics and the larger political context in explaining the *type* of violence we observe. To gain leverage on this question, I teamed up with Aderoju Oyefusi, a professor at Benin University in Nigeria, to design and implement a survey of insurgents in the Niger Delta. The Delta has suffered from low-intensity warfare since the 1980s, but little data has been collected about the characteristics and motivations of individuals participating in this conflict. The study is set to be particularly innovative in the sense that current as well as former combatants will be interviewed, in contrast to most other recent micro-level survey research, which concentrates on ex-combatant samples that are potentially problematic if surviving ex-combatants are significantly different from all combatants. In addition, survey

work on the Delta conflict will allow us to examine up-close what is widely thought to be a classic example of a resource-driven conflict. Understanding the violence in the Niger Delta will allow us to compare the micro-dynamics of this conflict with other recent studies of participation in civil war.<sup>3</sup>

Due to the absence of reliable census data or population lists to use as sampling frame, our sampling strategy will take advantage of publicly available satellite imagery of the region. We will use high-resolution aerial maps of towns in the Delta to measure variation in population density. Conditional on density, we will randomly select a set of map coordinates that we will use to target households for survey recruitment. In the field, we will hire and train survey enumerators to use global positioning system (GPS) locators to find the relevant map coordinates and invite members of target households to participate in our survey. Because low-level conflicts take place in towns and nearby riverine areas, we will use the initial random sample to build household rosters that will help us locate current as well as ex-combatants. The survey will be conducted in three different states in the Niger Delta region in May 2009 with funding from Columbia's Institute of Social and Economic Policy and Research (ISERP).

### **Book Chapters on Nigerian Politics**

In spite of data collection challenges, my research focuses on sub-national variation in Nigeria because of its richness and its relevance for a wide range of social phenomena we care about in comparative politics. I have recently begun work on Nigeria case-study chapters for two edited volumes: *Country Studies in Comparative Politics*, edited by David Samuels (forthcoming from Pearson Longman & Co) and a volume comparing micro-level findings on civil wars and political violence across countries, edited by Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy Weinstein. My chapter in the first book will explore linkages between ethnic cleavages, political institutions and economic development in contemporary Nigeria, while my chapter for the second volume will compare the dynamics of participation in riots and civil war.

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<sup>3</sup>For example, see recently completed ex-combatant surveys on Burundi (Mvukiyeye et al. 2008), Colombia (Arjona and Kalyvas 2007), Sierre Leone (Humphreys and Weinstein 2006) and Uganda (Annan and Blattman 2007).