Elections and Social Conflict in Africa, 1990-2009

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Abstract
Proponents of democratization often claim that liberal institutions have a palliative effect on the level of conflict within societies. Critics, however, suggest that the instruments of democracy, especially elections, can spark political violence, particularly in weakly institutionalized settings. Using the newly available Social Conflict in Africa Database (SCAD), we examine the relationship between executive elections and social conflict in Africa for the period 1990-2009, using country-months as our units of analysis. We also assess the conditions which make elections more or less violent. In particular, we examine elections in countries faced with armed conflict, immediately after armed conflict, elections in autocracies, and in relatively poor countries. Results show that while elections can sometimes spark violence, elections in genuinely democratic contexts are much less conflict-prone. Surprisingly, we do not find that armed conflict on a country's territory makes elections more conflictual. The empirical relationships explored by this paper will provide important insights for policy-makers and several academic literatures, including those of conflict, post-conflict peace, and democratization.

Elections and Social Conflict in Africa, 1990-2009

In December 2007, social tensions exploded across Kenya as a result of a disputed presidential election. Supporters of the challenger, Raila Odinga, alleged electoral fraud and manipulation on the part of the incumbent, Mwai Kibaki. Massive nation-wide riots ensued, exacerbated by the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the country. Ethnic and political violence raged for over two months, ending only in late February 2008 after a power-sharing agreement between Kibaki and Odinga. By that time, an estimated 1,500 people had been killed during the violence.

While the Kenyan case is among the deadliest episodes of electoral violence in Africa in recent decades, it is hardly unique. Nigeria and South Africa have been particularly prone to such behavior. As recently as April 2011, the election of Goodluck Jonathan in Nigeria provided the impetus for ethno-sectarian riots in the country's northern states, resulting in some 500 deaths. An even more dramatic picture of election violence emerges when we consider all forms of social conflict during the months leading up to and immediately after an election. In the days and weeks before and after the April 2007 presidential elections in Nigeria, 165 people were killed in clashes around the country, citizens demonstrated in Lagos after a number of candidates were left off the ballot, a women's activist group protested election rigging, and militants in the Niger Delta attacked the home of the vice president, to name just a few examples. In South Africa, between 1990 and 1994—the final years of Apartheid—clashes between the African National Congress and the Inkatha Freedom Party claimed over 2,000 lives as they competed for influence in the new democracy. While such violence has waned in recent years, organized

demonstrations, riots, and periodic clashes still occur and jeopardize the political process. Newly available data, described below, identifies some 685 events in which disputes over elections were a major source of contention (Salehyan et al 2012).

This paper explores the relationship between executive elections and social conflict. Elections are by nature conflictual events as rival parties compete for power. However, they have the potential to escalate from peaceful, even healthy, political debate to widespread violence and disorder. Such violence is cause for concern by itself, but in addition, it can jeopardize the democratic process and trust in political institutions. While a growing body of literature has explored the relationship between elections and civil war, similar work with respect to elections and other forms of social unrest—such as non-violent protest, riots, and strikes—has been limited. This paper helps to fill that gap. In particular, we seek to examine relationship between elections and social conflict. Moreover, we ask if there are conditions under which elections are more or less likely to become violent. We theorize that elections aggravate societal tensions in weakly institutionalized settings; particularly, in fragile states recovering from civil war, quasi-democratic elections in authoritarian regimes, and elections in countries that have weak state institutions. These hypotheses are assessed using the newly available Social Conflict in Africa Data (SCAD), an events-based dataset containing information on incidents of societal conflict in Africa during the period 1990-2010.

The following section discusses the current literature and presents our hypotheses regarding elections and violence in Africa. In particular we argue that elections will be associated with greater conflict and violence, but that such conflict is mitigated by stable, competent political institutions. Then we turn to some descriptive data and trends regarding African elections. Next, we discuss the data and methods we employ in our quantitative

analysis. The fourth section presents our empirical results, demonstrating a strong link between elections and conflict. However, we show that while elections during and after civil war periods are not necessarily more violent, those elections in non-democratic settings experience significant conflict. The final section discusses our conclusions and policy implications. It is important to stress here that on normative and practical grounds, we believe that elections are very important political processes that give average citizens voice in the political processes. Even if elections are sometimes associated with violence, the consequences of limiting voice can be worse. Rather, the main lesson of our research is that elections must be coupled with other meaningful democratic institutions and capacity-building.

Elections and Electoral Violence

Elections have been advanced as a means through which to counter political violence and social conflict, and particularly as a way to achieve peace after the conclusion of a civil war. Indeed, since the conclusion of the Cold War, there has been increased emphasis on regularly-held elections, overseen by international observers (Hyde 2011); and elections have been important elements of negotiated settlements between civil war combatants (Kumar 1998; Hartzell and Hoddie 2003; Carothers 2007). Moreover, some contend that democracy, of which elections are only one component, is among the surest ways to prevent civil war (Hegre et al 2001), although others emphasize that democracy is likely to fail if other institutional mechanisms such as constraints on executive power are not in place (Collier 2009; Gates et al 2006). As a result, significant literatures have emerged in the academic, policy-making, and advocacy communities, which see elections and democratization as important tools of conflict management.

Generally speaking, the argument in favor of elections and democratization, especially in post-conflict societies, makes both normative appeals and empirical assessments (Barnes 2001). In general, the argument proceeds as follows. Democracy and elections are desirable as they provide ordinary citizens a say in the decisions that most directly affect their lives. The ability to participate in the political process, organize into parties and interest groups, and go to the polls is a fundamental human right. In addition, democracy promotes internal peace by institutionalizing political competition, effectively trading bullets for the ballot box. This trade-off, moreover, aids political elites by providing them with an incentive to avoid repressing their opponents, and for the challengers to avoid the use of force (Diamond 2008; Jarstad and Sisk 2008; Collier 2009). Social actors can pursue their demands and address legitimate grievances through non-violent political processes. Absent the ability to vote for one's leaders through democratic processes, people may be more inclined to use violence to achieve their goals. This perspective, then, conceives of the choice between voting and violence as both a strategic substitutes and a strategic complement. Incomplete democratization may cause political actors to complement participation with violence, or to even substitute violence for participation entirely (Dunning 2011).

The pacifying effect of democracy has found quite a bit of empirical support in the literature on civil and interstate conflict. Scholars have shown that democracies are more peaceful in international affairs (e.g. Doyle 1986; Lake 1992; Schultz 1999), and are less likely to experience civil war (Hegre et al 2001; Hegre and Sambanis 2006). This conventional wisdom has found considerable support among scholars and has shaped the foreign policy of states. Such reasoning contributed to early elections following the US invasion of Afghanistan

and Iraq, for example.[1] Moreover, Lyons (2002) argues that setting an election date signals to international third parties the likely end date of peacekeepinging missions, thus encouraging them to contribute to the effort. Democratization and early elections also encourage the international community to increase foreign aid outlays (Knack 2004; Finkel et al 2007; Scott and Steele 2011). As Hyde (2011) argues, international donors are increasingly tying aid allocations to free and fair elections, even if incumbent regimes are not serious about the democratization process.

While elections are a laudable goal, they can also be fraught with problems. While full-fledged democracy may be peace-promoting, elections are only one component of democratic regimes. Elections encourage mobilization into rival political camps, the airing of grievances, and competition for power. One prominent line of argument holds that elections in illiberal states provide incentives for political elites to mobilize their supporters along ethnic and nationalist lines, and then to initiate interstate or intrastate violence (Huntington 1968; Mansfield and Snyder 1995, 2005; Zakaria 1997; Snyder 2000). Huntington (1968) makes a powerful argument that encouraging full political participation and competition while state institutions are still weak can lead to political instability. Indeed, illiberal and weak states often lack the conditions necessary for peaceful political participation. The challenge of democracy is that competition must be moderated such that all actors have an incentive to 'play by the rules' rather than circumvent constitutional procedures. Assurances must be provided that elections will not be rigged and losers must be convinced to accept defeat and wait for the next opportunity.

[1] For instance, according to a speech by George W. Bush in Afghanistan, "Democracies yield peace, and that's what we want. What's going to happen in Afghanistan is a neighborhood that has been desperate for light instead of darkness is going to see what's possible when freedom arrives." See: President Thanks US and Coalition Troops in Afghanistan, 1 March, 2006.
URL: http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/03/20060301-3.html <access data March 9, 2012>

Accordingly, democracies are more likely to survive when there is a well developed economy, a robust civic culture, constitutional safeguards, and institutions that are able to channel social conflict (Lipset 1959; Almond and Verba 1963; Dahl 1972; Lijphart 1977, 1999; Przeworski et al 2001; Acemoglu and Robinson 2006).

Underdeveloped, illiberal, and post-conflict states contain none of these traits. Poverty and fragile political institutions undermine the level of trust in society (Delhey and Newton 2005; Delhey 2003) and destroy the productive capacity of the economy (Collier 1999; Kang and Meernik 2005). Civil war states--already poor to begin with—often see a significant reduction in economic well-being, in addition to the hardening of social cleavages (Fearon and Laitin 2000). The DRC provides a powerful contemporary example. Hundreds died in the months surrounding the first post-conflict election in 2006. Even in 2011, almost a full decade after the official end of the civil war, repression and election riots caused dozens of deaths. In sum, then, international efforts are often focused on encouraging early elections in post-conflict states, but those same efforts may increase likelihood and magnitude of political violence. Therefore, some argue that it is better to wait until other state institutions have had a chance to develop before holding elections (Paris 1997, 2004; Brancati and Snyder 2011; Flores and Nooruddin 2012).

These problems are particularly significant in Africa. Even in states that have not experienced a civil war, Lindberg (2003) and Bratton (2008) argue that elections resemble a neo-patrimonial struggle over access to power and the resources. Because the control over the state yields real benefits and access to resources—the private sector is often weak—politicians resort to a variety of means to remain in power, or to seize it. African elections, then, become moments for politicians to mobilize their followers, manipulate election law, and indulge in vote buying, intimidation, and violence. Wilkinson (2004) similarly argues that with respect to India, ethnic

riots allow politicians to play on the fears of voters and thus mobilize support for candidates and parties. Electoral coercion is particularly significant in Nigeria, where nearly one in ten persons had direct experience with electoral violence or intimidation during the April 2007 election (Bratton 2008). Bratton's (2008) analysis of Nigerian survey data shows that although violence reduces turnout, voters commonly resist electoral intimidation. They may feign compliance with intimidation, while refusing in practice. Nonetheless, that such harassment occurs at all should be cause for concern.

In summarizing this literature, it is important to note that most of the quantitative analyses focus on war, generally concluding that early post-war elections, if improperly implemented, can increase the likelihood of civil war recurrence. Less has been said about other forms of political violence and contentious actions, such as riots and protests. Part of the problem has to do with data availability. Little data is available on a cross-national basis, aside from the commonly used datasets on war (e.g. Correlates of War and the Uppsala Armed Conflict Data). Studies of violence falling short of war typically rely on data collected in one country (e.g. Wilkinson 2004; Bratton 2008). What little cross-national data that exists on low level violence, such as the Cross-National Time-Series Archive (Banks 2011), lacks sufficient detail to disaggregate events by issue type; thus, it is difficult, if not impossible, to discern events that are truly election related from other types of action.

Hypotheses on Electoral Violence

In this paper we assess two interrelated questions. First, we ask if there is a general association between election periods and political unrest. Second, we are interested in uncovering factors that mediate or exacerbate the effect of elections on conflict. To address the

first question, we are interested in whether or not there is an increase in social conflict events immediately before, during, and after election periods. We are especially interested in elections that determine control of the executive: presidential elections in presidential systems and parliamentary elections in which the dominant party chooses the prime minister. Local or regional elections may follow a similar logic, but elections for the executive are very high profile and mobilize actors across the country. Therefore, they are more likely to be high-stakes contests.

We argue that, at least in the African context, elections are associated with more civil unrest. This should come as no surprise as even in well-established, developed democracies, election periods are marked by a high level of political engagement, rival parties competing for power, and greater scrutiny of the democratic process. Even in an established democracy like the United States, complaints of voter intimidation are common.[2] However, due to factors such as the weakness of institutions such as police forces, electoral commissions, and the judiciary; widespread poverty and illiteracy; deep ethnic cleavages; and a relatively weak civil society, we believe that Africa is particularly prone to election-related violence. Therefore, our first hypothesis is stated as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Election periods are associated with greater social conflict.

Note that we are comparing election periods--defined as months before, during, and after elections--with non-election periods as the comparison category. It is relatively easy to show—as we do below—that there is a strong correlation between social conflict events, violent deaths, and elections. Our main purpose, then, is to establish the magnitude of the effect and determine

[2] See, http://projectvote.org/voter-intimidation.html , for examples. Access date, March 9, 2012.

a baseline for comparison. We make no claim, however, that elections are normatively undesirable, even if they correlate with violence. Elections are important means of political expression, especially if coupled with other democratic institutions. Even if elections do spark some political violence, long-term disenfranchisement can ultimately be worse for political stability. While this is not something we directly test, others have shown that full-blown civil war, state failure, genocide, and gross violations of human rights are more likely to occur in undemocratic regimes (e.g. Davenport 1999; Poe and Tate 1994; Harff 2003). Rather, we seek to establish a first-order link between elections and social conflict and turn our focus to factors which reduce the potential for electoral violence.

Our second concern pertains to social and institutional features which can contain electoral violence. Following Huntington (1968), many analysts believe that elections and the resulting political mobilization are conducive to violence in countries where the institutional capacity to contain conflict is low. For example, strong, robust judiciaries and electoral commissions can settle disputes pertaining to claims of electoral fraud and manipulation. Capable, independent police forces that respect human rights can ensure that peaceful protests do not degenerate into violence. Moreover, a high degree of social trust and experience with democracy ensures that losers continue to "play by the rules" and wait until the next opportunity to run for office. Over time, repeated elections can establish the conditions necessary for stable democracy, although it may take several iterations before strong institutions are formed (Lindberg 2006).

While weak institutions, corruption, and neo-patrimonialism are common to many African states, we believe that the civil war and post-war contexts, in particular, have characteristics that make states more prone to election-related violence. During and after a civil

war, social trust is particularly low as combatants have just recently put down their arms. Political institutions have not had time to develop and mature. Moreover, the country's economy is often in shambles. These conditions have frequently been argued to be conducive to civil war onset, recurrence, and the breakdown of public order (Paris 1997, 2004; Cederman et al 2010; Brancati and Snyder 2009, 2011; Flores and Nooruddin 2012). Yet while others have focused on civil war—organized, armed violence against the state—we believe that this emphasis is too narrow. Actors may continue to pursue their aims through political violence, even if this does not lead to guerrilla attacks and conflict on the field of battle. Rather, rival political actors can mobilize their followers in the street, through peaceful protest or rioting and looting. In addition, elections encourage other actors, not involved in the war itself, to present themselves and contest for power. These parties may have no taste for rebellion itself, but can become the target of attacks or their followers can use sporadic violence and intimidation.

In addition to the post-civil war context, elections under autocratic regimes will also be conflict-prone. While autocratic elections may seem like an oxymoron, Jennifer Gandhi (2008) demonstrates that a wide variety of regime types use elections, even if they do not lead to a meaningful alternation of power. Although not free and fair, elections have been held in a number of quite repressive countries in Africa such as Sudan, Zimbabwe, and the Central African Republic. Elections in dictatorships are what Gates et al (2006) call, "inconsistent institutions". That is, democratic institutions coexist with authoritarian ones. Autocrats often hold elections in order to satisfy the minimal demands of external constituents such as foreign governments, international agencies, and non-governmental organizations (Hyde 2010). Yet, these elections are often meaningless, as the outcome is manipulated through intimidation and fraud. This institutional inconsistency is dangerous in that while rival parties are allowed to

organize and publically air their grievances and demands, the outcome is rigged to favor incumbents. Dashed expectations, a high degree of political organization, and grievances over unfair practices are an especially potent recipe for conflict.

Finally, elections in "weak states" may cause greater instability. Countries characterized by poverty, illiteracy, low administrative and bureaucratic capability, and a weak middle class, may be more prone to the type of instability that often come with elections. Democratic institutions are more likely to thrive in countries that already have a minimum degree of economic development (Lipset 1959; Przeworski et al 2000). Electoral violence may be more common in the poorest countries because they lack the means to effectively and fairly carry out basic tasks such as administering polls. Moreover, extreme poverty and illiteracy may make it easier for leaders to play to ethnic fears and to mobilize more "thuggish" elements responsible for intimidation and harassment.

In short, the literature suggests that while strong democratic institutions make countries more peaceful, the political competition that characterizes election periods may spark violence. Thus, election periods are likely to be more conflict-ridden than other periods. However, this effect is likely to be especially pronounced when other instability-promoting factors are present. In particular, elections during and after civil conflicts are likely to trigger violence because antipathies continue to run high, fear of exploitation is present, and nascent state institutions still do not have the wherewithal to contain conflict. Elections in undemocratic systems will also spark more conflict as they encourage parties to mobilize, but with little meaningful voice. Finally, elections in countries that are poor and suffer from weak bureaucratic capacity are more likely to lead to violence as state institutions do not have the ability to competently hold regular polls. These additional, interactive, hypotheses are listed below.

Hypothesis 2: Elections during and immediately following civil wars are more conflict-prone that other elections.

Hypothesis 3: Elections in autocratic regimes are more conflict-prone than elections in democracies.

Hypothesis 4: Elections in poor countries are more conflict-prone than elections in wealthier countries.

Patterns of Elections and Violence in Africa

Before we proceed to a statistical analysis of our main hypotheses, we describe a new dataset, the Social Conflict in Africa Database (SCAD), and present some summary statistics on elections and violence. SCAD is an event dataset, which covers the entire continent of Africa from 1990-2010.[3] It contains information on over 7,000 unique conflict events, including peaceful protests, violent riots, labor strikes, attacks by government forces, organized armed violence against the state, organized armed violence against non-state actors, and violence between factions of the government (e.g. coups, mutinies). The data are compiled from keyword searches of Associated Press and Agence France Press newswire services. The variables in the database include information on event start and end dates, the type of action, the actors and targets involved, the number of participants, the number of deaths, event locations, and event issues (see Salehyan et al, 2012 and www.scaddata.org) for full details. Of particular interest for us are conflicts that are specifically about elections. Indeed, one of the "issue"

[3] The SCAD 2011 update will be released shortly.

categories in SCAD specifically pertains to elections.[4] Therefore, in Figure 1, we examine the frequency of conflict events in general as well as the frequency of conflicts that are specifically about elections. While conflicts directly related to elections are a relatively small share of conflicts over all, the proportion has been increasing overtime. During the 1990s, electoral conflicts constituted an average of 7.6% of all conflicts, while in the 2000s that number increased to 10.1%. This in large part reflect the growing frequency of elections in Africa, as democratic and non-democratic regimes alike are holding regular polls.

FIGURE 1 HERE

Although the number of conflict events is useful to know, not all events are violent and disruptive. Therefore, for some purposes it is more useful to look at the number of deaths rather than the number of events themselves as violence is much more likely to threaten state institutions, dampen social trust, and undermine the democratic process. Therefore, in Figure 2, we report the number of deaths where elections were specifically mentioned as an issue underlying the violence. As can be seen there are two large spikes. The first occurs in 1993, where roughly 1,000 people died in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (then Zaire). Although the elections were held the year before, clashes in Shaba between rival ethnic groups continued for some time and grievances over disputed elections were one of the main drivers of the violence. The second spike occurs after the flawed Kenyan election in December, 2007. This is the single most violent election event in Africa, resulting in over 1,500 deaths. In Table 1, we report the top-ten most violent elections in Africa, as measured by the number of deaths that occur during election periods. Yet, it would be inappropriate to conclude that elections are

[4] SCAD lists up the three issues at stake in the conflict.

always associated with violence. Rather, while 1/3 of all election months witnessed some deaths, the remaining 2/3 remained peaceful.[5]

FIGURE 2 HERE

TABLE 1 HERE

Above, we claimed that elections are likely to be more violent and conflict-ridden in certain contexts than in others. In particular, we claimed that elections in authoritarian systems and those in the context of an ongoing or recently-ended civil war are most likely to be associated with violence. Yet, how common are such elections? In Table 2, we display a cross-tabulation of the number of months with and without executive elections in countries that are ranked as democratic and non-democratic, according to the Polity IV project (Marshall and Jaggers 2010). Polity IV scores countries from least democratic (-10) to most democratic (+10) on different institutional dimensions; countries at six or above are generally considered to be "democracies". While, as is to be expected, democratic regimes have more frequent elections (held in 2.13% of country-months), the majority of elections in Africa are held in undemocratic systems (92 of 144). In Table 3, we display elections held in conflicts with civil wars that are ongoing and those elections in countries where a civil war ended within 24 months. The definition of a civil war comes from the Uppsala University Armed Conflicts Database (Gleditsch et al 2001), and includes organized armed violence resulting in at least 25 battle-related deaths.

[5] Out of the 9,884 country-months in our dataset, 144 were election months. Of the non-election months, 14% experienced violence while of the election months, 33% experienced violence. Although the frequency of political violence may be higher during election periods, we stress that the vast majority of elections in Africa are relatively peaceful.

TABLE 2 HERE

TABLE 3 HERE

Data and Methods

In this section, we discuss our sources of data and our statistical methodology. Our units of analysis are all countries in Sub-Saharan Africa with a population of 1million or more; our temporal units are the country-month, from 1990 to 2009.[6] Our dependent variables come from the Social Conflict in Africa Database. In particular, we are interested in three outcomes. *Total events*, is a count of all events that occur in the country for that particular month. We include two separate variables to account for political violence. *Violent events* are the count of SCAD events in which the actor deliberately used violence; more specifically, we exclude peaceful protests and strikes from the count. *Deaths* is the number of deaths that occur during the country-month. In most cases, SCAD records the number of people killed, or a best estimate from news reports. However, in other cases the number of deaths was unknown. "Unknown" deaths are recorded as, "unknown," "unknown/probably small" and, "unknown/probably large". Probably large deaths were set at 100, probably small deaths were set to 5, and completely unknown cases were imputed using the panel average.[7]

Our main independent variable of interest is coded one for *election* months and zero otherwise. Here, we are interested in elections that determine the outcome of the executive; namely, those that directly elect the president or determine the prime minister in parliamentary systems (e.g. Botswana, Ethiopia). While legislative and local elections are undoubtedly important, executive elections mobilize large segments of the population, are of

[6] Although SCAD data exist for more recent years, our other independent variables limit our analysis to 2009.
[7] In all, only 182/7,321 (or 2.5%) of the events were so imputed.

higher profile, and are of higher stakes. In countries where there are multiple rounds of elections that span multiple months, all election rounds (usually two) are considered election months. In some models we also include variables for the *month prior* and the *month after* the election to account for pre-and-post election violence. In models not shown, as robustness tests, we include dummy variables for election periods, considered to be the election month itself and 1 and 3 months before and after the election (or 3 and 7 months in total). Our elections data come from the African Elections Database (http://africanelections.tripod.com/).

We also include variables for *civil war, post civil war,* and *democracy,* along with multiplicative interaction terms of each with the elections variable. The variable *civil war* is dichotomous indicator of whether there is (1) or is not (0) a civil conflict on the country's territory in that month. Data come from the Uppsala University/PRIO Armed Conflicts dataset (Gleditsch et al 2001), and includes all conflicts that result in 25 or more battle deaths in a given year. *Post war,* is simply a dichotomous indicator coded 1 for each of the 12 months following the end of an armed conflict. In alternative specifications, we have expanded this to 24 months. *Democracy* is also a dichotomous indicator, which is coded 1 for countries with a Polity IV score of 6 or above.

To account for poverty and weak state capacity, we include the log of the country's *GDP per capita*. In some models we interact this variable with elections to test whether or not elections in poor countries are more conflict-prone than others. We also include a control variable for *population* (logged). These data are from the Penn World Tables 6.3 (Heston, Summers, and Aten 2009). As an additional control we include the country's ethno-linguistic fractionalization to account for the possibility that ethnic diversity leads to more conflict (Fearon 2003).

Finally, media bias often plagues data that are based on coding news accounts (Hug 2003; Ortiz et al 2005). Media coverage is often stronger in some countries than in others because international audiences care more about countries that are politically and economically significant and because press restrictions limit access to journalists in some places. In part, this is corrected for by the variables mentioned above and by the sources in SCAD. Newswire agencies do not have the space constraints that newspapers have, and thus have fewer restrictions in deciding what is "fit to print". In addition, more populous countries with sizeable economies—such as South Africa, Nigeria, and Kenya—attract more media attention.[8] Democratic states are less likely to limit press freedom. News agencies may also be attracted to countries with more political violence. These factors are directly accounted for in our models. However, we include an additional control to partly correct for underreporting bias. Using the inverse of the keyword search methodology employed by SCAD, we search for articles that are explicitly *not* about conflict.[9] In this manner, we record the number of articles about non-conflict events for each country-year, in order to gauge how frequently a country is reported on in general. This tells us how important a country is to the media, irrespective of social conflict. We then create a variable for *media quartiles*, which bins the frequency of reporting into four categories from lowest to highest.

Because of the structure of our data, we use a time-series cross-sectional negative binomial model to estimate our models. Negative binomial models are appropriate for count data (i.e. counts of events and deaths) when there is concern with overdispersion in the distribution of the data. For all three of our variables the variance is much larger than the mean, and diagnostic tests indicate that the negative binomial model is preferable to other event count

[8] See data from the Global Attention Profiles (GAP) project: http://gapdev.law.harvard.edu/

[9] SCAD searches are based on five keywords, "protest," "riot," "strike," "violence," and "attack". In order to create the media coverage variable, we use Boolean operators to search for articles that do NOT contain these words.

models such as the Poisson. To correct for non-independence between observations within the same country panel, we employ random effects. Random-effects negative binomial models also allow for random dispersion parameters between groups. Finally, to address the temporal nature of our data, we include three lags of the dependent variable in all cases.

Rather than standard coefficients, which can be difficult to interpret in negative binomial models since they are expressed in log odds, we report the incidence rate ratio (IRR). The IRR has a simple and intuitive interpretation around the ratio, 1:1. Ratios greater than one indicate that the variable has a positive effect while less than one indicates a negative effect. For example, an IRR of 2 indicates that a one-unit increase in the independent variable *doubles* the frequency of events, holding all else constant. An IRR of 0.5 indicates that a similar increase *halves* the frequency of events.

Results

Table 4 reports the main effect of elections on our three dependent variables. Models 1-3 employ the various dependent variables for total events, violent events and the number of deaths. Models 4-6 report the same results, but with additional measures for the months before and after the election month itself. Across all models, Hypothesis 1 is supported. There is a positive, and statistically significant relationship between election months and social conflict. Moreover, the magnitude of the effect is quite large. The incidence rate ratios indicate that the frequency of *total events* nearly doubles during election months. However, *violent events* and the number of *deaths* increase 2.5 and 3 times over the baseline, respectively. Looking at the months before and after elections yields some interesting nuance in these results. The month before an election increases the number of total events and violent events, but not the number of deaths. The month

after the election is not significantly related to total events or the number of deaths, but it does somewhat *decrease* the number of violent events. This should perhaps not be surprising since the majority of post-election violence occurs within a few days of the poll and would be recorded in the election month itself. Moreover, there may be a conflict "fatigue" effect that spills over into the following month, which would depress the number of incidents.[10]

As for our controls, we note that the number of violent events diminishes somewhat during a civil war. However it is important to note that SCAD does not contain information on individual battle events during armed conflict, which would undoubtedly push these numbers higher. Across all models, the 12 months after a civil war witnesses greater social conflict. As expected, social conflict decreases in countries that are democracies and increases in more populous countries. The effect of GDP is somewhat ambiguous, however. While wealthier countries experience somewhat fewer conflict events, the number of death increases with the level of wealth. Ethnic diversity, as measured by ELF, reduces the number of violent incidents as well as the number of deaths. While this may be surprising, others have noted that ethnic diversity by itself is not a cause of conflict, especially if there are many groups that are relatively small in size. Ethnic conflict is especially likely in those cases where large groups compete for power and when significant segments of the population are excluded from state institutions (Reynal-Querol 2002; Posner 2004; Buhaug, Cederman and Rod, 2008). Finally, our measure of media attention demonstrates that more media coverage of a particular country also increases reporting on violent events, providing some indication of media detection.

[10] In alternative models, not shown, we include an indicator for 3 month and 7 month election periods. This is simply a dummy variable which includes the 1 and 3 months before, during, and after the election, respectively. Doing so does not alter the statistical significance of our results, although the magnitude of the coefficients decreases with longer periods, as less violent pre and post periods dilute the main effect of the election month.

TABLE 4 HERE

In Table 5, we examine the same three dependent variables as before, but include interaction terms between elections and, 1) civil war; 2) post civil war; 3) democracy; 4) GDP. First, across all specifications (except model 12), the primary effect of elections still continues to be positive and statistically significant. In addition, all of our control variables behave largely as they did before. Models 1-3 examine the interaction between elections and current civil wars. Interestingly, we find that there is a positive and significant interaction between elections and civil war, but only for *total events.* There does not appear to be a strong relationship between elections in conflict zones and violent events or the number of deaths. These results must be taken with a grain of salt, however, as they cannot account for the increasing intensity of the civil war itself. It may be the case that elections in civil war affected countries increase the severity of violence in ways that are particular to the interaction between the government and the rebels, which is not accounted for in our data. As for violence in society in general, however, we do not find that such elections cause more violence.

Models 4-6 examine the post war period. Here we do not find any statistically significant interactive effects, indicating that the post conflict period does not make elections any more or less violent. While many have examined the prospects for civil war recurrence, there are equally strong arguments that early post-conflict elections lead to more social conflict and instability in general because of the weakness of state institutions. Surprisingly, we do not find that to be the case. Indeed, some of the most violent elections in our data, such as elections in Kenya and Zimbabwe did not occur immediately after a civil war. In alternative models, not reported, we expanded the definition of "post war" to include the 24 months following conflict termination.

We do not note any changes in our results with respect to the number of events. We did find, however, that when expanding the time frame for post conflict, there is a statistically significant and *negative* interactive effect between elections and the post conflict period. While this says nothing about the prospects for the recurrence of civil war, it does suggest that post war elections do not necessarily cause more general disorder than other elections.

Models 7-9 look at the interaction between democracy and elections. As we note above, many elections in Africa are held in non-democratic systems. The interaction terms are negative and significant for total events and violent events, but not for the number of deaths. Summing the coefficients indicates that election periods are indeed more conflict-prone, and this holds regardless of regime type. However, the rate of conflict events is greatly diminished—by more than half—when countries are genuinely democratic and have the additional institutional features of democracy. Therefore, it is important to stress democracy as a complete package of policies and institutions, rather than urge elections by themselves. The lack of a significant finding for the number of deaths may indicate that there are different processes that account for the onset of a violent event and how deadly those events eventually become.

The final three models examine elections in wealthier versus poorer countries. We argued above that GDP is a proxy for institutional capacity as well as more general features of society associated with "modernization", such as a more urban and better educated workforce. We show that elections in wealthier countries, modeled by the interaction between elections and GDP per capita, are less conflict prone. This holds when looking at the number of events in total, and the number of violent events. But as with the previous models, model 12 does not show a significant result for the number of deaths.

We ran a series of robustness tests in models not reported. In particular, we distinguished between political events and non-political events using the issue categories in SCAD. We found, as is to be expected, elections significantly raise the probability of political events (IRR=5.5) but do not affect non-political events. This makes us more confident that the increase in conflict is directly due to elections themselves. Finally, the December, 2007 elections in Kenya may be exceptional as they resulted in the greatest number of deaths by far and led to indictments by the International Criminal Court. In models not shown, we ran our models by dropping the observation for Kenya, December 2007 and by dropping Kenya altogether. Our main results do not change substantially given the exclusion of this potential outlier.

Discussion and Conclusion

Our results support our main conjecture that elections in Africa are often associated with social conflict and violence. Africa is not unique in this regard as there has been significant electoral violence in other places such as Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, India, and Thailand, among others. However, it is important to stress that the vast majority of African elections pass without significant acts of violence. Therefore, the implication of our study is not that elections are bad per se. We believe that genuine elections are very important political processes that confer legitimacy to state institutions and allow voters to hold their governments accountable. Rather, it is important to look at the conditions under which electoral violence can be contained and how to prevent legitimate political competition from deteriorating into violence.

We argued that weak institutional environments are particularly likely to witness violent elections. We were, however, somewhat surprised to find that elections during and immediately after civil war are not necessarily more violence-prone, at least when it comes to riots and small-

scale attacks. It may still be the case that early post-conflict elections are more likely to result in civil war recurrence, as has been demonstrated by others (Flores and Nooruddin 2012). Therefore, such countries are not out of the woods. We did find strong evidence that elections in wealthier countries are correlated with fewer conflict incidents, confirming the long-held notion that economic development is conducive to democratic institutions.

From a policy standpoint, perhaps our most important finding is that while elections alone can lead to instability, conflict can be mitigated when other democratic processes and institutional safeguards are in place. While elections are the hallmark of democracy, they are not sufficient. Constitutional guarantees for minority rights, appropriate checks and balances, strong judiciaries, competent electoral commissions, and respect for civil liberties, together with regularly held polls, are important features of democracy. Therefore, as the international community urges countries to hold free and fair elections—itself a laudable goal—it should also stress other institutional reforms that are part of the complete package of democracy.

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Figure 1. All Conflict Events and Events Related to Elections, 1990-2010

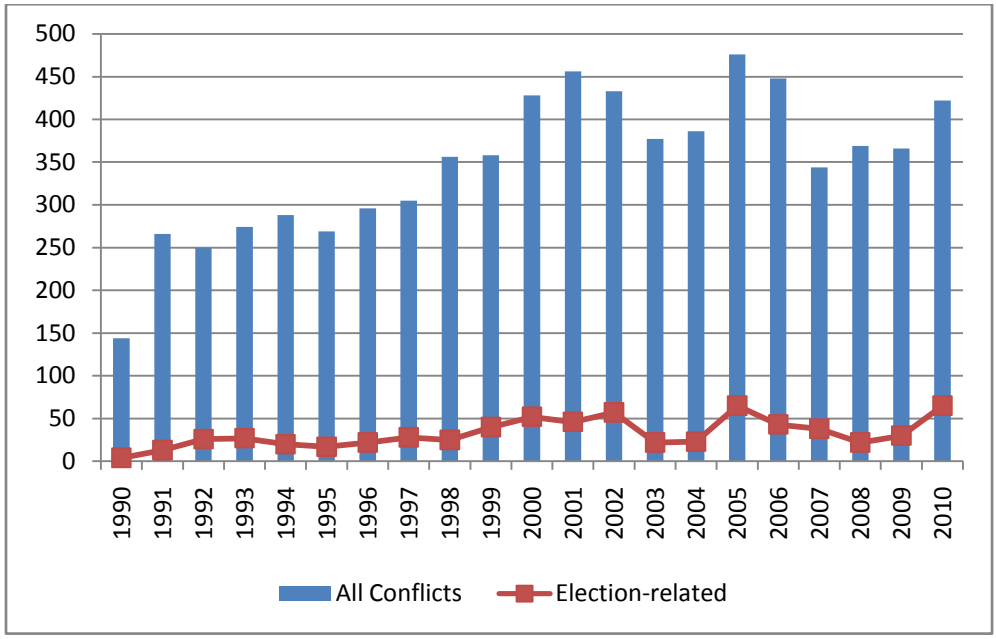

Figure 2. Election-related deaths in Africa, 1990-2010.

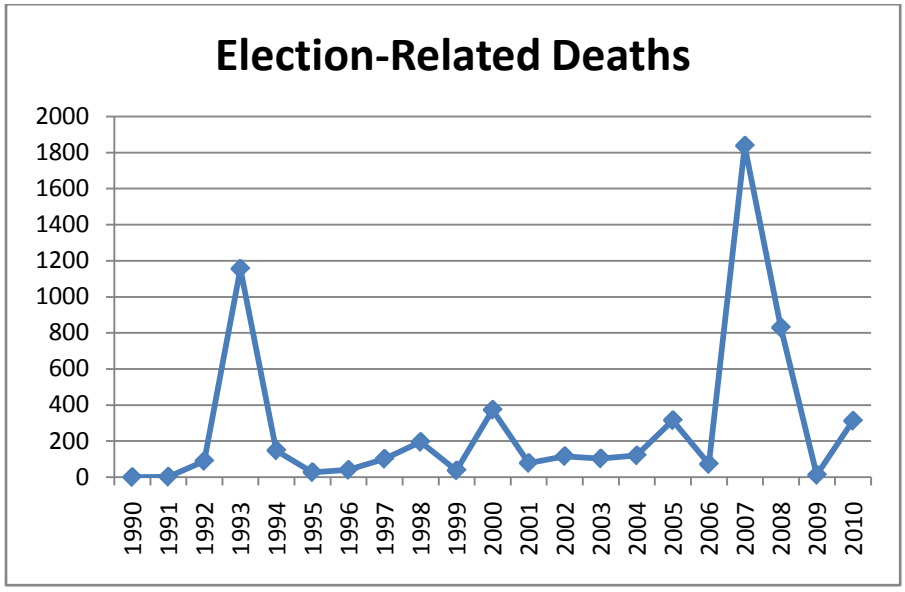

Table 1. Top 10 Most Violent Election Months[11]

Country	Date	Deaths
Kenya	December, 2007	1502
South Africa	April, 1994	239
Nigeria	April, 2007	226
Cote d'Ivoire	October, 2000	178
Kenya	December, 1992	156
Zimbabwe	March, 2008	114
Togo	April, 2005	110
Nigeria	April, 2003	57
DRC	October, 2006	42
Sierra Leone	February, 1996	28

[11] The number of deaths listed may not have all occurred during the election month itself. Rather, the violence may spill over into the following month. For example riots in Kenya following the 2007 election begin in December, but the riots last for several weeks. Therefore, many of the recorded deaths occur in subsequent months and the listed deaths refer to events which *begin* in that month.

Table 2. Elections in Democracies and Autocracies

	Democracy		
Election	No	Yes	Total
No	7,276	2,384	9,660
Yes	92	52	144
Total	7,368	2,436	9,804
% of Months w/Election	1.25%	2.13%	1.49%

Table 3. Elections with Civil War Ongoing and Within 24 Months of War Termination

Elections with Ongoing Civil War	Elections within 24 Months of War End
Angola, 1992	Chad, 1996
Chad, 2001	Guinea Bissau, 1999
Chad, 2006	Guinea Bissau, 2000
Ethiopia, 1995	Guinea, 2003
Ethiopia, 2000	Liberia, 1997
Ethiopia, 2005	Mozambique, 1994
Niger, 1996	Niger, 1993
Senegal, 1993	Niger, 1996
Sierra Leone, 1996	Niger, 1999
Sudan, 1996	Rwanda, 2003
Sudan, 2000	Sierra Leone, 2002
Uganda, 2001	
Uganda, 2006	

Table 4. Regression results. Elections and Social Conflict in Africa.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
VARIABLES	Total Events	Violent Events	Deaths	Total Events	Violent Events	Deaths
Election	1.974***	2.521***	3.017***	1.979***	2.523***	3.013***
	(0.173)	(0.263)	(0.437)	(0.173)	(0.265)	(0.437)
Civil War	0.906	0.759***	0.922	0.908	0.762***	0.922
	(0.0559)	(0.0640)	(0.0646)	(0.0560)	(0.0642)	(0.0646)
Post War $_{(12\ mo)}$	1.176**	1.304***	1.612***	1.177**	1.306***	1.611***
	(0.0850)	(0.118)	(0.172)	(0.0851)	(0.118)	(0.172)
Democracy	0.768***	0.705***	0.762***	0.766***	0.702***	0.763***
	(0.0450)	(0.0566)	(0.0612)	(0.0449)	(0.0564)	(0.0612)
Ln(Pop)	1.240***	1.432***	1.683***	1.247***	1.448***	1.683***
	(0.0608)	(0.0966)	(0.0576)	(0.0614)	(0.0979)	(0.0576)
Ln(GDP)	0.907**	0.796***	1.103**	0.909**	0.800***	1.104**
	(0.0429)	(0.0526)	(0.0462)	(0.0431)	(0.0529)	(0.0462)
ELF	1.055	0.557**	0.422***	1.064	0.555**	0.422***
	(0.232)	(0.162)	(0.0573)	(0.235)	(0.162)	(0.0573)
Media Quartiles	1.369***	1.374***	1.397***	1.368***	1.372***	1.398***
	(0.0329)	(0.0451)	(0.0456)	(0.0329)	(0.0451)	(0.0456)
Month Prior				1.448***	1.588***	1.094
				(0.166)	(0.230)	(0.258)
Month After				0.818	0.647**	0.824
				(0.110)	(0.131)	(0.221)
DV $_{(t-1)}$	1.085***	1.117***	1.000***	1.083***	1.114***	1.000***
	(0.00829)	(0.0149)	(9.82e-05)	(0.00824)	(0.0147)	(9.79e-05)
DV $_{(t-2)}$	1.041***	1.074***	1.000**	1.043***	1.080***	1.000**
	(0.00862)	(0.0145)	(0.000106)	(0.00870)	(0.0146)	(0.000106)
DV $_{(t-3)}$	1.058***	1.086***	1.000*	1.058***	1.086***	1.000*
	(0.00844)	(0.0146)	(0.0001)	(0.00842)	(0.0147)	(0.000109)
Constant	0.162***	0.129***	0.000138***	0.152***	0.115***	0.000138***
	(0.0821)	(0.0895)	(5.45e-05)	(0.0772)	(0.0794)	(5.45e-05)
Observations	9,597	9,597	9,597	9,597	9,597	9,597
Clusters	40	40	40	40	40	40

Table 5. Regression Results. Elections interacted with conflict, democracy and GDP.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
VARIABLES	Total Events	Violent Events	Deaths	Total Events	Violent Events	Deaths	Total Events	Violent Events	Deaths	Total Events	Violent Events	Deaths
Election*Civil War	1.998***	1.657	1.099									
	(0.499)	(0.570)	(0.424)									
Election*Post War				1.099	1.039	0.348						
				(0.608)	(0.755)	(0.354)						
Election*Democracy							0.414***	0.489***	1.094			
							(0.0829)	(0.118)	(0.344)			
Election*GDP										0.697***	0.773***	1.049
										(0.0560)	(0.0747)	(0.183)
Election	1.836***	2.420***	2.971***	1.969***	2.519***	3.132***	2.548***	3.105***	2.938***	23.97***	15.16***	2.166
	(0.173)	(0.266)	(0.472)	(0.175)	(0.266)	(0.458)	(0.240)	(0.363)	(0.510)	(13.17)	(10.14)	(2.650)
Civil War	0.898*	0.754***	0.920	0.906	0.759***	0.922	0.913	0.769***	0.922	0.920	0.772***	0.922
	(0.0555)	(0.0637)	(0.0649)	(0.0559)	(0.0640)	(0.0646)	(0.0563)	(0.0648)	(0.0646)	(0.0568)	(0.0654)	(0.0646)
Post War $_{(12\ mo)}$	1.173**	1.302***	1.612***	1.174**	1.304***	1.641***	1.182**	1.315***	1.612***	1.182**	1.318***	1.612***
	(0.0848)	(0.118)	(0.172)	(0.0855)	(0.119)	(0.176)	(0.0854)	(0.119)	(0.172)	(0.0852)	(0.119)	(0.172)
Democracy	0.772***	0.707***	0.763***	0.768***	0.705***	0.762***	0.801***	0.731***	0.759***	0.780***	0.712***	0.762***
	(0.0453)	(0.0568)	(0.0612)	(0.0450)	(0.0566)	(0.0611)	(0.0471)	(0.0591)	(0.0619)	(0.0455)	(0.0571)	(0.0612)
Ln(Pop)	1.239***	1.430***	1.683***	1.240***	1.432***	1.682***	1.232***	1.422***	1.683***	1.241***	1.430***	1.683***
	(0.0608)	(0.0966)	(0.0576)	(0.0608)	(0.0966)	(0.0575)	(0.0608)	(0.0962)	(0.0576)	(0.0609)	(0.0964)	(0.0576)
Ln(GDP)	0.905**	0.795***	1.103**	0.907**	0.796***	1.104**	0.913*	0.805***	1.103**	0.926	0.813***	1.102**
	(0.0429)	(0.0526)	(0.0462)	(0.0429)	(0.0526)	(0.0462)	(0.0432)	(0.0531)	(0.0462)	(0.0439)	(0.0539)	(0.0465)
ELF	1.051	0.558**	0.421***	1.055	0.557**	0.419***	1.065	0.568*	0.422***	1.058	0.565**	0.422***
	(0.231)	(0.163)	(0.0573)	(0.232)	(0.162)	(0.0569)	(0.235)	(0.165)	(0.0573)	(0.233)	(0.164)	(0.0573)
Media Quartiles	1.370***	1.374***	1.397***	1.370***	1.374***	1.399***	1.367***	1.374***	1.397***	1.369***	1.376***	1.397***
	(0.0329)	(0.0452)	(0.0456)	(0.0329)	(0.0451)	(0.0457)	(0.0328)	(0.0451)	(0.0456)	(0.0329)	(0.0453)	(0.0456)
DV $_{(t-1)}$	1.086***	1.118***	1.000***	1.085***	1.117***	1.000***	1.091***	1.120***	1.000***	1.094***	1.124***	1.000***
	(0.00832)	(0.0149)	(9.82e-05)	(0.00830	(0.0149)	(9.83e-05)	(0.00842)	(0.0147)	(9.82e-05)	(0.00855)	(0.0150)	(9.82e-05)
DV $_{(t-2)}$	1.042***	1.075***	1.000**	1.041***	1.074***	1.000**	1.046***	1.085***	1.000**	1.042***	1.080***	1.000**

	(0.00862)	(0.0145)	(0.000106)	(0.00862	(0.0145)	(0.000106)	(0.00864)	(0.0151)	(0.000106)	(0.00858)	(0.0148)	(0.000106)
$DV_{(t-3)}$	1.057***	1.086***	1.000*	1.058***	1.086***	1.000*	1.055***	1.082***	1.000*	1.054***	1.079***	1.000*
	(0.00843)	(0.0146)	(0.000109)	(0.00844	(0.0146)	(0.000109)	(0.00838)	(0.0145)	(0.000109)	(0.00838)	(0.0147)	(0.000109)
Constant	0.165***	0.132***	0.000138***	0.162***	0.129***	0.000138***	0.163***	0.125***	0.000138***	0.138***	0.112***	0.000139***
	(0.0837)	(0.0913)	(0.0000)	(0.0820)	(0.0894)	(0.0000)	(0.0829)	(0.0867)	(0.0000)	(0.0702)	(0.0775)	(0.0000)
Observations	9,597	9,597	9,597	9,597	9,597	9,597	9,597	9,597	9,597	9,597	9,597	9,597
Number of ccode	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40	40
Standard errors in parentheses												
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1												