Voting Against Violence: The Role of Civic Engagement in African Elections

Voters, as the targets of violence, make up half of the equation when studying electoral violence, yet little is understood about the reactions of these targeted citizens. How do voters respond to electoral violence and intimidation? This project examines the impact of electoral violence on voting behavior in sub-Saharan African elections. Specifically, I suggest that civic engagement, and the social capital it generates, mediates how electoral violence is perceived by African voters. I argue that politically engaged voters, are more likely to turnout when threatened with violence, and less likely to be intimidated into voting for a repressive incumbent. I posit that this relationship exists due to the political efficacy and interpersonal trust that citizens derive from various forms of political behavior. Using Afrobarometer survey data, I find some initial evidence that violence does result in an electoral backlash for incumbents, with this effect being heightened by active civic engagement.

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