

## BOOK REVIEW

Michael Wahman. *Controlling Territory, Controlling Voters: The Electoral Geography of African Campaign Violence*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2024. 272 pp. \$90. Hardcover. ISBN: 9780198872825.

The field of electoral violence within democratization literature is still relatively new and under-researched. The book by Michael Wahman, *Controlling Territory, Controlling Voters: The Electoral Geography of African Campaign Violence*, makes a significant contribution to this field by presenting a new theory that explains how electoral violence can be used strategically by both the incumbent and the opposition, specifically during the campaign period. To this end, the book contributes to the literature in the following ways.


Whereas most of the research so far has looked at pre-election violence from a cross-national analysis, the book takes a narrower approach through subnational focus on motivations for pre-election violence. Similarly, most of the research has focused on more lethal and intense pre-election violence, which, the book argues, can be counterproductive for the violence entrepreneurs in the long run because of the attendant high reputational costs. By focusing on Zambia and Malawi as the main case studies, the book unravels motivations for low level electoral violence in countries with geographically polarized electoral systems whose elections are highly competitive nationally but uncompetitive at the subnational levels.

Secondly, the book also provides a new theory to explain spatial variation in electoral violence during the campaign period. The book argues that previous theories that explain electoral violence primarily focus on political competition or mobilization and the constraining or incentivizing effects of electoral institutions. Essentially, pre-election violence is more likely if the stakes for winning are high, or the election outcome is uncertain. The book posits that although relevant to the field, these theories lack the broader applicability to subnational variation in pre-election violence due to the theories' focus on intense electoral violence hotspots. The book further suggests that the second existing theoretical framework focuses on behavioral motivations at the individual level, arguing that pre-election violence is employed with the goal of suppressing voter turnout for the opposing side. Thus, the book argues, this theory underestimates the detrimental effects of electoral violence at the subnational levels because if you employ campaign violence, it might also suppress voter turnout for your party supporters, hence your party will incur high reputational costs. Consequently, the main contribution of this book is that it offers a broader theory that explains variation in campaign violence at the subnational level, arguing that, in countries with geographical polarized electoral systems where elections are

competitive at the national level but uncompetitive at the local levels, both the incumbent and the opposition are incentivized to employ campaign violence to control their territory and the attendant votes. The theory suggests that if the incumbent or the opposition party can control the territory, they control the votes within the territory. Therefore, the resultant campaign violence is the jostle between the opposition and the incumbent to control the territory in which they enjoy immense support or contest the territory. Campaign violence is then strategically employed to enforce control of the territory by keeping the less popular party out, limiting the other party's democratic space and in essence controlling the political narrative. The book further demonstrates that campaign violence is employed by the incumbent and the opposition to contest the territory.

While the book makes a significant contribution to the literature on campaign violence and presents a broader theory applicable to explaining spatial variation in low-level campaign violence regarding local democracy, it does not explain temporal variation of the same type of violence. In other words, the polarized geographical electoral system explains why campaign violence occurs in political parties' strongholds and is sometimes orchestrated by the popular party. However, the theory does not explain temporal variation of campaign violence. Specifically, the theory does not explain why campaign violence occurs in political parties' strongholds when least expected or fails to occur when expected. Although the evidence from the Malawi case study suggests that the incumbent party is more likely to contest territory using campaign violence only if it possesses significant coercive capabilities, this argument still doesn't explain why campaign violence is sometimes absent even when the incumbent party still wields significant coercive capabilities.

Similarly, the book puts a lot of premium on the political parties as the purveyors of campaign violence. However, most sub-Saharan African countries have relatively weak political parties that are less institutionalized and driven by personalistic politics. These parties also have limited reach at the grassroots and usually have weak party machinery. Politicians use political parties to get into parliament without building the political parties at the grassroots level. It is common for politicians to party hop between electoral cycles. For instance, Joyce Banda, the candidate of the Peoples' Party (PP) was a member of three different parties between 1994 and 2012. Subsequently, to what extent is the campaign violence driven by enigmatic personalities that enjoy local support rather than the political parties?

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