

Anatomy of a Riot  
Participation in Ethnic Violence in Nigeria

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## **Abstract**

### Anatomy of a Riot: Participation in Ethnic Violence in Nigeria

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This book asks two questions about ethnic violence. First, who are the people who take to the streets and commit acts of violence during the chaotic chains of events known as ethnic riots? Second, why does this set of people ultimately decide to riot? Most contemporary studies of ethnic conflict overlook these questions and focus instead on the incentives of elites to instigate violence. This literature struggles to explain why ordinary people would choose to accept the risks and potential costs involved in carrying out violence on a local scale.

The central argument advanced here is that that poverty will increase the likelihood of riot participation for people who are embedded in community-level social networks that link them to other potential participants. In the communal riots explored here, individual-level poverty works in a very different way than classic theories of participation in violence suggest, however. I argue that, in contexts where state authorities cannot guarantee protection for their citizens, poor people will be particularly vulnerable to attack once communal violence begins. They will therefore be more willing to fight in order to defend their property, their families and themselves. Given the motivation to fight, certain types of social networks at the grassroots level help to transform potential into actual rioters. The motivating “push” of poverty and the “pull” of local social ties make a powerful combination.

To evaluate this argument, I draw on a large-scale original survey of ordinary people who chose to (or chose not to) participate in deadly Christian-Muslim riots in the northern Nigerian cities of Kaduna in 2000 and Jos in 2001. The survey contains direct questions about past participation in violent events and relies on innovative field research methods in order to locate rioters and elicit honest responses from them. The book also includes material from dozens of in-depth interviews with riot participants (and non-

participants), to increase confidence in the robustness of the joint effect of poverty and local social embeddedness on riot participation and evaluate alternative mechanisms that might underpin this relationship.

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

On the afternoon of September 7, 2001, in the central Nigerian city of Jos, a fight erupted between a Christian woman and a Muslim security guard outside a prominent mosque in a commercial area. Accounts of what exactly happened between them vary, but eyewitness observers agree that, at some point during the course of their conversation, the woman began shouting at the guard. Friday prayers were underway, and hundreds of mosque attendees lined the road. At that time, city rules dictated that traffic could be stopped on such occasions, and it was customary for Christians, particularly women, to take alternative routes on Friday afternoons.

After repeated attempts to persuade the woman to change her route, the fight became physical. The woman fled the scene and rumors that a Christian woman had been “slapped” by a Muslim man spread like wildfire throughout the immediate neighborhood. Within the hour, a street fight erupted on the main road in front of the mosque, involving dozens of Christian and Muslim men from the area. By midnight, the neighborhood surrounding the mosque was engulfed in its first Christian-Muslim riot. As surprising as this was to many Jos residents, they were utterly unprepared for what would follow—seven days of full-scale rioting, a death-toll of well over a thousand people, and the burning of dozens of churches and mosques across town.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>This story was repeated to me, with minor variations, in interviews with four eyewitnesses to the

Around eight o'clock that same Friday evening, a young Christian man, whom I will call Saidu, living in the predominantly Christian neighborhood of *Ali Kazure*, heard screaming outside the front door of his house. Running outside, he met a close friend who was well known as a member of a youth organization in the neighborhood. At that time, Saidu was 23 years old. He was working part-time in his uncle's stationery shop, trying to finish secondary school. Saidu's friend was clearly frightened as he described some "trouble in town" near a mosque up the hillside in the adjacent Muslim neighborhood of *Ungwan Rogo*. "They are killing Christians up there and we have to do something about it, or we are next!" After a few minutes of discussion, Saidu decided to see for himself what was going on. That night, Saidu explained, he helped a group of youth leaders in his area organize people to "protect" their neighborhood. "We Christians were a minority next to the people in *Ungwan Rogo*, and I knew I could help get the youths out." Throughout the course of the evening and the following day, Saidu fought alongside friends and neighbors in and around *Ungwan Rogo* and *Ali Kazure*.<sup>2</sup>

Jonathan is another Christian from *Ali Kazure*. At the time of the riots, he was 20 years old and was working in a local barbershop. He had recently completed secondary school and, although he had hopes of further study, he needed to work to earn money first. Like Saidu, Jonathan had lived in *Ali Kazure* for much of his life. Unlike Saidu, however, he did not hear about the riots until the early hours of Saturday morning, when fighting began in earnest on the outskirts of his neighborhood. Jonathan woke up around 5 a.m., when his father came into his room with the news that there was fighting going on in *Ungwan Rogo*. He ran outside immediately and saw a mosque on fire up a nearby hillside. "I knew that the crisis would be terrible from that Saturday morning," he explained. But he did not fight that day, or on any of the following days.<sup>3</sup>

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outbreak of the Jos crisis. (Interviews 1229, 1723, 1528 and 1566, Jos, July 2008.) Nearly 40 anonymous field interviews were conducted in 2008. Each interview was assigned a random number after completion. All names used in the book have been changed to pseudonyms to protect respondent anonymity.

<sup>2</sup>Interview 1602, Jos, July 18, 2008.

<sup>3</sup>Interview 1507, Jos, July 17, 2008.

These short narratives illustrate the central puzzle of this study. Saidu and Jonathan are similar in many respects—in their religion, age, gender, and neighborhood of residence, to name just a few characteristics. They both had Muslim friends prior to the riots, and neither had a history of violent behavior or criminal activity. In both cases, the decision to participate in the fighting or stay on the sidelines was voluntary, even though this choice was made under stressful conditions.<sup>4</sup> But Saidu participated in the riots and Jonathan did not. This book centers on two fundamental questions about ethnic violence inherent in this puzzle: *Who* are the people who take to the streets and commit acts of violence and destroy property during the chaotic and frightening chains of events we know as ethnic riots, and *why* do they ultimately decide to riot?<sup>5</sup> Are there systematic differences between the group of people we can call “rioters” and those who did not participate in the violence? The best way to answer these questions, I will argue, is by interviewing comparable groups of former rioters and non-participants and asking them to explain their choices and behavior prior to and during concrete riot episodes. Although ethnic riots are typically highly chaotic events, the chapters that follow build a case that participation can be studied systematically across individuals and across riot episodes.

This book explores participation in communal violence from close range, using the microscope as much as the wide-angle lens. The book’s main empirical approach draws on in-depth interviews and systematic micro-level survey data that I collected over the course of several years from two Nigerian towns that have repeatedly suffered deadly communal riots in the recent past. The research presented here is the first large-scale

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<sup>4</sup>The vast majority of riot participants interviewed were not coerced into joining the fight, suggesting an important degree of individual agency at work during the riots. This relative freedom of choice contrasts with more coercive strategies of recruitment used by rebel groups in civil wars in Uganda, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and other civil conflicts, or accounts of coercion exerted by local authorities across the country during the Rwandan genocide to induce participation.

<sup>5</sup>Following Horowitz (1985, 2001), I use the term “ethnic” to refer to groups in which membership is based on actual or perceived descent, and I thus classify violent events in which Christian and Muslim groups are the main actors as ethnic violence. Brass (1997), Horowitz (2001), Varshney (2002), Chandra (2004) and Wilkinson (2004) use this logic in defining Hindus and Muslims in India as ethnic groups.

survey of riot participants in the developing world and, as such, offers new insights into the dynamics of mass participation in localized violence.

## 1.1 The Puzzle of Participation

The question: “why join a riot?” touches in a dramatic way on fundamental puzzles about collective action. The risks and potential costs of participation are high in most places where communal violence occurs, while the benefits are typically highly uncertain. Across a range of contexts, communal violence occurs in localities with relatively balanced ethnic populations.<sup>6</sup> As a result, it is often unclear which side will prevail in battles on the street, and the risk of death to participants is very real. Also threatening is the prospect of being caught by the police or even the military, if they are called in to intervene to quell the violence.<sup>7</sup> On the benefits side, the potential gains of participation in communal violence are often unclear. Field interviews and survey responses from Nigeria suggest that selective incentives associated with participation (such as payment) are rare or are obtained at great personal risk (for example, goods from looting).

Despite this puzzle, the literature on ethnic conflict has largely presupposed rather than explained mass participation in violence (for example, Gagnon 1995, Hardin 1995, de Figueiredo and Weingast 1999, Snyder 2000, Wilkinson 2004, Lake 2017, Vogt et al. 2021). This branch of research has been instrumental in pinpointing a range of plausible elite motivations to instigate or foment violence in contexts as diverse as 1930s Germany and contemporary India. However, these studies often rely implicitly on the assumption that elites are highly strategic, if not implausibly cunning, while “masses” are non-strategic and easily manipulated. In doing so they overlook basic and impor-

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<sup>6</sup>Examples of communal riots in locations with relatively balanced group size include riots in Libreville, Gabon in 1981, in Nouakchott, Mauritania in 1989, and in Poso and the Moluccas, Indonesia in 1998 and 1999.

<sup>7</sup>Horowitz (2001) describes an impressive range of cases in which central government military forces were called in to stop fighting during ethnic riots because the local police were unable to restore order on their own.



tant questions about why ordinary people would ever decide to participate in such risky collective behavior.

For example, in his rich ethnographic study of Hindu-Muslim riots in India, Paul Brass describes violence as an “anticipated by-product of election campaigns” in which faceless crowds are cunningly used by political elites to serve electoral ends (Brass 1997, pp. 13–18). Similarly, Steven Wilkinson proposes that ethnic riots in India are “planned for a clear electoral purpose... to change the salience of identities among the electorate in order to build a winning political coalition” (Wilkinson 2004, p. 1). Arguments such as these, which suggest citizens fall prey to the rhetoric of political elites, are also common in the popular literature on ethnic violence (see, for example, Gourevitch 1998), but are hard to defend in contexts where violence erupts repeatedly. Why would ordinary people, particularly in settings where politicians fail to deliver on their promises, not update their beliefs over time and ignore top-down ethnic entrepreneurship as empty noise?

In a sweeping cross-national study of ethnic conflict, Donald Horowitz raises this question, urging conflict scholars to develop theories that “answer the insistent question of why the followers follow” (Horowitz 1985, p. 140). Horowitz’s agenda points us in the right direction, but in formulating the question this way, he makes an important assumption. It is reasonable to ask the prior question: *do* “followers” actually follow political elites at all when they participate in communal violence? As I discuss below, this book looks closely at participation dynamics in two Christian-Muslim riots in Nigeria that occurred in political contexts where incentives often *discouraged* politicians from attempting to deepen the ethnic divide or stir up intergroup violence. Events that unfolded before and during religious riots in the northern Nigerian cities of Kaduna and Jos suggest that the eruption of violence caught political elites largely by surprise. More generally, asking “why do followers follow?” rules out the possibility that leaders who appear to be instigating communal violence may in fact be *reacting* to mass behavior as much as directing it.

A growing number of important studies point to a promising shift in attention in the violence literature to decision-making by ordinary people, typically in cases of full-blown warfare. Scholars in comparative politics have offered a wide range of individual-level explanations for acts of anti-regime rebellion (Petersen 2001), participation in insurgent groups (Wood 2003, Kalyvas 2006, Humphreys and Weinstein 2008, Justino 2009, Arjona and Kalyvas 2012, Zeira 2019), genocide (Verwimp 2005, Straus 2006, Justino and Verwimp 2013), and non-battle violence during civil wars (Kalyvas 2006), bringing agency back to the people who choose to fight.<sup>8</sup> In spite of the richness of these studies, however, the incentive structures and dynamics at work in civil and interstate wars are quite different from those at work in shorter, more localized but often no less deadly episodes of ethnic rioting.

For instance, decisions made by participants during riots are typically made rapidly and the forms of collective action that occur are more weakly structured than those operating during civil wars. Participating in a communal riot does not involve joining a formal organization and, crucially, it involves a much more limited commitment of time than joining a rebel group. These differences have potentially important theoretical implications for a study of the motivations for violence.

Take as an example the argument often made in the literature on civil wars about the “opportunity costs” of fighting for potential rebels. Marketable or gainfully employed individuals, the argument goes, should be less likely to forgo earnings and join a rebel movement than those without secure jobs or attractive employment prospects (Collier and Hoeffler 2001, 2004, Miguel et al. 2004, Verwimp 2005). When applied to communal riots, however, the opportunity costs logic strains against the fact that participation typically involves a time commitment of hours or days, and participants can, and often do, return to work relatively quickly after the fighting ends. In contrast, rebels often travel far from home for months, or even years, after they make the decision to join.

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<sup>8</sup>See Verwimp et al. 2019 for a review of recent empirical studies focused squarely on the micro-dynamics of civil conflict.

While the micro-level civil wars literature offers a wide array of hypotheses that we can test in the context of riot participation, we should expect some of them to fit poorly with the decision-making calculus of potential rioters.

The theory developed here draws on findings from two additional sources—a large body of ethnographic work on the kinds of individuals present in the crowds out on the streets during ethnic riots (Engineer 1987, Tishkov 1995, Tambiah 1996, Horowitz 2001), and scholarship on the processes of mobilization for high-risk collective action from the literature on social movements (McAdam 1986, McAdam and Paulsen 1993, della Porta 1995 and, more recently, participation in anti-regime protest in non-democratic settings (Tucker 2007, Cantoni et al. 2019, Bursztyjn et al. 2021). These literatures focus squarely on the micro-contexts in which individuals decide to participate in collective behavior that may be fraught with extreme risk.

Ethnographic studies of riots have yielded consistent findings about the socioeconomic composition of rioting crowds, suggesting that rioters tend to be relatively poor, but are not typically criminals or “fringe elements” in society. Rather, rioters are often drawn from the working poor: people with jobs and connections in their communities, rather than the utterly marginalized (Tambiah 1996, Horowitz 2001). These studies offer powerful suggestive evidence on the question of *who* riots (the poor), but have less to say about *why* people ultimately riot. For example, what is it about poverty that makes riot participation more likely? As a further problem, the inferences we can draw from their findings are typically limited by the absence of *non*-rioters in their samples.

The social movements literature is similarly useful in its focus on the ways in which ordinary people come to participate in risky collective behavior. Several decades of scholarship on anti-regime protest, for example, indicates the importance of prior social relationships or informal social networks in pulling potential activists onto the streets (Kuran 1991, Lohmann 1993, 1994, Schussman and Soule 2005). Much like the ethnographic work on riots, however, studies of social movements have been more successful in

answering the question of *who* participates (people with prior social ties to other joiners) than in uncovering the mechanisms through which social networks might work to increase the likelihood of participation.<sup>9</sup>

Beyond academic concerns, the scale of the fatalities and destruction wrought by ethnic riots makes them worthy of scholarly attention in their own right. In each of the riots investigated here, Christian-Muslim clashes killed at least two thousand people, and probably many more (Kaduna State White Paper 2001, Tertsakian 2001, 2003). In addition to the death toll, dozens of churches, mosques and private properties were burned to the ground. Country experts estimate that more than 8,000 people have been killed in Christian-Muslim riots in Nigeria since 1999 (Scacco and Warren 2021.) This much destruction and killing demands an explanation.

## 1.2 What is an Ethnic Riot?

In spite of often deep disagreements over their causes and consequences, there is generally little controversy within the ethnic riots literature on the nature and scope of the event under study.<sup>10</sup> In their longitudinal analyses of Hindu-Muslim riots in India, Ashutosh Varshney and Steven Wilkinson used the following two criteria to classify an event as an ethnic riot for inclusion in their dataset of Hindu-Muslim riots in India: “(a) there is violence and (b) two or more communally identified groups confront each other/members of the other group at some point during the violence” (Varshney 2002, p. 309; Wilkinson 2004, p. 255). The crucial feature of this definition is that members from one communal group attack members of another communal group. This excludes violence directed against state institutions or state property, for example. In fact, this dataset deliberately

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<sup>9</sup>A recent review of the literature linking social networks and conflict (Larson 2021) notes that the field has “just begun to scratch the surface” in establishing the specific mechanisms through which social ties contribute to conflict and cooperation.

<sup>10</sup>For a somewhat dissenting view, see Beth Roy’s account of Hindu-Muslim violence in rural Bangladesh (Roy 1994).

omits violent events in which one ethnic group fights only with the police.

In an in-depth investigation of five communal conflicts in late 20th century India, Paul Brass defined an ethnic riot as “an event involving large numbers of massed persons from opposing ethnic groups engaged in assaults on persons, lives and property” (Brass 1997, p. 4). A few features of this definition are worth underlining. First, although it is difficult to define how many people are necessary to count as “large,” Brass’s definition rules out routine violent crime in which an attacker happens to have a different ethnic identity than the target. To take examples from this project’s research sites, a fight outside a local tavern between a Christian and a Muslim in Kaduna or Jos, for example, would not count as an ethnic riot. These kinds of events may *trigger* communal violence, but they are not riots themselves. Similarly, Brass’s term “massed” evokes crowd behavior. Small groups of Christians or Muslims fighting one another, for example, in the form of gang fights, would not count as riots under this definition.

Donald Horowitz offers a similar but slightly narrower definition of an ethnic riot as “an intense, sudden, though not wholly unplanned, lethal attack by civilian members of one ethnic group on civilian members of another ethnic group, the victims chosen because of their group membership” (Horowitz 2001, p. 1). The term “intense” evokes a similar image as Brass’s term “massed,” suggesting that riots need to assume at least a reasonably large scale in order to be classified as such. Horowitz adds the term “sudden” to differentiate rioting from violence involving higher levels of organization and advance planning, such as civil or interstate warfare. Most importantly, Horowitz emphasizes the logic of deliberate *targeting*—participants in ethnic riots do not simply happen to fight along ethnic lines but explicitly seek out members based on their ethnic identity, often going to great lengths to ensure that their victims are in fact members of the opposing group.

The riots that took place in Kaduna in 2000 and Jos in 2001 easily fit within the bounds of these definitions from the literature. They were undoubtedly large in scale

and highly lethal in effect. They began suddenly, without advance planning, and there is ample evidence that targeting during the violence occurred deliberately along ethnic lines. But why are these definitional considerations important? Why should we attempt to distinguish features of riots from other types of violence, such as civil wars?

I advocate a “splitting” rather than a “lumping” approach to the study of communal violence for the simple reason that, in considering many different forms of violence together, we may miss important differences in the motivations for participation across types. In contrast, if we first look carefully at the micro-dynamics of communal riots, we will be in a better position to investigate whether and under what conditions our findings can generalize to other types of violence. Further, the more narrow we are in our focus, the less likely we are to be led down irrelevant empirical paths. For example, a classic argument in the literature on insurgency suggests that rebel recruitment will be easier in localities with “rough terrain” (such as mountains or forests), because these geographic conditions thwart anti-insurgency efforts on the part of the state (Fearon and Laitin 2003). Anticipating this lower risk of being caught, potential rebels will be more likely to take up arms. While plausible for the study of insurgency, arguments about rough terrain map poorly onto the conditions under which communal riots take place—typically in urban areas, often in plain sight of state authorities.

### 1.3 The Argument

The theory of participation in violence I propose in this book is ultimately an argument about the organization of collective defense once an ethnic riot has already begun. This is not an argument about why the first punches are thrown, so to speak, but about decision-making by large numbers of people who do *not* throw that first punch, and would likely stay out of the fray if they felt that they could. It is a theory of mass participation in communal violence once the first “trouble in town” has started, and the mosque at the top of the hill is already on fire.

I begin with the assumption that safety is a first-order concern. Everyone wants protection for themselves, their families, and their property from attack. This protection can come in the form of publicly-provided order (typically by the police). In the absence of public order, people seeking protection from violence will invest in private sources of security (such as armed security guards, or high compound walls). When public security is absent and private security is too expensive, vulnerable communities will be left to provide protection for themselves.

As such, poorer communities will be particularly vulnerable to attack once a riot begins. Unlike wealthier people, who can access and afford a variety of private security measures, poorer people will have to organize their own protection. Given the risks involved in fighting, however, it is reasonable to expect that most people living in vulnerable communities would still prefer to stay home, while others go out and defend the neighborhood on their behalf. Organizing for collective defense, therefore, presents a serious problem of collective action. Overcoming this problem requires a group of motivated individuals and conditions that help transform the desire for safety into action. Local social networks help to overcome the collective action problem at the heart of organizing effective defense against attack from outsiders. Networks of informal social ties within communities facilitate collective action by providing information about where fighting is taking place, how best to prepare for it, and who can be counted on to share risks and costs. Beyond transmitting information, social ties can serve as important conduits of peer pressure during times of crisis. Refusal to participate when asked by a member of one's community can carry with it non-trivial social costs ("join us in our efforts or your reputation will suffer!").

This argument rests on an important background condition: a state bureaucracy weak enough that local authorities cannot guarantee protection for citizens, either during peacetime or when violence breaks out.<sup>11</sup> Contexts where state institutions like the police

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<sup>11</sup>This condition holds in a many settings where communal riots occur. For example, in Kyrgyzstan, ethnographers have described the local police not only in urban but in rural areas as "paralyzed" in

cannot respond effectively to routine crime, let alone violence on the scale of the Kaduna and Jos riots, can produce conditions akin to the classic security dilemma described in the causes of war literature (Herz 1951, Jervis 1978, Snyder 1985), particularly when polarizing social cleavages already exist (Posen 1993). Absent competent public security provision, people who cannot afford private security measures may be pulled into rioting because they fear they will be attacked if they do *not* fight.

The book’s main empirical claim, then, is that poverty will increase the likelihood of riot participation for people who are embedded in community networks linking them to other potential participants. Poverty may make people more willing to participate in communal violence, in order to defend their property, their families and themselves, but it is social networks at the grassroots level that help to transform potential into actual participants. Together, the motivating “push” of poverty and the “pull” of local social ties to other potential rioters make a powerful combination. The main empirical implication of the argument is that we should see a particularly strong *joint* effect of individual poverty and local social embeddedness on the likelihood of riot participation.

## 1.4 Case Selection: Two Nigerian Riots

In the pages that follow, this book investigates dynamics of participation in deadly religious riots that took place in two northern Nigerian cities, one in Kaduna in February 2000, and one in Jos in September 2001. Kaduna city, the capital of Kaduna state, is typically considered one of the ten largest cities in northern Nigeria, and was the capital of the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria under the British colonial administration. The north of Nigeria is predominantly Muslim, but Kaduna state has a large Christian

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the face of both ordinary criminal activity and large-scale violence between ethnic Kyrgyz and Uzbeks (Tishkov 1995). Examples of poorly skilled or largely absent police in periods prior to the outbreak of ethnic riots abound in the case study literature: Senegal (which experienced large-scale riots in 1981) and Zanzibar (1932) are two examples where an inadequate police presence seems to have played a role in allowing violence to escalate. Under these conditions, ordinary people cannot count on the police to protect their lives and property, even in times of peace.



population, drawn from over thirty tribal groups mostly based in the southern half of the state. The majority of people in the northern half of the state are Hausa Muslims. Although ethnic demography is controversial in Nigeria and reliable census data is unavailable for the post-colonial period, country experts estimate that Muslims comprise a slight majority (estimates typically range between 55 and 60 percent) in Kaduna state and Kaduna city (Abdu and Umar 2002, Sani 2007).<sup>12</sup>

Jos is the capital of Plateau state, located approximately four hours by road to the southeast of Kaduna. Plateau state is generally considered to have a slight Christian majority, and a substantial Muslim minority. Most Christians living in the state belong to one of nearly a hundred small tribal groups considered indigenous to the state. Jos itself is relatively balanced in its Christian and Muslim populations, with local experts estimating the Christian population at roughly 55 percent and the Muslim population approximately 45 percent (Bagu et al. 2004). Although Kaduna and Plateau are technically part of different administrative regions, they both fall within the swath of territory known as the “Middle Belt,” straddling the center of the country, separating the Muslim “far north” from southern Nigeria.

While not as poor as the northernmost region that borders Niger, the Middle Belt is considerably poorer than southern Nigeria, with higher levels of unemployment, lower average per capita household income, and worse performance on a range of other socioeconomic indicators (Nigerian Annual Abstract of Statistics, 2001, 2005). The Middle Belt is most widely known for its relatively even Christian-Muslim balance and, internationally, because it has been the site of a greater number of religious riots than any other Nigerian region in recent years. A dataset of violent events across Nigeria compiled by Human Rights Watch indicates that, of the 36 Christian-Muslim riots that occurred between 1999 and 2005, as many as 22 of them took place in the Middle Belt (Albin-Lackey

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<sup>12</sup>Unfortunately, no reliable nationwide census has been conducted in Nigeria since 1963. Results from the 1991 census were “corrected” in the wake of violent protests that led to the deaths of several people in southwest and northern Nigeria. As a result, tribal and religious identification were not recorded in the most recent 2006 census.

Figure 1.1: Kaduna and Jos, Federal Republic of Nigeria



and Lewis, 2006).<sup>13</sup> Jos in particular has experienced large-scale Christian-Muslim riots even more recently, in 2008 and 2010, and smaller-scale religious clashes in 2011, 2012 and 2015.<sup>14</sup>

The fact that both Kaduna and Plateau states have Christian and Muslim populations of relatively equal size is relevant because of an important institutional feature of electoral politics in Nigeria. Under what is described in the current constitution as the “federal character” principle, both gubernatorial and presidential candidates must not only win more votes than any other candidate, but must also win at least one quarter of the vote in at least two-thirds of the local government areas (LGAs) in that state.<sup>15</sup> The governors of both Kaduna and Plateau states, which have large populations of the minority religious group scattered throughout their states’ territories, thus have incentives to reach across the religious divide, and have little to gain from polarization.

As I will describe below, there is no evidence to suggest that politicians at the state level acted to foment violence in Kaduna and Jos. Elected officials appear to have been genuinely caught off-guard when the riots began. Similarly, the weight of evidence suggests that state security forces, including the police and the military, are generally behave in a neutral way in responding to Christian-Muslim conflicts. In spite of their neutrality, police capacity is sufficiently weak that large portions of Kaduna and Jos were left vulnerable to attack once the riots began. This book will offer multiple sources of evidence suggesting that limited police capacity, particularly in these these cities’ poorest neighborhoods, left ordinary people vulnerable to attack, with deadly consequences.

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<sup>13</sup>I use the terms “religious riot” and “Christian-Muslim riot” synonymously, as these are the only types of religious riots that occur in Nigeria. Only a tiny fraction of the population could be classified as belonging to a religious group other than Christian or Muslim. For example, only one out of 798 survey respondents classified himself as holding animist beliefs. All others identified themselves as Christians or Muslims.

<sup>14</sup>See chapter 7 for a complete list of Christian-Muslim riots that took place in Nigeria between 1999 and 2018.

<sup>15</sup>Local Government Areas are the smallest administrative unit for which public officials are elected in Nigeria.

### 1.4.1 Kaduna Riots, February 2000

Between February 21 and 25, 2000, Kaduna city erupted in the worst inter-religious violence ever witnessed in Nigeria. A judicial commission of inquiry established by the Kaduna state government in the aftermath of the riots reported 1,295 deaths, although other sources have suggested the true numbers may be far higher (Tertsakian 2003). The fighting began after several weeks of public debate about the possibility of introducing Shari'a law into the criminal code in Kaduna state. Although Shari'a provisions had long been incorporated into "personal" or domestic law for Muslims throughout northern Nigeria, the debate raised concerns in religiously heterogeneous states that Shari'a would be imposed on Christian communities (Abdu and Umar 2002).

In October 1999, the governor of Zamfara, an overwhelmingly Muslim state bordering Niger, decided to re-open the debate, in a move that was popular across his state, and in December Zamfara did incorporate Shari'a into its criminal code. Over the next few months, state legislatures across the northern region began to follow suit, with the exception of states like Kaduna and Plateau, which contain large Christian populations. The issue was particularly contentious in Kaduna and its governor, Ahmed Makarfi (himself a Muslim), strongly opposed introducing Shari'a. In January 2000, however, under pressure from Muslim civil society organizations, the Kaduna State Assembly established a commission to examine the "applicability" of Shari'a criminal law for Muslim residents of the state. The action divided the assembly along religious lines, and sparked increasingly vocal protests from Christian civil society organizations (Kaduna State White Paper, April 2001, Tertsakian 2003, Sani 2007).

On Monday February 21, the Kaduna branch of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), a nationwide confederation of Christian civil society groups, organized a demonstration against the government's investigative committee on the Shari'a question. According to participants in the rally, announcements were made in churches during the prior week, urging parishioners to attend the demonstration, and the event attracted

hundreds of demonstrators (Haroon 2002). The rally began in the southern part of Kaduna's town center, as protesters made their way north along the city's main thoroughfare, Amadou Bello Way, toward Lugard Hall, the seat of the governor and the state assembly. Most observers agree that the protest itself was peaceful and that protesters were unarmed, although some elements of the crowd carried signs marked with provocative slogans, such as "Shari'a is not Y2K Compliant" (Maier 2001). Accounts of how exactly the fighting began differ, but it is clear that at some point during the morning of February 21, small numbers of Christians and Muslims began throwing stones at each other as demonstrators made their way past Kaduna's crowded central market. At this point, the fighting spread quickly, and within the next hour, the market was engulfed in a Christian-Muslim riot, as Christian protesters fought with Muslim traders in the market, using simple weapons, such as stones and wooden planks.<sup>16</sup>

The fighting in the largely commercial center of town spread outward to residential areas across Kaduna metropolis, as rumors circulated about atrocities committed on either side. Interview respondents from neighborhoods across Kaduna recalled seeing smoke rising from the center of town, and hearing stories about churches and mosques being set on fire (Interviews 1558, Kaduna, July 28, 2008 and 1735, Kaduna, July 29, 2008). The riots lasted for four days, and were only put to rest when the central government ordered the military to intervene.<sup>17</sup>

Although sparked by the debate over Shari'a in the state assembly, the violence appears to have caught Kaduna's politicians entirely by surprise. Governor Makarfi himself was out of the country, undergoing medical treatment, when the riots began, and there is no evidence of other state-level politicians attempting to foment violence through the use of inflammatory public rhetoric. The commission debating the Shari'a issue had barely begun its work by the time of the demonstration and the governor's opposition

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<sup>16</sup>Interviews 1558, Kaduna, July 28, 2008 and 1398, Kaduna, July 31, 2008.

<sup>17</sup>The military was sent in late on the second day of the riots and stopped much of the fighting. Order was fully restored across Kaduna city on the fourth day.

to the changes in the criminal code, even for Muslims, remained strong. Interviews with witnesses to and participants in the riots revealed that politicians did not use the radio or television to incite violence, and there is no evidence to suggest collusion between Christian politicians at the state level and protest organizers. In combination with the fact that the Kaduna riots did not occur in proximity to local, state or national elections, this strongly suggests that the riots were not engineered or encouraged by political elites.

Given the poor regard in which most ordinary Nigerians hold their politicians, even if members of the state assembly *had* been making public speeches designed to stoke inter-ethnic tensions, it is unclear that such efforts would have been effective. In a telling moment, one interview respondent who was involved in fighting during the Kaduna riots, when asked if the actions or words of politicians in the days leading up to the riots had led him to consider fighting, responded: “What? Those guys are criminals. Honestly, if we had been able to find them, we would have killed them, too!” When asked why, he answered, “They never do anything for us. Nobody trusts them. They don’t bring us development... Nobody saw them before the riots and during the riots, they just hid behind their gates.”<sup>18</sup>

Turning to the reaction of the state bureaucracy, observers of and participants in the riots uniformly agree that, once the riots began, the police were quickly overwhelmed by the situation. In neighborhoods across Kaduna, calls to the police for help went unanswered and police units that did arrive at the scene of battles between Christians and Muslims found themselves unable to maintain order. One interview respondent from a Kaduna neighborhood that experienced heavy fighting during the first two days of the riots laughed when I asked him about the response of the police: “They really could not do anything. They were not serious. There were hundreds of people fighting at the *Tudun Wada* junction, and I think they came with five or six men, without guns! They were

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<sup>18</sup>Interview 1473, Kaduna, July 28, 2008.

scared and they just ran away!”<sup>19</sup> Residents of neighborhoods across Kaduna during the riots confirm that the police were unable to stop the fighting, due to insufficient manpower and inadequate weapons. Several interview respondents described rushing to nearby police barracks to report riot-related events, only to find officers “hiding” inside their offices. Interviewees only rarely reported outward signs of police bias in favor of one side during the fighting, but the conclusion that the police were simply not equipped to deal with a large-scale violent riot is inescapable.

#### 1.4.2 Jos Riots, September 2001

As described at the beginning of this chapter, the immediate trigger to the Jos riots was a fight between a Christian woman and Muslim security guard in front of a crowded mosque in the Muslim neighborhood of *Ungwan Rogo* during Friday prayers on September 7, 2001. The fight appears to have been the spontaneous result of a disagreement about the appropriate route for a Christian woman to take on her way home from work while prayers were in session at the mosque. Once the fight became physical, however, it engulfed the neighborhood with a speed and intensity that caught both ordinary residents and political elites in Jos by surprise. Within hours, the neighborhoods surrounding the mosque where the riot trigger took place were involved in fighting on a scale that had never been seen before in Jos. By the next day, Christians and Muslims were fighting in pitched battles across the city, as violence spread from the center of the town to residential neighborhoods across its outskirts. Precise estimates vary, but most accounts suggest that well over a thousand people were killed during the riots (Albin-Lackey and Lewis, 2006).

Although, unlike in Kaduna, the Jos riots did not occur at a time when issues related to religion featured prominently in public debate, some have pointed to a contentious political appointment as contributing to the outbreak of the crisis (Tertsakian 2003, In-

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<sup>19</sup>Interview 1872, Kaduna, July 31, 2008.

interviews 1483, Jos, July 16, 2008, and 1229, Jos, July 19, 2008). Several weeks before the riots, in August, a Hausa Muslim named Mukhtar Muhammad had been appointed by Plateau's governor to chair a "poverty eradication program" for Jos North local government area (LGA), the northern half of the city. Muhammad's appointment was opposed by Christian civil society organizations in Jos, not only because a high-profile post had been given to a Muslim not originally from Plateau state but because he had been forced to abandon another local government post in Jos in 1998, after being accused of falsely portraying his credentials (Tertsakian 2003). In the weeks following the appointment, several Christian groups launched a public advertising campaign against Muhammad, with one organization going so far as distributing leaflets urging him to stand down from office, while others wrote letters of complaint to the governor (Sani 2007).

Much like the Kaduna riots, the violence on September 7 caught the state authorities by surprise and the scale of the fighting quickly outpaced the capacity of the police to maintain order. Police squads were unable to keep large numbers of Christians and Muslims from fighting in battles across the city. One interview respondent from *Ungwan Rogo*, a neighborhood close to the initial outbreak of the violence, was present when a group of rioters surrounded a police unit and easily and quickly disarmed them.<sup>20</sup> Fighting continued until the military intervened on the second day of the crisis and began shooting into the rioting crowds, and then erupted periodically, in pockets across the city, for nearly a week afterwards. As in Kaduna, there is no evidence to suggest that political elites planned or hoped for violence in Jos. The riots did not occur during an election year, and there was no discernible spike in inflammatory public rhetoric prior to the riots.

### 1.4.3 Why Study These Riots in Particular?

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<sup>20</sup>Interview 1602, Jos, July 18, 2008.



Beyond the intrinsic interest in understanding why people took to the streets in events with such stark humanitarian consequences, I chose to study participation in these two riots for several substantive and social scientific reasons. First, and most importantly, this book makes the case that the riots in Kaduna and Jos were relatively spontaneous in their early stages and their organization remained *decentralized* as the fighting unfolded over the course of several days. Political (or other) leaders did not order ordinary citizens to riot, nor is there evidence that they manipulated the public prior to the outbreak of the fighting in either city. What leadership *did* arise was extremely localized, and largely reactive to events and perceived threats on the ground once the actual fighting had begun.

These events in Kaduna and Jos are consistent with Donald Horowitz's conclusion, in his review of dozens of ethnic riots across Asia and Africa throughout the 20th century, that "...most riots seem to be unorganized, partially organized and partially spontaneous, or organized by the ephemeral leadership that springs up to respond to events as they happen, often suddenly."<sup>21</sup> The riots in Kaduna and Jos were by no means entirely chaotic or atomistic. The evidence makes clear that participants nearly always fought in groups, more often than not alongside people they knew before the fighting began, most often with neighbors and friends. There are also surprisingly predictable patterns in the profiles of participants and the locations where the most intense fighting took place. It would be wrong, however, to suggest that these riots were organized in a top-down fashion or planned in advance.

Suppose we imagine a one-dimensional spectrum of riot centralization, running from the extreme of tightly hierarchical riots—where elites can induce rioting on command—on the left-hand side to the extreme of purely atomistic riots—with no leadership or social organization—on the right-hand side. Thinking in these terms, I would argue that much of the most compelling work within political science on the dynamics of ethnic riots has been skewed to the left side of the spectrum. For example, Paul Brass's investigations

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<sup>21</sup>Horowitz 2001, p. 225

of “organized riot systems” and Steven Wilkinson’s study of the electoral logic of riot onset in contemporary India, have led scholarly attention away from unplanned, relatively spontaneous riots in recent years.<sup>22</sup> These scholars have produced an impressive amount of evidence to suggest that, under certain conditions, politicians representing extremist ethnic parties may have both strong motives and capabilities to instigate riots for their own electoral gain. This book does not dispute these findings. Instead, it suggests that an important scholarly contribution can be made by focusing on less centralized riots, such as the Nigerian examples investigated here.

A second reason that led me to study the Kaduna and Jos riots is that they were sufficiently large to make it possible to locate former riot participants to include in a large-scale survey, and to conduct statistical analysis. As described below, the book’s main empirical chapters draw on a survey of nearly 800 respondents, over 200 of whom directly participated in the Kaduna and Jos riots, as well as nearly 40 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with residents of Kaduna and Jos during the riots. Third, the riots were recent enough that even detailed survey and interview questions did not place unrealistic demands on respondent recall.

Fourth, and perhaps most importantly from a methodological standpoint, prior to 2000 and 2001, neither city had experienced a religious riot for more than ten years, mitigating problems in determining the arrow of causal direction between important explanatory variables and riot participation. The most recent riot before the 2000 crisis in Kaduna occurred in 1987, and was small in scale. The Kaduna riots in 1987 began in the town of Kafanchan, in southern Kaduna state, about two hours outside of Kaduna city, and spread in a limited fashion to Kaduna several days later. Across both cities, a total of 25 people were killed. In Jos, *no* Christian-Muslim riot had ever occurred before 2001 (Yakubu 2005, Sani 2007). As such, these two research sites offer a reasonably clean way to isolate individual motivations for participation independent of past riot

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<sup>22</sup>Brass 1997, Wilkinson 2004

events. This is particularly important because, as I discuss next, exposure to episodes of communal violence can have lasting consequences for the beliefs, behavior and well-being of people living in divided societies.

## 1.5 Why Study Ethnic Riots at all?

Stepping back from the conditions that contributed to deadly communal violence in two Nigerian cities, why is it important to understand the dynamics of participation in this type of violence more broadly? In this section, I argue that understanding how and why ethnic riots escalate is important for two primary reasons. The first reason is simple. As I demonstrate below in the African context, communal riots are frequent and can be extremely deadly. Understanding the motivations of participants may offer important clues as to how best prevent them in the future. Second, communal violence can have profound long-term consequences, beyond the immediate costs in lives lost and property destroyed. I highlight three such consequences here. Ethnic riots (1) erode intergroup trust, making it more likely that future episodes of violence will occur; (2) contribute to sometimes dramatic residential segregation along communal lines, which complicates processes of reconciliation and can further damage intergroup trust; and (3) can have lasting psychological consequences for those exposed to violence in the communities where they live. I consider each of these points in turn.

First, localized intergroup violence happens frequently can be remarkably destructive. A brief look beyond Kaduna and Jos at figures for Nigeria and Africa as a whole reinforces this point. Table 1.1 includes fatality and event counts for all episodes of rioting in Nigeria and in Africa between 1990 and 2017 that (1) involved fighting between two groups (rather than one group and the state) and (2) led to at least one death. This data is drawn from the Studies in Conflict Analysis (SCAD) database, which includes forms of social conflict, such as riots, strikes, and protests, that are often overlooked in other conflict datasets. The SCAD distinguishes between “organized violent riots,”

in which clear leadership and named organizations can be identified and “spontaneous violent riots,” in which they cannot. Table 1.1 highlights several key points. First, this type of intergroup violence is deadly, with more than a thousand riot deaths occurring on average each year in Africa as a whole, and nearly 450 riot deaths on average each year in Nigeria between 1990 and 2017. Second, riots occur with some frequency, with more than 270 occurring on average each year across Africa, and more than 16 on average each year in Nigeria alone. Third, the vast majority of riots documented by SCAD are spontaneous, rather than organized, suggesting that the unplanned, decentralized riots in Kaduna and Jos are the norm rather than the exception in the region.

Table 1.1: *Riots in Africa, 1990–2017*

Deaths in African riots:	28,489
Number of African riots:	1,921
Number of spontaneous African riots:	1,719
Deaths in Nigerian riots:	12,710
Number of Nigerian riots:	405
Number of spontaneous Nigerian riots:	354
Source: Social Conflict Analysis Database (SCAD)	

Beyond being frequent and deadly, episodes of communal violence cast a long shadow in their consequences for the people and communities who live through them. Prior episodes violence can make ethnic identities and social divisions more salient, hardening boundaries between groups in conflict (Fearon and Laitin 2000, De Waal 2005), as demonstrated in recent empirical research in in Sudan, Israel, Bosnia, Kosovo and Kyrgyzstan (Beber et al. 2014, Mironova and Whitt 2018, Hager et al. 2019, Hadzic et al. 2020). Histories of conflict can make it more difficult for people living in divided societies to update negative beliefs when faced with new, positive information about members of the community with which they have previously fought (Fiske 1989, Devin et al. 2002). The mistrust generated by communal violence may decrease pro-social behavior more generally, both across (Mironova and Whitt 2018) and within (Hager et al. 2019) relevant

identity groups.

Research in social psychology suggests that deadly communal conflicts can produce psychological “repertoires” of fear and grievance, making it more difficult to break out of cycles of repeated intergroup conflict. Research on such repertoires, discussed in Bar-Tal and Avrahamzon (2016) and Sharvit (2014) suggests that, even when explicit attitudes or beliefs shift in a more positive direction (in lab experimental settings, for example) outgroup animosity may continue to be stored in implicit beliefs and attitudes.

An illustration of this type of conflict repertoire seems to have been in evidence during my field research in Jos in 2007, when I experienced what might be considered a “near-riot”. Early one morning, during a period of several weeks of survey enumeration in Jos, I woke to cries from neighbors living across the street that there was “trouble in the town” because “the Muslims were mobilizing” for a riot. In Jos, commercial motorcycle drivers (who offer an inexpensive, efficient form of transportation that many local commuters rely on) have historically tended to be Muslim men. In the hours that followed, rumors spread quickly through Christian neighborhoods that “religious trouble” was brewing. The motorcycle drivers had in fact begun marching through the center of town in protest against a recent order by the city government that forbade them from carrying passengers after dark.

A religious riot was prevented through swift military intervention (facilitated by the relatively recent opening of a federal military barracks nearby), but the panic and fear generated by the sight of a group of young men belonging to the same religious group marching together was unmistakable. Previous experiences with communal violence in Jos led people to view what was essentially a labor strike through the lens of intergroup threat, shedding light on the process by which violence can beget violence.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, the very fact that episodes of communal violence tend to occur again and again in the same localities indicates how difficult it is for groups to reconcile after violence has

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<sup>23</sup>As I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 7, riots occur repeatedly in the same locations within Nigeria.

Figure 1.2: *Segregation in Kaduna*

occurred.<sup>24</sup>

Episodes of communal violence can also have lasting consequences through their impact on neighborhood residence patterns, as people who no longer feel safe living in close proximity to outgroup members move into homogeneous residential enclaves. For example, the violence in Kaduna in 2000 changed life in the city dramatically, as residents abandoned more integrated neighborhoods and self-segregated across religious lines

<sup>24</sup>See Varshney (2003) and Wilkinson (2004) for detailed evidence on the spatial concentration of Hindu-Muslim riots in post-WWII India.

(Angerbrandt 2011, Wapwera et al. 2017). Figure 1.2 uses estimates from respondents in the riots survey (which I describe in detail in Chapter 3) of the proportions of each religious group living in their neighborhood of residence just before the riots broke out (2000) and at the time when the survey was conducted (2008). The degree of segregation, measured as the absolute value of the difference in the estimated proportion of Christian and Muslim residents of a neighborhood, is represented through shading from white to dark gray. In lighter-shaded neighborhoods, this difference is smaller, reflecting less segregation. Darker neighborhoods are more segregated. Comparing the map on the left to that on the right, it is clear that segregation increased after the riots. Nine out of the ten neighborhoods included in this study (all but the wealthy neighborhood of Ungwn Rimi), had become more religiously homogeneous by 2008 than they were before the riots in 2000.

Although motivated by a desire for safety, local segregation along communal lines may provide especially fertile ground for intergroup prejudice and animosity. Recent studies in political science have identified pernicious effects of segregation on racial prejudice and discrimination in American cities (Enos 2017), inter-religious mistrust and violence in Israel (Rokem et al. 2018), cycles of ethnic violence in Iraq (Weidmann and Salehyan 2013) and Kenya (Kasara 2017), and in laboratory settings (Enos and Celaya 2018). One reason for this is that residential segregation limits opportunities for meaningful cross-group social interactions among ordinary people – and communal leaders – that can provide information to help quell rumors and resolve small-scale conflicts (Kasara 2013). Although residential segregation may make people feel more safe where they live, if things *do* go wrong, segregation can make it more difficult to contain communal violence in its early stages.

Finally, an emerging literature on the psychological impact of communal violence suggests that conflict exposure can have lasting mental health consequences. These effects may be direct, if they stem from direct exposure to traumatic events, or indirect, if they

arise from displacement or other consequences of violent conflict, such as disruption of livelihoods. Direct effects of violence exposure on mental health include post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), insomnia, anxiety and depression (Gordon 2010, Bogic et al. 2015, Mpembi et al. 2018). Conflict exposure may affect mental health indirectly, as a result of displacement, scarcity of basic necessities, such as food and water, and the loss of family and financial stability (Garry and Checchi 2020). To the extent that violent conflict increases the number of people living in extreme poverty where it occurs, survivors of riots may experience negative impacts of poverty on their mental health (for example, Patel and Kleinman 2003, Lund et al. 2010). Given the scale and intensity of the violence documented in the Kaduna and Jos riots, it is reasonable to expect lingering negative mental health consequences among its survivors, and clinical studies suggest staggeringly high levels of PTSD and depression among riot survivors years after conflict events in both cities (Obilom and Thatcher 2008, Sheikh et al. 2014, Sheikh et al. 2015).

Understanding how and why communal violence escalates, in part as a consequence of individual decisions made by ordinary people in conditions of uncertainty and fear, is important in its potential to help us understand collective behavior more generally. It may also offer insights into how best to help prevent future episodes of violence. The fact that ethnic riots occur frequently, are often incredibly destructive in the short-term, and can have damaging long-term social and psychological consequences only amplifies its importance.

## 1.6 Looking Ahead

In the chapters that follow, I develop the book’s central argument — about the motivating “push” for the poor of the fear of being attacked and the “pull” of social ties to other rioters — in greater detail and test its central claims using a range of primary data sources and a variety of social science methods. Chapter 2 outlines the logic of this argument for the decision calculus of the potential rioter. Poverty and embeddedness in local networks



may interact in a number of other ways to increase the likelihood of individual riot participation, however, and Chapter 2 outlines a series of alternative explanations that might account for a joint effect of the two variables.

Rather than serving as a proxy for vulnerability to attack, poverty may increase the likelihood of riot participation through several other channels, including the *lure of material benefits* (such as goods from looting) during rioting that are more valuable to the poor than to wealthier individuals, or through an *expressive logic* (Berkowitz 1962, Gurr 1970), in which poverty produces such high levels of discontentment that poor people resort to violence out of frustration.

On the networks side of the argument, chains of informal social ties may work in other ways aside from the exertion of peer pressure to increase participation in high-risk collective behavior. In particular, they may play a *purely informative role*, by circulating information about the location and timing of ongoing riot events and by signaling a group of other people willing to fight. In a very different argument, beyond mobilizing already willing rioters, it is possible that local social ties may actually work to *activate grievances* prior to the riot itself. In this explanation, networks serve as what qualitative researchers of social movements have described as “workshops where grievances and strategies of resistance are constructed.”<sup>25</sup>

This theoretical discussion is followed by four empirical chapters. Chapter 3 tests the argument’s main observable implication—that the interaction between poverty and social embeddedness should dramatically increase the likelihood of riot participation. The chapter first describes the design and implementation in 2007 and 2008 of an original survey of nearly 800 Kaduna and Jos residents, over 200 of whom actively participated in the 2000 and 2001 riots. It then describes a series of sampling and question-design strategies I used to overcome three empirical challenges for a micro-level study of riot participation: (1) On the basis of what sort of behavior can we distinguish riot partici-

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<sup>25</sup>Kitts, James A., 2000. “Mobilizing in Black Boxes: Social Networks and Participation in Social Movement Organizations,” *Mobilization* 5: 2, 241-257.

pants from non-rioters?; (2) How can representative members of the hidden population of rioters be found?; and (3) Once found, how can we obtain reliable responses about their participation in violence? Using the survey data, the chapter then tests the argument about poverty and social networks against alternative explanations from the violence literature.

In order to convince the reader that my interpretation of the relationship between poverty, social embeddedness and rioting is correct, Chapter 4 draws on a combination of data from the riot participation survey described above and a dozens of semi-structured interviews with riot participants and eyewitnesses in Kaduna and Jos. Interview subjects were recruited from a diverse set of neighborhoods, in order to build a fine-grained picture of riot events as they unfolded in different micro-contexts across the two research cities. Chapter 5 focuses on the importance of neighborhood-level social ties in mobilizing both willing and somewhat less willing young men to riot. This chapter is largely qualitative, and uses the interviewees' stories to trace the way in which particular people were recruited to fight in a series of large-scale street battles across Kaduna and Jos. Chapters 4 and 5 turn our attention from the initial question of *who* riots to an exploration of *why* rioters and non-rioters made the decision to fight or stay on the sidelines.

Chapter 6 looks at the question of riot participation through a somewhat broader empirical lens. This chapter provides an additional test for the book's central hypotheses, with the help of a Nigeria-wide dataset 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 over 130 of Nigeria's 773 Local Government Areas (LGAs). Strong support is found linking poverty, centrality in local social networks and participation in violent demonstrations, suggesting that the argument travels beyond Kaduna and Jos.

I conclude the book with a discussion of the scope of the argument. I consider the way in which three particular features of the Nigerian Middle Belt research context—the weakness of state institutions, the relative balance in size between the ethnic groups in conflict, and the intermingling or segregation in residence patterns of ethnic groups at the neighborhood level—inform the generalizability of the book’s theory. I probe these claims about scope by discussing several examples of riots beyond Nigeria, drawn from varying geographic regions and time periods.