

—Summary of Dissertation—
**Threatening your own. Electoral violence within ethnic groups in
Burundi and beyond**

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The first chapter of the dissertation opens with the *prima facie* paradox that in Burundi—a country where conflict between ethnic groups has reigned for decades—violence before electoral polling in 2010 occurred predominantly *within* these groups. It continues by discussing that while ethnic diversity is usually believed to increase conflict between ethnic groups, there is not yet conclusive cross-national evidence of a link between ethnic fragmentation and violence before elections. In presenting evidence of behavior that existing theories are unable to account for, this chapter builds the case that pre-electoral violence within ethnic groups is a key missing element in the study of elections in multi-ethnic societies. I then summarize my arguments regarding the role of this form of violence and the electoral conditions under which it takes place, followed by an overview of the empirical results and roadmap of the dissertation.

Chapter 2: The Logic of Intra-Ethnic Violence before Elections

In this chapter I present my theoretical argument and discuss its empirical implications. The chapter opens by outlining the scope conditions for my analysis—that political parties possess the capability to inflict harm, that ethnic identities are politically salient, and that political parties are nested within ethnic groups. Here I present my main argument: violence can be used against *coethnics*, principally to demobilize coethnic opposition candidates and to coerce the support of coethnic voters. I begin by discussing the strategy of violent suppression of coethnic rival candidates and parties. I then elaborate on how violence can be employed to coerce voting behavior (that is, to boost turnout and shift vote preferences) and why it escalates in an effort to signal both an expected cost from retaliatory violence and a stronger capability to protect supporters from the opponent's retribution. Next, I identify the electoral conditions under which violence takes place: by applying the hypothesis that parties are more violent in proximity to the winning threshold to the context in which these parties compete for the support of their own ethnic group, I posit that closeness to the winning threshold is here determined by the size of this ethnic group and its internal fragmentation. That is, violence is more likely when the ethnic group is larger and not very fragmented. I then review other explanations for electoral violence in multi-ethnic societies and analyze how they relate to mine, discussing the conditions under which they apply. The final section explores how electoral violence against coethnics relates to violence against non-coethnics.

Chapter 3: Politics, Violence, and Ethnicity in Burundi

Following this, I evaluate the proposed mechanism by analyzing sub-national patterns of violence in Burundi. In this chapter I discuss the presence of my theory's scope conditions in the Burundi case, and the internal validity of an analysis of the 2010 elections with respect to the country's

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modern history. Having discussed the psychological, economic, and institutional factors that made ethnicity salient in the first place in Burundi and continued to influence its salience over time, I conclude that the use of violence as a coercive strategy in the 2010 elections was not driven by peculiar strategies linked to 2010 only. To do this, I review half-a-century of political conflicts to demonstrate that violence has been consistently employed over the years (against targets of any ethnic group) as a coercive strategy to obtain the support of people, to punish defectors and publicly warn against potential defections, and to physically eliminate challengers.

Chapter 4: The 2010 Elections

In the following two chapters I explore the use of coercion specifically during the 2010 elections. Chapter 4 shows that political parties employed violence against *coethnic* voters to mobilize their electoral support through fear. I first provide an overview of the electoral context, discussing the characteristics of the major political parties that competed for power (including their capability to inflict harm), the conditions under which these parties could achieve victory, and how the entrenchment of political parties and the existence of flaws in the voting process made it highly credible to both voters and opposition candidates that violence could be employed in retaliation against those who did not comply with the violent party's wishes. I then elaborate on how intimidation and violence fit into the menu of campaign options for Burundian political parties. To do this I rely on extensive interviews with representatives from all political sides and non-governmental organizations, on speeches from party rallies, TV interviews, and campaign songs that I collected and translated, and on data regarding acts of violence and general electoral malpractices that I disaggregated by nature and identity of targets and perpetrators. My analysis of these data shows that the parties focused on their own ethnic strongholds with both carrots and sticks: while they presented themselves as the best representative of the given ethnic group, they also worked to intimidate voters and demobilize opposition candidates within the same ethnic group. Specifically I show that violence was used by parties to show strength and their ability to protect supporters, punish defectors and warn potential defectors, and coerce opponents.

Chapter 5: The Electoral Logic of Violence across Municipalities

In this chapter I test the expectation that violence escalates in places where the outcome of voting is uncertain and the majority ethnic group is larger and not very fragmented. I statistically analyze the sub-national variation of violence preceding the 2010 municipal election, compiling an original dataset of violent events, socio-economic factors, historical election results, military resources, and campaign rhetoric for every municipality in the country. I employ several statistical methods to account for variation in both the *number* and the *nature* of violent acts across municipalities. In order to explore the electoral motivations that drive a party to employ violence, I begin with an analysis of only state-sponsored violence, and show that (a) the ruling party was most violent in districts where it expected to win or to lose by only a small margin (rather than to lose massively), (b) violence escalated in places where the opposition also initiated violence, and (c) violence was directed predominately against voters and candidates of the *same* ethnic group as the ruling party. I then analyze the territorial variation of all acts of violence and show that the number and intensity of violent events in a municipality were greatest when the majority ethnic group was larger and politically polarized. In other words, violence spiraled between the largest parties competing for the control of the same ethnic group. Results are robust to controlling for a set of social, economic, and military factors, to a battery of checks that address various forms of spatial correlation among the observations.

Chapter 6: Reactions to Violence

In this chapter I assess the impact of this violence on electoral results, in particular when violence was employed with the goal of boosting electoral participation. To overcome the challenge of capturing the psychological motivations of voters I measure the perception that voting behavior is influenced by intimidation, through a questionnaire administered to more than two thousands local election monitors from every municipality. The analysis of these data is complemented by an analysis of sub-national turnout rates. I find that both intimidation-driven voting and actual turnout were associated with *more* violence in the municipality—especially if that violence was targeted at specific individuals (rather than being group clashes or riots)—and with more state-sponsored violence only in localities where the incumbent could rely on a pool of strongmen and was therefore perceived to be a more powerful coercive actor. In order to ensure that this electoral outcome was not the result of fraudulent activities, I also employ statistical “forensic” techniques to show that the incumbent achieved this increase in participation without extensively denying votes to other challengers or manipulating and fabricating official vote counts. This demonstrates that electoral manipulation took place prevalently *before* polling, through intimidation and coercion.

Chapter 7: Beyond Burundi

This chapter concludes the empirical assessment of my theory by discussing its applicability beyond Burundi. I separate the two key claims of the theory: the role of violence in *mobilizing* voters, and the targets of violence being *coethnics* rather than non-coethnics. I begin by showing that there is no clear and definitive link between pre-election violence and turnout cross-nationally—which demonstrates that violence is not (or at least, not always) aimed at suppressing turnout, but (also) at enhancing it. In a specific discussion of violence as a mobilizing strategy, I focus on Zimbabwe. An analysis of three decades of electoral improprieties allows me to show clearly that violence can be used for multiple purposes, among which mobilization is important. I conclude with an analysis of Sri Lanka in order to discuss the ethnic nature of electoral violence. This analysis demonstrates that, as in Burundi, in Sri Lanka political parties presented themselves as the best representative of the given ethnic group while also working to intimidate voters and demobilize opposition candidates within the *same* ethnic group. Exploiting sub-national data for the 2000 and 2001 parliamentary elections—the most violent in Sri Lanka’s history—I further show that, like in Burundi, most election-related violence was perpetrated by the largest parties within the Sinhalese majority, which targeted one another and did so more when the size of their coethnic support base was larger.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

This chapter concludes by summing up the main theoretical claims and empirical findings of this dissertation and then discussing the implications for future research. On the conceptual side, I intend to further develop my theory by explaining under what conditions violence takes place between or within groups. My empirical findings from the case of Burundi—and to a lesser extent from Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka as well—further suggest that pre-electoral violence can be used to obtain control not specifically of the *ethnic* group, but simply of the group that constitutes the party’s expected support base, making this theory applicable to other contexts, such as intra-party competition. The empirical findings also open avenues for new research projects: my historical analysis of Burundi suggests that power-sharing political institutions might move a conflict from being between ethnic groups to being within ethnic groups—an important novel implication for

the study of political institutions in the resolution of ethnic conflicts, and one that bears further cross-national investigation. Furthermore, one should carefully disentangle the micro-dynamics of electoral coercion: the positive impact of incumbent-associated strongmen on voting behavior that I found offers a glimpse of this relationship, but more research is needed to unearth the ways in which parties can monitor voters and punish them. Finally, the relationship between violent and non-violent strategies, including fraud, should also be further explored.