Democratization and Social Conflict in Africa, 1990-2009

Election-related deaths, 1990-2009

Democratization in Nigeria

Democratization has affected patterns of social conflict in Nigeria after the end of military rule in 1999. First, we note that the frequency of events increased, with an average of 31 events per year during the Abacha regime and 61 events per year afterward.

In addition, the spatial distribution of events has also shifted. During the period of military rule, conflicts were mostly confined to the southern part of the country. Only a handful of northern states experienced notable unrest. After democratization however, one can discern a significant cluster of events around the Niger Delta and a major expansion of conflict to the northern states.

While few African countries held elections during the 1970s and 1980s, elections have become more common. In many cases elections occur in regimes that are not fully democratic, such as Zimbabwe and Uganda. From 1990–2009, there were 144 elections for the executive, and 92 occurred in undemocratic contexts.

We demonstrate that elections in genuine democracies are associated with a much lower level of social and political unrest, while elections in authoritarian regimes approximately double the rate of violence. For policy makers and those concerned with human rights, this research suggests that it is important to not encourage premature elections until necessary democratic safeguards are in place.