Local power-sharing institutions and interreligious violence in Nigeria

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Abstract
News reports of clashes between Muslims and Christians in countries such as Nigeria are increasingly common. Yet, interreligious violence erupts only in some communities but not others. Under what conditions does religious identity become the fault line of communal violence? We argue that informal power-sharing institutions on the communal level are essential in shaping the incentives of potential perpetrators. We provide both qualitative and quantitative evidence for our claim that districts in which informal power-sharing agreements exist are less likely to experience interreligious violence. We conducted interviews with community leaders in 38 Nigerian districts to trace the process by which local power-sharing institutions exert influence on actors’ incentives to engage in religious violence. We complement this with quantitative analyses of a new dataset capturing interreligious violence on a subnational level. The analyses show that the overall degree of interreligious violence is significantly lower in districts with power-sharing than in those without. We also identify two causal mechanisms through which informal power-sharing institutions operate. First, these institutions affect the incentives of elites to appeal for cooperation. We show that the rhetoric of elites in districts with power-sharing is significantly more conciliatory. Second, power-sharing affects the general population’s perception of the interreligious tensions. Individuals living in districts with power-sharing institutions are less likely to experience religious diversity as threatening. Local-level informal power-sharing institutions are therefore an important foundation for communal peace and interreligious cooperation.

Keywords
institutions, Nigeria, power-sharing, religious conflict

Introduction
Countries like Nigeria, Egypt, Kenya, India, Indonesia, Myanmar, and the Central African Republic have recently faced increased interreligious tensions. In Nigeria, interreligious violence has increased since the 1980s, concentrated in the north-central area of the country where the predominantly Christian south and Muslim north converge. Human Rights Watch (2010: 19) estimates that at least 13,500 people have been killed in Nigeria due to religious violence since 1999.

However, why does interreligious violence occur in some Nigerian districts but not others? For example, the socio-economic indicators and ethnic and religious composition of Chikun district are comparable to those of Jos North. Yet, while Chikun has remained largely peaceful, Jos North has been riddled with clashes between Christians and Muslims.

Two explanations are commonly posed when analyzing interreligious violence. First, the structural approach suggests that economic grievances eventually lead to violence. However, while the degree of poverty is comparatively similar across districts in northern Nigeria, they exhibit varying degrees of interreligious violence. Second, the rational choice approach suggests that elites use religious narratives in an instrumental manner to...
mobilize their followers. Yet, the question remains why some leaders utilize this rhetoric while others do not.

We address this puzzle by bridging the structural and the rational choice approaches with a focus on local institutions. We argue that informal power-sharing institutions are key. Using both statistical analysis and qualitative fieldwork we show that the degree of interreligious violence is significantly lower in districts with power-sharing arrangements than in those without them. Interviews with local community leaders and data gathered in 38 Nigerian districts reveal the process by which local power-sharing institutions affect actors’ incentives to mobilize. Quantitative analysis of an original dataset tests the causal mechanisms through which power-sharing arrangements affect both elites and the general population. First, we show that elites in districts with power-sharing agreements use more cooperative rhetoric and symbolic behavior towards the respective other religious group. Second, we demonstrate that individuals are less likely to perceive their living situation as competitive or threatening in districts with power-sharing institutions.

Related literature

Various distinctions between ethnic, tribal, religious, and other identities can be made, and many combinations of different identities are possible (Chandra, 2006). However, for the purpose of this study, we focus on the religious identities of the individuals in our sample. In doing so, we follow the work by Basedau, Vüllers & Körner (2013) as well as Langer, Mustapha & Stewart (2009) who refer to overlapping religious and ethnic group boundaries as the relevant structural feature of Nigerian society. The factors that lead to intrastate violence can be divided into two dominant types of explanations: structural theories and elite mobilizing theories.

**Structural approach: Socio-economic differences**

Structural theories focus on the long-term economic and demographic factors that may give rise to greed and grievances. Where economic inequality between groups is deep, economic grievances and competition for resources can spiral into violent conflict. In these cases, the costs of group mobilization decline relative to possible gains (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004; Fearon & Laitin, 2003).

While there is a very strong relationship between intrastate conflict and low per capita income, the mechanisms that translate these structural conditions into violent mobilization are not well defined (Blattman & Miguel, 2010: 4). Why do some similarly poor individuals engage in violence while others do not?

There are two ways in which the relationship between poverty, power-sharing institutions, and violence can be conceptualized to provide an answer to this question. First, poor economic performance can be treated as a background condition that might capture some, but not all, subnational variation in violence. Against this background, the presence or absence of power-sharing institutions explains the remainder of the variation by providing insights into the conditions under which collective action issues are not resolved (Boix, 2008; Blattman & Miguel, 2010). Alternatively, the effect of power-sharing institutions might differ across individuals of varying wealth. The institutional channels through which power-sharing operates might exert themselves most forcefully on individuals with the highest propensity for violence. With the first approach, poverty is a mere control variable, while the second approach requires interacting poverty and power-sharing.

**Rational choice approach: Elites mobilize their constituency**

In contrast to structural theories, rational choice approaches emphasize how elites may make instrumental ‘use’ of religious identity for political mobilization. For example, political entrepreneurs can mobilize the masses by framing the competition for scarce resources as an identity-based political contest (Posen, 1993). Wilkinson (2004) finds that ethnic riots in India are more likely where local elections are more competitive, as ethnic parties have an incentive to rally their base by sparking ethnic conflict.

However, given similar conditions of competition, why do some politicians instigate interreligious violence while others do not (Boix, 2008: 197–198)? For example, issues of inequality and competition over scarce resources are common in northern Nigeria. Following Wilkinson (2004), one would expect that the majority status of Christian ethnic groups in Chikun would incentivize violent politicization of religious identity. However, historically this has not been the case. Until recently, interreligious violence rarely coincided with local or national elections. Rational choice arguments do not sufficiently explain why elites in some districts utilize religious frames for mobilization while others do not.

**Theory**

Our approach bridges structural and rational choice theories. We argue that local power-sharing institutions shape both the motivations of elites to rationally use religious rhetoric and the general population’s perception of
informal institutional rules followed by the local elite. We refer to local power-sharing arrangements as the types of local power-sharing agreements.

Types of local power-sharing agreements
We refer to local power-sharing arrangements as the informal institutional rules followed by the local elite to create a more inclusive local government. By informal institutions, we refer to the ‘socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated, and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels’ (Helmke & Levitsky, 2004: 727). Our fieldwork in 38 districts of Kaduna and Plateau state in northern Nigeria revealed that power-sharing arrangements have been common since decentralization in 1976. We identify four types of power-sharing institutions.

In the case of rotating positions power-sharing, the main religious groups rotate the local government council executive from one election to the next. Chairmanship candidates are required to run on a joint ticket with a deputy from another ethnic group. The chairman then appoints the secretary, the third main seat in the local government. Since the composition of many of the districts is religiously pluralistic, the resulting distribution of seats reflects shared religious representation. This is the case in districts such as Kanam in Plateau state and Sanga in Kaduna state.

In what we refer to as rotating positions and rotating locations power-sharing, the same rotation is reflected but utilizing a different principle: the rotation of local government leadership among wards (i.e. subunits) of the district. Candidates for the chairmanship, for example, are not supposed to come from the same ward or set of wards as the previous chairman. This adds a spatial dimension to the rotation.

In a third form of power-sharing, static positions power-sharing, the posts held by each ethnic group are static over time but in a way that ensures the fair representation of all religious groups. This is the case in Chikun, where Christian Gbagyi always take the chairmanship, the Muslim Hausa-Fulani the deputy position, and a Christian Kabilu is appointed to the secretary’s post.

Static positions and rotating locations power-sharing is the fourth type of power-sharing arrangement. Here, local government leadership must rotate among the various wards of the district. Although executive council positions may always be held by representatives of the same groups, the ethnic/religious pluralism of the wards ensures shared leadership, as is the case in Kajuru district in Kaduna.

Causal mechanisms
Whatever the precise arrangement, the main objective of any power-sharing institution is that it ‘includes all groups that can threaten political stability if kept outside the arrangements’ (Rothchild & Roeder, 2005: 31). We...
suggest that these arrangements operate through two causal mechanisms. First, they moderate elites’ incentives to use religious identities for mobilizing the masses. For example, if a candidate for chairman is required to campaign with a deputy chairman of a different religious group, the use of divisive religious rhetoric is not a useful tool for political mobilization. The second causal mechanism focuses on the way power-sharing shapes perceptions of the general population. Inclusive institutions moderate individuals’ perceptions of other groups because regulated interaction reduces the sense of competition between different groups.

We derive three testable implications from the discussion above. First, the extent and severity of interreligious violence should be lower in districts with power-sharing.

\textbf{H1:} Comparing the number of violent incidences between Christian and Muslim groups, districts with informal power-sharing arrangements will have fewer incidences than those without such arrangements.

Second, the behavior of elites should differ. Specifically, power-sharing agreements should affect the degree to which the rhetoric of elites is cooperative as opposed to confrontational.

\textbf{H2:} Comparing the number of cooperative and moderating statements by elites, districts with informal power-sharing arrangements will have more such statements than those without power-sharing institutions.

Third, the presence of local power-sharing institutions should shape the attitudes of individuals. The perception of insecurity and level of threat should differ across districts.

\textbf{H3:} Comparing individuals across districts, those living in a district with informal power-sharing institutions will be less likely to perceive their living situation as competitive and more likely to view their surroundings as safe than those without these institutions.

The remainder of the article tests these hypotheses using both quantitative and qualitative evidence.

\section*{Quantitative evidence}

\textbf{Data}

To measure the presence or absence of power-sharing, our strategy involved three steps. First, we collected election results and subsequent appointments for 15 districts in Plateau state and 23 districts in Kaduna state between 1970 and 2010. Gathering the data was a major challenge as the National Electoral Commission, state government offices, and local government headquarters have not generally preserved records of local government officials. We therefore undertook fieldwork in each district to compile the names of past officials and their ethnic and religious identities. These data were then reviewed to detect systematic patterns in leadership changes. Second, we interviewed local decisionmakers directly to gather information on the absence or presence of power-sharing arrangements. This effort involved speaking with former chairmen, deputy chairmen, secretaries, councilors, information officers, and tribal chiefs. Third, we triangulated the qualitative insights from the interviews with the quantitative data on election results for the entire period. Districts are coded as power-sharing cases if the patterns of political appointments, statements by interviewees, and historical progression of election results agreed that a power-sharing arrangement operates in this district. See Figure 1.

Obtaining data for the dependent variable – instances of communal violence between Christians and Muslims or information on elite rhetoric – presented a similar challenge. One prominent approach has been to use newspaper reports to obtain data on interreligious violence. We therefore created an original dataset while undertaking fieldwork in Nigeria. We collected hard copies of Nigerian newspapers that are not available electronically and hand-coded news articles to obtain data on interreligious violent events.\footnote{The raw data are available at https://www.prio.org/jpr/datasets/.

Available at http://gdeltproject.org/.

\textbf{Data}}

\textbf{To ensure that the findings are not a function of the data, we replicate our analyses with two additional datasets. First, we use the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) by Raleigh et al. (2010). In addition, we utilize the Global Database of Events, Language, and Tone (GDELT),\footnote{Available at http://gdeltproject.org/} a project that codes electronically available newspaper articles to generate event data. Both datasets provide georeferenced event data on violent conflicts between Christians and Muslims. However, both suffer from the limitation that they code only electronically available newspapers. These datasets therefore use primarily international news agencies. For example, the three most common sources in the ACLED data are Agence France Presse, Reuters News, and AllAfrica. These sources likely underreport the number of interreligious violence incidents on a communal level.}
Control variables are drawn from the National Core Welfare Indicators Survey (CWIQ)\(^3\) conducted by the World Bank and the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics. It is the only available systematic dataset with district-level information as no other data source features information on the subnational and substate levels. However, the data are only available for the year 2006. This limitation requires us to use a cross-sectional approach. The survey offers data on 6,113 households, which we use as the unit of analysis in the subsequent estimations.\(^4\)

The overall degree of violence

To operationalize the degree of religious violence, we create a variable based on the number of violent events (not the number of newspaper articles on each event) between religious actors reported in local Nigerian newspapers between 2000 and 2006. We first produce this count variable from our own dataset based on local newspapers. To capture the interreligious dimension, we only count events where the two adversaries were clearly identified as Christians and Muslims.\(^5\) We obtain a similar variable from ACLED by counting all violent incidences that clearly identify the opposing actors as Christians and Muslims. Within GDELT, ‘violent events’ are defined as any violent attack directed at another actor, regardless of the casualties. Therefore, we include fights with small arms and the use of conventional military force as well as blockades restricting movement of opposing groups.

One concern with using coded newspaper articles is the coverage variation across geographical areas. Since newspapers assign fewer reporters to more remote districts, the likelihood of an event being reported is lower than in districts where many reporters are assigned – even if the underlying likelihood of an event is identical across these districts. Therefore, we include fights with small arms and the use of conventional military force as well as blockades restricting movement of opposing groups.

One concern with using coded newspaper articles is the coverage variation across geographical areas. Since newspapers assign fewer reporters to more remote districts, the likelihood of an event being reported is lower than in districts where many reporters are assigned – even if the underlying likelihood of an event is identical across these districts. Thus, the data may be biased due to newspaper coverage alone. To address this possible selection bias, we follow Copelovitch (2010) and calculate a propensity score that captures the likelihood of an event being reported should it occur. This propensity score serves as an additional control variable to compare each ‘treated’ observation where an

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\(^3\) Available at http://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/nada/index.php/catalog/30/study-description.

\(^4\) Note that the dependent variables for H1 and H2 are measured on the district level, not the household level. It is therefore possible that duplicating districts by reporting an estimation on the household level overstates the precision of the estimates. This problem, however, is conditional on the distribution of observations on the dependent variable: if instances of violence are concentrated in few districts, the precision of estimates might be overly precise. However, if violent incidences are widely dispersed across districts (and only differ in their frequency) the analyses might underestimate the precision. To differentiate between these two possibilities we create district-level averages of individual-level variables and replicate the analyses with 38 observations only. The results are presented in Section 6 of the online appendix. In short, the district-level results are consistent with the individual-level results. Districts without power-sharing have a positive number of cases of interreligious violence that is statistically different from zero, while this is not the case for districts with power-sharing. However, these results are only present in two of the three datasets used – our own dataset and the ACLED data – but not the GDELT data. This does not surprise us, considering the concerns regarding the data quality of GDELT data. See the online appendix for discussion of the rationale for reporting the individual- rather than district-level analysis.

\(^5\) Our data on religious violence do not include the violent actions by Boko Haram. Its violent campaign began on 26–29 July 2009, thereby falling outside of our date range.
interreligious fight was recorded with a ‘control’ observation that exhibits the same likelihood of an event being recorded in local newspapers if it takes place. We calculate a propensity score based on three variables: (1) the time to the nearest public transportation, (2) the time to the nearest all-season roads, and (3) the total district population. These variables capture a district’s degree of inaccessibility possibly affecting the likelihood of a violent conflict making it into the news. For each observation, this generates a ‘propensity score’ ranging from 0 to 1, measuring the predicted probability of an event being reported in the newspapers. As the newspaper coverage of the authors’ data, ACLED, and GDELT might differ, we calculate the propensity score separately for the respective dependent variable.

Following the discussion above, we account for both ways in which the relationship between poverty, power-sharing institutions, and violence can be conceptualized. First, we include power-sharing institutions without interactions but control for poverty by including the welfare quintile. Second, we interact power-sharing with each respondent’s welfare quintile, since the institutional channels through which power-sharing operates might most forcefully exert themselves on individuals with the highest propensity for violence.

We control for three sets of indicators that might also explain the degree of religious violence across districts. First, considering possible violence-inducing grievances, we control for whether individuals view inadequate employment opportunities, lack of adequate land, hard economic times, too much competition, or cultural and religious reasons as primary reasons for poverty. In addition, the total population of each district is included as a control for the possibility that feelings of competition and insecurity might be manifest more easily in more populated states. Second, we account for capacity to mobilize violence by controlling for an individual’s access to media (TV and radio) and her means for independent transportation (motorcycle). Third, we include individual-level characteristics. For example, more educated individuals might be more able to rationally respond to interreligious tensions. We control for gender and age, as young, male individuals might be more likely to engage in interreligious violence than older, female individuals. However, to ensure that the results are not dependent on the control variables, we first implement the model with a minimal set of variables and only later add the control variables. The propensity score and the population variables are included across all models.

Hypothesis H1 suggests that the presence of power-sharing arrangements reduces interreligious violence. We consequently estimate a negative binomial count model of the form

\[ y_{di} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_d + \beta_2 \delta_i + \beta_3 x_d \times \delta_i + \beta_4 \gamma_i + \beta_5 \gamma_d + \beta_6 \lambda_i + \epsilon \]  

(1)

where \( \beta_3 \) estimates the effect of the interaction between our measure of power-sharing \( x \) and the welfare quintile \( \delta \). We constrain \( \beta_3 = 0 \) in select models to account for the two ways in which the relationship between poverty and power-sharing can be conceptualized. \( \beta_4 \) and \( \beta_5 \) capture the effect of control variables on the individual level, \( \gamma_i \), and the district level, \( \gamma_d \), while \( \lambda_i \) are the propensity scores.\footnote{Likelihood-ratio tests indicate that the event variable is characterized by overdispersion. We therefore use a negative binomial regression instead of a Poisson model.}

The numerical results are displayed in Table I. Both the component variables, the power-sharing dummy \( x \) and the welfare quintile \( \delta \), as well as the interaction term exhibit statistical significance. However, the inclusion of interaction effects – particularly if they involve multiple categorical levels – complicates the interpretation of the regression table. Figure 2 visualizes the results by depicting the predicted number of attacks between Christians and Muslims.\footnote{The standard errors are not clustered as the survey’s sampling procedure was designed to capture the heterogeneity of individuals in each cluster, resulting in little intraclass correlation. Clustering standard errors therefore has little effect on sample precision. As a robustness check, Section 7 of the online appendix re-estimates all models with clustered standard errors.}

The overall level of interreligious violence is significantly lower in districts with power-sharing institutions than in those without. This finding is robust irrespective of whether the interreligious violence data come from the authors’ data, ACLED, or GDELT.\footnote{To preserve space, Figure 2 presents visualizations for select models only. The full set of graphs can be found in Section 2 of the online appendix.}

The rhetoric of elites

We also conduct direct tests of the causal mechanisms through which power-sharing operates. Hypothesis H2 suggests that power-sharing arrangements diminish the
Table I. Effect of power-sharing on the number of fights between Christians and Muslims

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Interreligious violence (authors' data)</th>
<th>ACLED</th>
<th>GDELT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power-sharing</td>
<td>-1.345*</td>
<td>-1.046*</td>
<td>-0.939*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd welfare quintile</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd welfare quintile</td>
<td>-0.380*</td>
<td>-0.268*</td>
<td>-0.218*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.083)</td>
<td>(0.094)</td>
<td>(0.095)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th welfare quintile</td>
<td>-0.973*</td>
<td>-0.870*</td>
<td>-0.829*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.092)</td>
<td>(0.102)</td>
<td>(0.104)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th welfare quintile</td>
<td>-0.997*</td>
<td>-0.840*</td>
<td>-0.814*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.089)</td>
<td>(0.101)</td>
<td>(0.104)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power-sharing*2nd quintile</td>
<td>-0.376</td>
<td>-0.472*</td>
<td>-0.315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.194)</td>
<td>(0.195)</td>
<td>(0.216)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power-sharing*3rd quintile</td>
<td>-0.315</td>
<td>-0.358</td>
<td>-0.254*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.216)</td>
<td>(0.219)</td>
<td>(0.192)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power-sharing*4th quintile</td>
<td>-0.585*</td>
<td>-0.735*</td>
<td>-0.226*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.199)</td>
<td>(0.202)</td>
<td>(0.197)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power-sharing*5th quintile</td>
<td>-0.499*</td>
<td>-0.560*</td>
<td>-0.297*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.197)</td>
<td>(0.198)</td>
<td>(0.197)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total population</td>
<td>-0.007*</td>
<td>-0.007*</td>
<td>-0.007*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
<td>(0.001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.622)</td>
<td>(1.632)</td>
<td>(1.650)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Propensity score (ACLED)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control variables</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>6,113</td>
<td>6,113</td>
<td>6,014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The presence of power-sharing institutions has a significant negative effect on the number of fights between Christians and Muslims. The results are robust to different model specifications and across three datasets. *p < 0.05.

We operationalize these considerations by testing whether the language and actions of elites differs significantly across districts. For example, we utilize the number of events where a Christian or a Muslim actor made a statement that ‘appeals to others to settle a dispute’, ‘expressed intent to meet or negotiate’, ‘expressed the intent to cooperate’, ‘engaged in diplomatic cooperation’, or ‘made a visit’ to the respective other actor.11

11 These variables are obtained from GDELT. Unfortunately, to our knowledge, no other data source exists that systematically codes types of statements by religious actors on a district level in Nigeria. We are therefore unable to replicate the analyses with an alternative data source.

Along with the interaction of power-sharing and welfare quintile, we incorporate control variables to capture alternative explanations for elite rhetoric. We control for whether households consider cultural or religious reasons to be the prime reason for poverty, as this would be the main target of elite rhetoric in instigating interreligious violence. Similarly, we control for the capacity to receive information from elites by including the most common communication device: the radio. For reasons detailed above, we also incorporate individual-level characteristics such as education level, gender, and age of the head of household, and whether he/she is employed.

We estimate a negative binomial regression model of the same form as Equation 1. Table II displays the numerical results for the five dependent variables described above. The predicted counts of the respective

\[
\text{Interreligious violence (authors' data)} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Power-sharing} + \beta_2 \text{Propensity score (GDELT)} + \text{Control variables} + \epsilon
\]

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events are displayed in Figure 3. In all instances, Christian and Muslim leaders in districts with power-sharing arrangements are significantly more likely to appeal to others to settle a dispute, express intent to meet or negotiate, express intent to cooperate, engage in diplomatic cooperation, or make a visit. In sum, power-sharing arrangements have a strong effect on elite behavior.

**The perception of the population**

While the previous section established how power-sharing arrangements affect elite behavior, our theory posits that they should also shape the perceptions of the masses. Hypothesis H3 suggests that the population should feel less threatened by economic or religious competition in districts with power-sharing arrangements. Similarly, they should have a higher sense of security than individuals living in districts without power-sharing. Consequently, their propensity to follow calls for violence from politicians and religious leaders should be lower.

We use two questions from the CWIQ survey for this purpose. First, the survey asks individuals to identify the most important reasons for poverty. One of the 27 possible responses is ‘too much competition’. We create a binomial variable indicating whether an individual has chosen ‘too much competition’ as one of the primary reasons for poverty. We acknowledge the possibility that this question captures competition within rather than between religious groups. To account for this possibility we carefully examined key violent events in which perceived competition was explicitly or implicitly an issue. In Shendam district, for example, the lead-up to Muslim–Christian violence between 2001 to 2004 was characterized by disputes over which group would benefit from the location of a new market or whether interreligious romantic relationships were acceptable. In Wase district, disputes over unequal representation and ownership of land sparked violence between the Christian Taroh and Muslim Hausa-Fulani. In Qua’an Pan district, intergroup competition – the perceived exclusion of one group from the creation of a new local development area – fueled Muslim–Christian violence. These examples highlight that perceived competition refers primarily to intergroup competition, not within-group competition, thereby supporting the validity of the dependent variable. The second dependent variable utilizes the

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12 Other possible responses are, for example, ‘irregular payment of pension’, ‘drought’, or ‘salaries or wages too little’.

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Figure 2. Predicted number of fights between Christians and Muslims in districts with and without power-sharing institutions

Results based on Models 3, 6, and 9 of Table I. 95% confidence intervals.
Table II. Effect of power-sharing on rhetoric of elites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Express intent to cooperate</th>
<th>Appeal to others to settle dispute</th>
<th>Express intent to meet or negotiate</th>
<th>Make a visit</th>
<th>Engage in diplomatic cooperation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power-sharing</td>
<td>2.717*</td>
<td>1.665*</td>
<td>1.679*</td>
<td>1.876*</td>
<td>0.606*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.126)</td>
<td>(0.204)</td>
<td>(0.221)</td>
<td>(0.114)</td>
<td>(0.202)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd welfare quintile</td>
<td>−0.568*</td>
<td>−1.072*</td>
<td>1.036*</td>
<td>−0.412*</td>
<td>−1.176*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.161)</td>
<td>(0.197)</td>
<td>(0.216)</td>
<td>(0.221)</td>
<td>(0.168)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd welfare quintile</td>
<td>−0.670*</td>
<td>−1.411*</td>
<td>1.333*</td>
<td>−0.402*</td>
<td>−1.497*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.169)</td>
<td>(0.211)</td>
<td>(0.231)</td>
<td>(0.231)</td>
<td>(0.252)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th welfare quintile</td>
<td>−0.454*</td>
<td>−0.866*</td>
<td>1.056*</td>
<td>−0.276*</td>
<td>−0.813*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.171)</td>
<td>(0.208)</td>
<td>(0.231)</td>
<td>(0.231)</td>
<td>(0.241)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th welfare quintile</td>
<td>−0.021</td>
<td>−0.552*</td>
<td>0.608*</td>
<td>0.070*</td>
<td>−0.649*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.173)</td>
<td>(0.205)</td>
<td>(0.239)</td>
<td>(0.206)</td>
<td>(0.238)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The presence of power-sharing institutions has a significant positive effect on number of cooperative statements made by elites. The results are robust across five different types of statements. *$p < 0.05$. 

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yes-or-no answer to the survey question: ‘Have police services improved in the last five years?’.

We control for individual-level characteristics such as gender, age, marital status, and employment. In addition to the welfare quintile, we include an indicator of whether the household experienced difficulties satisfying food needs as a more precise measure of grievances. We control for means that could facilitate mobilization: TV, radio, mobile phone, and motorcycles or vehicles. Lastly, we control for home ownership to differentiate between mobile individuals and those tied to a geographical location.
While we use a logistic regression instead of a negative binomial to account for the binary nature of the dependent variable, the model is of the same form as Equation 1. Again, we include a propensity score for the possibility that citizens in more rural areas are less likely to be included in the survey, which would result in selection bias.

Models 1 through 3 of Table III present the likelihood estimates of an individual citing ‘too much competition’ as one of the primary reasons for poverty. The corresponding predicted probabilities are visualized in the left panel of Figure 4. Individuals in districts without power-sharing arrangements are significantly more likely to state that police services have not improved than individuals in districts with power-sharing. There is strong evidence, therefore, that power-sharing institutions affect the perception of individuals in ways likely to reduce their incentives to engage in interreligious violence.

### Qualitative evidence

This section presents qualitative evidence from two districts, showing that the variation in the key explanatory variable – the presence or absence of power-sharing institutions – explains the variation in religious violence.

### Case selection

We chose Jos North and Chikun for methodological reasons, as they are similar in many ways. In demographic terms, both districts have populations around 500,000...
and are home to both Muslims and Christians who are indigenous and non-indigenous to the districts. In both cases, the Christian ethno-tribal groups are the majority while Muslims are the minority. The Muslim Hausa-Fulani constitute around 45% and 30% of the Jos North and Chikun populations, respectively, while Christians make up the respective remainder.

In their locations, both Jos North and Chikun contain urban centers that are hubs for commerce, business, and industry. Jos North encompasses the Jos metropolis, the state capital city, and the northeast area of Chikun merges with and is an extension of Kaduna city, the state capital of Kaduna. Plateau state as a whole is majority Christian, as is southern Kaduna state where Chikun is located.

Both Jos and Chikun have attracted migrants. In the 1920s, Jos’s thriving tin mining industry drew migrant laborers from both southern and northern Nigerian ethnic groups (Ostien, 2009). Chikun is also known as a melting pot because laborers are attracted by industry around Kaduna city. In both areas, groups of Muslims and Christians have lived side by side in integrated communities, intermarrying and participating in one another’s religious holidays. Additionally, both districts have served as safe havens for refugees fleeing interreligious violence in surrounding districts and states since the 1980s (before Jos became a generator of refugees itself).

They also share a similar historical experience: the resistance to Hausa-Fulani Muslim rule during the pre-colonial and colonial eras is an important part of the identity of both present-day Plateau state and southern Kaduna state (Turaki, 2010; Okpanachi, 2012). One difference, however, is that Kaduna state adopted Sharia law in 1999 while Plateau state did not. Yet, Sharia implementation in Kaduna has followed a ‘legally pluralistic’ and ‘benign trajectory’ that has defused tensions (Suberu, 2009: 552). If interreligious tensions due to the introduction of Sharia law are a defining feature, Chikun in Kaduna state should experience more violence than Jos in Plateau state. Yet, the opposite is the case.

While Jos North and Chikun share many important similarities, they still differ with respect to both the dependent variable and the key independent variable. Jos North experienced a larger number of interreligious clashes in the five years prior to 2006, even though the different datasets disagree over the exact number. Our own dataset counts four major episodes of interreligious violence, ACLED counts three events, while GDELT counts zero events. In contrast, Chikun experienced only one (authors’ data) or zero (both ACLED and GDELT) events. Regarding the independent variable, power-sharing institutions are present in Chikun, but absent in Jos North. We argue that this variation explains the relative absence of interreligious violence in Chikun and the violent experiences of Jos.

**Chikun: A district with power-sharing**

Power-sharing exists in Chikun’s local government. The informal power-sharing agreement in Chikun comprises the district’s three main actors: the Muslim Hausa-Fulani and the Christian Gbagyi and Kabilu.

The arrangement consists of four simple but powerful rules: first, the candidates for chairman and deputy must run on the same ticket. Second, they must come from
different ethnic/religious blocs, running on a joint electoral ticket in a cross-religious coalition. Third, in Chikun’s static power-sharing arrangement, the chairmanship is always represented by a Gbagyi-Christian, the deputy by a Hausa-Fulani Muslim, and the secretary by a Kabiliu-Christian. Lastly, the representatives that fill the top council positions must come from different wards to ensure more equitable ward representation.

The first and second rules exert a strong influence on elites’ behavior. Because the chairman and deputy of the local government must run on the same ticket and also come from different ethnic/religious factions, the two candidates must design their political campaign to appeal to multiple religious groups. Any politician who wants to get elected must convince his co-religionist constituency that the other politician on the ticket is a valuable partner. Thus, the ability of elites to use religious identity as a tool of political mobilization is limited.

Additionally, repeated interaction among elites in a context of power-sharing facilitates mutual trust among elites. In a gathering of about 30 local leaders, respondents described the power-sharing arrangement as central to peace between Muslims and Christians in the district. Remarkably on the Kaduna crisis in 2000, one member of the Muslim Jama’atu Nasril Islam organization pointed to the good political leadership fostered by the power-sharing arrangement as the impetus for a joint committee with five Muslim and five Christian religious leaders who work together to quickly resolve interreligious tensions. Others report that religious groups have appointed joint response teams ready to appeal to their religious constituencies when tensions arise to prevent violent outbursts. The power-sharing institution in Chikun, therefore, helps dispel tensions, avert politicization of religion by elites, and promote greater interreligious coordination.

Power-sharing not only affects the incentives of elites, but also shapes the perceptions of the general population. As interviews with community members highlighted, power-sharing reassures the various religious communities that their interests are also being represented. As one community organizer explained, Sometimes crises arise where there is no fair play. [However] when people are being carried along, there will be nothing like suspicion or crisis. So in Chikun, the structure has been around and everyone has been carried along, even though not everybody has been satisfied at the same time. But it has been like this for over 10 years, and I think we are okay.

Another participant also noted that the arrangement reflects a principle of inclusion ‘so that everyone will feel a sense of belonging’, which as a result ‘has really helped us to stop lies’. Power-sharing, therefore, moderates perception of deficient political representation, preventing individuals from following divisive religious narratives. In addition, power-sharing institutions allow the masses to monitor elites. Since the ‘rules of the game’ are commonly known, defectors can expect to lose the vote if they transgress the informal arrangement.

This discussion of power-sharing institutional dynamics does not mean that Chikun is unaffected by the interreligious clashes occurring nearby or in other states. Local leaders have had to act quickly on numerous occasions to keep youth from mobilizing in response to violence between co-religionists elsewhere. Muslims and Christians also feel pressure to segregate, fearing for their future safety. However, the power-sharing model has created a representative foundation for each group, enabling leaders to form interethnic alliances to combat interreligious tensions and thwart potential violence.

Jos North: A district without power-sharing

The population in Jos North is also divided into Muslims (primarily Hausa-Fulani) and Christians (primarily Berom, Afizere, and Anaguta). However, unlike in Chikun, there is no local power-sharing arrangement. Religious relations in Jos North are characterized by disputes over rights and representation between Muslims and Christians. On one side, the Hausa-Fulani Muslim elite argue that they have been historically underrepresented in Jos due to their supposed ‘settler’ status. This status, Muslims argue, denies them the political and socio-economic rights of their Christian counterparts. Further, Muslim leaders contend that they originally

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13 Interview with Anonymous (c), Group Forum, Chikun district, Kaduna state, Nigeria, 10 November 2011. 14 Interview with Anonymous (f), Group Forum, Chikun district, Kaduna state, Nigeria, 10 November 2011. 15 Interview with Anonymous (g), Local traditional leader, Chikun district, Kaduna state, Nigeria, 10 November 2011. 16 Interview with Anonymous (d), Community Organizer, Chikun district, Kaduna state, Nigeria, 10 November 2011. 17 Interview with Anonymous (b), Community Organizer, Chikun district, Kaduna state, Nigeria, 10 November 2011. 18 Interview with Anonymous (c), Local Government Administrator, Chikun district, Kaduna state, Nigeria, 10 November 2011. 19 Interview with Anonymous (d), Former Legislator of Kaduna state House of Assembly, Chikun district, Kaduna state, Nigeria, 9–10 November 2011.
settled in the area in the 19th century, establishing Jos as an administrative and economic center, warranting them better local government representation. The Christian groups dismiss these claims as historically false (Ostien, 2009). Instead, they note that Muslim Hausa-Fulani did not establish a significant presence in Jos until 1915 during the British tin mining era when the colonial authorities appointed a Hausa leader from Bauchi to preside over the Hausa mining settlements (Gonyok & Mangwvat, 1981).

Yet, these disputes did not spark ethnic or religious violence, and religion was not seen as a primary cleavage. This changed by the end of the 1990s, however. In 1991, General Babangida – the military leader of Nigeria – unexpectedly made the executive political decision to ‘resolve’ the Jos issue by demarcating new districts. The former Jos district (in which the Christian ethnic groups were the majority) was carved up into Jos North and Jos South. The Christian population perceived the new demarcation as granting the Hausa-Fulani Muslims their own district in the form of Jos North. Consequently, Muslims could now expect to win the local elections to city-wide office, since ‘[w]ithin the new Jos North, in particular, the local [Christian] peoples were no longer so predominant’ (Ostien, 2009: 8). Local Christian groups saw this move as an affront, decreasing the space for compromise.

Violence was not inevitable, but the absence of a power-sharing arrangement limited the possibilities for peacefully dealing with this external shock. Instead, the leaders of the religious blocs were highly motivated to pursue their competing interests. Without power-sharing rules mandating mixed religious electoral tickets, there was little need to build interreligious coalitions; the situation resembled a zero-sum game where the political gains of one religious group implied losses for the other. Both sides, therefore, employed narratives based on religious rifts to mobilize their followers.

Negative religious stereotyping, accusations of political malfeasance, and vote-rigging began to characterize local politics. Since 1994, there have been four episodes of major interreligious clashes in Jos (in 2001, 2002, 2008, and 2010) along with more than a dozen smaller clashes. Religious events or perceived offenses are now sufficient to spark devastating interreligious violence. The city itself became segregated into Muslim and Christian neighborhoods, and members of both groups fear entering one another’s neighborhoods. Religion has become the defining cleavage of local tensions. Observers noted regarding violence in 2001:

[Both sides] set up roadblocks all over the town, allowing people to pass if they were of their own faith and stopping and attacking those of the opposite faith. […] A Christian man who was stopped at a Muslim roadblock told how Muslim youths were encouraging each other to pick out as many Christians as possible, as if it were a kind of competition to see who could kill the most Christians. A Muslim leader was stopped by about eighteen Christian youths armed with sticks and machetes who were shouting “Useless Muslim!” and “Useless Hausa man!” at another Muslim ahead of him. (Human Rights Watch, 2001: 9)

In a short time span, Jos changed from a safe haven for refugees fleeing interreligious violence to a hotbed of recurrent Muslim–Christian clashes, generating thousands of refugees of its own. Community leaders in other districts view the situation in Jos with alarm. For example, elites in Chikun cite Jos to emphasize the dangers of one group monopolizing local government leadership.20 One NGO leader argued in an interview:

Any community that does not develop the issue of give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, then in that community there’s that tendency of having crisis, and that is what is happening in Jos. Monopoly. [Expressions of agreement around the room.] So that is the problem. And we are trying to see here in our own local government how we can continue to maintain that platform of give to Caesar what is Caesar’s. […] Let us try to uphold this virtue because that is the only thing that will help us live in peace.21

In short, where power-sharing is absent, there is greater danger of elites using religious divides to mobilize the population. As in Jos North, disputes are more likely to be interpreted through a Muslim-versus-Christian lens, rendering interreligious cooperation far more difficult to achieve.

Levels of integration (Fearon & Laitin, 1996) or civic associationalism (Varshney, 2003) cannot easily explain the divergent cases of Jos North and Chikun. Both Chikun and Jos were initially characterized by similar degrees of civic associationalism. For example, prior to 2001, Jos was considered one of the most peaceful districts in northern Nigeria. In fact, it was a popular vacation destination. Muslims and Christians lived in integrated neighborhoods, celebrated one another’s religious holidays, and peace persisted even when refugees

20 Interview with Anonymous (f), Group Forum, Chikun district, Kaduna state, Nigeria, 10 November 2011.
21 Interview with Anonymous (b), Community Organizer, Chikun district, Kaduna state, Nigeria, 10 November 2011.
poured into Jos. Religion was not a defining cleavage in either Jos or Chikun. Nevertheless, Jos is now known as one of the ‘no go’ areas of northern Nigeria due to interreligious violence. The level of Muslim–Christian integration did not create conditions for conflict, but rather, without power-sharing arrangements, religious elites did not have the capacity to deal with external shocks that instigated religious violence.

**Endogeneity concerns**

As with any observational data, there is the possibility of endogeneity. In our case, it might be that some districts were historically more peaceful than others and that these conditions facilitated the development of power-sharing in the first place. In this case, we would falsely attribute causal power to power-sharing institutions when they are in fact outcomes of, not reasons for, peace.

We argue that this is not the case and present both qualitative and quantitative evidence against the presence of reverse causality. First, examining the sequence of events in key districts provides insights into the direction of causality. As noted above, prior to 2001, the Jos area was considered one of the most peaceful in the Middle Belt with an integrated communal life. In fact, its official district slogan was ‘Home of Peace and Tourism’. If reverse causality were an issue, we would have expected Jos to develop power-sharing government and be unlikely to experience interreligious violence. However, no power-sharing agreement developed, despite its relative peace. Moreover, an exogenous political event reshaped local government boundaries, thereby exacerbating local identity politics. Lacking mechanisms for conflict resolution, Jos has experienced repeated and intense interreligious clashes.

Second, there are no differences in colonial experiences that might explain variation in violence across districts. In both present-day Kaduna state and Plateau state, British colonizers implemented a system of indirect rule using the Muslim Hausa-Fulani elite. The adoption of Christianity by the non-Muslim population in this region was indicative of their resistance to Hausa-Fulani Muslim political dominance (Okpanachi, 2012). This region is also known for a resistance movement that advocated for independence from this political and cultural domination. If reverse causality were an issue, we would not expect either of these districts to develop power-sharing arrangements. Yet, Chikun did develop power-sharing while Jos did not, despite similar colonial background and religious diversity.

Third, we examine historical data on the distribution of violent events across districts. If reverse causality were an issue, we would expect a distinct pattern in the data: districts without power-sharing today should be characterized by a history of violence, while districts with power-sharing today should exhibit a distinctively peaceful past. The Social, Political, and Economic Event Database Project (SPEED) provides historical data on political violence at the district level in Nigeria. We use data from 1955 to 1985, thereby ending the analysis around the time power-sharing agreements were introduced. First, we obtain data on politically motivated attacks, which explicitly include attacks ‘driven by hatred toward different socio-cultural groups (racial, nationality, religious, etc.)’ (Cline Center for Democracy, 2013: 7). Second, we obtain data on political messages, which include messages pertaining to ‘cultural mores that bear on how individuals live their lives (religion, family life, community life, etc.) [...] These messages must be threatening to societal elites and/or prevailing societal equilibria’ (Cline Center for Democracy, 2013: 2). The data (see Table 1 in the online appendix) do not support the hypothesis that districts without power-sharing arrangements today were historically less peaceful than districts with power-sharing.

**Conclusion**

We find evidence for our hypothesis that local power-sharing institutions shape the degree of interreligious violence on the local level. We identified two causal mechanisms through which these power-sharing arrangements work. First, they shape the incentives of elites to utilize a religious narrative to mobilize against the other group. Second, these institutions change the perception of the general population regarding ‘the other’ thus reducing their propensity to engage in violence. Both the quantitative and qualitative evidence support these claims.

Our research contributes to the existing work on intergroup violence – whether it is interreligious or interethnic – by bridging the gap between structural and rational choice approaches. We argue that complementing the study of formal, national-level power-sharing arrangements with research on informal and local institutions provides a fruitful avenue for future research. Future research could investigate how national and local power-sharing institutions interact with one another. For example, in Kenya, recent national power-sharing arrangements encouraged power-sharing between local ethnic leaders (Mayabi, 2012). In contrast, our fieldwork

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22 Available at http://www.clinecenter.illinois.edu/data/speed/event/.
in Jos suggests that the national government could act as a third-party mediator to facilitate and monitor a local power-sharing arrangement, but it currently does not do so. This might be an opportunity to study the conditions under which national and local-level power-sharing arrangements vary in their effectiveness.

The normative significance of our project speaks to the efforts by policymakers to intervene in violent conflicts between religious groups. Current examples, besides Nigeria, include the Central African Republic, Myanmar, Indonesia, and Pakistan. Our findings imply that publicity-friendly national-level power-sharing agreements might be ineffective if they are not complemented by local-level initiatives that create stable channels of communication and collaboration among religious groups. These might be more effective ways of achieving peaceful coexistence than televised press conferences.

Replication data
The dataset, codebook, and do-files for the empirical analysis in this article, along with the online appendix, can be found at http://www.prio.org/jpr/datasets.

Acknowledgements
The authors are listed in alphabetical order. The article greatly benefited from the comments by Todd Sandler, David Samuels, Lisa Blaydes, Erik Cleven, Daniel Rogger, and three anonymous reviewers and the editor. We thank Ashley Chundung Dauda, Alisha Kim, and Samuel Obiora Okeye for excellent research assistance.

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