

ELECTORAL UNCERTAINTY, PATRONAGE, AND VIOLENCE: THE 2007 ELECTIONS IN SIERRA LEONE

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Elections across the African continent have been plagued with violent riots, assaults on both candidates and voters, and political assassinations. Importantly, there is often a distinct region pattern to such incidents. Why is that some regions experiences more violence and insecurity than others? This paper addresses this research question. It presents a novel theoretical explanation for patterns of electoral violence in post-war societies, characterised by parallel processes of democratisation and peacebuilding. This paper argues that we are more likely to see violence occurring in areas where traditional patronage networks are being challenged by the post-war developments. This creates a higher degree of uncertainty about the electoral outcome and raises the stakes of the electoral contest given that the stakes associated with a loss at the poll are high. Paradoxically, therefore, the more democratic the elections are, with many political parties and candidates competing for power and little perceived space available for electoral fraud, the more likely that we will see violent incidents occurring in that area. An empirical in-depth analysis of the post-war elections in Sierra Leone in 2007 is carried out.