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## **Like Kwazulu-Natal, Like Rivers State: The Implications of Prebendalism on Electoral Contest**

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**Abstract:** *Prebendalism is a pattern of political behaviour where political offices are contested for and utilised to enrich its holders and their cronies. On account of this, the struggle for electoral positions may assume desperate dimensions, with political violence highly implicated in the mix. This article studies the patterns of election-related violence in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa and Rivers State, Nigeria. Using a qualitative methodology, it observes that similar factors occasioned the inordinate spate of assassination and political violence in KwaZulu-Natal in 2016, and the election-related killings in Rivers State in the build-up to the 2015 local elections. In both localities, politicians fete to patronage networks that are desperate to see political patrons emerge victorious while leveraging on violence. Secondly, both localities share a common identity as former hotbeds of political violence and thus suffer from the toxic vestiges of an entrenched culture of violence. While South Africa's transition to democracy was marked by high levels of violence in KwaZulu-Natal between the African National Congress (ANC) and Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), Rivers State was the epicentre of Nigeria's Niger Delta insurgency. The study, therefore, maintains that when prebendalism intersects with the availability of violent non-state actors, the likelihood of electoral violence is often high.*

**Keywords:** *Electoral violence, Prebendalism, Patronage, Rivers State, KwaZulu-Natal*

## **1. Introduction**

Empirical reality has shown that competitive elections in Africa can be an exceptionally risky engagement (Collier and Vicente, 2014; Collier and Vicente, 2012; Reno, 2011; Wantchekon, 2003). When not making use of state-security apparatus like the police, incumbent politicians turn to armed thugs or hired guns to tilt the balance of victory in their favour. Since 1999, when Nigeria returned to ‘democratic rule’, elections have continued to be contested as ‘do or die affairs’ (Onapajo 2014); characterised by ballot heist, intimidation and assassination of political opponents. There is a sense, therefore, in how elections are perceived as investments for which winners are guaranteed unfettered access to public resources (Omotola, 2009; Amuwo, 2013). Consequent on this, elections are heavily bankrolled by political godfathers and moneyed interests, whose responsibilities include vote-buying and paid-for political thuggery to intimidate political opponents. Similarly, since 1994, electoral contests in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa has been marked by high levels of political assassination, thuggery, and other forms of intimidation during election seasons. Hence, from higher-level political kingmakers and lower-level electoral thugs, the desperate to win at all cost provide a strong impetus for violence.

Electoral violence in the context of this study refers to “...random or organised act[s] that seeks to determine, delay or otherwise influence an electoral process through threat, verbal intimidation, hate speech, discrimination, physical assault, forced ‘protection’, blackmail, destruction of property or assassination” (Fischer, 2002: 18). Electoral violence may occur at different

periods in the electoral cycle: pre-election (during electoral campaigns), on election-day (during balloting), or post-election (after election results have been announced). Like other regular forms of violence, electoral violence can manifest in physical forms (killing of opposition voters, political contestants, kidnapping), non-physical forms (threats, intimidation of opponents, blackmail), to cause disruption to the process and inevitably influence the electoral process and outcome (Onuoha and Ufomba, 2017).

In Nigeria, electoral contests are easily conceived as a zero-sum competition, and losing could leave a significant dent on a politician's economic fortunes. Winners, on the other hand, typically limit the distribution of state resources within their immediate community or established patronage networks. Similarly, the 2018 Moerane Commission Report in KwaZulu-Natal suggested that the material advantages that come with winning a political office is at the centre of election-related violence in the province. The desperation to win and maintain established patronage networks resulted in fierce and violent competition for those positions (Moerane Commission, 2018: 414). It is this zero-sum nature of electoral contest that polarises communities and turns politics into a violent engagement (Weinberg, 2013). In a desperate desire for victory, political elites seek the collaboration of political thugs who willing to wield violence in furtherance of their victory at the polls (Orji, 2013).

In Nigeria, Rivers State is indisputably the locality with the most election-related violence (Punch, 2018). Similarly, KwaZulu-Natal province (KZN), is the most notorious for electoral violence in South Africa (Thomas, 2018). Both examples provide a persuasive basis for a comparative study on the nature and instrumentality of electoral violence in developing democracies in Africa. The main argument of the article is that prebendal proclivities provoke electoral violence in both localities. Secondly, it argues that the inordinate degree of electoral violence can be traced to an old but

entrenched culture of political violence in both localities. If Rivers State was the epicentre of protracted resource conflict in Nigeria's Niger Delta (Okorie, 2018; Ebiefa, 2011; Ibaba, 2008), KwaZulu-Natal province witnessed a vicious political power tussle between 1985 and 1994 (Schuld, 2013; Bonin, 2006). In effect, when competitive elections began to hold in these localities, the polarising nature of politics brought to the fore the residues of violence which have irrigated economic, social and political life in these societies for a long time.

This article is divided into four parts. First, it paper briefly provides a conceptual appraisal examination of prebendalism. The second part explicates the role of prebendalism in electoral violence in Rivers State and KZN. The third part highlights how electoral violence in contemporary times in both KZN and Rivers State can be traced to an entrenched culture of violence which was be traced back to the histories of both locales. Finally, it proposes recommendations that can stem electoral violence in both locales.

## **2. Methodology**

This study uses a qualitative approach, and draws from secondary sources of data, which provided background information on the study area and to strengthen the literature review and conceptual framework. Online news newspaper collection and commentary were used to make relevant inferences about the violent incidents during elections, their timing, actors, targets, motives and the specific activities that characterised these violent interactions. This method provided an understanding of the nexus prebendalism, intense political competition and electoral violence. Also, through this method, the paper critically examined the historical trajectory of violence in KwaZulu-Natal province and Rivers State and its relatedness to the recurring trend of political violence in both places.

## *2.1 Conceptual Review*

### Prebendalism

In problematising the corruption or general decadence in African politics, some scholars have attempted to use prebendalism as a framework of analysis. Richard Joseph introduced the concept of prebendalism as an analytical tool for Nigerian political leadership style, suggesting that, given the short period in which the democratic structure places on the officeholder, local politicians find it justifiable to use their positions as avenues for wealth accumulation (Joseph, 1983; Joseph, 2014). And because the natural form of social relationship is one characterised by patron-client exchanges, officeholders in the prebendal state use their loot to amass and service support groups. This essentially reduces the essence of state power to a struggle for who controls the distributive mechanism of state resources (Adebanwi and Diamond, 2013). In essence, prebendalism is a pattern of political behaviour where political offices are contested for and utilised for the exclusive purpose of enriching its holders and their cronies (Post and Vickers, 1973; Sacks and Levi, 2010; Kiser and Sacks, 2011). Suberu (2013), reckoned it to be the ‘I eat, you eat’ policy that underpinned the political behaviour of state elites irrespective of ethnolinguistic or regional differences. According to Amuwo (2013), prebendalism has thrived in Nigeria due to the presence of weak institutions and inchoate political structures. Thus, self-serving leaders have encountered no restraint in how they seek office and how they abuse it.

Prebendalism has been underlined as an underpinning factor in the political deterioration of the state. Bah (2012) elaborated on how various regimes in Africa (Sierra Leone under Siaka Stevens and Joseph Momoh, Liberia under Doe military rule, Cote d’Ivoire under successive post-Huupjouet-Boigny governments) suffered similar democratic dysfunction.

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Nevertheless, prebendalism, as a conceptual framework for understanding politics in Africa, has been criticised for being dated and somewhat reductive. For instance, Iweriebor (1997) criticised the concept as having no peculiarities to the African or Nigerian state, as Richard Joseph argued. Iweriebor instead argued that prebendalism is a mode of politics that is also obtainable in America, where politicians use their offices to advance their interests and those of their constituencies and sponsors. Similarly, Leonard (2009) noted that African states provided no reliable or formal systems of social security, leaving prebendalism to become the only rational outcome of politics, in the sense that individuals can benefit from the state when their family or friends were in power. And that the political power holders cater to the interest of friends or community whose support they can leverage on for re-election.

The premise of this criticism, however, tends to conflate prebendalism with patronage. Van de Walle (2007) ironed out the creases of this misinterpretation when he noted that while patronage politics may be obtainable in America or twentieth-century Europe, it cannot be likened to prebendalism which fosters clientelist networks, and which remains mostly unresponsive to the plight of citizens at large. Also, because prebendalism inhibits the development of effective representative democracy, it cannot be rationalised as an acceptable outcome of politics (Ugwuani and Nwokedi, 2015).

In any case, Leonard (2009) makes a compelling argument on the rationality of prebendalism in a political space like Nigeria where deploying tax-payers money towards the provision of public utilities may leave the officeholder vulnerable in the next election season against an opponent who enriches or demonstrates a will to enrich his cronies at the expense of the larger society. As he suggests:

“Politicians who fail to provide jobs, infrastructure and other elements of patronage will disappoint their electorate and be vulnerable to challenge in the next election – either from the opposition (most often in an urban area) or from another faction of the party (in most of the countryside). The temptation to be corrupt and profligate with the public purse in order to gain patronage for personally targeted distribution (with some personal wealth on the side) is overwhelming” (Leonard, 2009: 62).

While this argument describes the present realities of politics in post-colonial Africa concerning the incentives for politicians to sustain the politics of prebendalism, it opens up other concerns. First, the argument considers the office holder as a hapless victim of politics, who is caught up in a system that rewards clientelism as opposed to good governance. Secondly, it places the blame of prebendal governance on the citizens who exchange their votes for whatever they can directly benefit from the political office holder. In other words, the voting behaviour of the citizen is blamed for sustaining the culture of prebendalism, rather than the politicians who betray the citizens by pursuing political agendas that isolates them. Indeed, if the citizens are incapable of supporting politicians who cater to the public interest as opposed to sectional and provincial interests, such tragedy of civics must be attributed to years of economic privation and educational deterioration orchestrated by the same political class. Also, if prebendalism was as a result of a malformed political structure that does not reward broad-based governance, it is still the politicians who have refused to reform the defective system. As Agbaje and Adejumobi (2006) suggested, the institutional weakness of the post-colonial African state created a situation where political authorities only sought ways to acquire more power to undermine the state and sustain the rot. They opined further that:

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“The state in post-colonial Africa is unable to mediate the struggle between classes and even within classes, particularly the hegemonic class. The net effect of this is that politics, essentially the struggle for control and use of state power, becomes warfare. Power is overvalued, and security lies only in getting more and more power. There is hardly any restraint on the means of acquiring power, holding it or using it.” (Agbaje and Adejumobi, 2006: 29)

In Africa, therefore, prebendalism, cannot be understood outside the broader socio-cultural context in which political offices are contested for and used. In Nigeria, empirical reality has shown that politicians who are desperate to win elections collude with different actors (political thugs, state security agents) to intimidate, threaten or assassinate political opponents (Haberson, 2007; Oluwadare, 2011; Obo and Adejumo, 2014). Likewise in South Africa, there is a prevalence of ‘strongmen’, (known in Nigeria is ‘political godfathers’) with clientelist networks that extend into neighbourhoods, townships and rural areas (Kolble, 2018). It is common for political parties to seek out such local strongmen to campaign and mobilise voters. Mobilisation in this context may sometimes entail aggressive tactics as candidates pit communities against each other, aggravating political tensions and raising the stakes of winning political power (Weinberg, 2013). Importantly, given the general loss of confidence in the South African state to defend the economic security for the majority of its citizens, civilians are tempted to resort to self-help by becoming part of elite patronage networks which may include but not restricted to committing acts of electoral violence for material benefits (Bereford, 2015).

In KZN for instance, the advantages that come with winning the office of the Councillor trickles down to the office holder’s patronage network which includes personal associates, political thugs and corrupt police authorities (Moerane Commission, 2018).



It is what Allen (1999) referred to as ‘spoils politics’; a situation where public office is overvalued not for its potential to serve the public interest, but to achieve a cash return to the investment made in obtaining office. Lee Kwan Yew, former Prime Minister of Singapore in his book, *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story – 1965-2000*, succinctly captured the debilitating and self-perpetuating mechanics of spoils politics and describes how it promotes corruption and underdevelopment. Yew noted that:

“A precondition for an honest government is that candidates must not need large sums of money to get elected or it must trigger off the cycle of corruption. Having spent a lot to get elected, winners must recover their cost and also accumulate funds for the next election. Once elected, they had to recoup and prepare for the next election by using their influence with government ministers and officials to get contracts awarded...” (Yew, 2000: 164)

It is instructive to add that in a situation where political contestants can match each other’s financial resources, more money may no longer present a clear advantage, hence the need to invest in violence to gain an edge. Nevertheless, Yew’s assessment reflects the reality of both KZN and Rivers State. In KZN, an electoral loss for the Councillor entailed a loss of status and income not for the contestant alone, but also, for his/her entire patronage network who intend to benefit from contracts and tenders (Moerane Commission, 2018). In Rivers State similarly, the political personalities that make up the prebendal chain recognise the amount of wealth vested in the hands of whoever wins the Governorship elections and how quickly oil revenues find their way into the private pockets of the executive authority and those of his/her cronies (Omotola, 2009).

From the preceding, when each electoral contestant conceives the election in such zero-sum terms, the political climate is set for electoral violence to occur. Prebendalism is therefore linked to electoral violence because the ‘spoils politics’ mentality, which encourages is the overarching motivation for winning elections. The

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interplay between prebendalism and electoral violence produces three distinct outcomes. For the first outcome: if the incumbent political authority commits resources towards electoral violence, whereas the main opposition does not, electoral violence is asymmetric and the incumbent's chances of remaining in power become higher. A situation which Omotola (2009) refers to as 'garrison democracy'. For the second outcome: if both sides of the political divide invest in violence, election-related deaths would be not only highly probable but more widespread. For the third outcome: if no resources are invested in violence by neither political contestant, electoral violence is avoided. What is observable from Rivers State and KwaZulu-Natal is that competitive elections in both locales are defined by political elites (across party lines) who willingly deploy violence in furtherance to their political goals.

*2.2. Analysing the Case Studies*

Rivers State, Electoral Violence and Prebendalism

Rivers State receives the largest share of crude-oil-based national revenue in Nigeria and hence represents significant electoral value to any political party or Governorship winner. For this reason, elections in the State are often desperately contested. In 2007, the gubernatorial election in the State was marred by violence, vote-buying and intimidation of rival political groups. This was occasioned by the mutual dependence between political officer holders and political thugs who orchestrate electoral violence at their behest (HRW, 2008).

There were equally incidences of violence during the 2011 election cycle (Fund for Peace, 2018), but the 2015 elections saw a sordid escalation of political violence in Rivers State. The dominance of the ruling party – People's Democratic Party (PDP) was threatened by the seeming viability of the All Progressive

Congress (APC). As the stakes of electoral victory grew higher, so too was the propensity for electoral violence. The APC reported that 55 members from its party were killed in the intervening months leading to the election (International Business Times, 2015). There was the bombing of APC secretariat in Okirika on January 11th, 2015 (Ezeibe, 2015). In a re-run election in December 2016, a Police Chief was beheaded alongside his assistant, with other casualties reported (Punch, 2018). During the 2019 elections in the State, the incumbent PDP Governor, Nyesom Wike accused the Nigerian military of complicity in the killing of 16 people in Abonnema area of the State (Ekepi, 2019).

Given the limited scope of this study, trends of electoral violence in Rivers State is limited to 2015 election period and the 2016 re-run elections. Rivers State, in 2015 Gubernatorial and House of Representative and Senate elections was a hotbed of electoral violence. This violence can be narrowed down to several reasons, all of which are linked to the politics of prebendalism. Given the character of Rivers State as an oil-rich State and one of the highest federal revenue allocation recipient, the struggle for who would manage the state treasury is expected to assume desperate dimensions given Nigeria's political culture. The political rivalry between erstwhile allies, the then Governor of the State—Rotimi Amaechi and the Gubernatorial aspirant Nyesom Wike created political animosity within the State.

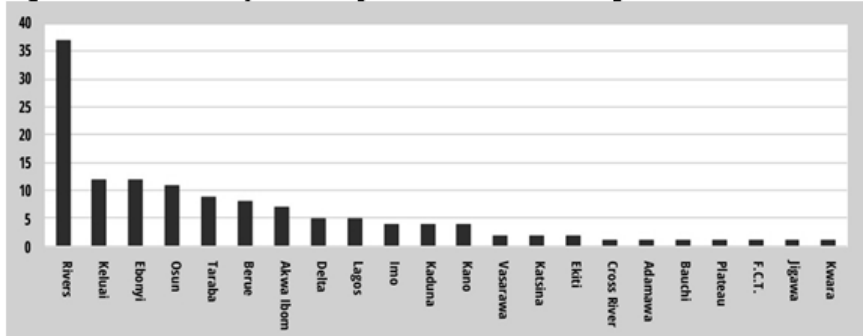
The relationship between both men soured when Amaechi fell out with the then President Goodluck Jonathan, who happened to be a benefactor of Wike. This eventually led to Amaechi leaving the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) to join Action Peoples Congress (APC). Further to this, he began to campaign for his political mentee—Dakuku Peterside to become his successor, as is often the case with outgoing Governors. This situation was untenable for Wike, whom, buoyed by the backing of the President, coupled with his notoriety as a grassroots mobiliser with deep pockets, was

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prepared to deploy any means necessary to clinch the gubernatorial seat.

As tensions continued to rise in the build of the elections, so were the number of deaths. According to Rivers State Commission of Inquiry, a monthly average of 19 killings occurred in Rivers State between November 2014 and April 2015 (Ezeamalu, 2015). The Commission noted that out of the 97 allegations of killings it received, 94 of them occurred between 15 November 2014 and 11 April 2015 (Ezeamalu, 2015). It may be instructive to add that, in a country where fatality figures are often understated (because security agencies find the high number of unresolved deaths as an indictment on their incompetence), the actual number of deaths reported by the Commission may be considerably higher.

**Figure 1: 2015 Election fatalities reported in States across Nigeria**



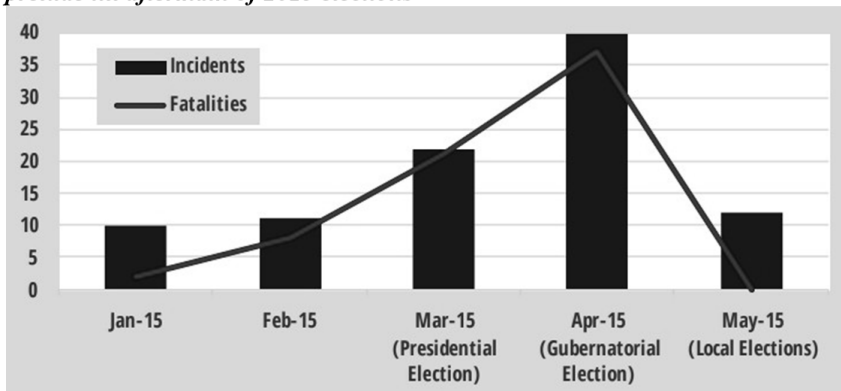
Source: Niger Delta Foundation, 2015

*Figure 1 depicts the number of reported deaths as occurred in various states in Nigeria during the 2015 elections, with Rivers State reporting a significantly higher number of fatalities.*

The worrying number of deaths and disappearance of politicians, especially of the APC Party in Rivers State became a grave source of concern, provoking the APC Rivers State committee to accuse the PDP of hiring gangsters to kill and intimidate its

members (News24 Nigeria, 2015). Further, the committee released 32 names of party members it said have been gruesomely murdered; some by multiple gunshots, several beheaded, and others who were clubbed to death (News24 Nigeria, 2015). While it has been alleged that these nefarious acts were committed by armed thugs (mostly populated by the dreaded Icelanders confraternity members) in Rivers State who are loyal to PDP (Premium Times, 2015), there is no evidence linking Wike directly to these actors. Typically, it is highly improbable for electoral violence committed by youth gangs of armed thugs to be traced directly to any senior political figure, even when such acts can be seen to favour the politician directly.

**Figure 2: Election related incidents and fatalities in Rivers State in the prelude till aftermath of 2015 elections**



Source: Niger Delta Foundation, 2015

Figure 2 depicts the rise in electoral incidents in Rivers State, as well as the fatality levels that soared along with the rise in electoral incidents. Here, one sees a slow but steady increase in the number of electoral skirmishes and deaths, until it reaches a crescendo in April 2015 which was the month for the gubernatorial polls. On Election Day, the campaign office of one of Rivers State leading APC figures Senator Magnus Abe at Bori Khana was burnt down by suspected political thugs. There was also an attack on some Nigerian

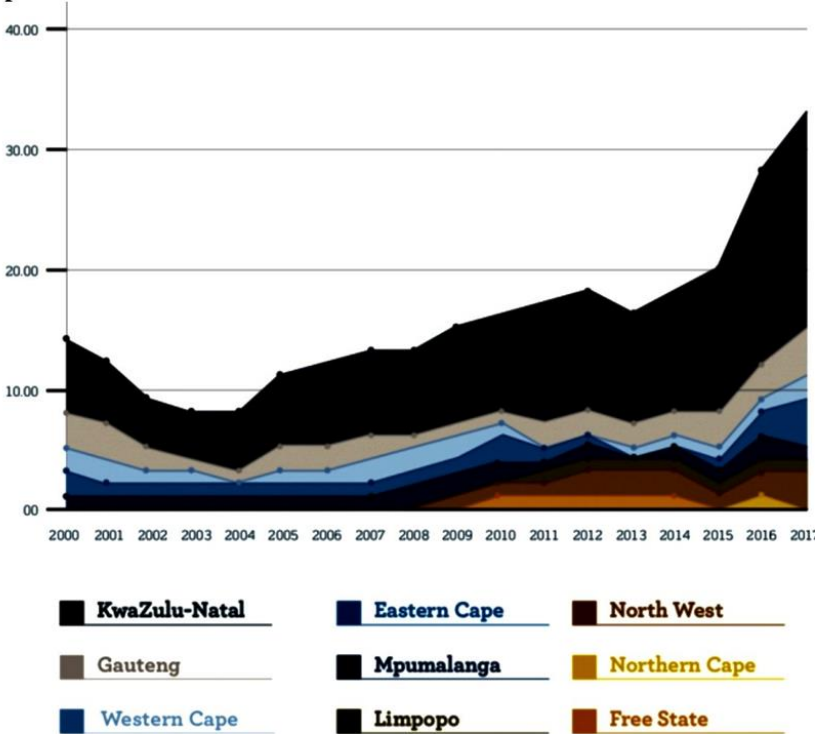
military personnel at Yeghe town in Gokhana L.G.A by armed militant youth after it was alleged the military officers killed some residents in the area. There was also the killing of 18 people in gun duels in Gokhana and Khana L.G.As of Rivers State. Also worthy of mention is the slaughter of 24 people reported at Omoku in Ogba Egbema Ndoni LGAs (Obiajuru, 2015). All of these deaths points to Rivers State as truly the epicentre of electoral violence in the Nigerian federation.

Interestingly, as figure 2 indicates, there is a decline in election-related deaths when the elections are over. Further, the diagram reinforces the report of the Rivers State Commission of Inquiry, which noted that the allegations of killings occurred within the specified time-frame of November 2015 and April 2015. While the above diagram captures the fatality rates starting from January 2015 and April 2015, it clearly shows the election-related nature of those deaths.

### **KwaZulu-Natal, electoral violence and prebendalism**

While South Africans have mostly voted peacefully in elections since democracy took hold in 1994 (Aucoin and Cilliers, 2016), the build-up to elections can be plagued with the assassination of politicians of interest. The propensity for election-related assassination is most pronounced in the province of KwaZulu-Natal (see Fig. 3). This accounts for why the province was isolated for this study.

Figure 3. Trend in annual political assassination in South African provinces: 2000-2017



Source: Thomas, 2018

According to Thomas (2018), there were 291 political assassinations reported in South Africa between 2000 and 2017. Throughout this period as Fig. 3 depicts, incidents in KZN dominate the average count of political assassinations. What the graph does not entirely reveal is that political violence in KZN has a much-dated history, and the struggle to establish territorial control through the instrumentality of political party began in the 80s (Schuld, 2013).

Before competitive democratic elections were held in post-apartheid South Africa in 1994, the ANC and conservative Inkatha Party (later became Inkatha Freedom Party – IFP in 1990) had been

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locked in a war of attrition in KZN, each attempting to establish ideological and turf pre-eminence (Schuld, 2013). This violence, it must be noted had its dimension and dynamics. The IFP who governed the KwaZulu homeland was initially aligned with the ANC apartheid resistance until the 1970s, where an ideological gap opened between the allies. ANC favoured the emergence of national democracy in the wake of apartheid while the IFP stood for the independent traditional rule of a 'Zulu kingdom' (Schuld, 2013). Hence, when elections were announced for 26 April 1994, the IFP refused to be part of the political process, and high levels of violence ensued (Truth and Reconciliation Commission 1998:319).

This ideological struggle led to sporadic violence where specific townships sections became inaccessible for people from another political divide, and taxi drivers crossing these borders risked their lives. People were asked of their political affiliation and threatened into leaving certain areas (Bonnin, 2006). The resultant black-on-black violence between vigilantes of the conservative Inkatha Party and ANC comrades involved hit-squad activities on a civil war scale, which saw the death of an estimated 25,000 people between 1985 and 1994 (Schuld, 2013). This violence continued several years after the 1994 elections with a further 4,000 deaths recorded between May 1994 and December 1998 (de Haas, 2016).

In the last decade, however, the ANC was finally able to win a majority of votes in more and more wards, changing the territorial landscape of political control. Between 2004 and 2009, the ANC made huge inroads in former IFP strongholds. Nevertheless, violent mobilisation strategies have not entirely disappeared, and electoral violence remains a common feature of elections in KZN (Schuld, 2013).

Recent trends in political violence in KZN shows that assassinations are rife during local government elections. Meirotti



(2019) made the point that this violence is necessitated by the view about local political positions being an entry point to lucrative government contracts and as a source of income in themselves. Within this matrix of desperate contestation for power, party defections are marked by violent confrontations involving party supporters, while intra-party factionalism can also occur – leading to internecine violence (Meirotti, 2019; de Haas, 2016). Election-related violence in KZN reached a crescendo in 2016, in which 20 politically motivated deaths occurred. Fourteen of those killed were affiliated with the ANC. Three of the slain (Alson Mzwakhe Nkosi, Siyanda Mnguni and Thokozane Majola) were IFP supporters, and another three who were NFP supporters (Nompumelo Zondi, Phosithe Mbatha and Anna Madonsela) were also killed (de Haas, 2016).

Further to this, there were reported assassination attempts on the lives of ANC candidate for Muden, Jeffrey Ngobese and NFP's KZN Chairperson – Vikizitha Mlotshwa in March and April 2016 respectively (de Haas, 2016). Similar to Rivers State, the timing and targets of the 2016 violence in KZN are indicative of the motivations behind them.

### **3. Discussion**

#### **Conflict-Ridden Past, Violence-Prone Future? Commonalities between KwaZulu-Natal and Rivers State**

If prebendalism accounts for electoral violence in both KZN and Rivers State, why are these locales more violence-prone compared to other states (provinces) within their respective countries? If the desire to win elections by politicians are the same nationally, why are these locales prone to electoral violence than other provinces or states? Figure 1 and Figure 3 captures the preponderance of election-related violence in Rivers State and KZN compared to other states (provinces). This prompts the need to ascertain if there are causal

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factors in the dynamics of violence that have not been accounted for. In response to these posers, a key observation from examining the history of both localities is that geographies of conflict-ridden past, are naturally more prone to political violence than localities without the same historical trajectory.

Several scholars have empirically determined that countries or locales that have witnessed protracted conflict can be electorally volatile even in a post-conflict setting (Lyons, 2004; Kühne, 2010; Kovacs, 2008). Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Angola are some of the most recent examples. There is a tendency for existing fault lines to exacerbate in the years or decades following the conflict (Samuels, 2005). While South Africa represents some of the successful cases of a thriving representative democracy in a post-conflict era, the preponderance of election-related violence in KZN is indicative of the fact that the province's bloody past continues to undercut political tolerance. Given the competitive and polarising effects of elections, loyalties along ethnic lines or self-serving material benefits become easy triggers for electoral violence. Further, because a culture of violence is entrenched in the social behaviour of that geographical space, and against the backdrop of weak state institutions, competitive elections easily rekindle violent proclivities between communities as well as individuals.

According to Schuld (2013), the political assassinations in KZN “appear to be a heritage of the pre-1994 period, in which the killing of political leaders – through petrol bombing of houses, drive-by shootings or hit-squad attacks – was one of the characteristic forms of violence.”

Rivers State similarly has witnessed a sustained period of violent resource militancy, characterised by pipeline bombing, kidnapping and murder of oil expatriates, state security agents and targeted civilians (Oriola et al. 2013; Omotola, 2009b; Naagbantou, 2006).

While the militancy purportedly ended in 2009 following a Presidential Amnesty program (Okorie, 2018), the bloody legacy of that period still looms large. For instance, some of the most prominent militant leaders like Ateke Tom (who resides in Okirika Local Government Area) and Asari Dokubo were active in 2013 as hired-guns for politicians in the state during the Peter Odili regime. Subsequently, these individuals became top militia commanders during the Niger Delta insurgency. In the aftermath of the resource-militancy, these ex-militia commanders have remained relevant in the state as local strongmen – and are courted by political contestants for support. Similar to KZN, therefore, political assassination also make up the character of electoral violence in Rivers State. For example, in 2003, Harry Marshall who had left PDP and moved to become the Chairman of the main opposition party in the state, ANPP was assassinated few weeks before the elections (Igbafe and Offiong, 2007; Durotoye, 2014). Likewise, John Chu, an APC Chieftain in Rivers State, was assassinated a few months to the 2019 gubernatorial elections in the state (Itode, 2018).

It is instructive, however, to note a few divergent patterns in how violence is instrumentalised in both locales. In Rivers State, electoral violence follows an inter-party dynamics, while in KZN, violence can take on both an inter-party and intra-party dimension. For instance, the 2016 intra-party violence seen in the ANC in KZN is rarely ever the case in Rivers State or Nigeria, generally. This is most likely down to the political configuration of representative democracy in both countries. In Nigeria, individuals contests for elections and are voted for into political position, but in South Africa, political parties are voted for. In Nigeria, therefore, party members who do not win nominations to stand for election seek to try their luck in the next electioneering period. Aggrieved members are advised to stand behind the Party's flagbearer for the position. In this context, electoral violence often becomes an inter-party affair.

On the contrary, political parties, not candidates win elections in South African elections. Party members are then appointed into the seats that have been secured depending on the margin of victory. This creates the opportunity for a desperate jostling for position between party-members, which may, in turn, lead to internecine violence.

Also, contrary to Rivers State, balloting day in KZN (and South Africa generally) are relatively calm (Zulu et al. 2009) and results are mainly unchallenged. Nevertheless, concerning the character of violence in months or weeks leading to the polls in KZN, there are disruption of rallies, attacks on party supporters and intimidation (Schuld, 2013; Moerane Commission, 2018). On this score, commonalities exist with Rivers State where the likelihood of intimidation of party supporters to prevent electioneering in politically sensitive areas remain palpably high (Onapajo: 2014, Ezeibe, 2015, Dagogo-Jack, 2019; Ekepi, 2019).

#### **4. Recommendation**

While the primary goal of this study is to make sense of the factors that account for electoral violence in KZN and Rivers State, it is nevertheless vital to outline or imagine a political solution that may stem this violence. For KZN, the recommendations of the 2018 Moerane Commission provides a helpful solution. Among a host of recommendations, one that particularly stands out, at least, in the context of this study was the need to revise the procedures that governed the tender system for better transparency and accountability. Evidence gathered from most witnesses invited to the Commission found that access to resources through the tender system was the root cause of political assassinations in election season (Moerane Commission, 2018). The unfettered control over the tender system (a prebendal undertaking) by politicians give rise to the desperate that undergird the scramble for political office.

Greater accountability was, therefore advised to make the tender system more transparent and equitable. It also called for the corrupt and criminal acts of politicians and public officials to be investigated and prosecuted.

While this call for accountability may produce some results in KZN or South Africa, it is unlikely to produce the required result in Rivers State or Nigeria. For example, Section 308 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution precludes any civil or criminal trial to be commenced against a Governor/Deputy Governor and President and Vice-President during their period in office. In effect, a Governor can engage in acts of political corruption or financial misappropriation without having to be investigated or probed. While the alleged premise of the law is to enable the officeholder focus on the work of governance without the distractions of litigations, several scholars have noted how this defeats the aim of good governance and political accountability (Okojie and Momoh, 2007; Fabamise, 2017; Olaoye, 2012; Umoh and Ubom, 2012). It creates a situation where the officeholder's interest emasculates those of the civic public, by allowing political corruption and self-aggrandisement to go unchecked.

Furthermore, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), which is the institution tasked with investigating financial misappropriation of political officeholders are exempted from extending their investigation towards State Governors. In short, the case of the Kano State Governor – Umar Ganduje who was caught on a video recording receiving bundles of USD currency as bribe from a business person in 2018 (Ogundipe, 2018) exemplifies the impunity of the immunity clause. He was never questioned for the alleged bribery case nor was any investigation initiated. A Governor's excesses can, however, be checked through a Vote of no Confidence by two-thirds of the State Assembly where a motion for impeachment can be moved. But this is rarely ever a possibility because the dynamics of power between a Governor and the State

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Assembly weighs in favour of the former. State Governors are in charge of a massive amount of financial resources and can easily sway members of the State Assembly to their side. Prebendalism will, therefore, be difficult to overcome at the State level since there are nearly no measures in place to check the financial and political excesses of Governors. The immunity clause in Nigeria's constitution must be revised for there to be hope for political accountability for State Governors.

With the right checks and balances in place, the desperation surrounding the tussle for power in African democracies would considerably subside as opportunities for personalising public resources would be curbed. With this curbed, the stakes of losing political officer would also be significantly lower, decreasing; thus, the desperation that inclines politicians to resort to violence.

## **5. Conclusion**

A strong feature of politics in post-colonial Africa is in the inability of political authorities to shun their self-serving needs for collective development. Hence, this article serves to call attention into how prebendalism is intricate to this disconnect between the expectations of African citizens and their self-serving leaders. It has sought to objectively discuss the manifestation of prebendalism in two of Africa's biggest democracies, South Africa and Nigeria. In examining the patterns of violence in the build-up to elections or on Election Day in KwaZulu-Natal province or Rivers State, it finds that the violence is provoked by avaricious political elite in cahoots with their patronage networks. This is especially the case when political terrain is a post-conflict society that has yet to heal from its violent past fully. Moreover, violence is also integral in the electoral contest due to the institutional freedom the winner enjoys in amassing material wealth for themselves or dispensing the same to their cronies. Without a strong commitment to check the

administrative excesses of political officeholders in nascent African democracies, competitive elections would continue to be plagued by violence.

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