

Averting the “Inevitable” Clash: Muslim-Christian Violence and Local Power-Sharing in Nigeria

Laura Thaut

Post-Doctoral Research Fellow
International Security & U.S. Foreign Policy Program
Dickey Center for International Understanding
Dartmouth College
thaut003@umn.edu

ABSTRACT: Inter-religious violence and fears of inter-religious violence have been on the rise in a number of new democracies in the global South. Yet, inter-religious violence erupts in only some religiously pluralistic countries, and only in some pluralistic areas of those countries. Under what conditions, then, does religious identity become the fault line of communal violence? Why does the violence break out in some religiously pluralistic communities and not others under similar conditions? Examining post-1980s variation in northern Nigeria’s Muslim-Christian violence, I suggest that a community’s vulnerability to inter-religious violence is a function of pre-existing inter-ethnic power-sharing arrangements at the local level. While scholars and policy-makers have been disappointed by the ability of formal, national-level power-sharing arrangements to avert ethnic conflict, they have overlooked the peacebuilding capacity of local government power-sharing institutions, which directly affect group representation and access to resources. My findings draw on both case study fieldwork and original data collection on communal violence and sub-national local government election/appointment results since the 1970s. I argue that power-sharing or consociationalism is not defunct; rather its importance and effectiveness lies at the local level.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the 1970s, a global resurgence of religion – of Christianity in particular – has enveloped the global South, calling the secularization and modernization theses into disrepute and generating new forms of political participation and mobilization.¹ Accompanying this resurgence of religion across the global South, however, is a worrying uptick in inter-religious violence in a number of new democracies. As Lijphart (2002: 37) notes, since the 1990s “ethnic divisions have replaced the cold war as the world’s most serious source of violent conflict.” Human Rights Watch (2010: 19) reports that since 1999 alone at least 13,500 people have been killed in Nigeria’s religious violence. Other countries such as India, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Indonesia are now flashpoints of inter-religious violence, and Ghana, Tanzania, Kenya face increasing tensions. A survey of 19 sub-Saharan African countries by the Pew Forum (2010: 44) indicates that inter-religious violence and religious extremism are a significant problem or concern.

At the same time, religious discord and violence does not transpire in *all* pluralistic communities where politicization of religious identity is rampant. Violence erupts only in some religiously pluralistic countries, and only in some areas of those countries. In northern Nigeria, the locus of inter-religious violence in the country since the 1980s, many pluralistic communities, even in the volatile Middle Belt (north-central) states, are largely free of inter-religious violence with Muslims and Christians living together peacefully next door to more volatile local government areas (LGAs). An “us-versus-them” narrative of religious conflict is rampant in Nigeria today with religion’s politicization in national politics, Christianity’s rapid growth, the emergence of violent Islamic groups like Jama’atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’awati wal-Jihad (e.g.,

¹ A number of studies now explore this trend. See, for example, Toft et al., 2011, Lumsdaine 2009, Bellin 2008, Ranger 2008, Freston 2008, Berger 2008, Steigenga and Cleary 2007, Gifford 1998, Berger 1998, Cleary and Stewart-Gambino 1998.

Boko Haram), heated debates over the implementation of Shari'a law in northern states, and the radicalization of some religious adherents to repay "eye-for-eye." Yet, the narrative and demonization of the religious "other" does not take root in every mixed Muslim-Christian community.

This puzzling variation in inter-religious violence is the focus of this paper. While scholars posit various structural, state-level, and individual-level variables to explain the likelihood and patterns of civil war or ethnic conflict, these theories are less capable of explaining sub-national variation in communal ethnic violence. Examining the variation in ethnic violence in northern Nigeria, this paper proposes a new theory of power-sharing – one that emphasizes the role of informal and local power-sharing institutions rather than formal national power-sharing arrangements – to explain the conditions under which inter-religious and inter-tribal violence are likely to emerge. While states across Africa and Asia have adopted decentralization reforms since the 1980s, opening up a new site for political competition and contestation and placing greater control over development in the hands of local leaders, the role of local political institutions in creating socio-economic and political conditions conducive for or detrimental to peace between communal groups is underexplored. Based on data and case study evidence gathered during fieldwork in northern Nigeria, this paper tests and finds support for the theory that pluralistic LGAs in northern Nigeria in which tribal leaders observe informal power-sharing arrangements are less prone to a divisive narrative of religious difference and to ethno-tribal or ethno-religious violence. Local and informal power-sharing is not only an important form of political representation in Nigerian politics, but it is also key to the creation and persistence of inter-tribal and inter-religious communal peace in pluralistic communities.

These findings challenge and call for revision to the theory of power-sharing or consociationalism – a form of political inclusion touted by international policy experts and peace negotiators as a means to end violent civil conflict and build sustainable peace. Recent scholarship questions, and even dismisses, the ability of power-sharing to ameliorate ethnic cleavages and conflict, finding little empirical support for the effectiveness of this institutional mechanism. This study argues, however, that the assessment is limited by its focus on the failure of *formal, national* level power-sharing institutions exclusively. Studies of intra-state and communal conflict must consider the evidence of and potential for peacebuilding from the bottom up through *local* and *informal* power-sharing institutions.

This paper is structured as follows: First, I briefly discuss the limitations of major theories of ethnic conflict in explaining sub-national variation in communal violence. Second, I delve into a discussion of the theory of power-sharing and its classic application, and I then make the case for a reformulation of the theory to examine the role of informal and local political institution in creating conditions for communal peace or conflict. Third, I summarize the data and present case study evidence from northern Nigeria, which show that informal and local-level power-sharing is the key difference in the likelihood of inter-religious violence in otherwise similar pluralistic communities. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of the importance of these findings for the study of ethnic conflict, institutions, and representations. Ultimately, I contend that power-sharing can be an effective mechanism to stem ethnic conflict at the local rather than the national level.

THEORIES OF CIVIL/ETHNIC CONFLICT

In studies of civil war and ethnic conflict, scholars offer a number of competing explanations for why some states are more prone to civil conflict. While the purpose of this

paper is not to provide an exhaustive discussion of each theory, I briefly highlight some of their limitations for explaining sub-national variation in communal ethnic violence or its mechanisms of mobilization, suggesting that a theory of local government institutions and their origins may help fill an analytical gap.

Various structural theories seek to explain ethnic conflict and challenges to the state by pointing to the role of state weaknesses or legitimacy, poverty and economic inequality, and demographic factors. Yet, as Wilkinson (2008: 276) argues, “We can point to significant empirical exceptions to almost any structural generalization we want to put forward.” In the case of economic poverty and inequalities, while these conditions be an underlying cause of conflict, greater specification is necessary to identify the causal mechanisms or conditions under which these factors lead to conflict.² Why does violence break out on some occasions in certain communities and not others where economic inequalities are present? Nigeria is case in point. Measures of states’ economic inequality do not shed light on the sub-national variation in or frequency of communal violence. The northern Nigeria’s states that suffer from higher levels of inequality or poverty are not necessarily more prone to communal violence. In the GINI index data for Kano, Kaduna, Bauchi, and Plateau states – where the majority of inter-religious violence is concentrated – the inequality levels tend to track very closely with those of surrounding states, and these four often fair better than a number of states in some years (Aigbokhan 2000: 60-62; Oyekale et al. 2006: 49; UNDP 2008: 148). The story is similar with GDP per capita and change in GINI scores from 1998 to 2004.³ As these data indicate, indices of

² For further discussion, See Kalyvas 2008: 402; Cederman 2008: 243; Fearon and Laitin 2003; Horowitz 2001; Collier and Hoeffler 2000.

³ Again the four states where the majority of cases of inter-religious violence are concentrated are not necessarily the worst performers. The GDP of Kaduna and Kano are middling, but they are better off than a number of other states in the north. Bauchi and Plateau states, in contrast, help to bring up the rear of states with the lowest GDP per capita (UNDP 2008: 138). Regarding the *change* in a state’s GINI score from 1998 to 2004, inequality in Kano declined somewhat, while in Kaduna, Plateau, and Bauchi inequality increased. However, apart from Kano, *all* northern

inequality gloss over local variation in the social, economic, and political rights and inclusion of groups in different communities, which shape the sub-national geographic and temporal dimensions of communal violence.

In contrast to structural or state-level explanations, other theories stress the role of individual level explanations, such as grievances and greed, as more proximate causes of violent mobilization (e.g., Cederman et al. 2011; Kahl 2002; Collier and Hoeffler 2000; Gurr 2000). Grievances may arise from group discrimination or differentiation, motivating groups to mobilize to seek redress. On the other hand, scholars point out that not all grievances spark violence or civil war, and conflict does not occur everywhere there are scarce resources. While Cederman et al.'s (2011) recent argument revives the grievances argument to some degree, it further emphasizes the need for qualitative case study work that specifies the mechanisms that translate grievances into violent mobilization.

Finally, another argument asserts that the strength of networks and civic associationalism in communities explains the likelihood of violence, since greater interaction, integration, and information shared about and among ethnic groups is key to maintaining cooperative relations and averting violence-inducing "exogenous shocks" (e.g., Fearon and Laitin 1996; Varshney 2002). Yet, these arguments raise the question of why a particular identity cleavage takes on political significance at a given point in time (See Horowitz 1985: 41-54; Chandra 2006). Also, the arguments imply that groups that live in integrated communities and that have long interacted, intermingled, and even intermarried are not conflict prone. To the contrary, there are a number of cases in northern Nigeria where ethnic groups have lived in integrated communities for decades

states showed increased inequality from 1998 to 2004, and these four states have fared better than a number of their neighboring states. Other measures, such as the percentage growth in real income and the poverty incidence scores from 1998 to 2004 also do not reflect a pattern in which the four Middle Belt/north central states are worse off than their neighbors (Oyekale 2006, 35).

or even generations but the bonds of community broke down along some ethnic cleavage in a short span of time. For example, during violent clashes in 2002 and 2004 in southern Plateau state, the inter-religious violence turned even members of the same family and tribe against one another (Hoomlong 2008). What is it that led to a disintegration of communal relationships? What social or political changes occurred that ate away at the bonds of formerly peaceful and integrated ethnic groups?

A key factor scholars overlook, I suggest, is the role of local government institutions entrusted with authority to coordinate group relations and adjudicate between their perceived needs, rights, and demands. The assumption of a “free-space” in which actors are not constrained or empowered by their institutional context (formal or informal) leaves out an important cog in the explanatory logic. Local institutional arrangements shape group relationships, rights, distribution of resources, and the incentives for political entrepreneurs and groups to mobilize around identity cleavages. In decentralized federal systems where access to resources and rights is often times determined by which group is in power at the local-level, the lack of a power-sharing arrangement may lead to or enhance the perception of socio-economic inequality and deficient political representation. In such a scenario, I argue, groups are more susceptible to divisive religious narratives and identity cleavages that can propel communal violence.

This paper presents evidence that supports the theory that the likelihood that communities fall prey to a divisive narrative of religious difference – and thus to religiously-inspired violence – is shaped by informal power-sharing institutions at the local level. This constitutes a reworking of power-sharing theory, as the ensuing sections discuss. Studies of ethnic conflict would benefit from further work that incorporates local institutional arrangements into their analyses and that

address how they come into being and the conditions under which they are sustainable or, as Grief and Laitin (2004) note, self-enforcing.

POWER SHARING

Current state of the theory

In Lijphart's 1977 [2002: 39] seminal work, he makes the case that regimes characterized by formal power-sharing or consociational institutions are more likely to achieve successful democratization and avert ethnic conflict, since they promote "the participation of the representatives of all significant groups in political decision-making." In general, as Rothchild and Roeder (2005: 23) observe, power-sharing regimes are "those states which are characterized by formal institutional rules which give multiple political elites a stake in the decision-making process." The concept, therefore, largely refers to an inclusive political or electoral strategy that offers representatives of conflicting ethnic groups a stake in the national pie, thereby building state legitimacy and reducing the incentives for insurgent groups to re-mobilize (LeVan 2011; Norris 2008; Gates and Strom 2007; Rothchild and Roeder 2005; Spears 2002; Hartzell et al. 2001; Sisk 1996). With this goal in mind, international peace negotiators and leaders in conflict states or unstable democracies such as Chad, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Angola, Zimbabwe, Benin, South Africa, Sri-Lanka, Lebanon, the Philippines, and Iraq have negotiated some manner of formal power-sharing arrangement. Yet, power-sharing's track record, according to recent scholarship, is dismal.

The critiques of the power-sharing model form an impressive list: it concentrates power in a few critical decision-making arenas, it can be used as a mutual veto weapon, conciliatory policy commitment diminishes over time, it creates government rigidity, it is difficult to enforce the rules because of opportunistic leaders, it merely postpones rather than resolves conflict, it

leads to incumbent manipulation, it is subject to the whims of self-interested and power-hungry politicians, the personality differences of actors hinders effectiveness, the incumbency advantage makes inroads difficult, it can be used as a political tool for one group to accumulate more power, it assumes static rather than fluid political interests, it leads to changes in government without new elections, and it emphasizes rather than diminishes ethnic differences (Spears 2000; 2002; Cheeseman and Tendi 2010; Oyugi 2006; Tull and Mehler 2005; Jarstad 2006; LeVan 2011; Rothchild and Roeder 2005). Hardly grounds for optimism.

In practice, therefore, the goals that power-sharing attempts to accomplish seem to be the conditions necessary for its success. For power-sharing to succeed, the literature emphasizes the need for a political culture of accommodation, economic prosperity, equality, demographic stability, strong government institutions or a strong state, stable hierarchical relations, a supportive international environment, elite dominance/enforce-ability, and a constructive relationship with the international community – all of which are unlikely to be present after severe conflict or in unstable democracies. Ultimately, despite the international community's penchant for power-sharing as a solution to ethnic conflict or civil war, a number of recent studies find that power-sharing limits democracy, can lead to a renewal of conflict, and is not the solution to long-term instability as policy practitioners had hoped.⁴ In fact, Lemarchand (2006: 2) goes so far as to say, "Much of the [African] continent has become a graveyard of consociational experiments...a point on which most observers would agree."

⁴ For further discussion, see the following studies: Rothchild and Roeder 2005, 41-47; Horowitz 2002; Lemarchand 2006; Jarstad 2009; Gates and Strom 2007; Norris 2008, 39; Spears 2000, 106; Tull and Mehler 2005; Vandeginste 2009; Trianello 2008; Mehler 2009, 472.

A REFORMULATION OF POWER-SHARING THEORY

Local-level

While the verdict on power-sharing is clearly tilted toward the negative, this study contends that the level of analysis may be misplaced and breadth of study stunted. A focus on formal power-sharing institutions at the national level overlooks the sustainable presence and effectiveness of *informal* power-sharing arrangements at the *local* government level. While Varshney (2002: 38), for example, argues that consociationalism or “institutional arguments cannot by definition account for why *different parts of a country* tend to have very different patterns of ethnic violence and peace,” he does not consider variation in *local* level institutional arrangements. Instead, this paper tests the theory that ethnically pluralistic communities with mechanisms of inclusion or power-sharing in local government institutions are less likely to experience communal violence than those that lack power-sharing institutions.

The notion that power-sharing, as a national level institutional arrangement, is sufficient to address group inequalities at the *sub-national* level seems counter-intuitive, particularly in a federal system where power is decentralized through local institutions of representation. In Nigeria, for example, access to resources and socio-economic rights (or lack thereof) are influenced in important ways by group representation in local political institutions. Furthermore, in pluralistic societies such as Nigeria, the ethnic cleavages are likely to vary not just from state to state but from community to community. While the potential value for local power-sharing institutions to create conditions for peace or conflict is only recognized in passing in the literature (e.g., Spears 2000), the importance of local-level politics and institutions in explaining variation in patterns of conflict or governance in Africa is confirmed in recent scholarship (Maclean 2004; Boone 2003). In short, a top-down model of power-sharing does not take into

account how grievances or socio-economic and political cleavages are constructed as identity issues and may vary sub-nationally.

Formal vs. informal

The focus on power-sharing as an *informal* strategy of group negotiation and cooperation also does not fit the standard definition or analysis of power-sharing as a formal institution that allocates legislative, committee or commission, and electoral seats among ethnic groups. I adopt Helmke and Levitsky's (2004: 727) definition of informal institutions as "*socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated, and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels.*" While studies of informal institutions in relationship to group conflict are not abundant, scholarship highlights their significance (both in democracies and non-democracies) in structuring socio-political life in conjunction with formal institutions (Azari and Smith 2012, Hale 2011, Tsai 2007, Tsai 2006, Boone 2003, Collins 2002). Power-sharing may not necessarily require formal institutional status, therefore, in order to succeed, and it may complement formal institutional arrangements, strengthening their intended democratic purpose.⁵

In the case of local government power-sharing arrangements in Plateau state and Kaduna state in northern Nigeria, research across more than three dozen LGAs revealed a variety of informal power-sharing institutions that are self-enforcing. Formal elections for local government councils are observed in these cases, but the pre-electoral informal arrangement between local ethno-tribal groups ensures that the election reflects the power-sharing principle. In some cases, this is a zoning arrangement in which the leadership of the local government

⁵ Informal power-sharing institutions in this study fall into the category of what Helmke and Levitsky (2004: 729) term "accommodating," as they "create incentives to behave in ways that alter the substantive effects of formal rules, but without directly violating them; they contradict the spirit, but not the letter, of the formal rules," helping to "reconcile these actors' interests with the existing formal institutional arrangements." In the language of Azari and Smith (2012: 42-43), these are "parallel informal arrangement[s]" or, as Tsai (2006: 117) notes, "adaptive" institutions.

council rotates among its districts/wards, thereby ensuring rotation of leadership among the ethno-tribal blocs in the LGA. In other cases, political parties abide by the power-sharing arrangement by only putting forward candidates from the ethno-tribal bloc whose turn it is to lead the council. Based on the population balance in an LGA, certain top positions may also be fixed to go to one or another ethno-tribal group (e.g., Chairmanship goes to the Gbagyi, Deputy to the Hausa), ensuring that leadership is shared by more than one ethno-tribal group even if the largest group in the LGA takes the Chairmanship.

While methods of zoning and rotating power among ethno-tribal blocs may not be democratic in the strict or official electoral sense, the informal institution essentially attaches a condition to electoral arrangements to ensure more representative local government, since “democracy” is not always synonymous with “representative.” The main objective “is to include all groups that can threaten political stability if kept outside the arrangements” (Rothchild and Roeder 2005: 31). The choice of which candidate to vote for within the framework of the informal agreement is still left up to the voters. Thus, although such institutions “violate the spirit of the formal rules, they may generate outcomes (democratic stability) that are viewed as broadly beneficial” (Helmke and Levitsky 2004: 730). This potential for promoting peace and stability in pluralistic communities goes overlooked when scholars only focus on formal, national level power-sharing arrangements.

Weaknesses of (local) power-sharing?

It is by no means clear that the weaknesses identified with national power-sharing institutions are generalizable to power-sharing in local government politics in federal systems, particularly in a context of communal violence rather than civil war. For one, local power-sharing avoids the main weakness highlighted in the beginning – the disconnect from local

dynamics and issues of representation. Case studies also reveal patterns of coordination and trust that have developed from power-sharing institutions particularly suited to the ethno-tribal dynamics of LGAs in northern Nigeria. While the institutional arrangement may by nature emphasize or highlight ethnic differences, it can also lessen the perception that ethno-tribal communities are being discriminated against *on the basis* of their tribal or religious identity.

Also, critiques about the non-democratic nature of power-sharing ignore the fact that candidates still compete in elections; skeptics must implicitly assume that politicians who are democratically elected (absent a power-sharing institution) will not also use their position to exploit resources to the advantage of their own ethno-tribal community, friends, and family members in unstable democracies. While power-sharing is not a solution to corruption in office, a power-sharing model that rotates ethno-tribal representation in the executive seats of local government leadership can help to avoid the tendency toward exploitative control by the majority ethnic group and encourage greater accountability.

Furthermore, the gains from power-sharing are more observable and leaders more easily monitored (in terms of results) at the local level. While there may be challenges to sustaining power-sharing institutions, there are nonetheless incentives for leaders *not* to defect or play a game of brinkmanship. As Horowitz (2002: 25) notes, “politicians who benefit from electoral incentives to moderation have continuing reason to try to reap those rewards, whatever their beliefs and whatever their inclination to toleration and statesmanship.” For example, as I find, leaders have an incentive to abide by informal power-sharing agreements, since their group may not otherwise have the political clout to ensure significant representation. There can also be historical incentives for leaders to form power-sharing institutions as well.

In sum, despite the emphasis on an inclusive politics of representation as a solution to ethnic conflict and a guarantor of a stable peace following civil war, studies of consociationalism or power-sharing in a number of countries do not bear out Lijphart's initial findings and contentions about this model's importance in creating stable democracy in plural societies. This paper contends, however, that Lijphart's theory of power-sharing is not defunct. Rather, with some revision in the level and assumptions of the analysis, power-sharing can be an effective tool of conflict prevention. In the following section, I present evidence for this argument from sub-national study of variation in inter-religious communal violence in northern Nigeria.

POWER-SHARING & THE NIGERIAN CASE: THE ARGUMENT

The north-central or Middle Belt states of Nigeria (See Map below) are an ideal site for comparative study; they are characterized by ethno-tribal and ethno-religious diversity, a shared colonial history, a rapid growth of Christianity, and an increase in Muslim-Christian violence since the 1980s in a context of national politicization of religious identity. Plateau state and Kaduna state, in particular, are two states in the Middle Belt region constituted by a number of tribally and religiously pluralistic LGAs and with higher reported incidence of Muslim-Christian violence over the last two to three decades. Only some of the pluralistic LGAs in the two states, however, have been prone to bouts of inter-religious violence since the 1980s, offering consideration variation on the dependent variable (endemic communal violence versus relative peace) that make them ideal for comparative study. Analysis of patterns of representation in these two states, therefore, offers an opportunity to test whether local patterns of representation are associated with patterns of communal violence or peace. Before presenting the findings of the data collection, a brief introduction to the context and rise of Muslim-Christian communal violence in northern Nigeria is necessary.

Figure 1. Map of Nigerian states



Religion and politics since colonial rule

The present-day Middle Belt states at one time constituted the fringe of Hausa-Fulani⁶ Muslim rule under the Sokoto Caliphate in the 19th century. The ethno-tribal communities in this north-central region were predominantly non-Muslim, and they generally resisted (cultural or religious) assimilation and (political) integration with the dominant Hausa-Fulani Muslim establishment. Nonetheless, the branches of Hausa-Fulani rule extended over a large swath of northern Nigeria, gradually expanding and subduing the smaller northern ethno-tribal groups through Islamic religion and political power. During the period of colonial incursion, the British defeated the Sokoto Caliphate and established the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria in 1900. The Hausa-Fulani Muslim elite and emirs continued to rule the north, however, through the British

⁶ The Fulani and the Hausa became integrated over time in the pre-colonial era, and, hence, I generally adopt the common Hausa-Fulani designation. See Wale Adebawale, 2009, "Terror, Territoriality and the Struggle for Indigeneity and Citizenship in Northern Nigeria," *Citizenship Studies* 13, no. 4: 354.

system of Indirect Rule or proxy rule, solidifying their authority over the local ethno-tribal and non-Muslim groups of the north (Mamdani 1996, Turaki 1993, Crowder 1978).

Although missions and commerce worked together to create inroads in Nigeria in the first part of the 19th century, the British allowed very limited Christian missions in the north, if any. When they did allow them along the fringes, they did so only with the permission of the local ruling emir. This arrangement was part of the British agreement with the Muslim political elite. It was not until 1960 when Nigeria achieved independence that the barriers to Christian evangelization fell. Hence, in the post-colonial period, it was largely in the non-Muslim Middle Belt – where ethno-tribal groups had rejected Islam and maintained forms of African Traditional Religion – that Christian missions flooded in and saw rapid gains (See Figure 2 and Table 4 in Appendix). Christian missionary education also reached this population of marginalized ethno-tribal groups and led to the emergence of a new “enlightened” Christian political class that threatened northern Muslim political domination. These political and religious institutions and changes helped shape the socio-political structure and communal politics of northern Nigeria with its mix of ethno-tribal and ethno-religious groups (Marshall 2009, Crampton 2004, Kukah 2003, Falola 1998, Turaki 1993).

A number of factors and events converged to heighten the rhetoric of religious cleavage in Nigerian national politics following independence in 1960 and the devastating Biafran civil war from 1967-1970. Debates over the expansion and implementation of Islamic Shari’a law in 1978 and 1999 led to riots between Muslims and Christians in a number of northern states (Paden 2008, Boer 2003, Falola 1998). In 1987, the issue of Nigerian membership in the Organization for the Islamic Conference led to an outcry from the Christian community. Meanwhile, with the rapid expansion of a Christianity that no longer spurned politics and with

the emergence of radicalized Islamic sects with expansionary political demands, new religious umbrella bodies – both Christian and Muslim – entered the political stage to advocate for their constituents and political stances.⁷ The continued growth of indigenous-led Christian churches intent on evangelizing and winning souls among the Muslim-dominant north also did nothing to quell perceptions of threat to the religious and political establishment of Muslim northern elites. Taken together, post-1960s events and religious changes emphasized a latent but potentially volatile religious fault line in the country that crossed ethno-tribal categories and began to coalesce in communal violence that pitted Muslims and Christians against one another from the end of the 1980s onward.

Revisiting the puzzle and argument

The question remains, however: why have the ethnic divisions devolved into inter-religious violence in some of these pluralistic communities of northern Nigeria since the 1980s and not others? While colonial rule and the socio-political categorization of groups and boundary-making helped to construct ethnic identities as salient categories of belonging and difference, the colonial experience itself cannot explain this puzzle. Instead, the evidence suggests that in communities where local elites established power-sharing institutions – even before the rampant politicization of religious identity in Nigerian national politics – power-sharing served as a local mechanism for defusing ethno-tribal and, eventually, inter-religious conflict.

In general, I trace the construction of power-sharing institutions in northern Nigeria to ethno-tribal leaders' strategic efforts to ensure political representation for their tribal groups following major local government decentralization reforms in the 1970s and 1980s. The reforms

⁷ e.g., The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (SCIA), and the Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI). In universities, students formed the Muslim Student Society (MSS) and the Fellowship of Christian Students (FCS).

circumscribed the power of traditional leaders or chiefs in the north, allocated greater authority for development to local government, and created an opportunity for the ethno-tribal groups to seek greater representation and access to the resources associated with local government leadership. Some communities in the Middle Belt or north-central region were quick to act to create power-sharing arrangements that would promote their group's rights and representation where the opportunity did not previously exist.

For each LGA, however, factors that varied across LGAs, that took place after independence, and that *cannot be traced back to colonization* powerfully shaped how local elites perceived the relative costs and benefits of power-sharing – the rapid growth of Christianity, the radicalization of Christian and Muslim politics, missionary education of previously politically marginalized populations, the adjustment of state and local government boundaries, the politics of new LGA creation, land pressures bringing groups into closer proximity/tensions with one another, constitutional changes affecting indigenous status, and expectations about future demographic changes in more urban areas (to name a few). Colonial political rule affected the construction of group identities and differences through patterns of assimilation and integration, but it does not tell us how these relationships were transformed and evolved into a communal politics of ethno-tribal and religious significance. Thus, the likelihood of power-sharing in the post-1970s was subject to different sets of incentives or hurdles that evolved in tandem with socio-political and religious changes in the LGAs. I find that the *routes* to power-sharing were at least smoother in those cases where these changes did not exacerbate local ethno-tribal relationships over time.

More specifically, regarding the relationship between power-sharing and inter-religious violence, my hypothesis is as follows:

H: Power-sharing was less likely to be perceived by local ethno-tribal groups as an affront or major concession of political representation to a group identified with former colonial masters where A) post-colonial changes and political events did not exacerbate local ethno-tribal cleavages, *and* B) where there was greater cultural assimilation and political integration during colonial-era Hausa-Fulani Muslim rule or where the Hausa-Fulani made up a relatively small proportion of the local population.

The opposite should then hold true as well, such that power-sharing was less likely in areas where pluralistic ethno-tribal communities were less culturally assimilated and politically integrated under colonial Hausa-Fulani Muslim proxy rule *and* where subsequent socio-political and religious changes exacerbated these cleavages. Power-sharing, in this context, would be perceived as a major concession to former colonial rulers. The incentives are less prominent for the following reason: where post-colonial politics and changes exacerbated colonial-era cleavages and where local ethno-tribal group(s) could not form a significant enough bloc to guarantee self-representation even with power-sharing, such an arrangement appears less likely.

Considering the trade-offs in power-sharing between local ethno-tribal groups and the Hausa-Fulani in particular, the argument can be represented as follows:

Table 1. Likelihood of power-sharing in pluralistic Middle Belt communities

	High Post-Colonial Integration	Low Post-Colonial Integration
High Colonial-Era Integration/Assimilation	(A) Higher likelihood of Power-Sharing	(B) (indeterminate)
Low Colonial-Era Integration/Assimilation	(C) (less contentious)	(D) Lower likelihood of Power-Sharing

As Table 1 above illustrates, communities with a significant population of Hausa-Fulani (pluralistic) that were less assimilated and integrated I expect to be less likely to have adopted a power-sharing institution following local government reforms if post-colonial changes did not alter the perceived ethno-tribal cleavages and inequality (Cell D).

In contrast, communities where the Hausa-Fulani Muslims were more assimilated and integrated with the local ethno-tribal populations *and* this relationship was maintained in the post-colonial period, the issue of power-sharing would be less contentious in the first place since the relationship between the ethno-tribal groups would be more seamless (Cell A). In some pluralistic LGAs of this type where the Hausa-Fulani have a low presence in the LGA, however, they may not rotate into the top positions of the local government, as these posts are more likely to be divvied up between the major ethno-tribal groups.

In a different scenario, where there was greater resistance to Hausa-Fulani Muslim rule during the colonial-era (low degree of assimilation/integration), but socio-political events and religious changes – such as migration patterns or demographic changes and the spread of Islam – promoted greater political integration even if not full cultural assimilation, I expect power-sharing to be a less contentious alternative among local elite (Cell C). In this case, power-sharing is not necessarily ruled out based on the colonial-era legacy, as subsequent changes may have altered the inter-group relationships and incentive structure for power-sharing.

Finally, in an LGA where communities were largely assimilated and integrated during the colonial era, but experienced greater differentiation due to events and changes in the post-colonial era, power-sharing may be more difficult to either negotiate or maintain if already in place (Cell B). This cell better represents those cases that, in contemporary Nigerian politics, face new pressures on inter-religious cohesion due to the prominent acrid Muslim-Christian

political relationship of more recent years and the violence between Muslims and Christians in surrounding LGAs. Some pluralistic Niger state LGAs, for example, may fit this bill. In the last five to ten years pressure for self-representation among the Christian population appears to be growing, and the state government has sought to keep inter-religious violence at bay in the face of a handful of small incidents. One of the reasons cited by interviewees for this shift is the increasing education among the Christian population, which is bringing “enlightenment” or political self-awareness and encouraging broader contestation for political office and influence. In the current religio-political environment in northern Nigeria and with an unsettling of the local political status-quo, this scenario may create challenges for the formation of power-sharing arrangements.

In sum, I expect power-sharing to be a more contentious issue and less likely in local government areas where assimilation and integration is low (exacerbated by events and changes over time) and where the population of Hausa-Fulani is fairly significant. Power-sharing, in those contexts, possesses greater representational costs to the local ethno-tribal groups seeking a “new era” of post-colonial self-autonomy and representation.

OPERATIONALIZATION & METHODOLOGY

Communal violence

Like Varshney (2002: 309) and Wilkinson (2004), this project draws on Olzak’s (1992) definition of communal riots as incidents in which “a) there is violence, and b) two or more communally-identified groups confront each other/members of the other group at some point during the violence.”⁸ Violence in this study refers primarily to lethal violence, which accounts

⁸ As in Horowitz’s (2002: 1) study of ethnic riots, I do not distinguish between communal violence and communal riots, which both fall under the designation of “an intense, sudden, though not necessarily wholly unplanned, lethal attack by civilian members of one ethnic group on civilian members of another ethnic group, the victims chosen because of their group membership.”

for the vast majority of cases, but also extends to violence involving injuries or property destruction (e.g., wiping out homes or villages). While some scholars exclude non-lethal violence in their analyses of civil conflict, this project includes non-lethal since it seems odd not to recognize as “violence” cases where, for example, the victims escape death but an entire village is burned to the ground. Such actions increase communal fear and entrench communal conflict, destabilize communities, create humanitarian and security nightmares, and are often connected to retaliation and subsequent deaths. These non-lethal cases are all part of the *story* of communal violence, the construction of an us-versus-them narrative. To limit analyses to only those instances in which deaths are involved overlooks the interconnected nature of lethal and non-lethal violence in constructing and entrenching communal cleavages.

Power-sharing

Power-sharing, as already discussed, refers to formal and, as this study argues, informal institutional mechanisms of political representation or inclusion. To measure the presence or absence of power-sharing, data were collected on patterns of representation in elections/appointments for Plateau state’s 17 LGAs and Kaduna state’s 23 LGAs. Gathering the power-sharing data represented a major hurdle: the National Electoral Commission, state government offices, and LGA headquarters have not generally preserved records of local government elected/appointed officials apart from, perhaps, a list of past Chairman or the previous one or two local government councils. With the help of research assistants, visits to each LGA were made to compile the names of past administration officials and their ethnic identities, as well as to gather general information on the nature of local governance and the absence or presence of a power-sharing arrangement. This effort often involved speaking directly with former chairmen, deputy chairmen, secretaries, councilors, information officers, and tribal

chiefs who were able to assist in the reconstruction of information about the various administration officials. Where possible, the data were cross-checked with multiple officials or other published sources. Although it was impossible to obtain comprehensive records for some local governments, the result of this effort is the first fairly comprehensive data of local government officials and their ethnic identities in Plateau state and Kaduna state. Where the full list of administration officials could not be obtained, data collection focused on the top officials – Chairman, Deputy Chairman, and Secretary – since these top three positions are the most important seats in local government councils and their ethno-tribal rotation represents the primary evidence of power-sharing.⁹

The two driving questions behind this data gathering project were: In pluralistic LGAs where respondents claimed to function under a power-sharing arrangement, is this reflected in their election results and/or political appointments? In LGAs characterized by communal violence, do their election and appointment outcomes show lopsided political control considering the major ethno-tribal groups in the LGA? This is my main indicator of variation in power-sharing. This next section presents the findings of the analysis of the relationship between communal violence and power-sharing. If the theory holds, I expect that the pluralistic LGAs that are less prone to violence are also more likely to be characterized by a power-sharing arrangement negotiated by the ethno-tribal elite.

FINDINGS I: POWER-SHARING DATA

The following two-by-two tables provide a summary of the overall pattern, contrasting pluralistic Plateau state and Kaduna state LGAs by a) whether they have a power-sharing arrangement and b) whether they experience relative inter-religious communal peace or

⁹ Local government elections have at times been suspended or delayed due to administrative inefficiencies. The data reflect these “inconsistencies,” but one can still observe the *pattern* of power-sharing or lack thereof over time.

violence.¹⁰ I also contrast in these tables the LGAs that lack a power-sharing arrangement but are largely *homogenous* in their ethno-tribal composition (dashed circle).¹¹

As illustrated below and supporting the theory, pluralistic Plateau state LGAs with a power-sharing arrangement have exhibited less propensity for inter-religious violence since the 1980s. Based on analysis of the data, these are the LGAs where the top tier positions of the local government – the Chairman, Deputy Chairman, and Secretary – rotate among the primary ethno-tribal groups in the LGA, and, by their implicit religious pluralism, also show mixed Muslim and Christian representation. The finding is the same whether the LGA is Christian majority, as in Bassa, or Muslim majority, as in Kanam.

Table 2. Pattern of power-sharing and violence, Plateau state

	Relative Peace	Violence
Power-Sharing	Pankshin, Mangu, Bassa, Mikang, Kanam, Bokkos	
≠ Power sharing	(homogeneous) Riyom, Kanke, Jos South, Jos East, Langtang North, Langtang South, Barkin Ladi	Jos North, Shendam, Qua'an Pan, Wase

The pattern also holds for the Kaduna state LGAs for which sufficient data could be obtained – 19 of 23 LGAs. The power-sharing data in some cases are more difficult to interpret without insight into the history of ethno-tribal relationships in a number of the LGAs – such as

¹⁰ The communal violence data collection is described in “Fighting for Faith or Tribe? Parsing Apart the Role of Ethnic Identities in Nigeria’s Communal Violence.” 2013. Article submitted for publication.

¹¹ Note that best estimates of homogeneity are derived from interviews with locals as well as academic studies or reports. There are no official statistics, as ethnic identity data were barred from census collection after 1963.

Zango-Kataf, Jema'a, and Kaduna South and Kaduna North – where disputes over questions of power-sharing extend beyond the simple allocation of local government seats and where incidents of inter-religious violence have led to changes over time in population dynamics. Indeed, in the case of Zango-Kataf and Jema'a, for example, self-determination and continued oversight by Hausa-Fulani emirates following independence and 1970s decentralization reforms complicated the relationship between the local ethno-tribal groups and the small Hausa-Fulani minorities. This scenario rendered issues of local government control more volatile. The Table below is the best representation that could be constructed from analysis of the data and other historical information.

Table 3. Pattern of power-sharing and violence, Kaduna state¹²

	Relative Peace	Violence
Power-Sharing	Kachia, Chikun, Sanga, Kajuru, Birnin Gwari	
≠ Power sharing	(homogeneous) Jaba, Kubau, Makarfi, Sabon Gari, Ikara, Kudan, Igabi, Soba, Giwa	Kaduna South, Kaduna North, Zango-Kataf, Jema'a, Zaria

These data, however, can only indicate a correlation or association. They cannot demonstrate direct causality or explain the history or factors that informed the establishment of power-sharing in some of the LGAs and not others. For this reason, the following section presents a paired comparison LGA case study (one of three conducted in the field), providing

¹² Although not verified in face-to-face interviews with local officials, the data obtained for Sanga and Kachia reflect and are highly suggestive of a power-sharing arrangement.

evidence that the absence or presence of a power-sharing institution is the key explanatory mechanisms underlying the relationship between inter-religious peace and power-sharing.

FINDINGS II: CASE STUDY EVIDENCE

Why did elites adopt power-sharing arrangements? How do they persist? And how is it that a power-sharing institution that rotates representation on the basis of tribal identity helps prevent inter-religious violence? These questions can only be answered in a meaningful way by discussing specific case studies of violence-prone and peaceful LGAs.

Building on the findings of the previous section, this chapter presents a paired comparison case study of Jos North LGA in Plateau state and Chikun LGA in Kaduna state. These north-central or Middle Belt states are an ideal site for comparative study; they are characterized by tribal and religious pluralism, a shared colonial history, a rapid growth of Christianity, and an increase in Muslim-Christian violence since the 1980s in a context of national politicization of religious identity. Both Jos North and Chikun LGAs have populations around four- to five-hundred thousand and significant populations of Muslims and Christians. In both cases, the Christian ethno-tribal groups are the majority. Best estimates conclude that the Hausa-Fulani compose about half of the Jos North population, and the Hausa-Fulani constitute around 30 percent of Chikun's population. Yet these two LGAs vary considerably on the dependent variable – inter-religious violence. While Jos North has experienced endemic inter-religious violence since a small skirmish in the mid-1990s sparked Muslim-Christian violence, Chikun has remained relatively peaceful despite its convergence with the large urban metropolis of Kaduna city (the capital of Kaduna state) in which inter-religious violence has been recurrent. Since clashes among co-religionists in other LGAs are one of the most common precipitators of inter-religious violence in northern Nigeria, Chikun's relative peace is all the more impressive.

Thus, while these two LGAs are fairly similar pluralistic communities, they have divergent patterns of inter-religious violence. Analysis of these two cases reveals that the presence or absence of a power-sharing is the most important explanatory variable to account for this divergence.

- JOS NORTH – NON-POWER-SHARING CASE -

Jos North LGA, settled by both Muslims and Christians, is the urban center of Plateau state and home to the state capital of Jos. The Christian population is made up primarily of the Anaguta, Afizere, Berom, and other local ethno-tribal groups along with the Muslim Hausa-Fulani. Jos itself became more populated in the 1900s during colonial rule when it was discovered as a source of tin. Subsequently, a tin mining industry grew up around the 1920s and attracted migrants, particularly Hausa Muslims, from other areas of northern Nigeria (Samuel et al. 2011: 184).

In light of the designation of Jos North LGA as a volatile site of inter-religious violence, one might presume that it is an area where inter-religious violence in the north had its inception. After all, since Jos North and the immediately neighboring LGAs are part of an urban center that is home to a mix of ethno-tribal groups that are largely Muslim or Christian, it seems a likely place for inter-religious violence to flare. Yet, Muslim-Christian violence was largely unheard of in Jos before 2001. While Kaduna, Bauchi, and Kano states were all experiencing inter-religious clashes that spread like wildfire to other cities in those states in the 1980s and 1990s, Jos remained peaceful. Furthermore, as the capital of Plateau state, Jos showed strong levels of integration in civic associations – such as in the mining union in the 1960s – and, prior to 2001, Muslims and Christians were very integrated; they engaged in every day interaction, living and socializing together in mixed neighborhoods and buying/selling together in the market. Plateau

state itself was conferred the (now ironic) title of “Home of Peace and Tourism,” and the communities “largely coexisted peacefully” (Samuel et al 2011: 184). At a peace meeting in early 2011, one religious leader recalled how Muslims and Christians used to interact prior to the crises, stating,

Long before now we had enjoyed so much peace...[we could] go into the house of a Muslim and visit freely. Until trouble started in 1994. Because of the experience we are going through here, everyone has become an enemy...Trust for each other is right now very low. Is there any hope for a return to those days?...I remember that in 1975 I was living in Bauchi Street and the people living next to us were Muslims, but today, that's not the case – everyone to his tent [religious, ethnic, tribal]. So a very old battle line is drawn; whether it's real or imagined, it exists.¹³

Why was it in 1994 that the Muslim-Christian cleavage became more pronounced, erupting in major communal violence in 2001, 2004, 2006, 2008, and 2010? In a relatively short span of time, Jos transformed from a place of inter-religious peace to recurring violence articulated and mobilized along Muslim-Christian lines. The shift renders Jos North LGA of particular interest for testing the role of religious and political changes in the constitution of the Muslim-Christian conflict and, ultimately, in the failure of a power-sharing arrangement to emerge.

Development and crux of the conflict

The breakdown in communal relationships can be traced back to the settlement and subsequent political developments in the Jos area among both the local “indigenous” ethno-tribal groups and the “settler” Hausa-Fulani Muslims. The first signs that these bonds might break down into violent conflict became apparent in the early 1990s, but the fundamental dispute over rights and representation between the significant Hausa-Fulani minority and the majority local ethno-tribal groups had long been present.

¹³ Notes recorded by author, Plateau State, March 23, 2011.

On the one side, the Hausa-Fulani Muslim elite contend that they have been historically under-represented in Jos local government due to their “settler” status, lacking the political and socio-economic rights of their ethnic counterparts despite their original settlement in the area and their central role in its administrative and economic development. One of the primary disputes between the Hausa-Fulani and the local ethno-tribal groups is over the “ownership” (i.e., political control) of Jos, the capital of Plateau state and a thriving metropolis. The Hausa-Fulani elite assert that they are the original founders of Jos and have resided in the area for generations (Ostein 2009).

Local ethno-tribal groups, dismiss these claims. Among other issues, they note that the Hausa-Fulani did not establish a significant presence in the Jos area until 1915 during the British tin mining era (when a Hausa leader was brought in from Bauchi by the colonial authorities to preside over the Hausa mining settlements). Furthermore, as Ostein (2009: 8) notes, “[t]he territory Jos now occupies....was successfully defended in the late 19th century against attempted ‘*jihadist*’ penetration from neighboring Bauchi, the nearest outpost of the so-called Sokoto Caliphate.” In an OpEd written by local scholars Gonyok and Mangvwat (1981: 6), they note that colonial direct rule presided in the area of Jos township “pending the indigenous chiefdoms would evolve larger and acceptable form of administration.” Upon the effective local organization of the indigenous chiefdoms, Gonyok and Mangvwat (1981: 6) continue, “the colonial government did the only logical thing, namely the incorporation of the former so called ‘Hausawa Areas’ into the various polities and chiefdoms of their habitants,” although this “naturally raised the dissatisfaction from the ‘Sarkin Hausawa areas.” Along these lines, the local ethno-tribal groups assert their historical ancestry in the area, the settler status of the Hausa-Fulani Muslims, and, hence, indigenous groups’ proper “ownership” of the contested area of Jos.

Yet, despite the competing claims and clashing historical accounts, violent conflict never erupted in Jos prior to the 1990s. Competing indigenous versus non-indigenous claims did not and do not inherently spell violent ethnic conflict. Indeed, it was not until General Babangida, the military leader of Nigeria, made an executive political decision in 1991 to “resolve” the Jos issue that the tensions morphed into something more threatening and violent. Babangida’s solution was to carve up the former Jos LGA into Jos North and Jos South. Due to the way in which the boundaries of the local government were newly delineated, the Hausa-Fulani achieved one of their central demands – their own local government in the form of Jos North, since, “[w]ithin the new Jos North, in particular, the local peoples were no longer so predominant, most of them living with less admixture of other ethnic groups in Jos South; in elections to city-wide offices in Jos North, therefore, other groups, like the Hausas, might now expect to win” (Ostein 2009: 8).

This political event led to a new more volatile politics of indigenous versus non-indigenous identity and, ultimately, Muslim versus Christian identity politics and violence. To the local Christian ethno-tribal groups, this move was seen as an affront, an attempt to appease the local Hausa Muslim population that was presumably advocating for more political power than acceptable. For the first time, no longer a political minority, the Hausa-Fulani could potentially control a local government area that included in its boundaries Jos metropolis, the state capital, and an area the local ethno-tribal groups long considered their own. Subsequent political moves to resolve the dispute, rather than helping to create a system of power-sharing, reinforced the divisions and made a power-sharing solution all the more untenable.

Religious dimensions

Since 1994, there have been five major inter-religious clashes in Jos – in 2001, 2004, 2006, 2008, and 2010 – in which hundreds of people have been killed. This does not include the number of “smaller” cases of deadly communal inter-religious violence that continue to fuel conflict and solidify the acrimonious nature of religious identity in parts of Plateau state. While the violence in Jos North is rooted in the political exacerbation of disagreements over local government representation, a religious dimension or a “religious coloration” has increasingly characterized and fueled the violence. Despite the broader and varied dimensions of the conflict, religious events or perceived offenses are now sufficient to spark devastating violence mobilized along Muslim-Christian lines. For example, prior to the September 2001 violence in which as many 1000 people were killed in Jos North and surrounding neighborhoods, a political dispute was simmering over the appointment of one Mallam Muktar Usman Mohammed, a Jasawa (Hausa-Fulani) man, to the position of Coordinator and Chairman of the Monitoring Committee of the National Poverty Eradication Program. The opposition of the local ethno-tribal elite to this appointment was strong, but the event that lit the fuse on the communal tensions was a scuffle that ensued at a local mosque. A Christian woman reportedly attempted to cross directly through an area outside of a mosque where Muslim men were holding their prayers. When she returned from the market the same way, despite their warning that she take an alternate path, the encounter with the annoyed worshipers turned violent. Christians suddenly appeared to defend her – either because they happened to observe the altercation or, as some claim, because they were standing in wait to carry out an attack. Whatever the exact details of that day, Human Rights Watch (2001: 9) recounts the subsequent events,

[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. People were targeted clearly on the basis of their religion or ethnicity. 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. In some areas, Christians and Muslims set up joint patrols in a bid to limit the spread of violence, but it became difficult to maintain these once the fighting had escalated.

Even members of small ethno-tribal groups from southern states who were residing in Jos but were not involved in the political dispute between the indigenous and settlers were targeted on the basis of religion. Christian Igbos were engulfed in the violence, since “Hausas regarded them same as unbelievers like the indigenous” (Abdulsalami 2001: 7). In the end, Human Rights Watch (2001: 10; 2010: 7) and other reports recorded approximately 1000 deaths, dozens or hundreds injured, 50,000 displaced in 16 refugee camps, and billions of naira (tens of millions USD) in property destroyed, including a number of places of worship.

In the large-scale violence in 2008 and 2010, the disputes once again took on a religious coloration with churches and mosques targeted and burned to the ground. One account of the major 2010 inter-religious clash notes that the refusal of some Christians to allow a Muslim man to rebuild his home (destroyed in previous communal violence) in an area now dominated by Christians sparked the violence. Another account notes that the violence occurred in response to a Muslim man’s attack on a church full of Christian worshipers in Jos. Either way, the perception of a Muslim versus Christian conflict was clear. Both the 2008 and 2010 inter-religious violence resulted in hundreds of deaths and injuries, further creating the perception of an insurmountable religious cleavage in Jos. In a smaller incident in 2010, “hoodlums” reportedly attacked members of the Christian Association of Nigeria while they were leaving a meeting in Jos. On August 30th,

2011 a church was destroyed and two-dozen Christians and Muslims were killed following a confrontation between Christians and Muslims when Muslims went to pray at an abandoned mosque in a now predominantly Christian area of the city. In March 2012, suspected Boko Haram extremists bombed a Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) church at its headquarters in the city, which Christian youth reacted to by setting up roadblocks to target Muslim motorcycle/transportation drivers who had nothing to do with the incident; at least ten Muslims were killed in this manner.

As these few examples highlight, whatever the underlying political dimensions of the dispute in the Jos North crises, the violence is either triggered by an event of some symbolic religious significance or it quickly takes on the garb of a religious conflict as Muslims and Christians mobilize to confront one another. The phenomenon of inter-religious violence in northern Nigeria is inseparable from the story of religious change in Nigeria since the 1970s. Plateau state, along with a number of other Middle Belt states, experienced a rapid conversion of its non-Muslim population to Christianity following the end of colonial rule with the removal of the barrier to missionary evangelism. The Pentecostal-charismatic revival that swept from south to north in the 1960s and 1970s could easily be constructed in the minds of some Muslim elite as a threat to the predominance of Islam in northern Nigeria where religion and politics have been integrally linked as far back as the rule of the Sokoto Caliphate. In Plateau state, Christianity was virtually non-existent at the beginning of the 20th century. Today, the population of Jos is around 50 percent Christian. Evangelistic crusades and enthusiasm, along with the establishment of countless new neighborhood Pentecostal churches and mega-churches, all speak to the rapid religious change in northern Nigeria, and, as Jan Boer (2003: 35) points out, this surge in Christianity in the Middle Belt region “has made Islam even more nervous, for it stakes its

claims on the basis of an alleged continued majority,” and “increasing nervousness spells greater volatility.”

Similarly, the expansion of Shari’a law to most northern states and the emergence of Islamic extremist movements – evidenced in intra-Muslim riots and violence at the beginning of the 1980s and the emergence of Boko Haram as an anti-Christian and anti-Western threat – also reinforce fears among Christians of an Islamic jihad intent on wiping out Christianity in the north. As Best (2011: 33) notes, “Many have argued that the radicalization of Islam, its provocative public preachings and statements attributed to some of its leaders and clerics helped to inflame Nigerian passions in the direction of religion.”

In a short space of time, following the political events outlined above, Jos went from being a peaceful vacation destination and home to refugees fleeing inter-religious violence to one of the hotbeds of recurrent Muslim-Christian clashes generating thousands of refugees of its own – one of the perceived no-go zones of northern Nigeria. The city itself is now segregated along Muslim-Christian lines, and Christians consider it risking their lives to enter the Muslim neighborhoods and vice-versa. Bouts of violence are unpredictable, killing anywhere from relatively few to a few hundred.

Yet, the conflict was not inevitable. While the relationship between the local ethno-tribal groups and the Hausa-Fulani was clearly shaped by the colonial legacy – lack of assimilation and political integration – it was subsequent political events and changes *particular* to this area of Plateau state that tipped the balance toward conflict rather than compromise. The creation of Jos North established a political impasse, removing incentives for any sort of power-sharing solution which national political elite might have negotiated. Rather than providing an incentive for power-sharing, this particular political event exacerbated local cleavages and enhanced the

competition between communal groups. Under these conditions, a divisive religious othering and a narrative of Muslim-Christian conflict, already rampant in Nigerian national politics and in communal violence surrounding Plateau state, found fertile ground in Jos. The issue was not ultimately one of integration or lack of prior civic associationalism but, rather, a lack of power-sharing at the local level, opening the space for religious identity politics to flare and morph an issue of representation into a perceived religious conflict.

- CHIKUN – POWER-SHARING CASE -

As in Plateau state, some but not all of the ethnically pluralistic LGAs of Kaduna state have been sites of intense inter-religious violence in recent decades. Chikun LGA in the west-central part of Kaduna state, for example, is located near the epicenter of some of the major sites of Muslim-Christian clashes, including the recurring bouts of inter-religious violence in the Kaduna metropolis and state capital (comprising Kaduna North and Kaduna South LGAs), which is one of the largest cities in Nigeria with 1.3 million inhabitants. These clashes often spill over from communal violence in the southern part of the state, in LGAs such as Zango-Kataf, Zaria, and Jema'a. As in Plateau state, cities and towns are increasingly divided along ethno-religious lines as a result of the recurrent violence.

Yet, despite the fact that Chikun LGA merges directly with the southern part of Kaduna metropolis, no major crises have emanated from Chikun local government – a point of pride to a number of local government officials and community leaders. Created in 1987, Chikun LGA is the fourth most populated of the 23 LGAs in Kaduna state. As residents of Chikun often noted in conversation, the local government has so many different tribes that it is a “mini Kaduna state.” There are three major local ethno-tribal blocs: the Gbagyi, Hausa, and the Kabilu (a mix of non-indigenous ethno-tribal groups). The Gbagyi, however, form the majority followed by the Hausa

who are also considered indigenous. Despite Chikun's very ethnically and religiously mixed population, the LGA remains relatively peaceful, and refugees escaping conflicts in southern Kaduna state will flee to Chikun. Why is it that this pluralistic LGA remains relatively peaceful compared to neighboring Kaduna North and Kaduna South LGAs or Zango-Kataf and Jema'a to the south? Politicians, in particular, could exploit the ethno-religious dynamics of the violence for political ends. As field research revealed, however, power-sharing is an integral part of the communal peace in Chikun LGA.

Power-Sharing

Many if not all of the subjects interviewed in Chikun provided the same unprompted observation when probed about the underling factors sustaining peace in Chikun – that the power-sharing institution among the major ethno-tribal groups in the local government is key. Based on their informal agreement, the Gbagyi, Hausa, and Kabilu share leadership of the executive local government seats. As a former leader of the LGA explained, if the Gbagyi hold the Chairmanship, then the Hausa will represent the Deputy-Chairman position, and the Kabilu the Secretary's seat.

The structure of the power-sharing agreement also appears to incorporate a zoning principle. That is, the various wards or districts within Chikun will each have the opportunity to represent the Chairmanship. For example, the Gbagyi representative must not come from the same ward that was represented in the last election. Or, as appears to be the case in Chikun, all three top council leaders may not come from the same ward. In this sense, the zoning arrangement also helps to quell claims of unfair play or inequality in representation that can emerge if a leader favors his or her own ward and if that ward is represented in multiple elections. In a gathering of about 30 local leaders – youth leaders, councilors, activists, and other local

officials – respondents described the power-sharing arrangement as central to peaceful relationships among the Muslim and Christian ethno-tribal groups in the local government. As one local organizer explained,

Sometimes crises arise where there is no fair play... [I]n the local government, if the chairman is from this area, then the deputy and secretary [are] from the other area. Then they spread the positions in such a situation [so that] everybody is being carried along. And 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. We are okay. Things are going on well, politically we are moving forward.¹⁴

One administrator went on to explain the arrangement as follows:

So in any zoning arrangement for positions, maybe the Gbagyi we'll say, "Okay, he's the son of the soil so he's taking the Chairmanship." You cannot go to Zango or Jos and contest for chairmanship there. So we understand with him and say, "Okay, first born of the family, take that spot," and then we the Kabilu and the Hausa-Fulani will now come and sit down in our kitchen cabinet and decide who take number two. That is the Vice-Chairman[ship]. We can either give the spot to the Hausa-Fulani – perhaps they are more in number – or whatever arrangement...we can give them that. And then we say, "Okay...now, the Kabilu, now we...take the Secretariate," so that we do all the right thing and include all... So that is the arrangement that has been helping us include. The party structure - it is the same thing. If the Gbagyi say they are taking the executive seat, okay, we say, "Hausa-Fulani you take the chairmanship of a party." ...So that everyone will feel a sense of belonging, and that has really helped us to stop lies, our crisis politically, for example.¹⁵

In this form, power-sharing appears to infuse local government administration in Chikun. Power-sharing extends to the top three council positions, to zonal representation in the executive, and to political party leadership. The LGA even provides greater autonomy to smaller ethno-tribal minorities by establishing "local development areas" *within* the LGA; local groups concentrated in a particular area of the LGA – whether or not they are members of the majority ethno-tribal bloc – thus have more say in the development projects and allocation of funds in their neighborhoods.

¹⁴ Author interview with Interviewee 1, Chikun LGA, Kaduna State, November 2011.

¹⁵ Author interview with Interviewee 2, Chikun LGA, Kaduna State, November 2011.

This discussion of power-sharing institutional dynamics does not mean that communities in the LGA are unaffected by the inter-religious clashes occurring nearby or in other states. Local leaders have had to act quickly a number of times to quell tensions that have threatened the peace of Chikun LGA, particularly following major inter-religious violence in other LGAs. Muslims and Christians living in mixed communities in the Chikun have also felt pressure to uproot their families and segregate out of fear for their future safety. Tensions exist, and the impetus for Muslim and Christian youth to mobilize is not entirely absent. Nonetheless, Chikun highlights how a system of local power-sharing reinforces relative peace, enabling ethno-tribal and religious leaders to better respond to cool crises before they boil over. Unlike Jos and neighboring Kaduna North and South, integrated Christian and Muslim communities still live in Chikun LGA and interact peacefully on a regular basis. It is the monopolization of local government leadership and decision-making that community leaders in Chikun fear would divide the local government, jeopardize understanding, and breed ethno-tribal or inter-religious violence.

Origin of power-sharing

What conditions were in place to facilitate agreement among the ethno-tribal leadership? What explains the origin of the institution? The strategic factors relevant in the formation of power-sharing in Chikun LGA can be traced to the settlement and migration pattern of the area, its geographic convergence with the Kaduna metropolis, and prior expectations about future demographic changes.

Despite the fact that members of ethno-tribal groups such as the Kabilu are non-indigenous or not considered “sons of the soil” in the LGA, they too form part of the power-sharing arrangement. According to a former chairman and recent member of the state legislature, power-sharing was a strategic reaction to the settlement dynamics of the LGA and its prospects

for growth due to the fact that it merges with Kaduna city. First, the Hausa-Fulani are considered indigenous to the area, necessitating their inclusion in any power-sharing arrangement. For the indigenous Christian Gbagyi population, the majority in the LGA, the strategic response necessary to guarantee their own political influence in local governance was a power-sharing institution that would protect their status while recognizing the roots and, thereby, political rights of the Hausa population.

Second, power-sharing was also a strategic option in light of the geographic position of Chikun. Local leaders explain that the Gbagyi agreed to the power-sharing institution because they saw that, although they were in the majority, different tribes would migrate to the LGA for trade and business since it is close to the state capital metropolis. Their aim was to ensure that their role in local representation would not be compromised by population changes.¹⁶ In this sense, the particular historical and geographic context of the LGA made power-sharing a strategic approach. As religio-political disputes intensified after the 1980s, the power-sharing institution – incorporating both Muslim and Christian ethno-religious groups – helped to maintain inter-religious peace and cooperation.

Peace dimension

Conversations with various local leaders highlighted a number of ways in which the power-sharing institution in Chikun enables local government officials, community activists and youth leaders, and Muslim and Christian religious leaders to work more effectively to protect the peace. In contrast to Jos and other LGAs, it is not an anomaly for Muslim and Christian religious leaders to coordinate peacebuilding activities. For example, members of local Muslim and Christian religious groups showed a great deal of camaraderie and knew each other well. Remarking on the 2000 crisis in Kaduna, one member of the Muslim Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI)

¹⁶ Author interview with Interviewee 3, Chikun LGA, Kaduna State, November 2011.

organization pointed to the good leadership present in the local government, enabling religious leaders from the local wards to form a joint committee of five Muslim and five Christian religious leaders to work together to bring quick resolution to any inter-religious crises. Working with traditional rulers who know their youth and area well, the local government leadership is also able to better identify troublemakers. Furthermore, there are zonal meetings in which the 37 Christian CAN representatives in the LGA meet with Muslim leaders to resolve problems.¹⁷

As this case demonstrates, the particular political, demographic, and geographic post-colonial context of the local government provided the incentives for power-sharing, which laid the foundation for peacebuilding, peacekeeping, and civic engagement. It was not a history of civic integration or association that provided the basis for peace and, by extension, power-sharing in Chikun. Integration among the local populations is not a guarantor of sustainable peace, as the case of Jos North highlights. In other words, the power-sharing model created a representative foundation for each of the ethno-tribal groups, enabling local leaders – whether Muslim or Christian – to form alliances with one another to combat inter-religious tensions and thwart the potential for violence. Where power-sharing institutions are not in place, politics and disputes are more likely to be interpreted through a contemporary Muslim-versus-Christian lens, rendering broad-based inter-religious cooperation and understanding far more difficult to achieve.

Threats to power-sharing

While the power-sharing arrangement between ethnic groups in Chikun LGA provides a foundation for cooperative inter-religious relationships, there are chinks in its armor. For example, with the population growth of the Kabilu over the last few years, they have clamored for adjustment to the power-sharing arrangement. Having overtaken the Hausa-Fulani community in number, the Kabilu are advocating for an “upgrade” in which they would also be

¹⁷ Author interview with Interviewee 4, Chikun LGA, Kaduna State, November 2011.

able to preside in the local government council as Deputy Chairmen rather than only as Secretaries, the third position in the hierarchy. At the time of the research, one insider noted that the situation was producing some tension between the Kabilu and the indigenous Hausa-Fulani community and that the “formula may reach a stage where it can’t work.”¹⁸

There could also be pressure on the majority Gbagyi population and leadership as well. With the increase in the Kabilu population, as well as an increase in the Hausa population, the Kabilu and the Hausa-Fulani elite may be tempted to form an alliance to demand change in the power-sharing arrangement. This scenario is complicated, however, by occasional violence in the southern part of the state, which works to prevent an alliance between the Hausa-Fulani and the Kabilu; they are not on particularly good terms due to the Kafanchan violence. Much of the growth in the Kabilu population in Chikun LGA is due to an influx of refugees from the state’s southern zone where Kabilu and Hausa-Fulani Muslims have clashed.

Nonetheless, local youth leaders, civil society organizers, and officials remain optimistic about the capacity of the power-sharing institution to endure the pressures. They highlight the importance of the precedent of cooperation already established and the institutional channels now available for addressing and resolving any problems that arise. Having established development areas within the LGA, groups also have more autonomy in pursuing their development goals. Community members also mentioned the troubles in Jos to emphasize the dangers of one group monopolizing local government leadership, highlighting the community members’ capacity to simultaneously learn from events elsewhere and reinforce the value placed on the institution of power-sharing. As one local NGO leader argued,

You see, 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. You want to monopolize everything. Whether it is your own

¹⁸ Interviewee 4, 2011.

*or not your own...[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. Even if it is done wrongly, let us try to uphold this virtue because that is the only thing that will help us live in peace.*¹⁹

In this sense, the rotational system and organization of development areas and wards provides the flexibility to adjust to societal changes in the ethnic composition of the LGA. Furthermore, the power-sharing arrangement has led to institutional outgrowths that help community leaders manage problems in their areas and work to prevent identity-based conflict. Whether the optimism of some of the leaders in the local government will prove warranted remains to be seen. Meanwhile, however, the institution is self-enforcing through the representational gains and assurances it provides to local ethno-tribal groups, giving political, tribal, and religious leaders a foundation upon which to promote and protect peace in Chikun LGA.

CONCLUSION

As this paper seeks to show, local and informal power-sharing is not only an important form of political representation in Nigerian politics, but it is also key to the creation and persistence of ethno-tribal and inter-religious communal peace in pluralistic communities. Local government ethno-tribal power-sharing arrangements adopted following 1976 local government reforms introduced an institutional mechanisms that has since helped to defuse inter-religious conflict and promote cooperation and peacebuilding. LGAs with power-sharing arrangements are more likely to experience relative inter-religious peace than those without such an arrangement in the highly politicized and vitriolic religious environment that has flourished in Nigeria since the 1980s. Case studies highlight the historically-rooted conditions for these institutions and the strategic incentives that sustain power-sharing. In contrast to the scholarship on national formal power-sharing arrangements, therefore, I find that local forms of power-sharing are more

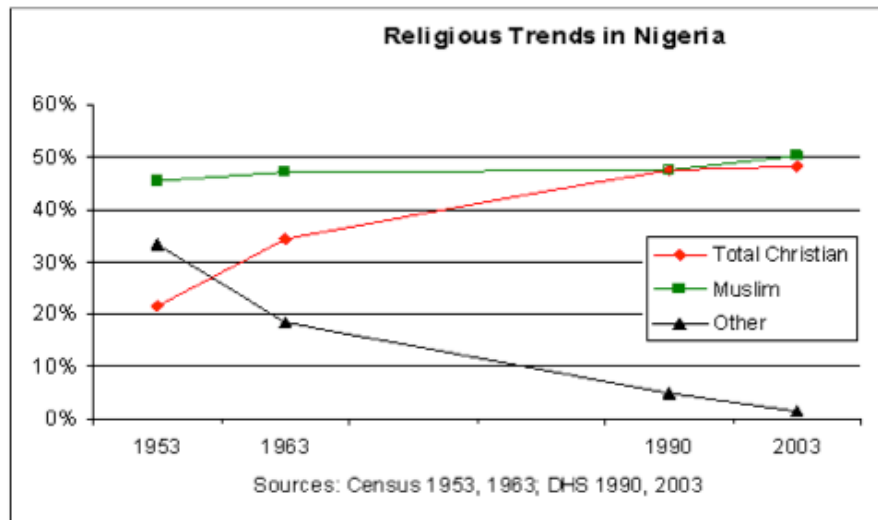
¹⁹ Interviewee 1, 2011.

promising. For one, representation at the local level is more likely to address the distinct concerns of ethnic groups in various communities, and informal arrangements allow flexibility in the negotiation of the institution over time. Representatives and the results they deliver are also more easily monitored at the local government level, and important cross-tribal and cross-religious peacebuilding efforts are easier to foster and organize through the communally-embedded relationships that form in a context of power-sharing. This study suggests that local power-sharing may be a more effective tool for promoting peace and building stable democracy. Local and informal power-sharing can better address specific contestation over rights and political representation in various communities at the sub-national level, helping avert endemic communal violence that destabilizes the nation.

These findings are important to the scholarship on civil conflict, institutions, democracy, and peacebuilding. Scholars have largely overlooked the capacity of informal local institutions to sustain ethnic peace in pluralistic societies. Although many post-colonial countries in the global South are characterized by a federal system with local government institutions, little scholarly attention is focused on how these institutions structure access to rights and representation and shape the likelihood of ethnic cleavages leading to communal violence or broader civil war. In federal systems, in particular, local governments are part of a logic of decentralization, a sphere of government designed to be closest to the needs and concerns of its citizens. As I attempt to show in this paper, in countries in which politicization of religious identity infuses political and communal space, local governments and their patterns of representation are all the more critical in shaping communal relationships and either exacerbating or quelling religious conflict. It is at this level that power-sharing may be a viable strategy for stable democracy and long-term peace.

APPENDIX

Figure 2. Percentage of religious adherents in Nigeria over time



Source: Pew Forum, 2009.

Table 4. Percentage of Affiliated Christians in select northern Nigerian states over time

State	1931	1952	1963	2010
Adamawa	0	3.2	14.3	25.0
Bauchi	0.1	1.6	3.2	15.0
Benue	0.2	6.9	41.2	73.0
Borno	0.0	0.6	2.0	20.0
Kaduna	0.0	7.8	25	35.0
Kano	0.0	0.4	1.0	8.0
Katsina	0.0	0.3	0.3	7.0
Niger	0.0	3.0	3.5	25.0
Plateau	0.5	12.9	20.0	60.0
Sokoto	0.0	0.5	0.3	5.0

Source: Compiled from Johnson 2007 and Crampton 2004.

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