**“Can Facebook make me more violent?”: Gauging the effects of using social media as a news source on electoral violence in Kenya and Uganda**

by

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## Abstract

This thesis aims to assess the relationship between social media usage for news and electoral violence. Using survey evidence of recent Kenyan and Ugandan elections, this thesis will look at the potential indirect effects of social media usage for news on the conditions for electoral violence to take place, namely, mobilization and social interactions as theorized by Yanagizawa-Drott (2014). Using survey evidence, I first I examine the variation in social media usage within Kenya, focusing on the former province of Nyanza and the Western province. I then extend this analysis to Uganda, a country where social media usage is less widespread than Kenya. Finally, I use the Afrobarometer dataset to examine descriptive patterns using regression analysis. Here, I examine the relationship between using social media as a news source and the propensity to protest, the propensity to join others to organize, and fear of violence or intimidation during election cycles, in both Kenya and Uganda. I conclude with a short discussion of the implications of this research, namely, I consider what avenues exist for fledgling democracies and/or unconsolidated regimes in stemming widespread disinformation on online platforms.

## Lay Summary

This thesis aims to contribute to the growing literature on the effects of social media usage on democracy. Attention regarding misinformation has tended to focus on its effects on Western democracies. However, this thesis aims to understand its potential effects on the democracies of the Global South. Namely, I look at the potential effect of social media usage for news on electoral violence in the East African countries of Kenya and Uganda. I do this by first looking at the 2017 Kenyan election and the variation in social media usage within this country. I then discuss the 2016 Ugandan election before comparing the variation in social media usage in Kenya and Uganda. I then conduct a regression analysis before discussing my results and avenues for future research.

## Preface

This thesis is the original and unpublished work of the author, Saleh Ismail.

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## Acknowledgements

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Lastly, I want to thank my friends and family for supporting me throughout this journey. I owe you all the world and more.

## Dedication

*To my Hooyo and Abo, for always teaching me that without knowledge there is no light.*

# Chapter 1: Introduction

Social media disseminates information more widely and more quickly than traditional news sources. As such, political parties and other political organizations have taken to social media to drum up support for their respective political campaigns. However, social media websites and apps, such as Facebook and WhatsApp, have been linked to increasing political polarization and in some instances, mass political violence due to the spread of misinformation or more aptly "fake news." For example, Myanmar's ongoing genocide against its Rohingya population was initiated with the help of anti-Rohingya posts on Facebook by members of Myanmar's own military (Mozur 2018), false news reports on WhatsApp have led to mob violence in Sri Lanka, prompting the country to shut down its services to curb this violence (Goel et al. 2018), and anti-refugee violence in Germany has been traced directly to usage of Facebook (Muller and Schwarz 2020). Most notably, misinformation on social media has been linked to the 2021 US Capitol insurrection, which saw the first breach of the US Capitol in more than 200 years (Holpuch 2021). Given this troubling trend, research concerning the effects of social media on different aspects of political violence is needed.

Electoral violence is loosely defined as "intimidation, harassment, and lethal violence during an elections campaign period, on polling day, or in the aftermath of voting (Birch et al. 2020)." Many countries experience electoral violence, where casualty death tolls can match those of civil wars in a matter of days or weeks (Birch et al. 2020). Recent research has detailed the strong effects of social media usage on political polarization (Levy 2020), as well as on its ability to lower barriers for potential mass mobilization (Krueger 2006). Research has thoroughly outlined what conditions must be met for mobilization to result in violent acts, however, this

research has been limited to traditional forms of media (Yanigizawa-Drott 2014). Thus, this thesis aims to bridge the gap between these literatures, that is, by answering, to what extent can we attribute modern electoral violence to social media usage for news, namely, Facebook and Twitter?

To do this, I will be looking at the Kenyan 2017 elections, where I examine the use of social media as a news source during the election cycle. Many observers noted the spread of misinformation on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, alleging potential voter fraud and intimidation (Mutahi and Kimari 2020). Mutahi and Kimari (2020)'s analysis of fake news in Kenya during the 2017 election hints at a possible relationship between fake news and electoral violence, however, they state no data exists to measure this relationship. This thesis aims to try to solve this by examining the variation in social media usage within Kenya, focusing on the former Nyanza Province and the Western Province using survey evidence. I then extend this analysis to Uganda, a country where social media usage is less widespread than Kenya. I do this by using available data from Afrobarometer, a research network that provides survey data on a number of African countries. Using Yanigizawa-Drott's (2014) theory regarding the indirect influence of mass media on mobilization and thus potential violence, I use data collected by Afrobarometer's round 7 (2016/2018) surveys to run an OLS regression on the potential effects of social media usage for news on (1) propensity to protest, and (2) propensity to join others to organize and request government action and (3) fear of intimidation or violence during election cycles in both Kenya and Uganda.

The road map for this thesis is as follows. I begin with a literature review defining electoral violence and discussing the current literature, before reviewing the ways in which social media has altered how information is transferred as well as compare and contrast mobilization

online to traditional forms of mobilization. I will then provide a background of Kenya's 2017 election before outlining my first sub-national study, where I compare the former Nyanza Province and Western Province. Next, I will discuss the Ugandan 2016 election, before outlining the variation in social media usage between the two countries. Next, using Afrobarometer's round 7 survey dataset, I will use OLS regression analysis to look for descriptive patterns concerning the effects of social media as a news source on (1) propensity to protest and (2) propensity to join others to request government action and (3) fear of violence or intimidation during election cycles in both Kenya and Uganda before discussing the results of this regression and its potential implications. I will conclude by considering avenues for further research where I discuss what fledgling democracies and private multinational companies can do to stem the flow of misinformation.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

## 2.1 Electoral Violence

This thesis will use Birch et al (2020)'s definition of electoral violence, which is loosely defined as "intimidation, harassment, and lethal violence during an elections campaign period, on polling day, or in the aftermath of voting (Birch et al. 2020)" as electoral violence in East Africa does not often only occur on election day, but rather can extend far beyond elections are declared to be over. In a literature review of electoral violence Birch et al. (2020) identify electoral violence as being united by its coercive component. For instance, they note that on the African continent harassment and intimidation are much more common forms of electoral violence than outright violence. However, electoral violence that results in casualties is still extremely prevalent in at risk democracies, as Birch et al. (2020) note "the Countries at Risk of Election Violence (CREV) data estimate that over three quarters (78%) of elections in countries deemed to be at risk of violence experience at least ten violent events" (p. 5). Thus, research concerning causes of electoral violence has become especially pertinent in recent years.

Researchers have suggested that where electoral violence occurs can help assess conditions that make electoral violence especially likely. For instance, Rauschenbach and Paula (2019) found that electoral violence is more common in opposition strongholds than elsewhere. Others have pointed to ethnic polarization as a key component in predicting electoral violence. For instance, in a cross-country analysis of Sub-Saharan African countries, Fjelde and Höglund (2014) found that electoral violence is especially likely where large ethno-political groups are perceived to be excluded from power and where large socio-economic inequalities exist. Whether these ethnic cleavages are activated, however, is argued to be elite-driven, that is,

political actors ultimately influence when and to what extent electoral violence is carried out within a given area (Wilkinson 2004). In a study on pre-election violence in Zambia, Wahman & Goldring (2020) argue that electoral violence is a manifestation of 'turf war', where locally dominant parties conduct violence against opposition parties and minorities to establish dominance. Thus, it is critical to consider these dimensions if we are the hypothesize the ways in which social media can help trigger electoral violence.

### 2.2 Social media vs. Traditional media

Traditional forms of media such as radio and newspaper are still often used for political campaigning in a number of African countries. However, in a study on social media and political campaigning in Africa, Ndlela and Mano (2020) argue these forms of media have led to an absence of mass media and hampered the effectiveness of political campaigning as it has little penetration beyond urban centres and is often government controlled. Thus, social media has created new communication models for effective political campaigning as well as political mobilization. For instance, the use of social media to disseminate information not only to local populations but to the world in the 2019 Sudanese uprising culminated in the overthrow of dictator Omar al-Bashir (Ndlela and Mano 2020). Ndlela and Mano (2020) note that social media is particularly noteworthy in Africa as "the digital face of Africa is mobile (p. 3)" with 82% of the continent's population having a mobile connection in 2018. In fact, average social media usage in some African countries like Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana, and South Africa lead most Western countries and the US (Ndlela and Mano 2020).

The growth of social media in Kenya, and Africa in general, has been attributed to a mix of growing affordability of smartphones and availability of fiber optic networks in major towns

as well as a decrease in Internet costs (Mutahi and Kimari 2020). However, it is important to note that there does remain an urban-rural divide when it comes to access to social media. Dwyer et al. (2019) note that in the context of low and inconsistent wages, social media usage for many people occurs sporadically. In a study on WhatsApp usage during Sierra Leone's 2018 election, Dwyer et al. (2019) also note the role of 'information brokers' in the dissemination of information from social media, that is, information that is gathered from social media is spread by word of mouth, selectively, to interpersonal networks.

Furthermore, in a comparison of traditional media and Twitter response to "Operation Usalama Watch", a Kenyan counter-terrorism effort that largely targeted Kenya's Somali minority, Patel (2019) argues that despite finding more alternate viewpoints on Twitter, ultimately established elite actors voices were often the most prominent thus countering narratives of social media as a purely "liberation-type technology." Diepeveen (2019) builds on this by studying discourse on Facebook in the County of Mombasa, Kenya. She finds that though Facebook has diversified who provides the public with information, it equally re-enforces attention on dominant personalities and familiar narratives, suggesting that though social media has revolutionized how we obtain information, the content of this information is not all that different from traditional media sources. Furthermore, Falisse and Nkengurutse (2019) find, in a study of the aftermath of the breakdown of independent traditional media, namely FM radio, in Burundi, that dialogue on social media has substantially increased the risk of conflict where no moderating force exists, and has allowed radical elements to re-enter popular media. As shown, literature on social media and politics in these contexts has aptly moved away from discussions of it as a "liberation technology", in the aftermath of the infamous Arab Spring of 2011, to a more critical study of the downsides of the advent of social media usage.

### 2.3 Mobilization and Violence

Political mobilization can be defined as "the process by which parties, activists, and groups induce other people to participate in political action" (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993 qtd in Krueger 2006). The advent of the internet and social media has been argued to substantially reduce communication costs to mobilization (Krueger 2006). Thus, researchers have argued that online mobilization has increased the number of politically active individuals (Valeriani and Vaccari 2016; Vissers and Stolle 2014). In a study analyzing the relationship between online mobilization and political engagement during the 2014 European election campaign, Valeriani and Vaccari (2016) found that "respondents who received an invitation to vote for a party or candidate via e-mail or social media engaged in a significantly higher number of political activities than those who did not (p. 69)." Similarly, when analyzing survey data among online and offline political engagement among undergraduate students, Vissers and Stolle (2013) found that Facebook mobilizes people who otherwise would not be politically active or engaged. In a study comparing online mobilization to traditional face-to-face modes of mobilization, Hooghe et al. (2010) found that political mobilization on the internet is just as effective as traditional forms of political mobilization (Hooghe et al. 2010). Political mobilization on social media has also been found to mobilize younger and poorer populations in particular (Enjolras et al 2012). Thus, ample research has laid out that online mobilization can be successful, sometimes even more, than traditional forms of mobilization.

What is less clear is whether social media mobilization can influence electoral violence offline. Research has, however, looked into the effect of traditional media on political violence. Yanagizawa-Drott's (2014) ground-breaking analysis of the Rwandan Genocide found that

radio-stations broadcasting anti-Tutsi propaganda directly contributed to participation in violence by both civilians and militia groups and indirectly by encouraging participation and mobilization of neighbouring villages – which he argues had an even more pertinent effect on mass violence. This indirect spread is particularly noteworthy, as Yanagizawa-Drott (2014) finds that the spread of information regarding violent acts via social interactions led to many more people mobilizing and participating in these acts. Beyond this, it seems literature on mass media and political violence mostly centers on mass violence, for instance genocide. Though the importance of such studies cannot be understated, the frequency at which electoral violence occurs warrants further investigation of how new forms of media potentially affect electoral violence.

# Chapter 3: Cases – 2017 Kenyan Election, and 2016 Ugandan Election

## 3.1 2017 Kenyan Election

The 2017 Kenyan election presents a solid case study for gauging the effect of social media usage for news on electoral violence due to the country's consistently competitive election cycles as well as the wide use of social media and variation in social media usage within the country. Dubbed "Kenya's first social media election" (Mohamed 2017a), the election held on August 8th, 2017 elected the President and members of the country's National Assembly and Senate. The outbreak of electoral violence is not uncommon in Kenya, as the previous 2007 and 2013 elections were also marred by electoral violence following contested election results. For instance, approximately 1,300 people died, while up to 500,000 people were displaced during Kenya's 2007 election prompting a national economic and political crisis that continues to hover over the Kenyan election process today (HRW 2008). However, a key difference in the 2017 election was the wider prevalence of social media and digital technologies in enhancing political campaigning. The Kikuyu, Kenya's largest and most dominant ethnic group, mostly support the ruling Jubilee party led by president Uhuru Kenyatta, while the Luo and other smaller ethnic groups largely support Raila Odinga under the National Super Alliance coalition (NASA). Both parties contracted the services of global data mining companies to identify and target potential voters (Mutahari and Kimari 2020). The Jubilee party employed the infamous Cambridge Analytica group, known for its collection of Facebook data to identify "persuadable" voters (Crabtree 2018), while NASA employed Aristotle Inc., a Washington, DC - based firm that specializes in data mining for political campaigns (Mutahi and Kimari 2020). The Communications Authority of Kenya reported that in the year 2017, there were 40.2 million

mobile subscriptions with mobile penetration hitting 90% for the first time (BAKE 2017). The monthly active users for WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Twitter were 12 million, 7.1 million, 8 million, 4 million, and 1 million, respectively (BAKE 2017). Thus, it is evident why both parties believed that social media would play a pivotal role in the outcome of the election.

As stated previously, violence during electoral period tends to be activated by politicians. For instance, Mutahi and Ruteere (2019) note the emergence of the "Nairobi Business Community" during the 2017 election – a vigilante group affiliated with the ruling Jubilee party that has been accused of being a re-branded Mungiki, a Kikuyu ethnic militia group known for its active role in election-related violence in the early 1990's. However, Mutahi and Ruteere (2019) also argue that widespread inter-ethnic violence was not as widespread in 2017 as in the past, instead, electoral violence took the place at the hands of an increasingly unruly police force, especially in opposition strongholds. Mutahi and Kimari (2020) state that a record number of cases of police brutality occurred in opposition strongholds in Kisumu and Migori counties in the country's former Nyanza Province. This led to a popular online campaign entitled "#LuoLivesMatter" which accused the state of unfairly targeting the Luo ethnic group, with some politicians taking advantage of a mostly grassroots online campaign.

The emergence of "fake news" was particularly concerning during this election cycle, so much so that the Communications Authority of Kenya issued guidelines prior to the election stating that "undesirable content" would be taken down within 24 hours of being posted (Sambuli 2017). These fears were not unwarranted. Doctored poll reports donning CNN and BBC logos were used to bolster support for Kenyatta, creating the belief that he had a much more sizeable lead on his opponent — prompting CNN International to issue a tweet stating that

the report was in fact fake (Sevenzo 2017). This also prompted Facebook to take out a full-page ad in a Kenyan national newspaper providing tools to identify misinformation on its platform as shown in Figure 1 (Said-Moorhouse 2017). Furthermore, a number of fake images and videos under the #LuoLivesMatter hashtag were shared widely on Twitter suggesting active police violence against Luos, despite many of these images and video either being doctored significantly or been taken from prior election cycles. For instance, a picture of a young boy expressing shock at the actions of police officers shared widely was found to have been taken from violence that occurred during 2007's post-election crisis (Mutahi and Kimari 2020). Figure 2 shows a viral tweet by a prominent NASA MP, where a Google reverse image search of the image links to a video verifying that the soldier was attempting to lead the schoolgirls to safety during a clash between police and opposition (Wamalwa 2017). Nevertheless, this heightened already existing tensions between the police and marginalized groups.

Police violence was at the center of much of the electoral violence seen in 2017. For instance, Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, an independent Kenyan human rights

Figure 1. Facebook tools to spot false news. Said-Moorhouse, L. C. (2017, August 3). Kenya election: Facebook takes out full-page ads over fake news. CNN. https://edition.cnn.com/2017/08/03/africa/kenya-election-facebook-fake-news-strategy/index.html

watchdog accused police of killing 92 people and of sexually assaulting dozens more (Muhumuza 2017). Police in Kenya have often been accused of advancing partisan interests on behalf of the government, especially during election periods in opposition areas (Ruteere 2011). In the former Nyanza province, a stronghold of Odinga's NASA, Mutahi and Ruteere (2019) report that "several people were beaten to death, including a six-month old baby (p. 257)" while allegations of police raiding homes and of women being raped by police were widespread in Kisumu city. In line with the literature on the impact of social media on discourse (Patel 2019; Diepveen 2019), Mutahi and Kimari (2020) argue that social media usage exacerbated existing tensions as it allowed for the quicker and wider circulation of false news information with the absence of adequate fact-checking, which contributed to a more polarized electoral environment. As such, it can be hypothesized that social media usage can indirectly exacerbate existing tensions resulting in electoral violence.

Figure 2. #LuoLivesMatter online campaign Retrieved from: *#luolivesmatter - Twitter-zoekfunctie*. (2017). Twitter.Com. https://twitter.com/search?q=%23luolivesmatter&src=typed_query

### 3.1 Nyanza and Western Province

To look at a link between social media usage as a news source on electoral violence I've selected two Kenyan provinces, one with high social media usage and the other with much lower social media usage. These are the former Nyanza Province and the former Western Province. Both provinces are located in western Kenya, however the former Nyanza Province is home to Kenya's fourth largest ethnic group, the Luo, while the former Western Province is the traditional settlement of Kenya's second largest ethnic group, the Luhya (Mohamed 2017b). Raila Odinga, a Luo, selected Luhya leaders Moses Wetangula and Musalia Mudavadi to join his coalition in opposition to the Kikuyu dominated KANU party (Mohamed 2017b). As such, the NASA coalition enjoyed wide support in both the former Nyanza Province and the Western Province as Mohamed (2017b) argues voting in Kenya can almost be precisely determined by ethnicity. However, it is important to note that such coalitions are subject to change during successive election cycles. For instance, in 2007, Odinga and William Ruto, a Kalenji politician, formed a coalition to oppose former Kenyan president Mwai Kibaki and Uhuru Kenyatta. However, in 2012 Kenyatta and Ruto formed a coalition to oppose Raila Odinga (Mohamed 2017). Nonetheless, both provinces occupy similar territory in western Kenya and are both opposition strongholds, which provides a compelling reason for comparison between the two provinces.

Furthermore, there is considerable variation in social media usage for news in each province. Figure 3 shows a map of Kenya's provinces and the percentage of people who receive

their news from social media every day or a few times a week. Nyanza is located in western Kenya where Kisumu, Kenya's third largest city, is located. As such, high social media usage in urban environments may contribute to Nyanza's high level of social media usage. Nyanza ranks third, behind Nairobi and the Rift Valley province, with 22.5% of respondents reporting



Figure 3 and Figure 4. % of population that uses social media for news across Kenya a few times a week or every day + Number of violent events linked to 2017 election. Retrieved from : *Kenya Round 7 questionnaire (2016) | Afrobarometer*. (2019). Afrobarometer.Org. Fjelde, H., & Höglund, K. (2021). Introducing the deadly electoral conflict dataset (DECO). *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*,2200272110216. https://doi.org/10.1177/00220027211021620https://afrobarometer.org/countries/kenya/kenya-round-7-questionnaire-2016.

either using social media as a news source every day or a few times a week, while 52.7% and 24.6% of respondents reported this in Nairobi and the Rift Valley respectively. 14.7% of respondents in the Western Province – just north of Nyanza Province – reported using social media as a news source. Moreover, according to the DECO dataset, a dataset of the number of electoral violence events around the world, there were 26 such events in the former Nyanza

Province and only 3 in the Western province between 2016-2017. Thus, the difference between each province in their respective social media usage for news provides a link between social media usage for news and electoral violence.

**Chapter 3.2 Ugandan 2016 elections**

Uganda's 2016 presidential election was also widely anticipated and the most competitive election in the country's history, despite the apparent absence of a free and fair ballot (Abrahamsen and Bareebe 2016). Similar to Kenya, the country has experienced a significant amount of electoral violence during each of its election periods. For instance, the 2001 and 2006 presidential elections were marred by violence that saw numerous beatings, jailings, and riots that were encouraged and supported mainly by the incumbent National Resistance Movement (NRM) government led by Yoweri Museveni (Sjögren 2018). However, Museveni's NRM government is considerably more authoritarian than the Kenyan government. Museveni has been the leader of Uganda since the end of the Ugandan Bush War in 1986, which saw the rise of his National Resistance Army (NRA) to power and the establishment of the NRM (Sjögren 2018). Museveni remains one of the longest serving leaders on the African Continent. The 2016 election saw him competing against Kizza Besigye, who had run in the last four Ugandan elections as Museveni's main rival, with his party Forum for Democratic Change (FDC) as well as former FDC member Mbabazi, who decided to run as an independent. Sjogren (2018) attributes the increased competitiveness of the 2016 election to Besigye's return following a short retirement and a more energized electorate given the increased repressiveness of Museveni's government as well as a weakening economy.

The increased use of social media by parties and their supporters to campaign and organize has also been argued to contribute to a more energized electorate. Journalists and media organizations have been routinely targeted and intimidated in both the 2016 election and previous elections. For instance, a vague Non-governmental Organisations Act passed in 2016 held activists and journalists criminally liable for "any act, which is prejudicial to the interests of Uganda and the dignity of the people of Uganda" (Human Rights Watch 2017). The Museveni government's ability to control information flows by targeting traditional media and civil society organizations has greatly constrained the ability of these organization to report accurate information. One journalist summarized the situation as such; "I think government intends to keep the people uninformed. You see, uninformed people are easy to manipulate. Cases of intimidation are prevalent. As journalists we are forced to cover up. In the reporting you don't hit the nail on top. You have to communicate carefully. In election season we see this very clearly." (Human Rights Watch 2017). Thus, the decentralization and anonymity provided by social media contributed to its greater use in the 2016 election.

Social media usage has grown considerably in the country with the growing use of smartphones. Yet although 60 percent of Uganda's population has access to a cellphone, social media penetration is relatively low (Allen 2021). In Kenya, the social media penetration rate in 2017 was at 13% compared to a Ugandan social media penetration rate of just 5% (Kemp 2018a). Nonetheless, Uganda did experience a 32% increase in social media use between January 2016 and January 2017 and a 27% increase between April 2019 and January 2020 (Kemp 2018b; Allen 2021). As such, the Museveni government has taken note of the increasing prevalence of social media and the potential for both quality reporting as well as misinformation to spread rapidly. Some shutdowns of traditional media organizations have been successful in

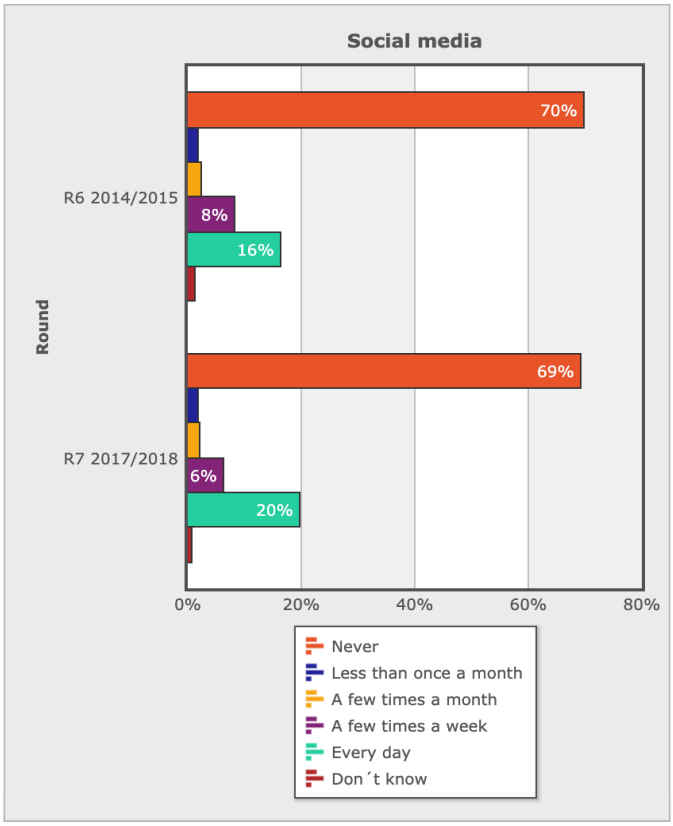
stemming misinformation. For instance, the Ugandan Communications Commission's shutdown of radio stations that aired harmful information encouraging listeners to adhere to the wishes of practitioners of witchcraft, often involving scams, did significantly reduce instances of such occurrences (Nassuna 2018). However, Cunliffe-Jones et al (2021) warn that such shutdowns may be exceptions to the rule, as media shutdowns by governments across Africa point to the potential for increased repression. Shortly before the 2016 Ugandan election the Museveni government shutdown all social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp, defending the decision as a "a security measure security measure to avert lies … intended to incite violence and illegal declaration of election results" (Duggan 2016). Moreover, in 2018, the government enacted a "social media tax" whereby Ugandans would be charged 200 shillings (or $0.05) to use social media apps such as Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter (Dreyfuss 2018). Critics have rightly expressed outrage at such measures, accusing the Museveni government of curtailing freedom of expression. Thus, Uganda's restrictive environment when it comes to social media usage compared to its neighbour Kenya, presents a solid case study for comparing the two countries, with Kenya acting as a treatment and Uganda as a control, in gauging the effect of social media usage for news on electoral violence.

### 3.3 Kenya and Uganda Social Media Usage: Survey Evidence

As mentioned previously, social media usage for news is growing in Kenya. Figure 4 shows the results of two rounds of surveys by Afrobarometer, one taken in 2014/2015 and the other in 2017/2018. The surveys asked respondents how often they got their news from social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, ranging from never to everyday. As shown, in Kenya, the most common answer was never, however, the amount of people getting their news

from social media increased by 4 percentage points. Moreover, young people aged 18-25 get their news from social media at much higher rates than the average. Between 2014/2015 and 2017/2018 respondents aged 18-25 who use social media as a news source every day increased by 8 percentage points, while those who never used social media decreased by 3 percentage points. Young people aged 35 and under make up nearly 75% of Kenya's population (Ndungu 2020). Thus, this number will likely grow significantly in the future and is especially notable as young people will make up a larger number of the voting electorate in Kenya.

A lower proportion of Ugandans as a whole use social media as a news source frequently when compared to Kenya, however, such usage is growing. As seen in Figure 5, between 2014/2015 and 2017/2018 the number of respondents getting their news from social media increased by 2 percentage points. When taking age into account, respondents aged 18-25 saw a 1.5 percentage point increase in the proportion of respondents who used social media as a news source. However, as shown in Figure 4 and 5, only 18.8% of Ugandan respondents used social media as a news source at least once a month compared to 30.7% of Kenyan respondents. Furthermore, Figure 6 shows how the two countries also diverge when it comes to mobile subscriptions, the primary tool for social media usage in Africa as mentioned previously. In 2017, Uganda had 60.6 mobile subscriptions per 100 people compared to Kenya's 85.3 and it appears the two countries are continuing to diverge in this regard. As such, the variation in social media use for news between the two countries could shed light on whether social media use for news has an effect on electoral violence.



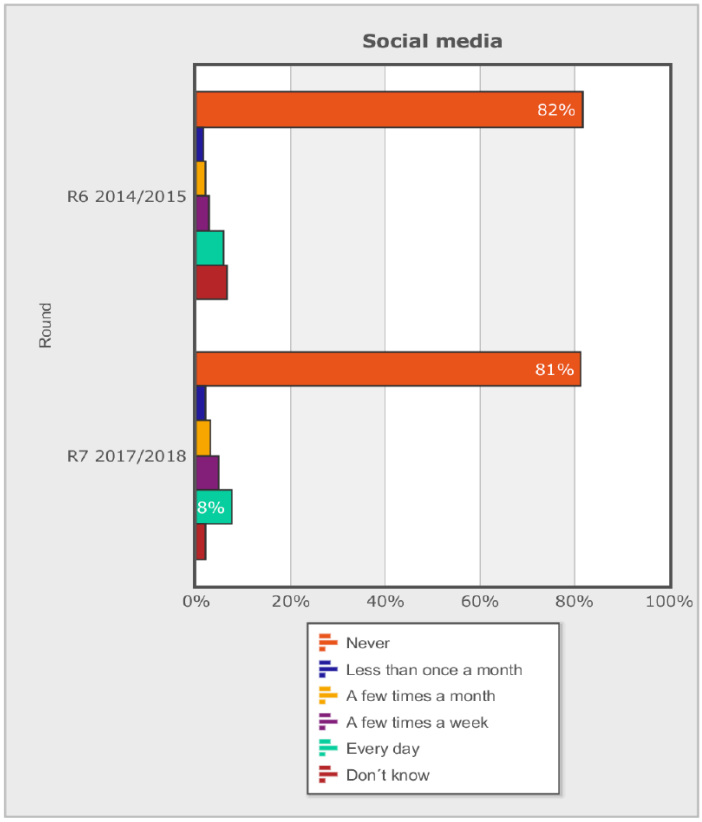




Figure 4 & 5. Use of social media for news in Kenya vs. Uganda . Retrieved from : *Kenya and Uganda Round 7 questionnaire (2016) | Afrobarometer*. (2019). Afrobarometer.Org. https://afrobarometer.org/countries/kenya/kenya-round-7-questionnaire-2016.

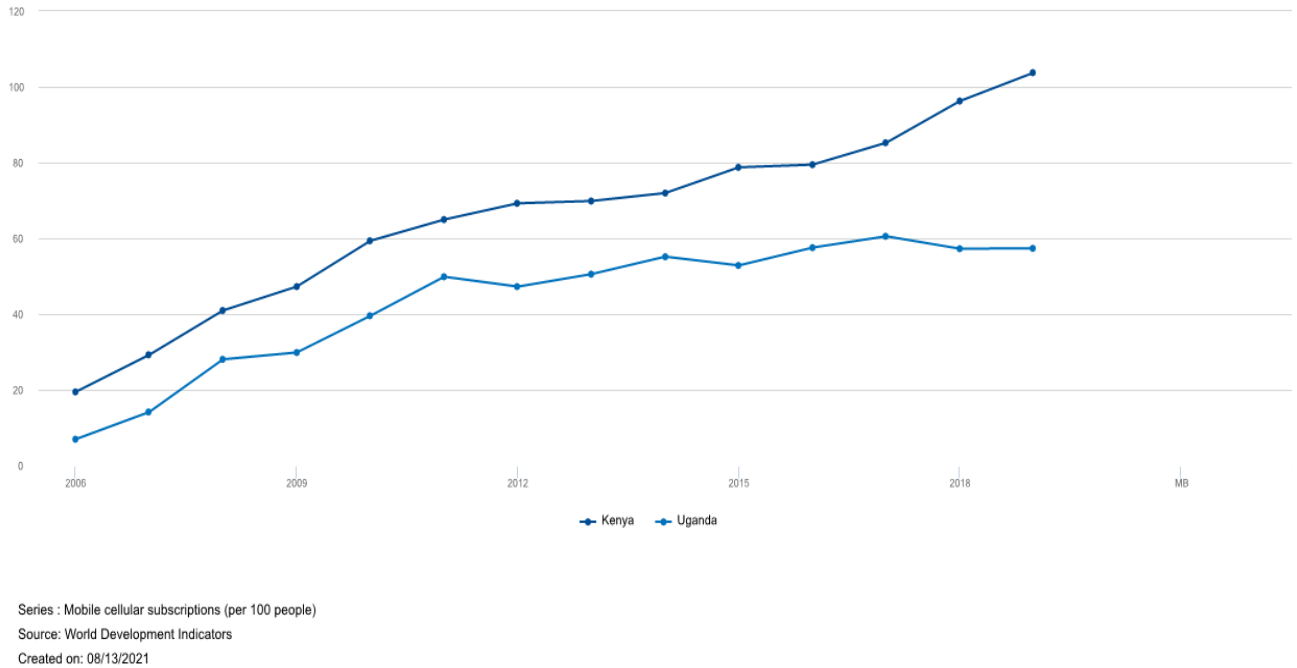



Figure 6. Kenya vs. Uganda mobile cellular subscriptions (per 100 people). World Development Indicators. (n.d.). Retrieved August 13th, 2020, from https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators

## Chapter 4: Regression Analysis

There is a stark lack of data available regarding social media usage for news and its impact on electoral violence, which has made it difficult to produce quantitative analyses on the subject. I will be using the Afrobarometer dataset, which allows for analysis on social media usage for news. This dataset measures social media usage by assessing the frequency to which respondent's use social media for news. I've decided to gauge the relationship between social media usage and electoral violence by using three valuable and distinct measures that the Afrobarometer surveys accounts for. These are, (1) propensity to protest, (2) propensity to join others to organize, and (3) fear of intimidation or violence during election cycles. Though none of these measures necessarily lead to violence, I hope to establish that there may be an indirect connection between social media usage and electoral violence due to its effects on mobilization and social interactions.

Thus, I hypothesize that (1) social media usage for news has a positive effect on mobilization (protest), (2) social media usage for news has a positive effect on social interactions (joining others to organize) and (3) social media usage for news has a positive effect on respondents' fear of intimidation or violence during an election cycle.

### 4.1 Data and Methodology

I used data from Afrobarometer's round 7 (2017/2018) dataset and round 6 (2014/2015) (*Merged Codebook* 2016), in which 1,599 Kenyans, including 208 individuals from the Nyanza province and 158 from the Western province participated in the survey. The main explanatory variable, social media use as a news source, is an ordinal variable ranking from 0, indicating a respondent never used social media as a news source, to 4, indicating a respondent used social

media as a news source every day. 1, 2, and 3, indicated less than once a month, a few times a month, and a few times a week respectively. I excluded respondents who refused to answer the question or did not know how to answer the question.

The control variables selected account for age, education, and the rural/urban divide that come with social media usage. Age, education and living in a rural area have the potential to affect either or both independent and dependent variables in my regressions. For instance, age could potentially account for social media usage for news and ability to protest as younger people use social media as a news source more and tend to protest more than the average population. Education was also important to account for, for example, in Kenya, 58% respondents who completed secondary school used social media everyday as a news source compared to 7% of respondents who only completed primary school, while the urban-rural divide has made it so access to social media is likely to be more prevalent in urban areas (Afrobarometer 2019). Moreover, both educated and urban individuals are more likely to protest and be subjected to electoral violence. Thus, these controls are important to account for in all the following regressions.

Respondents were asked to state their highest level of completed education, where education was measured on a scale of 0, indicating no formal schooling, to 9, indicating that a respondent obtained  a post-graduate degree, while missing values, respondents who refused to answer and who could not answer were not included. The rural variable simply asked respondents if they lived in an urban area, which was coded as 1, or if they lived in a rural area, which was coded as 2. Respondents were also asked if they lived in a semi-urban area or peri-urban area, however, I decided to not include these as only a very small number of respondents picked either of these two options.

My chosen dependent variables are (1) propensity to protest, (2) joining others to organize and (3) fear of intimidation and violence during election cycles. The first two can be used to gauge the effect of social media on mobilization and social interactions. Yanagizawa-Drott (2014) notes social interactions play a key role in mediating the effects of mass media and thus may play a role in the persuasion effect, which could influence violent behaviour. The last dependent variable is used to measure respondents' fear of electoral violence. Mutahi and Kimari (2020) note that a key factor in the electoral violence seen in 2017, was the fear that violence would in fact take place, leading to the excessive deployment of police forces thus excessive violence. Thus, it is important to gauge whether there is a relationship between using social media as a news source and fear of violence or intimidation during the election cycle.

Propensity to protest was measured by asking respondents whether they have participated in a protest or would plan to if they were dissatisfied with government performance. Respondents would then answer according to the following prompts: (0) Never would do this (1) No, but would do if they had the chance (2) Yes, once or twice, (3) Yes, several times, and (4) Yes, often. Similarly, for the join others to request government action variable, respondents were asked whether they have or would join others to request government action if they were dissatisfied with government performance using the same prompts. Lastly, fear of intimidation or violence was measured by asking respondents "during election campaigns in this country, how much do you personally fear becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence?" Respondents answered: (0) A lot, (1) Somewhat, (2) A little bit, or (3) Not at all.

For all three dependent variables, respondents who refused to answer or did not know how to answer were not included in this regression.

### 4.2 Results

In our first regression, without control variables, Table 1 shows that propensity to protest and social media usage for news in Kenya appears to have a statistically significant relationship as a one unit positive increase in social media usage for news results in, on average, a 0.063 increase in a respondent's propensity to protest, measured on the 0 to 4 scale ($p<0.01$). When factoring in our control variables, however, this relationship appears to no longer be significant as education instead appears to be most determinant of a respondent's propensity to protest. Here, a one-unit positive increase in a respondent's level of education results in a 0.049 increase in respondent's propensity to protest ($p<0.01$). Age and living in a rural area did not appear to have a statistically significant relationship to protesting.

Conversely, in the Uganda without our control variables, we find a statistically significant relationship between using social media as a news source and protesting, where a one-unit positive increase in social media usage for news results in, on average, a 0.143 increase in a respondent's propensity to protest ($p<0.01$). This relationship remains significant even after control variables are factored as a one-unit positive increase in social media usage for news results in, on average, a 0.076 increase in a respondent's propensity to protest ($p<0.01$). Age had a surprising negative relationship with protesting as a one-unit positive increase in a respondent's age resulted in a 0.008 decrease in a respondent's propensity to protest ($p<0.01$). Lastly, education also had a significant relationship with protesting as a one-unit positive increase in a respondent's level of education resulted in a 0.065 increase in a respondent's propensity to protest ($p<0.01$).

**Table 1: Social Media Usage and Protesting**

| | DV: Propensity to Protest | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Kenya | | Uganda | |
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
| Social Media Usage | 0.063*** | 0.024 | 0.143*** | 0.076*** |
| | (0.013) | (0.016) | (0.015) | (0.018) |
| Age | | -0.002 | | -0.008*** |
| | | (0.002) | | (0.002) |
| Rural | | -0.039 | | 0.060 |
| | | (0.048) | | (0.060) |
| Education | | 0.049*** | | 0.065*** |
| | | (0.014) | | (0.013) |
| Constant | 0.433*** | 0.431*** | 0.403*** | 0.551*** |
| | (0.026) | (0.126) | (0.040) | (0.159) |
| Observations | 1,568 | 1,546 | 1,181 | 1,175 |
| $R^2$ | 0.015 | 0.025 | 0.076 | 0.106 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.014 | 0.023 | 0.075 | 0.103 |
| Residual Std. Error | 0.857 (df = 1566) | 0.856 (df = 1541) | 0.948 (df = 1179) | 0.926 (df = 1170) |
| F Statistic | 23.194*** (df = 1; 1566) | 9.977*** (df = 4; 1541) | 96.783*** (df = 1; 1179) | 34.835*** (df = 4; 1170) |
| Significance levels | | | | *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01 |

This appears to be in line with the initial hypothesis that social media usage has a positive effect on mobilization. However, our second dependent variable may provide a more illuminating answer to the social interactions' hypothesis.

Table 2 shows a regression table for our second dependent variable, propensity to join others to organize. Without our control variables, there does not appear to be a significant relationship between social media usage for news and joining others to organize in Kenya. However, when we factor in our controls there does appear to be a statistically significant

relationship between the two as a one-unit positive change using social media for news results in, on average, a 0.042 increase in a respondent's propensity to join other to organize ($p<0.05$), measured on the 0 to 4 scale. Age ($p<0.01$), living in a rural area age ($p<0.01$), and education ($p<0.05$) each also have positive statistically significant relationships with the propensity to join others to organize.

**Table 2: Social Media Usage and Joining Others to Organize**

| | DV: Joining Others to Organize | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Kenya | | Uganda | |
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
| Social Media Usage | 0.022 | 0.042** | 0.009 | 0.017 |
| | (0.016) | (0.019) | (0.011) | (0.014) |
| Age | | 0.010*** | | 0.004** |
| | | (0.002) | | (0.002) |
| Rural | | 0.225*** | | 0.176*** |
| | | (0.057) | | (0.046) |
| Education | | 0.037** | | 0.023** |
| | | (0.016) | | (0.010) |
| | | | | (0.010) |
| Constant | 1.362*** | 0.451*** | 0.557*** | 0.051 |
| | (0.031) | (0.151) | (0.031) | (0.123) |
| Observations | 1,580 | 1,555 | 1,178 | 1,173 |
| $R^2$ | 0.001 | 0.027 | 0.001 | 0.018 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | 0.001 | 0.025 | -0.0003 | 0.015 |
| Residual Std. Error | 1.040 (df = 1578) | 1.026 (df = 1550) | 0.721 (df = 1176) | 0.717 (df = 1168) |
| F Statistic | 1.865 (df = 1; 1578) | 10.844*** (df = 4; 1550) | 0.695 (df = 1; 1176) | 5.355*** (df = 4; 1168) |
| Significance levels | | | | *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01 |

In Uganda, social media usage for news does not appear to have a significant relationship with joining others to organize. Instead, living in a rural area increases a respondent's propensity to join others to organize by 0.176 ($p<0.01$). Similarly, a one-unit positive change in age results in a 0.004 increase in a respondent's propensity to join others to organize ($p<0.05$) and a one-unit

positive change in a respondent's education level results in a 0.023 increase in their propensity to join others to organize ($p<0.05$).

**Table 3: Social Media Usage and Fear of Intimidation or Violence**

| | DV: Fear of Intimidation or Violence | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Kenya | | Uganda | |
| | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
| Social Media Usage | 0.003 | 0.008 | 0.037* | 0.038 |
| | (0.019) | (0.022) | (0.019) | (0.024) |
| Age | | -0.002 | | 0.007** |
| | | (0.002) | | (0.003) |
| Rural | | 0.144** | | 0.040 |
| | | (0.068) | | (0.080) |
| Education | | -0.001 | | 0.046*** |
| | | (0.020) | | (0.018) |
| Constant | 1.243*** | 1.066*** | 1.817*** | 1.311*** |
| | (0.036) | (0.180) | (0.053) | (0.214) |
| Observations | 1,565 | 1,541 | 1,191 | 1,185 |
| $R^2$ | 0.00001 | 0.003 | 0.003 | 0.013 |
| Adjusted $R^2$ | -0.001 | 0.001 | 0.002 | 0.009 |
| Residual Std. Error | 1.217 (df = 1563) | 1.216 (df = 1536) | 1.257 (df = 1189) | 1.253 (df = 1180) |
| F Statistic | 0.022 (df = 1; 1563) | 1.294 (df = 4; 1536) | 3.693* (df = 1; 1189) | 3.825*** (df = 4; 1180) |
| Significance levels | | | | *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01 |

Lastly, Table 3 shows a regression table for the third dependent variable, fear of intimidation or violence during election cycles. In Kenya, there does not appear to be a statistically significant relationship between social media usage and fear of intimidation or violence during election cycles, with or without considering our control variables. Instead, living in a rural area appears to be the most determinant variable in a respondent's fear of intimidation or violence as living in a rural area results in 0.144 increase in a respondent's fear

of intimidation or violence during an election cycle. In Uganda, without controls, a one-unit positive change in a respondent's social media usage for news results in a 0.037 increase in a respondent's fear of intimidation or violence during an election cycle ($p<0.1$). However, the significance of this relationship appears to disappear once we factor in our control variables. Instead age and education appear to have statistically significant relationships with a respondent's fear of intimidation or violence as a one-unit increase in a respondents age results in a 0.007 increase in a respondent's fear of intimidation or violence ($p<0.05$), while a one-unit positive change in a respondent's education level results in a 0.046 increase in a respondent's fear of intimidation or violence ($p<0.01$).

### 4.3 Discussion

Though I am unable to present a direct link between social media usage for news and electoral violence due to a lack of available data regarding this emerging subject, I hope to show that this explanatory variable may influence electoral violence indirectly by establishing or enhancing the conditions for it to take place as theorized by Yanagizawa-Drott (2014) in his study of traditional media and mass violence in Rwanda. Social media usage for news did not appear to have a significant effect on a respondent's fear of violence or intimidation in both Kenya and Uganda. Interestingly, social media usage for news had a significant effect on social interactions in Kenya, but not in Uganda, and social media usage for news had a significant effect on mobilization in Uganda, but not in Kenya. Possible explanations for this may be Uganda's more authoritarian government, where the consequences of protesting may be much greater than Kenya. The strength of social media, and the response to it by the government, has

only grown in Uganda since the 2016 election as the 2021 election in the country made headlines for both its violence and the central role social media played in it. As such, further research into such recent events could illuminate this relationship even more.

Though social media platforms are increasingly connected, for instance Facebook posts regularly make their way to Twitter, while tweets make their way to Instagram feeds, a more in-depth survey that asks for usage of these platforms is needed. For instance, WhatsApp usage outnumbers Twitter usage by nearly 12 times in Kenya and has been linked to fake news much more (BAKE 2017). Measuring violence would be more difficult. Yanagizawa-Drott (2020) uses village-level datasets on individuals prosecuted for committing violent acts during the Rwandan genocide to measure violence. However, in the Kenyan context, where police were usually the perpetrators of violence, it is not clear that official records of violent perpetrators of violent acts would yield much insight into this measure. A possible way to overcome this challenge is to use survey questions that would be designed to gauge propensity to commit violence. For instance, Knuckey and Hassan (2020) used the American National Election Survey of 2016 to devise an innovative index for authoritarianism using respondent's answers to questions regarding child-rearing. In this way, survey questions can be devised to gauge normative beliefs around violence, for instance asking respondents whether violence is an acceptable response to oppression or if they wish harm to political opponents.

### 4.4 Implications

These results warrant further investigation into the relationship between social media usage for news and electoral violence. As social media platforms, particularly the spread of disinformation, have been directly linked to an increasingly polarized electorate in several countries, more in-depth analysis needs to be undertaken to ascertain the negative effects of these platforms on elections and violence. This is especially pertinent for developing countries with unconsolidated democratic regimes, whose populations make up the majority of social media users in the world today (Statista 2020). As such, further research may look into potential effects of social media shutdowns as seen in Sri Lanka on political violence as well as potential mechanisms that developing countries may use to counter disinformation on largely Western-owned social media platforms. For instance, should Mark Zuckerberg not only have to answer to the US Congress and the European parliament over disinformation on Facebook, but also the Lok Sabha in India and the African Union? What role can international law play in mediating the effects of misinformation on large online platforms? Further research could shed light on these questions as a wider study of social media as a news source could help explain its effects on violence as well as democratization.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

This thesis has used both survey evidence and quantitative analysis to assess the relationship between social media usage for news and electoral violence. To do this, I examined the 2017 Kenyan election and looked at the variation in social media usage, my chosen independent variable, between the NASA strongholds of the Nyanza Province and Western Province. I then compared Kenya to Uganda by assessing the 2016 Ugandan election and outlining the variation between the two countries in social media usage. Next, I identified conditions under which electoral violence is likely to take place, that is, by increasing mobilization and social interactions, and measuring a respondent's usage of social media for news's effect on these. Moreover, I assessed whether using social media as a news source has an effect on a respondent's fear of violence or intimidation during an election cycle. Using regression analysis, I found descriptive patterns that point to a relationship between social media usage for news and electoral violence. Namely, I found social media usage for news can increase an individual's propensity to protest in Kenya, and propensity to join others to organize in Uganda. However, I did not find a significant relationship between using social media for news and fear of intimidation or violence. Due to limited data, I could not directly assess the relationship between social media usage and electoral violence. Thus, a more in-depth study is required to increase external and internal validity. This thesis aims to provide some insight into a new and growing field of research as the growth of social media and its effects on information gathering and elections will surely become more important, especially for democracies around the world.

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