

Reasons of electoral violence in the Philippines and Mexico: a comparative study

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Abstract. This research aims to explain the high level of electoral violence targeting candidates in hybrid democracies. Adopting a comparative perspective, this research project examines the contributing factors to the prevalent Electoral Violence Targeting Candidates (EVTC) in Mexico and the Philippines over the past decade. Given that two countries have vastly different political institutions and cultures, the findings from this research are expected to apply to hybrid democracies in general. The effect of impunity experienced by local elites on the number of electoral violence cases targeting candidates was investigated. Impunity, in turn, would be impacted by factors such as political dynasty, subnational authoritarianism, and local state capacity. Using mixed method of quantitative and qualitative analysis, this research finds sufficient evidence supporting the hypothesis that increased impunity, in the context of hybrid democracy, of local elites will contribute to electoral violence, as they would leverage these conditions to safeguard their interest. This paper contributed to the growing body of research in the field of electoral violence by branching beyond region- or country-studies, stressing the important roles of local elites and subnational authoritarianism in electoral violence.

Keywords: electoral violence, elections, Mexico, Philippines, political violence

1. Introduction

In ideal democracies, elections serve to strike a compromise among competing interests through a fair and peaceful process. However, in many hybrid democracies, elections have failed to meet such expectations. Specifically, if marred with violence, elections will become neither fair nor peaceful. Thus, it is imperative to study electoral violence, as it not only violates the most fundamental right—the right to live, but also rigs the election's outcome. This study aims to investigate the factors and conditions that contribute to Electoral Violence Targeting Candidates (EVTC) in hybrid democracies' federal/national and local elections. Specifically, through examining EVTC in Mexico and the Philippines between 2018 and 2023, the research aims to answer the following questions: What explains the large amount of electoral violence that occurred in the two countries? What explains the significant internal variation of electoral violence count across different administrative units at the local level inside those countries?

Though the definition of electoral violence slightly differs [1], most scholars agree that electoral violence can be considered as "the use or the threat of use of coercive force to purposefully influence or undermine the outcome of the elections during the electoral cycle" [2, 3]. One such case was an attack on the left-wing

Filipino presidential candidate Leody de Guzman on April 19, 2022. This was considered a case of electoral violence as the candidate was targeted (indicating the intention to influence the elections) during the electoral cycle.

Additionally, scholars have sought to subdivide electoral violence by its perpetrators, targets, timing, and intensity [3]. Building on the taxonomy, this essay will focus on electoral violence targeting candidates, as they constitute the overwhelming majority of victims in the Philippines and Mexico [4]. Candidates are individuals, as well as their staff and family members, who run for political office by competing in local and national elections.

This research project engages with Mexican and Filipino electoral violence in the contemporary era. Mexico and the Philippines are both developing countries with hybrid democracies featuring competitive subnational elections, comparable in population. They have both suffered significant electoral violence in recent years. Because the author aimed to conduct a subnational comparison, the two countries need not be identical. Instead, as two hybrid democracies, the greater the variance between them, the more this conclusion should display external validity in the broader context. Given their locations on different continents, the two countries differed significantly in their cultures, social norms, and many other aspects of society.

A cross-national comparison is used between the two countries. The Philippines is intended as a shadow case to verify and consolidate the potential findings from the study of Mexico, thereby establishing external validity across different political and societal contexts. When comparing different subnational units within a country, a Most Similar System Design (MSSD) is adopted, as subnational units with similar attributes experience different levels of electoral violence.

This paper also contributes to the growing body of research on electoral violence by stepping outside the confines of region- or country-studies, stressing the important role local elites and subnational authoritarianism play in electoral violence.

First, the existing literature has not fully embraced or utilized the concept of subnational authoritarianism. Levels of democracy have always been a major focus of scholars in this field. However, in hybrid democracies, due to varying conditions across regions, democratization at the national level is considered neither representative nor accurate because it is not sufficiently disaggregated to different locales. To address this overgeneralization, subnational authoritarianism, proposed by O'Donnell [5] and complemented by Hughes and Vorobyeva's study [6] on political violence, emphasizes the differing quality of democracy across subnational administrative areas within a country. In many hybrid democracies, where the state is concurrently weak and cannot project its influence beyond the capital regions, civil liberties and checks on elected officials are often undermined in those areas, creating fertile ground for electoral violence. Thus, the theory of subnational authoritarianism is critical for explaining cross-region variations within a country.

Secondly, for the analysis of the killings of subnational officials, this research points to the influential role played by local elites. Since local elites are the ones who ultimately perpetrate the violence, their actions and the institutional and non-institutional factors shaping them are of utmost importance in explaining the causes of electoral violence.

This paper begins with a comprehensive literature review of electoral violence before hypothesizing that entrenched elites perpetrate electoral violence to defend their interests, with the impunity they enjoy, shaping their decisions and leading to varied levels of electoral violence targeted at candidates. Next, the data collection and quantitative modeling methods are described in detail. The article then uses quantitative methodology to examine the primary case of Mexico, while using a qualitative method for the shadow case of the Philippines. Finally, this paper concludes by summarizing the contribution to existing studies on electoral violence.

2. Literature review

The first limitation of existing literature concerns case selection. To begin with, there has been a lack of scholarly focus on countries and regions outside Latin America and Africa, including the Philippines. The Philippines, like Mexico, experiences high levels of electoral violence with significant subnational variation. Although most researchers disaggregate their data to explain subnational variation, none have formally adopted the concept of subnational authoritarianism in analyzing the two countries, thereby limiting a more nuanced analysis of internal variation across local units.

Specifically, there has been a lack of scholarly-focused articles in which the causes of electoral violence in the Philippines have been investigated analytically and holistically. Among the few studies that focus on the Philippines, Kreuzer's work adopts an overtly descriptive tone, as it is limited by its report format [7]. In contrast, Deinla's work is more focused on constructing a dataset without making extensive theoretical claims [4]. Thus, existing literature can be complemented by an in-depth case study.

Secondly, contemporary literature often underemphasizes the effect of electoral violence on national-level officials, especially those studying Mexico or the Philippines. Typically, previous researchers either treat the country as a whole (without distinguishing between national and subnational violence) or focus only on subnational violence. Admittedly, compared with provincial or municipal-level government officials, there has been much less electoral violence at the national level. However, when one accounts for the number of electoral officials when calculating the frequency of electoral violence, one will find that killings on the national level are much more intense.

Researchers too often adopt a narrative that aligns with local officials' situation rather than that of national candidates. For example, Kreuzer's study [7] was focused on subnational electoral posts, as he pointed out that municipal candidates have a higher probability of being assassinated when compared to national candidates. That said, including state or national candidates would make the study more complete. Das's paper on electoral violence in West-Bengal, as its name has suggested, examined the dynamic in the province of West-Bengal [8]. Despite providing a more nuanced picture of violence in the province, the scope of the research prohibited cross-province comparison, which would have been desirable. This research aims to broaden the focus of existing literature by examining both types of targets, which may display varied patterns and causes, thereby providing a more holistic picture. This is crucial, as the patterns of electoral violence at the national level might differ from those at the local level, warranting special attention.

Additionally, researchers often emphasize only the benefits of attacks (or the costs of not conducting them) for the perpetrators. In other words, the cost of the attacks is often neglected, making the cost-benefit analysis incomplete. For example, Das's study emphasized the negative effects of not perpetrating violence, such as losing control and facing subsequent legal repercussions. Similarly, another researcher, Gutiérrez-Romero, conducted a cost-benefit analysis to explain why perpetrating electoral violence was the most desirable for criminal actors [9]. In other words, these two studies would benefit from an additional analysis of the potential (or the lack of) repercussions for perpetrators upon using violence.

3. Theory and hypothesis

Based on pre-existing literature and preliminary observation of the two cases, a rational-choice model was adopted. In the context of electoral violence, such a model assumes that individuals behave rationally, meaning they will only perpetrate electoral violence when the perceived benefits (which mainly concern the aversion to potential negative consequences) outweigh the perceived costs (including those imposed by society and the state). In other words, candidates are targeted because they negatively impact economic and political elites

(such as political dynasties, oligarchies, drug cartels, and criminal groups) in the local area to the extent that local elites deem perpetrating electoral violence the most cost-effective way to advance or safeguard their personal economic interests and political influence. Thus, it has been hypothesized that:

H0: In the context of a hybrid democracy, where local elites experience impunity due to subnational authoritarianism and other factors, candidates who threaten the interests of these elites are attacked by them.

If the hypothesis is valid, this research expects to observe the following:

H1: Political and economic elites, or local elites, have a low cost of perpetrating electoral violence and, therefore, use violence to their benefit.

There are multiple types of costs associated with the perpetrators, all of which will be examined accordingly in the following sections:

H1a: The legal and institutional costs that perpetrators experience are low.

The severity and the possibility of punishment imposed by the state are key determinants of the cost of electoral violence. This hypothesis mainly concerns whether the state judicial system punishes the candidates. If perpetrators are convicted and punished, few would risk perpetrating electoral violence. Here, perpetrators refer to the mastermind of such attacks, who, in many cases, does not directly carry out the attack themselves.

When legal and institutional costs are low, and perpetrators experience impunity, it is expected to observe a) the state capacity, as measured by government expenditure per capita, is low; b) the conviction rate is low.

H1b: The actors are not retaliated against by the government.

Governments or other actors might target criminal groups in response to the electoral violence perpetrated. If the local elites anticipated such retaliatory moves, they would be less willing to commit electoral violence in fear of the potential consequences. Government responses often come in the form of police crackdowns or the initiation of policies against drugs.

If this hypothesis is true, it is expected to observe no significant or meaningful variation in the state or municipal government's response towards local elites during and after the electoral period and the non-electoral period. This hypothesis will be quantified and measured by the number of killings of drug cartel members or the quantity of drugs confiscated following the perpetration of violence in the local area.

4. Methodology

The research adopted a mix of quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Given greater weight to Mexico, the paper will test the hypothesis using quantitative methods. As the shadow case in the research, the author will test the hypothesis in the Philippines through the qualitative method of process tracing.

4.1. Quantitative methods

This section aims to detail the methodology and the variables used in the quantitative analysis. A quantitative analysis was carried out in all municipalities where relevant data were available, resulting in 1957 observations across all 32 federal subjects (31 states and Mexico City, the Capital Area). Municipal was chosen as the level of analysis because it was the lowest level at which relevant data were available, while still providing a large sample size. On the other hand, state-level analysis might lack explanatory power since there is often significant variation within a state. Table 1 provides the descriptive summary statistics for the study.

4.1.1. The dependent variable

The dependent variable directly measures the number of candidates killed during the electoral cycle in Mexico from 2018 to 2024. During this period, there were two general elections and one mid-term election at the

federal level, with most states holding three state legislative and municipal elections, as well as one gubernatorial election.

Table 1. Listing of variables

Variables	<i>N</i>	Mean	St. Dev.	Min.	Max.
EVTC	2,478	0.1646	0.5535	0	8
Conviction Rate	1,957	0.05948	0.121	0	1
Plantation	2,478	26.15	292.7	0	11,240
Lab	2,478	0.006053	0.09407	0	4
Drug	2,478	271.4	2,311	0	94,873
GDP	2,478	14,010	9,752	3,210	88,342
Government Expenditure	2,478	5,615	3,838	238	40,133

This variable comes from Datacívica's Entendiendo La violencia politico-criminal en México Dataset [10]. Datacívica is a non-profit organization based in Mexico that aims to safeguard human rights through data-based analysis. Prevailing research on political violence in Mexico has also used this dataset for its detailed documentation of the attacks and comprehensive coverage, making it ideal for this study.

The dataset provides a detailed list of all the political violence within the years, which the author manipulated to include only electoral-related political violence via the criteria below:

(1) The attack must happen within 6 months before or 1 month after the election.

(2) The attack has to be targeted at either a. registered candidate b. pre-candidate, c. individual serving electoral office, or d. the family member of the said individuals.

After manipulation, it has been found that there are a total of 408 incidents of electoral violence across 290 municipalities, with Cuautla, Morelos, experiencing 8 incidents within the years, the most of all municipalities.

4.1.2. *The independent variables*

Electoral violence in Mexico is linked with drug activities. Previous research has pointed out that drug cartels would engage in electoral violence to capture the state and conduct rent-seeking behavior to gain an advantage in competition against other cartels [11]. Under this line of reasoning, it could be inferred that the government would aim to undermine its economic interest through the war on drugs for retaliation. Thus, statistics regarding the government's destruction of illegal cultivation are used to measure the government's policy response.

This research utilized MUCD's dataset on drug policies, which records the government's action towards illegal cultivates [12]. The dataset aggregates the drug seizure data of multiple institutions, including SEMAR, GN, and SEDENA, from 1990 to 2022 in dimensions such as destruction of plantations or confiscation of drugs. For this research, three indicators representative of the overall government action – area of plantation destroyed, number of drug labs seized, and weight of drug confiscated – were chosen. The *Plantation* variable measures the total hectares of drug plantations destroyed in every municipality by various institutions from 2017 to 2018; The *Lab* variable indicates the total number of drug laboratories destroyed between 2017 and 2018 by various institutions in every municipality; and the *Drug* variable measures the weight of various types of drugs seized in kilograms in various municipalities between 2017 and 2018. When there is no data, 0 is imputed.

Moreover, the institutional factors that might contribute to impunity are also quantified. First, the efficiency and effectiveness of the legal system were measured. Here, the conviction rate is used, as it measures the

percentage of convicted cases out of all cases handled by the judicial system, making it a good indicator of how many perpetrators are actually punished by the criminal justice system and, therefore, of impunity. A broken judicial system often has an extremely low conviction rate, either due to inefficiency or to insufficient evidence provided by police, as in many regions of Mexico.

The conviction rate used in this study is derived from INEGI data for 2019 [13]. Conviction rate is calculated by dividing the number of cases in which a sentence is imposed by the total number of cases admitted to the oral criminal system, two metrics available in the system. The conviction rate is coded by the court where the cases are registered. Since a court serves multiple municipalities in most cases, a second step is taken in which all municipalities within the court district are assigned the same value as the district seat (where the case was registered). One noticeable observation is that many municipalities have a 0% conviction rate, as no cases with a sentence recorded in the system are registered, with that variable missing. In these cases, the values are retained, as they almost certainly reflect a genuine lack of convictions rather than reporting errors. Additionally, a considerable number of municipalities have missing data. This can occur when a court system does not report the numbers. Imputation of state means was not used because there are cases where a majority (or all) of the data is missing in a state; such a method would lead to substantial uncertainty. Therefore, missing values were omitted in the analysis.

Secondly, this paper aims to quantify the state's overall capacity. Here, government expenditure per capita was used as a proxy for state capacity. Typically, high government expenditure enables the government to fund the police sufficiently to promote security and implement its policy proposals effectively, thereby likely significantly reducing the impunity enjoyed by local elites. As noted in previous literature, this research adopted a per capita approach to reflect variation in population across municipalities [14].

At last, GDP per capita data is used as a control variable to account for income and development levels. Some previous researchers have emphasized the effect of poverty on electoral and political violence [15]. However, since it may also directly affect government expenditure, a control variable is necessary to ensure the validity of the regression output. However, an official tally of municipal-level GDP per capita is hard to find in government sources. Thus, this study used an estimated GDP per Capita from a third-party dataset for all municipal units [16]. Admittedly, this might introduce additional uncertainty.

4.1.3. Modelling

Upon collecting the relevant data, the author first cleaned the dataset and computed the required variables in R, in preparation for preliminary regression testing. Since the dependent variable, the number of electoral violence incidents, is a count variable that is positively skewed and contains many 0 values, an OLS model would likely be inappropriate. This study must choose between a Poisson and a negative binomial regression model, following the precedent of other researchers in this field. Both of the models were fitted to the data. However, when examining the Poisson model, it has been found that:

$$Var(ViolenceCount) = 0.3063 \quad (1)$$

$$E(ViolenceCount) = 0.1646 \quad (2)$$

$$Variance/Mean = 1.861 \quad (3)$$

A Poisson model assumes that the variance of the variable is equal to its expectation. Here, since the variance is significantly larger than the expectation, it is reasonable to conclude that the Poisson model does not fit the violence count well. Thus, the Poisson model results are not reported, and only the negative binomial model is retained.

4.2. Qualitative method

As stated, the Philippines' shadow case will be analyzed via process tracing [17]. Process tracing is a valid qualitative method for establishing causality in case studies. In the qualitative analysis section, the author will draw on a range of scholarly and journalistic sources to establish a causal mechanism and to verify the hypotheses against alternative explanations.

5. Results

5.1. Mexico: quantitative analysis

Table 2 shows the result of the regression analysis using a negative binomial model. Due to missing values in the conviction rate variable, 1957 observations remained out of a total of 2,478 municipalities in Mexico. Each remaining observation has six parameters.

None of the variables representing the government's policy response (plantation, drug, and lab) shows a statistically significant correlation with the independent variable, electoral violence count, suggesting insufficient evidence for the hypothesis that the government specifically targets areas with higher violence. This demonstrated either a lack of government capacity or will in retaliating against potential cartels responsible for political killings, thus granting them impunity indirectly.

Table 2. Regression output

	Negative Binomial Model
Plantation	1.975×10^{-4} (3.621×10^{-4})
Drug	2.211×10^{-5} (4.101×10^{-5})
Lab	1.073 (0.6887)
GDP per Capita	1.600×10^{-5} ** (7.924×10^{-6})
Government Expenditure	-1.515×10^{-4} *** (3.498×10^{-5})
Conviction rate	0.5827 (0.6002)
Intercept	-1.403 *** (0.1968)
<i>N</i>	1,957
Adjusted Pseudo R^2	0.01293

Note. Standard errors shown in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

There is a significant correlation between government expenditure and the count of violent incidents. A 1,000 unit increase in government expenditure per capita would reduce the incidence of EVTC by roughly 15.2%. Less well-funded municipalities will have a harder time adequately funding their public security and justice systems, thereby reducing state capacity. Violent actors might perpetrate violence in these more vulnerable areas since they are aware of the decreased odds of being caught and punished by the state institutions.

There is no significant correlation between conviction rate, which measures the effectiveness of the judicial system, and the final violence count. Nevertheless, it is more likely than not that the lack of correlation was due to poor data quality rather than the two variables being genuinely independent. Even after excluding municipalities with missing data, the data quality remains suboptimal, as a significant number of observations have a conviction rate of 0 or close to 0 (less than 0.01), while a handful have a conviction rate of 1. Thus, it should not be surprising that no correlation is found, since the conviction rate across the board is very low and a few outliers positively skew the data. In fact, the mean conviction rate (0.0595) alone can suggest that the judicial system lacks capacity and may grant impunity to perpetrators of electoral violence.

5.2. The Philippines: a shadow case

This section argues that impunity resulting from subnational authoritarianism is the main cause of widespread electoral violence, while demonstrating that factors such as poverty, lack of economic opportunities, and ethno-religious conflicts are unable to explain the phenomenon.

5.2.1. Subnational authoritarianism

Local government units distant from the national capital often suffer from subnational authoritarianism, a deficit in democracy, and a discrepancy between formal rules and actual practices [6]. Subnational authoritarianism most often occurs in developing democracies with decentralized governance, as local politicians use their autonomy to engage in undemocratic behavior.

In the Philippines, local politics are often dominated by political bosses or political dynasties, a phenomenon characterized by the term "local bossism" [18]. Political dynasties would see multiple members, connected via family ties, dominate many, if not a majority, of the electoral positions within a certain geographical boundary. Thus, they can establish local dominance economically and electorally through their prolonged control of the government [19]. Having sustained their rule through access to resources and reputation, they often create an environment in which they have little accountability.

5.2.1.1. The police

Local government units in the Philippines often exert massive influence over the police department. Not only does the city mayor directly oversee and supervise the police department, but the mayor is also responsible for appointing the police chief, thereby making the police department extremely vulnerable to politicization [20]. In some cases, this made the police department complicit in acts of violence, including the infamous Maguindanao Massacre, acting according to the direction of politicians.

Furthermore, the police force in the Philippines often fails to investigate violent crimes properly and neutrally. In the notorious "War on Drugs", the police have used made-up evidence to justify their killings of alleged criminals, and in other cases, dropped their investigations into killings [21]. Although the total (index) crime solution efficiency rate, which measures the percentage of solved cases out of all reported cases from 2022 to 2023 fluctuates around 60% (significantly lower than the world average [22]), official reports during Duterte's tenure suffer from further underreporting to augment the effect of the "War on Drugs" [23].

As a result, many of the perpetrators of electoral violence remained unidentified. According to the Philippine Electoral Violence Dataset (PEV), cases in which perpetrators are identified as "no information" or

"other assailant actor" account for at least 80% of all recorded cases [4]. A report on the killing of politicians pointed out that "in the vast majority of cases it cannot be proven who actually ordered the killings" [7].

5.2.1.2. The judiciary

The politicization of the judiciary is another severe challenge confronted by the Philippines [24]. Local power holders have paid bribes to judges to delay or extort the process, and have pressured key witnesses to testify in their favor [25], obstructing the court's functioning and delaying the delivery of justice. Moreover, first- and second-level courts, where criminal cases were originally heard, are staffed by only one judge, further increasing their vulnerability to corruption and bias.

The lack of capacity, when compounded by the politicization of the judiciary, means that the prosecution rate for various crimes in the Philippines is staggeringly low. From 2016 to 2020, the overall prosecution rate was around 20% to 40%, whereas the prosecution rate for murder and homicide specifically typically fluctuated around 20% and 30% [26]. This demonstrated the judicial system's systematic failure to hold criminal actors accountable.

5.2.1.3. Private armed groups

Subnational authoritarianism has also caused the proliferation of active Private Armed Groups (PAG), who are hired by local bosses for their own protection. The dominance of local politics gave these local bosses vast economic resources to fund the armies. Even the Philippine National Police acknowledged the presence of at least 155 such organizations [27]. This problem is especially severe in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region [28], a traditional electoral hotspot. Despite constitutional provisions banning private armed groups, because the central government has limited control over local affairs, these provisions have only been loosely enforced. In fact, the central government sometimes even have to cooperate with them to deal with insurgencies, thus legitimizing them.

The presence of private armed groups meant that local elites, often the masterminds of such attacks, could remain behind the scenes, as they were no longer involved in the actual killing [29]. This meant they could avoid accountability altogether. Furthermore, the presence of such an army meant that the candidate is well-defended against potential retaliatory acts [30].

5.2.1.4. Abra: a case study

This section examines the case of Abra province, an electoral violence hotspot, to illustrate the causal mechanism outlined earlier. Abra is a landlocked province in the Cordillera Administrative Region, located on the northern half of the Luzon island. Notorious for its political rivalries and dynasties, the province of Abra has been ranked among the most violent provinces in the Philippines by scholars and government agencies alike [4].

The politics of Abra was dominated by a few large political dynasties and their bloody feud, as its political dynasty concentration was ranked among the top quarter in the country [31]. Before the 2025 election, the Bernos and Valera family maintained control of the governor position, held the congressional seat, and retained control of multiple mayoral posts through a coalition, beating their opponents, the Lunas and the Bersamins family [32].

The four political families, both the incumbent and the opposition, are identified for possessing PAGs, allegedly misusing revenue from local government budgets, with a 2007 report claiming that the Valera family has an army of roughly 40 individuals [33]. This gave the political families the means to engage in killings.

Furthermore, the entrenched interests can use or exploit the weaknesses of the established political institutions for their own gains. First, like the national trend, the police force in Abra is heavily politicized [34]. Previous researchers have noted the lack of transparency and accountability within security institutions, which has led to corruption. Specifically, it has been reported that House of Representatives member Seares-

Corpus, running in Abra, has used the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group, which her husband runs, for political gain [35]. On top of that, both the army and the police force had been manipulated by the governor to achieve political objectives [34]. Secondly, the judicial system in Abra generally lacks the capacity to deal with political violence. It is often the case that an overwhelming majority of electoral violence cases were dismissed due to a lack of personnel or evidence, suggesting a systematic failure [34].

Together, these factors have contributed to more than 20 incidents of electoral violence in Abra, most commonly as a side-product of political feud between local elites, making it one of the most dangerous provinces in the Philippines. Specifically, one high profile case is the murder of Luis Bersamin Jr, a former congressman, and his aids. Being shot to death at a wedding, former governor Vicente Valera was said to be responsible for the attack, a political opponent of the victim.

5.2.2. Alternative explanations visited

5.2.2.1. The economic deprivation explanation

One alternative hypothesis is the economic-deprivation hypothesis, which holds that the lack of economic opportunity is a key driver of the prevalence of such electoral violence.

However, it is unlikely that this is the case. Among the 10 election hotspots (provinces with the most electoral violence within an election cycle), 5 have an HDI of "high" or "extremely high", ranking them among the top 19 developed provinces in the Philippines [4]. Cities, including Cebu City and the Metro Manila region, experienced large volumes of killings despite being one of the richest administrative units in the country with an elevated standard of living. On the other hand, provinces that are predominantly rural with a higher poverty rate can experience either a large or a small volume of violence [7]. This evidence suggests that violence occurs nationwide, regardless of economic performance [7].

Moreover, political clans, often considered perpetrators of electoral violence, are well-off economically. By controlling local businesses for generations, they have amassed huge private wealth. A study estimates that individuals from political dynasties in the Congress have an average net worth of 52 million pesos, nowhere near the poverty line and significantly higher than the average [36]. Although it might be possible that they perpetrate violence to further their wealth by controlling the state, it is unlikely that poverty is the key factor here.

5.2.2.2. The ethno-religious conflict explanation

Another alternative explanation is that electoral violence is merely the extension of ethnic-conflict across the Philippines. However, this theory is also problematic. Ethnic militant groups such as the MNLF and the MILF primarily operate on the Mindanao island, where the strong presence of Muslim Moros clashed with Christian communities, while there are hardly any prolonged ethnic conflicts on the island of Luzon and Visayas. Nevertheless, electoral violence was equally intense on all three islands. This significantly undermines the credibility of this hypothesis.

6. Conclusion

Adopting a comparative perspective and a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods, this research aims to explain the causes of electoral violence in the Philippines and Mexico. Based on previous literature, the research first establishes that, in the context of a hybrid democracy, especially where political or economic elites use law to their own private political benefit, and where attacks are not punished, candidates who threaten their interests are attacked by them. Focusing on the idea of impunity, the two key components of the argument (H1a: institutional impunity and H1b: the lack of government retaliation (policy response)) are mostly supported by the quantitative analysis and the shadow case results. In the quantitative analysis section,

previous findings have been reinforced by the correlation among government expenditure, GDP per capita, and the electoral violence count. On the other hand, in the shadow case, a concrete causal mechanism has been established through a close examination of the province of Abra in the Cordillera Administrative Region.

This literature builds on previous studies of electoral violence in the Philippines and Mexico by identifying contributing factors. Previously, there was a limited cross-region comparative study of electoral violence, with a predominant focus on one or more countries in a single region. A cross-region study can better illustrate the universal determinants of electoral violence.

This research also sheds light on the effect of subnational authoritarianism on EVTC. Apart from the empirical result from the regression analysis in Mexico, a causal linkage has also been put forth, stating that local elites have increased likelihood of experiencing impunity and enjoying a lower cost of violence due to the decreased state capacity in those areas.

One potential limitation of this research is the data used in the quantitative analysis. The proxy for the capacity of the judicial system, the conviction rate, is not disaggregated to the municipal level and contains numerous instances of missing values, which undermines its value. Thus, future research should either seek a more reliable data source or, in the case of conviction rates, a more indicative proxy of the legal system's capacity.

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