

Connivance and coercion *

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Abstract

Why do states often fail to enforce their own policies, especially those governing the poor and vulnerable? How do state policies and their enforcement shape coercion by extralegal groups? This paper investigates these questions in the context of modern-day Nigeria, a decades-old democracy which nevertheless features high levels of violence and exploitation. I provide a conceptual framework which shows how enabling such exploitation is functional for democratic states insofar as it empowers non-state allies who benefit from the vulnerability of regulated populations. Diverging from existing approaches, which characterize uneven enforcement against the poor as benevolent, I detail how states ‘produce precarity’ in vulnerable citizens through uneven enforcement of their own policies. I focus on the role of transport unions in Lagos, Nigeria— extractive actors who exploit drivers, and work as purveyors of electoral violence for the ruling party—in determining state enforcement of a ban on okada motorcycle taxis in the state. First, using evidence from several months fieldwork in Lagos; as well as an original networked dataset of the Lagos transport union, I show how the Lagos State Government’s selective enforcement of its ban on motorcycle taxis was preceded by driver threats of secession amidst union extortion. Second, I use original geocoded data on enforcement locations, union territory, and traffic patterns along the Lagos road network to show how the political geography of the ban’s enforcement displaces riders into areas controlled by the union. Third and finally, I exploit the timing of a surprising election result to show how a shock to state reliance on the union affects enforcement patterns. This paper not only explores how states can exploit an understudied ‘enforcement lever’ to usurp democratic institutions and redistribute to their allies, but how powerful—but not necessarily criminal—groups can trade extralegal violence for such redistribution.

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1 Why do states often fail to completely enforce their own policies, especially those governing
2 the poor and vulnerable? All over the world, state actors propose, debate, and pass laws targeting
3 informal economies and populations: examples include bans on hawking, squatting, driving an
4 unregistered taxi, or crossing borders without documentation. However, enforcement of these
5 policies often varies significantly over time and space—even from one week to the next, even
6 within a single city. Most scholarship chalks up gaps in policy enforcement to gaps in state
7 capacity; more recent scholarship has advanced alternative explanations for *forbearance*, defined
8 by Holland as “intentional and revocable government leniency towards violations of the law”
9 (Holland, 2016, 233). These explanations show how governments can refuse to enforce policies
10 targeting the poor as a form of redistribution.

11 However, incomplete enforcement cannot always be attributed either to state failure or to state
12 sympathy with its most vulnerable populations. In many cases, infringing populations are not key
13 to the selectorate: undocumented migrants for example, who cannot vote either for or against the
14 incumbent and have few allies among registered voters. And while forbearance is often described
15 in benevolent terms, incomplete enforcement does not always benefit offenders. When a politician
16 blackmails Romani populations about tax nonpayment in direct exchange for votes—as described
17 by Mares and Young (2019)—the state, alongside the apparent concession, is extending not a favor
18 but a threat. When U.S. police across the Jim Crow South declined to enforce racist laws, only for
19 lawbreakers to be attacked by extrajudicial militias, the state was not *conceding* anything to Black
20 populations.¹

21 In this paper, I argue that gaps in enforcement can be strategically used to ‘produce precarity’ in
22 offenders and enhance opportunities for their exploitation, especially by third parties. I argue that
23 allowing—and even enabling—exploitation in this way is functional for democratic states insofar

¹One such example occurred during nonviolent sit-ins by Black college students at segregated lunch counters in Nashville, Tennessee in 1960. Several days into the demonstration, on February 27 of that year, the police began to engage—not just with arrests, but by standing aside as violent proxies attacked protesters. One demonstrator Bernard Lafayette noted that on that day “we were told in advance... that they are gonna allow the hoodlums to beat us up, and *then* the police were gonna arrest us.” Once the sit-in began, “as predicted, the police held back for the first fifteen minutes,” resulting in severe violence against the Black students. For more, see (York, 1999, minutes 0:35:22–0:36:22).

1 as it empowers non-state allies who benefit from the vulnerability of those being regulated. I refer
2 to this strategy as *connivance*: a coercive, rather than concessional, form of forbearance. I add to
3 existing conceptualizations of forbearance by integrating the concept with theories of repression,
4 and describe how selective enforcement can act as a strategy of political control (Hassan et al.,
5 2021) and consolidate relationships between state agents and extortionate, exploitative, and often
6 violent third-party actors.

7 I elucidate the concept of connivance against the backdrop of the informal transport industry
8 in Nigeria. Specifically, I analyze the 2022 selective enforcement of a ban on ‘okada’ motorcycle
9 taxis in Lagos, Africa’s largest metropolitan area. Okada riders² are usually economic migrants
10 and internally displaced persons from the North of Nigeria, often fleeing climate-induced land
11 scarcity and political violence (Grasse and Pavlik, 2025). While the Lagos okada ban applied
12 to all major roads in the state, it was enforced only across select bridges, intersections, streets,
13 and neighborhoods. Capacity-based explanations do not convincingly explain the ban’s uneven
14 enforcement; Lagos streets are heavily policed by at least a half a dozen branches of law enforcement.
15 The ban’s passage and partial enforcement also drew outrage from okada riders, calling into
16 question any benevolent motivation by the recalcitrant state.

17 I use original micro-level geospatial data on enforcement and extortion points on the Lagos
18 roadways, traffic patterns, and informal transport density, as well as qualitative data both from
19 fieldwork and archival news reports, to show that selective enforcement of the okada ban is a
20 strategy of connivance by the Lagos State Government. The ban’s incomplete enforcement was
21 not for the purpose of redistribution to vulnerable riders, but to ease their extortion by extralegal
22 violence entrepreneurs—in this case, the Lagos branch of the National Union of Road and Transport
23 Workers (NURTW; heretofore referred to as ‘the Union’): a mafia-like organization that behaves
24 as a key source of thugs-for-hire for Lagos’s leading political party, the All Progressives Congress
25 (APC). Drawing from participant observation on Lagos roadways and amongst Union members

²Here in keeping with local parlance, I refer to the drivers of the motorcycles as ‘riders,’ and the consumers of the service as ‘passengers.’

1 and okada riders, over 75 stakeholder interviews, and a near-comprehensive collection of local
2 newspaper reports spanning decades of Union activity, I describe how enforcement timing corresponded
3 with okada rider resistance to Union extortion, prompting state intervention. Using a ‘randomization
4 inference’ simulation-based technique on the Lagos road network, I demonstrate that the political
5 geography of the ban’s enforcement served to displace riders into areas of the city controlled
6 by the Union, increasing its ability to exploit riders during this tumultuous period. I show that
7 spatial patterns of ban enforcement does not cleanly vary with other potential explanations, such
8 as geographic variation in state capacity or traffic congestion. Finally, I exploit a surprising election
9 result from the year following the ban, which served as a shock to the state government’s perception
10 of the reliability of the Union. Using fine-grained satellite-based measurements of commercial
11 transport presence, I find that when state reliance on the Union is shaken, enforcement diminishes.

12 This paper contributes to several substantive agendas in the study of politics. I contribute to an
13 increasingly common focus on spatial economics in urban centers of low-income countries (Bryan,
14 Frye and Morten, 2025). More specifically, I add to the growing wealth of literature on the informal
15 transport sector and traffic politics (Agbiboa, 2022; Goodfellow, 2015; Fourchard, 2023) as well
16 as the road networks and their disruptions (Nathan, 2023; Schouten, 2022; Dell, 2015; Sánchez
17 De La Sierra et al., 2024) which characterize so many major cities in the Global South broadly,
18 and on the continent of Africa in particular. While there exist a number of studies examining
19 roads and their construction, including in studies of colonial expansion (Cowen, 2020), conflict
20 dynamics (Zhukov, 2012), and large-scale infrastructure corruption (Williams, 2017), modern laws
21 *governing* the roads get less attention.³ This is despite the fact that in urban areas worldwide,
22 parking tickets, traffic fines, and checkpoints are among the most frequent ways in which citizens
23 directly interact with the state. In what follows, I show how states can use instruments as seemingly
24 banal as traffic policy enforcement to advance the interests of exploitative third parties and alter a
25 city’s political geography. In doing so, I build on work in urban economics and in political science

³With notable exceptions: See Su and Buerger (2024) and Ben-Menachem and Morris (2023) for two examples in the U.S. context; and Sánchez De La Sierra et al. (2024) for a detailed dive into the Congo’s traffic agency.

1 by Xu (2023) and others on how spatial externalities foster inequality in such contexts. Moreover,
2 I add to existing work on the role of non-state actors in weakly-institutionalized democracies;
3 bridging the gap between work on civil society groups like unions (Dean, 2022; Hassan, Mattingly
4 and Nugent, 2022) and violence entrepreneurs including gangs, mafias, and political militias (Carey,
5 Mitchell and Scharpf, 2022; Tapscott, 2021; Acemoglu, Robinson and Santos, 2009). Indeed, in
6 this context, they are one and the same.

7 Most fundamentally, I expand our understanding of the concept of forbearance by exploring
8 how non-enforcement against precarious populations can counterintuitively be a tool of political
9 control, rather than a form of benevolent redistribution. In doing so, I expand both on studies
10 of forbearance and of repression in the context of informality. Most theories of repression and
11 coercion focus on the state's ability to inflict physical violence (Thachil, 2020), maintain high
12 levels of censorship and control over speech (Sullivan and Davenport, 2018), or even actively
13 engage in distribution for coercive purposes (Albertus, Fenner and Slater, 2018; Pan, 2020). Although
14 the study of how states inflict violence has recently expanded to include subtler modes of political
15 control (Hassan, Mattingly and Nugent, 2022), repression is still largely assumed to be a function
16 of a state's capacity to enforce its own repressive policies. As such, studies of repression have
17 incompletely grappled with the coercion produced where the state selectively does *not* engage in
18 enforcement. I show how in some contexts, uneven governance and policing patterns should be
19 interpreted not as lapses in capacity, but as purposeful tactics used to empower extra-state violence
20 entrepreneurs and enable exploitation of the vulnerable. These findings not only elaborate on
21 existing scholarly accounts on policing (Eck, Conrad and Crabtree, 2021) and strategic non-enforcement
22 (Holland, 2017; Cunningham and Owens, 2020; Su and Buerger, 2024), but have significant implications
23 for our understanding of a state's willingness to concede its monopoly on enforcement and violence
24 (Acemoglu, Robinson and Santos, 2009; Carey, Mitchell and Scharpf, 2022). This paper answers a
25 call by Hassan, Mattingly and Nugent (2022) to expand considerations of state repression "beyond
26 capacity to also consider intent" (Hassan, Mattingly and Nugent, 2022, 157).

1 Connivance

2 When forbearance is coercive

3 Why do agents of the state enforce certain policies and not others, and what explains vast variation
4 in enforcement across time and space? Most work tends to blame enforcement gaps on a lack of
5 state capacity, a concept at the center of explaining both how states form and how they operate—especially
6 how they utilize and build their coercive power (Tilly et al., 1992).⁴ However, the concept of state
7 capacity often bundles distinct qualities of bureaucratic performance and policy implementation,
8 leading to over-generalized theories which do not account for idiosyncratic constraints and incentives
9 (Williams, 2021). In response, scholars have increasingly explored cases where governments
10 are able, but unwilling, to comprehensively enforce a policy—*refusing to use* the capacity they
11 possess. These efforts have resulted in alternative ‘agent-based’ approaches, which theorize that
12 enforcement will vary not just with state capacity, but with interests. For instance, governments
13 may neglect to enforce violations where non-enforcement is popularly preferred.⁵

14 These agent-based explanations largely attribute non-enforcement to state incentives to appease
15 the population breaking the law. In other words, when offenders are key allies or members of
16 the selectorate, state agents may refrain from enforcement in order to retain this population’s
17 support: a *concessional* logic of non-enforcement. The literature has considered two varieties of
18 this phenomenon. Contingent non-enforcement occurs in exchange for favors from the infringing
19 population, as detailed in the extensive literatures on corrupt and clientelistic exchanges. However

⁴In fact, the concept of state capacity is often defined explicitly in terms of the state’s ability to enforce its laws; including by monopolizing coercive power (Weber, 1978) and expending resources to regulate relationships (Migdal, 1988). In a recent review of the concept, (Hanson and Sigman, 2021) define a state’s capacity as a function of its power, or in terms of Dahl’s pluralist ‘first face,’ the ability of the state to get its citizens to do things they would not otherwise do—the power to enforce its preferences (Hanson and Sigman, 2021; Dahl, 2007). See Cingolani (2013) for a detailed review of the intellectual history of the concept of state capacity. For a recent example of a study linking capacity with enforcement, see Cook and Fortunato (2023) on state legislative capacity and the enforcement of data provision laws.

⁵One example of this motivation finds that enforcement of traffic violations falls dramatically in the lead-up to sheriff’s races in the U.S.(Su and Buerger, 2024).

1 in her seminal book Holland (2017) shows how politicians decline to *broadly* enforce certain
2 policies targeting the poor in order to purposefully engage in “welfarist” forbearance (Holland,
3 2016). Specifically in the context of Latin America, Holland (2017) shows how forbearance
4 towards squatting and street-vending violations depends on the importance of poor voters to the
5 ruling party. However, not all forbearance is so benevolent. In a more sobering example, Wilkinson
6 (2006) describes how Hindu politicians in India decline to call in law enforcement to suppress
7 militia violence against Muslim protesters during elections.⁶ Forbearance can also be conceptualized
8 in terms of regulatory capture⁷ on the *enforcement* lever, rather than the *policymaking* lever.

9 Building on these existing explanations for selective and incomplete state enforcement, I use
10 the term *connivance* to describe the strategic, selective enforcement of law-breaking through which
11 the state ‘produces precarity’⁸ in the infringing population and renders it vulnerable to exploitation.
12 Connivance—a coercive form of forbearance—occurs when the state is within its legal right (and
13 obligation) to enforce a law, but instead alters enforcement patterns *for the purpose of* expanding
14 opportunities for offenders’ exploitation. With connivance, I offer a framework for integrating
15 the concept of forbearance with the vulnerability imposed on offenders through the selective
16 enforcement of *de jure* policies. A core characteristic of forbearance is that it is revocable; that is,
17 a policy forbids the offending behavior, the state has the right to enforce it, and offenders believe
18 that sanctions are possible (Holland, 2016, 234). In concessional forbearance, revocability solves
19 the credibility problem of non-contingent clientelistic exchanges (Holland, 2016, 236). But this
20 characteristic not only “cements political dependency” to the forbearing politician (Holland, 2016,
21 236) but exacerbates precarity in the population violating the policy. This precarity is distinctly
22 *not* revocable. And while one of its advantages as a distributive tool is that it is used outside the

⁶In these accounts, the incentives to engage in forbearance are electoral. But concessional forbearance is not exclusively tied to electoral considerations. In a very different context—highly industrialized countries of Western Europe—Dewey and Di Carlo (2022) shows how states engage in ‘regulatory’ forbearance as a form of industrial policy; declining to enforce firm tax violations as a way to shape markets and favor specific producer groups (rather than groups of voters).

⁷Dal Bó (2006) defines regulatory capture broadly as “the process through which special interests affect state intervention in any of its forms” (Dal Bó, 2006)[203]

⁸Precarity here refers to “a situation lacking in predictability, security or material and social welfare” (A. et al., 2022)

1 formal lawmaking system (Holland, 2016; Cunningham and Owens, 2020, 236), forbearance in
2 fact requires a policy pass through this system before it is viable strategy. Revoking the precarity
3 produced by non-enforcement therefore requires a shift in policy, not enforcement—meaning this
4 vulnerability is intrinsic to forbearance as a strategy.

5 Connivance, then, rests on the precarity manufactured by states through the gap between law
6 passage and enforcement. These paired conditions of an existing law and the choice to not enforce
7 it create a dynamic closely captured by Lovett’s conceptualization of domination, combining close
8 dependency and the arbitrary wielding of power (Lovett, 2001). It invokes a very specific type
9 of state power beyond its ‘first face’ (Lukes, 2021) and invites parallels with the concept of
10 coercive control in literature on domestic violence.⁹ Mann (1984) distinguishes between the state’s
11 power to impose mandates (despotic power) and to penetrate territory and implement policies
12 (infrastructural power) (Mann, 1984, 190). Many studies of repression, even those encompassing
13 ‘softer’ and subtler forms, reference only the former; indeed Hassan, Mattingly and Nugent (2022)
14 explicitly define political control in terms of this despotic power of the state. The concept of
15 connivance instead focuses on how power is exerted through selective and instrumental use of the
16 state’s infrastructural power in the presence of despotic mandates.

17 Crucially, while forbearance can be coercive in many ways, the concept of connivance requires
18 an intention to produce precarity in the infringing population such that it can be exploited by
19 the state or, in most cases, by its third-party state allies. An extensive literature shows how
20 selective non-enforcement can empower criminal groups (Sobering and Auyero, 2019; Dewey,
21 2012; Wilkinson, 2006), enable mass inefficiencies (Mahadevan, 2024), and produce negative
22 externalities such as environmental degradation (Dipoppa and Gulzar, 2023; Harding et al., 2024)—or
23 as in the case of state failure to enforce the mafia’s dumping of toxic waste across Southern Italy, all

⁹The concept of *coercive control* represents attempt to broaden understandings of domestic abuse beyond those of physical violence, and has been defined by Stark (2007, 228) as combined coercion—“the use of force or threats to compel or dispel a particular response” and control—“structural forms of deprivation, exploitation, and command that compel obedience indirectly” (Stark, 2007, 229) resulting in “a condition of unfreedom” (Stark, 2007, 205) experienced as entrapment.

three (Walters, 2013; D’Alisa et al., 2010). Distinct from these cases, connivance does not simply imply non-enforcement against ‘bad’ actors or with ‘bad’ consequences. Instead, it requires that the state purposefully look away, not from its criminal co-conspirators or key constituencies, but from populations in whose vulnerability the state or its allies have a vested interest.

Cui Bono? Third parties as profiteers of precarity

If connivance is used to produce precarity and facilitate predation, understanding its use as a strategy requires answering the question: Predation by whom? Who benefits¹⁰ from this coercive forbearance? The majority of studies of forbearance focus on the relationship between the state and the population being enforced (or not). And while connivance may be used to facilitate exploitation by the state itself,¹¹ in most cases it requires evaluating the incentives and distributional consequences for more than just the infringing population and the state. I focus on the role of ‘third party’ actors, other than the state or the population directly affected, who are nevertheless interested in a law’s enforcement. One straightforward example is those who profit off the illicit labor of lawbreakers, such as mafias, militias, or exploitative employers.

How can ruling parties effectively foster and maintain relationships with such third parties? Table 1 presents two dimensions along which state support to non-state allies can vary. Rows represent whether the inducement is a positive expenditure (e.g., providing cash or contracts) or a negative withdrawal of resources (e.g., revoking overburdensome regulations). Columns represent the target beneficiary—whether it is an explicit allocation towards the ally in question, or is targeted towards other, related actors such as the ally’s competitors, labor pool, or consumers.

A great deal of work in the social sciences focuses on the first column, in particular direct support from the state in the form of bribery or other incentives. However recent work from

¹⁰‘Cui bono’

¹¹Such is the case of ‘blackmail’ as described by Mares and Young (2019), in which state actors fail to enforce tax nonpayment by traveller populations in Hungary and Romania. While on its face a concession, these same state actors make a point to remind workers of their nonpayment in the lead-up to elections. In this case then, forbearance is not concessional but coercive. Its purpose is not conciliatory, but to foster vulnerability that can be exploited to gain votes.

	<i>Direct beneficiary</i>	<i>Indirect beneficiary</i>
<i>Expenditure</i>	Support (i.e., clientelism/corruption)	Burdening (i.e., regulation of competitors)
<i>Withdrawal</i>	Leniency (i.e., concessional forbearance)	Connivance (i.e., coercive forbearance)

Table 1: *Types of state assistance for a third party ally*. Columns are beneficiary type, and clarify whether the allocation is targeted towards the ally in question (making them a direct beneficiary), or towards other actors such as the ally’s competitors (making them an indirect beneficiary). Rows are inducement type, and represent whether the strategy involves the ‘positive’ extension of resources (expenditure) or the ‘negative’ removal of resources (withdrawal).

Holland (2017); Cunningham and Owens (2020); Harding et al. (2024); Wilkinson (2006) and others focus on strategic *leniency*, where state actors support non-state allies by declining to enforce their myriad offenses; respectively poor voters (engaged in squatting), specific sectors and firms (engaged in tax evasion), construction contractors (engaged in deforestation), and communal militias (engaged in electoral violence). With some groups however, states have an incentive to avoid explicit or direct favoritism, especially when these groups are engaged in violence (Carey, Mitchell and Scharpf, 2022). In such instances, the state may opt for indirect forms of support, and avoid traceable resource transfers. A positive but indirect strategy of ‘burdening,’ may involve targeting of rival groups with excessive regulation or repression. Finally, connivance refers to state assistance characterized by a negative expenditure targeted towards an indirect beneficiary. It is a coercive form of forbearance, where the state facilitates exploitation—through inaction—at the behest of its non-state allies.

By considering the role of these exploitative third parties in enforcement decisions, I expand the population of cases in which forbearance is plausibly purposeful and redistributive; but far from concessional. I contend that connivance becomes an especially viable strategy when there is significant state reliance on a extortionate third party who benefits from the enhanced vulnerability of affected lawbreakers. Four stylized—and necessarily brief—potential examples of connivance are laid out in Table 2.

Table 2: Empirical examples of connivance

<i>The Example</i>	<i>The Policy</i>	<i>The Actors</i>	<i>Connivance</i>
In the midst of an ongoing crackdown on undocumented immigrants, the U.S. federal government directed enforcement agencies to selectively pause raids and arrests; specifically targeting the agricultural industry.	A January 20, 2025 Executive Order by President Donald Trump “Protecting the American People Against Invasion” (The White House, 2025); Immigration & Nationality Act (INA).	Enforcer: The U.S. federal government; U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE); local enforcement partners Infringing population: Undocumented and unregistered immigrants in the U.S. Third party: U.S. agricultural employers	The abrupt shift of the U.S. administration’s ongoing mass deportation campaign towards <i>selective non-enforcement</i> of undocumented immigrants working on farms was aimed at avoiding “hurting industries...[President Trump] does not want to lose” (Aleaziz and Kanno-Youngs, 2025). President Trump himself acknowledged this in a social media post: “Our great Farmers...have been stating that our very aggressive policy on immigration is taking...workers away from them, with those jobs being almost impossible to replace” (Aleaziz and Kanno-Youngs, 2025). In lobbying for this position, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins reportedly explained that “farmers rely on immigrants to work long hours”(Pager et al., 2025), because they “cannot find Americans willing to do the physically onerous work” (Pager et al., 2025). By exercising forbearance only selectively, against immigrant farmworkers, the Trump administration has engaged in connivance—consolidating the vulnerability of undocumented workers in the interest of agricultural employers who rely on the “cheap and disposable labor” (Ngai, 2014, 3) made possible by these workers’ precarious legal position. While enforcement writ large continues, selective non-enforcement was exercised against the populations on whose labor Trump’s allies exploit.
Despite laws against settling on public land, officials in Nairobi, Kenya have selectively declined to enforce laws against the habitation of slums and sub-standard shacks and tenement buildings which proliferate in the city’s periphery.	Kenya’s Land Act of 2017 requires that authorities “shall issue a notice to the unlawful occupiers of public land to vacate the land” and evict tenants (Government of Kenya, 2017, Part VIII Section 64.(1), 2612)	Enforcer: Politicians, chiefs, and officials responsible for enforcing land grabs in Nairobi, Kenya Infringing population: Informal settlers on Nairobi’s public land Third party: Well-connected landlords overseeing construction and habitation in these informal slums	Urban land markets in Nairobi are “heavily influenced by what the local government does (or fails to do)...and the extent to which these rules are applied and for whom they are enforced” (Earle and Grant, 2019, 2). Landlords in Nairobi profit enormously from illicit settlements erected on public land: as noted by (Mwau and Sverdlik, 2020, 487), “hazardous informal shelter in Nairobi can be highly lucrative,” with up to four times higher returns than middle- and high-income housing. Kenyan authorities selectively engage in a “a lack of approval or enforcement...a “silent” policy of enabling tenement production,” (Mwau and Sverdlik, 2020, 495) which enables landlords and structure owners to extract from the city’s most vulnerable communities in the form of from informal rent, illicitly collected. Political appointees, including chiefs, have private interests which “can mean some criminal activity is tolerated due to the income it generates” (Price et al., 2016, 15). In addition to corrupt kickbacks, tenants often maintain coercive patronage relationships with structure-owners and landlords in which tenants are expected to support “the political interests of the latter” (Rigon, 2015, 2768). A strategy of connivance by local officials towards residents of informal areas run by their allies benefits these specific landlords and structure-owners, who both pass on profits and votes to (non-)enforcers.

	<i>The Example</i>	<i>The Policy</i>	<i>The Actors</i>	<i>Connivance</i>
	The Colombian government has failed to consistently enforce artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) of gold along the pacific coast, especially in territory populated by indigenous and Afro-Colombian populations.	Decree 2235 in 2012 instructed police to destroy untitled mining operations, effectively criminalizing long-informal ASM operations (Mindefensa, 2012).	Enforcer: Colombian law enforcement agencies Infringing population: Informal, small-scale subsistence gold miners (<i>barequeros</i>) Third party: Armed actors including Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN)	Between 80% and 90% of gold in Colombia comes from seldom-enforced ASM (Massé and Munevar', 2017). This “uneven and insufficient” enforcement (Martínez-Fernández, 2019, 7) is not due to an inability to locate mines, which often operate in full view of authorities (Massé and Munevar', 2017; ABColombia, 2012). Instead, it is a function of the selective complicity of local authorities towards armed groups who extort illicit mining operations for profit (Massé and Munevar', 2017). A common complaint is that “all the world sees [them] coming and going...except public officials” (Translated by author; Massé and Camargo', 2012, 41), and security forces have been accused of withholding protection of miners in order to facilitate their extortion (Massé and Munevar', 2017, 17). Gold has surpassed cocaine as the main source of armed group revenues in Colombia (Berg, Ziemer and Kohan, 2021), and the ELN in particular relies on its highly profitable extortion—not operation—of illegal mines (Massé and Munevar', 2017; Martínez-Fernández, 2019). These Colombian authorities are engaged in connivance: perpetuating, through selective non-enforcement, the vulnerability of local miners in order to enable their exploitation by armed groups in return for kickbacks.
II	City officials in Madrid, Spain failed to enforce extensive illicit electricity hookups by residents of a specific area of the city: Cañada Real, often called “Europe’s largest shantytown” (Gil, 2022), a 15km strip of informal housing on public land to the city’s Southeast.	Spain’s Criminal Code Chapter VI Subchapter 3 Article 255 prohibits illegal connections to the electrical grid, and provides precise guidelines for penalties and enforcement of the offense (Ministerio de Justicia, 2016)	Enforcer: Law enforcement officials in the Autonomous Community of Madrid, Spain Infringing population: Residents of Cañada Real informal settlements with illicit connections to the electrical grid (the majority) Third party: Commercial real estate developers in Madrid	In 2020, electricity supplier Naturgy cut off electricity supply to Cañada Real, forcing most residents—largely migrants, most of whom are children—to abandon their powerless homes (Jones, 2021). At the time of the shutdown, only 4 out of 1,800 total connections to the electrical grid in the settlement were legal (Duran, 2021). The state’s restraint cannot be attributed to lack of capacity (EFE, 2021), popular will or ignorance of the situation (EFE, 2020), ambiguous jurisdiction (Sánchez, 2022) and certainly not a desire to appease the population of the neighborhood (Bradock, 2021; Quesada, 2023). A representative for Cañada Real argued in a complaint that the state’s restraint was a form of “direct coercion for the most vulnerable to abandon their homes ... [with the purpose of benefiting] the urban developments of southeast” Madrid (Marín, 2022). The beneficiaries of this state restraint certainly included urban real estate developers, whose sprawling developments in eyesight of the settlement have been continually stalled due to complaints from residents (Montaner, 2021). Benefiting too is Madrid Community President Isabela Díaz Ayuso’s administration, whose reelection campaign proposed ambitious urban development projects and expansions to Madrid’s Metro System southeast, in the area surrounding the settlement (Comunidad de Madrid, 2022). In declining to enforce its own policies, her administration engaged in connivance, ultimately passively displacing the population in order to benefit its own political agenda.

1 It is beyond the scope of this article to lay each case in Table 2 out in its full complexity
2 and detail, but examining key differences and similarities is instructive. First, there is important
3 variation between these cases. These four examples take place across multiple regions of the world,
4 from generally high-capacity and income contexts such as the U.S. and Spain to the middle- and
5 lower-income states of Colombia and Kenya. The third-party actors vary as well; from industrial
6 farms and urban developers in the West, to armed actors in Latin America, and landlords in Africa.
7 The ignored infraction in each case varies widely as well, encompassing illicit electricity hookups,
8 border crossings, informal settlements, and artisanal mining.

9 What remains consistent however is the nature of the relationships between the three primary
10 actors featured in each case, as summarized in Figure 1. Connivance requires that the enforcing
11 actor actively restrains from enforcement, either in part or in total; this feature it shares with more
12 traditional ideas of forbearance as described by Holland (2016) and others. The key distinguishing
13 feature of connivance is the introduction of a third-party interest, with its own relationships to
14 the enforcer and the infringing population. In a framework of connivance, the third party has
15 some form of alliance with relevant state actors, be it through the provision of votes, bribes, or
16 other forms of support. Moreover, the third party also has exploitative power over the infringing
17 population, and stands to benefit from their precarity. It is this exploitative relationship which
18 makes connivance a potent tool for state actors seeking to strengthen or maintain their alliance
19 with its third-party allies.

20 There are other commonalities between the cases which help elucidate the advantages of
21 connivance either as a substitute or complement to other strategies of state support (see Table
22 1). Just as concessional forbearance is cheaper than welfare through official state programs such as
23 social security (Holland, 2017), connivance is cheaper than bribes, physical repression, crackdowns,
24 or evictions. It is also notable that each of these stylized cases take place in more or less democratic
25 contexts. This is not necessarily a strict scope condition, and it is beyond the scope of this article to
26 definitively state democracy's role in enabling connivance as a strategy. However, democracy may

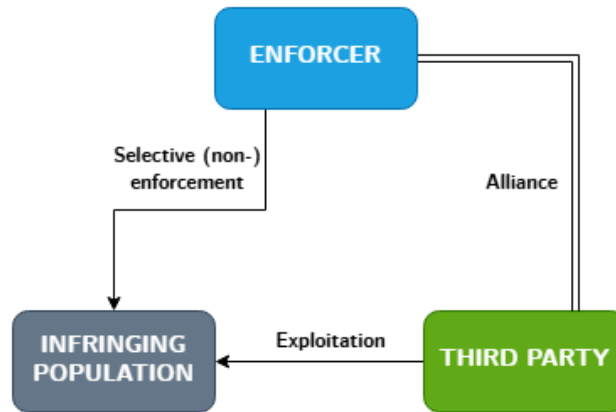


Figure 1: Relationships between key actors in connivance

1 foster the relationship between the state and third parties which is itself a necessary pre-requisite
 2 for connivance. When the state is not all-encompassing or autocratic, parties and politicians may
 3 increase their reliance on non-state allies in their quest to gain and maintain power. Moreover,
 4 democracy may foster a situation in which state actors are unwilling to be seen as actively favoring
 5 specific third parties over others, making connivance—an indirect and ‘negative’ strategy, as described
 6 in Table 1—attractive. This is especially true in contexts where the third party is itself violent or
 7 illicit (Carey, Mitchell and Scharpf, 2022).

8 Another similarity between the cases is the scope, if not the nature, of the infringement for
 9 which the state exercises forbearance. All of these are vast informal enterprises which are likely
 10 difficult to enforce entirely in the first place. The state’s ability to plausibly disguise enforcement
 11 variation as a state capacity issue may make it easier for the state to portray these patterns as
 12 benign. Just as perceptions of capacity matter for deterrence in a positive sense, perceptions of low
 13 state capacity may help states ‘get away with’ connivance. ? show that when local governments
 14 suspected of Mafia infiltration in Italy are dismissed, the resulting fall in petty crimes is due
 15 less to high capacity for enforcement, but to perceptions that the state is more powerful than
 16 it is. This mechanism can work in the other direction as well. Finally, when the populations
 17 responsible for law violations are an outgroup, or already vulnerable—as is true in every case

described above—connivance can, in a phrase, ‘kill two birds with one stone,’ and foster increased control over suspect populations, while simultaneously depressing their ability to advocate publicly for themselves. Not only are state actors able to provide assistance to valuable allies, but such vulnerable populations are already collectively weak and often socially ostracized, reducing the likelihood of societal backlash.

The remainder of this article explores a fifth example: the use of connivance by the state government of Lagos, Nigeria through the selective non-enforcement of the state’s 2022 ban on okada motorcycle taxis.

2 Connivance in the Lagos transport sector

In what follows, I argue that the state government of Lagos, Nigeria engaged in a strategy of *connivance* in its selective enforcement of a ban on ‘okada’ motorcycle taxis which began in mid-2022, as illustrated in Figure 2. The state (enforcer) chose to enforce the ban at such a time—and in such a way—so as to increase the vulnerability of okada operators (infringing population) and ease their exploitation by a key ally of the state: The Lagos transport Union (third party). This Union operates a complex system of coerced taxation through controlling motorparks along Lagos roadways, where they extort passing informal commercial transit operators. Around elections, the Union also mobilizes voters and commits violence in support of Lagos’s ruling party. With an election six months away, and okada riders in the midst of mobilizing against Union extortion, the state acted. The strategic timing and geography of the ban’s enforcement not only dulled the existential threat okada riders posed to the Union, but forced riders into motorpark-laden areas and therefore increased the Union’s opportunities to exploit them.

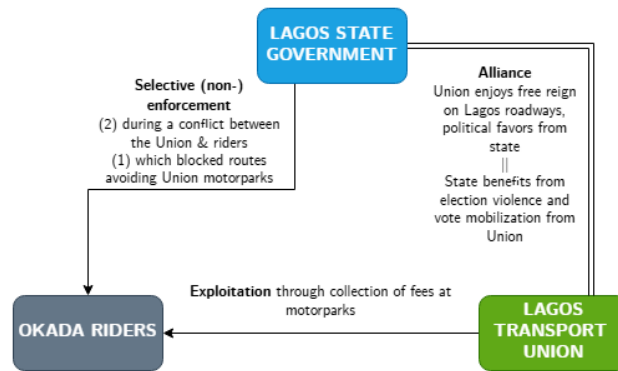


Figure 2: Relationships between key actors in connivance: The case of the Lagos okada ban

1 ‘Eko traffic’ and the okada ban

2 Lagos is Nigeria’s (and Africa’s) largest city, and the center of power in the southwest of the
 3 country—almost the furthest southwest you can get without crossing the border into Benin, or
 4 wading into the Gulf of Guinea (see Figure 3a and 3b). Lagos houses 10% of the country’s massive
 5 and rapidly growing population, crammed into only 0.5% of its physical landmass. And though it
 6 is no longer the federal capital¹² it remains a crucial economic and social powerhouse, and its state
 7 politics consistently reverberate to the federal level.

8 Like the country, there are strong and evident political geographies in Lagos. And like the
 9 country, Lagos wealth and (formal) employment is densely concentrated in the south, especially
 10 on small islands near the port. Meanwhile the vast majority of residents live on the mainland. The
 11 islands have the marina, the beaches, the city’s main tourist attractions, the fanciest hotels, and the
 12 multinational corporate headquarters. But as in many major cities, the residents of Lagos generally
 13 live and work in geographically separate areas.

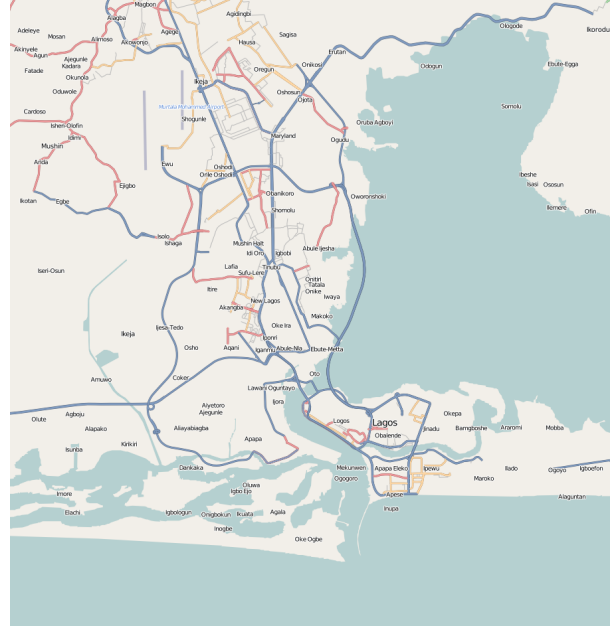
14 Lagos’s economic geography means that Lagos traffic is infamous; a trip of ten kilometers
 15 can easily take two or three hours, and sometimes up to eight.¹³ Public transportation options

¹²Negotiations between the country’s highly disparate North (the country’s most populous and poorest region, largely Muslim and Fulani or Hausa) and South (largely Christian and Igbo in the Southeast, and Yoruba in the Southwest) in the early 1990s moved the capital to the more centrally located and neutral planned city of Abuja

¹³‘Eko Traffic’ (Lagos Traffic) is the name of a cocktail I enjoyed at three different bars across three different neighborhoods of Lagos in the summer of 2023, it is so ubiquitous of a joke. While the precise recipe differed from



(a) Nigeria, West Africa



(b) (Central) Lagos, Nigeria

Figure 3: Maps of Nigeria and Lagos

are limited and unreliable. Roads are overburdened and not always in good repair. There is a never-ending need for the road transport of millions throughout the city on a daily basis. The result is a multifaceted landscape of informal transit options, and a near-universal reliance on them (Agbibo, 2020): these include bright yellow mini-buses (‘danfo’), tuk-tuk-like tricycles (‘keke papep’ or ‘keke marwa’), and okada motorcycles.

Okada were by all accounts an improvised and spontaneous introduction into the web of transport options available in Lagos, heralding back nearly 70 years to a period of military rule. Until recently, they were one of the most commonly used transport options for many Lagosians. Okada weave in and out of traffic jams with a dangerous deftness. Because of their ability to navigate road congestion, as well as much lower fuel requirements and costs, many thousands okada have generally been in operation across the state, ready to be hailed both from inner residential roads and major highways (see Figure 4).

place to place, its strength did not.



Figure 4: Photo: Okada riders, Lagos. Image sourced from <https://punchng.com/lagos-renews-campaign-against-okada/>

However on May 18, 2022 Lagos State Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu held a press conference in which he announced that starting on June 1, his administration would begin enforcing a ban on okada motorcycle taxis originally passed in 2018 (Adelagun, 2022; Osazuwa, 2017). The announcement of the ban's enforcement provoked high anxiety across Lagos, as individuals feared its effect on their already intolerably long and expensive commutes (Enimola and Joseph, 2022; Ige, 2022; Mosadioluwa, 2022; Enimola, 2022). However, the state government stood firm; according to Governor Sanwo-Olu and various spokespersons, the ban was necessary for crime prevention (Adelagun, 2022; Reporters, 2022), traffic control (Adekoya, 2022), and for reducing environmental pollution and degradation across the state (Badmus, 2022). But there was one curious aspect of the 2022 Lagos okada ban's enforcement: namely, its selectivity. While the ban being enforced technically applied to all major roads across Lagos State (Lagos State of Nigeria, 2018), the government in 2022 detailed a specific list of areas in which it intended to enforce the ban (Reuters, 2022).¹⁴ This left many parts of Lagos under the letter of the law, but outside the scope of state enforcement.

¹⁴See SI §section B.4 for more details on the technicalities of this ban, as well as on the history of okada bans within and beyond Lagos.

1 The okada ban is a prime example of a traffic restriction which maps neatly onto pre-existing
2 socio-political cleavages. Many okada riders are from Muslim and Hausa or Fulani-majority
3 northern states who have traveled to Lagos in search of work, often as a result of conflict and
4 climate change in the country's North. In particular, there exist differences in ethnic group, region,
5 language, and religion between native Lagosians and many okada riders, which adds a communal
6 dimension to the ban's enactment. News reports on the ban tend to be tinged with inter-ethnic
7 suspicion, often conflating okada riders with perpetrators of jihadist violence in the North such
8 as Boko Haram (Odunsi, 2022), as well as crime writ large (Mosadioluwa, 2022; Tribune Online,
9 2022). Riding an okada is an extremely vulnerable occupation and is viewed with hostility and
10 suspicion by many Nigerians, even as they make daily use of the services these riders offer.

11 So why did the Lagos government selectively enforce a controversial and restrictive policy
12 such as the okada ban? I argue that understanding selective enforcement of the okada ban requires
13 understanding the interests and incentives of not only the Lagos State Government and okada riders
14 themselves, but additional interested third parties. In particular, I argue that the state selectively
15 enforced the okada ban in order prop up its preferred faction of Lagos's transport unions amidst an
16 internal power struggle, through indirectly increasing the Union's ability to engage in extraction.

17 **The third party: Touts and transit policy in Lagos**

18 In the late 1970s, as the population grew and Lagos traffic steadily became more congested, the
19 burgeoning informal transport industry began to organize. Given the rising transportation needs of
20 the city, the sector became a primary growth industry—but also one where extractive actors stood
21 to make enormous profit and gain enormous power.

22 Today, transport unions are commonplace: extractors from commercial drivers, rather than
23 representative unions *of* drivers. Transport unions set up shop along the Lagos road network, in
24 areas called 'motorparks,' where they charge every commercial driver that passes a ticket for usage
25 of the road. The money unions collect from drivers does not go towards the improvement of public

1 infrastructure, or to the state at all, and Lagos drivers and riders see no assistance or benefits from
2 ‘their’ union. The unions monitor, manipulate, tax, and coerce commercial drivers of all types
3 of vehicles on a daily basis; in this way, it is perhaps as accurate to describe Lagos transport
4 *mafias*, rather than transport unions. It is estimated the unions bring in many billions of naira
5 every year through their extraction from drivers,¹⁵ and over its roughly 50-year existence, these
6 mafias have become some of the most powerful players in Lagos politics. This is in part because
7 ground-level ‘bureaucrats’ of the unions—also referred to as ‘touts,’ ‘agberos,’ ‘area boys,’¹⁶
8 ‘thugs,’ or ‘hoodlums’—are crucial tools for politicians around election time for the purpose of
9 voter intimidation and coercion (Fourchard, 2023). Agbiboa (2022) provides a succinct summary
10 of the most powerful branch of the transport unions:

11 “Consider the NURTW branch in Lagos. Founded in 1978, the NURTW
12 constitutes the primary support base for the Lagos state governor during
13 election campaigns. The state is often unwilling or unable to rein in the
14 union’s predatory treatment of its workers. The Union routinely engages
15 in patronage politics and voter mobilization to support various parties and
16 candidates in return for permission to levy taxes on informal transport operators
17 in public spaces. ‘The NURTW is a law unto itself,’ said a danfo driver.”
18 (Agbiboa, 2022, 179)

19 During elections, Union touts—at the behest of their powerful, well-connected chairmen—block
20 voting places, beat voters of the opposition party, participate in rallies, and perform other services
21 for the dominant All Progressives Congress (APC) political party.¹⁷ The rest of the time, they set
22 up fiefdoms in motorparks and adjacent bus terminals, their primary points of extraction, where
23 they collect their daily wares from informal commercial transport operators (see Figure 5). Union

¹⁵See investigative reports from the International Centre for Investigative Reporting (ICIR) Nigeria, including Odinaka Anudu’s “Money for the boys: How ‘agberos’ pocket billions of Lagos transport revenue.” ICIR. <https://shorturl.at/pho6a>

¹⁶I use these terms interchangeably for the sake of simplicity; but there are some subtle differences in their local use. In particular, ‘agberos’ sometimes implies the area boys who have ‘made it.’

¹⁷See SI §B.2 for more on the APC and the political context of Lagos and Nigeria.

1 touts are a source of constant strife for many commercial transport operators, who find themselves
2 at the whim of these henchmen on a day-to-day basis.

3 Union-led motorparks are thriving centers of commerce and chaos. They vary in their formality;
4 some are large tracts of land along the side of a road, surrounded by a fence; others are less
5 officially delineated, and seem to consist largely of the people and vehicles stretching across the
6 roads and spilling over the side, as opposed to any physical ‘park.’ Often, the parks and their
7 personnel (touts, drivers) stretch across multiple lanes of a road, blocking or slowing passage
8 of all passing vehicles, and extracting ‘ticket fares’ from all commercial drivers who pass. The
9 conglomeration of passengers boarding and alighting, drivers passing through, and touts milling
10 about collecting their dues means that motorparks and their surrounding areas are packed with
11 people. The masses in turn attract street vendors and hawkers, so many motorparks also feature
12 makeshift markets of stalls selling grilled maize, apparel, or gin in small hot sauce-like packets.
13 Representatives of various branches of law enforcement are very often spotted ‘hanging out’ in the
14 park, chatting to touts, admonishing drivers, or simply surveying the scene.

15 ‘Omo Area’ (Area boy), or agbero¹⁸ culture is a distinct Southwestern Nigeria phenomenon,
16 sharing some similarities with gang culture. It connotes the thousands of (mostly young, mostly
17 male) individuals crowding bus stops, stations, and motorparks demanding money from, cajoling,
18 and harassing commercial transportation drivers, often violently—the foot-soldiers of transport
19 unions. Agberos are there to ensure that every commercial transport driver who comes through the
20 park that day buys a ticket.

21 Lagos transport unions do not fit neatly into the typologies social scientists have offered categorizing
22 non-state, third-party actors in politics. While they are a union in both name and technically
23 in function, using this label may fail to communicate the real behavior and intention of these
24 groups. They are sector-constrained interest groups; they don uniforms, collect dues, and any
25 litigation by or against them is handled by the industrial courts of Nigeria rather than other judicial

¹⁸*Agberos* comes from Yoruba and the literal translation refers to someone who beckons or herds (agbo) a group of passengers onto a bus (akero).



Figure 5: Example of Lagos motorpark (photo by author, July 10, 2023)

1 systems. However, they are largely unrepresentative of the workers they claim to represent; and
2 do not engage in collective bargaining with employers on behalf of transport operators. And while
3 violence is certainly not foreign to union activity around the world, their particular relationship
4 with violence and with the political machine of Lagos make them unique. For these reasons,
5 the transport unions also share some similarities with criminal organizations and gangs, most
6 commonly explored in the context of Latin America (Lessing, 2024; Arias, 2017; Blattman et al.,
7 2025; Feldmann and Luna, 2022) as well as the mafias of southern Europe (Dipoppa, 2025;
8 Calderoni, 2011). Namely, Lagos transport unions exert occasional fatal violence and frequent
9 extortive violence over civilian actors, and maintain control over particular industries as well as
10 pockets of urban territory. However, while the transport unions engage in a variety of activities
11 that are not by any means strictly legal; their main source of income is not from protection
12 rackets, drug smuggling, human trafficking, illicit natural resource or mining operations, or any
13 other inherently criminal enterprise. They are formally recognized interest groups whose income

comes from the collection of worker fees and tickets to pass through motorparks—higher and more frequent fees than necessary perhaps, and with limited services offered in return, but nevertheless a legal and legitimate source of income. They also share some commonalities with paramilitary groups and pro-government militias (Carey, Mitchell and Scharpf, 2022; Acemoglu, Robinson and Santos, 2009). Like these groups, Lagos transport unions can and do influence elections through interference and violence, and there certainly exists a symbiotic relationship between politicians and transport unions. However unlike paramilitaries, these groups’ primary function is certainly not broad or targeted political violence, and they are not, in fact, ‘armed’ groups in any sense of the word. It is highly atypical for members to carry firearms, for example.

Argument and hypotheses

My contention is that the selective enforcement of the Lagos okada ban—over both time and space—is an example of *connivance*, and its patterns are motivated by the interests not of the lawbreakers themselves (okada riders) but of exploitative third parties on whom the state relies (Lagos transport unions). The okada ban’s incomplete enforcement served to ‘produce precarity’ in riders whose livelihoods were made illicit by the ban, making it more difficult for the riders to organize in opposition to their exploiters.¹⁹ I contend that *variation* in enforcement of the ban across areas in Lagos served to displace riders to Union-led motorparks, where they do most of their extraction. The state therefore selectively enforced policies aimed at okada riders in order to ease their exploitation by the Union, the state’s third-party ally. My principal assertion, then, is that:

Argument The Lagos State Government varies enforcement of the okada ban in order to appease the Lagos transport Union, riders’ primary extractors.

With the okada ban, as with many laws, enforcement is not all or nothing: there was neither

¹⁹SI §E introduces a simple sequential model formalizing this logic. See SI §§? for a more detailed qualitative analysis of okada rider organization in the lead-up and aftermath of the ban.

1 a completely absent nor a completely comprehensive enforcement regime. In fact, I contend that
2 there is strategic variation in enforcement which neatly aligns with Union interests. Specifically,
3 my theory predicts that enforcement patterns will vary *spatially* according to where Union extraction
4 takes place, and *temporally* according to the Lagos State Government's reliance on the Union to
5 maintain power. This leads to two more specific hypotheses regarding variation in enforcement:

6 **H1.** Enforcement of the okada ban varies *spatially* so as to displace okada into Union-controlled
7 motorparks.

8 **H2.** Enforcement of the okada ban varies *temporally* according to state perception of Union
9 reliability.

10 In what follows, I describe how the state government selectively enforced the okada ban in
11 order to assist the Union's ability to extract from okada drivers, and to address the looming threat
12 these riders posed.

13 **3 Empirical Strategy**

14 I probe these hypotheses across the three subsequent sections. In Section 4, I trace the law's initial
15 enactment and enforcement with data obtained through through participant observation on Lagos
16 motorways and by interviewing Union members, okada riders, and political and law enforcement
17 officials; as well as with original data compiled by consulting archival newspaper reports. I show
18 that okada riders in the leadup to the ban were creating issues for Union leadership, culminating

19 In Section 5 I address hypothesis 1, or the *spatial* variation of the state's selective enforcement.
20 I use original data collected on ban enforcement locations and motorpark locations, as well as
21 Very High Resolution (VHR) remote sensed imagery to count okada motorbikes on individual
22 road segments across multiple dates both before and after the ban's proposed enforcement. I show
23 that not only did the number of okada (as expected) decrease slightly in enforced areas after June

2022, but increased substantially on road segments featuring union motorparks. I then employ a detailed quantitative analysis of the spatial distribution of Union territory and state enforcement areas to show that okada riders' displacement to motorparks was *uniquely* driven by the particular selective enforcement areas chosen by the state, as compared to other possible enforcement areas. Specifically, I transform maps of the Lagos road system into a connected spatial network. I then simulate 10,000 routes between random points on the network, and show that blocking segments enforced by the state disproportionately drive riders into Union territory. I then collect data on other potential areas where enforcement might have been prioritized, based on Lagos state government statements motivating the ban—including traffic congestion, pollution, income, police presence, and crime—to construct potential *counterfactual* enforcement patterns. Running these same simulated routes under these counterfactual enforcement patterns, I find that none of them have the same effect of pushing okada riders into Union motorparks.

Finally, in Section 6, I address hypothesis 2, or the *temporal* variation in state enforcement. I utilize an unexpected and close election result in the Lagos presidential elections of 2023, in which former Lagos State Governor—and primary Union patron—Bola Tinubu of the APC lost in his home state to upstart challenger Peter Obi of the Labour Party. I argue this close election reduced confidence of the APC and the Lagos State Government in the Union's ability to sway elections on their behalf. While the Union turned this around with rejuvenated efforts during the Gubernatorial election about a month later (which was marked by heavily increased electoral interference, and ultimately an APC victory for the incumbent Lagos governor), I show that this inter-election period was marked by a significant decrease in enforcement by the state, in particular affecting the number of okada present in motorparks according to VHR estimates. I treat the Presidential election as a shock to the state's interest in fostering riders' precarity on behalf of the Unions, and argue that resulting changes in enforcement during the inter-election period were due to perceived Union defection during the Presidential election.

Before turning to this evidence, I briefly detail the original data collection supporting these

1 efforts.

2 **Geolocated data along the Lagos road network**

3 **Locations of ban enforcement**

4 I consult original policy documents to code the areas in which the okada ban was selectively
5 enforced in the period following June 2022. The government announced ahead of time the areas
6 of the state and city that it would actively enforce.

7 **Examples of enforced areas announced by Lagos State Government 2022**

8 Agege Motor Road/Oshodi Loop, Oshodi, Ikeja/Mushin Local Government
Mushin/Isolo Link Bridge, Mushin Oshodi Local Government
9 Dorman Long Bridge Surulere/Lagos Mainland Local Government
Ojuelegba Bridge, Surulere/Lagos Mainland Local Government
National Stadium Flyover, Surulere Local Government
Iganmu/Funsho Williams Bridge Surulere Local Government

10 The ban's (selective) enforcement went into effect on 1 June 2022. The state listed roughly 60
11 stretches of road, highway, or specific bridges or flyovers; as well as over a dozen local government
12 areas and specific councils and neighborhoods, in which the government would enforce the ban.
13 I hand-code these individually and merge this dataset with geospatial road data in Lagos²⁰ to get
14 a full universe of areas in which the state could choose to enforce, but with an indicator of where
15 they announced their intention to. I refer to these areas as 'intention to enforce' or ITE areas. This
16 is the primary dataset I use to map cross-sectional state enforcement (see Figure6 for a map of ITE
17 areas, marked with ×).

²⁰Data available at https://data.humdata.org/dataset/hotosm_nga_roads?

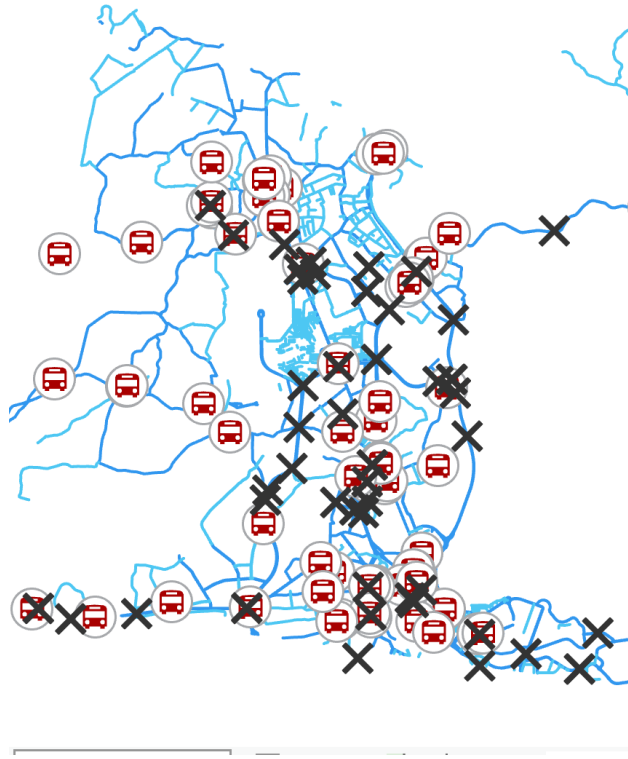


Figure 6: Motorpark and okada ban ITE locations in Lagos, Nigeria (mapped by author). Motorparks are represented by red bus icons; ITE areas are represented by ×.

Motorpark locations in Lagos

Measuring the geographic presence of motorpark operations is slightly more complicated; transport unions in Lagos border between state-sanctioned and illicit, and their activities are largely informal. Nevertheless, motorparks are palpably visible (see Figure 5 for an example of a motorpark). They are also mostly permanent; while new parks sometimes do crop up, change hands, or split, the general locations of major parks have mostly stayed the same over the decades.

I utilize a list in an Appendix of a transport statistics report produced by former Lagos Governor Ambode's administration in 2019²¹. This strategy is useful in that it avoids any post-treatment bias, as it was put together in the years before the okada ban's enforcement. I am left with a list of over

²¹See <https://mepb.lagosstate.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/sites/29/2022/02/Transport-Statistics-2019.pdf>

1 100 motorparks, which represent the primary locations of Union extortion of okada riders in Lagos
2 state. Figure 6 shows maps these park locations (represented by red bus icons).

3 **Satellite and Streetview-based informal transport density estimates**

4 Where are informal commercial transport operators—particularly okada riders—located? My
5 primary measure of this is constructed through analysis of very high resolution (VHR) remote-sensing
6 imagery. I combine measurements from publicly available Google Earth Historical Imagery and
7 supplementary, commercially available imagery from Airbus and Maxar VHR satellite images,
8 which have a spatial resolution of 30-50cm—meaning each pixel in the resulting geo-located
9 image measures less than half a meter²². At this resolution, it is possible to distinguish individual
10 commercial vehicles, including okada motorcycles, and therefore to create measures of okada
11 presence over space and time on the Lagos roadway. I utilize both manual coding and computer
12 vision models to count of the number of motorcycles present per segment of road over time on
13 the Lagos road network. I supplement this with (temporally sparser but more precise) Google
14 Streetview data to establish baseline counts, as well as lower-resolution but more readily available
15 satellite imagery, for which I utilize methods of Bayesian hierarchical spatial disaggregation to
16 infer okada prevalence in images where the resolution is not high enough to visually distinguish
17 them manually, as described in SI §D.1. My VHR data consist of roughly 10 observations between
18 2021 and 2023, covering a continuous 75km² stretch of Lagos; including roughly a quarter of
19 banned areas and motorparks in the state.

²²See §D.1 for more details

Interviews, participant observation, newspaper archives

Fieldwork and interviews

I spent about 6 months observing the aftermath of the ban while living in Lagos. My fieldwork began in the summer of 2023 and continued in the spring and summer of 2024 and 2025. My fieldwork²³ encompassed participant observation including in motorparks, at stops and intersections, and in transit; as well as semi-structured and unstructured interviews with over 75 stakeholders, ranging from the highest-ranking officials in the Lagos Ministry of Transportation and law enforcement agencies, to well connected Union chairmen and logistics operators, to okada riders themselves.

Participant observation focused on observing the inner workings of the Lagos transportation system as a curious passenger. I conservatively estimate that I took 400 separate trips through Lagos traffic, to all corners of the city, including via taxis and Uber (as well as competitor Bolt), informal transit such as keke, danfo, and okada, and public transit options such as the BRT. Many of my most meaningful conversations were with drivers as we were in transit, whether to the local supermarket or to a far-flung motorpark. I also spent time sitting in or walking through busy bus stops, markets, and motorparks; observing the behavior of informal transport operators, Union touts, and law enforcement officials. My sampling strategy was partly based on convenience—where I believed I could safely go, or had a connection—but purposefully spanned the entire geography of Lagos, from the northern border with Ogun state, to the marina on the Gulf of Guinea, and from Ikorodu in the far northeast of the city to Badagry in the far southwest.

Beyond my participant observation, I also conducted 75 semi-structured interviews with multiple types of relevant stakeholders. Interviews largely took place in person, at locations ranging from government offices, police stations, in abandoned corners of motorparks or unregistered watering holes down the road from them, and in the lobbies of immaculate hotels. Roughly half of these interviews were with okada riders themselves. The other half were divided between Union officials

²³Approved by Yale Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol #2000035418.

Type	Number
State and law enforcement officials	10
NURTW Union officials (all factions)	17
Okada riders	38
Other transport operators	10
<i>Total</i>	<i>75</i>

Table 3: List of interviews. I conducted interviews 75 with stakeholders between June 1, 2023 and the present while based in Lagos, Nigeria. The table denotes the number of interviews conducted across five broad categories of interviewees.

across the organization’s complex hierarchy (about half), and the remainder consisted of a roughly even split between high-ranking policy and law enforcement officials, and other informal transit drivers, private operators or logistics business owners and entrepreneurs (see Table 3).

Newspaper and social media archives

Utilizing archives of mostly English-language Nigerian daily newspapers²⁴ over the past three decades, as well as social media content, official press releases and documents, and other archival and primary material, I create a localized event and network dataset for Lagos, which combines and links information on hundreds of relevant actors, places, and events, covering both recent internal political dynamics of the Union and events such as passage and enforcement of the okada ban, protests by vehicle operators, battles between rival Union factions and political factions, and interpersonal rivalries and relationships. These data allow me to analyze trends in the political dynamics between the Union, the Lagos State Government, and informal commercial transport operators qualitatively ²⁵

²⁴See SI §?? for a list

²⁵In the text, I refer to these data collectively as Transport Operator & Union Tracking (TOUT) data for short. See SI §?? for more on the specific record-gathering process and other examples.

4 Evidence: The role of the Union in the ban's enactment

My argument requires analyzing the interactions between three actors: the Lagos State Government, the Union, and informal transport operators in Lagos, particularly okada riders. I draw on newspaper and social media ('TOUT') data as well as first-hand participant observation and interviews to investigate whether and how:

Argument The Lagos State Government varies enforcement of the okada ban in response to the interests of the Lagos transport Union, riders' primary extractors.

Politicking with gangsters: Motorparks and the power of a union

Because the Lagos informal transport sector is extremely lucrative, transport unions have over the years developed rigorous hierarchies and distinct organizational cultures (Fourchard, 2023; Agbibo, 2022). The national level NURTW presides over state-level chapters, themselves affiliated with sub-unions which represent particular types of transport workers. For example, affiliated with NURTW are the Tricycle Owners and Operators Association of Nigeria (TOOAN) which manages tricycle ('keke') riders, and the Motorcycle Operators Association of Lagos (MOALS) which manages okada riders. The precise nature of the relationship between TOOAN, MOALS, and NURTW chapters at the state level has been the source of considerable strife, as I detail in the following section.

The foot soldiers of the Union are the touts working in the motorparks. Touts are there to bring some level of organization to the chaos, mainly via collecting ticket fees from commercial drivers who pass through— fees which have steadily increased in price over the last couple of years.²⁶ At the time of the ban's enforcement, it seemed to range from around NGN 200 per ticket to nearly NGN 700.²⁷ Area boys weave in and out of lines of commercial vehicles, often with

²⁶Interviews with author, including July 22, 2023

²⁷See SI §?? for an example of a motorpark ticket one okada rider showed me.

1 hands firmly on doors shouting back and forth with the drivers. Touts operate with remarkable
2 impunity, and often with the visible and tacit acknowledgment of state officials. At one motorpark
3 on the mainland, I was struck when I noticed a small group of Lagos State Traffic Management
4 Authority (LASTMA) agency officials—obvious in their yellow, red-trimmed uniforms—laughing
5 and looking on as a tout, yelling over the chaos of the park, chased after a slow-moving danfo
6 mini-bus, whipping the already-cracked windows with a long wooden rod, a wad of apparently
7 not-enough cash clutched in his other fist. Touts’ jobs are violent and often dangerous; though
8 they are also important community members—more than once, an agbero kindly helped direct me
9 when I was lost.²⁸

10 Touts are presided over by ‘unit’ chairmen who rule over a particular junction, intersection, or
11 park. They in turn are directed by ‘area’ chairmen, who are directed by zonal chairmen; meanwhile
12 the chairman of the state-level chapter of the union exerts authority over the whole operation. The
13 work of chairmen at all levels is very political, dangerous, and delicate. When I interviewed one
14 unit chairman representing tricycle riders on the mainland, he spent 15 minutes (in Yoruba) at
15 the beginning of the interview interrogating my colleague, a Nigerian, about his background and
16 purpose for being there, in order to make sure that he was not a spy for another faction or for rivals
17 who sought the chairman’s coveted position. “Chairman work is very dangerous,” he explained to
18 me apologetically afterwards, “we have many enemies”.²⁹ There are often clashes, as rival factions
19 fight over control of particularly hotly contested motorparks.³⁰

20 However, the dangerous political maneuverings of Union leadership only escalate as they
21 ascend the ladder, and as the stakes get correspondingly higher. The chairman of the NURTW
22 Lagos branch (as of 2019) MC Oluomo is a longstanding ally of President (as of 2023) Bola
23 Tinubu, the first governor of Lagos after the fall of military rule. Tinubu has long exercised control

²⁸See SI §?? for social media posts on this particular issue.

²⁹Author interview, July 14, 2024

³⁰Indeed once, after one long afternoon of chatting to reticent touts in the back of a beat-up minibus parked in a motorpark in the North, a battle for supremacy over the park broke out between loyalists of the park’s general chairman and rival foot soldiers in a nearby neighborhood. About twenty minutes after I had vacated the park, the entire stretch of road leading to the roundabout was deserted, as touts battled with guns, cutlasses, bottles and stones.

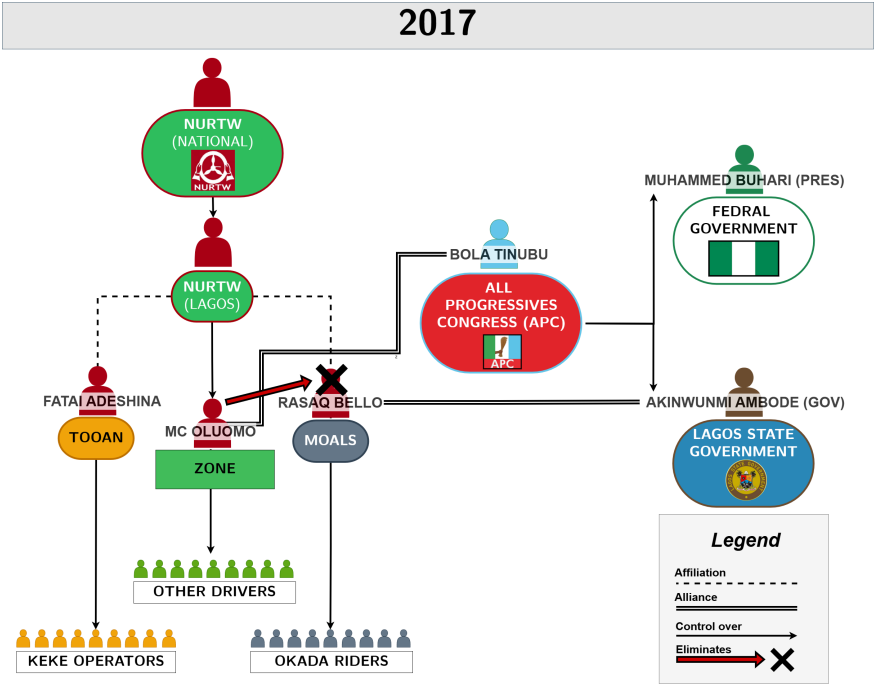
1 over the state politics of Lagos as a sort of “godfather.” Tinubu’s unique hold on formal institutions
2 in Lagos has its roots in his earlier life and in his Lagos governorship, in which he cultivated and
3 strengthened ties with informal networks of power such as the Union (Whiteman, 2013). Most
4 relevant for our purposes, Tinubu and MC Oluomo were both reportedly area boys in their youth
5 (Momoh, 2000, 188). During his governorship of Lagos, Tinubu was frequently referred to as the
6 “Area Boy Governor”, and is quoted by prominent journalist Kaye Whiteman as saying of the area
7 boys “These are my boys; I care for them.” (Whiteman, 2013, 217)

8 MC Oluomo’s rise to power in the Union was riddled with violence and with interference
9 from Tinubu, though this is not to understate his vast and loyal following. In particular, he has
10 historically been in conflict with drivers of keke and okada, and publicly rivals with the leaders of
11 two- and three-wheeler operations. When he took over as Lagos NURTW Chairman in 2019, then
12 leader of TOOAN (tricycle union) Fatai Adeshina³¹ was also vying for the top spot in the Lagos
13 NURTW chapter. Reports suggest Bola Tinubu personally called him and demanded he cede the
14 nomination to MC Oluomo (see 7).

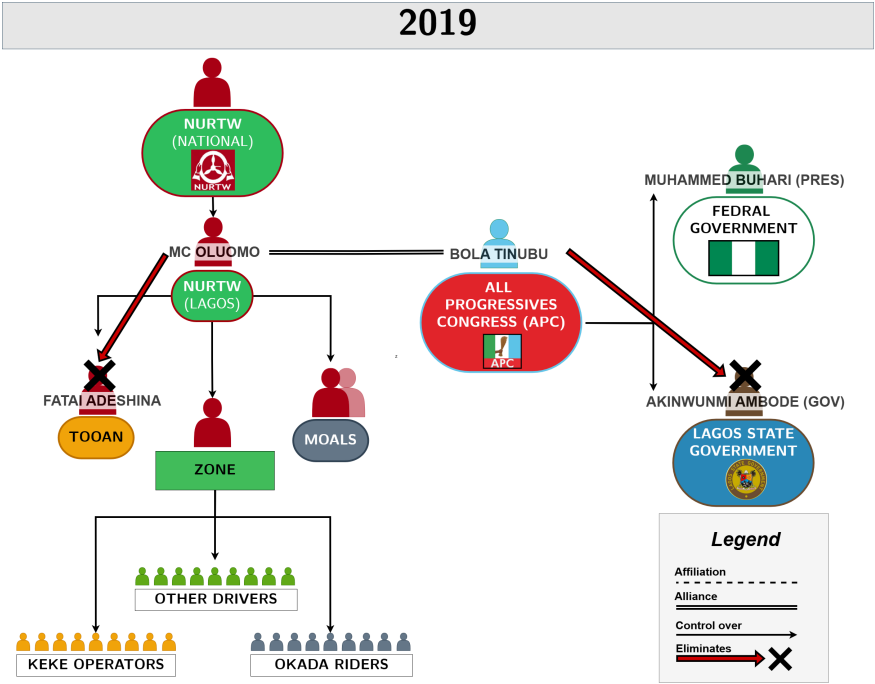
15 He fared better than his MOALS (okada union) colleague, however, who crossed paths with
16 MC Oluomo two years earlier. Rasaq Bello, who was rumored to support a different APC faction
17 than MC—and who operated in the same neighborhood, Oshodi—was shot to death in 2017,
18 almost certainly by MC’s men (Akinkuotu, 2019a; Akinsanmi, 2017; Odesola, 2022). The assassination
19 caused then Lagos State Governor Ambode to temporarily suspend NURTW from operating in
20 Lagos (Bankole, 2017; Akinsanmi, 2017), leading to an ambitious transport sector reform law
21 which attempted to regain state control over the industry (Infrastructure News, 2017; Olawoyin,
22 2017). Shortly thereafter, Tinubu, then leader of the APC, refused to allow the party to nominate
23 Governor Ambode for a second term (Akinsanmi, 2018; Abiodun, 2019), earning public support
24 from MC Oluomo on social media. Ambode’s reputation amongst people I spoke with remains
25 one of a man who got too close to disrupting big corruption, and whose second term candidacy

³¹Interviewed by author, July 10, 2023

Figure 7: Recent Union politics



(a) NURTW Lagos politics: 2017



(b) NURTW Lagos politics: 2019

1 Tinubu halted as a result (Abiodun, 2019). MC Oluomo's role in this rearrangement of Lagos
2 politics—albeit in a way that suited him quite well—is less clear. What is clear is that at least some
3 Ambode supporters connected the dots. During an APC rally for Sanwo-Olu, the *new* nominee for
4 governor to replace Ambode (and Lagos's current governor, reelected in 2023), MC Oluomo was
5 stabbed by an assailant who reportedly blamed him for Ambode's ruined political fortunes (Egbas,
6 2019). MC's political allies allegedly ensured he got medical treatment abroad (Elezuio, 2019).
7 When MC recovered, Tinubu ushered him into the Union's top spot, over the incumbent chairman,
8 an Ambode loyalist (Akinkuotu, 2019*b*; Inyang, 2019; Oyero, 2022*b*; Society Now, 2019).

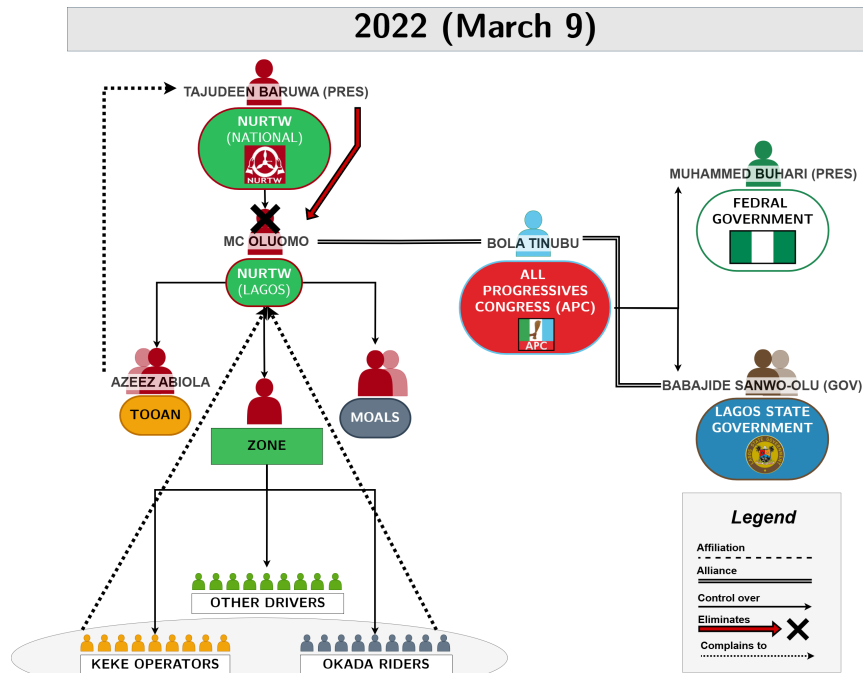
9 As is evidenced throughout the decades, the relationship between Tinubu's APC and Oluomo's
10 Union has been integral to the success of both. NURTW Lagos is not just thugs on demand for the
11 APC, and the APC is not just the political pawn of the Union. Theirs is a complex and dynamic
12 relationship; the internal politics of the APC are intricately related to the internal politics of the
13 Union, and the political success of particular factions. They have separate but also overlapping
14 goals, and their centers of power depend on each other—and, in the Union's case, on commercial
15 drivers whom they extort for billions.

16 **The lead-up to the ban's enforcement**

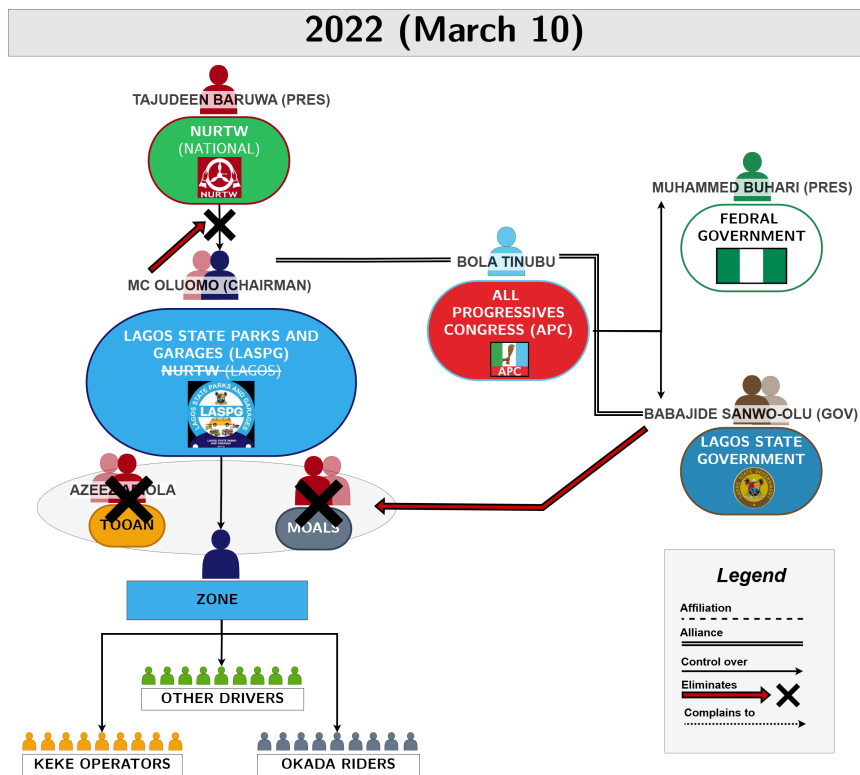
17 Shortly after MC Oluomo overtook leadership of the Union, he made moves to integrate okada and
18 keke operators directly under his control, usurping their existing unions—which had previously
19 operated independently, if under the same umbrella (Oboagwina, 2022). As a result, okada and
20 keke riders began to publicly complain about the rise in extortion at Lagos motorparks (Daily Trust,
21 2022*b*; Edema, 2022). In late 2021, this culminated in the then leader of TOOAN³² announcing
22 that excessive extortion from MC Oluomo's NURTW meant that he was looking to form an
23 alternative union of these operators, outside the purview of NURTW (Premium Times, 2022).
24 He then went over MC Oluomo's head, directly to the national NURTW president, to complain of

³²Interview with author August 28, 2023

Figure 8: Internal union developments in the lead-up to the okada ban.



(a) NURTW political developments: 9 March 2022



(b) NURTW political developments: 10 March 2022

1 the extortion from MC's regime (Olaoluwa, 2022). The National President of NURTW demanded
2 MC Oluomo work to prevent extortion of these riders (Olanrewaju, 2022). MC Oluomo refused
3 (Faith, 2022; Balogun, 2022). On March 9, 2022, the National NURTW umbrella suspended MC
4 Oluomo as chairman of the Lagos State NURTW Branch (Olaoluwa, 2022), and appointed in his
5 stead Fatai Adeshina, former TOOAN leader and MC Oluomo rival (?).

6 A rapid series of developments occurred in quick succession—in fact, all on the same day. MC
7 Olumo withdrew his membership from NURTW, and announced that not only was he still head
8 of Lagos State NURTW chapter, but that the chapter was breaking away from the national union
9 entirely (Akoni, 2022). That evening, Lagos Governor Sanwo-Olu announced that all parks and
10 garage management would now be under the purview of MC Oluomo's Union—now to be dubbed
11 Lagos State Parks and Garage Management (LASPG) (Alilyu, 2022; Society Now, 2022; Oyero,
12 2022*b*). They also announced that it was suspending the activity of the national union, NURTW
13 from the state entirely (Oyero, 2022*a*); leaving MC Oluomo's faction as the only one operating
14 with the state's blessing.

15 These developments did not unfold without protest. NGOs and rights organizations publicly
16 called out the role of the LSG in manipulating the law over the course of the leadership tussle;
17 one organization claimed that over 1,000 of these operators' vehicles were vandalized by Union
18 members over the course of one week in April (Sahara Reporters, 2022). Multiple motorparks
19 were forcibly overtaken (Oyero, 2022*c*; Daily Trust, 2022*a*), extortion by touts continued (Agha
20 and Aliyu, 2022), and violence erupted between area boys and okada riders that resulted in multiple
21 fatalities (Oyeleke, 2022; Lambo, 2022). And on May 8, a Justice of the Federal High Court in
22 Lagos ruled that MC Oluomo and his Union stop levying fees against riders (Titlola, 2022).

23 After having promised MC's men that he would “act on [their] grievances” (The Nation, 2022),
24 Governor Sanwo-Olu announced a week later that his government would pursue imminent—and
25 selective—enforcement of an okada ban, originally passed in 2018 (?). Okada riders and their
26 tricycle-riding counterparts had long been a thorn in MC's side, and they bore the brunt of the

1 extortion from a union that they did not feel they were members of. They had begun the protesting
2 excessive extortion in motorparks across the city, and in fact were at the root of MC Oluomo's—one
3 of the most powerful and connected men in Lagos—ongoing beleaguerment.

4 **5 Evidence: The political geography of selective** 5 **enforcement**

6 My theory requires that selective enforcement of the okada ban will vary in ways that benefit
7 the Union; allowing them to more effectively exert control over (and profit from) okada riders.
8 Therefore we should expect *spatial* variation in the ban's enforcement according to Hypothesis 1:

9 **H1** Enforcement of the okada ban varies *spatially* so as to displace okada into Union-controlled
10 motorparks.

11 Hypothesis 1 implies two component hypotheses. First, it implies that enforcement along the
12 ban's ITE routes *causes* more okada to be present at motorparks after enforcement commences:

13 **H1a** After the ban, the number of okada in motorparks *increases* compared to before the ban.

14 I test this assertion using a panel of satellite-based measures along road segments before and
15 after the ban. I show that okada density shifted in the aftermath of the ban; and that it shifted
16 differentially for (i) ITE areas vs. non-ITE areas; and (ii) for motorparks vs. non-motorparks.

17 Second, it implies that this choice of ITE areas is driven, at least in part, *in order to bring about*
18 this result:

19 **H1b** Enforcement areas (ITE) will increase okada density in motorparks *more* compared to other
20 possible enforcement areas.

1 I use randomization inference and simulations on the Lagos road network to not only show that
2 enforcement along ITE areas increase okada presence in motorparks, but that it does so significantly
3 more than other plausible counterfactual enforcement patterns.

4 These propositions were validated by some news reports (Olasupo, 2022), as well as by many
5 of the conversations I had with okada riders throughout Lagos. When I asked riders specifically
6 whether the Union, allegedly their representatives, were troubled by the ban, I got more than one
7 laugh of derision. One rider in the southwest said:

8 “The ban ... did not disturb [the Union] much. Why? Because if you cannot
9 go [on enforced routes], you go to the streets. That is where they collect
10 their dues ... so while you struggle, you still give them their dues.” (Okada
11 rider, Badagry, 20 July 2023)

12 Every rider I spoke to opined about the Union’s increased collection, even though what they were
13 collecting on was technically an illegal activity. They often cited the Union’s collusion with the
14 state. In Ikorodu, northeast Lagos, one rider stated “... all money they are collecting is illegal ...
15 they know that Lagos state has stopped bike. They stop okada. And they are *still* selling ticket, and
16 Lagos State did not stop them ... they are selling it, and we are buying it.”³³

17 Other riders confirmed the increased fees and interaction with the Union faced after the ban:

18 “The problem is the ticket[s you must buy to pass through the motorparks].
19 You buy one, 200 naira. You buy another, 200... [Now] you have to
20 buy four, five, six tickets. You cannot now ride bike [without passing a
21 park]...So you have to go more, more, more—but then you pass more and
22 pay more.” (Okada rider, Mile 2, 23 June 2023)

23 Some riders mentioned to me how the okada ban’s enforcement shifted how things were done in
24 terms of ticket pricing. Some noted that their Union membership ID card no longer exempted them
25 from paying ticket fees.³⁴ Moreover, many riders mentioned how many new okada riders had been

³³Interview with author on June 12, 2023

³⁴Interview with author July 27, 2024

crowded into pockets where okada riding was relatively safe from state enforcement, resulting in increased competition and rate depression.³⁵

Okada presence before and after the ban

H1(a) After the ban, the number of okada in motorparks *increases* compared to before the ban.

I begin by establishing that the ban was enforced as intended; namely by estimating the ban's differential effect across enforced (ITE) areas, and non-enforced ITE areas. Using the satellite-based measurement strategy described above, I run a standard two-way fixed effects model with two-periods, which estimates the *differential* effect of the ban between ITE and non-ITE areas:

$$(1) \quad \text{Okada}_{it} = \gamma_i + \lambda_t + \tau(\text{ITE}_i \times \text{Post}_t) + \varepsilon_{it}$$

Where Okada_{it} is the number of okada counted in satellite imagery from date t on road segment i . γ_i and λ_t account (respectively) for time-invariant, road segment (Edge ID) specific fixed effects and space-invariant, date-specific fixed effects. Given that each date represents a different satellite image, λ_t also act as controls for image-specific variation such as percentage cloud cover. ITE_i represents whether i road segment is expected to be enforced (1) or not (0), and Post_t whether t is before (0) or after (1) the ban's announced enforcement date. τ then represents the *differential* effect of the ban's enforcement on ITE areas compared to non-ITE areas. Errors are clustered by road segment.

Next, I test H1(a) directly by investigating the ban's differential effect, if any, on motorparks, using the same satellite-based measurement strategy. I investigate the I run the same standard two-way fixed effects model with two-periods as in Equation 1, substituting Motorpark_i for ITE_i .

³⁵Interview with author on August 15, 2024

Num. okada		
Model:	(1)	(2)
Post \times ITE	-4.560*** (1.677)	
Post \times Motorpark		2.991** (1.200)
<i>Fixed-effects</i>		
Edge ID	Yes	Yes
Time period	Yes	Yes

Clustered (Edge ID) standard-errors in parentheses

*Signif. Codes: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1*

Unsurprisingly, and as shown in Model (1) of Table 5, the presence of okada significantly decreases in the aftermath of the okada ban in areas where there is stated enforcement, by about 4 okada per road segment. Meanwhile, and in line with H1(a), the number of okada significantly increase after the ban on road segments which feature motorparks, compared to before (by about 3 okada per road segment). This is consistent with the theory that okada are displaced after the ban's enforcement to areas controlled by the union via motorparks, enabling their increased extortion by the Union.

Randomization on a road network

H1b Enforcement areas (ITE) will increase okada density in motorparks *more* compared to other possible enforcement areas.

Above, I show that the number of okada increased around motorparks after the ban's enforcement.

1 Next, I contend that this was the result of a purposeful strategy of displacement by the state (H1b).
2 Figure 9 lays out a simplified example of the process by which this may occur.³⁶ The top panel (a)
3 shows an abstracted road map of a particular neighborhood of Lagos, with two points marked A
4 and B. Union-run motorparks are marked with red buses. Before the ban, if one attempted to travel
5 via okada from point A to point B along the road network, the quickest route goes straight north
6 and east (marked in green). Notice on this route, no motorparks are passed.

7 In the bottom panel (b), areas enforced during the okada ban—bridges, streets, and intersections—are
8 denoted with red lines. These represent areas which, after the ban, are untraversable by okada
9 riders. Adapting to avoid the enforced areas, the green line in this bottom panel shows the new
10 shortest route from A to B riding an okada. Not only is the route longer and more circuitous, but
11 the okada is now forced to pass two motorparks.

12 This figure represents the type of displacement I suggest occurred on a systematic scale after
13 the okada ban. It demonstrates that while okada can still traverse through many areas, even in a
14 neighborhoods directly affected by the ban’s enforcement, the risk of arrest and bike confiscation
15 at key points on the road network forces riders to alter their routes, landing them in the hands of
16 Union touts who can exploit their precarity to extort them.

17 To investigate whether the chosen enforcement areas have this systematic effect, I built an
18 original *R* package³⁷ which uses Open Street Maps (OSM) geospatial road data to construct a
19 networked dataset, where roads (‘edges’) are connected by intersections (‘nodes’). This allows me
20 to flexibly simulate travel through the Lagos road network under a variety of circumstances—including
21 before and after the ban took place.³⁸ This process transformed all Lagos streets and roads—approximately
22 18,000 km in total—into 304,207 edges separated by 320,460 nodes.

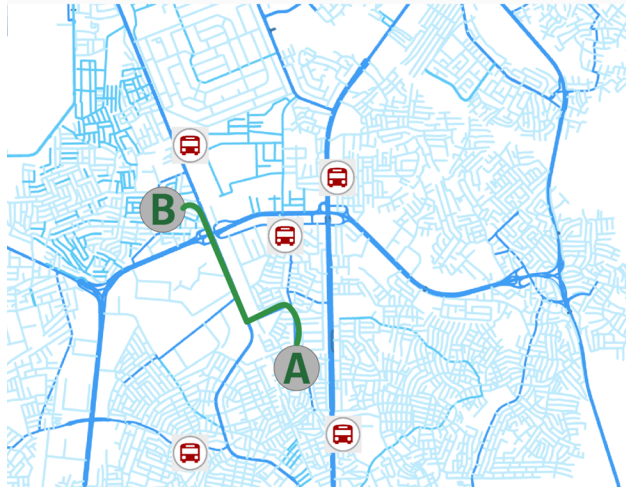
23 I complete the setup of the road network by merging it with the above-described motorpark
24 locations data, as well as enforcement locations named in the 2022 okada ban. I use this networked

³⁶Based, incidentally, on the route I took from my residence (A) to the supermarket (B) during fieldwork.

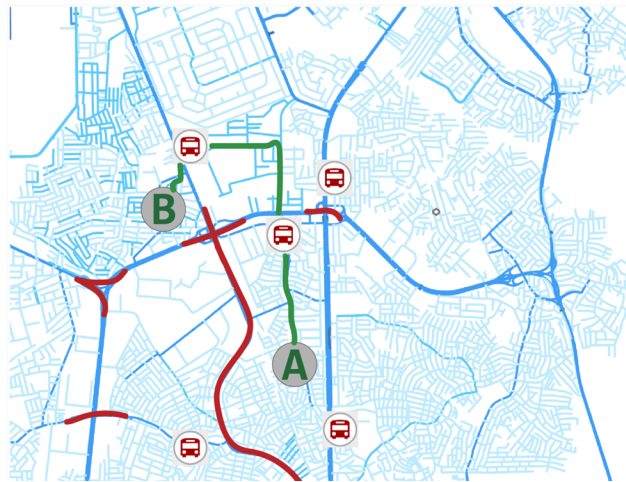
³⁷*tRaffic*, forthcoming on GitHub.

³⁸For more details on the technical approach of this package and how it is used in this approach, see SI §D.4.

Figure 9: Example of affected route. Illustration of how a okada rider's route may be affected by the okada ban.



(a) Example okada route (in green) from point A to point B, before okada ban enforcement. Union-led motorparks represented by red bus symbols. The route outlined passes no motorparks.



(b) Example okada route (in green) from point A to point B, after okada ban enforcement. Union-led motorparks represented by red bus symbols. The route outlined passes two motorparks.

dataset to calculate features of the paths traversed by riders between multiple points. SI §D.4 contains extensive details of this analysis process.

Results from 10,000 simulations provide suggestive evidence that the specific geography of the okada ban enforcement served the Union’s interests by displacing okada routes into areas in which the Union runs motorparks.

To begin with, analysis shows that okada riders face significant curtailing of freedom of movement as a result of ban enforcement in ITE areas. Just over $\frac{1}{3}$ of randomly selected routes become intraversable after the okada ban; that is, the okada ban prohibits passage from point A to point B at all, by any route. Moreover, enforcement in these areas results in a significant increase in cost. If we approximate that 1km of traversing the road costs NGN 100,³⁹ and each motorpark adds an additional NGN 500,⁴⁰ the average route’s cost after the ban’s enforcement is at least NGN 1,192.48 more than before the ban, either because of added mileage due to circumventing ban enforcement, or because of passing extra motorparks. This is equivalent to nearly 12km extra miles per route, or passing at least two additional motorparks on a given journey. While it is unsurprising that no routes will see a *decrease* in cost,⁴¹ the scale of the impact is significant. Over 75% of routes saw a more than NGN 500 cost increase, and the route with the maximum added cost totals more than NGN 5,500, more than 50% higher than before the ban was enacted.

While it is evident that the okada ban’s enforcement resulted in significant costs to okada riders, my primary analysis concerns the degree to which the Union benefited from the displacement of okada riders prompted by this selective enforcement. Indeed, simulations suggest that the Union benefited enormously. The majority of okada routes pass at least one additional motorpark after the okada ban prior to before, with an average of approximately 1 additional motorpark per route. Less than 2% of routes pass fewer motorparks after the ban than before (see Figure ??).

Importantly, the increase in ‘motorparks passed’ holds *even* when extending the sample to

³⁹Such as for fuel and ‘wear and tear’ motorbike expenses.

⁴⁰A standard price of a motorpark ticket around the time of the ban, evidenced via fieldwork by author

⁴¹Mechanically, the shortest route between points A and B after enacting barriers in the form of ban enforcement will either remain unaffected or get longer.

Joint Distribution of Route Cost and Motorparks Passed Enforcement Based on Okada Ban ITE Areas

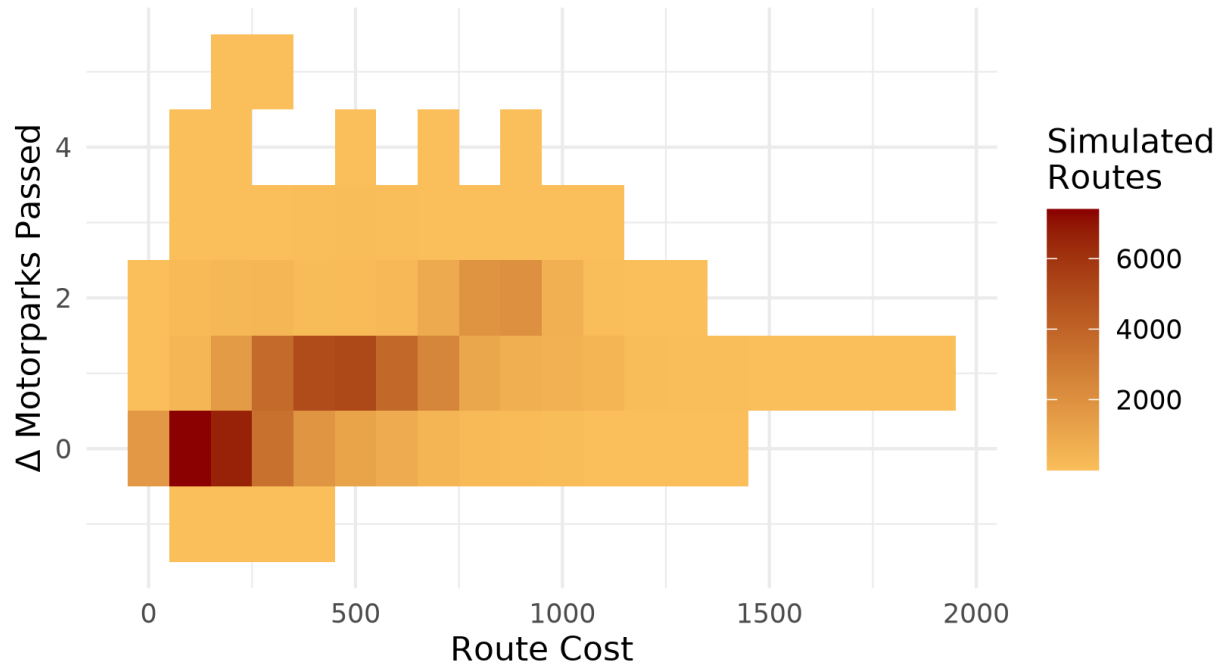


Figure 10: Density plot of 100,000 simulated routes given ITE enforcement areas. The y-axis is the change in the number of motorparks passed on a given route, compared to no ban enforcement/roadway impediments. The x-axis the approximate ‘cost’ of the route in NGN, determined as described above. The darkness of the shaded area indicates frequency of cost/motorpark combinations. Inspiration for this plot comes from ?.

all routes traversable in the pre-period. That is to say, even across $\frac{1}{3}$ fewer rides, the number of motorparks passed increases nearly 5.5 times after the enforcement of the okada ban on ITE areas. Translating into profit, this means that the Union's profit over 10,000 routes increases over 430%.

The total portion of routes which pass a motorpark before the ban's enforcement is also significantly less. Before okada ban enforcement on ITE areas, only 3% of simulated routes pass motorparks. In contrast, after okada ban enforcement, a majority of the traversable routes, nearly 61%, pass motorparks. This large difference attests to the significant displacement of okada riders into areas where the Union can take advantage of the ban's enforcement to extort from them. This trend holds even considering the larger sample of all routes, including those intraversable after the ban; over all simulated routes, less than 10% pass motorparks before the ban is enforced, compared to 36% afterwards.

Are these effects unique?

H1b Enforcement areas (ITE) will increase okada density in motorparks *more* compared to other possible enforcement areas.

The previous analysis makes clear that the ban's enforcement along stated ITE routes serves to displace okada riders into motorpark-laden areas, increasing the power wielded by the Union over these riders. However, this alone does not imply that these ITE routes were chosen (at least in part) in order to produce this effect.

Therefore, I now turn to additional analyses which make use of *counterfactual* ITE areas which could have—given the purported goals of the ban—reasonably been chosen as enforcement locations instead. There are a variety of potential logics which *could* have guided the government's choice of enforcement priorities. These include logics drawn directly from the LSG's stated reasons for the ban in first place; such as easing traffic congestion, preventing road accidents, or reducing pollution. We can also imagine alternative logics less likely to be stated in so many

1 words by state agents, such as enforcing the ‘eyesore’ of okada riders in the richest areas of the
2 city, or prioritizing areas where the traffic agencies had the highest pre-existing capacity.

3 I propose a variety of potential logics which could have reasonably guided enforcement decisions,
4 summarized in Table 4. I then construct *counterfactual* ITE areas based on these logics by selecting
5 approximately 60 areas of the road network chosen from appropriately-weighted distributions. I
6 then re-run the simulations described above, using these hypothetical ITE configurations instead
7 of the actual ITE areas analyzed in the previous section. My goal with this exercise is to determine
8 whether these counterfactual ITE configurations have effects similar to the actual ITE areas chosen
9 by the state. My theory suggests that these alternative hypothetical enforcement logics will have
10 substantively different results than those produced by enforcement along real ITE areas; and
11 especially, that choosing enforcement areas in this way would have benefited the Union substantially
12 *less* than the actual enforcement areas chosen by the state.

13 The results of this analysis indeed show that the effects of the okada ban’s enforcement along
14 ITE routes is substantively unique, especially in its effects on the number of motorparks passed
15 by riders. To take one example: one purported logic behind the okada ban’s enforcement was
16 an effort to reduce traffic congestion. One potential enforcement logic is, therefore, to prioritize
17 enforcement in areas with high levels of traffic. I therefore construct a counterfactual ITE area by
18 randomly selecting from a distribution of heavy-traffic areas, measured by an area’s mention in
19 pre-ban 96.1FM traffic radio announcements (See SI §D.4 for more details). I then run simulations
20 along the same start- and end-points used in the previous section.

21 For starters, ‘traffic-driven’ hypothetical enforcement areas make more routes intraversable to
22 riders. While the ban’s *actually* enforced areas prevent $\frac{1}{3}$ of simulated routes from being completed
23 at all, traffic-driven counterfactual enforcement areas on average prevent a much higher percentage
24 of routes from being traversed. Using this hypothetical ITE configuration, okada riders are able to
25 make only 65% of all simulated journeys, significantly and more efficiently curtailing okada use
26 with identical capacity.

Joint Distribution of Route Cost and Motorparks Passed Counterfactual Enforcement Based on Traffic Congestion

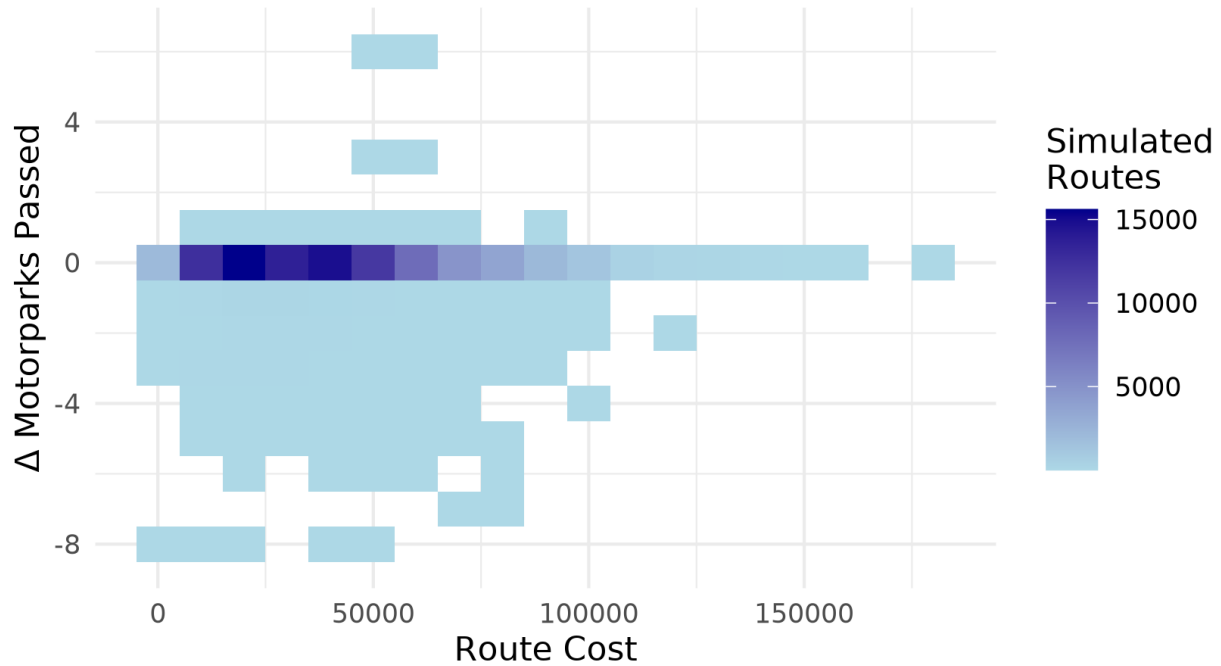


Figure 11: Density plot of 100,000 simulated routes given counterfactual enforcement based on traffic congestion. The y-axis is the change in the number of motorparks passed on a given route, compared to no ban enforcement/roadway impediments. The x-axis the approximate 'cost' of the route in NGN, determined as described above. The darkness of the shaded area indicates frequency of cost/motorpark combinations. Inspiration for this plot comes from ?.

1 Most crucially is the difference in the effect on motorparks passed. The ‘true’ ITE configuration
2 prompts riders to pass roughly one additional motorpark per journey on average. Meanwhile,
3 traffic-driven hypothetical bans have the opposite effect, and in fact *reduce* the number of motorparks
4 okada pass on their routes. Hypothetical bans on average result in a net and per-route loss in
5 the number of motorparks passed on an average route; and the majority of routes pass fewer
6 motorparks under this enforcement logic than without it (see Figure 11). SI §D.4 replicates this
7 analysis for other potential motivators of enforcement areas—such as locations of police stations;
8 locations most commonly associated with okada riding; and most reported accidents—with broadly
9 similar effects. These effects are summarized in Table 4.

10 This analysis confirms not only that most counterfactual enforcement patterns fail to benefit
11 the Union, but also that the actual enforcement patterns followed by the LSG *uniquely* benefit the
12 Union amidst a variety of plausible alternatives. This lends some credibility to my assertion that
13 the enforcement patterns of the ban were intended, at least in part, to prop up the Union’s ability
14 to exert coercive control over rebellious riders—even at the expense of more efficiently reducing
15 okada presence on the roadway.

16 **6 Evidence: Sudden disillusionment as a shock**

17 In previous sections, I described the peculiar political circumstances surrounding the conflict
18 between okada riders and the Lagos Union in the lead-up to an announcement of the ban’s enforcement
19 (Section 4), and demonstrate, consistent with H1, that spatial variation in the ban’s enforcement
20 served to displace riders into areas where the Union can extort them (Section ??). I show that this
21 pattern is not replicated when considering counterfactual enforcement areas based on traffic report
22 density, law enforcement presence, or other potential motivations for enforcement configurations
23 (Section 5. I now turn to an analysis of the *temporal* variation of okada ban enforcement, where I
24 predict that:

<i>Enforcement logic</i>	<i>Justification</i>	<i>Operationalization</i>	<i>Effects</i>
Actual ITE areas	Actual LSG enforced areas	Coded from policy announcement	67% routes traversable; 87 more motorparks
High traffic congestion	Ease traffic flow	Highest traffic incident density (via 96.1FM data)	35% routes traversable; 21 fewer motorparks
High state capacity	Utilize existing capacity	Closet to police stations (via OSM)	61% routes traversable; same number of motorparks
High offense areas	Target areas of high-okada density	Highest pre-ban okada level (via Streetview)	55% routes traversable; 4 more motorparks
High income areas	Appease wealthy constituents	Highest nightlight density (via EOG)	91% routes traversable; 8 fewer motorparks
High priority areas	Prioritize public safety	Closest to primary schools	84% routes traversable; 51 fewer motorparks
High crime areas	Target crime-dense areas	Highest level of crime (via LSG)	<i>Forthcoming</i>
High violence areas	Target hotbeds of political violence	Highest density of political violence (via ACLED)	81% routes traversable; 44 fewer motorparks
High pollution areas	Reduce pollution by okada	Highest particulate matter density (via NASA)	54% routes traversable; 23 fewer motorparks
Most efficient areas	Maximize enforcement efficiency	Areas with highest betweenness centrality on Lagos road network	27% routes traversable; 12 more motorparks
Concede to commuters	Minimize disruption to commuters	Areas with <i>lowest</i> pre-ban okada density (via Streetview)	<i>Forthcoming</i>
Ideal road conditions	Preserve okada availability where popular	Areas with most developed roads	<i>Forthcoming</i>

Table 4: Counterfactual enforcement patterns and their effects. Results are based on 10,000 simulated different start and end points randomly chosen from a uniform distribution across the Lagos road network. Number of motorparks passed is per 100 simulated routes, compared to pre-ban counts.

1 **H2** Enforcement of the okada ban varies *temporally* according to state perception of Union
2 reliability.

3 The evidence for this hypothesis comes from exploiting a shift in the state's reliance on the
4 Union, stemming from a surprising national election result at the state level. The Nigerian Presidential
5 and Gubernatorial elections of 2023, held about six months after enforcement of the ban began,
6 did not happen simultaneously. Federal elections—including for the President—were held on 25
7 February 2023. Meanwhile Lagos state elections—including for the governor, as well as for seats
8 in the state assembly—were held about a month later, on 18 March 2023.

9 The national election results were in one sense unsurprising; the incumbent APC's candidate
10 Bola Tinubu was elected against rivals Atiku Abubakar of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), and
11 Peter Obi of the Labour Party (LP), the upstart populist candidate who captivated young Nigerian
12 voters in particular. The APC's stronghold is in the Southwestern Nigeria, especially in Lagos
13 State, where the party has won every election it has ever stood.

14 Therefore, one unexpected result of the 2023 presidential election was that the people of
15 Lagos state voted on masse not for their former governor Bola Tinibu, but for the charismatic
16 and populist LP candidate Peter Obi. While the Lagos results did not ultimately sway the election
17 in Obi's favor, they nevertheless shocked the political elite of the state, who had been expecting
18 a comfortable APC victory, guaranteed (as usual) by the efforts of the Union. Multiple sources,
19 including a former Lagos commissioner of transport under the APC, told me the national election
20 sent reverberations through the Lagos political system, asking me: "Did you see the election? the
21 Union didn't deliver. Their days are numbered."⁴²

22 I contend that the national election provided a shock to Lagos state leadership's perspective of
23 the Union's reliability in guaranteeing an election victory for the incumbent APC, and therefore a
24 shock to their willingness to cater to Union demands.

25 Thus, as with H1, H2 can be broken into two component observational implications. First:

⁴²Interview with author on June 18, 2023

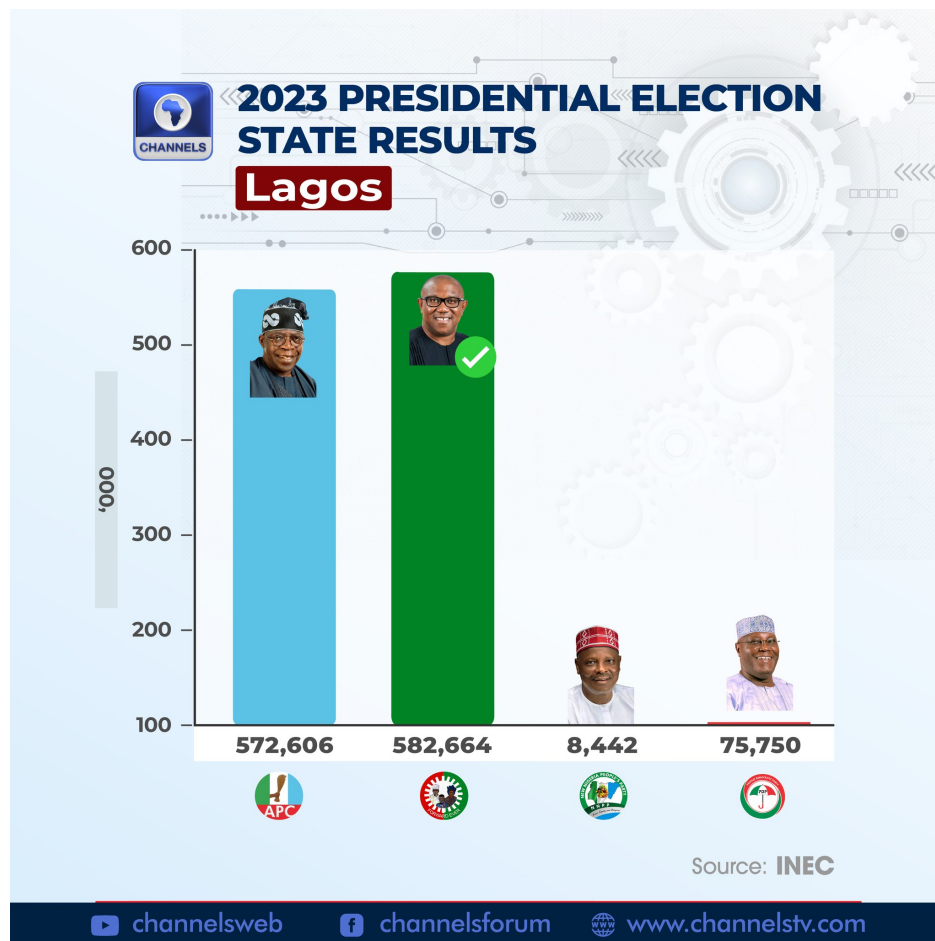


Figure 12: 2023 Nigerian Presidential Election Results for Lagos State. Image sourced from <https://tinyurl.com/ycympm3r>

1 **H2a** Okada density *increases* after the Presidential election on previously enforced routes (ITE
2 areas).

3 **H2a** Okada density *decreases* after the Presidential election around motorparks.

4 My strategy involves testing whether state enforcement of the ban changed after the national
5 election, in the lead-up to the Gubernatorial election a month later. If the LSG is selectively
6 enforcing the ban in order to produce precarity in okada riders for exploitation by the Union, we
7 should expect a shock to the state's trust in the Union to fundamentally alter this calculus, and
8 shift enforcement patterns accordingly. Interviews, including with okada riders, substantiate this
9 empirical strategy. Several (unprompted) brought up abrupt changes in enforcement during the
10 inter-election period.⁴³

11 I therefore define:

$$(2) \quad \text{InterElec}_t = \text{PresElec}_t - \text{GovElec}_t$$

12 Here as above, i denotes the road segment and t denotes the date of the measurement. The
13 variable PresElec_t takes the value of 1 when t is after the date of the Nigerian Presidential Election,
14 and GovElec_t when t is after the date of the Lagos Gubernatorial election. Therefore $\text{PresElec}_t -$
15 $\text{GovElec}_t = 1$ if t denotes a time period between the presidential and gubernatorial elections. I
16 measure the change during the inter-election period because, as I analyze further in SI §D.7), the
17 Union's behavior changed significantly during the gubernatorial election. After the ire from their
18 patron expressed after the Presidential election, the Union increased its election interference and
19 mobilization, meaning that I expect the enforcement dynamic to return to pre-Presidential election
20 patterns after the Gubernatorial election is complete.

21 I use this variable to estimate two two-way fixed effects linear models:

⁴³Interviews with author, including 15 June, 2023

$$(3) \quad \text{Okada}_{it} = \gamma_i + \lambda_t + \tau(\text{ITE}_i \times \text{InterElec}_t) + \varepsilon_{it}$$

1

$$(4) \quad \text{Okada}_{it} = \gamma_i + \lambda_t + \tau(\text{Motorpark}_i \times \text{InterElec}_t) + \varepsilon_{it}$$

2 As above, *Okada_{it}* is the number of okada counted via satellite imagery for *i* road segment
 3 (edge) square at *t* date. *Motorpark_i* is a spatially-varying indicator of whether road segment *i*
 4 features a motorpark; while *ITE_i* is an indicator for whether road segment *i* is affected by okada
 5 ban enforcement. (*ITE_i* × *InterElec_t*) denotes whether a given *i, t* is an observation from an ITE
 6 area in the inter-election period.⁴⁴

7 Results are given in Table 5. Compared to the time before and after the inter-election period,
 8 ITE areas saw a dramatic increase in the number of okada per road segment, with nearly 20
 9 additional okada per quarter-kilometer of coded area—suggestive of a temporary drop in enforcement
 10 during the inter-election period and an increase in okada in previously-enforced areas. Meanwhile
 11 and relatedly, the number of okada in motorparks during the inter-election period decreased substantially.
 12 Okada presence varies much as we might expect: Namely, okada presence decreases during this
 13 inter-election period in motorparks, and increases across areas where okada presence is usually
 14 enforced. These trends lend credence to my theory that the state reacted to the Union’s failure
 15 to sway the election for the APC by reducing selective enforcement; itself an indication that
 16 enforcement patterns were driven by Union interests.

⁴⁴See SI §D.6 for additional specifications; as well as for assessment of assumptions necessary for causal interpretation of these results.

Table 5: Inter-election trends in okada density

	Number of Okada	
	(1)	(2)
<i>Variables</i>		
ITE \times (InterElec)	19.18*** (6.624)	
Motorpark \times (InterElec)		-29.39*** (10.31)
<i>Fixed-effects</i>		
Edge ID	Yes	Yes
Time period	Yes	Yes
<i>Significance Codes: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1</i>		
<i>Clustered (Edge ID) standard-errors in parentheses</i>		

7 Conclusion

In this paper, I argue that states can selectively enforce policies aimed at vulnerable populations in order to ease their exploitation by important third-party groups. I examine the case of uneven enforcement of a ban on specific types of informal commercial transport in Africa's largest city, and provide evidence that uneven enforcement of this ban is in the interest of appeasing powerful transport mafias, political allies of the regime who are relied upon around election time to provide political violence on demand in favor of the ruling party. I demonstrate first, that the period before enforcement was rift with intra-union politics, and specifically unrest from commercial drivers fighting back against their exploitation by the Union. Next, I demonstrate that variation in okada ban ITE areas *systematically* and *uniquely* alters okada rider routes towards Union-led motorparks, where they face increased exploitation and extortion. Finally, I use VHR remote-sensing and Streetview data to count the number of okada motorcycles present in quarter-kilometer squares over time, specifically in the lead-up to and in the immediate aftermath of a shocking Lagos-level result in the Presidential election. I find that okada presence *increases* in areas enforced by the

1 ban (and decreases in areas with motorparks) in the period after the Presidential and before the
2 Gubernatorial elections, a period of immense tension between the Lagos State Government and
3 the Lagos transport unions.

4 This project, while focusing on the micro-level dynamics of a single policy enacted in a
5 single city, has implications far beyond the streets of Lagos. My findings underline the necessity
6 of integrating third parties—beyond state agents and directly regulated populations—into our
7 understandings of why states pursue certain policies and their enforcement (Artabe et al., 2023;
8 Albertus, Fenner and Slater, 2018). I build upon prevailing understandings of repression and
9 forbearance by integrating them into a broader framework of how states assist their non-state
10 allies. My focus on *connivance* as a strategy emphasizes how governments may aid allies not
11 only through direct concessions, but through manipulating enforcement to produce vulnerability
12 in populations challenging these allies’ power, or whose exploitation underwrites that power—or
13 both. Moreover, my focus on these third-party state allies shows the ‘flipside’ of a phenomenon
14 of great interest to the study of politics: election violence. I examine the supply-side dynamics
15 of election interference and violence by non-state groups, clarifying the independent motivations,
16 incentive structures, and interests of such groups. Moreover I provide a portrait of the ‘day jobs’
17 of election thugs, emphasizing how these actors exist within—and influence— political structures
18 even between elections. In doing so, I emphasize the need for research on the relationships between
19 governments and allied ‘violence entrepreneurs’ not only around election times, but in the years
20 and months beforehand.

21 Finally, I contend that even nominally benign policies (and their level of enforcement) are
22 motivated by complex, and often corrupt, political arrangements. Like Holland (2016), I caution
23 against interpreting a particular policy’s lack of enforcement as necessarily implying an *inability* to
24 enforce. As I reinforce above, a government’s recalcitrance may instead be strategic; and—crucially—is
25 often coercive. Future work should take these lessons to heart, especially in probing why governments
26 tolerate illicit and informal industries; or engage only half-heartedly in enforcing violations such

1 as irregular migration. As this paper demonstrates, such light-handedness is not always out of
2 benevolence towards policy infringers.

3 Policy enforcement—like its passage—is highly political with distinct distributive consequences.
4 And indeed, enforcement is often the policy stage in which many citizens first convey their demands
5 and interact with the state, especially in the Global South (Scott, 1969, 1142). This article deepens
6 our understanding of how democracies might use this ‘enforcement lever’ to contribute to the
7 oppression of vulnerable populations, and to the empowerment of exploitative third parties. In
8 this way it reminds us that non-enforcement is not merely the absence of power, but a method of
9 wielding it; and that examining its patterns may reveal not the limits of the state, but the logic of
10 its alliances.

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