

Central Politics and Local Peacemaking

The Conditions for Peace after Communal Conflict

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Dissertation presented at Uppsala University to be publicly examined in Sal IX, Universitetshuset, Biskopsgatan 3, Uppsala, Friday, 6 October 2017 at 10:15 for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The examination will be conducted in English. Faculty examiner: Associate Professor Leonardo R. Arriola (Department of Political Science, University of California, Berkeley).

Abstract

Elfverson, E. 2017. Central Politics and Local Peacemaking. The Conditions for Peace after Communal Conflict. *Report / Department of Peace and Conflict Research* 113. 48 pp. Uppsala: Department of Peace and Conflict Research. ISBN 978-91-506-2650-6.

Under what conditions can peace be established after violent communal conflict? This question has received limited research attention to date, despite the fact that communal conflicts kill thousands of people each year and often severely disrupt local livelihoods. This dissertation analyzes how political dynamics affect prospects for peace after communal conflict. It does so by studying the role of the central government, local state and non-state actors, and the interactions between these actors and the communal groups that are engaged in armed conflict. A particular focus is on the role of political bias, in the sense that central government actors have ties to one side in the conflict or strategic interests in the conflict issue. The central claim is that political bias shapes government strategies in the face of conflict, and influences the conflict parties' strategic calculations and ability to overcome mistrust and engage in conflict resolution. To assess these arguments, the dissertation strategically employs different research methods to develop and test theoretical arguments in four individual essays. Two of the essays rely on novel data to undertake the first cross-national large-N studies of government intervention in communal conflict and how it affects the risk of conflict recurrence. Essay I finds that conflicts that are located in an economically important area, revolve around land and authority, or involve groups with ethnic ties to central rulers are more likely to prompt military intervention by the government. Essay II finds that ethnic ties, in turn, condition the impact that government intervention has on the risk of conflict recurrence. The other two essays are based on systematic analysis of qualitative sources, including unique and extensive interview material collected during several field trips to Kenya. Essay III finds that government bias makes it more difficult for the conflict parties to resolve their conflict through peace agreements. Essay IV finds that by engaging in governance roles otherwise associated with the state, non-state actors can become successful local peacemakers. Taken together, the essays make important contributions by developing, assessing and refining theories concerning the prospects for communal conflict resolution.

Keywords: communal conflict, local conflict, non-state conflict, land conflict, conflict resolution, mediation, conflict management, intervention, ethnic politics, political bias, governance, sub-Saharan Africa, Kenya

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ISSN 0566-8808

ISBN 978-91-506-2650-6

urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-324928 (<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-324928>)

To Estrid and Dagny

List of Essays

This dissertation is based on the following essays, which are referred to in the text by their Roman numerals.

- I Elfverson, E. (2015) Providing security or protecting interests? Government interventions in violent communal conflicts. *Journal of Peace Research*, 52(6): 791–805.
- II Elfverson, E. Whose side are you on? Government bias, intervention and the recurrence of communal conflict. *Unpublished manuscript*, last presented at the 58th Annual International Studies Association Convention, Baltimore, USA, 22–25 February 2017.
- III Elfverson, E. The political conditions for local peacemaking: A comparative study of communal conflict resolution in Kenya. *Unpublished manuscript*, last presented at the Annual Conference of the Conflict Research Society, Dublin, Ireland, 7–9 September 2016.
- IV Elfverson, E. (2016) Peace from below: Governance and peacebuilding in Kerio Valley, Kenya. *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 54(3): 469–493.

Reprints were made with permission from Sage Publications (Essay I) and Cambridge University Press (Essay IV).

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Acknowledgements

It is often said that it takes a village to raise a child, and I think the same holds true for the production of a PhD dissertation. The constantly stimulating, engaging and supportive environment at the Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Uppsala, has been my village during these past years, and for this I am extremely grateful. While I cannot mention each and every person who has contributed along the way, and while any errors and shortcomings in this dissertation are entirely my own, I wish to acknowledge the support and constructive feedback of the many people who have interacted with this project over the years.

First and foremost, I want to express my gratitude to my supervisors (my chiefs), Kristine Höglund and Hanne Fjelde. You have not only been a constant source of constructive feedback and support, but also my most important role models. I don't think I can emphasize enough how much that means. And while both of you are extremely successful and always involved in a multitude projects, I have always felt welcome to come to you with any matter, large or small. Hanne, you have an incredible ability to identify the strengths and weaknesses of a manuscript, and provide detailed and constructive feedback that makes a text so much sharper. Stina, you are always able to see the broader picture and to provide just the right amount of support or challenge depending on the context and timing. At the beginning of my PhD studies, I was also fortunate to have Thomas Ohlson as one of my supervisors. I was inspired by Thomas when he was my teacher during my undergraduate studies, and he was certainly one of the reasons for my interest in peace and conflict in Africa. Sadly, Thomas passed away in 2012; he is sorely missed, and his wisdom and passion for socially relevant research continues to be an inspiration for so many people.

I am also indebted to a large number of colleagues within the DPCR village. Mats Hammarström (the wise village elder) early on provided encouragement to pursue the aim of a PhD. Mats, I am grateful for your support and clear-sighted advice, and I am happy that I had the opportunity to work with you as an intern while I was still an undergraduate student. I am also very grateful for my time with the Uppsala Conflict Data Program, which provided an insider's understanding of data collection and conflict patterns – not to mention great collegiality and long-lasting friendships. While probably half the department has been engaged in the UCDP at some point, I want to mention the Super

Trio Therése Pettersson, Lotta Themnér and Stina Högladh. Anna, I wish you could have been here to celebrate with me.

As a PhD student, I have benefited tremendously from being part of the Wednesday (a.k.a. Tuesday) supervision group. In this context, I have enjoyed countless stimulating discussions on research and on the many surrounding choices and challenges. Thank you Johan (my communal conflict comrade), Sara, Ralph, Andreas, Angela, Lisa, Mathilda, Ilmari, Florian, Anne, David, Sebastian, Susanne, Kyungmee, Charlotte, Kate, Desirée and Karen. Sara, I'm happy that we have gone through the "slutspurt" together, with regular debriefs over ice cream & coffee or a glass of wine. I am also grateful to everyone who has read and commented on my work at the research paper seminars, but in particular to Hanne, Peter Wallensteen and Nina von Uexkull for acting as discussants on different occasions. Thank you so much Kristine Eck and Isak Svensson for providing excellent feedback on the entire dissertation at my manuscript conference. I am also grateful to Anders Sjögren at the Nordic Africa Institute for providing feedback on parts of the manuscript, and for sharing his great knowledge about Kenyan politics.

I have ventured outside of the village on a number of occasions, all of which have enriched my research. One such excursion was to Bradford, which will always have a special place in my academic heart. Thank you to everyone at JEF CAS – in particular to David Francis who acted as my supervisor while I was there, and to Sarah Njeri who helped me with literally everything from office logistics to providing a roof over my family's heads (not to mention having us over for dinner and pointing out the best activities and restaurants). I was lucky to get to hang out with a large group of smart and friendly people in Bradford, and cherish my neon-green Peace Studies hoodie greatly. I have also benefited a lot from interacting with peers and senior researchers at PhD courses in Ghent (where I received brilliant feedback from Catherine Boone, Muriel Côte and Timothy Raeymaekers) and at PRIO (thanks in particular to Jeffrey T. Checkel for constructive comments on my research design). I also gratefully acknowledge the feedback on the different studies within this dissertation that I have received at conferences and workshops in Sweden and abroad, and from anonymous reviewers in the case of the two published articles.

An important part of my PhD experience has been the opportunity to conduct fieldwork and to make several visits to Kenya, which is the focus of two of my studies. I am very grateful to the Anna Maria Lundin scholarship foundation and the Nordic Africa Institute travel scholarship for making these research trips possible. I also want to thank the many people who have assisted me with contacts, information and logistics in Kenya. In particular, I want to mention George Kabongah, Gilbert arap Bor, James Kimisoi, Sylvester Kipkosgey Rotich, and Lucy Wambui Ndungu; and of course Stephen Kaloki for turning every potentially frustrating ride in Nairobi's traffic jams into an opportunity for engaging discussions (and for challenging me to practice my

Swahili – natumaini nitaendelea kujifunza). Most importantly, I am hugely indebted to the many individuals who chose to participate in my research and who provided me with their personal stories about conflict and peace in different parts of Kenya. I hope that my research can in some small way contribute towards the goals expressed by all of you: development, equality and peaceful coexistence.

On a personal note, I am very grateful for all the support I have received from my family and friends. Mom and dad, thank you for all your support and encouragement over the years. I hope I can be as good a parent to my children as you have been to me and my siblings. Ida, Jakob and Hanna – I hope we can always remain as close (geographically and spiritually) as we are now, and continue to make music together in different contexts. I am also grateful for the fun and recreation provided by Bokcirkeln (potentially the book club that spends the least time talking about books in the world), and Okapi (it is an intensely therapeutic and gratifying creative experience to sing with you wonderful ladies). I am of the firm opinion that everyone should be in a choir, whether you can sing or not.

Coincidentally (or not?), a previous choir is where I met the love of my life. David, I am grateful for having you by my side throughout this journey, and for your support for my career choices despite the stress of travels, deadlines and overall “life-puzzle” logistics. Not to mention putting up with my general nerdiness. As you know, *ever since we met you've had a hold on me. It happens to be true: I only want to be with you.* Finally, I am immensely thankful for our children who have come along during my time as a PhD student. I dedicate this dissertation to my daughters, Estrid and Dagny, who provide me with many opportunities to apply conflict resolution theories hands-on, and who make up a constant reminder of the things that matter in life and why efforts to change the world for the better are worth it.

Introduction

In 2001, severe violence broke out along the Tana River in eastern Kenya. The violence pitted the Pokomo, who are mainly sedentary farmers and live along the river, against the pastoralist Orma and Wardei, who graze their cattle west of the river. The violence took place amidst a strongly politicized and contested land adjudication programme, as well as a severe drought that increased competition for access to the river and other local resources. By the end of the year, the conflict had caused over 60 deaths. Numerous actors – including the government, faith-based organisations, and local customary authorities – sought to restore calm and attempted to mediate between the conflicting sides. However, although the violence eventually died down, mediation attempts made little progress beyond very limited and localized arrangements for coexistence. No agreement resolving the conflict was ever reached, and substantial tensions and polarization remained. In 2012, amidst polarizing political campaigning for the upcoming elections, the conflict re-erupted, causing around 160 deaths.

By conservative estimates, communal conflicts like the one in the Tana River have killed over 70,000 people since 1989 (UCDP, 2016). In many cases, communal conflicts – violent conflicts between non-state identity-based groups – have re-erupted repeatedly over time, resulting in cumulating death tolls and destruction; in other cases, the conflict parties remain at peace after an initial episode of fighting has ended. This dissertation seeks to explain these patterns and contribute to our understanding of how peace can be established after communal conflict has erupted. It focuses specifically on how national and local political dynamics affect the prospects for peace, addressing the following overarching research question: Under what conditions can peace be established after communal conflicts?

So far, little research has directly addressed this question. An emerging academic literature has begun to investigate the origins and dynamics of communal conflicts, partly in response to the recent availability of systematic and disaggregated empirical data on this category of organised violence. Yet, there is still a large research gap when it comes to our empirical and theoretical understanding of the management and resolution of these conflicts. This is despite the fact that communal conflicts kill thousands of people each year, and lead to the displacement of many more, often resulting in substantial disruption of local livelihoods. Communal conflicts may also spill over into other forms of organised violence, destabilizing larger regions and creating

major threats to human security (Brosché & Elfvérsson, 2012). Understanding the conditions for resolving these conflicts and preventing conflict recurrence thus has the potential to save thousands of lives.

This dissertation seeks to shed light on the actors and political dynamics that affect prospects for peace after communal conflict. It does so by analysing the role of the central government; local state and non-state actors; and the interactions between these actors and the primary groups in conflict. While communal conflicts are sub-national and often very localized phenomena, extant research has shown how these conflicts are often connected to national power struggles and larger conflicts, and hence need to be analysed against the backdrop of political hierarchies and relationships that affect the risks and opportunities associated with engaging in violence (Albert, 2001: 117; Brosché, 2014; Kalyvas, 2003; Raleigh, 2014). I argue that political bias, in the sense that central government actors have ties to one party in the conflict or strategic interests in the conflict issue, will affect government strategies in the face of conflict as well as the conflict parties' strategic calculations and ability to overcome mistrust and engage in conflict resolution.

To assess my arguments about central politics and local peacemaking, I analyse the conditions for peace after communal conflict using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The dissertation focuses geographically on sub-Saharan Africa, the part of the world that has been most affected by communal conflicts. Two of the essays are based on novel data on government interventions in communal conflict, and represent the first cross-national large-N studies of government intervention in communal conflict and how it affects the risk of conflict recurrence. The other two essays are based on systematic analysis of qualitative sources, including unique and extensive interview material collected during several field trips to Kenya. The combination of methods and empirical material employed in the dissertation enables the development, assessment and refinement of theories concerning the prospects for communal conflict resolution. Taken together, the essays make a number of theoretical and empirical contributions to existing research on communal conflicts. A key contribution is that the dissertation theorizes the role of state and non-state actors in relation to the management and resolution of communal conflict. In turn, this enables a closer analysis of how politics and political relationships affect the prospects for local peace. Specifically, I show how government bias under different conditions has different impacts on conflict resolution and conflict recurrence, making important contributions both to the growing research field on communal conflicts and to the literature on ethnic politics.

This introduction presents an overarching theoretical and analytical framework that lays the foundation for the four essays that make up the core of the dissertation. In the next section, I present and discuss the central concepts used in my analyses. The following section situates the dissertation within existing research. Subsequently, I present the overarching theoretical

framework guiding the composite essays, and my methodological approach. Then, I present the four essays in more detail. The introduction concludes by summarizing the key findings and their empirical and theoretical implications for policymakers and for future research.

Central concepts

The central unit of analysis in this dissertation is *communal conflict*. Communal conflict is defined as violent conflict between non-state groups that are organised based on communal identities. By *violent conflict*, I mean that the parties use lethal violence to gain control over some disputed resource, such as a piece of land or local political power. This follows a generally accepted conceptualization of armed conflict (Galtung, 1965; UCDP, 2017). The groups involved are *non-state actors*, meaning that neither side controls the state and armed forces. The state may act as a secondary party that supports one side in the conflict, or as a third party attempting to end the violence and promote a negotiated solution – or a combination of these (cf. Abdulrahman & Tar, 2008: 190; Debelo, 2016). In addition, the groups are *informally organised*, meaning that they do not have a formalized organisational structure like rebel groups or militias. In communal conflicts, mobilization and the lines of confrontation are based on *communal identities*. Communal identity is understood here as subjective group identification based on, for instance, a common history, culture or core values (Gurr, 2000; Stewart, 2000). Identities are fluid and constructed and not inherently conflictual; however, under certain circumstances, they become more salient and can be activated for conflict mobilization (Klaus & Mitchell, 2015; Lynch, 2011; Svensson, 2013). Because communal identity is socially constructed, it may change over time, and the dimension of identity that is emphasized for mobilization depends on the context. For instance, it may be ethnicity, religious affiliation, length of residence (i.e. “indigenes vs. settlers”) or livelihood (Brosché & Elfversson, 2012).

As a sub-national phenomenon, communal conflicts are often (but not always) relatively localized. Consequently, my theoretical arguments and empirical analyses place strong emphasis on the *central and local actors* involved in conflict and peacemaking. While this dichotomizing terminology is a simplification that may obscure the complex connections and fuzzy borders between different geographic and political scales (Hughes, Öjendal & Schierenbeck, 2015; Schierenbeck, 2015; Kappler, 2015), it serves to highlight how communal conflicts tend to take place on a micro level that is usually subsumed under, and governed by, a centralized political entity. This should not be taken to imply that the local level is not also political – indeed, the cases analysed within this dissertation emphasize this point. When I refer to “the local” and “local actors”, I am implying the geographic and political

space affected by the conflict and the actors that are relevant there. On the other hand, “the central level” and “central actors” refer to the top decision-making and executive authorities within a state.

The dissertation has an overarching interest in *peace following communal conflict*. The individual essays focus on different outcomes of interest – or dependent variables – which all relate to this overall theme. Essay I analyses the determinants of armed intervention by the government in reaction to communal conflict. This represents an important first step in seeking to understand the broader dynamics of peacemaking in these contexts. Essay II analyses whether or not communal conflict recurs, in the sense that the same conflict actors re-engage in violence after a period of relative peace. This follows the broadly adopted “negative” conception of peace as the absence of violence, which is a minimal definition, useful for large-N studies of the durability of peace. Essay III focuses on the conclusion of substantive peace agreements – i.e., agreements that address the issues that the groups are fighting over – following violent communal conflict, reflecting the assumption that agreement on how to address the incompatibility is necessary for peaceful coexistence (Wallensteen, 2015). Finally, Essay IV analyses under what conditions non-state actors can become successful peacemakers and help communal groups negotiate an agreement. The study emphasizes culturally contingent dynamics related to power and legitimacy of a type that is often downplayed in the search for parsimonious theories. The in-depth case studies in Essays III and IV also allow for a more qualitative assessment of the depth and durability of a settlement. The absence of overt aggression may not necessarily mean that the conflict is resolved; rather, as the cases analysed illustrate, conflict may be latent and prone to re-erupt if constraints are removed or power balances shift.

Another central concept in this dissertation is *government bias* in relation to communal conflict. Bias is broadly understood as partiality in relation to the two sides involved in a conflict. A key observation underlying the different analyses within this dissertation is that the role and extent of involvement of the government in communal conflict varies significantly. Based on state actors’ need to strengthen or protect their position of power, they have vested interests in some conflicts but not others. Dependent on local and national political dynamics, the government may take sides (actively or passively) in a communal conflict.

Bias may derive from the relationship to the conflict actors, or from local resources and the issues at stake in the conflict (Brosché 2014: 30–32). This builds on the distinction in the mediation literature between source bias, referring to ties to a conflict party, and content bias, referring to a mediator’s preference for certain issue outcomes (Arad & Carnevale, 1994). In the context of mediation studies, this is commonly translated into a distinction between partial mediators, who side with one of the conflict parties, and interested mediators, who have a stake in the conflict issue or outcome

(Elgström, Bercovitch & Skau, 2003; Kydd, 2003; Svensson, 2011; Touval & Zartman, 1985). In contrast, I use the overarching term government bias to refer to the government's *interests and actions* in relation to a conflict, and in turn note that bias may derive from relationships (partiality) or resources (self-interest) – or both.

The different essays analyse the dynamics and effects of bias in different ways. In Essay I, I find that both the economic importance of a conflict location (resources), and ethnic ties between central rulers and groups involved in communal conflict (relationships), affect the likelihood that the government will intervene militarily in a conflict. In Essay III, I argue that both of these underlying causes of government bias hamper intergroup trust building and may impede conflict resolution. However, while political dynamics may change the relationship between communal groups and central power holders, bias based on strategic resources may be more durable. In Essay II, I focus on bias based on relationships and make a distinction between “negative” and “positive” bias. Finally, in Essay IV, I study the conditions for peacemaking in the absence of strong engagement by the state, and analyse how longstanding positive engagement with local communities may enable non-state actors to take on the role as mediators in violent conflict.

Situating the dissertation in existing research

In recent years, a growing body of research has begun to systematically investigate the causes and dynamics of violent communal conflicts. Partly, this development has followed the emergence of new datasets covering non-state conflicts, which have enabled quantitative analyses of these phenomena. Below, I describe the key insights from this literature, and note that it has generally overlooked the question of peace after communal conflict. Next, I describe research within a broader academic literature which has approached this specific topic from different angles. I conclude that while many important insights can be derived from these studies, there is a scarcity of systematic empirical research that directly tackles the issue of peace after violent communal conflict while taking varying political dynamics into account.

Causes and dynamics of communal conflict

The availability of systematic empirical data on communal conflict has facilitated a better understanding of temporal and geographic patterns and dynamics. For instance, we know that communal conflicts are a frequent phenomenon and that sub-Saharan Africa has been particularly affected (Sundberg, Eck & Kreutz, 2012). Because the groups involved do not have a formal military structure, the dynamics of communal conflicts tend to differ from those of civil wars or conflicts between more organised militia groups

(Brosché & Elfversson, 2012). Unlike civil war violence, communal conflicts tend to be brief and sporadic, but there is also substantial variation in terms of conflict duration (Pettersson, 2010). Data availability has also enabled researchers to begin systematically exploring the causes of communal conflict. This work has mainly focused on environment-related factors (Hendrix & Salehyan, 2012; Meier, Bond & Bond, 2007; Raleigh & Kniveton, 2012; Theisen, 2012), institutions and political dynamics (Brosché, 2014; Eck, 2014; Fjelde, 2009; Tajima, 2014; Wilkinson, 2006), or both (Fjelde & von Uexkull, 2012; Raleigh, 2010; von Uexkull, 2016).

Research focusing on exogenous causes and triggers of communal conflict, such as climate-related shocks, has to a large extent yielded mixed results. However, there is growing consensus within the field that political relationships and institutions – aspects that are in many regards endogenous to conflict – condition the effect of other factors, and therefore need to be taken into account when studying the causes and dynamics of communal violence (von Uexkull, 2016). For instance, Brosché (2014) has shown that local-central political relationships are key to understanding the determinants of communal violence. Raleigh (2014) contextualizes communal conflict, alongside other organised violence, within a landscape of political power relations which affects the relative costs and benefits of engaging in different forms of violence. Numerous studies have shown that patrimonial networks and ethnic-based electoral politics can directly or indirectly fuel communal conflicts (Berenschot, 2011; Fjelde, 2009; Fjelde & Østby, 2014; Ikpe, 2009; Jackson, 2002; Klaus & Mitchell, 2015). Patrimonial political systems imply that elected leaders are expected to channel resources to their constituents in exchange for their electoral support, and are often based on ethnic or tribal allegiances (Arriola, 2013b). Some researchers have focused specifically on electoral dynamics and communal violence; for instance Boone (2011) shows how the use of land as a patronage resource is likely to produce communal tension and violence in connection to elections, while Wilkinson (2006) finds that communal violence in India is fuelled by political contest, but only erupts under certain circumstances, depending on leaders' electoral incentives.

Others have focused more closely on institutions in countries affected by communal violence, which are often democratizing or newly democratic states. For instance, arguing that institutional uncertainty impedes conflict resolution, Eck (2014) has shown that contexts where there are overlapping legal authorities have a higher risk of violent communal conflict. Brosché (2014) argues that when political actors interfere with local institutions and boundaries, undermining the transparency and subsidiarity of intergroup dispute resolution mechanisms, communal conflicts are more likely to escalate into violence. Partiality or ineffectiveness on behalf of the police and security forces contributes to an environment conducive to communal violence (Horowitz, 2000). Varshney (2002) shifts the focus to non-state structures and analyses the role of civil society. He argues that strong civic

interactions between communal groups decrease the risk of communal violence. This is because such civic interactions, particularly in more formal associations, enhance communication and create shared interests that can constrain political actors' ability to manipulate ethnic cleavages. De Juan et al. (2015) find similar effects for religious institutions in Indonesia. Conversely, Beitzinger-Lee (2009) analyses the destructive impact of "uncivil" society, and shows how civic associations based on communal identity can counteract peace and amplify the violent effects of conflict triggers.

So far, however, comparative research on communal conflict has focused overwhelmingly on the determinants of violence whereas the conditions for peace following violent conflict have been overlooked. Hence, this dissertation addresses a clear research gap within the field of peace and conflict research.

Peace after communal conflict

While there is little comparative research specifically focusing on peace following violent communal conflict, insights relevant to this topic can be found within several fields. Here, I first review relevant research within political science, and then note that rich case studies of communal conflict resolution have been conducted by anthropologists, sociologists and historians. I end this section by summarizing research that has focused specifically on the role of government strategies in relation to communal violence.

First, insights can be drawn from a large literature on state institutions and their role in conflict resolution, although this literature has rarely focused on the process of resolving specific communal conflicts but rather on broader societal developments. Within the Africanist literature, some studies relate changing levels of communal violence to a broader process of state-building, and note that these processes have sometimes undermined previously functioning customary conflict resolution mechanisms, but failed to replace them with sufficient state mechanisms (Abbink, 2006; Akinwale, 2010; Mohamed, 2002; Ssero, 2003). Because of the centrality of institutions, some studies have focused on the effect of specific institutional designs on the prospect of resolving conflicts. Adeghe (2009) investigates the potential role of federalism in addressing communal violence, but finds that in Ethiopia it has mainly served to decentralize conflicts with local boundaries becoming intensely contested. Angerbrandt (2015) finds similar effects in Nigeria. Several authors suggest that in the long run, land reforms may reduce communal conflicts revolving around land tenure (Amman & Duraiappah, 2004; Babiker et al., 2005); however, such measures are fraught with difficulties and say less about the short-term possibility for negotiated agreement.

Complementing macro-level studies of state institutions, others have focused on the role of civil society and non-state actors in mediation and reconciliation. Oftentimes, international and local non-government organisations (NGOs) respond to communal conflicts with programmes that seek to assist local communities in resolving their conflicts and improving intergroup relationships. These may take the form of “workshops”, peace education or sustained dialogue (Eaton, 2008a; Imoghibe, 2003). However, the effectiveness of such interventions is debated, and research primarily focused on such interventions in civil wars has shown that the impact is likely to depend strongly on the surrounding political context. For instance, in a randomized experiment assessing the effects of sustained dialogue on intergroup trust in Ethiopia, Svensson and Brounéus (2013) found positive effects on attitudes, but no clear effect on behaviour. Conversely, in a field experiment using a radio programme designed to foster intergroup understanding, Paluck (2009) found a positive effect on behaviour, but no effect on personal beliefs. Overall, while several studies have found positive effects of these types of programmes in contexts of identity-based intergroup violence, there is as of yet little consensus on the long-term effects on conflict-mitigating behaviour as well as on the scope conditions under which interventions can succeed (Ditlmann, Samii & Zeitzoff, 2017). Furthermore, most of these studies focus on cases where the central state itself is being renegotiated in the midst or aftermath of civil war, which means that the dynamics may be markedly different from peacemaking in communal conflicts. Focusing specifically on communal conflict along the Kenya-Uganda border, Eaton (2008b) criticises the entire NGO-based “peace industry” and argues that economic and political incentives have led to approaches that are superficial and cynical, and may at times even have harmful effects.

Taking a broader grasp of the literature, communal conflict resolution has been studied by anthropologists, sociologists and historians. There is also a large “grey literature” documenting specific cases and seeking to derive lessons for policymakers on best practices in communal conflict resolution. Much of this work has focused on Africa. Within this broader body of research, numerous studies have sought to explain the outcome in particular cases, or evaluated strategies used by individual states to reduce communal conflicts within their borders. For instance, anthropologists and historians have given rich accounts of customary conflict resolution mechanisms, such as elders or spiritual leaders mediating in conflict situations (Abbink, 2000; Akinwale, 2010; Blench, 2003; Haggmann & Mulugeta, 2008). There has been a resurgence of interest in customary conflict resolution in recent years from states, international organisations and NGOs, and it has been argued by both scholars and practitioners that these processes may fill an important role as a complement or corrective to state strategies (Boege, 2006; Buur & Kyed, 2007; Mac Ginty, 2008; Menkhaus, 2008). To some extent, this interest in

local, “traditional” conflict resolution practices has been driven by the “local turn” within peacebuilding research and practice more broadly, where disillusionment with the universalist visions of liberal peacebuilding has triggered a search for more legitimate and contextualized approaches (Hughes, Öjendal & Schierenbeck, 2015). In line with the idea that successful conflict resolution needs to be anchored in local traditions and everyday practice, a large number of reports and policy papers have documented successful cases of communal conflict resolution based on customary mechanisms in different parts of Africa (see e.g. Chapman & Kagaha, 2009; Chimaraoke, 2002; Farah, 1999; Frank, 2002; Ibrahim Abdi & Jenner, 1997; Ndegwa, 2001).

However, the extent to which customary conflict resolution practices remain relevant, or are normatively desirable, remains a topic of much debate. Few of the existing studies have taken a systematic comparative approach to analysing the conditions under which such processes are more or less likely to succeed. For instance, within parts of the literature, the erosion of customary authority has become a catchphrase and tends to be taken for granted (and is often employed to explain the very existence of violent communal conflict). In other studies, the opposite holds, and the constructive role of such institutions is assumed. However, neither the strength nor the weakness of these structures and actors should be taken for granted, but should be studied empirically (cf. Hughes, Öjendal & Schierenbeck, 2015; Meagher, 2012). Some communal groups have significant cohesion and elders (or similar authorities) possess strong authority, whereas in other cases this is not true. This may vary greatly among groups in the same state or region. Even in states where these types of institutions are given a semi-formal role in governance, their legitimacy and capacity may vary significantly, and they are often vulnerable to political manipulation and corruption (Kioko, 2017). The same holds for other non-state actors such as NGOs, where the financial capacity, political role and – not least – legitimacy among conflict-affected communities varies greatly (Eaton, 2008b). In particular, the role of these different non-state actors is likely conditional on the central government’s ability to handle conflicts and its willingness to let other actors play a role in this regard.

When it comes to political dynamics, there are some studies that focus explicitly on the relationship between central government responses to communal conflict – a central topic within this dissertation – and prospects for peace or renewed violence. Several of these have described continued or renewed violence as a consequence of too-weak state responses. These studies focus on regions where the state is weak or absent, where communal conflict can be depicted as competition for vital resources in areas of limited state capacity or escalatory “defensive” violence in the absence of government-provided security (Mkutu, 2008b; Weiss, 2004: 23–24). Hence, an overall lack of engagement by the state may result in lawlessness and local ethnic security dilemmas, increasing the risk of recurring violence. However, other studies

show that when governments do engage in conflict management, they may aggravate the situation rather than help to resolve it: For instance, state intervention may upset local power balances, triggering more violence (Abbink, 2000; Bevan, 2008; Mkutu, 2008b). For instance, several studies have argued that attempts by the government to disarm pastoral groups in the Karamoja region have had adverse effects on local insecurity, because the collection of weapons has not been coupled with a clear strategy to address the security concerns of the groups, and people have quickly acquired new arms and resumed fighting (Bevan, 2008; Mkutu, 2008a). Cox (2016) also finds that government interventions may undermine local peace, particularly if state actors employ indiscriminate force in reaction to the conflict. Conversely, Sagawa (2010) claims that among the Daasanach (also known as Merille) in Kenya and Ethiopia, it is the absence of government interference with local power balances which has allowed communities to negotiate local order and control violence. The latter finding is in line with broader claims that in regions characterized by an absence of state authority, local communities tend to develop strong local mechanisms for regulating and resolving violent conflict (Raeymaekers, Menkhaus & Vlassenroot, 2008).

In summary, there is a large and rich body of research on the dynamics of intergroup relations that closely relates to the prospects for peace following communal violence. However, within this literature, there has been a tendency either to treat communal conflict as a symptom of state failure or to focus narrowly on conflict resolution processes in isolation from the political context in which they take place. Hence, there is a gap in the literature in terms of systematically analysing the interaction between central politics and the prospects for peace following communal conflict. A better understanding of these dynamics could help us understand and explain subnational variation in communal conflict resolution, contributing both to the emerging research field on communal conflicts and serving as a basis for improved strategies to address conflicts and promote durable peace.

Theoretical framework

While the essays in this dissertation have different foci and investigate different theoretical claims, they all analyse different components of an overarching question: Under what conditions can peace be established after communal conflicts? Based on my review of previous research, I focus specifically on how interactions between central politics and local peacemaking affect the prospects for peace. This section describes the overarching theoretical framework guiding the analyses. I begin by taking note of the key assumptions underlying the framework. Next, I present the main argument. I elaborate first on government bias, and next on how it affects prospects for peace after communal conflict.

Underlying assumptions

The overarching framework guiding the dissertation is based on a number of assumptions about communal conflicts and the states in which they take place. First, for the purpose of developing hypotheses, I work from the theoretical assumption that the primary conflict actors – the communal groups involved in conflict – are unitary and make rational decisions about whether to engage in violence or seek peace based on the perceived costs and expected outcomes of these different courses of action. By unitary, I mean that I make a theoretical assumption that groups are cohesive and that leaders can make decisions about violence and peace which members of the group will follow, conditions that are often implied by theories about conflict resolution (Kleiboer, 1994). However, the empirical reality is more complex: The cohesiveness of groups involved in communal conflict varies in practice, and intra-party dynamics may be one important factor explaining if and when peace becomes possible (Fearon & Laitin, 1996), a point I return to in my discussion about scope conditions at the end of this introduction. The assumption about unitary actors is most pronounced in the two quantitative studies within this dissertation. In the qualitative analyses, I am able to relax this assumption, and Essay IV in particular explores intragroup dynamics as well as intergroup relations.

In terms of rational decisions, like Varshney (2003) I understand rationality as goal-directed behaviour, where the goals are informed both by instrumental concerns and by norms, values and identity issues. In turn, structural conditions constrain the possible routes of action. In line with Wilkinson's (2006) work on ethnic riots, I understand communal conflicts as revolving around incompatibilities existing at the local level – between the primary conflict actors in focus – but constrained or fuelled by the way the central government responds to the conflict, passively or actively. In turn, I also assume that the central government and other relevant actors make rational decisions about if and how to intervene in reaction to the conflict.

By definition, states are not primary actors in communal conflict. Instead, I treat the central government as one of several potential interveners (or “third parties”). In many cases, communal groups resolve or manage their conflict without involvement by state authorities. As Fearon and Laitin have pointed out, in most cases relations between communal groups are peaceful rather than violent. They developed a theory that can explain peaceful coexistence, even in the absence of a strong state, based on two mechanisms: the fear of escalatory spirals, and intragroup policing (Fearon & Laitin, 1996). While they focus on explaining peaceful relations, their argument also applies to conflict reduction and prevention of renewed violence, as their empirical examples illustrate; indeed, cooperation may emerge as a rational response to previous violence and insecurity. However, they also point out that a fuller understanding of peaceful intergroup relations needs to take explicit account of the central state, and under which conditions it will facilitate or hamper

inter-ethnic cooperation. I seek to follow this imperative. In so doing, I make the basic assumption that in most cases, governments have significant power over the opportunities for other actors to intervene. Furthermore, when the central state does project its authority directly, it will usually override local “informal” institutions (Boone, 2003).

While Fearon and Laitin hold the state constant and theorize about conditions for intergroup cooperation in its absence, I bring it to the fore and note that although by definition the government is not a primary actor in the conflict, its role in practice varies considerably. A key insight underlying the theoretical framework is the inherently contradictory role of the central state in relation to communal conflict. On the one hand, local violent conflict within a state’s territory can be seen as a challenge to that state’s authority, and governments should therefore have strong incentives to attempt to prevent and resolve communal conflicts – and in many cases, of course, they do. On the other hand, the very fact that these conflicts take place indicates a limited ability and/or willingness of the central government to contain this type of violence. This is the point of departure for theorizing about the conditions affecting government strategies vis-à-vis communal conflicts, and the effect this has on the prospects for peace.

Communal conflict and government bias

The core argument of this dissertation is that when the central government is biased in relation to a communal conflict, it affects prospects for conflict resolution in several ways. First, bias affects the government’s actions in relation to the conflict (an argument assessed in Essay I); second, it affects the possibility for other actors to serve as local peacemakers (a key focus in Essays III and IV); and third, it affects the local power dynamics and the expectations of the conflict actors in terms of the costs and benefits of violence or peace (a question explored in Essays II and III).

Government bias implies that the central government seeks to promote the interests of one side in the conflict. I use the concept to refer to both *interests* and *actions* on behalf of the government in relation to a conflict. The government is not always biased: Based on state actors’ need to strengthen or protect their position of power, they have vested interests in some conflicts but not others. However, violent communal conflicts often arise precisely because of (active or passive) unequal treatment of communal groups (Brosché, 2014; Fjelde, 2009; Horowitz, 2002). This implies that these dynamics need to be taken into account when analysing both the causes of communal conflicts, and the prospects for their resolution.

Within this dissertation, I consider two key sources of political bias: resources and relationships. Government bias may relate either to the interactions and ties between central and local actors – relationships – or to the government’s stake in the conflict’s incompatibility – resources. This

distinction is made by Brosché (2014: 31), who notes that governments may be biased in relation to communal groups for instrumental reasons or due to ties to certain communities. In turn, this builds on the distinction in the mediation literature between content bias, referring to a mediator's preference for certain issue outcomes, and source bias, referring to ties to a conflict party (Arad & Carnevale, 1994).

Government bias related to resources may arise if the conflict concerns an issue that is of particular strategic or economic value to the central government. For instance, Boone (2014) argues that the economic importance of the area where conflict takes place may affect state strategies in relation to that conflict. She shows that in areas with valuable, fertile land, governments have usually maintained direct control over land allocation and promoted settlement of their political supporters on the land; if local conflict arises, the government will support these constituencies. In general, if conflict takes place in an area that has some economically or strategically important resource, the government is likely to support the side in the conflict that it perceives as most likely to cooperate in facilitating access to the resource.

In terms of relationships, the government's position in relation to a local conflict may be different depending on whether the groups involved are considered important political supporters, threatening opponents, or if they are not perceived to play a significant political role at all (Cederman, Wimmer & Min, 2010; Wilkinson, 2006). The emphasis on relationships is in line with Kalyvas' elite interaction theory, which stresses how alliances between local and central elites may affect conflicts and power dynamics on different levels. Importantly, these relationships can go both ways: Just as central elites may manipulate local conflicts to suit their broader political purposes, local elites may exploit national-level conflicts or cleavages to secure support against their local adversaries (Kalyvas, 2003). In a context where electoral outcomes are closely connected to ethnic voting, such dynamics are likely to be particularly important. For instance, local elites can promise to deliver local votes in exchange for policies or resource allocations favouring their community (Arriola, 2009; Lynch, 2015). Supporting a group involved in a communal conflict may, in turn, be a way for the government to reward that group for political support (Allen, 1999; Brosché, 2014). I make a further distinction between "positive bias" – when the government's partiality in relation to a specific conflict derives from a positive relationship, such as ethnic ties, with one side – and "negative bias", when partiality mainly derives from the incentive to marginalize one side in the conflict, for instance because it is perceived as a political threat. I explore these dimensions of bias in Essays I and II.

Of course, "positive" and "negative" bias may be present simultaneously in any given conflict, and are likely mutually reinforcing. Indeed, they may produce each other: Discrimination may be motivated by the very fact that a group is in conflict with a politically favoured group. Similarly, while I make

a theoretical distinction between bias based on resources and relationships, in practice these dynamics are likely to interact and reinforce each other. This is illustrated by Boone's research, which shows that central governments tend to strategically settle their supporters in economically important regions (Boone, 2012; Boone, 2014). Still, I argue that it makes analytical sense to distinguish between these different origins of government bias, and I show in the essays within this dissertation that they may have slightly different implications.

Government bias and local peacemaking

When the government is biased in relation to a communal conflict, it affects the government's strategies vis-à-vis the conflict, as well as the conflict parties' perceptions and expectations related to the desirability, and viability, of peace. First of all, bias in relation to the groups involved in the conflict may condition the government's reaction to violence (Horowitz, 2002; Wilkinson, 2006). Intervention offers an opportunity to affect the local power dynamics or secure control over strategic resources. In turn, if an intervening actor pushes for an outcome that does not reflect the interests or relative strength of the primary actors in a conflict, this will increase the risk of conflict recurrence (Werner & Yuen, 2005). This implies that interventions to impose peace may have different effects on the risk of renewed violence in the future, depending on government bias. If the government intervenes in a partial manner, it may upset the local power balance and raise the risk of conflict recurrence between the primary actors.

The primary parties are also less likely to be able to trust each other and to negotiate an agreement to their conflict if they perceive that the government is biased or has a strong interest in a particular outcome. In order to overcome fears about the future and negotiate a mutually acceptable agreement, the parties are reliant on third-party guarantees, but such guarantees will only work if the conflict parties have reason to believe they will be upheld and fairly applied (Lake and Rothchild 1996). I argue that a communal group that has the support of central politicians will perceive that it can likely obtain a better deal outside the negotiation table, with active or passive governmental support. This means that this group will be less willing to yield in negotiations; even if it does, it cannot credibly commit to an agreement. On the other hand, a group that perceives itself to be politically marginalized will not trust the government's willingness to protect them. If the parties believe that the central government is not willing to guarantee or uphold the agreement they reach, they will not be able to trust each other enough to negotiate a mutually acceptable solution to the incompatibility.

In laying out these arguments in the different essays, I emphasize to different extent two theoretical mechanisms in relation to the possibilities for peace: local power dynamics (in focus in Essay II), and dialogue and trust-building (in Essays III and IV). In developing the arguments, I draw on

existing knowledge within the field of peace and conflict research, but adapt the expectations based on the specific context of communal conflict. Within the literature on international mediation in civil wars, there are strong arguments that mediator bias may, under certain circumstances, facilitate rather than obstruct peace (Kydd, 2003; Svensson, 2007; Svensson, 2009; Touval & Zartman, 1985). These studies suggest that bias may enhance mediator credibility, help overcome commitment problems, or that the mediator may be able to “deliver its side” in case of an agreement. While my theoretical argumentation draws on the mediation literature, I argue that the role of the central government vis-à-vis communal conflict is substantially different from external mediation in civil wars. Hence, the theoretical expectations for the effect of bias are also different. First, as noted above, I argue with reference to communal conflict that it matters whether bias is “positive” – i.e., that the government actively favours one group – or “negative”, i.e. that one group is actively discriminated against. In cases with positive bias, I expect that intervention will decrease the likelihood of renewed violence, because it will reinforce the existing power dynamics. On the other hand, in cases with negative bias, I expect intervention to upset the local power balance and therefore increase the risk of recurrence. In other words, the theoretical expectations regarding the risk of conflict recurrence depend on the type of bias. At the same time, and in line with Brosché (2014), I expect bias in general to be detrimental to trust building and, ultimately, conflict resolution. While these arguments may seem contradictory, they focus on different components of the outcome of interest – the absence of violence and the presence of agreement, respectively – and as such capture different dimensions of the broader phenomenon of interest.

The effect of government bias on the prospects for peace after communal conflict is transmitted through a number of relationships between key actors in the context of communal conflict. First, there is a direct relationship between the central government and the groups in conflict. I argue that this relationship affects the government’s strategies in relation to the conflict (Essay I), the local power dynamics between the groups in conflict (Essay II) and the possibility for these groups to trust each other (Essay III). Second, the relationship between central politics and local conflict is mediated by local politicians and other powerful subnational actors (explored in Essay III). Third, the government’s actions affect the opportunities for potential local peacemakers to mediate and help the conflict actors resolve conflict (Essay IV). If the state’s legitimacy has been eroded due to inaction or partiality in relation to communal conflict, non-state actors can sometimes step in as successful mediators. In turn, the role these non-state actors can play is conditioned by their previous relationship with the conflict parties. I argue that they are more likely to be seen as legitimate and resourceful mediators if they are perceived as neutral and at the same time have played a previous role in governance, providing important services to local communities (cf. Hagmann

& Péclard, 2011; Menkhaus, 2008; Raeymaekers, Menkhaus & Vlassenroot, 2008). However, while such actors may be able to help the parties overcome mistrust and engage in substantive negotiations, the longer-term possibility for peace and upholding agreement depends on change at the central political level.

In theorizing about the relationship between central politics and local peacemaking, I characterize actors along the dimensions central–local and state–non-state, implying four ideal-type categories of actors relevant to local peacebuilding (cf. Krampe, 2016). It is important to point out that this is a simplification, and that reality is a lot messier than these dichotomies imply (Kalyvas, 2003; Mitchell, 1991). Political relationships and ties imply that some actors involved in localized, communal violence have close links to central decision-makers and the inner circles of power; conversely, top politicians residing in the capital may have strong ties to and commonly visit a specific sub-national constituency. As I have noted, these connections are often intricately linked both to the causes of communal conflict and to its potential resolution. Local politicians and other elites within the communities involved in conflict occupy a particularly important mediating position at the nexus between both the central–local arenas and between state and non-state domains (Brosché, 2014). In many of the countries affected by communal conflict, the concept of the state and state authority is in itself challenged and fluid; for instance, actors may strategically employ symbols and language associated with the state or with local custom to legitimize their authority in different arenas (Hagmann & Péclard, 2011). In Essays III and IV, I seek to move beyond the simplified analytic dichotomies to present a more nuanced argument about how central politics affect prospects for peace after communal conflict.

Methodological approach

Depending on the analytical focus of each essay, I strategically employ different methodologies. Essays I and II are quantitative studies covering sub-Saharan Africa after the end of the Cold War. A focus on sub-Saharan Africa is justified as it is the part of the world most affected by communal conflicts (Brosché & Elfversson, 2012; Sundberg, Eck & Kreutz, 2012). This makes understanding prospects for preventing renewed violence in this context particularly important, and also means that focusing on this region ensures sufficient observations and relevant variation. Extant systematic research on the causes and dynamics of communal violence, which this dissertation builds upon and seeks to contribute to, has also overwhelmingly focused on this region (Döring, 2017). Complementing the two quantitative studies, Essays III and IV employ case study methodology to more closely analyse causal relationships. These two studies draw on unique and extensive interview

material collected during several field trips to Kenya. Taken together, the combination of methods and empirical material employed in the dissertation enables the development, assessment and refinement of theories concerning the prospects for peace after communal conflict.

Quantitative analysis and data

Two of the essays are large-N studies which develop hypotheses based on existing research and test them using logistic regression analysis. In these essays, I study the determinants of government intervention (Essay I) and the effect of government intervention on the likelihood of conflict recurrence (Essay II). In both cases, the analyses are based on a novel dataset on government interventions in communal conflict, collected as part of this dissertation project. The data collection was purposely conducted so as to be compatible with communal conflict data from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program. This enables an analysis of how characteristics of communal conflict affect the prospects for government intervention, as well as how intervention affects prospects for renewed violence. The dataset contains all communal conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa between 1989 and 2011 that are recorded in the UCDP Non-State Conflict Dataset. UCDP defines communal conflicts as fighting between “[g]roups that share a common identification along ethnic, clan, religious, national or tribal lines. These are not groups that are permanently organized for combat, but who at times organize themselves along said lines to engage in fighting” (Sundberg, Eck & Kreutz, 2012). Communal conflicts are a subcategory of the broader UCDP Non-State Conflict Dataset. To be included in the UCDP dataset, the fighting in the conflict must reach an intensity threshold of 25 deaths in at least one year. Each conflict involves one dyad, i.e. two communal groups (or coalitions of communal groups) fighting each other.

My dataset includes armed government interventions in response to violent communal conflict. For each active conflict episode in the UCDP dataset, I coded whether or not the government deployed security forces in reaction to the violence. Preventive measures are not included. Although a dataset containing preventive deployments would enable a more comprehensive analysis of the effects of interventions, collecting such data on a systematic scale would have been very difficult due to the scarcity of reliable information for some countries and because news attention tends to be limited before a conflict has escalated (Jakobsen, 2000). Focusing on the cases that have escalated into violent conflict alleviated this problem, because these conflicts have generally generated enough media attention to result in the availability of comparable information. To be included in the dataset, security force deployment had to take place in direct response to the fighting. Deployment of security forces typically takes place in direct connection to the outbreak of violence, i.e. within days of its eruption. Interventions were coded if the

government deployed a contingent of military forces, paramilitary troops or special police units (including federal police in federal states) to the locality of conflict in direct reaction to the violence. For country-years without a functioning state, the intervention variable was coded as missing (in effect, this concerns Somalia in 1997–2000 and 2003–2005, based on UCDP’s coding of the state-based conflict).

Cases in which communal violence was only addressed by the ordinary, local police forces are not included in the dataset. To be sure, the management of conflict by local police likely plays an important role in explaining the prospects for re-establishment of peace. However, the decision to focus on deployment of the army and other special units is based on the assumption that these latter types of interventions are better measures of a situation where the central government actively and strategically seeks to project its authority over a specific conflict. While local police forces are often made up of local residents, the deployment of military forces more closely resembles “outside” intervention (Horowitz, 2002: 358).

In both quantitative essays, I combine my interventions dataset with geocoded information about local resources and state capacity, as well as group-level information about ethnic power relations. In contrast to much of the previous large-N research on communal conflict, the essays focus on conflicts as the unit of analysis, rather than geographic units as has been the dominant approach in existing research on the causes of communal conflict (cf. Fjelde & von Uexkull, 2012; Raleigh, 2014). Although the availability of geocoded, sub-nationally disaggregated data – and the analysis of what factors make a specific location more or less likely to experience communal violence – has made many of the recent advancements in this field possible, a focus on conflicts as the unit of analysis allows for making and testing different theoretical arguments, and is appropriate to the focus on conflict resolution and recurrence (cf. Gleditsch & Weidmann, 2012: 475). A focus on the actors involved in conflict rather than the areas where conflict takes place may also tell a slightly different story about the relationship between political hierarchies and communal conflict, as I discuss further in Essay II. This is because a focus on dyads enables analysis of the relative power balance between the actors involved in conflict. For instance, while several studies have argued that marginalization increases the risk of communal conflict and found support for this in a spatial approach, my data show that a large proportion of the conflicts involve a politically included group on at least one side.

Qualitative methods and field research

For the purpose of theory development, in-depth empirical study of carefully selected cases is crucial (George & Bennett, 2005; Gerring, 2007). While structured focused comparison enables an assessment of the explanatory value

of existing theories as well as theoretical hunches, within-case analysis and process tracing enable the generation of a new understanding of causal mechanisms. To this end, cases should be selected in order to provide a fruitful combination of control and variation (George & Bennett, 2005). Furthermore, one important research objective of this dissertation is attempting to disentangle local dynamics from state strategies and assess the relative strength and importance of each, in line with the imperative to avoid a state-centrist bias (Zahar, 2009); for this purpose, close and in-depth assessment of local processes is essential. In line with these overarching considerations, two of the essays are qualitative analyses focusing on cases in Kenya, one of the states that have seen the highest number of communal conflicts (Brosché & Elfversson, 2012).

Kenya provides a fruitful context for analysing the political and subnational dynamics of interest within this dissertation. First, there is a variety of outcomes in terms of conflict resolution or recurring violence following communal conflicts, ranging from elaborate peace agreements that have upheld peace for a long period of time to conflicts that have recurred repeatedly. Second, while Kenya has a relatively strong central state, the effective presence of this state varies considerably across different parts of the country (Chopra, 2009). Third, politics in Kenya have been highly characterized by clientelist and ethnic networks affecting both macro- and local-level conflicts (Boone, 2011; Haugerud, 1997; Lynch, 2011), making it a suitable case for exploring the effects of political bias on local conflict resolution.

Essay III consists of a structured, focused comparison of four cases in Kenya: local peace processes in Wajir, Tana River, Kerio Valley and Mandera. The analysis builds on the theoretical and empirical insights from the previous essays, and systematically tests arguments about the effect of political bias on conflict resolution by comparing four cases that are similar in many important regards but have different outcomes in terms of conflict resolution. This case selection enables me to focus on the role of political dynamics, while holding other potential explanations constant. Taking a closer look at the mechanisms of peacemaking, Essay IV is a within-case analysis of the peace process in Kerio Valley in 2001–2002. It traces the history of conflict and the process of conflict resolution in order to understand the role played by different actors in that process. The approach, based on rich empirical material, is guided by an overarching theoretical framework, but also allows the emergence of untheorized insights.

Given the limited amount of publically available information about the processes of local peacemaking after communal conflict, field research in these contexts is essential to improve our theoretical understanding of these phenomena (cf. Wood, 2008). A substantial part of the empirical material in Essays III and IV consists of interviews with experts, practitioners and locals from the conflict-affected areas, conducted during field trips in 2013, 2014

and 2016. During these trips, I conducted a total 75 interviews in Nairobi, Nakuru, Eldoret, Kerio Valley, Malindi, and Tana River. Interviewees were selected strategically based on their roles and insights in conflict and peace processes in different locations. In all cases, interviews were semi-structured. This interview method enables a systematic compilation of information on pre-set questions, while also allowing the participants to expand on topics they consider important and to add other relevant information. Through active and reflective listening, the researcher can gain insight into dimensions beyond factual events, such as motivations and interests (Brounéus, 2011). All interviews were preceded by acquiring informed consent, and participants were given a sheet of information about the project, including contact details. Participants were informed that there was no economic compensation for participating, but were usually provided with a soda or cup of tea. Before the field research, I obtained approval from the Swedish Ethics Review Board (Etikprövningsnämnden, EPN).

In Kerio Valley, the subject of the in-depth case study in Essay IV, I conducted a longer stay and carried out interviews with locals with the help of a research assistant. Here, interviewees were selected through a snowballing technique, with multiple strategically selected entry points to obtain the insights of people with different perspectives (Wood, 2006). This procedure is suitable when the aim is not to achieve a statistically representative sample of respondents, but rather to ensure inclusion of all relevant perspectives on the research question. The snowballing method also helps to overcome problems of mistrust and limited access, which may pose significant methodological challenges when conducting field research in areas affected by political violence (Cohen & Arieli, 2011).

A key concern when collecting and interpreting the interview material was awareness of the different biases and interests of participants in telling a specific story. In my case, it was important to keep in mind that certain respondents might – intentionally or unintentionally – omit information, seek to play up their own importance in a local peace process, or promote a certain narrative about how a local conflict played out. At the same time, to the extent that they can be detected by the researcher, such biases and omissions can in themselves be a source of important information (Fujii, 2010). In order to verify and triangulate factual accounts (Höglund & Öberg, 2011; Wood, 2008), the interview material was complemented by an extensive review of secondary sources, including government and NGO reports, news articles, and academic case studies.

Conducting interviews on the subject of violent conflict is always sensitive. The benefits of accessing primary information about the conflicts must always be weighed against the risk that interview participants are re-traumatized or otherwise subjected to risk due to participation (Brounéus, 2011). In some cases, particularly when conflict is still active, associating with outsiders and sharing information may endanger participants' physical security (Mertus,

2009). For these reasons, I conducted continuous risk assessments while in the field, and participants were always informed that they could withdraw participation at any time before, during or after the interview. Identifying information and interview recordings were stored under password protection while in the field, as well as thereafter. In Kerio Valley, where the bulk of the interviews in conflict-affected communities took place, at the time of the research more than ten years had passed since the conflict was violent, and most people appeared comfortable talking about the conflict and intergroup relations.

Presenting the essays

This section presents the individual essays in more detail, and situates their findings in relation to the overarching theoretical argument.

Essay I: Providing security or protecting interests? Government interventions in violent communal conflicts

The first essay, “Providing security or protecting interests? Government interventions in violent communal conflicts”, was published in 2015 in *Journal of Peace Research*. The essay takes a first step towards assessing the prospects for peace after communal conflict by problematizing government interventions in these conflicts. It notes that government responses to communal conflicts within their territory vary significantly, and theorizes the conditions that affect the willingness and capacity to intervene. I argue that state intervention is explained by a combination of strategic interests and state capacity, and that interests related to ethnic constituencies and land control play an important part in explaining governments’ strategies.

To assess the theoretical arguments, I employ multivariate logistic regression analysis of data covering sub-Saharan Africa from 1989 to 2010. The analysis is based on UCDP data on non-state conflicts combined with my own dataset on armed government interventions in communal conflict. I find that the probability of government intervention is higher if conflict involves groups that are represented in executive power, takes place in an economically important area, or revolves around land and authority. This is interpreted as support for the notion that strategic concerns – the basic interest of rulers to protect their power base and secure important resources – play a role in explaining government behaviour in reaction to violent conflicts. In line with expectations, the overall material capacity of the state also conditions the likelihood of intervention: A lower state capacity and the presence of state-based armed conflict both decrease the likelihood of intervention.

The findings lay the basis for the subsequent essays by showing that the management of communal conflicts cannot be analysed merely as a component of a gradual process of state building and institutional reform. Rather, in line with previous research on how rulers seek to protect their power base and secure important resources, my results suggest that the decision to intervene is conditioned by ethnic constituencies and control over land and resources. This implies that to understand the conditions for peace after communal conflict, the incentives underlying central government responses to local conflicts need to be kept in mind, and their effects analysed empirically.

Essay II: Whose side are you on? Government bias, intervention and the recurrence of communal conflict

The second essay builds on the insights from Essay I and asks how government intervention in communal conflict, under different conditions, affects the risk of conflict recurrence. It focuses on how government bias in relation to the conflict parties affects the impact that armed intervention has on the risk of future violence. I argue that this impact will be different depending on whether this bias reflects or challenges the local power dynamics. Specifically, I expect that when the government intervenes in favour of a group that is a political ally at the national level (positive bias), the outcome will reinforce the dominance of that group, decreasing the risk of recurrence. On the other hand, if the government intervenes and seeks to weaken a politically threatening group (negative bias), this will result in an outcome that upsets the local power balance, thus increasing the risk of recurrence.

I test my propositions in a multivariate regression analysis of data covering sub-Saharan Africa, 1989–2011. To assess whether government bias conditions the effect of intervention, I interact my armed intervention variable with measures for negative and positive bias constructed based on the Ethnic Power Relations (EPR) dataset. To capture conflict recurrence, I rely on data from the UCDP Georeferenced Events Dataset (GED), which allows me to ascertain whether the conflicting groups re-engage in lethal violence. I also control for a number of potentially confounding variables related to the conflict dynamics and the broader context. The analysis provides support for my arguments: Government intervention is associated with a decreased risk of conflict recurrence when there is positive bias, and an increased risk of recurrence when there is negative bias.

The findings contribute to the broader study of how ethnic power relationships affect the dynamics of sub-state violence. The claim that such relationships affect government actions in intervention, and that it matters whether bias is in favour of the weaker or the stronger side in the conflict, appears to hold some currency. The analysis also lays a foundation for more

closely analysing how security forces act during interventions, as well as investigating the broader implications of government bias for peace beyond the mere absence of violence.

Essay III: The political conditions for local peacemaking: A comparative study of communal conflict resolution in Kenya

The third essay adopts a qualitative, comparative approach to investigating the impact of government bias. I focus on the effect that bias has on the ability of the conflict parties to negotiate an agreement addressing their incompatibility. I argue that government bias makes the conflict parties less likely to overcome distrust, because they cannot trust the government's willingness to guarantee or uphold any agreement they reach. Compared to the preceding essays, I take a closer look at the actual dynamics of government bias, paying attention to the role of subnational politicians and other local elites.

I explore my arguments using a systematic comparison of four cases in Kenya. The analysis is based on a range of different sources, including government and NGO reports, news articles, and academic case studies, as well as interviews with experts, practitioners and locals from the conflict-affected areas. Whereas Essay II analysed the effect of armed interventions by the government without taking into account what other strategies the government and other actors adopt, Essay III seeks to open up this black box. I purposely select cases where the government (at least ostensibly) sought to promote a solution, and where non-state actors reportedly perceived as neutral acted as mediators, in order to isolate the effect of government bias. I analyse four conflicts with similar dynamics, but with different outcomes in terms of negotiation and agreement. The analysis suggests that in cases with a strong perception of government bias, it was difficult for the parties to overcome distrust, and hence they were unable to reach substantive peace agreements.

The analysis also shows that it matters whether bias primarily concerns resources or relationships. When bias relates to resources, it is more resistant to change, while political turnover may alleviate former bias related to relationships and open up possibilities for peacemaking. Through this distinction, as well as the emphasis on government bias and the interaction between communal groups, local elites, and central political actors, the study contributes to the research on ethnic politics and ethnic violence. It also highlights the fact that the potential role of non-state actors in local conflict resolution is strongly contingent on the broader political dynamics.

Essay IV: Peace from below: Governance and peacebuilding in Kerio Valley, Kenya

The fourth essay, “Peace from below: Governance and peacebuilding in Kerio Valley, Kenya”, was published in 2016 in *Journal of Modern African Studies*. It takes a closer look at the actual dynamics of communal conflict resolution through an in-depth analysis of one peace process. The essay seeks to understand the conditions under which non-state actors can become successful mediators in communal conflict. I argue that the involvement of such actors in local peacemaking, and the type of roles they are able to play, is conditioned by their previous involvement in local governance and their relation to the conflict actors. The argument highlights how a history of local engagement generates not only material but also significant symbolic power, which becomes important in situations of conflict resolution.

Based on field research in Kerio Valley, Kenya, the essay analyses the peace process that began in 2001 between the Marakwet and Pokot communities, and culminated in the Kolowa peace agreement in 2002. The process was mediated by a Catholic social organisation, and drew on customary approaches to conflict management between pastoralist and sedentary communities. The analysis illustrates how over time, the failure of the state to provide security and basic services led non-state actors to fill important roles in governance. Through this process, they were endowed with legitimacy and power which enabled them to play key roles in a peace process that led to a mutually acceptable peace agreement.

The analysis illustrates how a specific local peace process is at the same time deeply intertwined with national politics, yet highly context-specific. I argue in the essay that national political dynamics affected the history and dynamics of the conflict and the role that non-state conflict resolution could play, and also that political change was likely necessary for the longer-term sustainability of peace. Yet, the conclusion of a substantive agreement addressing the conflict, and its legitimacy in the eyes of local residents, cannot be fully explained without taking the role and history of local actors and customs into account. Despite the Kolowa agreement, and after the publication of this essay, violent conflict re-erupted in Kerio Valley in 2016. While an examination of this development falls beyond the scope of this dissertation, the analysis in Essay IV may provide relevant insights both for interpreting the return of violence and for attempts to restore peace once again.

Conclusions

To recall, the overarching purpose of this dissertation is to understand the conditions for peace after communal conflicts. I find that central government responses to communal conflicts vary, and that strategic interests shape

government actions. Apart from structural, capacity-related factors, government strategies are also affected by rulers' interest to protect their electoral power base and secure important resources. In turn, the government's position and actions in relation to a conflict affect the conflict parties' willingness and ability to seek a peaceful resolution to their conflict, as well as the possibility for non-state actors to play a role in local peacemaking. Importantly, when the government is actively biased, it may obstruct other actors from intervening; however, when it is passive or absent, non-state actors can become successful peacemakers.

These findings represent contributions to a number of ongoing debates and research fields. First, the finding that state intervention cannot only be explained by capacity-related factors implies that the management of communal conflicts should not be seen as merely a component of a gradual process of state building and institutional reform. Instead, like Wilkinson (2006), I find that governments deploy security forces in reaction to violence when it is in their interest to do so. In line with previous research on ethnic politics (e.g. Boone, 2014; Cederman, Wimmer & Min, 2010), my findings suggest that intervention in communal conflict is employed strategically to ensure control over important resources and provide support to ethnic constituencies. This implies that such strategic interests, and not only material capacity, should be kept in mind when analysing communal conflict management.

A second key contribution relates to the differentiation between different forms of government bias. Building on Brosché (2014), I argued that government bias in relation to communal conflict can relate either to resources or relationships. I found in Essay I that both forms of bias make government intervention more likely, but I also argued in Essay III that they may have slightly different implications for the prospects for conflict resolution. In line with Brosché's findings, both forms of bias are found to impede trust building and conflict resolution; however, my analysis also suggests that it may be more difficult to overcome bias related to resources. The findings in Essay III indicate that when bias relates to relationships, political turnover may alleviate perceptions of bias and create a window of opportunity for peacemaking. On the other hand, bias related to resources is likely to be more durable and therefore more difficult to overcome.

I also distinguish between positive and negative bias, depending on whether a communal conflict includes a politically favoured group or a community that is actively discriminated against by the government. This distinction allows me to adapt arguments from the civil war literature and test them in the context of communal conflict. Previous research on bias and mediation has found that it matters which side the mediator favours (Kydd, 2003; Svensson, 2007). While the dynamics of government intervention in communal conflict are different than international mediation in civil wars, my findings in Essay II that government intervention has different effects on the

risk of conflict recurrence depending on the form of bias speaks to this literature: They suggest that like in civil wars, it matters whether the intervener sides with the stronger or weaker side in communal conflict. The findings are also in line with Werner and Yuen's argument that outcomes of intervention that do not reflect the relative power balance between the parties are unlikely to last (Werner & Yuen, 2005).

Finally, a third key contribution is the theorizing and assessment of the prospect for non-state actors to engage in local peacemaking. One implication of the findings in Essay I is that the role and importance of non-state, informal actors in local peacemaking varies not only with state strength but also depending on the incentives for central government intervention: Even in strong and capable states, some conflicts may receive little attention by government agencies, heightening the need for engagement by other actors. In Essay III, I find that non-state actors can help conflict actors reach substantive peace agreements when government bias does not impede trust building. Essay IV further explores how non-state actors can gain influence and legitimacy, key assets in order to become successful mediators. In line with research on "hybrid political order", I find that non-state actors can gain symbolic and material power through their involvement in local governance in the absence or shadow of the state (e.g. Boege et al., 2008). My findings from Kerio Valley, Kenya, resonate with similar examples from Nigeria, Ethiopia and Uganda (Buur & Kyed, 2007; Raeymaekers, Menkhaus & Vlassenroot, 2008). They also contribute to suggesting some conditions for successful non-state peacemaking, complementing Eaton's work, which has demonstrated the shortcomings of many NGOs and other non-state actors in trying to address communal conflict (Eaton, 2008a; 2008b).

Implications for future research

The findings within this dissertation highlight avenues for further research within two main literatures. One is the study of communal conflict as a specific topic within peace and conflict research, and the other is ethnic politics, specifically its implications for political violence.

In terms of the growing research field on communal conflict, this dissertation contributes a perspective that has largely been missing so far by systematically analysing the prospects for peace after violent conflict. Previously, most works have focused on the conditions that cause communal conflict, or that lead them to escalate (Brosché, 2014; Eck, 2014; Fjelde & Østby, 2014; Horowitz, 2002; Raleigh, 2010; Wilkinson, 2006; von Uexkull, 2016). By expanding the focus to conflict resolution and conflict recurrence, this dissertation opens up several agendas for further research. One such research agenda would be to conduct more comparative analyses of mediation in the context of communal conflict. As I noted in the previous research section, numerous case studies highlight successful mediation in specific

cases, without necessarily connecting these cases to broader theories or comparatively assessing the determinants for mediation success. By more explicitly testing theories and findings from the large literature on international mediation in the context of communal conflict, future research can develop middle-range theories that broaden our understanding of mediation in this specific context. Future research should also unpack government intervention and study explicitly what governments do when they intervene in communal conflict. As shown in the extended analysis in Essay II, intervention increases the risk of conflict recurrence in cases where communal conflict involves a marginalized group. This may suggest that governments in such contexts behave in a way that strengthens the grievances of the groups involved or undermines local capacities to prevent violence (cf. Cox, 2016). This point warrants further systematic exploration.

Another fruitful line of research is to question and analyse empirically the cohesiveness of the actors involved in communal conflict. While I base much of my theorizing on the assumption that the groups involved in communal conflict can be treated as unitary actors, and that spokespeople can sit down to negotiate on their behalf, in practice this is an empirical question and likely varies significantly. Theorizing and analysing the conditions under which valid spokespersons (Zartman, 2001) can be identified, for instance, may help in identifying the scope conditions for local conflict resolution. Also related to the application of existing peace and conflict theory in the context of communal conflict, this dissertation finds that the incompatibility – the conflict issue that the parties are fighting over – affects both the way the government addresses the conflict, and the prospects for peace or conflict recurrence. This suggests that researchers should continue to analyse conflict issues in communal conflicts, both in quantitative and qualitative work, and that this dimension ought to form a part of systematic data collection (cf. von Uexkull & Pettersson, 2013).

This dissertation also suggests new avenues for research within the literature on ethnic politics and political violence. In particular, many recent studies have focused on how rulers in semi-democratic states employ different strategies in relation to sub-national areas inhabited by groups that are to varying degrees perceived as supporters or threats (e.g. Arriola, 2009; Arriola, 2013a; Hassan, 2016). While much of this work has focused on the national political level, and studied outcomes such as voting patterns and top-level elite bargaining, some recent work explicitly connects these strategies to the incentives of different sub-national groups to engage in political violence (Raleigh, 2014; Wimmer, Cederman & Min, 2009). The findings of this dissertation contribute to this work, and suggest that it may be fruitful to continue to study the sub-national consequences of these dynamics not only in terms of violence, but also for local bargaining and peacemaking. In turn, insights from the ethnic politics literature about coalition building and principal-agent problems could help problematizing the central government

as an actor in the study of violent communal conflict. Within this dissertation, I mainly treat the government as a unitary actor with a fixed set of preferences in relation to different communal groups, but in reality multiple groups and elites from different grassroots constituencies are usually represented in the inner circles of power (Arriola, 2013b; Lynch, 2011; Mozaffar & Scarritt, 2005).

Finally, while the geographic focus of this dissertation is on sub-Saharan Africa, future work should expand the analysis and assess the extent to which the arguments travel to other contexts. This is not only a question of assessing the geographic scope conditions, but more specifically, future work should explore the boundaries of the argument in terms of the political system, level of democratization, institutional landscapes, and other contextual and structural factors that condition the dynamics and resolution of communal conflicts.

Policy implications

One important implication of the findings in this dissertation is that policymakers should seek to support locally legitimate conflict resolution mechanisms, if such are present. For governments and organisations seeking to support peace after communal conflict, this implies critically analysing and identifying local actors that exacerbate conflict, as well as structures and individuals that have the potential to serve as mediators. As Eaton (2008a; 2008b) has pointed out, donors seeking to support non-state conflict resolution should be wary of fuelling a cynical “peace industry” where short-term funding results in briefcase NGOs and local leaders with varying degrees of popular legitimacy attending peace workshops that have little connection to the actual conflict dynamics. To help donors identify potential peacemakers, my findings suggest that actors who are considered neutral and who have gained legitimacy by helping to provide important services may be particularly important in this regard.

On a related note, the Kenyan case studies in this dissertation support the insight from many other studies that culturally anchored, customary conflict resolution mechanisms are often seen as the most efficient and legitimate path to local peace. Cultural and symbolic resources can be important in mobilizing support for local peacemaking. However, policymakers should be wary of romanticizing or uncritically supporting customary practices. First, conflict resolution mechanisms that rely on customary practices are often conservative and exclusionary. For example, reliance on customary approaches may mean that women are effectively excluded or marginalized. Second, customary structures and authorities mean different things in different contexts, and are sometimes strongly politicized and involved in fuelling the conflict. Finally, while customary institutions are often effective and necessary, reliance on

these types of group-based structures may mean that ethnic “essentialism” and difference is upheld (cf. Fearon & Laitin, 1996:731).

Finally, and perhaps most crucially, a key overarching finding of this dissertation is that central government actions often have harmful effects on the prospects for durable peace at the local level. This finding resonates with previous research on communal conflict and government bias (e.g. Abdulahi, 2004; Abdulrahman & Tar, 2008; Brosché, 2014; Fratkin, 1994). However, it does not imply that states should scale back on their duty to protect their citizens from violence. Instead, the findings in this dissertation underline that the best prospects for peace are achieved when central governments support local peacemaking processes and strengthen state provision of security. International actors and organisations can put pressure on governments to improve their performance in this regard. Closely monitoring the conduct of security forces in situations where bias is present is one tool towards this end. External actors may also encourage trust building between conflict actors by providing security guarantees when the central government is not perceived as a credible guarantor. In the long run, and more generally, improvement of state institutions and service delivery may alleviate the risk of communal conflict (both its emergence and recurrence). International organisations should hence push governments to improve their performance both in relation to these structural causes of conflict, and in relation to intervention, in order to make central politics supportive of local peacemaking.

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