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**CAUSES OF COMMUNAL CONFLICTS-  
GOVERNMENT BIAS, ELITES, AND CONDITIONS FOR COOPERATION**

Johan Brosché

*Causes of Communal Conflicts –  
Government Bias, Elites, and Conditions for Cooperation*

Johan Brosché

*Johan Brosché* is an assistant professor at the Department of Peace and Conflict Research at Uppsala University. He defended his dissertation "Masters of War – The Role of Elites in Sudan's Communal Conflicts" at Uppsala University in February 2014. The dissertation can be found at <http://uu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:677431/FULLTEXT01.pdf>. His e-mail is [johan.brosche@pcr.uu.se](mailto:johan.brosche@pcr.uu.se).

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## Introduction

In some regions communal conflicts lead to only a few deaths or are solved before they have caused any fatalities. In others, however, these conflicts become very violent and dozens, hundreds, or even thousands of people are killed. The Ituri region of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is a well-known example of the latter, and communal conflicts have killed thousands in this region. In other parts of the DRC, however, such conflicts occur with a much lower level of violence despite the fact that they share several structural characteristics with the Ituri region (ICG 2003). Similar subnational variations also distinguish communal conflicts in Nigeria, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, Kenya, and Uganda, the six countries most afflicted by this type of conflicts since 1989 (Sundberg, Eck, and Kreutz 2012; Sundberg and Melander 2013). This study sets out to examine this variation. It does so by asking the following research question: *Why do communal conflicts turn violent in some regions but not in others?* To empirically explore this question, three Sudanese regions will be compared: Darfur, Eastern Sudan and Greater Upper Nile. In two of them, Darfur and Greater Upper Nile, communal conflicts have killed thousands, but such conflicts have killed only a few dozen people in Eastern Sudan.

Communal conflicts pose a severe threat to human security and kill thousands of people each year (Sundberg, Eck, and Kreutz 2012) and this type of collective violence is often a trigger of civil war (Fearon and Laitin 2011). Still, communal conflicts are understudied within peace and conflict research (Brosché and Elfverson 2012). Whereas scholarly research on civil war has boomed in recent years, mirroring the prominence of the issue on the agenda of policy-makers and development agencies alike, the study of communal violence has been lagging behind. Meanwhile, the 2014 World Development Report from the World Bank will be dedicated entirely to local violence in developing countries and humanitarian agencies working in places such as Kenya, South Sudan, and Nigeria have long recognized violent communal conflict as a key obstacle to human security and societal development (cf. HRW 2011; UN 2012; UNMISS 2012). Bringing rigorous scientific methods into the study of communal conflicts is, therefore, of both scholarly and policy importance.

This summary will first discuss the concept of communal conflict. Thereafter, the main argument and the methodological approach are presented. Next, some inferences from the comparison of the three regions are outlined. The report ends with some concluding remarks.

## Communal Conflict

Communal conflict is defined in this study as a *conflict between non-state groups that are organized along a shared communal identity*. This definition deserves some further clarification. *Conflict* refers to the fact that the parties want to gain control over some disputed and perceived indivisible resource, such as a piece of land or local political power. The groups involved are *non-state groups*. This means that neither actor controls the state, although the state might be involved as an important supporting actor in a communal conflict. Thus, this category of collective violence is more symmetric than civil wars typically are. In communal conflicts, no actor is empowered with the authority that a government has, and none of the parties are in control of the national army. Likewise, the groups are not formally organized rebel groups with standing capacities for violence, but are groups that only occasionally organize to engage in conflict. The higher level of organization and material strength of state-based conflicts means that they usually (but far from always) have a higher destructive potential, and a tendency to drag on for a longer period of time than communal conflicts.

Additionally, the groups are *organized along a shared communal identity*. Some would equate the concept of *communal identity* with ethnic or religious identity, but as conceived here the definition is purposefully left more open because group identity is considered to be socially constructed rather than a static phenomenon. Communal identity is conceptualized as subjective group identification based on, for instance, a common history, culture, or core values (cf. Gurr 2000). Focusing solely on ethnic or religious identity would make the term less flexible and unable to capture other forms of relevant identity. For instance, in some local conflicts the dividing line is between the “original” inhabitants of an area and more recent “settlers”. In this study, this is seen as a form of communal conflict because people strongly identify themselves (and the “other” group) along these lines. This type of demarcation often causes sons-of-the-soil conflicts

where the original inhabitants perceive themselves as the rightful owners of the land (Fearon and Laitin 2011). In other areas the main identification might be based on one's livelihood, and conflicts sometimes arise, for example, between groups such as pastoralists and agriculturalists. Livelihood conflicts often parallel ethnic lines because, for instance, pastoralists living together often are from the same ethnic community. This is not always the case, however. For instance, farmers in a village might identify as inhabitants of a particular village no matter if the village is ethnically homogenous or heterogeneous. The bottom line is that what constitutes the basis for a communal identity can differ across time and space. Hence, leaving the definition of this term more open allows for an examination of conflicts in a broader range of contexts.

### **The Main Argument**

The overall purpose of this study is to better understand the causes of violent communal conflicts by building a theory that explains why communal conflicts turn violent in some regions but not in others. It is argued that government bias is critical to explain this puzzle. In regions where the regime acts in a partial manner, by offering benefits and support to some communities but not to others, violent communal conflicts are more prevalent. The argument provided offers a refined understanding of how government bias affects communal conflicts. In particular, this study – by considering the role of the state and by combining an actor-centered theoretical perspective with an institutional notion – identifies causal mechanisms for how state bias leads to violent communal conflicts.

The theoretical argument in this study is built primarily by combining insights from three theoretical perspectives. The first building block emphasizes government bias, which in this analysis refers to whether a government acts in a partial manner in relation to the communities within the country it rules. It captures if certain communities are regularly favored while others are consistently disfavored. Although the most important part of regime bias in this study is the effects of such partial behavior, it is also essential to theorize about the motivations for the state's behavior. What decides government bias and why might this differ between regions? Inspired by Boone (2003), this study argues that regime bias is influenced by the threats (such as insurgencies, political opponents, and rival communities) and opportunities (such as vital economic resources or strategic

interests) a region entails for the government. In a region presenting a severe threat to regime interests, the ruling elites are more likely to act in a biased manner. Crucial opportunities, however, might decrease partiality if neutrality is deemed to be vital to make use of these assets. The reasons for government bias are, therefore, to be found in the complex interplay between the opportunities and threats that a region presents.

The second building block of the theory, Stathis Kalyvas's elite interaction perspective, is relevant to the issue at hand because it has a clear actor focus that previous research on communal conflicts generally lacks. By adapting this theory to communal conflicts, an actor-centered perspective is introduced to a research field that previously has been primarily focused upon structural and societal explanations. Bringing agency to the study of communal conflicts allows for more detailed causal stories. Likewise, this theory is relevant because it has been used to account for violence at local levels in civil wars, and local dynamics are important for communal conflicts. In addition to its local dimension, communal conflicts are also influenced by decisions and actions at the center.<sup>1</sup> Kalyvas's theory emphasizes interactions between the local and central level, which makes it particularly useful for studying communal conflicts (Kalyvas 2003; 2006).

The third building block, Elinor Ostrom's common-pool resources (CPR) theory, delineates the conditions for cooperation in managing common resources (Dolšak and Ostrom 2003; Ostrom 2008; Poteete, Janssen, and Ostrom 2010). Control over land, a critical common resource, is central to most communal conflicts (von Uexkull and Pettersson 2013).<sup>2</sup> The CPR literature has, for the most part, been overlooked within peace and conflict research. This is unfortunate because the theory includes important insights into aspects which are focal points of this line of research, such as cooperation, conflict, and collective action. The insights about conditions for collaboration that the CPR literature offers can further our comprehension of why relations between communities are relatively peaceful in some areas but violent in others.

This study presents a causal story for how government bias leads to violent communal conflicts. The first step in the causal story is that a biased regime will disrupt interactions

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<sup>1</sup> In this study, the prime center is the national capital.

<sup>2</sup> The UCDP data on conflict issues in non-state conflicts shows that land played a pivotal role as one of the core conflict issues in 75 % of the communal conflicts in Africa between 1989 and 2011 von Uexkull, Nina and Thérèse Pettersson. 2013. "What They are Fighting for. Conflict Issues in African Non-state Armed Conflicts 1989-2011." in *International Studies Association Annual Convention*. San Francisco CA. and that Africa has experienced 90% of the world's communal conflicts Sundberg, Ralph, Kristine Eck, and Joakim Kreutz. 2012. "Fighting Without the State: Introducing the UCDP Non-State Conflict Dataset." *Journal of Peace Research* 49:503-516.

between central and local elites as well as among local elites. In the context of communal conflicts, the government is the most crucial central elite, and leaders of different communities – as well as the native administrations that they often are a part of – are the most important local elites.<sup>3</sup> As the most influential central elite, the government's behavior has a great impact on other actors. When the regime acts in a biased manner, local elites who are disfavored are likely to be hesitant to cooperate with the government. This decreases the chances of cooperation between central and local elites.

Government bias can also create problems in the relationships among local elites. That the government is essential for relations among local elites might seem a bit counterintuitive. However, the regime can undermine arenas that are crucial for fostering constructive relations among local elites as well as replace elites it dislikes. For a local elite favored by the state, conflictual behavior, and even violence, is less risky. Thus, by favoring certain communities, governments can generate distrust both between itself and local elites and among local elites.

The second step in the argument provided here is that such negative elite interactions will undermine cooperation among communities. The world consists of an immense number of communities, and cooperation among them is standard and much more common than conflict (Fearon and Laitin 1996). Even during difficult circumstances, armed conflict is rare. A biased government, however, is likely to make violence more prevalent by souring the relations between elites and thereby disrupting chances for cooperation among the communities. In this process, three mechanisms derived from Ostrom's CPR theory are important.

First, if a violation important for communal relations (such as killing, trespassing, or cattle theft) takes place, it is crucial that proportional sanctions follow. This means that a perpetrator's punishment depends on the severity and context of the violation. When the government takes a biased position towards the communities, however, sanctions are likely to depend on other factors, such as the communal affiliation of the perpetrator, rather than the gravity and circumstances of the crime. When sanctions are not proportional, favored communities are likely to enjoy impunity. This will reduce their

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<sup>3</sup> In this study, native administration refers to a semi-governmental institution where representatives from various communities form a body that deals with intra-communal issues at a sub-national level. Traditional authorities in a general African context are further explored in Chapter 2 and the role of the native administration in Sudan in Chapter 4.

disincentive to engage in violence because they do not need to fear punishment. Likewise, disfavored communities will be less inclined to seek a legislative solution to a dispute because they are assured that they will be treated unfairly. Taken together, this will decrease the incentives for cooperation and thereby contribute to violent communal conflicts.

Second, cooperation is enhanced when boundaries, both administrative and those relating to land use, are clear. However, in an attempt to empower its allies, and disempower the communities it perceives as enemies, a biased government will be prone to change administrative units. This is likely to make boundaries less clear because newly drawn boundaries are likely to no longer correspond to traditional demarcations. The prime reason for this is that interests other than historic customs are decisive factors for how the new boundaries are drawn. This contributes to violent communal conflicts because it becomes more difficult to distinguish which community has the right to use a particular area. Such demarcations, furthermore, often entail power struggles over control of the new unit, which can contribute to violent communal conflict. If the new units are purposefully drawn to increase local hostilities, they will, naturally, contribute even more to the prevalence of such conflicts.

Third, communal cooperation is further facilitated when rules relate to local conditions and when local actors are able to influence regulations. However, as part of their behavior, biased governments tend to disregard local circumstances and restrict local actors' abilities to influence decisions over rules. In particular, the regime might replace influential local leaders in possession of vast knowledge about local conditions with people more closely affiliated with the administration. Often the new appointees lack understanding about the context of the situation at hand. Especially important in a communal conflict setting is that partial governments are likely to replace native administrators from communities it disfavors with people that have closer ties to the regime. When such replacements take place, they tend to undermine conflict management and reduce the likelihood of peaceful resolutions of disputes among the communities. Thus, violent communal conflicts are more likely to be prevalent when rules do not reflect local conditions and when local actors are unable to influence decisions.

In sum, this study argues that government bias will disrupt interaction between central and local elites as well as among local elites. Government bias, and the unconstructive elite interaction it entails, will negatively affect the three mechanisms essential for preventing communal conflict. All three mechanisms contribute to violent communal conflicts. In a region where the regime is partial, we can expect violent communal conflicts to be more prevalent than in a region where the government takes a more neutral position. This study’s theoretical framework is summarized in the figure below.

Figure 1



Methodological approach<sup>4</sup>

To empirically investigate the research question, this study will compare communal conflicts in three Sudanese regions: Darfur, Eastern Sudan, and Greater Upper Nile (since July 9, 2011 part of the independent South Sudan). These regions illustrate a significant variation regarding violent communal conflicts. Although parts of Eastern Sudan have been described as “perfect mirror images” to Darfur (Babiker, Wadi, El Hillo, and Bashir Ali 2005), communal conflicts have caused thousands of deaths in Darfur and Greater Upper Nile but only a few dozen in Eastern Sudan. Furthermore, this vast difference exists despite the fact that these regions share several structural characteristics that have been emphasized in previous research as crucial for the causes of violent communal conflict. Thus, the empirical puzzle of why communal conflicts become violent in Darfur and Greater Upper Nile, but are generally resolved peacefully in Eastern Sudan, is unexplained by previous research.

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<sup>4</sup> The actual empirical examinations are not part of this summary but this section gives an idea of the empirical foundation from which the presented findings stems from.

Figure 2: Map of Sudan and South Sudan



In this work, within- and between-region analyses are combined to investigate why violent communal conflicts are more frequent in some regions. First each of these regions is examined individually to discern if the theoretical framework furthers an understanding of the regional dynamics and the outcome in terms of violence. A structured focused comparison between the three regions is then carried out to evaluate if the theoretical argument explains why two of the regions – Darfur and Greater Upper Nile – have been devastated by violent communal conflict whereas such conflicts are generally solved peacefully in Eastern Sudan. The empirical analysis builds on almost 200 semi-structured interviews carried out during field trips to the regions. The field research lasted for a total of five months and was carried out between 2007 and 2013. To complement the information collected in the regions, secondary sources have been consulted. This research design is conducive to the overarching aim of theory development because it facilitates the empirical identification of the suggested mechanisms and enables identification of conditioning factors that would not otherwise be possible with a single-case study.

This study considers two different regimes: the Government of Sudan and the Government of South Sudan. The starting point for examining Darfur and Eastern Sudan is 1989, the year the contemporary government of Sudan took power. In 2005, the

Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that ended the Sudanese North–South war was signed. This drastically changed the administrative organization of the southern part of Sudan. The accord established the Government of South Sudan as the primary authority of the area. 2005 is, therefore, the starting point of the analysis for Greater Upper Nile.

### Comparing the Regions

This section will compare the three examined regions – Darfur, Eastern Sudan and Greater Upper Nile with a focus on the three theoretical mechanisms (sanctions, boundaries and local rules) presented above.

#### Selective Sanctions Contribute to Violence

The theoretical framework suggested that three mechanisms are important for the prevalence of violent communal conflicts. The first mechanism proposed that government bias would make sanctions less proportional and thereby contribute to violent communal conflicts. This mechanism gains empirical support from the analysis of the three regions. The significance of this mechanism primarily stems from four different, but interrelated, dynamics. Lack of fair sanctions has contributed to violent communal conflicts by (i) lowering the threshold for using violence among favored groups, (ii) decreasing the likelihood that disfavored communities will seek legislative solutions to the disputes they are involved in, (iii) upsetting local power balances, and (iv) disrupting traditional conflict management devices, such as *Diya*. In line with the theoretical framework, a lack of proportional sanctions has contributed to violent communal conflicts in Darfur and Greater Upper Nile whereas proportional sanctions have played an important role in fostering peaceful relations in Eastern Sudan.

In Darfur and Greater Upper Nile, sanctions have not been proportional. Instead of reflecting the context and severity of a violation, ethnic affiliation has taken precedence when decisions on punishments have been made. The biased manner in which sanctions have been implemented has meant that perpetrators from some communities have been less likely to be imprisoned compared to perpetrators from other communities. In fact, crimes have often not even been investigated due to the ethnic affiliation of the person who committed the crime. In Darfur, such dynamics have been prevalent throughout the

examined time period. Likewise, the regime in Juba has followed a similar policy of discriminatory incarceration in Greater Upper Nile.

In Eastern Sudan, in contrast, sanctions have to a large extent been proportional. Punishments have tended to depend on the circumstances and magnitude of the violation rather than the perpetrator's communal affiliation. Importantly, no community has enjoyed blanket impunity, and this has contributed to cooperation among the communities. Likewise, no group has been repeatedly punished in an unjust manner. This has enhanced cooperation because it is easier to uphold trusting relations when communities expect that violations will be punished in a relatively fair manner. In particular, the proportional sanctions have increased the propensity to seek legislative solutions to communal conflicts.

Comparing the Sudanese government's policy with regard to pro-regime militias reveals important aspects about sanctions in Darfur and Eastern Sudan. In Darfur, deployment of militias has been widespread, but the government has refrained from such tactics in Eastern Sudan. Militia campaigns have contributed to the prevalence of selective impunity. In Darfur, this can be exemplified by the lack of imprisonment of Musa Hilal – Darfur's most infamous Janjaweed leader – who enjoys impunity because he provided militias to the government. Thus, when tribal militias were deployed, sanctions against crimes committed tended to depend on the perpetrators' communal affiliation. An important reason for this was that the government offered selective impunity to certain communities to persuade them to provide militia recruits. In fact, opportunities to take land without being punished were key enticements to join such groups, and a decreased risk for imprisonment lowered the threshold to use violence.

Disproportionate sanctions have also had a negative effect on conflict management. Paying *Diya* when a murder has taken place is essential for peaceful relations between the communities of rural Sudan. However, this system depends on *Diya* fees being considered fair. If such assessments do not depend on the context and severity of a violation, the system will be compromised. During the first half of the period examined in this thesis, the government was supposed to be a guarantor for the paying of *Diya* in Darfur. However, the regime did not perform this task in a neutral manner, and this reduced the effectiveness of the system. Likewise, paying blood money has not been a

functional method for solving disputes in Greater Upper Nile because the traditional authorities responsible for such decisions have been undermined. In contrast, the system of *Diya* remained intact in Eastern Sudan where it played a critical role in ensuring cooperation among the communities. In fact, the paying of *Diya* repeatedly contributed to settling disputes before they turned into violent communal conflicts.

#### Unclear Boundaries Disrupt Cooperation

The second theoretical mechanism holds that if the government is biased, then both administrative boundaries and land-use boundaries will be unclear and this will contribute to violent communal conflicts. This mechanism is empirically supported by the comparison of the three regions because boundaries have been significantly less clear in Darfur and Greater Upper Nile than in Eastern Sudan. The strongest causal linkage was found in Darfur where unclear boundaries were critical for several of the region's violent communal conflicts. Boundaries are also in disarray in Greater Upper Nile, and this was an important reason for the Jikany Nuer–Lou Nuer conflict in 2009. In Eastern Sudan, boundaries have been fairly clear.

In Darfur, numerous violent communal conflicts have been closely linked to alterations of administrative boundaries, for example the Arab–Masalit conflict in the mid-1990s and the Maaliya–Reizegat Baggara conflict in the early-2000s. A critical reason for the prevalence of violent communal conflicts based on boundaries in Darfur was that the Sudanese government has actively used the redrawing of administrative units as a tool to shift power balances between the communities and to incite conflicts between the communities in the region. This policy was embedded in the regime's desire to decrease the threat that some communities in the region posed. In order to reduce the power of groups perceived to be antigovernment, and to empower groups aligned with the regime, Khartoum has repeatedly altered administrative units in Darfur. Thus, redrawing boundaries in Darfur has been used as part of a divide-and-conquer strategy. In 1994, Darfur was divided into three states (it had previously constituted a single entity). The primary objective of this separation was to reduce the power of the Fur community, which the government perceived as their main enemy. Before the division, the Fur were in the majority in Darfur. However, the new borders were intentionally drawn to put the

Fur into a minority position in all three new states. Importantly, the Fur heartland (Jebel Marra and surrounding areas) was split between all three new states, and this increased the disarray caused by this division. The division of Darfur was a core reason for the violent conflicts (both communal conflicts and the rebellion) that followed. Although Eastern Sudan was also split into three states in 1994, this division did not cause the same lack of clarity over boundaries and did not lead to inter-communal clashes. A key reason for this was that shifting power balances between the communities was a core reason for the split of Darfur, but no similar intentions motivated the 1994 division of Eastern Sudan.

The government has also frequently altered more local boundaries such as *Dars* and districts in Darfur. The motives were similar to the ones behind the 1994 split: to strengthen communities considered supportive – while weakening the ones perceived as threats – and to increase local tensions. The unclarity of these boundaries has contributed to several of the violent communal conflicts that have devastated Darfur. In Eastern Sudan, administrative boundaries have remained fairly stable since the 1994 split. Nevertheless, boundaries have not been completely clear in Eastern Sudan and disputes over boundaries and administrative units have taken place. While such disputes have regularly caused violent communal conflicts in Darfur, this has not been the case in Eastern Sudan. An important reason for this relates to how borders are demarcated. In Darfur, the government often established boundaries in order to change power relations between the communities. In the east, boundaries have not been drawn in a similarly conflicting manner and the government has attempted to dampen, rather than incite, conflicts over administrative units in the region. This conduct was based on the regime's desire to avoid turmoil in Eastern Sudan that could endanger the economic assets that the regime depended on.

The difference is most clearly manifested in how the government has used the pleas for *Dars* (tribal homeland) in Darfur, whereas similar aspirations in Eastern Sudan have not been extensively exploited by the regime. Aspirations for *Dars* are fundamental for many rural Sudanese communities, and the government has capitalized on this desire for land by drawing boundaries in a conflictual manner in Darfur. In contrast, when the regime strives to calm the situation, boundaries will not be drawn to increase local tensions and

this lowers the risk for a conflict to turn violent. In Eastern Sudan, this is illustrated by the fairly unbiased demarcations of boundaries that have not generally been manipulated to alter power relations between the communities by empowering some and disfavoring others.

Similar to Darfur, boundaries are characterized by lack of clarity in Greater Upper Nile and administrative boundaries have repeatedly been changed. The importance of this mechanism for the development of violent communal conflict was manifested in the Jikany Nuer–Lou Nuer conflict in 2009. A key reason for this violent communal conflict was that the two communities disputed to which county the Wading payam should belong. Administrative alterations have often been accused of being made to empower certain groups with close connections to the government.

#### Local Understanding Enhances Cooperation

The third theoretical mechanism holds that the prospects for cooperation among communities increase if rules reflect local circumstances. Likewise, peaceful cohabitation is enhanced if local actors are allowed to modify rules. In Eastern Sudan, regulations have generally reflected local circumstances and local actors have been allowed to adjust rules. This has been essential for managing conflicts in the region. In contrast, rules have generally not related to local conditions in Darfur and Greater Upper Nile and local actors have been denied opportunities to influence regulations. This has contributed to the extensive prevalence of violent communal conflicts in these two regions.

In Eastern Sudan, an important reason for why local rules have reflected local conditions is that local actors with thorough comprehension about the regional dynamics have been empowered to influence decisions. This played an essential role for solving communal conflicts before they turned violent in this region. In particular, this was done through the native administration, which was a viable arena for conflict management in Eastern Sudan. This institution ensured that local conditions were accounted for when regulations were stipulated. Furthermore, and even more importantly, local actors (as part of the native administration) were able to influence rules in the region and often solved disputes between the communities before they escalated into violence. The government has strengthened leaders within the native administration because they perceived them as

useful to promote the regime's interests in the region. By contrast, the power of prominent local actors has regularly been reduced in Darfur and Greater Upper Nile. In particular, traditional local elites who hold a negative view of the government have been stripped of their power. Leaders in possession of extensive local knowledge have repeatedly been replaced with individuals who are pro-government but who often lack an understanding of local contexts. Hence, local leaders with the required understanding to settle disputes were prevented from having any influence. This undermined peaceful management of conflicts between the communities – mainly because the native administration was undermined – and this contributed to the violent communal conflicts in Darfur and Greater Upper Nile. Thus, the extent to which local rules were considered in Greater Upper Nile contrasts with that of Eastern Sudan but resembles that of Darfur.

The importance of being able to alter rules can be exemplified by the Hausa–Masalit conflict that took place in Eastern Sudan in 2009. In this conflict, the government followed the recommendations from the native administration and changed its decision to imprison a traditional leader from the Hausa community. This enabled a peaceful solution to the conflict. The government altered its decision – despite somewhat favoring the Masalit – because it considered stability in the region to be more important than imprisoning this individual. No examples resembling this have been found in Darfur or Greater Upper Nile. In fact, it is inconceivable that the Sudanese government would act similarly in Darfur, or that the regime in Juba would modify its verdict in a similar manner in Greater Upper Nile. Instead, the governments' biases have been so strong in the two regions that it usually takes precedence over other considerations. Thus, a similar conflict in either of these two regions would likely have escalated.

The empirical examination revealed that international actors have also led to a distancing of regulations from local circumstances. International actors have organized numerous peace conferences in Darfur and Greater Upper Nile, and these initiatives have often included issues to please donors. Topics raised by international actors could be important, and could stimulate peace, but to include outsiders' perspectives has tended to decrease the extent to which local customs have been reflected and has contributed to undermining traditional actors. In fact, the results of most of these conferences, where international actors have preempted local rules, have been meager. In sharp contrast to

these two regions, international actors have largely been absent from peace conferences in Eastern Sudan. Local conditions have, therefore, been more reflected and local actors have been able to steer the consultations, and this has increased the prospects for agreements to be reached and for them to be implemented.

## **Prevention and Management of Communal Conflict**

This study concerns the causes of violent communal conflicts, but it also offers important insights for the resolution and prevention of such forms of organized violence. The analysis challenges simplistic views of communal conflicts, which are often described as only stemming from scarcity of resources or from ethnic hatred. What are the implications of the study's main findings for the management and prevention of communal conflicts? What role can international actors play in such efforts?

A crucial dimension revealed by this study is the key roles that elites have in fermenting inter-communal violence. If elites are overlooked in the management of communal relations, efforts to solve conflicts are likely to be futile. Spoiler behavior by elites can be illustrated by a peace process launched by South Sudan's Archbishop Daniel Deng to solve Jonglei's communal conflicts. In the early phase of this initiative, politicians were excluded. These politicians felt sidestepped and, therefore, undermined the peace process. Elites involved in communal conflicts, furthermore, constantly try to hide their involvement in such communal conflicts. It is critical, therefore, that the roles that elites play in encouraging violence are exposed in order to reduce the risk that these groups can continue to act in a destructive manner. Likewise, an increased awareness of the negative role many of these actors have might contribute to reducing their popular support. This in turn might facilitate efforts to empower more benign communal leaders.

This study also contributes to our understanding of how to attain peaceful relations between communities. At a general level, this study exposes the severe consequences of governments treating communities in a biased manner. In attempting to persuade governments not to favor some communal groups over others it should be emphasized how easily things become uncontrollable when inter-communal relations are disrupted. At a more detailed level, it is crucial to identify resiliencies against violent communal conflict that can strengthen the cooperative coexistence among the communities. Eastern

Sudan demonstrates that communities can live in relative peace despite extremely harsh conditions if principles for cooperation are not undermined. Such principles include a fair justice system based on the rule of law where the severity of sanctions is in relation to the severity of the crime. It is also important for cooperation between communities that boundaries are clear. This means that policies that contribute to the establishment of well-defined administrative units are likely to have a conflict-dampening effect.

This study also suggests that local ownership matters. To enhance cooperative behavior between communities, local actors should be empowered and local circumstances should be carefully considered. National governments should, therefore, allow local actors to play a pivotal role in inter-communal relations. This argument is equally true for international actors who have a poor track record in managing communal conflicts in Sudan. This is primarily a case of not taking local conditions into account. Instead of appropriately reflecting local conditions, many examples from Darfur and Greater Upper Nile, show that international actors try to steer peace initiatives in the direction that they desire. Outside actors can play a facilitating role in conflict resolution, but such efforts need to be combined with the empowerment of local actors. Otherwise such involvements run the risk of becoming counterproductive.

This inability to appropriately take local conditions into account exemplifies a general problem that relates to international actors' lack of local knowledge (cf. Autesserre 2010; Poulingny 2006). This predicament is understandable because the local context in Sudan (cf. Sørbø 2010) – and in many other areas where communal conflicts take place – is highly complex. Still, more efforts have to be made to increase the understanding of the local dynamics in general, and the effects of international interventions in particular, or else peacemakers risk doing more harm than good. At a minimum, the risk of contributing to more conflict has to be minimized. One way of doing this is to try to get people involved in such activities to stay longer in the region. International actors tend to stay for a short period of time only; just as they start grasping the dynamics at hand, they are replaced. This is equally true for individuals within organizations and for the organizations themselves. To increase awareness of local circumstances, it is important that contacts are made in a wide variety of communities and from different interest groups within local communities. International actors tend to involve only one local

organization and let them decide who else to engage with. This might lead to a situation where international NGOs (or other international actors) believe that they have a wide local representation, but in fact all of those involved might embody the same interest and reflect a very limited perspective of the situation.

In addition, inter-communal cooperation is often impeded by entrenched acrimony and suspicion. Trust-building endeavors among various elites and among the communities are needed, and sustained dialogues are a potential path to increase interethnic trust (Svensson and Brounéus 2013). In many cases, inter-communal fears and suspicions are a result of the government's use of militias. Governments should, therefore, be persuaded to abandon their reliance on militias and divide-and-conquer tactics for military campaigns against resistance movements. Admittedly, this is difficult but the importance of this issue makes it crucial.

This study further illustrates that awareness of intricate interlinkages between various types of collective violence is important to prevent and manage conflicts. Such dynamics were seen in Darfur where a key reason for the 2003 rebellion was biased behavior by Khartoum in earlier inter-communal fighting (Brosché and Rothbart 2013). If connections between different types of violence are not considered, potential solutions become elusive. While one conflict might be ripe for resolution, another might not be, and this can have severe consequences for conflict resolution. For example, although the 2005 peace agreement ended the North-South war it was followed by extensive fighting between the communities in Greater Upper Nile. A peace agreement should, therefore, not only carefully consider the conflict it primarily deals with but also broaden its consideration and examine the potential effects of the accord on other types of conflicts (Brosché 2009).

This study also provides new insights into the functioning of the native administration. This is a contentious issue in contemporary African politics, and diverse viewpoints on this institution have been expressed. Some perceive it as a fundamental tool for achieving peaceful coexistence within diverse societies. Others view it as an outdated system that is not democratic and does not attribute appropriate power to youths and women. Without taking a moral standpoint in favor or against this institution, the analysis in this study shows that the native administration in contemporary Sudan works as an important

device for conflict resolution in Eastern Sudan, but not in Darfur or Greater Upper Nile. A more nuanced understanding of native administrations is, therefore, warranted. The shortcomings of the institution should be thoroughly discussed, but it is equally important to identify the potential strengths that this institution has. In particular it is crucial to trace the circumstances under which this device can serve as an important arena for solving disputes. Furthermore, it is central to examine how the shortcomings of this institution can be minimized and how it can be complemented with other institutions to make up for its limitations.

### Concluding remarks

This study provides insights into, and refines the understanding of, several lines of research and aspects related to the causes of communal conflict. One such factor concerns climate factors and resource scarcity. The analysis presented here demonstrates that peaceful communal cohabitation is possible even with a widespread lack of resources. This conclusion supports previous research that highlights the interplay between scarcity and political factors (cf. Fjelde and von Uexkull 2012; Kahl 2006; Turner 2004). Under circumstances of scarcity, disputes – primarily over land – might be frequent but these disputes can be settled peacefully when the government’s behavior is not characterized by partiality. This study suggests that lack of resources – together with government bias – can create a disastrous combination. Thus, all areas are not equally prone to conflicts over resources and this study provides clues as to where such conflicts are most likely to be found.

A second line of research emphasizes the management of communal conflicts. Two important dimensions in this perspective concern local institutions and in-group policing (cf. Fearon and Laitin 1996). This study illustrates that the native administration is a local institution that can be fundamental for promoting positive interrelations between communities. However, the effectiveness of this institution can be undermined if the government is biased. Likewise, regime partiality can disrupt in-group policing. In a tribal society, violence committed by an individual is often regarded as the responsibility of the community, which can create strong disincentives for violence. However, when the government as part of its biased conduct provides weapons to elements of certain

communities, the latter might become immune to traditional in-group policing processes. This is likely to decrease the cost of using violence.

To what extent are these findings applicable to cases outside Sudan? First, the causal story attributes an essential importance to trust, which is a factor that influences the opportunities for cooperation, and the risks for conflict, universally. Thus, from a theoretical perspective, it is likely that regime partiality will increase the propensity for violent communal conflicts in a broad range of contexts. Second, numerous countries with a high prevalence of violent communal conflicts share several characteristics with Sudan. For example, many countries in Africa – the continent that has experienced 90% of the world’s communal conflicts – have societies structured in a patrimonial manner much like in Sudan. Likewise, a core aspect of communal conflicts in Sudan is land grievances, and access to land is a cause of disputes in many different parts of the world, not the least in Africa. A strong communal identity is also a characteristic that is not unique to Sudan but is a source of identification in many societies around the world. Third, examining violent communal conflicts in other places suggests important similarities to the dynamics revealed by this study. For example, government bias has been an important dimension in ethnic conflicts over land in Uganda (cf. Green 2006).<sup>5</sup> In Kenya, negative interactions between central and local elites have been important for conflicts between communities over land and in relation to elections (cf. Boone 2011; Boone 2012), and central–local dynamics were seen to play a role in the violent communal conflicts that followed after the Kenyan presidential elections in 2007 (cf. ICG 2008). In regards to selective sanctions, impunity has contributed to violent communal conflicts in many countries. Indonesia (cf. Aragon 2001), Kenya (cf. IRIN 2012), and Mexico (cf. NACLA 2012) are three such examples. In addition, changes to sub-national boundaries have been an important aspect of violent communal conflicts in Nigeria (cf. Fjelde 2009). In terms of local rules, empowering local institutions that have an appropriate understanding of the circumstances at hand, has been emphasized as a critical dimension of the management of inter-communal conflicts in Ghana (cf. Gati 2008). Thus, the theoretical argument presented in this study is likely to be applicable to a wide range of

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<sup>5</sup> Butler and Gates Butler, Christopher K. and Scott Gates. 2012. "African Range Wars: Climate, Conflict, and Property Rights." *Journal of Peace Research* 49:23-34. reveal a similar dynamic and show that biased decisions regarding property rights contribute to range wars.

contexts. However, to what extent, and in which combination, these mechanisms are important is likely to vary under different circumstances.

Can the findings also be applied to other types of collective violence? Unfair treatment by the government has been suggested to contribute to civil wars (cf. Cramer 2003; Ohlson 2008). This study has revealed specific aspects of such bias that are particularly prone to result in conflict, and it is likely that the same mechanisms could also be important for the occurrence of civil wars. Because sanctions, boundaries, and local rules affect communities in a fundamental manner, it can be expected that unfair treatment in regard to these mechanisms will increase the propensity of certain groups to launch an insurgency against the regime that is perceived as acting unfairly.

An important avenue for future research is to look further at the link between communal conflicts and civil wars. As this study shows, the two forms of violence are interlinked and communal conflicts can contribute to civil war – as seen in Darfur – and an end to civil war can spawn communal conflicts – as seen in Greater Upper Nile. A critical part of such a project would be to examine under what conditions communal conflicts are likely to be followed by civil wars. Are particular types of communal conflicts more likely to lead to intrastate conflicts? Likewise, because peace agreements are sometimes followed by violent communal conflicts, it would be worthwhile to examine if particular kinds of peace agreements are less prone to exacerbate communal conflicts than others, as well as to identify the causal mechanisms at work in such processes.

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