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**PEACE AND POLITICS: PROMOTING DURABLE SOLUTIONS TO
COMMUNAL CONFLICTS**

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Peace and politics: Promoting durable solutions to communal conflicts

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Expertgruppen för biståndsanalys

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Introduction

Each year, a number of violent communal conflicts take place around the world. These conflicts, which involve non-state identity-based groups and revolve around conflict issues such as land access, cattle raids or local authority, cause hundreds of battle-related deaths each year and often have severe consequences for local livelihoods and security (Brosché and Elfversson, 2012; UCDP, 2017). Because they do not directly challenge the central state, communal conflicts often receive less media attention than civil wars. Few know, for instance, that in northern Nigeria, communal conflict between herders and farmers caused more deaths than the Boko Haram insurgency in 2016 (Angerbrandt, 2017). Partly due to improved data collection efforts, recent years have seen an increasing number of studies that analyze the causes of communal conflicts. However limited research has to date investigated how they can be managed and resolved.

My dissertation seeks to increase knowledge about how durable peace can be established after violent communal conflict. To this end, I draw on existing research on the causes and dynamics of communal conflict, combined with theories about conflict resolution. Because a growing body of systematic research has found that political dynamics play a key role in explaining the emergence and escalation of communal conflicts, I analyze how these dynamics, in turn, affect the prospects for resolving conflicts. Specifically, I analyze how political bias affects the central government's responses to violent communal conflicts, and the incentives for the groups involved to resolve their conflict or to re-engage in violence. The analyses within the dissertation focus on Sub-Saharan Africa, which is the region that has been most affected by violent communal conflicts since 1989 (Melander *et al.*, 2016).

Communal conflicts are often associated with democratizing or fragile states, and systematic research shows that marginalized regions within a state are more at risk of communal violence (Fjelde and von Uexkull, 2012; Raleigh, 2014). However, a key argument within my dissertation is that communal conflicts should not be seen only as a symptom of weak states, and consequently that conflict resolution is about more than state building. I argue, and show empirically, that government intervention in communal conflicts depends on interests and relationships and not just on state capacity. I also show that such interventions have different effects on the risk of conflict recurrence depending

on political relationships between the groups involved and the central government: When a communal conflict involves a group that is discriminated by the government, state intervention makes it more likely that the conflict re-erupts in the future. If the government is biased, or has strategic interests in a specific outcome, the communities involved are also less likely to be able to negotiate a peace agreement. These findings problematize the role of the state, and suggest that improving state-led efforts to resolve communal conflicts is about politics as well as capacity. For external organizations and agencies, this implies monitoring states' behavior in relation to communal conflicts and putting pressure on governments to improve their performance in this regard. I also analyze how non-state actors can contribute to local peace in the absence of strong government engagement. I find that a history of involvement in governance, as well as attunement to local customary conflict resolution mechanisms, may help such actors become legitimate mediators. These findings may help donors in identifying and empowering suitable non-state actors for mediation in specific communal conflicts.

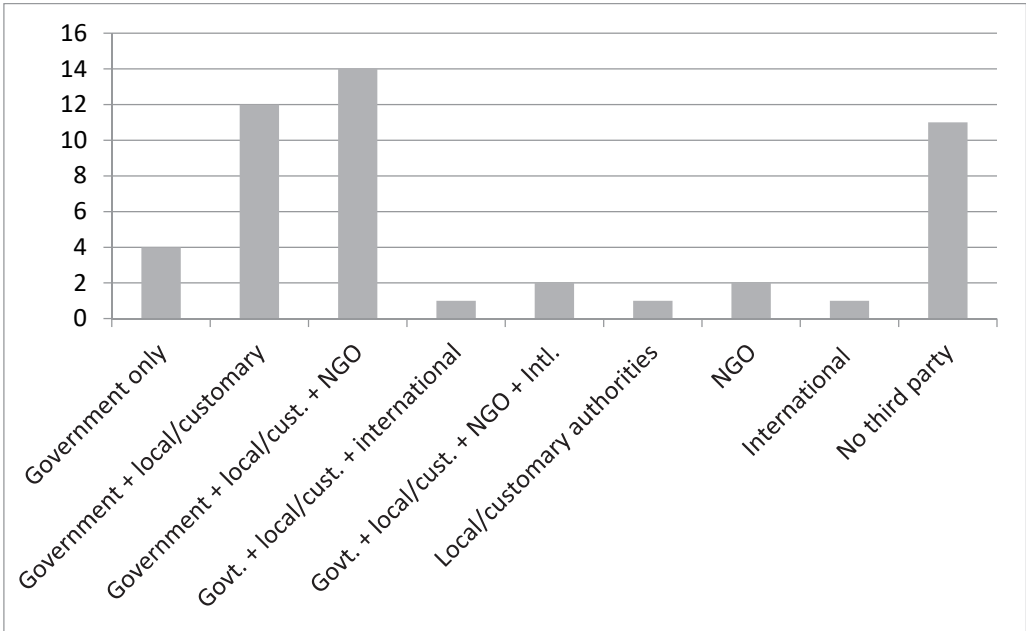
Communal conflict

The dissertation studies *communal conflict*, which is defined as violent conflict between non-state groups that are organised based on communal identities (cf. Brosché and Elfversson, 2012; Sundberg *et al.*, 2012). Violent conflict implies that the parties use lethal violence to gain control over some disputed resource, such as a piece of land or local political power. Communal conflict is a category of non-state violence, where neither side controls the state and armed forces. The groups that are involved mobilize and fight each other based on communal identity, but they do not have a formalized organisational structure like rebel groups or militias. The concept of communal identity is broad and covers a range of potential group identities such as clan, ethnicity, religion or livelihood. Communal identity is socially constructed, and the type of identity lines that are relevant differ across regions and states; in some areas the main lines of confrontation may be between indigenous groups and “settler” communities, in others they may be between ethnic groups, or between sub-clans, etc. As has been shown in a number of studies, communal identities are not inherently conflictual, but under certain circumstances they

become more salient and can be used for conflict mobilization (Gurr, 2000; Klaus and Mitchell, 2015; Lynch, 2011; Svensson, 2013).

By definition, the state is not directly involved in communal conflicts – the primary actors are the communal groups that are fighting each other. Instead, 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, as is often the case in practice, as a combination of these (Abdulrahman and Tar, 2008). Both the role and the extent of involvement by the state varies considerably. Sometimes the central government is heavily involved in trying to manage the conflict, while in other cases it does not respond at all. A number of other actors may also be involved in responding to communal conflicts, including international organizations, NGOs, faith-based organizations, and local community-based organizations. As an example, Figure 1 below illustrates third-party involvement in violent communal conflicts in Kenya, 1989-2011 (Elfverson, 2013). For instance, in about a third of the cases (17 out of 48), conflict resolution activities were carried out by at least three different actors: The central government, local/customary authorities, NGOs and/or international organizations. Meanwhile, in 11 cases, there was no third party activity at all.

Figure 1. Third party involvement in communal conflicts, Kenya, 1989-2011



Political bias and conflict resolution

Previous research on communal conflict has shown that while structural conditions such as climate change or increased pressure on land may comprise background causes of conflict, political dynamics, such as patrimonialism, ethnic electoral mobilization and discrimination of communal groups, have a strong impact on whether or not conflicts arise and escalate into violence (Brosché, 2014; Fjelde and von Uexkull, 2012; Klaus and Mitchell, 2015; Raleigh, 2010; von Uexkull, 2016). Central political actors' actions and interests may politicize communal identities and affect the relative costs and benefits of engaging in violence. In patrimonial states, elected leaders are expected to channel resources to their constituents – which are often identified along communal lines – in exchange for their electoral support (Arriola, 2013). These dynamics can often fuel conflicts: for instance, Boone (2011) has shown how the use of land as a patronage resource has produced communal tension and violence in connection to elections in Kenya, and Brosché (2014) has shown that differential treatment of communal groups by the Sudanese government helps explain why some conflicts have become very violent.

In line with these studies, I understand communal conflicts to be about incompatibilities between two communal groups at the local level, but constrained or fuelled by the way the government responds to the conflict, passively or actively. In turn, the central government and other relevant actors make decisions about if and how to intervene in reaction to the conflict based on a number of factors. These may include an overall capacity to intervene and how destructive the conflict is, but also other concerns that derive from the basic interest of rulers to remain in power and protect their support base. For instance, Wilkinson's (2006) influential study of India showed that communal violence was fuelled by political contest, but only erupted under certain circumstances, depending on leaders' electoral incentives. Research by Boone (Boone, 2003; 2014) and Brosché (2014) suggests that the relative threats and opportunities present in a specific region affects the government's actions in relation to conflicts in that area. The government may be biased in favour of one side in the conflict, for instance if it is an important constituency, or it may seek to repress a group that constitutes a threat to current rulers. The government may also have an interest in a specific outcome, for instance to secure or gain access to important resources.

When the central government is biased in relation to a conflict, or has certain interests in a specific outcome, I expect that this will impede conflict resolution in several ways. First of all, if it intervenes in the conflict, the government may act in a way that upsets the local power balance and increases the grievances of the disfavoured group. Second, the primary parties are 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. If the parties believe that the government is not willing to guarantee or uphold the agreement they reach, they will not be able to trust each other enough to resolve their conflict. Third, the government may prevent other actors from mediating in the conflict, or undermine their efforts. In the dissertation, I test these expectations in different essays employing both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Methods & material

The dissertation consists of four separate essays, which employ different methodologies to study different aspects of the overall research topic. Two of the essays rely on a novel dataset to study government interventions in communal conflict. The other two essays are focused on cases in Kenya, and combine secondary sources and field research to study the process of conflict resolution in more depth.

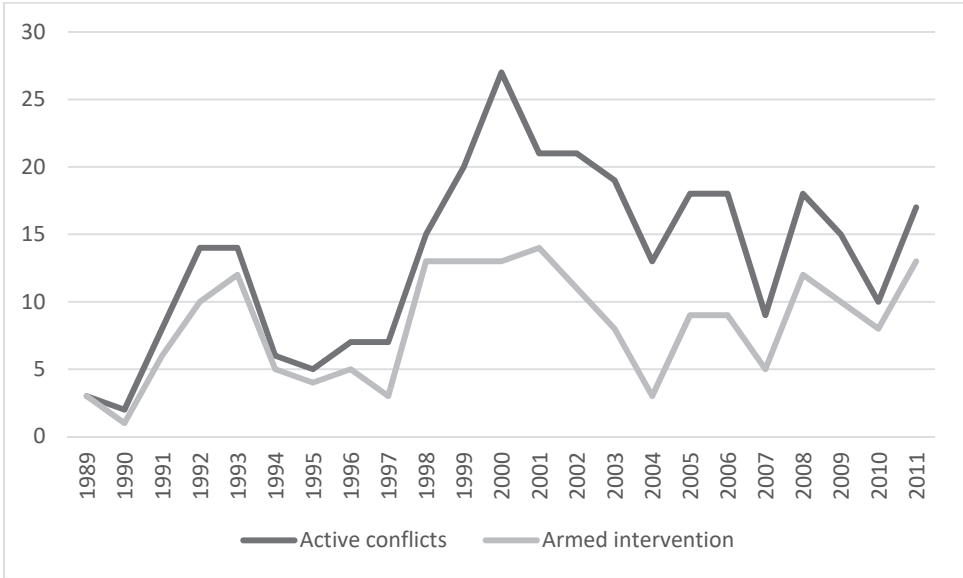
Government interventions: Data and analysis

As part of my doctoral research, I compiled a dataset on government interventions in violent communal conflicts which covers sub-Saharan Africa from 1989 to 2011. The dataset builds on communal conflict data from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP).¹ For each active conflict in the UCDP data, I coded whether or not the central government of the affected state deployed security forces in reaction to the violence. The coding was based on a systematic search in the Factiva news database, complemented by a review of reports and other relevant material. Interventions were coded if the government deployed a contingent of military forces, paramilitary troops or special police units

¹ 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 *et al.*, 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.

(including federal police in federal states) to the locality of conflict in direct reaction to the violence.² Figure 2 below illustrates the number of active communal conflicts per year, and the share of those conflicts that resulted in armed intervention by the government, in Sub-Saharan Africa 1989-2011.

Figure 2. Government intervention in communal conflict, sub-Saharan Africa 1989-2011



In the dissertation, I rely on this dataset for two quantitative studies: One investigates under what circumstances government intervention is more likely, and the other how intervention affects prospects for renewed violence. In each study, I rely on previous research to propose a set of hypotheses, and then test these using statistical analysis. For this purpose, I combine my dataset with a number of other data sources, including UCDP data on conflict intensity and dynamics, geocoded information about local resources and state capacity, and group-level information about ethnic power relations.

² 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 alleviates this problem, because these conflicts have generally generated enough media attention to result in the availability of comparable information.

Conflict resolution: Case study analysis

The other two essays within the dissertation employ case study methodology in order to more closely study the process of conflict resolution. This methodology makes it possible to not only test, but also develop, theory. It also enables me to examine dynamics and relationships at different subnational levels, in relation to specific conflicts, in more detail. For this purpose, I selected and studied cases in Kenya, which was a suitable country for my field research for a number of reasons. First, there have been a large number of communal conflicts with many similarities but with very different outcomes, ranging from elaborate peace agreements that have upheld peace for a long period of time to conflicts that have recurred repeatedly. Second, Kenya has a relatively strong central state, but this state has performed very differently in relation to different locations and conflicts; there are also a large number of non-state organizations that carry out different forms of conflict resolution activities. Finally, politics in Kenya have been highly characterized by clientelist and ethnic networks which relate to both macro- and local-level conflicts (Boone, 2011; Haugerud, 1997; Lynch, 2011), allowing me to analyze the effect of such political dynamics on local conflict resolution.

The case studies are based on systematic analysis of secondary sources, combined with extensive interview material collected during several field trips. Conducting field research was important given that processes of local peacemaking after communal conflict tend to be underreported and publically available information about them is limited. During my field trips, in 2013, 2014 and 2016, I conducted interviews with experts, practitioners and locals from the conflict-affected areas. In total, 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 one location, Kerio Valley, I conducted a longer stay and carried out interviews with locals with the help of a research assistant. All interviews were semi-structured, meaning that they were all based around the same pre-set questions, but also allowed the participants to expand on topics they considered important and to add other relevant information. Before the field research, I obtained approval from the Swedish Ethics Review Board (Etikprövningsnämnden, EPN).

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, the interview material was complemented by an extensive review of secondary sources, including government and NGO reports, news articles, and academic case studies.

Findings

The dissertation consists of four separate studies, two of which have been published in academic journals. Below, I summarize the results of each study, before concluding by discussing the implications of the dissertation as a whole.

When and why does the government intervene?

The first essay analyzes what factors affect the likelihood that the government intervenes militarily in response to violent communal conflict. It is published in *Journal of Peace Research* (Elfversson, 2015). The article is based on the interventions dataset described above, and begins by noting that government responses to communal conflicts within their territory vary significantly. To explain these patterns, I argue that state intervention depends on 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.

In a quantitative analysis of all active communal conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa 1989-2010 (n=264), I find that governments are more likely to intervene in conflicts that involve groups represented in executive power, that take place in an economically important area, or that revolve around land and authority. I interpret these findings as support for the argument 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 communal conflicts. In substantive terms, the likelihood

of intervention becomes 38% higher if the government has ethnic ties to a group in a conflict. If the conflict concerns land and local authority – key patronage assets in many African states – the likelihood of intervention is 64% higher than if it does not. More intense conflicts are also more likely to result in intervention, suggesting that governments may prioritize the cases that pose the greatest threat to lives and stability. In line with expectations, the overall material capacity of the state also conditions the likelihood of intervention: If the state is weak (e.g., has a low material capacity) and/or faces a state-based armed conflict, it is less likely to intervene in communal conflicts.

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.

How does government intervention affect the risk of renewed conflict?

In the second essay, I investigate how government intervention in communal conflict, under different conditions, affects the risk of conflict recurrence. The analysis 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. I make a distinction between “positive bias” – when the government’s partiality in relation to a specific conflict derives from the fact that one group in the conflict is represented in central power – and “negative bias”, when partiality relates to one group in the conflict being actively discriminated by the central government. Again, I rely on my interventions dataset but this time I seek to determine the effect of interventions. I study all active communal conflict episodes in sub-Saharan Africa 1989-2011, and the dependent variable records whether there is a resurgence of fighting between the same actors which causes at least 10 deaths.

I find that if the conflict involves a group that is represented in executive power (“positive bias”), government intervention reduces the risk that the conflict re-erupts within five years. In substantive terms, intervention in such a case decreases the probability of recurrence by almost half (from 0.3 to 0.16). I suggest that this is because in these cases, intervention will support the side that is already the strongest side in the conflict; in other words, the intervention will reinforce the dominance of one side, making it less likely that the other group is able to challenge it again. However, in conflicts that involve a discriminated group (“negative bias”), government intervention instead increases the risk that conflict re-erupts. I suggest that in these cases, intervention will seek to repress the discriminated group and thereby upset the local power balance. It may also be that security forces in such cases acts in a more destructive way, compounding local grievances and undermining local conflict management mechanisms (cf. Cox, 2016), while interventions in conflicts involving politically important groups are allocated more resources and therefore better able to prevent renewed violence. Comparing the two situations to each other, recurrence following state intervention is more than two times more likely in a conflict with negative bias than in one with positive bias. The findings suggest that we should pay more attention to how security forces act during interventions, as well as investigating the broader implications of government bias for peace beyond the mere absence of violence.

How does government bias affect local peace negotiations?

In the third essay, I adopt a qualitative, comparative approach to investigate how government bias affects attempts to resolve conflict through negotiation. I analyse four conflict resolution processes in Kenya: in Wajir in 1993-1994, Tana River 2001-2002, Kerio Valley 2001-2002 and Mandera in 2005. The cases are chosen because they are similar in many regards that may affect the ability to create peace, but are different in terms of the outcome of interest: In two cases (Wajir and Kerio Valley), the parties reached substantial peace agreements addressing the conflict issues, while in two cases (Tana River and Mandera) they did not. This case selection enables me to focus on the role of political dynamics, while holding other potential explanations constant.

In my analysis, I test the argument that government bias prevents conflict resolution because it makes it more difficult for the groups in conflict to trust each other. In all four

cases, the government (at least ostensibly) sought to promote a solution, and non-state actors reportedly perceived as neutral acted as mediators, yet in two of the cases these efforts did not produce substantial agreements. My analysis suggests that this is because in these cases there was a strong perception of government bias, which made it difficult for the parties to overcome distrust. In both cases, it was alleged that local politicians in allegiance with central government actors were able to manipulate border demarcations and other local policies in a way that favoured one side in the conflict. These locations were also of high strategic importance to the central government; in one case (Mandera) due to its geostrategic location, and in the other (Tana River) because of energy generation and prospects for major international investments in large-scale farming.

My analysis also suggests 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. In the Kerio Valley case, there was a history of strong bias related to relationships, but this dynamic was changing at the time of the peace process. I argue that this is one reason why it became possible for the groups to trust each other and negotiate an agreement. This suggests that political leadership changes can provide an important window of opportunity for local peacemaking.

How can non-state actors help resolve communal conflict?

The cases analysed in the third essay illustrate how non-state actors can, under the right circumstances, help communal groups negotiate peace. However, previous research has shown how in many cases, non-state actors engaging in local conflict resolution are not perceived as legitimate, and may have a limited or even harmful impact (for instance, see Eaton, 2008). In the fourth essay, I seek to understand how non-state actors can achieve legitimacy and influence necessary for a constructive mediation role. For this purpose, the essay conducts a within-case analysis of the peace process in Kerio Valley, western Kenya, in 2001–2002. It is published in *Journal of Modern African Studies* (Elfverson, 2016).

The article 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 is based on rich empirical material, including interviews with actors who were involved in the

peace process as well as civilians from the affected communities, the Marakwet and Pokot. Following a long history of violent conflict that became particularly destructive in 2001, the communities engaged in a peace process that culminated in the Kolowa 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. My analysis illustrates how this organisation had gained legitimacy through filling important roles in governance in an area that was for long neglected by the central state. The analysis highlights how a history of local engagement generates not only material but also significant symbolic power, which becomes important in situations of conflict resolution.

The analysis also 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. Finally, the interviews with community members emphasized that in the longer run, the key to preventing renewed conflict lies in addressing the underlying causes through development projects that alleviate the stress on land, and education and employment opportunities making it possible for pastoralists to diversify their livelihoods.

Implications for promoting durable communal conflict resolution

A central finding in my dissertation is that government responses to communal conflicts are conditioned by political interests. 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 sometimes become successful peacemakers.

One important implication of these findings is that the management and resolution of communal conflicts should not be seen as merely a component 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, and that intervention in communal conflict is employed strategically to ensure control over important resources and provide support to ethnic constituencies. Hence, in line with a study by Ababu (2013), my findings suggest that donors should not expect that projects focused on statebuilding will automatically result in improved management of communal conflict. Instead, external organizations and donors should monitor states' behavior in relation to communal conflicts and put pressure on governments to improve their performance in this regard. This entails both a commitment by central authorities to ensure security for all its citizens and act in a neutral manner in relation to conflicts, and promoting discipline and equal treatment of communal groups on behalf of the security forces. 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.

Another 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 groups and individuals that have the potential to serve as mediators. As Eaton (2008) 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.

Finally, in the long run, improvement of state institutions and service delivery, and promoting development, is necessary to alleviate the risk of communal conflict (both its emergence and recurrence). Importantly, such projects need to carefully assess local

dynamics so they do not unintentionally exacerbate conflict by benefitting some communities more than others.

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