Forces of Destruction and Construction
Local Conflict Dynamics, Institutional Trust and Postwar Crime

Annekatrin Deglow
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Abstract

In 2017 alone, an estimated 68,851 people lost their lives as a consequence of civil wars, that is, armed conflicts that take place within the borders of a state. Such violent conflicts not only lead to immense human suffering, but also leave social, economic and political imprints on the societies that experience them. This dissertation contributes to a burgeoning literature that seeks to understand these imprints by studying how local conflict dynamics affect two specific outcomes: institutional trust and postwar crime. It comprises four independent essays that pose separate research questions, but taken together make important contributions to our understanding of how subnational particularities related to conflict intensity, armed actors and the type of violence employed determine whether, how and why civil wars affect the outcomes of interest. Essay I finds that a large-scale insurgent attack on civilians led to an immediate increase in individual-level trust in state institutions in Kabul City. Essay II finds that conflict intensity at the local level in Afghanistan has a negative impact on individual-level perceptions of one specific state institution: the police. Essay III finds that the more an area in Northern Ireland was affected by wartime violence, the more crime it displayed in the postwar context, but that this effect is contingent on the actor perpetrating violence. Finally, Essay IV shows how conflict dynamics in a former insurgent stronghold of Northern Ireland (West Belfast) changed the style of policing at the local level, as well as the consequences this had for the police’s ability to enforce law and order in the postwar context. These findings speak to an emerging research agenda that studies the conditions under which civil wars function either as forces of destruction or as catalysts for societal development, and offer three larger conclusions: conflict dynamics shape the relationship between local populations and the state far into the postwar period; institutional consequences of armed conflict can translate into postwar challenges, such as crime; and conflict dynamics affect perceptions of state institutions in a quite similar manner across rather different contexts, in this case, Afghanistan and Northern Ireland.

Keywords: internal armed conflict, civil war, organized violence, subnational, institutional trust, postwar crime, state institutions, police, Afghanistan, Northern Ireland, Kabul, Belfast

Annekatrin Deglow, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, Box 514, Uppsala University, SE-75120 Uppsala, Sweden.

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To Magnus
List of Essays

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


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# Contents

Acknowledgements ................................................................................................................. 9

Introduction ............................................................................................................................ 11

Situating the dissertation ......................................................................................................... 13
  Internal armed conflict and institutional trust ................................................................. 14
  Internal armed conflict and postwar crime ...................................................................... 15

Definitions and theoretical point of departure .................................................................... 17

Presenting the essays .............................................................................................................. 18
  Essay I ............................................................................................................................... 19
  Essay II ............................................................................................................................. 20
  Essay III ............................................................................................................................ 21
  Essay IV ............................................................................................................................. 22

Methodological challenges and case selection ..................................................................... 23

Conclusion ............................................................................................................................... 25

References ............................................................................................................................... 28
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Introduction

In 2017, there were 48 ongoing civil wars, that is, armed conflicts taking place within the borders of a state. In that year alone, an estimated 68,851 people lost their lives due to violence resulting from clashes between government forces and non-state armed actors\(^1\) and tens of thousands more became the victims of other forms of organized violence such as the deliberate targeting of civilians and communal conflicts (Pettersson and Eck, 2018). How many more were injured, abused or traumatized remains unknown. While internal armed conflicts lead to immense human suffering, they also leave political, social and economic imprints on the societies that experience them. For example, research has shown that civil wars have the potential to undermine human and economic development (Collier et al., 2003), pose challenges to health and psychological well-being (see, for instance, Bundervoet et al., 2009; Ghobarah et al., 2003; Østby et al., 2018) and disrupt social capital (Colletta and Cullen, 2000). At the same time, a burgeoning literature focusing on the subnational level finds that internal armed conflicts can – under certain conditions and in specific contexts – lead to unexpected outcomes such as increased social cohesion and trust within communities (Gilligan et al., 2013), raised political participation among victimized individuals (Bellows and Miguel, 2009; Blattman, 2009) and enhanced collective action in conflict-affected areas (Bateson, 2013; Wood, 2003). These findings have reignited the debate on the consequences of internal armed conflicts with a plethora of studies indicating that whether they function as forces of destruction or as catalysts for societal development, depends on a range of aspects.

This dissertation contributes to previous work by studying how local conflict dynamics affect two specific outcomes: institutional trust and postwar crime. By “institutional trust”, I am referring to how much trust and confidence individuals place in formal institutions of the state. Postwar crime refers to violations of the law by individuals or groups as defined by legal codes after the official termination of armed conflict. Despite a growing interest in these two variables in recent years, an overarching research gap remains insofar as previous studies have rarely theorized, nor empirically explored, how subnational variations in overall conflict intensity, the actors perpetrating violence, the victims targeted, as well as the violent tactics employed, shape these outcomes. This is surprising, given that civil wars are localized, meaning that

\(^1\)Author’s own calculation based on conflict category 3 (intrastate conflicts) and 4 (intrastate conflicts with foreign involvement) of the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) Battle-Related Dataset (version 18.1). Available at: http://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/
conflict dynamics tend to vary across a country’s geographical space (Kalyvas, 2006). While studying separate research questions and therefore having different theoretical foci, the four essays that this dissertation comprises share a common theoretical point of departure: if we wish to understand how internal armed conflict influences institutional trust and postwar crime, we must take into account local-level variations in the behavior of armed actors.

Studying these two outcomes is also relevant from a policy perspective. Institutional trust is important for functioning and democratic institutions. The extent to which individuals consider state institutions to be trustworthy and legitimate, for instance, affects their inclination to comply with the rules and regulations set by the state (Levi and Stoker, 2000). This becomes particularly relevant in war-torn societies in which the prospect of social, political and economic stability depend on the population’s willingness to accept postwar reforms, participate in the political process and support government decisions (cf. De Juan and Pierskalla, 2016). Likewise, high levels of crime in the aftermath of conflict pose a challenge to the the quality of peace, endanger public security and can put severe economic, social and institutional strain on postwar societies. Studying how local conflict dynamics affect institutional trust and postwar crime not only helps identify factors that create an unruly and fragile postwar environment, but also provides us with information about geographical areas of a country that might be particularly at risk.

This dissertation comprises four independent essays. Each essay deduces specific hypotheses from the overarching theoretical point of departure, and evaluates them empirically by focusing on one of two cases: The first two essays focus on Afghanistan and assess how local conflict dynamics affect institutional trust during ongoing armed conflict. The other two essays focus on Northern Ireland – a postwar country – and probe into the potential consequences of armed conflict on crime in its aftermath. The dissertation primarily relies on quantitative approaches but complements them with one qualitative in-depth case study. In line with the overarching theoretical point of departure, the quantitative essays make use of geographically fine-grained data to test hypotheses on subnational dynamics. The qualitative case study complements this approach by focusing on one concrete geographical area and is based on both secondary material and interviews conducted during fieldwork.

Taken together, the findings of the four essays indicate that internal armed conflicts indeed affect institutional trust and postwar crime, but that the extent to which they do so depends on the context. While each essay makes a specific contribution to the research field, the dissertation at large advances our understanding by highlighting how local particularities related to the intensity of conflict, the type of violence present, as well as the actor perpetrating it, determine both the magnitude and the direction of the effect. For instance, while conflict intensity appears to have undermined trust in the police in Afghanistan (Essay II), a large-scale insurgent attack on civilians in Kabul City triggered an increase in trust in several state institutions (Essay I). Likewise, while vi-
olence perpetrated by insurgent groups in Northern Ireland is associated with higher levels of postwar crime, violence by pro-state groups had no statistically significant effect on the outcome (Essay III).

This introductory chapter serves several purposes: In the following sections I will situate the dissertation in existing research and outline the gaps that it addresses. I continue by providing definitions of key concepts and by describing the theoretical point of departure that all four essays share. I will then present each of the essays separately, before discussing challenges related to methods and describing the cases being studied. I end by outlining general conclusions, as well as avenues for future research.

Situating the dissertation

Previous research on the consequences of armed conflict has studied a range of social, political and economic outcomes: Scholars have focused on the consequences of armed conflict for social trust and cohesion (Bauer et al., 2014, 2016; Cassar et al., 2013; De Luca and Verpoorten, 2015b; Gilligan et al., 2013; Kijewski and Freitag, 2018; Mironova and Whitt, 2018; Rohner et al., 2013; Traunmüller et al., 2015; Weidmann and Zürcher, 2013; Whitt, 2014), political participation, preferences and identity (Balcells, 2012; Bellows and Miguel, 2009; Blattman, 2009; De Luca and Verpoorten, 2015a; Dyrstad, 2012, 2013; Freitag et al., 2017; Grossman et al., 2015; Rozenas et al., 2017), as well as economic factors and decision-making (Brück et al., 2018; Serneels and Verpoorten, 2015; Voors et al., 2010). Taken together, the findings yielded by these studies provide a nuanced picture of the social, political and economic impact of armed conflicts, indicating that – depending on the outcome and context being studied – they function either as forces of destruction or catalysts for societal development.

In addition to the outcomes mentioned above, scholars have paid increasing attention to the effects of armed conflicts on institutional trust, meaning the extent to which individuals place trust and confidence in formal institutions of the state. Another outcome of interest is postwar crime, with a growing body of literature that attempts to understand the extent to which armed conflicts create an environment conducive to illegal behavior. While this dissertations generally speaks to the larger research field on the consequences of armed conflict as described above, it makes a specific contribution to these last two strands of literature. In this section, I will first review previous research on the relationship between armed conflict and institutional trust, before I present relevant studies that focus on armed conflict and postwar crime. I conclude each section by outlining the research gaps that this dissertation aims to address.
Internal armed conflict and institutional trust

The first literature that this dissertation, and in particular Essays I and II, speaks to is the literature on the relationship between internal armed conflict and institutional trust. Political scientists and peace and conflict scholars alike have long been interested in the institutional consequences of armed conflicts. Some of the earliest work that focuses on state-formation and nation-building processes in Europe pinpoints armed conflicts as a driving force of institutional development (Tilly, 1975, 1990). A second long-standing hypothesis, focusing more specifically on the consequences of internal armed conflicts, is the notion of a “conflict trap”, which stipulates that civil wars weaken state capacity and consequently lead to institutional decay (Collier et al., 2003). While the discussion on whether armed conflicts strengthen institutional capacities or weaken them is still ongoing – with empirical evidence pointing in different directions (Wig and Tollefsen, 2015) – there has been a growing interest among scholars in a related, yet slightly different outcome. Rather than focusing on institutional capacities, emphasis has also been placed on immaterial consequences in the form of public perceptions of state institutions, such as institutional trust (De Juan and Pierskalla, 2016). It is this outcome that this dissertation is interested in and which the following review focuses on.

To date the literature on the effects of internal armed conflict on institutional trust remains inconclusive. For instance, large-N country-level comparisons indicate that the experience of civil war in sub-Saharan Africa on average reduces individual-level trust in the government (Hutchison and Johnson, 2011). Sub-national studies further show that both local variations in the intensity of violence in countries such as Burundi (Voors and Bulte, 2014) and Nepal (De Juan and Pierskalla, 2016), as well as individual-level victimization in Europe (Grosjean, 2014), reduce trust and confidence in a range of state institutions.

Other studies, however, find mixed results or even a positive impact. Bakke et al. (2014), for instance, report that witnessing wartime violence correlates with higher levels of individual-level trust in the president in Abkhazia, while such exposure does not appear to have a statistically significant effect on trust in the police, parliament and judicial system. In Mali, Gates and Justesen (2016) found that a large-scale insurgent attack negatively affected approval of and trust in the president, but did not affect public evaluations of state institutions such as the parliament. In Korea, Hong and Kang (2017) find that whether or not civilian victimization affected trust in the government depended on the perpetrator committing violence. And finally, in Sierra Leone, Sacks and Larizza (2012) find that those areas most exposed to civil war violence are also the areas where trust in local government counsellors was highest in the aftermath of conflict.

The fact that the results have remained inconclusive might be due to several reasons. For instance, some scholars have noted that previous work differs
with regard to methodological approaches, cases studied, as well as the specific point in time when the outcome is measured (De Juan and Pierskalla, 2016). In addition to these factors, however, the differences in the results might also be due to more substantial conditionalities that shape the extent to which armed conflict affects public perceptions of state institutions. That is, there might be several factors that influence whether or not, and to what extent, armed conflict engenders either an increase, a reduction or no changes at all in institutional trust: the type of state institution, the extent to which individuals are exposed to organized violence, as well as the perpetrator, victim and type of violence are all likely to matter for the direction and magnitude of effects.

Thus, while previous research has offered important insights into the relationship between armed conflict and institutional trust, a gap remains with regard to understanding how armed conflicts affect trust-related outcomes across different contexts. This dissertation makes a contribution by providing a nuanced picture of the consequences of armed conflict on institutional trust by focusing on different conditionalities: Essay I focuses on one particular type of organized violence that takes place in the context of internal armed conflicts: large-scale insurgent attacks on civilians. Essay II theoretically develops and empirically explores how variations in the extent to which individuals are exposed to organized violence translates into variations in their perceptions of one particular state institution: the police. And Essay IV theorizes and empirically traces how the presence and activities of one particular actor – insurgent groups – affect public perceptions of the police as a key state institution.

Internal armed conflict and postwar crime

The second literature that this dissertation, and in particular Essays III and IV, speaks to is the literature on the relationship between internal armed conflict and postwar crime. In particular, the studies contribute to a sub-strand that is interested in the structural environment that armed conflict provides for crime. In contrast to previous research on conflict and institutional trust, this literature has reached a general consensus: armed conflict is often associated with high levels of crime in the postwar period. Although the summary of the literature below is somewhat simplified and hides nuances, it largely reflects the vast majority of previous work.

Several quantitative country-level analyses indicate that post-conflict societies on average display higher levels of homicide than countries that have not faced armed conflict (Ember and Ember, 1994; Rivera, 2016), with some studies further showing increases comparing pre- to postwar homicide rates.

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2For a more comprehensive review of the relationship between conflict and crime that also touches upon aspects that are not of interest for this dissertation, such as individual-level explanations related to the trauma of combatants and the likelihood of criminal and violent behavior, see Gartner and Kennedy (2018).
Subnational quantitative analyses, as well as single and comparative case studies, corroborate these findings, while also offering more nuanced insights. For instance, Bateson (2013) shows that while homicide rates are not affected by local conflict intensity in Guatemala, violent vigilantism is higher in former conflict hotspots. Bakke (2015) illustrates how rebel group fragmentation during conflicts leads to crime and violence in the aftermath of civil wars in de facto states. Nussio and Howe (2016) find that demobilization processes in a particular region of Columbia have led to increased homicide rates. And several case studies illustrate how conflicts can give rise to both structures and cultures that can either facilitate the continuation of violence in the aftermath of conflict, or contribute to the emergence of new forms of violence that constitute crimes in the post-war context (Cruz, 2011; Howarth, 2016; Kurtenbach, 2013; Richani, 2010; Steenkamp, 2009, 2014, 2017; Suhrke and Berdal, 2012; Zinecker, 2006).

These findings are commonly explained with reference to the idea that armed conflicts trigger social, economic and/or institutional processes that create an environment conducive to crime (Steenkamp, 2005; Suhrke and Berdal, 2012; van Baalen and Höglund, 2017). This dissertation speaks to one specific theoretical approach: the idea that armed conflict weakens state institutions, in particular those within the security sector, making them ill-equipped to deal with crime in the postwar period, thereby contributing to an environment conducive to crime (see, for instance, Call, 2007; Cruz, 2011; Howarth, 2016; Richani, 2010; Steenkamp, 2017; Zinecker, 2006).

While studies within this “institutional approach” have contributed significantly to our understanding of the relationship between internal armed conflict and postwar crime, several gaps remain. In particular, few studies take into account the localized nature of armed conflict theoretically and/or empirically. For instance, apart from Bateson (2013), quantitative subnational analyses remain absent from the literature. While it is commonly argued that armed conflicts create an environment conducive to crime, the dominant focus on national-level comparison, as well as on single-case studies, implies that we currently do not know when, where and why such an environment is likely to develop at the local level. Furthermore, previous research does not take into account that the perpetrator of violence at the local level might matter with regard to the extent to which state institutions are affected and, by extension, contribute to an environment conducive to crime. This dissertation, and in particular Essay III, addresses this gap by providing a quantitative subnational analysis of Northern Ireland that analyzes whether the actor who perpetrates wartime violence at the local level matters for postwar crime.

There is also a strand of literature that is interested in understanding the continuation and/or emergence of more organized forms of political violence beyond the recurrence of civil wars (see, for instance, van Baalen and Höglund, 2017; Bara, 2017; Grandi, 2013; Herreros, 2011).

For a more general overview of explanations offered for the link between conflict and postwar violence and crime, see Suhrke and Berdal (2012).
A second gap relates to the theorized processes assumed to link armed conflict to postwar crime. While previous research within the institutional approach proposes that armed conflict weakens state security institutions, thus making them ill-equipped to enforce law and order, few analyses provide a detailed theoretical account, as well as systematic empirical evidence of, this theorized causal story. Essay IV addresses this gap by tracing how the experience of internal armed conflict in one particular local environment – the insurgent stronghold – shapes policing conduct. It shows the consequences this has for an environment conducive to crime in the form of a “policing gap”, i.e. a situation in which the police neither display the characteristics nor enjoy the support of the local population necessary to prevent and deter crime.

Definitions and theoretical point of departure

While the essays in this dissertation address different research questions, have different theoretical foci and test different hypotheses, they all have as a common denominator a shared understanding of internal armed conflict that serves as a theoretical point of departure for the more specific arguments of each essay. I define internal armed conflicts in line with the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) as “a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of force between two parties, of which one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in one calendar year”.\(^5\) Throughout the dissertation, I use the term “internal armed conflict” interchangeably with “civil war”. In the context of an internal armed conflict, several forms of organized violence can take place. These include clashes between government forces and non-state armed actors, clashes between different non-state armed actors, as well as the deliberate targeting of civilians by both government forces and non-state armed actors (Melander et al., 2016).

Non-state armed actors are organized armed groups that do not form part of government forces and either challenge the government of a state, or employ violence to protect the status quo. I refer to the former interchangeably as “insurgent”, “rebel” and “anti-government groups”, and refer to the latter as “pro-state groups”, i.e. groups that are supportive of the government but not directly linked to it.\(^6\)

In addition to this basic definition, all four essays share a common understanding of internal armed conflicts as characterized by two key features: First, they are believed to set in motion processes that are shaped by the behavior and actions of armed actors and that have the potential to leave social and

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\(^5\) The UCDP calls this an intrastate conflict and an intrastate armed conflict with foreign involvement if an external state actively supports one side. Definitions are available at: https://www.pcr.uu.se/research/ucdp/definitions/.

\(^6\) Note that this differs from the term “pro-state militias”, which is commonly used to described non-state actors that have either direct or indirect links to government forces (Carey et al., 2013).
institutional consequences (Wood, 2008). Second, the extent to which these processes are generated and consequently affect outcomes varies at the subnational level (cf. De Juan and Pierskalla, 2016). Conflict is unlikely to affect all parts of a country equally in that overall conflict intensity, the actors perpetrating violence, the victims targeted and violent tactics employed are not the same across geographical space (Kalyvas, 2006). A key argument of this dissertation is therefore that we need to take into account the behavior of armed actors, as well as how it varies across space, if we wish to understand how internal armed conflicts affect postwar crime and institutional trust. Each of the four essays then address different research gaps and make unique contributions.

Before presenting each essay in more detail, a brief conceptual discussion of the two outcomes studied in this dissertation is warranted. When referring to institutional trust I mean the extent to which individuals place trust in formal institutions of the state, such as central and local government, the parliament, the presidency, judicial system, armed forces and the police. In the literature on institutional trust the term is interchangeably used with concepts such as “political trust”, “vertical trust” or “institutional confidence” (Newton, 2007). While there is lack of consensus regarding what exactly trust in general means, how it is generated and what consequences it may have (Levi and Stoker, 2000; Newton, 2007), there is a minimum definition that scholars agree upon: trust is the “belief that others will not deliberately or knowingly do us harm, if they can avoid it, and look after our interest, if this is possible” (Newton, 2007). Institutional trust differs from what is referred to as “social”, “interpersonal” or “horizontal” trust in that individuals place trust in state institutions, rather than in other individuals or groups (Mishler and Rose, 2001; Newton, 2007). This is a relevant conceptual distinction, as both causes and consequences of these two types of trust are likely to differ (Hetherington, 2005).

Postwar crime is understood to be any violation of a country’s legal code by individuals or groups after conflict termination (cf. Mac Ginty, 2006). The prefix postwar refers to the time frame in which crimes of interest occur, namely after armed conflict has been officially terminated. In the case of Northern Ireland, the focus of Essays III and IV, this means after negotiated settlement, i.e. an agreement between the main conflict parties to lay down their arms and resolve their incompatibility. Essay IV does not directly focus on postwar crime as the outcome, but instead traces the process from local conflict dynamics to a postwar environment conducive to crime in the form of a policing gap, i.e. a situation in which the police neither display characteristics nor enjoy the support needed to discourage crime.

Presenting the essays
This dissertation comprises four independent essays that together contribute to our understanding of the effects of internal armed conflicts at the local level.
While Essays I and II focus on the relationship between internal armed conflict and institutional trust in Afghanistan, Essays III and IV study how internal armed conflict shapes (an environment conducive to) postwar crime in Northern Ireland. This section introduces the four essays separately, outlines their theoretical arguments, research design and empirical material, and summarizes the main findings and key contributions.

Essay I

The first essay “To Blame or to Support? Large-scale Insurgent Attacks on Civilians and Institutional Trust: Evidence from Kabul City” (co-authored with Ralph Sundberg) focuses on the effect that one particular form of organized violence that takes place in the context of an ongoing internal armed conflict – large-scale violent attacks on civilians by non-state armed actors – has on individual-level trust in three major state institutions: the local government, parliament and police. The essay notes that while these kinds of attacks are a common part of the violent repertoires of insurgent groups, we know surprisingly little about the impact they have on citizens’ evaluation of state institutions. It addresses this gap by assessing empirical support for two competing explanations that are theoretically equally plausible, but predict hypotheses expecting different outcomes: the “rally-round-the-flag” approach stipulates that large-scale attacks trigger short-term increases in institutional trust and the “democratic accountability” approach expects reduced trust in state institutions as a consequence of violent attacks.

To evaluate these hypotheses empirically, the essay leverages a quasi-experiment arising from the cooccurrence of a large-scale attack by Taliban insurgents on a hotel on the outskirts of Kabul City on 21 June 2012 with the country’s largest public opinion survey, the “Survey of the Afghan People” (The Asia Foundation). This cooccurrence makes it possible to assess the impact of the attack by comparing individuals interviewed before the attack to those who were interviewed after. The essay finds that the attack led to statistically and substantively significant increases in institutional trust among a sample of Kabul City residents. It discusses why we might observe this effect by linking the findings back to the rally-round-the-flag approach deduced from previous research.

The essay makes three main contributions. First, it shows that large-scale insurgent attacks on civilians can have quite strong effects on institutional trust, even in the context of an ongoing armed conflict. Second, it suggests that rally effects might be produced by a much more diverse set of attacks than commonly anticipated. And finally, it adds to the literature on the effects of internal armed conflicts on institutional trust by suggesting that organized vio-

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7Department of Peace and Conflict Research. Equal authorship.
lence during war can trigger very different responses, depending on the specific context of interest.

Essay II

The second essay “‘We Don’t Talk To Police’: Internal Armed Conflict and Individual-level Trust in the Police in Afghanistan” (co-authored with Ralph Sundberg) focuses on the effect of conflict intensity at the local-level on institutional trust. It zooms in on one particular state institution: the police. As a point of departure the essay notes that although the police play a major role during internal armed conflicts because of their involvement in counterinsurgency policing, previous research has largely neglected them as an institution worthy of studying in their own right. Drawing on theoretical insights from the literature on counterinsurgency and counterterrorism policing, as well as the criminological literature on police legitimacy, the study contributes by theoretically developing how local-level variations in conflict intensity translate into variations in the type of policing to which individuals are exposed to, with more intensely affected areas seeing more militarized counterinsurgency than ordinary crime policing. This, in turn, is expected to affect three dependent variables related to institutional trust: public perceptions of police effectiveness, procedural justice, as well as overall legitimacy.

To evaluate this claim empirically, the study focuses on Afghanistan and employs a multilevel modelling approach to 31,720 Afghans across a sample of 360 districts from 2007–2012. To assess conflict intensity it uses fine-grained data on fatalities from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program’s Georeferenced Event Data Set (UCDP GED) and combines three forms of organized violence: (1) fighting between government forces and non-state armed actors, (2) fighting between different non-state armed actors and (3) the deliberate targeting of unarmed civilians by both government and non-state forces. To measure public perceptions of police effectiveness, procedural justice and overall legitimacy it uses survey items from the Asia Foundation’s “Survey of the Afghan People”. In line with theoretical expectations, the study finds that the more an individual has been exposed to conflict, the less likely it is to perceive the police as being effective in fighting crime, just in their conduct and generally legitimate.

The study expands our knowledge of how organized violence at the local-level shapes perceptions of the police during ongoing armed conflict by providing fine-grained quantitative insights. More precisely, it emphasizes that subnational variations in conflict intensity need to be taken into account in order to understand how internal armed conflicts shape individual-level perceptions of state institutions – in this case, the police. While the suggested causal mechanism is not measured directly, it also highlights the potentially

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8 Deglow is lead author of this essay.
destructive impact that employing the police on the frontline of an armed conflict could have for any efforts to win hearts and minds. This is of particular concern in the context of a state-building enterprise where legitimate and trusted state institutions, such as the police, are a basic requirement for stabilizing war-torn societies.

Essay III
The third essay “Localized Legacies of Civil Wars: Postwar Violent Crime in Northern Ireland” was published in 2016 in the Journal of Peace Research. It analyzes the consequences of internal armed conflict at the local level for levels of violent crime in the aftermath of conflict and focuses on Northern Ireland. It departs from the observation that previous work on the topic expects armed conflict to create a crime-conducive environment, but that we know surprisingly little about where, when and why such an environment is likely to develop due to a lack of systematic subnational analyses.

Building on previous research on the micro-dynamics of civil wars, as well as on insights from criminological literature on police legitimacy, the study makes a contribution by developing a theoretical argument suggesting that the more a subnational area is affected by violent conflict, the higher will its level of postwar violent crime be, as the experience of conflict erodes the police legitimacy necessary to enforce law and order. Following efforts in peace and conflict research to disaggregate non-state armed actors in order to advance our understanding of the consequences of armed conflict, the essay further theorizes how targeting patterns of anti-government groups are particularly likely to reduce police legitimacy and, consequently, affect crime.

The hypotheses are evaluated employing negative binomial regression models on a subnational dataset covering conflict-related fatalities stemming from different forms of organized violence taking place in the context of internal armed conflict from 1969–1998 (Sutton Index of Death), and police recorded crime statistics for the postwar years 2001–2006. In line with the theoretical expectations, the study finds that conflict-related violence in general, and violence perpetrated by anti-government groups in particular, has a positive effect on levels of postwar violent crime. Violence by pro-state groups, however, has no statistically significant effect. While the suggested causal mechanism is not tested directly, additional qualitative evidence, as well as an analysis of targeting patterns, indicate that it might be a plausible process for explaining the observed patterns of correlation.

The study confirms previous macro-level research in that armed conflict shapes local-level dynamics during war, which, in turn, bear consequences that extend to the the postwar period. In particular, it advances our understanding of the legacies of armed conflict by showing how subnational variations in
wartime violence, as well as the actor perpetrating it, can translate into variations in the degree to which areas suffer from postwar crime.

Essay IV

The fourth and final essay “Losing Hearts and Minds: Armed Conflict, Counterinsurgency Policing and Postwar Crime in West Belfast” builds on Essay III by developing the argument about the impact of anti-government group activity on policing conduct and consequently on police legitimacy and crime. However, rather than assessing the effect of local conflict dynamics on postwar crime, it traces one potential pathway that leads to an environment conducive to crime in the form of a “policing gap”, i.e. a situation in which the police neither display the characteristics nor the support necessary to discourage crime. More precisely, the essay zooms in on how conflict dynamics in insurgent strongholds affect the style of policing in the area, how this shapes public perceptions, as well as the effectiveness of policing and the consequences this has on the police’s ability to enforce law and order.

The suggested causal story is explored in the context of West Belfast, a former insurgent stronghold of Northern Ireland that was highly affected by conflict, saw a considerable share of insurgent activity and displays high levels of postwar crime. Relying on secondary sources, as well as on interviews conducted in Belfast in 2017, the study finds overall support for the suggested causal mechanisms, though with important nuances: insurgent activity in the area led to more militarized counterinsurgency policing at the expense of ordinary crime policing. This undermined public perceptions of police legitimacy, translating into an environment conducive to crime in the form of a policing gap. However, empirical evidence suggests that merely focusing on the police neither adequately explains when nor why this policing gap emerges. Instead, it highlights the relevance of the partial withdrawal of insurgent groups from informal policing in the wake of the peace process as an additional factor. The analysis further suggests that local conflict dynamics also triggered socio-economic and socio-cultural processes that facilitated postwar crime in the area, as well as points towards the importance of pre-war characteristics related to traditional harsh and repressive policing conduct.

The study confirms previous research by showing that processes set in motion by armed conflict can have institutional consequences and that these can translate into postwar challenges. At the same time, focusing on insurgent strongholds the essay advances our understanding by providing insights into how this plays out at the local level. The study also confirms, and moves beyond, concerns raised in previous research about the use of police at the forefront of an armed conflict: counterinsurgency policing might not only have the potential of destroying public perceptions of police legitimacy, but can also hamper their ability to enforce law and order in the long term.
Methodological challenges and case selection

As shown by the presentation of the four essays above, each essay uses a different method specifically geared towards the respective research question. Three of the essays employ quantitative methods, offering insights into patterns of correlation and average effects. This is complemented by a qualitative study that looks in more detail into one particular causal process. The essays complement each other, however, in that they shed light on different aspects of the underlying research interest: understanding the effects of internal armed conflict at the local level. A major methodological challenge that arises from this research topic is that conflict dynamics at the local level are often endogeneous to the outcomes studied (De Juan and Pierskalla, 2016; Rozenas et al., 2017; Voors and Bulte, 2014). For instance, while overall conflict intensity, as well as the activity of armed actors at the local level are likely to affect outcomes such as institutional trust and postwar crime as described above, these outcomes, in turn, are equally likely to affect where violence takes place, where it is most intense and who perpetrates it. Indeed, some studies have shown that public attitudes in general can shape patterns of violence at the local level (Hirose et al., 2017; Linke et al., 2015). While it has not been studied empirically, it is also theoretically plausible that crime affects local conflict dynamics: areas with high crime levels and low law enforcement capacities may be fertile grounds for recruitment into insurgent groups, as well as easy targets. This also implies that whether and where conflict breaks out in the first place might be driven by aspects related to institutional trust and crime. Thus, assuming anything other than that the relationship between armed conflict and the two outcomes of interest is ruled by reverse causality would be unreasonable. The essays in this dissertation employ different approaches to tackle these reverse causality concerns, such as measuring the independent variables related to local conflict dynamics prior to the outcomes studied to establish a causal time order, quasi-experimental designs to handle the non-randomness of violence, providing qualitative case study evidence, as well as the in-depth tracing of causal processes over time. Since none of these approaches provide perfect solutions to issues related to endogeneity, each of the four essays in this dissertation acknowledges and discusses what specific concerns remain, and what implications this has for interpreting the findings.

A second point that warrants discussion relates to the two cases studied in this dissertation – Northern Ireland, and Afghanistan – and what they represent. These cases are strategically chosen in light of the dissertation’s underlying research interest. Northern Ireland is a postwar country whose internal armed conflict ceased in 1998 with a comprehensive peace agreement signed by the main conflict parties. It is therefore a suitable context for studying the effects of conflict on postwar outcomes, such as crime. In order to advance our understanding of the consequences of internal armed conflict on institutional
trust during ongoing armed conflicts, Essays I and II study Afghanistan, i.e. an active armed conflict.

Northern Ireland and Afghanistan are further characterized by a number of factors that allow for testing the specific arguments that follow from the general understanding of internal armed conflict as described above. Both countries have seen at least one major insurgent group challenging the government of the respective state through violent means. They have further in common that their respective internal armed conflicts display several forms of organized violence. In addition to clashes between government forces and the main insurgent groups, each case also involves a number of additional non-state armed actors who were fighting the government, as well as each other. In both cases, non-state armed actors and state forces have been involved in the targeting of civilians. Most importantly, these factors vary across geographical space within both countries, making them particularly suited for assessing hypotheses based on local-level arguments.

While sharing similarities, the two cases also display important differences. First, they differ with regard to the type of incompatibility, with Afghanistan’s conflict centering on disagreement over government, while Northern Ireland’s conflict concerned disagreement over territory. Second, while Afghanistan had (and continues to have) one of the deadliest conflicts with regard to fatalities stemming from organized violence (Pettersson and Eck, 2018), Northern Ireland is commonly classified as a “low intensity” conflict (O’Leary and McGarry, 1996). Third, the cases differ with regard to the capacity of the central state. While Northern Ireland as part of Great Britain displayed high state capacity by the time of the conflict, Afghanistan is a weak state undermined by the presence of informal power holders at the regional level (Mukhopadhyay, 2014). Fourth, and related to the last point, Afghanistan also differs from Northern Ireland in that it has been a highly internationalized armed conflict. External armed forces in the form of US and NATO-mandated ISAF troops were fighting non-state actors alongside Afghan national security forces and Afghanistan can be seen as one of the most extensive state-building enterprises of our time. Thus, while Northern Ireland represents a case of separatist low-intensity armed conflict were an insurgent group challenged a strong state, Afghanistan is an example of a high-intensity armed conflict over government control in which insurgents are challenging a weak state that relies heavily on external support. While none of the essays compare the cases directly with each other, this mixture of similarities and differences makes it possible to gain insights into the effects of internal armed conflict at the local level across different contexts.

Characterizing Northern Ireland as a low intensity conflict refers strictly to the numbers of fatalities in comparison to Afghanistan. It does not imply that the conflict has not led to immense suffering among the population that was exposed to it.

24
While being different in outlook, these two cases display several features commonly found in other internal armed conflicts: Northern Ireland has a strong ethno-sectarian component that is comparable to ethnic cleavages in other instances of civil war. It further features an insurgent group that heavily relies on guerrilla tactics, thus speaking to other cases of irregular warfare in which power relations between state and non-state actors are asymmetrical. Afghanistan, on the other hand, mirrors other heavily internationalized armed conflicts that involve statebuilding. As such, these two cases speak to a larger universe of internal armed conflicts and findings offered in this dissertation should be informative beyond the specific context of Afghanistan and Northern Ireland.

Conclusion

This dissertation shows that conflict dynamics affect social and political outcomes, but that the extent to which they do so depends on the intensity of conflict, the types of actors perpetrating it and the forms of violence employed at the local level. As such, it confirms previous research by suggesting that whether internal armed conflicts function as forces of destruction or construction is contingent on the particular context of interest. Based on these findings the dissertation offers three general conclusions about the social and political consequences of civil wars:

First, it shows that armed actors, through their use of violence, can shape the relationship between the state and local populations and that this impact can extend into the postwar context. Insurgents and state forces – in this case, the police – can both affect how individuals perceive state institutions and how they behave towards them. This has implications for both the relationship between the state and its citizens during armed conflict and in the aftermath of it.

Second, the dissertation suggests that there are relevant interlinkages between the two outcomes studied. Local conflict dynamics shape how individuals perceive state institutions, how much they trust them and how legitimate they consider them to be. This, in turn, has important implications for the ability of formal institutions to function effectively in the aftermath of conflict. More specifically, it shows that the police as a key state institution are substantially affected by conflict at the local level and that this hampers their ability to provide security and enforce law and order, even in a postwar context.

Finally, the dissertation shows how conflict dynamics can play out in a rather similar manner across very different contexts: state responses to insurgency, such as employing the police as counterinsurgents at the forefront of an armed conflict, are fairly similar when comparing Northern Ireland and Afghanistan. The analysis shows how such responses can backfire, and that they undermine how individuals and local populations perceive formal institutions. In short:
similar processes were at play despite the cases having very different conflict environments.

While offering relevant conclusions, the dissertation also raises new questions that reflect avenues for future research. In general, it highlights the need to further explore how the impact of internal armed conflicts on institutional trust and postwar crime is conditioned by contextual factors. For instance, how does the ethnic or political identity of individuals and local populations condition the effect of conflict dynamics on institutional trust? How does violence by groups affiliated with the state affect how individuals perceive formal institutions? And do victims of violence respond differently compared to individuals living in areas affected by conflict, but who are not directly physically harmed? With regard to postwar crime, it would be interesting to assess how conflict might – or might not – shape an environment conducive to crime in areas that are contested, under state control, or under the influence of pro-state groups. Conflict dynamics are likely to look quite different when comparing these areas, and assessing their impact is important in order to gain a more complete picture of the consequences of armed conflict on postwar crime.

A second fruitful avenue for future research is to delve more deeply into the long-term consequences of armed conflicts on the two studied outcomes. The essays in this dissertation focus on the effects of local conflict dynamics on institutional trust during armed conflict and on (an environment conducive to) crime in the first ten years after conflict termination. However, several studies have recently highlighted the potential of armed conflicts to shape outcomes several decades after conflict termination (for instance, Balcells, 2012; Rozenas et al., 2017). Assessing the extent to which local conflict dynamics leave long-lasting imprints on individuals and societies exposed to them is therefore relevant in order to advance our understanding of the temporal dimensions of such effects.

Finally, researchers should assess more directly the causal processes that link local conflict dynamics to institutional trust and postwar crime. All essays in this dissertation make a contribution by theorizing how and why local conflict dynamics affect the outcomes of interest, but only one essay traces the suggested process directly (Essay IV). If we want to understand, for instance, why a single large-scale attack on civilians triggered an increase in institutional trust as found in Essay I, while broader trends of conflict reduce trust (Essay II), then we need to trace the processes that underly these patterns.

Understanding how, when, where and why internal armed conflicts affect social and political outcomes is important, because it provides us with the information needed to adequately address the challenges that arise for individuals, local populations and societies. This dissertation has provided relevant insights into some of the contextual factors that seem to determine how armed conflict affects two specific outcomes: institutional trust and postwar crime. There is much left to be done, however, and scholars should push the research agenda on the consequences of civil wars further in order to gain a more com-
plete picture of the conditions under which internal armed conflicts function either as forces of destruction, or forces of construction.
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