Masters of War
The Role of Elites in Sudan’s Communal Conflicts

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Abstract

Why do communal conflicts turn violent in some regions but not in others? Communal conflicts pose a severe threat to human security and kill thousands of people each year, but our understanding of this phenomenon is still limited. In particular, we lack knowledge about why some of these conflicts become violent while others are resolved peacefully. This study addresses this knowledge gap and has a novel approach by addressing subnational variations that are unexplained by previous research. The theoretical framework combines insights from three different perspectives focusing on the role of the state, elite interactions, and conditions for cooperation over common resources. Empirically, the research question is investigated by combining within- and between-region analyses of three Sudanese regions: Darfur, Eastern Sudan, and Greater Upper Nile. Despite sharing several similar characteristics, communal conflicts have killed thousands in Darfur and Greater Upper Nile but only a few dozen in Eastern Sudan. The empirical analysis builds on extensive material collected during fieldwork.

This study generates several conclusions about the importance of government conduct and how state behavior contributes to the prevalence of violent communal conflicts. It finds that when governments act in a biased manner – favoring certain communities over others – interactions between central and local elites as well as among local elites are disrupted. Unconstructive elite interactions, in turn, have negative effects on three mechanisms that are crucial for communal cooperation. First, when the regime is biased, communal affiliation, rather than the severity and context of a violation, determines the sanctions that are imposed on the perpetrators. Second, government bias leads to unclear boundaries, which contribute to violent communal conflicts by creating disarray and by shifting power balances between the communities. Third, regime partiality distances rules from local conditions and restricts the influence of local actors who have an understanding of local circumstances. The study also reveals why a regime acts with partiality in some areas but not in others. The answer to this question is found in the complex interplay between the threats and opportunities that a region presents to the regime. Taken together, the findings have important implications for the prevention and management of communal conflict.

Keywords: communal conflicts, causes of conflict, conflict prevention, conflict resolution, government bias, elites, common-pool resources, sanctions, boundaries, local rules, Sudan, South Sudan, Darfur, Eastern Sudan, Greater Upper Nile

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Acknowledgments

Almost a decade ago I began to study the crisis in Darfur and was overwhelmed by the human suffering in the region. This was also a time when Sudan often appeared in the media. Typical stories described topics such as genocide, ethnic cleansing, war, and massacres in Darfur or Southern Sudan. At the same time, however, Eastern Sudan seemed to be fairly peaceful. This piqued my curiosity. In particular, I was surprised by the fact that many of the factors used to explain the devastating situation in Darfur appeared to also be present in Eastern Sudan. This thesis is the result of that curiosity.

My good friend Johan Berglund once said that the life as a PhD candidate constantly shifts between hubris and self-contempt. For me, this has been very true and without the support of numerous persons this project would have ended in self-contempt long time ago. First, I want to thank my main supervisor Kristine Höglund for her unwavering support throughout this process. Stina, you combine intellectual brilliance with a deep desire to help others in a unique manner and are a true role model for supervisors. In the beginning of this process, I was privileged to have late Thomas Ohlson as a supervisor. This dissertation is indebted to your energy, enthusiasm, and encouragement (at least here I use three alliterations, sorry for not following this tradition about the mechanisms in the dissertation). We often talked about this day and decided to celebrate with a few glasses of Scotch. It breaks my heart that this will not happen. Still, you are here in spirit and I will drink a Scotch and hope that you will have one too, wherever you are. After Thomas sadly passed away in April 2012, Anders Themnér stepped in as an assistant supervisor. Thomas would have been very proud of the way you have fulfilled this task, Anders. Not only have you significantly improved this study with your insightful advice, you also have a great ability to give support in tough times. For both of these characteristics that are so typically you, I am very grateful.

When I was six years old, my daycare collected money for the victims of the famine in Ethiopia (thanks for organizing this Berit Sanker), and I have wanted to work with Africa since then. Ten years later, Mats Hammarström held a fascinating lecture in Falun and at that point I knew that I wanted to become a peace researcher. Mats, not only was this lecture decisive for my future career, but your belief in me as a researcher before I had any such confidence has been invaluable. In addition, I am glad that you once called
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Last but not least, last but not least, do I have to say her name? Ann-Sofie, to entitle my dissertation I borrowed from the master of music. Likewise my own words are not enough to express my love to you, so I steal from him:

I love you more than ever, more than time and more than love  
I love you more than money and more than the stars above  
Love you more than madness, more than dreams upon the sea  
Love you more than life itself, you mean that much to me  
(Bob Dylan, Wedding Song 1974)

To you I dedicate this work my beloved wife.

Johan Brosché

Uppsala, December 2013
1. 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 and Melander 2013; Sundberg et al. 2012). 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 et al. 2012) and this type of collective violence is often a trigger of civil war (Fearon and Laitin 2011). Still, communal conflicts are under-studied within peace and conflict research (Brosché and Elfversson 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. UN 2012; UNMISS 2012; HRW 2011b). Bringing rigorous scientific methods into the study of communal conflicts is, therefore, of both scholarly and policy importance.
1.1 Communal Conflicts

Communal conflict is defined in this study as a \textit{conflict between non-state groups that are organized along a shared communal identity}. This definition deserves some further clarification. \textit{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. This follows a generally accepted conceptualization of conflict (Galtung 1965; Wallensteen 2007). The groups involved are \textit{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 \textit{shared communal identity}. Some would equate the concept of \textit{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.
This study centers on the prevalence of violent communal conflicts at a regional level. It does so by comparing the frequency of conflicts in each region. To capture the difference in violence, this study differentiates between communal conflicts and violent communal conflicts. In this analysis, 25 fatalities in a calendar year is used to define a violent communal conflict.\(^1\) This threshold is used because it suitably captures the collective and political violence that is the focal point of the analysis.

1.2 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 insurrections, 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

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\(^1\) This is in line with the threshold used in the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) non-state dataset. This is an established criterion within peace and conflict research that is also used to define an armed conflict in which the government is a primary warring party (UCDP 2013a).
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. 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 et al. 2010). Control over land, a critical common resource, is central to most communal conflicts (von Uexkull and Pettersson 2013). 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 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. 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

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2 In this study, the prime center is the national capital.
3 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 and Pettersson 2013) and Africa has experienced 90% of the world’s communal conflicts (Sundberg et al. 2012).
4 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.
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 violent 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 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.

1.3 A Note on Cases, Methodology, and Sources

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 et al. 2005:45), 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.

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. In order to include as long a time period as possible, and to make the best use of material collected during fieldwork, year 2012 constitutes the end point of the analysis in all three studied regions. By keeping the primary authority constant for each case, the influence of government bias can be adequately explored.

Map of Sudan and South Sudan

![Map of Sudan and South Sudan](image-url)
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 be possible with a single-case study.

1.4 Main Contribution

The joint theoretical and empirical approach used in this study makes four main contributions to a deeper understanding of violent communal conflicts.

The first contribution concerns the causal mechanisms explaining why government bias generates violent communal conflicts. Although government bias has previously been studied in relation to communal conflicts, these analyses generally have not provided in-depth explanations for how the two phenomena are connected. This study, in contrast, provides a detailed causal story about how government bias is related to the prevalence of violent communal conflicts.

An important part of the explanation provided is that it uses independent variables that previously have been overlooked. While interactions between elites have been focused on in the study of civil wars, these have largely been ignored when communal conflicts are in focus. This means that actors of vital importance have largely gone unnoticed. Additionally, although the potential for using Ostrom’s CPR theories to study collective violence has previously been noted, this perspective has generally been omitted within peace and conflict research. This is unfortunate because this theory offers profound insights into issues at the heart of this field of research such as cooperation over common resources and collective action. Furthermore, the causal story provided in this study is not limited to explaining the prevalence of violent communal conflicts; it also theorizes about, and empirically investigates, the determinants of government bias. Thus, this analysis provides a rich argument that links the different theoretical components together. To
identify the causal mechanisms an elaborated research design, in which three regions are analyzed and compared, are used. The analysis draws on material collected during five months of fieldwork, including interviews with people involved and affected by communal violence which furthers an understanding of the micro-scale dynamics of these conflicts. Together, the theoretical and methodological approaches used in this study allow for the identification of causal mechanisms.

A second contribution relates to the conception of violent communal conflicts and its causes more generally. This study emphasizes variations in violence, and shifts focus away from conflict issues to the interplay between actors and institutions. While conflict issues such as cattle, grazing rights, or water are not unimportant for communal conflicts, more dynamic factors need to be considered to account for variations in violence. Moreover, the research design used in this study makes it particularly suitable for evaluating alternative explanations, such as conflict triggers. By comparing regions that share several structural similarities, factors commonly suggested by previous research to be decisive for communal conflict – such as environmental degradation and extensive scarcity of resources – are accounted for and cannot explain the patterns of violence in Darfur, Eastern Sudan and Greater Upper Nile.

Third, this study provides important insights into conflict dynamics in Sudan. The examination reveals that the Sudanese government’s policy is essential for interactions among various elites. In fact, the general strategy taken by the regime affects both relations between central and local elites, and relations among local elites. It is also shown how the regime’s decisions influence local institutions, such as the native administration. Although Sudan displays clear regional variations, previous studies about the country generally lack comparative analysis. In contrast, this study compares the prevalence of communal conflict in several regions and emphasizes shared similarities, as well as reveals critical differences between them. Furthermore, this study includes an analysis of Eastern Sudan, a region which has been less studied than Darfur and Southern Sudan. In addition, links between communal conflicts and the civil war in Sudan are revealed. By expanding the conception of the causes of violent communal conflicts, and their links to civil war, this study offer insights to the more general causes of collective violence.

Finally, the theoretical and empirical insights taken together provide a solid foundation for highlighting implications for the prevention and management of communal conflicts. Importantly, the study identifies actors such as local and central elites that need to be considered when addressing communal conflicts, which may increase the opportunities for preventing violent communal conflict. Furthermore the analysis emphasizes the conditions necessary for peaceful relations among communities, and certain resiliencies against violent communal conflict. For example, the analysis demonstrates
the importance of taking local rules into consideration when promoting peace. The conclusions of this study might, therefore, provide insights concerning the design of strategies that contribute to resolving communal conflicts before they turn violent.

1.5 Overview of the Study

The study proceeds as follows. Chapter 2 first identifies the research gap by reviewing previous research. Thereafter the theoretical framework of the study is presented. This framework primarily consists of three building blocks: (i) government bias, (ii) elite interactions, (iii) and CPR theory. The three components are first outlined individually and thereafter insights from these realms are combined to propose a theory regarding the prevalence of violent communal conflicts.

In Chapter 3, the research design is described. It starts by discussing the selection of cases, followed by a presentation of the general methodological approach that combines within- and between-region analysis. Next, the structure of the empirical study is presented. An important aspect to this is outlining the questions posed to the regions to answer the research question at hand. The chapter ends with a discussion on material and sources used in the study with a particular focus on the difficulties of doing field research in war-torn societies.

The empirical investigation starts with Chapter 4, which focuses on Sudan. In this chapter some characteristics of Sudan’s political and economic life are outlined along with a brief description of Sudan’s wars. The three following chapters are dedicated to the case studies: Darfur (Chapter 5), Eastern Sudan (Chapter 6), and Greater Upper Nile (Chapter 7). Each of these chapters starts with a description of the general conflict situation in the region followed by a more thorough investigation of communal conflicts. Thereafter, government bias and elite interactions are examined. Next, the three mechanisms presented in the theoretical framework are empirically investigated. The chapters end with a few conclusions drawn from the within-region analysis.

Chapter 8 is devoted to a structured and focused comparison of the three regions. This comparison is made in order to extract observations beyond the three within-region analyses. The chapter compares communal conflicts in the examined areas and then the government’s bias towards the communities inhabiting the regions is scrutinized. This is followed by an inquiry into how elites have interacted in the studied cases. Subsequently, the focus is on the three mechanisms identified in the theoretical framework. Then, a few additional findings are outlined. The chapter ends with a discussion of alternative explanations to the causes of violent communal conflicts, and the implications of the selected research design. In Chapter 9, the last chapter, the main
conclusions of the study are summarized. This chapter also reflects upon the implications for preventing and managing communal conflicts that the analysis provides, and points out potential avenues for future research.
2. Government Bias, Cooperation, and Communal Conflicts

This chapter presents the theoretical framework of the study and starts with reviewing previous research in order to identify the research gap. Thereafter the three theoretical building blocks of the study – government bias, elite interaction, and CPR – are presented. Subsequently, by merging certain aspects of the theoretical pieces presented, a theory proposed to explain the prevalence of violent communal conflicts is outlined.

2.1 Previous Research

This section presents previous research on communal conflicts. Explanations for why communal conflicts erupt have traditionally centered on one of four groups of factors: 1) livelihood and climate factors, 2) traditional mediation efforts, 3) governance factors, and 4) institutions.\(^5\)

The first line of research has focused primarily on livelihood and climate issues,\(^6\) and a main focus within this literature is conflicts among pastoralists or between pastoralists and agriculturalists. Several studies have found that the occurrence of communal conflicts is positively related to factors such as scarcity of resources, droughts, soil degradation, and environmentally induced migration (Homer-Dixon 1999; Mkutu 2008b; Reuveny 2007). But the roles of these factors are debated. Some research claims that droughts are negatively related to communal conflicts because they deprive raiders of camouflage (Meier et al. 2007) and pastoralists deem it infeasible (Theisen 2012), or even suicidal (Eaton 2008), to fight during severe droughts. Other

\(^5\) A theory related to communal conflicts is the ethnic security dilemma. However, this theory is developed for ethnic conflicts involving the state and, therefore, is not directly applicable to communal conflicts. Furthermore, important tenets of this theory such as weakness of central authority, groupness, and the tendency to view neighbors as threats (Posen 1993; Melander 2009), seem to be similar across many regions experiencing different levels of communal conflicts. For example, pastoralist communities generally have a strong groupness and often inhabit regions were central authority is weak and communities tend to view neighboring groups as threats. Still, violent communal conflict are much more frequent in some of these areas (cf. Markakis 1994).

\(^6\) Although this perspective primarily focuses on environmental security, other factors are not dismissed. Instead, some studies explicitly acknowledge the role of state’s capacity and the mediating effect of political and economic marginalization.
studies suggest that water availability and cattle health increase the intensity of raids in wetter times (Witsenburg and Adano 2009). However, the first large-N study covering numerous countries over time found that communal conflicts are more likely in dry years, especially in regions inhabited by ethno-political groups that are politically excluded (Fjelde and von Uexkull 2012).

Furthermore, despite often being fought over scarce resources, farmer-herder conflicts are also politicized and sometimes caused by manipulating political elites (Turner 2004), and cattle rustling can be used by political entrepreneurs (Greiner 2013). Additionally, property rights are important for range wars and the risk for such conflicts are reduced if such rights are protected by the state. However, if protection is provided in a biased manner the risk of pastoral conflicts increases (Butler and Gates 2012). The causes of communal conflicts have also been sought in the complex interlinkages between ecology and politics. Such studies have emphasized the role of political-economy (Bassett 1988) and corruption (Benjaminsen and Ba 2009). Likewise, environment-induced conflicts are suggested to be more likely in countries characterized by a strong groupness and where certain communities lack access to important institutions (Kahl 1998, 2006).

The second line of research has focused on communal conflicts in relation to traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. This literature is important because successful conflict resolution might account for variation in communal violence. While different communities have diverse conflict resolution customs, researchers have emphasized some aspects that are similar in many parts of Africa (Malan 1997; Brock-Utne 2001; Boege 2007; Mac Ginty 2008). Traditional conflict resolution values factors such as reconciliation, harmony, and integrity, and such mediation is generally based on wisdom, integrity, and neutrality. Justice is important as a means for compensation rather than as a tool for retribution. In this process, paying of blood money is often essential to reconcile relations. However, for this tradition to be efficient perpetrators need to recognize their guilt and seek pardon and victims must view the sought forgiveness to be sincere. Mutuality is thus central for such customary arrangements (Zartman 2000a).

Numerous studies have argued that traditional mechanisms have to be strengthened for successful conflict resolution to take place (cf. Osamba 2001; Chapman and Kagaha 2009). Mac Ginty (2008) emphasized that traditional mechanisms can constitute a viable complement to state-centered “liberal peace”-focused approaches, which are often criticized for having a top-down bias and for being unable to deal with the psychological effects of war.

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7 The importance of political marginalization for communal conflicts is also emphasized by Raleigh (2012).
8 Groupness is defined as “[t]he sense of belonging to a distinctive bounded and solidary group” (Brubaker 2004:47) and can be based on factors such as ethnicity, religion, or identification with a particular region (Kahl 1998, 2006).
Likewise, cooperation between state-based and non-state actors is important for successful conflict resolution (cf. Abdulrahman and Tar 2008; Elfversson 2013). In addition, informal modes, such as mediation by mutual friends, direct conversation, or avoidance, have been found to be effective in solving intra-communal disputes in the Sahel (Turner et al. 2011).

In the third line of research, earlier studies have explored how governance factors, such as patrimonial systems and the ethnification of politics, relate to communal conflicts. Patrimonialism is a core characteristic of many of the countries where communal conflicts take place (Arriola 2009) and has been suggested to be a root cause of internal conflict in Africa (Jackson 2002). In Nigeria, for example, communal conflicts are argued to be entrenched in the patrimonial way in which the state is structured. The Nigerian political system is also characterized by an extreme ethnification where ethnicity is held as the most important political asset (Imobighe 2003a). In this system, certain communities are excluded while others are included. Competition over access to the resources of the state leads to conflicts at the center, as well as to local communal conflicts where communities strive to attain access to subnational political resources (Jackson 2002). Likewise, the political side of communal conflicts in Nigeria is illustrated by the fact that elections and changes in sub-national administrative borders increase the risk for such conflicts (Fjelde 2009).

The importance of patrimonial politics for communal conflicts can also be witnessed in Kenya where land grievances are often used by opportunist politicians who manipulate local communities for their own political purposes (Bates 2008; Boone 2012). Land patronage is also crucial in Zimbabwe and Côte d’Ivoire, especially in relation to elections and the violence that might take place in connection with them (Boone and Kriger 2012). Furthermore, in times of state collapse a political actor might initiate violence by arming a local community and encouraging it to attack another community. This strategy often leads the victims to arm themselves, in accordance with standard action-reaction spirals, which often leads to a circle of violence (Allen 1999).

Leaving Africa, similar dynamics have been found in Indonesia and India where clashes between religious groups have broken out. Conflicts between Christians and Muslims in Indonesia have been based on patronage networks and clientelism. The trigger for the fighting was an upcoming election (Van Klinken 2001). Elections were also at the core of Wilkinson’s (2004) study on ethnic riots in India. More specifically, he explored why ethnic violence breaks out in some places but not in others. That study argued that electoral incentives at the town level explained where Muslim–Hindu riots broke out, whereas state-level electoral motivations decided if the police will be called in to prevent riots. It was concluded that minorities are protected when it is in the government’s interest to protect them, and that ethnic riots are probable when protecting minorities is not a government priority. Furthermore, by
alluding to examples outside India he argues that ethnic riots do not take place if a state’s army or police is fully committed to stopping them.

The fourth line of research has investigated the importance of institutions for relations between communities. Fearon and Laitin (1996) analyzed why interethnic relations are usually characterized by tension but that it is exceedingly rare that such tensions develop into violence between different groups. The study reveals that local institutions and in-group policing are fundamental to explain interethnic cooperation. In particular, such institutional arrangements “allow people to avoid the cost of violence and capture the benefits of peace” (Fearon and Laitin 1996:727). An important reason for why in-group policing is critical is that social networks are stronger within groups than across communities. This implies that monitoring measures within the group are more efficient because they are better suited to identify the committer of a crime. In a political gerontocracy, elders can be effective for in-group policing because they hold adequate sanctioning capabilities that make it in the youth’s best interest to follow the decisions of older age groups (Bates 2008).

Similarly, Varshney (2001, 2002) has suggested the strong importance of social networks in preventing violence. Studying Muslim–Hindu riots in India, he found that areas with a vibrant inter-communal civic life were less prone to communal riots. Furthermore, a vigorous intercommunal associational life was critical for cooperation because routine engagement between people from different communities enables the formation of organizations in times of tensions. Thus, if Hindus and Muslims are part of the same institutions the risk of ethnic riots decreases.9

2.2 Positioning the Study

The theoretical explanations raised above highlight several important factors for the causes of violent communal conflict. However, many of the explanations presented are fairly general and fail to identify the causal mechanisms at play. Furthermore, many questions remain unanswered by the theoretical notions outlined above.

It is true that a central factor for causing many communal conflicts is scarcity of resources, but how can peaceful relations prevail among the communities in some areas despite living under extremely harsh circumstances? The findings in research into environmental scarcity are rather inconsistent and it is still highly disputed how climate factors are linked to

9 In a similar manner, McCauley (2013) found that economic development strategies that foster robust civic strength make communal violence less likely. However, he used a broader definition of communal violence than this study and included violence where the government is a warring party.
communal conflicts and why regions experiencing similar environmental hardships vary substantially in terms of communal violence. The focus on manipulation (cf. Greiner 2013; Turner 2004) and political exclusion (cf. Fjelde and von Uexkull 2012; Raleigh 2012) furthers our understanding of this matter, but significant sub-national variations are left unexplained. The strengthening of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms can play a pivotal role in decreasing the risk for communal conflicts. But why do these mechanisms remain strong in some areas whereas they are futile in others? Although traditional conflict resolution is demonstrated to be important, previous studies do not reveal why the effectiveness of this method varies across regions. Essential insights are offered by theories focusing on governance and patrimonialism (cf. Allen 1999; Bates 2008; Arriola 2009). However, countries characterized by strong patrimonialism display a wide variety in terms of communal violence and these theories, in general, do not address sub-national differences. An important exception is the work of Wilkinson (2004) who provided a compelling argument to sub-national variation in ethnic riots. However, his argument centered on elections in democracies and is, therefore, not directly applicable to autocracies.

Institutions are essential for communal relations, but why are institutional arrangements effective in some areas but not in others? Fearon and Laitin (1996) offer valuable insights about intraethnic conflict, and cooperation, by emphasizing local institutions and in-group policing. Still, this does not account for where these critical aspects are most prone to be in place. Varshney’s (2002) focus on civic life is also interesting but that study examined an urban phenomenon that is distinct from the rural situation examined here. In a rural context, the opportunities for a vibrant civic society are different. It is true that some inter-communal contact exists, in markets and elsewhere, but separate communities tend to live separate lives. In particular, the nomadic life-style restricts pastoral communities from interacting with other communities on a daily basis.

Hence, the question of why communal conflict turn violent in some regions but not in others has not been properly answered by previous research. In order to increase our understanding of the prevalence of violent commu-
nal conflict, it is necessary to develop detailed causal stories that can identify the mechanisms at play. In this process, three aspects need to be further theorized. First, further insights about the state and how it influences communal conflicts is needed. We also need to know more about how the behavior of the state varies within the same country and why this is the case. Second, agency needs to be more accurately incorporated because this will facilitate efforts to identify central causal mechanisms. A strictly structural focus seems unable to explain the variation that is the core interest of this study. Third, the general conditions for communal cooperation offered in previous research need to be further developed to understand why communities tend to cooperate in some areas while relations are more hostile in others. In the next section, such a theory is developed by focusing on government bias, elite interaction, and the conditions for cooperation over common resources.

2.3 Government Bias

This section theorizes the role of the state and argues that government bias is crucial for explaining the prevalence of violent communal conflicts. It first describes what government bias refers to in the context of communal conflicts and then outlines potential reasons for government bias.

**Government Bias and Communal Conflicts**

In this study government bias refers to the extent to which a government acts in a partial manner in relation to the communities within the country it rules. Are certain communities frequently favored whereas others are regularly disfavored? Is there a regional difference in how the government acts? Although the government’s bias targets particular communities (and not subnational units per se), regional variation can still exist. It is, however, unlikely that a government is completely biased in some areas and against certain groups while completely unbiased in other areas and towards other communities. Hence, governments are biased to different extents, and it is this variation that is crucial.

The notion that government bias might be important for the prevalence of violent communal conflicts is founded in the line of research that emphasizes patrimonialism. Patron-client relations are an important aspect of most states where communal conflicts take place. In this system, governments tend to provide jobs in a clientelism manner in order to safeguard continued rule and to extract resources. This is often deemed as the best strategy to remain in power in weak and politically volatile states (Bates 2008; Lemerchand 1972). Political power-struggles in clientelistic countries often follow ethnic lines. A crucial reason for this is that the most viable option to attain control over desired scarce resources is often to organize in ethnic groups (Bates
Under these circumstances, mobilization of support and the creation of viable armies are key factors for a regime to achieve its primary objective, which is to secure its own political survival. To achieve this fundamental goal, the central executive leadership uses different techniques (Migdal 1988). When states are structured in this manner, ethnic groups are often treated differently with some being favored while others are disfavored. For instance, leaders might appoint ethnic kin into the state apparatus to secure support. Likewise, if a state is dominated by a particular community, members of this group habitually assume that they will be treated favorably (Wimmer 1997). Thus, instead of governing in a neutral manner, such governments often act with partiality.

In a communal conflict context, the most important part of the government to consider is the top leadership of the central authority. This primarily includes the head of the state and his closest associates, but it also comprises influential military officers who might have the power to influence the government’s policy in the direction they desire. Because this study uses regions as the unit of analysis, the administration within the region is also important to include in the analysis. Most often governors are the leaders of such regional administrations. Consequently, this study takes government administration both at the national and sub-national level into account.

Although governments are not a primary warring party in communal conflicts, they still have extensive influence in such conflicts. One reason for this is that governments are generally stronger (militarily, politically, and economically) than the communities fighting in these conflicts. This means that the government can provide critical support (military, political, or economic) to certain communities to increase its power. Furthermore, the government can influence many aspects that are important for the relations between the communities. Regimes, for instance, have the ultimate authority over the justice system, and this means that they can steer court decisions in a direction they find desirable. They also have the ability to change the administrative boundaries that are essential for inter-communal relations (Fjelde 2009). Furthermore, if the state makes biased decisions over property rights it increases the risk for pastoralist conflicts (Butler and Gates 2012). The government is also in power to appoint people into positions that are central for coexistence among the communities, such as positions in local administrative structures. Thus, the central authority has the power to decide upon rules and regulations regarding several factors important for communal conflict.

**Reasons for Government Bias**

A core purpose of this study is to examine how partiality by the central authority affects the relations among communities. Thus, the focus is on the consequences of government bias. However, to deepen the understanding of
the frequency of violent communal conflicts, it is also important to discuss potential determinants of why a state might act in a partial manner and why this might differ between regions.

There are several factors that are likely to determine regime behavior. Government bias is central within the mediation literature (cf. Arad and Carnevale 1994; Carnevale and Arad 1996; Svensson 2007), and in this line of research, government bias refers to a mediator that favors the government. Thus, it captures something different than this study. Still, it differentiates between two types of bias that might capture important reasons for government bias in context of this study. Content bias refers to a mediator that is biased in the sense that the content of the settlement the mediator proposes is influenced by its own preferences (Arad and Carnevale 1994). Source bias, in contrast, refers to a bias that stems from a mediator’s closer ties to one of the parties. These connections can come from economic, political, personal, or identity relations. The two different types of bias are not mutually exclusive, instead they can support, or counter, each other (Carnevale and Arad 1996). Adopting this reasoning to communal conflicts, it is possible that a government acts with partiality towards certain communities for instrumental reasons (content bias) or due to ties to certain communities (source bias). When evaluating government bias in the examined regions, it will be considered whether content bias or source bias takes precedence.

In general, theories dealing with government bias consider this phenomenon in a country as a whole and thus do not differentiate between subnational units. A prominent exception is Boone (2003), who provides an explanation for why governmental behavior often varies within a country. She argues that governments adopt different approaches to regions depending on the distinctive threats and opportunities a region presents.13 Not only does this theory elucidate regional variations, it is also well grounded in the notions concerning patrimonialism, which is important for this study. This study will, therefore, explore if the reasons for government bias are to be found in the interplay between the threats and opportunities that a region entails. The important question to ask in this context, therefore, is what the most important threats and opportunities are in the context of communal conflict.

Rebellion within a region constitutes one critical threat to the government. How severe a challenge a rebellion poses to the regime depends on the strength of the insurgency. If the rebellion draws support from certain communities, the government is likely to disfavor these groups (Allen 1999). Likewise, it will be prone to favor communities with closer ties to the regime, in particular if they want to recruit militias from these groups

13 A similar argument is provided by Job (1992) who states that perceived threats and opportunities influence elites’ decisions.
Another potential threat is powerful political figures based in a particular region and who might challenge the regime.

If a region is of high strategic importance – for example due to economic reasons – it is likely to constitute a vital opportunity for the central authority. Different strategies are likely to follow depending on the type of resource and if the asset is under government control or not. If such resources are not controlled by the regime, it is probable that the regime will attempt to achieve control over these resources. If the government controls the resources, stability is often needed to make use of them because if the area is stable it means that the resources and infrastructure connected to it are less likely to be destroyed. Likewise, if the government depends on revenues from tourism from a certain region, it will try to avoid turbulence because it might jeopardize this income. If stability is desired, the government will be more prone to act in a neutral manner in this region because biased behavior might increase the risk for disorder. In particular, it will be hesitant to use militias because this can create chaos and thereby endanger the utilization of the resources (Roessler 2005). Thus, it is important to carefully analyze the effects of a particular resource and acknowledge the various ways in which such an asset can influence strategies.\(^\text{14}\)

### 2.4 Elite Interaction

The next part of the theoretical framework concerns elites. Strategies taken by elites have been shown to be important for internal conflict (Jackson 2002), state-making (Ayoob 1995), and for ethnic conflicts involving the state (Brown 2001). In fact, “the decisions and actions of domestic elites often determine whether political disputes veer toward war or peace” (Brown 2001:220). Thus, there are reasons to believe that actions by key leaders will also have explanatory value for communal conflicts. For this reason, this study uses elite interaction as one of its theoretical cornerstones.

This study applies the elite interaction theory developed by Kalyvas (2003; 2006). This theory offers a profound deliberation of the relations between different elites and how such interactions influence conflicts. In the study of intrastate conflicts, local circumstances are often disregarded. For example, local cleavages are often overlooked or portrayed as being part of a master cleavage. Kalyvas’s theory, in contrast, gives prominence to local dynamics. It is, therefore, suitable to adapt to communal conflicts because the latter are often more localized than civil wars. Despite the importance of emphasizing local factors, the broader public sphere should not be ignored. Instead, it is the interaction between the political and private spheres that

\(^{14}\) Such dynamics can be illustrated by diamonds, which have very different implications depending on what method is needed to mine them (Lujala et al. 2005; Gilmore et al. 2005).
matters (Kalyvas 2006). Under such circumstances, power-seeking actors at the center can use resources and symbols to side with peripheral actors involved in local conflicts. This creates a linkage that might facilitate joint action between central and peripheral actors (Kalyvas 2003). In essence:

theories of civil war must incorporate a multilevel analysis, simultaneously accounting for the interaction between rival elites, between elites and the population and between individuals. Failing to do so will distort the analysis and miss the mechanisms that mediate between opportunities and constraints at the center and the periphery (Kalyvas 2006:391).

Important connections between local and central actors exist and a central elite can provide a local actor with external support. In exchange, it falls on the local actors to be responsible for recruitment and motivation at the local level. Factors such as concerns about reputation, a desire to contribute to the success of the group, respect for leaders, and care for comrades are often more important for combatants than ideology or other political aims. Personal, or local, considerations are, therefore, critical for participants and this ensures a prominent position for local elites when it comes to recruitment (Kalyvas 2006).

In this context, power-seeking actors at the center can use resources and symbols with the purpose of allying with peripheral actors involved in local conflicts. This creates bonds that might facilitate joint action between central and peripheral actors. In some cases, political actors intentionally endorse groups at the local level. However, it might also be the other way round. Contenders at a local level can try to manipulate political elites at the center to gain support in their local conflict. In this way, central actors can end up acting in ways that they rather would have preferred not to. When such maneuvering succeeds, local actors can get a central actor to direct its violence against one of its private enemies (Kalyvas 2003).

In a communal conflict context, primarily two types of elite interrelations are essential: interactions between central and local elites, and interactions among local elites. As elaborated above, governments are important to consider in relation to communal conflicts and are, therefore, viewed as the most crucial central elite in this study. At the local level, leaders of the different communities are considered the most important local elites. These elites can be fundamental for whether relations between communities will be characterized by cooperation or conflict because they play a key role in local conflict management. Prominent individuals primarily include traditional leaders that render prestige from their communities. Respect can also be given to individuals who are educated or prosperous. Of prime significance for this
study is that these leaders are perceived as prominent persons within their communities.\textsuperscript{15} The reason why they have this position is less important.

In an African context, influential community leaders are often part of the native administration. This traditional institution is often the most important arena for resolution of conflicts between communities and is often the primary authority for monitoring decisions on inter-communal relations. Native administrations generally take different forms in different areas. In particular, the institution’s relation to the government may differ. In this study, the close link between the native administration and the state authorities that often exist is acknowledged. In general, however, this device tends not be fully part of the government, but neither is it a completely autonomous actor. Instead it can be seen as semi-governmental because people within the native administration are often paid by the government, but the institution tends to not be completely incorporated into the structures of the state. The prime reason for this is that representatives within this institution are most often in possession of traditional authority. This facilitates close relations to communities and provides native administrators with extensive influence over local communities. Also, despite the fact that the native administration often depends on the government, it sometimes acts against the regime. Thus, to equate native administration with a local layer of government administration would entail a risk of overlooking unique aspects of this traditional device.

The practices and strengths of this authority vary extensively across and within countries.\textsuperscript{16} In some areas the native administration is very strong whereas it is exceedingly weak in others. Likewise, in some parts it tends to be autonomous whereas it is not in a position to act independently in others. In general, the capacity of native administrators is most extensive in areas where they have a long history of a prominent position. If members within this authority come from families that have played an important role within a community for generations, the power of the institution increases. In contrast, if members of the authority are newly appointed and not in possession of similar heritage, the leverage and legitimacy of the native administration is likely to be lower. In addition, the strength and autonomy of the native administration depends on government policies and interferences. Governments occasionally perceive native administrators as a threat and, therefore, attempt to undermine them. Under other circumstances, regimes consider these elites as opportunities and work with them. Thus, it is important to be aware of the fact that the strength (as well as independence) of traditional authorities varies considerably.

\textsuperscript{15} In regions where rebellion is ongoing, rebel leaders can constitute other prominent local elites. However, they generally do not have the same opportunities to influence inter-communal relations as traditional authorities.

\textsuperscript{16} For more information about such variations across African nations, see Zartman (2000b) and Buur and Kyed (2007). Nigeria displays an extensive within-country variations of traditional authorities (cf. Onigu-Otite and Albert 1999; Imobighe 2003b)
Thus, the government has extensive ability to influence the native administration. This reflects a broader dynamic where the government, as the most important central elite, has a great impact on other actors. When the government acts in a biased manner, local elites who do not receive preferential treatment are likely to be hesitant to cooperate with the government because such cooperation will bring few, if any, rewards. Under such circumstances, cooperation between central and local elites is unlikely. Government bias can also create problems for the relationships among local elites. First, the government has the ability to undermine arenas that can otherwise foster fruitful interaction among local elites. Second, local elites favored by the government are less likely to use reciprocity towards elites from rival communities because they can count on support from the government. This could potentially lower the threshold for the use of violence. Third, the incentive to seek legislative solutions to disputes decreases among unfairly treated communities. If governmental rulings predominantly follow a partial path, such elites will be assured that decisions within the legal framework will be biased and might, therefore, seek other ways to settle disputes. Thus, by favoring certain elites and communities, governments can generate distrust both between central and local elites and among local elites.

### 2.5 Common-Pool Resources

The third building block of the theoretical framework presented here is Elinor Ostrom’s CPR theory. A main source of conflict among pastoralist communities, or between pastoralists and farmers, is the control over land (Lane 1998). In fact, land was a pivotal conflict issue in 75% of Africa’s communal conflicts between 1989 and 2011 (von Uexkull and Pettersson 2013). The CPR theory delineates factors that enable cooperative management of shared resources such as land.

This section first discusses the rationale for adopting CPR theory to communal conflicts. Some general tenets of this perspective are then presented. Next, conditions for cooperation stipulated by the CPR theory are summarized. Finally, three mechanisms that link government bias to communal conflicts are introduced.

**Adopting CPR Theory to Communal Conflicts**

The definition of a CPR has clear connotations to the definition of conflict. Wallensteen (2007:15) defines conflict as “a social situation in which a minimum of two actors (parties) strive to acquire at the same moment in time an

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17 There are several other theorists who have contributed to this perspective, but Elinor Ostrom is the prime authority within this line of research.
available set of scarce resources”. To be categorized as a CPR, a resource needs to have two characteristics. The first is subtractability (or rivalry); what one person harvests subtracts from what is left for others. The second is that a CPR involves a cost to exclude appropriators that are not allowed access to the resource (Dolšak and Ostrom 2003). The definition of conflict thus has clear associations to the subtractability aspect of CPRs. Still, the potential for using CPR theory for collective violence is largely unexplored. This is unfortunate because this perspective offers profound insights into issues such as cooperation over resources, collective action, institutions, conflict resolution, monitoring, and trust, all of which are central concepts in peace and conflict research. In fact, in essence Ostrom’s theory centers on determinants of cooperation or conflict during difficult circumstances. For this reason, this study develops a theoretical argument inspired by the profound perceptions about cooperation offered by this literature.18

To properly adapt CPR theory to the dynamics of communal conflicts, two important factors have to be discussed. First, the CPR literature is based on individuals (or families) sharing the same pool of resources whereas the present study focuses upon communities, the primary entities of communal conflicts. To apply a theory from one level of analysis to another is not unproblematic. In this context, however, it is considered suitable to take such a step and to relate CPR theory to communities. The main reason is that the individuals comprising these communities share a communal identification, and this constitutes a crucial component of the definition of communal conflict. The virtue of being a member of a political community is often essential to individuals within the community (Zartman 2000a). Relations between individuals from different communities can, therefore, easily affect the relationships between communities.

Communal conflicts often start with a quarrel between individuals (or families) from different communities, but because of a shared communal identity such disputes often turn communal. Global data on communal conflicts reveal many such cases and an example from Iraq illustrates the dynamics of such processes. In 1992, a dispute arose between two individuals – one from the Dereiat community and the other from al-Shahman community – over the right to cultivate a particular piece of land. The dispute escalated into a violent conflict between the communities killing 266 people (UCDP 2013c). Without a shared communal identity, it is likely that the standard approach to address grievances would be individual, rather than communal, and lead to individual, not communal, conflicts.

In the process of applying the CPR perspective to communities instead of individuals, some other important factors should be emphasized. The indi-

18 The potential for using the CPR perspective on other circumstances than its original focus is also emphasized by Boone (2003), who finds that Ostrom’s theories about local institutions can also have similar effects in the wider political sphere.
ividuals in the situations examined by Ostrom share a history of living together and expect to continue to interact in the future. In addition, the participants do not vary significantly in terms of factors that could strongly divide a group of individuals such as ownership of assets, ethnicity, or race (Ostrom 2008). Communities in the context of this study usually live in close proximity, interact with each other and expect to continue to live in the same region. However, they differ clearly on partition factors such as communal affiliation and possessions of resources. Thus, this study explores if a theory based on individuals sharing several similarities can be readily translated to communities that have certain connections but differ in other regards.

Second, the CPR literature does not typically deal with situations of violent conflict. However, scholars have noted the potential of CPR theory in the context of violent conflict. Leeson (2005), for instance, argues that insights from the CPR literature can be extended to the problem of violent conflict. Furthermore, Gardner and Ostrom (1991:146) claim that models within this realm of research “may help to improve many real world problems of conflict and violence”.

Common-Pool Resources: Basic Tenets

Garrett Hardin’s influential article The Tragedy of the Commons introduced a negative view of the potential for peaceful coexistence among CPR users (Hardin 1968). This theory relies on the assumption that actors are rational and driven by a short-term self-interest. Hardin’s work describes a scenario where lack of cooperation among herders leads to the depletion of a shared grazing pasture. Management of CPRs, therefore, has to be imposed from the outside either through privatization or through a Leviathan controlling the resource. The theory was influenced by Olson (1965), who argued that the logic of collective action implies that individual welfare does not bring about joint welfare. These theories were later formalized in prisoner’s dilemma models (Dawes 1973, 1975). All of these theories claim that decisions taken by individuals harm the collective, a notion that went unchallenged for a long time (Ostrom 2008).

Despite Hardin’s dismal predictions, however, numerous examples of cooperative resource management exist. The prevalence of examples of cooperation, as well as non-cooperation, has led the research community to examine when, and under what conditions, cooperation does take place. A CPR is typically governed by a government, a private company, a common-property ownership, or a combination of these categories. Empirical investigations have not rendered consensus on any type of system being superior to the others (Dolšak and Ostrom 2003).

Hardin’s theory adopts its notion of human behavior from rational-choice theory. However, individual behavior is more complicated than presumed by this theory (Poteete, Janssen et al. 2010). To form an appropriate behavioral
theory of the decisions humans take in a dilemma situation, three core elements should be considered. First, although actors favor net benefits for themselves, their decision making is often influenced by taking into consideration others and societal norms. Thus, individuals do not always maximize their short-term material returns without taking other persons into account. Instead, the prospect for collective action is subject to many conditions depending on the context in which they take place. Second, actors do not usually have complete information when they make decisions. Importantly, information is imperfect regarding issues like the situation at hand, others’ preferences, the availability of possible actions to take, and the probability of outcome in relation to which action is chosen. Over time, however, actors can obtain more reliable information, particularly when they interact frequently with others, and feedback is part of this relation. Third, in most situations actors use heuristics instead of collecting maximal information when making decisions (Poteete, Janssen et al. 2010). These insights have been critical for the development of theories focusing on the management of CPRs.

Conditions for Cooperation

To further the understanding of CPRs, Ostrom sought underlying commonalities among the institutions that could explain why some are sustained over time whereas other break down (Ostrom 2008). Factors that are conducive to cooperation in a CPR setting include trust, communication, appropriate information about the situation, and whether interacting individuals know each other or not. In addition, rules and norms influence decision making, and communication is decisive in terms of which norms and rules develop. In particular, previous dealings are vital to build trust (Ostrom 1998; Ostrom et al. 1992; Poteete et al. 2010; Walker and Ostrom 2003), and the chances for reciprocity increase with a custom of mutual trust and if shared concerns exist. In contrast, levels of cooperation are lowest when the other is unknown, anonymity is guaranteed, and no opportunity to build reputation exists. Trust is thus critical to understanding why people cooperate under certain circumstances, but not under others. The prominence of trust relates to the fact that learning and revision, norms, and the use of heuristics are critical for decision making (Dolšak and Ostrom 2003; Poteete, Janssen et al. 2010).

Successful cooperation over a CPR is also highly dependent on a proper understanding of local dynamics. For instance, it is conducive for cooperation if procedures of monitoring and sanctioning are internal, rather than external, because this increases the chances for the local context to be more appropriately considered (Ostrom 2008). However, a CPR is often useful for actors at various levels, and these actors might have contradicting views on how the resources should be used. With regards to land, pastoralists and
agriculturalists might regulate land at the local level and use it for subsistence resources, but the central government might want to use the land differently (Dolšak and Ostrom 2003). The relationships between local communities, and regional, as well as national, political systems are particularly important. Such relations might be problematic because external actors often fail to understand social customs and norms among local communities. It can thus be essential for a community to influence political bodies at a higher level. The ability to do this depends on access to decision-making forums and to linkages between the local communities and higher political levels. Despite the tension between actors at different levels, local and central actors sometimes realize their mutual dependence and shift some of their independence to increased complementarity (Dolšak and Ostrom 2003). The chances for cooperation among local communities can in this way either be enhanced, or obstructed, by external authorities.

What are the more precise conditions under which cooperation can take place in a CPR setting? After thorough analysis of the management of CPRs, Ostrom exposed some regularity behind the wide variety of successes and failures. Certain regulations increased the likelihood for successful management, and from these regularities she formed eight design principles that enhanced the performance of the CPRs. A design principle is defined as “an essential element or condition that helps to account for the success of these institutions” (Ostrom 2008:90). The design principles increase the chances for robust institutions in which users can cooperate fruitfully over a long period of time. Cox, Arnold et al (2010) examined the design principles in a meta-study of 91 CPRs and found strong general support for them. Fundamental to these design principles is that they promote cooperation under difficult circumstances (Ostrom 2008). It is primarily this aspect of the design principles that are focused upon in this study.

Ostrom’s eight design principles are:

- Graduated Sanctions
- Well-Defined Boundaries
- Proportional Equivalence Between Benefits and Costs
- Collective-Choice Arrangements
- Minimal Recognition of Rights
- Nested Enterprises
- Monitoring
- Conflict-Resolution Mechanisms

*Graduated Sanctions* imply that decisions on sanctions should depend on the gravity and context of violations because this facilitates trust in the system. A wide variety of different degrees of sanctions should, therefore, be available so that they can respond appropriately to the severity of the violation
committed. A person who has violated a rule will be more likely to return to compliance if the response to the violation is appropriate (Poteete et al. 2010). Well-Defined Boundaries mean that the borders of a resource system, and who are allowed access to it, must be clearly defined. Such clarity amplifies incentives for cooperation and reduces problems with externalities. Proportional Equivalence Between Benefits and Costs emphasizes that rules are often more acceptable to the appropriators of a CPR if they are set so that the more a person contributes the larger is the benefits that he will receive. In contrast, a perceived imbalance increases the risk that some people will refuse to follow the rules. Collective-Choice Arrangements indicate that if people affected by the CPR are allowed to make and modify the rules then such regulations are more likely to fit local circumstances. This increases the chances for successful management of the CPR. Minimal Recognition of Rights specifies that if the regime acknowledges a role for local actors to create their own rules it enhances the chances for cooperation because the rules are likely to be better matched to the circumstances of the CPR. Nested Enterprises emphasizes that organization in several nested layers is beneficial if a CPR is part of a larger system. Smaller units in this system can assure that rules match local conditions while larger units are desirable to govern interdependencies among smaller units (Ostrom 2008; Poteete et al. 2010). Monitoring capabilities are crucial because freeriding can undermine a CPR. It also promotes cooperation because it decreases the fear of being used by others. Monitors are more efficient if they are accountable to users because this will increase people’s trust in them (Dolšak and Ostrom 2003). Conflict-Resolution Mechanisms assert that rapid, low-cost, local arenas for conflict resolution increase the chances for cooperation.

From Design Principles to Mechanisms

In a communal conflict context, not all design principles carry equal importance. For analytical purposes, the design principles considered most relevant for communal conflict have been structured into three mechanisms that capture aspects assumed to be of importance for cooperation in a communal conflict context.

In this process, four design principles are omitted. First, Proportional Equivalence Between Benefits and Costs is considered unsuitable in a communal conflict context. This design principle emphasizes that increased contribution should render increased output. In the context considered here contribution and output is not central. The focus is, instead, on the opportunities for cooperation among communities and not how the output is distributed among them. Second, Nested Enterprise is omitted. This design principle suggests that it is beneficial to organize CPRs in nested layers. This aspect is not part of the mechanisms because it is to a large extent already captured by the previously presented elite-interaction aspect that takes elites at various
levels into account. Third, *Conflict-Resolution Mechanisms* and *Monitoring* are not included in the three mechanisms even though they clearly display aspects of importance for intercommunal relations. The reason for this is that the most important device for managing and monitoring communal conflicts, at least in the African context, is usually the native administration. In this study, this authority is perceived as the prime local elite and constitutes an essential part of the elite interaction outlined in the theoretical framework. The inclusion of the native administration as part of the elite interaction permits a more detailed examination of the role of this device. In particular, such an approach enables investigation of how the native administration influences the three mechanisms outlined below. Instead, if native administration were to be excluded from the elite interaction perspective it would lead to a less dynamic examination of the forces at work.

The four remaining design principles are organized into three mechanisms. The first mechanism relates to sanctions. It includes the design principle concerning *Graduated Sanctions*, which stipulates that sanctions should depend on the context and severity of a violation. The main feature of communal conflict of interest for this study is violence and destructive behavior. If cooperation is to be enhanced, perpetrators of violence need to be targeted with sanctions. Trust will be boosted if the severity of such sanctions is dependent on the gravity of the violence. On the contrary, if other factors take precedence and sanctions are considered unfair this will undermine the chances for reciprocity and cooperation. It is particularly destructive for communal cohabitation if sanctions depend on communal affiliation. If individuals from certain communities are repeatedly punished more severely than people from another community, this is likely to negatively affect opportunities for cooperative behavior between communities. This is likely to be especially true if perpetrators with a particular communal affiliation enjoy impunity for committing violations. A consequence of such selective impunity is that it might result in discriminatory incarceration. Moreover, if a perpetrator of a murder, or some other crime, goes unpunished because he belongs to a community favored by the government this will severely compromise the trust in the system, particularly from the community to which the victim belonged. In addition, the disincentive to solve disputes in a violent manner declines among favored communities when they do not have to fear punishment for committing crimes. This will reduce the chances for cooperation and increase the risk for revenge that might lead to vicious circles of violence.

In the rural context where most communal conflicts take place, compensation, often in the form of blood money, plays a significant role in healing relations between two communities after a violent incident has occurred. If compensation is paid, it often calms the situation and a peaceful relation between the communities is likely to be restored. In contrast, if reimbursement is not delivered it is viewed as an offense and a disgraceful act, and this
increases the risk for revenge and for the conflict to escalate. For this system to be efficient, it is crucial that the amounts are perceived as fair. Thus, the sums to be paid should be dependent of the violation committed. If the communities feel that the amounts are unfair, however, the incentive to pay compensation decreases, and this can cause these conflicts to escalate.

The second mechanism concerns boundaries. It includes the design principle Well-Defined Boundaries, which centers on who has the right to access a particular resource. Disputes between agriculturalists and pastoralists (or among pastoralists) over who has the right to use a certain land area are common. Pastoralists moving with their herds frequently have disputes with farmers because the animals often trespass into agriculturalists’ land. If boundaries are clearly demarcated, so it is undisputed to which community a piece of land belongs, solutions are more likely than if boundaries are uncertain. A prime reason for this is that the more definite boundaries are the easier it is to facilitate regulations of any wrongdoings. Disputes over land have traditionally been regulated through longstanding systems ascribing a certain area to a particular community. Such systems also regularly stipulate pastoralists’ movements with their herds. These codes of practices have an administrative aspect where the group to which the land is attributed tends to be given a prominent position within administrative structures. Furthermore, administrative changes can cut off natural resources from a community that previously had access to them (Adano et al. 2012). Therefore, if administrative boundaries change it often leads to conflict with how boundaries have traditionally been perceived. Thus, although new boundaries might be clearly demarcated on a map, such changes contribute to increased discrepancies between current and traditional boundaries. In particular, since the communities tend to perceive the traditional boundaries as the “real” ones.

Changes in administrative borders at a regional level also increase the risk for violent communal conflicts (Fjelde 2009). In particular, disputes over local administrative units have the potential to become salient if the administrative dividing lines change the balance of power between politically viable groups (Posner 2004). A community disfavored by such alterations might take up arms to make up for its subsiding influence. Therefore, demarcations intentionally made to shift the power between groups are particularly prone to increase conflicts. Administrative structures and borders regarding the use of land, therefore, are often closely related and both of these aspects will be considered. To enhance cooperation, it should be clear who has the right to use a particular piece of land. Moreover, it should be clear who has the authority to decide over land use. In contrast, collaboration is likely to be hampered if parallel administrations exist.

The third mechanism concerns local rules. This factor combines the two design principles of Collective-Choice Arrangements and Minimal Recognition of Rights. For cooperation, it is important that communities have the right to create their own rules and that they have the ability to modify such
rules. Communal conflicts often take place in distant, rural areas of a country. During these situations, local communities might develop certain rules to solve intercommunal disputes. If rules relate to local conditions, the familiarity with regulations will be enhanced and this in turn might increase the chances for cooperation. To prevent violent communal conflict, it is important that such rules can be used. If rules are locally based, this increases the chances to appropriately modify them, which is important because local situations in these areas can change rapidly. The system of coexistence between communities in rural areas often builds on traditional knowledge with detailed conventions on how to uphold peaceful relations. It is, therefore, crucial that regulations reflect local rules and that local actors with appropriate information about the resident circumstances, are allowed to influence regulations. If so, rules can increase cohabitation between communities. If the communities feel alienated from the rules, however, the incentive to follow them will decline.

It is also important that people affected by the rules can influence them. This is essential because members of the affected communities usually have a better comprehension than outsiders for how rules should be stipulated to enhance cooperation. Thus, if local conditions change the chances for appropriate modifications of rules increase if the affected people can influence the regulations.

**Government Bias Undermining Cooperation**

This study argues that a biased government will disrupt elite interaction, which in turn will increase the prevalence of violent communal conflicts. The three mechanisms focus on how biased government behavior affects cooperation between communities.

First, when a government is biased it might give impunity to certain communities and their leaders. This will create frustration among disfavored elites because they often suffer while their rivals enjoy impunity. As a consequence, elites from disfavored communities will be hesitant to cooperate with the regime. Selective impunity is also likely to impede cooperation amongst local elites because favored elites will be less inclined to use reciprocity towards other elites because they can count on not being punished for committing violations. Likewise, if partiality characterizes the government’s behavior, it is likely that it will punish perpetrators from communities that it views as enemies with disproportionate severity. In this case, decisions about sanctions are likely to depend on the communal affiliation of the perpetrator rather than the gravity and context of the violation. It is thus suggested that sanctions are less likely to be proportional when the government is partial.

Second, biased decisions by the government might interfere with how well-defined boundaries are. Elites representing communities that will be
disempowered by alterations of boundaries are prone to not cooperate with the regime because they see few incentives to cooperate with a government that disfavors them. Unclear boundaries are also likely to aggravate relations among local elites because this creates with determining for who controls a particular area. For instance, boundaries might be redrawn in order to weaken communities that the government perceives as threats. Likewise, administrative units may be changed in order to compensate communities that have provided support to the government. Both of these developments will contribute to a blurring of boundaries. Consequently, boundaries are assumed to be less clear when a government generally acts in a biased manner.

Third, a biased government also decreases the chances that rules relate to local conditions because the government will ensure that the rules follow the broader interest of the government rather than reflecting local circumstances. A biased government will also be hesitant to let people affected by the rules participate in modifying them, because this risks weakening the government’s power in the area. In particular, a biased government will be likely to disempower local elites from communities it considers as enemies. A biased government also tends to interfere with who should represent a community. This often leads to unconstructive central-local elite interaction because the newly positioned leaders regularly have their primary allegiance with the government rather than truly representing the communities. This will further distance rules from local conditions.

This study’s theoretical framework is summarized in the figure below.

*Figure 2.1*

The first step in the figure shows that the government’s bias will determine if elite interactions will turn positive or not. If the government is biased, it is likely to turn both local-local and local-central elite relations in a negative direction. The second step draws attention to how harmful elite relations affect the mechanisms that are essential for communal cooperation. As demonstrated here, government bias has the potential to undermine or compromise all three factors outlined above. The erosion of principles enhancing the cooperative use of common resources contributes to violent communal conflicts. In a region where such destructive interactions takes place, we can expect violent communal conflicts to be more prevalent than in a region unaffected by such dynamics.
3. Research Design

The previous chapter suggested that government bias is essential in explaining regional variation in the prevalence of violent communal conflicts. A biased government might make elite interactions unconstructive and thereby negatively affect the three mechanisms assumed to be important in determining if communal conflicts turn violent or not. This chapter presents the research design used to explore this argument empirically.

An appropriate research design is important to achieve the goals of a theory-oriented case study (George and Bennet 2005) and the design can be seen as “the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study’s initial research questions and, ultimately, to its conclusions” (Yin 2009:26). Three regions of Sudan – Darfur, Eastern Sudan and Greater Upper Nile – have been selected for this study. Each of these regions will first be examined through a within-region analysis to determine if the theoretical framework furthers an understanding of the regional dynamics and the outcome in terms of violence. Thereafter, a cross-region comparison will be carried out to evaluate if the theoretical argument can explain the variation in the outcome of the cases. Together, the within- and between-region analyses will enable an evaluation of the explanatory power provided by the causal story presented. It will also facilitate possibilities to refine the theory by analyzing the relative importance of the outlined mechanisms.

This chapter starts by presenting the methodological approach and the rationale for combining within- and between-region analyses. Next, the rationale behind the selection of cases is discussed. The chapter ends with a discussion on the material and sources used in the study with a particular focus on the difficulties of doing field research in war-torn societies.

3.1 Methodological Approach

This dissertation aims to build a theory about regional variations in the prevalence of violent communal conflicts. In Chapter 2, an apparent gap in previous research regarding this puzzle was identified. In a situation where identifiable theories are not suitable to answer the research question, theory testing is not appropriate. Instead, it is more rewarding to start a new process of theory building or development. To generate a new theory, it is critical to identify relevant variables, as well as causal pathways, relevant to the ou-
come in focus (George and Bennet 2005). This study has used qualitative methods in this process and the main benefit with this approach is that it is apt to discover and evaluate causal mechanisms and to demonstrate temporal order.

**Combining Within-Region and Between-Region Analysis**

To combine within- and between-region analyses is conducive to the overarching aim of theory development because it facilitates the empirical identification of the suggested mechanisms and enables the identification of conditioning factors that would not be possible with a single case study.

The empirical investigation presented here seeks to reveal the causal leverage of the notions discussed, as well as to suggest appropriate improvements to the theory. To combine causal mechanisms and covariance is a fruitful way to improve a causal story (Checkel 2008). In addition, a comparative approach can be useful to summarize and logically check the outcomes from case studies (Mahoney 2010). The reasons to start with analyzing the cases individually are threefold. First, within-case analysis is an important tool for capturing causal inference. A core aspect of the within-region analyses is to identify the causal mechanism of the dynamics at play. Second, a proper independent analysis of the regions is a prerequisite for a valid comparison between the cases. To take such a step is critical to avoid an overly mechanical application of a comparative analysis. In fact, without extensive case knowledge the method of comparative case study should not be used (Mahoney 2010). Third, within-case analysis can be fruitful to describe previously overlooked factors (Gerring 2007).

The within-region examination seeks to capture causal inferences. To do this, it is essential to look for causal-process observations (CPOs).

A causal-process observation is an insight or piece of data that provides information about context or mechanism and contributes a different kind of leverage in causal inference...a causal-process observation may be like a "smoking gun." It gives insight into causal mechanisms, insight that is essential to causal assessment and is an indispensable alternative and/or supplement to correlation-based causal inference (Collier, Brady et al. 2010:184-185).

One way to discover CPOs is through intensive data gathering of key events, for instance through field research (Mahoney 2010). In some circumstances, one sole observation can be sufficient to demonstrate inference (Gerring 2007). Hence, when the within-region analyses are conducted, it is important to expose observations that reveal causal inference.

After the three regions have been examined independently, they will be scrutinized in relation to each other to further evaluate the causal argument. To compare the three regions, a structured and focused comparison method
will be used. This method is chosen because it is a rewarding method for
evaluating the differences between cases. This method is *structured* in that
the questions asked reflect the research purpose and because the same ques-
tions are asked about all cases. This structure facilitates systematic compari-
son of the cases and enables findings that are cumulative. It is also *focused* in
that it only deals with certain aspects of the cases studied (George and
Bennet 2005).

### 3.2 Selection of Cases

To generate theoretical inferences, it is important to delineate what the cases
are cases of (Ohlson 2008a). In addition, this makes it possible to consider
the scope conditions and the generalizability of the findings (George and
Bennet 2005). The cases in this study are regions where communal conflicts
have taken place. However, these regions display a wide variety in the
prevalence of violent communal conflicts. In some regions these communal
conflicts often turn violent, in others they do not. A vast variation on the
dependent variable thus exists and it is this variation that the present study
seeks to explain. To be included in the population of cases to which the ana-
lytical approach is applicable, a region does not need to have any violent
communal conflict but has to have experienced communal conflicts with the
potential to turn violent.

One important aspect of enhancing conceptions about causes of violent
communal conflict is to emphasize the structure of the dependent variable. In
fact, “careful characterization of the dependent variable and its variations is
often one of the most important and lasting contributions to research”
(George and Bennet 2005:248). Focusing on the escalation from communal
conflict to violent communal conflict is primarily motivated by the fact that
it is a suitable approach to capture the collective political violence that this
study seeks to explain. Furthermore, this dimension is understudied in previ-
ous research. Some quantitative studies have used the 25 fatalities threshold
to examine communal conflicts (cf. Fjelde 2009; Fjelde and von Uexkull
2012) but they do not reveal if communal conflicts are absent in the cases
where this threshold is unmet or if communal conflict exists but at a lower
level of violence. This study’s research design makes it possible to compare
cases where we know that communal violence take place (at a low level of
violence) with regions where numerous violent communal conflicts are
prevalent. This strategy necessitates explanations that go beyond conflict
issues because we can be certain that they also exist in the “non-cases”.

In this study, a region is conceived of as an area with a particular socioec-
onomic and political reality as well as a collective cultural understanding
(Østby et al. 2009). There are five reasons for studying regions. First, al-
though global data on communal conflict reveals that sub-national variations
of this type of violence are extensive, this dimension is understudied in previous research on communal conflicts. In addition, within contemporary peace and conflict research there is a strong trend to carry out analysis at a more disaggregated level. To focus on regions, instead of countries, is in line with this development. Second, to study regions of the same country makes it possible to hold several factors constant and this enables an examination of alternative explanations. Putnam (1993) and Kohli (1990) provide two prominent examples of within-country comparisons that demonstrate how comparing regions in the same country can generate new theoretical and empirical insights. Third, communal conflicts have important local dynamics that are often overlooked by outside analysts. Nevertheless, some studies—mainly anthropological analyses—take such local dynamics into account, but these analyses are often single case studies and this makes it difficult to make generalizable conclusions. Comparing regions constitutes a suitable middle ground because it allows for properly considering local circumstances at the same time that it includes an element of comparison. Fourth, the region represents an appropriate level of analysis to examine the dynamic between the center and the peripheries, which is suggested to be critical to understanding the causes of communal conflicts. Fifth, comparing regions within the same country is sensible from a practical point of view because field research requires considerable resources and an extensive understanding of the local context (Höglund 2011). In-depth knowledge about the dynamics at play, attained through field research, is particularly important for studying communal conflicts because it constitutes an undertheorized localized phenomenon.

In the process of deciding which regions to study, cases where the outcome varies have strategically been chosen. The literature on case-study methodology is in agreement that this is to be preferred over a random selection of cases (George and Bennet 2005; Gerring 2007; Höglund 2011; Van Evera 1997). Furthermore, the method of comparing most similar cases has been chosen because this method is suitable for identifying mechanisms omitted by previous research (Gerring 2007). Ideally, cases selected for a controlled comparison should be “comparable in all respects except for the independent variable, whose variance may account for the cases having different outcomes on the dependent variable” (George and Bennet 2005:81). Thus, the cases selected for this study share numerous characteristics that have been argued in previous research to be essential for understanding communal conflict. This makes it possible to control for the influence of several factors in the comparative part of this study.

This study will assess communal conflicts in Sudan. This country represents a particularly useful case for investigating sub-national variations in communal violence because it displays clear regional patterns. In some regions of Sudan, communal conflicts have caused thousands of deaths, but in others only a few dozen. Sudan is also among the countries in the world
most hit by communal conflicts, which makes it critical to understand the causes of such conflicts in this country. Furthermore, it constitutes a good case to draw generalizations because it is located in Africa, which has experienced close to 90% of all communal conflicts since 1989 (Sundberg et al. 2012). In addition, Sudan is especially interesting from a theoretical point of view because factors such as scarcity of resources and patrimonial systems are prevalent in the country (Burr and Collins 2008; Johnson 2006; Jok 2007). These factors have been pointed out by previous research as being important for explaining communal conflicts. Nevertheless, the regional variation that Sudan displays in terms of violent communal conflict remains unexplained. For instance, the scarcity of resources is similar in various regions of Sudan even though there is wide variation in terms of prevalence of violent communal conflicts.

This study uses the UCDP non-state dataset to identify the presence of violent communal conflicts and regional variations in Sudan. This dataset is suitable for case selection because it provides estimates of fatalities for each violent communal conflict. The UCDP non-state data is available for the period between 1989 and 2012 and reveals the following regional patterns of communal conflicts in Sudan (Table 3.1) (Sundberg et al. 2012). It should be noted that three of the regions – Greater Upper Nile, Equatoria, and Bahr el-Ghazal – are now part of South Sudan, which gained independence in 2011.

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19 Another commonly used dataset is the Minorities at Risk project that gathers data on inter-communal conflicts (Gurr 2000). This data collection, however, is less appropriate as a starting point for this study because it only includes non-state conflicts among groups that are also involved in fighting a government. Additionally, it has not been updated beyond 1998. Other attempts to identify active instances of communal conflict have either been limited in time (cf. Smith 2004) or focused on just one, or a few, cases (cf. Homer-Dixon and Percival 1996; Rajeshwari 2004; Varshney et al. 2004).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Number of violent communal conflicts</th>
<th>Active conflict years&lt;sup&gt;21&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Estimated deaths&lt;sup&gt;22&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Darfur</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4 471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(32%)</td>
<td>(37%)</td>
<td>(39%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Sudan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3%)</td>
<td>(2%)</td>
<td>(0.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kordofan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3%)</td>
<td>(2%)</td>
<td>(1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abyei&lt;sup&gt;23&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3%)</td>
<td>(2%)</td>
<td>(2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Upper Nile</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5 477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(22%)</td>
<td>(30%)</td>
<td>(49%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equatoria</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(13%)</td>
<td>(10%)</td>
<td>(3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahr el-Ghazal</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>669</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(24%)</td>
<td>(17%)</td>
<td>(6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in the table, violent communal conflicts in Sudan primarily take place in Greater Upper Nile and Darfur. More than half of Sudan’s communal conflicts have occurred in these two regions, and they have experienced more than two thirds of the active conflict years. In terms of fatalities caused by these conflicts, the two regions are even more dominant. In fact, almost

<sup>20</sup> These regions constitute the administrative states of Sudan at the start of this study’s time period (Madut-Arop 2006). The administrative boundaries often change in Sudan but these regional entities remain important as they are central in the Sudanese mindset. An additional two regions—Northern and Central—are part of Sudan but since there are no recorded violent communal conflicts in these regions they are excluded from this table.

<sup>21</sup> Conflicts can be active for more than one year. The total years communal conflicts have been active in one region is captured in this figure.

<sup>22</sup> UCDP provides three estimates: best, low and high. Provided here is the best estimate. The difference compared to the low or high estimate is limited.

<sup>23</sup> Abyei is an area on the border between Sudan and South Sudan and it is disputed to which country it should belong.
nine out of ten people killed in communal conflicts in Sudan since 1989 have been killed in Darfur or in Greater Upper Nile. Because this study seeks to explain violent communal conflicts, these two cases have been chosen for further examination. To understand the causes of violent communal conflicts in areas where fatalities from this collective violence are measured in the thousands is also particularly important from a policy perspective.

To properly evaluate the causes of violent communal conflicts in Darfur and Greater Upper Nile, they are contrasted with Eastern Sudan where violent communal conflicts are less frequent. Eastern Sudan allows for a fruitful comparison because it constitutes a theoretical irregularity. Factors emphasized by previous research as a source of conflict are prevalent in the region, but violent communal conflicts are exceedingly rare. In fact, Gedarif – one area in Eastern Sudan – has been labeled as a “perfect mirror image” of Darfur (Babiker, Wadi et al. 2005:45) and is deemed to face a similar situation concerning ecological degradation as Darfur (Elhadary and Samat 2011). Such an apparent anomaly offers extensive possibilities to generate new theories (Gerring 2007).

Eastern Sudan shares several of the characteristics of Darfur and Greater Upper Nile, which makes it suitable for comparison. In Sudan, degradation of land has been pointed out as a major cause of poverty and risk of conflict, especially in Darfur and Eastern Sudan (Taha 2007). In addition, communal conflicts are often fought between pastoralists and farmers, or among pastoralists, and Eastern Sudan has Sudan’s highest percentage of pastoralists (DRDC 2010). Underdevelopment and poverty in Darfur and Greater Upper Nile are often seen as contributing to the violent communal conflicts in these regions. In terms of poverty and lack of development, however, Eastern Sudan is similar to Darfur (Young 2006a). In fact, Eastern Sudan has Sudan’s highest poverty rate, highest level of deaths of children under five years, and the highest rate of youths between six and thirteen out of school according to the UNDP (AFP 2012). Likewise, Eastern Sudan – as well as Darfur and Greater Upper Nile – has experienced civil war during the examined time period and communal conflicts commonly take place where civil war is also present (Pettersson 2010). The ethnic diversity in Eastern Sudan is extensive and comparable to Darfur and Greater Upper Nile. In fact, most ethnic groups inhabiting Darfur are also present in Eastern Sudan (al-Hardallu and el-Tayeb 2005). An additional factor that makes Eastern Sudan suitable for comparison is that the region, in contrast to some other regions in Sudan, has experienced one violent communal conflict. This means that communal conflicts have the potential to turn violent in Eastern Sudan. Still, whereas
As previously emphasized, government bias and the interaction between local and central elites is assumed to play a pivotal role in the development of communal conflicts. If the dominant actor at the center is the same throughout the time period under study, such relations, and why they play out differently in various regions, can be analyzed. If the prime central elite changes, it is more difficult to evaluate government bias and the relations between the central and local elites. The current Sudanese government took power in 1989. This regime has gone through some important changes since it gained power, but it is still dominated by the same political party, the National Congress Party (up until 1998 called the National Islamic Front). The current president, Omar al-Bashir, has also been at the country’s helm since 1989 (ICG 2011a). This makes 1989 a suitable starting point for this study. The end point of the analysis is 2012 because data are available up until this year.

On January 9, 2005, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed by the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM/A) and the Sudanese government. This agreement drastically changed the administration of southern Sudan because it gave far-reaching autonomy to southern Sudan and established the Government of South Sudan as the prime authority of this area. This government ruled South Sudan as an autonomous region of Sudan up until July 9, 2011, at which time the Republic of South Sudan was born as an independent state. The same political movement (SPLM/A) has strongly dominated the political scene in South Sudan since the signing of the CPA. The political landscapes during the interim period and after independence share many similarities, especially because the autonomy that was granted was extensive and mimicked that of an independent state (CPA 2005).

Two primary authorities were in place in southern Sudan between 1989 and 2012. Analyzing the same central elite in power during the examined time period facilitates a more nuanced examination. Greater Upper Nile (located in South Sudan) will be analyzed from 2005 up until 2012. If similar dynamics can be discerned in how the regime in Juba has influenced communal conflicts in the area it governs, just as the regime in Khartoum has affected communal conflicts in Sudan, this would indicate that the provided explanation is not specific to the government of Sudan, and this would widen the applicability of the study.

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24 Other Sudanese regions have not experienced any violent communal conflicts. These are deemed less appropriate points of comparisons because we cannot be assured that communal conflicts have the potential to turn violent in these regions.

25 Most important of these is the split between Hassan al-Turabi and Omar al-Bashir in 2000 (further described in Chapter 4).
Greater Upper Nile will be studied from 2005 to 2012 and this region is by far the most affected by communal conflicts in South Sudan (Table 3.2). In fact, almost nine out of ten people killed in communal violence in South Sudan during the time period it has been under the rule of the Government of South Sudan has taken place in Greater Upper Nile.

Table 3.2 Regional Variation in Violent Communal Conflict in South Sudan 2005–2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Number of violent communal conflicts</th>
<th>Active conflict years</th>
<th>Estimated deaths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greater Upper Nile</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4,413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(40%)</td>
<td>(57%)</td>
<td>(88%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equatoria</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(15%)</td>
<td>(11%)</td>
<td>(3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahr el-Ghazal</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(45%)</td>
<td>(32%)</td>
<td>(9%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the start of the time period examined (1989) up until 1994, the regions also constituted states in Sudan. In 1994 the administrative organization of Sudan changed and the three regions at the heart of this study were divided. The state of Darfur was split into South Darfur, North Darfur, and West Darfur; Eastern Sudan into Kassala, Gedaref, and Port Sudan; and Greater Upper Nile into Jonglei, Upper Nile, and Unity State. In 2012, Darfur was further split and two new states – Central Darfur and Eastern Darfur – were established. However, to maintain homogeneity in the cases, the geographic entities that constituted the states of Darfur, Eastern Sudan, and Greater Upper Nile in 1989 will remain the unit of analysis throughout the investigated period.

3.3 Structure of the Empirical Analysis

The first empirical chapter describes some general aspects of Sudan and focuses on political and economic aspects as well as the wars it has experienced and the split into two countries. This is followed by three empirical chapters that focus on the examined regions. These will be structured as follows.

In order to situate the communal conflicts, each chapter starts with a brief description of the general conflict situation in the region. Thus, this section
is not only focused upon communal conflicts but on the broader situation of different conflict types. Thereafter the communal conflicts in the area are described. Next, the degree of governmental partiality towards the communities inhabiting the particular region will be examined. Elite interactions – both between central and local elites and among local elites – are the focus of the subsequent section. Afterwards, each of the three mechanisms stipulated in the theoretical framework are examined to see if they find empirical support in the region under study. To discern the relative explanatory power of the mechanisms, and to investigate if any other case-specific explanations seem to be important, the chapter ends with the main conclusions drawn from the within-region analysis.

To steer the empirical analysis in the theoretical direction outlined in Chapter 2, and to capture the important key variables, questions will be posed to each region. To ensure that the questions asked to each case are theoretically relevant, indicators of the factors emphasized in the theoretical framework are outlined. The questions aim to be specific enough to allow comparability while at the same time being open enough to capture the nuances of the different cases. The answers provided will be used to determine the value of the theoretical factors stipulated in this study.

To recap from Chapter 2, in a region where the government acts biasedly towards some communities elite interactions will tend to become unconstructive and cooperation among the communities probable to compromise. As this process unfolds, violence becomes progressively more likely. The theory outlines three mechanisms – sanctions, boundaries, and local rules – that connect government behavior to violent communal conflict. Thus the theoretical framework stipulates a causal linkage that consists of three crucial components. If a government is biased it will (i) turn elite interactions negative, which will (ii) negatively affect the three mechanisms and thereby (iii) make violent communal conflict more likely.

In order to attain as rich an empirical analysis as possible, all critical steps of the causal story will be investigated by the questions posed to the cases. To reiterate, it is unlikely that the government is completely biased in some regions and totally unbiased in others. It is, therefore, the degree of partiality that matters. Likewise, it is implausible that a mechanism is fully present in one region and entirely absent in another. Again, it is the degree that is critical to consider. Finally, as stated above, the dependent variable greatly differs between the regions. Nevertheless, regions where communal conflict generally does not turn violent can still have occasional incidents of violent communal conflict. It is equally true that not all communal conflicts turn violent in the regions characterized by prevalence of violent communal conflicts. Hence, it is the frequency of violent communal conflicts in the regions that are examined.
To empirically discern the degree of government bias, elite interaction, and the three mechanisms previously identified, the following questions will be posed to each region:

- **Government Bias.** Has the government’s policy towards the region been characterized by strong bias? Does the government offer benefits and support (such as land, jobs, and weapons) to only certain communities? Do the government’s decisions in general disfavor certain communities while favoring others? Do some communities perceive the government as always treating them unfairly? Is disfavoring certain communities the determining factor for the government’s behavior, or is it also influenced by other factors such as particular opportunities?

To more fully understand the government’s position and possible bias, it will also be investigated why the government has acted in a relatively biased, or unbiased, manner.

- Has the government acted in a biased manner for instrumentalist reasons? Does the government have strong connections to certain communities that lead to source bias? Does the region constitute particular threats to the government? What measures have the government taken to counter such threats? Does the region entail essential opportunities (such as critical economic assets) for the government? What tactics have the government used to harvest these assets?

- **Elite Interaction.** Do central and local elites generally interact in a positive or negative manner? Are the government (the most important central elite) and the leaders of the different communities (the most important local elites) cooperating in a constructive manner? The local communities often constitute parts of a native administration. Are the government and the native administration interrelating in a cooperative manner or not? Are relations among local elites characterized by cooperation or conflict? Do arenas that foster positive interrelations among local elites exist? Have traditional local elites been undermined? Has positive interaction between local elites fostered peaceful settlement of disputes? Has fruitful interaction among local elites played an important role in monitoring decisions that regulate inter-communal relations? Has government bias been decisive in determining how elites interact?

- **Sanctions.** Are sanctions proportional? Proportional sanctions imply that decisions on sanctions depend on the gravity and context of a violation. Violation here refers to issues important for inter-communal relations such as killings, cattle raiding, or trespassing of herds. If sanctions are not proportional, what determines the sanctions imposed? Are perpetra-
tors from different communities given the same punishment for similar violations? Are the risks for confinement discriminatory? Has the government offered impunity to certain communities? Are crimes committed against individuals from communities disfavored by the regime less likely to be investigated? Has government bias been decisive in deciding if sanctions have been proportional or not?

- **Boundaries.** Are boundaries in the region clear? Here, administrative boundaries will primarily be focused on because they are deemed to be the most important for communal conflicts. Sudan is administratively divided into states, counties, payams (districts), and homas (villages). Are the boundaries of these administrative units clear? Do these administrative units generally follow traditional administrative boundaries? Do parallel administrative systems exist? Have boundaries been redrawn to weaken the power of certain communities? Have certain communities been compensated with administrative units for supporting the government? Have boundaries purposefully been redrawn to increase tensions in the region? Have the administrative boundaries changed repeatedly? If so, has this created a general disrespect for boundaries? Boundaries regarding livelihood issues will also be examined. Are boundaries clear regarding pastoral and agricultural areas? Are masarats (roads) for pastoralists clearly defined? Has government bias been decisive in determining how clear boundaries are?

- **Local Rules.** Are rules generally related to local circumstances? Such conditions include issues like regulations regarding trespassing, use of water sources, and procedures to appoint people into prominent positions. Have other non-local interests been more decisive than local considerations for how rules are designed? Have people affected by rules been allowed to participate in modifying them? The native administration is often in possession of extensive knowledge about local circumstances. Has the native administration been able to influence rules made by the government? Have the communities found any other ways to modify rules that are important for them? Has government bias been decisive in determining if rules relate to local conditions?

### 3.4 Material and Sources

The foundation for the empirical analysis in this study is information gathered through almost 200 semi-structured interviews carried out during field research in Sudan and South Sudan. The field trips – in total lasting for five months – were carried out between 2007 and 2013. Of primary interest during the field research were stakeholders with first-hand information about
the relations among the communities. Therefore, people from different communities and representatives of various interest groups, such as unions (pastoral and agricultural), the native administration, and the government, were interviewed.

In order to contextualize and verify the information gathered from individuals with first-hand information, data was also gathered from academics as well as NGO and IGO representatives. A wide spectrum of second-hand sources was also scrutinized in order to achieve as high reliability as possible. These triangulation efforts provided opportunities to double-check information provided by stakeholders in the conflict. This is important because they perceptively might want to blame another actor to look innocent themselves.

All three regions under study – Darfur, Eastern Sudan and Greater Upper Nile – were visited. The field research in Eastern Sudan was particularly pertinent because this is an under-researched area and information regarding this region is relatively scant. In Eastern Sudan, the city of Gedarif and surrounding areas were visited. In Darfur, research was carried out in the capital of South Darfur, Nyala. Regarding Greater Upper Nile, interviews were conducted in Bor (capital of Jonglei State) and Malakal (capital of Upper Nile State). To broaden the material gathered, interviews were also carried out in the Sudanese capital of Khartoum and the South Sudanese capital of Juba. The reason for these complementary field trips outside the studied regions was that they enabled access to other actors who could not be reached in the regions. This was particularly important in regards to Darfur because the security situation made meetings with certain actors impossible. In fact, it was easier to talk to Darfurians representing various interest groups (primarily those with an anti-government agenda) in Juba, where they could move more freely, than in Darfur. Likewise, people from all areas of Sudan inhabit Khartoum and it was possible to interview key informants from all three regions in the Sudanese capital. Khartoum is also the dominating center for national and international experts, which enabled numerous discussions with this category of interviewees. In South Sudan, Juba plays a similar role and visits to South Sudan’s capital were especially important to gain information about Greater Upper Nile. Field research in Juba facilitated meetings that complemented the discussions carried out in Bor and Malakal, both of which are located in Greater Upper Nile.

26 Particularly important in gaining information from such stakeholders was field research carried out in Juba in November 2007. At that time the “Juba Process”, an effort to unify different factions of the Darfur rebel movements, was ongoing. To be in Juba at this time enabled interviews with numerous representatives of the Darfurian resistant movements.

27 Established networks between the Department of Peace and Conflict Research at Uppsala University and Sudanese universities such as University of Nyala, University of Gedarif, University of Juba, and University of Khartoum were important for the interviews because scholars at these institutions acted as door-openers.
Carrying out field research in a war-torn society entails several ethical challenges – especially those relating to security and the sensitivity of communal conflict as a research topic – for the researcher, local research assistants, and those individuals choosing to participate in the study. It is, therefore, important to inform the informants about the purpose of the study and to protect politically sensitive data (Eckl 2008). All interviewees were offered anonymity, which is the reason why some informants are named whereas the identity of others is not revealed. Field research in conflict-torn societies also implies risks for the physical and emotional security of the researcher and carries strong importance for how the researcher identifies himself (Martin-Ortega and Herman 2009). Furthermore, when evaluating material collected through interviews in a war-torn society, some factors are critical to remember. One important issue is that post-war outcomes and personal experiences during the war can shape wartime memories. Likewise, people tend to remember intense incidents better than less intense ones, and political events can be reshaped by social or cultural processes. For instance, containment of some memories might result from cultural norms that hold that a certain memory is unacceptable (Wood 2006). Triangulation of sources is a good way of decreasing problems involved with field studies in war-torn societies (Harpviken 2009).

Although many interviewees spoke English, others spoke only Arabic or other local languages. This constituted an additional challenge because it necessitated the use of interpreters for several of the discussions. To be dependent on an interpreter means that the researcher loses some control over the situation. Lacking local language skills also means that discussions between people where the researcher is not involved cannot be picked up. This is unfortunate because such dialogues can potentially include important information for the study (Borchgrevink 2003). The triangulation of sources decreased the predicaments of using an interpreter. Critical information was scrutinized by asking the same question to several respondents and with different interpreters. Moreover, some key informants were interviewed more than once to crosscheck the provided information. Likewise, connections with local academics were used when selecting interpreters, which provided information about the background of the latter.

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28 Because of these ethical predicaments, this project submitted an application (which was approved) to the Ethical Review Board in Uppsala before carrying out the fieldwork. Furthermore, general principles of field research ethics have been adhered to.
4. Sudan

To situate Chapters 5–8, which constitute the empirical foundation of this dissertation, this chapter outlines some core characteristics of Sudan. Brief descriptions are provided of political and economic life as well as of the history of conflict. Greater Upper Nile, one of the studied regions, is part of South Sudan, which gained independence on July 9, 2011. South Sudan is, therefore, also briefly presented in this chapter. The government of South Sudan will, however, be more thoroughly examined in the chapter focusing on Greater Upper Nile.

Located in northeast Africa, separated from the Arab Peninsula by the Red Sea, and split in half by the mighty Nile River, Sudan occupies a particularly conflict-torn region of the world. The countries that border Sudan – Chad and the Central African Republic in the west, Egypt and Libya to the north, Ethiopia and Eritrea in the east, and Kenya, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the south – have all experienced armed conflicts during the last fifty years. Sudan, Africa’s largest country split with South Sudan on July 9, 2011, after a referendum in which close to 99% voted for secession. After this division, Sudan became Africa’s third largest country, roughly one-fifth the size of the United States, with approximately 30 million residents.29 Up until the split, the size of Sudan was one fourth the size of the United States and had about 38 million inhabitants. Its tidy borders, drawn like so many of the boundaries on the African continent by former imperialist powers, host a complex, historic variety of ethnicities, cultures, and religions. Sudan has been part of Egypt – when it was known as the regions of Kush and Nubia – and it has been ruled by the British, who intentionally emphasized divisions between the north and the south to prevent any unified resistance to their rule. Since gaining independence from the United Kingdom in 1956, Sudan has suffered from protracted hostilities and violence.

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29 This study examines the period between 1989 and 2012. The split thus came at the end of the period under study. The word “Sudan” will, therefore, refer to both Sudan and South Sudan. Occasionally, however, Sudan will refer to the remaining “North Sudan”. To avoid the risk of confusion, this will be clearly highlighted when this is the case.
4.1 Political Life at the Center

Sudan is one of the most heterogeneous countries in the world when it comes to ethnicity, language, and religion. This diversity, however, is not reflected in the leadership of the country, which imposes mechanisms of oppressive controls over marginalized peripheries including the regions examined in this study (Thomas 2009). In fact, all regions outside the center are marginalized. A cadre of elites originating from the Nile Valley, north of Khartoum, has controlled the reins of political power since Sudan’s independence. By filling leadership positions in the central government, they have ruled Sudan in ways that have enforced the existing power inequities between the central elite and the disparate ethnic communities at the margin (el-Din 2007). For the marginalized poor and periphery groups, the paralyzing domination the center of Sudan has enjoyed since independence has had devastating effects. The periphery groups have been subject to hardships due to the inadequate distribution of essential services and resources, including roads, education, health-care, food, and housing.

The center does not consist of a solidly united elite but of different elites that compete for power (de Waal 2007c). Although diverse, these central elites advocate a unified Sudanese identity around Islam (ICG 2011a). The efforts to create one national identity around Islam and Arabism has been ongoing since independence (Sørbo and Ahmed 2013), and it was further endorsed by Jaafar Nimire and strictly enforced by the current regime (Abusharaf 2009). Another important feature of the ideology at the center is Arab superiority, which has been part of the societies in northern Sudan for centuries (de Waal and Flint 2008). Since independence in 1956, these elites have endorsed an Arab–Islamic project that portrays Sudan as an outright Islamic and Arabic country. However, this project is not as straightforward as it might sound and can rather be perceived as a discourse to promote the interest of the riverine elites. In this venture, both Muslims and people with legitimate claims to an Arab identity have often been excluded (El-Tom 2009). Still, this project has strongly favored the Arab religion, ethnicity, and culture that dominate in northern Sudan over the African religious and cultural identity more prevalent in the south (Deng 1995). At times Sudan has been ruled by unstable parliamentary governments and at other times the country has been ruled by military regimes. Yet, regardless of the type of government, the elites from the Nile Valley have been at the country’s helm, controlled the channels of power, blocked access to power for other groups, and strongly dominated the national political scene (el-Din 2007; Hassan 2009). Hence, power relations have prevailed and the elites at the center have retained their privileged position and the marginalized have stayed in the periphery (El-Tom 2009).

30 Since they originate from this area these elites are often referred to as “riverine”.

60
Since 1989, the center has been dominated by the National Congress Party (NCP), which until 1998 was called the National Islamic Front (NIF). In a key historical event this party took power in Sudan through a military coup on June 30. This coup placed Omar al-Bashir in the highest office, but it is widely recognized that it was the prominent Sunni Muslim Islamist Hassan al-Turabi who was the architect of the coup (HRW 2002; Lesch Mosely 1998). Thus, the primary agents of the coup comprised members of the civilian elite of the NIF party, and the army was assigned camouflaging roles, designed primarily to disguise the genuine identity of the architects of the coup—Islamic elements who sought control of the state. Al-Turabi was at the forefront of the leadership of the coup and held an important leadership position in the government of President al-Bashir (I.D.F. and Assal 2010). In 1999 a dispute between al-Turabi and al-Bashir arose over a bill to limit presidential powers. Later, when Turabi resisted the re-election of Bashir in 2000 the two split and Turabi formed his own party called the Popular Congress Party (Sidahmed 2011).

As a military man, President Bashir derived his political power from close ties with the military forces. In his capacity as head of state, he currently oversees a cadre of elite officials and their allies (Temin and Murphy 2011). The internal dynamics of the NCP are characterized by bitter rivalries and sudden shifts in leadership positions. The NCP is divided between security hardliners, who draw their ranks primarily from the military, and pragmatists, who tend to be more accommodating on matters regarding the future of Sudan (ICG 2011a). The hardliners tend to respond with military force to threats from the marginalized regions. Critical aspects of this are divide-and-conquer tactics in order to undermine the unity of the rebels and to increase hostilities between various communities. In 2008, the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an indictment against President Bashir for genocide and crimes against humanity in Darfur (ICG 2009b). Yet, at the time of this writing, Bashir has been ruling Sudan for more than 24 years, a notable achievement given the many threats to his regime, especially from the resistance movements in the south and in Darfur.

In 2005, the political life in Sudan fundamentally changed. Khartoum had for more than two decades been military challenged by a rebellion in South Sudan. On January 9, 2005, however, the CPA was signed by the Sudanese government and the SPLM/A. The agreement brought an end to Africa’s longest war. A crucial aspect of the CPA was that it established the Government of South Sudan as the prime ruling party of South Sudan. Before the final status of South Sudan should be decided in a referendum this regime was to govern South Sudan as a region of Sudan with extensive autonomy (CPA 2005). Six years after the signing of the CPA, the referendum was held in the south and close to 99% voted for independence, which was actualized six months later (LeRiche and Arnold 2012).
The government of South Sudan is dominated by former rebels in the SPLM/A. The regime in Juba (the capital of South Sudan) furthermore shares several characteristics with the regime in Khartoum that it fought against for more than two decades. Most importantly, the regime in Juba follows a similarly hierarchical structure as its counterpart in Khartoum. A core reason for this is that both governments primarily consist of military personnel. This also implies that they respond to threats in a similar manner (Interview with Mudawi 2009). The expectations among the population in South Sudan were high when the SPLM/A rose to power. Large segments of the society, however, have been disappointed in the lack of peace dividends in many areas and because some of the similar problems remain as during the war (Interview with South Sudanese scholar, 2013). For instance, ending marginalization was a fundamental aspect of the political program of the SPLM/A (Garang 1987). Still, marginalization is prevalent in South Sudan despite being ruled by this party for more than eight years. The contemporary deprivation of certain areas is, however, different. Previously the entirety of South Sudan was disfavored compared to Khartoum. Now peripheral areas of South Sudan are disregarded compared to Juba (Interview with South Sudanese scholar, 2013).

4.2 Political Life in the Peripheries

An important aspect of the political life in Sudan, particularly in the rural areas, is the native administration, or traditional authority as the institution is sometimes referred to as. Despite its name, this system is neither genuinely native nor traditional. Instead this system was introduced by British officers who entered Sudan in 1899 and it has undergone numerous changes since that time (Leonardi and Abdul-Jalil 2011). Still, the system introduced by the British followed previous regimes’ reliance on local political structures. The most essential shift by the British administration was that previously fluid constructions were changed into established structures of authority. The degree to which this new system built on existing arrangements varied significantly across Sudan. In some areas, actors with a strong local influence were promoted into official positions, but in other areas actors without any strong historical power were endorsed. This system was introduced to ensure control over the various areas of Sudan and to weaken any resistance to the British administration. In order to introduce the system, the British needed to create socio-political entities associated with demarcated territorial units out of Sudan’s myriad communities. The British spent a long time organizing these communities into tribes, sections, and sub-sections, and some of the contemporary tribal structures are remnants of this process (Miller 2005). Nevertheless, the neat and tidy structure that the British sought was never
realized because the areas were still ethnically heterogeneous (Leonardi and Abdul-Jalil 2011).

The native administration constitutes the prime arena for conflict resolution in the rural areas of Sudan. In particular, it is the most crucial device for seeking peaceful solutions to disputes between communities. Not only is it important for conflict management but it also plays a central role in monitoring the decisions made to regulate relations among communities. The native administration is particularly entrusted to solve disputes over land. In fact, most land in the rural areas of Sudan was communal at the time when the native administration was introduced. In this system some larger communities were in control over *Dars* (homelands), which gave them a favorable position while smaller tribes were in inferior positions. A Dar defined the area under which a paramount chief – most often called *Nazir* – had authority. Therefore, demands to own a tribal area were often pursued through demands to have a *Nazir* because that would imply land rights. In 1970, however, the regime of Jaafar Nimeire introduced the Unregistered Land Act that established that all land that was not privately owned and registered belonged to the government. This law was introduced as a response to greater needs for land for agriculture and to weaken the power of the native administration. In 1971 the native administration was formally abolished by the People’s Local Government Act. In combination, these two acts created further confusion around tribal rights and responsibilities in regards to land ownership. Even today many of these issues are unresolved and the policy has generated confusion, uncertainty, and conflict (Leonardi and Abdul-Jalil 2011).

In 1986, the native administration was re-introduced by then Prime Minister Sadiq el-Mahdi. In need of local support, the current regime (which took power in 1989) kept tight relations with the native administration. Before it took power, the Islamists had argued for the abolishment of the native administration, which it viewed as an outdated system that did not favor their cause. Once in power, however, they understood what a useful tool the native administration could be. In particular, they realized that this institution could constitute a suitable arena in which their politics could be promoted and militias recruited. Overall, it served to increase the regime’s power at the local level. Therefore, instead of eliminating it, the regime reshaped it to suit their needs. At the same time, the regime did not want any other power-centers that could challenge it, especially not in areas where it encountered significant threats. Hence, in addition to changing the native administration the government also weakened it through manipulation and co-optation. The relation of the NCP to this traditional authority is thus generally viewed as part of the government’s divide-and-conquer tactics rather than any attempt to actually empower the peripheral areas (Miller 2005). In fact, the government seeks to promote local actors that are easily controlled by patronage and political manipulation. The current regime started a project of social
engineering in the 1990s. In this process the native administration had an important position and was trained to agitate for the Islamic revolution and recruit mujahidin to fight in the government's wars. Members of the native administration who delivered what the government wanted were often rewarded with more prominent positions. This governmental tactic has also led to intense struggles over positions within the native administration, which ensures that many local elites are preoccupied with local struggles rather than fighting against the government (Leonardi and Abdul-Jalil 2011).

The legitimacy of the native administration is fragile, and it has to balance the desires of the government and the local societies. As part of this process, local elites within the native administration try to enhance their relations with political parties and the government. The success of the native administration in general and as a conflict management actor in particular, is dependent on a combination of government support and indigenous legitimacy. Still, notwithstanding the strength the native administration has over the communities it rules, solutions negotiated by the native administration usually fall apart if powerful politicians or militaries want to spoil them. This means that the current strength of the native administration in Sudan varies substantially between different regions (Leonardi and Abdul-Jalil 2011).

Although its strength varies, the native administration is still a significant actor throughout rural Sudan. The reason why it has remained important is that it is entrenched in local power structures that are important for most Sudanese rather than that it constitute an ideal preferred organization (Leonardi and Abdul-Jalil 2011). There also exists widespread criticism of the native administration. Critics view it as a gender-imbalanced system from the past that is not a solution for the problems facing a modern society. Nevertheless, even opponents often believe that the native administration needs to be involved when it comes to disputes over land because they are the only ones with the appropriate knowledge of the local context (Interview with Nihar, 2010).

The native administration system is also in place in southern Sudan. However, during the time this region was examined (2005–2012) the role that traditional authorities, such as the native administration, are meant to play is unclear. This institution is stipulated to have an important role, especially in traditional courts. In general, South Sudanese prefer these adjudicators over the government ones, but the power of these traditional institutions are generally compromised. Furthermore, favoritism, delays, and bribery decrease the effectiveness of them (Leonardi et al. 2010).

### 4.3 Economic Life

The economic life in Sudan follows similar structures as political structures. Sudan is, therefore, highly centralized also in terms of its economy, and the
central elites in Khartoum dominate both the economic and the political situations in the country. In this system, resources are collected from the peripheral areas and taken to Khartoum (de Waal 2007c). Resources within Khartoum are not equally distributed, and this results in poverty among large sections of the population living in and near the capital city. However, the poor at the center have better access to social services such as roads, schools, and hospitals than the population inhabiting the peripheries.

The dominant economic asset in Sudan is oil, which was first discovered in 1978. The first deposits were found in southern Sudan, and about 75% of Sudan’s oil deposits are located there. It was not until 1999, however, when a pipeline to Port Sudan was finished that oil revenues started to fill the government’s coffers. One reason was that the areas in which oil were discovered were not controlled by the government due to an ongoing rebellion. To gain control of the oil, the government took control over the areas through forced displacement and ethnic cleansing. In addition, the oil fields were located in remote parts of the country. The oil was mainly found in the northern parts of southern Sudan, and much of it in Greater Upper Nile, one of the examined regions in this study. The revenues from oil constituted a major source of income for the government and were decisive for the government’s ability to continue the war. Oil remained by far the most important economic asset for the regime during the war (HRW 2003; ICG 2002; Johnson 2006). The CPA stipulates that revenues from the oil exploited in southern Sudan should be shared equally between Sudan and South Sudan for a six-year interim period. Although this significantly reduced Khartoum’s profits from the oil, it remained the prime asset during this period. After South Sudan became independent, all revenues from the oil produced in South Sudan should accrue to the Government of South Sudan. However, South Sudan has no other alternative to export the oil than through Port Sudan. To do this they need to pay fees to Sudan. These fees constitute an important source of income for Khartoum, and how high these payments should be is a fierce dispute between the two countries (UNEP 2012). In an attempt to make up for lost profits from oil, the regime in Khartoum has tried to boost production of gold and most gold sources are located in the northernmost areas of Sudan (Sharaky 2005). Despite increased incomes from gold, it is still far below revenues previously gained by oil (BBC 2012; Reuters 2012a).

Although the regime in Khartoum has been strongly dependent on oil, its counterpart in Juba is even more reliant on this asset. The revenues received during the interim period constituted by far the most essential resource for the Government of South Sudan. Profits were supposed to be 50% of the earnings of the oil produced in South Sudan, but Juba repeatedly complained that Khartoum took more than its justified part (Sudan Tribune 2012b). After independence, this extreme oil dependence has continued and more than
98% of South Sudan’s total budget is based on revenues from the oil (World Bank 2011).

The agricultural sector is also important for the government. Before oil came to dominate the revenues of the regime in Khartoum, incomes from crops and livestock constituted the largest contributor to export earnings. In 2011 Sudan’s third most important export asset – after oil and gold – was livestock. Until 2002, crops contributed substantially more than livestock, and since then the two assets have accounted approximately equally to export earnings. Livestock is an essential asset in all three examined regions (Greater Upper Nile, Eastern Sudan, and Darfur), although the export of livestock has recently decreased in Darfur because of the ongoing civil war (UNEP 2012). In regards to farming, Eastern Sudan provides a larger source of income to the government in Khartoum than Darfur because mechanized farming and cash crops, which are more lucrative than subsistence farming, are more prevalent in Eastern Sudan. Almost half of the owners of these mechanized farms have previously been employed by the government (Ijami 2006) and this more modern type of farming has a tradition of being more supported by the Sudanese state than pastoralism and small-scale farming (Badal 2006). In southern Sudan, pastoralism is more prevalent than farming, and it is also culturally esteemed by many communities. It is estimated that South Sudan had close to 12 million cattle in 2011, but these cattle are rarely exported. One important reason for this is the prestige that comes with ownership of many cattle within numerous communities (TDRF 2011). For the people living in the rural areas of Sudan, land constitutes the primary asset. Not only is it the means of survival for the majority of the rural population of Sudan, but land is also a source of pride for individuals and communities. The importance of land makes it a constant source of potential exploitation and conflict (Ijami 2006).

4.4 Sudan’s Wars

The center’s political and economic domination over the peripheries has caused frustration among the people in the marginalized areas. This resentment is evident among resistance movements from various regions of Sudan that have all emphasized redistribution of power from the center to the regions as a fundamental aspect of their rebellions (Mohamed 2007). This antagonism has been particularly strong in southern Sudan, and Sudan has been embroiled in North–South civil war for most periods since its independence. The initial period of conflict was from 1962 to 1972 and then again from 1983 onward when the SPLM/A took up arms against the regime.
Although ethnically heterogeneous, the north is mainly inhabited by Muslims with an Arab culture while the south is more African and its inhabitants generally follow Christianity or animist religions. Nevertheless, this simplified dichotomy disguises a large variety of ethnic groups living in both the north and the south. Even if the war was primarily fought in southern Sudan, fighting also took place in South Kordofan, Blue Nile, and Eastern Sudan, which are located northwards and are parts of contemporary Sudan. In January 2005, Africa’s longest war ended after 22 years of fighting through the signing of the CPA (CPA 2005; Johnson 2006).

As negotiations to end the North-South war were ongoing, however, a new rebellion started in Darfur, the westernmost region of Sudan. Ten years after its start, this conflict is still active. In relation to the secession of the South, an additional uprising started in two states – South Kordofan and Blue Nile – located in Sudan but close to the border to South Sudan. In addition to these intrastate conflicts, Sudan and South Sudan also fought each other in an interstate conflict over oil resources and the contested border in 2012 (UCDP 2013c; Brosché 2011a). The Republic of South Sudan has also not been spared from conflict since it gained independence, and several rebel groups have challenged the regime in Juba with armed insurgencies. These rebel groups have been located in the Greater Upper Nile region (Small Arms Survey 2011b).

31 A mutiny among some South Sudanese soldiers occurred in 1955. The mutineers lacked a clear political agenda, seeking merely to stay alive. Therefore, 1962 is seen as the start of the war rather than 1955 (Johnson 2006).
5. Darfur

Violent communal conflicts have devastated Sudan’s westernmost region of Darfur for the last several decades. In late-1980s and early-1990s, thousands of people were killed in a conflict pitting the Fur against several Arab communities. Similar conflicts continued throughout the 1990s with communities with an African descent, such as the Masalit and Zaghawa, fighting against various communities identifying themselves as Arabs. In 2003, a rebellion against the regime in Khartoum was launched in Darfur. The insurgency was mainly founded in three communities – the Fur, Masalit, and Zaghawa – and a main reason for the rebellion was that the Sudanese government had disfavored these groups in earlier communal conflicts. In the following years, Darfur became a concern for the international community because Khartoum’s counterinsurgency included gross humanitarian atrocities such as ethnic cleansing.

A decade after the start of the rebellion, it is still ongoing and an estimated 300 000 Darfurians have been killed since 2003. In parallel to the civil war, violent communal conflicts have continued to devastate Darfur. However, the dynamics of these conflicts have changed drastically in the last decade. In contrast to the conflicts pitting Arabs against non-Arabs that preceded the rebellion, the fierce fights between communities after it started mainly include various Arab communities fighting against each other. These conflicts center on control over land from which other groups have been forcefully displaced.

This chapter traces the roots of Darfur’s violent communal conflicts. It shows that Khartoum’s partiality towards the various groups inhabiting the region is critical in explaining why the region has been devastated by such conflicts for the last two and a half decades. Groups perceived as hostile to the regime, and thus constituting a threat, are constantly disfavored. In particular, the contemporary Sudanese government has acted in a biased manner against non-Arab groups such as the Fur, Zaghawa, and Masalit since it took power in 1989. This policy is also based in the Arabization that the government has promoted in the region. However, it is also important to note that the government has not treated the various Arab communities equally either. Instead it has sided with those Arab communities that provided the strongest support to its counterinsurgency and disfavored Arab communities perceived as opponents to the regime. Again, this policy of favoring some communities over others has contributed to violence between these groups.
The biased manner in which the government has treated several of Darfur’s communities has disrupted interaction between local and central elites as well as among local elites. In particular, this partiality has undermined the native administration that was previously important for regulating interactions among local elites and for managing inter-communal disputes. In Darfur, three mechanisms are pivotal for understanding how Khartoum’s bias, and the negative elite interaction created by such policies, has contributed to violent communal conflict. First, the regime’s partiality has led communal affiliation – rather than the context and severity of a violation – to be a decisive factor when handing out sanctions. Thus, sanctions are not proportional, which decreases trust and compromises chances for cooperation. Second, to disempower its enemies – and to empower its allies – the government has repeatedly changed administrative units, which has led to undefined boundaries and borders that no longer follow traditional demarcations. Such confusion over boundaries has intensified tension between the communities. Third, the government’s bias has distanced rules from local conditions and restricted local actors’ ability to influence decisions. This diminishes the opportunity for conflict resolution. Taken together, these factors have disrupted peaceful cohabitation between Darfur’s communities.

To situate Darfur’s communal conflicts, this chapter starts by outlining the general conflict situation in the region. Thereafter, the focus is on communal conflicts. Government bias and elite interactions are then described. Next, the three mechanisms identified in the theoretical framework are examined. The chapter ends with a number of conclusions derived from the within-region analysis.

5.1 Conflicts in Darfur

The conflict in Darfur has often been portrayed as a conflict between Africans and Arabs. Such a description is simplistic.32 Rather, the crisis in Darfur consists of a complicated web of four different types of conflict (Brosché and Rothbart 2013). First, Darfur has suffered from communal conflicts for centuries, but these conflicts have become more violent since the mid-1980s (ICG 2004). Second, there exists a strong rivalry between various elites within the region that leads to local elite conflicts. This has led to numerous splits among the rebel groups as well as conflicts between traditional leaders.

32 In Darfur there are about 40 to 90 ethnic groups (de Waal and Flint 2008). To divide them along Arab and African lines is a gross simplification. Additionally, the Arab-African division in Darfur is not based on language, skin-colour, religion (all Darfur’s communities are Muslim), culture, or way of life. Rather its foundation is claims to an Arab identity. Still, for those who adhere to it, the Arab identification is vital (Tubiana 2007). In spite of these uncertainties, the terms Arabs and Africans (or non-Arabs) will sometimes be used because this is in line with the practice of most Sudanese and offer some insight to the dynamics at hand.
and younger individuals aspiring for influence in the region. Third, an important aspect of the crisis in Darfur is center-periphery conflicts and the region is severely marginalized in relation to the center, Khartoum, and its surroundings. Fourth, the Darfur crisis also consists of cross-border conflicts, and the relationship between Chad and Sudan has been particularly significant for the crisis in Darfur (Tubiana 2008, 2011).

The four conflict types outlined above are entangled, but for analytical purposes they will be treated separately in this study and the focus will be on communal conflicts. The other forms of conflicts will be briefly addressed in the outline below, and thereafter only when they substantially affect communal conflicts.

In 2003, Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) and Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) started a rebellion against the Sudanese government. Although sharing the same ultimate goal – ousting the Sudanese government – the origins of these two groups are very different. The SLM/A found its roots primarily within three non-Arab communities – the Fur, Zaghawa, and Masalit – which created self-defense forces for protection from assaults by Arab militia groups, whereas the JEM originated from the center.

In the 1990s, a group of Darfuri students from the Fur community (including the founder of the SLM/A, Abdul Wahid) had devised strategies to strengthen their martial forces to withstand attacks from Arab militias (Flint 2007a). In this conflict, the government backed the Arabs and the Fur were considered an enemy. The propensity of the regime in Khartoum to support the Arabs in such conflicts incited these Fur defense forces to shift from targeting other communities to fighting the government (de Waal and Flint 2008). At the same time, the Zaghawa community underwent a similar political transformation from engaging primarily in local communal skirmishes to mounting a full-scale resistance movement with national ambitions. The Zaghawa (predominantly camel herders) and Arab herders had previously engaged in lengthy struggles over access to scarce resources. The Zaghawa were – like the Fur – primarily motivated by their belief that the national government developed military strategies and national polices that favored the Arab tribes in local communal conflicts in Darfur (Flint 2007a).

In 2001, Abdul Wahid directed his Fur-dominated militia to join forces with the Zaghawa groups in a campaign against the government. The Masalit tribe, a third major non-Arab ethnic group in Darfur, joined the Fur–Zaghawa resistance following military defeats at the hands of Arab militia groups (Brosché 2008). By the early 2000s, these forces united and became a serious military threat to the government. This alliance of Fur, Zaghawa, and Masalit (and smaller elements from some other communities) forces first called themselves the Darfur Liberation Movement. But in February 2003, these forces adopted a new name, the Sudanese Liberation Movement/Army
(SLM/A), after overrunning an army outpost in the small town of Golo in Jebel Marra (Flint 2007a; Interview with Abdul-Jalil, 2007).

Shortly after the formation of the SLM/A, another Darfuri rebel movement – the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) – took up arms against the regime in Khartoum. The origins of the JEM are fundamentally different from those of the SLM/A. While the SLM/A sprang from the local communities at the periphery of power, the JEM emerged from the center of power in Khartoum with most of JEM’s top officials having held positions in the regional government. Its alleged founder and leader was Hassan al-Turabi, the former architect of the NIF coup and previously an ally of President al-Bashir (Burr and Collins 2008; Prunier 2007). The official leader of JEM was Khalil Ibrahim (El-Tom 2011) and he remained the leader of the movement until he was killed in battle in late 2011. After his death he was replaced by his brother Jibril Khalil. The JEM is dominated by the Zaghawa tribe from which most of its leaders, such as the Khalil brothers, originate (Small Arms Survey 2012a).

The first rumblings of the JEM movement can be traced to events of the mid-1990s when certain members of the NIF formed a clandestine group of representatives from multiple peripheral regions in Sudan. This group sought to redress the extreme inequalities of access to political power and essential material resources (Flint 2007a). In 1999, relations between President Omar al-Bashir and Hassan al-Turabi deteriorated leading to acrimony between these two figureheads in Khartoum’s Islamist regime (de Waal 2007a). At that time, al-Turabi was forcibly removed from power. Shortly after this split, JEM openly opposed Sudan’s government and sought to address the humanitarian needs of those living at the periphery of power. The JEM shared the SLM/A’s goal of armed rebellion against the central government in Khartoum. Both movements also had an essential objective to redress the structural inequalities in Sudan (Prunier 2007).

In the early days of the rebellion, the SLM/A and JEM enjoyed a series of military successes due in part to their knowledge of the local terrain. To combat this advantage, Khartoum began recruiting fighters from local communities by luring members of some local Arab tribes into counterinsurgency forces. The majority of recruits came from ethnic groups that lacked their own Dars. To entice recruits and buy loyalty, the government promised to parcel out land, alluring members of many Arab communities with these incentives (Interview with Bonsu, 2007). These militias came to be known as Janjaweed. The militias, often together with the government, carried out gross human rights violations such as ethnic cleansing and forced displace-

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33 Darfur is divided into different Dars (tribal homeland in Arabic). The name Darfur means homeland of the Fur.
ment. Ten years after its start, the war in Darfur is still ongoing and the UN estimates that the Darfur crisis has killed 300,000 people since 2003 (UN 2011).

5.2 Communal Conflicts

To situate the time period under scrutiny, 1989–2012, it is fruitful to look into the communal conflict situation prior to this period. However, information about communal conflict during this period is scant and it is difficult to find information on how many casualties the communal conflicts caused. Nevertheless, some information is available. This information reveals that Darfur has a tradition of relatively peaceful relations between the communities. For centuries, nomads and farmers had managed to coexist rather peacefully because of a workable system to settle disputes between the communities (Burr and Collins 2008). However, in the mid-1980s the interactions became increasingly contentious as the Sudanese government introduced policies that manipulated ethnicity in their – and their provincial allies’ – interest. Previously, communal conflicts were in general sporadic and at a low level of violence. In contrast, the conflicts that emerged in the late 1980s were sustained and extraordinarily fierce (ICG 2004).

As shown in Table 5.1, Darfur has witnessed twelve violent communal conflicts between 1989 and 2012. The number of active conflicts annually has varied between zero and three (UCDP 2013b). The table shows fatalities, ethnicity, and main livelihood in these active conflicts. Some caveats are in order when interpreting this table; ethnicity is fluid, livelihood is often mixed, and fatality data are hard to confirm. Thus the table should be viewed as a summary rather than a complete delineation of violent communal conflicts in Darfur.

34 In fact, between 2001 and 2005 97% of the villages attacked in Darfur were attacked by the Janjaweed, governmental forces, or a combination of them, whereas 3% of the attacks were conducted by the rebels. The majority (58%) of all reported attacks were by a combination of government and Janjaweed forces (Petersen and Tullin 2006).

35 The UN figure includes direct and indirect deaths, such as diseases, that caused about 80% of the fatalities between 2003 and 2009 (Reuters 2010). Coding only direct violent deaths, the UCDP estimates 8,000–58,000 fatalities in one-sided violence; 8,000–13,000 in state-based violence; 4,700–5,400 in communal conflicts; and about 300 in rebel-rebel fighting (another subcategory of the non-state data). Thus, communal conflicts caused fewer deaths than state-based and one-sided violence. For many years, however, communal conflicts were the only active type of conflict in Darfur. In fact, for the first 14 years of the studied time period communal conflict was the sole form of violent conflict in Darfur.
Table 5.1 Violent Communal Conflicts in Darfur, 1989–2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communities</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Main livelihood</th>
<th>Active years</th>
<th>Estimated deaths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salamat/Beni Halba–Fur</td>
<td>Arab–African</td>
<td>Cattle herders and farmers–farmers</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>1500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reizegat Abbala–Zaghawa</td>
<td>Arab–African</td>
<td>Camel herders–camel herders</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awlad Zeid Arabs–Zaghawa</td>
<td>Arab–African</td>
<td>Camel and cattle herders–camel herders</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rizeigat Baggara–Maaliya</td>
<td>Arab–Arab</td>
<td>Cattle herders–cattle herders</td>
<td>2002, 2004</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hotiya Baggara–Nawayba, Mahariya, and Mahamid</td>
<td>Arab–Arab</td>
<td>Cattle herders–camel herders</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reizegat Baggara–Habbaniya</td>
<td>Arab–Arab</td>
<td>Cattle herders–cattle herders</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reizegat Abbala–Tarjem</td>
<td>Arab–Arab</td>
<td>Camel herders–cattle herders</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maaliya–Zaghawa</td>
<td>Arab–African</td>
<td>Camel herders–camel herders</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>40–50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1 shows that nine out of twelve conflicts were fought among pastoralists and that the only combination of livelihood groups not involved in fighting was farmers against farmers. In Darfur, six out of twelve communal

36 The data is compiled from the UCDP Non-State Dataset (Sundberg et al. 2012).
conflicts were fought between groups that both identify as Arabs. It is important to note that the pattern of communal conflicts has drastically changed since the start of the rebellion in 2003. Before the rebellion, all communal conflicts (except one year of Maaliya–Reizegat Baggara fighting) were between Arabs and Africans. After the SLM/A and JEM started their insurgency, however, five out of six communal conflicts pitted Arabs against Arabs. The shift in who is fighting whom coincides with a shift in the control over land. During the early phase of the civil war, millions of non-Arabs were ethnically cleansed from the areas where they lived. After these fertile areas were abandoned, different Arab communities started to fight each other over who should be in control over the land (ICG 2007).

5.3 Government Bias and Communal Conflict

How can the prevalence of violent communal conflicts in Darfur be explained? In the following section, the government’s bias, elite interactions, and the three previously identified mechanisms will be examined.

Government Bias

The Sudanese government has acted in a biased manner toward the Darfuri-an communities – by favoring some and disfavoring others – for the entire time period examined. In particular, the government has disfavored the three non-Arab communities of the Fur, Zaghawa, and Masalit while it has favored Arab groups. As this examination will show, however, such a description leaves out important parts of the regime’s behavior. In particular, although this general trend can be discerned the regime has not treated all Arab, or all non-Arab, communities equally.

A main reason for the government to act with partiality is that communities in the region have constituted severe threats to the regime. The primary threats to Khartoum have been several armed groups that have challenged the government through rebellions. Additionally, the government has not been restricted to use such a policy because of concern over strategic assets. Although Darfur does offer some economic assets for the government, such as livestock, these resources have not been vital for the survival of the regime, which means that the region is of comparatively low economic importance to the regime. The government’s promotion of Arabization of Darfur, which has partly been carried out to strengthen ties with Libya, has also served to favor certain communities over others (Burr and Collins 2008; Lesch Mosely 1998).

In 1989, when the current regime took power, the war in southern Sudan constituted the largest threat to the government. Not only did the rebellion set up a severe challenge in the south, the regime also worried that the war in
southern Sudan would spread northwards. Thus, besides affecting its policy towards southern Sudan, this war also influenced Khartoum’s policy towards other regions, such as Darfur (Tar 2005). A year after the NIF took power in Khartoum, Daud Bolad – a Fur Islamist with close relations to the government – defected because he considered the government to be favoring the Arabs in a conflict between the Fur and numerous Arab communities (Interview with Mohamed, 2010). Later, Daud Bolad joined the SPLM/A, which for a short period in 1991 took this rebellion to Darfur (Haggar 2007). The government perceived this as an insurgency by the Fur people (ICG 2004). As a consequence, Khartoum came to perceive the Fur as their main enemy, which led the government to act especially partial against this community (Prunier 2007).

To counter this rebellion, Khartoum wanted to secure support from some Arab communities in southern Darfur to fight alongside the regular army. To ensure such backing, the government used tribal rhetoric and warned that the Arab communities risked being run by a Fur (Bolad) who would take over Darfur with weapons from a Dinka (John Garang, leader of the SPLM/A). This perceived danger was one reason to why some Arab communities joined the government’s fight against the SPLM/A (Interview with Mohamed, 2010). A combination of the regular army and militias annihilated the rebellion, and Bolad was captured and killed (Flint 2007a). The success of this tactic cemented the Sudanese government’s alliance with some Arab communities in Darfur (ICG 2004). The strategy of using militias to fight against rebels has been a tactic used by consecutive Sudanese governments, particularly in the south (Johnson 2006).

In its counterinsurgency against the 2003 rebellion, the government adopted similar militia tactics. Because the leaders, as well as most of the recruits, of the insurgency came primarily from three non-Arab communities (Fur, Zaghawa, and Masalit) the government again turned to Arab communities for recruitment into ethnic militias. This tactic became more important as the rebels scored some major successes in the beginning of the war, partly because they had extensive knowledge about local conditions. The recruited militias were also in possession of a deep understanding of the difficulties of fighting in Darfur. In addition, the Sudanese army was tired and overstretched because of the ongoing war in southern Sudan. Therefore, militias, famine, and scorched earth tactics became critical components of the government’s counterinsurgency. The reliance on ethnic militias intensified the regime’s bias in favor of those communities from which recruits could be

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37 In fact, already in 1985 the government was concerned that the SPLM/A insurgency would spread to Kordofan, a region neighbouring Darfur to the east (Tar 2005).
38 It should also be recognized that some Arabs have been part of the SLM/A and JEM and that smaller rebel groups with a majority originating from Arab communities have also emerged (Interviews with Darfurian rebels 2010). No absolute correlation between Arabs equals militias and non-Arabs equals rebels exists.
gleaned, and such favoritism has been instrumental in ensuring the recruitment of militias (de Waal 2004; Interview with Abdul-Jalil 2009).

Another source of the government’s differentiation between various communities in Darfur is the promotion of the Arabization of Darfur (Burr and Collins 2008). In 1990, Sudan signed a deal with Libya that promoted Arab culture and language in Darfur. The motive for the deal was to substantiate the relations with Libya and secure weapons supplied by Qaddafi, which was essential for strengthening Khartoum’s military arsenal in the war in southern Sudan (Lesch-Mosely 1998). This agreement further strengthened Khartoum’s favoritism of certain ethnic groups and increased tensions both between communities and between certain communities and the government. Actually, the move to manifest the relation with Qaddafi infuriated non-Arab communities in Darfur. This was because the Libyan government a few years earlier had supported and influenced the formation of the Arab Alliance, which augmented the hostilities between the Arab and non-Arab communities of Darfur (Osman 2006).

The Arabization strategy of the government was further manifested in 1994 when Darfur was divided into three states. Importantly, Arabs from Khartoum and Chad, instead of people from the traditional families in Darfur, were appointed governors of the new states. This policy was taken one step further in January 2000 when an outspoken advocate of Arabization (General ‘Abdalla es-Safi al-Nur from the Reizegat Abbala community) was given the governorship of North Darfur. With the blessing of the central government, he started a campaign of collecting weapons from the non-Arab communities. Even policemen with an ethnic affiliation with these communities were disarmed, while the Arab communities were allowed to keep their weapons (Burr and Collins 2008).

Although the government has been more supportive of Arabs than non-Arabs, these broad clusters of communities are extremely complex and Khartoum has treated various communities within these broad groupings in different ways. In fact, such a wide variation exists that some African communities are not perceived as opponents of the regime. Likewise, certain Arab communities have not supported the government. A critical division among Darfur’s Arab communities is that the Abbala (camel nomads) groups have been much more involved in the current conflict than the Baggara (cattle nomads) groups. The fundamental reason for this difference is that the Baggara have been in possession of land – the most important asset for Darfur’s communities for centuries – whereas the Abbala has been left

39 This agreement was a follow up to a previous agreement signed in 1985 in which Sudan allowed Qaddafi to use Darfur as a rear base in Libya’s war against Chad in return for Libyan arms. One effect of the agreement was that it allowed thousands of Chadian Arabs to cross into Darfur. This influx exacerbated existing local tensions (rooted in the effect that the Chad-Libya war had on Darfur) and sparked the war between the Arabs and the Fur between 1987 and 1989 (de Waal and Flint 2008; UCDP 2012).
without land ownership (de Waal and Flint 2008). Therefore, the regime in Khartoum has primarily recruited militias from pastoralist communities that do not have established land rights. The strong desire for land among these groups makes them particularly prone to being manipulated by the government (Haggar 2007).

The most powerful Arab community in Darfur is the Reizegat Baggara of southern Darfur (Flint 2010). The Reizegat Baggara is the largest tribe in southern Darfur and holds extensive traditional power. As a powerful actor, this group has often rejected rulings by the regime in Khartoum. A prime example of this is that the government did not succeed in recruiting the Reizegat Baggara into military proxies in the counterinsurgency against the SLM/A and JEM, although it strongly attempted to persuade them to fight for the regime (de Waal and Flint 2008; Flint 2010).

The Reizegat Baggara have not rebelled against the regime but the community still constitutes a political rival to Khartoum. The Reizegat Baggara community is traditionally ruled by the influential Madibbo family, which is a strong supporter of the Umma Party. In Darfur, the Umma Party has a powerful position and traditionally has strong support in the region. It is also the party the NIF ousted from power in 1989 and represent a political rival to the regime (Mamdani 2009). Since it took control of Sudan, the NIF has sought to break the dominant position of the Umma Party in Darfur (de Waal and Flint 2008) and because the government perceives the Reizegat Baggara as a potential threat it has repeatedly disfavored this community. Importantly, it has supported land claims from communities neighboring the Reizegat Baggara (de Waal and Flint 2008; Tubiana et al. 2012). In 1992, for instance, the regime in Khartoum proposed to give away parts of the land under control of the Reizegat Baggara to the Mahahmid and Nawayba communities, two other branches of the Baggara Arabs. The intent was to consolidate the power of the NIF by weakening the Umma Party (Tubiana et al. 2012).

Thus, in addition to the severe challenges it faces from armed groups, Khartoum also has other political adversaries in Darfur. The regime has sought to weaken these political enemies and as part of this strategy the regime has acted against communities that support its rivals and it has favored groups that support the regime. Communities that are both powerful and critical of the regime have been particularly disfavored because they pose a greater threat to the government. Because this includes certain Arab groups, this has contributed to aggravate the relations among different Arab communities over the past decade (Interview with Sudanese scholar, 2011).

**Elite Interaction**

This study’s theoretical argument suggests that elite interaction is essential to link government bias with the three mechanisms suggested to explain variation in communal violence. This section describes the relations between
various elites in Darfur. The focus will be on the two relations assumed to be most important for communal conflicts: central elites with local elites, and among local elites. The primary central elite is the government, and the most important local elites are the leadership of the various communities and the native administration that they are often a part of. In general, the relations between Darfurian elites have been unconstructive in Darfur since the late 1980s, and government bias has turned both types of elite interaction negative.

Government bias has undermined the interactions between central and local elites. In Darfur, the native administration has historically been hailed for enabling peaceful coexistence among Darfur’s diverse population by combining traditional African and Arab–Islamic methods for addressing disagreements. For centuries, Darfurians generally trusted the native administration as a sound means for preventing conflict and promoting peace. The effectiveness of the native administration rested on trust in the system, and this in turn depended on faith in the neutrality of those presiding over the hearings (ICG 2004; Mohamed 2009). Traditionally, the tribal leadership in Darfur holds high symbolic power and paramount chiefs often come from rich and famous families in possession of historical land rights. This ensures that representatives are seen as genuine by their constituency. In Darfur, traditional justice and reconciliation is regularly referred to as Judiya. The people involved in the Judiya are called Ajawid and are important individuals from a family, clan, or tribe, who are not involved in the conflict (Tubiana et al. 2012). An important aspect of this system is that people who have committed a crime tend to admit their guilt in a Judiya, whereas such confessions are much less likely to take place in a government court (Badal 2006). Neutrality is central for Judiya, and the government traditionally has a facilitator role in this procedure but refrains from being directly involved in the deliberations. However, the current regime has taken a more active role in this process, and this has largely undermined this arena for conflict management (Tubiana et al. 2012).

The government’s intrusion into the Judiya system is part of a wider policy to foster its own interests. Significantly, the regime has appointed important positions in the native administration in a partial manner to strengthen its control over this institution. Furthermore, the government has created many new leadership positions for individuals and supported them politically and often militarily. In addition, the government abolished other positions, while at the same time creating others, and bought off other individuals (Tubiana et al. 2012). The current regime has interfered with such appointments since it took power, but this policy was intensified after the start of the rebellion in 2003. When tribal leaders have been selected by the government, traditional power has usually been disregarded. Instead the government has appointed elites that it has close ties to and leaders it believes that it can control. This means that the prime allegiance of these leaders is to the govern-
ment, not the community they are supposed to represent (Interview with Sudanese NGO worker, 2010).

The Fur have historically been the most important tribe in Darfur and the government’s prime enemy. Therefore, tactics to undermine powerful traditional Fur leaders have been prioritized. To do this the regime sought alliances with pro-government Fur. One such example was when Hussein Ayoub Ali Dinar, endorsed by the government, appointed himself the Sultan of all Fur in 1992. This was a clear divergence from local customs because no such position had existed before. Likewise, Ali Dinar did not have any court, no land, and no Omdas40, which also was in contrast to traditions. He was later replaced by Ibrahim Yusuf Ali Dinar who has never lived in Darfur and reportedly does not even speak the Fur language (Tubiana et al. 2012).

One consequence of the regime’s deep involvement in the region is that native administrators are more dependent on the government than ever before. This impedes fruitful local–central interactions because native administrators giving voice to an opinion that is not in line with that of the government might face grave consequences, such as removal from their official positions. They might even risk their personal security as illustrated by an example from 2008 when pro-government militias attempted to assassinate Ishaq Yahya Hussein, an Omda from the Fur community who regularly stated his criticism against the government (Tubiana et al. 2012). Additionally, constructive interaction between local leaders and the government is impeded because the leaders the regime interrelates with do not genuinely represent the communities’ concerns, but rather the central regime’s interest. This interference by the government has undermined the effectiveness of the native administration. Decisions made by this traditional authority in regard to issues such as conflict management, compensation, and monitoring used to be respected by the communities because it was viewed as legitimate by the communities. This is not the case anymore. Thus, government interference has weakened a local authority that previously worked properly (Mohamed 2009).

To be affiliated with the government is perceived negatively by many groups in Darfur. This is due to the widespread antigovernment sentiments among numerous Darfurian communities. The prevalence of such aversions implies that it can be enough for a person to be viewed as potentially pro-government for them to lose support within the community. This means that the regime can manipulate how leaders are perceived by their communities and might try to weaken leaders it perceives as constituting a threat (Interview with Mohamed, 2010). The government used a refinement of such a tactic in 2007. At that time negotiations between the rebels and the government were upcoming in Sirtre, Libya. The negotiation team had invited nu-

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40 Omdas are traditional administrative leaders, one level below the Sultan in the native administration hierarchy.
merous traditional Darfurian leaders to participate in the negotiations, but the government selectively granted visas only to certain leaders and not to others. This raised skepticism among Darfur’s communities because it was widely believed that the persons who were granted visas were close to the government and thus did not truly represent the communities’ interests (Interview with Eliasson, 2011).

Intuitively, the strong support that certain Arab communities have received in Darfur would suggest that local elites from these communities would interact constructively with the central authority. However, this local–central elite interaction has also been problematic, especially during the last few years. To recruit militias, Khartoum promised land to several landless communities, but these promises were often unfulfilled despite the fact that the militias had fought on the side of the government, taken casualties, and carried out extensive atrocities on behalf of the regime. This has resulted in extensive resentment towards the government among many Arab communities. This anger has been amplified because Darfurian Arabs have generally been demonized and labeled as murderers even though many communities have remained neutral during the conflict (Flint 2007b).

Large segments within the Arab communities, therefore, feel rejected and manipulated by the government. In addition, when the regime signed the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) in 2007 it committed to disarm the Janjaweed. Although Khartoum has not taken any steps in this direction, the decision to disarm was viewed with aversion by many militia leaders. From their point of view, they had only carried out government policies, and instead of being rewarded the government turned them into scapegoats (Interviews with Darfurian Arabs 2007). The increased anger toward the government constitutes a major concern for Khartoum, especially because these groups are military strong because of all the arms they possess. In fact, in certain areas of Darfur these militias are stronger than the regular army (de Waal 2007b).

The partiality that characterizes the government’s behavior has also upset relations among local elites, and confrontational relations between local elites have characterized Darfur since the late-1980s. This is in contrast to more constructive cooperation that has historically characterized such relations. In particular, the native administration constituted an arena in which local elites generally interacted in a positive manner. As described above, the current regime started to interfere with the native administration when it took power in 1989 (Miller 2005) and this policy was particularly strong in Darfur. Not only did the government replace many traditional leaders, it also actively tried to disrupt interactions among local elites within this traditional authority. This tactic was part of a wider strategy to aggravate tensions between, and within, the communities in Darfur to ensure that local actors were

41 The national part of this process is described in Chapter 4.
too busy with local struggles to mount a challenge to the regime in Khartoum (Tubiana et al. 2012).

To do this, the government promoted tribalization because it ensured more opportunities for the government to practice divide-and-conquer tactics. The government has used tribalism as an efficient tool to control Sudan’s multiple communities (Tubiana et al. 2012). In fact, the present regime has taken the policy of politicizing tribes to hitherto unprecedented levels, and this policy has politicized relations that earlier had largely been apolitical (Osman 2006). In order to better control the tribes, the current regime started a process to deterritorialize, and instead tribalize, leadership in Darfur in the early-1990s. Historically, most influential local elites were leaders of a territory – not a tribe – that was often inhabited by members of several communities. This tactic foremost sought to weaken the Fur community and many territorial leaders came from this group. A prime example of this was when the government in 1994 restricted the power of the influential magdum of South Darfur by shifting his position to be the leader of the Fur community in that area, not the leader of a multatribal area as the magdum used to be (Tubiana et al. 2012).

One consequence of the government’s strategy of tribalization and divide-and-conquer was that it led to an increased division between Arab and non-Arab groups. These augmented hostilities led to the formation of two tribal organizations: the Arab Alliance – which compromised many of the Arab communities in Darfur – and the Zurga Alliance – which comprised numerous non-Arab communities (Osman 2006). In the process that led to the establishment of the Arab Alliance, native administrators were exploited to support ethnic polarization (Abdul-Jalil et al. 2007). The creation of these organizations intensified hostilities between Arab and non-Arab elites as well as between the communities they represented (Osman 2006).

Sanctions

The first mechanism outlined in the theoretical framework of this thesis proposes that government bias will make sanctions less proportional and that this will contribute to violent communal conflict. Proportional sanctions imply that decisions depend on the severity and context of a violation. This is not the case in Darfur. Instead, communal affiliation, rather than the circumstances and gravity of violations, has been decisive for sanctions throughout the time period studied here.

A first important dimension concerning sanctions relates to traditional methods for conflict management. Historically, customary courts have been central for managing conflicts in Darfur. However, the autonomy of these courts has declined as the government’s involvement has increased, and the government appoints several of the members of these courts. The regime has the power to replace individuals who it does not want to be part of the sys-
tem and the purpose of Khartoum’s interference is to further its political control. Consequently, members with a pro-government agenda tend to be selected. These appointments influence rulings within the courts, and communities considered pro-Khartoum are inclined to receive preferential treatment (Tubiana et al. 2012). In this appointment procedure, the government often promotes leaders that are not viewed as genuine by the communities. This has created problems in relation to Diya, historically a fundamental aspect of managing conflicts between Darfur’s communities. Tribal shame has traditionally been used to ensure that compensation is paid after a conflict resolution decision. Yet, if the communities do not feel that the decision makers are genuine, and, therefore, do not feel accountable to them, tribal shame is minimal even when Diya goes undelivered (Interview with Mohamed, 2010).

The government’s partiality has also affected the paying of Diya more directly. As the communal conflicts became more lethal in the late 1980s, the Diya amounts correspondingly increased. Sometimes the sums were too large for the communities to afford paying them. The government promised to pay blood money if the parties involved in a conflict could not meet the expense of the Diya. The regime in Khartoum, however, did not treat the communities equally. Instead it did not ensure that Diya was paid to communities it considered hostile—such as the Zaghawa. Not only did this create frustration among the communities who did not receive their Diya, it also led to a feeling among pro-government communities that they could avoid paying compensation without being punished. Unmet payments of Diya—because of the government’s neglect—in the communal conflict between the Zaghawa and Abbala Arabs in the late-1990s and early-2000s led peace initiatives to be futile and violence to resume. After the start of the 2003 rebellion, the Diya system has been further eroded. One reason for this is that the number of people killed is so vast that communities cannot afford such payments. Furthermore, communities favored by the regime use the system in an inappropriate manner and demand Diya for made up violations or for damages that traditionally would not generate compensation (Tubiana et al. 2012).

The second important dimension of sanctions is that government bias has resulted in selective impunity. When perpetrators from certain communities are not adequately punished, it creates frustration among the victimized groups. This can lead to revenge attacks and decrease the likelihood that disfavored groups will seek legislative solutions. This dynamic can be illustrated by the conflict between the Masalit community and several Arab groups in mid-1990s. This war started with an attack by Arab raiders on a group of villages around Mejmerie, east of al-Genina in Western Darfur. In these attacks numerous villages were destroyed, cows stolen, and many people killed. Still, the government did nothing to punish the Arab raiders because they strongly sided with this community in the conflict. This infuriated
the Masalit and escalated the conflict (de Waal and Flint 2008). Likewise, unpunished atrocities in relation to Daud Bolad’s rebellion (described above) enraged the Fur community. During this fighting, many Fur villages were burned to the ground by Arab militias. However, the government turned a blind eye to such atrocities because these Arab communities had supported the regime. Not only did this create frustration in the Fur community, it also destroyed the social fabric for cooperation among the ethnic groups in this part of Darfur (Flint 2007a). The violent communal conflict between the Awlad Zeid Arabs and Zaghawa in 2001 displays a similar dynamic of government partiality and lack of appropriate sanctions. The conflict took place at Bir Taweel, which is the most important water resource in this part of northern Darfur. In the conflict at least 70 Zaghawa were killed by the Awlad Zeid fighters. Instead of punishing the perpetrators, however, the national army prevented the Zaghawa from using the wells after the attack (de Waal and Flint 2008).

Impunity has also been offered by the government via amnesties. The regime has particularly made use of this policy after the 2003 rebellion, which means that impunity is more widespread in contemporary Darfur than before (Barends 2007; HRW 2007). A core reason for this is that the government has used elements from certain communities as militias (de Waal 2004). In particular, amnesty was offered to some communities and individuals in exchange for their participation in the counterinsurgency to the 2003 rebellion. A well-known case, that had devastating effects, is that of the infamous Janjaweed leader Musa Hilal. When the rebellion started, Hilal was imprisoned because he had caused problems among Darfur’s communities. However, to empower its counterinsurgency the government released him so that he could mobilize elements from certain Darfurian Arab communities against the rebels and the communities they belonged to (Sudan Tribune 2008b). Although he was released to join the counterinsurgency, this also contributed to violent communal conflicts because Musa Hilal used his weapons, position, and impunity to procure land for his landless community (HRW 2007).

The impunity has also upset the social fabric that used to create social disincentives for violence. Darfur is a society based on tribalism and historically the pressure from the community to behave well was a strong discouragement for violence because an incident was the responsibility of the community rather than just the individual. However, this part of the tribal system has been undermined by the current regime. If a local group is armed and offered impunity, such disincentives for violence are diluted. Moreover, this serves to upset the delicate balance between youths and elders. In general, young adults are more prone to use violence than elders who often take a
more moderate position. The power of the young men has been amplified compared to that of the elders because the weapons provided by the government are primarily in the hands of the youth (Tubiana et al. 2012)

**Boundaries**

The second mechanism outlined in the theoretical framework suggests that government bias makes boundaries less clear and that this can contribute to violent communal conflicts. In Darfur, the Sudanese regime has repeatedly interfered with existing boundaries to reduce the power of groups perceived as antigovernment and to secure the support of other communities. In its attempt to assure such support, the government has attributed administrative units to a certain community and appointed a leader from its elite to be in control of it. In this process, existing administrative units are often strategically divided into smaller units to weaken the influence of certain ethnic groups. These repeated changes lead to widespread uncertainty over boundaries, especially because newly drawn borders usually do not follow traditional demarcations.

An essential reason for why altering administrative units leads to communal conflict relates to the *Dar* system, which is essential in Darfur. In addition to giving control over land, being in possession of a *Dar* is also critical for tribal pride and native administration. When the government shifts administrative boundaries, it also makes the boundaries between the different *Dars* unclear. Historically, indigenous groups, and migrants that have been settled for a long time, have had their own *Dar*. Increased interference with this system by Khartoum, however, has disrupted coexistence among Darfur’s communities (ICG 2004). The confusion concerning land rights is further aggravated by tribalization of the native administration and a proliferation in the number of leaders that has been ongoing since the late-1980s. The newly appointed leaders hoped that their titles would entail land rights. Sometimes this happened, but the most important implication of this strategy was that it created confusion. The system of landownership was transformed from an arrangement where control over land was fairly clear to a system in which anyone with a gun could claim land (Tubiana et al. 2012). In addition, a drastic change in how the communities perceive the *Dar* system has aggravated the problems with unclear boundaries. Traditionally, the system was conducive for stability because the rights of landless groups to live in the *Dar* of another group were regulated. This original interpretation of *Dars* has, however, been lost and they are now viewed as mono-ethnic entities

42 It should be noted that traditional leaders and elders sometimes entice conflicts when it suits their purposes. This role is often unnoticed by the international actors. Still, a general difference between younger and elder men in how prone they are for violence can be noticed (Interview with Abdul-Jalil 2009).
The increased contentiousness of Darfur stems from the increased politicization of ethnicity in Darfur, and this was caused by political developments such as the formation of the Arab Alliance and the government’s siding with certain communities in the 1980s (ICG 2004; Osman 2006).

The primary example of how the Sudanese regime has made boundaries unclear in Darfur is when the region was split into three states in 1994. In fact, this division was “perhaps the most crucial decision” (Burr and Collins 2008:287) for the disastrous developments that followed in Darfur. Traditionally, Darfur constituted one state and was in fact an independent Sultanate before it was annexed into Sudan in 1916 (Daly 2007). Darfur constituted one administrative unit up until it was divided into three states in 1994. This split was politically motivated and designed to disrupt the traditional ethnic administration and to weaken the power of certain communities. Because the government considered the Fur as the main threat at the time, the prime purpose of the split was to decrease the power of this community. Therefore, the Fur’s traditional stronghold – Jebel Marra and its surroundings – was divided between all three new states: South Darfur, West Darfur and North Darfur (ICG 2004). The Fur, who were previously a majority group in Darfur, became minorities in all three new states after the division (Leonardi and Abdul-Jalil 2011). As a result, the division reduced the power of non-Arab communities while it empowered Arab groups in Darfur. The split was, therefore, entrenched in the strategy to promote the Arabization of Darfur (Burr and Collins 2008).

The developments in Dar Dima – a Fur heartland on the plains south of Jebel Marra – after the 1994 split are illustrative of how troublesome the division was. After the division, Dar Dima became part of South Darfur whereas Zalingei (the traditional capital of the Darfur from which it used to be ruled) came to be part of West Darfur. This implied that a new leader for this territory had to be selected. Abu Mansur, a local Fur chief with close ties to the ruling party was chosen for this position. In addition to the support he gained from the regime in Khartoum, Mansur was supported by local Arab communities because he had appointed an Arab to be his deputy. In 2008, Abu Mansur stepped down in favor of his son. This move was questioned by Arab chiefs who argued that he should be replaced by his Arab deputy. This exemplifies how the government’s intended policy of the division was ful-

43 In 2012, Darfur was further split and two new states (Central Darfur and Eastern Darfur) were established (Sudan Tribune 2012a). This division was not part of a national administrative change. Instead it was only Darfur’s administrative boundaries that were changed. The decision to again divide Darfur augmented the confusion of boundaries and was taken to further the government’s interest in the region. Furthermore, this decision was taken in sharp contrast to the will of most Darfurian rebels who had argued for reuniting Darfur into one single state since they launched their rebellion (Interview with Fur Consultative Council representative, 2007).
filled because ownership of a traditional Fur area was now questioned (Tubiana, Tanner et.al 2012).

The 1994 division also had important implications in West Darfur. In this area, the split weakened the Masalit community – which likewise was perceived as antigovernment – while it empowered various Arab communities that were considered to be closer to the regime (de Waal and Flint 2008). In 1995, another administrative adjustment took place in West Darfur when the Masalit’s traditional homeland was divided into thirteen domains. Five of these territories were allocated to Arab groups. This division is commonly seen as the prime trigger for the violent communal conflicts between the Masalit and different Arab groups in the following years (ICG 2004). A critical reason for why this division had such a precarious effect was that it led to uncertainty concerning boundaries (they no longer followed traditional demarcations) and the downgrading of the traditional authority of the Masalit Sultanate (Abdul-Jalil et al. 2007).

Administrative borders in Darfur have also been corrupted at a more localized level. In South Darfur, for example, an increase in the number of administrative units has created unclear boundaries. The government has attributed provinces to certain communities, and this has led these communities to consider these areas as their ethnic chiefdoms. However, the areas where these communities actually live often do not correspond to the newly drawn boundaries. This has created overlapping systems and caused widespread tensions among the communities (ICG 2004) and intensified communal conflicts in South Darfur (Takana 2008; Interview with Mohammed 2010).

Another illustrative example of how administrative units are deliberately drawn to exacerbate tensions between communities is found in the relation between the Birgid and Reizegat communities. In an attempt to entice conflict between these communities, the government drew administrative boundaries to put the Birgid community in a minority position in a state dominated by their arch-enemy – the Reizegat. With the Birgid and the Reizegat busy fighting each other, the threat they posed to Khartoum subsid- ed (Interview with Sudanese scholar, 2011). A Birgid representative stressed that although the communities understood the government policy behind how the boundaries were drawn, the tactic was still very useful and has often lead to violence between the communities because they have problems finding an alternative way out of the situation (Interview with Birgid representative, 2011). Thus, as part of the government’s Machiavellian tactics of divide-and-conquer, administrative divisions have at times placed groups with a history of enmity into the same administrative units. Such partition is viewed by local experts as a strategic ploy to entice the groups to engage in violent confrontation and to deflect attention away from struggles with the regime (Interview with Sudanese scholar, 2011).
Unclear boundaries have also been important for the numerous conflicts that pit different Arab communities against each other and that have comprised a clear majority of the violent communal conflicts since the start of the rebellion in 2003. The prime reason for these conflicts is control of land from which non-Arab communities have been forcibly removed. To reward the communities that provided the strongest support to the government during the counterinsurgency, the regime selectively provided land only to some Arab communities.\footnote{And as described above, not all groups who had fought on the government’s side were given land (Flint 2007b).} Not only did this create deep divisions among the Arab communities, it also caused uncertainty over boundaries that further aggravated the enmity between them (ICG 2007).

The conflict between the Maaliya and Reizegat Baggara illustrates the dynamics at hand. In an attempt to weaken the Reizegat Baggara – who had remained fairly neutral throughout the civil war – the government supported the Maaliya in this conflict (Flint 2010; Tubiana et al. 2012). The Maaliya had for a long time desired a Dar of their own but were denied a homeland by the Reizegat Baggara because any area attributed to the Maaliya would have been carved out from the land the Reizegat Baggara was in control of (Mamdani 2009). However, the government favored the Maaliya’s position. In 2003, this was manifested in the government’s decision to give the Maaliya its own homeland from the land that historically had belonged to the Reizegat Baggara (Tubiana et al. 2012). The contentiousness of this issue led the conflict to escalate in the early 2000s and dozens of people were killed in both 2002 and 2004 (Sundberg et al. 2012; UCDP 2013c).

Local Rules

The third mechanism outlined in the theoretical framework posits that government bias will result in rules that are less related to local conditions. In Darfur, the interests of Khartoum have taken precedence over local circumstances throughout the studied period. Additionally, actors with extensive knowledge about the local situation have been prevented from influencing rules. Thus, in general, rules have not been related to local conditions.

The importance of taking local rules into account – and for local actors to influence such rules – is repeatedly stressed among Darfurians. The disputes among Darfurian communities, it is often asserted, can only be resolved if the government (and other outside parties) withdraw from Darfur. An essential reason for this is that external efforts to solve the disputes are doomed to failure because they lack the needed comprehension of the situation and they cannot take local dynamics appropriately into account. It is suggested that if Darfurians were allowed to play a larger role rules would reflect local conditions better and, therefore, be more successful (Interview with el-Amin,
2007). However, the government has neither withdrawn nor allowed local conditions to be appropriately reflected throughout the studied period. Instead, the regime has gained more and more influence in Darfur while local structures have been weakened (Tubiana et al. 2012). The government’s unwillingness to consider local rules is evident in the following statement by the deputy governor of South Darfur:

We want to start from scratch, to stop using traditional mediation. No judiya or traditional court. Law only. We want to impose the law, otherwise people will not feel that there is a government (cited in Tubiana et al. 2012:83)

How a lack of consideration for local circumstances contributes to communal conflicts is demonstrated by the Arab–Masalit conflict in the 1990s (described above). As part of a biased policy that empowered the Arab groups, while rebuking the Masalit, the ruling regime gave the title Amir to newly appointed Arab administrators. In Dar Masalit – the traditional area of the Masalit community in western Sudan – the title Amir is supposed to only be given to the Sultan’s son. This decision thus violated local customs and infuriated the Masalit community and as a consequence aggravated the relation between the Masalit and the Arab communities. In addition, local actors were circumvented from influencing this decision because it was taken without asking the native administrators of the area (Osman 2006).

The appointment exemplifies a general trend of breaking local traditions – and of providing local actors limited access to the decision-making process – that has existed in Darfur under the contemporary government. A result of this policy, with devastating effects for Darfur, is that conflict resolution mechanisms based on local circumstances, and performed by local actors, has been undermined. Traditionally, the native administration used methods that were locally based to solve disputes between the communities. A critical aspect of this has been to use proverbs, sayings, and citations from the Quran to boost the credibility of the decisions among the communities. Increased interference with this institution by the government, however, has decreased the extent to which the native administration is considering local rules. The government has precluded many actors with profound understanding of the Darfurian circumstances to be part of this traditional authority because it views them as antigovernment (Abdul-Jalil et al. 2007; Tubiana et al. 2012). This is particularly true of the Fur – who have historically been influential in deciding and modifying regulations regarding issues such as land-ownership and compensation – but whose influence declined when the regime came to view them as their main enemy (Interview with Mohamed, 2010).

The grave consequences that can follow when local rules are not adhered to are also illustrated by an example from the Fur–Arab war in the late-1980s and early-1990s. In May of 1989 it was decided to hold a tribal conference in El Fasher, a town in northern Darfur. This kind of consultation constituted
an ancient tradition recognized by all ethnic groups. However, the Arab communities – emboldened by the strong backing they had from the government – decided the following:

In an astonishing disregard for these established customs, the Baggara chiefs boycotted the conference. No other gesture could have been a greater insult. No other symbol could convey the arrogance of those convinced of their superiority by the power of their weaponry over the Fur whom they regarded as defeated. Within days fighting resumed with uncontrolled ferocity (Burr and Collins 2008:244).

The devastating conflict continued and later a government-sponsored peace conference attempted to solve it. However, this meeting was unable to stop the fighting because the government strongly sided with the Arab communities and was thus not entrusted as a legitimate broker by the Fur. One important reason for this consultation being unsuccessful was that it was not guided by a genuine desire to alleviate the root causes to the problem. Instead it sought to strengthen Khartoum’s influence at the communal level. To make up for the shortcomings of this initiative, local actors attempted to solve the problem. The initiators believed that the conflict could be solved if enlightened ethnic leaders – with authority within their respective community – were allowed to influence the process. The government, however, viewed this attempt as something that would decrease its influence in the region. Therefore, the regime undermined this process by restricting the involvement of crucial leaders. Local actors were thus not able to influence rules in a direction that would increase the extent to which local circumstances were considered (Mohamed 2009).

Currently, a proliferation of peace conferences sponsored by the government exists in Darfur. In general these attempts are futile and do not promote peace. A critical reason for this is that these endeavors fail to take local conditions into consideration. Furthermore, the strong involvement of the regime – which is siding with some groups – reduces their effectiveness, especially because the government is not neutral and because it restricts the involvement of more appropriate actors with an extensive comprehension of the dynamics at hand. To make matters worse, there is no coordination among initiators of these conferences. Thus, these conferences in general do not enhance cooperation, but rather contribute to chaos (Abdul-Jalil 2009; Interview with Mohammed 2001). In contrast, initiatives where the government is not in control do not get any logistical or financial support, which decreases their ability to play a constructive role (ICG 2004).

When examining local rules and communal conflicts in Darfur, it becomes clear that the involvement of the international community has further distanced rules from local conditions. The atrocities that characterized the Sudanese government’s counterinsurgency against the 2003 rebellion meant
that Darfur became a major concern for international actors, including the UN, AU, and numerous NGOs. Not only have international actors been involved in trying to solve the conflict between the rebels and the government, they have also attempted peaceful management of more localized conflicts. In particular, numerous international NGOs have focused on conflicts between communities. However, in general these peace-promoting efforts have failed to appropriately consider local dynamics (Interview with Sudanese scholar, 2011). One reason for this is that it is difficult for concerned international actors to identify appropriate leaders to interact with, which means that leaders with the best understanding of local circumstances might be ignored. This can create tensions and contribute to power struggles among local leaders (Tubiana et al. 2012). The role of international actors for communal conflict management has been summarized by Morton (2011:25):

NGOs are working with tribal leaderships, in some cases funding their activities. The approach is ad hoc and there is no overall strategy, or capacity to form one. It took the British many years to achieve a rather imperfect understanding of the institutions underlying the idarat al ahlia,[civil administration, explanation added] and the highly political personalities which led it. An NGO which was working on humanitarian aid until last year, and which is only funded for two years anyway, cannot hope to achieve the same. The result is the embarrassing sight of Darfuri shaykhs and omdas, [traditional leaders, explanation added] who have been brought up in a centuries-old tradition of conflict management, being taught ‘How to Work With Conflict’ out of a glossy manual printed in Birmingham.

The lack of appropriately considering local circumstances was also crucial for the failure of the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) signed May 5, 2006 between the Sudanese government and one of the Darfuri rebel groups (the SLM/A faction led by Mini Minawi). In addition to dealing with the civil war, the DPA also stipulated aspects important for communal conflicts, such as the Darfur-Darfur Dialogue and Consultation (DDDC), which was a dialogue initiative meant to only include Darfurians (DPA 2006). The inclusion of the DDDC was supposed to ensure legitimacy of the agreement among the local communities. Instead, the agreement was widely viewed among Darfurians as being extremely inappropriate and even futile because the root causes of the problem were not considered. Although the agreement stipulated that local perspectives should be taken into account, the negotiations leading up to the signing of the DPA focused solely on the warring parties and local communities were not allowed to influence the decisions as to which issues should be addressed (Brosché 2011b; Mohamed 2009; Nathan 2006). The result of the DPA was disastrous. Not only did it add to an intensification of the civil war and fragmentation of the rebel groups, it also had a deteriorating effect on the relations among Darfur’s communities (Interview with Sudanese scholar, 2011). The horrifying humanitarian situa-
tion in Darfur at the time put pressure on the mediators to reach a quick agreement. However, the DPA prolonged rather than shortened the conflict (Nathan 2007).45

5.4 Conclusions from Within-region Analysis

Since the contemporary Sudanese government took power in 1989, Darfur has witnessed numerous violent communal conflicts. Up until 2003 these conflicts were primarily fought between Arab and non-Arab communities. Not only did these conflicts kill thousands of people, they were also a critical reason for the start of the 2003 rebellion, which is still ongoing. In parallel to the civil war, violent communal conflicts continue to devastate Darfur. During the last decade, however, they have primarily pitted various Arab communities against each other. The question to ask, then, is why Darfur has been devastated by violent communal conflicts since the late-1980s.

The theoretical argument outlined in Chapter 2 finds strong empirical support in the case of Darfur. The contemporary Sudanese government has acted in a biased manner toward some of the communities in Darfur throughout its time in power. Crucial reasons for this biasedness are to be found in the extensive threats – and limited opportunities – that Darfur presents to the regime. The primary threat consists of various rebel groups that have challenged the government. Another important source of the government’s bias is that the regime has promoted Arabization in Darfur. Policies of partiality have disrupted the interaction between local and central elites as well as among local elites. These negative elite interactions have reduced the incentive to cooperate with the regime among local elites representing disadvantaged communities, and they have also undermined the native administration that was previously an important arena for fruitful interactions among local elites.

Government bias, and the negative elite interaction it entails, has contributed to Darfur’s violent communal conflicts by negatively affecting the three mechanisms emphasized in the theoretical framework. First, proportional sanctions are not present in Darfur. Instead, the government’s bias has implied that punishments depend on communal affiliation rather than the context and severity of a violation. Perpetrators from communities perceived as antigovernment are repeatedly punished more harshly than offenders from communities that are more supportive of the regime. Importantly, some groups enjoy impunity. This has undermined traditional conflict manage-

45 In addition, the referral of the Darfur crisis to the International Criminal Court (ICC) led to a distancing from the local context of Sudan. In this process, international actors called for accountability, but this process was dominated by international – rather than local – actors and local complexities were largely overlooked (Sørbo and Ghaffar 2013).
ment methods and decreased the fear of punishment among certain communities. The disincentives to use violence, therefore, have subsided.

Second, Khartoum’s constant favoring of some groups in Darfur has led to increased uncertainty as to boundaries in the region, which has aggravated the relations among Darfur’s communities. To weaken the power of the communities viewed as the most severe threat – primarily the Fur, Zaghawa, and Masalit – and to empower its allies, the government has repeatedly changed administrative boundaries. In 1994, the state of Darfur was divided into three. This was above all done to weaken the Fur, which the government viewed as its main enemy at the time. The Fur went from a majority position in Darfur to being a minority in the three new states. Similar strategies have continued throughout the examined time period, and these have frequently contributed to violent communal conflicts. Modifications of the land system have been particularly important in increasing the likelihood of violent communal conflicts.

Third, the regime’s biased behavior towards Darfur’s communities has distanced rules from local conditions and prevented local actors with extensive knowledge from influencing regulations. For centuries, a fairly peaceful coexistence among Darfur’s tribes was enabled by local conflict resolution mechanisms. This was primarily through elites from the various communities as part of the native administration. To be effective, this institution needs autonomy. However, the current regime has severely decreased the sovereignty of this traditional authority. To empower itself – and its provincial allies – the government has restricted actors that previously have been pivotal in solving disputes from taking part in these processes.

Thus, all three mechanisms suggested to be essential for connecting government bias to violent communal conflicts find support in the case of Darfur. The examination of the three variables in this chapter does not suggest that any of the mechanisms are more important than the others. Instead, they seem to carry fairly equal weight in terms of explanatory power. Furthermore, the three mechanisms sometimes interact and can further contribute to the same violent communal conflict. Such interactions can be illustrated by the violent communal conflict between the Masalit and the Arabs. This conflict was ignited by an adjustment of administrative boundaries, which weakened the Masalit and empowered the Arabs. The effects of this change were exacerbated because local rules were not reflected – and local actors were sidestepped – when these modifications were carried out. An important aspect of this dynamic was that newly appointed Arab leaders were entitled Amirs, which was in sharp contrast to local traditions. Previously only the sons of the Masalit’s Sultan were authorized to use this title. Another important aspect of this conflict was unfair punishments. Early in this conflict, Arabs destroyed a cluster of Masalit villages and killed many people. However, the government did nothing to punish these crimes, which escalated the
conflict. Thus, all three mechanisms played a crucial role for this violent conflict between the Masalit and the Arabs.

A reasonable question to ask is whether there are any alternative explanations that can explain Darfur’s violent communal conflicts in a more profound manner. A core reason often stated for the Darfurian crisis is environmental change. For instance, the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon has labeled it as an environmental conflict (Ban Ki Moon 2007). This dimension has not been emphasized in this chapter, but this does not mean that ecological factors are unimportant for Darfur’s communal conflicts. Instead, many of them are fought over scarce resources, primarily land. Likewise, the famine that devastated Darfur in 1984–1985 contributed to social disorder and internal displacement in the region, which had important implications for the developments that followed (de Waal 1989). However, the findings in this chapter are in line with Alex de Waal’s analysis in relation to Ban Ki Moon’s description of Darfur:

Climate change causes livelihood change, which in turn causes disputes. Social institutions can handle these conflicts and settle them in a non-violent manner—it is mismanagement and militarization that cause war and massacre (de Waal 2007a). Environment problems can be dealt with in many different ways, and relatively peaceful coexistence between communities is a possibility during prevailing scarcities. Furthermore, the focus of this study is not on why a dispute emerges in the first place, but why some disputes escalate to violent communal conflicts but others are solved relatively peacefully. A focus on both institutions and actors is particularly suitable for this question. Environmental stress might serve to explain why a dispute arises in the first place, but does not explain why some of them are resolved peacefully but others are not.

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46 This famine also had severe effects in Eastern Sudan with considerable loss of livestock. The Beja, for instance, lost 80% of their livestock in the mid-1980s because of this famine (Pantuliano 2005) and this community is still suffering of the effects from this drought (Assal 2013). Still, this did not have the same grave effects on the relations between the communities in this region.

47 A similar description is provided by Sørbo (2012) who describes the crisis in Darfur as consisting of many factors and cannot be explained by only climate issues.
Eastern Sudan is an impoverished region of Sudan that is inhabited by numerous cattle and camel pastoralists as well as farming communities that display a wide ethnic diversity (Miller 2005). Persistent drought, land degradation, and shrinking pasture areas makes the living conditions in the region very harsh (UNDP 2010) and disputes between the region’s multiple ethnic groups over scarce resources are common. These quarrels pit pastoralists against farmers, as well as pastoralists against other pastoralists, and center around issues like land, water, and trespassing. These disputes, however, do not generally turn into violent communal conflicts. Why?

This chapter traces the causes of the relatively peaceful relations among Eastern Sudan’s communities that have prevailed throughout the examined time period (1989–2012). It finds that the government has behaved relatively neutrally toward the various groups inhabiting the region and this is important in explaining why the prevalence of violent communal conflicts is low in Eastern Sudan. Importantly, the government does not constantly favor some communities or repeatedly disfavor others. The reasons for this relative impartiality can be found in the threats and opportunities the region present to the regime. Although some communities – primarily the Beja – have been involved in insurgencies against the government, these rebellions have been quite small compared to rebellions in other areas of Sudan. In addition, Eastern Sudan possesses crucial strategic and economic assets for the government. Port Sudan, located in the region, is the only oil-exporting harbor in Sudan and constitutes the major economic lifeline for the government. To ensure control over Port Sudan (and the pipeline transporting the oil to it), stability is important. As a consequence, the government has been reluctant to use militias in Eastern Sudan because this often leads to disorder. The limited use of such tactics in Eastern Sudan has contributed to the relatively neutral behavior of the government.

The reasonably impartial manner in which Khartoum has treated Eastern Sudan’s communities has enabled positive interaction between local and central elites as well as among local elites. In particular, the government interrelates fruitfully with the native administration, which is also an important arena for positive interaction among local elites. Furthermore, the

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48 Eastern Sudan’s ethnic diversity applies to both urban and rural areas and is largest in Gedaref State (Miller 2005).
government’s fairly unbiased behavior – and the constructive elite interaction that this has produced – has been positive in terms of the three mechanisms postulated to be important for communal cooperation. First, sanctions after a violation has taken place generally depend on the severity and context of the violation rather than on the communal affiliation of the violator. Importantly, no community enjoys impunity in the region. Second, boundaries are fairly clear in Eastern Sudan. Administrative units are fairly stable and have not been adjusted to shift power balances between the communities. Third, rules important for Eastern Sudan’s communities tend to reflect local conditions, and actors with appropriate knowledge about local circumstances are allowed to influence these regulations. This enhances collaboration among the communities as an entrusted system for important decisions is in place. Taken together, these factors have enabled rather peaceful coexistence between Eastern Sudan’s communities and – despite harsh living conditions – violent communal conflicts are exceedingly rare in Eastern Sudan.

To situate Eastern Sudan’s communal conflicts, this chapter starts by outlining the region’s general conflict situation. The focus is thereafter on communal conflicts. The situation of government bias and elite interaction is subsequently described. Then, the link between government bias and communal conflict is investigated with the focus being on the three mechanisms outlined in the theoretical framework of this thesis. The chapter ends with some conclusions from the within-region analysis.

6.1 Conflicts in Eastern Sudan

The four conflict types constituting the Darfur conflict are also present in Eastern Sudan. First, communal conflict (at a low level of violence) over scarce resources, particularly land, has been ongoing for centuries in the region. Second, local elite conflicts have created severe intra-party difficulties among the rebels. Third, Eastern Sudan is severely marginalized vis-à-vis the center, which creates severe center-periphery conflicts. Fourth, cross-border conflicts, particularly the relation between Sudan and Eritrea, are an integral part of the conflict situation in the region.

Eastern Sudan is located in a frontier area bordering northern Ethiopia and western Eritrea. The area where these three countries meet has witnessed conflicts for generations (Young 2006b). In addition, the regimes in Khartoum, Addis Ababa, and Asmara have repeatedly supported one’s another’s opponents (Young 2007a) The largest ethnic group in Eastern Sudan is the Beja. In 1958, the Beja Congress, a political party that promotes the rights of this marginalized group, was formed (Pantuliano 2006). The struggle to improve the situation for the impoverished Beja was fought with non-violent means for decades. In 1995, however, the Beja Congress declared armed
struggle against the Sudanese government (ICG 2006). Extensive expropriation of Beja land was a key determinant for this decision (Pantuliano 2005). Two other important factors for the existing infuriation among the Beja were that many Beja had been forcefully recruited into the army and that in April 1990 more than 200 men (two thirds of whom were Beja) were killed extrajudicially because of their assumed involvement in an alleged coup plot (ICG 2006). When the Beja Congress took up arms it was done as part of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), an antigovernment umbrella organization under the command of SPLM/A leader John Garang, that it had joined in 1993 (Young 2007b; Johnson 2006). Essential for the increased tension in Eastern Sudan at the time was the deteriorating relation between Sudan and Eritrea in the mid-1990s. Khartoum provided extensive support to Eritrean rebels in their struggle for independence from Ethiopia, because Ethiopia had strongly backed the SPLM/A rebels in southern Sudan. However, after Eritrea gained independence in 1993, Khartoum started to train Eritrean Jihadist rebels. As a response, the Eritrean government initiated support for the Beja insurgents (ICG 2006).

The military activities of the Beja Congress started in 1996 when it attacked numerous bridges and government military training camps (Lesch Mosely 1998). Under the NDA banner, the Beja Congress, together with the SPLM/A and some other smaller groups, repeatedly tried to shut down Port Sudan. These attempts failed, but in 1997 the rebels succeeded in gaining control of large parts of the areas of Eastern Sudan that bordered Eritrea. The armed rebellion in the east constituted a new front in the Sudanese civil war, which previously had been fought in southern Sudan (and some border areas between the south and the north). This new front posed a serious threat to Khartoum because it challenged strategic transportation routes to Port Sudan. It also came at a critical time because preparations for oil exports, which started in 1999, were ongoing at the time (ICG 2002, 2006). The fighting in Eastern Sudan peaked in 2000 when the oil pipeline and several army outposts were attacked. The government, however, mobilized impressive military strength. This enabled it to generally keep the fighting close to the Eritrean border, which prevented major damage to economically vital interests such as the pipeline, Port Sudan, and mechanized farming (ICG 2006). The NDA rebellion continued until 2001 and caused more than 3 000

49 The Beja are a non-Arab community divided into various groups of which the four largest are the Bisharien, Amar’ar, Hadendowa and Beni Amer (Al-Hardallu and El Tayeb 2005). However, it should be noted that it is debated if the Beni Amer should be seen as Beja or a distinctive group (Assal 2013). In numbers, the Beja are followed by the Shukriya and Dabyna. These two groups are considered Arabs. Eastern Sudan also contains smaller Arab groups such as the Rashaida, Kinana, Jaaliyn, Baggara, and Jawama. In addition, numerous non-Arab groups live in Eastern Sudan. In Gedariif, the southernmost state in Eastern Sudan, Hausa, Zabarma, Bargo and Ambararo constitute 30% – 40% of the population. Moreover, many groups originating in South Sudan (such as Dinka and Nuer) and West Sudan (such as Fur, Tama, Masalit and Dajo) live in the region (Al-Hardallu and El Tayeb 2005).
battle-related deaths (UCDP 2013). At that time, the power of the NDA had declined because of increased internal problems as well as decreased support from Eritrea (ICG 2006; Young 2007b).

In 2003, the Beja Congress restarted its military action because it was excluded from negotiations between the SPLM/A and the government. The following year, the Beja Congress signed a memorandum of understanding with the Darfurian rebel group JEM, which had its headquarters in Asmara, the capital of Eritrea, at the time. Although the military presence of JEM was rather limited, the group was important for the military capabilities of the Beja Congress. Two years after it had resumed its rebellion, the Beja Congress merged with the Rashaida Free Lions, a rebel group formed in 1999. The Rashaida is a tribe inhabiting both sides of the Eritrean–Sudanese border (Young 2008). Depletion of natural resources and destruction of roads for pastoralists were the main grievances for the Rashaida (ICG 2006). Together with some smaller groups from the Shukriya and Dabaina communities, the Beja Congress and the Rashaida Free Lions formed a united movement called the Eastern Front (Pantuliano 2005). This group demanded that Sudan should be governed through federalism to empower the different regions of the country. Moreover, it held strong land grievances and wanted to strengthen Easterners control over land in the region. The Eastern Front carried out some hit-and-run attacks, but the opportunities for the rebels were limited due to the government’s heavy security presence in the region (ICG 2006).

After a few years of low-intensity rebellion, the fighting ceased due to the signing of the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement (ESPA) in October 2006 (Assal and Ali 2007). The agreement was negotiated by the Eritrean government, which was also the only security guarantor, and the agreement is generally viewed as an accord between Asmara and Khartoum rather than between Eastern Sudan and the Sudanese government. The ESPA improved relations between the Eritrean and Sudanese regimes and can be seen as a by-product of reconciling relations between the two states (Young 2007b).

6.2 Communal Conflicts

In rural Eastern Sudan, small-scale agriculture, pastoralism, and mechanized farming are the three dominant livelihoods. Disputes between different pas-

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50 Again government atrocities contributed to an escalation in violence. In January 2005 more than 20 demonstrators were killed in a peaceful protest in Port Sudan. This enraged the Beja community and added to radicalization of the community (ICG 2006).
51 The low magnitude of the rebellion is illustrated by the fact that it never reached the UCDP threshold of 25 battle-related deaths in a calendar year.
52 A prevailing feeling in Eastern Sudan is that Asmara sacrificed the Eastern Front in order to enhance its relation with Khartoum (Interviews in Eastern Sudan March-April 2010).
toralist communities, as well as quarrels between pastoralists and farmers, regularly take place in the region (Interview with pastoralist union representative, 2010). However, these conflicts are generally not particularly violent (el-Amin 2004). Instead most of these disputes are resolved peacefully, although occasionally one or two individuals are killed. In total about 10–15 persons die every year in communal conflicts in Eastern Sudan (Interview with international NGO representative, 2010). It is thus exceedingly rare that tensions between the communities turn into violent communal conflicts.

During the time period examined (1989–2012), only one violent communal conflict took place in Eastern Sudan (UCDP 2013b). In 1997, a conflict between the Nuer and Dinka communities caused 35 fatalities and, therefore meets this study’s threshold for a violent communal conflict. These communities originate in southern Sudan and had fled to Eastern Sudan to escape the war in the south. At the time, different South Sudanese rebel factions fought each other fiercely. This fighting involved a distinct ethnic dimension pitting Nuer against Dinka. The violent communal conflict between the Dinka and Nuer in Eastern Sudan was embedded in these hostilities (UCDP 2013c; UNHCR 2010).

Conflicts over natural resources such as land and water have historically occurred among the communities of Eastern Sudan (Al-Hardallu and El Tayeb 2005). Likewise, the contemporary situation in Eastern Sudan is contentious with many communities competing over access to land. Importantly, land available for pastoralists and agriculturalists has decreased in the region due to environmental factors and increased mechanized farming (Assal 2006). Thus, mechanized farming causes problem for both pastoralists and farmers. However, such problems do not regularly pit different communities against each other, and are therefore not a regular cause of disputes between communities. In contrast, the various ethnic groups often use different sources of income in terms of pastoralism or small-scale farming, and this contributes to the strong ethnic identification that prevails among Eastern Sudan’s communities (Miller 2005).

Another source of communal tensions in Eastern Sudan is that the communities strive for political recognition. One group might attempt to demonstrate its importance by challenging another community, which can lead to a conflict between the two communities (Interview with Sudanese academic, 2010). Furthermore, conflicts between individuals from different communities can turn to a communal conflict. Whether disputes between two persons remain at an individual level, or turn communal, is often decided by the issue that is at stake. If a conflict between two individuals concerns issues like

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53 Participants at a seminar organized at the University of Gedarif on March 29, 2010 confirm this. At the seminar it was asked if any conflict was overlooked by the UCDP data. Native administrators and local academics gathered during the seminar could not think of a conflict that had been violent enough to be included.
money, the solution should be found among these individuals. In contrast, if a conflict centers on land, water, or grazing it becomes a group responsibility because of the strong communal identity among Eastern Sudan’s communities (Al-Hardallu and El Tayeb 2005).

6.3 Government Bias and Communal Conflict

How can the general lack of violent communal conflicts in Eastern Sudan be explained? To examine this question, this section outlines how the Sudanese government has acted towards the communities inhabiting Eastern Sudan and examines whether partiality or neutrality takes precedence. To investigate the dynamic at hand in more detail, it will also be examined how elites interact in the region and how government behavior influences relations between the communities via the three theoretical mechanisms suggested to influence cooperation.

**Government Bias**

Throughout the studied period, the government has acted in a fairly impartial way towards Eastern Sudan’s communities. In fact, the general feeling expressed when Easterners were interviewed was that the government’s behavior did not differentiate strongly between the various communities in Eastern Sudan. No particular community was constantly disfavored and no community received strong support from the regime. However, this should not be interpreted that attitudes toward the government in general are positive in the region. Instead many interviewees expressed deep frustration with the government, and the prevailing poverty in the region was the prime complaint articulated. This resentment was expressed by people from numerous communities, thus, the impoverishment and marginalization of the region seems to cut across ethnic affiliation. The relatively unbiased manner in which Khartoum treats the communities of Eastern Sudan does not imply that the government is completely impartial. Instead, pastoralists, as well as some analysts, see the regime as somewhat partial in favor of the agriculturalists (Babiker et al. 2005; Interview with pastoralist union representative, 2010). Also, Khartoum has exploited the economic opportunities of Eastern Sudan (ICG 2006) and favors mechanized farming in which it has large monetary interests (Elhadary and Samat 2011). Moreover, instead of strongly favoring some Eastern Sudanese constituencies over others, the government favors

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54 The strong communal identification can be exemplified by motivation the Rashaida have to join the Rashaida Free Lions. A key motivation for recruits was tribal duty (Bass 2013).

55 Notably, this neutrality relates to the government’s treatment of the communities and thus does not imply that Eastern Sudan as a region is not disfavored.
people from the center of the country – Khartoum and its surroundings. In fact, a prevailing grievance among the communities in Eastern Sudan is that employment and important positions in the public and private sphere are given to non-Easterners (Assal 2013).

The prime factors explaining why Khartoum has acted in a fairly unbiased manner towards the communities of Eastern Sudan relates to opportunities. Eastern Sudan is economically vital for the regime and brings about critical opportunities for the government. As previously mentioned, oil constitutes the preeminent economic asset for the regime in Khartoum, and Sudan’s only oil-exporting harbor is located in Port Sudan. This town at the Red Sea coast is, therefore, of highest economic and strategic interest for the government. It is also the town through which most foreign trade passes (ICG 2006). The importance of Port Sudan is emphasized by the SPLM/A attacks in 1997 (as part of the NDA umbrella organization) that were carried out in Eastern Sudan in order to “cut off Port Sudan, which is the lifeline of Khartoum”, according to its leader at the time John Garang (Reuters 1997). The government’s control over Port Sudan was threatened throughout the NDA rebellion (1996–2001). To secure control over Port Sudan, Khartoum mobilized an extraordinary display of military strength.\(^{56}\) In fact, three times as many troops were allegedly deployed in Eastern Sudan than in Darfur (ICG 2006). Other essential economic assets, such as mechanized farming, are also located in Eastern Sudan. To safeguard these resources, the government promotes stability in the region. Consequently, policies that are too partial have been avoided because such strategies could create disorder (Interview with Sudanese academic, 2010). Therefore, because the region constitutes such economic importance, the government cannot afford a conflict of similar scale in Eastern Sudan as it can in Darfur or in southern Sudan (ICG 2006).

Despite the threat that the different rebellions constitute to the government, the economic opportunities in the region are more significant. In particular, the need for stability to harvest the economic assets in Eastern Sudan has led the regime to be reluctant to use tribal militias as part of its military strategy because this is a tactic that often creates chaos. Still, it is true that some attempts to recruit militias exist. But the government has been unwilling to empower them and has, instead, firmly relied on its military (ICG 2006; Interview with Sudanese academic, 2010). Furthermore, the largest

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\(^{56}\) After the secession of South Sudan Khartoum’s income from oil drastically decreased and in June 2012, the regime in Juba decided to close its oil-fields because of disagreements with its Sudanese counterpart about how much the former should pay the latter for transporting the oil to South Sudan (Sørbo and Ahmed 2013). Although the production of oil restarted in April 2013 (Sudan Tribune 2012e), oil revenues are still drastically lower after the split with South Sudan than before. This means that even though Port Sudan continues to be important as Sudan’s major port, the significance of the city has decreased in the last years, which might have important consequences for policies in the future.
militia recruitment endeavors in Eastern Sudan sought to recruit Easterners to fight against SPLM/A in Southern Sudan not to fight in Eastern Sudan (ICG 2013). After chaos erupted in Darfur, Khartoum became even more reluctant to use militias in Eastern Sudan because it did not want a similar pattern of conflict in that region (Interview with Masalit representative, 2010).

**Elite Interaction**

During the examined time period, elite interaction has generally been constructive in Eastern Sudan. This is true both for interactions between the government and leaders of the communities and for interaction among local elites.

The positive elite interaction in Eastern Sudan is manifested in how the government interrelates with the native administration and how local elites cooperate within this traditional authority. The system of native administration is in place throughout Sudan, but the effectiveness of this system varies significantly. In some areas it has been undermined whereas it has remained effective in others. Eastern Sudan is a particularly good example of the latter (el-Amin 2004). In fact, the native administration is hailed as fundamental for the generally peaceful coexistence among Eastern Sudan’s communities (Interviews in Gedarif March-April 2010). The relatively neutral behavior of the government is essential for the effectiveness of this institution in Eastern Sudan.

Trustworthy and neutral mediators are key to the successful outcome of conflict resolution processes. Such mediators are only effective if they are acknowledged as neutral parties and not if they appear to be representing a stakeholder in the conflict (including a particular ethnic group or government interest) [italics added] (Al-Hardallu and El Tayeb 2005:6).

In particular, the regime allows this traditional authority to serve as a low-cost and rapidly accessible arena for conflict resolution. An important aspect of how this neutrality contributes to positive elite interaction is that it allows local elites to be accountable to their constituencies (Interview with legislature representative, 2010). Instead of undermining, or replacing, local elites with a strong position within the communities, the government permits them to remain accountable to the communities they serve (Interview with pastoralist union representative, 2010). This community-based accountability increases the ability of the local elites because it enhances the communities’

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57 This was unanimously stressed by interviewees in Eastern Sudan. Even people who perceptibly could hold a negative view to this traditional authority (such as younger people aspiring to prominent positions within the community) perceived the native administration as fundamental for inter-communal relations in the region.
respect for their decisions. This strategy is based in the cooptation strategy that the Sudanese regime uses in Eastern Sudan (ICG 2006). This cooptation leads to cooperation between central and local elites because they are mutually dependent on each other. A key aspect of this strategy is that it does not strongly differentiate between various communities, and the government seeks to establish such relations with elites from all communities. The government seeks stability in the region and believes that local elites, through the native administration, can contribute to such calm. The local elites, on the other hand, are dependent on the government to keep the influential positions they have been given (Interview with European academic, 2011).58

A crucial aspect of constructive central–local elite interaction in Eastern Sudan is that the government and the native administration often cooperate to manage conflicts. In Kassala state, for instance, a native council system in which native administrators gather to solve conflicts has been successful. The government finances the project and has a symbolic presence, but it is the native administrators who control the work in the council. In this case, the government and the local elites complement each other well. The central authority provides resources that the native administrations lack, but native administrators are responsible for the actual managing of disputes and this enhances the council’s efficiency (Al-Hardallu and El Tayeb 2005).

The positive dynamic between the most important central elite – the government – and the most important local elite – native administrators – is further illustrated by an example from Gedarif. In November 2008, a pastoralist from the Beni Amer tribe killed a Masalit farmer. People worried that, in the absence of an intervention, the killing would lead to a war between these two communities. However, community leaders from many different tribes as well as the Wali (governor) went to ease the situation. They succeeded in convincing the Masalit not to retaliate, which calmed the situation, and no more killings were carried out. The Beni Amer pastoralist who killed the Masalit is now imprisoned (Interview with pastoralist union representative, 2010).

Relations among local elites in Eastern Sudan take many different forms. Ethnic and ideological differences have led to severe power struggles that have weakened the influence of political movements in Eastern Sudan. This has restricted the latter from forming a unified counterpart to Khartoum (Assal 2013; Young 2007b). Nonetheless, in terms of inter-communal conflicts, local elites have predominantly interacted in a constructive manner in Eastern Sudan, and again the role of the native administration has been crucial. An important reason for the efficacy of this institution is that the native

58 Here it is important to note that the elite interactions in focus here are between native administrators and government officials, as these are the ones deemed as most important for communal conflicts. At higher political levels, such as governorships, however, regional leaders might be undermined if they are perceived as threats. Still, oftentimes political threats are dealt with by co-optation and bribes at this level (Assal 2013; ICG 2013).
administration in Eastern Sudan has a committee for conflict resolution that meets once a month. This team is also always on standby to meet as soon as a dispute emerges. This committee comprises local elites from various communities, and constitutes a rapidly accessible arena for conflict management (Interview with legislature representative, 2010). A conflict taking place in Port Sudan that pitted the Beni Amer and Beja communities against each other illustrates the dynamics at hand. When the conflict started, native administrators from the whole eastern part of the country (Gedarif, Kassala, and Red Sea) and representing several ethnic groups were called in. These local elites succeeded in calming the situation and preventing the conflict from escalating (Interview with legislature representative, 2010).

The significance of the native administration is enhanced because the communities of Eastern Sudan, in general, prefer this device – rather than formal courts – as the arena to solve communal disputes. A predominant feeling in Eastern Sudan is that prominent local elites are more effective at solving such disputes than other actors are. Eastern Sudan’s communities consider government solutions unlikely, and if they happen they are generally short-lived. This feeling stems from a conviction that rulings from a formal court are apt for revisions, and this flexibility creates uncertainty in the system. The informal mechanisms of conflict resolution that are used by the native administration, in contrast, build on consensus and respect and this makes it unlikely that their decisions will be revised (Al-Hardallu and El Tayeb 2005).

The strong foundation of the native administration in Eastern Sudan has also decreased tensions between local elites within this system and local elites outside it. Rivalry over influence within the community can lead aspiring leaders to challenge traditional authorities. In Eastern Sudan, such conflicts have not been particularly fierce and younger elites seem to respect the traditional authorities even when they have different opinions. This has contributed to a comparatively constructive cooperation among these various local elites. In Port Sudan, for instance, youth elements of the Beja community were about to attack certain government installations but refrained from doing so out of respect for tribal leaders who asked them not to destroy the infrastructure (Pantuliano 2005). Likewise, some rural Beja youths who were strongly critical of the traditional leaders of their community still upheld the system of customary dispute resolution in which they saw the native administration as fundamental (Leonardi and Abdul-Jalil 2011).

Sanctions

The first mechanism assumed to be important for how government bias influences relations between the communities relates to sanctions. In Eastern Sudan, decisions on punishments reflect the seriousness and context of a violation and this takes precedence over other factors such as the communal
affiliation of the perpetrator. Thus, sanctions are generally proportional in the region, and several factors point in this direction.

First, none of the communities inhabiting Eastern Sudan has blanket impunity. Although actions taken by the government are sometimes accused of being biased, the regime is overall not seen to have certain enemies that it constantly rules against (Interviews in Eastern Sudan, March-April 2010). An important reason for sanctions being proportional in Eastern Sudan is that the region has not experienced any widespread use of ethnic militias, which often contributes to discriminate punishments (Interview with Sudanese academic, 2010). When a government uses such tactics, it needs to favor certain communities to facilitate recruitment into these military entities. Other communities will consequently be biased against. Furthermore, this often implies that the communities from which the militia is recruited receive impunity (Roessler 2005; de Waal 2004).

Second, cooperation between the government and the native administration ensures that sanctions will be proportional. One example of this is that the native administration sometimes identifies criminals who are later imprisoned by the government (Interview with native administrator, 2010). Because various communities are represented in the native administration, and none of them is constantly disregarded, this decreases the risk that the ethnic association of a perpetrator will overrule the circumstances and gravity of a crime. This increases communities’ confidence that such rulings are fair, and this promotes cooperation among the different groups (Interview with pastoralist union representative, 2010).

Third, an important device to ensure peaceful coexistence between communities throughout rural Sudan is the paying of Diya (blood money) if a killing has taken place. In this process, the community from which a perpetrator belongs will be collectively responsible to deliver compensation to the victim’s community. This system of sanctioning abuses is strongly dependent on fairness. If rulings deciding Diya amounts are perceived as prejudicial, the system loses its credibility. In Eastern Sudan, decisions over compensation amounts are generally seen as fair and the system of Diya is functional and plays an important role in settling disputes between the communities (Interview with Omda from western Sudan, 2010). For instance, the paying of Diya was important for the resolution of a conflict between the Bergo and Falata communities. After a Bergo farmer killed a man from the Falata tribe in 2009, the native administration instantly arbitrated. As part of this intervention, Diya was paid and the situation calmed. The immediacy of this intervention, and the paying of Diya, was essential for resolution of the conflict because it prevented revenge that could have led to vicious circles of conflict (Interview with Omda from western Sudan, 2010).

Despite sanctions generally being proportional in Eastern Sudan, there were still severe flaws in the justice system. A prominent example that has caused widespread resentment in Eastern Sudan is what is referred to as the
Port Sudan Massacre. On January 29, 2005, policemen attacked a peaceful protest in Port Sudan, and 22 people – mainly Beja – were killed. The families of the victims have called for compensation and the perpetrators to be punished. However, eight years after the incident the policemen involved in the incident still enjoy impunity (All Africa 2013; ICG 2013). However, this impunity was not based on communal affiliation, but on being employed by the government.

**Boundaries**

The second mechanism in the theoretical framework proposes that biased governments often result in less clear boundaries and, therefore, augments the risk for communal conflict. In Eastern Sudan, the administrative boundaries are fairly well defined.

As part of a national division of administrative units in 1994, Eastern Sudan was split into the three states of Gedarif, Red Sea, and Kassala. However, the split in the East did not create extensive confusion over boundaries because it did not extensively shift power balances between the communities. Importantly, boundaries were not primarily drawn to favor some communities over others (Interview with Sudanese academic, 2010). After this division, the administrative units have remained rather stable and dividing administrative units has not been a political tool used to disempower particular communities (Interview with European academic, 2011). The fact that administrative units have remained rather intact is important because in a region where land is crucial for rural communities such changes are very contentious, especially if divisions benefit one community over another (Interview with pastoralist union representative, 2010).

In Eastern Sudan (as in Darfur) the system of *Dars* (tribal homelands) is critical for access to land and for political recognition (el-Amin 2004). Land ownership is also essential at a sub-tribe, and clan, level because it symbolizes cultural identity and history (el-Amin 2004). The struggle for *Dars* is, therefore, a constant trigger for conflict among Eastern Sudan’s communities. For example, the Rashaida are not in possession of any *Dar* and are considered guests on Beja land. The Rashaida have a strong desire to obtain their own *Dar*, but such attempts have been thwarted by the Beja. This has led to a persistent dispute between the two communities. The Beja are not only economically dependent on their land but also culturally and emotionally attached to it, and this increases the contentiousness of the issue (Al-Hardallu and El Tayeb 2005). In 1994, the current regime gave the

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59 In addition, there also exist customary laws that organize access to water.
60 Numerous communities in Eastern Sudan share this cultural attachment for land. For pastoralist communities like the Hadendowa also livestock is culturally important (Manger 1996).
Rashaida a Nazirate without land. This implies that, although they were not offered any Dar, they were politically recognized and given a prominent position within the native administration. This decision left the Beja dissatisfied (ICG 2006), but this conflict has not led to any major outbreak of violence (el-Amin 2004). An important reason for this is that although the Rashaida were given a Nazirate, their demand for a Dar was denied, which means that the change did not disrupt power relations to the same degree as receiving their own Dar would have done. Likewise, the Masalit community desires its own Dar in Gedarif State but this demand has been denied by the Shukriya community (Al-Hardallu and El Tayeb 2005). This dispute has also avoided turning into a violent communal conflict.

Another important dimension concerning boundaries relates to masarats (roads) used by pastoralists when moving their animals. In Eastern Sudan, masarats are not properly demarcated, and this is a constant concern for Eastern Sudan’s communities and regularly causes disputes among pastoralists and agriculturalists. From the pastoralists’ perspective, the main problem is that the roads are too narrow and that farmers often cultivate them. According to the farmers, however, the main problem is that the pastoralists’ animals eat the farmers’ crops. The government allocates these roads to the pastoralists, but often fails to communicate this to the farmers and has not bought the land from them (Interview with Beni Amer cow nomads, 2010; Interview with Gedarif government official, 2010). Both groups, therefore, view themselves as rightful owners of this piece of land, which repeatedly leads to disputes among the communities (Interview with eight farmers, 2010). The problems related to masarats are aggravated by the expansion of mechanized farming (Badal 2006). Except for masarats, the boundaries are fairly clear and have not been extensively disarrayed in Eastern Sudan.

Local Rules

The third mechanism presented in the theoretical framework holds that biased governments tend to contribute to violent communal conflict by failing to relate rules to local conditions and by not allowing local actors to influence rules. In Eastern Sudan, the government generally tolerates rules related to local circumstances and permits local actors to influence regulations.

Several examples lead to this conclusion. First, the way in which rules relate to local circumstances can be illustrated by the use of religion. Islam is deeply rooted in the region and is often used to ease relations between the communities. This means that factors vital for the communities are part of the regulatory development process. Important meetings are often held in mosques and verses of the Quran are quoted to emphasize how Muslims should deal with situations of conflict. This ensures that rules are related to local traditions. This is of critical importance because rules with a founda-
tion in Islam are substantially less likely to be broken than rules that do not take this aspect into account (Al-Hardallu and El Tayeb 2005).

Second, local elites with substantial knowledge about local circumstances are allowed to influence critical decisions in Eastern Sudan. One feature that confirms an influential position for local actors is that the government has committed itself to consult with the native administration if an inter-communal killing takes place in Eastern Sudan. This practice has been in place for a long time and was later manifested in the ESPA of 2006 (Interview with deputy Nazir, 2010). This policy ensures that rules relate to local conditions because the native administration generally has a more refined understanding of the dynamics in the particular area. Local elites are thus allowed to influence decisions taken by central elites issues that are important for peaceful coexistence among the communities.

Likewise, the native administration in Eastern Sudan keeps an eye on how the government applies rules to ensure that local conditions are being considered. This traditional authority is, for instance, involved when trespassing has taken place or if crops have been destroyed. This contributes to cooperation among the communities in Eastern Sudan because regulations are more likely to be accepted if they are influenced by the native administration than if they come solely from the government (Interview with youth politician, 2010).

Third, appropriate local rules have been promoted because the government allows representatives from the communities to modify rules. An example from Gedarif illustrates how imperative the modifications of rules by local actors can be. In November 2009, a conflict between the Hausa and Masalit caused 13 fatalities – making it the most severe communal conflict in Eastern Sudan in many years. In this conflict, the Hausa perceived the government as somewhat biased in favor of the Masalit, a view shared by local academics (Interview with Sudanese academic, 2010). During the conflict, the Omda (a high-ranking traditional leader) of the Hausa was arrested. This action was interpreted by the Hausa as evidence of the government’s bias in favor of the Masalit. Native administrators from other ethnic groups saw the arrest as a severe mistake and feared the tribal shame of having the Omda arrested would lead to an escalation in the conflict. The government listened to the advice of the native administration and released the Hausa’s Omda (Interview with deputy Nazir, 2010). The modification of the rules by local actors was critical because it has been suggested that “if the government should not have released the Omda there would not have been any more Gedarif”. Regardless of an initial bias, the government listened to the advice of the native administration and changed its decision accordingly (Interview with Sudanese academic, 2010).
6.4 Conclusions from Within-region Analysis

Despite harsh living conditions, which constantly lead to disputes between Eastern Sudan’s communities, violent communal conflicts are exceptionally rare in the region. In fact, the Nuer–Dinka conflict from 1997 constitutes the only violent communal conflict that Eastern Sudan has witnessed during the examined time period (1989–2012). How can the absence of violent communal conflicts in the region be explained?

This chapter finds that the fairly unbiased manner of the government’s behavior towards Eastern Sudan’s communities is essential for the low prevalence of violent communal conflicts. The prime reason for this neutrality is that Eastern Sudan has assets that are vital to the government, and these resources are more decisive in terms of government’s behavior than the threats posed by the rebellions in the area. The economic assets in Eastern Sudan (such as the oil-exporting harbor in Port Sudan) constitute an economic life-line for the Sudanese regime. Khartoum has been reluctant to use militias in this region because such tactics often lead to disorder, and this would endanger these economic assets. This has influenced the government to take a more neutral position because the use of militias often implies favoring some communities and disfavoring others.

Khartoum’s fairly neutral treatment of Eastern Sudan’s communities has enabled constructive interactions between the government and local elites as well as among local elites. The fact that the government (the most important central elite) regularly cooperates with the native administration (the most important local elites) has been particularly important for the relatively peaceful relations in Eastern Sudan. In particular, such fruitful interrelations have enabled the resolution of several disputes before they have turned violent. Furthermore, this has led to positive behavior in terms of the three mechanisms outlined in the theoretical framework of this study. First, in Eastern Sudan sanctions are generally proportional as they tend to depend on the context and severity of a violation rather than on other factors such as the perpetrator’s community affiliation. The prevalence of proportional sanctions means that no community in Eastern Sudan enjoys impunity. Second, although some problems exist concerning roads for pastoralists, boundaries are generally well defined in Eastern Sudan. One reason for the rather clear boundaries is that the government has not tried to shift power balances between the communities through redrawing of administrative boundaries. Third, in Eastern Sudan rules often relate to local conditions and the regime allows local actors to modify regulations concerning communal disputes. This means that rulings are generally respected among the communities, which enhances cooperation amongst Eastern Sudan’s communities.

Thus, all three theoretical mechanisms, suggested to be important for the absence or presence of violent communal conflicts find empirical support in the analysis of Eastern Sudan. When examining their relative value, howev-
sanctions and local rules are more clearly linked to the absence of violent communal conflicts than boundaries are. The prevalence of proportional sanctions primarily enhances peaceful communal cohabitation in two ways. First, one important consequence of sanctions being proportional is that no community enjoys blanket impunity. This promotes peaceful coexistence because the absence of such immunity means that disincentives to use violence are not diluted. Likewise, it makes communities more prone to seek legal solutions because they are aware that perpetrators will not routinely go unpunished because of their communal belonging. Second, the Diya system plays a crucial role in solving disputes between the communities in Eastern Sudan. One important feature that makes the Diya system efficient in the region is that decisions on how large Diya amounts should be tend to depend on the context and gravity of a violation. This substantially enhances cooperation and thereby prevents communal conflicts from turning violent.

Regarding local rules, there exist several examples of how consideration of local circumstances has contributed to solving disputes before they escalate into violent communal conflicts. In particular, the local understanding that the native administration possesses – and the fact that they are allowed to use this knowledge to modify rules – has enhanced peaceful coexistence. The native administration was, for instance, decisive in solving one of the most severe communal conflicts in Eastern Sudan during the examined time period. This conflict pitted the Masalit and Hausa communities against each other. Although the conflict was fairly fierce, further escalation was avoided by local elites who ensured that local rules were considered.

What are the primary alternative explanations to the relatively peaceful relations among the communities in Eastern Sudan? Proliferation of modern weapons has been argued to increase the lethality of communal conflicts (Hussein et al. 1999; Mkutu 2008b). Another related potential explanation for the absence of violent communal conflicts in Eastern Sudan is a comparatively low level of militarization. It is true that modern weapons are less prevalent in Eastern Sudan and that the communities are not as militarized as some communities are in other parts of Sudan. However, neither of these two related explanations seem to be critical in explaining the absence of violent communal conflicts in Eastern Sudan. Importantly, numerous conflicts have had the potential to turn violent, but they have been solved before doing so. Although modern weapons are less widespread in Eastern Sudan, some communities still have access to such arms. In fact, modern weapons were used in several of these conflicts. Besides, Eastern Sudan is located in a frontier area where weapons can easily be acquired – either from neighbor-

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61 Still, the clarity of boundaries is not unimportant. In particular the risk of violent communal conflicts have been reduced because administrative boundaries were not altered to change power balances between the communities, which may have led to fights over who should control the new entity.
ing countries such as Ethiopia and Eritrea or other areas of Sudan – if more arms are desired. Additionally, traditional weapons can cause extensive death tolls. In the numerous violent communal conflicts that followed the 2007 presidential elections in Kenya, for instance, traditional weapons were predominantly used, and hundreds of people were killed in this violence (ICG 2008). Traditional weapons are widespread in Eastern Sudan, but still conflicts are still generally solved before they escalate.

In addition, this study uses a relatively low threshold – 25 fatalities in a calendar year – in defining what constitutes a violent communal conflict. Thus, also with comparatively low levels of militarization and proliferation of modern weapons a higher frequency of violent communal conflicts would be likely if intra-communal disputes were not solved. Furthermore, during the research carried out in Eastern Sudan, lack of weapons (or low level of militarization) was never referred to as a core reason the de-escalatory path any of the recorded communal disputes took. Instead, active management to settle these disputes was repeatedly considered important. In particular the role of the native administration and its interaction with the government are central explanations for the prevention of violence.

A repeated argument within the literature on communal conflicts is that scarcity of resources is fundamental to these conflicts. This chapter, in contrast, demonstrates that relative peaceful coexistence is possible despite severe lack of resources. Eastern Sudan illustrates that if the government behaves fairly impartially, it increases the chances for elite interactions to be constructive. This will contribute to sanctions being proportional, boundaries being rather clear, and local rules being considered, and all these aspects are conducive for the peaceful coexistence that prevails among the communities in Eastern Sudan.

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62 For a more thorough discussion about this argument, seeThemnér (2011).
In 2005, Africa’s longest war ended when the Sudanese government and the SPLM/A signed the CPA. This accord terminated the second Sudanese civil war that had been ongoing for 22 years and gave extensive autonomy to southern Sudan. It did not, however, end violent conflicts in the region. Instead, violent communal conflicts have devastated some areas of southern Sudan since the end of the civil war. The Greater Upper Nile region (constituting the states of Jonglei, Unity, and Upper Nile) has been particularly shattered by such conflicts. In fact, the conflict between the Murle and Lou Nuer, taking place in Jonglei, is one of the world’s most violent communal conflicts and has killed more than 3 000 people since 2006 (Sundberg et al. 2012). This chapter examines the violent communal conflicts that have overwhelmed Greater Upper Nile since the signing of the CPA. Throughout the examined period (2005–2012), the Government of South Sudan has been the prime authority in the area. Up until South Sudan gained independence on July 9, 2011 the regime in Juba governed South Sudan (of which Greater Upper Nile is a part) as an autonomous part of Sudan and thereafter as a sovereign country.

A critical question to ask is why the end of the civil war did not lead to an end of large-scale collective violence in Greater Upper Nile. How can the extremely violent communal conflicts that have haunted the area throughout the examined time period be explained? This chapter shows that although Greater Upper Nile’s communal conflicts are embedded in the scarcities that characterize the region, the political side of these conflicts is pivotal in explaining the prevalence of violent communal conflicts. In particular, the behavior of the South Sudanese government is essential to answering this question. The regime in Juba is dominated by the Dinka community, which puts this group in a favored position. Other communities, in contrast, are generally disfavored. The partiality that characterizes the government’s behavior towards the communities of Greater Upper Nile has contributed to negative relations among elites in the region. In fact, it has soured the interactions between central and local as well as among local elites.

Government bias, and the destructive elite interactions it has contributed to, can be described by negative aspects of the three mechanisms suggested to be important for violent communal conflicts. First, sanctions are generally not proportional in Greater Upper Nile. Instead of depending on the severity and context of a violation, the community affiliation of the perpetrator is
crucial for the sanctions they will receive. Second, administrative boundaries are generally unclear in Greater Upper Nile. Third, when important decisions that affect the coexistence among the region’s communities are made, they do not generally reflect local circumstances. Instead of allowing local actors with a profound knowledge about the local context to influence rules, decisions are generally taken to enhance the power of the government.

To situate the violent communal conflicts in the region, this chapter starts by outlining the general conflict situation in Greater Upper Nile. The focus is, thereafter, on communal conflicts. Subsequently, the situation of government bias from the regime in Juba, and how elites have interacted in Greater Upper Nile is described. The link between government bias and communal conflicts are then investigated with the focus being on the three mechanisms outlined in the theoretical framework. The chapter ends with the main conclusions drawn from the within-region analysis.

7.1 Conflicts in Greater Upper Nile

Like Darfur and Eastern Sudan, the conflict situation in Greater Upper Nile can be portrayed as four different types of conflict. Communal conflicts over scarce resources, often involving cattle raiding, have prevailed in Greater Upper Nile for centuries. Moreover, local elite conflicts have created splits among various rebel groups. In addition, the area is severely marginalized, which implies that the region also suffers from center-periphery conflicts. Before the signing of the CPA, South Sudan was one of the most disregarded areas of Sudan. Although the SPLM/A fought to alter such marginalization, this has not ended with this party coming to power in South Sudan. Instead, internal marginalization within South Sudan characterizes the country and Greater Upper Nile has been deprived compared to other areas of the country, especially in relation to the national capital, Juba. Finally, cross-border conflicts are essential and South Sudan’s relation to Sudan has been pivotal in the dynamics of the region. The two countries, Sudan and South Sudan, are involved in a proxy war, in which the regime in Khartoum provides weapons to rebels in South Sudan and the regime in Juba provides weapons to rebels in Sudan (Broschê and Rothbart 2013: Chapter 7).

The history of Greater Upper Nile in general, and the State of Jonglei in particular, is plagued by war, and the region has repeatedly been the epicenter of many of South Sudan’s conflicts (Young 2010). As will be discussed later in this chapter, these conflicts have influenced the relation between the communities in South Sudan and the government’s behavior. In 1983, the second Sudanese civil war started with a mutiny in Bor, the capital of

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63 This dynamic also prevailed before South Sudan became independent.
This uprising developed into a rebellion by the SPLM/A. A persistent tactic by the Sudanese government to counter the threat from this rebellion was to encourage divisions and conflicts in the south (Young 2007d). A key feature of this strategy was to use militias to weaken the SPLM/A. As a result, much fighting during the North–South war actually consisted of rebel movements in the south fighting each other. Such clashes often followed ethnic lines, and communities were frequently targeted because of their ethnicity. This created enmity among many of South Sudan’s communities (Johnson 2006; Jok 2007).

The most severe of these South–South conflicts was the fighting that followed a split of the SPLM/A in 1991 when Riek Machar and Lam Akol led a revolt against SPLM/A’s chairman John Garang. This faction, which constituted the strongest southern opponent to the SPLM/A during the war, was called SPLM/A-Nasir (this group was also sometimes referred to as the White Army) and primarily consisted of people from the Nuer community. A consequence of the split was large-scale violence in which the communities of the opposing factions were repeatedly targeted. This fighting was most severe in Jonglei because it was a stronghold for SPLM/A-Nasir. As part of its attempt to decrease the power of the SPLM/A, the regime in Khartoum provided support to SPLM/A-Nasir. In 2002, Riek Machar returned to the SPLM/A as part of a unification process, and this considerably strengthened the SPLM/A (LeRiche and Arnold 2012). This more unified SPLM/A constituted a greater threat to the Sudanese government and strengthened the movement’s negotiating position.

After several years of consultations, the CPA was signed on January 9, 2005 and brought an end to more than two decades of war. The agreement stipulated a six-year interim period during which southern Sudan should be governed as an autonomous part of Sudan before a referendum would decide the final status of South Sudan (Brosché 2007). As stipulated in the CPA, a referendum about South Sudan’s future position was held on January 9, 2011. In the referendum, close to 99% voted in favor of independence, which was actualized six months later on July 9, 2011 (LeRiche and Arnold 2012).

South Sudan has experienced several new armed rebellions since the end of the North–South war. In 2010, George Athor, a prominent general within the SPLM/A, defected after losing an election to become Governor of Jonglei (one of the three states in Greater Upper Nile). Athor founded a rebel group called the South Sudan Democratic Movement/Army (SSDM/A) and

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64 The first Sudanese civil war started in 1962 when the southern-based rebel group Anya Nya 1 took up weapons against the government. This war ended through the Addis Ababa agreement in 1972.

65 The split between Machar and Garang constitutes the most important division during the war. However, many other splits occurred. For a detailed narrative see, for instance, Johnson (2006) and LeRiche and Arnold (2012).
started to fight against the regime in Juba. George Athor was from the Padeng Dinka community, whereas a majority of the SSDM/A’s troops were Nuer (Small Arms Survey 2011c). In late 2011, George Athor was killed in battle but other elements of the SSDM/A continued the rebellion (Small Arms Survey 2012d). Simultaneously, David Yauyau launched another rebellion in Jonglei. This insurgency was also connected to the elections because Yauyau started his uprising when he lost the voting for a parliamentary seat. Yauyau is from the Murle community, and an essential cause for this rebellion was intense discontent among the Murle community with regard to how they were treated by the regime in Juba (Small Arms Survey 2011a). Yauyau joined the SPLM/A in 2011 but defected again in April 2012, and the rebellion is ongoing as of 2013 (Sudan Tribune 2013a).

Another rebellion started in Unity State, also in Greater Upper Nile, in 2011 when an insurgency group called the South Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SSLM/A) took up weapons against the South Sudanese government. The leader of this group was Peter Gadet, a Nuer who had fought on the behalf of the regime in Khartoum against the SPLM/A for a large part of the North–South war (Small Arms Survey 2011d). This fighting primarily took place in the first half of 2011 and killed between 300 and 600 people (UCDP 2013c). In August 2011, Peter Gadet returned to the SPLM/A (Sudan Tribune 2011). This rebellion persisted, however, because other factions did not merge with the ruling party but continued the insurgency (UCDP 2013c).

All three of the groups described above were supported by the Sudanese government. Most importantly, the majority of the weapons used by the three insurgency groups came from Khartoum (Small Arms Survey 2013a, 2013b, 2012d). The prime reason for the Sudanese regime supporting these groups was that the relation between the two countries was far from harmonious. Instead, issues such as demarcation of the border between the countries, oil, and the support of rebels in each other’s countries constituted fundamental issues that were left unresolved. At the end of March 2012, the hostilities between the two nations escalated into warfare over a disputed oil-rich area – located between Unity State (South Sudan) and South Kordofan (Sudan) – called Heglig (or Panthou by the South Sudanese). The fighting was intense and caused hundreds of fatalities (UCDP 2013c; Small Arms Survey 2012c).

### 7.2 Communal Conflicts

Since South Sudan gained autonomy, it has experienced numerous violent communal conflicts, but these conflicts are not evenly distributed throughout the country. Instead Greater Upper Nile (comprising three out of South Sudan’s ten states) has had the greatest number of violent communal conflicts
during the examined period, especially in terms of fatalities. The region has experienced 40% of the violent communal conflicts, 57% of the active conflict years, and a full 88% of the fatalities caused by communal conflicts in South Sudan since 2005 (Sundberg et al. 2012).

In addition, Greater Upper Nile displays a wide internal variation. In 1994, the region was divided into three states – Jonglei, Upper Nile and Unity – and of these Jonglei has experienced most of the violent communal conflicts. The pattern of violent communal conflicts in Greater Upper Nile since the region came under the control of the Government of South Sudan is shown in Table 7.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Number of Violent Communal Conflicts</th>
<th>Active Years</th>
<th>Estimated Deaths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jonglei</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3 901</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(63%)</td>
<td>(75%)</td>
<td>(88%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unity State</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>391</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(25%)</td>
<td>(19%)</td>
<td>(9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Nile</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(12%)</td>
<td>(6%)</td>
<td>(3%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because Jonglei clearly dominates in terms of violent communal conflicts in Greater Upper Nile, this chapter will mainly focus on this state. Nevertheless, the conflicts in Unity State and Upper Nile will also be considered. The major ethnic groups, and the most relevant in a communal conflict context, are the Dinka, Nuer, and Murle in Jonglei (ICG 2009a); the Shilluk, Dinka, and Nuer in Upper Nile (UNDP 2012); and the Nuer and Dinka in Unity State (ICG 2011b). The violent communal conflicts that have taken place in Greater Upper Nile between 2005 and 2012 are shown in Table 7.2. The table shows fatalities and the main livelihood in these violent communal conflicts. When interpreting this table, it is important to keep in mind the caveats that livelihood is often mixed and fatality data are hard to confirm. Therefore, the table is a summary rather than a complete delineation of violent communal conflicts in Greater Upper Nile.

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66 For a fuller description of how South Sudan’s violent communal conflicts are divided between the various regions, see the selection of cases in Chapter 3.
Table 7.2 Violent Communal Conflicts in Greater Upper Nile, 2005–2012<sup>67</sup>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communities</th>
<th>Main Livelihood</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Active Years</th>
<th>Estimated Deaths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lou Nuer–Jikany Nuer cattle herders</td>
<td>Jonglei</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>77</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bor Dinka–Murle cattle herders</td>
<td>Jonglei</td>
<td>2007, 2011, 2012</td>
<td>270</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bor Dinka–Mundari cattle herders</td>
<td>Jonglei</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngok Dinka–Shilluk cattle herders</td>
<td>Upper Nile</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>121–134</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinka–Nuer cattle herders</td>
<td>Unity State</td>
<td>2010, 2011</td>
<td>361</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luac Jang Dinka–Awan Dinka cattle herders</td>
<td>Unity State</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in the table, Greater Upper Nile has experienced eight communal conflicts in the examined time period. These conflicts have been active for a total of 16 years with the Lou Nuer–Murle conflict being active for five years making it the most long lasting of the eight conflicts. The UCDP estimates that these communal conflicts in total have caused about 4,400 fatalities during the period of 2005–2012. By far the most violent of these conflicts is the Lou Nuer–Murle conflict that has killed more than 3,200 people. The number of violent communal conflicts has varied considerably over time with zero recorded conflicts in 2005 and six verified conflicts in 2009.

The long history of conflicts in Greater Upper Nile, in which elements from the communities have often been used as militias, has led to a prevail-

<sup>67</sup> The data is compiled from the UCDP Non-State data. Since none of the groups in Greater Upper Nile identify as Arabs a category indicating if the groups are Arabs or non-Arabs are excluded from this table.
ing hostility among the regions’ communities. The widespread distrust is partly the result of social contracts that were eroded during the war (Willems and Rouw 2011). In addition, the area suffers from a severe scarcity of resources. For most communities in Greater Upper Nile, life centers on cattle; wealth is quantified, dowry is paid, and prestige is measured in cows. Likewise, in times of drought, cattle are often the primary means of survival. All of these factors contribute to cattle rustling, which is extensive in the region. Cattle are, therefore, a central component of Greater Upper Nile’s communal conflicts. Land also plays a fundamental role in a majority of these communal conflicts because pastoralists need large areas of land to secure pasture and water for their herds. Therefore, seasonal migrations in search of these resources often lead to disputes. Land is also politically important, and disagreements over administrative boundaries often lead to conflicts (Interview with international NGO worker, 2010).

Undoubtedly, the scarcities that characterize Greater Upper Nile are important for the communal conflicts that take place in the region. However, these conflicts also have a pertinent political side that is often overlooked (Interview with South Sudanese scholar, 2013). One reason for why the political dimension is repeatedly unobserved is that politicians (and other elites) involved in these conflicts purposefully try to conceal this dimension of the conflicts in order to downplay their responsibility (Interview with Moro, 2011). A prime reason for this is that if the role played by numerous politicians – in order to empower themselves – were to be disclosed it would harm their reputation. It is believed that people will not follow a politician if an agenda to strengthen his personal influence is obvious. To persuade communities to participate in conflicts, the situation is, therefore, portrayed as though it is tribal wealth that is threatened (Hutchinson 2001).

Despite attempts by politicians to disguise their involvement, the political dimension of these conflicts was repeatedly stressed in interviews carried out during the field research for this study. For instance, researchers, aid workers, UN personnel, community leaders, and residents agreed that these conflicts are, indeed, political. The interviewees furthermore observed a general trend that the more politicized a conflict is the more casualties it causes. Tellingly, the only individuals who disagreed were some politicians who stated that these conflicts, in fact, are apolitical (Interviews in Juba, Bor, Malakal, 2007–2013). In the sections below, the political aspects of the communal conflicts in Greater Upper Nile are scrutinized.

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68 For a thorough examination of the cattle culture among the Nuer society see Evans-Pritchard (1940) and Hutchinson (1996).
7.3 Government Bias and Communal Conflict

This section first examines the Juba regime’s behavior towards the communities in Greater Upper Nile. It thereafter studies how government behavior has affected interactions among elites. Subsequently, the mechanisms assumed to be important for violent communal conflicts are analyzed to assess their importance in Greater Upper Nile.

Government Bias

During the period the regime in Juba has ruled South Sudan, two administrative systems have been in place. First, South Sudan was ruled as an autonomous part of Sudan, and this was followed by the creation of South Sudan as an independent nation. This does not imply a clear difference in governance because the autonomy was extensive, and the SPLM/A dominated the government of South Sudan both before and after independence. Thus, the ruling party has remained the same during the examined period. John Garang, founder and leader of the SPLM/A, was the president of the autonomous region of South Sudan from the signing of the CPA in January 2005 until his death in a helicopter crash on July 30, 2005 (ICG 2005). He was replaced by South Sudan’s current president, Salva Kiir, who acted as president throughout the rest of the interim period and after South Sudan became independent. Garang and Kiir are both from the Dinka community, which contributes to the preferential treatment of this community. This is especially true because the political system in South Sudan is strongly hierarchical, and extensive power is attributed to the president (Rolandsen 2007).

Since it became the primary authority over Greater Upper Nile, the Government of South Sudan has acted in a biased manner vis-à-vis the communities in the region. This partiality primarily stems from three different factors. First the regime is characterized by the historical and current dominance of the Dinka community. Second, the government has faced numerous threats from rebellions and political opponents, and these threats are magnified by the fears created by the war. Third, this biased behavior has not been restricted by concerns that it might jeopardize opportunities to extract crucial resources.

The regime in Juba is dominated by the Dinka, which is the largest ethnic group in South Sudan and makes up about one third of the population. This community is regularly favored by the South Sudanese government, and non-Dinka communities are generally disfavored. It is important to note, however, that the Dinka are not a homogenous group but instead are very diverse. In fact the group consists of 25 different tribal groups. Although similar diversities are also true for other tribes in South Sudan, the heterogeneity of the Dinka is extraordinary because it is the largest group and also a group that is present in most areas across South Sudan. This heterogeneity
implies that there is fertile ground for intra-Dinka conflicts. The history of the Dinka reveals several such examples, and many of the main opponents to highly positioned Dinka leaders have come from inside this community (Johnson 2006). Despite this caveat, people within the government cannot make decisions that are viewed as too unfavorable from the communities from which they originate. With the Dinka holding many powerful positions, this means that this community is often treated in a favorable manner vis-à-vis other communities. In addition, and essential for the dynamics at hand, an extensive perception about Dinka dominance prevails among the non-Dinka communities in South Sudan. Although the government does not treat all communities equally, the perception is often stronger than the intended partiality (e-mail correspondence LeRiche 2013).

In addition, although politicians often play the ethnic card in order to empower themselves, it is common that political alliances cut across ethnic associations. Actually, political realities often imply that a leader envisions opportunities to increase his influence by associating with someone from another community (e-mail correspondence LeRiche 2013). One such example is how President Salva Kiir appointed James Wani Igga from the Bari community to be vice-president in 2013. This selection was supposed to increase the support of Salva Kiir among the Bari community (BBC 2013). In a manner typical for the complexities of South Sudan politics, however, this was only one reason among several. Another important factor was seniority. James Wani Igga is highly esteemed within the SPLM/A as one of the most senior leaders having served in the movement for a very long time. This aspect often supersedes other political factors (e-mail correspondence LeRiche 2013).

Although the political life in South Sudan is dominated by Juba, it is important to also take politics at the highest sub-national level into account and the most important power centers in South Sudan (outside the national capital) are the capitals of the states. In Greater Upper Nile this means Bor (Jonglei), Malakal (Upper Nile), and Bentiu (Unity State). Each state is run by a governor who has extensive power in the area he is governing. For this study, the politics of Bor are particularly important because a large majority of Greater Upper Nile’s violent communal conflicts have taken place in Jonglei. Kuol Manyang Juuk (governor of Jonglei) was from the Bor Dinka community, which is one of the most politically influential sub-groups of the Dinka. The prominent position of the Bor Dinka primarily stems from the fact that John Garang was from this community. This group has, therefore,

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69 Kuol Manyang Juuk was governor of Jonglei from 2007 (when he replaced Philip Thon Leek, a Dinka from Duk Paueil who had been governor since the signing of the CPA) until he was appointed Defense Minister in August 2013 (Sudan Tribune 2013b). His deputy, Hussein Maar Nyuot (a Nuer), replaced him and stepped in as acting governor (Sudan Tribune 2013c). Again, appointments do not strictly follow ethnic lines. Despite a Nuer stepping in as acting government, however, the Bor Dinka still hold a favored position in Jonglei.
always held a preferential position within the SPLM/A, and Garang appointed many Bor Dinka to leading positions. Despite the fact that the current president, Salva Kiir, is from another Dinka community (originating in Bahr el-Ghazal in northwestern South Sudan), the Bor Dinka are still politically powerful. In fact, the group is the most influential of Jonglei’s communities and holds numerous important positions in both Juba and Bor. Other Dinka groups in Jonglei are, nevertheless, also favored in relation to the non-Dinka communities (Hyde 2012).

Despite its Dinka dominance the government of South Sudan includes some elements from other communities. In particular, the second largest ethnic group in South Sudan, the Nuer, holds some prominent positions, but representation by the Murle is especially restricted. The low influence of the Murle stems from the fact that they are one of the most marginalized groups in South Sudan. Furthermore, the group is stigmatized by other groups, which view them as brutal savages and regularly use the Murle as scapegoats for the conflicts in Jonglei. Another reason for the widespread antagonism against the Murle is that a militia from this community fought on Khartoum’s side during the North–South war (Rolandsen and Breidlid 2012). The severe marginalization of the Murle, in combination with the animosity it receives from other groups, has led to great resentment among this community (Ferrie 2011).

A general favoritism for the Dinka community prevails in South Sudan, which means that non-Dinkas are relatively disfavored. Such unfair treatment, however, is not equal and some groups are more disfavored than others. The prime reason for the regime in Juba to act in a particularly biased manner towards certain communities is to counter challenges to its power. For that reason, groups perceived as more threatening to the regime are in general discriminated against to a larger extent than communities perceived as less threatening. This attitude is aggravated because the South Sudanese government consists of former rebels with a strong military mind-set in which countering threats with military means is a likely option. The biased behavior of the regime in Juba is further augmented by the fact that it tends to label entire communities as enemies of the state if individuals from these communities actively oppose the SPLM/A. The communities from which rivals – politicians or militaries – to the government originate from are especially likely to be unfairly treated. Furthermore, the current political landscape in southern Sudan is strongly shaped by the war. This means that both contemporary competitors, and individuals that challenged the SPLM/A during the conflict, are seen as threats by the regime. Such a view is not un-

70 In July 2013, President Kiir disbanded the entire government of South Sudan. The prime purpose behind this move was to get rid of Vice-President Riek Machar (Nuer) and the Secretary General of the SPLM Pagan Amum (Shilluk). The government was reestablished shortly afterwards without these two persons. This move further increased the Dinka dominance of the regime (Sudan Tribune 2013e).
founded, however, and many opponents of the SPLM/A during the war has often remained as enemies of the regime (Jok 2013).

When examining the government of South Sudan, it is important to consider the circumstances under which it was established. The area it came in control over in 2005 was shattered by decades of war. Several armed groups wanted to challenge the new regime, and many of them had fought against the SPLM/A during the war. The extensive fighting between different South Sudanese factions during the war also contributed to a widespread distrust between the communities of South Sudan. Additionally, state structures were extremely weak when the government of South Sudan was founded. In fact, practical matters such as offices for the ministers were key problems that occupied the regime and international donors, during the first years after the signing of CPA (Interview with senior international observer, 2009). The regime, therefore, was very fragile and it faced several extensive threats.

Once the CPA was signed, the SPLM/A sought to monopolize the use of force in South Sudan by establishing itself as the only group with arms. This was a strategy to get rid of potential threats from armed opponents. The fragility of the regime meant that not all dangers could be given the same amount of attention. Instead, the most imminent threats needed to be dealt with first. The Lou Nuer community in Jonglei was perceived as the largest risk to the SPLM/A at the time because the group was heavily armed and hostile toward the Dinka who dominated the new administration. In addition, the White Army – originally a group that fought against the SPLM/A for a large portion of the war – consisted of Lou Nuer fighters (Young 2007c). The history of this group, in combination with its strong aversion to the regime in Juba, made it a likely proxy for Khartoum to use if it wanted to increase disarray in South Sudan (Young 2010). Weakening the power of the Lou Nuer was, therefore, important in order to decrease the Sudanese government’s opportunities to threaten the security of South Sudan. To counter this imminent threat, the government targeted the Lou Nuer community in the first disarmament process after South Sudan gained autonomy (Young 2007c).

A few years later, various rebel groups based in Greater Upper Nile started to challenge the government of South Sudan and constituted a severe threat to the regime in Juba. Not the least because they were all supported by Khartoum (Small Arms Survey 2011b). Leaders of these insurgencies have primarily been from the Nuer and Murle communities, and these communities have been especially disfavored. The only exception is George Athor, leader of the SSDM/A, who is from the Dinka community. However, most of the people fighting in the SSDM/A are Nuer (Small Arms Survey 2011c). In addition to armed rebellions, other political opponents of the Juba regime come primarily from other groups than the Dinka. For instance, Lam Akol, the leader of South Sudan’s strongest opposition party, SPLM/A-Democratic Change, is from the Shilluk community. This has contributed to the govern-
ment’s disfavoring of this group (HRW 2011a). These threats increase the disfavoring of non-Dinka communities in Greater Upper Nile such as the Nuer, Shilluk, and Murle.

Greater Upper Nile presents important opportunities for the regime in Juba. The prime economic resource for the South Sudanese government is oil, and considerable quantities of this asset are located in Greater Upper Nile (Grawert and Andrä 2013). Importantly, the oil fields are primarily located in the northernmost part of Greater Upper Nile, but the most politically contentious relations exist between groups inhabiting more southern parts of the region where the Bor Dinka, Lou Nuer, and Murle communities live in close proximity. Jonglei’s capital Bor, the most important power center in Greater Upper Nile, is located in the southernmost part of the state (ICG 2009a; Small Arms Survey 2012b). In contrast, the oil fields are located in the northern part of Greater Upper Nile, close to the border of Sudan. After the oil is extracted, it is transferred northwards to Port Sudan because no pipeline goes southwards. One implication of this is that while localized stability over the oil fields is essential, the importance of regional stability is less crucial for securing the extraction of this asset. Furthermore, since the regime in Juba became the central authority over Greater Upper Nile, the oil fields have not been attacked by any rebels.

The theoretical chapter of this study suggests that opportunities might, under certain circumstances, have a dampening effect on the government’s bias. This has not, however, been the case for Juba’s behavior towards the communities of Greater Upper Nile. Instead, the threats have taken precedence over the opportunities. The prime reason for this is that the challenges against the regime in Juba have been severe and imminent throughout the examined period. In contrast, the economic assets have not been severely threatened but have remained firmly controlled by the government. As a result, the regime has not perceived that partiality towards the region’s communities jeopardizes these assets (Interview with South Sudanese scholar, 2013).

**Elite Interaction**

During the examined period, elites have generally interacted in a negative manner in Greater Upper Nile. In a complex interplay, local grievances and ethnic identities have been manipulated by local and central elites in the region. The disruptive interrelations between various elites have aggravated the competition over scarce resources (da Costa 2012). In fact, the most important central elite – the regime in Juba – has interacted unconstructively with local elites, and the interactions among local elites have also primarily been destructive.

A core reason for the destructive interaction between central and local elites in Greater Upper Nile is that tribal politics in the region are strongly
connected to politics at the national level. This is particularly true in Jonglei. In fact, relations between Jonglei’s communities are related to politics in Juba to a greater extent than communal relations in other states in South Sudan. To increase their influence, political players in Juba as well as political entrepreneurs in the region often intensify tensions between the communities, and various elites often instigate conflicts between the communities as part of their struggle for power (Interview with international academic, 2011).

Negative interactions between Juba and local elites are exacerbated because representatives from the disfavored groups feel a strong resentment towards the government. This frustration stems largely from the fact that nomination decisions usually follow ethnic lines, and people from communities disfavored by the regime are less likely to be selected. A pertinent example is when Koul Manyang (the governor of Jonglei) replaced Joshua Konyi (a Murle) with Peter Ruei (a Jikany Nuer) as commander of the South Sudanese army in the Murle heartland of Pibor. This severely restricted the chances for local Murle leaders to constructively engage with the government. The timing of this replacement (December 2012) was critical because fighters from the Lou Nuer community were on their march to attack Pibor. The Murle view this as a decision taken in order to ensure that the South Sudanese army would not protect them against the attacking Lou Nuer. In addition, two thirds of the army in Pibor is Dinka and Nuer, which makes them less inclined to protect the Murle. When Pibor was attacked, the government’s forces were watching as Lou Nuer burned and looted homes of the Murle just outside their barracks (Small Arms Survey 2012b). This created frustration among the Murle community and increased its resentment of the government.

As a consequence, many local elites from disfavored communities do not consider constructive engagement with the regime to be a fruitful option. In fact, these local elites often deem the government’s prejudice against them as preventing rewarding relations with the regime. This negative attitude was articulated by a local Shilluk leader who remarked, “Salva Kiir is not the president of South Sudan; he is just a big Dinka chief” (Interview with Shilluk youth leader 2010).

Another manifestation of the prevailing negative interaction between elites in Juba and local elites is how this has influenced certain conflict management initiatives. Powerful elites are in a position to empower, or undermine, efforts to peacefully solve communal disputes (Interview with UNMIS representative, 2011), and numerous conflict management initiatives fail because the link between local conflicts and powerful politicians is overlooked (Interview with Moro, 2011). Such dynamics are illustrated by a peace initiative to stop Jonglei’s communal conflicts that was launched in 2011 and chaired by the Archbishop of the Episcopal Church of Sudan, Daniel Deng. Jonglei’s communities opposed the involvement of politicians in
the peace process, because they perceived them as fueling the tensions (Interview with Archbishop Deng, 2011). This initiative was, therefore, launched without the involvement of politicians. However, this move made these elites feel sidestepped and they actively sought to undermine the process. To decrease the risk that politicians would continue to sabotage the process, they were later included. But the incorporation of these individuals diluted this attempt at conflict management (Interview with Eltayeb, 2011). Negative elite interactions effectively undermined this prominent conflict management initiative and the conflicts restarted. In the absence of successful resolution of these conflicts, revenge and re-revenge often creates vicious circles of violence (Interview with Jonglei government representative, 2011).

Similar to the prevailing negative interaction between central and local elites, interactions amongst local elites are also predominantly destructive in Greater Upper Nile. The disruptive interaction among local elites is manifested in the fact that local politicians often use violence to empower themselves (Sørbo 2010). In a clear resemblance to central elites, local elites often promote animosity among the communities to gain influence. Political positioning has been particularly tough in Jonglei, which has been the state most struck by violent communal conflicts (Young 2010).

The manner in which the regime in Juba authorizes influential positions is also important in terms of interactions among local elites. Partiality in appointment procedures prevents positive interactions between elites representing disfavored communities and other local elites because they are left out from an arena where positive relations could be fostered (Interview with UNMIS representative, 2011). Constructive interactions among local elites are further impeded by the government’s tendency to appoint people in order to empower itself. Instead of selecting representatives with established relations to groups in the area they are placed, veterans from the war are frequently awarded prominent positions (Interview with UNMIS representative, 2011). This implies that individuals more prone to use violence have been strengthened in place of leaders who might be less likely to fight political struggles with weapons (Interview with Senior UN official, 2010). An additional effect of this is that it disrupts the opportunities for fruitful interrelations among local elites, and this reduces the chances for solving conflicts between the communities. In particular, the SPLM/A leaders’ ability to solve disputes is less than that of traditional leaders (Rolandsen 2005).

The disruptive interactions among local elites that prevail in Greater Upper Nile today are in contrast to historically fairly well-functioning relations among the region’s elites (Harragin 2001; Interview with senior BCSSAC representative, 2011). Indeed, positive engagement by various local elites often prevented inter-communal disputes from turning into violent commu-

71 This view was shared by senior officials at the United Nations (Interview with UNMIS representative, 2011).
nal conflicts. Crucial in this process were the chiefs who had extensive power to solve disagreements (Interview with Ninrew 2011). An important part of such conflict management was compensation in blood money where cows were the currency (Ryle 2011).

Positive interactions among local elites have primarily taken place within the native administration, but the capacity of this traditional authority is currently severely compromised and its ability to solve disputes in contemporary Greater Upper Nile is limited. The power of the native administration eroded during the war (Young 2007e). A prime reason for this was that conflicts between the communities became more politicized as the Sudanese government and the SPLM/A both tried to use this traditional authority for their own purposes (Interview with senior BCSSAC representative, 2011). The politicization of the communal conflicts is still ongoing, and the power of the native administration continuous to be restricted (Interview with Moro, 2011). One reason that this traditional authority has not been revitalized is that it has lost its impartiality. In Greater Upper Nile, the contemporary perception of this traditional justice system is that it is contaminated by bias as well as by corruption (Hyde 2012).

Negative elite interaction appears to be an important factor behind the prevalence of violent communal conflicts in Greater Upper Nile. This notion is supported when investigating violent communal conflicts in Greater Upper Nile over time. Political competition in South Sudan was particularly fierce in 2009 because political figures wanted to position themselves before elections held in April 2010 (the first in decades). After the elections, the intensity of elite rivalry decreased somewhat. This was partly because the elections were over but also because the referendum for independence was upcoming in January 2011. Although heavily antagonistic to each other, a majority of the elites (as well as the population in general) were in favor of independence. Thus, the referendum acted as a unifying factor among political elites in South Sudan. At the time, a widespread worry existed in South Sudan that Khartoum would cancel the referendum and use conflicts in the region as the motivation. To not risk the referendum, and thereby their independence, elite conflicts were less manifest in the period between the elections and the referendum. After the vote (in which close to 99% supported independence), the competition for positions intensified because of a widespread desire to be part of the new nation’s administration. Political competition was fierce at all levels, including the national government, governorships, county commissioner, and local political positions (HRW 2009b; Brosché 2009; Willems and Rouw 2011). The violent communal conflicts in Greater Upper Nile accompanied the intensity of elite rivalry and were much more violent in 2009 and 2011 than they were in 2010 (UCDP 2013c).

An analysis of elite interactions reveals that some elites – both local and central – sometimes initiated conflict. To further understand how it is possible for these elites to entice conflicts, two factors – a culture of honor and a
lack of information – need to be discussed. A strong war culture prevails in Greater Upper Nile and this increases the chances for conflict instigators to succeed. For generations a strong culture of honor, in which it is important to take revenge for injury done to an individual or to a community, has existed in Greater Upper Nile (Evans-Pritchard 1940; Hutchinson 1996; Willems and Rouw 2011). This type of culture is often more prevalent in pastoralist communities (Nisbett and Cohen 1996), and this is the livelihood that is utterly dominating in Greater Upper Nile. The long history of war in the region implies that this culture of honor has been combined with a widespread war culture. This makes retaliation crucial, and many conflicts are retributions for earlier conflicts (Harragin 2011). The war culture also makes it easier for military “strong men” to obtain prestige. Previously, respect could be gained by demonstrating humanity, but this is currently not a strong source of admiration in the region. Instead, what primarily matters for respect within the community is power, which in a war culture means weapons and ammunitions. In this system, high-ranking officers within the army, as well as important politicians, often provide weapons to their community and this ensures that they remain in a powerful position (Interview with Ninrew, 2011). Thus, the prevailing war culture contributes to interactions among elites often being pursued through violence.

A widespread lack of access to information gives local elites extensive opportunities to manipulate the communities. The communities often lack the means to inform themselves, and this makes them more vulnerable to opportunistic elites (Interview with senior UN official, 2010). In fact, even when members within a community reveal the devious role played by some politicians in communal conflicts, it can be difficult to overcome the antagonistic propaganda provided by such leaders. The strong communal identification among the ethnic groups living in Greater Upper Nile makes it difficult to hold a position that can be viewed as against the community. An educated young man from the Shilluk community emphasized that it is extremely difficult to argue against a politician who calls for an attack against another community. To articulate views seen as being too friendly towards a group perceived as the community’s enemy entails a risk of being viewed as weak, as well as being too soft toward the antagonists of the group. In fact, an individual who nevertheless declares a different point of view risks being ostracized from the group. In Upper Nile, the Shilluk community is involved in a communal conflict with the Dinka, and a Shilluk young man asserted, “if I would argue against attacking our rival community, people would disgrace me as a Dinka-lover” (Interview with Shilluk youth leader, 2010).

Sanctions
The first mechanism outlined in the theoretical framework proposes that government bias makes sanctions less proportional and thereby increases the
risk of violent communal conflicts. If sanctions are proportional, decisions about punishment depend on the severity and context of a violation. This is not the case in Greater Upper Nile. Instead, community affiliation, rather than the circumstances and gravity of the crime committed, has generally been the deciding factor for sanctions throughout the studied time period. This has led to discriminatory punishments where perpetrators from certain communities enjoy impunity. It has also contributed to uneven disarmament where the weapons from some groups are taken while other communities are allowed to keep their arms.

In contemporary Greater Upper Nile, no efficient justice system exists (HRW 2009a; Harragin 2011). Likewise, the limits between customary and government laws are blurred leading to a hybrid and changeable local justice system (Leonardi et al. 2010). In addition, the police force lacks resources and access to several areas (Interview with Jonglei government official, 2011). Hence, the citizens have been deprived of their security, which has led to a deep distrust between communities and security providers (Willems and Rouw 2011). In combination, these factors contribute to impunity in Greater Upper Nile, particularly in Jonglei (Interview with Upper Nile government representative, 2011). Thus, several structural problems contribute to the flaws in the justice system in Greater Upper Nile, but this lack of rule of law does not affect all communities equally. Instead perpetrators from some communities receive harsher punishments than perpetrators from other communities. As a result, impunity is not all embracing but, to a large extent, selective. Discriminatory imprisonments are also used to uphold patronage systems based on ethnicity. The justice system is, therefore, non-neutral and favors the communities with the closest ties to the government (Hyde 2012). The government’s biased policies, and the stigmatization of some of South Sudan’s ethnic communities, contributes to this inequality. This means that the risk for a Dinka to be imprisoned for a crime is substantially less than if a similar crime is committed by a non-Dinka. Likewise, communal affiliation affects the chances of a crime being investigated, and crimes against a Dinka are more likely to be investigated than if individuals from other communities are targeted (Interview with senior UN official, 2010).

In Jonglei, the Murle community in particular suffers when sanctions are not proportional. For example, in 2007 seven Murle were killed in Bor on the same day. Four of them were shot dead in a hospital run by the Médecins Sans Frontières, and the other three were killed in the town. None of these incidents were investigated, and this created resentment in the Murle community (Small Arms Survey 2012b). The prejudiced use of incarceration augments the risk for communal conflict in primarily two ways. First, the disincentive among potential perpetrators drops when they can count on immunity from the government and do not need to fear punishment. Second, the communities suffering from the impunity other groups enjoy will be
more prone to use violence because they do not see any legal opportunities to obtain restitution (Interview with senior UN official, 2010).

Communal affiliation has also been decisive in terms of which community should be punished for being in possession of weapons. To decrease the number of small arms among Greater Upper Nile’s communities, disarmament processes take place regularly. Intuitively, this might seem like a sound policy in a region awash with weapons. In Greater Upper Nile, however, it has contributed to violent communal conflicts rather than preventing them. The prime reason for this is that the disarmament has been uneven. Certain communities have been punished by the government because they hold large quantities of weapons whereas other communities have not. Thus, the government’s position vis-à-vis different communities is manifested in disarmament, which has always been a biased endeavor in South Sudan (Interview with Eltayeb, 2010).

In Jonglei, the preferential position of the Dinka is evident because no substantial attempts to disarm the region’s Bor Dinka or Twic Dinka communities have been carried out. Such disarmament would likely cause a major political backlash (Rands and LeRiche 2012). This is in sharp contrast to the other two main ethnic groups in Jonglei – the Nuer and the Murle – who have been targeted for disarmament on several occasions. A prevailing perception among non-Dinka groups is that disarmament is part of a Dinka strategy to first take their weapons and then to take their land (Interview with Eltayeb, 2010). The SPLM/A states that practical problems explain why disarmament is selective. They argue that because it is impossible to disarm all communities simultaneously the process has to start where hostilities are the fiercest (Interview with junior BCSSAC representative, 2011).

As stated above, the Lou Nuer community was targeted in the first disarmament campaign after the government of South Sudan took power. This operation started at the end of 2005 and was heavily resisted by the Lou Nuer. The group argued that without weapons they would be vulnerable to attacks from the Murle, but the government proceeded with the disarmament anyway. This led to heavy fighting between the Lou Nuer and the regime that caused at least 1,600 casualties. Later, disarmament processes were also carried out against the Murle community (Brewer 2010; Small Arms Survey 2007; Young 2007d, 2007e, 2007c).

The timing of disarmament helps to explain the Murle–Lou Nuer conflict, which is by far the most violent communal conflict in recent years (not only in Greater Upper Nile and Sudan/South Sudan but in the entire world). The conflict has killed more than 3,200 people since 2006. The government’s behavior – through partial decisions over disarmament – was decisive in this

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72 Other studies have alluded to similar dynamics and showed that imbalanced disarmament has upset local balances of power and contributed to violent communal conflicts in Uganda (Bevan 2008; Mkutu 2008a), Kenya (Weiss 2004), and Ethiopia (Sagawa 2010).
conflict. In fact, interviewees in Jonglei almost unanimously (except for some politicians) linked the disarmament of the Lou Nuer in late-2005 and during the first half of 2006 to the episode of large-scale violence between the two communities that has been ongoing for the last several years. This analysis is supported by data on violent communal conflicts. Actually, 2006 was the first year the Lou Nuer–Murle conflict was active during the 1989–2012 period (UCDP 2013b; Sundberg et al. 2012).

As predicted by the Lou Nuer, their disarmament resulted in an escalation in raiding by the Murle (Pastoralist Communication Initiative 2007). Indeed, during the six months that followed the start of the process, fighters from the Murle community killed at least 150 Lou Nuer. Before the disarmament started, the Lou Nuer had warned that it would result in such attacks (because the Murle remained armed) and when this did happen it created anger towards the Murle as well as against the government. The contempt towards the regime was aggravated because the Lou Nuer did not perceive the disarmament to be carried out on behalf of the communities, but as a revenge campaign targeting them because the role they played in the North–South war. Moreover, during the disarmament process the SPLM/A carried out gross atrocities, including the burning of villages, killing of civilians, and looting of cattle (IRIN 2006).

The impact of disarmament in general, and the 2006 campaign targeting the Lou Nuer in particular, is evident in a statement from a Nuer leader:

We would like to warn President Salva Kiir that any attempt to disarm the Nuer White Army will lead to catastrophe and bloodbath...[we] have acquired military arsenal which can bring down the government in Juba if provoked. The White Army has no intention to fight the government. But if the President of the south will launch another forced disarmament similar to 2006, there will be a military uprising... Our intention is to defend our cattle and kids from Murle because the government failed to provide security after disarming us in 2006. But if Salva Kiir lost touch with reality and insists on disarmament, we will fight him (Nuer White Army 2012).

After disarming the Lou Nuer, the SPLM/A was supposed to proceed to collect weapons from the Murle community. However, the attempts to disarm this community were futile leaving the Murle well-armed (Young 2010). The reason for why the Murle remained armed is debated. The government did not show extensive interest in this endeavor, and one potential reason for this is that the Murle community is feared in the region. Practical difficulties is another suggested cause (Young 2010). Still, amongst the Nuer many perceived this to be a strategy by the SPLM/A to weaken the opponents of the government. It has been suggested that the regime wants the Nuer and Murle to fight each other because such a conflict would strengthen the position of the Dinka in the region (Interview with young Nuer adult, 2011). What can be clearly discerned is that the decision to start disarming the Lou Nuer was
taken because the government perceived this group to be its largest threat. The regime should also have been able to foresee the effects of such a process because warnings about its consequences existed at the time. The decision was, therefore, part of the government’s ambition to monopolize power and can be viewed as a counterinsurgency tactic (Interview with international scholar, 2011).

After being attacked by the Murle, the Lou Nuer were in search of weapons to take revenge (Interview with Jonglei government official, 2011). The Lou Nuer succeeded to rearm in three different ways. First, they looted arms from the Sudan Armed Forces in November 2006 when elements of the Sudanese army clashed with the SPLM/A in Malakal. Second, in late 2006 the Akobo commissioner opened up weapon storage facilities and distributed weapons among the Lou Nuer when Akobo (a Lou Nuer town in eastern Jonglei) was threatened by a Murle attack. Third, in April 2008 local police and the SPLM/A fought in Khorfulus – a town in northern Jonglei where many weapons from the 2006 disarmament were stored. During the fighting, the weapons storage facilities were opened and the arms returned to the Lou Nuer (ICG 2009a). After re-arming, the Lou Nuer started to attack the Murle in December 2008 (Interview with Jonglei government official, 2011). Vicious circles of communal conflicts between these two communities have since plagued Jonglei (UCDP 2013c).

The most violent episode in the conflict between the Lou Nuer and Murle took place in December 2011 and January 2012. In this attack an 8 000-strong Lou Nuer force attacked the Murle town of Pibor and killed approximately 1 000 Murle. Such a large force was unprecedented, and the government knew that an attack was imminent. The national response to this attack was, however, influenced by the widespread anti-Murle feelings that exist in South Sudan. President Salva Kiir ordered some troops to Pibor, but this response came too late and the troops were only allowed to fire in self-defense. Instead of firm action that could have protected Pibor, the government was less inclined to prevent this attack because it targeted the Murle community. If the government were aware that a similar attack on a Dinka town was imminent, the response would likely have been completely different (Small Arms Survey 2012b; Interview with South Sudanese Scholar, 2013).

In addition, proper investigation of the incidents have not been prioritized by the Juba regime (Small Arms Survey 2012b). The lack of proper exploration to find the perpetrators has meant that they have enjoyed selective impunity. Infuriated by this attack – and the lack of suitable interference by the government – the Murle took revenge on the Lou Nuer, which led the vicious circles of violence in Jonglei to continue (Small Arms Survey 2012b; Reuters 2012b).
Boundaries

The second mechanism outlined in the theoretical framework suggests that government bias will make boundaries less clear, which will make violent communal conflict more likely. Control over land is a constant conflict issue in Greater Upper Nile. In particular, it is a pivotal asset because pastoralists need large areas for water and pasture. Land is also essential for political reasons because it constitutes a source of influence and patronage. In Greater Upper Nile, boundaries are characterized by a lack of clarity, and this has aggravated relationships between the communities in the region and contributed to violent communal conflicts.

Throughout the time period studied here administrative borders have regularly been redrawn leading to a widespread confusion about where boundaries are. Such changes contribute to governance being characterized by fluidity and uncertainty with disputes regularly emerging over who is responsible for a particular issue (Rolandsen 2007). In particular, boundaries of counties and Payams (districts) have frequently been changed (ICG 2009a). Existing units have often been divided into smaller entities, and this has created a rapid expansion of administrative units. Decisions to divide administrative units are generally perceived by the communities to be made to empower one community over another. In Greater Upper Nile, it is believed that boundaries are interfered with in order to reduce the power of groups viewed as antigovernment (Interview with UNMIS representative, 2011). However, clear examples of such deliberate strategies have not been discerned. Still, one reason behind these administrative changes is that they provide an opportunity to reward people who have provided essential support to the government by appointing them to influential positions. Consequently, the most desired positions within newly formed units are usually given to supporters of the government (Interview with senior UN official, 2011).

Modifications of administrative units constitute crucial changes, and the redrawing of boundaries is politically contested. Therefore, if the members of a community feel that an administrative change is disfavoring them, they are often ready to fight against it (Interview with senior UN official, 2011). An important reason for this is that extensive political and economic resources are connected to administrative entities. For instance, Payams receive resources from the government. Furthermore, administrative units are important for employment within the state, and government appointments are highly desired in South Sudan because they represent one of the few opportunities to safeguard one’s salary and influence (ICG 2009a).

The contentiousness of administrative boundaries is manifested in the conflict between the Jikany and Lou branches of the Nuer community. These two communities traditionally have close ties, and intermarriages are not uncommon. However, in 2009 the two communities fought each other in a violent communal conflict estimated to have killed close to 80 people. A
core aspect of this conflict was to which county Wanding payam should belong. The Jikany Nuer held that the Wading belongs to Nasir County (Upper Nile) whereas the Lou Nuer argued that it should be annexed to Akobo County (Jonglei). On January 9, 2009 it was decided that Wading should be administrated as part of Upper Nile. This contested decision contributed to fierce fighting between the two communities during the spring of 2009 (ICG 2009a; Inter-Agency Assessment Mission 2009).

In addition, the introduction of elections in South Sudan has contributed to disarray over boundaries. South Sudan’s Local Government Act stipulates that 70 000 inhabitants are needed for an area to constitute a county. If a region is smaller it is merged with a neighboring county. A county entails a seat in the South Sudan Legislative Assembly, whereas a constituency size of 146 000 is needed for a seat in the National Assembly (ICG 2009a). This means that a redrawing of boundaries can be disastrous for a politician jockeying for power because it can jeopardize his chances to safeguard his position. Importantly, administrative changes can put a community that previously was in the majority in a constituency into a position of being a minority. With voting strongly following tribal lines in South Sudan, such changes are likely to also alter who will win an election in the area. Accordingly, administrative alterations constitute a useful tool in the fierce competition of the political sphere (Interview with UNMIS representative, 2011).

Local Rules

The third mechanism outlined in this study’s theoretical framework holds that violent communal conflicts are more likely if rules do not consider local conditions and if local actors cannot influence such regulations. In Greater Upper Nile, rules do not appropriately take local circumstances into account and local actors are restricted from modifying them, and this has contributed to the prevalence of violent communal conflicts in Greater Upper Nile. This is a consequence of five different dynamics.

First, in Greater Upper Nile an absence of functional, legitimate, local governing institutions prevails (Young 2010). In 2005, the Government of South Sudan was established by the CPA and through the establishment of the Interim National Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan. Both of these documents emphasized decentralization of power and local democracy, but such structures hardly exist in reality and the opportunities for local establishments to influence rules, or to control their executions, have been severely restricted (Rolandsen 2007). This distances decision making from local perspectives. Important decisions are, as a consequence, regularly taken at a level where there is little opportunity for actors with an extensive local knowledge to influence them. For example, chiefs in Jonglei have been prevented from influencing the disarmament process in the region (O’Brien 2009; Garfield 2007).
Second, party structures at the grassroots level are lacking in South Sudan (Rolandsen 2007). Instead the South Sudanese state is structured in a hierarchical manner, and within the SPLM/A the prospects for ordinary members to influence decisions are strictly limited. The SPLM/A has been a strongly authoritarian movement since it was founded in 1983. Sometimes the movement uses a rhetoric that focuses on local governance, but decision making within the movement still follows a clear top-down approach (Rolandsen 2005; Interview with SPLM/A veteran, 2011).

The strong power of the top leaders in South Sudan can be illustrated by how a governor is chosen. During the first years after the signing of the CPA, governors were not elected but directly appointed by the president (Rolandsen 2007). It was not until 2010 that the first election of a governor took place, and this process is still primarily part of Juba politics rather than part of the local political processes in the state. Important decisions (like nominations of candidates) are, for example, made at the national level. The preferences of the government are thus more important than considerations of local contexts. Similar dynamics exist at the state level where the power of the governor is extensive. Importantly, the government at the state level decides where crucial development resources should be invested. In Jonglei, this means that such decisions are made in Bor. Because the Dinka dominate Bor, this is a constant source of frustration for non-Dinkas because the resources are primarily spent in areas inhabited by this favored community. As the most marginalized group, the Murle are particularly disfavored by this policy (Ferrie 2011). Hence, despite support in the constitution, decentralization is generally absent and rules regularly do not take local conditions into account.

Third, traditional authorities have only a limited ability to influence decisions in contemporary Greater Upper Nile. Historically, local actors with a deep understanding of local conditions could impact rules through the native administration. Because the power of this institution has been diluted, and understanding of local context is not a valued qualification for promotion, such actors are currently restricted from having influence. Instead of providing the native administration a sphere in which it can authoritatively act, decisions taken in Juba overshadow local self-rule (interview with senior BCSSAC representative, 2011). This external influence means that conflict management, which used to be respected by the communities, is not perceived as genuine. When such procedures are not esteemed by the local population, they become futile (Interview with Jonglei government representative, 2011).

Fourth, the chances to influence rules are especially restricted for communities and individuals from groups disfavored by the government. The desires of such groups are often deliberately denied by people within the government. Moreover, the representation of these communities within the state structures is limited, and this means that they lack access to the gov-
ernment and people who can speak on their behalf (Interview with senior UN official, 2010).

Fifth, the opportunities for local actors to influence decisions have been further curtailed by the heavy involvement of foreign actors in the South Sudanese political landscape. During the war, international actors were involved in the South Sudan crisis. The participation of foreign actors (such as international NGOs) has continued after the signing of the CPA. The presence of these international actors has prevented decisions from properly taking local conditions into account. The prime reason for this is that these actors, in general, do not have sufficient knowledge of the intricacies of South Sudan. Furthermore, international organizations are dependent on their funders and need to take their opinions into account to assure continued funding. This means that project plans are often written to persuade donor agencies in Washington D.C., London, or Brussels rather than the reflecting conditions in places such as Malakal, Pibor, or Bentiu (Interview with international academic, 2011).

Resolution of local conflicts has lately become a priority within the donor community. However, the involvement of international actors in these endeavors often creates tension between the preferences of the international organizations and local customs as well as prevailing norms in the communities (Leonardi et al. 2010; Interview with Catholic Church representative, 2010). There also exists a proliferation of peace conferences sponsored by international donors in South Sudan. However, the results of these initiatives are fairly meager because they tend not to be respected by the communities (Interview with international academic, 2011). In their attempt to understand the contexts of Greater Upper Nile, international actors are dependent on South Sudanese partners. In this process, international actors often interrelate with elites in Juba and local actors, in contrast, have little influence over such decisions. Central elites in Juba can thereby influence where resources from foreign actors are spent. As part of this process, investments have been allocated to areas inhabited by communities that are favored by the government, which aggravates the resentment against the government among the disfavored communities (Interview with senior BCSSAC representative, 2011).

The conflict between the Shilluk and Ngok Dinka in Malakal (the capital of Upper Nile) demonstrates how a failure to adhere to local traditions can contribute to violent communal conflicts. This conflict was ignited by a quarrel over which communities’ dancers should enter a peace ceremony first. In Malakal, the fourth anniversary of the signing of the CPA was celebrated at a stadium on January 9, 2009. The festivities included traditional

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73 Here it should be noted that this dynamic is not entirely in line with the causal story provided in the theoretical framework because the distancing from local rules stems from the behavior of the international community, rather than the government.
peace dances from Malakal’s two main communities, the Shilluk and the Ngok Dinka. According to custom, the Shilluk dancers should enter before the Ngok Dinka dancers. However, in clear violation of local customs the Ngok Dinka group demanded to arrive first. The Shilluk refused this request and violence between dancers from the two communities broke out. Traditional weapons that were supposed to be used ritually were used to fight each other (Sudan Tribune 2009; UCDP 2013c).

This clash ignited violence between the two communities. Most fighting occurred in close proximity to the peace dance incident, but fighting continued throughout the year. In total more than 120 people were killed (UCDP 2013c). This conflict was entrenched in control over Malakal, which is bitterly contested between the two communities with both groups claiming that the city belongs to them. The issue of land ownership was publicly disputed for the first time in 2008 when some Ngok Dinka threatened to fight the Shilluk if the government did not attribute Malakal to the Dinka community (Sudan Tribune 2008a). Local traditions hold that dancers from the community to which the area belongs should enter first. This was the main reason why a decision about a peace dance, which might seem minor, could spark such a violent conflict (Sudan Tribune 2009; UCDP 2013c).

The Dinka dancers were emboldened to take the contentious decision to enter first because the regime in Juba favors the Ngok Dinka while it behaves in a biased manner against the Shilluk. In addition to its general pro-Dinka position, the government disfavors the Shilluk because Lam Akol, the leader of South Sudan’s strongest opposition party (SPLM/A-Democratic Change) is from this community. The bias against the Shilluk group was demonstrated by the fact that it bore the brunt of the abuses carried out by the South Sudanese army in Upper Nile (HRW 2011a). Most neutral observers argue that Malakal belongs to the Shilluk community (Interviews with NGO analyst and South Sudanese from neutral communities 2010).

### 7.4 Conclusions from Within-region Analysis

In 2005, the historical CPA brought an end to the Sudanese North–South civil war that had been fought for more than two decades. The expectations of a peaceful development were extensive. Instead of peace, however, devas-

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74 This favoritism exists despite the fact that some prominent positions – such as Pagan Amum (Secretary-General of the SPLM up until June 2013) and Oyay Deng Ajak (current Minister for Investment) – are held by people from the Shilluk community (Sudan Tribune 2013e, 2013d).

75 Lam Akol and Pagan Amum are involved in a lengthy struggle to be the most powerful politician within the Shilluk community (Sudan Tribune 2013d).

76 Here neutral refers to individuals that are not from any of the two communities directly involved in the conflict i.e. not Dinka or Shilluk.
tating violent communal conflicts have constituted a severe threat to human security in parts of South Sudan, in Greater Upper Nile in particular.

This chapter traces the roots of this violence. Partiality by the regime in Juba, in which some communities are favored while others are disfavored, is critical in explaining these conflicts. The prime reason for this partiality is that the government wants to counter perceived challenges by weakening the communities that constitute threats. The government bias disrupts positive interactions among elites and contributes to violent communal conflicts primarily through three mechanisms. First, sanctions are not proportional in Greater Upper Nile, which implies that decisions about punishments depend on community affiliation rather than the context and severity of a violation. Second, boundaries in Greater Upper Nile are generally unclear. Third, local actors have limited opportunities to influence vital decisions concerning rules in the region, and this means that rules generally do not relate to local conditions in Greater Upper Nile.

Thus, all three theoretical mechanisms suggested to be important corresponded in the manner proposed by the causal story provided in Chapter 2. In terms of their relative importance, sanctions stand out and violent conflict was most clearly linked to this mechanism. Importantly, in 2006 the Lou Nuer were targeted in South Sudan’s first disarmament campaign. At the time, many communities were in possession of large quantities of arms, but this community was singled out because the government perceived the Lou Nuer as the most significant threat. After the Lou Nuer were disarmed, they were attacked by the Murle and vicious circles of violence between the two communities followed. Additionally, selective impunity (a result of sanctions not being proportional) has contributed to the prevalence of violent communal conflicts in Greater Upper Nile. First, disincentives to use violence decreased among communities who did not need to fear punishment. Second, selective impunity caused frustration among disfavored communities who, as a result, viewed legislative solutions as futile and felt that violence was the preferred option.

The other two mechanisms have substantially contributed to Greater Upper Nile’s violent communal conflicts, but to a somewhat lesser degree than sanctions. The analysis revealed that boundaries are unclear in Greater Upper Nile, and a key reason for this is that administrative units are regularly changed. This contributes to conflicting relations between the communities because such alterations are politically important. The importance of unclear boundaries was most clearly manifested in the Lou Nuer–Jikany Nuer conflict. A clear link between violence and the local rules mechanism was also established. For instance, the Shilluk–Ngok Dinka conflict was ignited because local rules were not being respected. An important reason for not adhering to local traditions was that the Ngok Dinka community was emboldened by the support it received from the government. Lack of appropriate consideration of local rules has also resulted in the futility of numerous con-
conflict management initiatives and thereby contributed to violent communal
conflicts.

Before the regime in Juba became Greater Upper Nile’s primary authority in 2005, the region was governed by Khartoum. In addition, the region was part of Sudan until South Sudan’s independence (July 9, 2011), although it was ruled by the government of South Sudan. Thus Greater Upper Nile also remains in Sudan’s sphere of interest. What influence, then, does Khartoum have for the communal conflicts in Greater Upper Nile after the signing of the CPA?

The Sudanese government contributed to aggravate the relations between Greater Upper Nile’s communities through the divide-and-conquer policy it pursued during the war. To a large extent, the hostilities that this policy intensified still remain in contemporary Greater Upper Nile. However, this strategy primarily sought to pit various communities against the Dinka rather than to increase hostilities among non-Dinka communities. Still, many of the contemporary violent communal conflicts in Greater Upper Nile do not involve Dinka. Another noteworthy aspect of this divide-and-conquer policy was that the regime in Khartoum used elements from both the Lou Nuer and Murle communities as militias during the war, but did not try to entice conflict between them. Still, fighting between these two communities constitutes the most violent communal conflict in Greater Upper Nile. Thus, historical animosities intensified by Khartoum during the war do not give a full answer to why these communal conflicts have resorted to such levels of violence, although it offers important insights into the dynamics of this process.

Khartoum’s influence in the region has not ended with the termination of the war between the Sudanese regime and the SPLM/A. An important aspect of the current dynamics is that the Sudanese government provides weapons to rebel groups that are fighting against the regime in Juba. This leads not only to civil war but also contributes to Greater Upper Nile’s violent communal conflicts because these weapons are regularly used in such conflicts. Members of a community often join a rebel group to gain access to arms. After fighting for the insurgency group for a while, many combatants return to their community with their weapons. Hence, the Sudanese government bears some responsibility for these conflicts because large shares of the weapons used originate from Khartoum.

Still, the behavior of Juba appears to be more important. The partial manner in which communities are treated is crucial for the contemporary conflicts, and political decisions made by the South Sudanese government sometimes significantly contribute to violent communal conflicts. For instance, disarmament of the Lou Nuer community is repeatedly argued to be a prime reason for the conflict pitting this community against the Murle. The decision to target the Lou Nuer community followed Juba’s partiality and was taken because this community was perceived as the largest threat to Juba. An important factor for why the Lou Nuer community constituted such a threat
was that it was in possession of arms that Khartoum had provided. However, the decision to disarm them, and the way in which this campaign was designed, is the responsibility of the South Sudanese government. Thus, in a manner typical for South Sudan, the explanations to this conflict have to be sought in the interplay between several interlinked factors.
8. Comparing the Regions

This chapter presents a structured and focused comparison of Darfur, Eastern Sudan, and Greater Upper Nile. The aim is to deepen the understanding of the prevalence of violent communal conflicts by drawing inferences that go beyond the within-region analyses. It starts by comparing the situation of violent communal conflicts in the three regions. Thereafter, the focus is to assess and further refine the theoretical argument of this study beginning with an analysis of the absence or presence of government bias in the three cases. The reasons for the neutrality, or partiality, that characterizes government behavior as well as the consequences of such conduct are emphasized. Next, the influence of government behavior on the interaction between central and local as well as among local elites is compared. The three mechanisms suggested to be important for upholding cooperation are then analyzed, and this inquiry compares the similarities and differences in how these mechanisms have played out in the three regions. An assessment of the relative importance of these mechanisms concludes the comparison. The chapter ends by outlining a few additional findings from the within- and between-region analyses and by discussing possible alternative explanations for the patterns of violent communal conflicts seen in these regions as well as the implications of the chosen research design.

8.1 The Prevalence of Violent Communal Conflicts

Communal conflicts over scarce resources and political influence have taken place in all three regions during the studied time period. However, these conflicts turned violent much more often in Darfur and Greater Upper Nile than they did in Eastern Sudan. Since the contemporary Sudanese government took power in 1989, twelve violent communal conflicts – active for a total of 21 years and causing about 4,500 fatalities – have taken place in Darfur. During the same period, only one violent communal conflict has erupted in Eastern Sudan. This conflict was active for one year and caused 35 fatalities. In 2005, Greater Upper Nile came under the rule of the Government of South Sudan. Since then, eight violent communal conflicts – active for a total of 16 years and estimated to have killed 4,400 people – have occurred in the region. By far the most violent communal conflict in the examined regions is the one pitting the Lou Nuer against the Murle in
Greater Upper Nile that has caused around 3 200 casualties. In 2009, Greater Upper Nile experienced six violent communal conflicts, which was the highest number of conflicts any of the studied cases have had in the same year. 

In Darfur and Eastern Sudan, some communal conflicts have pitted agriculturalists against pastoralists and others have been fought between different pastoralist communities. However, in Greater Upper Nile all groups involved in violent communal conflicts have been pastoralists. Another difference concerning livelihood is that while both camel and cattle pastoralists are prevalent in Darfur and Eastern Sudan, all pastoralists in Greater Upper Nile herd cattle. A striking similarity between communal conflicts in the three regions is that access to land has played a fundamental role in both agriculturalists vs. pastoralists and in pastoralist vs. pastoralist conflicts. In all regions, land was crucial because it constituted an essential scarce resource and because it was of political importance. In terms of ethnicity, Darfur has witnessed numerous violent communal conflicts with Arabs fighting non-Arabs as well as several conflicts among communities all identifying as Arabs. Before the 2003 rebellion, almost all conflicts in Darfur pitted Arabs against non-Arabs, but after the rebellion started almost all violent communal conflicts pitted Arab communities against each other (the reason for this change are described below). In Eastern Sudan, conflicts have pitted Arabs against non-Arabs, Arabs against Arabs, and non-Arabs against non-Arabs. However, the intensities of these conflicts have been less severe than in Darfur, or Greater Upper Nile. All communities in Greater Upper Nile identify themselves as Africans and, therefore, all conflicts in the region have been fought among non-Arab groups.

8.2 Why Government Bias Matters

The causal story of this dissertation holds that government bias is essential for explaining the prevalence of violent communal conflicts. Comparing government bias reveals that government partiality has varied significantly between the three regions. As postulated in the theoretical argument, violent communal conflicts were found to be much more frequent in the regions characterized by such biased behavior. In Darfur and Greater Upper Nile, the Sudanese and South Sudanese governments, respectively, have strongly fa-

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77 In line with the environmental security argument (cf. Homer-Dixon 1999) it could be suspected that population and size of the sub-national units would be important for the witnessed variation. However, comparing the regions in terms of population and size does not reveal any clear difference that can explain the pattern of conflict. The population of Darfur is around 7 500 000, Eastern Sudan 4 500 000 and Greater Upper Nile 2 900 000. Darfur is about 503 000 km², Eastern Sudan 330 000 km², and Greater Upper Nile 236 000 km² (City Population 2013). It should be noticed that population statistics in Sudan and South Sudan are disputed.
vored certain communities throughout the studied time period whereas Khartoum’s behavior towards Eastern Sudan’s communities was characterized by relative neutrality.

In Darfur, the regime in Khartoum has acted in a strongly partial manner since it took power in 1989. Certain communities have been favored and others have been disfavored. Such tactics have been designed to advance the regime’s interests. Resources have been allocated or bribes paid to favored groups, whereas other communities have suffered from economic deprivation and have been the targets of military assaults. This behavior is in sharp contrast to the government’s behavior in Eastern Sudan where the government does not have any particular communities that it has constantly disfavored or any groups that it has persistently supported. This does not mean, however, that the regime has been completely neutral in Eastern Sudan, and, indeed, the government has been somewhat more supportive of farmers than pastoralists in the region. Still, this preference has been significantly weaker than the strong partiality that has characterized Khartoum’s behavior in Darfur. In addition, the regime has favored mechanized farming over subsistence farming and pastoralism as part of its exploitation of the economic opportunities in the region. In Greater Upper Nile, the regime in Juba has regularly favored groups perceived as pro-government while it has disfavored communities viewed as threats to the regime. Juba has, therefore, behaved similarly in Greater Upper Nile as Khartoum has in Darfur. An important aspect of this similarity is that both regimes have reacted to threats in a similar manner. Another similarity is that Sudan’s and South Sudan’s ruling elites both have tended to view an entire community as an enemy if a rebel leader originated from that particular group.

The Importance of Threats and Opportunities

What accounts for the government’s behavior? The comparison between the three regions demonstrated that whether a government will be biased or not is determined by the opportunities and threats a region presents. In addition, ideological reasons, such as the promotion of Arabization and ethnic kin relations have influenced state partiality in the three regions. However, these reasons have affected regime conduct to a significantly lower degree than threats and opportunities have. This finding raises an additional question. Are threats or opportunities the most important in explaining government bias? This study cannot with any certainty demonstrate that either of the two takes precedence over the other. Instead, the answer to government bias is found in the complex interplay between them. In other words, it is the magnitude of the threats – and how they are dealt with – in combination with the significance of the opportunities – and what tactics are used to extract them – that determines if a regime will be biased or not. This finding is based on the fact that survival is fundamental for governments, and to stay in power vari-
ous threats and opportunities have to be dealt with. Sometimes countering threats is more important for the endurance of a regime, and on other occasions making use of opportunities has a higher priority. Likewise, countering threats might be a top priority in a particular region while ensuring the harvesting of resources might be critical in another region.

How did these dynamics influence the course of developments in Darfur, Eastern Sudan, and Greater Upper Nile? The reasons for why the government has acted in a biased manner in Darfur are found in the severe threats, and limited opportunities, that the region has posed to Khartoum. In the late-1980s and early-1990s, the ruling authorities in Khartoum were worried that the war in the south would spread northwards. To counter this threat, it recruited militiamen from certain Darfurian Arab communities in southern Darfur. To convince recruits to join the militias, the regime treated these communities in a favorable manner. In contrast, the regime perceived the Fur, Masalit, and Zaghawa communities as their largest threats in Darfur and these communities have, accordingly, been disfavored. After Daud Bolad (from the Fur community) led a rebellion against the government in 1991, the Fur were singled out as the prime enemy of the regime. The Masalit and the Zaghawa communities were also viewed as threats because of the strong antigovernment feelings among these groups. As a result, all three of these non-Arab groups have been favored in relation to Arab communities, and this unfavorable treatment increased resentments among these groups and was a core reason for them to take up arms against the regime in 2003. However, the general favoring of Arabs over non-Arabs does not mean that the government has treated all Arab (or all non-Arab) communities alike. Instead it has supported the Arab groups that have provided the strongest support to the regime.

The rebellion by the SLM/A and JEM increased the threat that Darfur presented to the government, and this intensified the government’s discrimination against the Darfurian communities perceived as threatening its power. Early in the insurgency, the two movements scored some substantial victories. Later, the severity of the threat was manifested by the JEM attack on Omdurman (a neighboring city to Khartoum) in May 2008 (HRW 2008). Despite some form of civil war for most of Sudan’s existence since independence, no insurgencies had come this close to the capital before. Countering the rebellion in Darfur, therefore, became critical for the survival of the regime.

Darfur’s economic importance for Khartoum has been relatively low, and this has meant that counterinsurgency in the region could be fought without jeopardizing any important assets. When no such considerations have to be taken into account, reliance on militias can constitute an inexpensive way to
fight such threats and Khartoum has deployed militias in Darfur on a large scale. Certain communities, therefore, needed to be persuaded to contribute with militiamen. To ensure recruitment, the communities who provided fighters were promised land and were favored by the regime.

In sharp contrast to Darfur, Khartoum has acted fairly neutrally vis-à-vis Eastern Sudan’s communities. The key reasons for this were that the rebellion in the east composed a different type of threat to the regime and that the region is economically vital for the central authority. The magnitude of the NDA rebellion in the east from 1996 to 2001 was significantly smaller than the rebellion in Darfur or the insurgency based in the south. Thus, it posed less of a military challenge to the government. Nonetheless, Eastern Sudan is economically crucial to Khartoum and the insurgency endangered these assets. Port Sudan, located in Eastern Sudan, is Sudan’s only oil-exporting harbor. This city on the Red Sea coast, and the pipeline transporting the oil to the harbor, constitute an economic lifeline for Khartoum. In particular, exporting oil was necessary for the government to be able to continue to fund its war in the south. The significance of these resources has substantially influenced the government’s behavior. Because of the economic importance of the region, the regime cannot afford a conflict in Eastern Sudan on a similar scale as in Darfur and in the south.

To ensure that the oil could be sold on the world market, stability in the region was crucial. The pipeline runs across large parts of Eastern Sudan, and disorder would endanger Sudan’s oil exports. Damaging the oil infrastructure was a prime ambition of the NDA rebellion, so to safeguard the trade of this commodity the government maintained an extensive security presence in Eastern Sudan. Because of the economic importance of Eastern Sudan, a counterinsurgency method similar to the one in Darfur was not suitable in the east. Instead of a strong reliance on militias – which would entail a clear risk of disorder – the government relied primarily on the army. Another factor that potentially contributed to a reduced dependence on milit-

78 Alex de Waal has illustratively described Khartoum’s answer to the Darfurian rebellion as “[c]ounterinsurgency on the cheap” (de Waal 2004).
79 First, the regime recruited militias from certain communities in southern Darfur to fight against Daud Bolad’s rebellion and Khartoum later made extensive use of this tactic to counter the SLM/A and JEM rebellion. Additionally, the current regime (and its predecessors) has used such tactics to a large degree in South Sudan.
80 In addition to disfavoring direct threats, both Juba and Khartoum have favored certain communities because of other political realities that they have faced. In Darfur, the above-mentioned militia recruitment was important. In Greater Upper Nile (particularly in Jonglei), certain Dinka communities have been so influential that any political decisions that would disfavor them would be hazardous. This was one reason for the preferential treatment of these communities. For example, no substantial attempts to disarm Jonglei’s Bor Dinka or Twic Dinka have been made because this might have major political repercussions.
81 The Eastern Front rebellion (1999–2006) was even less intense and never met the threshold of 25 fatalities in a calendar year to be considered a state based conflict.
82 Reportedly, three times as many soldiers are located in Eastern Sudan than in Darfur.
Militias in Eastern Sudan was that its strongest military opponent in the east, the NDA, was led by the SPLM/A,\(^{83}\) which had its core constituencies in southern Sudan.\(^{84}\) Militias are often used to fight against both rebels and the communities they recruit from. Thus, the deployment of militias is less effective in areas not inhabited by the rebel’s core constituencies. This reluctance to use militias was in contrast to its policies in Darfur and southern Sudan where such tactics have been used extensively. A reduced reliance on militias in Eastern Sudan has influenced the government to act more neutrally vis-à-vis Eastern Sudan’s communities because partiality was not needed to ensure the recruitment of militiamen.

In Greater Upper Nile, the behavior of the regime in Juba has been characterized by partiality. The region poses severe threats to the regime as well as important economic assets. However, in terms of determining government behavior the threats have had a substantially greater influence on the regime’s conduct than the economic assets. This is because the resources were not severely threatened by the region’s rebellions. When the Government of South Sudan became the prime authority over Greater Upper Nile, it faced several severe threats. The danger that these challenges posed was especially grave because the regime in Juba was weak after having coming into power in a region shattered by decades of war. The fragility of the government meant that it could not counter all of the threats against it simultaneously but had to deal with the most imminent threats first. The Lou Nuer community was perceived as the primary challenge because it was averse to the ruling elites in Juba, was well armed, and was a likely proxy for Khartoum if the Sudanese regime would try to incite disorder in South Sudan. Since 2010, various rebel groups have posed significant threats to the government of South Sudan. These challenges have mainly been initiated from elements within the Nuer, Murle, and Shilluk communities, and as a consequence, Juba has disfavored these groups. In regards to opportunities, the regime in Juba has been heavily dependent on oil, and a substantial part of it is located in Greater Upper Nile. However, extraction of this asset has not been critically endangered by the rebellions in the region.

The comparison of the three regions reveals some important insights about how opportunities influence governments’ behavior. Opportunities affect regimes differently, and a careful analysis of the significance that certain opportunities present for the central authority is needed to assess the influence of this factor. In Eastern Sudan, the economic resources were vital and threatened by the rebellion, but the insurgency posed a relatively limited

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\(^{83}\) The NDA was an antigovernment umbrella organization comprising numerous rebel groups. The strongest of these movements in military terms was the SPLM/A, and the leader of the NDA was John Garang, head of SPLM/A (Assal 2013; Johnson 2006).

\(^{84}\) This should not be interpreted to mean that the SPLM/A is solely a southern movement. Instead it is comprised of members from communities across Sudan and receives support at a national level. Still, its most crucial constituency area is southern Sudan.
military challenge. This implied that the primary objective of the counterinsurgency operation was to safeguard the oil and its infrastructure. In Darfur, where economic opportunities were comparatively insignificant, such considerations were not necessary. Similarly to Eastern Sudan, Greater Upper Nile offered important opportunities for the regime in Juba. However, extraction of these resources was not endangered by the rebellion in the region and, therefore, had less effect on the government’s behavior. Importantly, the economic assets in Eastern Sudan and Greater Upper Nile were in the hands of the respective government of these regions. If this would not have been the case, it is likely that this significantly altered the regimes’ conduct in the region. This can be illustrated by how the regime in Khartoum acted to gain control over the oilfields in southern Sudan. When oil was discovered, these parts of southern Sudan were in the hands of the SPLM/A. To take over these areas, the government relied strongly on militias that used ethnic cleansing tactics to oust anti-government groups. Once the area was in the hands of the government, however, the reliance on militias decreased and the regular army became more responsible for maintaining government control in the region (HRW 2003; ICG 2002). Thus, opportunities controlled by the regime restrict the deployment of militias, but such tactics are a viable option when important assets are not under government control.

What About Ethnic Kin?

The comparison of government bias has, up to this point, centered on how opportunities and threats have influenced the regimes’ actions. To further develop the understanding of state partiality, the concept of source bias is borrowed from the literature on mediation. In this study, source bias refers to an influence on government behavior that has its origin in closer ties to particular communities. We can ask, therefore, if source bias has influenced the behavior of the two regimes studied in this thesis. In Darfur, Khartoum has promoted Arabization. This is manifested in an agreement signed between Sudan’s government and Libya to promote the Arab culture in Darfur. A core reason for signing this accord was to cement relations with Libya and to ensure that Muammar Qaddafi, the President of Libya at the time, would provide weapons to the regime in Khartoum. However, the tactic also had ideological roots and followed the regimes policy of endorsing Arabization.

The ideology of Arabization as a reason for government bias has, however, been inferior to other motivations. Importantly, the regime has favored certain Arab communities when it had instrumental need for them (particularly as militias). However, both before and after these recruitment drives Khartoum has failed to provide support to these communities, whereof some

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85 It should be noted that instrumentalist partiality and source bias do not exclude each other, but can go hand in hand.
are among Darfur’s most impoverished. Likewise, the promises (primarily of land) that the government used to recruit militias were largely unfulfilled. Thus, the Sudanese government has primarily acted in a biased manner to counter threats and to empower itself, and this bias does not appear to stem from closer ties to any particular communities. It is important to note here that although numerous communities in Darfur and Eastern Sudan adhere to an Arab identity, these groups are not the same as the riverine Arabs who dominate the central government. Thus, it is not the regime’s ethnic brethren who are involved in the communal conflicts in the peripheries of the country. This lack of close ethnic ties could be important for the general absence of extensive source bias. Further evidence that ethnic ties are not the basis for the Sudanese government’s bias comes from Khartoum’s policy in Southern Sudan during the North-South war. In this conflict, the government supported communities, such as the Nuer and Murle, that it did not have any ethnic affiliation to at all in order to facilitate recruitment of militias to counter the threat from the SPLM/A.

In Greater Upper Nile, there has been a closer link between some of the groups involved in the communal conflicts and the regime. The Dinka community, which dominated the government of South Sudan, has taken part in some conflicts. Scrutinizing the policies of the Juba administration reveals that its bias stems from a combination of instrumentalist reasons and source bias. Strategic decisions to empower itself, such as decisions about disarming different communities, are regularly taken to counter threats. However, it would be politically hazardous to make decisions that might be viewed as disfavoring ethnic brethren. Thus, ethnic solidarity is not unimportant and the regime tends to prefer Dinkas also due to ethnic ties. The regime’s behavior is also influenced by the severe stigmatization of the Murle, which increases the prejudice that the regime show toward this community. In the end, however, the key determining factor for the regime’s behavior has been the threats and opportunities it has faced.

**Government Bias Impedes Constructive Elite Interactions**

The theoretical argument of this study suggests that government bias is likely to disrupt interactions among various elites. In a communal conflict context, the most important central elite is the government and leaders of the communities (and the native administration that they often are part of) constitute the most crucial local elites. The comparison of the three regions in this study reveals that elites, in general, have interacted more constructively in Eastern Sudan than in Darfur and Greater Upper Nile. Both central–local and local–local interactions have been largely unconstructive in the two latter regions, but such interrelations have predominantly been positive in Eastern Sudan. This section first compares central–local relations and then local–local interactions.
A core reason for the unconstructive central–local elite interactions in Darfur has been the strong partiality that characterizes Khartoum’s policy towards the region’s communities. In a similar manner, Juba’s biased behavior in Greater Upper Nile has impeded cooperative central–local elite interactions. In contrast, the regime’s impartiality has enabled constructive interactions between central and local elites in Eastern Sudan.

An important aspect of how the ruling authority’s behavior has affected elite interaction relates to appointment procedures. In Darfur, the Sudanese government has promoted individuals in a selective manner. Local elites perceived as hostile to the regime have regularly been replaced by pro-government individuals within various state institutions. This has implied that members from favored groups have been more likely to be appointed. Likewise, the regime has sought to empower pro-government elements within communities that have generally been hostile to Khartoum. Furthermore, elites with strong traditional power among the communities have intentionally been replaced with leaders with close ties to the central authority. As a result, their prime allegiance has been with the government rather than with the communities. This is also clearly seen in the relation between Greater Upper Nile and the regime in Juba in which influential positions have not been assigned because of merit or traditional power. Instead appointments have been part of a policy of promoting the interests of the South Sudanese government and have favored pro-government communities (principally the Dinka) over communities perceived as hostile to the regime. To a large extent, individuals have been given powerful positions as a reward for achievements during the war, and this has meant that individuals who are accustomed to fighting military conflicts have been empowered.

In Darfur and Greater Upper Nile alike, this method of appointing individuals to positions of power has contributed to the predominantly negative interactions between central and local elites. Four dynamics have been at play in how these appointment procedures play out. First, empowering elites without any genuine power among the communities has restricted the prospects for constructive central–local interactions. If local elites lack influence within their communities, they will not be in a good position to bring local and central perspectives together. Likewise, newly appointed leaders have often lacked the means to properly engage with the communities and have regularly failed to understand the local contexts behind the various communal conflicts. This can be illustrated by the appointment of Ibrahim Yusuf Ali as Sultan of all Fur. He was appointed despite the fact that he had never lived in Darfur and reportedly does not speak the Fur language. When individuals without any local leverage are appointed to positions meant to voice the concerns of the local communities, local perceptions are less likely to be pertinently reflected. In fact, although such interactions are central–local on paper, they are really more central–central interactions in reality. Importantly, local elites selected in this manner have their prime allegiance
to the government at the center, not to the communities in the region. Second, selective appointments have decreased the incentive for representatives of the unfairly treated communities to constructively engage with the government because they consider such cooperation an unfeasible alternative when they are constantly overlooked. In Greater Upper Nile, elites stated that interaction with the central authority was futile because of the government’s preferential treatment of the Dinka. A Shilluk youth leader even said that President Salva Kiir was a “big Dinka chief” rather than the head of state. Third, even when elites with traditional power have been included in the administrative structures this has often not fostered constructive local–central interrelations. Instead these elites have tended to lose credibility within their communities because of the widespread antigovernment opinions that prevail among many groups in Darfur and Greater Upper Nile. Indeed, to even be perceived as supportive of the regime can be enough to lose credibility in many Darfurian communities. Fourth, the fact that elites from disfavored communities are regularly not incorporated into the administrative structures limits their participation in an arena that could potentially foster positive relations between central and local elites. In Greater Upper Nile this has particularly been true for the Murle who have consistently been overlooked in appointments to influential positions.

The poor relations between central and local elites in Darfur and Greater Upper Nile stand in sharp contrast to how such elites have acted together in Eastern Sudan. In this region, the government has often engaged constructively with local elites. Critical for such positive interrelations has been that the government, as part of its policy to promote stability in the region, has empowered local elites with strong traditional power. Instead of undermining such leaders, the government has co-opted them. In fact, the regime has succeeded with the delicate balance of co-opting traditional leaders at the same time as these elites have remained influential within their communities. Importantly, despite working closely with the government, these leaders are seen as having their prime allegiance with the communities. An essential reason for this is that they have been allowed to influence decisions taken by the government, and this has fostered constructive interrelations between central and local actors. Above all, mutual dependence has arisen between the regime and local leaders. Khartoum has depended on the traditional elites to promote its interest in the region, and the leaders of the communities have been dependent on the government to keep their influential positions. This shared reliance has enabled constructive interactions, and the positive interrelations between the government and local leaders in Eastern Sudan have been essential for the peaceful coexistence in the region. Crucially, the regime and the native administration have repeatedly interacted constructively to settle inter-communal disputes.

In the three regions, local–local elite interactions largely follow the same pattern as local–central interrelations. Thus, partial behavior by the state has
contributed to the negative interaction among local elites in Greater Upper Nile and Darfur, while the relative neutral behavior of the regime has contributed to positive relations among local elites in Eastern Sudan. Traditionally, the native administration has been a crucial arena to foster interrelations among local elites from various communities. In Greater Upper Nile and Darfur, however, the native administration has been undermined and has failed to nurture productive interactions. Instead of a stable arena with enduring interrelations among local elites, the native administration in these two regions has been characterized by disarray and constant reorganizations during the examined time period. This has prevented constructive relations among local elites. In addition, the appointment procedures described above have also created problems for local–local interactions. Neutrality is essential for traditional authorities to be effective, but increased interference with this institution by the government in both Darfur and Greater Upper Nile has meant that it has been permeated by partiality. The native administration has not been replaced by another system that could foster constructive interrelations among local elites.

In contrast to Darfur and Greater Upper Nile, the native administration has fulfilled the important task of fostering positive relations among local elites in Eastern Sudan. In fact, it has played an essential role for the mainly amicable cohabitation between the region’s elites. The government has allowed, and encouraged, productive engagement among local elites within this traditional authority in Eastern Sudan. The prime motivation has been that the regime views this institution as suitable for maintaining stability in the region. In Eastern Sudan, another type of constructive local–local interrelation has also been observed. Traditional leaders are usually held in high esteem in the region, and they have the power to influence other local actors. For instance, traditional leaders have – through timely interventions – successfully stopped plans by youth leaders to attack infrastructure in the region. Even young adults in Eastern Sudan who had a critical perception of the traditional leaders representing their communities still held these elites as important for solving inter-communal disputes.

In Darfur, interactions among local elites have been further disrupted because the regime in Khartoum has exploited intertribal rivalries for military purposes. In this process, the central elite has aggravated divisions among the leaders of the ethnic groups living at the periphery of power. Khartoum has deployed tactics to provoke confrontation and intensify inter-ethnic hatred to promote division, disarray, and hostility among Darfurian communities that oppose the government. Likewise, the government has repeatedly provided military support to one group in an attempt to manipulate it to engage in intergroup violence. Such divisive tactics had political motivations in that they helped to decrease the threat that local groups posed to the government and diverted attention away from the failures of the regime. The techniques of pitting one group against the other have led to destructive relations
among local elites and communities alike. Such dynamics were not as obvious in Greater Upper Nile, but in order to empower themselves local and central elites sometimes instigated conflicts and at times political actors conspired to increase tensions among local elites to increase their influence in the region. This contributed to the prevailing unconstructive relations among local elites in Greater Upper Nile.

**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. As part of this tactic, atrocities carried out by Dinkas have been less likely to be investigated than if committed by non-Dinkas. Likewise, perpetrators from favored communities have, in general, been less likely to be charged and imprisoned than those from disfavored communities. The prime cause for the unfair treatment of some communities has been that the regime in Juba has used this policy to counter perceived threats. In addition to unfair criminal prosecution, uneven disarmament has been an especially decisive factor behind violent communal conflicts in Greater Upper Nile. The igniting factor behind the violent communal conflict between the Murle and Lou Nuer, which has killed thousands of people in Greater Upper Nile during the
last several years, was the disarmament of the Lou Nuer but not the Murle, who were allowed to keep their weapons. This campaign upset the local balance of power, and the Murle attacked the disarmed Lou Nuer. Vicious circles of violence between the two communities followed.

The ethnic affiliation of the victims of violence has also influenced decisions regarding sanctions. For example, crimes committed against members of the Murle community have been less likely to be investigated than offenses targeting other groups. This prejudiced treatment of the Murle is founded in the stigmatization of this community in South Sudan. In Darfur, offenses that victimized communities perceived as pro-rebel were substantially less likely to be investigated than crimes committed against pro-government groups. These two aspects, ethnic affiliation of the perpetrator and communal belonging of the victim, are interrelated. Thus, punishments have been especially likely to be discriminatory when the perpetrator came from a favored community and the victim belonged to a disfavored group.  

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.

It should be noted that there are also a general problem for law enforcement in Darfur because of the chaos in the region and in Greater Upper Nile due to the inaccessibility of parts of the region. Thus, perpetrators from disfavored communities sometimes also go unpunished. Still, a clear difference in the likelihood of being punished depending on communal affiliation exists.
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. However, in this region there was no evidence that could establish with any certainty a clear causal connection between clear boundaries and the low levels of violence.

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. However, no clear evidence for this being an important reason for how boundaries were changed was found in the empirical analysis of Greater Upper Nile. Still, the government is not impartial when such decisions are taken. Instead, a likely reason behind the failure to establish this link might lie in the intricate state structures of Southern Sudan, which means that it is difficult to reveal from which authority a particular decision stems. Thus, it is probable that boundaries have been drawn to empower particular communities even if these dynamics are difficult to discern.

In fact, the Balanda–Dinka conflict that took place in Western Bahr el-Ghazal (another South Sudanese state located in the northwestern part of the country) exposes such a dynamic. This conflict was triggered by a biased decision by the state concerning administrative boundaries. In 2012, the regime in Juba decided to relocate the headquarters of Wau County from the city of Wau to the Bagari area. The relocation of this administrative center blurred boundaries because they no longer followed traditional demarcations. This decision was strongly resisted by the Balanda because the transfer would empower the Dinka at their expense. To show their detest for this verdict, Balanda protestors burned the South Sudanese flag. Infuriated by the decision, the Balanda also attacked the Dinka. This led to fighting between the two communities that is estimated to have killed 28 people in 2012 (Sudan Tribune 2012d, 2012c; UCDP 2013c). Nonetheless, unclear boundaries have contributed to the prevalence of violent communal conflicts in Darfur to an even larger extent than in Greater Upper Nile. A probable reason for this is that whereas the redrawing of administrative boundaries have been carried out to inflame conflicts in Darfur, evidence of intentional state policies to do this in Greater Upper Nile have not been found.

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.

8.3 Extending the Argument

To further evaluate the causal story provided in the theoretical framework, the altered pattern of Darfur’s violent communal conflicts after the start of the 2003 rebellion will be reassessed. This is done to see if the theoretical framework can also be used to understand changes over time. The prime change in the violence was that the conflicts went from primarily pitting Arabs against non-Arabs to mainly being fought between Arab communities. Can the argument provided in this study explain the new dynamics that emerged? Land is crucial for this study and the shift in who is fighting who was primarily related to land. Many communities had joined Khartoum’s counterinsurgency as a means to procure land, and more than three millions non-Arabs have been driven from their traditional areas. This has led to fierce competition among numerous Arab communities over who should control the abandoned land. In these fights, the government supported some groups over others. In particular, the regime backed the communities that had contributed most significantly to the counterinsurgency, while some groups were disfavored because Khartoum perceived them as threats. Thus, the government differentiated between various Arab communities and was not neutral in these Arab–Arab conflicts.

Likewise, the government’s partial behavior disrupted elite interactions. The central authority had promised rewards (primarily land) to several Arab communities. In general, however, these promises went unfulfilled and this deteriorated the relations between Arab elites and the central authority. In addition, Khartoum’s non-neutral policies impeded constructive relations among local elites. Importantly, the government sought to disrupt interrelations among such elites because these groups, if united, could pose a significant threat to the regime. Not the least because these communities were in possession of large quantities of arms that the government had provided to them.
Furthermore, scrutinizing the three mechanisms of the theoretical framework presented in this thesis increases our understanding of the dynamic that emerged post-2003. In particular, explanatory power is provided by the boundaries mechanism. Many of the Arab–Arab conflicts were fought to safeguard the territorial claims of the respective communities and borders were in disarray during this time. In a similar manner, the chaos that prevailed in Darfur after the rebellion was initiated distanced rules from local conditions. A key effect of the fighting, and of the counterinsurgency in particular, was the displacement of millions of people. This meant that communities often did not live in their area of origin, and this prevented regulations from reflecting local circumstances. Finally, sanctions were not applied in a proper manner, and selective impunity prevailed. Not only did perpetrators go unpunished if they targeted pro-rebellion communities, but oftentimes also when they fought other Arab communities. Thus, the theoretical argument concerning government bias and how it influences the factors determining conflict versus cooperation not only helps us understand patterns across regions, but also changes over time.

8.4 Comparing the Mechanisms

The comparison above lends support to the three mechanisms because they corresponded in the anticipated manner in each of the cases. In the region with low prevalence of violent communal conflicts, Eastern Sudan, sanctions were generally proportional, boundaries fairly clear, and rules reflected local circumstances. In the two regions experiencing numerous violent communal conflicts (Darfur and Greater Upper Nile) sanctions were largely partisan, boundaries generally unclear, and rules did not properly relate to local conditions. However, this does not mean that the explanatory power of the three mechanisms was equally strong. While the process connecting sanctions and local rules to patterns of communal conflicts were identified in all three regions, the role of boundaries was somewhat less certain. Boundaries were causally linked to the prevalence to violent communal conflicts in Darfur and Greater Upper Nile but were not clearly connected to the absence of such conflicts in Eastern Sudan. Hence, the within-region analyses established causal-process observations for all mechanisms in the regions with prevalence of violent communal conflicts, but such observations were identified only for sanctions and local rules – not for unclear boundaries – in the region where violent communal conflicts were absent.

Thus, clear boundaries seem to carry less explanatory power for the absence of violent communal conflicts in Eastern Sudan. Why? A conceivable reason for this is that while unclear boundaries might cause disputes it is more difficult to comprehend how they might influence how differences are managed. In Eastern Sudan, border disputes repeatedly occurred but were
handled in a rather peaceful manner. Thus, while disputes can be caused by unclear boundaries, how these are managed seems to be more important than the frequency of such differences. One important reason as to why conflicts over boundaries were easier to settle in Eastern Sudan was that borders were not generally drawn to shift power balances or to incite conflicts in the region. Instead, the government tried to dampen rather than spur border disputes. Not only did this strategy decrease the confusion around boundaries, it also meant that border disputes could be managed in a peaceful manner.

Another potential reason for why proportional sanctions and local rules appear to be more significant for explaining peaceful cohabitation could be that these two mechanisms seem to be more closely related than unclear boundaries to issues of trust. During the situations considered in this study, trust proved to be fundamental for cooperation. Selective impunity efficiently eroded trust among the communities in Darfur and Greater Upper Nile. In particular, it caused mistrust in legal institutions among communities that suffered from atrocities that went unpunished. This consistently left violence as the only viable option to settle disputes. In addition, trust among the communities was also eroded when rules were unrelated to local circumstances and when local actors were not allowed to influence regulations. This was especially the case because the government was not considered legitimate by many groups. In contrast, levels of trust remained high when local circumstances were considered because this created familiarity with the system. In particular, levels of trust were enhanced when legitimate representatives from the communities were allowed to influence rules. The empirical examination did not uncover any clear examples about how boundaries affected level of trust.

Hence, proportional sanctions and local rules were found to be more important for the absence of violent communal conflicts in Eastern Sudan, but this should not be interpreted to mean that the boundaries mechanism is trivial. Quite the contrary, the within-region analysis of Darfur (and Greater Upper Nile to a lesser degree) provided evidence for how this mechanism has contributed to the violent communal conflicts in these two regions. Likewise, the between-region analysis showed that this mechanism varies in line with the expectations of the theory. Thus, the combined causal leverage is larger when the three mechanisms are combined than if the boundaries mechanism is excluded.

8.5 Additional Findings

The empirical examination of the three regions revealed several important findings that are beyond the main scope of this study. The first of these findings is that in addition to the intra-regional dynamics described above, the governments’ behavior in the regions has also been influenced by develop-
ments in other sub-national units. In Darfur, Khartoum’s policies became more partial in mid-1980s in an attempt to counter the spread of the war in the south. In contrast, the regime came to be even more reluctant to act in a biased manner in Eastern Sudan when disorder erupted in Darfur after the 2003 rebellion because it wanted to prevent a similar development in the east. Thus, when examining sub-national units, it is important to not only examine the region under study but also to analyze interlinkages with other parts of the country. A related dynamic has been discerned by Walter (2006), who in a study of separatist conflicts found that governments in multiethnic countries are likely to fight an initial separatist challenge in order to deter separatist attempts in other parts of the nation.

The second additional finding relates to interconnections between different forms of violence and in particular how civil wars and communal conflicts interact. As shown above, counterinsurgency tactics used by the government have had significant effects on the relations between the communities in the regions examined here. However, instead of a linear connection between communal conflicts and civil wars, a complex interplay between the two types of conflict was found. Although all the three regions have experienced civil war at some point during the studied time period, they also displayed a wide variety of such violence, experiencing periods before, during, and after civil wars. When comparing the occurrence of civil war and the frequency of violent communal conflicts, no straightforward relationship is observed. Instead, some of the most violent communal conflicts took place when no civil war was ongoing. The very violent communal conflicts in Darfur in late-1980s and early-1990s, and the conflicts in Greater Upper Nile after the signing of the CPA, are two prominent examples of this. However, the two types of warfare were sometimes closely interlinked. Not only was the Darfur rebellion in 2003 preceded by violent communal conflicts, the government’s behavior in these conflicts was also a crucial factor for the insurgents to take up weapons. Likewise, the end of the North–South war was closely related to the violent communal conflicts that followed in Greater Upper Nile. One consequence of the conflict between Khartoum and the SPLM/A was that it intensified hostilities between groups in Greater Upper Nile.

In Darfur, state-based violence has taken place from 2003 onwards leaving the first 14 studied years without this type of conflict. In Eastern Sudan, the NDA rebellion was ongoing between 1996 and 2001 and the low-intensity conflict between the Eastern Front and the regime in Khartoum took place between 2003 and 2006. Greater Upper Nile, was a key battle ground throughout the second Sudanese civil war (1983–2005) between the regime in Khartoum and the SPLM/A but did not experience any state-based conflict during the first five years the region was examined in this study (2005–2010). The region, however, once again experienced civil war from 2010 to 2012 when various rebel groups rose up against the regime in Juba. Thus the regions have experienced periods before civil war (Darfur 1989–2002 and Eastern Sudan 1989–1996), during civil war (Darfur 2003–2012, Eastern Sudan 1996–2001, and Greater Upper Nile 2010–2012), and after civil war (Eastern Sudan 1997–2012 and Greater Upper Nile 2005–2009).
Nile, in particular because of Khartoum’s divide-and-conquer strategy. These hostilities were important for the violent communal conflicts that emerged in Greater Upper Nile after the signing of the CPA. Connections between communal conflicts and civil wars have also been identified at a global level (cf. Brosché and Elfversson 2012; Pettersson 2010), and Cunningham and Lemke (2013) have shown that wars within, and between, countries often have similar causes.

The third additional finding was that communal conflicts can be influenced by interstate relations with neighboring countries. In Darfur, Khartoum’s agreement with Libya that promoted the Arab culture contributed to the government’s bias against the non-Arab communities. Later, the relation between Chad and Sudan – which alternated between periods of proxy-war and periods of tranquility – had significant impact in the region. In particular, the support Chad provided to the rebels (primarily JEM) during the 2004–2009 period increased the threat the insurgencies posed to Khartoum, and this contributed to violent communal conflicts via increased partiality by the Sudanese regime. In Eastern Sudan, the most important interstate relation was the one between Eritrea and Sudan. One dimension of the Asmara–Khartoum relationship was that Eritrea provided support to rebels based in Eastern Sudan. Furthermore, improved relations between the two neighbors were important for the signing of the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement. However, no substantial effect of this intrastate dimension was manifested in terms of the relations among Eastern Sudan’s communities. In Greater Upper Nile, the relationship between Sudan and South Sudan has constituted the most important cross-border dimension in the region. Despite the signing of the CPA, the relation between Sudan and South Sudan remained hostile and weapons provided by Khartoum to southern insurgencies were also extensively used in the region’s communal conflicts. The finding that communal conflicts are affected by developments in adjacent countries relates to the literature concerning the role of neighbors for ethnic state-based conflicts (cf. Brown 1996; Lake and Rotchild 1998) and the influence of adjacent countries on civil wars in general (cf. Brown 2001; Hegre and Sambanis 2006; Forsberg 2009).

### 8.6 Alternative Explanations

This study argues that the most important factor for explaining the variation between the three regions in terms of prevalence of violent communal conflicts is biased behavior by the state. However, it is important to ask what alternative explanations might fit the observations in this study.

One important aspect to consider is whether the cases varied in terms of communal identification, which is a core aspect of the definition of communal conflicts. Moreover, groupness among the communities is an important
feature for theories in the ethnic security dilemma realm (cf. Melander 2009; Posen 1993). In addition, the political salience of cultural differences can vary across different areas (Posner 2004), and numerous studies have shown that ethnic identification is strong in Darfur (cf. Abdul-Jalil 2009) and Greater Upper Nile (cf. ICG 2009a). Can the low frequency of violent communal conflicts in Eastern Sudan be explained by less distinct communal identities in the region? The empirical examination revealed that this is probably not the case. Instead, the analysis showed that communal identification was also strong among Eastern Sudan’s communities. This was manifested in a strong communal pride and by the fact that conflicts between individuals easily turned into communal conflicts. Many communal disputes in Eastern Sudan had the potential to intensify, but a solution was reached before they turned violent. On no occasion, however, was the reason for resolution of the conflict related to the importance of the communal identification among the communities.

The comparison between Darfur and Eastern Sudan exposed another difference related to identity. In Darfur, the Arab–African division was much more strident and politicized than in Eastern Sudan. Historically, the fact that all of Darfur’s communities are Muslim and that many non-Arab groups have Arabic as their mother tongue made the division less sharp. But the polarization between Arabs and non-Arabs has increased during the last decades and was cemented after the start of the civil war. Thus, identifying as an Arab or African has come to precede other identities that had previously often superseded this division. The significance of this division was manifested in the creation of the Arab and Zurga Alliances as well as by the fact that a clear majority of the violent communal conflicts prior to 2003 pitted Arabs against non-Arabs. In Eastern Sudan, the same division existed and some of the communities identified themselves as Arabs while others classified themselves as non-Arabs. However, this was not a decisive partition and Easterners generally did not view this as a critical factor for the relations between the communities in Eastern Sudan. It is important to ask, therefore, if this difference in division between Arabs and Africans can explain the lack of communal conflicts in Eastern Sudan. When evaluating the communal conflicts in the region, this does not seem to be the case. If the identification with the community would have been significantly less important in Eastern Sudan than in Darfur, it would have constituted a substantial difference. It is possible that a stronger politicization of the Arab–African divide could lead to violent communal conflicts becoming more prevalent in Eastern Sudan. However, even without a strong Arab–African division numerous

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88 The Arab–non-Arab division is not relevant for Greater Upper Nile since no community in the region identify themselves as an Arab.
89 This is in contrast to a majority of the post-2003 violent communal conflicts that were fought among Arab communities. The reasons for this shift are examined in the “Extending the Argument” section of this chapter.
conflicts had the potential to turn violent but did not do so because of successful conflict management. Likewise, if such an increased polarization would take place, one potential reason for such a development would be increased regime partiality. In fact, the government’s siding with certain communities was significant for the intensity of the Arab–African division in Darfur.

A second potential alternative explanation concerns the culture of honor. Among many communities involved in communal conflicts, a culture of honor prevails and such conflicts are sometimes ignited because of the wounded pride of an individual or a community (Los Angeles Times 1993; UCDP 2013c). In Greater Upper Nile, a pervasive culture of honor made it easier for conflict instigators to find recruits and to entice conflicts. Likewise, a strong culture of honor, in which values such as bravery, honor, and respect were highly esteemed, prevailed among many Darfurian communities. This was manifested in the tradition of *Hakkama* (women singers), which exists among Arabs and non-Arabs alike, who promote bravery among their men during times of war (Tubiana 2010; Mohamed 2004). Because such a culture was prevalent in the two cases that frequently experienced violent communal conflicts, it might be suspected that such a culture was absent in Eastern Sudan. The empirical analyses, however, revealed that this was not the case and that a strong culture of honor also existed in Eastern Sudan. In fact, violent disputes sometimes occurred because communities argued about which community was the bravest (Interview with camel nomad, 2010). This culture is also manifested in perceptions about how women should behave so as to be honorable (Hassan 2007).

A third alternative explanation relates to scarcity of resources. This argument is frequently emphasized as an important factor for communal conflicts both in Sudan (cf. Richardson 2011; Leroy 2009) and globally (cf. Homer-Dixon 1999). This study, however, set out to examine three regions that were all characterized by a severe shortage of subsistence resources. Thus, the environmental security argument does not seem to have had an extensive causal effect on the variation in frequency of violent communal conflicts in the three regions. This does not mean, however, that the scarcity of resources is unimportant for communal conflicts in Darfur, Eastern Sudan, and Greater Upper Nile. Indeed, the scarcity dimension has been significant in the conflicts in these regions and conflicts have frequently been triggered by dis-

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90 This tradition was manifested in 2004 when some elements of Minni Minawi’s forces stole goats from the Zayadiya Arabs. The men from the victimized community did not want to retrieve these animals, because they believed that they would be ambushed in such an attempt. However, the wife of the man whose animals had been stolen started to sing about her husband. “She sang to insult her husband, accusing him of cowardice, commanding him to go and reclaim them by force. The husband said ‘I know I am a dead man but I will go’ ” (de Waal and Flint 2008: 137). Her and others’ songs prompted the men to attack the rebels, but the Zayadiya pastoralists were ambushed by the rebels, resulting in nineteen fatalities (de Waal and Flint 2008).
putes over subsistence means, especially land. In fact, in a majority of the conflicts grievances over land have played an important role. In addition to being a frequent conflict trigger, the lack of subsistence resources has provided a breeding ground for elites who have wanted to use community conflicts for their own political purposes. A prime example of this was when the regime in Khartoum used land grievances among several groups in Darfur to recruit members of these groups to serve as militias. However, Eastern Sudan demonstrates that such resource scarcity does not necessarily lead to violent communal conflicts and that situations of scarcity can be managed in a relatively peaceful manner. Importantly, problems that have arisen in Eastern Sudan because of resource scarcity have been dampened by the rather impartial behavior of the government in this region. This has contributed to constructive elite interactions, proportional sanctions, fairly clear boundaries, and rules relating to local circumstances. All of these aspects have contributed to the prevailing peaceful coexistence among Eastern Sudan’s communities despite the widespread scarcity of resources.

All of the regions studied here share a widespread shortage of resources, and it is reasonable to ask if the results of this study could still be applicable in regions that are not characterized by extensive resource scarcity. The mechanisms and factors shown to be important in this study are likely to have a general explanatory power because they influence factors, such as levels of trust, that are generally considered to be important for conflict and cooperation. Therefore, issues such as government bias, elite interactions, sanctions, boundaries, and local rules are likely to also be important under circumstances in which resources are more readily available. However, the combination of regime bias and scarcity of resources – that have characterized Darfur and Greater Upper Nile – appears to constitute a particularly volatile combination that is unlikely to occur in situations of less scarcity. If resources were not scarce, conflict triggers would be fewer – and fights probably not as intense – because resource scarcity would not endanger the survival of communities and communities would not be as vulnerable to manipulation by various elites.

A fourth alternative explanation relates to the structure of civic life. Although the opportunities for a vibrant civic life is more limited in a rural than in an urban context, how such relations are structured may influence the risk for violent communal conflicts. In situations with a vibrant civic life – in which intercommunal interaction is frequent – it is conceivable that government bias will be less prone to cause violent communal conflicts. It is equally true, however, that government bias can disrupt such civic life, because it is more difficult to uphold constructive inter-communal relations when certain communities are favored over others. This was demonstrated in Darfur where increased partiality by Khartoum had negative consequences for how the civic life was structured. In addition, also societies where such a civic life exists are likely to be influenced by the mechanisms described in this
study. Thus, the causal argument provided here and the explanations that relate to how intercommunal relations are structured should not be viewed as mutually exclusive but as complementary explanations.

A final alternative explanation to consider relates to the proliferation of weapons and the militarization in the regions. Modern weapons are less prevalent in Eastern Sudan than in Darfur and Greater Upper Nile and the communities in the former are less militarized than in the latter. One implication of the accessibility of weapons and militarization of the communities is that this has lowered the threshold for using arms in Darfur and Greater Upper Nile. This means that in situations where grievances prevail – and conflict resolution mechanisms are absent – access to arms might be an additional factor spurring conflict by creating opportunities for violence. Yet, this explanation still leaves out important aspects of the variation between the regions.

In Eastern Sudan, clashes between the communities frequently took place and it was generally considered an obligation to avenge an offense committed against the community. Although modern arms were less abundant in Eastern Sudan, such weapons were not completely absent and were sometimes used in the region’s communal conflicts. This meant that Easterners frequently worried that communal conflicts would escalate. In fact, interviewees in Eastern Sudan repeatedly articulated that a war between two communities was a viable option if a settlement was not reached. However, effective conflict resolution initiatives, through the native administration and its constructive interaction with the government, repeatedly settled these disputes before they intensified. Thus, successful resolution of communal disputes was a key explanation to the low frequency of violent communal conflicts in Eastern Sudan.

Furthermore, modern weapons are not a necessity for violent conflict, and numerous violent communal conflicts in other parts of the world have been fought with the belligerents using traditional weapons. Examples from such conflicts have taken place in Nigeria (The Atlantic 2013), Indonesia (BBC 1999; Van Klinken 2001) and Papua New Guinea (Frankel 2005; UCDP 2013c). Besides, Eastern Sudan is a frontier area and weapons could easily be obtained either from neighboring countries or other parts of Sudan if they were needed by the communities.

Importantly, the attacks that militias carried out in Darfur on behalf of the regime in Khartoum are not part of the UCDP communal conflict dataset. Instead, this warfare is defined as one-sided violence because it was a deliberate targeting of civilians and did not pit two particular communities against each other. Likewise, these attacks were oftentimes carried out together with the regular army and were, therefore, not coded as non-state violence.

This does not mean that modern weapons were generally absent in these countries. Instead some violent communal conflicts were fought with modern weapons, whereas others were fought with traditional arms.

In this context, it is important to remember that this study uses a fairly low level of what distinguishes a violent communal conflict, 25 fatalities in a year. The conflicts in Darfur and
8.7 Implications of the Research Design

In addition to discussing alternative explanations, the implications of the selected research design warrant consideration. This study examines regions, and this means that the communal conflicts taking place in a sub-national area are aggregated to a regional level. Thus, the analysis does not seek explanations for each individual conflict. Instead, it is the general connection between state bias and patterns of violent communal conflicts that are analyzed. Furthermore, although violent communal conflicts were much more frequent in Darfur and Greater Upper Nile than in Eastern Sudan, not all communal disputes turned violent in the first two regions. This raises an important question. Do the findings concerning the importance of state bias also hold if a more disaggregated unit of analysis is studied?

The empirical examination revealed that many of the trajectories of individual conflicts followed the developments provided by the argument for the regional level. A prominent example is the Masalit–Arab conflict in Darfur in the mid-1990s. In this conflict, the Arab communities were strongly backed by the government. This bias impeded elite interactions between Khartoum and Masalit representatives. Likewise, this conflict provides support for the three theoretical mechanisms. The conflict was ignited by demarcation of administrative units, which created unclear boundaries. In addition, the conflict was fanned by selective sanctions in which Arabs went unpunished for committing atrocities and by inconsideration of local circumstances. In Greater Upper Nile, the conflict between the Ngok Dinka and Shilluk provides similar support to the theory. The regime in Juba strongly favored the Ngok Dinka in this conflict, which disrupted central–local elite interactions. Likewise, the Shilluk were punished more harshly than the Ngok Dinkas. Finally, this conflict started because of a severe violation of local traditions. Likewise, the causal argument was manifested in conflicts that did not turn violent in Eastern Sudan. This can be illustrated by a conflict between the Beni Amer and Beja communities in Port Sudan. In this conflict, the regime in Khartoum acted relatively impartially. When the conflict started, native administrators – accompanied by the governor – from the entire Eastern Sudan went to Port Sudan to calm the situation. This constructive interaction between central and local elites enabled a solution to the conflict before it escalated. Importantly, the conflict management initiative was embedded in local traditions that contributed to its success.

This does not mean that violent communal conflicts cannot occur without biased behavior by the state. This is shown in a conflict between two Misseriya clans in Kordofan (a region that neighbors Darfur to the east). In 1993, a

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Greater Upper Nile sometimes cause hundreds or even thousands of deaths. If a higher threshold for what distinguishes a violent communal conflict had been chosen, it is probable that the proliferation of weapons and a high level of militarization would be even more important.

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violent communal conflict between the Awlad al-Zuid and Awlad Omran clans killed 108 people. This conflict was caused by the wounded honor of a spurned suitor. The two clans fought each other fiercely for one day before the Sudanese army was sent to the area to stop the fighting. Both clans were disarmed and the government mediated between the two parties. Thereafter, no further clashes between the two clans have taken place (Los Angeles Times 1993; UCDP 2013c). Thus, although this study explains the regional variation of patterns of communal conflicts, as well as a majority of the individual violent communal conflicts in the regions, it is not an explanation for all violent communal conflicts. No similar example, where the government showed impartiality and acted properly to hinder the conflict, was found in Darfur and Greater Upper Nile. This raises the question of whether conflicts in which the role of the state was less manifested tended to be less reported. Although this is not an impossible option, it is deemed unlikely that violent communal conflicts would remain under the radar for two reasons. First, both Darfur and Greater Upper Nile are areas that garner much interest by Sudanese and international actors alike. Second, the combination of extensive fieldwork and rigorous use of secondary sources should be able to appropriately capture the conflicts that have taken place.
9. Conclusions

Communal conflicts have had devastating consequences for human security in many parts of the world. Our understanding of this phenomenon is, however, still limited. In particular, we lack knowledge about why some of these conflicts become violent while others are resolved peacefully. This study set out to examine this issue. Its point of departure was asking the following research question: *Why do communal conflicts turn violent in some regions but not in others?* Regions were used as the unit of analysis in the study because these conflicts show clear subnational variations that are unexplained by previous research. The theoretical framework combines insights from three different perspectives focusing on the role of the state, elite interactions, and the conditions for cooperation over common resources. Empirically, the research question has been investigated by combining within- and between-region analyses of three Sudanese regions: Darfur, Eastern Sudan, and Greater Upper Nile. 

Despite sharing several characteristics, communal conflicts have killed thousands in Darfur and Greater Upper Nile, but only a few dozen in Eastern Sudan. The empirical analysis builds on material collected during more than five months of fieldwork in Sudan and South Sudan. The aim of this comparative study is to provide insights into the causes of violent communal conflicts by building a theory on this under-researched topic. In this chapter, the principal conclusions of this study are summarized. Some implications for preventing and managing communal conflicts from the findings of this research project are also discussed. Finally, some avenues for future research are outlined.

9.1 Main Conclusions

The prime contribution of this study is that it provides an answer to *how* government bias contributes to violent communal conflicts. The study shows that the conduct of the regime is critical for explaining the prevalence of such violence. Although the state is not one of the primary warring parties in these conflicts, the government is important because its behavior has the potential to both undermine and strengthen actors and institutions that are

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94 Since July 9, 2011 Greater Upper Nile has been part of the independent nation of South Sudan.
important for cooperation and conflict. The examination furthermore provides a detailed causal argument explaining how state behavior contributes to the prevalence of violent communal conflicts. When the government acts in a biased manner – by favoring certain communities and disfavoring others – it disrupts interactions between central and local elites as well as among local elites. More specifically, government bias, and the negative elite interaction it entails, undermines three mechanisms that are important for communal cooperation.

First, when the regime is biased communal affiliation, rather than the severity and context of a violation, determines the kinds of sanctions imposed on the perpetrators. This mechanism contributes to violent communal conflicts by: (i) lowering the threshold for using violence among favored groups, (ii) decreasing the likelihood that disfavored communities seek legislative solutions to disputes they are involved in, (iii) upsetting local power balances, and (iv) disrupting traditional conflict management devices. Second, government bias leads to unclear boundaries that contribute to violent communal conflicts by creating disarray and shifting power balances between the communities. Third, regime partiality distances rules from local conditions and restricts the influence of local actors who possess adequate understanding of local circumstances. Thus, all three mechanisms have severe negative consequences for the interrelations between the communities and contribute to violence between them. When their relative importance is considered, sanctions and local rules appear to be more important for the frequency of violent communal conflicts than boundaries.

An additional finding of importance relates to why a regime acts with partiality in some areas but not in others. The answer is found in the complex interplay between threats and opportunities, and not in any one of them alone. It is the magnitude of the threats – and how they are dealt with – in combination with the significance of the opportunities – and what tactics are used to extract them – that determines if a regime will be biased or not. Government bias is also influenced by ethnic kin relations, but such relations appear to be substantially less important for determining state partiality than the threats and opportunities that the regions present. An important opportunity that influences state partiality is economic resources. If the government is in control over such assets, it might act more neutrally so as not to risk disorder that could endanger control over the assets. In contrast, if a region does not present any important assets – or if they are not under government control – then the state is more likely to act in a biased manner.95

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95 This finding has implications for the greed and grievance debate (cf. Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Fearon and Laitin 2003) because it shows how conditions important for greed-related motivations – such as control over economic assets – will lead to partiality or neutrality. In addition, this study shows that a key reason for why government bias contributes to violent communal conflicts is that it causes strong resentment – and grievances – among disfavored communities.
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 conclusions 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
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 2012, 2011), 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 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 2008b). 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.

9.2 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

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96 Butler and Gates (2012) reveal a similar dynamic and show that biased decisions regarding property rights contribute to range wars.
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 becomes 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. 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.

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.

9.3 Future Research

This study opens up several avenues for future research. In general the analysis above shows that the interaction between the state, local elites, and local institutions is critical for generating, or preventing, violent conflicts among communities. Thus, this research demonstrates the usefulness of combining a theory that centers on agency – Kalyvas’ elite interaction perspective – and one that has institutions as it primary focus – Ostrom’s CPR theory. The detailed causal story about how government bias increases the risk for violent communal conflict is founded in both of these theoretical perspectives and emphasizes the interplay between actors and institutions. For example, this study showed that government bias disrupts elite interactions and that this undermines the native administration and impedes peaceful management of disputes because rules become distanced from local circumstances. Although both elites and institutions have been focused upon in previous research, these two factors have rarely been studied in combination. Future research should, therefore, try to combine these two sets of theories to a larger extent so as to further explore the interactions between actors and institutions.

Although CPR theories have been proposed to be suitable for analyzing violent conflicts – because cooperation is at the heart of the CPR perspective – these theories have not been given much attention in peace and conflict research. This study suggests that there is much to be gained by making more use of such perspectives. The analysis presented here highlights how principles from CPR theory are applicable to situations of violent conflicts causing many deaths, not just the rather non-violent conflicts that have hitherto been the focus of analyses using the CPR framework. An interesting avenue for future research would, therefore, be to investigate whether the mechanisms that have been the focus of this dissertation offer insights into other types of collective violence. Although communal conflicts are intuitively more closely related to the CPR literature than civil wars, it would be interesting to examine civil wars from this perspective because the CPR
perspective offers central insights into conflict, cooperation, and collective action.

The argument provided in this study needs to be tested in regions in other countries. This would enrich the study of communal conflicts by assessing how applicable the theoretical reasoning outlined in this examination is outside Sudan. Furthermore, this research compares occurrences of violent communal conflicts in different regions, which leaves other variations unaccounted for. Not all parts of the studied regions experienced violent communal conflicts so a potential avenue for future research would be to study smaller geographical entities and to examine why the frequency of violent communal conflicts varies between them. Additional insights could, furthermore, be gained by studying communities and examining why certain groups are more prone to be involved in violent communal conflicts while others are not. Moreover, communal conflicts tend to vary over time with some years being much more violent than others. Examining this variation could further our understanding of the temporal dimensions and trajectories of violent communal conflicts.

Although this study emphasizes the interaction between the center and sub-national regions, it focuses more on the former. An opportunity to enhance the understanding of communal conflicts is to focus more on the interests, resources, and brokering abilities of the regions. Interactions between central and local elites are fundamental in the findings of this research, and the emphasis in this study has been on how government bias turns such relations negative. What has been less studied is the inherent strength of the primary local elites and the native administration that they are often a part of. A worthwhile option for future research would be to examine determinants for how receptive or resistant various local elites are to government bias. A related issue to explore in more detail is the structure of civic life among the communities. Such a study could generate interesting findings about how the civic structure affects the communities’ resilience to manipulation from elites.

A final 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.
List of Interviews

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Birgid representative, interviewed March 30, 2011, Khartoum.

Bonsu, Joseph, UN Human Rights Officer in Darfur, interviewed December 4, 2007, Khartoum.

Camel Nomad (from Lahuwien community), interviewed April 3, 2010, south of Gedarif.

Catholic Church representative, interviewed November 21, 2010, Malakal.


Deputy Nazir, interviewed March 30, 2010, Gedarif.


El-Amin, Khalil, Associate Professor, Development Studies and Research Institute, University of Khartoum, interviewed December 5, 2007, Khartoum.

Eliasson, Jan, former UNSG Special Envoy to Darfur, interviewed May 24, 2011, Stockholm.

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97 This list includes the interviews cited in the study. Other interviews provided important background information, but are not directly referred to.

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International NGO representative, interviewed March 29, 2010, Gedaref.

International NGO worker, interviewed March 25, 2010, Juba.

International scholar, interviewed October 15, 2011, Juba.

Jonglei government official, interviewed March 23, 2011, Bor.

Jonglei government representative, interviewed March 24, 2011, Bor.

Junior BCSSAC (Bureau for Community Security and Small Arms Control) representative, interviewed March 23, 2011, Bor.

Komey, Guma Kunda, Senior Researcher, Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg interviewed October 7, 2011, Khartoum.

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Senior BCSSAC representative, interviewed March 25, 2011, Juba.

Senior international observer, interviewed July 13, 2009, Juba.

Senior UN official, interviewed November 19, 2010, Juba.


South Sudanese scholar, interviewed April 6, 2013, Juba.

SPLM/A veteran, interviewed October 14, 2011, Juba.

Sudanese academic, University of Gedarif, interviewed March 29, 2010, Gedarif.

Sudanese NGO worker, the Kalma camp, interviewed November 12, 2010, Nyala.

Sudanese scholar, interviewed April 2, 2011, Khartoum.


Upper Nile government representative, interviewed March 24, 2011, Malakal.

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