The State of Trust

Governmental Capacity, Political Trust and (Non-)Violent Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa

Student:	Y. van der Meer
	S1366041
Program:	MSc Political Science, specialisation: International Politics
Instructors:	Dr. R. van der Haer
	Dr. M.F. Meffert
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Universiteit Leiden
Institute of Political Science

Abstract

A rich literature suggests that citizens' trust in their government depends on its (and its institutions') overall governmental capacity. Low levels of political trust have been linked to the prevalence of violent conflict in a multidirectional way: exposure to violence lowers citizens' trust in their government and citizens with little political trust are expected to be more likely to engage in violent conflict. In this thesis, this reasoning is extended to the prevalence of non-violent conflict. Countries experiencing little political trust are expected to be more likely to experience non-violent protests and riots, compared to armed rebellion, due to the former's lower 'participation threshold': the personal risk of participation in non-violent conflict is smaller, non-violent conflict enjoys greater legitimacy and (international) public support and non-violent conflict is morally less exacting. Violent conflict is expected to occur only in cases of extremely deteriorated political trust. Using a regionally disaggregated research design based on a multilevel statistical model, this expectation is tested in 406 unique regions across 29 sub-Saharan African countries, covering a time span of 16 years (1999-2015). The hypotheses are partly confirmed: political trust was found to be significantly related to violent, but not to non-violent conflict prevalence. Nevertheless, the notion of varying 'participation thresholds' continues to hold some merit, possibly in relation to as of yet unexplored predictors for violent and non-violent conflict. Several theoretical avenues and methodological challenges are outlined for future research focused on exploring such explanatory factors.

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Introduction

Public dissent knows many faces. For example, since July 2016, thousands of Zimbabweans have taken to the streets in peaceful, non-violent mass protests known as the #ThisFlag movement. They demonstrated against governmental corruption, repression and political and economic misrule by the Mugabe government, which was successfully ousted in November 2017, and continue to do so against Zimbabwe's subsequent and current military government. At the same time, the Sudanese region of Darfur continued to be embroiled in violent uprisings by multiple armed rebel groups seeking greater political autonomy and security for the non-Arab Sudanese minorities in the region, which reportedly claimed more than 2,000 lives in the period between July 2016 and November 2017 alone (Sundberg & Melander, 2013). In terms of violence, destructiveness and lethality, these two conflicts could not be more different. At their core, however, both conflicts could be seen as to be driven by similar motives: a lack of confidence or trust among (groups of) citizens in the governmental and representative capacity of their respective governments, leading them to challenge their government in an attempt to ameliorate their perceived deprivation. Why one of these conflicts devolved to violence and devastation, while the other remains decisively non-violent, is a question that applies to more than just these two cases: in sub-Saharan Africa alone, in the past two decades 40 countries have experienced violent conflict akin to the Darfur uprisings (Sundberg & Melander, 2013), while in more than 43 countries exclusively non-violent protests and strikes have been recorded (Salehyan et al., 2012). This thesis will investigate citizens' political trust as a differentiating factor in the development of violent over non-violent conflict, by answering the research question: *How does political trust affect the prevalence of violent and non-violent conflict?*

Prior research suggests that citizens' confidence and trust in their government and its institutions is shaped by their experiences with its governmental capacity and responsiveness (e.g., Mishler & Rose, 1997; 2001; Newton, 2001; 2007). This is known to be especially pertinent in less developed countries, which hold varying track records of political responsiveness and governmental and

institutional capacity (Hutchison & Johnson, 2011, p. 742). An increasing number of studies has linked this capacity-based conception of 'political trust' (Newton, 2007, p. 344) to the prevalence of violent conflict (e.g., Hutchison & Johnson, 2011; Cunningham, 2013; De Juan & Pierskalla, 2016). Their authors argue that citizens with substantially low levels of political trust have so little to expect from conventional political participation, that violent dissent becomes the more appealing alternative to voice their dissatisfaction. In this thesis, I argue that non-violent conflict, such as peaceful strikes and protests, offers citizens with little political trust another alternative to express their concerns. The extant literature on non-violent conflict is markedly limited, especially concerning the (potential) relationship between non-violent conflict and political trust. However, it does provide some starting points for the theoretical argument proposed and tested in this thesis. Non-violent conflict is known to have several distinct 'advantages' over its violent counterpart: the personal risk to participants is arguably lower (Stephan & Chenoweth, 2008; Nepstad, 2011; 2013; Cunningham, 2013), it enjoys greater intrinsic legitimacy and (international) public support than violent tactics (Stephan & Chenoweth, 2008; Thomas & Louis, 2014) and non-violent action is morally less exacting than picking up arms against fellow countrymen (Marty, 1971; Pelton, 1974; Godrej, 2006).

Non-violent conflict might then also have a comparatively lower 'participation threshold', with violent and non-violent conflict coexisting on a 'conflict spectrum': in a situation of wavering political trust, citizens will preferably opt for non-violent conflict. Only when trust levels have deteriorated sufficiently, violent tactics might be adopted. These expectations would be confirmed by a quantitative comparison of non-violent and violent conflicts that yields directionally comparable (i.e. negative) correlations with political trust. However, the strength of the relationship between political trust and non-violent conflict should be comparatively greater, reflecting its lower 'participation threshold'. In this thesis a regionally disaggregated, multilevel statistical design is used to test these hypotheses with data on (non-)violent conflict prevalence in 406 unique regions across 29 sub-Saharan African countries in the period 1999-2015. First, however, the concept of political trust is

discussed in light of various prior studies, specifically linking it to the prevalence of violent conflict. Then, this reasoning is extended to the prevalence of non-violent conflict. This argument is subsequently tested using the above-mentioned research design, the results of which are presented and discussed in this thesis' final sections.

A better understanding of the distinct relationships between political trust and (non-)violent conflict is merited by the substantial real-world effects such knowledge could have. Governments and (international) non-governmental organisations wishing to prevent the outbreak of violent insurrections, which so often result in tremendous destruction, deaths and human suffering, would benefit from knowing what factors contribute to the emergence of non-violent over violent conflict. If political trust levels are truly found to be relevant here, this may suggest a way to preliminarily identify high-risk areas, as well as directions for policies intended to stave off the onset or escalation of (further) violence.

Political trust

Trust in the context of political interactions is often distinguished from its more general, social and interpersonal conception by referring to it as 'political trust' (Newton, 2007, p. 344). Political trust is impersonal, abstract and vertical: it refers to individual's conceptions of and confidence in the capacities of political institutions, such as the national executive, the judiciary or the election system (Newton, 2007, p. 344). Some scholars, notably those subscribing to theories of 'social capital' (e.g., Putnam, Leonardi & Nanetti, 1993; Putnam, 2000), have argued that citizens' political trust is a necessary requirement for effective governance. In implementing and executing policy, governments and political institutions that enjoy high levels of political trust are unlikely to experience substantial objections or dissent by civilians. These citizens trust their government to act in their general interests and to crack down on those turning their backs to governmental directions and policy (Hutchison & Johnson, 2011, p. 739). For instance, individuals comply with traffic laws and pay their

taxes because they trust that their government will make sure that this compliance leads to overall, shared benefits for all citizens, such as a lower traffic mortality risk or public investments in education or healthcare. Moreover, they trust that their government will effectively punish those who shirk their responsibilities by, for instance, ignoring red lights and committing tax fraud.

Conversely, governments and political institutions lacking political trust face considerable resistance to policy execution, lowering their overall governmental capacity (Hutchison & Johnson, 2011, p. 738). When citizens distrust their government and its institutions, they are less likely to comply with (new) governmental policies. This diminishes the effectiveness of these policies and, consequently, lowers the government's effective 'reach over' society. Moreover, more of the governments' resources, such as time, money and expertise, have to be redirected to redress and penalise this non-compliance, leaving even less resources available for the creation, implementation and execution of other policies (Hutchison & Johnson, 2011, p. 741). This in turn lowers governmental capacity in other sectors. Tax evasion serves as an illustrating example. When citizens' political trust is low, they have little faith that their contributions to the national treasury will eventually result in tangible benefits. If they, moreover, do not trust their government to effectively penalise tax avoidance, they are incentivised and thereby more likely to attempt to avoid paying their taxes. The government's capacity to effectively collect taxes is thus lowered. Moreover, the resulting decrease in tax revenues diminishes the availability of funds for other governmental policies and programs. In this way, citizens' lack of political trust can lead to a drop in governmental capacity across policy sectors. Governmental capacity is even further lowered by the government's need to expend resources in an attempt to counteract and punish tax avoidance, which leaves even less resources available for the execution of other governmental policies.

Recently, however, various scholars (e.g., Mishler & Rose, 1997; 2001; Newton, 2001; 2007) have argued for a different take on the relationship between political trust and governmental capacity,

suggesting that political trust should not just be seen as a requirement for governmental capacity, but rather as a result of it. These authors argue that citizens' political trust is not a given. Instead, it has to be established and subsequently cultivated (Newton, 2001, p. 348). Citizens' perceptions of the effective capacity of their government and its institutions form the basis of this trust, because "when institutions (…) are perceived as performing effectively (…) they are more likely to appear legitimate, and consequently individual levels of trust in the government are higher" (Hutchison & Johnson, 2012, p. 41). From this perspective, citizens' political trust is seen as a learned behaviour (Newton, 2007, p. 348), emerging only after adequate levels of governmental capacity and institutional effectiveness have been proven by successfully executing policies that have a substantial impact on citizen's lives. Examples of such policies are maintaining law and order, deterring or overcoming (potential) threats to citizens' security or improving their socio-economic situation through public education or state-sponsored health programmes. Conversely, demonstrations of political or institutional ineffectiveness or inadequacy can lower political trust (Newton, 2001, p. 355). The notion that political trust depends on governmental capacity, rather than vice versa, is supported by a large number of empirical studies, focusing mainly on western (post-)industrialised societies (e.g., Mishler & Rose, 1997; 2001; Craig, 1993; Torcal, 2014; Abrams, 2018).

However, this alternative conception holds not only in western countries, but also in the less developed countries of the Global South. Less developed states are known to have strongly varying track records of political responsiveness and governmental and institutional capacity (Hutchison & Johnson, 2011, p. 742). It is likely that the citizens of these states are, at the very least, wary of trusting their governments and its institutions (Hutchison & Johnson, 2011, p. 742). Therefore, citizens of less developed states may be expected to form their political attitudes, such as political trust, pragmatically: to first require 'proof' of substantial capacity before truly confiding in their government and its institutions (Bratton, Mattes & Gyimah-Boadi, 2005; Hutchison & Johnson, 2011, p. 742). Empirical research (e.g., Askvik, Jamil & Dhakal, 2011; Godefroidt, Langer & Meuleman, 2017)

supports this expectation, finding a strong positive effect of governmental capacity on political trust in various less developed states. Moreover, in a ground-breaking study of more than a dozen sub-Saharan African countries, Bratton et al. (2005) find convincing evidence in support of this pragmatic development of political trust. In other words: there is a substantial body of convincing research that suggests that, both in economically more developed and less developed countries, citizens' political trust levels depend strongly on the capacity of their government.

Political trust and violent conflict

Recently, various studies (Hutchison & Johnson, 2011; Sacks & Larizza, 2012; De Juan & Pierskalla, 2016; Wong, 2016) have connected this capacity-based conception of political trust to the prevalence of violent conflict, specifically in less developed states. Their authors point out that the countries of the Global South experience widely varying levels of political trust among their citizens (stemming from varying levels of governmental capacity) and that they are also disproportionally often confronted with armed conflict (Allansson, Melander & Themnér, 2017, p. 577). These authors find support for a two-way negative relationship between political trust and the prevalence of such violent conflicts. On the one hand, studies on post-conflict societies show that (in)direct exposure to armed violence lowers citizens' post-conflict political trust (Sacks & Larizza, 2012; De Juan & Pierskalla, 2016; Wong, 2016). This happens for multiple reasons. For one, violent conflict reveals a government's lack of a monopoly on violence and its inability to protect their subjects from harm (De Juan & Pierskalla, 2016, p. 68). Additionally, armed responses to violent rebellions often result in damage to and destruction of citizens' lives and livelihoods, as well as other human rights abuses (Kalyvas, 2006; De Juan & Pierskalla, 2016, pp. 71-72). Together, these factors demonstrate to citizens' a lack of governmental capacity (i.e. the governments' inability to fulfil the most basic of governmental responsibilities: to safeguard citizens from harm and to maintain the monopoly on violence; Tilly, 1990), curtailing their political trust (De Juan & Pierskalla, 2016).

On the other hand, recent research also suggests that low levels of political trust may actually exacerbate the likelihood of violent conflict (Hutchison & Johnson, 2011, p. 741; De Juan & Pierskalla, 2016, p. 69). Employing a grievances-based, costs-benefits approach to conflict, these authors argue that an individual's decision to engage in violent conflict follows from a rational analysis of the value of continued submission to governmental authority on the one hand and the expected benefits, costs, risks and likelihood of success of engaging in armed, violent subversion of this authority on the other (Hutchison & Johnson, 2011, p. 741). Ordinarily, citizens are expected to accept and submit themselves to governmental authority and try to represent their interests through conventional political means, such as participating in (parliamentary) elections, or through petitioning or legal recourse (Cunningham, 2013). However, when (groups of) citizens become increasingly aggrieved, for instance due to a (relative) lack of socio-economic opportunities, governmental repression or a lack of political representation, their incentives to adopt other, non-conventional political tactics, such as violent rebellion, in order to uphold their interests in an attempt to ameliorate their grievances, increase (De Juan & Pierskalla, 2016, p. 69; Cunningham, 2013, p. 294). Citizens may expect that, through violent conflict, they may secure some alleviating benefits, such as access to valuable resources or increased political autonomy. However, by challenging their government's authority, they will also likely lose (some of) the benefits associated with acquiescence, such as access to publicly financed health programs, education or infrastructure development (Hutchison & Johnson, 2011, p. 741). It should be noted that, as Hutchison and Johnson (2011, p. 741) stress, this is especially pertinent in less developed states, where governments are frequently the sole providers of public goods. Additionally, rebels risk incurring the costs of their government's (armed) response to their defection, for instance through counter-insurgency programs and violent clashes with government forces, which both carry a serious risk of personal harm to insurgents.

Of course, citizens' immediate motivations for such conflict may vary. Rebels seeking political autonomy for their disenfranchised ethnic group are markedly different from a warlord wishing to

extract profits or rents from capturing valuable natural resources. However, at the core, their considerations are similar: they experience “relative deprivation” (Gurr, 1970), a “perceived discrepancy between value expectations and value capabilities” (Gurr, 1970, p. 37). In other words: their actual situation (e.g. in terms of socio-economic development or (political) opportunities) is perceived to be objectionably worse than what they perceive it should be. When the expected benefits of violent rebellion outweigh its costs and risks, citizens are increasingly more likely to adopt violent tactics to rectify this perceived deprivation, making violent conflict more likely (Hutchison & Johnson, 2011, p. 741; De Juan & Pierskalla, 2016, p. 69; Cunningham, 2013, p. 294).

Political trust ties directly into these considerations: aggrieved citizens with sufficiently high political trust, based on their previous experiences with the capacity and attentiveness of their government, are more likely to trust that conventional political action is sufficient to attend to their issues (De Juan & Pierskalla, 2016, p. 69; Cunningham, 2013, p. 294). Conversely, strongly distrusting citizens do not have this experience and expectation, which, as described above, incentivises them to adopt violent tactics instead. Empirical research supports this expectation. Hutchison and Johnson (2011) and De Juan and Pierskalla (2016) find a negative relation between political trust and violent conflict levels in, respectively, various sub-Saharan African countries and Nepal. Although the exact direction of this correlation could not be established, meaning that the authors could not decisively conclude that it is political trust levels that affect the prevalence of violent conflict and not vice versa, it is indicative that their findings held up even when controlling for any ‘lagged’ trust-eroding effects of conflicts in prior years (Hutchison & Johnson, 2011, p. 749; De Juan & Pierskalla, 2016, p. 81). In sum, the studies reviewed above suggest that political trust and violent conflict are negatively related and that this relationship is likely to be multidirectional, meaning that trust levels affect violent conflict occurrence and vice versa.

Political trust and non-violent conflict

So far, this theoretical discussion has been limited to violent conflict only. This is in fact indicative for much of the academic field of conflict research, which has generally been characterised by a strong focus on exploring and explaining the prevalence of armed, violent conflict resulting in substantial casualties or otherwise considerable damages (Chenoweth & Cunningham, 2013, pp. 272-273). This is especially true concerning those studies that specifically address the interactions of conflict with political trust, ostensibly all of which have focused exclusively on violent conflict (e.g., Hutchison & Johnson, 2011; Sacks & Larizza, 2012; De Juan & Pierskalla, 2016; Wong, 2016). From a theoretical standpoint, this limitation is unnecessarily stringent, because citizens' discontent and distrust may be expressed in a variety of ways, of which violent, armed rebellion is only one (extreme) way of doing so. Citizens may also (and frequently do) resort to non-violent demonstrations of their grievances, such as through peaceful protests or strikes. In the past century such peaceful resistance, which scholars have dubbed 'non-violent conflict' (Kurtz & Nepstad, 2012), has occurred and continues to occur in developed and less developed countries alike. Moreover, it has remarkably often been successful in attaining (political) changes and concessions (Stephan & Chenoweth, 2008, pp. 8-9). For instance, some well-known examples are the non-cooperation and civil disobedience movement in British India, which eventually resulted in Indian and Pakistani independence, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine (2004-2005), which effectively reverted fraudulent presidential elections, and, more recently, the Arab Spring protests in Tunisia (2010-2011), which resulted in the ousting of the long-reigning autocratic president Ben Ali, and the aforementioned #Thisflag protest movement in Zimbabwe, which already succeeded in forcing the authoritarian ruler Mugabe to resign and to this day continues to non-violently campaign for greater civil liberties and social equality. These protests, strikes and other peaceful acts of disobedience are exemplary of how non-violent conflict can serve to advocate and realize substantial political changes.

Recently, the topic of non-violent conflict has experienced a surge in academic attention, resulting in a multitude of studies seeking to explain, for example, what socio-economic and demographic conditions are conducive to the prevalence of non-violent conflict (Chenoweth & Lewis, 2013), what motivates participants to engage in non-violent conflict (Asal, Legault, Szekely & Wilkenfeld, 2013; Schaftenaar, 2017), how non-violent conflicts develop in scope and size (Shellman, Levey & Young, 2013) and how non-violent conflicts affect targeted governments and institutions (Rivera Celestino & Gleditsch, 2013). However, so far none of these efforts has been concerned with investigating the relationship between non-violent conflict and political trust. This is unfortunate, because there are various theoretical reasons why one should expect a significant negative relationship to exist between the prevalence of non-violent conflict and citizens' political trust, similar to the way violent conflict and political trust have been found to be related. On the one hand, exposure to non-violent conflict may affect citizens' political attitudes, such as political trust, in much the same way exposure to violent conflict lowers citizens' political trust. Focusing on the 2006 immigrant rights marches in the United States, Wallace, Zepeda-Millán and Jones-Correa (2014) found that exposure to large-scale peaceful protests significantly affected citizens' attitudes towards their government by lowering their perceptions of 'governmental efficacy'. In other words: citizens' view of their government's capacity appeared to be significantly lowered by exposure to non-violent conflict. In light of the many studies that have linked (citizens' conceptions of) governmental capacity to political trust (e.g., Askvik, Jamil & Dhakal, 2011; Godefroidt, Langer & Meuleman, 2017), it seems plausible that exposure to such non-violent conflict also negatively affects citizens' political trust. However, as Wallace, Zepeda-Millán and Jones-Correa's (2014) study investigates the effects of non-violent protests in the American context only, it remains unclear to what degree these findings can be generalised outside of the American political sphere.

On the other hand, there are also reasons to suspect that a low level of political trust among citizens can itself affect the likelihood of non-violent conflict prevalence. Aggrieved citizens that have too

little political trust for them to rely on conventional political means, nor wish to engage in armed violence, may alternatively choose non-violent protests and strikes to exert their dissatisfaction in an attempt to ameliorate their grievances (Cunningham, 2013). Indeed, non-violent conflict has some distinct 'advantages' over its violent counterpart that may make it the more preferable and acceptable option. First, governmental retaliation to peaceful protests is likely to be less severe than to armed, violent rebellion, because non-violent conflict does not pose an equally substantial challenge to governmental authority and, above all, does not challenge the state's monopoly on violence (Cunningham, 2013, p. 293). Therefore, the personal risk of participating in non-violent conflict may be expected to be lower than that of violent conflict. The 1986 non-violent anti-government protests in the Philippines serve as an illustrative example (Stephan & Chenoweth, 2008, pp. 32-36). Prior to the protests, years of violent guerrilla rebellion had been largely unsuccessful, resulting only in increasingly violent governmental repression. However, when Philippine citizens rose up in peaceful mass demonstrations, governmental security forces refused their orders to engage the crowds and defected on a large scale, eventually resulting in the resignation of Philippine dictator Marcos. Indeed, various empirical studies (e.g., Stephan & Chenoweth, 2008; Nepstad, 2011; 2013) find that when governments order violent repression of peaceful protests and strikes, governmental security forces are significantly more likely to refuse or even defect, compared to repressive governmental responses to violent rebellion.

Second, non-violent protests and strikes may enjoy greater legitimacy and domestic or even international support. In their comparative study of 234 non-violent and violent conflicts in a wide variety of countries, Stephan and Chenoweth (2008, p. 8) conclude that (non-participating) citizens consistently view non-violent conflicts as more legitimate precisely due to the absence of violence. This is because, contrary to violent conflict, peaceful, non-violent protests and strikes remain within the boundaries of accepted (political) behaviour. For the same reason, non-violent protests and strikes are more likely to generate international support from, for instance, foreign governments or

non-governmental organisations (Stephan & Chenoweth, 2008, p. 12). Similarly, Thomas and Louis (2014) find that, compared to violent acts, non-violent protests more effectively convey a sense of legitimacy and efficacy of the protesting group to (international) outsiders, thereby increasing public support. This increase in conflict legitimacy may even help in mobilising more citizen participants, further enhancing its perception as a broad-based citizen movement (Stephan & Chenoweth, 2008, p. 10; Thomas & Louis, 2014, p. 273).

Third, and related to all of the above, consider the moral and ethical implications of participating in non-violent versus violent conflict. It seems intuitively plausible that ordinary citizens hold substantial moral reservations to picking up arms and engaging in violence to further a political cause. In contrast, peaceful protests and non-violent strikes appear considerably less morally exacting. In other words: citizens' basic willingness to engage in violent conflict may be lower compared to their willingness to engage in non-violent conflict. Indeed, various scholars (e.g., Marty, 1971; Pelton, 1974; Godrej, 2006) have reported on the intrinsic moral 'attractiveness' of principled non-violence in advocating political goals. The 'moral boundary' individuals need to cross before participating in or supporting non-violent conflict is therefore arguably lower than that of violent rebellion.

In summary: the personal risks of non-violent conflict are arguably lower than that of its violent counterpart, non-violent conflict enjoys greater public legitimacy (both domestically and internationally) and non-violent tactics are morally considerably less exacting than the use of violence. It seems plausible, therefore, that the 'threshold' for participating in non-violent conflict is substantially lower than that of violent conflict. The fact that non-violent conflicts are typically characterised by far greater and broader citizen participation rates than violent conflicts (Stephan & Chenoweth, 2008; Schaftenaar, 2017), seems to reflect such thresholds differences. In a situation of (sufficiently) low political trust, it could then be expected that citizens are more likely to engage in non-violent over violent conflict in order to express their dissatisfaction and demand change. These

two types of conflict may even exist side-by-side on a 'conflict spectrum', with citizens opting for violent action only when political trust levels have crumpled to exceptionally low levels. However, as has already been alluded to above, there are presently no published studies that directly address these expectations by comparing the (potential) relationships between political trust and violent conflict and political trust and non-violent conflict. Clearly, additional research is required to provide clarity here.

If these theoretical assumptions are correct, a quantitative study comparing a large number of non-violent and violent conflicts should yield directionally comparable (i.e. negative), significant correlations between political trust and the occurrence of both violent and non-violent conflict. However, the strength of the relationship between political trust and non-violent conflict should be comparatively greater, reflecting its lower 'participation threshold'. To determine this, an indication of the strength of the relationship between political trust and violent conflict is needed as a baseline. Therefore, the first hypothesis is:

> H1: Countries with low levels of political trust are more likely to experience violent conflict.

Then, the strength of the relationship between non-violent conflict and political trust should be compared against this baseline in order to determine whether the relationship between political trust and non-violent conflict is indeed stronger than the relationship between political trust and violent conflict. Therefore, the second hypothesis is:

> H2: Countries with low levels of political trust are also more likely to experience non-violent conflict. This likelihood is greater than the likelihood of experiencing violent conflict.

Research design

To test these hypotheses, two quantitative analyses based on a regionally disaggregated multilevel statistical design are performed, covering in total 29 sub-Saharan African countries over the period 1999-2015[1]. Because the data, models and statistical techniques used in the two analyses are identical, save for the definition and measurement of the dependent variable (violent versus non-violent conflict), the outcomes of both analyses can justifiably be compared, such as on the strength of the relationship between the dependent and independent variables (H2).

Case selection

Limiting the analyses to sub-Saharan Africa has precedent (e.g., Bratton et al., 2005; Hutchison & Johnson, 2011; 2012; Arbetman & Johnson, 2012), as this region is known to vary widely in factors deemed relevant for this study, such as political stability, governmental and institutional capacity and (consequently) political trust levels (Hutchison & Johnson, 2011; 2012), socio-economic development indicators such as economic productivity, education efficacy and healthcare provision (Bratton et al., 2005), and, most pressingly, violent and non-violent conflict prevalence (Hutchison & Johnson, 2011; Salehyan et al., 2012). Therefore, if there are indeed statistically significant relationships between (non-)violent conflict and political trust, they are likely to be found in this sample of cases. This case selection is further necessitated by limitations in data availability. Specifically, the surveys used to generate measurements on political trust and most of the control variables (which will be discussed in detail below), have been administered exclusively in 29 sub-Saharan African countries and only in the period 1999-2015. Therefore, only these cases have been included in the analyses. This, of course, opens the door to selection bias. Successful survey administration likely favours stability, security and accessibility, factors that are overwhelmingly found in economically more developed, democratic and politically stable countries (Bratton et al., 2005; Hutchison & Johnson, 2011, p. 743). Indeed, these surveys also appear to suffer from this effect. Several of sub-Saharan Africa's most unstable, conflict-

[1] See Appendix 1.1. for a complete overview.

torn countries, such as Chad, South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, are notably absent. This results in an overrepresentation of stable, relatively democratic countries, which may affect the analyses' results and entails that any conclusions may not necessarily be generalisable to all sub-Saharan African or even all economically less developed countries (Hutchison & Johnson, 2011, p. 743).

Level of analysis

Quantitative studies of (violent) conflicts have, for a long time, frequently employed country-level measures of conflict prevalence (Gleditsch, Metternich & Ruggeri, 2014). In other words, scholars analyse whether, in any given period, a country experienced one or more conflicts and subsequently try to determine what factors contributed to this occurrence. This approach has undeniably contributed to a better understanding of the characteristics of such conflict, including its aforementioned links to political trust (Hutchison & Johnson, 2011). Nevertheless, there has been an increasing tendency among researchers to employ theoretically and methodologically disaggregated approaches to studying conflicts (Gleditsch et al., 2014). Specifically, various authors (e.g., Buhaug & Gates, 2002; Buhaug & Lujala, 2005; De Juan & Pierskalla, 2016) have emphasised the merits of greater geographical disaggregation of data on conflict prevalence, arguing that violent conflicts "rarely engulf entire countries, but often take place in confined and atypical areas, leaving much of the country at relative peace" (Gleditsch et al., 2014, p. 305). Indeed, these geographically disaggregated studies of violent conflict have demonstrated that especially sub-national, regional differences on certain key explanatory variables, such as geography and the presence of valuable resources (Buhaug & Lujala, 2005), can significantly affect the prevalence, duration and intensity of violent conflict. This also extends to the relationship between violent conflict and political trust, as De Juan and Pierskalla (2016) demonstrate by concluding that differences in average political trust levels between Nepalese villages are significantly related to their relative exposure to violent conflict in the Nepalese Civil War.

For these reasons, I use a geographically disaggregated measurement of conflict prevalence, measuring yearly (non-)violent conflict prevalence in the aforementioned 29 sub-Saharan African countries on the highest sub-national administrative level (i.e. province, state or region). Both violent and non-violent conflicts are expected to operate in a limited spatial dimension: some regions may experience conflicts while at the same time others do not. This variation may very well be related to regional differences in various explanatory factors (the independent and control variables), such as political trust levels. Such subtleties are lost when employing country-level conflict data. Using sub-national administrative region as the unit of analysis yields a total of 406 unique regions, which results in a grand total of 1,484 region-years over the period 1999-2015.

Dependent variables

Data on the two dependent variables, violent conflict and non-violent conflict, originates from the latest Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) Georeferenced Event Dataset (Sundberg & Melander, 2013) and the most recent Social Conflict Analysis Database (SCAD; Salehyan et al., 2012), respectively. The UCDP dataset lists all (known) violent events of those conflicts that at least once resulted in more than 25 battle-related deaths per year in the period covered by the dataset (1989-2017). The SCAD lists all (known) non-violent conflict events in sub-Saharan Africa in the period 1964-2016, defined as all organised or spontaneous, but peaceful (i.e. not resulting in any fatalities) demonstrations and strikes (Salehyan et al., 2012). Both datasets are based on retroactive data collection from (international) news media publications on (non)-violent conflict events. An inevitable, but potentially debilitating drawback of this approach is its susceptibility to methodological biases, such as those resulting from relative under- or overreporting of specific (types of) events by international media outlets. Indeed, Herkenrath and Knoll (2011, p. 165) demonstrate that there are substantial differences between national and international press coverages of protests and conflict events, meaning that many of these events remain un- or underreported in international media. Moreover, these authors find that international reporting is

significantly more likely for relatively larger, more intense conflicts, involving high-profile actors in well-accessible locations (2011, pp. 171-175). For these reasons, datasets based on such reports are prone to distortions and measurement biases.

Both datasets contain conflict events with approximated geographical locations. This longitude-latitude data was recoded to a categorical variable defining the sub-national administrative region the event took place in. Subsequently, two dichotomous variables were created, noting the presence (1) or absence (0) of both violent and non-violent conflicts in any region-year. ±11% of region-years suffered at least one instance of violent conflict. These instances are unevenly distributed, with over 80% of violent conflict-affected region-years concentrated in only four countries (Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda and Mali). The majority of regions and countries analysed did not experience violent conflict at all. Non-violent conflict is more common and slightly more evenly distributed, with ±43% of region-years experiencing such conflict in this timeframe, covering 27 out of the 29 countries studied. Of the affected region-years, ±54% is concentrated in the four most affected countries (Nigeria, Zimbabwe, South Africa and Senegal). Non-violent conflict's greater and more evenly distributed prevalence provides some preliminary support for the notion that it has indeed a comparatively lower 'participation threshold' than violent conflict. Disgruntled citizens across all countries seem to have turned to non-violent protests and strikes much more than to violence.

Independent variable

For the independent variable, political trust, data from six Afrobarometer survey rounds (rounds 1 to 6; Afrobarometer data, n.d.) was used. These surveys measure, among others, several political, social and economic attitudes and experiences among citizens of a steadily increasing number of African countries. Following the established practice in quantitative research on political trust (see, for example, Hutchison & Johnson, 2011; 2012; 2017), a measurement index of political trust (Cronbach's alpha: 0.852) was created for each respondent, based on the mean score of their

responses to six questions tapping into respondents' trust in the national executive, the judiciary, government-run media, the military, police forces and the national election committee. Political trust levels are distributed normally among respondents (N=183,347), averaging 1.71 on a scale ranging from 0 (strongly distrusting) to 3 (strongly trusting), with a standard deviation of 0.83.

Individual-level control variables[2]

The Afrobarometer results are also used to generate individual-level measurements on six control variables covering political attitudes expected to have an effect on conflict prevalence (see Hutchison & Johnson, 2011, pp. 744-745). These consist of five indices, based on respondents' answers to questions concerning their satisfaction with governmental performance (Cronbach's alpha: 0.689), respondents' interest and participation in politics (Cronbach's alpha: 0.669 and 0.563, respectively), respondents' media exposure (Cronbach's alpha: 0.642) and the level of economic hardship respondents have experienced in the past year (defined as not having access to sufficient food, water or medicine; Cronbach's alpha: 0.678). The sixth control variable is a measure of respondents' opinion of democracy. Finally, four socio-demographic variables on respondents' age, gender, education level and location (urban versus rural) were included to control for under- or overrepresentation of certain socio-demographic groups.

Country-level control variables[2]

Following Hutchison and Johnson (2011), five additional structural control variables were included: GDP per capita, ethnic fractionalisation, religious fractionalisation, political instability and the state of democracy. Unfortunately, data on these variables is not available at the sub-national level. Country-level measures were used instead. First, economically more developed countries are expected to have greater governmental or state capacity and therefore to be relatively less likely to experience conflict (Hendrix, 2010, p. 277; Hegre, 2014, p. 168). A variable measuring yearly GDP per capita,

[2] See Appendices 1.2. and 1.3. for an overview of the descriptive statistics of all variables used.

provided by the World Bank Group (2019), was used to capture this. Second and third, ethnically and religiously divided societies are known to be more likely to experience conflict (Reynal-Querol, 2002). To account for this, measurements of ethnic (Fearon, 2003) and religious fractionalisation (Montalvo & Reynal-Querol, 2005) were included as control variables. Fractionalisation is measured on a scale ranging from 0, indicating a society is completely ethnically or religiously homogeneous, to 1, indicating severe ethno-religious diversity. Fourth, countries with a history of recent political instability are expected to be more likely to experience (renewed) conflict (De Juan & Pierskalla, 2016). Following Hutchison and Johnson (2011), data from the 2017 version of the Polity IV project (Marshall, Gurr & Jaggers, 2018) was used to account for this by generating a dichotomous variable registering a change of 2 or greater in a country's democracy-autocracy score from one year to the next. Finally, the Polity IV dataset also yielded a yearly measure of countries' state of democracy, ranging from -10 (strongly autocratic) to 10 (strongly democratic). This variable was included in the analyses to account for the expectation that democracies are less likely to experience conflict than autocracies (Hegre, 2014, p. 168).

Method

When performing statistical analyses, it is crucial to properly scrutinise the structure of the data used (Field, 2009, pp. 726-728). In this case, the data is hierarchically clustered. The main units of analysis, sub-national administrative regions, do not exist independently, but are grouped in mutually exclusive higher-level clusters: their respective countries. Similarly, data derived from individual-level Afrobarometer surveys is clustered in mutually exclusive regions and also in countries. This is important to recognise, because it can have significant effects on the outcome of an analysis. Certain aspects of a higher-level grouping, such as a country's economic development or ethnic fractionalisation, may affect the prevalence of conflict within that country. However, it has no effect on conflict prevalence in other countries. This introduces interdependency in the observations: a region is more likely to experience conflict similarly to other regions in its country than to regions of

other countries, due to the characteristics of their shared higher-level group: their country. Likewise, individual-level observations in the present study are more likely to be similar to other observations in the same clusters of region and country. This violates one of the basic assumptions of most 'standard' statistical estimation techniques: independence of the residuals (Sommet & Morselli, 2017, p. 206)[3].

This problem can be overcome by using a multilevel statistical approximation technique. Contrary to 'standard' statistical techniques, multilevel models do not assume independence of variance (Field, 2009, p. 730). Rather, it allows for incorporating differences in within- and between group effects. In other word, the correlational direction and strength of the effects of lower-level variables is allowed to vary between clusters (Sommet & Morselli, 2017, p. 207). This is important for my research, because political trust might affect (non-)violent conflict prevalence differently (such as in terms of correlational strength) in different countries, based on cluster-shared higher-level characteristics. Multilevel analysis allows for this possibility by taking potential within-group similarities into account.

Another benefit of multilevel analysis is that the method allows the generation of estimations across multiple levels of data (Hutchison & Johnson, 2011, p. 746). As discussed above, this thesis is based on individual-, regional- and country-level observations. 'Standard' statistical estimation techniques would require either the aggregation of lower-level data to the country-level of analysis or the disaggregation of country-level data to lower levels (Hutchison & Johnson, 2011, p. 746). However,

[3] To determine the extent of this issue and, consequently, whether a multilevel model is appropriate, the Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC) may be calculated using the higher-level variance component $var(u_{0j})$, generated by running an empty or 'null' model (i.e. not containing any predictor variables; Sommet & Morselli, 2017, p. 212). For a multilevel logistic model, which was employed here, the formula for calculating the ICC is $\frac{var(u_{0j})}{var(u_{0j})+(\frac{\pi^2}{3})}$ (Sommet & Morselli, 2017, p. 212). Using this formula, the ICC for violent conflict prevalence was determined to be ±0.493, indicating that ±49.3% of the chance on violent conflict is explained by between-country differences, whereas the ICC for non-violent conflict was determined to be ±0.737, indicating that ±73.7% of the chance on non-violent conflict is explained by between-country variation. In cases where the ICC is substantively greater than 0 (which would indicate that specific cluster (i.e. country) membership has no effect at all), it is appropriate to employ multilevel models (Sommet & Morselli, 2017, p. 212). This is clearly the case here.

these approaches risk ecological inference issues (Hutchison & Johnson, 2011, p. 746), because they ignore the possibility of between-group variation. Multilevel analysis does not require such (dis)aggregation, but instead incorporates these different levels in one all-encompassing, mixed-level statistical model. Ideally, a three-level model is used to incorporate all three data levels in this study. However, due to the limited scope of this thesis and the exponential difficulty of modelling additive levels, a two-level model was used instead, comprising of regional-level and country-level observations. All individual-level observations stemming from the Afrobarometer results were therefore aggregated to mean values for their respective region-year. This approach sacrifices some statistical accuracy: for example, the distribution and dispersion of individual-level observations can no longer be determined after aggregation into means. However, because the mean values of these variables 'remain' clustered in the same region-year groups, the risk of ecological inference is minimal. Because the dependent variable is dichotomous (regions either experienced conflict or did not), a multilevel logistic approach was employed (Sommet & Morselli, 2017). Specialised multilevel statistical software (HLM 7.03) was used to perform the analyses[4].

[4] See Appendix 2.1. for replication instructions.

Analyses

First, I present the results of the analysis modelling violent conflict prevalence, focusing specifically on the effect of political trust. Then, I present the results of the analysis of non-violent conflict, comparing these results to those of the first analysis. Finally, some secondary findings are interpreted and discussed.

First analysis: violent conflict

Table 1 lists the results of the first analysis, concerning violent conflict prevalence in the region-years studied. Four different models, with increasing numbers of predictors, were used to estimate the effect of political trust and various control variables on the prevalence of violent conflict. This allows for the detection of substantial changes in predictors' effects when new explanatory variables are introduced into the model. Such changes would indicate the possibility of a (between-levels) interaction effect that should be properly incorporated into the model. However, this is evidently not the case here: none of the predictor variables change substantially when new (country-level) variables are introduced and most statistically significant effects are robust across all models.

Model 1, containing only region-level variables, suggests a statistically significant, negative effect of political trust on the prevalence of violent conflict. This effect is robust to introducing country-level variables on economic development and ethnic and religious fractionalisation (Model 2), democracy scores (Model 3) and political instability (Model 4). These results confirm Hypothesis 1 by indicating that there is indeed a significant, negative relationship between political trust and violent conflict prevalence. In other words, regions with lower political trust levels are indeed more likely to experience violent conflict.

Table 1: Effects of political trust and control variables on violent conflict prevalence

	Model 1 (n = 1,484)		Model 2 (n = 1,484)		Model 3 (n = 1,484)		Model 4 (n = 1,484)	
Intercept	-0.27	(1.66)	-0.65	(1.63)	-0.68	(1.63)	-0.72	(1.68)
Region-level:								
Political trust	-0.96**	(0.46)	-1.07**	(0.44)	-1.08**	(0.45)	-1.09**	(0.45)
Age	-0.11***	(0.03)	-0.11***	(0.03)	-0.11***	(0.03)	-0.11**	(0.03)
Gender	1.13	(1.40)	1.06	(1.18)	1.07	(1.17)	0.98	(1.16)
Education	-0.12	(0.17)	0.05	(0.17)	0.05	(0.17)	0.04	(0.17)
Urbanisation	-0.45	(0.39)	-0.61	(0.39)	-0.61	(0.39)	-0.58	(0.39)
Satisfaction with gov. performance	-0.46	(0.50)	-0.19	(0.53)	-0.20	(0.53)	-0.19	(0.53)
Opinion of democracy	-0.04	(0.26)	-0.06	(0.25)	-0.05	(0.25)	-0.03	(0.25)
Political participation	0.08	(0.79)	0.05	(0.82)	0.06	(0.83)	0.08	(0.83)
Political interest	0.78*	(0.46)	0.62	(0.50)	0.61	(0.49)	0.60	(0.50)
Economic hardship	1.01***	(0.27)	0.93***	(0.26)	0.93***	(0.27)	0.92***	(0.27)
Media exposure	0.63***	(0.20)	0.59**	(0.21)	0.59**	(0.21)	0.59**	(0.21)
Country-level:								
GDP per capita			-0.01**	(0.01)	-0.01**	(0.01)	-0.01*	(0.01)
Ethnic fractionalisation			3.49**	(1.17)	3.50**	(1.18)	3.59***	(1.21)
Religious fractionalisation			-6.58***	(1.61)	-6.72***	(1.81)	-6.83***	(1.83)
Democracy					-0.01	(0.06)	-0.01	(0.06)
Political instability							0.89	(0.85)
Random effect:								
Variance component	2.95***		2.44***		2.49***		2.53***	
Df	125		122		121		120	
χ^2	423.21		339.91		340.69		342.52	

Note: robust standard errors in parentheses.
** indicates significance at the .10 level; ** indicates significance at the .05 level; *** indicates significance at the .001 level.*

However, because the analysis used logistic models to estimate this relationship, assessing the actual size of any of the predictors' estimated effects can prove challenging (Sommet & Morselli, 2017, p. 205). To facilitate interpretation, Table 2 lists the odds ratios of all predictor variables of the final model. The odds ratio of political trust (±0.34) suggest that a one-unit increase in a region's average level of political trust is associated with a lowering of the odds of violent conflict by ±66.3%.

Table 2: Predictors of violent conflict prevalence, odds ratios

Model 4 *(n = 1,484)*			
	β coefficient	**Odds ratio**	**Confidence interval**
Region-level:			
Political trust	-1.09**	0.34	(0.14, 0.81)
Age	-0.11**	0.89	(0.84, 0.95)
Gender	0.98	2.67	(0.27, 26,14)
Education	0.04	1.04	(0.75, 1.45)
Urbanisation	-0.58	0.56	(0.26, 1.23)
Satisfaction with gov. performance	-0.19	0.83	(0.29, 2.37)
Opinion of democracy	-0.03	0.97	(0.59, 1.59)
Political participation	0.08	1.09	(0.21, 5.52)
Political interest	0.60	1.82	(0.69, 4.82)
Economic hardship	0.92***	2.51	(1.49, 4.23)
Media exposure	0.59**	1.81	(1.19, 2.74)
Country-level:			
GDP per capita	-0.01*	0.99	(1.00, 1.00)
Ethnic fractionalisation	3.59***	35.91	(3.24, 398,11)
Religious fractionalisation	-6.83***	0.01	(0.00, 0.04)
Democracy	-0.01	0.99	(0.87, 1.12)
Political instability	0.89	2.44	(0.46, 13.05)

*Note: * indicates significance at the .10 level; ** indicates significance at the .05 level; *** indicates significance at the .001 level.*

Second analysis: non-violent conflict

The results of the second analysis, concerning the prevalence of non-violent conflict, are presented in Table 3. Again, country-level variables were introduced in a stepwise manner. All four models are designed identically to their respective counterparts in the previous analysis of violent conflict prevalence. In other words, model 1 contains only individual-level variables, similar to model 1 in the first analysis. The other models correspond similarly.

Table 3: Effects of political trust and control variables on non-violent conflict prevalence

	Model 1 (n = 1,484)		Model 2 (n = 1,484)		Model 3 (n = 1,484)		Model 4 (n = 1,484)	
Intercept	3.37*	(1.87)	2.79	(1.86)	2.82	(1.87)	2.88	(1.90)
Region-level:								
Political trust	-0.42	(0.46)	-0.56	(0.46)	-0.58	(0.46)	-0.64	(0.45)
Age	-0.09**	(0.03)	-0.10**	(0.04)	-0.10**	(0.04)	-0.10**	(0.04)
Gender	-3.81**	(1.21)	-3.91**	(1.28)	-3.91**	(1.30)	-4.55***	(1.19)
Education	0.17	(0.22)	0.41*	(0.22)	0.40*	(0.22)	0.41*	(0.22)
Urbanisation	1.61**	(0.62)	1.34**	(0.65)	1.39**	(0.67)	1.47**	(0.68)
Satisfaction with gov. performance	-0.51	(0.45)	-0.39	(0.47)	-0.39	(0.47)	-0.30	(0.47)
Opinion of democracy	0.05	(0.30)	0.19	(0.31)	0.22	(0.31)	0.26	(0.31)
Political participation	1.05*	(0.61)	1.24*	(0.64)	1.24*	(0.65)	1.29*	(0.66)
Political interest	-0.36	(0.35)	-0.69*	(0.36)	-0.68*	(0.36)	-0.68*	(0.37)
Economic hardship	0.15	(0.25)	0.13	(0.26)	0.11	(0.25)	0.10	(0.26)
Media exposure	0.57*	(0.30)	0.60**	(0.30)	0.59*	(0.31)	0.58*	(0.31)
Country-level:								
GDP per capita			-0.01*	(0.01)	-0.01*	(0.01)	-0.01	(0.01)
Ethnic fractionalisation			2.79	(1.81)	2.86	(1.80)	3.00*	(1.78)
Religious fractionalisation			-11.32***	(2.84)	-11.68***	(2.88)	-12.02***	(2.89)
Democracy					-0.04	(0.08)	-0.05	(0.09)
Political instability							3.10*	(1.81)
Random effect:								
Variance component	10.49***		9.21***		9.34***		9.21***	
Df	125		122		121		120	
χ^2	758.10		668.56		669.32		657.64	

Note: robust standard errors in parentheses.
** indicates significance at the .10 level; ** indicates significance at the .05 level; *** indicates significance at the .001 level.*

Interestingly, the analysis of non-violent conflict prevalence yields substantially different results. As expected, the direction of the relationship between political trust and non-violent conflict is negative, which suggests that a decrease in political trust leads to greater conflict prevalence. This is in line with Hypothesis 2. However, its strength is lower than that of the relationship between political trust and violent conflict (-0.64 versus -1.09, respectively). This is also reflected in the odds ratios of the predictors of non-violent conflict (see Table 4). The effects of a one-unit increase in political trust on the odds of conflict are smaller in the case of non-violent conflict (a ±47.2% decrease) than in the case of violent conflict (a ±66.3% decrease). This contradicts Hypothesis 2, which holds that the effect of changes in political trust should be comparably greater for non-violent than for violent conflict prevalence. More important, however, is the fact that the relationship between political trust and non-violent conflict fails to reach statistical significance across all four models. Based on these results, the second hypothesis cannot be confirmed. There is no evidence here that the relationship between political trust and non-violent conflict is statistically significant, nor that it is relatively stronger than the relationship between political trust and violent conflict.

Table 4: Predictors of non-violent conflict prevalence, odds ratios

Model 4 *(n = 1,484)*			
	β coefficient	**Odds ratio**	**Confidence interval**
Region-level:			
Political trust	-0.64	0.53	(0.22, 1.27)
Age	-0.10**	0.91	(0.85, 0.97)
Gender	-4.55***	0.01	(0.01, 0.11)
Education	0.41*	1.51	(0.98, 2.33)
Urbanisation	1.47**	4.34	(1.15, 16,37)
Satisfaction with gov. performance	-0.30	0.74	(0.29, 1.85)
Opinion of democracy	0.26	1.30	(0.70, 2.40)
Political participation	1.29*	3.62	(0.98, 13.31)
Political interest	-0.68*	0.51	(0.25, 1.04)
Economic hardship	0.10	1.11	(0.67, 1.85)
Media exposure	0.58*	1.79	(0.98, 3.26)
Country-level:			
GDP per capita	-0.01	1.00	(1.00, 1.00)
Ethnic fractionalisation	3.00*	20.15	(0.59, 688.83)
Religious fractionalisation	-12.02***	0.01	(0.00, 0.01)
Democracy	-0.05	0.95	(0.82, 1.11)
Political instability	3.10*	22.17	(0.62, 798.68)

*Note: * indicates significance at the .10 level; ** indicates significance at the .05 level; *** indicates significance at the .001 level.*

Secondary findings

There are some more striking differences between the two analyses' results. Consider the fact that for non-violent conflict, gender appears to be a highly significant negative predictor, indicating that a greater share of female respondents in a region's Afrobarometer surveys (and, consequently, in the responses determining the mean values of the region-level variables used) is associated with higher prevalence of non-violent conflict. At first glance, this seems implausible: gender merely serves as a control variable to counter-act possible over-representation of any gender in the survey data, which by itself cannot logically have an effect on conflict prevalence. However, it should be considered that in regions where women enjoy (relatively) greater gender equality, women might be more likely to be included in the survey, either because there are more (single) women that are the heads of their households or because they are (relatively) less hindered by patriarchal social structures from participating in civic life, which may include partaking in survey studies. These findings would then indicate that non-violent conflict is relatively more likely to occur in more gender-equal regions. Indeed, this is exactly what Asal et al. (2013) and Schaftenaar (2017) conclude in their studies on the effects of gender equality on the occurrence of both violent and non-violent conflict. The fact that the present study did not find a significant relationship between gender and violent conflict prevalence, attests to the remarkably distinct and, arguably, under-explored nature of non-violent conflict.

Similarly, urbanisation rates seem to be positively related to the prevalence of non-violent conflict, but have no significant effect on violent conflict. This suggests that non-violent protests and strikes, rather than violent rebellion, are predominantly city-dwellers' tools of choice to voice their dissatisfaction. These findings correspond to Chenoweth and Ulfelder's (2017), who argue that the type of broad-based mobilisation non-violent conflict is known for (see Stephan & Chenoweth, 2008; Schaftenaar, 2017) is most easily achieved in close-quarter, high-density urban environments.

Finally, it seems remarkable that the regional measure of economic hardship is a significant predictor of violent conflict, but is not significantly related to non-violent conflict. This suggests that people experiencing (extreme) deprivation will consistently pick violent over non-violent tactics to express and ameliorate their dismay. Alternatively, and arguably more persuasively, this could be a directional issue: it seems plausible that violent conflict results in far more deprivation, for instance through destruction of lives, property and economic opportunities, than non-violent protests or strikes will.

These results, both concerning political trust and the secondary findings discussed directly above, are noteworthy for their indicativeness of the unique and strongly distinct characteristics of non-violent conflict, compared to its more well-explored violent counterpart. However, as will be discussed below, these conclusions should be subject to due considerations of validity and bias.

Discussion and conclusion

This research aimed to uncover in what ways political trust affects the prevalence of both violent and non-violent conflict. Evidence was found that supports the well-documented (e.g., Hutchison & Johnson, 2011; Sacks & Larizza, 2012; De Juan & Pierskalla, 2016; Wong, 2016) notion that political trust levels negatively relate to violent conflict prevalence, meaning that regions and countries experiencing low levels of political trust are more likely to suffer from violent conflict. Extending these insights to the prevalence of non-violent conflict, it was expected that a similar, but relatively stronger relationship existed between political trust and non-violent conflict. However, the analyses suggest otherwise. Not only was the statistical relationship between political trust and non-violent conflict found to be weaker than that between political trust and violent conflict, it also failed to achieve statistical significance. Non-violent conflict occurred relatively often and in almost all countries observed, regardless of political trust levels. The exact opposite was found regarding violent conflict. The proposed notion that both types of conflict coexist on a 'conflict spectrum' in

relation to political trust, is therefore likely false. Nevertheless, the fact that non-violent protests and demonstrations are more common and widespread than violent rebellion, suggests that the notion of comparably different 'participation thresholds' still holds some merit. Perhaps citizens' decision to engage in one type of conflict over the other depends not on their political trust, but on other political, demographic or socio-economic factors. Future research should focus on clarifying these factors. With this thesis' secondary findings in mind, differences in gender equality levels and urbanisation rates may prove fruitful avenues here. For this to succeed, however, some of this thesis' (methodological) limitations have to be overcome.

First, as has been discussed earlier, the data used to measure conflict prevalence may be subject to various types of biases, which may result in over- and underreporting of conflict events. Arguably, non-violent conflict is especially vulnerable to such bias, as its (international) 'media value' may be deemed lower than that of armed, violent uprisings resulting in loss of life and considerable (humanitarian) hardships. This gives extra reason to doubt the accuracy and validity of news reports on non-violent conflicts and the datasets that are based on them. Indeed, there are signs indicating such a lack of accuracy in the SCAD dataset. For example, out of the 2,415 relevant non-violent conflict events extracted from the dataset, 332 were listed as occurring nationwide. Consequently, all regions of those countries were coded as having experienced non-violent conflict in the corresponding years.[5] The degree to which this reflects reality and is not merely a result of reporting inaccuracy, may very well be questioned. A compounding factor is that, as was discussed earlier, many of the most unstable and violent sub-Saharan African countries were not included in the analysis due to a lack of data. The statistical results concerning the relationships between political trust and (non-)violent conflict may very well have been different if these expectedly conflict-prone and trust-lacking countries would have been included in the analyses. To address this issue,

[5] It was decided not to exclude these (major) events from the analyses for a lack of geographical accuracy, as this would greatly reduce the number of conflict events, thereby almost certainly resulting in even greater distortions of the data.

researchers should dedicate themselves to generating comprehensive, extensive datasets that carefully and thoroughly document both violent and non-violent conflict events. Some progress has already been made in this regard with the publication of the Nonviolent and Violent Campaigns and Outcomes (NAVCO) dataset (Chenoweth & Lewis, 2013), which offers a far more detailed account of non-violent protests and strikes. Unfortunately, this dataset's scope is still limited, covering only three sub-Saharan African countries at present.

Second, it must be noted that for this thesis, conflict prevalence was measured dichotomously: regions either experienced (non-)violent conflict or did not. This, of course, reveals little about other, potentially relevant factors, such as conflict size, duration or intensity. Therefore, although this research concludes that political trust is not related to non-violent conflict prevalence, it remains to be seen whether it is also not significantly related to conflict size, intensity or duration. Scholars should take these considerations into account when designing future research, as the choice for a specific operationalisation of the independent variable may also affect the outcome of analyses of other predictors of (non-)violent conflict, besides political trust.

Finally, the validity of this thesis' results may be curtailed by certain methodological limitations. As was discussed in the section on research design, due to the limited scope of this research, a two-level multilevel design was employed instead of the theoretically and methodologically preferable three-level design, reflecting the individual-, regional- and country-levels on which the data used was initially available. This approach required aggregating the individual-level data to regional means, inevitably sacrificing statistical and methodological accuracy. A three-level model would not require such aggregation. Furthermore, this research' units of analysis, regions, were treated cross-sectionally, meaning that each region-year combination was considered a separate case. However, in reality it is likely that countries and regions within the same time period (here: year) share certain common characteristics. Following the logic of multilevel analysis (Field, 2009, pp. 726-728), 'time'

should then be modelled as a fourth, overarching level. This would allow the model to more closely approximate the observed data, improving the reliability and validity of its results. Future research should aim to use more sophisticated statistical models and techniques than the ones used in this study in order to overcome such methodological limitations.

This thesis' findings also provide some directions for policy initiatives. Governments of less developed countries wishing to prevent (future) domestic violent conflict should indeed keep a close eye on their perceived trustworthiness in the eyes of the public. To ameliorate dwindling trust levels, efforts should be made to expand and demonstrate governmental capacity (Hutchison & Johnson, 2011; Sacks & Larizza, 2012; De Juan & Pierskalla, 2016; Wong, 2016). Unfortunately, the same cannot necessarily be said for the identification and prevention of non-violent conflict, as no proof for a relationship between political trust and non-violent conflict has been found. On the upside, the absence of support for a 'conflict spectrum' suggests that peaceful protests and strikes should not necessarily be seen as a precursor to violence, should trust levels deteriorate further. In other words, preventing violence and disorder cannot rightfully serve as justification for preventive repression of non-violent protests and strikes. It is perhaps naive to expect repressive governments to take this into consideration, but these findings may provide (international) human rights organisations and foreign governments with an additional argument to call authoritarian governments to account for coercive transgressions against peaceful demonstrations. Lastly, although this research failed to provide support for political trust levels as a relevant differentiating factor for the development of violent over non-violent conflict, it has highlighted some fruitful directions for future research that may result in the development of falsified theories on other differentiating factors.

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Appendix 1

1.1. Tabled overview of all countries analysed, specified by year

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total
Benin							×			×			×			×		4
Botswana	×				×		×			×				×		×		6
Burkina Faso										×				×			×	3
Burundi														×		×		2
Cameroon															×		×	2
Cote d'Ivoire															×	×		2
Gabon																	×	1
Ghana	×			×			×			×				×		×		6
Guinea															×		×	2
Kenya					×		×			×			×			×		5
Lesotho		×			×		×			×				×		×		6
Liberia										×	×			×			×	4
Madagascar							×			×					×	×	×	5
Malawi	×				×		×			×				×		×		6
Mali			×	×			×			×				×	×	×		7
Mauritius														×		×		2
Mozambique				×			×			×				×			×	5
Namibia	×				×			×		×				×		×		6
Niger															×		×	2
Nigeria		×			×		×			×				×	×	×	×	8
Senegal				×			×			×					×	×		5
Sierra Leone														×			×	2
South Africa		×		×				×		×			×				×	6
Swaziland															×		×	2
Tanzania			×		×		×			×				×		×		6
Togo														×		×		2
Uganda		×		×			×			×			×	×			×	7
Zambia	×				×		×				×			×	×	×		7
Zimbabwe	×					×	×				×			×		×		6
Total	6	4	2	6	8	1	15	2	0	17	3	0	4	18	10	18	13	127

1.2. Descriptive statistics of (aggregated) region-level variables

	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Mean political trust	1,484	1.73	0.46	0.34	2.88
Mean age	1,484	36.7	4.23	24	52.88
Mean gender	1,484	0.5	0.04	0	1
Mean education	1,484	3.23	1.11	0.56	6.8
Mean urbanisation	1,484	0.36	0.28	0	1
Mean satisfaction with gov. performance	1,484	1.66	0.40	0.25	2.75
Mean opinion of democracy	1,484	3.07	0.73	0.50	4.69
Mean political participation	1,484	0.89	0.22	0.00	1.59
Mean political interest	1,484	1.42	0.35	0.06	3.00
Mean economic hardship	1,479	1.17	0.48	0.00	3.33
Mean media exposure	1,484	2.46	0.84	0.00	4.83
Violent conflict prevalence	1,484	0.11	0.32	0	1
Non-violent conflict prevalence	1,484	0.43	0.50	0	1

1.3. Descriptive statistics of country-level variables

	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
GDP per capita	127	3706.04	3994.75	650.00	18256.00
Ethnic fractionalisation	127	0.72	0.20	0.26	0.95
Religious fractionalisation	127	0.50	0.12	0.17	0.66
Democracy	127	4.51	4.03	-9	10
Political instability	127	0.05	0.21	0	1

Appendix 2

2.1. HLM 7.03 replication instructions

Below, the replication instructions for the analyses reported on in Table 1 (violent conflict) and Table 2 (non-violent conflict) can be found. These instructions, which are based on Hutchison and Johnson's (2011) replication guide, apply to version 7.03 of the Hierarchical Linear Modelling (HLM) software by Scientific Software International. A free, time-limited trial version of this software can be requested at http://ssicentralc.web808.discountasp.net/index.php/products/hml/free-downloads-hlm.

Generating the MDM file

Step 1: Select 'File', select 'Make New MDM', select 'Stat package input'
Step 2: Select 'HLM2' for a two-level hierarchical model and click 'Ok'.
Step 3: Below 'Level-1 Specification', select 'Browse' and choose the region-level SPSS data file.
Step 4: Select 'Choose Variables', click 'ID' for [HLM_ID], click 'In MDM' for [URBRUR], [GENDER], [AGE], [EDUC], [TRS_INDE], [PRF_INDE], [DEM_SATI], [PRT_INDE], [POL_INT], [ECO_HARD] and [MEDIA_EX].
Step 5: Next to the 'Missing Data?' box, select 'Yes'.
Step 6: Next to the 'Delete missing data when' box, select 'running analyses'.
Step 7: Below 'Level-2 Specification', select 'Browse' and choose the country-level SPSS data file.
Step 8: Select 'Choose Variables', click 'ID' for [HLM_ID], click 'In MDM' for [GDP_CAPI], [ETHNIC_D], [RELIG_DI], [POLITY] and [PRIOR_TR].
Step 9: Enter a file name in the prompt below 'MDM File Name (use .mdm suffix)'.
Step 10: Select 'Save mdmt file', enter a file name and select 'Save'.
Step 11: Select 'Make MDM'.
Step 12: Select 'Done'.

Generating the HLM models

Step 1: Select 'Outcome' in the top left corner and select 'Bernoulli' under 'Distribution of Outcome Variable'. Select 'Ok'.
Step 2: Select either [VC] or [NVC_SMAL] and select 'Outcome variable'.
Step 3: Select 'Level-1', select all variables that are to be included in the model by picking 'Add variable uncentered' for each.
Step 4: Select the first [Beta0] equation below 'LEVEL 2 MODEL'.
Step 5: Select all level-2 variables that are to be included in the model (if any) by selecting them and picking 'Add variable grand centered'.
Step 6: Select 'Other settings', select 'Iteration settings', type '50' for 'Number of (micro) iterations', type '200' for 'Number of macro iterations'. Select 'Ok'.
Step 7: Select 'Run Analysis', select 'Run the model shown'.

2.2. Reproduction data

This research' reproduction datasets can be requested from the author.