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# Social Cohesion After Armed Conflict

## A Literature Review

*Charlotte Fiedler*  
*Christopher Rohles*

# Social cohesion after armed conflict

A literature review

Charlotte Fiedler

Christopher Rohles

Bonn 2021

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## Abstract

How does armed conflict affect social cohesion, that is, the social fabric of societies? This question is central if we want to understand better why some countries experience repeated cycles of violence. It is also a crucial question for the design of peacebuilding interventions. In recent years, considerable scientific work has been put into studying the social legacies of armed conflict. This literature review brings these academic studies together in a novel way.

In this discussion paper we conduct an extensive review of the empirical academic literature on how armed conflict affects social cohesion. We take a holistic perspective and analyse each of the three constituent elements of social cohesion – trust, cooperation and identity – in detail and along both a vertical (state-society relations) and a horizontal (interpersonal and intergroup relations) dimension. Regarding conflict, the focus lies on intrastate conflict and civil war, but the review also includes the few studies that focus on armed conflict between states or groups (interstate and non-state conflict). Overall, this review brings together insights from 39 published, peer-reviewed, empirical studies, most of which analyse the effects of conflict based on comprehensive survey data or behavioural experiments. Strengths and shortcomings are discussed and future avenues for research are identified.

Contrary to the initial optimism of the potentially positive legacies of armed conflict expressed by some scholars, our main finding holds that the literature by now mainly points towards such conflict harming social cohesion. Most clearly, there is quite a large body of literature showing that social trust is negatively affected by experience of violence. Research on political trust and social identities is still nascent but currently also points towards negative effects. The literature on cooperation is more mixed with studies finding both support for an increase or a decrease in cooperative behaviour. However, several (and particularly newer) studies demonstrate that an increase in cooperation can often be explained by prosocial behaviour towards the in-group but not the out-group, calling into question whether this should be interpreted positively for social cohesion overall. Political participation does, however, seem to be one aspect of social cohesion in which effects of the “post-traumatic growth” mechanism can indeed be traced in several contexts.

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## 1 Introduction

How does conflict affect social cohesion, that is, the social fabric of societies? This question is central if we want to better understand why some countries experience repeated cycles of violence while others are able to escape the so called “conflict trap” (Collier & Sambanis, 2002, p. 45). It is also a crucial question for the design of peacebuilding interventions as it tells us more about which efforts we should be focusing on as well as when a country can be considered to have left its conflictual past behind. In 2010, Blattman and Miguel (2010, p. 42) noted that “the social and institutional legacies of conflict are arguably the most important but least understood of all war impacts”. Since then, considerable work has been put into studying the social legacies of armed conflict. This literature review brings many of these studies together in a novel way by focusing on the effects of armed conflict on social cohesion. The strengths and shortcomings of these studies are discussed and future avenues for research are identified.

In a meta-analysis of 16 studies on how conflict affects prosocial (other-oriented) behaviour,<sup>1</sup> M. Bauer et al. (2016, p. 250) find that “people exposed to war violence tend to behave more cooperatively after war”. While this finding might seem surprising at first glance, it does lend support to theories that stress that war can be an important driver of change, for example, for the creation of the modern state (Tilly, 1985). At the individual level, the studies that find such positive social effects of war tend to claim that this stems from a “post-traumatic growth” mechanism whereby experiencing violence instils a sense of agency in victims, making them politically more active as well as generally more willing to trust and cooperate with others.

Is it really the case that conflicts might incur high immediate human costs and result in both short- and long-term economic damage, but at the same time improve a country’s social fabric? To answer this question, we conduct an extensive review of the empirical academic literature on how conflict affects social cohesion. We take a holistic perspective and analyse each of the three constituent elements of social cohesion – trust, cooperation and identity – in detail and along both a vertical and a horizontal dimension.<sup>2</sup> Regarding conflict, the focus lies on intrastate conflict and civil war, but the review also includes the few studies that focus on armed conflict between states or groups (interstate and non-state conflict). Overall, the study compiles insights from 39 published, peer-reviewed, empirical studies, most of which analyse the effects of conflict based on comprehensive survey data or behavioural experiments.

Contrary to the initial optimism expressed by some scholars, our main finding is that the literature mainly indicates that conflict harms social cohesion. Most clearly, there is quite a large body of literature showing that social trust is negatively affected by the experience of violence. Research on political trust and social identities is still nascent but also points towards conflict having net negative effects with political trust decreasing and group identities increasing. The literature on cooperation is more mixed with studies finding both support for an increase and a decrease in cooperative behaviour. However, several (and

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1 More specifically, political and civil participation as well as trust.

2 This means we build on the study by M. Bauer et al. (2016) but expand it in important ways, resulting in a considerably larger number of studies being covered.

particularly newer) studies demonstrate that an increase in cooperation can often be explained by prosocial behaviour towards the in-group but not the out-group, calling into question whether this should be interpreted positively for social cohesion overall. Political participation does, however, seem to be one aspect of social cohesion in which effects of post-traumatic growth can indeed be traced in several contexts.

Reviewing the literature on how conflict affects social cohesion more broadly also reveals several crucial gaps in current approaches. First, the fact that authors focus on different outcomes and measurements thereof when making claims on the broader concepts of trust, cooperation or identity make it difficult to systematically compare the studies. Second, the literature would benefit by not only systematically analysing specific components but also studying social cohesion as a whole. Third, several of the studies fail to theoretically and empirically connect their analysis more precisely with the conflict at hand, by differentiating more clearly between in-group and out-group dynamics, for example. Fourth, most of the studies systematically examine within-country variation. While this produces interesting findings of high internal validity, their generalisability is limited. This is particularly problematic because there is an evident tilt towards certain world regions and even specific countries in the literature. Fifth and finally, most of the studies are not able to track how trust, cooperation and identity develop over time, thereby leaving a key question on the relationship between conflict and social cohesion unanswered.

This discussion paper is organised into three sections beyond this introduction. In Section 2, we discuss the concepts of conflict and social cohesion used here and present the main theoretical arguments on how conflict could affect social cohesion. In Section 3, we analyse the current empirical literature with regard to how conflict affects each of the three core elements of social cohesion: trust, cooperation and identity. To do so we critically discuss measurement, empirical results and open questions for each element. Section 4 provides a concluding discussion and gathers the insights from across the three elements together to reveal patterns and remaining gaps.

## **2 Concepts and theory**

### **2.1 Key concepts: Armed conflict and social cohesion**

The first key concept for this literature review is armed conflict. We follow the established definition by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program and the Peace Research Institute Oslo (UCDP/PRIO):

A state-based armed conflict is a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in one calendar year. (UCDP, 2020)

Non-state conflict is characterised by the fact that “none of the warring parties is a government”, whereas in interstate conflicts both warring parties are governments of a state (UCDP, 2020).



While the roots of the second and more controversial key concept for this review – social cohesion – go back to sociologist Emile Durkheim (1933), originally published in 1893, it did not gain prominence until the early 2000s and initially did so primarily in policy circles. It is now a concept that attracts widespread scholarly as well as policy attention (Chan, To, & Chan, 2006; Langer, Stewart, Smedts, & Demarest, 2017; OECD, 2011; UNDP, 2020). As with most complex concepts, there is no single, agreed upon definition of social cohesion available (Schiefer & van der Noll, 2016). Due to its focus on core elements common to almost all conceptualisations, we follow the definition by Leininger et al. (2020):

Social cohesion refers to both the vertical and the horizontal relations among members of society and the state as characterized by a set of attitudes and behaviours that includes trust, an inclusive identity, and cooperation for the common good.

This definition is closely based on work by Chan, To, and Chan (2006) who argue for a minimalist definition while still emphasising the importance of not only horizontal relations between groups or individuals but also the vertical relations between individuals and the state.<sup>3</sup> In both the vertical and horizontal dimensions the definition focuses on three core elements: trust, an inclusive identity and cooperation for the common good, thereby, further developing the Chan et al. (2006) definition in several important regards.<sup>4</sup> Focusing on these three core elements of social cohesion is also in line with the main arguments put forth in a relatively recent review article by Schiefer and van der Noll (2016). They identify six macro “ingredients” of social cohesion visible in most studies, but argue that only three are actually central to the concept: (i) social relations between individuals and between groups, which also include trust among members of the society and trust towards institutions; (ii) identification with, and feeling of belonging to the social entity, such as a group or a country; and (iii) orientation towards the common good (Schiefer & van der Noll, 2016). On the three elements, Leininger et al. (2020) expand as follows:

1. **Trust** refers to both social and political trust. Particularly important for social cohesion at the horizontal level is generalised trust, which is the “ability to trust people outside one’s familiar or kinship circles” (Mattes & Moreno, 2018, p. 357). It is also sometimes referred to as “bridging trust” that acts as the “bond that people share across a society and across economic and ethnic groups, religions, and races” (Rothstein & Uslander, 2005, p. 45). This is the type of trust captured by the horizontal dimension. Institutional trust, instead, is the trust towards “formal, legal organizations of government and state, as distinct from the current incumbents nested within those organizations” (Mattes & Moreno, 2018, p. 357), and, thus, refers to the vertical dimension.
2. **Cooperation for the common good** exists in a society in which many people and groups cooperate for “interests that transcend those of the individuals involved” (van Oorschot & Komter, 1998, p. 7). While the importance of cooperation among individuals and groups on the horizontal dimension, namely civic participation, has been stressed in the past, the definition also incorporates vertical cooperation in which individuals cooperate

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3 Several other authors also stress the importance of state institutions for social cohesion as they regulate the coexistence of people (Fonseca, Lukosch, & Brazier, 2019; Jenson, 2010; Markus & Kirpitchenko, 2007).

4 It further develops the Chan et al. definition, first, by focusing on an inclusive identity rather than only a sense of belonging and, second, by moving from the willingness to cooperate to actual cooperation and only cooperation for the common good.

with the state through political participation (Acket, Borsenberger, Dickes, & Sarracino, 2011; Chan et al., 2006; Jenson, 2010; Schiefer & van der Noll, 2016).

3. **Inclusive identity:** A socially cohesive society is one in which individuals with different identities can co-exist in a peaceful way and where some particular identities are not dominant over the overall collective identity. At the horizontal level, different group identities are tolerated, recognised and protected. At the vertical level, this means that people feel first of all part of a broader entity (e.g., the nation) that is more than the sum of individuals and that bridges the different identities within a society.

Two more controversial elements of social cohesion exist and are not included here. First, some see shared values as a constitutive element of social cohesion. However, while some argue that uniformity between values ensures better social interactions, others argue that it is highly unclear which values a cohesive society should exhibit and that cohesive societies are exactly the ones that should be able to deal with the coexistence of groups with different values in a peaceful way (Dragolov, Ignácz, Lorenz, Delhey, & Boehnke, 2013; Jeannotte et al., 2002; Spoonley, Peace, Butcher, & O'Neill, 2005). Second, several studies include economic factors, such as economic equality or quality of life, as core elements of social cohesion (Langer et al., 2017; OECD, 2011). However, while it is evident that economic factors should be able to influence social cohesion, it is less convincing that they should be seen as necessary and constitutive core components of the concept to the same degree as trust, cooperation and identity (see also Chan et al. (2006) and Schiefer and van der Noll (2016)).

The studies covered in this review relate to the concept of social cohesion in different ways. While some explicitly reference social cohesion (e.g. Gilligan, Pasquale, & Samii, 2014; Kijewski & Freitag, 2018), others connect their work to social capital (De Luca & Verpoorten, 2015b; Hadzic, Carlson, & Tavits, 2017; Rohner, Thoenig, & Zilibotti, 2013; Voors & Bulte, 2014), and still others aim to contribute to the debate on how conflict affects attitudes, especially prosociality (Hager, Krakowski, & Schaub, 2019; Werner & Graf Lambsdorff, 2019; Whitt & Wilson, 2007). There are definitional debates on each of these concepts and we cannot discuss each in detail here. Social capital usually focuses on vertical relations and networks, including especially cooperation but also trust within and between groups, thereby addressing a subset of social cohesion (Fukuyama, 1995; Putnam, 1995). Regarding prosociality, Bhogal and Farrelly (2019, p. 910), describe the research field as exploring “why people help others at a cost to oneself, which is helpful to the benefit of society” and include altruism, cooperation, heroism, fairness and trust into the types of behaviours studied. Prosociality, therefore, explicitly covers the same two core elements of social cohesion as social capital (cooperation and trust) but also focuses on the basis for cooperation (fairness and altruism) as well as behaviour that goes beyond social cohesion (heroism).

## 2.2 Theoretical expectations

Before discussing the results from the empirical literature, it is important to look at the different theoretical arguments that have been put forth to explain both why conflict might increase social cohesion and, contrarily, why and how conflict instead might have a negative impact on social cohesion. The theoretical explanations, thereby, provide the basis for the interpretation of the results found in the literature review in the next chapter.

The literature reviewed here puts forward three theoretical explanations: (i) post-traumatic growth theory, (ii) post-traumatic withdrawal theory and (iii) social identity theory. The first two assume that violence changes people's attitudes and behaviour towards one another more generally, while the third focuses on how conflict affects attitudes towards and within specific groups. The theories do not differentiate between the elements of social cohesion but allow for more general assumptions about how conflict affects social cohesion.

The post-traumatic growth (PTG) theory ascribes war a positive transformative potential whereby violence enables psychological change that benefits social cohesion. PTG theory can be traced back to psychologists Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996; 2004) who define post-traumatic growth as "the experience of positive change that occurs as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life crises" (2004, p. 1). More specifically, they highlight five positive outcomes that can result from PTG: "greater appreciation of life and changed sense of priorities; warmer, more intimate relationships with others; a greater sense of personal strength; recognition of new possibilities or paths for one's life; and spiritual development" (2004, p. 6). Psychologists have found examples of PTG across a wide array of outcomes, including several severe medical diseases, sexual assault, combat and being a refugee (Tedeschi & Calhoun 1996, 2004). This theory has been applied to the post-civil war context with war and violence experienced during it representing the traumatic event. This can lead to a positive re-evaluation of life, political behaviour and personal relationships more generally. Blattman (2009, p. 244), for example, reports that interviews with youth provided "narratives of newfound self-control, confidence, and skills". According to PTG theory, we should expect that war can contribute to more cooperation and trust because experiencing violence can lead to a realisation that associational life, participation and collective action is intrinsically valuable.

A negative psychological mechanism has also been suggested, whereby violence is instead expected to lead to persistent psychological damage. We label this approach "post-traumatic withdrawal theory". This theoretical approach also has its roots in psychology and is based on the internationally recognised post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), "a debilitating anxiety disorder resulting from trauma exposure" (Frans, Rimmo, Aberg, & Fredrikson, 2005, p. 291). Apart from regularly re-experiencing the trauma, "the victim feels numb (psychic numbing), experiences a loss of normal affect and emotional responsiveness, and exhibits less interest and involvement in work and interpersonal relationships" (Figley, 1985, p. 55). PTSD has been linked to a number of traumatic events, including war, rape, natural disasters, accidents and crime experiences (Frans et al., 2005). If these symptoms persist after the war, we can expect victims to reduce interpersonal exchange and overall closeness to others, as well as withdraw from social activities, resulting in a reduction in both cooperation and trust.

The third mechanism focuses on how individuals interact with one another depending on group membership, arguing that conflict will increase in-group bonding while decreasing out-group bridging. It is based on social identity theory, most prominently coined by social psychologists Tajfel and Turner (1979, 1986) who contend that individuals have a strong inclination to feel part of groups, which they do on the basis of social (group) identities. Based on these groups, we then categorise people into groups and distinguish between "us" and "them". This in turn implies that people favour their in-group and behave more prosocially towards its members, which can increase distance to the out-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986). Applying this to the conflict context means that there is an extreme event that intensifies group distinctions, increasing in-group bonding and at the same time

decreasing out-group bridging. This argumentation is very similar to an evolutionary mechanism put forth by some economists according to which intergroup conflict should increase internal bonding and cohesion because only groups in which individuals cooperate and behave altruistically towards one another will survive competition (Bowles, 2006; Choi & Bowles, 2007). Since war is an extreme form of competition, it is assumed it will hence increase parochial prosociality – prosocial behaviour towards the in-group – while at the same time increasing aversion to the out-group, particularly the opponent in the war. In conflict studies, this mechanism has especially been stressed for societies where ethnicity plays a major role and can act as a marker for the in-group and the out-group (Horowitz, 1985). The expected effect according to the in-group/out-group mechanism hence depends on whom an individual interacts with. Based on this theoretical argument, we would expect more cooperation and trust within groups and less across groups as a result of conflict. For identity, the theory would predict a strengthening of group identities rather than allowing subordinate identities to overlap or a joint identity to develop.

Overall, the three different arguments lead to very different expectations. According to post-traumatic growth theory, conflict should increase social cohesion, while post-traumatic withdrawal suggests the opposite. Looking at group dynamics, one could expect that war increases cohesiveness within, but not across, groups with a net negative effect on social cohesion for society as a whole. The next section presents and discusses the literature with regard to its empirical findings and theoretical implications.

### **3 Literature review**

#### **3.1 Selection of studies**

We define several scope conditions for which types of studies are included in the analysis to allow a focused discussion. First, to ensure methodological rigour, this literature review focuses on published, peer-reviewed academic studies. Second, we only include empirical studies, because we are interested in reviewing the current state of knowledge of the effects of conflict on social cohesion. Third, we include both studies that explicitly analyse and reference social cohesion as a whole as well as studies that only focus on one or several of the three core components of social cohesion – trust, cooperation and identity. At the same time, this also means we exclude a few studies with outcomes that are related to but not at the core of social cohesion, in order to ensure as much comparability as possible among the studies included. Fourth, we are mainly interested in studies on intrastate conflict, which includes (a) both civil wars and minor armed conflict in which the state opposes one or more rebel groups as well as (b) non-state conflict between two groups with no state involvement. Because they also provide interesting insights and because the line between intra- and interstate conflict is sometimes blurry, we also include a small number of studies that analyse the effects of conflict between states on social cohesion. We do not, however, include non-political violence more generally, again to ensure as much comparability across studies as possible. Fifth, we consider studies that investigate the short-, medium- and long-term effects of conflict. While we are particularly interested in the medium- and long-term effects because these are likely to be particularly important for post-conflict development and peace, defining a clear conflict end can be challenging at times. For this reason, we also include the more immediate effects of conflict in our analysis. Finally, as social cohesion is an interdisciplinary phenomenon, we did not explicitly exclude any disciplines. However,

due to the other selection criteria applied, most papers discussed come from either political science or behavioural economics. The studies were identified first based on the snowballing technique starting with the influential M. Bauer et al. (2016) meta-analysis that combines 16 studies on prosociality and conflict.<sup>5</sup> This was complemented by searches of academic literature databases (including Web of Science, Scopus, and Google Scholar). We conducted full-text searches and looked for key terms in titles and abstracts.<sup>6</sup>

Overall, we identified 39 relevant articles and covered them in this review. Table 1 gives an overview of the key characteristics of the studies included and demonstrates that a majority of them are single country studies published in political science or economics journals. Regarding the type of conflict, there is a strong focus on intrastate conflict, while methodologically most papers work with surveys or behavioural experiments.<sup>7</sup> Table 1 also shows that the number of articles studying social cohesion after conflict has greatly increased in recent years.<sup>8</sup>

<b>Table 1: Overview of studies included</b>				
<b>Scientific discipline</b>	Political science (21)	Economics (15)	Other (3)*	
<b>Scope</b>	Single country (33)	Cross-country (6)		
<b>Methodology</b>	Survey (25)	Behavioural experiment (9)	Both (3)	Other (2)
<b>Type of conflict**</b>	Interstate (7)	Intrastate (30)	Non-state (4)	
<b>Year published</b>	2005-2010 (4)	2010-2015 (12)	2015-2020 (23)	
Notes: *This includes two articles from social psychology and one from development studies; ** Two papers include different types of conflicts and are, therefore, counted several times				
Source: Authors				

The next section presents and discusses these studies with regard to their empirical evidence on how conflict effects social cohesion, more specifically trust, cooperation and identity.

5 This means systematically scanning all works cited as well as going through all published journal articles that cite the M. Bauer et al. (2016) study and continuing the snow-balling technique with the respective references found through this approach.

6 The key terms, which led us to the relevant literature, were adapted to each database and include: “civil war trust”, “civil war ethnicity”, “civil war prosocial behaviour”, “social trust war”, “social cohesion war”, “exposure to violence trust”, “conflict political trust”. The journals that were individually searched for relevant literature include the *American Journal of Political Science*, *American Political Science Review*, *British Journal of Political Science*, the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, the *Journal of Economic Growth*, *Oxford Economic Papers*, the *Journal of Peace Research*, and *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, among others.

7 Some studies claim to conduct a “lab-in-the-field experiment” (Cassar et al., 2013; Cecchi et al., 2016; Gilligan et al., 2014; Mironova & Whitt, 2016; Whitt & Wilson, 2007), some denote their experiment “field-experiment” (M. Bauer et al., 2017; Becchetti et al., 2013; Voors et al., 2012), while others do not specify their experimental approach further (M. Bauer et al., 2014; Cecchi & Duchoslav, 2018; Hager et al., 2019; Werner & Graf Lambsdorff, 2019). The difference between them lies in the extent of how natural the decision-making context and the situation itself is. However, we do not differentiate between them because often their distinction is rather blurry.

8 This literature review covers literature published up until September 2020.

### 3.2 Trust after conflict

How does conflict affect the first core component of social cohesion, namely trust? This question is relevant both regarding trust between groups (social trust) as well as between the state and its citizens (political trust). Because these two types of trust have mostly been addressed by different studies, we summarise and discuss insights on each type of trust individually. In order to do so, the following subsections first provide background information on different ways of measuring social and political trust, then present the literature on the different types of trust after conflict and finally critically discuss which questions are left open by the two strands of literature.

#### 3.2.1 Defining and measuring social trust

Different types of social trust, that is, trust between people,<sup>9</sup> can be identified depending on whom trust is geared towards. The main two types the academic literature differentiates are *particularised trust* and *generalised trust* (Freitag & Traunmüller, 2009; Newton & Zmerli, 2011; Oskarsson, Svensson, & Öberg, 2009; Stolle, 2002; Uslaner, 2002; Yamagishi & Yamagishi, 1994). Particularised trust is “trust at close social range” (Gundelach, 2013, p. 125) and is the trust one has towards people one knows and frequently interacts with. The radius of generalised trust is much larger, as it describes a more abstract attitude towards people in general and particularly strangers. A third type of trust is *identity-based trust*, which is conferred on the basis of group membership. While one may not directly know a person, trust is here based on belonging to the same salient social group (based on ethnicity, nationality, religion or language, for example). A distinction that cuts across these three different types of trust is in-group and out-group trust. We follow M. Bauer et al. (2016, p. 260) in that we define “in-group members as people from the same family, village, class, and ethnic group. Out-group members are classified as individuals from other ethnic groups or parts of the country”.<sup>10</sup>

In terms of measurement, researchers differentiate between a direct measurement where people self-report their trust through surveys, and an indirect measurement where people are observed and their behaviour is evaluated. The behavioural approach consists of experiments, also referred to as behavioural games. Due to the multitude of approaches, in this overview we focus on the most prominent methods, which are especially important for the measurement of social trust in post-conflict contexts.

The central experimental approach for the measurement of trust is the trust game. It was designed by Berg, Dickhaut and McCabe (1995) and is based on the distribution of money between two players – a “truster” and a “trustee”.<sup>11</sup> In a first step, the truster decides how much of an initial amount of money she is endowed with she would like to send to the trustee. If she decides to send something, the amount is multiplied by a constant before reaching the trustee. The trustee then decides how much she will keep and how much she

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9 Trust more generally can be defined as “an expectation that people will behave with good will, that they intend to honor their commitments, and that they will avoid harming others” (Freitag & Bauer, 2013, p. 25).

10 Theoretically, other salient groups could be, for example, linguistic, religious or political.

11 Using the investment game as a basis.

sends back to the truster. The amount the truster sends to the trustee is usually interpreted as a measure of trust, while the amount the trustee returns is considered a measure of trustworthiness (repaying trust). In the game, the trustee actively reacts to the decision made by the truster, making it possible to study reciprocity and the anticipation thereof: the truster must trust that the trustee will send money back and the trustee proves her trustworthiness by doing so. The trust game is intended to measure generalised trust when the two players are anonymous; if the two players are purposefully chosen from the same or two different groups, the game can also be used to measure particularised or out-group trust.

Although “behavioral scholars have gone to great lengths to construct lab experiments that allow for capturing behaviour that is caused by trust and not by alternative motivations” (C. P. Bauer & Freitag, 2016, p. 3), the trust game is not without criticism and it cannot be entirely ruled out that it measures outcomes beyond trust. Several scholars have called attention to the fact that the trust game might also capture altruism as well as risk (aversion),<sup>12</sup> which is why ideally other games measuring these outcomes should be included in experimental studies measuring trust (Alós-Ferrer & Farolfi, 2019). Nevertheless, this does not call into question the validity of the experiment in general, which to this day remains the main experimental way to measure trust (see also: C. P. Bauer & Freitag, 2016; OECD, 2017).

The standard survey measure of generalised trust used in numerous large-scale surveys worldwide is the “most-people” question: “Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you must be very careful in dealing with people?”<sup>13</sup> The relatively recent Global Preferences Survey<sup>14</sup> in turn asks respondents whether they think other people only have the best intentions, with answer possibilities provided on a Likert scale between 0 and 10 (Falk et al., 2018; Falk, Becker, Dohmen, Huffman, & Sunde, 2016). Another possibility for measuring social trust through surveys is the “wallet question”: “If you lost a wallet or purse that contained two hundred dollars, how likely is it to be returned with the money in it if it was [*sic*] found by a complete stranger” (Soroka, Helliwell, & Johnston, 2007, p. 98). The question is based on an actual experiment and Knack and Keefer (1997) show that the return rate strongly correlates with the answers of the “most-people” question on the country level.

Despite various criticisms and suggestions on more innovative approaches, variants of the most-people question are still the most widely used instrument for measuring generalised trust.<sup>15</sup> Less critically, surveys can also be used to measure particularised or out-group trust by asking about a specific trustee category. For example, C. P. Bauer and Freitag (2016, pp. 16-17) suggest a whole battery of answer options for the wallet question, asking if respondents think their wallet will be returned if it were found by “a relative”, “one of your friends”, “a neighbour”, “someone who speaks the same language as you”, or “someone of

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12 In order to avoid distortions due to higher risk-aversiveness, different studies control for this with a lottery game (see e.g. Gilligan et al., 2014; Naef & Schupp, 2009, pp. 18-19).

13 Also called the “Rosenberg question” (OECD, 2017, p. 138; Rosenberg, 1956).

14 The Global Preferences Survey covers 76 countries around the world. Data collection was supported by the European Research Council.

15 The “most people” question has been criticised on several grounds, including the binary nature of the answer possibilities and whether people associate known or unknown people with “most people” (Uslaner, 2011).

the same nationality as you”. In a similar vein, other surveys ask respondents to rate how much they trust family members, neighbours, known people or people from other ethnic or social groups.

Several studies focusing on the measurement of trust combine experimental measures and surveys. This is important because whether survey and experimental measures capture the same aspects of trust remains debated (Ben-Ner & Halldorsson, 2010; Fehr, Fischbacher, von Rosenbladt, Schupp, & Wagner, 2002; Glaeser, Laibson, Scheinkman, & Soutter, 2000; Johnson & Mislin, 2011; Naef & Schupp, 2009). For this reason, Alós-Ferrer and Farolfi (2019, pp. 8-9) caution that “researchers should not assume that any particular behavioural or survey measure available at this point suffices to cover all aspects of our intuitive notions of human trust and trustworthiness”. However, so far, this is very rarely done in studies on the effects of conflict on trust.

### 3.2.2 Summary of empirical findings

Overall, social trust has been studied quite extensively in the literature. The majority of studies suggest that conflict negatively impacts social trust. However, a smaller number of studies find either the opposite or that there is no statistically significant effect.

A relatively large number of studies finds that conflict negatively impacts social trust. Rohner, Thoenig and Zilibotti (2013) study the effects of violence on generalised trust, that is, trust in strangers, in Uganda. Comparing Afrobarometer data before and after a peak of violence between 2002 and 2005, their results show that generalised trust decreases significantly in areas that witnessed more intense fighting. The authors, furthermore, find that the effect “is stronger when fighting events involve the respondent’s ethnic group”, suggesting that especially out-group trust suffers as a result of conflict. They could not find a significant effect with regard to “trust in known people” or “trust in relatives” (particularised trust), indicating that fighting “induces distrust mainly towards people outside the ordinary social network” (Rohner et al., 2013, p. 221). Also focusing on Uganda, De Luca and Verpoorten (2015b) are able to compare Afrobarometer survey results before, during and after the civil war (2000, 2005, and 2012). Their findings suggest that time is an important factor: levels of generalised trust strongly decreased during conflict and particularly so in areas heavily affected by violence. After the civil war, however, trust increased and fully recovered to pre-violence levels.

Also studying survey data but in an Eastern European context, Kijewski and Freitag (2018) analyse the 2010 Life in Transition survey for Kosovo. As their dependent variable they use a version of “the wallet question” in which respondents are asked how likely it is that their wallet would be returned with nothing missing should they lose it in their neighbourhood. The authors find that exposure to violence significantly decreases social trust. However, it remains unclear whether this finding should be interpreted as particularised or generalised



social trust as the question is about people in the neighbourhood more generally thereby including both known and unknown people.<sup>16</sup>

Cassar, Grosjean and Whitt (2013) analyse the effects of the legacy of the Tajik Civil War on particularised trust using an experimental set-up 13 years after the war. They implement the trust game with 426 respondents and use a treatment whereby the second player comes either from the same or a “distant village”. The authors find that victims of the civil war are significantly less trusting, but only towards their local neighbours, not distant villagers. Cassar et al. (2013) explain this somewhat surprising result of decreased particularised trust with the fact that in the Tajik Civil War political allegiances oftentimes cut across villages, showing that “civil war may have particularly deleterious effects in regions where opposing groups inter-mixed” (2013, p. 287).

Focusing on a particularly severe conflict, Ingelaere and Verporten (2020) find clear and persistent negative effects of the Rwandan genocide on intergroup trust between the Hutu and the Tutsi. Their quantitative data consists of over 400 life stories that the authors collected in three interview rounds. It provides yearly observations on self-reported levels of social trust from 1989, five years before the genocide, to 2011, 17 years after the genocide. They find that both for the Hutu and the Tutsi, intergroup trust significantly decreased as a result of the violence. The decrease is more pronounced for the Tutsi and is especially strong among those who were directly exposed to violence. The Tutsi victims are also the group whose interethnic trust recovered the least. Intragroup trust in turn stayed relatively stable among the Tutsi but declined among the Hutu, which can be explained by the violence targeted at the moderate Hutu. More generally, Ingelaere and Verporten (2020) find that both intra- and intergroup trust recovered, but overall failed to reach pre-genocide levels.

Taking a more long-term perspective and analysing interstate conflict, Conzo and Salustri (2019) study the effects of World War II on generalised trust in 13 European countries using two waves of the Survey on Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe from 2006/2007 and 2013. The authors find a significant decrease in trust among adults who were exposed to violence in their childhood. This is in line with the psychological literature, which indicates that early childhood is a particularly critical period for trust formation.

Applying an even longer-term perspective, Besley and Reynal-Querol (2014) study the legacy of pre-colonial conflict on current conflict as well as attitudes in 18 African countries. By combining historical conflict data with the Afrobarometer survey of 2008, they show that respondents from countries that experienced historical conflict between 1400 and 1700 show significantly lower out-group trust – up to 600 years later. Although the authors themselves caution that further analyses to corroborate this finding are needed, the results do provide evidence for a negative long-term legacy of conflict regarding social trust.

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16 The authors claim to, thereby, be measuring generalised trust because “the question is phrased in a way that respondents are unlikely to think only of people they know personally, such as their closest neighbours but also include people living in their immediate surroundings” (Kijewski & Freitag, 2018, p. 723). However, the respondents’ answers might differ significantly depending on whether they come from a rural or urban setting. And in bigger cities the group of people that respondents associate with their neighbourhood might differ considerably depending on how segregated or mixed specific neighbourhoods are.

Interesting insights on possible conditional effects of conflict on social trust stem from two studies on non-state conflict. Werner and Graf Lambsdorff (2019) conduct several experiments, including the trust game, on prosocial behaviour with 724 students in the Maluku region of Indonesia, which experienced repeated non-state conflict between 1999 and 2011. They do not find that participants generally discriminate towards the out-group. Interestingly, by including a third variant, Werner and Graf Lambsdorff's (2019) experiments instead show that prosociality is generally higher when the identity of the receiver is not revealed. Once identity is revealed, less is allocated to members of both the in-group and the out-group. This effect is even stronger for those who report victimisation: "subjects who were hit particularly hard by the conflict, measured by having experienced physical injury, allocate significantly more when they only receive neutral information. When confronted with group identity information, however, they show a lower level of prosociality" (Werner & Graf Lambsdorff, 2019, p. 10). Becchetti, Conzo and Romeo (2013) also find a somewhat similar effect. They exposed 404 Kenyan slum inhabitants to experimental games two years after the major outbreak of electoral violence in 2007 and 2008. In the study, two anonymous trust games are played with a common pool resource game in between and their respective outcomes are compared. The authors find that people who were exposed to violence show higher levels of trust in the first game. However, if they are confronted with the other ethnic group or opportunistic behaviour in the common pool resource game in between there is a significant reduction in their trust level in the second trust game, which Becchetti et al. (2013, p. 302) explain as follows: "by reopening the old wounds of the civil war, this memory would induce the negative reciprocal reaction". Both studies, hence, suggest that when identity is introduced into the game it influences its outcome. It is noteworthy that both of these studies that focus explicitly on non-state conflict find a conditional negative effect with trust only being low if information on the identity of the second player is introduced into the experiment. Whether a similar conditional effect can also be found after civil war is an important, open question for future research.

Three studies instead find a significant, positive relationship between conflict exposure and trust levels. Bellows and Miguel (2009) study the aftermath of the civil war in Sierra Leone ending in 2002 based on nationally representative surveys pooled from two waves of household surveys in 2005 and 2007. Though the focus of their study lies elsewhere, they also include questions on trust. They find no effect with regard to trust in people from one's own community and a positive effect on trust towards people from outside the community. M. Bauer, Fiala and Levey (2017) study 668 former child soldiers in Uganda in 2011 using a variant of the trust game, which they complement with a survey. Here, exposure to violence can include "violence received, committed or witnessed by an individual" (Michal Bauer et al., 2017, p. 1805). They find that those who were abducted at an early age (<14 years) display considerably more trusting behaviour towards people from a "nearby but different village". Focusing on social cohesion within communities, Gilligan, Pasquale and Samii (2014) study the effects of the Nepalese Civil War, which ended in 2006. Based on experimental games including the trust game with 252 household heads implemented in 2009, they find that "members of communities that suffered greater exposure to fatal violence during Nepal's 10-year civil war are significantly more prosocial in their relations with each other than were those that experienced lower levels of violence" (Gilligan et al., 2014, p. 605). Participants from violence-affected communities show significantly higher levels of trust and trustworthiness towards other people from their village.

Finally, a smaller number of studies fail to find significant effects between conflict and social trust. The studies include surveys studying interstate as well as intrastate conflict in Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia (Child & Nikolova, 2018; Grosjean, 2014) as well as two civil wars in Africa (Bellows & Miguel, 2006; Voors & Bulte, 2014). In their meta-analysis on the relationship between war and cooperation, M. Bauer et al. (2016) among others include studies that take a closer look at social trust. Comparing and rerunning the analyses of nine studies,<sup>17</sup> they overall fail to find a statistically significant effect of exposure to violence on social trust. Their first main model shows no relationship and their second model shows a negative but statistically insignificant relationship. This result does not change in more fine-grained analyses focusing on in-group and out-group members.

### 3.2.3 Critical discussion

Overall, the majority of the studies find a significant, negative relationship between experiencing conflict and levels of social trust afterwards. This holds both for studies analysing generalised and out-group trust, lending support to post-traumatic withdrawal and in-group/out-group mechanisms. However, a smaller number of studies find either the opposite (positive effects) or no statistically significant effect. The meta-analysis by M. Bauer et al. (2016) somewhat raises the question whether there is in fact no relationship between conflict and social trust. However, several factors might explain this none-finding. First, the authors themselves acknowledge that their results are based on a relatively small number of studies. Second, the authors explicitly exclude non-state conflict as a type of violence, where two studies suggest a significant negative, albeit conditional effect. Third, the studies included are only as recent as 2015; several relevant studies have been published since then. Taking a closer look at the three studies that find a positive effect of conflict on social trust also raises some interesting questions. The study by Gilligan et al. (2014) on increased social trust in Nepal has been widely cited. However, it comes with an important caveat the authors themselves note: due to the specificity of the Nepalese conflict, the “results do not address the question of how violence might affect relations between communities or groups” (Gilligan et al., 2014, p. 617). Instead, their study focuses on how external, primarily state-inflicted violence impacts community cohesion, showing that conflict can increase particularised trust. Bellows and Miguel (2009) in turn find no effect on particularised trust but a positive effect on generalised trust, pointing towards post-traumatic growth in Sierra Leone. However, since trust is not the main focus of their analysis, too little information is provided to fully comprehend the result. Finally, M. Bauer, Fiala and Levey’s (2017) study on child soldiers in Uganda reveals more trusting behaviour towards people from a “nearby but different village”. While this is a very interesting insight, the question used does not allow for clear identification of whether this result should be interpreted as particularised or generalised trust and, more importantly, whether this would be considered in- or out-group by the players, making it very difficult to interpret these findings. As the next sections show in more detail, this is a more general problem that the literature on social trust is struggling with.

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17 The studies include Annan, Blattman, Mazurana and Carlson (2011), M. Bauer, Cassar, Chytilová and Henrich (2014), M. Bauer et al. (2017), Bellows and Miguel (2009), Cassar, Grosjean and Whitt (2013), De Luca and Verpoorten (2015a), Grosjean (2014), Rohner, Thoenig and Zilibotti (2013) and Voors and Bulte (2014).

What the literature on social trust after conflict most clearly lacks is a systematic distinction between the different types of social trust analysed and the corresponding type of underlying conflict. The majority of studies focus only on generalised trust (Becchetti et al., 2013; Bellows & Miguel, 2006; Child & Nikolova, 2018; Conzo & Salustri, 2019; De Luca & Verpoorten, 2015b; Grosjean, 2014), two studies exclusively analyse particularised trust (Gilligan et al., 2014; Voors & Bulte, 2014), and three compare effects across the two types (Bellows & Miguel, 2009; Cassar et al., 2013; Rohner et al., 2013). Most of these studies fail to explicitly theorise and test for the different types of trust most relevant in the specific country case. Some of the conflicts analysed were fought along group lines, such as the civil war in Burundi while in others, for example, Nepal, a smaller guerrilla group opposed the state. Theoretically, which type of trust is expected to suffer and which type might improve should depend heavily on the lines the conflict was fought along. Post-war levels of social trust could also be strongly influenced by the outcome of the conflict. The fact that the differences regarding the underlying conflict are not taken into account properly in many of the studies can at least partially explain some seemingly contradictory findings that have been produced on social trust. For example, Cassar et al. (2013) find that particularised trust decreases, which they explain by the fact that loyalties in the Tajik Civil War cut across villages, whereas Gilligan et al. (2014) find the opposite effect regarding community cohesion in Nepal where violence was primarily externally-led. As most of the studies are based on surveys or experiments in single cases, addressing the relationship between the conflict, relevant or potential societal groups and the type of trust would be highly important.

In contrast, three studies explicitly differentiate between the relevant in-group and out-group when analysing the effect of conflict on social trust.<sup>18</sup> Besley and Reynal-Querol (2014) use the third survey round from Afrobarometer in 2008, which explicitly asks about trust in people from other ethnic groups,<sup>19</sup> thereby focusing on out-group trust. Ingelaere and Verpoorten (2020) systematically measure and analyse both in-group and out-group trust between the Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda. Werner and Graf Lambsdorff (2019) explicitly test for differences in the results of the experiments focusing on the two main dividing lines relevant in the context of the Malukuan conflicts – Muslim vs. Christian and autochthonous vs. immigrant respondents. All three studies find negative effects of conflict on trust. While the relevance of such an explicit distinction is clearer in conflicts with a strong ethnic or religious dimension, a definitional differentiation between what constitutes the in- and out-group in the conflict at hand would greatly help contrast findings and, hence, sharpen insights on the effects of conflict on social trust more generally.

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18 While most of the studies based on survey data control for ethnicity to take the out-group into account, they rarely address the issue explicitly.

19 This raises the question of whether ethnicity is the most relevant indicator for groups across the African continent or whether other factors such as religion, political affiliations, class or language are equally or more important. While there are of course cases where other distinctions are more relevant, ethnicity is a highly important factor in many African contexts and conflicts.

**Table 2: Overview of studies on social trust after conflict**

n.	Authors	Country, conflict, conflict end	Sample	Method	Aspect of social trust	Data collection	Effect
1	M. Bauer, Fiala & Levey (2017)	Uganda: civil war (2008)	Adults and ex-child soldiers (N = 668)	Survey and experiments	Unclear (trust in people from a “different but nearby village”)	2011	Positive effect
2	Becchetti, Conzo & Romeo (2013)	Kenya: non-state conflict (2008)	Slum-dwellers (N = 404)	Experiments	Generalised	2010	Negative effect, conditional on ethnic cues
3	Bellows & Miguel (2009)	Sierra Leone: civil war (2002)	Households (N = 10,471; nat. representative)	Survey	Particularised and generalised	2005, 2007	Positive effect (generalised)
4	Bellows & Miguel (2006)	Sierra Leone: civil war (2002)	Chiefdoms (N = 152; mean chiefdom population: 20,325)	Survey	Generalised	2004, 2005	No effect
5	Besley & Reynal-Querol (2014)	18 African countries: 91 pre-colonial conflicts (1400-1700)	Adults (N = 25,397)	Survey	Out-group	2008	Negative effect
6	Cassar, Grosjean & Whitt (2013)	Tajikistan: civil war (1997)	Adults (N = 426)	Experiments	Particularised and generalised	2010	Negative effect (particularised)
7	Child & Nikolova (2018)	15 Central and Eastern European countries: World War II (1945)	Adults (N = 17,492)	Survey	Generalised	2010	No effect
8	Conzo & Salustri (2019)	13 European countries: World War II (1945)	Adults born 1939-1945 (N = 6,759)	Survey	Generalised	2006/ 2007, 2013	Negative effect
9	De Luca & Verpoorten (2015b)	Uganda: civil war (2008)	Adults (N = 2,400; nat. representative)	Survey	Generalised	2000, 2005, 2012	Negative effect
10	Gilligan, Pasquale & Samii (2014)	Nepal: civil war (2006)	Household heads (N = 252)	Survey and experiments	Particularised	2009	Positive effect
11	Grosjean (2014)	35 countries in Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia: World War II, several civil wars, one non-state conflict	Adults (N = 38,864; nat. representative)	Survey	Generalised	2010	No effect
12	Ingelaere & Verporten (2020)	Rwanda: civil war, genocide (1994)	Adults (N = 471)	Self-reported life stories	Out-group and in-group	2007, 2011, 2015	Negative effect (out-group and in-group)
13	Kijewski & Freitag (2018)	Kosovo: civil war (1999)	Adults (N = 930)	Survey	In-group	2010	Negative effect
14	Rohner, Thoenig & Zilibotti (2013)	Uganda: civil war (2008)	Adults (N = 2,431; nat. representative)	Survey	Particularised and generalised	2008	Negative effect (generalised)
15	Voors & Bulte (2014)	Burundi: civil war (2008)	Households (N = 872)	Survey	Particularised	2007	No effect
16	Werner & Graf Lambsdorff (2019)	Indonesia: non-state conflict in Maluku (2011)	Undergraduate students (N = 724)	Experiments	Out-group and in-group	2013	Negative effect (out-group and in-group), conditional on ethnic cues

Source: Authors

### 3.2.4 Measuring political trust

Compared with the other components, the measurement of trust in state institutions – referred to in the literature as political or institutional trust – is rather straight forward and approached similarly across authors and disciplines. It is mostly captured through a single survey item asking, “How much do you trust the [institution] in your country?”. With responses given on a scale (often a 4-point Likert scale, such as: 0 = not at all, 1 = a little, 2 = much, 3 = very much). The institutions inquired about span from the national government and its main branches to security institutions, such as the police or the military, to formal or informal institutions at the local level. The World Value Survey, for example, asks about 18 different institutions, the Afrobarometer about 13. Trust can then be assessed by focusing on the specific institution in question or, more generally, by aggregating across institutions into an additive index.

A discussion has evolved on what type of political trust is being measured depending on the institution asked about: “despite the extensive study of political trust, there remains no consensus on how to measure the underlying concept” (Parker, Parker, & Towner, 2015, p. 61). It has been argued that some trust questions measure the approval of specific ruling political leaders, parties or governments rather than state institutions more generally (Giddens, 1990; Hardin, 2002; Offe, 1999; Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005; Seligman, 1997; Zmerli & Newton, 2008). If authors are more interested in trust in the political system in general than incumbent political actors, they tend to exclude questions that focus on institutions often associated with concrete political parties or individuals, such as the president or the government. We refer to this more long-term type of trust in state institutions as *institutional trust* and more short-term trust in incumbents as *personalised political trust*.

### 3.2.5 Summary of empirical findings

With only seven studies on the topic, the research field on political trust is still nascent and, hence, not yet well developed. The majority of studies looking at the relationship between conflict and political trust suggest that conflict reduces political trust. However, a few studies find positive or no effects.

Five studies find that conflict negatively affects political trust. De Juan and Pierskalla (2016) analyse the effect of exposure to violence during a ceasefire in the Nepalese civil war between 1999 and 2003. Combining survey data collected from 8,822 households in 2003 with geo-located data on killings, they show that respondents in areas that experienced more violence were significantly less trusting regarding the national government. This negative relationship is confirmed by Hutchison and Johnson (2011). The authors analyse Afrobarometer survey data for 16 African countries between 2000 and 2005 and find that respondents from countries that recently experienced internal violence are significantly less trusting in state institutions. Grosjean (2014) in turn covers 35 countries in Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Her study is based on the Life in Transition Survey conducted by the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction in 2010. Measuring trust as the sum of trust in the presidency, the government and the parliament, and looking at within-country variation only, she finds that “political trust is strongly and negatively associated with victimization in conflict” (2014, p. 443). The relationship is particularly strong in the

more recent cases of civil conflict, but Grosjean's (2014) findings also provide support for a long-term effect stemming from the interstate violence due to World War II. Also focusing on the long-term effects and interstate war, Hong and Kang (2017) find persistent effects of violence against civilians during the Korean War (1950-1953). Their study is based on a difference in difference strategy, which compares a conflict and post-conflict cohort of survey respondents that were born during and after the war. Sixty years later they find clear effects, with those who experienced the war displaying significantly lower trust in political institutions, particularly those institutions that were directly involved in violence. Gates and Justesen (2020) in turn reveal interesting immediate short-term effects of conflicts in a quasi-experimental setting in Mali. Comparing survey rounds of the Afrobarometer executed days before and after a rebel attack in 2008 they find a clear short-term effect of the attack showing that mainly the president is held responsible, albeit not state institutions more broadly.

There are also studies questioning the negative relationship between conflict and political trust, although they are few. Bakke, O'Loughlin, Toal and Ward (2014) analyse political trust as one dimension of regime legitimacy in Abkhazia, a break-away region of Georgia. Their study is based on a survey conducted with 1,000 respondents two years after the then most recent clashes in the Russo-Georgian War in 2008. Although the primary focus of their study lies elsewhere, they include victimisation as a control variable. They find that respondents who had experienced violence had significantly higher trust levels in the president but find no effect with regard to trust in the parliament. Because it is not the primary focus of their study, this result is neither theoretically explored nor assessed further through robustness tests. The fact that they find a statistically significant effect for the president could suggest that violence can also increase political approval in specific cases – the violence was seen as a Georgian attack, which was successfully defeated with the help of Russia. Child and Nikolova (2018), focusing on the long-term effects of World-War-II, use the Life in Transition survey from 2010 to study the relationship between victimisation and social cohesion, including political trust. Using a subjective measure of victimisation, they find a significant, negative relationship between victimisation and political trust. However, the sign is reversed and the coefficient is no longer significant when substituting the subjective survey measure with an objective measure of whether violence took place where the respondent lives. While Child and Nikolova (2018) rightfully point out a potentially very important selection bias with less trusting people being more likely to report victimisation, their analysis exclusively focuses on World War II, making it unclear what this result means for civil conflict. A third interesting insight on possible positive effects of conflict on trust comes from Hong and Kang's (2017) analysis of the Korean War. In contrast with the negative long-term effects on institutional trust for direct victims in the Korean War, they interestingly find a different mechanism for the post-conflict cohort. Those who were born after the war in areas more affected by violence were in fact *more* trusting. Hong and Kang (2017) explain their finding through a stigma effect, according to which the post-conflict cohort developed higher trust to compensate for their fear of being associated with the prosecuted "communists". "Survivors and observers of violence [...] had to exert special effort to prove their conformity to the South Korean government in order to differentiate themselves from the victims of violence" (Hong & Kang, 2017, p. 268). While this is an interesting finding, the authors themselves note that the "stigma's effect relies on the idiosyncratic political circumstances in South Korea after the end of the war" (Hong & Kang, 2017, p. 265), which raises doubts about the generalisability of the finding.

Two main theoretical arguments can explain why conflict should lower political trust. First, several authors put forward a performance-based approach. Here it is argued that violence demonstrates that the state is not able to protect its citizens (De Juan & Pierskalla, 2016; Gates & Justesen, 2020; Hutchison & Johnson, 2011). Instead, violent conflict is a “blatant sign of the government’s inability to maintain its monopoly over the use of force” (De Juan & Pierskalla, 2016, p. 68). This should reduce trust towards state institutions and particularly in areas where the population witnesses more violence. Second, trauma and distrust can result directly from the government being a main perpetrator of violence with both short- and long-term effects on trust particularly in those institutions that are viewed as most responsible for violence (De Juan & Pierskalla, 2016; Hong & Kang, 2017).

**Table 3: Overview of studies on political trust after conflict**

n.	Authors	Country, conflict, conflict end	Sample	Method	Aspect of political trust	Data collection	Effect
1	Bakke, O’Loughlin, Toal & Ward (2014)	Georgia: Russo-Georgian War (2008)	Adults (N = 1,000)	Survey	Personalised political trust	2010	Positive effect
2	Child & Nikolova (2018)	15 Central and Eastern European countries: World War II (1945)	Adults (N = 17,492; nat. representative)	Survey	Institutional trust	2010	No effect
3	De Juan & Pierskalla (2016)	Nepal: civil war (2006)	Adults (N = 8,822; nat. representative)	Survey	Personalised political trust	2003	Negative effect
4	Gates & Justesen (2020)	Mali: rebel attack (2008)	Adults (N = 1,150)	Survey	Personalised political trust	2008	Negative effect
5	Grosjean (2014)	35 countries in Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia: World War II, several civil wars, one non-state conflict	Adults (N = 38,864; nat. representative)	Survey	Institutional trust	2010	Negative effect
6	Hong & Kang (2017)	South Korea: Korean War (1953)	Adults born between 1949 and 1958 (N = 1,600)	Survey	Institutional trust	2003, 2011	Negative effect
7	Hutchison & Johnson (2011)	16 African countries: different conflicts	Adults (N = 27,122; nat. representative)	Survey	Institutional trust	2000-2005	Negative effect

Source: Authors

### 3.2.6 Critical discussion

Overall, it is interesting to note that very few studies have systematically analysed the effect of conflict on political trust compared with the breadth of literature on the other elements of social cohesion. While the studies so far point to a negative relationship, some central



questions regarding the relationship remain unanswered. This is due to a number of important differences between the studies that make it difficult to generalise findings.

First, the studies vary widely with regard to the underlying conflict being analysed: only three studies explicitly focus on analysing the effect of *intrastate* conflict on political trust (De Juan & Pierskalla, 2016; Gates & Justesen, 2020; Hutchison & Johnson, 2011).<sup>20</sup> Of these, Hutchison and Johnson (2011) provide cross-country analyses across Africa, but their analyses are weakened by the fact that they only have data on countries that “tend to be more populous, more democratic, and less prone to civil conflict compared to the African countries not included in the sample” (Hutchison & Johnson, 2011, p. 745). Gates et al. (2020) also focus on intrastate conflict, but since they analyse a single rebel attack the effects might be very different from what would be found by an analysis of more systematic and sustained violence. Studies of the effects of *interstate* conflicts have also contributed first important insights on the relationship between exposure to violence and institutional trust, but a major problem here is that it is not entirely clear whether these insights can be transferred to civil conflicts (Child & Nikolova, 2018; Grosjean, 2014; Hong & Kang, 2017). The difference between inter- and intrastate conflict could, for example, potentially explain the differences in effects found so far. All studies that found no or even positive effects were analysing the effects of conflict between states, rather than civil conflicts.<sup>21</sup>

Second, the findings are difficult to compare because the studies vary greatly with regard to *when* trust is measured. Grosjean (2014) and Child et al. (2018) study long-term effects by analysing surveys at least 50 years after interstate conflict. Bakke et al. (2014) conduct their survey in Abkhazia two years after conflict. Hutchison and Johnson’s study (2011) might similarly be classified as a mid-term measure. De Juan et al. (2016) claim that they are measuring levels of trust during and after conflict. However, the Nepalese ceasefire in 2003 did not constitute the actual end of the civil war, which was in fact in 2006, making theirs a study on the effects of violence on trust *during* ongoing conflict. The most short-term measurement is the one provided by Gates et al. (2020) who also study violence in ongoing conflict. The authors were able to take advantage of the fact that during a survey round conducted by the Afrobarometer a rebel attack occurred, meaning that some survey respondents were interviewed days before and others the days after the attack. Studies to date, hence, analyse institutional trust at points in time that differ widely from one another, spanning from only several days after an attack to over 50 years after a conflict. More systematic longitudinal analyses on how political trust is affected by civil war and how it develops afterwards are needed. Such an approach would also provide insight into the relationship between the more immediate, mid- and long-term effects of conflict on political trust.

The third important difference is that the studies vary in *how* they measure political trust. As explained above, scholars have noted that depending on the measure used, different types of trust are analysed. Trust in state institutions more generally, that is *institutional trust*, is

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20 The majority of studies in this review focus on intrastate conflict, but this interestingly does not seem to be the case for political trust.

21 The study by Bakke et al. (2014) on Abkhazia is a certain exemption here but also fits into this pattern to a certain degree. While it is an internal conflict between Georgia and Abkhazia, Russia’s open support of Abkhazia makes it a highly internationalised internal conflict, if not an interstate conflict.

usually captured by creating an additive index measuring trust across several institutions. Such an approach is pursued by several of the authors (Child & Nikolova, 2018; Grosjean, 2014; Hong & Kang, 2017; Hutchison & Johnson, 2011). It is interesting to note, however, that the types of institutions included vary widely. Hutchison and Johnson (2011) include the largest set of institutions (the executive, the courts, the police, the armed forces, electoral commissions, and government-run media), Grosjean (2014) focuses only on a few core state institutions (the government, parliament and presidency), while Child and Nikolova (2018) include several political institutions as well as economic institutions, such as banks and the financial system. How sensitive the results are to the specific institutions included and whether these studies all measure the same institutional trust is unclear. An even larger difference exists with regard to those studies that focus more narrowly on *personalised political trust*. Personalised political trust captures trust in incumbents rather than state institutions more broadly and is usually measured when respondents are asked about their trust in specific institutions associated with certain political parties or leaders, especially the government or the presidency. De Juan and Pierskalla (2016), for example, only ask about trust in the national government. Both Gates et al. (2020) and Bakke et al. (2014) compare trust in different institutions and only find significant results when focusing on trust in the president. These studies, hence, hold interesting insights into the effect of conflict on political trust in incumbents but do not suggest that conflict more fundamentally erodes institutional trust. More generally, the difference between institutional and personalised political trust has not been explored systematically in existing studies; there is ample room for further research.

### 3.3 Cooperation after conflict

How does conflict affect the second core component of social cohesion: cooperation? In order to answer this question, it is important to take into account different types of cooperation: (i) *political participation*, which can be seen as vertical cooperation between individuals or groups and the state and second; and (ii) *civic cooperation*, which describes horizontal cooperation between individuals or groups. Similar to the distinction with regard to trust, cooperation can also focus on the in-group or the out-group with the former often being referred to as “bonding” and the latter as “bridging”. The next section provides background information on different ways of measuring cooperation before the literature on cooperation after conflict is presented and then critically discussed.

#### 3.3.1 Measuring cooperation

Ways to measure cooperative behaviour include surveys and experiments. Table 4 summarises exemplary survey measures of the two types of cooperation as used in the studies discussed in this review. As with the different types of trust, it is interesting to note that the different types of cooperation can be broken down even further. On the one hand, there are formal types of political participation, such as voting or membership in a political party. On the other hand, more informal political participation is also often included in studies by asking respondents whether they attended demonstrations or strikes, for example. Regarding civic participation, two types of indicators are most prominent – either authors measure membership in different types of social groups, such as religious, economic or

recreational organisations, or they measure it as public-good-oriented cooperation, such as voluntary work or donations.

<b>Table 4: Examples of different measurements of political and civic participation</b>	
Political participation	Civic participation
<p>Formal political participation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• membership in a political party</li> <li>• voting in a referendum/local/national election</li> <li>• registering to vote</li> <li>• attendance at community meetings</li> <li>• holding political posts</li> </ul> <p>Informal political participation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• taking part in a strike</li> <li>• attending a demonstration</li> <li>• signing a petition</li> </ul> <p>Interest in politics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• discussing politics with others</li> </ul>	<p>Membership in social groups</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• religious organisations</li> <li>• economic associations (e.g., farmers' cooperatives or labour unions, trade and business organisations)</li> <li>• recreational organisations (e.g., sports, youth)</li> <li>• thematic organisations (e.g., environmental, educational, peace groups)</li> </ul> <p>Voluntary work and public good contribution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• volunteering</li> <li>• donating to charity</li> <li>• participation in community maintenance</li> </ul>
Source: Authors	

Experimental measures in turn, observe cooperative behaviour and are best suited to measure in-group and out-group cooperation. Prominent experimental measures for cooperation include the prisoner's dilemma and the public goods game. Furthermore, we also include the dictator game and the ultimatum game under measures of cooperation, although they are primarily meant to measure altruism and fairness. This is because we believe both outcomes are important preconditions for cooperation for the common good.

### *The prisoner's dilemma*

became the foundation for the analysis of cooperation, in part, because the game structure so clearly represents the nature of the conflicting incentives involved in certain social situations—namely, those in which the individual incentives to defect [...] overshadow the collective benefit that might be obtained from jointly cooperating. (Cook & Cooper, 2003, p. 210)

The game theoretic approach involves two persons that can choose to either cooperate or defect. Choosing to cooperate would be more beneficial to both actors than non-cooperation. But on an individual level both are better off if they do not cooperate with each other, regardless of the decision of the other person.<sup>22</sup> The prisoner's dilemma has provided a crucial basis for studies on cooperation because classic economic theory would predict that both players defect (Axelrod, 1984).

The *public goods game* represents a prisoners' dilemma with multiple players. As indicated by its name, a common pool of money exists, accessible to everyone in the group. Participants can choose to contribute to the pool or take money out of it. Like in the prisoner's dilemma, everybody would be better off by contributing to the common pool, although the private return in case of contribution is negative. A public goods game can

<sup>22</sup> For a more detailed explanation see Cook and Cooper (2003).

hence reveal whether participants decide to cooperate or to free-ride (benefit from the public good without contributing to it).

Another widely used experiment is the *dictator game*, which is primarily meant to measure altruism (Leder & Schütz, 2018). Here one player – the dictator – receives an amount of money and can decide how much of it to share with the passive, other player. A purely selfish dictator would keep all the money to herself. The *ultimatum game* follows the same set up, but the recipient becomes active and can decide whether to accept the decision of the first player. If the recipient rejects, both players receive nothing. Besides measuring the first players willingness to share, the ultimatum game, therefore, also measures whether the second player regards the offer made as fair.

There is an ongoing debate in the mainly economic and psychological literature about what exactly the different experiments measure and to what extent they might be interrelated (Cook & Cooper, 2003; Gächter, Herrmann, & Thöni, 2004; Kumakawa & Elliott, 2018; Peysakhovich, Nowak, & Rand, 2014; Saijo, Feng, & Kobayashi, 2017). While we acknowledge that ascribing only one outcome to the different games is imperfect, we include the cited games here because they represent widely used measures of cooperation and altruism.

### 3.3.2 Summary of empirical findings

With over 20 academic studies on the topic, cooperation after conflict is the component of social cohesion that has received the most scholarly attention. A clear majority of studies finds that conflict significantly increases cooperation. However, more recent research calls this supposed positive effect into question.

Positive effects of conflict on cooperation have been traced both through survey and experimental data across different contexts. Bellows and Miguel (2009) study the effects of war on the Sierra Leonean society. The survey data was collected soon after the end of the war in 2002 and shows a robust, positive relationship between exposure to violence and participation in community meetings, social and political groups, school committees as well as registering to vote, especially among males. They also show that respondents who experienced conflict are more engaged in local public goods activities. Blattman (2009) studies political and civic participation among 741 ex-combatants in Uganda through survey data collected in 2005 and 2006. His analysis reveals a significant and robust positive association between victimisation and political participation: “forced recruitment leads to greater postwar political participation – a 27 per cent increase in the likelihood of voting and a doubling of the likelihood of being a community leader among former abductees” (2009, p. 231). De Luca and Verpoorten (2015a) also analyse the Ugandan conflict, but with regard to how victimisation affects political participation among adults more generally. They base their results on four rounds of the Afrobarometer survey (2000, 2005, 2008 and 2012), which includes data collected both during and after the conflict. Their results indicate that the experience of violent conflict encourages political discussions and attendance at local meetings but only in the years immediately after conflict. Focusing on a very specific type of violence, Koos (2018) also finds support for an increase in cooperative behaviour in his study on the effect of conflict-related sexual violence in Sierra Leone. Based on a survey from 2002, Koos (2018, p. 219) shows that civic participation is significantly higher among

survivors of sexual violence: “they are more likely to be members of community organisations and more likely to contribute to social events, such as weddings and funerals, and they donate more often”. He explains this surprising finding through the fact that immense local-level peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts were undertaken to enable the acceptance of survivors and their families into the community. Broadening the analysis to different types of conflict, Grosjean (2014) analyses both interstate conflict, in this case World War II, and recent civil conflicts, including civil wars in Yugoslavia, Tajikistan, Kosovo, and Chechnya as well as interethnic clashes in Kyrgyzstan, based on the Life in Transition Survey. She finds that “victims of a civil conflict or an international conflict are 20-30 per cent more likely to be active members of an association and 13-20 per cent more likely to have participated in acts of civic collective action” (Grosjean, 2014, p. 445) in comparison with non-victims. Following Grosjean (2014), the experience of violence in conflicts also raises the probability of membership in political parties. Also using the Life in Transition Survey, Freitag, Kijewski and Oppold (2019) focus specifically on the aftermath of conflict in Kosovo, which ended in 1999. They find that conflict in Kosovo positively affected noninstitutionalised forms of political participation, including attending demonstrations and strikes and signing a petition. The effect was stronger for those civil war victims that experienced economic hardship in the post-conflict period. Hadzic and Tavits (2019) study attitudes towards political engagement 10 years after the ethnic civil war in Bosnia. Based on survey data, they show that “violent conflict can introduce disparities in political engagement across gender” (2019, p. 676). When primed with cues on violence between the main ethnic groups (Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs) men were more interested and willing than women to engage in politics. Also focusing on conditional effects, Krakowski (2020) analyses the legacy of different types of conflict in Colombia using survey data from 224 Colombian villages from 2013. He differentiates whether villages experienced no conflict, asymmetric conflict between rebels and the state or more symmetric war between rebels and paramilitary groups. Krakowski (2020) finds that cooperation in the form of collective action and charity membership increased, but only after symmetric wars. This is explained by the fact that symmetric wars increase identity lines and activate collective coping mechanisms. Finally, two behavioural studies also find a positive relationship between victimisation and cooperation. Voors et al. (2012) study 300 household heads across 35 communities in Burundi combining surveys and the social value orientation game<sup>23</sup> shortly before the end of the war in 2007. They find that conflict positively affects altruistic behaviour: individuals exposed directly to violence or from communities exposed to violence display more altruistic behaviour towards other villagers. Finally, Gilligan, Pasquale and Samii’s (2014) study on the Nepalese Civil War includes an analysis of cooperation as one central element of social cohesion. A brief analysis of household surveys supports previous findings: both voting and community membership increased in communities that experienced more violence during the war. Behavioural experiments, including the dictator game with 252 household heads, corroborate this finding; participants from victimised communities both behave more altruistically and contribute more in a public goods game, although only the latter is statistically significant.

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23 In this one-shot game, individuals make multiple decisions with respect to the distribution of resources for themselves and for others. It is the “most widely studied personality construct in relation to cooperation in social dilemmas” (Pletzer et al., 2018, p. 63).

While some have interpreted the positive findings with regard to cooperation as a sign of remarkable resilience of conflict victims and an opportunity for post-conflict development, other results call into question whether an increase in cooperation should be regarded as beneficial for post-conflict societies. Calvo, Lavallée, Razafindrakoto and Roubaud (2019) study the ongoing civil conflict in Mali. Based on household survey data from before (2006) and during the conflict (2014, 2015, 2016) the authors find that in conflict-affected areas participation increased significantly. However, their analyses also show that the increase in membership only concerns family and political associations where participation is primarily based on kinship ties. Participation in organisations that span groups instead decreased in fragmented areas that witnessed violent events. Calvo et al. (2019, p. 4) therefore “interpret these findings as evidence that an increase in associational membership, far from being prosocial, actually forms a veiled withdrawal behind inner group or community frontiers and can therefore spawn exclusion and local tensions”. A similar argument is put forward by M. Bauer et al. (2016), whose meta-analysis covers both trust and cooperation. They find that “people exposed to war violence tend to behave more cooperatively after war” (2016, p. 250). More specifically, they identify a “positive and statistically significant [relationship] for participation in social groups, community leadership and participation, prosocial behaviour in experimental games, voting, and knowledge of politics” (M. Bauer et al., 2016). However, when differentiating the studies further, they find that people do behave significantly more prosocially, but only towards their in-group, not the out-group. Based on this insight, M. Bauer et al. (2016, p. 271) conclude that “this evidence for parochial altruism, while preliminary, matters because war might enhance intragroup cooperation and facilitate post-conflict reconstruction while simultaneously raising the risk of future social divisions and renewed intergroup conflict”.

A number of behavioural studies suggest that parochial altruism, that is, behaving more altruistically but only towards your in-group, might be a consequence of conflict. Whitt and Wilson (2007) combine experimental and survey data to analyse altruism in post-war Bosnia almost 10 years after the conflict’s end. The 681 participants originate from the three main ethnic groups: Croats, Bosniaks and Serbs. All participants took part in a survey and played two rounds of the dictator game with an anonymous second player from their ethnic group in the first round and an anonymous second player from another ethnic group in the second round. The results from the experimental game show that players send significantly less in the second game. The analysis of the survey data reveals that this is particularly the case for respondents who feel threatened by the other ethnicity or value their own ethnicity very highly. Because of the limited magnitude of the effect, Whitt and Wilson (2007, p. 655) overall conclude that although “there is a distinct outgroup effect, a norm of fairness persists”. Newer studies find a stronger effect. M. Bauer, Cassar, Chytilová and Henrich (2014) apply different dictator games with 543 children in Georgia and 586 adults in Sierra Leone in order to study both short-term and long-term effects of conflict on altruism. The results reveal that “for those who were more affected, rates of egalitarian sharing choices increased among those sharing with an in-group member but either declined or did not change for those sharing with an out-group member” (M. Bauer et al., 2014, p. 4). They, furthermore, identify a developmental window between the ages of seven and 20 years in which exposure to violence strengthened in-group cooperation but weakened the out-group relationship towards anonymous, distant targets. Cecchi, Leuvel and Voors (2016) study competitiveness among rural Sierra Leonean youth based on a soccer tournament pitting teams from different streets against each other. By including a dictator game in their experimental set up with 162 soccer players, they find that victimised youth behave more

altruistically, but only towards their teammates, and show more competitive behaviour towards others. Using experiments that include the dictator game, the ultimatum game and the public goods game with 466 adults in Kosovo more than ten years after the war, Mironova and Whitt (2016) find interesting variations in their results depending on the information provided in the behavioural experiment. Irrespective of victimisation, subjects behave more altruistically and cooperate more in games in which the other player is from the same ethnicity: “when given clear cues about the ethnic identity of a recipient, subjects in a post-conflict environment tend to behave more altruistically towards in-groups than out-groups, and to contribute more money to public goods if the in-group is the majority” (Mironova & Whitt, 2016, p. 757). The effect is even stronger for those subjects who have experienced victimisation. They are also the group that shows less cooperative behaviour when ethnicity is not explicitly introduced in the game but played with an anonymous player from “somewhere else in Kosovo” (Mironova & Whitt, 2016, p. 755).

Several other studies and particularly several very recent ones find clear negative effects of conflict victimisation on cooperation. Focusing on Uganda, De Luca and Verpoorten (2015b) analyse trust and cooperation based on a comparison between different survey results during and after violence (2000, 2005, and 2012). They find a significant decrease of membership in religious and community associations. Conzo and Salustri (2019) focus on how early-life exposure to violence due to World War II affects social cohesion. Regarding citizens’ engagement, their analysis reveals a negative relationship between victimisation and voluntary work and a non-significant, positive result for political participation. Grossman, Manekin and Miodownik (2015) study the effects of combat exposure in the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict on young, male, Jewish ex-combatants in 2013. Among other findings they identify significantly lower levels of diverse forms of political participation among ex-combatants. Hall and Kahn (2020) study the effect of conflict on altruism among Syrian refugees in Turkey. Based on survey questions resembling the dictator game, Hall and Kahn (2020) are able to study altruism towards different out-groups and among refugees who suffered victimisation to different degrees. Their results show, first, that only targets from a hostile out-group were met with less altruism. Second, they find that the more participants were exposed to trauma, the less altruistically they answered and the more clearly they differentiated between in-group and out-group targets. Hager et al. (2019) analyse the effect of interethnic violence in Kyrgyzstan in 2010 on cooperation and altruism. The analysis is based on behavioural experiments between 880 Uzbeks and 220 Kyrgyz seven years after the violence. The results of a dictator’s game and a prisoner’s dilemma game show that Uzbeks, the victims of the violence, cooperate less – both within their group as well as with the out-group. Based on qualitative interviews with Uzbek victims, Hager et al. (2019, p. 14) argue that the reduction in cooperation within the in-group can be explained by two mechanisms: “a feeling of being let down by one’s coethnics, and suspicion toward non-victimized neighbors”. Werner and Graf Lambsdorff (2019) find similar effects for non-state conflict in Maluku, Indonesia. Beside the trust game, they also play a dictator game and an ultimatum game with their respondents and find very similar results across games: prosociality is generally higher when the identity of the receiver is not revealed. In games in which identity is revealed, less is allocated both to members of the in-group and the out-group. The effect is strongest for respondents who experienced violence. Finally, Cecchi and Duchoslav’s (2018) findings suggest an intergenerational, negative effect of violence on cooperation. They combine behavioural games with biometric data to study the effect of violence-induced prenatal stress on cooperation. This includes a public goods game with 442 children and their

caregivers as well as compiling survey data on both groups. They also measure the children's 2D:4D digit ratio, which is the relative length of the index finger with respect to the ring finger. The 2D:4D digit ratio is influenced by hormones during pregnancy and shown by the authors to be a "reliable marker of prenatal stress" (Cecchi & Duchoslav, 2018, p. 36). Controlling for a variety of influencing factors and behaviour of the caregivers, the results robustly show that caregivers who have experienced violence as well as "children of caregivers with PTSD symptoms are less likely to contribute to the public good" (Cecchi & Duchoslav, 2018, p. 36) and that prenatal stress is one important explanation for why this is the case.

### 3.3.3 Critical discussion

Overall, while some earlier and often-cited work suggests that conflict has a positive effect on cooperation, this finding must be called into question as the results are now rather mixed. There is indeed some indication of post-traumatic growth with regard to political participation, an important element of the vertical dimension of social cohesion. But on the horizontal dimension of cooperation and with regard to cooperative behaviour more generally, several newer studies demonstrate that it is often only cooperation towards the in-group not the out-group that increases, which does not bode well for a society's social cohesion overall. The doubts about the positive effects are further strengthened by the fact that several relatively recent studies have found significant negative effects of conflict on cooperation. Hager et al. (2019) even find significantly lower cooperation both with the in-group and the out-group. Hager et al. (2019) provide qualitative evidence based on interviews conducted with participants to explain the reduction in in-group cooperation. They find what they call a "disappointment channel" and a "suspicion channel". Uzbeks felt disappointed because their co-ethnics did not provide help during or after the clashes. Victims were also suspicious as to why they themselves, not other Uzbeks, had been targeted. Whether or not this is only the case of isolated larger clashes as was the case in Kyrgyzstan remains to be studied more systematically. Bringing together the main results from the different studies on the relationship between conflict and cooperation raises three overarching issues for further research focusing on analysing cooperation after conflict.

First, very different outcomes are subsumed under "cooperation", which might blur important differences between the studies. Blattman (2009), for example, finds a positive effect only for political, not civic, participation. Others find differences within these broader categories. De Luca and Verpoorten (2015a), for example find a positive effect only for informal participation, not formal participation, a finding very similar to that of Freitag et al. (2019). Finding variation between types of civic participation, De Luca and Verpoorten's (2015b) analysis only yields significant, negative effects for membership in religious and community organisations, but not economic associations; Krakowski's (2020) analysis produces clearer results with regard to charitable engagement than what he calls collective action organisations. These contradictions first raise the question of whether the many ways of measuring cooperation are indeed comparable across cases. Also, and possibly more importantly, most authors fail to take the country context into account when analysing which type of cooperation is affected by conflict. An exception in this regard is a paper by Calvo et al. (2019), that critically discusses why only some types of organisations enjoy higher participation after conflict to demonstrate that their findings indicate an in-group bonding rather than an out-group bridging effect. An interesting addition to the literature would,



therefore, be to not just measure cooperation, but to examine the quality of cooperation more critically. The concept of “cooperation for the common good” used by Leininger et al. (2020) might be an interesting addition here.

Second, several studies focus too little on clearly defining and exploring differences between the in-group and the out-group most relevant to the conflict at hand.<sup>24</sup> The two experimental studies that find positive effects and are often cited for doing so, only focus on in-group cooperation by pairing players from the same village with one another (Gilligan et al. 2014; Voors et al. 2012)<sup>25</sup>. This lack of explicitly explaining which in-group and out-group will be analysed and how this relates to the underlying conflict is also present in other experimental surveys (M. Bauer, Cassar, Chytilová, & Henrich, 2014; Cecchi, Leuvel, & Vors, 2016). Differences between the in-group and the out-group are even less well accounted for in survey designs, with Hall and Kahn (2020) and Hadzic and Tavits (2019) being notable exceptions in this regard.

Third, the measurement of victimisation used might play an important role in the robustness of some of the findings. Child and Nikolova (2018) study the relationship between victimisation in World War II and social cohesion based on a survey across 15 Central and Eastern European countries. They are interested in how the results both for cooperation and trust change depending on the type of measure of victimisation used. When applying the subjective measure of victimisation (survey questions asking respondents whether they experienced violence), two measures of political participation (voting and protests) as well as one measure of civic engagement (member in voluntary organisations) are positive and significant. Rerunning the same analysis with an objective measure of victimisation (based on battle events data where respondents live) the coefficients are no longer significant and mostly reversed. Based on these results, Child and Nikolova (2018, p. 10) therefore “extend caution towards the interpretation of earlier findings linking political/civic engagement to conflict based entirely on self-reported victimisation data”. Of the studies analysed here, seven rely purely on self-reported data, six use objective conflict measures, and eight combine subjective and objective victimisation data.<sup>26</sup>

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24 For a similar argument see M. Bauer et al. (2016).

25 Gilligan et al. (2014) put these findings into perspective by discussing the peculiarities of the Nepalese Civil War to provide context for their findings.

26 Two studies do not measure victimisation. Grossmann et al. (2015) study ex-combatants who were all involved in combat, and Whitt and Whilson (2007) focus on behavioural experiments with different ethnic groups to infer post-war behavior.

<b>Table 5: Overview of studies on cooperation after conflict</b>							
<b>n.</b>	<b>Authors</b>	<b>Country, conflict, conflict end</b>	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Aspect of cooperation measured</b>	<b>Time of measurement</b>	<b>Effect</b>
1	M. Bauer, Cassar, Chytilová & Henrich (2014)	Georgia: Russo-Georgian War (2008) Sierra Leone: civil war (2002)	Georgia: children aged 3-12 (N = 543); Sierra Leone: adults (N = 586)	Experiment	Altruism	Georgia: 2009; Sierra Leone: 2012	Positive (in-group)
2	Bellows & Miguel (2009)	Sierra Leone: civil war (2002)	Households (N = 10,471; nat. representative)	Survey	Civic participation, political participation, public goods provision	2005, 2007	Positive
3	Blattman (2009)	Uganda: civil war (2008)	Male youth and ex-combatants (aged 14-30) (N = 741)	Survey	Political participation, civic participation	2005-2006	Positive (political)
4	Calvo, Lavallée, Razafindrakoto & Roubaud (2019)	Mali: Jihadist insurgents (ongoing)	Households (N = 42,967)	Survey	Political participation, civic participation	2006, 2014, 2015, 2016	Positive (in-group)
5	Cecchi & Duchoslav (2018)	Uganda: civil war (2008)	Children (N = 442)	Survey and experiment and biometric data	Public goods provision	2012	Negative
6	Cecchi, Leuveld & Voors (2016)	Sierra Leone: civil war (2002)	Soccer-playing youth (aged 13-31) (N = 162)	Experiment	Altruism	2010	Positive (in-group)
7	Child & Nikolova (2018)	15 countries from Central and Eastern Europe: World War II (1945)	Adults (N = 17,492; nat. representative)	Survey	Political participation, civic participation	2010	No effect
8	Conzo & Salustri (2019)	13 European countries: World War II (1945)	Adults (born 1939-1945) (N = 6,759)	Survey	Political participation, civic participation	2006, 2007, 2013	Negative (civic)
9	De Luca & Vanporten (2015b)	Uganda: civil war (2008)	Aduts (N = 2,400; nat. representative)	Survey	Civic participation	2000, 2005, 2012	Negative
10	De Luca & Vanporten (2015a)	Uganda: civil war (2008)	Aduts (N = 2,400; nat. representative)	Survey	Political participation	2000, 2005, 2008, 2012	Positive (informal political participation)
11	Freitag, Kijewski & Oppold (2019)	Kosovo: civil war (1999)	Adults (N = 939)	Survey	Political participation	2010	Positive (informal political participation)

**Table 5 (cont.): Overview of studies on cooperation after conflict**

Source: Authors

### 3.4 Social identities after conflict

How does conflict affect the third core component of social cohesion: identity? Identities exist on three levels: the personal, the group and the national level, of which the latter two are conceived as social identities (Abdelal, Herrera, Johnston, & McDermott, 2009). Both for social cohesion and for conflict, these social identities and the relationship between them, in particular how the subordinate (group identity) relates to the superordinate (national level), are considered highly important. According to the concept of social cohesion by Leininger et al. (2020) an inclusive identity should be particularly beneficial for social cohesion because it allows people to identify with one or various subordinate identities but equally or more so with an overarching identity that bridges group divides. The next section provides background information on different ways of measuring social identities before the literature on social identities after conflict is first presented and then critically discussed.

#### 3.4.1 Measuring social identities

How much people identify with a certain social group or a superordinate identity such as the nation state is usually measured using survey data. A particularly often used survey question is the one from Afrobarometer, which asks respondents to compare how much they identify with their ethnic identity vs. their national identity. The question is phrased as follows: “Let us suppose that you had to choose between being a [national identity, e.g., Kenyan] and being a [respondent’s ethnic group]. Which of the following statements best expresses your feelings?” Respondents can then pick one of the following options: (0) I feel only [national identity]; (1) I feel more [national identity] than [ethnic identity]; (2) I feel equally [national identity] and [ethnic identity]; (3) I feel more [ethnic identity]; (4) I feel only [ethnic identity]; and (5) I don’t know.

In comparison, the World Value Survey asks respondents how proud they are of their nationality, thereby, focusing on national identity only. The International Social Survey Programme in turn provides two separate questions asking how close respondents feel (a) towards their ethnic group and (b) towards their country. Providing a more fine-grained measurement, Nair and Sambanis (2019) develop an identification index consisting of several measures of identification, including a question for which respondents rank their social identities in order of importance.

#### 3.4.2 Summary of empirical findings

Overall, empirical research on how conflict shapes the third core element of social cohesion – social identity – is surprisingly scarce and only addressed by four studies to date.<sup>27</sup> However, so far, results are consistent across these studies with conflict increasing group identities and negatively impacting the identification with one overarching, inclusive identity.

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27 For excellent theoretical work on the topic, see, for example, Almagro and Andrés-Cerezo (2020) and Sambanis and Shayo (2013). There is also highly interesting work on national vs. ethnic identification, which, however, does not take conflict into account (see Robinson (2014), Ali et al. (2019), and Staerklé et al. (2010)).

Rohner et al. (2013) study the relationship with respect to the Ugandan Civil War. Based on the Afrobarometer round of 2000 and 2008, their results show a clear negative effect on national identification whereby “violence strengthens the identification of Ugandans with their own ethnic group” (Rohner et al., 2013, p. 232). Also based on Afrobarometer data, Besley and Reynal-Querol’s (2014) findings suggest a long-term, negative effect of conflict on national identification. Their study of the legacy of precolonial conflict shows that, in 2008, respondents from countries that experienced precolonial conflict exhibited statistically significantly stronger ethnic identification and a significantly weaker identification with the national state. Focusing on minorities with ethnic kin in a neighbouring country, Nair and Sambanis (2019) also show how exposure to violence negatively affects national identification. In the region of Kashmir, Nair and Sambanis (2019) study what effect experiencing violence has on national identification towards the Indian state as well as separatist and irredentist (joining neighbouring Pakistan) sentiments among the local Indian population in 2015. Based on diverse measures of identification, including a survey experiment in which respondents are confronted with videos of state violence, the authors find that violence exposure is consistently negatively correlated with national identification. Finally, Hadzic, Carlson and Tavits (2017) study the effect of violence on a phenomenon closely related to ethnic identities: ethnic voting. Based on an analysis of election results in 109 municipalities before and after the Bosnian civil war, they show that “in general, the higher the casualty rate, the higher the level of post-war ethnic voting” (Hadzic et al., 2017, p. 13). However, the effect becomes weaker as time passes: the results are statistically significant when comparing the election in 1990 with those in 2006 and 2010, but not those in 2014.

Overall, the literature currently suggests that experiencing violence increases ethnic identification and decreases national identification. However, these results must be seen as preliminary. Rohner et al. (2013) and Besley and Reynal-Querol (2014) do not analyse the relationship in detail, Hadzic et al. (2017) take a closer look at an outcome strongly related to identity but not at identity per se, and Sambanis and Nair (2019) study the effects of state repression but not necessarily of armed conflict.

From a theoretical perspective, the finding that conflict increases ethnic identity compared with national identity lends support to social identity theory and the in-group/out-group mechanism. If violence occurs along identity lines, individuals will turn to their own group for support and protection and interact less with the out-group that is seen as the enemy. This will increase identification with the in-group both during and after conflict while at the same time decreasing out-group bridging and lowering national identification in general (Hadzic et al. 2017). In a similar vein, Nair and Sambanis (2019, p. 334) argue that their

expectation is that ethnic violence makes ethnic identities more salient because it draws attention to the incompatibilities between the state and an ethnic minority and it heightens the significance of ethnic attributes that differentiate the minority from the rest of the nation. (Nair & Sambanis, 2019, p. 334)

### 3.4.3 Critical discussion

Given the persistent academic interest in and discussions around social (particularly ethnic) identity as an explanatory factor for conflict, it is surprising how little empirical evidence

there is tackling the opposite causal direction, namely how conflict affects social identity. Taken together, the current results point towards an increase in ethnic identity and decrease in national identification as a result of conflict. However, almost none of the few studies cited above explicitly focus on the relationship between conflict and social identity. They are also contradictory in terms of how the effect develops over time. Hazdic et al. (2017) suggest a more long-term effect that diminishes over time, while Besley and Reynal-Querol (2014) instead claim to find an effect six centuries after the conflict. A third shortcoming is that the studies that exist exclusively focus on ethnic identity. While this is understandable because ethnicity does play a role in many (particularly African) conflicts, conflict could strengthen social identities beyond ethnicity, including, for example, religious or linguistic differences, which has not been addressed so far. This is also again connected to taking a closer look at the type of underlying conflict, which is likely to make an important difference regarding how conflict affects social identities.

<b>Table 6: Overview of studies on social identities after conflict</b>							
<b>n.</b>	<b>Authors</b>	<b>Country, conflict, conflict end</b>	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Method</b>	<b>Aspect of identity measured</b>	<b>Data collection</b>	<b>Effect</b>
1	Besley & Reynal-Querol (2014)	18 African countries: 91 pre-colonial conflicts (1400-1700)	Adults (N = 25,397)	Survey	National and group	2008	Negative (national), positive (in-group)
2	Hadzic, Carlson & Tavits (2017)	Bosnia and Herzegovina: civil war (1995)	Municipalities (N = 428)	Difference-in-differences regression of election results	Group	1990, 2006, 2010, 2014	Positive (in-group)
3	Nair & Sambanis (2019)	India: Kashmir conflict (ongoing)	Adults (N = 2,522; nat. representative)	Survey experiment	National and group	2015	Negative (national)
4	Rohner, Thoenig & Zilibotti (2013)	Uganda: civil war (2008)	Adults (N = 2431; nat. representative)	Survey	National and group	2008	Negative (national), positive (in-group)
Source: Authors							

Clearly, more research is needed to better understand how armed conflict affects social identities. Following several years of academic discussion on the topic, the view that “identification is not static – it changes over time in response to social conditions” (Nair & Sambanis, 2019, p. 335) has prevailed. Recent research on how specific activities, such as winning national sports events, or governmental interventions can increase national identification underlines the point that identities in post-conflict situations are malleable (Blouin & Mukand, 2019; Depetris-Chauvin, Durante, & Campante, 2020). And since identities are malleable, we need to understand much better the role conflict plays in shaping them.<sup>28</sup> This could then also provide a better basis for discussions on nation-building in post-conflict situations.

<sup>28</sup> See also Chandra (2006), who questions the use of the category of “ethnic identities”.

## 4 Concluding discussion

Reviewing the literature shows, somewhat intuitively, that conflict mostly harms social cohesion. However, this review also points towards several important caveats as well as blind-spots of the current literature. It demonstrates the value of taking a closer look at the three core elements of social cohesion. With regard to *trust* the majority of findings suggest that both the vertical (political trust) and the horizontal (social trust) dimension suffer due to conflict. Theoretically, we thereby find support for an out-group effect as well as post-traumatic withdrawal more generally. At the same time, the discussion shows that social trust has been studied much more extensively than political trust. On *cooperation* the results are partially mixed, but especially taking newer research into account we find that war does not increase cooperation. Instead, many studies systematically show how cooperation decreases as a result of conflict and several studies reveal a negative effect of conflict on out-group cooperation, which does not bode well for social cohesion as a whole. However, with regard to political participation, evidence from several studies does suggest a post-traumatic growth effect. *Identity*, the third core element of social cohesion, has by far been studied the least. The research that does exist unequivocally points towards increased group identification and decreased national identity, again providing support for social identity theory and an in-group/out-group mechanism to be at play. Taking the results from the different elements together, the literature thereby overall quite strongly suggests that conflict decreases social cohesion.

Two more nuanced findings are also particularly interesting, also from a policy making perspective. First, the findings of several studies discussed here suggest that experiencing violence in early childhood especially could have lasting detrimental psychological effects (M. Bauer et al., 2014; Conzo & Salustri, 2019). Conzo and Salustri (2019, p. 26) argue that this is due to parents' reactions to the war that have long-term consequences on the social preferences these children later exhibit: "exposure to violence may have set children on a low path for trust development through the anxiety intentionally or unintentionally exhibited by parents in response to acts of war". Cecchi and Duchoslav (2018, p. 36) results even demonstrate an intergenerational effect beyond nurture, namely "the effect of conflict-related stress on the social preferences of individuals that had yet to be born at the time that it first affected them". More specifically, they show that children exposed to prenatal stress display significantly less cooperative behaviour. This suggests the importance of measures to increase social cohesion reaching beyond those immediately affected by conflict. Second, it is noteworthy that several studies find a conditional effect whereby participants' behaviour changes significantly if ethnicity is introduced into the experiment. For example, both of the studies on non-state conflict and trust find a conditional negative effect with trust only being low if information on the identity of the second player is revealed in the experiment (Becchetti et al., 2013; Werner & Graf Lambsdorff, 2019). Taken together with research that shows that social identities are malleable, this overall suggests that interventions to increase out-group bridging need to be particularly careful and apply a conflict-sensitive approach.

Reviewing the literature also demonstrated that while the field has considerably expanded in recent years and has produced many interesting findings, considerable shortcomings still exist. Addressing these suggests five particularly fruitful avenues for future research. First, the field would benefit greatly from more explicitly differentiating between the different subtypes of trust, cooperation and identity and systematically comparing results within each

of them. This is especially the case for trust and cooperation where, for example, social trust can be broken down into particularised, generalised, in-group and out-group trust, and participation can be divided into political (both formal and informal) and civil forms. Being specific about which subtype one is addressing and using more similar measures to study them would greatly increase comparability across studies. This would also allow more meta-analyses to be conducted to strengthen confidence in the effects found so far. Second, it is equally important to not only focus on specific elements and even subtypes thereof, but also to study social cohesion as a whole. Studying social cohesion more holistically could provide a more encompassing picture of the social legacies of conflict and at the same time help strengthen our knowledge about interdependencies between the different elements of social cohesion. Connected to the first two points is the third point, that studies would benefit greatly by further exploring how the type of underlying conflict theoretically and empirically affects whether social cohesion (or a specific element thereof) increases or decreases. For example, if the state played a central role in perpetrating violence, then one could expect political trust to decrease. But some state institutions might be associated more with violence than others and the configuration of the post-conflict political elite might also be an important factor here. Similarly, the effects of social trust are likely to differ strongly depending on the conflict at hand. If conflicts are fought along clear group lines, in-group and out-group trust are most likely affected. But allegiances can also cut across groups or generally bring people closer together if they see the state as the primary, external enemy, for example. Fourth, the research field currently focuses heavily on single cases, which makes it difficult to infer generalisable results. Although not without methodological flaws, the debate has so far produced remarkably rigorous research that is mostly based on detailed analyses of survey or experimental data collected in single countries. However, this also comes with the caveat that while these studies display high internal validity, the generalisability of the results is less clear. This is particularly problematic because there is a clear bias towards certain countries in this literature, most likely because of data availability as well as higher feasibility to conduct surveys and experiments in certain contexts. A clear majority of studies focuses on Africa (18 out of 39 studies), particularly Uganda (six) and Sierra Leone (four). Several of them look at Europe and Central Asia (13) with Kosovo and Bosnia (three each) receiving the most attention, and even fewer focus on Asia (five), where only Nepal is addressed by more than one study. Surprisingly, with the exception of one study on Colombia, the entire world region of Central and Latin America is virtually missing from this debate. Research in less-studied contexts would hence be an important contribution to the field. Finally, another common blind spot across the studies on all three elements of social cohesion is that most of them are not able to study developments over time. Instead, the effect of conflict is analysed statically. While trust, cooperation and identity are sticky concepts that are unlikely to change rapidly over time, tracing more closely how they are affected by conflict across the short-, mid- and long term would be an important addition to current insights. Overall, while the study of the social legacies of armed conflict has vastly expanded in recent years, many open questions on conflict and how it affects social cohesion remain. In particular, we need to study in more detail how conflict affects social cohesion as a whole, what role the type of underlying conflict plays and how this develops over time.



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