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Working Paper

Trust the hand that protects you: Does UN peacekeeping harm post-conflict governments' legitimacy?

WIDER Working Paper, No. 2022/152

Provided in Cooperation with:

United Nations University (UNU), World Institute for Development Economics Research (WIDER)

Suggested Citation: Di Salvatore, Jessica (2022) : Trust the hand that protects you: Does UN peacekeeping harm post-conflict governments' legitimacy?, WIDER Working Paper, No. 2022/152, ISBN 978-92-9267-285-0, The United Nations University World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER), Helsinki,
<https://doi.org/10.35188/UNU-WIDER/2022/285-0>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/273955>

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WIDER Working Paper 2022/152

Trust the hand that protects you—Does UN peacekeeping harm post-conflict governments’ legitimacy?

Jessica Di Salvatore*

December 2022

Abstract: Rebuilding state legitimacy is a thorny challenge in the aftermath of civil wars. The international community has stepped in to support post-conflict states in rebuilding state capacity, sometimes replacing governments in providing public goods. Most notably, research shows that UN peacekeepers reduce violence and are *de facto* security providers. On the one hand, by providing a secure environment, UN peacekeepers may facilitate the functioning of domestic institutions, which could reap the reputational benefit of working with the UN. However, I argue that attribution problems and reputational costs may counter the positive impact of the UN's capacity-building efforts. The analysis assesses whether and how external provision of security affects citizens' trust towards formal institutions—that is, government and police. The empirical analysis focuses on the case of the UN mission in Liberia and combines subnational deployment data with three rounds of geocoded Afrobarometer surveys. The project provides insights on how international interventions affect an understudied aspect of state-building: the legitimacy of the institutions they are expected to assist.

Key words: legitimacy, post-conflict, peacekeeping, trust

JEL classification: D74, F53

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This study has been prepared within the UNU-WIDER project [Institutional legacies of violent conflict](#).

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ISSN 1798-7237 ISBN 978-92-9267-285-0

<https://doi.org/10.35188/UNU-WIDER/2022/285-0>

Typescript prepared by Gary Smith.

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The Institute is funded through income from an endowment fund with additional contributions to its work programme from Finland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom as well as earmarked contributions for specific projects from a variety of donors.

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1 Introduction

In the aftermath of civil wars, rebuilding state institutions and their legitimacy is crucial for reducing the risk of conflict renewal. Fragile states are especially vulnerable to the conflict trap and are likely to re-experience violence (Collier et al. 2003). Not only state authority needs consolidation, but citizens often perceive post-conflict governments and institutions as corrupt or inaccessible (Blair 2019), or even illegitimate (Lake 2016). Rebuilding legitimacy and citizens' trust of formal institutions is pivotal for the long-term stability of post-conflict countries. In recognizing the importance of rebuilding institutions in the aftermath of violence, the notions of peacebuilding and state-building have by now fully entered the United Nations (UN) discourse on peacekeeping (Campbell and Di Salvatore 2022), and have become increasingly connected to peacekeeping goals since the Brahimi Report (United Nations General Assembly 2000). While there is consensus on the need for peace operations to actively assist national governments and security institutions, there is an important trade-off between *facilitating* effective governance to boost popular support and *replacing* national governments in their functions. On the one hand, committed to rebuilding states after civil wars, peacekeepers heavily assist central governments in civilian functions but also in security provision; this allows governments to gradually recover and reform institutions without worrying about peace spoilers. On the other hand, peacekeepers' effectiveness in replacing some state functions may threaten a government's legitimacy by reducing trust in domestic formal institutions among the population. This paper aims to assess whether externally supported state-building is a boon or a bane for post-conflict formal institutions.

This paper explores the impact of UN peace missions with strong peacebuilding components on citizens' trust of formal institutions (government and police). In doing so, the paper considers UN peacebuilding interventions as double-edged swords that can help in post-conflict state-building, but may also risk alienating citizens. UN peacekeeping missions may provide the necessary security to enable domestic institutions to function, while also building institutional capacity through their peacebuilding component. However, long and intrusive interventions, such as peacebuilding-oriented missions that involve numerous civilian tasks, may signal the inability to provide public goods. Existing research has focused on how UN peacekeeping forces can enhance some aspects of state-building, with a focus on rebuilding the rule of law and strengthening the national police (Blair 2019, 2020). While research has been generally positive about the benefits of peacekeeping for state-building, the threats stemming from the ownership of the state-building process have received less attention from quantitative researchers. The broad range of activities the UN requests from its personnel turns peacekeepers into major service providers for the population, who attribute progress to the international interveners and discount domestic institutions for their inability to govern. As Von Billerbeck (2016: 27) puts it, 'international intrusion into post-conflict states may be a necessity for successful peacekeeping; however, intrusion into post-conflict states necessarily entails a curtailment of the latter's ability to determine their own political future'. As the post-conflict progress is attributed to the external support the government receives, citizens who can directly observe that support (e.g. those who live near UN facilities) are likely to have less positive views of their government and security forces.

In studying state-building in post-conflict setting, I focus on one key pillar of state capacity, namely the perceived legitimacy (i.e. trust) of institutions. Some studies have highlighted the positive impact of UN peacekeeping missions on two other key dimensions of state capacity, namely coercion and capital. Peacekeeping missions can help to build economic capacity (Bove et al. 2021; Hunnicutt 2022) and reform the security sector (Blair 2020). The importance of legitimacy for state-building is linked to its sustainability, and it is particularly thorny in post-conflict countries whose institutions have limited statehood. This is not just a lack of authority over their territory

but, more importantly for this paper, a monopoly on legitimate use of violence (Krasner and Risse 2014). It follows that, as argued by Lake and Fariss, '[b]uilding state capacity ... requires the reconstruction of the state's monopoly of violence, suppression of other violence-wielding groups, and *equally reconstituting the legitimacy* of that monopoly' (2014: 572, emphasis added). In supporting the process of state-building, the UN may help to promote and reform democratic institutions (e.g. holding elections), but at the same time erode citizens' trust in governments.¹

To test these expectations, the empirical analysis focuses on the case of post-conflict Liberia, which hosted the UN peacekeeping mission UNMIL from 2003 to 2018. UNMIL was not only a long peacebuilding mission with a large military deployment, but was also considered a particularly successful intervention (Ighobor 2018). It was stationed in Liberia for 15 years from the end of its civil war. Hence, it provides an ideal case to test the impact of peacekeeping on legitimacy and long-term dynamics of state-building. To this end, I combine three waves of the geocoded Afrobarometer surveys with subnational data on local deployment of UNMIL peacekeepers from the GeoPKO data (Cil et al. 2019). Afrobarometer carried out surveys in Liberia in 2008, 2012, and 2015, and I rely on its rich questionnaire to investigate to what extent levels of trust in formal institutions vary across locations that have hosted peacekeepers. The timing of the rounds allows observation of the impact of peace missions' security provision on local populations from the peak of its deployment to the end of it. The empirical analysis suggests a strong association between peacekeeping and citizens' trust in the president and the national police, and this effect is conditional on the duration of the deployment and the perceived effectiveness of the UN mission.

2 State capacity and legitimacy

As highlighted by Collier (2007), fragile states are often unable to develop economically and politically because they are entrenched in a vicious cycle where weak institutions, poverty, and violence feed each other. One challenge for both academic researchers and policy-makers is to grasp what capacity entails and to what extent external interventions may support and strengthen it. Indeed, the concept of state capacity entails a variety of components, and as a consequence of its multifaceted nature it has been studied from different perspectives. In the conflict literature, state capacity is made up of pillars whose absence or weakness contributes to explaining why governments fail to deter violent collective mobilization. In this section, I build on the importance of coercion, capital, and legitimacy in state formation (Rubin 2005; Tilly 1993) to illustrate how the peacekeeping literature has shed light on the impact of missions on the first two pillars, and to a more limited degree on the third.

Mobilization of coercion means that states need to concentrate the use of violence throughout the territory in their hands. In post-conflict settings, this commonly translates into disbanding non-state armed groups and reforming national police and armed military. In this sense, the positive impact of UN peace operations on violence (Bove et al. 2020; Di Salvatore and Ruggeri 2017; Hultman et al. 2019) and their capacity to support the state in restoring the rule of law (Blair 2020) points towards the strengthening of states' coercion. Notably, scholars have also highlighted the unintended effects of enabling states' coercive power. Von Billerbeck and Tansey (2019) argue that the UN may unintentionally enable authoritarianism exactly by reinforcing the coercive capacity of authoritarian elites and their security forces. This is exacerbated by the need to ensure state consent for the mission, which results in tacit acceptance of non-democratic behaviours that

¹ This does not necessarily imply that citizens will have positive views about the UN, but overall they will judge their own leaders incapable of assuring basic needs to them without external support.

signals what the authors call ‘a permissive environment’ (p. 707). In line with this, research that unpacks violence by perpetrators shows that UN peacekeepers are able to deter rebel groups from resorting to victimization of civilians, but their presence is a much less effective deterrent for government forces (Fjelde et al. 2019).

The second pillar of state formation, capital mobilization, relates to the production of income and extraction of revenues needed to sustain the state apparatus. Research on the economic impact of peacekeeping offers more limited evidence in this regard. UN missions seem to boost household consumption (Bove et al. 2021), but we do not know whether households are more tax compliant. UN peacekeeping can also increase confidence from donors and investors (Collier and Hoeffler 2004), hence fostering capital formation and its mobilization. Ongoing research indicates that the presence of peacekeepers may boost foreign aid by providing reassurance of states’ commitment to stability, although this effect is conditional on the type of personnel deployed (UN police) and actual improvements in the rule of law (Hunnicut 2022). In some cases, economic resources may also come from the UN system itself. Since the establishment of the Peacebuilding Architecture in 2004, UN missions with a strong peacebuilding mandate have operated alongside the financial support of the UN Peacebuilding Fund (Campbell and Di Salvatore 2022). The Fund provides financial resources for, among others, dialogue, security, and provision of basic services, and coordinates support from other agencies operating in the field.

Taken together, these results suggest that UN missions can help to build two pillars of state capacity, namely coercion and capital. The material resources needed to (re)build coercion and mobilize capital can be provided by the international community, and they are considered as instrumental to the broader strategic objective of building legitimacy and capacity (Zoellick 2008). However, rebuilding institutional legitimacy (the third pillar of state capacity) is more challenging because perceptions of legitimacy are often linked to state performance and efficient provision of services. In other words, legitimacy in the form of trust towards institutions cannot be built with external material resources. In a sense, legitimacy ‘consecrate[s] the use of force and public revenues ... and link[s] them into meaningful whole to induce people to comply voluntarily as citizens’ (Rubin 2005: 95–96).

The problem of governments’ legitimacy is often conflated with elections in the UN discourse. Accordingly, in the aftermath of civil wars, the first post-conflict elected government is a legitimate one if elections were held fairly and freely (which is why international monitors often observe the first round of elections). However, the focus on elections and procedural legitimacy (Dahl 1956) may be the first step in building trust, but for many citizens this remains conditional on enactment of policies and the provision of (at least) basic services. Ultimately, state-building necessitates both procedural legitimacy and performance-based legitimacy.² In the next section, I argue that UN peacekeeping missions with peacebuilding mandates may support capacity, but ultimately thwart trust towards formal institutions because they signal states’ inability to perform basic functions without external support, which may be costly if missions fail to deliver on their mandates.³

² Democratic procedures and delivery of services by the state are also correlated. Lindgren and Persson (2010) have found that input legitimacy (the procedure) is a strong predictor of output legitimacy (the performance). See also Rothstein (2009).

³ For a similar argument on how foreign aid signals state failure rather than state capacity, see Belmonte et al. (2021).

3 Peacekeeping and post-conflict institutional legitimacy

The key argument of this paper moves from the observation that UN peace missions are different from other unilateral external interventions. The practice of peacekeeping operations has evolved substantially in the last 15 years and has moved from a military to a prominent political (and civilian) focus. Peacekeeping operations under the aegis of the UN have moved beyond security, and most recent mandates are built around the idea that peacekeeping is part of a broader peacebuilding process. With the inclusions of tasks that explicitly refer to institution and confidence-building, assistance to governments, and socio-economic reconstruction, UN peacekeeping has become a tool for state-building. As missions have become longer and more intrusive in their mandates, the trade-off between external assistance and principles of sovereignty has become more problematic compared to past operations that were overwhelmingly focused on halting violence.

UN peace operations are associated with improved perspectives of democratization in the aftermath of conflict. Countries hosting peace operations are more likely to democratize their institutions (Blair et al. forthcoming; Joshi 2013; Steinert and Grimm 2015), but more critical scholars have highlighted the risks of UN democratization efforts crowding out domestic efforts to reform (Fortna 2008; Lake 2016). Indeed, democratization efforts that fail to engage domestic institutions are less likely to succeed (Blair et al. forthcoming). More importantly, the democratization of institutions and holding elections are not sufficient to foster citizens' trust towards them; post-conflict governments must provide for their citizens to enhance their legitimacy.

While we have evidence that UN missions have a democratizing effect on institutions, we lack evidence on whether missions also enable institutions to provide services for their citizens. Lake and Fariss (2014) show that external interventions generally do not make states better at providing services and goods, compared to states that do not receive external support. Furthermore, while legitimacy is a function of performance, the relationship between the two is not unambiguous. In a study on post-conflict Liberia, Blair et al. (2019) show that interventions that improved citizens' awareness of the national police and reduced the level of some crimes do not necessarily improve trust towards the police. In the context of peacekeeping interventions, this may indicate that strengthening the performances of institutions or facilitating their functioning may not be enough to improve their perceived legitimacy. Citizens do not simply care about whether they receive some services or not; they also care about *who* provides them. It follows that activities of Blue Helmets may shape citizens' perceptions of governments and prompt them to believe that their institutions are unable to protect and provide for them without external support.

I argue that peacekeeping missions may affect citizens' perceptions of post-conflict domestic institutions in two ways. First, as mentioned, the literature suggests that peacekeeping missions can result in more democratic institutions and improvements in states' capacity to secure the monopoly of power. Facilitating governance and assisting national institutions can result in actual improvements in the performances of these actors. This capacity-building effort benefits governments as it often involves financial resources they lack in the aftermath of civil wars (Campbell and Di Salvatore 2022). Similarly, it benefits the national police, which receives training and performs activities in close cooperation with UN contingents. In addition, the provision of security can allow the government to devote more attention to service provision within a stable environment. Hence, citizens would report higher levels of trust towards the state and the national police in deployment locations. On aggregate, we would expect peacekeeping missions to improve the quality of states' goods provision, including services and security, particularly in locations where the mission operates.

However, this capacity-building mechanism is curbed by (1) the attribution problem associated with the prolonged UN peacebuilding efforts and (2) the reputational cost of working with a (un)successful mission. Hence, and secondly, the impact of peacekeeping may be mediated by two observable factors, namely the length of the deployment and the success of the deployment. Research shows that the implementation of mandates that foster peacebuilding and assist in reforming institutions can be less effective at promoting democracy if peacekeepers *bypass* the state rather than cooperating with it (Blair et al. forthcoming). Furthermore, even if peacekeepers do not bypass national institutions completely, citizens may still interpret their prolonged presence as a signal of weakness, or may be unable to attribute positive successes to domestic institutions. The longer the mission operates in the country (and in specific locations), the more it signals that external support is needed by domestic institutions. This presence is unlikely to go unnoticed as UN troops and police patrol communities and perform highly visible activities in their areas of responsibility. Moreover, missions deployed in locations that do not see conflict re-eruption may indicate that peacekeeping does work and can secure communities, while domestic institutions cannot. Research shows that citizens that see the positive impact of peacekeeping are also more likely to cooperate with UN personnel (Gordon and Young 2017). I examine whether this increased close cooperation may come at the expense of domestic institutions.

In sum, I formulate the following testable hypotheses:

H1: Respondents in locations that hosted UNMIL are more likely to trust the government and the national police.

H2: The relationship in H1 is mitigated by the duration of the deployment within a given county.

H3: The relationship in H1 is mitigated in locations that remained peaceful after UNMIL deployment.

4 Research design

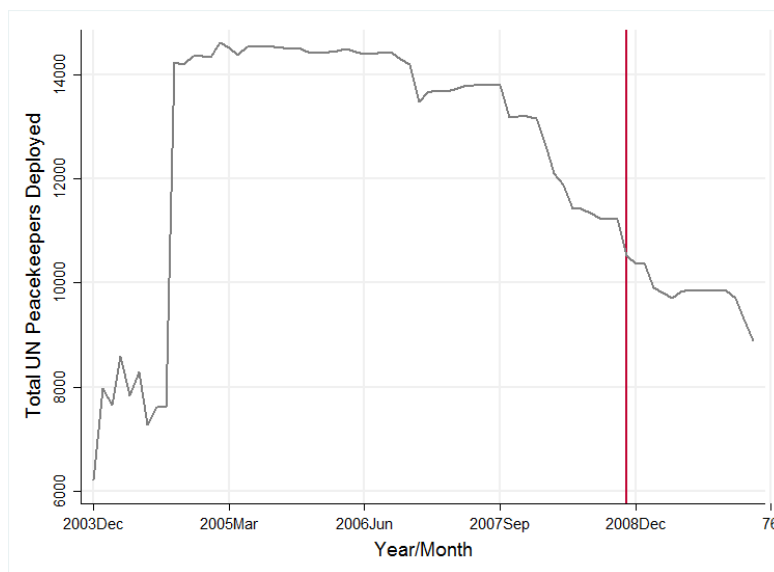
To test whether and how UN peacekeeping affects post-conflict institutional legitimacy I focus on the case of UNMIL as a typical case of a peacebuilding mission deployed in a post-conflict setting. UNMIL is also considered as an example of a successful peacebuilding mission (UN News 2018). This is relevant when considering how the findings for the case are useful when evaluating other UN missions. Given the positive outcome of the mission, one could argue that the potential harm to institutions' legitimacy may be even more pronounced for missions that face more challenges.

Building on research measuring perceived legitimacy as trust (Hutchison and Johnson 2011), I investigate to what extent levels of trust in formal institutions vary across locations that have hosted or host peacekeepers. The empirical strategy is two-fold. First, I estimate the association between past exposure to UNMIL and trust for the president and the police. As the expansion phase of UNMIL was completed by 2008, I will be able to estimate whether this has affected citizens' perceptions in locations that had hosted UNMIL personnel before the 2008 round was carried out by Afrobarometer. Second, I evaluate whether the impact of UNMIL is conditional on the duration of the deployment and on its effectiveness.

To this end, I combine two main data sources, namely geocoded survey data on citizens' perceptions from the Afrobarometer and information on UNMIL subnational deployment from the GeoPKO data (Cil et al. 2019). I use three rounds of the Afrobarometer survey conducted in

Liberia between 2008 and 2015. At the time of the first round, UNMIL had been stationed in Liberia for five years. The total number of UN personnel deployed to Liberia reached its peak in February 2005, when more than 14,600 units were stationed in the country (see Figure 1). By November 2008, when the first Afrobarometer survey was conducted, 10,500 peacekeepers were still present in Liberia. The mission completely withdrew from Liberia in 2018. Hence, the three rounds of the survey were conducted during a contraction rather than expansion phase for the mission. The consolidation phase was over, meaning that it is very unlikely that the mission was going to access new locations and communities. This makes the possibility of inferring the impact of peacekeeping less problematic. At the same time, exactly because of the presence of the UN, Afrobarometer includes useful questions on UNMIL that allows squaring respondents' trust in the government and their opinion about the mission.

Figure 1: Deployment of UNMIL over time



Note: the red line is the first Afrobarometer survey (round 4) in 2008

Source: author's compilation based on International Peace Institute Peacekeeping data.

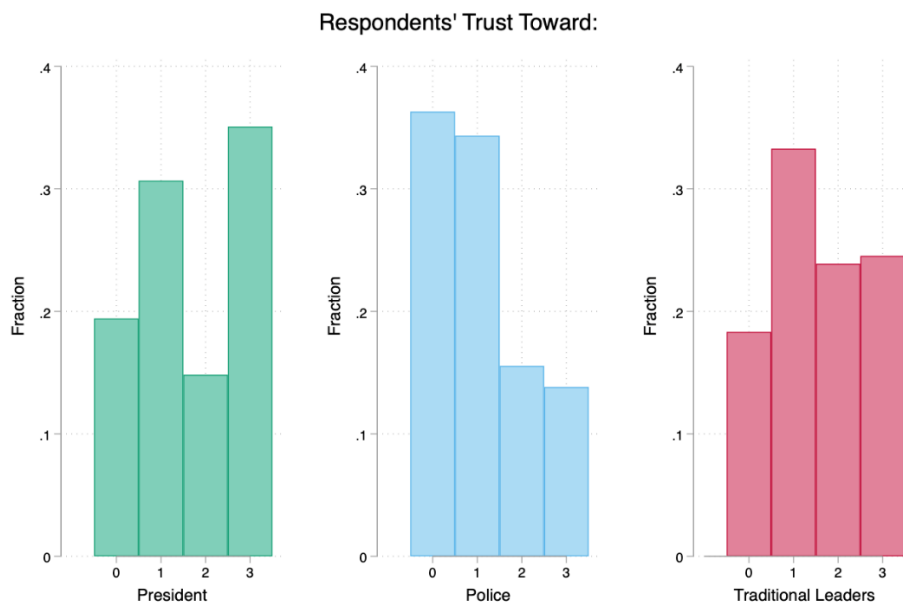
For each of the three rounds of the survey, the main dependent variables are constructed using Afrobarometer questions on trust in institutions. Representative surveys on public opinion serve as extremely useful sources for investigating legitimacy perceptions in post-conflict countries, where other indicators are oftentimes unavailable or rely on experts' assessment of the quality of institutions. Hence, I operationalize perceived legitimacy using a measure of trust in line with research identifying trust as a reliable indicator of state legitimacy (Hutchison and Johnson 2011). The Afrobarometer questionnaire asks respondents 'how much do you trust?' regarding several institutions. I focus on trust in the president (as Liberia has a presidential system) and the national police to account for varying perceptions of political and security institutions. The survey also asks about trust in traditional leaders, which I include to assess whether the effect on trust is specific to formal institutions or applies to informal institutions as well. Hence, I do not theorize on the impact of peace missions on informal institutions but include the results on traditional leaders in the analysis for the purpose of comparison.⁴ All trust-related variables range from 0 to 3, where 0

⁴ For a study on the role of Liberian traditional leaders in post-conflict peacebuilding, see Hunnicutt and Gbaintor-Johnson (2021).

indicates that respondents do not trust ‘at all’ a given institution and 3 indicates they trust it ‘a lot’. The phrasing of the possible answers allows me to dichotomize since there are no middle values. All four possible answers can be ultimately summarized to show whether individuals trust (somewhat, a lot) or not (a little, not at all) a given institution. In Appendix A I show that using an ordinal rather than a dichotomized version of the dependent variable does not significantly affect the results.

Figure 2 illustrates the varying degrees of trust expressed by the survey respondents for the three groups. In aggregate, the national police has the lowest levels of trust, with 70 per cent of respondents saying they do not trust the police. Conversely, the highest levels of trust are expressed in favour of the president, who is trusted ‘a lot’ by 35 per cent of surveyed individuals, and at least ‘somewhat’ by an additional 15 per cent, for a total of 59 per cent. Across the three rounds of the survey, though, the percentage of respondents trusting the president drops dramatically in the 2015 wave, from 59 to 30 per cent. This is not due to new elections, as Ellen Johnson Sirleaf remained president of Liberia from 2006 to 2018. Notably, traditional leaders are the second most trusted institutions (32 per cent).

Figure 2: Respondents’ trust as an ordinal variable

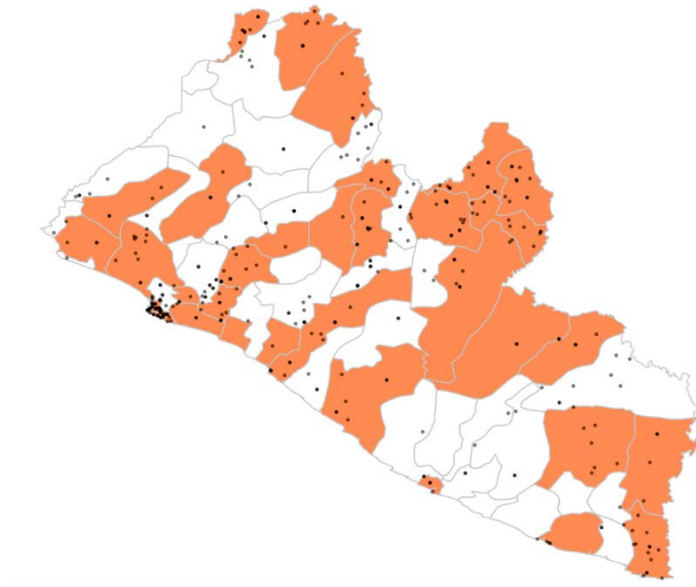


Source: author’s compilation based on Afrobarometer data.

As the goal of the paper is to assess whether UNMIL’s presence and activity in Liberia can explain variation in attitudes towards post-conflict institutions, I combine the location of respondents with subnational locations of UNMIL bases. Using the GeoPKO dataset (Cil et al. 2019), I locate counties hosting peacekeepers and assign this as a treatment to all respondents within counties that had hosted the mission before the survey was conducted. Since each round of the survey is a cross-section, I create three versions of the main independent variable to measure exposure to UNMIL. First, I create a dummy that equals 1 if the county where the respondent lives has ever hosted a peacekeeping contingent before each round of the Afrobarometer. Second, I calculate the average of the monthly number of peacekeepers deployed to each county before the survey. Finally, I calculate the duration of the deployment in each county. By doing this, I attempt to capture the extent to which respondents were exposed to UN activities and interacted with peacekeepers before being asked about their attitudes towards institutions. If peacekeeping is beneficial in improving security and perceived safety among the local population, I expect

respondents within districts with heavy UN presence to exhibit different levels of trust towards domestic institutions than their less-exposed counterpart. Figure 3 shows the deployment of UNMIL in the whole period and the location of survey respondents across Liberian counties. The temporal trends in the deployment of UNMIL, which I briefly described before, are depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 3: Liberian county boundaries and Afrobarometer respondents' locations and deployment locations



Note: black dots are respondent locations; orange areas are deployment locations.

Source: author's compilation based on Afrobarometer and GeoPKO data.

The model's specification includes a set of control variables at the respondent level. I include gender as indicated by the respondent, education levels, age, and a dummy for respondents living in urban areas. Furthermore, I control for whether respondents are interested in politics, are active members of their communities, and express satisfaction with democracy in Liberia. In addition, I include proxies for state presence and provision of public goods using the information recorded for roads, electricity grids, sewerage systems, and police presence in enumeration areas. The inclusion of a dummy for urban respondents and for roads is particularly crucial as research shows that peacekeepers are more likely to deploy in urban areas that are more accessible because of proximity to road networks (Ruggeri et al. 2016). At the county level I control for the intensity of conflict in each district before the UN's arrival in 2003 using the average level of total deaths (military and civilians) as recorded in Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) data (Sundberg and Melander 2013). Some counties continued experiencing violence after the arrival of the mission. However, as the peace process corresponded with the beginning of the mission, UCDP data does not record post-deployment violence. Hence, I use the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data project (ACLED) (Raleigh et al. 2010) to control for post-deployment violence measured as the number of violent events recorded in ACLED. This allows capturing the extent to which peacekeepers were effective at stabilizing the counties they were sent to.

Since the main dependent variable is dichotomous, I run logit models with fixed effects and clustered standard errors at the county level.⁵ When estimating the conditional effect of UN

⁵ Appendix A reports the results of an ordered logit that uses the original variable as recorded in the Afrobarometer. Results only differ for traditional leaders and the impact of UNMIL's presence, which is found to be positively

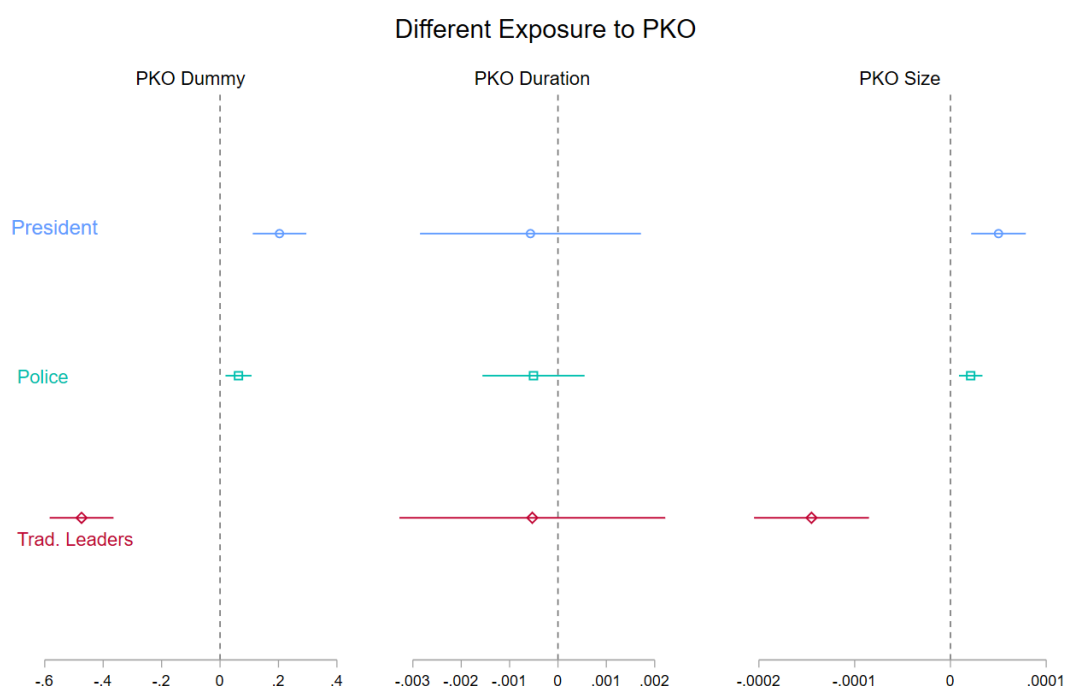
effectiveness, though, I drop the fixed effects because post-deployment violence does not change over time. This allows me to also control for pre-deployment violence using the UCDP data, as mentioned above. Models also include respondents' weights as provided by Afrobarometer. The main limitation of this research design is related to the selection bias explaining the deployment of peacekeepers in the first place, which cannot be explicitly accounted for given the data at hand.

5 Discussion of the results

I summarize the results of the statistical analysis using coefficient and marginal effects plots; full tables are available in Appendix A. I begin by examining whether the presence and size of UNMIL's contingent across Liberian counties affect trust in institutions. Figure 4 compares the relationship between these two measures of exposure and trust in the president, police, and traditional leaders. It emerges that, overall, past presence of UNMIL and the size of the deployment have a positive association with trust in the president and, to a slightly lesser extent, the police. Respondents in locations that hosted UNMIL have a 57 per cent probability of trusting the president, compared to 37 per cent in locations that never hosted UNMIL troops. The difference is less pronounced, though still significant, for the national police (30 per cent in counties with a UNMIL presence vs 24 per cent in non-UNMIL counties). The impact of duration as such does not reach statistical significance, though the expectation is that duration mitigates the positive effect of exposure to peacekeeping operations (which I examine next). Notably, the probability that respondents will express trust in traditional leaders is much lower in locations that hosted UNMIL compared to those that never hosted the operation (14 vs 66 per cent). This may indicate that it is not the case that respondents in UNMIL deployment locations tend to exhibit overall higher levels of trust across all institution types. The association between trust and UNMIL presence is similar when considering the magnitude of the exposure (i.e. the size of the deployment).

associated with levels of trust. As mentioned, though, this paper focuses on formal institutions in theorizing the link between peacekeeping and trust, and the results for these remain substantively unchanged.

Figure 4: Marginal effects based on coefficients reported in Table A1



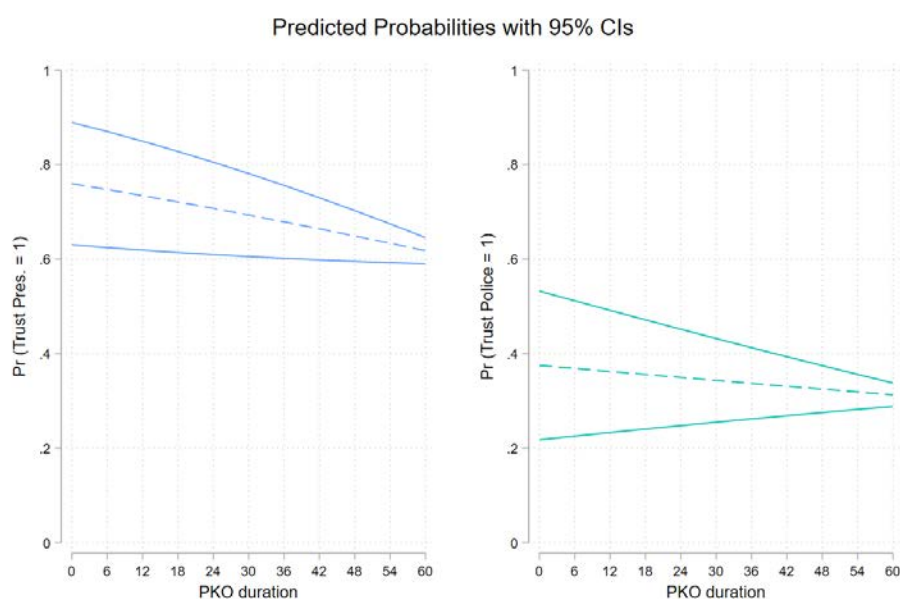
Note: PKO, peacekeeping operations.

Source: author's compilation based on Afrobarometer and GeoPKO data.

As the next step, I examine whether this beneficial effect is dampened by the length of the intervention. The results of these models are reported in Figure 5. The duration of the mission is measured as the number of months since the deployment started. In line with my expectations, longer deployments mitigate the positive association between trust in the president and UNMIL presence. More specifically, each additional year of deployment decreases the probability of trusting the president by 3.5 percentage points, and goes down by 15 points after ten years. However, there seems to be only a very small mitigation effect for the national police, as the predicted probability of trust changes little as deployment continues (by approximately 1.3 percentage points after one year). Again, the results report opposite patterns for trust in informal institutions, with traditional leaders being more likely to be trusted as the deployment's length increases.

A few interesting patterns also emerge when looking at the control variables in Table A1. First, respondents that report being satisfied with democracy in Liberia are unsurprisingly more likely to trust the president and the police. This is one of the most consistent results throughout all models. The association between age and trust, however, is somewhat surprising as younger respondents are more likely to trust traditional leaders and less likely to trust the president. Furthermore, sewerage systems and roads recorded in the enumeration area by the Afrobarometer interviewer are also associated with lower odds of trusting the president. This would counter the general expectation that provision of public goods would increase trust in institutions. It is possible, though, that respondents may be unhappy about the quality of the provision or that the provision has not changed at all. The variables do not capture whether respondents have access to those services or are satisfied with them or have experienced improvements over time, as these are just recorded by enumerators as they carry out the survey.

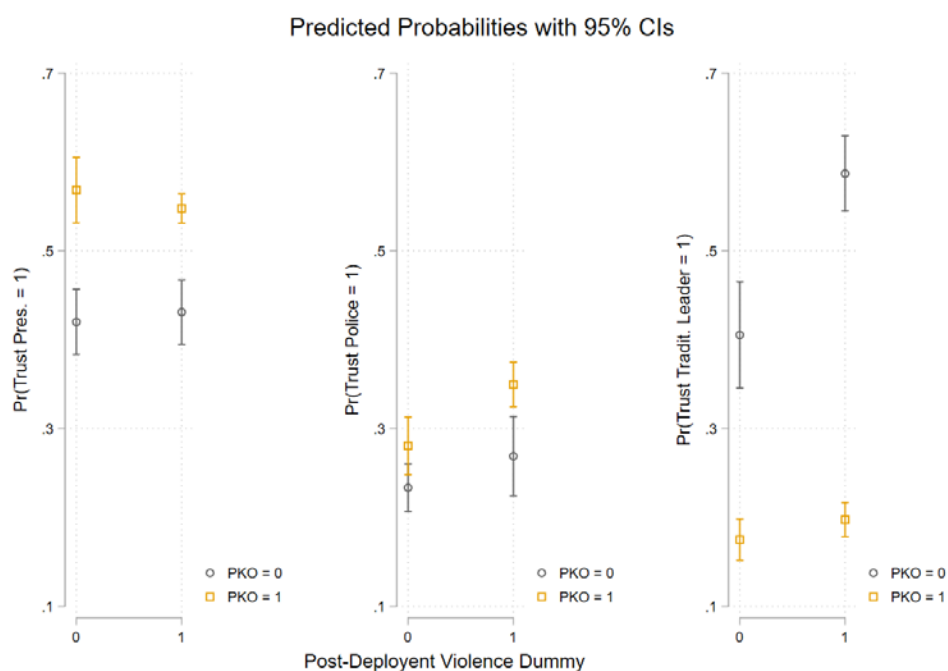
Figure 5: Predicted probabilities based on models in Table A3



Source: author's compilation based on Afrobarometer and GeoPKO data.

A more accurate test of the hypothesis that effective peace missions may be counterproductive for governments legitimacy would require, however, that such detrimental effects exist under the condition that the mission does maintain peace. Indeed, it is not the mere presence of large peacekeeping missions but their contribution to post-conflict stabilization that could threaten the legitimacy of institutions in the short run. Hence, as an attempt to capture this mechanism, I present an additional set of models that include an interaction between UNMIL's presence and post-deployment violence. The latter is measured using ACLED, and is a dichotomous variable taking value 1 if violence is reported after the deployment of UNMIL in a location. As the variable measures violence in a county before the survey, I cannot include fixed effects at the county level. The variable is binary to simplify the interpretation of the interaction effect. As shown in Figure 6, respondents are more likely to trust the government when previously exposed to peacekeepers. However, when missions operate in counties that did experience post-conflict violence, citizens are less likely to trust the president compared to cases where no violence was recorded. This implies that challenging environments are a threat not only for peacekeepers, but also for national governments that may be blamed for consenting to interventions that fail. Police, however, see the opposite dynamic. To begin with, in peaceful settings, peacekeepers do not seem to change citizens' propensity to trust the police; however, and differently from the president, unstable environments may foster trust in the police when peacekeepers are deployed alongside. This may indicate that while governments may get the blame, security forces that work with the UN military get a confidence boost. This could be due to either higher visibility or perceived effectiveness. In sum, while the hypothesized counterproductive impact of successful missions does not find empirical support, the analysis sheds light on unexpected ways in which national institutions, as speculated, benefit or pay the price for UN interventions.

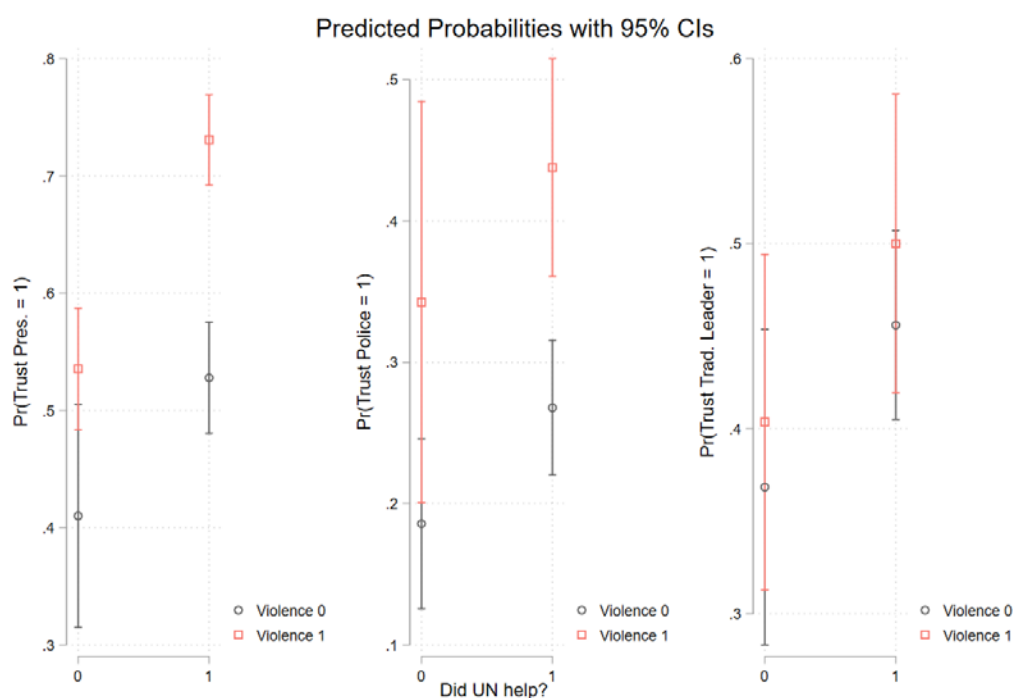
Figure 6: Predicted probabilities based on models in Table A4



Source: author's compilation based on Afrobarometer and GeoPKO data.

A corollary of this analysis is that citizens will punish or reward domestic actors depending on their assessments of the UN intervention. The previous discussion assumed that onset of violence will be used by citizens to update their perceptions of the mission as unsuccessful. However, the analysis cannot clearly link perceived legitimacy of institutions to perceived effectiveness of UNMIL. To investigate this channel in more detail, I conclude the empirical section with an analysis that accounts for perceptions of the UN from the perspective of the 'peacekeepers' (Figure 7). The fourth wave of the Afrobarometer (the first one for Liberia) includes a question on how much the UN does to help Liberia. I dichotomize the responses to group positive assessments ('somewhat' and 'a lot') and negative ones ('a little bit', 'not at all'). This question is only asked in the fourth round and does not exactly ask about the UN mission; however, it is an interesting variable to use for the purpose of this analysis.

Figure 7: Predicted probabilities based on models in Table A5



Source: author's compilation based on Afrobarometer and GeoPKO data.

Most predicted probabilities have large confidence intervals that do not help to tease out the role of the blame mechanism, but it is worth noting that citizens that acknowledge UN support of Liberia are more likely to trust the government and the police, even when violence is taking place in the post-conflict setting. This seems to suggest that positive assessments of the mission may benefit domestic institutions as well, instead of backfiring and being interpreted as lack of capacity.

6 Conclusions

This paper builds on existing research finding a beneficial effect of UN peacekeeping missions on state-building. It adds to this scholarship by theorizing a possible counterproductive effect of UN peacekeeping missions on the perceived legitimacy of domestic institutions in the aftermath of civil wars. Based on the observation that UN missions have become increasingly focused on building institutions by performing political and civilian functions, I argue that this can result in two countervailing effects. On the one hand, peacekeeping may successfully improve state capacity and state performance, hence fostering citizens' trust in governments and national police. On the other hand, peacekeepers' role as *de facto* security guarantors can backfire as it signals lack of capacity, and hence it could harm the legitimacy of domestic institutions. By adopting an instrumental perspective on legitimacy according to which the delivery of basic needs and services (i.e. physical protection) is central to perceived legitimacy (Fisk and Cherney 2017; Lipset 1959), the project identifies conditions under which the external provision of security may become a challenge for state legitimacy and citizens' trust in institutions. In supporting the process of state-building, the UN may help to promote and reform democratic institutions (e.g. holding elections) but at the same time erode citizens' trust in governments. This does not necessarily imply that citizens will have positive views about the UN, but overall they will judge their leaders as incapable of ensuring basic needs are met without external support.

Using the case of Liberia and the UNMIL deployment to the country, I test these expectations by relying on three rounds of a nationally representative survey conducted by the Afrobarometer and the geographic location of UNMIL military personnel. I analyse how past exposure to UN peacekeepers may affect citizens' reported trust in the president, the national police, and, for comparison, traditional leaders. The results confirm the positive association between peacekeeping and trust in formal institutions, though the results for informal institutions are consistently negative. While beyond the scope of this paper, the consistent negative effect of peacekeeping on trust in traditional leaders should be further investigated, and raises interesting questions considering that 62 per cent of surveyed respondents in the first round of the Afrobarometer in Liberia reported that traditional leaders had 'some or a great deal of influence on governing local communities' (Baldwin and Raffler 2019: 64).

As a next step, the analysis uncovers a conditional effect linked to both the duration and effectiveness of the mission. On the former, I find that longer deployments may backfire and mitigate the positive effect of peacekeeping. On the mitigating effect of effectiveness, results are less conclusive. I find that citizens are more likely to trust governments and police when their own assessment of the UN is positive, but the eruption of violence in the post-conflict setting may be costly for the same state that consented to the operations. Trust in police forces, however, is boosted by violence when UNMIL was deployed in the same county. This could be due to the increased visibility of police (and UN contingents) in response to security threats. To speculate, violence may harm governments that cannot prevent it, but make citizens more willing to trust security institutions. There is no clear moderating effect of violence and perceptions of the UN on trust in informal leaders.

The available data does not allow further digging into the mechanisms linking peacekeeping and trust in institutions. For example, respondents are not asked to assess the efficacy of national institutions as providers of security and other goods. The information on the services available within enumeration areas is not sufficient to assess the extent to which UNMIL has improved both performance and perceived legitimacy. Furthermore, the survey only started including Liberia in 2008, and hence we do not have a pre-deployment benchmark to evaluate the contribution of UNMIL in the post-conflict phase. However, the selected case is commonly considered a success story of peacebuilding and state-building, suggesting that missions facing more challenges could be more likely to harm institutional trust, especially if governments can be blamed for such failures.

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Appendix A

Table A1: Trust for institutions by exposure to UNMIL (logit)

	President		Police		Trad. leaders	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
0/1 PKO	0.814*** (0.187)		0.316*** (0.114)		-2.492*** (0.360)	
Avg. PKO size		0.000*** (0.000)		0.000*** (0.000)		-0.001*** (0.000)
Interest pol.	-0.081** (0.041)	-0.088** (0.035)	-0.003 (0.045)	-0.007 (0.045)	-0.042 (0.042)	-0.007 (0.054)
Active member	0.087 (0.107)	0.068 (0.104)	-0.060 (0.151)	-0.064 (0.149)	0.145 (0.200)	0.155 (0.187)
Satisf. dem.	0.578*** (0.074)	0.607*** (0.069)	0.367*** (0.056)	0.379*** (0.058)	0.212*** (0.055)	0.079 (0.060)
Education	-0.000** (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000** (0.000)	0.002*** (0.000)	0.002*** (0.000)
Age	0.012*** (0.004)	0.013*** (0.004)	0.004 (0.005)	0.004 (0.005)	-0.012** (0.005)	-0.016*** (0.004)
Urban	0.031 (0.133)	-0.070 (0.134)	0.117 (0.149)	0.085 (0.149)	-0.101 (0.170)	0.141 (0.192)
Electricity	-0.046 (0.111)	-0.069 (0.137)	0.043 (0.185)	0.025 (0.193)	-0.126 (0.161)	-0.004 (0.192)
Sewerage	-0.057** (0.025)	-0.051 (0.034)	-0.033** (0.016)	-0.027 (0.019)	0.015 (0.023)	-0.029 (0.042)
Roads	-0.406*** (0.110)	-0.448*** (0.141)	-0.012 (0.137)	-0.024 (0.126)	-0.204 (0.264)	-0.065 (0.320)
Police presence	0.121 (0.096)	0.018 (0.107)	0.004 (0.168)	-0.027 (0.158)	-0.049 (0.133)	0.208 (0.240)
Female	-0.075 (0.084)	-0.078 (0.084)	0.008 (0.079)	0.007 (0.078)	-0.183** (0.078)	-0.153** (0.068)
Constant	-2.115*** (0.353)	-1.625*** (0.322)	-1.990*** (0.409)	-1.836*** (0.415)	0.639 (0.464)	-0.376* (0.464)
Observations	2,441	2,441	2,441	2,441	2,441	2,441

Note: standard errors clustered by county. County fixed effects included. * $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

Source: author's compilation based on Afrobarometer and GeoPKO data.

Table A2: Trust for institutions by exposure to UNMIL (ordered Logit)

	President		Police		Trad. leaders	
	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12
0/1 PKO	0.973*** (0.145)		0.410*** (0.114)		0.516*** (0.187)	
Avg. PKO size		0.000*** (0.000)		0.000*** (0.000)		-0.000 (0.000)
Interest pol.	-0.077* (0.043)	-0.085** (0.036)	0.026 (0.040)	0.023 (0.040)	-0.048 (0.058)	-0.052 (0.056)
Active member	0.066 (0.121)	0.054 (0.121)	0.087 (0.085)	0.079 (0.086)	-0.059 (0.308)	-0.075 (0.295)
Satisf. dem.	0.638*** (0.078)	0.675*** (0.070)	0.365*** (0.075)	0.382*** (0.079)	0.266*** (0.055)	0.285*** (0.055)
Education	-0.000** (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000** (0.000)	-0.001*** (0.000)	-0.000* (0.000)
Age	0.010*** (0.004)	0.012*** (0.004)	0.006 (0.005)	0.007 (0.005)	-0.004 (0.005)	-0.004 (0.005)
Urban	0.112 (0.133)	-0.002 (0.148)	0.077 (0.152)	0.017 (0.152)	0.038 (0.146)	-0.013 (0.141)
Electricity	-0.084 (0.078)	-0.094 (0.116)	0.080 (0.193)	0.075 (0.201)	-0.085 (0.111)	-0.088 (0.115)
Sewerage	-0.028 (0.021)	-0.021 (0.029)	0.017* (0.010)	0.015 (0.012)	0.013 (0.019)	0.007 (0.016)
Roads	-0.380*** (0.109)	-0.429*** (0.144)	-0.044 (0.088)	-0.076 (0.082)	0.089 (0.165)	0.011 (0.184)
Police presence	0.099 (0.086)	-0.021 (0.123)	0.137 (0.153)	0.071 (0.131)	-0.154 (0.130)	-0.200 (0.129)
Female	-0.033 (0.063)	-0.027 (0.062)	-0.015 (0.062)	-0.015 (0.060)	-0.050 (0.087)	-0.068 (0.085)
Constant	-2.115*** (0.353)	-1.625*** (0.322)	-1.990*** (0.409)	-1.836*** (0.415)	0.639 (0.464)	-0.376 (0.491)
Observations	2,425	2,425	2,425	2,425	1,580	1,580

Note: standard errors clustered by county. County fixed effects included. * $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

Source: author's compilation based on Afrobarometer and GeoPKO data.

Table A3: Trust for institutions conditional on length of deployment

	President Model 13	Police Model 14	Trad. leaders Model 15
PKO duration	-0.011** (0.005)	-0.005 (0.005)	-0.105*** (0.041)
Interest pol.	0.007 (0.059)	-0.011 (0.058)	-0.040 (0.055)
Active member	-0.042 (0.244)	-0.074 (0.245)	0.303 (0.274)
Satisf. dem.	0.582*** (0.058)	0.409*** (0.077)	0.230 (0.149)
Education	-0.001*** (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.001)
Age	0.017*** (0.005)	0.010* (0.006)	-0.009 (0.006)
Urban	0.064 (0.173)	0.393** (0.166)	0.365 (0.483)
Electricity	0.050 (0.111)	0.125 (0.137)	-0.174 (0.122)
Sewerage	-0.043 (0.042)	-0.008 (0.045)	0.198* (0.106)
Roads	-0.235** (0.118)	0.068 (0.141)	0.168 (0.430)
Police presence	-0.084 (0.123)	0.061 (0.224)	0.013 (0.274)
Female	-0.128 (0.110)	-0.043 (0.099)	-0.296** (0.125)
Constant	-0.538 (0.703)	-2.188*** (0.736)	5.420* (2.847)
Observations	1,693	1,699	1,699

Note: standard errors clustered by county. County fixed effects included. * $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

Source: author's compilation based on Afrobarometer and GeoPKO data.

Table A4: Trust for institutions conditional on effectiveness

	President Model 16	Police Model 17	Trad. leaders Model 18
0/1 PKO	0.598*** (0.157)	0.247 (0.153)	-1.167*** (0.229)
Post-depl. violence	0.045 (0.159)	0.188 (0.217)	0.734*** (0.198)
PKO × post-depl. violence	-0.129 (0.175)	0.133 (0.220)	-0.586*** (0.217)
Interest pol.	-0.089*** (0.031)	0.018 (0.038)	0.034 (0.045)
Active member	0.105 (0.097)	-0.009 (0.137)	0.174 (0.155)
Satisf. dem.	0.540*** (0.067)	0.342*** (0.044)	0.100* (0.056)
Education	-0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.002*** (0.000)
Age	0.013*** (0.004)	0.004 (0.005)	-0.013*** (0.004)
Urban	0.018 (0.109)	0.027 (0.114)	-0.112 (0.216)
Electricity	-0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)
Sewerage	-0.060 (0.136)	0.055 (0.132)	-0.122 (0.158)
Roads	-0.044 (0.032)	-0.028 (0.021)	-0.005 (0.027)
Police presence	-0.538*** (0.139)	-0.101 (0.119)	0.302 (0.185)
Female	-0.039 (0.118)	0.033 (0.128)	0.020 (0.164)
Pre-depl. violence	-0.064 (0.072)	-0.018 (0.070)	-0.174*** (0.064)
Constant	-1.778*** (0.299)	-2.012*** (0.339)	-0.283 (0.547)
Observations	3,293	3,293	3,293

Note: standard errors clustered by county. County fixed effects not included. * $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

Source: author's compilation based on Afrobarometer and GeoPKO data.

Table A5: Trust for institutions conditional of perception of UN

	President Model 19	Police Model 20	Trad. leaders Model 21
UN helped	0.475 (0.294)	0.472* (0.256)	0.362* (0.198)
Post-depl. violence	0.506 (0.330)	0.826 (0.598)	0.149 (0.441)
UN help × post-depl. violence	0.381 (0.326)	-0.071 (0.552)	0.028 (0.294)
Avg. PKO size	-0.001* (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
Interest pol.	0.056 (0.061)	0.009 (0.062)	-0.003 (0.048)
Active member	0.031 (0.228)	0.082 (0.232)	0.289 (0.217)
Satisf. dem.	0.472*** (0.065)	0.360*** (0.097)	0.256** (0.126)
Education	-0.001*** (0.000)	0.000* (0.000)	-0.001 (0.000)
Age	0.010** (0.005)	0.006 (0.006)	-0.004 (0.005)
Urban	-0.215 (0.205)	-0.342 (0.252)	0.031 (0.276)
Electricity	-0.374*** (0.084)	0.054 (0.214)	-0.147 (0.175)
Sewerage	0.130*** (0.023)	0.004 (0.050)	0.124 (0.080)
Roads	0.100 (0.190)	0.274 (0.258)	0.197 (0.245)
Police presence	-0.412** (0.181)	-0.215 (0.230)	-0.266 (0.258)
Female	-0.116 (0.116)	-0.122 (0.109)	-0.197 (0.129)
Pre-depl. violence	0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)
Constant	-0.688 (0.430)	-1.956** (0.782)	-0.444 (0.523)
Observations	1,140	1,140	1,140

Note: standard errors clustered by county. County fixed effects not included. * $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$.

Source: author's compilation based on Afrobarometer and GeoPKO data.