

### 3 A Micro-Level Theory of UN Peacekeeping

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In independent Africa we are already re-experiencing the instability and frustration which existed under colonial rule. We are fast learning that political independence is not enough to rid us of the consequences of colonial rule.

Kwame Nkrumah, first prime minister of Ghana

The Security Council shall determine the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression and shall make recommendations, or decide what measures shall be taken. . . to maintain or restore international peace and security. . . Such provisional measures shall be *without prejudice to the rights, claims, or position of the parties concerned*.

UN Charter, Chapter VII, Articles 39–40  
Emphasis added

Peacekeepers do not deploy in a vacuum. Societies in conflict and post-conflict settings in Africa are the product of more than a century of foreign interventions that continue to shape citizens' everyday lives across the continent. These interventions have pitted domestic social groups against each other, as colonial occupiers arbitrarily picked favorites from among locals. As Kwame Nkrumah's declaration above makes clear, the wounds of colonialism did not disappear after independence.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, concerns about perceived favoritism resulting from these lingering divisions help explain the UN's insistence that its work should not prejudice the position of domestic groups, to paraphrase the language of the UN Charter cited above. The UN has committed to remaining impartial from its inception, even as its peacekeepers have become increasingly embedded within local populations.

With the legacies of colonialism in mind, this chapter introduces the book's main theoretical claims. I explore the conditions under which communal disputes in settings where peacekeepers are deployed should

<sup>1</sup> Nkrumah was a strong supporter of the UN and UN peacekeeping, which he believed to be a metaphorical salve for these wounds. I discuss this idea in greater detail in Chapter 8. See Asante (2020).

be expected to escalate. Because local populations have prior beliefs about international actors' biases, I explain how perceptions of peacekeepers strongly influence how effectively they can enforce local-level peace. Colonial legacies and narratives rooted in the postcolonial experience, a unique time in the history of each independent country in sub-Saharan Africa, play a dominant role in shaping these perceptions. I argue that when domestic populations perceive them as impartial, peacekeepers can promote intergroup cooperation, incentivize the peaceful resolution of disputes, and help prevent communal disputes from escalating. Emphasizing the UN's unique institutional characteristics, I posit that residents of conflict and postconflict settings perceive UN peacekeepers as relatively impartial, which largely explains its success at the local level.

The central micro-level insight of the chapter is that the presence of peacekeepers shapes individuals' beliefs about others' willingness to cooperate in systematic ways. For example, individuals will be more optimistic in their perceptions of the risks of peaceful engagement as well as the likelihood that members of out-groups will reciprocate their attempts to cooperate. International actors deploy armed police or military troops to patrol villages, towns, and neighborhoods to enforce peaceful interactions between members of different social groups. These peacekeeping patrols encourage cooperation by punishing (or threatening to punish) individual violations of the law – which domestic security institutions in such contexts are unable or unwilling to do. Peacekeeping at this level thus operates as a deterrent: Residents of conflict and postconflict settings recognize that if they commit violence, peacekeepers will respond in kind or apprehend them, which makes them more willing to cooperate across group boundaries.

Critically, perceptions of impartiality work to reassure individuals that other parties to local disputes will not resort to violence for the same reason. Thus peaceful resolution becomes more appealing (because it is less costly) than violence. By contrast, individuals who perceive peacekeepers as biased have no confidence that they will protect nonfavored groups or punish favored groups that commit violent acts. Individuals from nonfavored groups expect partial peacekeepers to punish them for engaging in violence, but they do not expect any protection from the violence of favored groups.

The theoretical model outlined in this chapter, which I call *localized peace enforcement theory*, suggests three mechanisms through which impartial peacekeepers reduce communal violence; each is formulated as a set of hypotheses (see Figure 3.1). First, if there is a dispute between two individuals from different social groups living in the same community, impartial peacekeepers *increase* individuals'

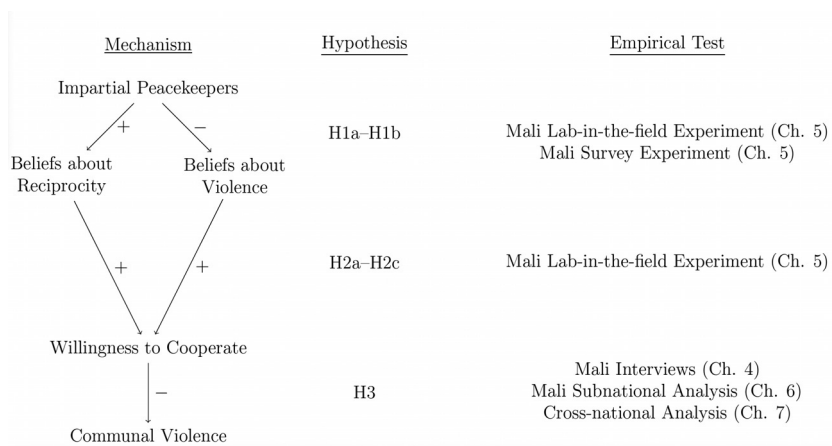


Figure 3.1 Diagram of mechanisms proposed in the localized peace enforcement theory, the hypotheses deduced from those mechanisms, and the empirical tests of those hypotheses

beliefs that others will reciprocate their attempts to resolve the dispute cooperatively (Hypothesis 1a) and *decrease* individuals' beliefs that others will escalate their dispute violently (Hypothesis 1b). In a second mechanism, this twofold belief shift will then *increase* individuals' willingness to cooperate (Hypotheses 2a–2c). Third, as more members of a community become more willing to cooperate to resolve disputes, this will *decrease* the incidence of communal violence (Hypothesis 3).

The chapter's primary goal is to outline a set of conditions under which my theory would predict that peacekeepers could prevent communal violence from escalating. I do *not* suggest that UN peacekeepers will always succeed, or that all kinds of UN peacekeepers will succeed. Indeed, perceptions of UN peacekeepers vary depending on the troop-contributing country and the identity of the civilians involved in the dispute. I test these implications of the theory in the subsequent empirical chapters.

I first discuss the challenges facing individuals involved in a communal dispute. Reflecting on these obstacles to peaceful dispute resolution, I outline a formal micro-level theory of dispute escalation between two individuals from different social groups who live in the same community. I also define the modes of UN intervention in communal disputes and highlight its role in shaping escalation dynamics in the theory. I then shift the focus to local perceptions of intervener impartiality, which I argue are a key determinant of whether a UN intervention succeeds in preventing the onset of violence. I identify the importance of multilateralism, diversity, and the nonuse of force as critical factors shaping local perceptions and, as a result, UN peacekeeping effectiveness. The chapter

closes with a discussion of the most important hypotheses derived from the theory.

### **Resolution and Escalation of Communal Disputes**

Civil wars rip apart the social fabric that connects individuals to one another, making cooperation unlikely. In the aftermath of conflict, individuals, families, or clans enmeshed in a dispute over local issues such as cattle herding, land use, or the value of goods in a marketplace have little reason to trust that others will comply with an agreed-upon resolution. In this section, I draw on previous work to show that resolution is particularly difficult after civil war violence, even in communities that were at peace for generations prior to the conflict. I explain that the absence of trust in conflict and postconflict settings makes communal disputes more likely to escalate. I begin by outlining the challenges these communities face. I then introduce the formal model underpinning my understanding of how disputes escalate. In the remainder of the chapter I investigate the conditions under which peacekeepers can help peacefully resolve communal disputes.

#### *Incentives to Escalate a Communal Dispute*

When members of a community are involved in a dispute, they must each decide whether to resolve the dispute peacefully or escalate it violently. Individuals living in postconflict settings must assess several factors when weighing the material and social costs against the benefits of a cooperative solution to a dispute. I base my assessments of costs and benefits on rationalist principles. My theory builds on the assumption that self-interested individuals whose beliefs are based upon the costs and benefits of a given action will try to maximize their utility. These factors are a function of the probability that a potential adversary will choose to reciprocate cooperation and the risk that a potentially straightforward interaction may escalate into violence. Bargaining theory maintains that individuals should always be able to find a mutually beneficial deal to resolve a dispute because violence is always costly (Fearon 1995; Matanock 2017). Put otherwise, violence is always costly because conflicts destroy resources, and can make the individual a target for retaliation or arrest (Fearon 1995). Cooperation may be beneficial as long as all parties agree to a peaceful resolution. That is, since escalating a dispute may harm all sides involved, a set of deals that will produce the same outcome without the violence must exist.

Unfortunately, peaceful deals are hard to come by in conflict and postconflict settings. In game theoretic terms, the bargaining space is very

small in such fragile settings. Individuals cannot easily signal their commitment to peacefully resolve a dispute. Even if they tried, the other parties to the dispute may not believe they are serious about cooperation. The central issue is that trusting other disputants to cooperate can be costly if they fail to uphold their end of the deal. Without an enforcement mechanism that punishes escalation, they have no incentive to cooperate. Parties to a dispute will obtain a better deal by escalating than by agreeing to a peaceful bargain where they would be vulnerable to violent attack. Individuals engaged in a communal dispute know there is no reason for others to resolve a dispute peacefully, and will thus prefer violence.

Rational action notwithstanding, I do not consider individuals to be robotic utility maximizers motivated solely by the pursuit of their own goals. I concede that some individuals will act for altruistic reasons, and cooperate with others independently of their own self-interest. Others will never cooperate, regardless of the potential benefits, out of a sense of anger toward members of other groups. I am agnostic as to whether this cooperation is rational or not. Some scholars instrumentalize emotions by incorporating them into utility calculations and treating the actions of individuals motivated by such emotions as rational (Balcells 2017; Petersen 2002). Others maintain that such actions are fundamentally inconsistent with rationality. I do not attempt to arbitrate between these explanations; I merely assume that material concerns will drive the behavior of most individuals.

Below, I present a model of behavior to explain how the structural features of weakly institutionalized settings can be linked to systemic variation in patterns of communal violence and cooperation. I develop the simplest possible game theoretic model that allows me to analyze a communal dispute with and without enforcement. It is a simplified version of Fearon's two-stage bargaining and enforcement game (Fearon 1998).<sup>2</sup> In the first stage of Fearon's game, the two actors must bargain to choose which of the potential deals they will implement before they begin cooperating. In the subsequent enforcement phase, the actors have a short-run incentive to defect if the other side cooperates, making it structurally identical to a repeated prisoners' dilemma. I begin by describing the structure of the game with reference to the players, assumptions, sequence of moves, and payoffs.

### *Players, Sequence of Moves, and Payoffs*

Consider two strategic actors from different ethnic groups living in the same community – a farmer and a cattle herder for simplicity. Both have

<sup>2</sup> For a similar application, see Blaydes (2004).

lived in the same community for a long time and will continue to do so. Each has typically stayed on her own part of the land. However, prior to the first stage of the game, an exogenous shock has created a dispute between the two over how the land is divided. The herder and farmer simultaneously choose one of two actions in response: They can either *defect* from their traditional land division, attacking the other actor to gain the upper hand, or *cooperate* to find a peaceful resolution to the dispute. I model the ongoing dispute as a repeated modified prisoner's dilemma. The first stage of the dispute can take one of four forms, which I present in a 2x2 matrix in Table 3.1: (1) the farmer can attack the herder's cattle to push them off the land while the herder seeks a peaceful solution (top right cell), (2) the herder can attack the farmer's land and the farmer while the farmer chooses to cooperate (bottom left cell), (3) both parties can continue to cooperate and remain on their own land (top left cell), or (4) the farmer and herder can both reject the previous division of land (bottom right).

My theoretical model is based on four assumptions. First, I assume that each actor incurs a cost,  $k$ , when the other player attacks, regardless of their own action. For example, if the herder attacks the farmer, the farmer's property will be damaged regardless of what the farmer does. Second, I assume there is a "sucker's payoff,"  $b \in (0, 1)$ , which represents the extra payoff from taking advantage of the "sucker" who cooperates when the other actor chooses to escalate. So if the farmer defects when the herder cooperates, the farmer would gain  $b$  and the herder would lose  $b$ . Third, I assume that the interaction occurs in a weakly institutionalized setting in which the state has a limited capacity to enforce the rule of law. Finally, I assume that when the payoffs are the same, players will choose the more cooperative outcome.

Table 3.1 summarizes the payoffs, which I normalize to 0 if both actors are willing to cooperate – in which case both will receive 0 until the next period of the game. If the farmer and herder interact once (i.e., a one-shot game), cooperation is not a rational choice for either actor. If the farmer thinks the herder is likely to cooperate, it makes

Table 3.1 *Payoffs from a stage game in a communal dispute (without peacekeepers)*

|                   | Farmer Cooperates                                      | Farmer Defects   |
|-------------------|--|--|
| Herder Cooperates | <u>Resolution:</u><br>(0, 0)                           | <u>Violence (farmer escalates):</u><br>( $-b - k, b$ ) |
| Herder Defects    | <u>Violence (herder escalates):</u><br>( $b, -b - k$ ) | <u>Violence (both escalate):</u><br>( $-k, -k$ )       |

sense to defect because she can catch the herder unawares and gain the upper hand in a violent interaction ( $b > 0$ ). If the farmer thinks the herder is likely to defect, it also makes sense to defect since this will allow the farmer to protect herself rather than be caught off guard ( $-k > -k - b$ ). Since the payoffs are symmetrical, the same holds for the herder. Therefore, in a one-shot interaction, the dominant strategy with no international enforcement is simply to escalate and fight. However, communal disputes are not always resolved violently.

To explain why some communal disputes are resolved peacefully, I now model the interaction between the farmer and herder as an infinitely repeated game, where  $a = \{a^t\}_{t=0}^{\infty}$  denotes the infinite sequence of action profiles. The payoff for each player  $i = \{H, F\}$  can be written as follows:

$$U(a) = \sum_{t=0}^{\infty} \delta^t u_i(a^t, a^t; i)$$

The discount factor, denoted by  $\delta \in (0, 1)$ , measures each actor's probability of surviving to the next period of the game, given the precarious nature of communal disputes.

*Analysis: Identifying the Conditions for Cooperation*

Next, I analyze the payoffs to identify the conditions under which the players are more or less likely to cooperate. I assume that both players will use a Grim Trigger strategy, which presumes that any Defect play will result in Defect plays in all future rounds, making it an effective reciprocal strategy for enforcing cooperation. This strategy imposes the harshest possible penalty for noncooperation – defection forever. For theory-building purposes, this means that if players can sustain cooperation even using this strategy, many other possible strategies would also facilitate cooperation.

Given these symmetrical payoffs and a Grim Trigger strategy being played, what must the discount factor be in order to sustain cooperation? I assume there has been no defection in the past. Under these conditions, the payoff from cooperating forever is:

$$Eu_i(C) = 0 + 0\delta + 0\delta^2 + \dots = \frac{1}{1 - \delta}(0) = 0$$

The payoff from defecting, which offers  $b$  in the first period of the game but then activates the Grim Trigger and offers  $-k$  for the remaining periods, is:

$$Eu_i(D) = b - k\delta - k\delta^2 + \dots = b - \frac{\delta}{1 - \delta}(k)$$

A player will choose to cooperate when the expected utility of cooperating forever is greater than the expected utility of defecting forever. Simplifying terms,

$$Eu_i(C) \geq Eu_i(D)$$

$$\delta \geq \frac{b}{b+k}$$

Recall that  $k$  is the cost incurred when attacked by the other player, while  $b$  is the payoff of catching the other player unawares. There are two important implications of the model so far. First,  $k$  is inversely related to  $\delta$ , meaning that as the cost of being caught in a spiral increases, the necessary magnitude of the discount factor required to sustain cooperation decreases. Second,  $b$  is directly related to  $\delta$ , thus as the value of capturing the other player’s land and obtaining the sucker’s payoff increases, the necessary magnitude of the discount factor required to sustain cooperation also increases.

This explains why disputes sometimes (but not always) escalate. Figure 3.2 indicates the discount factor needed to sustain cooperation

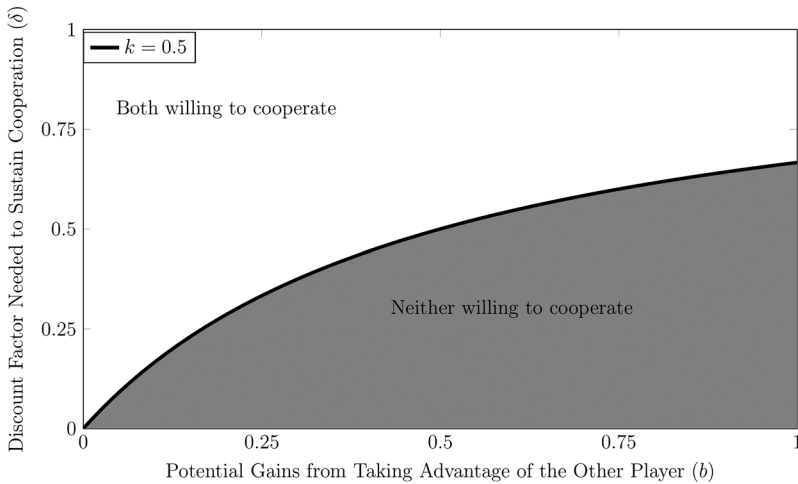


Figure 3.2 Willingness to cooperate to resolve communal dispute (equal costs incurred during attack)

Note: The figure displays the willingness of parties in a communal dispute to cooperate when equal costs are incurred during a violent escalation of the dispute ( $k$ ). Their willingness increases as a function of their perceived probability of surviving the dispute (i.e., their discount factor [ $\delta$  on the vertical axis]) and decreases as a function of the potential gains from escalating the dispute ( $b$  on the horizontal axis).



as a function of the potential gain associated with taking advantage of the other player. For illustrative purposes, I assume here that the cost of attacking incurred by either player is an arbitrary constant ( $k = 0.5$ ). The line separates the area of potential violence (gray) from the area of potential cooperation (white). If  $k$  increases (decreases) in value, the black line will move down (up) and the white area will expand (shrink). The white area indicates all combinations of values that would sustain cooperation. For instance, at this level of  $k$ , a fairly high discount factor is needed to maintain cooperation. However, if the potential gains associated with taking advantage of other players decrease, the discount factor needed to sustain cooperation also decreases.

So far I have assumed that the payoffs for each player are symmetrical. But if we assume the costs incurred by each player in an attack would differ (i.e.,  $k_F \neq k_H$ ), we would expect the farmer to be willing to cooperate when  $\delta \geq \frac{b}{b+k_F}$ . The herder, by contrast, would cooperate when  $\delta \geq \frac{b}{b+k_H}$ . If the costs of violence increase for the farmer but not for the herder ( $k_F > k_H$ ), there will be a larger range of possible parameter values than before that indicate violence might break out (see Figure 3.3). As before, the area of potential violence is shaded dark gray. Neither the farmer nor the herder is willing to cooperate when the parameters fall

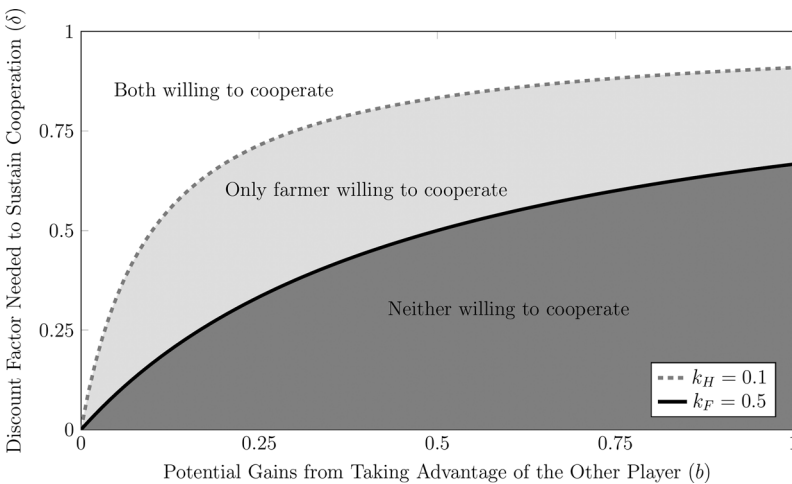


Figure 3.3 Willingness to cooperate to resolve communal dispute (different costs of attack ( $k$ ))

Note: The figure graphs the willingness of parties in a communal dispute (e.g., a herder ( $H$ ) and a farmer ( $F$ )) to cooperate when they incur different costs from a violent escalation of the dispute ( $k_H > k_F$ ). The farmer is more willing to cooperate than the herder under these conditions, adding a new space for violence (light gray).

into this area. However, unlike when the costs of conflict were the same, this graph contains a light gray area that indicates where only the farmer is willing to cooperate. Because the costs of violence are lower for the herder than for the farmer, the herder will be more likely to escalate to violence.

The consequences of living in conditions where violence is the rational choice (i.e., the dominant strategy) are enormous for communities in conflict and postconflict settings. For instance, there was a dispute in central Nigeria between the owner of a bee farm from the Tiv ethnic group and a member of the Fulani ethnic group who was accused of stealing honey. After the farmer captured the alleged thief, his family negotiated his release as part of an amicable resolution to the dispute. However, later that day, a group of armed Fulani men returned to attack the farm, killing five people. The Fulani thief and his family reneged on the deal with the bee farmer, and the farmer paid the price. When such disputes happen frequently, the results are devastating.

*Domestic Factors: Costs of Attack, Land Value,  
and Dispute Resolution*

As discussed earlier, the first implication of this model is that changes in  $b$  and  $k$  affect the likelihood of cooperation. I briefly discuss two sets of domestic factors that might affect these changes before assessing the role of foreign interveners. Because international intervention is the primary focus of this book, I do not explicitly derive hypotheses related to these factors. However, I return to this topic briefly in Chapter 5 when I trace patterns of conflict in the absence of intervention in Mali. I also highlight this as a promising area for further empirical research in Chapter 9.

As Figure 3.3 illustrates, violence becomes an increasingly attractive option as the costs of attack ( $k_i$ ) decrease for at least one party to the dispute. In communal disputes, four factors will decrease the costs of an attack. In each case, there is the possibility that the costs of attack dropping for one party would create a security dilemma that would motivate the other group to attempt to decrease its costs of attack as well. The first factor is if the civilian parties to the dispute gain access to weapons, training, or any other new capacity that would allow them to better defend themselves. Second, if civilians in a community group unite or call upon a self-defense militia, they can protect themselves from violence. Third, if a civil war is fought along social identity lines, civilians can use overlapping social identities to call upon armed groups to come to their defense. Fourth, if a violent extremist group is recruiting from the civilians' ethnic group in the community, the costs of attack will decrease.

Figure 3.3 also illustrates that there is a positive, curvilinear relationship between the discount factor and the potential gains associated with taking advantage of the other player in a dispute, denoted  $b$ . These gains are a direct function of the value of the disputed land, which can be increased by three factors: (1) environmental factors that decrease the amount of arable land – primarily temperature increases and rainfall decreases, both effects of climate change, (2) the presence of displaced persons looking to settle in the area of contention, and (3) food, water, or general resource shortages, often brought on by conflict.

Other domestic factors in addition to the costs of attack and the value of land that are not part of the model might affect the likelihood of communal violence. For instance, though formal resolution mechanisms are unlikely to be available to parties in a communal dispute, informal mechanisms may be quite robust. For example, individuals can signal to the other side that they intend to cooperate (Williamson 1986; Kydd 1997). Coethnicity may be especially useful in identifying trustworthy partners during this process (Habyarimana et al. 2009). Preferring in-group over out-group members will only increase as cooperation with an out-group becomes riskier. Alternatively, cooperation may be a direct function of how individuals interpret each other's motives (McCabe, Rigdon and Smith 2003). For instance, individuals may have a reputation for being trustworthy, or reciprocity norms may dominate in a community, which will dictate whether (and how) parties to a conflict are likely to respond to cooperative actions (Berg, Dickhaut and McCabe 1995). Moreover, in-groups might be uniquely able to enforce defections, which can bolster intergroup cooperation in the long run (Fearon and Laitin 1996; Bernhard, Fehr and Fischbacher 2006). The challenge for individuals embroiled in a communal dispute is that the parties involved are typically from different social groups. Civil wars harden cleavages, making individuals more likely to identify with parochial in-groups and less likely to cooperate with members of out-groups (Sambanis and Shayo 2013). Disputants are also unlikely to have had frequent interactions, making it much more difficult to foster positive reputations or gather information about the other side. And given that time horizons are short across group boundaries, it is particularly unlikely that in-groups' unique ability to enforce defections will apply to communal disputes in postconflict and conflict settings.

Formal and informal domestic sources of order aside, the other potential dispute resolution mechanism discussed in the literature is enforcement by a third party (Walter 2002; Fehr and Fischbacher 2004). Domestic state police and security institutions can promote peaceful resolution in multigroup settings by punishing those who take advantage of individuals seeking to cooperate, thereby increasing the costs of

escalation. However, civil war violence decimates such institutions' limited capacity and legitimacy (Nomikos and Stollenwerk 2024). After a conflict, formal institutions rarely have the capacity to intervene in communal disputes to prevent them from becoming violent. Local leaders are critical in this regard, though their capacity may be limited too, as in the case mentioned earlier in which community members in Côte d'Ivoire complained that perpetrators ignored traditional leaders (Baldwin 2016).

When left unchecked, communal clashes threaten the goals of UN peacekeeping operations (PKOs), UN-brokered peace agreements, and the peacekeepers themselves (Autesserre 2010; Hunnicutt, Nomikos and Williams 2021). In recent years, the UN has therefore devoted more attention to preventing such disputes from becoming violent. In the subsequent sections, I discuss these efforts in greater detail, paying special attention to UN peacekeeper practices that prevent the onset of communal violence.

### **Localized Peace Enforcement Theory**

Although there are many different methods of resolving disputes, communal conflicts have increasingly overwhelmed domestic resolution mechanisms. The international community has intervened more and more often in conflict settings to help communities peacefully resolve disputes. Interveners raise the costs of violent escalation, which lowers the risk of cooperation and resolution. Yet not all international interventions are equally effective. In this section, I argue that peacekeepers succeed when community members perceive them as impartial enforcers of the peace, since this allows them to credibly threaten to punish escalation by any party – and therefore facilitate the peaceful resolution of communal disputes. In the following section, I explain why locals are likely to consider some interveners more impartial than others.

The UN increasingly designs PKOs and their mandates based on the understanding that communal violence is a central aspect of the conflicts to which they will be deployed. When the UN Security Council approves a PKO, UN force commanders establish permanent and forward operating bases in the country according to the preferences of the troop-contributing countries (Blair 2020). Peacekeepers conduct weekly patrols along set routes from these bases. Although these troops rarely use coercive force, the *threat* of force is central to their effectiveness. At the time of writing, more than 95 percent of deployed peacekeepers were mandated (i.e., allowed by international law) to use any means necessary, including violence, to protect civilians from harm (UN 2022, <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/protecting-civilians>). Localized peace enforcement as practiced by peacekeepers discourages the types of aggression

that might lead to bloodshed. Peacekeeping patrols deployed to conflict and postconflict settings thus lay the foundation for intergroup cooperation at the local level. International enforcement is particularly useful in multigroup postconflict societies because low state capacity, limited government legitimacy, and pervasive social mistrust limit the effectiveness of other sources of potential cooperation. Next, I use our understanding of what peacekeepers actually do at the local level to inform the theoretical model of communal dispute resolution and violence that I developed in the previous section.

### *Introducing Peacekeeping into the Game*

I describe three regular practices that together constitute *localized peace enforcement*. First, UN peacekeepers conduct patrols authorized to punish the violent resolution of communal disputes. Specifically, the patrols' rules of engagement allow them to use force to defuse communal disputes before they turn violent. Second, UN peacekeeping patrols apprehend individuals and groups that might escalate a communal dispute. When they do so, peacekeepers temporarily detain individuals before handing them over to domestic authorities. Third, peacekeepers monitor ongoing disputes through their constant patrolling. They gather information about potential threats of communal violence on these patrols, which they can use to enforce intergroup cooperation or apprehend individuals they suspect might escalate disputes.

Theoretically, we can model peacekeepers' localized enforcement (punishing, apprehending, and monitoring) as imposing a cost on the escalation of communal disputes. Peacekeepers thus boost an individual's willingness to cooperate by increasing the perceived probability that their partner will reciprocate cooperation. International actors – organizations, regional alliances, or countries – deploy troops to patrol villages, towns, and neighborhoods within cities to enforce peaceful interactions between members of different social groups. These peacekeeping patrols encourage cooperation by punishing (or threatening to punish) individual violations of the law. Either in collaboration with domestic police forces, traditional authorities, civil society leaders, or community leaders or on their own, peacekeepers interact with civilians, learn about ongoing local disputes, and attempt to prevent them from escalating.

Consider again the hypothetical dispute between the farmer and the cattle herder from different social groups. Now let us assume that a peacekeeper with sufficient capacity to prevent violent escalation discovers the dispute. I assume the peacekeepers will impose a cost  $c$  with probability  $p$ . The presence of an impartial peacekeeper alters the incentives of the individuals involved in the dispute: The payoffs change such

Table 3.2 *Payoffs from a stage game in a communal dispute (with peacekeepers)*

|                   | Farmer Cooperates   | Farmer Defects  |
|-------------------|---|---|
| Herder Cooperates | <u>Resolution:</u><br>(0, 0)                                | <u>Violence (farmer escalates):</u><br>( $-b - k, b - pc$ ) |
| Herder Defects    | <u>Violence (herder escalates):</u><br>( $b - pc, -b - k$ ) | <u>Violence (both escalate):</u><br>( $-k - pc, -k - pc$ )  |

that the cost to both parties of defecting on the deal increases, *regardless of whether the other party defects* (Table 3.2). Assuming the peacekeeper has sufficient capacity to enforce the communal dispute, both parties now have an incentive to cooperate rather than defect.

As in the communal dispute without intervention, I model the interaction as an infinitely repeated prisoner's dilemma. I retain the assumption that both players will use a Grim Trigger strategy. The payoff of cooperating forever is  $Eu_i(C) = 0$ , as before. The payoff of defecting, which offers  $b - pc$  in the first period of the game but then prompts the Grim Trigger and offers  $-k - pc$  for all future periods, is:

$$\begin{aligned} Eu_i(D) &= b - pc + (-k - pc)\delta + (-k - pc)\delta^2 + \dots \\ &= b - pc + \frac{\delta}{1 - \delta}(-k - pc) \end{aligned}$$

A player will choose to cooperate when the expected utility of cooperating forever is greater than that of defecting forever. Simplifying terms,

$$\begin{aligned} Eu_i(C) &\geq Eu_i(D) \\ \delta &\geq \frac{b}{b + k} - \frac{pc}{b + k} \end{aligned}$$

This payoff structure makes intuitive sense, given that if there is no localized peace enforcement ( $p = 0$ ), the players will be willing to cooperate under the same conditions as before.

#### *Analysis: Peacekeeping Increases Cooperation Space*

The shift in payoffs as a function of international interventions explains how such interventions make the onset of communal violence less likely. Figure 3.4 illustrates the discount factor needed to sustain cooperation as a function of the potential gain associated with taking advantage of the other player. I again assume that the cost incurred by either player when attacked by the other is an arbitrary constant ( $k = 0.5$ ). I assume that

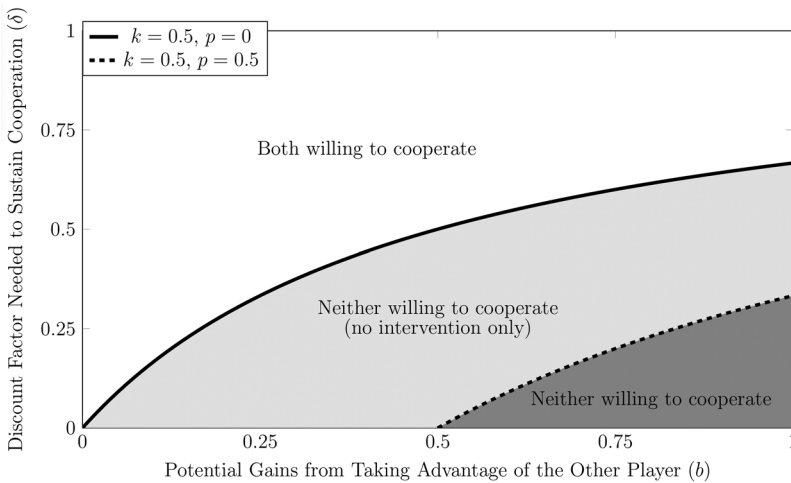


Figure 3.4 Willingness to cooperate to resolve a communal dispute (with intervention)

Note: The figure graphs the willingness of parties in a communal dispute to cooperate when equal costs would be incurred during a violent escalation but the probability of international intervention varies. The light gray area denotes the probability of violence without intervention (identical to Figure 3.2). The dark gray area shows how this probability shrinks when the likelihood of intervention increases.

the actual cost of intervention enforcement is a constant ( $c = 1$ ). The figure depicts the area of potential violence with (dark gray,  $p = 0.5$ ) and without a UN intervention (light gray,  $p = 0$ ), as well as the area of potential cooperation (white).

The figure shows that as the probability of intervention increases, the area of cooperation also becomes larger. By intervening in the dispute and changing the structural circumstances surrounding communal disputes, the international actor has removed the incentives for disputants in many interactions to escalate the conflict. The area in which intervention increases the likelihood of cooperation is shaded light gray. For example, for players for whom the discount factor is relatively middling (e.g.,  $\delta = 0.4$ ) and the gains associated with taking advantage of the other player are high (e.g.,  $b = 0.8$ ), disputes that would have become violent without intervention are no longer likely to.

Figure 3.4 also illustrates how intervention lowers the discount factor needed to sustain cooperation. Without intervention, cooperation will only occur when the discount factor is relatively high. However, intervention offers another potential option. Given that civil wars reduce the



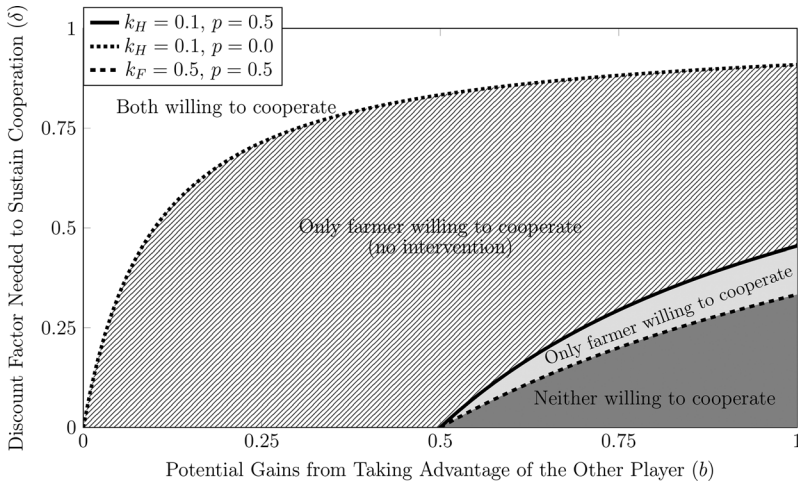


Figure 3.5 Willingness to cooperate to resolve a communal dispute (with intervention, different costs of conflict)

Note: The figure graphs the willingness of parties in a communal dispute to cooperate when they would incur different costs from a violent escalation of the dispute *and* there are different probabilities of international intervention. The line shaded area denotes the large probability of violence without intervention (identical to Figure 3.3). The light gray area indicates the probability of violence with intervention. The dark gray area shows how this probability shrinks when the probability of intervention increases.

discount factors for many residents of fragile settings, this explains why interventions are so critical.

So far I have assumed that the payoffs for each player are symmetrical. Next I assume that  $k_F \neq k_H$ . In this case, we would expect the farmer to be willing to cooperate when  $\delta \geq \frac{b}{b+k_F} - \frac{pc}{b+k_F}$  and the herder to be willing when  $\delta \geq \frac{b}{b+k_H} - \frac{pc}{b+k_H}$ . If the costs incurred from violence rise for the farmer but not the herder ( $k_F > k_H$ ), this increases the range of possible parameter values where violence might break out (Figure 3.5). Neither the farmer nor the herder is willing to cooperate when the parameters fall into the area of potential violence (dark gray). Yet unlike when the costs of conflict were the same, there is an additional area in which only the farmer is willing to cooperate, even with intervention (light gray). Because the costs of violence are lower for the herder than for the farmer, the herder will be more likely to escalate to violence. In the patterned area, only the farmer is willing to cooperate in the absence of intervention: This area represents the gains in cooperation from having UN peacekeepers on the ground.



## **Impartiality as a Key Mediator of Local-Level Effectiveness**

The book's primary argument is that local perceptions of peacekeepers' relative bias and impartiality shape the effectiveness of local peacekeeping enforcement. In this section, I first define bias and impartiality. Next, I identify colonial practices and postcolonial ethnic relations as a critical source of perceptions of bias. I then incorporate perceptions of peacekeeper bias into the formal model to demonstrate how they affect the willingness of individuals engaged in communal disputes to cooperate.

### *Conceptualizing Bias and Impartiality*

Intergroup bias is the systematic preference for one group over other groups. Bias results in choosing goods and services from, extending trust to, or cooperating exclusively with a favored group rather than a non-favored group. I define bias along two axes: bias toward an actor and bias toward an outcome. I focus entirely on the former and assume that peacekeepers are biased toward the same outcome – “peace.”

Prior research occasionally conflates impartiality (or the lack of bias) with *legitimacy*. As Kydd (2010) points out, at least some of the divergence in empirical studies on how bias influences international politics stems from different definitions of “bias.” Legitimacy refers to the diffuse support that governance institutions and actors experience more broadly rather than the specific support of political parties, policies, or individuals (Easton 1975; Nomikos and Stollenwerk 2024). Past studies have argued that international interveners face a dilemma: The more involved they become in a state, the less legitimate they seem (Lake 2016; Russell and Sambanis 2022). Yet this issue is primarily a dilemma for biased peacekeepers, because local groups frame their very presence as an extension of their bias. The more such peacekeepers invest in local-level conflict resolution, the less legitimate the intervention appears because they side with their favored group.

I examine how domestic social groups perceive international actors' bias toward other domestic social groups. Local actors will have different perceptions of bias depending on their own social group and the affiliations of the international actors. Prior work has attributed resistance to international interventions, peacekeeping, occupation, and empire to nationalism (Arreguin-Toft 2001; Spruyt 2005; Edelstein 2008; Darden forthcoming). However, I believe the situation is more complicated than that. While nationalism typically plays a role, a local actor may perceive some international actors as biased and others as impartial. Nor does the behavior of the international actor alone determine this assessment.

Prior beliefs and histories affect how local actors perceive international actors as well as how they behave in their presence.<sup>3</sup>

### *Generation of Sticky Perceptions of Bias*

Where does bias come from? Why does it arise? Individuals, as social beings, have multiple social identities – distinctions that categorize groups of individuals, such as Greeks, Turks, Christians, Muslims, communists, and fascists. In different social situations, various cleavages become more or less salient (e.g., ethnic, religious, or ideological). Under these circumstances, intergroup bias can serve many useful purposes. On the one hand, bias and reciprocal favoritism help individuals boost their own in-group, social identity, and, by extension, their own self-esteem and status derived from this identity.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, in-group bias can serve as a rudimentary yet invaluable survival technique that helps individuals minimize the risk of defection during cooperation (Brewer 1999).<sup>5</sup> Together, these factors ensure that bias remains an ever-present feature of intergroup relations. The process of categorizing an individual as belonging to a particular group (and not belonging to others) is the first stepping stone toward bias.

Social psychologists theorize that bias has two sources, which they classify as “objective” and “subjective” (Tajfel and Turner 1979). *Objective* sources of bias may be traced to political, economic, and historical factors, such as the intergroup tensions generated between the historically politically advantaged Tutsis and disadvantaged Hutus in preindependence Rwanda. Such tensions also exist between international actors and domestic social groups, especially between Western states and social groups in conflict settings that have a colonial history.

Relations between international actors and domestic groups are likely to feature powerful perceptions of bias that are difficult to overcome for two reasons. First, colonial relations between international actors and favored domestic groups have lingered in postcolonial states for generations, creating a historical rationale for nonfavored groups to perceive

<sup>3</sup> Kocher, Lawrence and Monteiro (2018) make a similar point in their examination of French opposition to the Nazi occupation of France.

<sup>4</sup> This is a foundational building block of “Social Identity Theory” in social psychology. See the work of Henri Tajfel and his colleagues (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Tajfel et al. 1971). For a review of applications to political science, see Kalin and Sambanis (2018).

<sup>5</sup> This *raison d’être* has also been familiar to students of international relations, at least since the seminal work of neoliberal institutionalists, who devoted considerable ink to the question of how states increase their absolute power through various strategies of cooperation while minimizing the risk that other states will take advantage of them. See in particular Keohane and Nye (1973), Keohane (1984), Axelrod and Keohane (1985), and Axelrod (2006).

certain international peacekeepers as biased in favor of the international actor's perceived favorite groups. Second, international actors have limited interactions with domestic groups, which generates very few opportunities to improve perceptions of the international actor. In short, historical perceptions of peacekeeper bias are likely to remain immutable during peace operations.

*Subjective* sources of bias are rooted in social interactions between individuals who are categorized (and self-categorize) as members of different social groups. Social interactions create or reinforce cleavages between groups. The mere existence of such cleavages creates space for intergroup bias, however small. When individuals interact as individuals rather than as representative members of a social group, the interaction is less likely to lead to the creation of new biases or to magnify old biases. Interpersonal interactions emphasize the similarities between individuals rather than any differences based on their social categories. Such interactions will therefore not intensify an individual's bias (i.e., her preference for her own in-group) since she can rely on her interpersonal interactions to generate information about the other individual; she does not need to rely on the cognitive shortcuts provided by intergroup bias. By contrast, the more a social interaction is defined by an individual's social group membership, the more reminders surface of the differences between the two members.

Although it is possible in theory for an international actor to improve its own image, in practice, perceptions of peacekeepers are difficult to overcome. Since international peacekeepers and community members rarely interact on an interpersonal level, there are very few opportunities to change perceptions of the international actor, for better or worse. When they do interact, the peacekeeper does so on behalf of an international actor, not as an individual.

#### *Colonialism and Postcolonial Ethnic Relations Shape Perceptions of Bias*

Perceptions of international actors are not uniformly distributed among a domestic population. Colonial policies and the structure of postcolonial ethnic relations are especially important in accounting for such variation. Colonial occupiers typically divided their subjects to subjugate and govern them. In some cases, colonial powers favored a particular ethnic group, typically a minority group. In other cases, they targeted certain minority groups, generating greater anti-colonial resentment within these groups than others. Members of nonfavored groups thus have prior beliefs about the presence of international actors in their state that predate the ongoing conflict. Locals will interpret contemporary

interventions through the prism of these priors. There are three types of ethnic power relations that generate long-lasting biases.

First, if favored minority groups remain in power after independence thanks to continued support from the colonial power, excluded groups will perceive the colonial power as biased in the minorities' favor. For example, in the Central African Republic the minority Riverine ethnic groups stayed in power following decolonization with the support of the former colonizer, France. The Northern Groups (Baya, Banda, Mandjia, Sara, and Goula), which constitute 83 percent of the population, remain out of power and perceive the French as biased in favor of the Riverine groups.

Second, a similar power dynamic emerges when dominant groups are in charge following colonialism. These are demographically large groups that either seize control during the decolonization process or are granted control by the colonizing power. These can be either outright majorities or large pluralities. In many cases, these groups were subject to the worst of colonial policies. For example, the French targeted the Merina, Madagascar's dominant group (part of the "coastal dwellers" who control politics in the state), during the 1947–1948 repression of the Malagasy Rebellion that is considered one of the worst acts of colonial-era violence (Garcia-Ponce and Wantchekon 2011).

More generally, postcolonial governments crafted policies following decolonization that would forge an independent path for their new states. The independence movements in such societies delegitimized minorities perceived as having received favorable treatment during colonialism. Governments led by dominant groups framed colonialism as a partnership between a foreign occupier and a local minority group. These nation-building narratives prime majority groups to perceive international actors as biased in favor of minority groups.

These new states spread and inculcate values about the nation through a variety of methods, none more systematic than schooling (Darden and Grzymala-Busse 2006). Curricula and textbooks can be adapted wholesale to fit the leadership's view of the nation. For example, Belgium had relied upon members of the Tutsi minority, representing about 15 percent of the population, to govern Rwanda's other ethnic groups. After independence, the majority Hutu group seized control of the government and began to craft a national identity centered around the primacy of the Hutu population. The ruling regime portrayed Tutsis as foreign collaborators, always favored by colonial powers. Nowhere was this portrait of Tutsis clearer than in Rwandan education during the exclusionary Hutu regime.

A third type of ethnic power relations emerges when some minority groups exploited colonial sociopolitical structures to the same extent as demographically dominant ethnic groups, in effect creating unranked

societies with equal groups at independence or ranked societies with the minority group ahead of the demographically dominant group (Horowitz 1985; Tambiah 1989). For example, black Mauritians had gained favor with French colonizers by seeking educational opportunities and learning French in greater proportions than their Arab Mauritanian counterparts (Magistro 1993). Members of these ethnic groups occupied special economic and social niches in colonial life, coming from other French colonies or other parts of the same colony to fulfill a specific function. Colonial powers would empower these niche groups in order to maximize economic efficiency in the colony, effectively creating an ethnic hierarchy and division of labor.

As a result of the postcolonial ethnic power relations described earlier, I expect domestic populations to perceive peacekeepers from two sets of countries as especially biased. First, perceptions of peacekeeper bias are most likely to manifest when a country returns to its former colonial possession as a peacekeeper. Former colonial powers account for the vast majority of military interventions in recent conflicts in Africa, including the United Kingdom's intervention in Sierra Leone in 2000 (Operation Palliser) and the French intervention in Mali in 2013 (Operation Serval). This involvement reinvigorates feelings of being "imposed upon" among the local population (Talentino 2007). Additionally, I expect domestic populations to perceive peacekeepers from neighboring countries with similar identity cleavages as biased. Even if power relations are different in those neighboring countries, as long as the identity cleavages are similar, I expect it to affect local populations' perceptions.

### **Incorporating Biased Peacekeeping into the Model**

Impartial peacekeepers convince individuals to find cooperative solutions to disputes. For individuals embroiled in a communal dispute, it is simply not worth using violence to resolve a disagreement. Local residents believe impartial peacekeepers will stop any violence, attack any perpetrators of violence, or detain survivors. Thus violence will be ineffective at best, and counterproductive at worst. The deterrent effect of impartial peacekeepers also reassures individuals that other parties to local disputes will not use violence, for the same reason. Should they try, the impartial peacekeeper will stop them. Thus, by process of elimination, peaceful resolution becomes more appealing (less costly) than violence. By contrast, biased peacekeepers fail to reassure individuals that they will protect them from violence by favored parties. While individuals from nonfavored groups do not doubt that impartial peacekeepers will punish them for violent acts, they are not confident that biased peacekeepers will punish a favored group to protect nonfavored civilians.

Table 3.3 *Payoffs from a stage game in a communal dispute*

|                   | Farmer Cooperates   | Farmer Defects   |
|-------------------|---|--|
| Herder Cooperates | <u>Resolution:</u><br>(0, 0)                                  | <u>Violence (farmer escalates):</u><br>( $-b - k, b - p_Hc$ )  |
| Herder Defects    | <u>Violence (herder escalates):</u><br>( $b - p_Hc, -b - k$ ) | <u>Violence (both escalate):</u><br>( $-k - p_Hc, -k - p_Fc$ ) |

*Payoffs with Biased Peacekeeping*

To illustrate why perceptions of peacekeeper bias matter, I return to the stylized example of the farmer and the herder. As before, let's assume a peacekeeping patrol discovers the dispute. However, this time the patrol is biased in favor of one of the disputant parties. We can denote this formally by individualizing the perceived probability parameter  $p$  as  $p_F$ , the probability that the peacekeeper will impose a punishment cost  $c$  on the farmer, and  $p_H$ , the probability that the peacekeeper will impose a punishment cost  $c$  on the herder. As shown in Table 3.3, the payoffs change such that both parties pay an increased cost if they defect on the deal *if the peacekeepers are not biased in their favor* (i.e.,  $p_i > 0$ ).

Recall again that I originally modeled the game as a repeated prisoner's dilemma. As before, the discount factor is denoted by  $\delta \in (0, 1)$ . I retain the assumption that both players will use a Grim Trigger strategy. Given these payoffs and strategy, what must the discount factor be in order to sustain cooperation? Let's assume that there has been no defection in the past. Then, given that the other player is using Grim Trigger and the payoffs are symmetrical, the payoff of cooperating forever is  $Eu_i I = 0$ , as before. The payoff of defecting, which offers  $b - p_i c$  in the first period of the game but then prompts the Grim Trigger and offers  $-k - p_i c$  for all future periods, is:

$$\begin{aligned} Eu_i(D) &= b - p_i c + (-k - p_i c)\delta + (-k - p_i c)\delta^2 + \dots \\ &= b - p_i c + \frac{\delta}{1 - \delta}(-k - p_i c) \end{aligned}$$

A player will choose to cooperate when the expected utility of cooperating forever is greater than that of defecting forever. Simplifying terms,

$$\begin{aligned} Eu_i(C) &\geq Eu_i(D) \\ \delta &\geq \frac{b}{b + k} - \frac{p_i c}{b + k} \end{aligned}$$

In the previous discussion, I modeled perceptions of impartiality as  $p = p_F = p_H$ . I now relax this assumption and assume that  $p_F > p_H$ . That is, the farmer believes the peacekeeper will be more likely to punish the farmer than the herder for escalating the dispute. For instance, the peacekeeper may be from a country that the farmer associates with the same ethnic group as that of the herder; thus the farmer believes the international peacekeeper is biased in favor of the herder. To illustrate how each player's calculus changes, I consider the payoffs for each player separately. In either case, a player will choose to cooperate when the expected utility of cooperating forever is greater than that of defecting forever.

*Analysis: Biased Peacekeeping Reduces Cooperation Space*

The shift in payoffs explains how biased peacekeepers may be less successful at preventing communal violence than impartial peacekeepers. Figure 3.6 illustrates the discount factor needed to sustain cooperation as a function of the potential gains from taking advantage of the other player. I again assume that the cost incurred by either player from

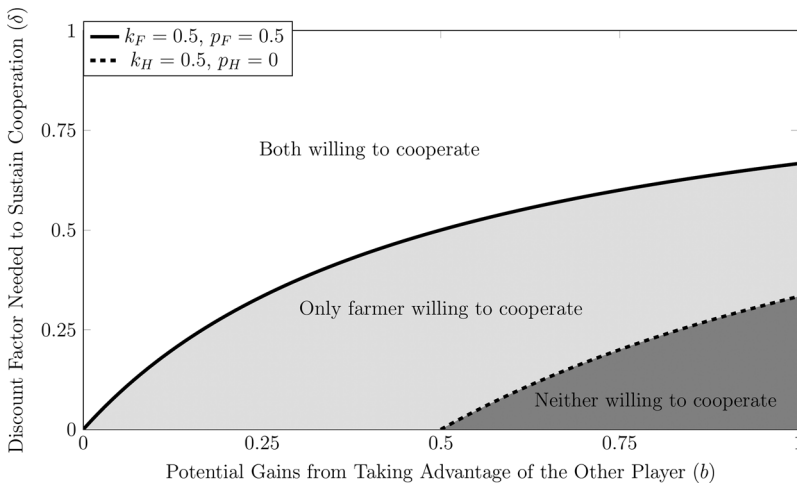


Figure 3.6 Willingness to cooperate to resolve communal dispute (with peacekeepers biased in favor of herder)

Note: The figure graphs players' willingness to cooperate when equal costs are incurred during a violent escalation of the dispute *but* peacekeepers are not equally likely to intervene against both farmers and herders ( $p_H < p_F$ ). The dark gray area indicates the area of potential violence in the presence of an international intervention. The light gray area denotes the space in which the farmer is willing to cooperate but the herder is not.

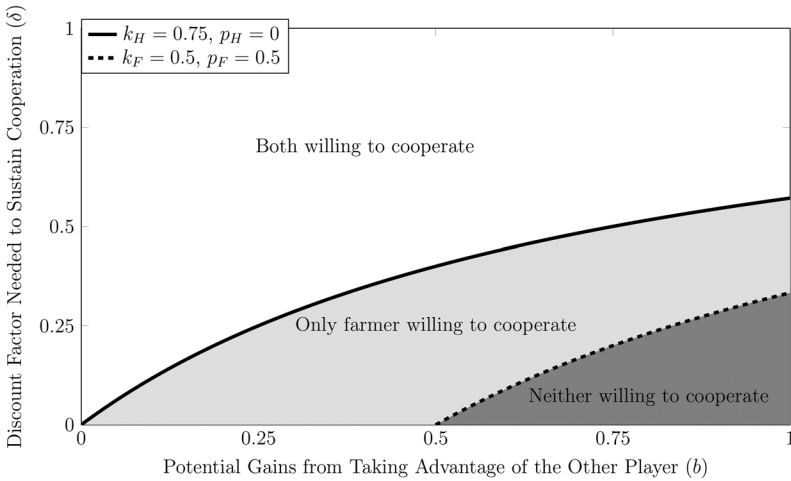


Figure 3.7 Willingness to cooperate to resolve a communal dispute (with peacekeepers biased in favor of more cooperative herder)

Note: The figure depicts players’ willingness to cooperate when the peacekeeper is more likely to intervene against the party that would incur lower costs from engaging in violence. The dark gray area indicates the area of potential violence in the presence of an international intervention. The light gray area denotes the space in which the farmer is willing to cooperate but the herder is not.

instigating an attack is an arbitrary constant ( $k = 0.5$ ), and that the cost of intervention enforcement is a constant ( $c = 1$ ). Clashes may become violent in the presence of an international intervention in the dark gray area indicated in the figure because neither the farmer nor the herder is willing to cooperate under these conditions. The light gray area denotes the space in which the farmer is willing to cooperate but the herder is not (or the farmer does not believe the herder will cooperate). In this scenario the farmer believes the biased intervener is likely to punish the farmer but not the herder; thus it behooves the farmer (but not necessarily the herder) to cooperate.

This analysis does not necessarily mean that biased peacekeeping is meaningless or cannot increase individuals’ willingness to cooperate. Indeed, if a peacekeeper is biased in favor of the more cooperative side, then biased peacekeeping might sustain cooperation. So far I have assumed that the payoffs to each player are symmetrical. Next I assume that  $k_F \neq k_H$ . In this case, we would expect the farmer to be willing to cooperate when  $\delta \geq \frac{b}{b+k_F} - \frac{p_F c}{b+k_F}$  and the herder to cooperate when  $\delta \geq \frac{b}{b+k_H} - \frac{p_H c}{b+k_H}$  (Figure 3.7).



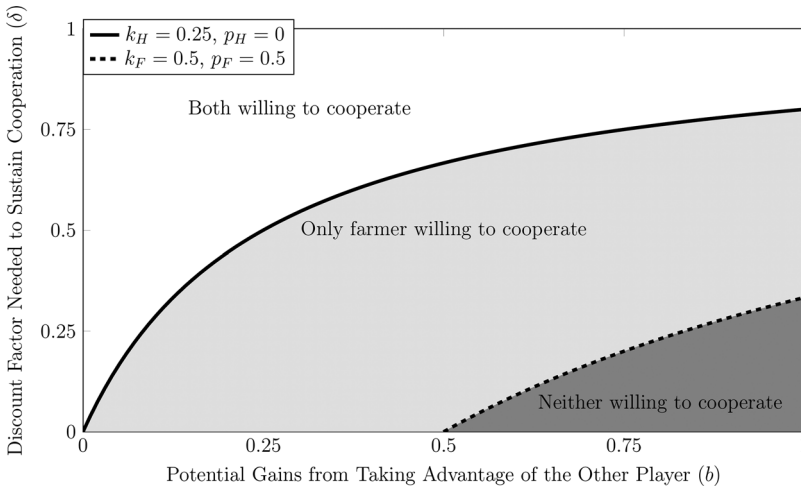


Figure 3.8 Willingness to cooperate to resolve a communal dispute (with peacekeepers biased in favor of less cooperative herder)

Note: The figure illustrates players' willingness to cooperate when the peacekeeper is more likely to intervene against the party that would incur higher costs from engaging in violence. The area of potential violence in the presence of an international intervention is shaded dark gray. The light gray area denotes the space in which the farmer is willing to cooperate but the herder is not.

Retaining the same assumptions as above, I further assume that  $k_H > k_F$ , so the herder is now more willing to cooperate than the farmer. The biased intervener does indeed increase the cooperation space by effectively making it more appealing to the farmer, who does not want to cooperate, to choose cooperation. However, if we assume that  $k_H < k_F$  and the herder is less cooperative than the farmer, the problem of biased peacekeeping is further exacerbated (Figure 3.8).

### The UN's Institutional Advantages

I have kept the discussion so far purposefully general. For the remainder of the book, I focus explicitly on UN PKOs. As I explained in Chapter 2, UN peacekeepers are the primary international enforcers of local-level peace and I focus on UN interventions because the UN increasingly designs its PKOs and their mandates based on the understanding that communal violence is a central aspect of the conflicts to which they will be deployed. Prior studies have discussed UN efforts to bolster conflict resolution institutions, elections, and the rule of law (Matanock

2017; Blair 2019, 2020; Smidt 2020*b*) with a focus primarily on civilian operations.

In this section, I explain why UN PKOs are uniquely suited to enforce the peaceful resolution of communal disputes. I begin by explaining why local residents are likely to perceive the UN as impartial. Domestic populations have prior beliefs about the presence of international actors in their country that predate the ongoing conflict. Locals will interpret contemporary peacekeeping through the prism of these priors. I argue that perceptions of the UN as impartial directly improve its ability to contain communal disputes. Therefore, I expect that UN peacekeepers will be better able than those from a foreign country to dissuade locals from escalating a communal dispute. Because community members are relatively more likely to perceive the UN as impartial in the enforcement of their communal disputes, they will interpret UN peacekeeper threats to punish any violations of the peace as credible. Peacekeepers change individual incentives – which matter to community-level peace.

Three institutional advantages set the UN apart from other international actors: (1) a “veil” of multilateralism, (2) diverse membership, and (3) a doctrinal commitment to avoid using force.<sup>6</sup> This section describes each advantage in turn and ends with a discussion of the UN’s impartiality. Each advantage applies to domestic perceptions of the UN’s role in communal disputes rather than countrywide civil wars. As I explain in greater detail in the final part of this section, the perception of the UN as impartial does not extend to its intervention in large-scale conflicts. Indeed, in recent years the UN has become increasingly implicated in such wars.

### *Multilateralism*

The UN is a multilateral international organization branded in conflict and postconflict settings as a peacemaker. The UN Department of Peace Operations<sup>7</sup> is an established institutional mechanism that implements and leads its PKOs independently of the UN’s member states.<sup>8</sup> The UN brand is so pervasive that locals in conflict and postconflict settings informally refer to UN soldiers and police as “blue helmets”

<sup>6</sup> Howard 2019*b* similarly suggests that “what distinguishes peacekeeping from other forms of military intervention are its doctrinal principles of impartiality, consent, and the nonuse of force” (p. 129).

<sup>7</sup> This department was previously known as the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, which was established in 1992 as part of UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali’s Agenda for Peace program. It was renamed in 2019.

<sup>8</sup> I use the term “member states” to refer to the constituent members of the UN, and “countries” to describe the political entity that is each member state.

and “blue berets,” respectively, based on their uniforms.<sup>9</sup> The independence of this framework allows the UN to “launder” its actions to disassociate itself from locals’ perceptions that certain nationalities are more biased than others (Abbott and Snidal 1998, 2000). These factors give individual UN peacekeepers a “veil” of multilateralism that affects how local actors view their conduct in peace operations (Kahler 1992; Martin 1992). While domestic populations view former colonial powers or neighboring countries as having ethnic cleavages that align with the interests of their own country’s ethnic, religious, or tribal groups, they see UN peacekeepers differently.

### *Diverse Membership*

With 193 sovereign member states, the UN is an especially diverse international organization. Other interveners have far fewer members: The European Union has twenty-seven, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization has thirty-two, the Economic Community of West African States has fifteen, and the African Union has fifty-five members. Moreover, none of these alternative organizations is as culturally diverse as the UN. The constituent forces of each UN mission are constantly rotated so that the nationality and composition shifts over time. Thus even if local populations connect the presence of some UN peacekeepers to a given nationality, this view will not apply to all UN peacekeepers deployed to a setting. Multilateral international organizations such as the UN operate without the burden of legacies associated with individual countries (Bush and Prather 2018). Such a history might make locals hesitant to believe a non-UN peacekeeper would intervene on their behalf if a noncooperative partner was from a favored group.

### *Nonuse of Force*

UN peacekeepers rarely victimize civilians. While civilians are not intentional targets of UN peacekeepers by practice, UN peacekeepers have engaged in sexual exploitation and abuse. Although relatively few allegations against peacekeeping troops have been recorded (forty-nine in 2019, thirty-nine in 2018, and forty-one in 2017), these numbers likely vastly undercount actual occurrences of abuse. These abuses have important potential consequences for how local populations perceive UN

<sup>9</sup> Recent scholarship suggests that the branding of foreign aid may convey information about international actors and, even when it does not, improves attitudes toward the international actor. See Dietrich, Mahmud and Winters (2018), Dietrich, Hyde and Winters (2019). This effect will likely be even greater with the “blue helmet” brand since it is so strongly associated with the UN. See Howard (2019b).

peacekeepers. I return to this topic in great detail in Chapter 9, where I examine potential challenges for UN peacekeeping moving forward.

When international actors commit violence against individuals from a certain group, this causes other members of that group to believe the actor is biased against them. For example, US violence increased Sunni tribal identification with and support for insurgents in Iraq and decreased Pashtuns' willingness to cooperate with US forces in Afghanistan (Sambanis, Schulhofer-Wohl and Shayo 2012; Lyall, Blair and Imai 2013). Country-led peace operations are far more likely to include violence against civilians than UN-led peacekeeping missions due to the practice of their operations. Individual countries have broad and expansive mandates when intervening abroad that permit the use of violence against civilians. Moreover, they couple ground patrols with aerial bombing campaigns that indiscriminately target civilians (Shurkin 2014). By contrast, UN PKOs' mandates limit violence against civilians as much as possible (Brahimi 2000).<sup>10</sup>

### *Impartiality?*

Skeptics question whether the UN is truly impartial. International relations scholar Richard Betts has referred to UN impartiality as a "delusion" (Betts 1994). According to this line of thinking, when an actor invests as much human and financial capital in a postconflict state as the UN does, it cannot maintain its impartiality (Lake 2016). The UN Security Council's bias in favor of certain armed groups might also manifest in perceptions of individual UN peacekeepers (Talentino 2007; Benson and Kathman 2014; Rhoads 2016). The Security Council, which consists of five permanent members (the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, China, and France) and a rotating set of ten member states, must approve PKOs before they deploy *and* in every year of their operation. Past research shows that member states use their position on the Security Council to influence the placement of UN peacekeepers (Mikulaschek 2017; Carnegie and Mikulaschek 2020).

However, this criticism applies to political elites and armed groups rather than citizens disputing local issues. Interviews and survey evidence suggest that regular citizens in countries with UN peacekeeping missions

<sup>10</sup> Prior research suggests that exposure to violence has no adverse effects on behavior toward members of an in-group and may increase political participation. See Bellows and Miguel (2006), Blattman (2009), Voors et al. (2012), and Gilligan, Pasquale and Samii (2014). However, violence committed by international actors in PKOs can adversely affect individual behavior toward an out-group (e.g., the international actor that perpetrated the violence). A recent review of this literature concurs with this assessment. See Bauer et al. (2016), p. 1.

worry more that the UN does *too little* (Talentino 2007; Kelmendi and Radin 2018). These views originate in past UN peacekeeping missions, particularly in the 1990s or outside of sub-Saharan Africa, when mandates were particularly limited. For example, a civilian in Haiti expressed frustration with the United Nations Multidimensional Mission in Haiti's limited (Chapter VI) mandate in 2004: "If we call them, they say it is not their job – but what is their job?"<sup>11</sup> Moreover, these critiques conflate being impartial with being *neutral* (Kydd 2010). Since the UN actively intervenes to maintain order, it is not neutral. However, because it applies force equally to any party or individual that disturbs the peace, domestic audiences perceive UN peacekeepers as relatively impartial.

Nonetheless, there are at least three important caveats to the argument that the UN is more effective than other potential international interveners because it is impartial. First, I assume that on balance, UN peacekeepers will be perceived as more impartial than peacekeepers from other countries; I do not claim they will be perceived as entirely impartial. Second, I do not claim that the UN is never biased in favor of one party to the conflict at the negotiating table; it typically favors the elected government in peace negotiations. I contend that elite interactions between leaders of political factions are fundamentally different in nature from those between members of the same community. Third, I do not assume that all UN peacekeepers from different contributing countries are perceived the same; domestic populations will likely perceive some as more impartial than others.

For example, Muslim Fulani cattle herders and Christian farmers in the CAR both perceive the UN as largely impartial.<sup>12</sup> The payoffs from escalating a given dispute are relatively low for both Muslims and Christians since they will face swift retribution from the UN. Moreover, they do not have to worry that the other party in the dispute will use violence since UN peacekeepers will punish them as well. With violent alternatives no longer feasible, both sides will seek to peacefully resolve any dispute. In this way, the presence of UN peacekeepers in the CAR has limited the spread of local-level conflict. French troops, by contrast, have struggled to convince Muslim groups, including the Fulani, that they are not biased in favor of the Christian anti-Balaka groups. For this reason, Muslim Fulani in communal disputes with Christians have continued seeking the support of armed groups from the Séléka rebel group

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Pouligny (2006), p. 110. Missions with a Chapter VI rather than a Chapter VII mandate lack the authority to intervene in local disputes.

<sup>12</sup> International Peace Institute, "Prioritizing and sequencing peacekeeping mandates: The case of MINUSCA," 2019.

coalition rather than France.<sup>13</sup> These rebels frequently escalate disputes, continuing the cattle war in the CAR.<sup>14</sup>

### **Hypotheses from *Localized Peace Enforcement Theory***

*Localized Peace Enforcement Theory*, the micro-level theory I have articulated in this chapter, has observable implications for the prospects for peace in both conflict and postconflict settings. Many aspects of the theory are difficult to test because it predicts the nonoccurrence of violence. I therefore rely on the formal model to deduce hypotheses at separate levels of analysis to validate different components of the theoretical framework. In Chapters 5 to 8, I test these hypotheses using a variety of social scientific methodologies and data. The variety of methods used and levels analyzed should increase our confidence in the theory. In this section, I begin by discussing the four sets of observable implications (hypotheses) derived from the theory. I then return to the alternative explanations that I introduced in Chapter 1, outlining how each differs with regard to testable predictions compared to my theory. Table 3.4 summarizes the book's analytical framework.

#### *Individual Beliefs*

The first set of hypotheses concerns the beliefs of individuals engaged in a dispute. The book's overarching claim is that deploying UN peacekeepers makes communal disputes less likely to become violent. However, the theoretical discussion in this chapter has focused on individual motivations to cooperate and resolve disputes. Broadly, I argue that peacekeepers shape civilians' beliefs about the actions of others. To begin with, international peacekeepers perceived as impartial should make individuals involved in a local dispute more willing to cooperate with members of a different social group than if no peacekeepers are present or if they are thought to be biased. This mechanism forms the basis of the first hypothesis to be tested:

**Hypothesis 1a:** *Impartial peacekeepers make individuals engaged in a communal dispute MORE likely to believe the other party will reciprocate their attempts at cooperation.*

<sup>13</sup> Because this coalition has been officially disbanded, members of these groups are also known as "ex-Séléka."

<sup>14</sup> FRANCE 24, "Muslims protest at French troops in Central African Republic," December 12, 2013.

Table 3.4 Summary of explanations derived from localized peace enforcement theory and three primary alternative explanations

|                                    | Outcomes of Interest   |  |   |
|------------------------------------|--|--|---|
|                                    | Beliefs  | Willingness to Cooperate   | Communal Violence   |
| Localized Peace Enforcement Theory | <p>Impartial PKOs increase belief that others will reciprocate cooperation (H1a)</p> <p>Impartial PKOs decrease belief that others will escalate dispute (H1b)</p> | <p>Impartial PKOs increase willingness to cooperate (H2a)</p> <p>Impartial PKOs increase willingness to cooperate more among individuals with low levels of trust (H2b)</p> <p>Impartial PKOs increase willingness to cooperate more among individuals with more contact with PKOs (H2c)</p> | <p>Impartial peacekeepers decrease communal violence (H3)</p>   |
| Alternative Explanations           | <p>No prediction about beliefs about reciprocity</p> <p>All peacekeepers decrease beliefs that others will escalate dispute</p>                                    | <p>All peacekeepers increase willingness to cooperate</p>  | <p>All peacekeepers decrease communal violence</p>  |
| Biased/Invested PKOs               | <p>No prediction about beliefs about reciprocity</p> <p>Biased PKOs decrease beliefs that others will escalate dispute</p>   | <p>Biased peacekeepers increase willingness to cooperate</p>   | <p>Biased peacekeepers decrease communal violence</p>   |
| Top-down Institutionalization      | <p>No predictions about beliefs</p>  | <p>New institutions increase willingness to cooperate</p>  | <p>No relationship between peacekeeping deployment and communal violence conditional on establishing institutions</p> |

This hypothesis follows from the argument that impartial peacekeepers will be able to credibly signal their commitment to enforce cooperation from all parties, regardless of their background. Next, armed with the belief and reassurance that others will reciprocate their attempts at cooperation, civilians will update their beliefs about whether other disputants will use violence. Specifically, I argue that UN patrols change the nature of the security dilemma facing individuals engaged in a communal dispute. Although others' intentions remain unknowable, the presence of peacekeepers makes civilians less likely to believe other disputants will resolve a communal dispute violently. Civilians will therefore believe they are safer and have fewer incentives to take escalatory actions of their own. This shift in beliefs makes all sides less likely to resort to violence to resolve a dispute.

**Hypothesis 1b:** *Impartial peacekeepers make individuals engaged in a communal dispute LESS likely to believe the other party will resort to violence to resolve the dispute.*

#### *Willingness to Cooperate*

This change in beliefs makes individuals more willing to cooperate when impartial peacekeepers are present than when there are no peacekeepers or when they are biased. The second set of hypotheses elucidates this change in behavior.

Peacekeeping patrols encourage cooperation by punishing (or threatening to punish) individual violations of the law. Either on their own or in collaboration with domestic police forces, traditional authorities, civil society leaders, or community leaders, peacekeepers interact with civilians, learn about ongoing disputes in a locality, and attempt to stop them from escalating. The formal theory also implies that as the probability of intervention increases, the area of cooperation also swells. By intervening in the dispute and changing the structural circumstances surrounding communal disputes, the international actor removes the incentives for disputants in many interactions to escalate the conflict. Hypothesis 2a specifies this relationship formally.

**Hypothesis 2a:** *Impartial peacekeepers make individuals engaged in a communal dispute MORE willing to cooperate.*

Next, the theory implies that peacekeeping will be most effective when baseline levels of intergroup and social trust are low. Under these conditions, enforcement is needed the most since members of different social groups will have little reason to trust each other enough to cooperate. Moreover, if an individual trusts a potential partner enough, external retribution for uncooperative behavior might not be necessary since they



believe the partner will reciprocate any attempts at cooperation. Peacekeepers are unlikely to have a significant effect on such interactions. Hypothesis 2b summarizes these expectations.

**Hypothesis 2b:** *Impartial peacekeepers increase individuals' willingness to cooperate more among individuals with low levels of trust than among those with high levels of trust.*

Additionally, I posit that the more individuals interact with peacekeepers, the more likely they are to trust their enforcement commitment and to believe that any potential interactions with members of other groups will be policed. Although there is limited data on interactions between civilians and peacekeepers, past research suggests that UN bases may increase economic activity (Mvukiyeha and Samii 2010) and that UN peacekeeping patrols may strengthen perceptions of state authority (Blair 2019). Prominent critiques argue that UN peacekeepers should interact *more*, not less, with local populations (Autesserre 2015). Prior work has demonstrated that international peacekeepers can build fruitful relationships with local populations through increased contact and communication (Gordon and Young 2017; Bove, Ruffa and Ruggeri 2020).

**Hypothesis 2c:** *Impartial peacekeepers increase individuals' willingness to cooperate more among individuals who have frequent contact with peacekeepers than among those who have infrequent contact.*

### *Communal Violence*

Finally, *Localized peace enforcement theory* implies that impartial peacekeepers will reduce the onset of communal violence, all other factors held equal. The logic of this prediction derives from a combination of the two mechanisms articulated above: Impartial peacekeepers shift beliefs (H1a–b), which makes individuals more willing to cooperate (H2a–c). Communities filled with individuals who are willing to cooperate with each other to peacefully resolve disputes are less likely to have violence break out than those populated by individuals who are less willing to cooperate.

**Hypothesis 3:** *All else equal, impartial peacekeepers decrease the likelihood of communal violence.*

This escalation hypothesis assumes there are no other shifts in supply or demand factors that would alter the risk of violent escalation. For instance, climate change-induced migration could serve as an important exogenous source of increase in the demand for violence. Similarly, the

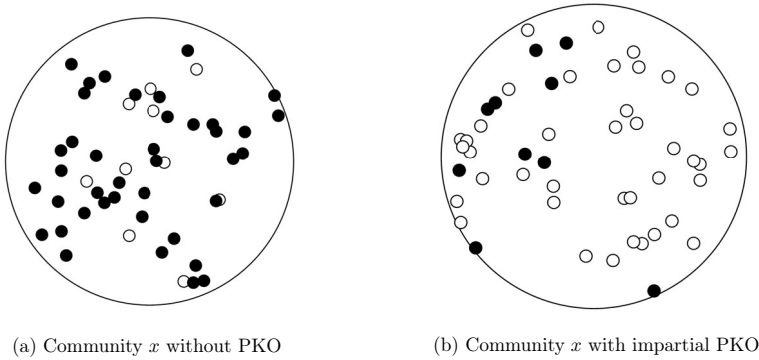


Figure 3.9 Illustration of the escalation dynamic in the theoretical framework (Hypothesis 3)

rise of a new extremist movement could serve as an important endogenous (or exogenous) source of increase in the supply of violence. The hypothesis assumes that the effect of peacekeepers can be observed when we hold these factors constant.

For example, consider two counterfactual situations in the same community,  $x$ , displayed in Figure 3.9. Each dot in the figure represents a communal dispute; black dots depict disputes in which one of the parties is not willing to cooperate and white dots represent disputes in which both parties are willing to cooperate. When impartial PKOs deploy to a community, they decrease the number of disputes in which one party is not willing to cooperate (black dots). Even if all of those disputes do become violent, we should observe less communal violence when impartial PKOs are deployed.

#### *Alternative Explanations*

*Localized peace enforcement theory* maintains that international peacekeepers keep the peace by preventing communal violence at the local level *when they are perceived as impartial*. There are three primary alternatives to my focus on impartiality; Table 3.4 summarizes the observable implications.

The first alternative explanation is that peacekeepers' physical presence in a community will contain disputes – by either creating a buffer zone that separates communities or generating information about communal disputes that can be used to resolve them. According to this perspective, there is a direct link between the number of troops deployed and their ability to prevent violence.

These explanations also emphasize peacekeepers' ability to intervene to help locals commit to peacefully resolve communal disputes.<sup>15</sup> Local actors also respond to peacekeepers' apparent resolve – that is, the probability that a peacekeeper will use force to protect civilians if a violent event occurs. The more peacekeepers there are, the more likely local actors are to practice restraint.<sup>16</sup> A substantial peacekeeping presence may also facilitate the flow of information between peacekeepers and civilians, which would help interveners identify and prevent disputes from becoming violent. This logic maintains that more “boots on the ground” allow peacekeepers to gather more information in daily patrols (Gordon and Young 2017; Hultman, Kathman and Shannon 2020).<sup>17</sup> To gather information about a dispute, peacekeepers must have local collaborators who are willing to work with them (Kalyvas 2006). Therefore, the more peacekeepers the UN deploys to an area, the easier it is for them to protect potential collaborators.

Previous studies have highlighted the importance of rapidly deploying peacekeepers from military bases to limit violence in conflict settings (Ruggeri, Dorussen and Gizelis 2017; Fjelde, Hultman and Nilsson 2019; Hultman, Kathman and Shannon 2020). Yet these analyses focus exclusively on the behavior of armed groups rather than violence originating from communal clashes. I instead suggest that the mechanisms that explain the effectiveness of PKOs at the local level differ fundamentally from those that are important at the country level. For example, peacekeepers operating within communities do not create physical buffer zones to separate disputing parties, as is critical to success when deployed in the midst of fighting between armed groups (Hultman, Kathman and Shannon 2014). Nonetheless, the logic of my argument aligns with the idea that in the absence of a third-party enforcer, ethnic groups will not cooperate due to an inability to credibly commit to an agreement (Walter 1997; Fearon 1998; Matanock 2017). In this sense, peacekeepers can help solve commitment problems that arise between civilians just like they do between leaders of armed groups (Hultman, Kathman and Shannon 2014).<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> In conflict scholarship, issues arising from an inability to commit to resolutions are known as “commitment problems.” See Fearon (1995, 1998) for a discussion of these problems and Walter (2002), Fortna (2008), and Matanock (2017) for more on international intervention as a solution to commitment problems.

<sup>16</sup> This definition is based on Dafoe, Renshon and Huth (2014).

<sup>17</sup> For a related argument about mediators and third-party monitoring, see Kydd (2006).

<sup>18</sup> In a related finding, Kydd and Straus argue that international interventions to prevent atrocities are most effective when they are not believed to be affiliated with armed groups – that is, when all parties to a conflict believe peacekeepers do not side with any particular group over others. See Kydd and Straus (2013).

Another challenge to localized peace enforcement theory comes from studies arguing that the UN and other international interveners operate – and succeed – from the top down. According to this view, interventions influence postconflict governance, political elites, or central legal institutions, and these effects “trickle down” to the local level to prevent the onset of communal conflict. These explanations emphasize the importance of international actors’ ability to create institutions, build states, and foster political bargains to keep the peace from the top down. These scholars posit that interveners can lay the foundations for domestic governance institutions that will remain in place for the long term. Recent work has argued that interveners create legal frameworks that secure the conditions necessary for the rule of law to thrive (Blair 2020). Other studies highlight the political and economic incentives that interveners embed into peace agreements and negotiations (Dayal 2021; Matanock and Lichtenheld 2022). Intervenors can also provide conceptual maps that help postconflict states hold elections and forge power-sharing agreements (Matanock 2017; Nomikos 2021). Relatedly, they can deploy international monitors to increase the legitimacy of postconflict elections (Hyde 2007; Bush and Prather 2017). Accounts of efforts to end civil wars have also identified international civilian attempts to reduce communal violence (Blattman, Hartman and Blair 2014; Smidt 2020b).

These scholars readily admit that it is unclear whether top-down institutionalization can facilitate peace in postconflict settings without a peace agreement in place. In PKOs like the one deployed in Mali, many belligerents do not participate in conventional peace negotiations. Even in countries such as South Sudan where belligerents sign peace agreements, communal violence continues among parties that feel aggrieved by (or excluded from) the peace talks. In places like Mali or South Sudan, institutions designed to resolve communal disputes are dead on arrival, and have little chance of keeping the peace.

These challenges notwithstanding, it is quite possible that top-down institutionalization can work in conjunction with more coercive peace-building strategies, including localized peace enforcement. I return to this idea in my discussion of avenues for future research in Chapter 9.

The final alternative to my argument that international interveners’ perceived impartiality facilitates conflict resolution is that successful interventions require the investment of a biased international actor, organization, or power with regional strategic or economic interests at stake (Fearon and Laitin 2004). Some scholars argue that such a bias may *improve* an international actor’s chances of promoting peaceful outcomes. According to this perspective, only biased peacekeepers can credibly convince their favored group of the resolve of other ethnic groups since they

are effectively “on their side” (Kydd 2003; Savun 2008). Additionally, bias may reveal private information about a peacekeeper’s willingness or resolve to enforce the peace (Favretto 2009). Alternatively, biased peacekeepers may enjoy unique leverage over their favored parties, which they can use to promote peaceful outcomes (Zartman and Touval 1985).

There are several reasons to be skeptical of these arguments. To begin with, though biased peacekeepers may indeed have influence over favored parties, the converse is also true: Biased peacekeepers will not enjoy any unique leverage over nonfavored groups (Beber 2012, p. 404). Moreover, while biased international actors may be well suited to elite-level conflicts that feature informational asymmetries about relative power and resolve, they are less well suited to local conflicts characterized by intergroup mistrust (Kydd 2006). In these cases, biased peacekeepers are likely to support their favored side regardless of their level of trustworthiness, making them unreliable enforcers of communal interactions.

A related argument emphasizes the importance of having information about a conflict setting, including the local culture and the dynamics of conflict resolution (Bove and Ruggeri 2019; Bove, Ruffa and Ruggeri 2020). Autesserre (2015) argues that where peacekeeping fails, peacekeepers’ everyday practices prevent them from gathering sufficient information about local disputes, regardless of how many resources they have at their disposal. She maintains that peacekeepers arrive in conflict zones with little local knowledge and do not acquire sufficient information about the culture in which they are expected to keep the peace.<sup>19</sup> Though prior research has found that cultural distance between international peacekeepers and domestic populations decreases battlefield performance, I argue that distance may be beneficial at the local level since it strengthens the perception that peacekeepers are impartial (Bove and Ruggeri 2019; Bove, Ruffa and Ruggeri 2020). In some cases, cultural distance may negatively impact peace outcomes if more closely related nationalities are perceived as biased, which I examine in greater detail in my analysis of Senegalese peacekeepers in Mali in Chapter 7.

## Conclusion

International PKOs represent an important tool through which the international community can prevent communal disputes from destabilizing conflict and postconflict settings. Because local populations perceive them as relatively impartial, UN peacekeepers change the incentive structure of civilian interactions in these settings. UN peacekeepers

<sup>19</sup> See King et al. (2016) for a discussion of Autesserre’s work.

can thus enforce the peaceful resolution of disputes and limit their escalation. This chapter explained that in the absence of third-party enforcement, individuals are incentivized to escalate disputes violently. It introduced localized peace enforcement theory, a micro-level theory that shows formally how the engagement of local-level UN PKOs alters these incentives, making cooperation more likely.

The chapter concluded by deriving a set of three hypotheses that were presented alongside a set of three alternative explanations. The theoretical model outlined in this chapter suggests three mechanisms through which impartial peacekeepers reduce communal violence, each formulated as a set of hypotheses (see Figure 3.1). First, in a dispute between two individuals from different social groups living in the same community, impartial peacekeepers *increase* individuals' beliefs that others will reciprocate their attempts to cooperate to resolve the dispute (Hypothesis 1a) and *decrease* individuals' beliefs that others will escalate their dispute violently (Hypothesis 1b). Second, this twofold belief shift will *increase* individuals' willingness to cooperate (Hypotheses 2a–2c). Third, as more members of a community become more willing to cooperate to resolve disputes, this will *decrease* the incidence of communal violence (Hypothesis 3).

Chapter 4 describes the research design for the empirical analysis that tests the observable implications of these hypotheses. I begin by describing the case of Mali, which serves as the primary context for the evidence presented in Part II of the book (Chapters 5–7). I then discuss my strategy for analyzing the data in Chapters 6 and 7, which includes original interviews, qualitative data, experiments, and quantitative, georeferenced observational data. I conclude by describing in depth the data collection strategy for the cross-national analysis presented in Chapter 8.