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# Fraying Threads:

## Exclusion and Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa

Hany Abdel-Latif, Mahmoud El-Gamal

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**Fraying Threads: Exclusion and Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa**  
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**ABSTRACT:** This study investigates the factors leading to exclusion and their detrimental impacts in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). It employs two-levels of analysis: a macro-level estimation of the influence of exclusion and marginalization on violent conflict, and a micro-level investigation identifying the triggers of exclusion sentiments. We construct statistical summaries from multiple measures of exclusion, producing an overall exclusion index as well as social, economic, and political exclusion sub-indices. Our results show the importance of mitigating exclusion and marginalization within SSA nations, and pinpoint the most effective policy levers that governments may use to minimize destabilizing feelings of exclusion.

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WORKING PAPERS

# **Fraying Threads:**

## Exclusion and Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa

Hany Abdel-Latif, Mahmoud El-Gamal<sup>1</sup>

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# Fraying Threads: Exclusion and Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa<sup>☆</sup>

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## 1. Introduction

Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is a region that suffers from incessant conflicts and persistent underdevelopment. An important factor in causing these conflicts and underdevelopment is exclusion. We follow the common definition of exclusion as a condition or process through which certain individuals or groups are systematically denied access to rights, opportunities, or resources, which may be available to other segments of the population.<sup>1</sup> Perceptions of exclusion may be magnified by a state's failure to provide basic public services across disparate regions sufficiently and/or equitably. Unequal access to clean water, food, healthcare, education, and economic opportunities can magnify feelings of exclusion among marginalized populations. These perceptions of exclusion, in turn, may lead to social strife that disrupts a nation's growth efforts.

This consideration is particularly important for SSA, because economic development in the region has been consistently derailed by persistent conflicts. These conflicts were in part inherited from the region's colonial past, but they remain fueled by ethnic, religious, and tribal differences that have magnified problems for post-colonial nation states. Whether or not perceptions of exclusion are indeed justified—in other words, whether or not they are results of intentionally discriminatory policies—they increase the frequency and intensity of conflicts that have adverse effects on economic performance. Therefore, our analyses are focused on perceptions of exclusion and their correlates at the macro- and micro-levels, without delving deeply into political and social analysis of the reality or causes of discriminatory policies.

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<sup>☆</sup> The views expressed here are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the IMF, its Executive Board, or IMF management.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, United Nations (2016) defines social exclusion as "a state in which individuals are unable to participate fully in economic, social, political and cultural life, along with the process leading to and maintaining such a state". World Bank (2013) highlights the dynamic nature of exclusion and its role in hindering meaningful participation in society.

The measures of exclusion that we construct in this paper will be shown to correlate significantly with classification of some SSA countries into the category of Fragile and Conflict-affected States (FCS).<sup>2</sup> Countries in this category have experienced disproportionately many humanitarian crises and displacements. These events have, in turn, impeded these countries' social and economic development. We aim to identify the root causes of ongoing turmoil in these SSA fragile states by studying the role of social, political, and economic exclusion in sparking conflicts. This approach does not deny the importance of other supranational conflict determinants such as climate change or disputes over natural resources. Our focus merely aims to highlight the importance of perception of exclusion as a cause of conflict and to identify its causes at the micro-level in order to help SSA governments in devising policies that are conducive to economic stability and growth.

We conduct our empirical analysis at the following two levels: At the national level, we explore how perceptions of exclusion—economic, social, or political—contribute to conflict and instability.<sup>3</sup> In this regard, perceptions of exclusion create a fertile environment for armed groups to capitalize on the discontent of marginalized individuals, thereby fueling violence. We show empirically that these intra-state dynamics of marginalization exert a more substantial influence on conflict likelihood than mere poverty or economic underdevelopment alone. At the individual level, we use survey data to identify the socioeconomic and governance factors that cultivate feelings of exclusion, thus suggesting potential frameworks for policy interventions aimed at mitigating conflict-inducing alienation.

At least since the 1970s, scholars have expressed dissatisfaction with standard overall poverty measures. Researchers thus introduced multidimensional measures of poverty and later introduced measures of “exclusion,” which was hypothesized to contribute more significantly to dissatisfaction and social unrest.

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<sup>2</sup> The World Bank 2023 list of fragile and conflict affected states includes the following 17 sub-Saharan African countries: Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, South Sudan, and Zimbabwe. The study also covers Mauritania as part of the Sahel region.

<sup>3</sup> We recognize the possibility of endogeneity issues, particularly the influence of conflict in engendering exclusionary sentiment. To address potential reverse causality concerns, our empirical model employs lagged explanatory variables. By analyzing data from prior years for the exclusion variable, we argue that conflicts at time  $t$  are unlikely to have impacted previous levels of exclusion.

This previous literature generally used ad hoc weighted averages of various measures of exclusion. We use factor analysis to construct our indices of exclusion in a statistically-systematic and meaningful way.

The structure of this paper is as follows: Section 2 provides an overview of conflict in SSA. Section 3 offers a literature review. Section 4 introduces our Perception of Exclusion Index (PEI) and its sub-components. Section 5 describes the dataset and outlines the empirical methodology. Section 6 presents our findings. Section 7 offers a brief discussion of policy implications and concluding remarks.

## **2. Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Context**

The security situation in many SSA countries is acutely problematic, as exemplified most recently by escalating violence and displacement in Sudan. Since the turn of the millennium, intermittently persistent conflicts have caused severe human suffering and economic destabilization throughout the region. Conflicts often begin with isolated operations of extremist groups, but quickly expand into regional violence that spreads, like a virus, from one subregion to another. Non-state armed factions continue to stage large-scale attacks on civilian and military targets. In many cases, this violence reflects disputes over access to natural resources, territorial dominance, and regional influence. We show that intranational feelings of social, economic and political exclusion also play an important role.

The extant literature identifies a plethora of conflict-inducing factors within SSA countries, particularly focusing on the Sahel region wherein violent conflicts have been particularly concentrated. Climatic fluctuations and food insecurity have also been particularly acute in this subregion. More broadly, SSA stands as the global epicenter of food insecurity worldwide. Forecasts for 2023 indicate that nearly 142 million individuals in the region will confront acute food insecurity, marking a 12 percent elevation from the preceding year. Over one-third of these individuals have succumbed to acute food insecurity following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over longer time horizons, climate change has exerted a detrimental impact on agricultural productivity,

thereby precipitating a decline in income and asset values. This has intensified the distressing trends of malnutrition and food insecurity in the region. SSA's FSC are particularly susceptible to exogenous perturbations, such as climatic shocks. Recent research reveals that fragile states may incur cumulative output losses amounting to four percent in the wake of severe climatic events, compared to one percent loss in other nations (Jaramillo et al., 2023). Such losses can critically hamper a nation's resilience against future shocks, and the resulting strife often spreads beyond national boundaries and lasts for several generations.

In the particularly badly impacted Sahel subregion, the proportion of people facing acute food insecurity has surged threefold in the preceding three years, soaring significantly from 3.6 million to 10.5 million. According to the Global Hunger Index, Chad is facing an "alarming" level of hunger severity, while other Sahelian nations are experiencing "serious" levels. Additionally, the prevalence of undernourishment in Chad is markedly elevated in comparison to its Sahelian counterparts. Floods and, more impactfully, droughts have been the main natural calamities in the Sahel. During 2021-22, the subregion endured multiple grave climatic occurrences. In particular, Chad suffered unprecedented flooding, while Niger witnessed a devastating drought that led to substantial reduction in agricultural output. Thus, climate change has played a significant role in exacerbating malnutrition and food insecurity in the region. These climatic challenges have thus amplified the vicious cycle of fragility and conflict in SSA.

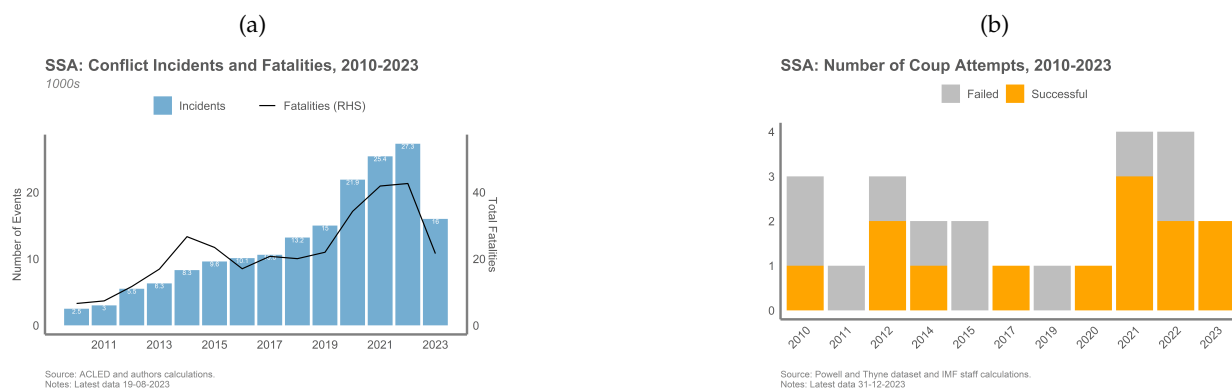
In this regard, there has been a marked increase in the frequency and severity of conflicts in SSA in recent years. The noticeable rise in fatalities due to conflicts has coincided with numerous coup attempts, especially since 2020, c.f. Fig. 1. Figure 1a shows the significant increase in recorded conflict incidents that involved fatalities, compared to 2010 (note: 2023 data is incomplete at this writing). There were 42,653 fatalities recorded in 2022, a massive increase from 11,686 in 2012, and 6,755 in 2010. This increase reflects a staggering increase of 531.8 percent. More broadly, conflict incidents have increased significantly to 27,330 in 2022, from 5,497 in 2012 and 2,483 in 2010, marking an increase of 1000.4 percent. In particular, conflict within the Sahelian subregion underwent a particularly significant increase in 2022, aggravating extant macroeconomic and social problems. The number of recorded incidents jumped from 4,170 in 2021 to 6,120



in 2022, a rise of nearly 20 percent from an already high base. In addition, the number of recorded fatalities increased by a staggering 34 percent, from 6,610 in 2021 to 10,740 in 2022. These Sahelian incidents in 2022 were concentrated in Burkina Faso and Mali.

Overall, forty percent of Sub-Saharan Africa is categorized as either fragile or conflict-ridden. Figure 1b shows the frequency of coup attempts in the SSA region between 2010 and 2023. Post-2020, the region has witnessed 10 successful or attempted coups, signaling a notable escalation after two decades of relative stability. Interestingly, some of these coups have had significant popular support, suggesting widespread dissatisfaction with the previous ruling regimes.

Figure 1: SSA Fragile States Conflict Incidents and Fatalities, 1999–2023



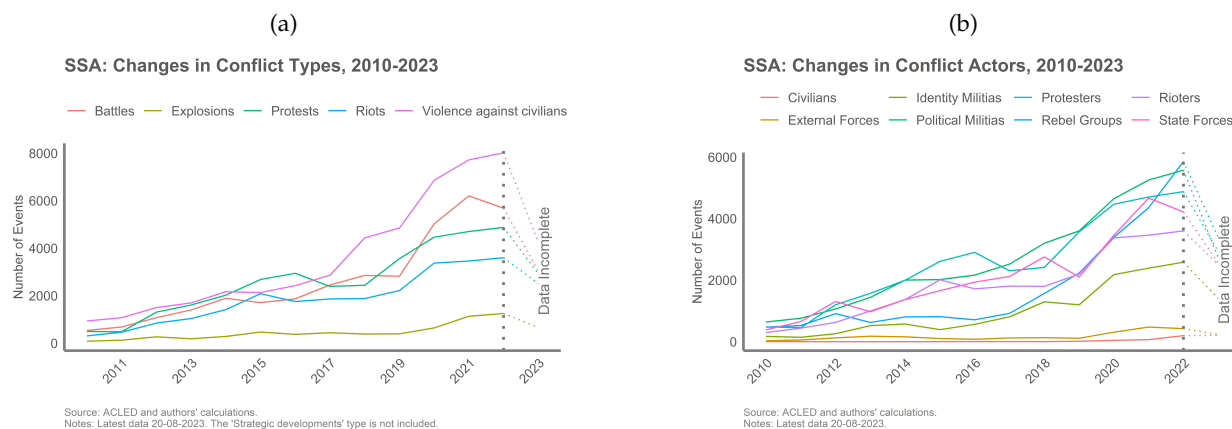
Source: ACLED and authors' calculations.  
Notes: Latest data 19-08-2023.

Although all types of conflict have increased, violence against civilians has increased particularly strongly, c.f. Fig. 2. The trend toward increased violence, especially against civilians, suggests the urgent need to pay attention to conflict prevention. This is particularly important in light of the pronounced increase in rebel groups' involvement in conflicts, especially noticeable since 2018. This trend may signal growing dissatisfaction and fragmentation within political and social structures, requiring urgent attention to address the underlying causes and prevent further escalation.

The Sahelian subregion suffered a particularly harsh increase in violence during 2022. For example, there

has been a significant escalation in combat encounters and detonations in Burkina Faso, and Niger witnessed a rise in civilian-targeting violence. The highest proportion of conflict incidents involving insurgent factions was recorded in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. Border areas, particularly the tri-border between Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, referred to as Liptako-Gourma, has been a perpetual target for acts of terrorism and operations of violent extremist groups, c.f. Fig. 3. There was a surge in confrontations between the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) and Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimeen (JNIM) earlier this year. The most recent instability in the eastern Sahel region of Sudan further exacerbates the situation, as conflicts that were previously restricted to the Sahel spread to the broader African stage.

Figure 2: Conflict Types and Main Actors, 2010–2023

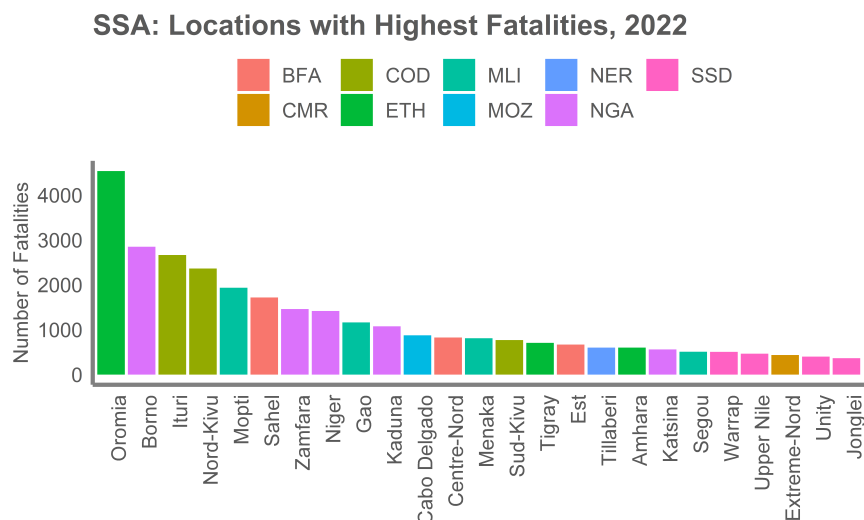


Source: ACLED and authors' calculations.  
Notes: Latest data 19-08-2023.

Conflict seems to be concentrated primarily near national borders. These border regions often lack sufficient provision of public services, creating what are known as ungoverned (or ungovernable) spaces. These conflict-prone hotspots pose substantial risks to security and stability, both in the directly affected countries and their nearby neighbors. Notable examples of conflicts with potential cross-border spillover effects include the recent civil war in Ethiopia and the long-running conflicts in South Sudan and Central African Republic, as well as extremism-driven conflicts across the Sahel and northern Mozambique, c.f. Figures 3 and 4.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> In Ethiopia, following the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in November 2022, the peace process has been progressing

Figure 3: Conflict Main Locations, 2022



Source: ACLED and authors' calculations.  
Notes: Latest data 20-08-2023.

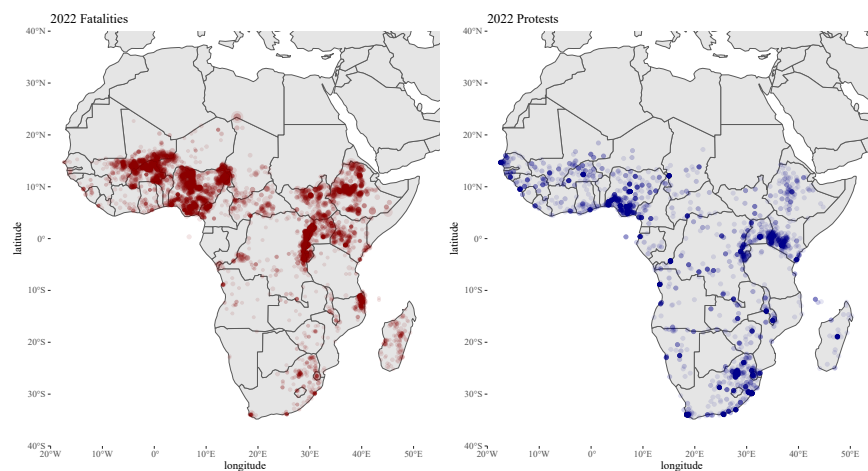
Source: ACLED and authors' calculations.  
Notes: Latest data 28-04-2023.

### 3. Exclusion and Conflict in The Literature

The literature examining the impact of exclusion on conflict is quite limited. One notable early study is Cederman et al. (2010), which focused on ethnic exclusion and its role in initiating armed conflicts. The findings indicated that politically marginalized ethnic groups were more likely to engage in armed rebellion against the central government. Stewart (2000) investigated the concept of horizontal inequalities, finding that pronounced disparities between culturally-defined groups can fuel social unrest and contribute to conflict. Østby (2008) explored the relationship between horizontal inequalities, polarization, and the risk of civil conflict. This study revealed that heightened polarization and horizontal inequalities between ethnic or religious groups were associated with an increased likelihood of conflict. Gurr (2000) provided a comprehensive analysis of minority groups at risk of political violence and conflict, focusing on the influence of factors such as political exclusion and discrimination. Murshed and Gates (2005) found that economic

well. Although there have been recent violent incidents in Amhara province, these are more localized and primarily involve small arms.

Figure 4: Conflict and Protest Locations, 2022



Source: ACLED and authors' calculations.

Notes: Latest data 28-04-2023.

and social exclusion, particularly in rural areas, has contributed significantly to conflict in Nepal.<sup>5</sup> Esteban et al. (2012) examines the link between measures of ethnic distribution and social conflict.

Unfortunately, the literature concerning the impact of exclusion on conflict in the SSA region is even more limited. Nonetheless, a handful of studies have provided valuable insights on the subject. Notably, Boutellis and Zahar (2017) underscored the significance of political and social exclusion within the context of the ongoing conflict in Mali. Furthermore, Nyadera and Massaoud (2019) contended that prolonged and systematic marginalization along with ineffective governance have resulted in the emergence of pockets of ungoverned territories that became fields of operation for armed groups. The author advocated for a multidimensional approach that includes social as well as economic reforms, especially measures that enhance inclusiveness to achieve peace and stability in the Sahel region. In this regard, it should be noted that most studies to-date have primarily focused on other determinants, such as resource capture and climate change, as exemplified by the work of Mbaye (2020).

<sup>5</sup> Extensive research has been conducted on various determinants of conflicts, including the role of natural resources and climate change. For a comprehensive review, refer to Vesco et al. (2020), which examines 41 articles linking natural resources to conflicts. This paper finds that both resource scarcity and abundance are associated with a higher probability of conflict.

#### 4. A New Exclusion Index

To capture the complex phenomenon of exclusion encompassing social, economic, and political dimensions, we construct a new overall exclusion index with three subindices. These indices were constructed using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on a long list of selected variables related to exclusion that we obtained from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) dataset.<sup>6</sup> In this section, we outline the methodology employed to develop this exclusion index.

Let  $\text{ExclVar}_{ij}$  represent the  $j$ th V-Dem variable associated with social, economic, or political dimensions of exclusion for country  $i$ , and let  $\text{ExclIndex}_i$  denote the latent variable that represents the overall measure of exclusion in country  $i$ . Using all the V-Dem exclusion variables, we conduct a single-factor analysis which simultaneously explains the variation in all the variables of interest (as usual,  $\mu_j$  represents the mean of variable  $j$  over all countries, and  $\epsilon_{ij}$  denotes the unexplained error for country  $i$  and variable  $j$ ):

$$\begin{aligned} \text{ExclVar}_{i1} - \mu_1 &= \lambda_1 \cdot \text{ExclIndex}_i + \epsilon_{i1} \\ &\vdots \\ \text{ExclVar}_{in} - \mu_n &= \lambda_n \cdot \text{ExclIndex}_i + \epsilon_{in} \end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

The factor loading  $\lambda_1, \lambda_2, \dots, \lambda_n$  measure the relationships between the latent variable for exclusion in each country  $i$  and the observed variables ( $\text{ExclVar}_{i1}, \dots, \text{ExclVar}_{in}$ ) in that country.

Consequently, the exclusion index serves as a comprehensive measure, summarizing the level of exclusion experienced within each country. To facilitate meaningful comparisons across countries, we apply min-max normalization to the exclusion index, scaling it to range from zero to one. In this normalized form, higher values of the exclusion index indicate a greater degree of exclusion, while lower values signify a lesser

<sup>6</sup> Unlike previous attempts which merely chose ad hoc weights to different indicators reflecting exclusion, our application of factor analysis significantly streamlines extensive information from V-Dem data while simultaneously revealing any underlying correlations among this comprehensive list of variables.

degree of exclusion. This index effectively captures the multidimensional nature of exclusion and provides a valuable tool for analyzing and comparing exclusion across countries.

Furthermore, to capture the specific dimensions of social, political, and economic exclusion separately, we classify our selected variables into separate categories (see Table A.2). By conducting the aforementioned analysis separately for each category, we obtain subindices of exclusion that specifically measure social, political, and economic dimensions. This approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of the different facets of exclusion and provides a more comprehensive assessment of the specific dimensions at play in different countries.

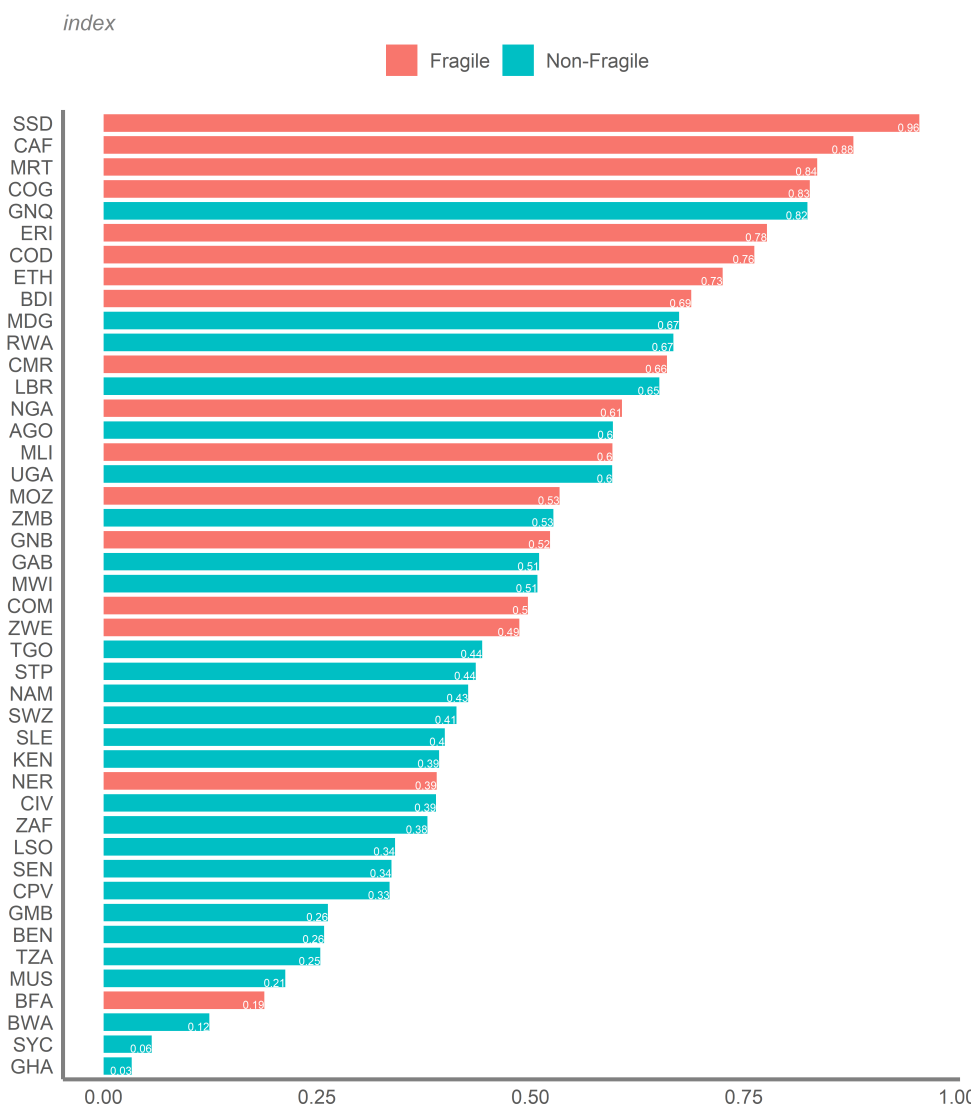
Figure 5 depicts our newly developed exclusion index for sub-Saharan African countries, including Mauritania, and representing levels of exclusion in 2022. The index is scaled from zero, indicating optimal conditions, to one, representing the most severe exclusion, and is visualized by the height of the bars. The coloration of the bars aligns with the World Bank's 2023 classification of Fragile and Conflict-Affected States (FCSs). A discernible pattern is that, barring a few exceptions, states identified as fragile tend to manifest elevated values on our formulated Perception of Exclusion Index. It illuminates that, aside from some deviations, countries designated as fragile by the World Bank's 2023 classification predominantly register the uppermost scores on our delineated index of exclusion, highlighting a profound correlation between exclusion and state fragility. For example, when comparing West African countries, it is observed that Mauritania and Chad resonate with heightened levels of exclusion, eclipsing their regional counterparts.

Niger and Burkina Faso, conversely, emerge as anomalies, reflecting subdued values on our exclusion metric, albeit their classification as fragile states. This underlines the conjecture that there could be other factors at play in these countries. Conversely, although Equatorial Guinea (GNQ), Madagascar (MDG), Rwanda (RWA), and Angola (AGO) are not classified as fragile states by the world bank, they score high values (above 0.5) on our exclusion measure. This calls for closer scrutiny of underlying factors that might provoke conflict in the future in these countries.

Figure 6 illustrates the correlation between the average values of our Perception of Exclusion Index and the Fragile State Index (FSI) spanning the years 2012-2022. The color differentiation within the dots distinguishes between fragile and non-fragile states, in accordance with the World Bank classification. This chart elucidates a positive correlation between our exclusion index and the FSI, positing exclusion as a potential precursor to state fragility in numerous countries. For instance, countries like South Sudan, Chad, and Ethiopia, all categorized as fragile states exhibiting elevated FSI scores, also register high values on our exclusion index. Conversely, nations like Botswana and Seychelles, identified as non-fragile states, manifest low values on our exclusion index. This reaffirms the efficacy of our index in encapsulating instances of exclusion and delineating its association with state fragility, thereby underlining the consequential linkage between exclusion and the susceptibility of a state to fragility.

Figure (7) presents our meticulously crafted sub-indices, capturing the relative prominence of social, economic, and political dimensions of exclusion within each SSA country. It is crucial to emphasize that the graph illustrates the relative importance, not the absolute levels, of these varying types of exclusion within a specific country. The chart unfolds several intriguing insights into the multifaceted dimensions of exclusion. This visualization accentuates the escalated levels of social and political exclusion in Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali, all fragile states. Furthermore, in nations such as Tanzania and Burkina Faso, the predominance of exclusion is substantially propelled by social factors, with this element being minimal in Seychelles and Mauritius. In contrast, economic exclusion emerges as a consequential factor in Nigeria and Mali but manifests with lesser intensity in Ghana and Botswana. This nuanced representation enhances our understanding of the diverse dimensions and relative importance of exclusion dimensions within each country, enabling a more refined interpretation of exclusion dynamics across the region, and spotlighting areas where intervention may be particularly impactful.

Figure 5: Perception of Exclusion by Country, 2022

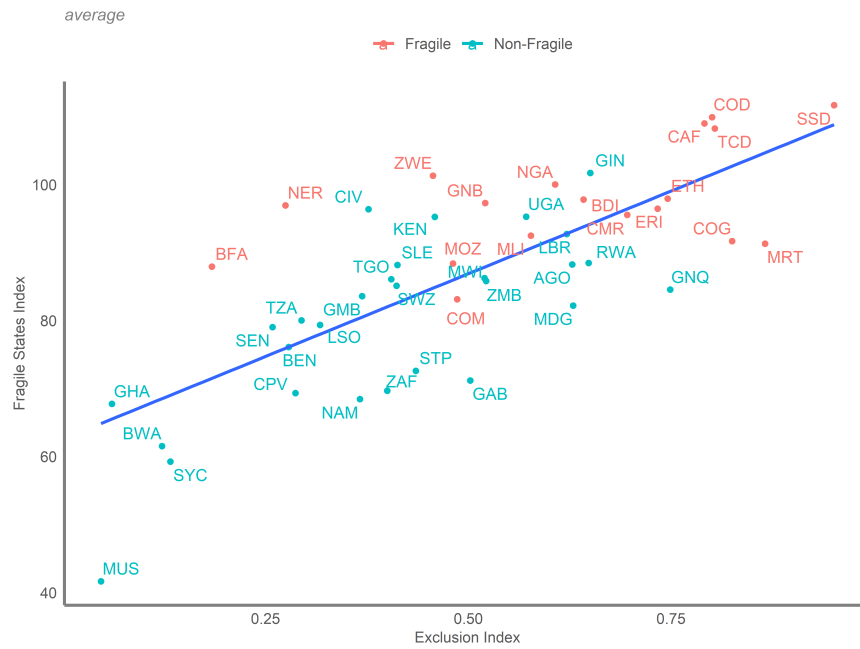


Sources: V-Dem database and authors' calculations.

Notes: The index ranges from 0 to 1 with higher values denoting higher exclusion. This index was constructed using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on a long list of selected variables related to exclusion that we obtained from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) dataset. These variables cover a wide range of topics including civil liberties equality, power distribution, access to state jobs, access to state business opportunities, access to public services, and political group equality.



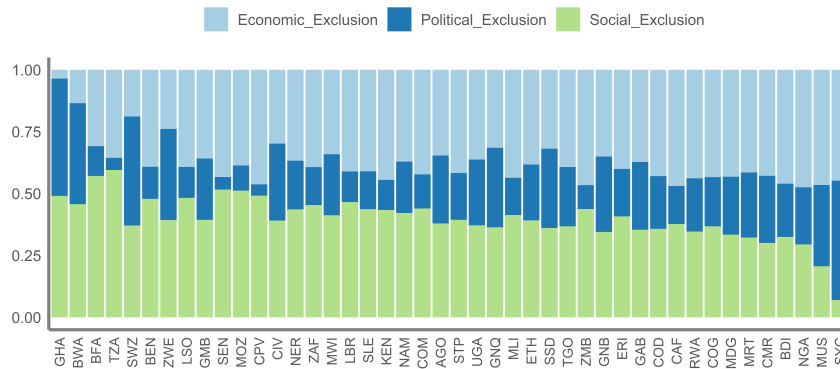
Figure 6: Exclusion and State Fragility, 2012-2022



Sources: V-Dem database, Fund For Peace and authors' calculations.

Figure 7: Exclusion Multidimensions, 2022

SSA: Exclusion Multidimensions, 2022



Source: Authors' calculations.

Sources: V-Dem database and authors' calculations.  
 Note: Values are averaged between 2012 and 2022.

## 5. Data and Methodology

The national-level analysis of the impact of exclusion on conflict uses data from 1990 to 2022 for all sub-Saharan African countries, including the Sahel G5 countries (46 countries in total). The key variables in the dataset are as follows:

1. **Dependent Variables:** For the national-level analysis, we employ three alternative measures to capture conflict: The first is the Fragile States Index (FSI), which is published by the Fund for Peace. The second variable is the total number of fatalities from the ACLED dataset, which is an event-based database that contains disaggregated incident information on political violence, demonstrations, and select related non-violent developments around the world. The annual series is obtained by summing up fatalities over a given year. The third variable is the reported social unrest index (RSUI), which is a monthly index of social unrest derived from counts of pertinent media reports, with surges in the index signifying significant events. The annual series is obtained by collecting the maximum value of the index in each year. The RSUI series is then normalized to range from 0 to 1 with higher values indicate higher levels of social unrest.<sup>7</sup>
2. **Main Regressor:** To capture the effects of exclusion on different measures of conflict, we use the Exclusion Index described in section 4 as our main control variable of interest. We also use our Exclusion subindices measuring economic, social, and political exclusion for country-level analysis and in the individual-level regressions in Section 6.2, which aims to uncover the determinants of perceptions of exclusion.
3. **Other Control Variables:** We also use trade uncertainty, measured using the World Uncertainty Index, which captures fluctuations in trade policy and economic conditions. Another useful control variable that we use is institutional quality, using the government effectiveness indicator from the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) dataset. The latter indicator helps to capture the quality of institutions

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<sup>7</sup> By employing three distinct measures of conflict (our dependent variable) and comparing these against lagged values of our proposed exclusion index (our independent variable), we underscore the robustness of our results.

in the analyzed countries.

In addition to simple panel data models (pooled OLS, fixed effects, and random effects), we employ the local projections method to analyze the dynamic relationship between exclusion and conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa. The latter is a widely-used econometric technique for estimating responses of dependent variables to contemporaneous and lagged shocks in explanatory variables. This method thus allows us to report the impulse response functions (IRFs) of the dependent variable (incidents of violence or social unrest) to changes in the main control variable (the Exclusion Index) and other control variables while addressing potential endogeneity concerns.

The local projections method involves estimating a series of ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions of the dependent variable on lagged values of the control variables and relevant shocks. For each horizon  $h$ , we estimate the following regression:

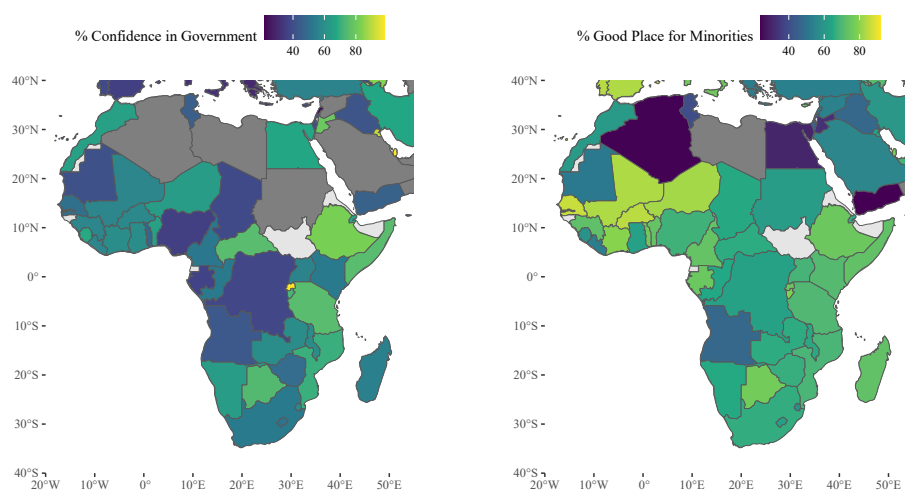
$$\Delta Y_{i,t+h} = \alpha_h + \beta_h \Delta X_{i,t} + \gamma'_h Z_{i,t} + \delta'_h W_{i,t} + \epsilon_{i,t+h} \quad (2)$$

where  $\Delta Y_{i,t+h}$  represents the change in incidents of violence in country  $i$  at time  $t + h$ ,  $\Delta X_{i,t}$  denotes the change in the Exclusion Index,  $Z_{i,t}$  is a vector of other control variables, and  $W_{i,t}$  includes (country and time) fixed effects to control for unobserved heterogeneity. The coefficients of interest are  $\beta_h$ , estimating the effect on incidents of violence (or social unrest) from an increase in exclusion  $h$  periods before. Our main identification strategy to address possible endogeneity concerns is by using lagged values of our exclusion index along with three distinct measure of conflict (our dependent variable). For instance, it seems improbable that social unrest in year  $t$  (one of our conflict measures) could have caused exclusion in previous years ( $t-n$ ). Similarly, the number of fatalities (another conflict measure we use) is unlikely to have retroactively influenced exclusionary sentiments.

The data and methods describe above allow us to study the effect of exclusion on conflict, controlling for other major variables of interest. Results from this analysis are reported in Section 6.1. We then turn to

individual-level analysis to study the determinants of exclusion at the country level. This analysis aims to uncover the areas (e.g. education vs water quality) in which governments can invest their scarce resources most fruitfully to minimize feelings of exclusion and hence the potential for socially and economically disruptive conflicts. Our main source of data for individual-level analysis is the Gallup World Survey, which covers several sub-Saharan African countries from 2020-2022. We supplement this data with country-wide social, economic and political exclusion indices discussed in Section 4. The key variables are:

Figure 8: Degree of Confidence in Government (left) and Perceived Goodness of Country for Racial/Ethnic Minorities (right)



1. **Dependent Variables:** We use three binary dependent variables in our regression analyses using this individual level data: (i) respondent's trust in government, (ii) perception that the respondent's country is a good place for racial or ethnic minorities, and (iii) perception that the respondent's country is a good place for religious minorities. The average percentage over all respondents and years for all sampled African countries are shown in Fig. 8 first two dependent variables. It can readily be seen in those figures that the Sahel region is neither homogenous nor distinctive: For both measures, there is significant variation among the Sahel countries (e.g. between Chad and Niger for both measures of government trust and goodness of the country for ethnic/racial minorities). Moreover, for both measures, there is greater similarity between countries in the Sahel and others outside (e.g. Chad is more similar to Congo on both measures than to other neighboring countries in the Sahel such as Niger). Thus, we conduct our regression analyses in Section 5.2 both for a larger sample of sub-Saharan

African countries as well as only for the Sahel G5, which constitute the focus of this paper. We also include country and year fixed effects in those regressions, and cluster standard errors by country to allow for heterogeneity of unknown kind as well as potential cross-country heteroscedasticity.

2. **Explanatory Variables of Interest:** Our main variables of interest are the ones that government policy may be able to influence. Those are: the respondent's satisfaction with their health, the education system, air quality, and water quality, whether they are food or shelter insecure, and the country-wide corruption index and law and order index.
3. **Additional Controls:** For additional controls, we use sex of the respondent (1 if Female), age, type of area in which they live (large city, rural, etc.), their level of education (one to eight years, secondary, etc.), religion, and the country-level exclusion indices from Section 4.

## 6. Empirical Results

### 6.1. *The Effects of Exclusion on Conflict*

Our baseline analysis in Table 1 consists of traditional panel estimation methodologies: pooled OLS, fixed effects, and random effects. We regress various measures of conflict – the fragile state index (Fragility), the number of fatalities (Fatalities), and the reported social unrest index (RSUI) – separately on a series of independent variables that may potentially instigate conflict.

Recall that the Fragility index and RSUI have been normalized to range from 0 to 1, with larger values indicating higher levels of conflict. The third variable, number of fatalities, is studied in logs. The regressors in these country-level regressions include the exclusion index, a dummy variable for country being included in Sahel G5, an uncertainty index, and a measure of governmental effectiveness. We also include an interaction term between the Sahel G5 dummy and the exclusion index which is expected to reveal the differential impact of exclusion on conflict measures in the Sahel G5 in comparison to other countries in the sample. Naturally, the fixed-effect model does not include a coefficient for the time invariant Sahel dummy.

The pooled regressions in Table 1 (models 1, 4 and 7) confirm our null hypothesis that exclusion contributes positively to conflict. The estimated coefficient for the exclusion index is positive and statistically significant for different measures of conflict. The most straight forward Model 1 suggests that a 1% increase in exclusion results in 0.8% increase in fragility. The same qualitative result is true for the random effects regressions for fragilities and (log) fatalities (models 3 and 6). Allowing for random effects across countries Model 3 still suggests that a 1% increase in exclusion results in 0.1% increase in fragility. The fixed effects model for log fatalities (model 5) also shows a strong positive effect of exclusion on this most tragic outcome of conflict. The most straight forward Model 1 further shows that the interaction term (Exclusion  $\times$  Sahel G5 dummy) is positive and very significant statistically. According to this estimate, a 1% increase in exclusion is associated with an additional 0.7% increase in fragility in Sahel G5 compared to other countries.

Table 1: Basic Panel Estimations

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>								
	Pooled (1)	Fragility FE (2)	RE (3)	Pooled (4)	Fatalities FE (5)	RE (6)	Pooled (7)	RSUI FE (8)	RE (9)
Exclusion	0.818*** (0.027)	-0.043 (0.062)	0.088* (0.052)	5.636*** (0.378)	7.285*** (1.812)	5.323*** (1.246)	0.200** (0.078)	-0.505 (0.670)	0.085 (0.336)
Sahel.G5	0.482*** (0.034)		-0.002 (0.077)	3.970*** (0.500)		2.473 (1.604)	0.164*** (0.054)		0.106 (0.241)
Gov.Effectiveness	-0.150*** (0.014)	-0.112*** (0.012)	-0.122*** (0.012)	0.121 (0.197)	-0.561** (0.285)	-0.401 (0.267)	0.012 (0.045)	-0.062 (0.065)	-0.036 (0.061)
Uncertainty	0.234*** (0.019)	0.029*** (0.008)	0.030*** (0.008)	1.869*** (0.280)	0.744*** (0.248)	0.781*** (0.248)	0.186*** (0.067)	0.206*** (0.067)	0.199*** (0.067)
Exclusion:Sahel.G5	0.659*** (0.059)	0.455*** (0.165)	0.129 (0.119)	5.113*** (0.846)	6.546 (5.404)	4.545 (2.633)	0.317*** (0.104)	0.536 (0.908)	0.223 (0.392)
Observations	623	623	623	722	722	722	242	242	242
R <sup>2</sup>	0.546	0.155	0.193	0.122	0.054	0.037	0.045	0.046	0.041

Notes:

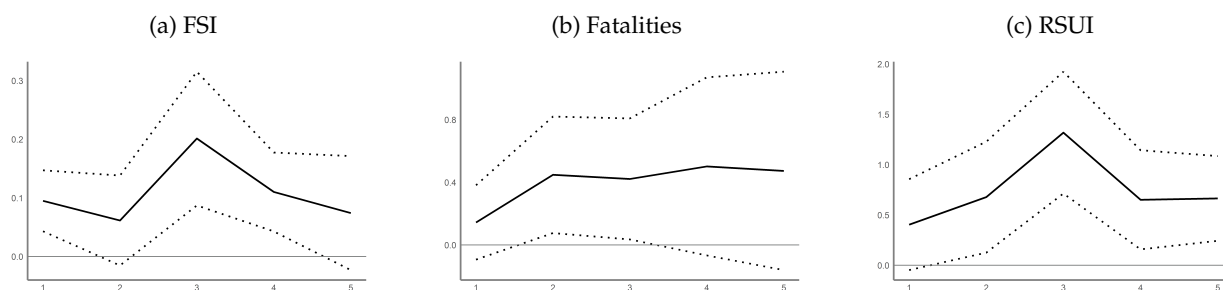
\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

The table presents estimated coefficients for three distinct panel data models. The Pooled OLS model operates under the assumption that data is derived from a uniform distribution and disregards the panel elements (t and i). The Fixed Effects model accounts for heterogeneities across countries by incorporating country-specific fixed effects. Finally, the Random Effects model assumes that individual-specific effects are random and uncorrelated with the independent variables, allowing for the estimation of effects across both time and individual dimensions. Since this is merely a baseline estimation, we explored potential endogeneity concerns in the context of the local projection estimation.

We now turn to estimated dynamics using Local Projections (LP). Figure 9 shows five-year impulse response

functions (IRFs) for our three conflict measures: Fragility, log Fatalities, and RSUI, given a hypothesized shock to the Exclusion Index. The median response estimates are approximately 0.1, 0.4, and 0.6 percent for the Fragile State Index (FSI), log fatalities, and Reported Social Unrest Index (RSUI), respectively. This indicates that, on average, a one percent rise in the exclusion index typically leads to a 0.1 percent increase in the FSI, a 0.4 percent increase in log fatalities, and a 0.6 percent increase in the RSUI over the course of five-years. Thus, we can see that the effect of exclusion on conflict is both substantial (and statistically significant for most measures and lags) and persistent.

Figure 9: Conflict Response to Rising Exclusion



Notes: Figure shows local projection IRFs (LPIRFs) for the effect of an increase in Exclusion on conflict (measured by FSI (normalized), number of fatalities (logged values) or the reported social unrest index (RSUI)). The IRFs shown above come from three different models. The solid line depicts median impulse responses with 95% bootstrapped confidence bounds over annual time horizon.

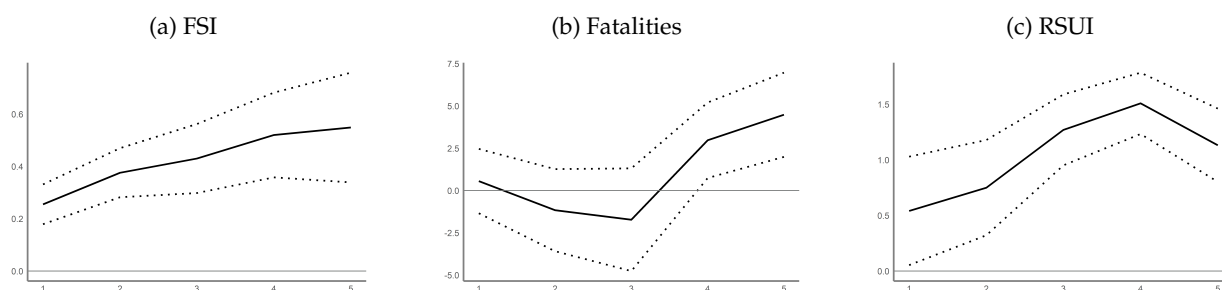
RSUI shows the most significant response to changes in the exclusion index, followed by fatalities and then the FSI. In this regard, because RSUI measures instances of public dissent and protests, it might be more immediately and directly responsive to exclusion than fatalities or the FSI. Fatalities, which are the most severe consequences of conflict, also increase significantly with exclusion, albeit with a longer lag. FSI is a composite index that captures various elements of state fragility, and thus it shows a less pronounced response to exclusion, albeit still significant.

Figures 10 through 12 show the IRFs for conflict responses to the Exclusion sub-indicies—respectively: social, economic and political. The charts show that social exclusion strongly correlates positively with FSI, intensifying over time, indicating heightened state fragility with increasing social exclusion. Economic exclusion also positively correlates with the FSI, but its influence is less pronounced. Political exclusion

exhibits no clear impact on FSI. The effect of social exclusion impulse on fatalities is initially insignificant, suggesting a delayed response. The effect of economic exclusion impulse on fatalities is inconsistent and occasionally positive, implying that economic exclusion is not an important determinant of conflict fatalities. The effect of political exclusion impulse on fatalities is muted or insignificant. There most persistent and largest impulse response magnitude that we find is that of social exclusion on RSUI. This suggests a reliable prediction that when social exclusion increases, so does social unrest. The effect of economic exclusion impulse on social unrest is similar, albeit slightly smaller in magnitude than the effect of social exclusion. The effect of an impulse to political exclusion is the smallest.

In summary, social exclusion significantly impacts all conflict measures, underlining its critical role in causing state fragility and social unrest. Economic exclusion also plays a role but is notably less pivotal, particularly regarding fatalities. Political exclusion distinctly influences the RSUI index, albeit more weakly, and yields inconsistent results across other conflict measures. Thus, policymakers should focus their efforts on mitigating or preventing perceptions of social exclusion and concomitant types of economics exclusion. Political reform, which may be the most difficult to prescribe, appears to be the least likely to help in minimizing the incidence of unrest and destabilizing violence.

Figure 10: Conflict Response to Rising Social Exclusion

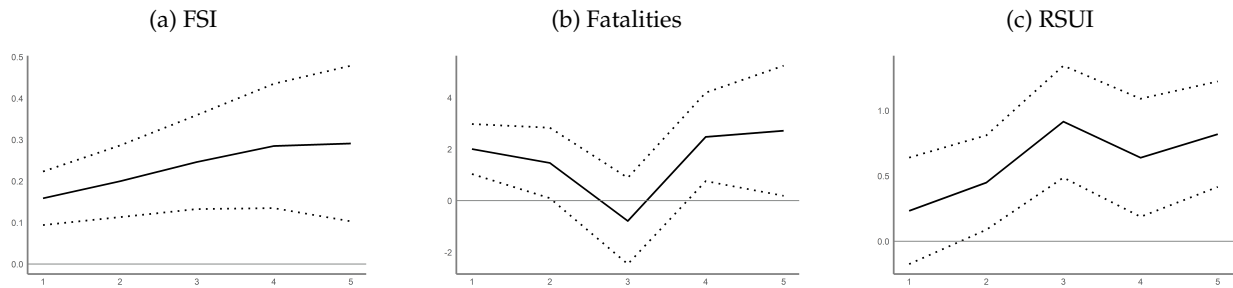


Notes: Figure shows local projection IRFs (LPIRFs) for the effect of an increase in Exclusion on conflict (measured by FSI (normalized), number of fatalities (logged values) or the reported social unrest index (RSUI)). The IRFs shown above come from three different models. The solid line depicts median impulse responses with 95% bootstrapped confidence bounds over annual time horizon.

We have thus confirmed that exclusion has a positive, statistically significant, and persistent effect on conflict. Policies aiming to reduce conflict should thus give serious consideration to reducing exclusion,

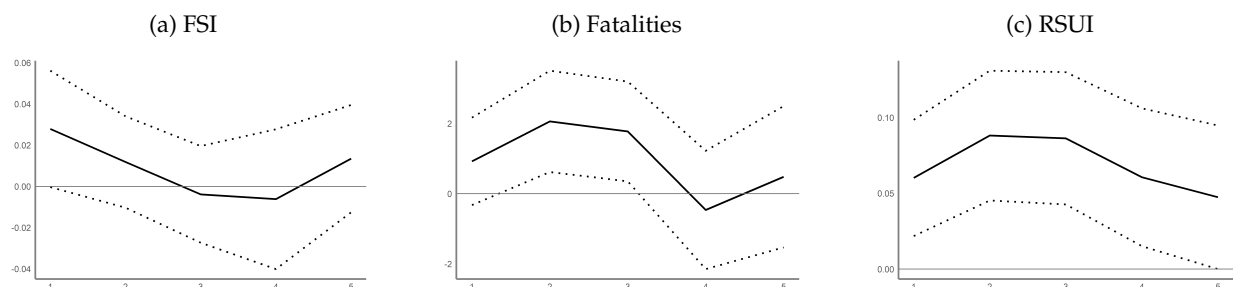


Figure 11: Conflict Response to Rising Economic Exclusion



Notes: Figure shows local projection IRFs (LPIRFs) for the effect of an increase in Exclusion on conflict (measured by FSI (normalized), number of fatalities (logged values) or the reported social unrest index (RSUI)). The IRFs shown above come from three different models. The solid line depicts median impulse responses with 95% bootstrapped confidence bounds over annual time horizon.

Figure 12: Conflict Response to Rising Political Exclusion



Notes: Figure shows local projection IRFs (LPIRFs) for the effect of an increase in Exclusion on conflict (measured by FSI (normalized), number of fatalities (logged values) or the reported social unrest index (RSUI)). The IRFs shown above come from three different models. The solid line depicts median impulse responses with 95% bootstrapped confidence bounds over annual time horizon.

fostering inclusivity, and promoting equity and social cohesion. We now turn to studying the main drivers of feelings of exclusion, which should be helpful in devising effective conflict reduction strategies.

### *6.2. The Main Drivers of Exclusion*

The results in Table 2 are quite intuitive: Dependent variables were coded to be positive measures of inclusion (trust in government, perception that the country is a good place for ethnic/racial minorities, and perception that the country is a good place for religious minorities). Clearly, higher levels of satisfaction with own health, quality of the education system, air and water quality all contribute positively to those inclusion perceptions. Food insecurity contributes negatively to trust in government, and shelter insecurity contributes negatively to perception that the country is a good place for racial/ethnic minorities. Moreover, at the institutional level, higher law and order scores correlate positively and corruption index correlates negatively with measures of inclusion. Interestingly, the respondent's own employment status and income quintile generally have no effect on the inclusion variables, supporting our hypothesis that provision of social services (quality of health, education, air and water) and quality of governance are paramount.

Table 3 shows that the exact same pattern of results holds for the smaller sample comprised only of respondents from the Sahel G5 countries. These results suggest strongly that governments in the Sahel G5 as well as sub-Saharan Africa more broadly should focus their efforts on improving the quality of their institutions (reduce corruption and improve law and order) and provision of public goods (healthcare, education, air and water quality, food and shelter sufficiency) rather than focus primarily on macroeconomic variables such as the levels of economic growth and unemployment.

Overall, our findings indicate that social and economic factors are the most influential in the context of exclusion, followed by political factors, which exhibit weaker and less consistent effects. This insight is particularly valuable, considering that political reforms are often challenging to implement. Intriguingly, our findings suggest that such reforms might be the least effective in alleviating the impact of exclusion on conflict. Furthermore, our micro-level regression analyses reveal that economic exclusion significantly

Table 2: Exclusion and Conflict Regressions

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>		
	Conf_Nat_Gvt	Gd_Pl_Eth_Min	Gd_Pl_Rel_Min
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Female	0.02** (0.01)	-0.005 (0.004)	0.01*** (0.005)
age	0.001*** (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	0.001*** (0.000)
area.Large.City	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)	
area.Rural	0.03 (0.02)	-0.05** (0.02)	
area.Small.town	0.03* (0.02)	-0.03 (0.02)	
education.One-Eight	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.03*** (0.01)	
education.Secondary	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)	
education.Some Tertiary	-0.05*** (0.02)	-0.01 (0.01)	
education.Tertiary	-0.05** (0.02)	0.05*** (0.02)	
Health.Satisf	0.03*** (0.01)	0.03*** (0.01)	0.02** (0.01)
Edu.Satisf	0.11*** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)	0.03*** (0.01)
Air.Satisf	0.04*** (0.01)	0.09*** (0.01)	0.07*** (0.01)
Water.Satisf	0.04*** (0.01)	0.03*** (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)
Unemployed	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	
Food.Insecure	-0.02*** (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Shelter.Insecure	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.03** (0.01)	-0.01*** (0.005)
Corruption_indx	-0.25*** (0.02)	-0.04*** (0.01)	0.01 (0.02)
Law_and_Order_indx	0.28*** (0.02)	0.07*** (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)
Income.Quint	-0.003 (0.004)	0.01** (0.003)	
Rel.Catholic	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.03)
Rel.Muslim	-0.03 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.04)
Rel.Orthodox	-0.002 (0.02)	0.03 (0.03)	-0.06* (0.03)
Rel.Protestant	-0.03** (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)	-0.003 (0.03)
social_index	2.39 (3.46)	2.83 (4.50)	7.79** (3.39)
economic_index	2.69* (1.59)	-0.68 (0.95)	-6.74*** (1.03)
political_index	-0.93 (1.29)	1.14** (0.52)	5.56** (2.70)
Constant	45.92 (31.16)	-47.70** (22.88)	-50.10 (40.79)
Country FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	49,686	49,713	33,328
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.18	0.08	0.09

Note:

\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01  
SEs Clustered (by country) in parentheses

Table 3: Exclusion and Conflict Regressions (Sahel G5 Only)

	<i>Dependent variable:</i>	
	Conf_Nat_Gvt	Gd_Pl_Eth_Min
	(1)	(2)
Female	0.02*** (0.01)	-0.004 (0.004)
age	0.001*** (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)
area.Large.City	-0.04* (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)
area.Rural	0.05** (0.02)	-0.05** (0.02)
area.Small.town	0.02 (0.02)	-0.05** (0.02)
education.One-Eight	0.02 (0.01)	-0.02** (0.01)
education.Secondary	-0.02 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
education.Some Tertiary	-0.02 (0.02)	0.003 (0.01)
education.Tertiary	-0.05** (0.02)	0.07*** (0.02)
Health.Satisf	0.02*** (0.01)	0.06*** (0.01)
Edu.Satisf	0.15*** (0.01)	0.03*** (0.01)
Air.Satisf	0.07*** (0.01)	0.14*** (0.01)
Water.Satisf	0.06*** (0.01)	0.03*** (0.01)
Unemployed	-0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Food.Insecure	-0.02*** (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)
Shelter.Insecure	-0.02*** (0.01)	-0.04*** (0.01)
Corruption_indx	-0.24*** (0.02)	-0.03** (0.01)
Law.and.Order_indx	0.25*** (0.02)	0.07*** (0.01)
Income.Quint	0.003 (0.004)	0.003 (0.003)
Rel.Catholic	-0.01 (0.01)	0.02 (0.02)
Rel.Muslim	-0.02 (0.02)	0.05*** (0.02)
Rel.Orthodox	-0.09*** (0.02)	0.21*** (0.03)
Rel.Protestant	-0.03** (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)
social_index	-36.00*** (3.46)	-38.23*** (4.50)
economic_index	1.10 (1.59)	-0.44 (0.95)
political_index	-2.95*** (1.29)	0.91* (0.52)
Constant	-8.32 (31.16)	-115.63*** (22.88)
Country FE	Yes	Yes
Year FE	Yes	Yes
Observations	10,104	10,139
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.21	0.13

Note:

\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01  
SEs Clustered (by country) in parentheses

affects trust in government. Conversely, political exclusion primarily impacts perceptions regarding the suitability of a place for ethnic and religious minorities.

## 7. Conclusion

The persistent security challenges and escalating crises in Sub-Saharan Africa, especially in the vulnerable Sahel subregion, have profound implications both in terms of security and humanitarian concerns. The G5 Sahel countries—Burkina Faso, Chad, Niger, Mauritania, and Mali—are particularly afflicted by these protracted conflicts and humanitarian crises. This research has explored the instrumental role of social, political, and economic exclusion in driving these conflicts, utilizing a novel Exclusion Index and an empirical approach based on the local projections method.

Our findings show that the crisis of confidence experienced by marginalized groups towards state institutions is the primary driver of conflict. This crisis of confidence originates from the perceived failure of state institutions to safeguard interests, ensure justice, promote human capital development equitably, oversee fair allocation of natural resources, and encourage inclusive economic growth. Such institutional failures, contributing to perceptions of social and economic exclusion, invite conflict as they undermine the principles of fairness and inclusivity vital for sustainable development.

We highlight that mitigating violent conflict necessitates a comprehensive strategy addressing economic, social, and climate-related insecurities. Fostering relationships between the populace and an impartial state, ensuring justice, equitable access to basic services, and solidarity, is crucial in establishing conditions for sustainable peace and social cohesion. The presence of poverty and underdevelopment by themselves may not lead to the observed level of conflict. However, those underlying factors are exacerbated by the experience or perception of social and economic exclusion, thus providing a fertile breeding ground for armed groups, necessitating urgent intervention.

There is no doubt that the region's myriad causes of conflict extend beyond exclusion, encompassing climatic changes and food insecurity. Moreover, the dire repercussions of the security crisis, coupled with these challenges, underscore an urgent need for humanitarian assistance and the pressing requirement to improve the quality and efficiency of security expenditures, as well as combating terrorism financing. However, those efforts may fall short if the problem of exclusion is not addressed at the same time.

In conclusion, this research contributes to the existing body of knowledge by illuminating the nexus between exclusion and conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa. By identifying and addressing the root causes of exclusion and promoting inclusive practices, we propose pathways to alleviate tensions, reduce the likelihood of conflict, and ultimately foster an environment conducive to peace and development. The insights gleaned from this study can help policymakers to navigate the complexities of the region, with the ultimate aim of improving the lives of its people.

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## Appendix A.

Table A.1: Countries with Samples in Table 2 Regressions

Sample	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
BDI	BDI	BDI	
BEN	BEN	BEN	BEN
BFA	BFA	BFA	BFA
BWA	BWA	BWA	BWA
CAF	CAF	CAF	CAF
CMR	CMR	CMR	CMR
COD	COD	COD	
COG	COG	COG	
COM	COM	COM	
GAB	GAB	GAB	
GHA	GHA	GHA	GHA
GIN	GIN	GIN	
KEN	KEN	KEN	KEN
LBR			LBR
LSO	LSO	LSO	
MDG	MDG	MDG	
MLI	MLI	MLI	MLI
MOZ			MOZ
MRT			MRT
MUS	MUS	MUS	
MWI	MWI	MWI	MWI
NAM			NAM
NER	NER	NER	
NGA	NGA	NGA	NGA
RWA			RWA
SEN	SEN	SEN	SEN
SLE			SLE
SWZ	SWZ	SWZ	
TCD	TCD	TCD	TCD
TGO	TGO	TGO	TGO
TZA	TZA	TZA	TZA
UGA	UGA	UGA	UGA
ZAF	ZAF	ZAF	ZAF
ZMB	ZMB	ZMB	ZMB
ZWE	ZWE	ZWE	ZWE



Table A.2: Indicators Based on V-Dem Data

Indicator	By Group
Access to public services	Socioeconomic
	Social
	Gender
	Urban-rural
	Political
Equality in respect for civil liberties by	Socio-economic
	Social
	Gender
	Urban-rural
	Political
Access to state jobs	Socio-economic
	Social
	Gender
	Urban-rural
	Political
Access to state business opportunities	Socio-economic
	Social
	Gender
	Urban-rural
	Political
Power distribution	Socio-economic
	Social
	Gender
	Urban-rural

Social
Economic
Political

The V-Dem dataset is an extensive collection of data on democracy, providing detailed metrics on various aspects of political systems and governance across the world. Particularly, the questions on exclusion in this dataset focus on assessing the degree to which certain groups or individuals are systematically barred from accessing public services, state jobs, and state business opportunities. It also includes questions on equality in respect for civil society and power distribution. These questions help in understanding the dynamics of exclusion, measuring how countries differ in their inclusiveness of diverse populations and minority

groups. Please check section 3 in the V-Dem codebook for more details.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> [https://www.v-dem.net/documents/24/codebook\\_v13.pdf](https://www.v-dem.net/documents/24/codebook_v13.pdf)



# PUBLICATIONS

**Fraying Threads: Exclusion and Conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa**  
Working Paper No. WP/2024/004