

How Political Exclusion and Natural Resources Influence Conflict: A Case Study Analysis of South Sudan

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master in
Political Science (MSc)

Master thesis Political Science: Conflict, Power, and Politics

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15-08-2022

23,072 words

Abstract

There are several uncertainties about how natural resources and political exclusion influence conflict. This research will aim to study the relationship between natural resources and political exclusion from a decision-making process of an ethnic (minority) group and its influence on (violent) intrastate conflict to try and take away some uncertainties. Three theoretical narratives are studied to research this relationship, namely “the lootability of natural resources”, “the political economy approach”, and “the influence of rebel actors on conflict”. A case study of South Sudan is done through a qualitative content analysis. A codebook was developed to research the theoretical narratives. The results indicate that each narrative partially reveals that natural resources and political exclusion influence conflict by worsening it. However, other factors were found to play a role in each narrative, influencing conflict. In general, the conclusion is that natural resources and political exclusion from a decision-making process of an ethnic (minority) group influence (violent) intrastate conflict for the worse, and the relationship undermines political and economic institutions. However, other factors, such as ethnic polarization, the political regime, and conflict duration, influence this effect on conflict. A side note of this research is that personal bias might have influenced the analysis. Furthermore, only one case was studied, making it difficult to generalize the results. Future research must therefore focus on more than one case and use other research methods to verify the results. Furthermore, the effect of varied factors on conflict should be studied.

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List of abbreviations and acronyms

Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan	ARCSS
Comprehensive Peace Agreement	CPA
Gross Domestic Product	GDP
Human Rights Division	HRD
Intergovernmental Authority on Development	IGAD
National Salvation Front	NSF
Nile Petroleum Corporation	Nilepet
Regional protection force	RPF
South Sudan Democratic Movement	SSDM
Southern Sudan Liberation Movement	SSLM
Sudan People's Liberation Army-In Opposition	SPLA-IO
Sudan People's Liberation Movement	SPLM
Sudan People's Liberation Movement-In Opposition	SPLM-IO
Sudanese People's Liberation Army	SPLA
Tiger Faction New Forces	TFNF
Transitional Government of National Unity	TGoNU
United Nations	UN
United Nations Department of Political Affairs	UNDPA
United Nations Environment Programme	UNEP
United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights	UNOHCHR
United Nations Human Rights Council	UNHRC
United Nations Mission in South Sudan	UNMISS
United States of America	USA
World Trade Organization	WTO

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Chapter 1. Introduction

The political exclusion of (ethnic) groups can influence how natural resources are used in a conflict by various actors. Numerous studies show the effect natural resources have on conflicts (Ross, 2004a, p. 35; Collier & Hoeffler, 1998; Fearon, 2004; Collier & Hoeffler, 2002; Buhaug & Gates, 2002). Political exclusion also influences conflicts over natural resources: Asal, Findley, Piazza, and Walsh (2015) concluded that excluding ethnic groups could increase the likelihood of conflicts. Therefore, understanding the relationship between natural resources, political exclusion, and conflicts is essential.

However, there are debates and uncertainties about various ideas and views on the relationship between natural resources, political exclusion, and conflicts. Discussions have been conducted from multiple perspectives. If one researches how to better improve a country's political system from a developmental approach, a study might focus on how to establish political inclusion within a natural resource conflict. Basedau and Roy (2020, p. 74) studied how political inclusion is one of the best ways to reduce conflicts related to (natural) resources. Suppose one focuses on natural resources as the main issue. In that case, a researcher might focus on the type of natural resources, showing how this influences a conflict. It, therefore, matters from which point of view the debate is researched.

Uncertainties also play a role in the debates. Studies question how natural resources and political exclusion affect a conflict. Wennmann (2007) argues that natural resources do not necessarily help us better understand conflicts and how those are financed: the financing of conflicts is done through various financial strategies, of which the wealth of natural resources is only one. There are also uncertainties on how studies present natural resources and political exclusion as the central issue in a conflict. This is often not the case. Natural resource conflicts often involve stakeholders' various (ethnic) power relations (Brown & Keating, 2015, p. 12). Questions remain on the motivations for using natural resources and political exclusion to justify conflicts and how conflict arises when natural resources are found in a conflict area (Basedau & Roy, 2020).

Uncertainties about understating how political exclusion and natural resources influence conflicts also endure because of diverse ideas on this. For example, Asal *et al.* (2015, pp. 1348-1349) observed mechanisms that might produce a heightened risk of a conflict occurring when the settlement area of an excluded ethnic group contains oil, thereby focusing on the living area of excluded groups. In contrast, Brown and Keating (2015, p. 2) focused on

how natural resources and political exclusion influenced each other: when a conflict over natural resources is resolved in peace, this can lead to progress; however, natural resource conflict leads to violence when the government is weak and ethnic and political divisions play a role in politics. Political exclusion becomes a factor of weak governance structures, influencing the resource conflict for the worse. Ideas from which perspective studies are conducted contribute to uncertainties.

The various debates and uncertainties on the relationship between natural resources, political exclusion and conflict require detailed research to help overcome doubts and discussions. This research will focus on various theoretical narratives to help better understand the relationship. Through a case study analysis, this research will try to take away uncertainties and present how the relationship works in practice. Looking at the relationship in depth through various narratives can help understand how natural resources, political exclusion, and conflict influence each other in practice and what other factors might influence conflicts.

The research will focus on intrastate conflicts because the study focuses on the national politics of a country and how political exclusion plays a role in this. Intrastate conflict is violence between or among one or more (dis)advantaged minority or majority groups and the political state to either control a larger share of limited (natural) resources or to gain a larger share in the autonomy of the (territorial) state (Morales, 1998, p. 246). This research will focus on political exclusion (which often excludes minority groups while the majority groups own power) and natural resources (for which violence is used to gain a larger share). Therefore, this type of conflict was chosen to research.

The research will focus on all natural resources in a country, mainly when those resources contribute to (ongoing) conflict. Political exclusion in this research is defined as a dynamic process where an ethnic (minority) group is politically isolated from a decision-making process on, e.g., natural resource distribution or other affairs related to natural resources or their way of living (Guo & Jordan, 2022, pp. 43-52). It will be researched if natural resources and political exclusion alone or together affect a conflict. This form of political exclusion is chosen to take away uncertainties on how being ethnically and politically isolated might be a factor which contributes to conflicts.

The research question arising from the uncertainties and debates mentioned above is, *“How do natural resources and political exclusion from a decision-making process of an ethnic (minority) group influence (violent) intrastate conflict?”*. This question focuses on natural

resources and a form of political exclusion to contribute to the knowledge of intrastate conflicts and how the two concepts play a role in this. The question is open and broad-based to ensure various theoretical narratives can be researched, which would have been harder if there had been a focus on a specific natural resource.

This research is relevant to society for various reasons. Future policies could be drafted to include groups and other actors politically. It can help ensure actors have a say in, for example, conflict resolution and different (local) political situations. It can be helpful for society to understand how a natural resource contributes to conflict and how political exclusion is related to this. Solutions can then be found to prevent the two from contributing to conflicts negatively. Society, especially policymakers and politicians, can draft policies on tackling issues of political exclusion and natural resources to conflicts when it arises or when it is happening. Bayramov (2018) argued that it is unclear how poor performances of state institutions interact with natural resources and conflict. Poor performances can be political exclusion as well. This research will help understand society how to improve poor performances of state institutions to tackle conflicts.

This research's scientific relevance contributes to existing scientific uncertainties and debates. The question builds forth on, first, the role of natural resources in conflicts today. Many studies have been done on conflicts before 2010, so I will concentrate on a conflict that occurred after 2010. The research will try to fill a knowledge gap on how natural resources and political exclusion affect conflict through various theoretical narratives. It will also contribute to a knowledge gap in how the relationship contributes to conflicts, which is made possible by conducting a case study analysis to observe how the relationship works in practice. The research will furthermore try to contribute to a knowledge gap on how political exclusion plays a role in natural resource conflicts in general, to find out how political exclusion works if it is not related to natural resources.

I will first present three theoretical narratives, which all affect natural resource conflicts and where political exclusion is able to play a role. I will then present the research methods: I will conduct a directed qualitative case study analysis. Chapter 4 discusses my selected case, South Sudan, and why this case is essential for this study. I will then present the case study analysis results and show how the theoretical narratives play a role in this. Lastly, I present the conclusion where I will show that natural resources and political exclusion form a decision-making process of an ethnic (minority) group influence violent intrastate conflicts

often for the worst and that the relationship undermines political and economic institutions. However, I will also discuss how other factors affect this influence.

Chapter 2. Theoretical Framework

This chapter discusses the various roles of natural resources and political exclusion within a conflict. I discuss three theoretical narratives, explaining each, discussing shortcomings and presenting the hypothesis based on the narrative. Each narrative discussed here is chosen because each contributes distinctly to the theoretical debates and uncertainties on the relationship between natural resources and political exclusion in conflicts.

Lootability of a natural resource

The lootability of a natural resource influences conflict, which makes it interesting to research to what extent it does and how it is related to political exclusion. In this part, I first define lootability. I will then give some theoretical assumptions and how the lootability of a natural resource is linked to political exclusion. In the end, I present the hypothesis based on the “lootability” narrative.

The lootability of a natural resource is the ease with which a natural resource is extracted and transported by individuals or a small team of unskilled workers (Ross, 2003, p. 10). It influences the type of conflict. Other factors, such as the location and type of natural resource, matter for the lootability. For example, an easy-to-loot natural resource tends to make non-separatist conflict more likely to start. Once a non-separatist conflict has begun, easy-to-loot natural resources might make it harder to solve. In contrast, hard-to-loot natural resources make separatist conflict more likely (Ross, 2003). For these two types of conflict, the lootability of a resource matter.

Various characteristics matter for a natural resource to be lootable (or unlootable). In Table 1, the characteristics that influence the lootability of a natural resource are presented and discussed below.

Table 1. Characteristics of natural resources

<i>Characteristic</i>	
<u>“Proximate”</u>	<u>“Distant”</u>
Natural resources are found close(r) to a national capital and are therefore easier controlled by a government (Le Billon, 2001, p. 570)	Natural resources are found further away from a national capital and are therefore easier for rebels to control (Le Billon, 2001, p. 570)
<u>“Point source”</u>	<u>“Diffuse”</u>
Natural resources are concentrated in small areas and are therefore easily controlled by a small group (Le Billon, 2001, p. 570)	Natural resources are scattered over a larger area and are therefore harder to control by any single group (Le Billon, 2001, p. 570)
<u>“Obstructable”</u>	<u>“Unobstructable”</u>
The transportation of natural resources can be blocked easily by small numbers of individuals with few weapons (Ross, 2003, p. 10)	The transportation of natural resources can only be blocked by a large number of individuals with heavy weapons (Ross, 2003, p. 10)

Table 1 presents the definition of the characteristics. The characteristics make a natural resource easier or harder to loot. The location of a natural resource matters for how easy to loot it is: “point source” resources are easy to be looted by one actor or a few small actors since it is found in a smaller area; in contrast, “diffuse” natural resources are spread throughout a larger area, making it harder to loot and to be controlled by just one actor. “Proximate” natural resources are easier controlled, and therefore looted, by one actor (most likely the government or related actors). In contrast, “distant” resources are easier controlled by rebel actors (or other associated actors) since it is further away from governmental power. Lastly, “obstructable” natural resources are easier to block while transported, which means they are easier to loot than “unobstructable” resources, which need many actors to block them during transportation.

Natural resources have other common characteristics, such as legality or profitability, which are not discussed within this theoretical narrative. These distinctive characteristics either do not matter for how easy a resource is to loot, or the characteristic differ so much per natural resource that it is difficult to discuss in general (e.g., the distinction between renewable and non-renewable resources).

Le Billion (2001, p. 570) argues that four characteristics (as discussed in Table 1) also matter for the influence of a natural resource on conflicts. “Point source” resources found further away from governmental power are associated with secession conflicts. In contrast, “point source” resources concentrated near governmental authority can lead to attempts to overthrow that authority. “Diffuse” resources found near a capital are more likely to lead to riots, while “diffuse” resources found further away from a capital are associated with conflicts of warlords. For the lootability of a natural resource, it is the distance from certain actors and the location within a country (or neighbouring countries) that matters, but these characteristics also matter for the type of conflict most likely to occur.

Theoretical assumptions also discuss evidence on how lootability influences the severity and duration of a conflict. An easy-to-loot natural resource found in larger numbers influences the severity of an armed civil conflict, but the location (as discussed above) also matters for the impact (Lujala, 2009). If a lootable resource is found in the conflict area, the duration of a conflict is most likely to double (Lujala, 2010). For example, if rebels easily exploit a natural resource, this could be a motivation and means for those rebels to revolt against existing powers. Conflict can last longer since rebels can sell the natural resource and use the revenues to finance their rebellion. Ross (2004b) also found evidence of how lootable commodities, such as gemstones and drugs, do not make a conflict more likely to happen but can increase an existing conflict’s duration.

All theoretical assumptions and examples above demonstrate how the lootability of a natural resource influences conflict. It is essential to realise that lootability is not always the sole reason natural resources influence conflicts (Herbst, 2000). Literature has shown how natural resources are not always the only goal for fighting to occur. These critiques should be kept in mind during research.

It is now the case to discuss the role of political exclusion within this theoretical narrative. Political exclusion affects conflict. For example, Asal *et al.* (2015) believe that groups subject to exclusion from (national) politics and groups who cannot pursue their interest engage in

armed conflict. Political exclusion can lead to groups convincing other individuals to partake in collective political action, including political violence (Asal *et al.*, 2015). Conflict with a governmental power is more likely to occur when representatives of ethnic groups are increasingly politically excluded, especially if this exclusion happened recently (Cederman, Wimmer & Min, 2010, p. 88).

However, political exclusion also affects natural resource conflicts and the other way around. Natural resource conflicts can lead to violence, especially in a state with weak governance structures and ethnic and political divisions. Political exclusion can develop due to these circumstances, influencing the resource conflict for the worse. Asal *et al.* (2015) found how political exclusion and natural resources are intertwined: while exclusion alone increases the likelihood of conflict occurring, it was the presence of a natural resource, oil, and its wealth, that further raised the risk of war occurring.

However, it should not be forgotten how political exclusion and natural resources do not always have to lead to conflicts. Political exclusion could improve conflict resolution if, for example, it is being tackled. Basedau and Roy (2020, p. 74) found that when natural resource deposits are present, this can lead to a higher chance of violent protests occurring; but this effect is reversed for all forms of protest when (ethnic) groups in regions where natural resources are available could participate in political decisions. If political exclusion is tackled or becomes more inclusive, natural resource conflicts might be solved.

Above, it is discussed how political exclusion influences natural resource conflicts and how, in theory, the lootability of a natural resource also affects conflict. Easier-to-loot natural resources might worsen conflict; politically excluded actors might instigate conflict and use natural resources as a means and motivation to begin or worsen a conflict. Therefore, it is theoretically interesting to understand how political exclusion and the lootability of a natural resource together influence conflict. The hypothesis developed from these theoretical assumptions is then:

H1: When natural resources are easier to loot, this will lead to more and/or worse conflict, especially when politically excluded actors are able to manage the resources or participate in conflict.

This hypothesis will research the relationship between lootable natural resources and political exclusion and their influence on conflicts.

Political economy approach

The distribution of natural resources has been conflictive for a long time. One narrative suggests that after the Cold War, conflict began to have a more economic agenda (Keen, 1998; Kaldor, 1999; Duffield, 2001) and began focusing on the process of globalisation, which started in the early 1990s. Conflicts and natural resources are connected due to the growing political and economic importance of natural resources as both a source for expanding (existing) industries as a source of finance for hostile groups (Samset, 2009). The political economy approach explains how the distribution of natural resources, while paying attention to government structures, might lead to conflict. Therefore, it is necessary to research this approach: it is about the influence of natural resources on politics and conflicts. I first explain the political economy approach and how it relates to natural resource conflict. I then discuss how the approach is related to political exclusion. In the end, I present the hypothesis based on the “political economy” narrative.

The political economy of natural resources is concerned with how valuable natural resources and politics are intertwined: politics can affect the exploitation of natural resources, and natural resources can influence politics (Collier, 2010, pp. 1105-1106). It is presumed that the ruling elite chooses between national public goods (in this case, natural resources) and the (re)distribution of those goods towards themselves. How smaller the elite is, how more likely these elite feel the need to (re)distribute goods to themselves. Therefore, accountability of politicians towards citizens and security (from external and internal threats) must be established. These two elements help establish an effective state representing its citizens' interests. If both elements are not provided for, a political system can become unstable, and the (re)distribution of natural resources easily goes to the ruling elite (Collier, 2010, p. 1112).

The government plays a leading role in the exploitation of natural resources. The resources are in nature “natural”, which means once discovered, ownership rights can fall under anyone. The government can, however, gain custodial in the name of citizens who discovered and own the natural resources. The government should carefully manage natural resources and ensure that the value of resources is maximised for those who own them. The government must protect those who discover natural resources to prevent fights about who is the righteous owner. This can be done, e.g., by assigning extraction rights (Collier, 2010, pp. 1117-1118).

But politics influences both the revenues and the extraction of natural resources, for example, through insufficient prospecting, rapidly extracting natural resources (which is especially a

problem when society and politics are unstable and divided) or not investing enough in natural resources to guarantee a decent value. While distributing natural resources in a political system, the system must be stable and inclusive. If this is not possible, some form of democracy with a solid check-and-balance system should be in place (Collier, 2010, pp. 1120-1126).

The government should play an effective and efficient role in the discovery, extraction, and management of revenues of natural resources in the political economy approach. This is often not the case in unstable political systems. The *resource curse*, as mentioned by Le Billon (2008), explains how politics, natural resources, and conflict are related. The *resource curse* is a theory concerning abundant natural resources and how this connects to a higher likelihood of conflict. Resource abundance is defined as having a high natural resource production per capita (Samset, 2009). The *resource curse* highlights how resource-rich states might fail to take advantage of their natural resource wealth and engage in more armed civil conflicts than resource-poor states. Those states can experience slower economic growth than expected but can also experience more instability: these states might be faced with a higher rate of conflicts and corruption (Vesco, de Cian & Carraro, 2020, pp. 2-3; Samset, 2009; Lujala, 2010, p. 15). These factors make domestic politics unstable.

Literature on the *resource curse* argues how abundant natural resources lead to inequality and violence. Grievances are found due to unfair distributions and treatment of those who do not hold power. An abundance of natural resources, especially oil, in developing countries can weaken the economy and institutions and makes society more vulnerable to armed disputes (Bayramov, 2018, pp. 72-74). This vulnerability may come from poor policy choices and a weak state often found within these countries; both elements help expose society to violent conflicts (Lujala, 2010, p. 15).

The abundance of natural resources is often related to weak governance, poor development outcomes and an illogical way of exploiting resources. Weak governance power often leads to weak governmental institutions where governments (re)direct resource revenues to themselves and other elites. There is a consistent negative correlation between sustained economic growth and natural resource abundance. The *resource curse* theory is, in summary, focused on how an abundance of natural resources affects conflict and in which ways.

Once a country has become resource-dependent, three mechanisms might lead to economic growth failure: economic disruption (such as the Dutch disease), institutional failure (such as

less representation and low accountability) and conflict (over greed, grievances, or feasibility, for example). These mechanisms are found throughout the *resource curse* (Tadjoeddin, 2007, pp. 5-8).

As demonstrated above, natural resources, conflicts and (weak) politics can undermine a country's economic performance and governance. But important critiques are worth mentioning. De Soysa (2000) concluded that specific natural resources cause lower economic growth and grievances, but both factors can lead to conflict without the presence of resources. In the political economy approach, conflicts can also be financed through strategies other than through revenues of natural resources. Extracting and selling natural resources is only one financial strategy (Wennmann, 2007). Natural resources do not always play a role in the political economy approach.

I now discuss how the political economy approach and natural resource conflicts are related and then discuss the role of political exclusion in this approach. There are four types of resource conflicts that can challenge a country's stability: (1) secessionists conflict where resource-rich regions want to split from other parts of the country; (2) resource disputes as part of a new national compact; (3) grievances over stand-alone projects; and (4) multiple small-scale disputes (Brown & Keating, 2015, p. 7).

The first and second types share that both attempt to establish a new "social" contract between a government and its citizens. Resources can be redirected or allocated in several ways. This can, however, lead to highly political processes that tend to be conflictual (Brown & Keating, 2015, p. 7). This is related to the political economy approach since both types focus on the (re)distribution of natural resources.

The third type is often about resource disputes, such as those on large-scale agribusiness investments. The resource conflict is usually fought between private-sector actors and local communities. The national government may be actively involved. This type is concerned with the potential impacts these stand-alone projects have on local communities and how the project's benefits are fairly distributed (Brown & Keating, 2015, p. 9). This is related to the political economy approach since it is about the distribution of (the wealth) of natural resources to the government, larger companies, and local communities. The government can monitor whether local communities can participate sufficiently in this process.

The fourth type is about how minor disputes threaten broader stability and peace. It is, for example, about land conflicts. Each dispute is minor but may turn violent, affecting a wider

area's stability (Brown & Keating, 2015, p. 10). This relates to the political economy approach since it focuses on the stability of politics and the economy once disputes arise.

Apart from these four types, there are also some potential issues which are typically the reason for national resource conflicts to occur: (1) ownership of a natural resource; (2) the allocation of power to manage the access to or to develop the natural resources; (3) distribution of natural resource revenues; and (4) environmental and social damages caused through extraction. These four issues can be stand-alone or are a combination of issues during a resource dispute (Brown & Keating, 2015, p. 2).

Determining the ownership of a natural resource is controversial, especially since customary rights and private ownership need to be considered. The second issue may overlap with the first: a community may have common laws on the right to use resources but may not legally own them. The dispute is then about who decides on the management of resources (Brown & Keating, 2015, pp. 12-13). This is related to the political economy approach since it focuses on the politics of how to manage natural resources and what influence potential governmental issues might have on this.

The distribution of revenues has led to frequent disputes in the past. Transparency is vital to know who gets what percentages of revenues to prevent corruption and guarantee political stability. The last issue concerns itself with how the exploitation of resources damages communities' livelihoods or how it may disrupt social structures (Brown & Keating, 2015, pp. 13-14). This is related to the political economy approach since it focuses on how to distribute natural resource wealth in the country and how this is necessary for political peace.

The political economy approach is related to conflict because of the distribution of natural resources and the political and economic instability this can cause. Political exclusion has a significant role in this approach: it can heavily influence a country's economic and political system. Political exclusion is about choices made by those who have power and those who cannot influence the decision-making process since they are excluded. It is essential to know who owns power and through which ideology or political approach they act since this might affect the amount of political exclusion in a country.

Inclusivity is important in the political economy approach: as Besley and Persson (2008a; 2008b) underscore, a political system which is non-inclusive and highly unstable has less capacity to build an effective state. Samset (2009) emphasises how resource-rich countries might develop weak governance institutions at the country level. On the micro-level,

individuals or groups feel the consequences of these weak institutions: citizens have fewer economic opportunities because often countries only focus on resource extraction sectors; the public sector is often corrupt and does not allow citizens to voice their opinions, excluding them from the decision-making process regarding natural resources (Samset, 2009). The political economy approach and political exclusion are related through the unequal distribution of natural resources. Since the ruling elite holds power, people are excluded from having a say in the distribution process.

Apart from discussing the distribution of natural resources, it is also essential to discuss the wealth those resources generate. For example, Asal *et al.* (2015, p. 1344) theorized and found evidence for how the presence of natural resource wealth increases how political exclusion is a strong motivator for armed conflict. A government might have information on resource revenues, while ethnic, politically excluded groups believe the government is withholding this information. For an excluded group, armed conflict might be a solution: if the group takes control of the region where the natural resource is found, it no longer must share revenue results, and they can keep revenues themselves. Especially when an ethnic group is excluded from the decision-making process in sharing oil revenues, this might lead to problems. This exemplifies how political exclusion and the political economy approach are related. It shows how an inadequate distribution of natural resource wealth and unstable politics, where a ruling elite excludes people, can lead to conflicts.

Another example of the role of political exclusion in the political economy approach is found within mineral resources, which are often high-income resources due to the bountiful rent that extraction and export generate. This stimulates an environment where rent-seeking politicians and bureaucrats might give rise to a regime of authoritarianism, including weak institutions, to control those rents. This fosters violent conflicts because reaching peace is obstructed and since institutions are weak, resolving disputes is hard (Samset, 2009).

However, excluding certain groups may have political advantages. For example, excluding ethnic groups strengthens included groups' (political) power. Political representation and the ability to make decisions are reinforced for included groups. Sustaining political exclusion is a choice made by ruling elites within the political economy approach. Still, this choice can be dangerous since it can foster unstable politics and a higher chance of people rebelling.

As discussed in the "political economy" narrative, natural resources and political exclusion might lead to conflicts in various ways. A hypothesis was formed based on the theoretical

assumptions presented above to study how the two concepts are related within the political economy approach while concentrating on conflicts. The hypothesis is then:

H2: If actors feel politically excluded regarding the distribution of (the wealth of) natural resources, conflict is more likely because a country's economic performance and governance structures are undermined.

This hypothesis will research how natural resources and political exclusion play a role in conflicts while using the political economy approach to study this.

Rebel actors in conflicts

Rebel actors often use a specific dialogue to legitimise their actions and to recruit people to their cause. Political exclusion can be such a dialogue. There are usually underlying causes of interest, and it is not necessarily political exclusion why actors rebel. There is a greed for other interests than just solving political exclusion, such as future prizes for extracting natural resources. It is worth knowing how rebel actors play a role in the influence of natural resources and political exclusion in conflicts. I first discuss how rebels are related to natural resource conflict. I then discuss how rebel actors use political exclusion in their campaigns and present the hypothesis formed.

Rebel actors influence how a conflict begins or acts out. For example, Lujala (2010) concluded that rebels who had access to hydrocarbons or gemstones doubled the duration of a conflict. Lujala (2010) also concluded that if oil is produced onshore, the risk of a conflict increases. Onshore oil production and the access rebel movements have are important for a conflict's impact on shaping civil conflict. Apart from these conclusions, Lujala (2010) also found evidence on how non-lootable natural resources have a possible significant impact on rebel groups: rebels may be willing to engage in more extended conflict if they see the future reward of gaining access to a natural resource (exploitation) as large enough; and rebels may sell future extraction rights to finance current conflict. Furthermore, countries which are resource-rich experience more conflict than resource-poor countries: (1) natural resources, especially those that are easily exploited by others, can be both a motivation and means for rebels to revolt against existing powers; and (2) access to natural resources may increase the chance of a rebellion to be successful, since natural resource can provide financial opportunities (Lujala, 2010).

Rebels might instigate conflicts due to future economic interests of possessing natural resources. However, the individual behaviour of rebel actors also contributes to conflicts.

Few studies have been done on this, with a few exceptions, including Weinstein's (2007) study of rebel movements in Peru, Uganda, and Mozambique. Weinstein (2007) studied several behaviours among rebel groups, individuals joining these groups, and those who declined to join a rebel group. Resource financing has a significant impact on the behaviours of individuals. Rebel groups which have access to easy financing opportunities are more likely to use violence at random or indiscriminately; in contrast, rebel groups that focus more on social endowments are more likely to use violence selectively and are more likely to restrain their relationship with civilians, since they need civilians' support. Economic and socially endowed rebel groups each attract different individuals. Economic-focused rebel groups attract individuals motivated by the potential to see quick returns of financing opportunities; social-focused rebel groups attract individuals more likely to make a sacrifice in the short term to gain long-term opportunities (Weinstein, 2007). Both economic and social interests are possible reasons why rebel actors want to possess natural resources.

However, natural resources mattered less in a study on why individuals participated in civil war. In a Sierra Leonean conflict, apart from short-term gains, an individual's economic and social position, social pressures and costs and benefits mattered for joining a rebel group (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2008, p. 452). The dynamic of gaining opportunities in the short-term is therefore far from deterministic. Individual behaviours are a potential factor for why rebel actors might start or influence conflicts.

Rebel actors influence natural resource conflict, but natural resources are not always the main reasons for rebel actors to revolt or for individuals to join a rebel group. Rebel actors often focus on economic or social interests, which means natural resources are only one path as to why to rebel. I now discuss how political exclusion plays a role in how rebel actors influence conflicts.

Wimmer, Cederman & Min (2009) discovered that rebel actors are more likely to start an armed rebellion when a large segment of the population is excluded based on their ethnicity. States which are more inclusive experience fewer armed rebellions. When competing elites must share power in a segmented state, this could increase infighting in the form of rebellion. Not a higher degree of diversity within a society but a higher degree of ethnic exclusion from state power led to (ethnic) conflicts (Wimmer, Cederman & Min, 2009).

Excluded ethnic minority groups play a significant role in the causes of mass political rebellions (Choi & Piazza, 2014, p. 37). When a government is politically excluding an ethnic

group, this group is significantly more likely to begin an ethnic rebellion, which indicates that ethnic exclusion can be a risky political strategy (Vogt, Bormann & Cederman, 2016). This is because political exclusion is a way for rebel actors to convince individuals to partake in collective political action, including political violence (Asal *et al.*, 2015).

Political exclusion is often a means to convince individuals to partake in rebellious actions. The reason rebel actors revolt is often underlying economic or social interests. Rebel actors that feel politically excluded can take up arms and rebel against existing powers. Natural resources might play a role, but this role is not always explicit due to underlying economic and social interests, which might be the main reasons for rebel actors to revolt. Natural resource (wealth) is then an added benefit. It is, therefore, interesting to study whether rebel actors use natural resources and political exclusion as their reason to rebel or use this as a reason to fight for underlying interests. The resulting hypothesis coming from these theoretical assumptions is then:

H3: Rebel actors are more likely to rebel or use rebellious actions when they are politically excluded and/or able to control natural resources.

This hypothesis will try to research whether political exclusion and access to natural resources is the reason rebel actors rebel or whether other causes are the reason, and whether gaining a natural resource (or its wealth) and political exclusion are only means to convince people to join the rebel cause.

The three presented hypotheses study political exclusion and natural resources' influence on conflicts through different narratives. Each of these narratives plays an essential role in theories on conflict. While a rebel actor might use political exclusion to recruit people to fight for underlying interests, does the political economy approach focus on how natural resources are (unequally) distributed and how this might lead to conflict. The lootability focuses on something else entirely, namely the characteristics of natural resources.

Chapter 3. Research methods

This chapter discusses the research methods I will use for my research. I will first define and operationalise political exclusion and natural resources. I then discuss the research method, why I chose this method and why this will contribute to existing research. In Chapter 4, I discuss which case I have selected and why.

Political exclusion: definition and operationalisation

Political exclusion developed out of “social exclusion”. Social exclusion is a dynamic process where a group or an individual is isolated from a community or organisation and is deprived of their due rights and entitlements (Guo & Jordan, 2022, p. 43). These groups and individuals are discriminated against based on their e.g., race, gender, ethnicity, or disability. Discrimination arises in public institutions and social institutions. Social exclusion is multidimensional and involves economic, cultural, social, and political dimensions. Social exclusion is also relational because it is about unequal power relations (Khan, Combaz & McAslan Fraser, 2015, p. 3). Experiencing exclusion can lead to negative emotional and psychological impacts. Exclusion is related to poverty and a lack of access to fundamental human rights (Guo & Jordan, 2022, pp. 43-44).

When people discuss political exclusion, they discuss how some cannot access their political rights and experience a lack of political engagement. Political exclusion is various: for example, a person can have little to no opportunity to express their interest, or a person might lack access to feedback channels to provide critique (Guo & Jordan, 2022, p. 50).

Furthermore, political exclusion includes a denial of citizenship rights (such as political participation) or a denial of personal security (such as the ability to voice your opinions safely). The state is not neutral and discriminates between various social (ethnic) groups (Khan, Combaz & Mc Aslan Fraser, 2015, p. 12). Political exclusion is the political isolation of an individual or group from a community or an organisation.

In this research, political exclusion concentrates on a situation where an ethnic (minority) group experiences a lack of access to a political decision-making process or where those groups are intentionally left out of the political decision-making process. Political exclusion is a dynamic process where an ethnic (minority) group is politically isolated from a decision-making process (Guo & Jordan, 2022, pp. 43-52). To measure political exclusion, I will study the political arena and whether an ethnic (minority) group was deliberately left out or was not provided other opportunities to participate in the political process.

Natural resources: definition and operationalisation

Natural resources are defined by the World Trade Organization (WTO) as “stocks of materials that exist in the natural environment that are both scarce and economically useful in production or consumption, either in their raw states or after a minimal amount of processing” (2010, p. 46). Natural resources have several functions, depending on how they are defined. When defining a natural resource from an economic perspective, natural resources are raw materials used to generate wealth (Jensen & Bateman, 1981). However, if natural resources are defined from an environmental and social perspective, they give life-supporting functions to those who use them (Gilmore & Lujala, 2003, p. 2). The United Nations Department of Political Affairs (UNDPA) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) refer to natural resources as, for example, fertile lands, water, minerals, forests, or oil; the resources are present in nature and can be used for economic gains. Natural resources are essential sources of power and income. When managed poorly, resources could be drivers of conflict (UNDPA & UNEP, 2015, p. 11).

Natural resources have diverse characteristics, which help explain how natural resources influence conflicts. Natural resources can be easy or hard to loot, but a resource can also be more profitable once harder to track on (illegal) markets (Mildner, Wodni & Lauster, 2011, p. 166). If a natural resource is deemed illegal, it means it is tough to trade this resource on an international market. Natural resources also differ in their renewability (Oregon State University, n.d.): does the resource have the potential to be regrown or replaced by natural processes over time, or is there a finite supply?

Natural resources are diverse, and each natural resource has distinctive characteristics. To measure natural resources, I will research the various characteristics of and contributions to a conflict based on the theoretical assumptions presented above and within this section.

Research method

The chosen research method for this research is a case study analysis. I will conduct a qualitative content analysis to help thoroughly understand the meaning of how natural resources and political exclusion are related to conflicts. This research method will help take away uncertainties and debates. I will conduct a directed content analysis since I will build upon and use the support of an existing theoretical framework (as presented above; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). I developed a codebook, which I will use to study the chosen case. The codebook is based on theoretical assumptions, the hypotheses, and the research method. Several key concepts essential for the study are also considered in the codebook. In the

results section, I will discuss the results of the directed content analysis with the help of the codebook. In the concluding chapter, I discuss the relevance of this research, but I will also present shortcomings or striking different expectations.

To collect data, I will conduct a document study: I will use policy briefs, reports, written interviews, news articles, video interviews and many more sources to answer the questions in the codebook. I will try to find diverse data, which I will thoroughly analyse. I will try to understand how natural resources and political exclusion influence conflicts. Through the chosen research method, I should be able to find various insights into the relationship between natural resources, political exclusion and conflict and analyse this based on theoretical assumptions.

Variables

Within this research, many variables play a (potential) role. Here, I explain the dependent, independent, and possible mediating and control variables.

The dependent variable is “(violent) intrastate conflict” since this variable is caused by the independent variables “natural resources” and “political exclusion from a decision-making process of an ethnic (minority) group”. Other factors might influence conflict as well.

Therefore, I will control, during the case study analysis, for the following variables: ethnic polarization (Lujala, 2009, p. 59), political regime (Mildner, Wodni & Lauster, 2011, p. 159), conflict duration (Lujala, 2009, p. 59) and the context of the conflict.

Other variables, such as income level/income per capita, population size and number of deaths, are control variables usually used in quantitative research. These variables are not controlled for here because it is harder to interpret their influence on conflict since it is more challenging to study their impact through a qualitative analysis.

Strengths and weaknesses

The chosen research method has both strengths and weaknesses. I now discuss these, and while discussing the flaws, I will try to argue how I ensure these weaknesses are prevented from influencing the research.

Qualitative research has several strengths. Qualitative research can help find the behaviours of actors. This will help understand why actors act in specific ways and where this behaviour developed from. Qualitative analysis can give a detailed account of a complex issue. Since the study focuses thoroughly on the research subject, it helps better understand it. In this case,

there will be a thorough analysis of how and why political exclusion and natural resources might influence conflict.

However, qualitative research contains some weaknesses. The researcher's bias can influence how research is conducted, and results are interpreted. For example, my own experiences can affect how I interpret specific data. To ensure my personal bias does not influence the research, I will try to stay close to the theoretical assumptions while conducting the study and answering the questions in the codebook. While interpreting the results, I will use the theoretical assumptions to argue why these results are found.

Another issue might be that I, as a researcher, might not detect when data is relevant and when it is not. To prevent this, I will stay open-minded during the gathering of data. Since qualitative research is a detailed analysis, it is hard to generalize the results to a larger context. For example, this research focuses on one case. However, I will also try to observe general patterns found in the theoretical assumptions in the case study.

I now discuss how I will try to ensure reliability and validity in the research. Reliability is focused on a measure's consistency: to what extent can the results be reproduced when the analysis is repeated under the same conditions? To check for reliability, one should check the consistency of the results across different observers, parts of the test, and time. A reliable measurement is not always valid: even though results might be reproducible, these are not always correct (Thanasegaran, 2009, pp. 35-37). To ensure reliability in this research, I will try to answer the questions in the codebook, for example, based on what is asked. I will also try to stay close to the theoretical assumptions while analysing data, making sure my interpretations are left out.

Validity is about a measure's accuracy: to what extent did the results measure what they were supposed to measure? To check for validity, one should check how well the results correspond to the established theories and other measures of the same concept. A valid measurement is often reliable: if a test produces accurate results, these results should be reproducible (Thanasegaran, 2009, p. 37). To ensure validity in this research, I have tried to define what I will research through the chosen research method and codebook based on theoretical assumptions. I will conduct the research as presented. The next chapter discusses the case selection.

Chapter 4. Case selection and background information on South Sudan

This chapter presents the chosen case and why this case was selected. I will first discuss why I chose South Sudan. Then I will discuss some background information necessary to understand the context of the results better.

South Sudan is an interesting case to study for several reasons. Not only does it have a rich history of conflicts where natural resources (especially oil) have played a role, but political exclusion (primarily based on ethnicity) is also present. South Sudan's finances are unstable, and the country's elite holds oil revenues close within their reach. Oil is one of South Sudan's economic fortunes: it accounted, in 2018, for approximately 90% of government revenues and 95% of total exports. Both the economy and politics are highly dependent on oil. South Sudan has no fair power-sharing in the political centre, and the state is fragile. Governance challenges are extensive, and there is little political will and capacity to make essential institutional changes. The political centre is fractured and non-inclusive, civilians experience high inequality, governance institutions and state capacity are weak, and the amount of institutional corruption and the number of rebel groups is growing. South Sudan is a complex country, being the youngest in the world as it was only established in 2011.

It is necessary to understand better how South Sudan works, how political exclusion in the civil war, which occurred from 2013 to 2018, is present and how natural resources influence the country. South Sudan is studied through this research, and it can be researched how to make the country less complex and less dependent on oil. Furthermore, how to tackle South Sudan's weak political centre can be studied. In return, South Sudan also helps better understand the relationship between natural resources and political exclusion in conflicts. All three narratives can sufficiently be studied due to the country's unstable political economy, numerous active rebel actors, and numerous natural resources. Furthermore, the civil war is an intrastate conflict where violence occurred between and among several ethnic groups and the government over natural resources and gaining more power or autonomy in the state.

This study focuses on the civil war between 2013 and 2018. Even in 2022, tensions remain in the country due to the civil war. Therefore, South Sudan and the civil war must be thoroughly analysed to understand the complex dynamics the country deals with. I discuss the demographic profile of South Sudan, past (civil) wars and conflicts, the civil war which

occurred from 2013-2018, the role natural resources play in South Sudan and how political exclusion is found in the political centre.

Demographic profile

The demographic profile presented here is primarily based on the situation in South Sudan in 2018 since this is the end of the civil war. When other years are discussed, this is either to compare different years or because data were missing for 2018¹.

South Sudan, officially called the Republic of South Sudan, had a population of 10,975,924 million in 2018. Since the start of the civil war in 2013, population growth has slowed, dropping from 4.4% in 2005 (this year, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed, and southern Sudan gained autonomy) to 2.4% in 2013 to 0.6% growth in 2018. South Sudan is a total of 644,329 square kilometres (The National Bureau of Statistics, n.d.). The country lies in north-eastern Africa, and the capital is Juba, where the government resides. South Sudan has a rich biodiversity, which includes swamplands, rain forests and lush savannas. All areas are home to diverse wildlife species (Sikainga, Spaulding, Collins & el Din Sabr, n.d.).

A person born in South Sudan in 2018 had a life expectancy of 58 years. At the start of the civil war, this was 56 years. Around 50% of the population is below eighteen, and about 70% is below thirty. Furthermore, approximately 80% of households depend on agricultural activities as their primary source of livelihood (The National Bureau of Statistics, n.d.). Of the total population, around 6.2% had access to electricity, and 5% used the internet in 2018. Approximately 20% of the population lived in urban areas, and, of this percentage, 91% lived in slums. In 2018, only 41% of the population used basic drinking water services and 63.7% dealt with the prevalence of a severe food crisis. Of the people aged fifteen and above, only 35% could read in 2018.

South Sudan is home to 64 tribes and ethnic groups. Many ethnic groups share similar cultures but sometimes clash over their differences. The Dinka are the largest ethnic group (in 2011, 35.8% of the total population). The Dinka have a history of being nomadic cattle keepers, which is a large part of their culture. The Dinka also carry out many agricultural

¹ All data presented below in the 'Demographic profile' is from the website of the World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/country/south-sudan>, unless stated otherwise.

activities, such as crop production. The Nuer, the second largest group (in 2011, 15.6% of the total population), often occupy savanna lands, but their economic activities are comparable to that of the Dinka (such as agricultural activities). The other part of the population, 48.6%, belongs to other ethnic groups. These groups include the Zanda, Anywa, Bari and Shilluk. South Sudan also houses a small Arab population (Embassy of the Republic of South Sudan, n.d.; Sikainga, Spaulding, Collins & el Din Sabr, n.d.).

The most important linguistic grouping is that of the Nilotens, where various languages of the Eastern Sudanic language family are part of. The Dinka, Nuer, Shilluk, Bari and Anywa speak this language. Other small ethnic groups, including the Zande, speak languages related to the Adamawa-Ubangi branch. The Arab population speaks Arabic. In the 2005 CPA, Arabic and English were official working languages, but after independence in 2011, English became the country's official working language (Sikainga, Spaulding, Collins & el Din Sabr, n.d.). South Sudan's population is predominantly Christian or animist in their religious beliefs. Around 60% of the population was Christian in 2010, and 40% practised another religion (such as Islam or more traditional animist religions).

South Sudan's economy is fascinating. The country's gross domestic product (GDP) is around \$11.8 billion; in 2015, 8.5% of this GDP came directly from oil rents (African Development Bank Group, 2022a). Around 75% of the GDP comes from oil production (African Development Bank Group, 2022b). Inflation in South Sudan is currently 10.5%, but in 2016 it reached over 350%. Of the total labour force (4,706,766 million people working in 2018), 3.9% worked as armed force personnel. Military expenses (% of the GDP) were 3.6% in 2018. In this economy, 51% of the total population lives below the poverty line (Embassy of the Republic of South Sudan, n.d.).

South Sudan had a transitional government with two legislative houses, but in 2016 a transitional government of unity was formed after the signing of the Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (ARCSS) by President Kiir and vice-president Machar (Sikainga, Spaulding, Collins & el Din Sabr, n.d.). South Sudan scores low on political indicators of the Worldwide Governance index, developed by the World Bank. The indicators are based on percentile ranks, which means the number indicates the rank among all countries of the world, where zero is the lowest, and one hundred is the highest. South Sudan scores low on all indicators, and the score has dropped since independence (World Bank, n.d.-b): 1.45 on Voice and Accountability (in 2011 15.49); 2.36 on Political

Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism (in 2011 7.11); 0 in Government Effectiveness (in 2011 0.47); 2.4 on Regulatory Quality (in 2011 2.84); 1.4 on the Rule of Law (in 2011 2.84); and 0,48 on the Control of Corruption (in 2011 3,32). This shows how ineffective and weak the politics in South Sudan are.

Past (civil) wars and conflicts

Conflict is found throughout the history of both Sudan and South Sudan. Past conflicts were often about political, historical, economic, and social grievances. Strained religious and racial relationships date back many centuries. The introduction of Islam remains problematic. In the 16th century, Sudan was part of the Ottoman Empire. Once this Empire fell, it paved the way for an Anglo-Egyptian rule, worsening (economic) conditions in southern Sudan.

In 1955, the Anya-Nya I rebellion took place due to government abuses and the systemic underdevelopment of the south. On January 1st, 1956, Sudan gained independence. Sudan was divided along religious, regional, and ethnic lines (African Development Bank Group, 2018, p. 5). Sudan became the largest country in Africa and became known for its heterogeneity in areas such as religion and ethnicity. Past conflicts often arose from skewed colonial policies, which mainly contracted administrative, political, and economic development in the north. But cultural and religious issues, and later the battle for political dominance, were also reasons for conflict (Kok, Lotze & Van Jaarsveld, 2009, pp. 30-31). In 1956, southern insurgents took up arms against the rule of Khartoum, the governmental capital of Sudan. In this civil strife, many people were killed. The “African” south and “Arabised” north fought each other, but southern Sudan was used to this, having seen numerous battles among themselves. Most of their battles were related to communal and ethnic differences (International Crisis Group, 2021b, p. 3).

In 1972, the first civil war ended with the Addis Ababa Agreement. All rebel groups gathered under the Southern Sudan Liberation Movement (SSLM), and the Sudanese government had negotiated the Agreement (Larson, the Valentino Achak Deng Foundation & Water for South Sudan, n.d.). The Agreement guaranteed southern Sudan its regional government with executive powers, and Juba would get a regional assembly. However, in the late 1970s, tensions with Khartoum intensified because of the discovery of oil in Sudan (International Crisis Group, 2021b, p. 3). In 1983, a new civil war broke out due to the introduction of the Sharia law and the abolishment of the Addis Ababa agreement. The government redrew provisional borders of provinces, cutting southern Sudan off from fertile lands and areas rich

in oil (Kok, Lotze & Van Jaarsveld, 2009, pp. 30-31). The Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) was formed, led by John Garang (Larson, the Valentino Achak Deng Foundation & Water for South Sudan, n.d.). The SPLA was a guerrilla movement fighting for a united and secular Sudanese state.

In the late 1990s, then-President al-Bashir escalated its counterinsurgency in southern Sudan to develop oil fields. Most oil fields are located near the Sudan-South Sudan border. The Khartoum government won most battles, but it did draw attention to how civilians were abused in the civil war. The West, specifically the United States of America (USA), began to sympathise with the Southern cause (International Crisis Group, 2021b, p. 3). The civil war ended in 2005 when President al-Bashir was persuaded to sign the CPA (Kok, Lotze & Van Jaarsveld, 2009, pp. 30-31). The President was partly persuaded because the strong-armed Bush Administration would military intervene. The deal was signed together with the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), the political wing of the SPLA. The SPLM promised southern Sudan that a secession vote would take place six years from 2005, in 2011.

Khartoum also provided southern Sudan with (semi-)autonomy, and oil revenues from the southern region would be shared equally. In 2005, Salva Kiir became the new leader of the SPLA/M after Garang's death (International Crisis Group, 2021b, p. 3).

In both wars, more than two million people died, and over half a million fled and became refugees. Sudan experienced both intrastate as well as large-scale one-sided and non-state conflicts. The government often instigated conflicts and responded to armed rebellions by mobilizing armed militias. These militias repeatedly violated human rights (Kok, Lotze & Van Jaarsveld, 2009, pp. 30-31).

Oil would become the groundwork for the secession of South Sudan. Oil prices climbed in the years following independence. The SPLM forged a southern consensus for independence by handing out non-existent positions and promising a broad-based government after independence. After southern Sudan gained 50% of the revenues from oil produced in the region, stability began to fall. The SPLM, first a small budget operation where commanders mostly had to finance their units, began to be corrupt. During the war with Khartoum, some top SPLM rebels had managed to make themselves richer, and after the 2005 CPA, the elite started to self-deal more illicitly. The years after 2005 became a free-for-all sphere: there was an influx of billions of dollars into a proto-state where no governance institutions were yet established. Furthermore, some military officials kept oil money as a justification for the

decades of suffering due to the previous conflict (International Crisis Group, 2021b, pp. 3-4). This all led to a wear down of southern solidarity. Oil revenues became concentrated in a few SPLM elite's hands, which led to the rise of ethnic mistrust: the SPLM was perceived to be Dinka-dominated, and smaller ethnic groups had spent decades resisting the SPLM. After more corruption scandals, ethnic mistrust rose even more (International Crisis Group, 2021b, p. 4).

On the 9th of July 2011, thousands of southern Sudanese came together in the capital of what would soon be Africa's 54th state to celebrate South Sudanese independence. Six months prior, people in southern Sudan had voted on a referendum to carve out a new state from Sudan. The referendum resulted from stretched-out talks between representatives of the Khartoum administration and southern Sudanese leaders. The self-determination referendum was internationally recognised (Knopf, 2016, p. 5). On the 11th of July, the Republic of South Sudan was officially formed, and the country became known for its underdevelopment. Apart from developmental challenges, the newly established country also dealt with serious ethnic challenges due to ethnic divisions (International Crisis Group, 2021a, pp. 3-4).

[The civil war from 2013-2018](#)

From 2013 to 2018, another civil war took place in South Sudan, leaving the country devastated. Approximately 400,000 people were killed, and around four million were displaced. Oil revenues, which were once hope for a brighter future, were plundered by politicians. In 2018, a new peace deal was signed again, but the country remains unstable (International Crisis Group, 2021a, pp. 1-2). There are multiple reasons why civil war broke out. Still, one evident reason was the continued struggle between Nuer Riek Machar, Dinka Salva Kiir and other elites over the leadership of the country's governing party: the SPLM.

Soon after the Heglig oil crisis of 2012 (see below), the unity of the government fell apart. Senior party officials challenged Kiir's SPLM leadership and his presidency. Kiir, who had first introduced a political inclusion strategy, began tightening his grip on power and oil funds. Dissatisfaction within the SPLM grew. In 2013, the dispute escalated when Kiir sacked his vice-president Machar and other top officials. At a party conference in December, Dinka and Nuer elite presidential guards began exchanging gunfire. This led to weeks of people being targeted for their ethnicity and a five-year lasting civil war (International Crisis Group, 2021b, pp. 4-5).

Parts of the capital were destroyed, and over 40,000 Nuer civilians sheltered in a nearby United Nations (UN) base. A war had developed in the Greater Upper Nile province. In response, the SPLM/A-In Opposition (SPLM/A-IO) was formed, while Nuer forces defected across the country. Machar became the leader of the SPLM/A-IO, declaring the movement national. It actively began to seek non-Nuer members, but few joined. Parts of the country were on the brink of famine, and atrocities were committed everywhere. At the end of 2014, conflict slowed down. Fighting remained heavy, but it was never as intense as in the first six months (International Crisis Group, 2016a, pp. 8-12).

Not all areas of South Sudan were immediately involved in the civil war. Equatoria became part of the conflict later on. Equatoria covers the southern third of South Sudan, is a diverse region and is home to the country's largest agricultural population. Equatorians have been involved in all significant conflicts in South Sudan, and during the new civil war, they served under both the SPLA and SPLA-IO. Equatoria is diverse, but it unites behind federalism. It was believed federalism mitigates the effects of a Dinka-dominated national government and security forces. Equatorians use minimal violence, but tensions were building in the region, especially in Western Equatoria, between agriculturalist communities and largely Dinka pastoralists and the SPLA.

In the past, the SPLA was ethnically mixed. But it became Dinka-dominated after many Nuer defected in December 2013. Many Dinka cattle keepers migrated into Western Equatoria when the civil war broke out. This strained existing relations with local agriculturalists. The predominance of the Dinka in SPLA units and the Nuer defection from the SPLA to the SPLA-IO contributed to a shift in the SPLA's relationship with Western Equatorian communities. This would all contribute to rebellious actions in the area, as described below in the results chapter (International Crisis Group, 2016a, p. 1).

The region's Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) launched a peace effort within a week since the civil war broke out. In August 2015, this resulted in the signing of the ARCSS (International Crisis Group, 2016a, p. 10). Both Kiir and Machar signed the power-sharing Agreement, which was supposed to end the civil war, improve governance structures, and address long-term tensions between Khartoum, Kampala (capital of Uganda) and Juba. The Agreement led to the Transitional Government of National Unity (TGoNU; International Crisis Group, 2016b, pp. ii-1). The ARCSS made certain Kiir would remain president, but Machar would become his vice-president. Machar returned in April 2016 to South Sudan.

However, the ARCSS had two flaws: (1) Kiir never truly accepted the contents of the ARCSS, even stating his resistance during signing; and (2) mediators, when the agreement was almost entirely written, removed the possibility of a third-party force that could demilitarise Juba, which meant Kiir and Machar had to negotiate a shared security control of Juba (International Crisis Group, 2019, pp. 1-2).

In Equatoria, the ARCSS contributed to the fragility in the region. After the signing of the ARCSS and the detention of several leaders, including the Western Equatorial Governor Bakosora, many Equatorians alienated themselves from the government. The SPLM/A-IO turned what were first local uprisings into full-scale rebellions. Increased mistreatment of civilians and military operations by criminals and armed groups led many civilians to be displaced (International Crisis Group, 2016a, pp. 13-14).

In the whole of South Sudan, fighting officially broke out again in July 2016 due to clashes between forces of both Kiir and Machar in Juba. Machar fled Juba again, leading to the transitional government's collapse. Kiir's SPLA tried to kill Machar, but Machar's forces fought back. The TGoNU had failed. This was, however, predicted. Negotiated agreements succeeded in ending a civil war under three conditions, which were not present in South Sudan (Knopf, 2016, pp. 6-7): (1) involved parties need to believe a military solution is impossible; (2) the negotiated agreement needs to offer a sustainable and an equitable distribution of power that includes, but is not limited to, "compromised elites" as well as a protection of minority groups; and (3) involved parties should believe the terms of the agreement will be enforced over time. Political and ethnic violence continued since involved parties believed a military solution was still possible: four previously reached cease-fires had been broken numerous times since January 2014, and various tribal communities increasingly saw military actions as their only way to fight the threat that the forces of Kiir and Machar posed (Knopf, 2016, p. 8). Furthermore, power was not sufficiently distributed, and few believed the ARCSS would hold over time.

Since fighting broke out again, Kiir reconfigured domestic and regional politics to his favour. Juba became calm, but conflict and fragility scorched throughout the country. The IGAD and ARCSS had prevented a regional war between neighbouring countries, but an inclusive TGoNU was not established. However, in December 2016, Kiir announced he would introduce an inclusive national dialogue, which would complement the ARCSS implementation and negotiations with armed groups. The TGoNU needed a balanced,

politics-first approach. The IGAD asked the UN Security Council for a regional protection force (RPF) to help improve security in Juba and prevent future conflict. Juba would first not accept the RPF. After the Security Council forced Juba to accept the RPF if it did not want to have an arms embargo implemented, Juba accepted after regional negotiations (International Crisis Group, 2016b, pp. i-ii).

In mid-2017, the IGAD was pressured by the EU and the Troika (USA, United Kingdom, and Norway) to launch a High-Level Revitalisation Forum. This Forum brought the government into open talks with opposition leaders (such as Machar and other newly formed rebel groups) and political parties who all hoped to gain future benefits from the new power-sharing agreement. In December 2017, some agreements to cease violence were reached, but they were never really implemented. Talks halted due to disagreement over numerous affairs: whether Machar could return from exile, power-sharing and future security deals. Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir became direct mediators between Kiir and Machar. Their mediating efforts worked. On the 27th of June 2018, Kiir and Machar signed a new declaration: the Declaration of Agreement on a Permanent Ceasefire. This Declaration became the basis for the future peace deal (International Crisis Group, 2019, pp. 3-4).

On the 12th of September 2018, a new set of peace agreements was finalised. This was two years after the ARCSS fell apart. The new deal did not immediately solve the crisis that South Sudan faced. The main points of the agreements were to form a unity government and to cease fighting. However, the new deal did not solve the power struggles between Kiir and Machar. A new political system was not developed, and Kiir and Machar had to create a new one that was unsteady and still excluded groups which had not had access to power for an exceptionally long time. The agreement did lessen fighting, but numerous disputes still need to be solved. The deal needs revision, and additional policies need to be written. However, the actors involved are not yet ready to accept this reality. Especially two urgent matters need attention: resolving disagreements over local boundaries and the administration of South Sudan; and unifying a national army. At the time the peace deal was signed, Kiir and Machar were still discussing how to share security control of Juba (International Crisis Group, 2019, pp. i-ii).

Armed conflict continued. The UN did implement an arms embargo and maintained a peacekeeping mission. The most significant part of this mission is the Protection of Civilian

sites that house most of the 1.3 million internally displaced people. In April 2021, the UN warned South Sudan that if the peace process and drafting of a new national constitution were delayed further, full-scale conflict could break out again. More than 70% of the population needs humanitarian aid (Concern Worldwide, 2022).

On February 22, 2020, Machar was sworn in as vice-president. In 2022, new elections should have taken place. But this election has recently been pushed to December 2024, which means the current transitional government stays in power. Kiir said the delay was not so he could remain in power, but it was done not to rush elections which would bring new conflict. As of 2022, a unified national army is not established, and many other agreements have not been implemented, such as writing a new constitution (Machol, 2022; Reuters, 2022).

The role of oil

South Sudan is enormously dependent on oil production and wealth. Oil revenues have been the primary hard currency source for a long time, and the government has used oil-based loans to rearm massively. Little of the oil-backed loans and oil revenues were directed to benefit the population of South Sudan. Some economists argue that South Sudan has mortgaged its future to finance the civil war and that it will, in the end, lack the resources to pay for core state functions which can ensure stability and peace if this path of spending oil profits continues (International Crisis Group, 2015, p. 20).

Oil exploitation began in the early 1970s in Sudan, but production only started in 1995 for Unity State and in 2004 for Upper Nile State. Since 1998, oil exploitation shifted the structure of the southern Sudanese economy from relying primarily on agricultural activities to depending almost entirely on oil production. Commercial oil exports began in 1999 after pipelines were laid down from the Heglig oil field to Port Sudan. Two export pipelines are now crucial for the export of oil out of South Sudan: the Petrodar pipeline from Paloich to Port Sudan and the Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company pipeline from Heglig to Port Sudan. Through the CPA, southern Sudan would gain a 50/50 split from oil incomes, but only after two per cent of the government share of oil production was paid to the states who produced oil. But mistrust grew between Sudan and southern Sudan when oil figures Khartoum published could not be verified (World Bank, 2022b, p. 22).

South Sudan had a proven oil reserve of 3.75 billion barrels at independence. The economy is highly dependent on oil export, which means the economy is easily influenced by shock if oil production, oil demand or oil world prices change. For example, after the 2012 Heglig oil

crisis (discussed below), the South Sudanese economy shrunk by 51.5%. Oil production in 2018 was low, 126,000 barrels per day, but if security improves, this could increase to 200,000 barrels per day.

However, oil production is projected to slow down: in the mid-2030s, oil production is expected to cease since oil reserves will run out unless South Sudan discovers new oil. South Sudan deals with the significant but complex challenge of convincing those responsible for exploration activities to do so, but weak institutions and other significant challenges might prevent this. The government plays a crucial role in developing the oil sector, and open, stable, and accountable institutions improve the climate to invest in the oil sector. This could raise recovery rates and be added to state reserves (African Development Bank Group, 2018, p. 10).

Heglig oil crisis and the relationship with Sudan

When South Sudan gained independence, Sudan lost three-quarters of its oil production capacity and, therefore, half of its fiscal revenues. But, with international help, Sudan negotiated a financial deal with South Sudan. Juba agreed to pay a fee to use Sudan's oil pipelines. However, in January 2012, no formal agreement had been reached. Khartoum sought payment: it loaded oil into Sudanese tankers. Juba, in response, shut down oil production to try and force Khartoum to their demands. Tensions rose between the two countries, and oil had become a cause of trouble. Negotiations with Sudan on how much South Sudan had to pay for the pipelines to transport crude oil from southern oil fields to the Port of Sudan became deadlocked (Mayik, 2020, pp. 13-14; International Crisis Group, 2021b, p. 4).

South Sudan went as far as to send their army to capture the Heglig oil fields. This led to a short-lived border war since the fields are inside Sudan. In April 2012, the SPLA occupied the Heglig region. South Sudan had supposedly attacked the Panthou Oil field, and Sudan had defended its territory. The bombing of oil fields followed, and minor clashes took place. The militaries of both countries mobilised (Mayik, 2020, p. 14).

In September 2012, the Cooperation Agreement was reached on the borders, security, and natural resources, ending the (economic) crisis between the two countries. Both countries promised to no longer support and harbour the other's rebel groups, and they would withdraw military forces. The agreement was only partially implemented (International Crisis Group,

2016b, p. 4). However, the situation damaged already fragile relations further. South Sudan quickly left the area due to international pressure (Mayik, 2020, p. 14).

In August 2016, Taban Deng (the new vice-president and replacement of Machar) advanced talks further. Khartoum announced that Deng promised to expel the SPLA/M-North, and since then, Khartoum has denied Machar support and entry into Sudan. Khartoum's goal was to reach diplomatic and security benefits from this deal (International Crisis Group, 2016b, pp. 6-7).

Other natural resources

While many disputes originate from oil, South Sudan still has untapped natural resources. These resources can be used to reconstruct South Sudan, both economically and politically, but also to develop South Sudan further. Ninety per cent of the land area is suitable for agricultural activities, and fifty per cent is considered prime agricultural land. In 2010, only four per cent of the land area was actively used for crop production, which means even now, the country can develop the agricultural industry further. The forests, which cover around 29 per cent of the land area, provide opportunities for several public goods. The *Sudd*, one of the world's largest wetlands, is essential for sustaining vast grazing lands. These grazing lands are often crucial for the regional development of states and are necessary for pastoralist communities. There are also considerable amounts of mostly unexplored mineral resources. These include uranium, tin, gold, and copper. Mineral resources could be an alternative source of revenue once oil reserves run out. Suppose South Sudan invests in mineral resource extraction and land-based activities such as forestry or agriculture. This could diversify the economy and help South Sudan to no longer rely on oil (Deng, 2014, p. 9).

Political exclusion in South Sudan

Political exclusion has long been present in South Sudan. In 2005, Kiir became the new leader of the SPLM and began carrying out a strategy of political inclusion. Kiir tried actions that worked out to some degree: he brought southern factions closer together by handing out excellent state positions and by promising money of massive oil arrangements; in 2006, he negotiated with the South Sudan Defence Force (the main enemy of the SPLM) and reached the Juba Declaration: former and current SPLM protestors joined Kiir, aiming for oil riches and sharing the aim of independence from Sudan; and in 2010 Kiir's strategy reached its top when he managed to prevent fallout and in October he hosted a political conference in Juba (where 23 parties attended). This conference was meant to discuss a ceasefire. The

opposition was promised a broad-based government and an inclusive constitutional review once independence was achieved (International Crisis Group, 2021a, pp. 9-10).

The inclusive strategy fell apart after the January 2011 referendum. Once independence was reached, Kiir and Machar tried to monopolise power towards the SPLM, meaning a broad-based government would not be implemented. Inclusive constitutional reviews also never occurred. Struggles within the SPLM emerged since the elite rose to fight for the country's presidency. Three factions emerged: (1) Kiir, who drew his primary support from prominent Dinka; (2) Machar, who commanded loyal but influential Nuer; and (3) a separate, ethnically heterogeneous faction led by SPLM Secretary General Pagan Amum (International Crisis Group, 2021a, pp. 7-8). Instead of sharing power equally and securing inclusivity, the elite had made a mess.

South Sudan's civil war demonstrates how badly it needs a broad political consensus to keep it together. At independence, South Sudan had a presidential system in place, where no well-negotiated norms ensured that those with no power could trust the state; instead, some chose to rebel against it. Peace deals do not solve the issue of political exclusion since Kiir still dominates the government. Sharing oil revenues under power-sharing arrangements has since broken down. Donors saw no path to achieve peace with their investments, and neighbouring countries, which first supported the independence of South Sudan, had hoped, in 2016, to prevent another collapse. South Sudanese who observe the country along ethnic lines admit it is troubled: the people describe polarising ethnic divisions and their lost trust in the national government (International Crisis Group, 2021a, pp. 9-10).

Political exclusion will most likely remain. Kiir presented a misleading argument: conflict arose because entire ethnic groups felt politically excluded from access to power and oppressed by those who hold power. But conflict came from other issues, such as ethnic violence and the power struggle between Kiir and Machar. Kiir's attempt at political inclusion fell short. The political system discourages elites from building an inclusive coalition with others (International Crisis Group, 2021a, pp. 19-20).

Limits to freedom of expression

Apart from political exclusion, there is also a limitation to expressing views in South Sudan. A study from the Human Rights Division (HRD) of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNOHCHR), which studied the period July 2016 to December 2017, found several incidents

where people could not legitimately exercise their rights to freedom of expression. The study finds that the Juba government can strengthen democracy, can have sustainable peace in the country and have a genuine reconciliation if, among other things, it encourages civic participation and political engagement. This means there needs to be a space to freely express views, even those that the government rather does not hear. For politics to be inclusive, all opinions should be heard (UNMISS & UNOHCHR, 2018).

From October 2016, there was a sudden rise in ethnically driven rhetoric and hate speech. This further polarised communities and led to more violence along ethnic lines. In December 2016, Kiir announced a National Dialogue to unite civilians. Several civil society actors questioned whether the Dialogue would be inclusive and credible for the freedom of expression. But in May 2017, when the Dialogue was sworn in, ‘political prisoners’ were supposedly released from prison (at least thirty individuals were recorded). From October to December 2017, over two hundred consultations took place in various states of South Sudan and outside the country (to reach refugees). However, only areas controlled by the government had such talks. During the consultations, most were experienced as open and participants were given enough time to respond and express themselves (UNMISS & UNOHCHR, 2018, pp. 5-6).

HDR had received 99 reports where individuals could not express their views in freedom. HRD verified 60 of these reports. In two-thirds of the reports, government security forces imposed restrictions: the National Security Service (the vast majority), the SPLA and the South Sudan National Police Service. For the remaining cases, civilian authorities and the Media Authority are responsible. The HRD found that restrictions usually targeted individuals or entities (e.g., a media house) of which it was perceived that their views were undermining the reputation of South Sudan or whose views were deemed ‘sensitive’. The interference of the government by imposing restrictions has resulted in a shrunken public space where debate can happen freely, has made political participation lower and resulted in a growth in self-censorship (UNMISS & UNOHCHR, 2018, pp. 13-14).

Political exclusion is found in both the expression of views and in the political arena in South Sudan. Countless promises have been made to make politics more inclusive, but as of now, this has not been realised (entirely).

Chapter 5. Results

This chapter discusses the results of the directed qualitative case study analysis. I will discuss the three narratives and hypotheses discussed above and the results from the code book. I will first discuss the lootability of natural resources, then the South Sudanese political economy and lastly, the role of rebel actors.

Lootability in South Sudan

South Sudan's natural resources are often not looted, but their revenues are. Oil has long led to issues and is the natural resource which plays a significant role in conflict. South Sudan is a country with an enormous number of natural resources. Based on the theoretical narrative, I discuss how natural resources in South Sudan are managed, whether the resources are easy to loot and if they are looted, or whether their wealth is looted more.

Oil-producing fields in South Sudan are not necessarily close to the capital Juba but are found further away. Juba lies in the country's south, while the oil fields are located in the north, near the Sudan border. Theoretically, this means that the natural resource is hard to be managed by the government and more accessible by rebel actors (Le Billon, 2001, p. 570). Oil has a "distant" characteristic. It is, however, important to mention that the oil fields, the production of oil and the revenues generated are managed by the government, private companies, and national companies. Asian companies are the most prominent operating group in South Sudan, and the group includes Petronas (Malaysian), Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Videsh (Indian) and National Petroleum Corporation (China). This group dominates the oil market in South Sudan. Smaller companies operating in South Sudan are Sinopec (a state-owned Chinese company), TriOcean (a private Egyptian company) and Kuwait Foreign Petroleum Exploration Company (an international Kuwaiti company). The Nile Petroleum Corporation (Nilepet), the national state-owned oil company of South Sudan, has a stakeholder position in the oil market (Qekeleshe, 2020).

Several companies control the oil fields in South Sudan, not just the government. This is in line with expected theoretical assumptions: the natural resource is found further away from the capital, which means the government can harder manage the resource. Theoretically, other actors might easier loot the natural resource since management by the government is more complicated. However, what deviates is who controls the resource. Le Billon (2001) theorized rebels would easier control resources, but in South Sudan, it is private and national oil companies from within and outside South Sudan. The natural resource is harder to loot because the government and other companies control it. Furthermore, the oil fields have

stationed security guards, meaning looting is more complex (International Crisis Group, 2021b, pp. 6-7).

The natural resource oil also has “point source” characteristics. Oil is concentrated in an area near the Sudan-South Sudan border. As theorized by Le Billon (2001), this would suggest that oil is more accessible and managed by a small group of actors. In the case of South Sudan, these actors are the government (through Nilepet) and the other (private and national) companies. The resource is hard to loot: it is concentrated in a small area, which means it is easier to defend by one or a few actors and harder to take over by other actors.

The oil transport in South Sudan is primarily unobstructable: the oil is transported through pipelines. Transportation begins in the oil fields and ends in Port Sudan. It is hard for actors to take over the pipelines. It is harder to loot this oil since blocking transportation and taking control of the natural resource is hard. However, for example, if a pipeline breaks down due to, e.g., bombings or weathering, oil might be looted by other actors (but this can only be if oil is transported through the pipeline at that moment). Then oil becomes an “obstructable” natural resource.

The natural resource oil is a more distant, point source and unobstructable resource characteristic-wise. Based on theoretical assumptions, oil is harder to loot in South Sudan. According to Le Billon (2001), point source, more distant natural resources are often associated with secession attempts. However, in South Sudan, the civil war is fought for many reasons, such as ethnic struggles and obtaining oil revenues, not because of secession attempts. Natural resources in South Sudan are not always looted, but the revenues they generate are. And here, political exclusion comes into play.

In line with theoretical assumptions made by Herbst (2000), the lootability of the leading natural resource of South Sudan, oil, is not the sole reason why natural resources play a role in the civil war. It is the looting of oil revenues that does. The leaders of South Sudan used oil wealth to get richer and fuel civil war. Oil revenues have been used to fund militias throughout South Sudan. The government looted the oil revenues through the state-owned company Nilepet. This company helped fund the civil war. Millions of dollars are indicated to be paid to companies (partially) owned by family members of elites. These companies were responsible for funding government-aligned militaries. A key internal log of the Ministry of Petroleum and Mining contained evidence that Nilepet had made 84 transactions worth over \$80 million to government agencies, military officials, politicians, and private

companies. The transactions had captions that could directly be linked to the war effort of the Juba government. Actors who received payments used them for either security- or military-related activities, which might have supported forces responsible for horrible atrocities. Some companies knew to what purpose the payments would go, while others did not (The Sentry, 2018, pp. 2-6).

The looting of oil revenues by the government and Nilepet contributed to the funding of the civil war. The lootability of natural resource wealth, therefore, leads to worse conflict. Without funding, some companies or government-aligned actors might not have been able to operate and would thus not contribute to atrocities committed and the civil war. The government could also loot oil revenues from Nilepet due to the weak governance institutions of the South Sudanese state. There is no checks-and-balance system which evaluates the operation of Nilepet. In South Sudan, ethnic polarization is heavenly present, and the Dinka-dominated government struggles against other ethnic groups for power. In line with theoretical assumptions, the weak governance and ethnic polarization led to political exclusion: only the government could manage oil revenues, and opposition groups or outside actors had no way to do so or check the government spending. The looting of oil revenues could contribute to the ongoing civil war. These results are also in line with Asal *et al.* (2015): the presence of the wealth of oil and the weak state institutions allowed for political exclusion and raised the risk of the civil war being funded by the state. Therefore, the lootability of natural resource wealth contributes to worsening a conflict due to political exclusion and the presence of natural resource wealth.

In the civil war of South Sudan, it is primarily revenues from natural resources which are looted. This wealth helped fund the civil war, including those responsible for violating human rights. The hypothesis, H1, is therefore partially accepted: the wealth of natural resources worsens conflict, and politically excluded actors could not check the spending of natural resource wealth. However, it is not natural resources and the ease with which those are looted that influenced the South Sudanese civil war. Also, politically excluded actors might want to control the revenues, but to claim those actors wish to manage natural resources is not possible because evidence was not evidently found for this in this case study analysis.

The South Sudanese political economy

The political economy of South Sudan has contributed to the civil war. Because of its complex structure, I first explain the political economy of South Sudan and then I discuss how this relates to the theoretical narrative.

The civil war has had a severe economic impact on South Sudan. Poverty is at an all-time high. Conflict, floods, and drought have affected agricultural production, even though this production has significant potential for the economy. The non-oil GDP dropped by more than a third. In 2019, oil wealth was still the country's most accounted for resource income, but there is no transparency in the numbers, and the state budget is weak (World Bank, 2022a, p. 42).

South Sudan is dependent on oil, which can lead to future conflict. South Sudan's economy is easily influenced by trade shocks, and a decline in oil exports would negatively impact government resources. This might also derail the government's already underfunded investment program. South Sudan must focus on alternative sources of income and growth to sustain the development of the economy, especially if oil prices remain lower than expected (World Bank, 2022a, p. 34). Revenues fell drastically because of the oil shutdown in 2012, the civil war, damages to the oil-industry infrastructure and a global decline in oil prices since 2014. The government's debt increased since it relied on (oil) loans (International Crisis Group, 2016b, p. 17). The political economy of South Sudan in 2018 dealt with six realities (African Development Bank Group, 2018, pp. 1-2): (1) there are overwhelming opportunities in the non-oil sector that remain (largely) unused because of political insecurities; (2) there is a high dependence on oil. 90% of government revenues come from the oil sector, 95% of total exports of South Sudan are in oil and oil revenues account for more than half of the country's GDP; (3) political and security challenges drain government resources and limit domestic and foreign direct investments; (4) the social and economic infrastructures of the country are poor, which limits both economic productivity and diversification; (5) since the conflict began in 2013, development partners have been focusing on humanitarian aid instead of economic or political support; (6) the country deals with governance challenges, and there is little political will nor capacity to make the necessary institutional changes that the country needs.

South Sudan also deals with developmental challenges that could lengthen conflict and lead the state into an economic and political collapse. The civil war flowed out of a weak political economy based on rent-seeking and where the public administration was heavily militarized

and bureaucratic. The South Sudanese economy is volatile because oil revenues continue to bring about economic challenges (e.g., high inflation and a depletion of foreign reserves; African development bank group, 2018, p. 2).

The political model of South Sudan failed: the model is focused on an authority that resides in the centre of politics, and the governance system is a winner-takes-all system, which constantly fuels tensions among elites. Many elites, communities, rebel groups, religious leaders, women's groups, and government officials are deeply frustrated with the current national leadership. These actors believe that one solution to the issues in South Sudan is greater autonomy and representation of the country's diverse regions and communities within. The actors call for actions that precede the independence of 2011: decentralisation and the promise that South Sudan would be a country shared equally among diverse ethnic groups (International Crisis Group, 2021a, p. 2).

After independence, the political area seemed calm. This was perhaps due to South Sudan's new ruling-party leaders of the SPLM, which were bound together through an illicit system of self-enrichment from the state's coffers. Soon, the calm was disrupted. The loose alliance of the ruling party's elite began to crumble after a few people associated with Kiir's home region and the Dinka elite began to tighten their power on the government and the party. Fewer and fewer hands had (political and economic) power, and these hands used more repression and violence than before to maintain this power. Targeted people often saw violence as the only option to fight back. South Sudan quickly spiralled into ethnic violence (International Crisis Group, 2021a, pp. 4-5).

Then in 2015, after the signing of the ARCSS, hope was restored for a stable political and economic sphere. But the ARCSS, which should have restored power-sharing between Kiir and Machar, had not addressed long-standing issues between the two and their constituencies for political and economic power. The state no longer delivered safety or public services to civilians. Kiir's idea to shape 28 states further undermined power-sharing and added new local drivers into the civil war. Tribal polarization made it challenging to believe in viable power-sharing agreements, especially to share power with minority groups and guarantee their rights (Knopf, 2016, pp. 10-12).

South Sudan was dealing with an imbalance of power. South Sudan has no history of meaningful governance, meaning power is not easily equally distributed. There is a lack of well-organized institutions and a lack of sufficient legitimate power to distribute. Kiir lost

legitimacy after the outbreak of the civil war because of his actions and because competitors damaged his authority (Knopf, 2016, pp. 12-13). The TGoNU led to more unification but had to become more effective by including opposition-leaning communities and armed groups into the governance structure. For the government to become more inclusive, serious action had to happen, such as negotiations with armed groups, implementing an interconnected process and organising an inclusive national dialogue.

The government had opened the door for a national dialogue with its citizens, but Kiir's presidency could not be altered (till at least 2018). The government could use the national dialogue to become more inclusive and to represent the nation better. For the process to be effective and credible, support and capacity building for the TGoNU was needed. Juba should use the peace process, negotiations with armed groups and the national dialogue as an opportunity to seek solutions to individual conflicts. This can help restore civilians' trust in the government (International Crisis Group, 2016, pp. 14-15).

The structural and systemic crisis continues to affect peace in South Sudan. Structural problems are connected to ethnic tensions, while systemic problems concern divisions within the SPLM/A: the leadership is divided, and there are unresolved political tensions among elites. Rent-seeking is highly present in South Sudan. Rent-seeking occurred in state institutions but was also present through rebellions. Security, for example, has been promoted through the renting of elite loyalty and armies. During the CPA period, rent-seeking uprisings began. SPLA commanders who were dissatisfied and other local leaders started mutiny while rebelling against the government and trying to bargain for benefits (African Development Bank Group, 2018, p. 9).

The peace processes of 2018 emerged in an environment where the political system failed to build effective governance institutions. The failures of institutional and political institutions led to armed violence and the erasing of state authority, legitimacy, and authority. Around eight groups fought for the leadership, and the belief that violence paid off meant rebel groups rose in numbers. This led to more tension and increased expenses on political and security loyalty (African Development Bank Group, 2018, p. 9).

The political economy of South Sudan is complex, but till now, only internal issues have been discussed. South Sudan also has problems with Sudan influencing the political economy. I will now discuss how the South Sudan-Sudan relationship affects the political economy of South Sudan.

South Sudan and Sudan: distributing oil

The distribution of oil wealth was a factor in continuing tensions between Sudan and South Sudan, but oil was also a critical factor in conflict resolution. The 2005 CPA reached a deal between South Sudan and Sudan: revenues from southern-extracted oil would be split equally between northern and southern Sudan. Oil became the basis for peaceful cooperation during the transitional period. But the lack of transparency led to mistrust between both countries and often threatened the fragile peace. The CPA failed to address oil management issues in the post-independent era. Sudan was left with large debts since it had to repay investors and South Sudan gained oil fields where crude oil would be transported to Port Sudan through the Sudanese pipelines (Mayik, 2020, pp. 13-14). The disputes over oil and border areas find their origin in a history of South Sudan's marginalisation by previous Khartoum governments. Most oil discovered is based in South Sudan. This gave Sudan an incentive not to allow secession of southern Sudan. Now, these issues seem to lead to peaceful coexistence. But mediation, litigation and negotiation are essential to solving problems between the two countries (Mayik, 2020, p. 17). The division of oil wealth between Sudan and South Sudan was a source of political tensions, mainly due to the lack of transparency. Agreements on the distribution of oil wealth were necessary to guarantee the two countries would not continue to experience (armed) clashes.

Oil revenues and conflict

The considerable sum of oil revenues also led to corruption inside the political centre of the Juba government. In February 2019, the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) reported that South Sudan had used its prosperous oil industry to fund the civil war. Nilepet supposedly diverted oil revenues from sharing it with regional states to sharing it with elites. There is no transparency within Nilepet nor an independent oversight to monitor the company's operations. The income from natural resources has funded the war, according to the UNHRC, which also allowed human rights violations to continue (Al Jazeera, 2019).

However, the Minister of Petroleum, Ezekiel Lol Gatkuoth, denied the allegations. In a video interview in 2019, he stated that "enemies of peace" spread these allegations. Gatkuoth is convinced that South Sudan does not use its oil to fuel the civil war since the government focuses on peace. In response to why the South Sudanese civilians have not yet experienced benefits from oil revenues, the Minister states there is an anti-corruption campaign to secure better opportunities to provide for the population. During the interview, Gatkuoth mentioned several times he was proud to serve under President Kiir, constantly stating his activities to

deal with corruption, such as introducing a panel to prosecute corrupt people and launching development projects for civilians (Al Jazeera, 2019).

However, not only the UNHCR had found evidence that Nilepet helped fund the war. The Associated Press initially studied how the SPLM received corporate aid and found evidence that Nilepet paid high-ranking government and military elites in the civil war (Crane, 2019). In 2018, Global Witness also found evidence. Nilepet, which the President and his inner circle control, has no institutions that check the rules and regulations. Because of this, it could transfer millions of oil revenues to ethnic militias and brutal security services (Global Witness, 2018, pp. 5-14).

Other natural resources

Oil and agricultural production are the two dominators of the South Sudanese economy. Where oil contributes mainly to government income, agriculture is the primary source of livelihood for most households. The potential gains oil could have secured are limited because of governance challenges: misappropriation of oil revenues is facilitated by “vagueness” and a lack of accountability. South Sudan must sustain future economic growth through, e.g., diversifying the economy. The civil war also supported an environment where illicit flows could thrive, public resources could be systemically misappropriated, and state building failed. The GDP of South Sudan in 2018 was a third of what it would have been had the civil war not occurred. South Sudan is one of the least developed countries in the world: households’ disposable incomes have fallen by approximately seventy per cent from 2011 to 2018; it is one of the poorest countries where more than three out of four people live under the international poverty line; low-level access of social services remain due to no improvements of the physical infrastructure and the collapse of the service delivery; and development indicators are among the lowest (World Bank, 2022b, p. viii).

One example of how the South Sudanese population thought natural resources were not divided fairly and politics was corrupt is found in Equatoria. The Equatorian population in both Nimule and Juba believed that newer inhabitants (specifically Dinka) owned most land and that these lands were obtained unfairly through the Dinka domination of security and political systems, which resulted in economic power. There is no clear community consensus on how land should be allocated. This led to corruption (International Crisis Group, 2016a, p. 11). Equatorian civilians allege that the SPLA dominates not only the local administration of the goods entering South Sudan at Nimule but also that it cooperated with long-resident Dinka internally displaced persons instead of native civilians. The Equatorian region is rich in

natural resources, such as gold, teak, and diamonds. These resources receive the most significant foreign investments after the oil industry. Equatorians worry that the national government in Juba might use these natural resources and foreign investments to address budget shortcomings or support Juba-based patronage networks instead of investing revenues into the region (International Crisis Group, 2016a, pp. 11-12)

Within Equatoria, political exclusion and the unequal distribution of natural resources and their wealth are present. When peace talks were organised, the Equatorians were in mediation with the government, but no specific Equatorian group existed. The government had always claimed that the Equatorians were part of the government. But many Equatorians, particularly those with no strong sympathy for either warring party, did not consider being part of the negotiation. According to the ARCSS, 85% of state-level positions in Equatoria are filled by the government and 15% by the SPLM/A-IO. Many locals, therefore, believe they must be part of one of these groups if they want to be represented, even if they do not support those groups. However, despite all this, many Equatorians are still committed to the agreement of 2015, seeing it as the best opportunity for federalism, reform, and peace (International Crisis Group, 2016a, p. 19). As the situation in Equatoria reveals, the government used the wealth of other natural resources and the ability to exclude an ethnic group due to weak governance institutions during the civil war.

[Theoretical assumptions found in the South Sudanese political economy](#)

Now that I have tried to describe and discuss the complex political economy of South Sudan, I will link assumptions from the theoretical narrative to the case. The political economy of South Sudan is complex and contains many elements of both failing economic and political structures that sustain conflict. Within the political economy approach, there is an interplay between unstable politics and (the exploitation) of natural resources: oil is exploited by Nilepet to sustain the power of politicians, and politics has become corrupt to gain oil revenues. As Collier (2010) theorized, in South Sudan, a small elite redistributed oil wealth to themselves and their causes (e.g., funding the civil war). The political system is unstable, and there are no solid checks and balances to monitor the government. The distribution of oil revenues also led to struggles with Sudan: due to weak institutions, transparency lacked, and mistrust grew between the two countries.

South Sudan suffers from the resource curse, as found in Le Billon (2008) and Bayramov (2018): South Sudan is abundantly rich in oil, but the country fails to take advantage of its wealth. The oil-based economy is volatile due to trade shocks or changing oil prices. The

political system of South Sudan is weak, and unstable economic institutions make the population vulnerable to disputes often fought between elites. The economy of South Sudan failed to grow due to three mechanisms (Tadjoeddin, 2007, pp. 5-8): economic disruptions (e.g., the oil shutdown in 2012 and falling world oil prices), institutional failures (e.g., there is low accountability and transparency on spent oil revenues) and conflict (e.g., the civil war that partly began due to ethnic differences and a struggle between Machar and Kiir for natural resources and power).

Other reasons why the political economy is unstable are found in potential issues why natural resource conflicts occur. As discussed by Brown and Keating (2015), there are several reasons why natural resources lead to conflicts in South Sudan: South Sudan faces problems with the allocation of the power of who can manage natural resources; and there are problems in the distribution of revenues: elites distributed most wealth to themselves, and the population barely experiences benefits from revenues. It is worth mentioning that the civil war in South Sudan is about controlling natural resources and gaining wealth of natural resources and power over the state.

The South Sudanese government distributed oil revenues to its elites and family members and used this system to fund the war. The government does deny these allegations, but multiple sources have presented evidence. Weak governance institutions allowed Kiir and his inner circle to control Nilepet, a company with no check-and-balance system. The government failed to diversify the economy, which depended almost entirely on oil during the civil war period. This led to economic struggles and will continue to do so in the future.

The political economy of South Sudan is weak and a factor in sustaining conflict, which is in line with theoretical assumptions. However, political exclusion also plays a role within the political economy. First, the distribution of natural resource wealth is done by elites, who distribute most to themselves and not the wider population. But civilians feel the consequences of smaller or no economic growth. For example, of 4,000 interviewed businesses, only two reported not having been negatively affected by the civil war. And in urban areas, around half of the civilians have lost at least one crucial job since 2013 (World Bank, 2022a, p. 42). Through the unequal distribution of wealth, the ruling elite has excluded civilians from the distribution process and from gaining economic benefits. Civilians are politically excluded due to weak political institutions where only a few have power. Civilians

are, therefore, not allowed to voice their opinions on the distribution (of the wealth) of natural resources.

Second, the political system does not include all ethnic groups or (dividing) opinions of (individual) actors. Certain ethnic groups felt excluded based on their ethnicity. The situation in Equatoria is a good example, which shows how political exclusion and not being open to hearing opinions on land distribution can lead to corruption and land disputes. Furthermore, Equatorians are afraid the government will not consider the region while spending revenues and will use the natural resources to support Juba-based networks and address state budget shortcomings, once again excluding an ethnic group would Juba take this course of action.

Thirdly, as theorized by Samset (2009), the rent-seeking political economy gave rise to weak institutions. Rent-seeking for the wealth of natural resources happened in the political area and within rebellious activities. Elite loyalty and (government and rebel) armies have been rented by other elites, for example. Due to political exclusion, rent-seeking is stimulated since politicians and bureaucrats are not monitored.

In South Sudan, actors are (partially) politically excluded regarding (the wealth of) natural resource distribution. The distribution (of the wealth) of natural resources is, in general, also problematic since the elite can redistribute oil revenues without significant checks and balances in place to control them. The political economy of South Sudan is weak: governance institutions need to become more inclusive and develop into solid institutions, and the high dependency on oil needs to disappear by diversifying the economy and sustaining economic growth. The natural resources, economic performance and governance structures are intertwined. The hypothesis, H2, is therefore partially accepted: political exclusion and the lousy distribution (of the wealth) of natural resources make struggles and conflict more likely, and it undermines the economic performance and governance structures of a country; but at the same time do the already in place economic and governance structures influence the distribution (of the wealth) of natural resources, possibly sustaining conflict.

Rebel actors in South Sudan

Several rebel actors in South Sudan played a significant part in the civil war from 2013-2018. In this part, I first present an overview of the most active rebel actors and why they formed a group or movement. I then present other evidence found in the case study about rebel actors, and I discuss the results based on the theoretical narrative discussed above.

Table 2 presents an overview of several rebel actors in South Sudan, including their years active, what the initial goal of the rebel actor was and other relevant information.

Table 2. Rebel actors in South Sudan

<i>Rebel actor</i>	<i>Type of rebel actor</i>	<i>Relevant information:</i>
Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army -In Opposition (SPLM/A-IO)	Rebel army and movement; political party	Split from the SPLM in 2013, after a rift between Kiir and Machar; led by Riek Machar; the most significant and somewhat multi-ethnic opposition group; recently lost members who defected to other groups and gained new ones from the former Central Equatoria region (Tchie, 2017); Active since 2013.
National Salvation Front (NSF)	Ethnic nationalist, militant movement	Swaka, the leader, turned against Kiir, claiming Kiir had turned the SPLA into an exclusive Dinka "tribal army" (Tchie, 2017); it wants to restore order and law, respect for human rights and dignity without regard to age, gender and origins; beliefs in national co-existence by embracing ideals of a sovereign, democratically governed nation (National Salvation Front, n.d.). Active since 2017.
Arrow Boys	Community-based armed group	Because of the absence of an adequate response from the (southern) Sudanese government to the LRA, it took security into its own hands; loose-knit, meagrely armed local defence force (Heaton, 2010); do not want to be called a militia (William, 2011). Active since 2008.
South Sudan Democratic Movement (SSDM)	Militant movement	To fight against a southern government that they say is brutally suppressing minority rights; formed out of five southern Sudanese armed militia rebel groups; the groups are united through tribal and local grievances about the leadership of South Sudan (Boswell, 2011). Active from 2011 to 2012/2013.
Nuer White Armies	Community defence force; militant organisation	Organised to participate in military battles to protect their communities and avenge atrocities committed against Nuer civilians in December 2013; Nuer ethnic group; participation reflects obligation to protect families (International Committee of the Red Cross, n.d.). Active since 2013.

Tiger Faction New Forces (TFNF)	Shilluk military movement	To discontinue the twenty-eight states and have back the annexed Shilluk lands within the borders of 1956; ethnic Shilluk force (Sudan Tribune, 2016). Active from 2015 to 2017.
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As described in the table, many significant rebel actors involved in the civil war are organised groups. It is important to note that these are not all rebel actors, but they are the most active. The reason these rebel actors revolted is various. Underlying political, security and ethnic interests are mostly found. While studying political interests, it was four rebel actors who fall under this category: the SPLA-IO split from the SPLM/A in 2013 due to a rift and has since become the most significant political opposition party; the NSF formed because they were against Kiir, who had, in their opinion, allowed the SPLA to become a Dinka army and now they want to restore the political order; the SSDM is against the government and wants to fight the oppression of minority rights; and the TFNF wants to revoke the 28 states that were created, reinstate ten state and their Shilluk borders back as they were drawn in 1956.

Five rebel actors fall under the ethnic interests category: the SPLM/A-IO also split due to ethnic struggles between Dinka Kiir and Nuer Machar; the NSF was against the now largely Dinka-dominating SPLA and believes ethnicity should not matter as to why civilians could be part of something (e.g. they believe dignity and respect are to be bettered without looking at someone's origin); the SSDM is against the suppression of minority rights and fights for equal rights; the Nuer White Armies formed partly to avenge atrocities committed against the Nuer civilians in December 2013 by the Dinka and SPLA; and the TFNF is an ethnic Shilluk force that wants to reinstate borders of their lands. The Arrow Boys and Nuer White Armies formed for security reasons: they both wanted to protect their local communities, at times using violence against other actors, including government-aligned groups.

For these rebel actors, natural resources do not seem to be the main reasons to rebel against existing powers, but underlying interests are. This is against theoretical assumptions based on Lujala (2010), who had found how rebels might be willing to engage in conflict against existing powers if there is a possibility to access natural resources. The rebel actors are more social-focused: the actors are eager to fight for long-term goals while making a sacrifice in the short term, e.g., Arrow Boys defending their communities and the NSF by investing time in improving state institutions. Rebel actors in South Sudan often revolt against ethnic exclusion, and the political interests of either gaining power or improving the political model

play an intertwined role in this revolt. Economic interests are not found for these rebel actors. Still, they might see financial interest as added benefits (e.g., the SPLM/A-IO will gain access to oil revenues, now managed by Kiir, if they become the major political party).

Political exclusion seems to be a reason why rebel actors revolt (which is in line with political interests): the SPLM/A-IO felt excluded from the political process and therefore parted with the SPLM/A (also due to ethnic struggles); the SSDM is fighting the political exclusion of minority groups; the NSF wants an inclusive government where someone's ethnicity does not matter; and the TFNF might feel politically excluded in the decision for crafting 28 states out of ten, and therefore crossing borders with different races, where Shilluk land is no longer just that.

These rebel actors are active throughout South Sudan, but I will now focus on local rebel groups in Equatoria and why they rebel. In Equatoria, local rebel groups became involved due to the incidents in this region (see Chapter Four). There are three critical factors found as to why rebellions took place in this region (International Crisis Group, 2016a, pp. 15-16):

1. There were long-running tensions between the government in Juba and Western Equatoria Governor Bakosora. This led to Bakosora being removed from his position and his detention in September 2015. Governor Bakosora had long not allowed rebellions in Western Equatoria, and he kept trying to hint at a possible concession from Juba. But when Bakosora was removed from his position, Zande Arrow Boys led a rebellion and attacked Yambio (capital of Western Equatoria). When Bakosora had the second detention in December, many Zande in alienated from the political centre, even those who did not support the rebellion.
2. Violence escalated between local agriculturalists and migratory, mostly Dinka, cattle keepers. Perceptions in Equatoria also rose that the SPLA sided with the Dinka cattle keepers. The growth of Dinka cattle keepers in Equatoria since the outbreak of the civil war made local perceptions grow that the SPLA would actively support Dinka civilians. When in April 2015, Dinka cattle keepers had not left the region, even though they were ordered to do so through a presidential decree, action was taken to avoid an inter-communal conflict. President Kiir ordered Dinka cattle keepers to leave the state. Some left, others stayed. Those who stayed were often bettered armed and used to solving disputes through violence. Most Equatorian farmers wanted a peaceful coexistence, not seeking violence.

3. The SPLA-IO emerged in Mundri and Wonduriba (counties in Equatoria), providing military support after August 2015. The Arrow Boys had limited successes in this area, mainly organising hit-and-run attacks on government outposts and road transport. Operations of the Arrow Boys led to heavy government responses, such as burning houses, extrajudicial killings, and looting. The conflict could best be solved through the ARCSS since forces identified with the SPLM/A-IO. However, major battles did not occur again, and the SPLA-IO did not control a significant town in Equatoria.

The three critical factors presented here are political struggles (when Governor Bakosora was removed), ethnic struggles (between local Equatorian farmers and Dinka cattle keepers) or small military operations against the government (the Arrow Boys' operations in Equatoria). Rebel actors revolted because they believed the SPLM/A favoured Dinka civilians, not punishing them and believing that the South Sudanese government did not care about Equatoria. They felt ethnically excluded from how Dinka cattle keepers were treated in their region and that a Western Equatorian Governor was removed, losing faith that their interests were no longer represented. Rebel actors here did not always form into rebellion groups; they were primarily individual actors that used rebellious actions to use violence against, e.g., Dinka cattle keepers. The Arrow Boys did partake in rebellious activities. For local farmers, economic interests might have played an influential role since Dinka cattle keepers could earn incomes they could have had.

In the current civil war, natural resources do not appear to play a significant role in why rebel actors revolt, and political exclusion is often not the main reason either. Ethnic, political (including political exclusion), and security interests are often reasons why rebel actors revolted. This means the hypothesis, H3, can partially be verified because rebel actors might use rebellions to fight political exclusion (but evidence remains doubting), but natural resources are certainly not the main reason. Instead, rebel actors are more likely to rebel or use rebellious actions when they are ethnically excluded, when they have diverse political views from the government or when their security is undermined. In summary, rebel actors fight for underlying interests.

Concluding results

As discussed in the results, the lootability of natural resources, the state of the political economy and rebel actors (partially) influenced the civil war from 2013 to 2018 in South Sudan. This research used three theoretical narratives which might influence conflict to

study how political exclusion and natural resources affect conflicts. The influence of each narrative is different. Below, I present some concluding remarks.

The lootability of natural resources was not the main reason resources played a role in the conflict. This did not play a significant enough role in influencing conflict. However, the lootability of natural resource wealth does affect conflict in such a way that conflict worsens or is prolonged. Natural resource revenues can fuel conflict, meaning atrocities like human rights violations can endure. Without this funding, conflicts might be shortened: militias might not have enough financial means to continue, or elite loyalty cannot be bought, which means support for conflict might be less. Political exclusion will rise in a state with weak governance structures with no checks-and-balance system: political exclusion will happen to groups who do not have power and cannot monitor the state for revenue spending.

A weak political economy where political exclusion is present influences the conflict for the worst as well: if natural resource wealth is controlled by a few elites, where others are excluded from giving input due to weak governance structures, this can help fund conflicts; if a population does not experience the benefits that natural resources can generate and they are politically excluded, through a flawed political system, from voicing their views on how natural resources (or their wealth) should be distributed, this further sustains conflict since populations might go against the government through the use of violence; and rent-seeking is stimulated through a weak political structure, and since other actors are politically excluded, rent-seeking cannot be monitored. Economic and governance structures, including political exclusion, influence the distribution (of the wealth) of natural resources, as does the distribution influence the structures.

Often, ethnic, political and security interests are the main reason rebel actors revolt against existing powers. Political exclusion and the economic benefits from access to natural resources are often not the main reason but might be secondary arguments for rebel actors to revolt. Rebel actors are more likely to revolt when they feel ethnically and politically excluded, when there are security concerns or when they have diverging political interests from the existing power. Conflict worsens the longer the rebel actors need to fight for these interests, especially if all sides involved use violence.

Natural resources and political exclusion from a decision-making process of an ethnic (minority) group influence each other in various manners in starting or continuing violent intra-state conflicts. Often there was an intertwined influence, where both influenced

conflicts for the worst: for all three presented theoretical narratives, conflict worsened if natural resources and political exclusion were present. But often, other factors mattered as well, like ethnic polarization, the functioning of the state or other interests that actors wanted to reach. Based on these three narratives, the influence of natural resources and political exclusion on conflict undermines political and economic institutions and can be described as unfavourable since conflict worsens (partially) when natural resources and political exclusion are present in conflict. However, this influence is affected by other factors, meaning that natural resources and political exclusion are possibly more of a secondary effect to conflict than the main reasons conflict occurs or worsens.

It is essential to realise that other factors influence conflicts. For example, ethnic polarization, violence, and exclusion influenced the conflict immensely in the South Sudan case.

Throughout all theoretical assumptions, ethnicity mattered. Ethnic polarization, therefore, affects how conflicts prolong, but also the role political exclusion and natural resources have: ethnic exclusion might prevent some groups from accessing natural resources and having a say in the political area. However, because this research focused on intrastate conflicts, ethnic polarization was partly controlled for. Apart from this, does it also matter what the political regime of a country is. If a state is robust, political exclusion might be present less, while weak states might allow political exclusion to sustain. Lastly, conflict duration also influenced the conflict: the longer the conflict occurred, the more rebel actors formed, and the more corruption of the political centre could happen.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

This chapter discusses the conclusion of the research. Political exclusion of ethnic (minority) groups from a decision-making process and natural resources can influence conflicts to various degrees. But there are diverse ways of researching how the relationship between the two influences conflict, and several ideas exist on how to study this. This research tried to take away some uncertainties by examining a case and how political exclusion and natural resources, both separately and together, influenced conflict. I will now discuss concluding remarks, the reflection, the discussion, and some suggestions for future research.

A theoretical framework was built to study the relationship between political exclusion and natural resources in conflict based on various theoretical assumptions of past research. Three different theoretical narratives were developed. Each narrative influences conflict. The narratives were “the lootability of natural resources”, “the political economy approach”, and “the influence of rebel actors”. Each narrative is different, but each had assumptions about how political exclusion and natural resources might influence conflict.

The lootability of natural resources mattered for the effect a natural resource had on conflict: when a natural resource is easier to loot, conflict worsens. In theory, conflict might occur when actors feel politically excluded, and natural resources might be a means or catalysator during a conflict. The theoretical assumptions discussed were that natural resources that are easy to loot would lead to more or worse conflict, especially when actors feel politically excluded.

The political economy approach theorized how political exclusion and (the wealth of) natural resources influences conflicts. The approach pays attention to the distribution (of the wealth) of natural resources and the resource curse: resource-rich countries experience worse conflict, leading to political and economic struggles, such as exclusion and weak governance institutions. The theoretical assumptions discussed were that when actors feel politically excluded regarding the distribution (of the wealth) of natural resources, conflict is more likely because a country's economic performance and governance structures could be undermined.

Rebel actors might use political exclusion to convince individuals to participate in rebellious activities. However, underlying economic or social interests are reasons for rebel actors to revolt. Natural resources might be a financial reason due to the wealth resources can generate.

The theoretical assumptions discussed were that rebel actors might be more likely to use rebellious actions when they are politically excluded and/or have access to natural resources.

The chosen research method was a directed qualitative content case study analysis. This method helped understand how each theoretical narrative, political exclusion and natural resources affect conflict. A codebook was developed to get a clear overview of the case and to interpret data based on the theoretical narratives. Several data types, such as interviews, policy briefs and written reports, have been studied.

The concluding results of the research conducted are as follows. Each hypothesis is partially accepted, confirming that political exclusion and natural resources play a role in conflict. For each narrative, the influence differs: for the political economy approach, political exclusion and the distribution of the wealth of natural resources play a more significant role in affecting conflict than the relationship does for rebel actors since these actors often revolted against existing powers for underlying interests; and for the lootability of natural resources, the relationship worsened conflict, but evidence lacked on if politically excluded actors want to manage natural resources in the first place. It differs per theoretical narrative what the influence of political exclusion and natural resources is. In general, natural resources and political exclusion from a decision-making process of an ethnic (minority) group influence violent intra-state conflict for the worse and undermine political and economic institutions. In each narrative, evidence was found for the relationship, affecting conflict for the worse.

However, it is essential to note that other factors influenced this effect on conflict. The political regime, but also ethnic polarization and conflict duration influence conflicts. Natural resources and political exclusion seem to be side-effects of other factors influencing conflict. Future research should try to decipher how significant other factors are and if the relationship between natural resources and political exclusion matters for the impact on research: what is the influence of other factors if the relationship is not present? Is conflict worse or not if the relationship is absent?

This research contributed to both social and scientific relevance. The relevance for society is various. Research shows that when a group is politically excluded, this influences conflict. Also, when, in general, the political economy of a country is unstable, this affects the stability of a country. Policies should carefully be drafted in societies where groups are politically excluded, or governance structures are weak by including all perspectives on improving the situation. Furthermore, natural resource wealth should help benefit the population, not only

the elite. Policies should also be drafted to improve the distribution of natural resource wealth to the whole country, ensuring development thrives. Both also help tackle corruption. The government plays a role in helping to draft politically inclusive policies. This research has shown some issues that can arise when politics is not inclusive or when the distribution of resource wealth is not equal. Policy drafters can find lessons here on what not to do when trying to improve a country's political and economic regime and state institutions.

The scientific contribution is also various. First, this research contributed to a knowledge gap on how political exclusion of (ethnic) groups and natural resources affects conflict. The three theoretical narratives present findings verifying past research or showing new results on the relationship that affects conflict. The study confirmed that natural resources and political exclusion affect conflict, but this research also contributes to understanding what influences conflict and how and if other factors play a role. Secondly, this research helps understand how natural resources and political exclusion have affected conflict in recent years. The case study paid attention to a conflict that took place after 2010. Past research was often done on conflicts which took place before 2010. This research helped fill a knowledge gap on how natural resources and political exclusion affect conflict in recent years.

Reflection and discussion

It is essential to reflect on the research, how it was conducted and what some potential limitations were. Personal bias might have influenced the analysis. The bias could have influenced the data selection process and how data was interpreted. During the interpretation of data, I tried to use theoretical assumptions to interpret the results. I also used the theoretical narratives to try and choose which data were important and less important (e.g., to filter out repetitions found in several data). The codebook was developed based on theoretical assumptions and the three theoretical narratives. This codebook was used to try and prevent my personal bias from influencing the results. Furthermore, I searched for sources on all themes presented in this research while selecting data. I would only disregard data if it were outdated or irrelevant (for example, because not one question in the codebook could be answered). My personal bias also influences the reliability: if another researcher conducts the same research, results might differ due to a selection of different data or because data is interpreted differently. As argued above, I tried to prevent bias from influencing the research, but there might be unaccounted-for bias.

The results of this research can partially be generalized to a broader set of cases. Context-specific findings, such as why the civil war in South Sudan began, are harder to generalize,

though. The results on the influence of natural resources and political exclusion, but also the influential role ethnic polarization can play, might be generalized to more cases. These circumstances can happen in other countries. South Sudan, a former colony, has several ethnic groups living in the country; other former colonies might face the same circumstances. Furthermore, natural resources are found in other countries. Countries with weak governance institutions and political exclusion are found worldwide, in diverse regions. The results found in this study are generalizable to these circumstances.

However, the results of the political economy approach might be less generalizable. The results on how the political economy of a country, and especially the distribution of natural resources, might be generalizable since this situation is found in several cases. However, the heavy reliance on one type of natural resource is not always the case in other countries, which means to generalize these results, this heavy reliance should be kept in mind before doing so.

The qualitative content analysis helps understand what the actors involved in the civil war desired. Elite actors wanted oil revenues to enrich themselves, and some elites helped to fuel the civil war through payments, for example. Rebel actors formed for several reasons, such as feeling ethnically excluded or wanting to change the political landscape, and it was clear why they revolted. The analysis also helped to understand how political exclusion and natural resources do and do not influence conflict. Through this detailed account, other factors, such as ethnicity, were found to influence the conflict.

However, other insights might have been gained through a different research method.

Through field-based research or interviews, the behaviour of actors might have been better understood since those actors can be observed and interviewed on questions about why they behaved in specific ways during the conflict. The insights presented are based on theoretical assumptions and a document study. However, the opinions or behaviours of actors are less well-represented. Other insights might be gained in future research with different research methods.

The validity of this research is only guaranteed minorly. The codebook, which was based on the theoretical assumptions and narratives presented in Chapter 2, helped to secure that I measured what I was supposed to measure: the influence of political exclusion and natural resources on conflict. However, the results show that other factors, such as the political regime of a country, also influence outcomes. I tried to account for a few variables that might

affect the results, but there might be factors that I did not account for since I might not have observed them.

One crucial reflection worth mentioning is that this study contributed to a current debate on uncertainties on the role natural resources and political exclusion play in conflict. The research takes away some uncertainties since the relationship between the two on conflicts is found through the detailed account. It also presents how other factors might influence conflict and this relationship, presenting ideas for future research. This can help take away leftover uncertainties.

Limitations

It is worth mentioning that this research deals with some limitations. First, the results are primarily contextual. This research studied one case, which means it might be harder to generalize results to a broader context. Results might be different for another country, even if the background to a conflict or circumstance of political exclusion is similar, for example. Second, the data used in this research might limit the results. Other data, such as interviews, might produce different results or might have gained additional insights (while leading to identical results). Furthermore, due to time restraints, this research could not study all data found within the subject of South Sudan, natural resources, or political exclusion. For future research, a more extended period might help better verify results.

Thirdly, data was not always diverse. Much data concentrated on the same issues, such as the functioning of the South Sudanese government and the oil-dependent economy. Due to data restrictions, results might be different if the research could have been conducted longer or if other research methods were conducted, such as field-based research. However, these limitations help suggest future research, which I will now discuss.

Future research

Based on this research's conclusion and reflection, I have a few recommendations for future research. I would first recommend conducting the study with more cases. With more cases, results can be compared, and general patterns can be detected. However, a detailed account still contributes to helping understand how the relationship between natural resources and political exclusion works and if other factors, and if the same elements, also influence this relationship and conflict. Furthermore, this improves the generalizability of the results. While conducting this research, there might also be other research methods used to help

understand the behaviours of actors, for example. Moreover, by conducting the study longer, more data might be gathered to help ground the results in theoretical assumptions.

Secondly, I would recommend research on natural resources but on another relationship than the one of political exclusion. The results have shown that ethnicity and the political regime also influenced the civil war. Furthermore, human rights violations were found in large numbers as well. These could all have a relationship with natural resources, or these factors might influence conflicts in countries rich in natural resources. Results might be gained in solving a country's issues while focussing on new aspects.

Thirdly, the relationship between natural resources and political exclusion might be found by researching other theoretical narratives. One of these narratives might be ethnic polarization. This will help gain new insights into the relationship but also helps control for other factors that might influence conflict.

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Appendix

Appendix one: Codebook

Codebook

Context of the conflict:

The lootability of a natural resource:

- What are the characteristics of the natural resource?
- In what way does the natural resource contribute to the resource conflict?
 - How is this, or is this not in line with the theoretical assumptions?
- Based on theoretical assumptions, how lootable is the natural resource in the conflict?
What effects does this have?
- Does political exclusion play a role?

The political economy approach:

- Is natural resource (wealth) distributed equally, or are some experiencing political exclusion in this process? If so, why? What are the consequences of this on the conflict?
 - Who has political power, and do they intentionally exclude actors?
 - What is the political status of the country? Is it stable? What kind of system is in place?

The rebel discourse:

- Are rebel actors involved in the conflict? If so, are they excluded politically?
- What are the effects of rebel actors on the conflict?
- Why did the rebel actor revolt?

Is Political Exclusion present in the conflict?

- If yes, what is the influence of political exclusion on the conflict based on theoretical assumption?

Are political exclusion and natural resources complementing or influencing each other in the conflict, and if so, how?

Control variables:

- Ethnic polarization: is this present in the conflict? If so, how?
- Conflict duration: did it influence conflict? If so, how?
- Political regime: what is the political regime? Is the government strong or weak?

Are there other important facts that need to be mentioned or that could have influenced the conflict?

Data coded/updated:

Source(s):