

# How Institutional Trust Changes During Armed Conflict: Evidence from Cameroon's Anglophone Crisis

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## Abstract

How does public trust change across institutions during armed conflict? I argue that trust trajectories depend on institutions' roles in the conflict and on the regional position of the citizens evaluating them. Using repeated cross-sectional Afrobarometer surveys conducted in Cameroon in 2015, 2018, 2021, and 2022, I compare the Northwest and Southwest, the core regions of the Anglophone crisis, with the adjacent West and Littoral regions. Three findings stand out. Police trust fell from about 31% to 10% in the conflict regions while rising from 39% to 47% in the comparison regions, producing a 29-percentage-point divergence; the ruling party and army display the next-largest divergences. Trust in parliament declined in both regional groups, whereas the opposition-party divergence was driven mainly by rising trust outside the conflict regions. Finally, somewhat-or-a-lot trust in traditional leaders partially rebounded by 2022, while the share reporting a lot of trust remained sharply lower. Armed conflict therefore does not produce a uniform loss of institutional confidence. By comparing eleven institutions and making each region's trajectory visible, the paper shows how institutional roles and citizens' regional positions together structure changes in trust.

**Keywords:** institutional trust; armed conflict; Anglophone crisis; Cameroon; Afrobarometer; difference-in-differences.

**JEL codes:** D74, D72, Z13, O55.

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## 1 Introduction

Armed conflict places many public institutions under pressure at once, but it does not necessarily alter confidence in all of them in the same way. Security institutions use force and claim to provide protection. Executive institutions direct the state's response. Courts, electoral bodies, and representative institutions may offer accountability or appear unable to provide it. Traditional and religious leaders may mediate, assist communities, or become entangled in the conflict. Citizens may therefore lose trust in one institution while retaining or even increasing trust in another. This variation raises the paper's central question: how does public trust change across institutions during armed conflict, and why do those changes differ across regional publics?

The question matters for both political legitimacy and conflict recovery. Institutional trust indicates whether citizens express confidence in the organizations that exercise authority, deliver public functions, and represent them. A broad measure of trust in "government" can obscure important differences among those organizations. It can also obscure the fact that the same conflict may be experienced differently across a country. Identifying which relationships deteriorate, which endure, and for whom helps clarify the political consequences of violence and the institutional relationships that a later settlement may need to repair.

Research on war and social behavior gives no reason to expect a single, uniform change in trust. Bauer et al. (2016) show that exposure to violence can coexist with increased local cooperation, often within bounded communities. Barceló's (2026) meta-analysis similarly identifies varied attitudinal and behavioral legacies rather than a general rise or decline in trust. Much of this literature concerns interpersonal trust, cooperation, and identity. The related question of how confidence changes across distinct public institutions has received less direct comparative attention. A conflict may undermine an institution associated with coercion or political responsibility while leaving confidence in an institution associated with representation, assistance, or mediation relatively intact.

I examine this question during Cameroon's Anglophone crisis. Lawyers' and teachers' protests began in October 2016, and the crisis escalated into armed conflict in late 2017. I use Afrobarometer surveys conducted in 2015, before this escalation, and in 2018, 2021, and 2022, after armed conflict had begun. The surveys repeatedly ask about trust in eleven institutions: the president, parliament, Elections Cameroon (ELECAM), local government councils, the ruling party, opposition parties, the police, the army, courts of law, traditional leaders, and religious leaders. The main analysis compares changes in the Northwest and Southwest, where the conflict has been concentrated, with changes in the adjacent West and Littoral regions. A 2013 survey provides an additional pre-crisis observation for nine institutions. Because these surveys are repeated cross-sections rather than a panel, they follow regional patterns over time rather than the same individuals.

The argument has two parts. First, institutional roles shape the basis on which citizens evaluate each organization during conflict. Direct involvement in coercion, responsibility for political decisions, the provision of representation or accountability, and the capacity to protect or mediate create different grounds for approval and blame. The distinction between state and community institutions is too broad: the police, courts, parliament, and local councils are all state institutions, but they perform different functions, just as traditional and religious leaders can occupy different positions in relation to communities and the state. Second, citizens' regional position shapes how

they interpret those roles. An institution can be viewed as a source of harm or failed protection in the conflict's core and as a source of security outside it. People outside the core may support the government's response, oppose it, experience spillovers, or revise their opinions for reasons unrelated to the conflict. Institutional roles and regional position must therefore be considered together.

Three general lessons organize the findings. The first is that the largest regional divergences cluster among institutions closely connected to coercion and political responsibility, but the pattern does not extend uniformly across state institutions. The second is that a relative difference between regions is not itself evidence that trust declined in the conflict regions: the same estimate can arise from a local decline, an increase outside the conflict regions, or changes in both places. The third is that community-based institutions are not uniformly insulated from armed conflict. Their trajectories depend on their position in the conflict and on whether the analysis measures moderate confidence or the strongest expression of trust. These lessons reduce eleven institutional series to a common conclusion: conflict changes trust selectively, through the relationship between what institutions are understood to do and where their evaluators stand.

The specific results illustrate each lesson. First, between 2015 and 2022, police trust fell by about 21 percentage points in the Northwest and Southwest while rising by about 8 points in West and Littoral. The resulting difference in changes is approximately  $-29$  points, the largest among the eleven institutions. Trust in the ruling party declined by about 25 points in the conflict regions and 2 points in the comparison regions, while army trust declined by about 29 and 7 points, respectively. These patterns are consistent with a distinction between institutions directly associated with the state's coercive response and political management of the crisis and institutions performing other roles. Second, trust in parliament fell by about 10 points in the conflict regions and 11 points in the comparison regions, so its near-zero difference between changes conceals a decline in both places. By contrast, trust in opposition parties changed little in the conflict regions but rose by about 14 points outside them. Third, trust in traditional leaders at the combined "somewhat or a lot" threshold partially rebounded after an initial decline, but the share reporting "a lot" of trust fell from about 35% in 2015 to 9% in 2022. The apparent resilience of traditional leadership is therefore qualified rather than complete.

The difference-in-differences design describes how regional trajectories diverged after 2015; it does not separate the effects of insurgent violence from those of the government's counterinsurgency, nor does it identify individual exposure to particular events. I therefore interpret the estimates as changes during the Anglophone crisis and examine each region's underlying trajectory before interpreting the difference between them. This distinction is especially important in a national conflict with displacement, economic disruption, information flows, and political responses beyond the principal theater of violence.

The paper makes three contributions. It compares eleven institutions within a common survey and setting, showing what an aggregate measure of political confidence would hide. It develops an institution-specific account that links trust to coercion, political responsibility, representation, justice, and mediation while recognizing that those roles can be evaluated differently across regional publics. It also demonstrates substantively why relative changes must be interpreted alongside the levels and changes that produce them. This approach complements Afrobarometer research on insecurity in Mali, where Diallo (2025) finds that relationships vary with the political regime and level of insecurity, and extends the focus to variation across institutions and regions

over successive surveys. The next section develops the theoretical expectations. Section 3 then places the eleven institutions within the history and politics of Cameroon's Anglophone crisis. The remaining sections introduce the data and regional comparison, present the descriptive and difference-in-differences results, evaluate their robustness and limits, and draw out their implications.

## **2 Institutional roles and regional publics during armed conflict**

### **2.1 Institutional trust and armed conflict**

I conceptualize institutional trust as a respondent's expressed confidence in a named institution. It is an evaluation of that institution, although the evaluation may also reflect broader judgments about government performance, fairness, political identity, security, or economic conditions. Levi and Sacks (2009) connect legitimating beliefs to assessments of government performance and fairness. Institutional trust matters because public institutions depend on citizens to accept decisions, cooperate with officials, seek services, and use formal channels for representation and dispute resolution. At the same time, a survey response about one institution is narrower than state legitimacy as a whole and does not reveal the precise experience or judgment on which the response rests.

Armed conflict can change these evaluations through direct experience, information about violence, perceived performance, group identity, and judgments about responsibility. Yet a simple expectation that conflict reduces trust is incomplete. Violence can weaken confidence in authorities that citizens blame for harm or failed protection, strengthen confidence in actors seen as providing security or assistance, and redirect confidence toward institutions viewed as credible alternatives. Bauer et al. (2016) and Barceló (2026) show more broadly that the social and political legacies of violence are heterogeneous. The central theoretical task is therefore to explain why trust might change differently across institutions rather than to predict a uniform decline.

The paper's first claim is that the role attributed to an institution provides the most direct basis for such differentiation. Armed conflict makes some functions especially salient: coercion and protection, political direction and responsibility, justice and accountability, electoral and territorial representation, and community mediation. Institutional location or formal status alone does not capture these distinctions. Two institutions can both be local yet occupy different positions in the conflict; two state institutions can elicit different judgments because one exercises force while the other represents citizens. The following discussion therefore considers the eleven institutions according to the roles through which citizens may encounter and evaluate them.

### **2.2 Security and justice institutions**

The police and army embody the tension between protection and coercion. Both can gain trust when citizens regard their presence and use of force as necessary, effective, and appropriately targeted. Both can lose trust when citizens associate them with abuse, arbitrary intervention, collective punishment, or failure to provide security. These possibilities apply to security institutions generally rather than only to the police. They also make attribution crucial: Lyall, Blair, and Imai (2013) find asymmetric responses to harm inflicted by different combatants in Afghanistan, showing that identity and judgments about responsibility mediate political reactions to violence.

The police and army need not move together. Police are often encountered through routine law enforcement and local administration, while the army is more closely associated with military security. Citizens may therefore distinguish everyday police conduct from the deployment of armed forces, even when both are identified with the state. Evidence from other settings reinforces the need to measure rather than assume their trust consequences. Across jihadist attacks occurring during European Social Survey fieldwork, Nägel, Nivette, and Czymara (2024) find no general rally in institutional trust and different patterns across institutions. In Liberia, an intervention studied by Blair, Karim, and Morse (2019) improved several policing outcomes without increasing trust in the police, courts, or government. Performance on one dimension does not automatically translate into institutional confidence.

Courts occupy a related but distinct position. They can authorize detention and prosecution, review state conduct, provide remedies, and adjudicate ordinary disputes. Conflict may reduce court trust when legal institutions are perceived as instruments of repression or as unable to hold coercive actors accountable. It may preserve or increase trust when courts are viewed as fair forums for redress. Courts therefore connect coercion to justice and accountability, but their trajectory need not match that of either the police or army.

### **2.3 Political responsibility and representation**

The president and ruling party are linked to political responsibility for the government's response to armed conflict. Citizens who approve of that response may reward them; citizens who blame the government for escalation, repression, insecurity, or failed negotiation may withdraw confidence. Because the presidency is evaluated nationally, trust can also decline or rise across several regions at once. The ruling party may follow a similar trajectory, but its partisan identity and organizational presence can produce a more geographically uneven response. The relevant expectation is not simply loss: both institutions can be rewarded or penalized depending on how citizens assign responsibility.

Parliament and local government councils are representative institutions at different territorial levels. Parliament can be judged by whether it voices grievances, constrains the executive, and contributes to negotiation or accountability. Local councils can be evaluated through their proximity to residents, their provision of services, and their capacity to represent communities during disruption. Proximity does not itself protect an institution from distrust. It can make assistance more visible, but it can also make inaction, limited capacity, or cooperation with other authorities more salient.

ELECAM, the electoral commission, links political competition to the administration and credibility of elections. During conflict, elections can offer institutional representation and a peaceful route for political choice. They can also be viewed as exclusionary, unsafe, or incapable of resolving the dispute. Trust in ELECAM may therefore depend on whether citizens see electoral procedures as meaningful and accessible under conditions of violence.

Opposition parties represent a potential institutional alternative to incumbents, but dissatisfaction with the government need not translate into confidence in them. Opposition parties may gain trust if citizens see them as credible advocates or vehicles for accountability. They may lose trust if they appear unable to represent affected communities, influence the state's response, or offer a viable political alternative. The survey item refers to opposition parties collectively. It

does not measure support for any particular party or for armed separatist organizations, so confidence can shift away from governing institutions without appearing as increased opposition-party trust.

## **2.4 Traditional and religious leaders**

Traditional leaders combine local social authority with formal and informal connections to the state. They may mediate disputes, communicate community concerns, coordinate assistance, and provide continuity when other institutions are inaccessible. The same position can expose them to pressure from state and nonstate armed actors or to criticism from residents who view them as aligned with one side. Henn (2023) shows that institutional arrangements condition whether traditional authorities and the state operate as complements or substitutes. In armed conflict, state connections can bring access and resources, create accusations of collaboration, or restrict a leader's room for maneuver. Trust should therefore depend on perceived conduct and independence rather than on a general assumption that chiefs are either community representatives or state agents.

Religious leaders may also provide assistance, moral authority, and mediation. Their organizational networks can help communities cope with insecurity or create channels for dialogue. Their credibility can nevertheless suffer if residents perceive political alignment, ineffective mediation, or an inability to protect communities. Traditional and religious leaders are consequently useful comparisons: both are rooted in community authority, but their institutional relationships and roles in a conflict need not be the same.

Taken together, these roles imply that armed conflict should produce differentiated rather than uniform trust trajectories. Institutions identified with coercion or responsibility for contested political decisions may lose confidence among citizens who experience those activities as harmful or ineffective. Institutions viewed as providers of protection, representation, justice, or credible mediation may retain or gain confidence. Because any institution can be judged successful, complicit, constrained, or irrelevant, these are conditional expectations. The key claim is that institutional role offers a more precise account of variation than a simple division between state and community authorities.

## **2.5 Regional position and the public doing the evaluating**

Institutional role alone cannot explain variation in trust because the same role may be evaluated differently by citizens in different positions relative to a conflict. People in the principal theater of violence are more likely to confront insecurity, coercion, disrupted services, and the immediate performance or failure of public institutions. People outside that theater may view state force as protection against a security threat, oppose the government's response, identify with affected communities, or give the conflict less weight when evaluating institutions. Armed conflict can therefore polarize institutional evaluations across regions rather than move national trust in one direction.

Regional position is not equivalent to a simple division between affected and unaffected populations. Displacement, commercial disruption, security spillovers, national political events, media coverage, and relationships with affected relatives can carry the consequences of conflict beyond its core. People living in the same region can also differ in identity, exposure, and political judgment. The International Crisis Group (2019) describes varied Francophone responses to the

Anglophone crisis and growing calls for dialogue, underscoring why opinion outside the two Anglophone regions should not be assumed to follow a single path.

The paper's second claim follows: institutional roles and regional position interact in shaping trust. A coercive institution may be judged as threatening in one place and protective in another. A national political institution may lose confidence in both places for different reasons. A local intermediary may retain trust where it remains accessible and lose it where armed actors constrain its autonomy. The empirical analysis cannot observe all the judgments underlying these patterns, so it evaluates whether the observed trajectories are consistent with this account rather than treating institutional role or regional location as a directly measured mechanism.

This framework yields two expectations. First, changes in trust should vary across institutions according to their perceived roles in coercion, political responsibility, representation, justice, and mediation. Second, the direction and magnitude of those changes should vary across regional publics according to their position relative to the conflict. The most informative evidence is therefore not a single average change in political trust, but the pattern formed by specific institutions within each regional group.

### **3 Cameroon's Anglophone crisis and the roles of public institutions**

The theoretical argument becomes concrete in Cameroon because the Anglophone crisis emerged from disputes over language, law, representation, and political authority and subsequently implicated a wide range of institutions. The Northwest and Southwest largely correspond to the former British Southern Cameroons, which joined the formerly French-administered Republic of Cameroon in 1961. The later erosion of federal arrangements and disputes over the standing of English-language education and common law contributed to a distinct Anglophone grievance. Konings and Nyamnjoh (1997) trace how these grievances developed into demands for federalism and, among some actors, secession.

Colonial administration also shaped traditional authority, but not through a uniform contrast between strong chiefs on the British side and weak chiefs on the French side. Geschiere (1993) documents variation in the ways colonial authorities constructed and governed through chieftaincy. Substantial customary authority developed on both sides of the former partition, although its forms and relations with the state varied. This history is relevant because traditional leaders entered the contemporary crisis with both local authority and institutional connections to the state; neither their resilience nor their loss of trust can be inferred from colonial lineage alone.

The immediate crisis began with lawyers' and teachers' protests in October 2016 over the treatment of Anglophone legal and educational institutions. The mobilization broadened, and the government responded with repression and an internet shutdown (Pommerolle and Heungoup 2017). The confrontation escalated into armed conflict in late 2017. The International Crisis Group (2019) documents widespread displacement, destruction, and insecurity, centered in the Northwest and Southwest and extending through spillovers into West and Littoral. The 2018, 2021, and 2022 surveys were therefore conducted during an ongoing conflict, after its onset rather than after its conclusion.

The crisis made the roles of the police, army, and courts especially salient. Government security forces were responsible for enforcing state authority and confronting separatist groups,

while separatist organizations used violence, attacks, and abductions. Human Rights Watch (2020a) documents abuses by government forces, separatist attacks and abductions, and repression extending beyond the Anglophone regions. Residents could consequently evaluate the police and army through both security provision and coercion. Courts could be evaluated through prosecution, detention, and the possibility of legal redress, while the origins of the protests in disputes over common-law institutions gave the justice system particular symbolic importance. The available survey items do not identify which of these experiences or judgments respondents had in mind.

The president and ruling party occupied the clearest positions of political responsibility for the government's management of the crisis. Parliament, local government councils, and opposition parties occupied representative roles, but their capacity to channel grievances or alter the conflict's course could be judged separately. Opposition parties were institutional competitors within electoral politics and were distinct from armed separatist organizations. A decline in confidence in incumbents therefore need not produce a corresponding increase in trust in opposition parties.

Elections and electoral institutions were also drawn into the conflict. Violence and threats surrounded the 2020 parliamentary and municipal elections, including attacks on electoral infrastructure (Human Rights Watch 2020b). This setting implicated ELECAM as the electoral administrator, parliament as a national representative body, and local councils as the institutions chosen through municipal contests. Citizens could view these institutions as channels for peaceful representation or as unable to provide an effective political response under conditions of violence.

Traditional and religious leaders occupied still different positions. Their local authority created opportunities to communicate community concerns, assist residents, and mediate, while also exposing them to demands and pressure from armed actors. The International Crisis Group (2019) reports pressure on traditional and religious leaders and efforts by some religious leaders to convene dialogue. Traditional leaders' formal connections to the state could be understood as access to government, as a constraint on their independence, or as evidence of alignment. Religious leaders could derive credibility from mediation and service but were likewise vulnerable to intimidation and contested perceptions of neutrality.

These institutional roles were evaluated from different regional positions. Violence and disruption were concentrated in the Northwest and Southwest, but the consequences did not stop at their borders. West and Littoral experienced spillovers, economic and social connections, and displacement from the conflict's core (International Crisis Group 2019). Citizens outside the core could see government institutions as providing security, disapprove of the state's conduct, sympathize with Anglophone grievances, or respond to broader national political conditions. The Cameroonian setting thus offers a revealing case for the argument: the same eleven institutions were present across regions, but their perceived roles and the circumstances under which citizens evaluated them could differ sharply. The next section explains how the survey data and regional comparison are used to trace those differences.

## **4 Data and descriptive trajectories**

### **4.1 Surveys, regional comparison, and measurement**

I use the Cameroon observations from Afrobarometer Rounds 6–9, fielded in 2015, 2018, 2021, and 2022. The 2015 survey predates the protests that began in October 2016 and the escalation to

armed conflict in late 2017; the three later surveys were fielded after the conflict began. The main analysis compares the Northwest and Southwest, where the conflict has been concentrated, with the adjacent West and Littoral regions. West and Littoral share borders, commercial ties, and social connections with the conflict's core, which makes them useful comparison regions. They may also have experienced displacement, economic disruption, and security spillovers. The analysis therefore compares two regional trajectories; it does not assume that West and Littoral were unaffected by the conflict.

The four-region sample contains 1,920 interviews: 488 in 2015, 480 in 2018, 464 in 2021, and 488 in 2022. Item-specific samples range from 1,799 to 1,880 because some respondents did not provide a substantive answer to every trust question. Afrobarometer Round 5, fielded in 2013, provides an additional pre-conflict observation for nine political and state institutions. That round did not ask about trust in traditional or religious leaders. Appendix A reports regional sample sizes, field dates, variable mappings, and coding decisions.

The eleven outcomes measure trust in the president, parliament, Elections Cameroon (ELECAM), the local government council, the ruling party, opposition parties, the police, the army, courts of law, traditional leaders, and religious leaders. For each institution, respondents could answer “not at all,” “just a little,” “somewhat,” or “a lot.” The Round 9 questionnaire documents the latest version of these items (Afrobarometer 2023). The main outcome equals one for “somewhat” or “a lot” and zero for “not at all” or “just a little.” Non-substantive responses, including “don’t know,” are treated as missing. This common threshold allows every result to be read as a change in the percentage of respondents expressing at least moderate trust. It does not imply that the difference between moderate and strong trust is unimportant. Appendix A reports the complete response distribution for traditional leaders and alternative thresholds for all institutions; the replication files contain the complete distributions for all eleven institutions.

The institutional questions and four-category response scale are comparable across rounds, although comparable wording does not guarantee that respondents interpreted every question in the same way across languages and interview settings. The main figures, means, and regressions are unweighted so that the descriptive changes and regression coefficients have the same arithmetic interpretation. Survey-weighted estimates are reported as a sensitivity check.

## **4.2 Levels before differences in changes**

Figures 1 and 2 show the percentage of respondents who trusted each institution somewhat or a lot in each survey. Solid lines with circles represent the Northwest and Southwest; dashed lines with squares represent West and Littoral. All panels use the same vertical scale, and the spacing between observations reflects calendar time. These are descriptive sample means. Appendix A reports the exact values and denominators.

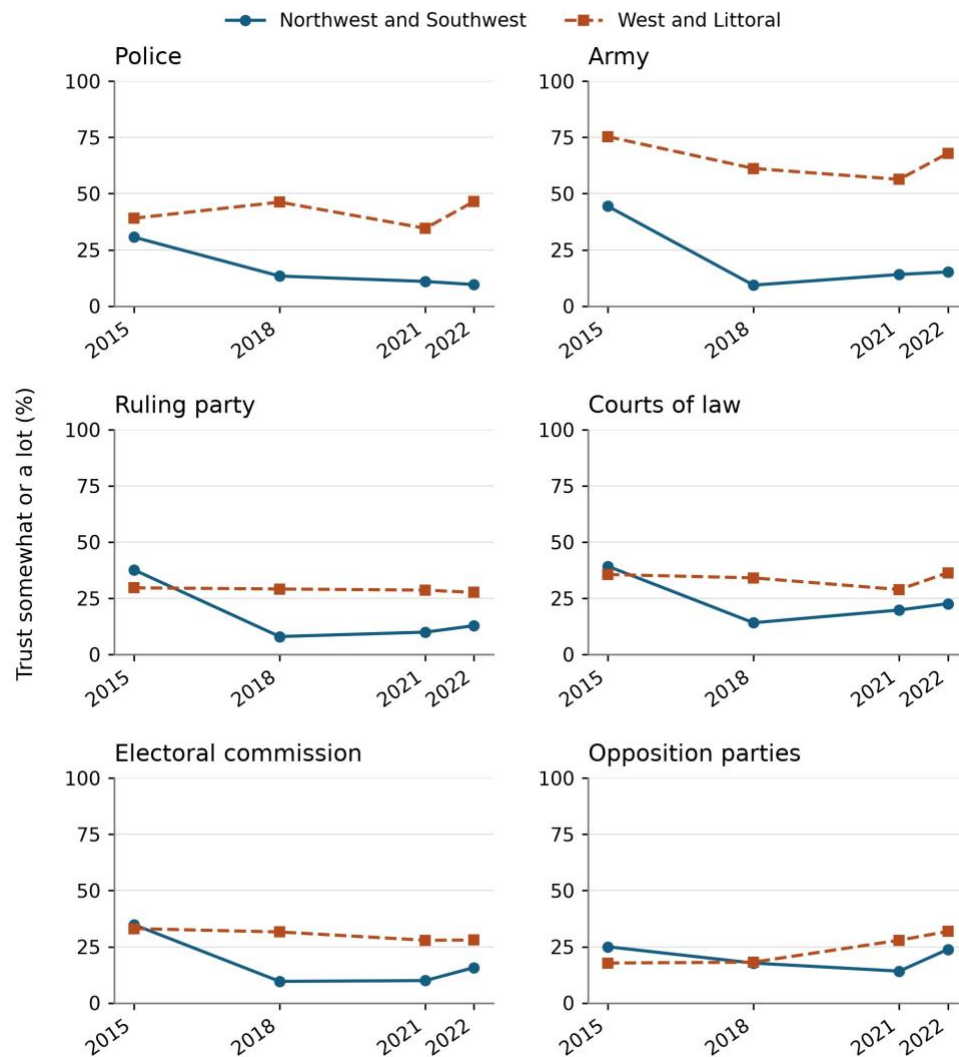


Figure 1. Trust in political and security institutions by regional group. Source: Afrobarometer, Cameroon Rounds 6–9. Unweighted substantive-response means; trust equals somewhat or a lot. Points are survey

observations; connecting lines do not represent annual measurements. Exact values and denominators appear in Appendix A.

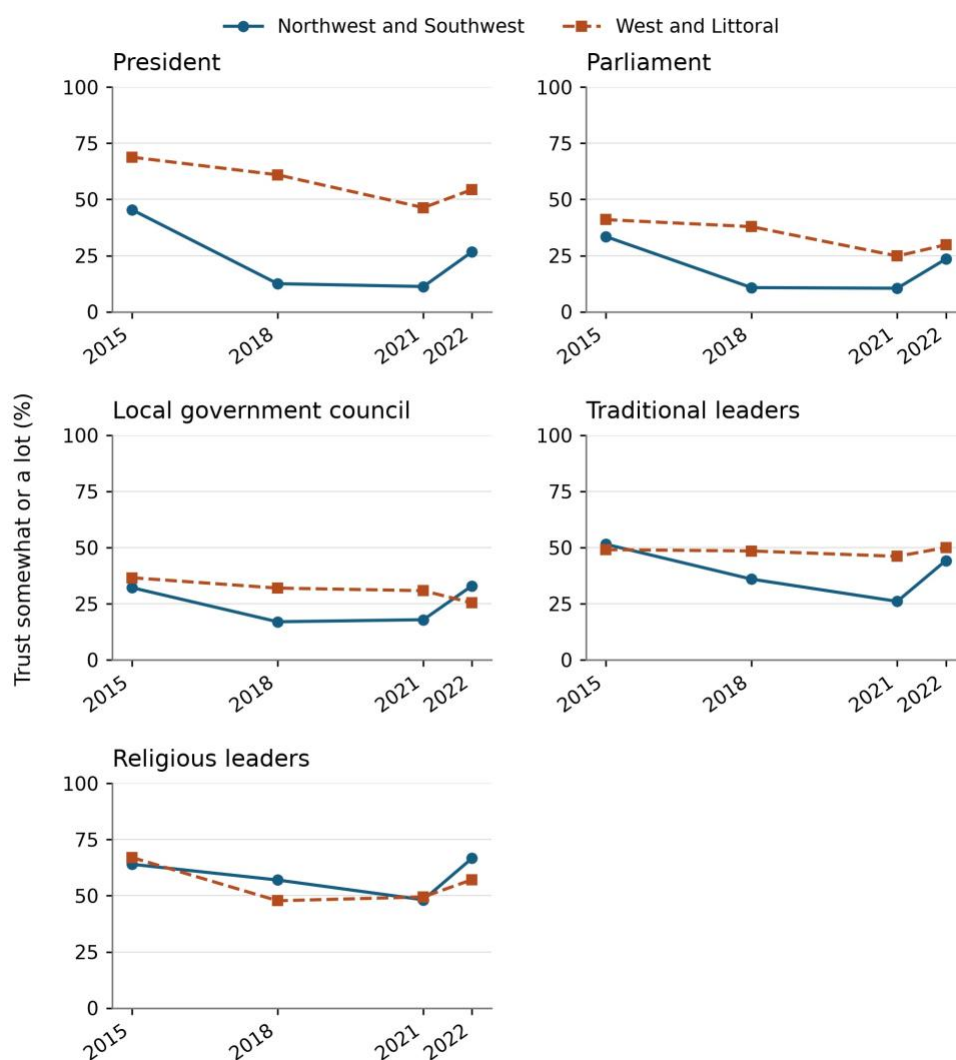


Figure 2. Trust in representative and community institutions by regional group. Source: Afrobarometer, Cameroon Rounds 6–9. Unweighted substantive-response means; trust equals somewhat or a lot. Points are survey observations; connecting lines do not represent annual measurements. Exact values and denominators appear in Appendix A.

The groups did not begin at the same level of trust. In 2015, 75% of respondents in West and Littoral trusted the army somewhat or a lot, compared with 44% in the Northwest and Southwest. The corresponding shares for the president were 69% and 46%. Trust in traditional leaders was much closer, at 49% in West and Littoral and 52% in the Northwest and Southwest. Difference-in-differences does not require equal starting levels, but these contrasts show why the analysis must examine changes within each group rather than compare their later levels alone.

Table 1 places the 2015 and 2022 levels beside each group's change. The clearest divergence concerns the police. Trust in the police fell from 31% to 10% in the conflict regions, a decline of 21 percentage points, while it rose from 39% to 47% in West and Littoral, an increase of 8 points. The gap between the groups consequently widened from 8 points in 2015 to 37 points in 2022.

Trust in the army also fell more in the conflict regions, but through a different combination of changes: it declined by 29 points there and by 7 points in West and Littoral. Trust in the ruling party declined by 25 points in the conflict regions and by 2 points in the comparison regions. Thus, all three institutions show a large relative loss in the conflict regions, even though only the police gained trust in the comparison regions.

**Table 1. Trust levels and changes from 2015 to 2022**

| Institution          | Conflict regions | Comparison regions | Conflict change | Comparison change | DiD        |
|----------------------|------------------|--------------------|-----------------|-------------------|------------|
|                      | 2015 → 2022      | 2015 → 2022        | 2022 – 2015     | 2022 – 2015       | Change gap |
| Police               | 31 → 10          | 39 → 47            | –21             | +8                | –29        |
| Ruling party         | 38 → 13          | 30 → 28            | –25             | –2                | –23        |
| Army                 | 44 → 15          | 75 → 68            | –29             | –7                | –22        |
| Courts               | 39 → 23          | 36 → 36            | –17             | +1                | –18        |
| Opposition parties   | 25 → 24          | 18 → 32            | –1              | +14               | –15        |
| Electoral commission | 35 → 16          | 33 → 28            | –19             | –5                | –14        |
| Traditional leaders  | 52 → 44          | 49 → 50            | –7              | +1                | –8         |
| President            | 46 → 27          | 69 → 54            | –19             | –14               | –4         |
| Parliament           | 34 → 24          | 41 → 30            | –10             | –11               | +1         |
| Local council        | 32 → 33          | 37 → 25            | +1              | –11               | +12        |
| Religious leaders    | 64 → 67          | 67 → 57            | +3              | –10               | +13        |

Notes: The conflict regions are the Northwest and Southwest; the comparison regions are West and Littoral. Levels are percentages trusting somewhat or a lot. Changes are percentage-point differences between 2022 and 2015. The difference-in-differences estimate equals the change in the conflict regions minus the change in the comparison regions. Changes and difference-in-differences estimates are calculated from unrounded means and then rounded, so they may not equal calculations from the displayed endpoints. Appendix A reports unrounded values and item-specific denominators.

The other institutions show why the sign of a difference-in-differences estimate cannot be interpreted without the underlying levels. Trust in parliament fell by about 10 points in the conflict regions and 11 points in West and Littoral. Because these declines were almost equal, the difference between them is close to zero; this does not mean that parliamentary trust was stable. Opposition-party trust was nearly unchanged in the conflict regions but rose by 14 points in West and Littoral, producing a negative relative estimate even though the decline inside the conflict regions was only about 1 point. Presidential trust fell substantially in both groups—by 19 points in the conflict regions and 14 points in West and Littoral—so its modest relative estimate also conceals broad decline.

The reverse issue arises for local councils and religious leaders. Their positive 2022 estimates do not indicate large increases in trust in the conflict regions. Trust there rose by only about 1 point for local councils and 3 points for religious leaders; the positive estimates arise mainly because trust declined by about 11 and 10 points, respectively, in West and Littoral.

Three descriptive patterns guide the analysis that follows. First, trust changed differently across institutions: the largest 2022 regional divergences appear for the police, ruling party, and

army. Second, the same relative estimate can summarize very different regional experiences, including decline in both groups, stability in one group and growth in the other, or movement in opposite directions. Third, traditional leaders follow a distinct temporal path: trust in them fell sharply in the conflict regions through 2021 and then partially recovered by 2022. The regression framework summarizes these regional differences consistently across institutions and survey rounds, while the interpretation continues to rely on the underlying group trajectories.

## 5 Empirical strategy

### 5.1 Estimating differences in regional change

The descriptive figures reveal the levels and direction of change, but they do not provide a single, comparable estimate of how far the two regional trajectories diverged after the conflict began. I therefore estimate a separate difference-in-differences model for each institution. The model compares the change in the Northwest and Southwest with the change over the same period in West and Littoral. This removes stable differences between the two groups and common changes between survey rounds, while retaining the institution-specific changes that are central to the paper.

The general estimating equation is an unweighted ordinary least squares linear probability model:

$$y_{ijrt} = \alpha_j + \gamma_j C_r + \lambda_{jt} + \sum_{s \in S} \beta_{js} (C_r \times \mathbf{1}[t = s]) + \phi_j' X_{it} + \varepsilon_{ijrt} \quad (1)$$

Here,  $y$  is the binary trust response of respondent  $i$  for institution  $j$  in region  $r$  and survey year  $t$ .  $C$  equals one for respondents in the Northwest and Southwest and zero for respondents in West and Littoral. The set  $S$  contains the three post-2015 surveys: 2018, 2021, and 2022. The coefficients of interest are the interactions  $\beta$ . Each one measures how much the change in trust in the conflict regions differs from the change in the comparison regions, relative to 2015.

The baseline sets  $\phi$  to zero and therefore includes only the regional-group indicator, survey-year indicators, and their interactions. This specification reproduces the differences visible in the figures and Table 1. Sensitivity analyses add age, sex, urban residence, and harmonized education categories or apply Afrobarometer survey weights. I use the unadjusted model as the baseline because characteristics such as education and place of residence may themselves have changed through displacement and selective survey access during the conflict.

Without covariates, each interaction coefficient can also be written directly as a difference between two changes:

$$\hat{\beta}_{jt} = (\bar{y}_{j,C,t} - \bar{y}_{j,C,2015}) - (\bar{y}_{j,N,t} - \bar{y}_{j,N,2015}) \quad (2)$$

In equation (2),  $C$  denotes the Northwest and Southwest,  $N$  denotes West and Littoral, and the barred values are group means. The 2022 police estimate illustrates the calculation. Police trust declined by 21 percentage points in the conflict regions, while it increased by 8 points in West and Littoral. The estimate is therefore  $-21 - (+8) = -29$  percentage points. Put plainly, the change in police trust was 29 percentage points lower in the conflict regions than in the comparison regions between 2015 and 2022. The estimate does not mean that police trust fell by 29 points inside the

conflict regions—it fell by 21 points there—and it does not by itself establish that the armed conflict caused either change.

A causal interpretation would require trust in the two groups to have followed parallel trajectories in the absence of the conflict. It would also require assumptions about spillovers, displacement, survey access, and changes in the population reached by interviewers. Region of residence was not randomly assigned, and the surveys do not measure each respondent’s exposure to violence or follow the same people over time. The directly observed quantity is therefore a difference in changes among the respondents interviewed in successive regional surveys. I use it to describe and compare institutional trust trajectories during the period of armed conflict, while treating causal interpretations as conditional on assumptions that the data cannot fully verify.

## **5.2 Assessing uncertainty**

Two features of the analysis limit statistical precision: the main design contains only four administrative regions, and it compares eleven institutional outcomes. A large number of individual interviews does not create additional independent regional units. Table 2 therefore reports standard errors clustered by region, but those values should be interpreted cautiously because there are only two conflict regions and two comparison regions (Cameron and Miller 2015; MacKinnon, Nielsen and Webb 2023).

Appendix A provides two additional checks. The wild-cluster calculations ask whether the principal estimates remain unusual under an inference method designed for a small number of clusters. The regional-placebo exercise asks a simpler comparative question: if another pair of Cameroonian regions were labeled the focal group and compared with West and Littoral, how often would the analysis produce a difference as large as the observed one? The maximum-statistic versions also account for the fact that the paper examines eleven institutions and highlights the largest patterns. These checks are useful because an apparently exceptional estimate may be less unusual when many outcomes and regional pairings are considered. Their construction, alternative reference statistics, and direct comparisons of the police estimate with each other institution are reported in Appendix A.

Neither check converts the four-region comparison into a randomized design. The alternative regional assignments were not randomly generated, and Cameroonian regions are not interchangeable. The checks therefore calibrate how unusual the results look under different assumptions; they do not supply exact randomization tests or eliminate uncertainty. For this reason, the analysis emphasizes the size and regional composition of the estimates and does not claim a statistically proven ranking of all eleven institutions.

## **6 Comparative results**

This section organizes the eleven outcomes around three findings. First, the largest regional divergences appear for the police, ruling party, and army, institutions closely connected to security provision or political responsibility during the crisis. Second, similar difference-in-differences estimates can result from very different changes within the two regional groups. Third, traditional leaders show a partial recovery in moderate trust that does not extend to strong trust or reported contact. For each finding, I therefore report the change in the Northwest and Southwest, the change in West and Littoral, and the difference between those two changes.

Table 2 reports the difference-in-differences estimates for 2018, 2021, and 2022, relative to 2015. A negative estimate means that trust declined more, or increased less, in the conflict regions than in the comparison regions. A positive estimate means the reverse. Neither sign reveals what happened within either group on its own. For example, a positive estimate can arise when trust declines in both groups but falls less in the conflict regions. The underlying levels in Figures 1 and 2 and the component changes in Table 1 are therefore essential to interpreting Table 2.

**Table 2. Difference-in-differences estimates of changes in institutional trust**

| Institution          | 2018     | 2021     | 2022    | Obs.  |
|----------------------|----------|----------|---------|-------|
| Police               | -25 (5)  | -15 (1)  | -29 (4) | 1,880 |
| Ruling party         | -29 (6)  | -27 (5)  | -23 (6) | 1,820 |
| Army                 | -21 (2)  | -11 (5)  | -22 (8) | 1,868 |
| Courts               | -24 (8)  | -13 (4)  | -18 (3) | 1,850 |
| Opposition parties   | -8 (5)   | -21 (9)  | -15 (9) | 1,806 |
| Electoral commission | -24 (8)  | -20 (5)  | -14 (5) | 1,828 |
| Traditional leaders  | -15 (4)  | -23 (9)  | -8 (9)  | 1,857 |
| President            | -25 (5)  | -12 (10) | -4 (14) | 1,818 |
| Parliament           | -20 (12) | -7 (9)   | +1 (9)  | 1,805 |
| Local council        | -11 (6)  | -9 (1)   | +12 (7) | 1,799 |
| Religious leaders    | +12 (4)  | +2 (13)  | +13 (4) | 1,866 |

Notes: Each row reports a separate unweighted OLS linear probability model, as in equation (1). The 2018, 2021, and 2022 columns are interactions between the conflict-region indicator and the survey-year indicators, in percentage points, with standard errors clustered by administrative region in parentheses. Negative estimates mean trust declined more, or increased less, in the Northwest and Southwest than in West and Littoral. Obs. is the institution-specific number of substantive responses. Estimates and standard errors are rounded to the nearest whole percentage point. With only four regions, inference is approximate. Appendix A reports unrounded estimates, wild-cluster calculations, and other alternative calculations.

### 6.1 Finding 1: The largest divergences concern the police, ruling party, and army

The clearest pattern is the change in police trust. In 2015, 31% of respondents in the Northwest and Southwest and 39% in West and Littoral trusted the police somewhat or a lot, an 8-point gap. By 2022, the corresponding shares were 10% and 47%, a 37-point gap. In difference-in-differences terms, trust fell by 21 points in the conflict regions and rose by 8 points in the comparison regions:  $-21 - (+8) = -29$  points. The result therefore combines a sharp decline where the conflict was concentrated with an increase outside its core. The police estimate is negative in every post-onset survey—25 points in 2018, -15 in 2021, and -29 in 2022—although its size does not decline steadily from one survey to the next.

The ruling party and army show the next-largest 2022 divergences, but the component changes differ from the police pattern. Trust in the ruling party fell by 25 points in the conflict regions and by 2 points in the comparison regions:  $-25 - (-2) = -23$  points. Trust in the army fell by 29 points in the conflict regions and by 7 points in the comparison regions:  $-29 - (-7) = -22$  points. Thus, the army and ruling-party estimates reflect steeper losses in the conflict regions, while the police

estimate also reflects rising trust in West and Littoral. All three institutions have negative estimates in each post-onset survey.

This concentration is consistent with an institutional-role interpretation of the crisis. The police and army were the state institutions most directly associated with security and coercion, while the ruling party was closely associated with the government directing the response. Human Rights Watch (2020a) documents abuses by government forces as well as separatist attacks and abductions. The survey cannot determine which events respondents knew about, whom they blamed, or whether they were reacting to insurgent violence, the state response, or both. The estimates therefore do not isolate an effect of counterinsurgency. They show that trust changed most sharply for institutions that occupied especially visible security and political roles during the armed conflict.

The courts and electoral commission show smaller but still substantial 2022 divergences. Court trust fell by 17 points in the conflict regions and rose by about 1 point in the comparison regions, producing an estimate of  $-18$  points. Trust in the electoral commission fell by 19 points in the conflict regions and by 5 points in the comparison regions, producing an estimate of  $-14$  points. These patterns matter in Cameroon because the crisis extended into legal and electoral institutions: it began with lawyers' objections concerning Anglophone legal institutions, and violence and threats surrounded the 2020 parliamentary and municipal elections (Human Rights Watch 2020b). The results are consistent with distrust extending beyond the security forces to institutions connected to law and electoral government. They do not show that any particular judicial or electoral action caused the changes.

Taken together, the first finding is not that all state institutions lost trust equally. The police, ruling party, and army have the largest negative point estimates in 2022, with the courts and electoral commission following. The data do not establish a precise statistical ranking among these coefficients. The substantive pattern is that institutions with different roles did not move together, even within the state.

## **6.2 Finding 2: The same relative estimate can conceal different regional trajectories**

The second finding concerns how the DiD estimates should be read. Presidential trust fell substantially in both regional groups: by 19 points in the conflict regions and 14 points in the comparison regions. The calculation,  $-19 - (-14) = -4$  points, produces a modest negative estimate even though trust in the president declined considerably in the Northwest and Southwest. Parliament provides an even clearer warning. Trust fell by 10 points in the conflict regions and 11 points in the comparison regions, so  $-10 - (-11) = +1$  point. The positive estimate does not mean that parliamentary trust increased. It means that the decline was about one point smaller in the conflict regions.

Opposition parties show the opposite composition. Their  $-15$ -point estimate is not driven by a comparable collapse inside the conflict regions. Trust there fell by only 1 point, while it rose by 14 points in West and Littoral:  $-1 - (+14) = -15$  points. Afrobarometer asks about opposition parties collectively; it does not measure support for armed separatist organizations. The result therefore points to growing confidence in electoral opposition outside the conflict's core, not to a measured transfer of support from the government to insurgents inside it.

The positive estimates for local councils and religious leaders also require attention to both components. Local-council trust rose by 1 point in the conflict regions and fell by 11 points in the comparison regions, yielding +12 points. Trust in religious leaders rose by 3 points in the conflict regions and fell by 10 points in the comparison regions, yielding +13 points. These estimates indicate that trust changed less negatively in the Northwest and Southwest; they do not represent 12- or 13-point increases there.

These contrasts show why respondents' regional position is part of the explanation. West and Littoral were outside the fighting's core but were not untouched: they shared borders and commercial ties with the Northwest and Southwest and experienced displacement and other spillovers (International Crisis Group 2019). Nor do their trajectories show a uniform rally behind the government. Police trust rose there, but trust in the president, ruling party, and army declined. The most defensible interpretation is therefore that the crisis coincided with differentiated evaluations across regional publics, rather than a single shift in trust inside the conflict zone or a uniform pro-government response outside it.

### **6.3 Finding 3: Traditional leaders recovered moderate trust, but not strong trust**

Traditional leaders show a rise after an especially deep mid-period decline. In the conflict regions, the share trusting them somewhat or a lot fell from 52% in 2015 to 36% in 2018 and 26% in 2021, before returning to 44% in 2022. Trust in the comparison regions remained close to one-half throughout. The DiD estimates consequently moved from -15 points in 2018 to -23 in 2021 and -8 in 2022. The 2022 value indicates that much of the earlier regional divergence had narrowed, but trust in the conflict regions had not returned to its 2015 level.

The four-category responses show why this rebound should be described as partial. The share of respondents in the conflict regions reporting a lot of trust in traditional leaders fell from 35% in 2015 to 9% in 2022. When a lot of trust alone defines the outcome, the 2022 DiD is -33 points; on the original 0-3 scale, it is -0.39 points. The rebound in the binary measure therefore reflects movement back into at least moderate trust, while the strongest expression of confidence remained far below its earlier level.

Reported behavior tells a similar story. Between 2015 and 2021, the change in reported contact with a traditional leader was 18 points more negative in the conflict regions than in West and Littoral; between 2015 and 2022, it was 12 points more negative. These are DiD estimates: they describe how the regional gap in contact changed, not the absolute change within the conflict regions alone. The combination of recovering moderate trust, persistently low strong trust, and a continuing relative decline in contact suggests that the relationship had not returned to its pre-crisis form by 2022.

That distinction is especially relevant in Cameroon. Traditional leaders faced pressure from armed actors during the crisis, and their position could expose them to competing demands for mediation, cooperation, or political allegiance (International Crisis Group 2019). The decline is also geographically uneven. The 2022 traditional-leader estimate is -18 points when the Northwest is considered alone but +4 points for the Southwest alone; within the pooled sample, it is -21 points among rural respondents and -11 among urban respondents. These patterns locate the strongest change in the Northwest and in rural communities, where chieftaincy is especially prominent and much of the fighting occurred. They are consistent with traditional authority being

evaluated through its position in the conflict, but the survey does not reveal whether respondents were reacting to protection, perceived collaboration, displacement, leadership turnover, or another mechanism.

#### **6.4 How much confidence should readers place in these comparisons?**

The police pattern is substantively large, appears in every post-onset survey, and remains negative under every reported comparison group, weighting scheme, and outcome coding. Statistical precision is harder to judge because the main comparison contains only four administrative regions and because the paper considers eleven outcomes. The alternative calculations in Appendix A do not support a precise ranking of the institutions. I therefore treat the ordering of coefficients as descriptive and place greater weight on the size, component trajectories, and consistency of the police result. Appendix A reports the complete uncertainty calculations, regional placebos, and pairwise comparisons.

### **7 Robustness and limitations**

The robustness analysis addresses three questions in order. First, were trust levels in the conflict and comparison regions already changing differently before the armed conflict began? Second, does the main pattern depend on the selected comparison regions, survey weights, covariates, or outcome coding? Third, could conflict-related displacement or survey access have changed the population observed over time? The first two sets of checks assess whether the estimates are tied to a particular modeling choice or an obvious preexisting trend. The third identifies a limitation that alternative specifications cannot resolve.

#### **7.1 Pre-conflict trajectories**

Difference-in-differences is most credible when the groups would have changed similarly without the conflict. The 2013 survey allows one limited check of this assumption for the nine political and state institutions measured in both 2013 and 2015. This exercise cannot prove that the post-2015 paths would have remained parallel, but it can reveal whether the groups were already diverging sharply immediately before the crisis.

For the police, the 2013–2015 difference in changes is approximately  $-1$  percentage point. In other words, there was almost no relative change in police trust between the two regional groups during that pre-conflict interval. This provides limited reassurance that the much larger post-2015 police divergence was not simply a continuation of the immediately preceding pattern. The evidence is less reassuring for some institutions: the ruling party and ELECAM show pre-conflict differences of approximately  $+10$  and  $+9$  points, respectively. Those values indicate that the two regional groups were already moving differently for some political institutions, which strengthens the case for caution when interpreting their later estimates.

This check remains modest. It covers only one pre-conflict interval, the interval lengths are not identical to the later survey gaps, and four regions provide little power to detect meaningful differences. Traditional and religious leaders were not included in the 2013 institutional battery, so they have no comparable pre-conflict test. The appropriate conclusion is neither that parallel trends have been established nor that the exercise is useless. It shows no obvious immediate pre-conflict divergence for police trust, while warning that a common-trend assumption is less

plausible for some other institutions. Appendix A reports the full estimates and uncertainty calculations (Roth 2022).

## **7.2 Alternative comparisons and specifications**

The next checks ask whether the central patterns depend on the choice of West and Littoral as the comparison group or on a particular way of analyzing the surveys. This matters because no single set of comparison regions is an uncontested counterfactual, and because differences in survey composition or coding could influence the estimates.

The 2022 police estimate remains negative under every reported regional comparison. It is approximately –24 points when West alone is the comparison, –24 points when the seven regions outside the two conflict regions and the Far North are used, –20 points when all eight other regions are included, and –22 points when Douala is removed from the adjacent-region sample. Separate comparisons for the Northwest and Southwest also produce negative police estimates, at approximately –33 and –23 points. The magnitude varies with the population being compared, but the conclusion that police trust declined relative to other regions does not depend on either one of the two conflict regions or on West and Littoral alone.

The police estimate changes little after applying Afrobarometer survey weights (–31 points), adjusting for age, sex, and urban residence (–28 points), or adding education (–28 points). It is also –30 points when non-substantive responses are coded as zero, although that recoding changes the outcome definition and is not a correction for missing data. These results show that the observed adjustments and coding choice do not materially alter the estimate. They do not correct for unobserved changes in who could be interviewed. In particular, covariate adjustment cannot reconstruct the opinions of people who were displaced or lived in inaccessible areas.

For traditional leaders, the subgroup estimates discussed in Section 6.3 and reported in Appendix A show that the pooled result also conceals differences between the Northwest and Southwest and between rural and urban respondents. Alternative response thresholds further distinguish the partial recovery of moderate trust from the continued weakness of strong trust. These analyses describe heterogeneity; smaller subsamples and the same four-region design prevent precise subgroup comparisons.

The remaining specification results, including the full comparison-group results, response thresholds, ordinal outcomes, item nonresponse, and the descriptive Far North comparison, appear in Appendix A. The Far North is useful context because it has experienced a different insurgency, but the reported comparison begins in 2015, after Boko Haram violence had already begun there. I therefore present it as a contextual contrast rather than a second causal test.

## **7.3 Survey access and changing populations**

The most consequential limitation concerns who could be interviewed as the conflict progressed. The surveys are repeated cross-sections, and the regional estimates are most comparable when each round reaches similar populations and places. Conflict-related displacement, insecurity, or changes in field access could alter the observed sample. If the composition of surveyed communities changes, part of an apparent change in trust may reflect who was reached rather than a change among otherwise comparable residents.

The observed interview context changed markedly in the Northwest and Southwest. The share of respondents interviewed in an enumeration area with a police station, or with one within easy walking distance, rose from 12% in 2015 to 100% in 2021 and 88% in 2022. The share interviewed in Pidgin fell from 35% in 2015 to less than 1% in 2022. The presence of the army and official roadblocks, interviewer-rated respondent ease, and several observed demographic characteristics also changed (Appendix A). These shifts provide concrete evidence that the setting and composition of the observed samples were not constant.

The indicators do not reveal why the samples changed or the direction of any resulting bias. Changes in police-station proximity, for example, could reflect new security infrastructure, different sampled locations, changed access, or recording practices. The 2015 conflict-region sample also included 24 valid police-trust responses from areas with a nearby police station, so there is overlap on this observed indicator. That overlap does not establish that the rounds covered comparable communities.

The data do not follow individuals, verify continuous residence, or provide a complete record of places that interviewers could not reach. They therefore cannot recover the attitudes of inaccessible households, people who fled abroad, or displaced people absent from the relevant sampling frame. Survey weights and observed covariates cannot solve this problem without additional information about exclusion from the sample. Face-to-face surveys also cannot separate a change in trust from a change in respondents' willingness to criticize an institution.

Taken together, the checks support a bounded conclusion. The relative decline in police trust is not confined to one comparison group, one conflict region, the use of unweighted data, or the observed coding choices, and there is no comparable police divergence in the one available pre-conflict interval. At the same time, the small number of regions, the marked changes in observed interview context and sample composition, and possible changes in access prevent a precise causal estimate for the full population affected by the conflict. The evidence most firmly establishes a large and persistent divergence in police trust among the regional samples that Afrobarometer reached; claims about the conflict's total causal effect must remain more cautious.

## **8 Interpretation and conclusion**

This paper asks how trust in different institutions changed during Cameroon's Anglophone crisis and whether those changes differed between the Northwest and Southwest, where the conflict was concentrated, and neighboring West and Littoral. I compare Afrobarometer surveys conducted in 2015, 2018, 2021, and 2022 and use difference-in-differences estimates to summarize changes in the regional gaps. Because the design observes the crisis as a whole, it cannot separate the effects of insurgent violence from those of the government's response. Its contribution is to show which institutional and regional trajectories lie behind the aggregate estimates.

Three findings answer the question. First, the largest 2022 divergences concern the police, ruling party, and army. Police trust fell by 21 points in the conflict regions while rising by 8 points in West and Littoral, producing a 29-point relative decline. Trust in the ruling party and army fell in both groups, but much more in the conflict regions, producing differences of 23 and 22 points. The police and army occupied direct security roles, and the ruling party was tied to the government directing the response. This concentration is consistent with people distinguishing institutions

according to their visible roles during the conflict. It does not establish which side's actions produced any respondent's evaluation.

Second, the direction of a DiD estimate does not reveal whether trust rose or fell in either region. Presidential trust fell sharply in both groups, leaving only a 4-point regional difference. Parliamentary trust also fell in both groups, even though its DiD was slightly positive. By contrast, the opposition-party divergence arose mainly because trust rose in West and Littoral while remaining nearly unchanged in the conflict regions. Local councils and religious leaders also have positive estimates largely because trust declined outside the conflict's core. These trajectories show why the actor doing the evaluating matters alongside the institution being evaluated. They also show that West and Littoral did not respond uniformly: rising police trust coexisted with declining trust in several national institutions.

Third, traditional leaders did not simply retain or regain their earlier standing. Moderate-or-high trust recovered after reaching its lowest level in 2021, but the share expressing a lot of trust fell from 35% to 9%, and reported contact remained lower relative to the comparison regions. The strongest relative decline appears in the Northwest and among rural respondents. In the Cameroonian setting, where traditional leaders faced pressure from armed actors and could be viewed as intermediaries, state-linked authorities, or local representatives, this mixed pattern is more informative than a single claim of resilience. It suggests a return of limited acceptance without a restoration of the strong confidence observed before the crisis.

Together, the findings support an institution-specific and public-specific account of trust during armed conflict. Institutions connected to coercion or political responsibility show the largest negative divergences, but formal status alone does not explain the entire pattern. Institutions within the state moved differently, and community authorities did not uniformly retain trust. Regional position also shaped the observed changes: the same institution could lose trust in both groups, move in opposite directions across groups, or appear relatively stable because both groups declined. A single national trust index, or a DiD coefficient reported without its component changes, would obscure these distinctions.

The practical implication is direct. Governments, researchers, and organizations assessing public confidence during conflict should identify which institution has lost trust, where that loss occurred, and whether apparent resilience reflects genuine recovery or a decline elsewhere. In Cameroon, a modest regional estimate for the president or parliament does not mean that confidence remained healthy in the conflict regions; both lost trust there. Likewise, the recovery of a broad traditional-leader measure does not mean that strong confidence and contact recovered. Rebuilding trust therefore cannot be treated as one national task directed at "the state" or "local authority" as a whole.

The conclusions remain bounded by the design. The analysis compares repeated regional cross-sections rather than the same people over time. It has one additional pre-crisis comparison for nine institutions, only four regions in the main design, possible spillovers into West and Littoral, and substantial changes in survey access and sample composition as the conflict progressed. The 2013–2015 police trajectory offers some reassurance because its regional difference was close to zero, but one pre-crisis interval cannot establish the absent post-2015 counterfactual. These limits prevent a clean causal attribution to the conflict and make a precise statistical ranking of all eleven institutions unwarranted.

The most consistent result is nevertheless clear: during the Anglophone crisis, trust in the police collapsed in the Northwest and Southwest while rising in the comparison regions, and this divergence remains across all reported specifications. The broader contribution is that conflict did not move confidence in Cameroon’s institutions in one direction. The observed pattern is consistent with differences in institutional roles and in the regional position of the public evaluating each institution. Attending to both is necessary to distinguish an absolute loss of trust from a loss relative to somewhere else—and to identify which relationships require repair.

### **Competing interests**

The author declares none.

### **Data availability**

All data are from the publicly available Afrobarometer merged files for Rounds 5–9 ([afrobarometer.org/data](https://afrobarometer.org/data)). Code and constructed datasets reproducing every table and figure, including the harmonization of question numbers across rounds documented in Table A18, are available from the author and will be deposited in a public repository on acceptance.

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## Appendix A Supporting evidence and methods

The tables below accompany the revised manuscript. C denotes the conflict regions, Northwest and Southwest; N denotes the comparison regions, West and Littoral. Unless stated otherwise, trust equals somewhat or a lot, means are unweighted, and changes are percentage points. All calculations are reproduced from the original SPSS survey files. The main sample has four administrative regions, so inferential reference calculations remain approximate.

**Table A1 Survey coverage and national field dates**

| Round / year | Cameroon (n) | Conflict (n) | Comparison (n) | Dates in merged file  |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| 5 / 2013     | 1200         | 200          | 288            | 17.3.2013 – 2.4.2013  |
| 6 / 2015     | 1182         | 200          | 288            | 24.1.2015 – 8.2.2015  |
| 7 / 2018     | 1202         | 192          | 288            | 7.5.2018 – 25.5.2018  |
| 8 / 2021     | 1200         | 192          | 272            | 17.2.2021 – 9.3.2021  |
| 9 / 2022     | 1200         | 200          | 288            | 12.4.2022 – 30.4.2022 |

National dates and counts above are computed from the supplied microdata. The published Round 8 national report gives 17 February–8 March 2021 and the Round 9 report gives 12 April–7 May 2022 (Afrobarometer 2021, 2022). The merged-file dates differ from the published dates in Rounds 8 and 9; survey round, rather than day of interview, defines the analysis periods. Group-specific dates are in results/sample\_composition.csv. Round 5 omits traditional and religious leaders and is used only for the pre-crisis comparison.

### Regional definitions

| Group                      | Regions                                                  |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| Conflict core              | Northwest and Southwest                                  |
| Adjacent comparison        | West and Littoral, including Douala                      |
| Broader comparison         | Adamaoua, Centre, East, Littoral, North, South and West  |
| Additional conflict region | Far North; excluded from the broader baseline comparison |

Regional labels are harmonized across French and English spellings and the separate Douala/Yaoundé codes. The groups are geographic; they are not defined using each respondent's interview language, ethnicity, or self-reported violence exposure. West and Littoral are not assumed unaffected by the crisis.

**Table A2 Trust levels by group and survey**

Unweighted percentages trusting somewhat or a lot. Adjacent comparison: West and Littoral.

| <b>Institution</b>   | <b>Group</b> | <b>2015</b> | <b>2018</b> | <b>2021</b> | <b>2022</b> |
|----------------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Police               | C            | 30.7 (199)  | 13.3 (180)  | 10.9 (192)  | 9.5 (199)   |
| Police               | N            | 39.1 (274)  | 46.2 (279)  | 34.6 (269)  | 46.5 (288)  |
| Ruling party         | C            | 37.7 (199)  | 8.0 (163)   | 9.9 (191)   | 12.8 (195)  |
| Ruling party         | N            | 29.7 (263)  | 29.1 (254)  | 28.6 (269)  | 27.6 (286)  |
| Army                 | C            | 44.4 (198)  | 9.3 (172)   | 14.1 (192)  | 15.2 (198)  |
| Army                 | N            | 75.4 (272)  | 61.2 (281)  | 56.3 (268)  | 67.9 (287)  |
| Courts               | C            | 39.3 (196)  | 14.1 (170)  | 19.8 (192)  | 22.6 (199)  |
| Courts               | N            | 35.6 (267)  | 34.1 (270)  | 28.9 (270)  | 36.4 (286)  |
| Opposition parties   | C            | 25.0 (196)  | 17.7 (158)  | 14.1 (191)  | 23.8 (193)  |
| Opposition parties   | N            | 17.7 (265)  | 18.1 (248)  | 27.9 (269)  | 31.8 (286)  |
| Electoral commission | C            | 34.8 (198)  | 9.6 (167)   | 9.9 (191)   | 15.7 (197)  |
| Electoral commission | N            | 33.1 (257)  | 31.6 (263)  | 27.9 (269)  | 28.0 (286)  |
| Traditional leaders  | C            | 51.5 (200)  | 36.0 (178)  | 26.0 (192)  | 44.2 (199)  |
| Traditional leaders  | N            | 49.1 (267)  | 48.5 (266)  | 46.1 (269)  | 50.0 (286)  |
| President            | C            | 45.5 (198)  | 12.5 (160)  | 11.2 (187)  | 26.7 (195)  |
| President            | N            | 68.8 (263)  | 61.0 (269)  | 46.4 (261)  | 54.4 (285)  |
| Parliament           | C            | 33.5 (197)  | 10.8 (158)  | 10.5 (191)  | 23.5 (196)  |
| Parliament           | N            | 41.0 (256)  | 37.9 (256)  | 24.8 (266)  | 29.8 (285)  |
| Local council        | C            | 32.2 (199)  | 17.0 (165)  | 17.9 (190)  | 33.0 (197)  |
| Local council        | N            | 36.6 (257)  | 32.0 (244)  | 30.8 (263)  | 25.4 (284)  |
| Religious leaders    | C            | 64.0 (200)  | 57.0 (186)  | 48.2 (191)  | 66.7 (198)  |
| Religious leaders    | N            | 67.0 (267)  | 47.7 (266)  | 49.4 (271)  | 57.1 (287)  |

Parentheses contain the unweighted number of substantive responses for the institution and group in that round. Means exclude non-substantive responses. Weighted percentages use the round-specific within-country survey weight. The number of interviews is not the number of independent treatment units. All exact values are in results/trust\_levels.csv.

**Table A3 Trust levels by group and survey**

Survey-weighted percentages trusting somewhat or a lot. Adjacent comparison: West and Littoral.

| Institution          | Group | 2015       | 2018       | 2021       | 2022       |
|----------------------|-------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Police               | C     | 32.7 (199) | 13.3 (180) | 11.9 (192) | 10.1 (199) |
| Police               | N     | 40.0 (274) | 47.8 (279) | 31.6 (269) | 47.8 (288) |
| Ruling party         | C     | 37.8 (199) | 7.5 (163)  | 10.5 (191) | 13.5 (195) |
| Ruling party         | N     | 31.2 (263) | 29.8 (254) | 27.5 (269) | 25.9 (286) |
| Army                 | C     | 47.9 (198) | 7.8 (172)  | 14.6 (192) | 17.9 (198) |
| Army                 | N     | 75.4 (272) | 61.5 (281) | 53.5 (268) | 70.1 (287) |
| Courts               | C     | 43.0 (196) | 15.0 (170) | 18.1 (192) | 24.8 (199) |
| Courts               | N     | 33.4 (267) | 34.9 (270) | 26.9 (270) | 36.3 (286) |
| Opposition parties   | C     | 25.1 (196) | 16.6 (158) | 10.5 (191) | 26.7 (193) |
| Opposition parties   | N     | 17.4 (265) | 18.0 (248) | 25.4 (269) | 30.6 (286) |
| Electoral commission | C     | 34.4 (198) | 8.9 (167)  | 8.7 (191)  | 17.3 (197) |
| Electoral commission | N     | 31.8 (257) | 32.3 (263) | 25.9 (269) | 30.0 (286) |
| Traditional leaders  | C     | 54.3 (200) | 34.7 (178) | 23.9 (192) | 48.6 (199) |
| Traditional leaders  | N     | 46.3 (267) | 48.7 (266) | 48.6 (269) | 51.5 (286) |
| President            | C     | 44.8 (198) | 13.9 (160) | 14.7 (187) | 27.0 (195) |
| President            | N     | 67.1 (263) | 61.2 (269) | 45.4 (261) | 56.5 (285) |
| Parliament           | C     | 35.3 (197) | 10.8 (158) | 10.9 (191) | 25.3 (196) |
| Parliament           | N     | 40.0 (256) | 39.2 (256) | 21.6 (266) | 29.4 (285) |
| Local council        | C     | 34.8 (199) | 18.0 (165) | 15.2 (190) | 35.8 (197) |
| Local council        | N     | 34.3 (257) | 31.7 (244) | 26.1 (263) | 25.9 (284) |

| Institution       | Group | 2015       | 2018       | 2021       | 2022       |
|-------------------|-------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Religious leaders | C     | 64.4 (200) | 56.5 (186) | 46.4 (191) | 64.9 (198) |
| Religious leaders | N     | 66.5 (267) | 50.9 (266) | 52.0 (271) | 59.2 (287) |

Parentheses contain the unweighted number of substantive responses for the institution and group in that round. Means exclude non-substantive responses. Weighted percentages use the round-specific within-country survey weight. The number of interviews is not the number of independent treatment units. All exact values are in results/trust\_levels.csv.

**Table A4 Trust levels by group and survey**

Unweighted percentages trusting somewhat or a lot. Broader comparison: seven other regions excluding the Far North.

| Institution          | Group | 2015       | 2018       | 2021       | 2022       |
|----------------------|-------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Police               | C     | 30.7 (199) | 13.3 (180) | 10.9 (192) | 9.5 (199)  |
|                      | N     | 48.0 (767) | 54.5 (780) | 51.1 (787) | 51.1 (816) |
| Ruling party         | C     | 37.7 (199) | 8.0 (163)  | 9.9 (191)  | 12.8 (195) |
|                      | N     | 38.5 (742) | 42.7 (736) | 46.3 (787) | 37.6 (813) |
| Army                 | C     | 44.4 (198) | 9.3 (172)  | 14.1 (192) | 15.2 (198) |
|                      | N     | 75.2 (762) | 73.1 (783) | 67.3 (787) | 68.8 (815) |
| Courts               | C     | 39.3 (196) | 14.1 (170) | 19.8 (192) | 22.6 (199) |
|                      | N     | 40.2 (753) | 46.7 (754) | 38.7 (785) | 38.9 (813) |
| Opposition parties   | C     | 25.0 (196) | 17.7 (158) | 14.1 (191) | 23.8 (193) |
|                      | N     | 23.7 (738) | 26.1 (735) | 31.9 (784) | 26.7 (812) |
| Electoral commission | C     | 34.8 (198) | 9.6 (167)  | 9.9 (191)  | 15.7 (197) |
|                      | N     | 42.9 (734) | 45.4 (754) | 42.6 (784) | 35.9 (813) |
| Traditional leaders  | C     | 51.5 (200) | 36.0 (178) | 26.0 (192) | 44.2 (199) |
|                      | N     | 50.8 (758) | 55.4 (762) | 60.4 (787) | 52.3 (814) |
| President            | C     | 45.5 (198) | 12.5 (160) | 11.2 (187) | 26.7 (195) |
|                      | N     | 74.5 (753) | 69.2 (760) | 65.6 (778) | 61.5 (812) |

| <b>Institution</b> | <b>Group</b> | <b>2015</b> | <b>2018</b> | <b>2021</b> | <b>2022</b> |
|--------------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Parliament         | C            | 33.5 (197)  | 10.8 (158)  | 10.5 (191)  | 23.5 (196)  |
|                    | N            | 45.9 (740)  | 50.8 (733)  | 42.6 (780)  | 37.1 (812)  |
| Local council      | C            | 32.2 (199)  | 17.0 (165)  | 17.9 (190)  | 33.0 (197)  |
|                    | N            | 43.5 (738)  | 45.3 (722)  | 40.4 (775)  | 32.2 (811)  |
| Religious leaders  | C            | 64.0 (200)  | 57.0 (186)  | 48.2 (191)  | 66.7 (198)  |
|                    | N            | 68.7 (756)  | 62.5 (761)  | 65.3 (790)  | 61.5 (815)  |

Parentheses contain the unweighted number of substantive responses for the institution and group in that round. Means exclude non-substantive responses. Weighted percentages use the round-specific within-country survey weight. The number of interviews is not the number of independent treatment units. All exact values are in results/trust\_levels.csv.

**Table A5 Regional gaps and their uncertainty**

Differences in trust levels between C and N, by round. These gaps are not difference-in-differences estimates.

| <b>Institution</b>   | <b>2015</b>   | <b>2018</b>   | <b>2021</b>   | <b>2022</b>   |
|----------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Police               | −8.4 p=0.147  | −32.9 p=0.010 | −23.6 p=0.004 | −37.0 p=0.003 |
| Ruling party         | +8.0 p=0.266  | −21.2 p=0.011 | −18.7 p=0.001 | −14.8 p<0.001 |
| Army                 | −30.9 p=0.007 | −51.9 p=0.001 | −42.3 p<0.001 | −52.8 p=0.001 |
| Courts               | +3.7 p=0.014  | −20.0 p=0.066 | −9.1 p=0.048  | −13.8 p=0.006 |
| Opposition parties   | +7.3 p=0.294  | −0.4 p=0.933  | −13.7 p=0.040 | −8.0 p=0.177  |
| Electoral commission | +1.8 p=0.793  | −22.0 p=0.020 | −17.9 p=0.001 | −12.2 p=0.005 |
| Traditional leaders  | +2.4 p=0.674  | −12.5 p=0.151 | −20.1 p=0.081 | −5.8 p=0.224  |
| President            | −23.4 p=0.048 | −48.5 p=0.003 | −35.1 p=0.012 | −27.7 p=0.038 |
| Parliament           | −7.5 p=0.418  | −27.1 p=0.017 | −14.3 p=0.036 | −6.4 p=0.098  |
| Local council        | −4.4 p=0.301  | −15.0 p=0.142 | −12.9 p=0.014 | +7.6 p=0.186  |
| Religious leaders    | −3.0 p=0.401  | +9.2 p=0.100  | −1.3 p=0.904  | +9.5 p=0.236  |

Each gap is the unweighted C mean minus the N mean, in percentage points. The p-value tests that gap against zero using regional-cluster standard errors and a t(3) reference. These conventional calculations allow comparison of the groups without inferring significance from overlapping confidence intervals, but four regions provide fragile inference. No multiplicity adjustment is applied in this descriptive table. Do not interpret a large p-value as evidence of equivalent levels.

**Table A6 Alternative uncertainty calculations**

| Institution          | DiD   | Cluster SE | Cluster p | Wild p | Cell SE | Cell p |
|----------------------|-------|------------|-----------|--------|---------|--------|
| Police               | -28.6 | 4.2        | 0.006     | 0.060  | 7.8     | 0.006  |
| Ruling party         | -22.8 | 6.0        | 0.031     | 0.062  | 6.0     | 0.005  |
| Army                 | -21.9 | 8.0        | 0.072     | 0.182  | 6.4     | 0.009  |
| Courts               | -17.5 | 2.7        | 0.007     | 0.051  | 7.4     | 0.047  |
| Opposition parties   | -15.2 | 8.8        | 0.182     | 0.187  | 8.7     | 0.118  |
| Electoral commission | -14.0 | 4.9        | 0.065     | 0.054  | 7.0     | 0.082  |
| Traditional leaders  | -8.2  | 9.0        | 0.430     | 0.563  | 10.6    | 0.462  |
| President            | -4.4  | 14.0       | 0.776     | 0.796  | 12.5    | 0.737  |
| Parliament           | +1.2  | 9.2        | 0.908     | 0.892  | 9.7     | 0.908  |
| Local council        | +12.1 | 7.2        | 0.194     | 0.373  | 8.5     | 0.192  |
| Religious leaders    | +12.6 | 4.3        | 0.062     | 0.057  | 12.4    | 0.339  |

2022 minus 2015. Coefficients and standard errors are in percentage points. Cluster: respondent-level OLS, four administrative-region clusters, finite-sample correction  $G/(G-1) \times (n-1)/(n-k)$ , and t(3) reference. Cell: weighted least squares on sixteen region-round means, using the number of valid outcome responses as weights, conventional residual variance, and eight residual degrees of freedom. The two estimators reproduce the same baseline coefficients, but their variance assumptions differ. Cell calculations assume independent region-round disturbances and do not address within-region serial dependence.

### Wild-cluster calculation

For each 2022 coefficient, the null is imposed by omitting that interaction while retaining the other nuisance regressors. Restricted residuals receive one weight per administrative region. The six weights are  $\pm\sqrt{3/2}$ ,  $\pm 1$  and  $\pm\sqrt{1/2}$ , yielding  $6^4 = 1,296$  combinations. Each synthetic sample is refitted, and its coefficient is divided by the corresponding regional-cluster standard error. The reported value is the share of absolute bootstrap t-statistics at least as large as the observed statistic. Equality is included using a numerical tolerance of  $10^{-10}$ . Exhaustive enumeration removes simulation noise but does not establish valid inference with four regions.

**Table A7 Regional placebo calibration****A All 28 assignments**

| <b>Institution</b>   | <b>Single <math>\beta</math></b> | <b>Max <math>\beta</math></b> | <b>Max t cluster</b> | <b>Max t cell</b> |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Police               | 0.071                            | 0.071                         | 0.143                | 0.036             |
| Ruling party         | 0.036                            | 0.107                         | 0.500                | 0.036             |
| Army                 | 0.036                            | 0.286                         | 0.857                | 0.071             |
| Courts               | 0.250                            | 0.679                         | 0.214                | 0.107             |
| Opposition parties   | 0.786                            | 0.893                         | 1.000                | 0.393             |
| Electoral commission | 0.286                            | 0.929                         | 0.786                | 0.286             |
| Traditional leaders  | 0.250                            | 1.000                         | 1.000                | 1.000             |
| President            | 0.643                            | 1.000                         | 1.000                | 1.000             |
| Parliament           | 0.679                            | 1.000                         | 1.000                | 1.000             |
| Local council        | 0.143                            | 1.000                         | 1.000                | 0.643             |
| Religious leaders    | 0.179                            | 1.000                         | 0.786                | 0.929             |

**B Excluding the Far North: 21 assignments**

| <b>Institution</b>   | <b>Single <math>\beta</math></b> | <b>Max <math>\beta</math></b> | <b>Max t cluster</b> | <b>Max t cell</b> |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Police               | 0.048                            | 0.048                         | 0.095                | 0.048             |
| Ruling party         | 0.048                            | 0.048                         | 0.524                | 0.048             |
| Army                 | 0.048                            | 0.190                         | 0.857                | 0.048             |
| Courts               | 0.048                            | 0.571                         | 0.190                | 0.095             |
| Opposition parties   | 0.714                            | 0.857                         | 1.000                | 0.333             |
| Electoral commission | 0.238                            | 0.905                         | 0.762                | 0.238             |
| Traditional leaders  | 0.333                            | 1.000                         | 1.000                | 1.000             |
| President            | 0.571                            | 1.000                         | 1.000                | 1.000             |
| Parliament           | 0.762                            | 1.000                         | 1.000                | 1.000             |

| Institution       | Single $\beta$ | Max $\beta$ | Max t cluster | Max t cell |
|-------------------|----------------|-------------|---------------|------------|
| Local council     | 0.190          | 1.000       | 1.000         | 0.619      |
| Religious leaders | 0.238          | 1.000       | 0.762         | 0.905      |

West and Littoral are fixed comparison regions. The observed Northwest–Southwest assignment is included. Each value is the share of assignments whose reference statistic is at least the observed institution’s statistic. Single  $\beta$  uses only that institution; maxima use all eleven institutions at the 2022 endpoint. The cluster and cell statistics use exactly the variance estimators in Table A6 for both observed and placebo assignments. Ties are included. These observational assignments are not exchangeable by design, so the shares are descriptive calibrations, not exact randomization tests or guaranteed family-wise error control. The family does not cover all survey years and robustness specifications.

**Table A8 Comparison groups and weighting**

| Institution          | Base  | West  | Seven | Eight | Without Douala | Weights |
|----------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|----------------|---------|
| Police               | −28.6 | −23.8 | −24.2 | −19.5 | −22.1          | −30.5   |
| Ruling party         | −22.8 | −22.9 | −24.0 | −22.3 | −26.5          | −19.1   |
| Army                 | −21.9 | −9.3  | −22.9 | −21.4 | −13.8          | −24.7   |
| Courts               | −17.5 | −22.1 | −15.3 | −10.4 | −18.8          | −21.0   |
| Opposition parties   | −15.2 | −30.7 | −4.2  | −2.1  | −22.6          | −11.6   |
| Electoral commission | −14.0 | −19.3 | −12.1 | −9.1  | −17.0          | −15.2   |
| Traditional leaders  | −8.2  | −10.8 | −8.8  | −8.2  | −9.1           | −10.9   |
| President            | −4.4  | +15.4 | −5.7  | −3.0  | +6.8           | −7.2    |
| Parliament           | +1.2  | −5.1  | −1.2  | +0.4  | −1.1           | +0.6    |
| Local council        | +12.1 | +5.3  | +12.1 | +11.4 | +7.7           | +9.4    |
| Religious leaders    | +12.6 | +20.1 | +9.8  | +10.3 | +15.9          | +7.9    |

2022 differences in changes, in percentage points. West uses one comparison region; Seven uses seven comparison regions excluding the Far North; Eight includes the Far North. Without Douala removes respondents with the distinct Douala/Wouri regional code. Weights uses the original within-country survey weights with the adjacent comparison. Each alternative changes either the comparison population or the weighting of observations.

**Table A9 Sample restrictions and covariates**

| <b>Institution</b>   | <b>NW only</b> | <b>SW only</b> | <b>Age sex urban</b> | <b>Plus education</b> | <b>Missing as zero</b> |
|----------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Police               | −33.0          | −23.2          | −28.0                | −27.9                 | −30.4                  |
| Ruling party         | −29.4          | −14.6          | −22.0                | −20.0                 | −25.3                  |
| Army                 | −26.3          | −16.6          | −21.4                | −22.5                 | −25.5                  |
| Courts               | −18.9          | −15.9          | −17.2                | −17.0                 | −19.1                  |
| Opposition parties   | −17.9          | −11.6          | −14.5                | −13.4                 | −16.8                  |
| Electoral commission | −17.3          | −9.6           | −13.3                | −11.8                 | −17.3                  |
| Traditional leaders  | −18.3          | +3.7           | −7.6                 | −8.1                  | −11.7                  |
| President            | −15.3          | +8.6           | −4.0                 | −4.9                  | −10.0                  |
| Parliament           | −7.7           | +11.7          | +1.8                 | +2.1                  | −3.1                   |
| Local council        | +4.6           | +20.8          | +12.8                | +14.3                 | +8.1                   |
| Religious leaders    | +8.4           | +17.1          | +13.0                | +11.4                 | +7.2                   |

NW only and SW only each retain West and Littoral as comparisons and therefore use three regions. Covariate models use complete observations for the listed covariates. Education enters as indicators for four substantive categories. Missing as zero recodes all non-substantive trust responses to zero; it changes the outcome definition and is not a missing-data correction. All specification-specific sample sizes and regional-cluster calculations are retained in results/robustness.csv.

**Table A10. Threshold sensitivity**

| <b>Institution</b>   | <b>Any trust</b> | <b>Somewhat or a lot</b> | <b>A lot</b> | <b>Ordinal 0–3</b> |
|----------------------|------------------|--------------------------|--------------|--------------------|
| Police               | −33.0            | −28.6                    | −18.3        | −0.798             |
| Ruling party         | −17.3            | −22.8                    | −17.9        | −0.580             |
| Army                 | −35.2            | −21.9                    | −15.0        | −0.720             |
| Courts               | +11.7            | −17.5                    | −20.2        | −0.260             |
| Opposition parties   | −10.6            | −15.2                    | −15.2        | −0.411             |
| Electoral commission | −11.1            | −14.0                    | −14.7        | −0.398             |
| Traditional leaders  | +2.2             | −8.2                     | −33.3        | −0.393             |

| <b>Institution</b> | <b>Any trust</b> | <b>Somewhat or a lot</b> | <b>A lot</b> | <b>Ordinal 0–3</b> |
|--------------------|------------------|--------------------------|--------------|--------------------|
| President          | –4.8             | –4.4                     | –18.8        | –0.280             |
| Parliament         | +7.1             | +1.2                     | –12.7        | –0.045             |
| Local council      | +14.8            | +12.1                    | –12.6        | 0.142              |
| Religious leaders  | +11.9            | +12.6                    | –20.3        | 0.041              |

2022 relative to 2015, adjacent comparison. The first three columns are percentage-point changes for nested binary thresholds on the four-category response. The last column is a change in the original 0–3 scale and is not a percentage-point change. Changing the threshold changes the estimand. These alternatives are not separate confirmatory tests.

**Table A11 Traditional leaders’ response distribution**

| <b>Year</b> | <b>Group</b> | <b>Not at all</b> | <b>Just a little</b> | <b>Somewhat</b> | <b>A lot</b> | <b>N</b> |
|-------------|--------------|-------------------|----------------------|-----------------|--------------|----------|
| 2015        | N            | 21.7              | 29.2                 | 33.0            | 16.1         | 267      |
| 2015        | C            | 20.5              | 28.0                 | 17.0            | 34.5         | 200      |
| 2018        | N            | 29.3              | 22.2                 | 20.3            | 28.2         | 266      |
| 2018        | C            | 27.0              | 37.1                 | 18.0            | 18.0         | 178      |
| 2021        | N            | 23.4              | 30.5                 | 26.0            | 20.1         | 269      |
| 2021        | C            | 31.2              | 42.7                 | 17.7            | 8.3          | 192      |
| 2022        | N            | 22.0              | 28.0                 | 26.6            | 23.4         | 286      |
| 2022        | C            | 18.6              | 37.2                 | 35.7            | 8.5          | 199      |

Percentages among substantive responses. The binary rebound in 2022 mainly reflects the lower of the two positive categories. The full corresponding distributions for all eleven institutions are in results/response\_distributions.csv.

**Table A12 Item non-response**

| <b>Institution</b> | <b>2015 C / N</b> | <b>2018 C / N</b> | <b>2021 C / N</b> | <b>2022 C / N</b> |
|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Police             | 0.5 / 4.9         | 6.2 / 3.1         | 0.0 / 1.1         | 0.5 / 0.0         |
| Ruling party       | 0.5 / 8.7         | 15.1 / 11.8       | 0.5 / 1.1         | 2.5 / 0.7         |
| Army               | 1.0 / 5.6         | 10.4 / 2.4        | 0.0 / 1.5         | 1.0 / 0.3         |

| <b>Institution</b>   | <b>2015 C / N</b> | <b>2018 C / N</b> | <b>2021 C / N</b> | <b>2022 C / N</b> |
|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Courts               | 2.0 / 7.3         | 11.5 / 6.2        | 0.0 / 0.7         | 0.5 / 0.7         |
| Opposition parties   | 2.0 / 8.0         | 17.7 / 13.9       | 0.5 / 1.1         | 3.5 / 0.7         |
| Electoral commission | 1.0 / 10.8        | 13.0 / 8.7        | 0.5 / 1.1         | 1.5 / 0.7         |
| Traditional leaders  | 0.0 / 7.3         | 7.3 / 7.6         | 0.0 / 1.1         | 0.5 / 0.7         |
| President            | 1.0 / 8.7         | 16.7 / 6.6        | 2.6 / 4.0         | 2.5 / 1.0         |
| Parliament           | 1.5 / 11.1        | 17.7 / 11.1       | 0.5 / 2.2         | 2.0 / 1.0         |
| Local council        | 0.5 / 10.8        | 14.1 / 15.3       | 1.0 / 3.3         | 1.5 / 1.4         |
| Religious leaders    | 0.0 / 7.3         | 3.1 / 7.6         | 0.5 / 0.4         | 1.0 / 0.3         |

Each cell gives the percentage of all interviews without a substantive trust answer in C and N. The main models exclude those responses institution by institution. A stable questionnaire does not ensure stable willingness or ability to answer. The underlying counts are in results/item\_nonresponse.csv.

**Table A13 Pre-crisis changes from 2013 to 2015**

| <b>Institution</b>   | <b>DiD</b> | <b>Cluster SE</b> | <b>Cluster p</b> | <b>Placebo share</b> |
|----------------------|------------|-------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| Police               | −0.6       | 4.6               | 0.897            | 0.929                |
| Ruling party         | +10.4      | 1.9               | 0.012            | 0.357                |
| Army                 | −6.9       | 6.2               | 0.345            | 0.893                |
| Courts               | −4.1       | 1.7               | 0.097            | 0.786                |
| Opposition parties   | −4.4       | 5.1               | 0.448            | 0.500                |
| Electoral commission | +8.8       | 4.7               | 0.161            | 0.143                |
| President            | −0.3       | 6.8               | 0.973            | 1.000                |
| Parliament           | −9.1       | 5.3               | 0.184            | 0.857                |
| Local council        | −7.1       | 6.3               | 0.344            | 0.214                |

Same adjacent regions as the main design, using only 2013 and 2015. Cluster p uses t(3). Placebo share uses the same 28 fixed-comparison assignments as Table A7, applying the 2013–2015 contrast to each institution individually. No multiplicity adjustment is applied. Traditional and religious leaders were not measured in the 2013 institutional battery. A single pre-crisis interval, especially with four regions, cannot establish parallel trends. The two- and three-year interval lengths also differ from later gaps between surveys.

**Table A14 Pre-crisis trust levels in 2013**

| <b>Institution</b>   | <b>Conflict %</b> | <b>Conflict n</b> | <b>Comparison %</b> | <b>Comparison n</b> |
|----------------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Police               | 20.6              | 194               | 28.4                | 282                 |
| Ruling party         | 23.0              | 191               | 25.4                | 260                 |
| Army                 | 32.1              | 187               | 56.1                | 278                 |
| Courts               | 36.1              | 191               | 28.4                | 275                 |
| Opposition parties   | 26.1              | 184               | 14.4                | 271                 |
| Electoral commission | 24.9              | 185               | 31.9                | 270                 |
| President            | 29.2              | 195               | 52.3                | 277                 |
| Parliament           | 29.8              | 188               | 28.2                | 273                 |
| Local council        | 31.7              | 189               | 29.1                | 265                 |

**Table A15 Sample composition and interview context**

| <b>Characteristic</b> | <b>Group</b> | <b>2015</b> | <b>2018</b> | <b>2021</b> | <b>2022</b> |
|-----------------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Interviews            | C            | 200         | 192         | 192         | 200         |
| Interviews            | N            | 288         | 288         | 272         | 288         |
| Urban                 | C            | 44.0        | 45.8        | 41.7        | 48.0        |
| Urban                 | N            | 77.8        | 77.8        | 76.5        | 80.6        |
| Male                  | C            | 50.0        | 50.0        | 50.0        | 50.0        |
| Male                  | N            | 50.0        | 50.0        | 50.0        | 50.0        |
| Age in years          | C            | 33.63       | 34.66       | 30.32       | 30.83       |
| Age in years          | N            | 35.12       | 33.86       | 35.06       | 32.67       |
| Education 0–3         | C            | 1.67        | 1.90        | 2.08        | 2.39        |
| Education 0–3         | N            | 2.14        | 2.05        | 2.21        | 2.23        |
| Police station nearby | C            | 12.0        | 12.5        | 100.0       | 88.0        |
| Police station nearby | N            | 83.3        | 38.5        | 38.2        | 44.4        |

| Characteristic     | Group | 2015 | 2018 | 2021  | 2022 |
|--------------------|-------|------|------|-------|------|
| Army observed      | C     | 24.0 | 20.8 | 100.0 | 96.0 |
| Army observed      | N     | 30.6 | 5.2  | 35.3  | 11.1 |
| Official roadblock | C     | 20.0 | 16.7 | 70.8  | 84.0 |
| Official roadblock | N     | 33.3 | 2.8  | 14.7  | 22.2 |
| Pidgin interview   | C     | 35.0 | 49.5 | 2.6   | 0.5  |
| Pidgin interview   | N     | 0.0  | 0.0  | 0.0   | 0.0  |
| English interview  | C     | 62.5 | 50.5 | 97.4  | 99.0 |
| English interview  | N     | 1.7  | 1.0  | 0.4   | 0.0  |
| Fully at ease      | C     | 96.5 | 75.5 | 84.4  | 65.0 |
| Fully at ease      | N     | 74.3 | 84.4 | 86.0  | 88.5 |

Unweighted observed means. Binary characteristics are percentages; age and education are means on their indicated scales. Education has four substantive categories (0–3); code 9 and other non-substantive responses are excluded. Police station nearby means in the enumeration area or within easy walking distance, not necessarily inside a narrowly defined locality. Army and roadblocks are interviewer observations. Fully at ease uses the strictest interviewer category. Repeated area observations attached to multiple respondents should not be counted as independent infrastructure measurements. These changes are not proof of a particular pattern of survey relocation.

**Table A16 Police trust and observed station presence**

| Year | Station nearby | Valid trust N | Trust % |
|------|----------------|---------------|---------|
| 2015 | No             | 175           | 30.3    |
| 2015 | Yes            | 24            | 33.3    |
| 2018 | No             | 159           | 15.1    |
| 2018 | Yes            | 21            | 0.0     |
| 2021 | Yes            | 192           | 10.9    |
| 2022 | No             | 24            | 4.2     |
| 2022 | Yes            | 175           | 10.3    |

Conflict-region respondents only. There are 24 valid trust responses in the station-present category in 2015, so the data do not support a claim of no observed overlap on this indicator. The small and changing category sizes, the area-level nature of the measure, and its possible endogeneity prevent this table from resolving sampling selection. Empty categories are absent; they do not imply observations with zero trust.

### Coverage and reporting limits

The analysis does not have respondent panel links, a verified history of each respondent's residence or a complete account of locations that field teams could not reach. It therefore cannot identify an effect among continuous residents or recover the attitudes of people excluded through displacement or insecurity. Interview language, local infrastructure, and interviewer-rated ease can reveal changes in observed context; they do not establish the direction or size of bias. Weighted or covariate-adjusted estimates cannot repair unobserved exclusion without further assumptions.

**Table A17 Comparing the police with other institutions**

| Comparator           | Contrast | Cluster SE | Cluster p | Holm p | Cell SE | Cell p |
|----------------------|----------|------------|-----------|--------|---------|--------|
| Ruling party         | -6.2     | 2.6        | 0.099     | 1.000  | 7.0     | 0.402  |
| Army                 | -7.1     | 5.6        | 0.298     | 1.000  | 7.9     | 0.397  |
| Courts               | -11.5    | 4.4        | 0.081     | 1.000  | 10.1    | 0.289  |
| Opposition parties   | -14.8    | 10.9       | 0.269     | 1.000  | 11.6    | 0.239  |
| Electoral commission | -16.7    | 6.2        | 0.076     | 1.000  | 5.7     | 0.019  |
| Traditional leaders  | -20.6    | 5.7        | 0.037     | 1.000  | 11.6    | 0.113  |
| President            | -24.2    | 10.2       | 0.099     | 1.000  | 9.1     | 0.029  |
| Parliament           | -31.1    | 7.4        | 0.025     | 1.000  | 7.4     | 0.003  |
| Local council        | -41.8    | 5.8        | 0.006     | 0.287  | 9.6     | 0.002  |
| Religious leaders    | -41.5    | 0.5        | <0.001    | <0.001 | 13.4    | 0.015  |

For each pair, the outcome is police trust minus comparator trust among respondents with substantive answers to both. The reported coefficient is the 2022 DiD in that within-respondent difference, retaining covariance between the two outcomes. Pair-specific samples mean these values need not equal the subtraction of separately estimated coefficients. Holm adjusts the conventional cluster p-values across all 55 institution pairs; all pairs and sample sizes are in results/pairwise\_differences.csv. The adjustment does not repair inaccurate underlying small-cluster p-values.

## Why precise differences in coefficient magnitude are not established

The police–religious-leader contrast is especially sensitive to variance estimation: the clustered standard error is about 0.5 percentage points, whereas the independent-cell value is about 13.4 points. Opposing cluster contributions can nearly cancel when outcomes are differenced and there are only four clusters. Neither reference calculation supplies a general guarantee here. These exploratory contrasts distinguish cross-institution comparisons from tests against zero, but do not warrant describing the full set of pairwise differences as identified.

**Table A18 Variable harmonization and replication**

| Outcome key | R5   | R6   | R7   | R8   | R9   |
|-------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| trad        | —    | Q52K | Q43J | Q41K | Q37J |
| relig       | —    | Q52L | Q43K | Q41L | Q37K |
| pres        | Q59A | Q52A | Q43A | Q41A | Q37A |
| parl        | Q59B | Q52B | Q43B | Q41B | Q37B |
| elect       | Q59C | Q52C | Q43C | Q41C | Q37C |
| council     | Q59E | Q52E | Q43D | Q41D | Q37D |
| rulparty    | Q59F | Q52F | Q43E | Q41E | Q37E |
| opparty     | Q59G | Q52G | Q43F | Q41F | Q37F |
| police      | Q59H | Q52H | Q43G | Q41G | Q37G |
| army        | Q59I | Q52I | Q43H | Q41H | Q37H |
| courts      | Q59J | Q52J | Q43I | Q41I | Q37I |

All trust items retain only substantive codes 0, 1, 2, and 3. The principal binary outcome is one for 2 or 3.

**Table A19 Far North: gap in trust relative to the seven non-conflict regions**

Each entry is the Far North mean minus the mean of the seven non-conflict regions, in percentage points of the share trusting *somewhat* or *a lot*, in the round shown. The final column is the change in that gap between 2015 and 2022. Boko Haram violence predates the 2015 round, so no pre-crisis baseline exists, and no causal interpretation is available.

| Institution         | 2015  | 2018  | 2021  | 2022  | Δ 2022–2015 |
|---------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------------|
| Religious leaders   | +13.1 | +27.0 | +26.8 | +11.8 | –1.3        |
| Traditional leaders | +18.7 | +24.1 | +25.3 | +17.1 | –1.6        |
| Local gov't council | +11.5 | +14.7 | +31.4 | +16.7 | +5.3        |

| <b>Institution</b>   | <b>2015</b> | <b>2018</b> | <b>2021</b> | <b>2022</b> | <b>Δ 2022–2015</b> |
|----------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|--------------------|
| Parliament           | +18.4       | +12.3       | +8.4        | +11.8       | −6.6               |
| President            | +4.3        | +9.1        | +7.9        | −10.4       | −14.7              |
| Opposition parties   | +31.3       | +3.1        | +19.3       | +21.9       | −9.4               |
| Electoral commission | +18.9       | +16.3       | +10.2       | +4.3        | −14.6              |
| Courts of law        | +26.6       | +10.7       | +7.8        | +1.9        | −24.7              |
| Ruling party         | +16.9       | +18.0       | +16.7       | +8.6        | −8.4               |
| Army                 | +3.3        | +4.1        | −1.1        | −4.7        | −8.0               |
| Police               | +28.7       | +9.5        | +5.4        | +5.7        | −23.0              |

Trust in traditional leaders in the Far North itself lies between 69% and 86% across rounds, among the highest in the country.

**Table A20 Behavior and perceived conduct, traditional leaders**

| <b>Outcome</b>                  | <b>2018</b>  | <b>2021</b> | <b>2022</b>  |
|---------------------------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| Trusts traditional leaders      | −15.0 (3.7)  | −22.5 (9.2) | −8.2 (9.0)   |
| Contacted a traditional leader  | −10.2 (13.4) | −17.5 (1.9) | −12.1 (8.9)  |
| Sees most/all chiefs as corrupt | −1.4 (15.1)  | +6.2 (13.1) | +10.7 (11.1) |

Each row is a separate estimate of equation (1) on the adjacent-region sample, with coefficients and regional-cluster standard errors multiplied by 100. Contact equals one if the respondent contacted a traditional leader about an important problem during the previous year; corruption equals one if the respondent believes most or all traditional leaders are involved in corruption. Four-region inference remains approximate.

**Table A21 Heterogeneity of the traditional leaders estimate**

| <b>Dimension</b> | <b>Subsample</b>  | <b>DiD</b>  | <b>N</b> |
|------------------|-------------------|-------------|----------|
| Residence        | Urban             | −10.5 (4.7) | 1,195    |
| Residence        | Rural             | −21.4 (6.9) | 662      |
| Age              | Under 35          | −15.4 (9.1) | 1,163    |
| Age              | 35 and over       | −14.1 (2.6) | 694      |
| Education        | Secondary or more | −11.7 (7.4) | 555      |

| Dimension | Subsample       | DiD         | N     |
|-----------|-----------------|-------------|-------|
| Education | Below secondary | -16.9 (9.9) | 1,302 |

Each row estimates the pooled difference-in-differences for trust in traditional leaders on the indicated subsample of the adjacent-region design, with coefficients and regional-cluster standard errors multiplied by 100. Subsample splits reduce an already small number of regions' interviews further, so these contrasts are descriptive.

**Table A22 Mean-reversion diagnostic**

|                                                      |                |
|------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
| Correlation, 2015 conflict-region level and 2022 DiD | <b>+0.398</b>  |
| Regression slope (SE)                                | +0.500 (0.384) |
| p-value                                              | 0.225          |
| R <sup>2</sup>                                       | 0.16           |

Regression of each institution's 2022 difference-in-changes on its 2015 conflict-region trust level, across the eleven institutions. Institutions that started higher ended with more positive estimates, the opposite of what regression to the mean would produce.