*Hundreds of people demonstrated on Thursday outside the Johannesburg High Court to protest the suspension of Zwelinzima Vavi, general secretary of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). "We are here to give him our support. We shall protest until the court overturns his suspension," [protester Patrick Malume] said.[[1]](#footnote-1)*

*27 March 2014*

*Johannesburg, South Africa*

*A teenager was shot dead during a violent protest in a region of South Africa which has been rocked by days of rioting… "It was a protest action, there was a crowd or a mob, and somebody took out their firearm and shot at the young man and he died on the scene," North West police spokesperson Thulani Ngubane said.[[2]](#footnote-2)*

*10 April 2014*

*Christiana, South Africa*

Two protests in South Africa occurred within two weeks of each other, both relating to the upcoming 7 May 2014 presidential elections and trade worker factionalization amidst dissatisfaction with the current ruling party. The protest in Johannesburg was a peaceful demonstration outside the High Court, complete with flags and signs. The protest in Christiana was a riot, complete with firebombs, looting…and a death. What happened in Christiana that did not happen in Johannesburg to result in a casualty? This study attempts to approach this question through a quantitative lens by analyzing social conflict events throughout the African continent.

1. Data and Research Questions

Social conflicts—defined to be conflict events including, but not limited to, protests, riots, strikes, inter-communal conflict, and government violence against civilians[[3]](#footnote-3)—are differentiated from full scale intra-state war and mobilized conflict, but this differentiation does not make social conflict events less ubiquitous, disruptive, or dangerous. The Social Conflict in Africa Database (SCAD), prepared by Cullen Hendrix and Idean Salehyan for the program on Climate Change and African Political Stability (CCAPS) at the Robert S. Strauss Center for International Security and Law at the University of Texas at Austin, provides data on 7957 African social conflict events occurring in 48 countries between 1990 and 2011. Secondary datasets are merged into the SCAD to add more information about country demographics; these datasets include the World Religions and National Material Capabilities (NMC) datasets from the Correlates of War Project and the national freedom scores from the Polity IV Project. All datasets used in this project are available for direct download from the websites listed at the end of this paper and in local cached form from the project’s GitHub account.

In this course, we reversed the ‘traditional’ scientific process in a way in that we started from data and then developed research questions. I started out the process with the general idea of investigating differences between social conflict events. After seeing my available data, I decided to focus on the following two main areas of inquiry and investigation:

1. What differentiates an episode of social conflict that results in deaths from an episode of social conflict that does not result in deaths?
2. Is there a way to predict the number of deaths that will result from an episode of social conflict?

2. Who Cares? Possible Impacts Of This Study

Burdened with colonization until the mid 20th Century followed by, in many cases, a transition to independence hijacked by dictatorial rule, African countries are still embroiled in a transition from colonial rule to true independent, democratic governance. Throughout history governmental transitions become catalyzed through widespread dissent, protest, conflict, and, in some cases, violence. The perpetual political transition makes African countries a particularly interesting area of research for political scientists. As such, there is a relatively wide body of literature discussing African social conflict in the context of an overall process of political regime change; however, the body of literature on African conflict as a unique entity is almost nonexistent (Scherrer 4). It should be noted, though, that there is a somewhat substantial theoretical and case study based literature about social conflict in general, not specifically relating to the African continent.

Investigating this broader set of social conflict theory and analyses, authors do not agree on a concise set of factors resulting in the escalation of social conflict events. Some researchers such as peace scholar Christian Scherrer and anthropologist Jay O’Brien use ethnic or religious identity to explain differences in conflict severity, citing the claim, “Few of the nation-states created by Europe in Africa bore any relationship to any [natural ethnic or religious divides] other than the imperial designs of the colonizers” (O’Brien 63). On the contrary, geographer Adrian P. Wood argues, “Shortages of natural resources lead to competition which may result in conflict” (83). In yet another contrary argument, sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf identifies economic disparities across a country’s social classes as a potentially major factor, and economist Massimo De Angelis expounds on this idea by giving an example from the United States: “The Great Depression, with its historically high levels of unemployment, did not make the American working class more docile. On the contrary, it sparked open insurrection: ‘Don’t starve—fight!’ was one slogan” (Dahrendorf 52; De Angelis 51). As sociologist Nigel Fielding writes, conflicts can be attributed to any, some, or all of “class, ethnicity, gender and sexual politics, region, nation, employment status, age, and ideology” (5). There is no consensus on how to explain conflict.

Since the release of the SCAD dataset in March 2011, a handful of quantitative studies specifically focusing on Africa have been published using the SCAD as a primary source, most of them published by the leading authors of the SCAD. These quantitative studies, like the broader and more theoretical literature referenced earlier, identify a variety of factors from climate change to food price spikes to the occurrence of elections (Devlin, Franck, & Hendrix; Smith; Salehyan & Linebarger). However, data on external variables such as weather patterns, food prices, and election schedules are not part of the SCAD, and a unifying theme amongst these studies is one of a lack of reproducibility. Most of the papers are published without code and, in many cases, without links to specific datasets used for analysis, making it impossible to further investigate their results in a study such as this one. Therefore, a reproducibly transparent quantitative exploration of the factors that precede the escalation of African social conflict events—as opposed to theory or individual case studies—would most likely be a welcome addition to the academic debate.

3. Data Cleaning

All of the datasets used here are put out by major research institutes and come with relatively detailed codebooks and documentation. Consequently, setting missing values, understanding variable coding, and other data cleaning tasks were relatively straightforward. All conflicts in the SCAD dataset are included in the study, with the exception of 119 conflicts that do not start and end in the same calendar year. Such conflicts were excluded from the analysis due to the complexities of merging secondary data sources delineated by calendar year onto multiyear conflicts; multiyear conflicts represent under 1.5% of the entire dataset, so removing them from the study should have a somewhat minor effect on the analyses.

The NMC and Polity IV datasets provide information on a country per year level of specification, and variables such as democracy scores, iron production, and total country population were directly merged into the SCAD with little manipulation. The World Religion dataset measures at five-year intervals for every country the number of people who subscribe to a specific religion. To simplify the analyses, I computed the dominant religion in every county per five years, forward filled the data to create country-year measurements, and merged onto SCAD.

4. Methods & Results

Intro par about the methodological approach. Sections structured based on the research questions.

*4.1 Differences between Death and No Death Conflicts*

*4.2 Modeling*

par describing the process. Use parametric techniques to investigate, verify robustness through other means. Split into two unique modeling tasks based on the results of the first research question.

4.2.1 Death/No Death Indicator

4.2.2 Absolute Number of Deaths

5. Discussion

Focus here on the variables picked out and the impact on the community. What will this study bring to the table?

6. Future Extensions

* perhaps id better proxy variables
* merge in more information, such as election years and weather data to test other hypotheses
* do a more robust model selection process as well as more robust validation to give more confidence in the accuracy and usefulness of the results

**Put the UN idea in the conclusion perhaps**

1. http://www.worldbulletin.net/news/132179/hundreds-of-south-africans-protest-outside-johannesburg-court [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/news/afp/140410/teenager-shot-dead-during-safrica-riots [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. https://www.strausscenter.org/scad.html [↑](#footnote-ref-3)