


RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Trust, distrust, and mass atrocity prevention: The Central African Republic

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(Received 19 August 2022; revised 05 May 2023; accepted 10 May 2023)

## Abstract

The article calls on academics and policymakers who focus on mass atrocity prevention to engage with Trust Studies. This is needed because trust and distrust are commonly identified as a significant factor in destruction processes, yet there remains no substantive engagement with these concepts. The article combines Trust Studies, interdisciplinary research on the Central African Republic (Anthropology, Sociology, African Studies, and Political Science), and primary sources to analyse *social* and *political* trust dynamics through an exploration of (a) leadership, (b) outsourcing, (c) identity politics, and (d) witchcraft. It makes a twofold contribution. First, it provides a more informed understanding of the mass violence that took place in the Central African Republic through a historical analysis of trust dynamics. Second, it considers the implications for mass atrocity prevention, as it argues that the mainstream commitment to ‘rebuilding trust’ is built on misguided assumptions. The case study holds broader implications for both Trust Studies and mass atrocity prevention. Ultimately, it calls for interdisciplinary research to aid our collective understanding of the multifaceted roles that trust and distrust play in mass violence.

**Keywords:** Central African Republic; distrust; interdisciplinary; mass atrocity prevention; trust

## Introduction

This article calls for a new interdisciplinary research agenda that brings together (a) studies on mass atrocities such as Genocide Studies and the Responsibility to Protect, and (b) Trust Studies with its focus on concepts such as trust and distrust as well as their application to the real world. This is needed because trust and distrust are cited as important factors when explaining mass atrocities (genocide, crimes against humanity, ethnic cleansing, and war crimes) and feature prominently in mass atrocity prevention strategies, but these studies do not engage with research on trust and distrust.

Consider Sémelin’s seminal study, in which he argues that one of the most fundamental causes of mass violence is distrust, as collective memories are forged and manipulated into thinking that ‘it is from THEM that all our suffering arises. We cannot trust them. Those people are not like US.’<sup>1</sup> We see this time and time again in literature. During the ‘Mytilenean Debate’ (427 BC), it is argued that their betrayal of the Athenians represented a ‘serious breach of trust’ and that only ‘violent retaliation’ could address this.<sup>2</sup> The ‘religious cleansing’ of Spain in the early 17th century is said to have taken place because ‘a court faction argued successfully that new Jewish and Moorish converts

<sup>1</sup>Jacques Sémelin, *Purify and Destroy: The Political Uses of Massacre and Genocide* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p. 77.

<sup>2</sup>Hans Van Wees, ‘Genocide in the ancient world’, in Donald Bloxham and A. Dirk Moses (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 239–59 (p. 254).

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could not be trusted.<sup>3</sup> In Rwanda, Hutu extremists saw what was taking place in Burundi and concluded ‘you can’t trust the “Inyenzi” (cockroaches); which paved the way for the 1994 genocide.<sup>4</sup> In Iraq, Al-Qaeda’s number two Ayman al-Zawahiri wrote to Aby Musab al-Zarqawi warning that ‘Shi’a Muslims could never be trusted.’<sup>5</sup> In each case, the underlying logic was that the group in question cannot be trusted and must be destroyed before ‘they’ harm ‘us’. Such thinking is also embodied in mass atrocity prevention strategies. For instance, the United Nations Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes views mass atrocities as caused by ‘[w]idespread mistrust in State institutions or among different groups as a result of impunity,’<sup>6</sup> and ‘mistrust between opposing parties based on past or present breaches of commitments or agreements.’<sup>7</sup> From this perspective, mistrust and distrust play an important role in mass atrocities, as people are killed en masse because perpetrators do not perceive they can be trusted. Yet other than these fleeting references, we do not see any substantive engagement with the concepts in question.

To illustrate this further, let us turn to a more contemporary case, which remains a grossly under-researched case of mass violence, the Central African Republic (CAR). Between 2013 and 2015, an estimated 3,000–6,000 people were killed, 825,000 internally displaced, and 423,000 forced to flee CAR, although the United Nations acknowledges these numbers are a ‘radical under-estimate.’<sup>8</sup> A striking statistic is that the Muslim population in the capital Bangui may have been reduced by up to 99 per cent in just a couple of months.<sup>9</sup> Explaining why these mass atrocities took place, academics have cited distrust as a key factor.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Gatfooui went as far as to proclaim ‘It is all about Trust!’, though this was in a short blog piece that provided little by the way of in-depth analysis.<sup>11</sup> Significantly, the importance of trust was identified by policymakers as critical for preventing further mass atrocities. Jan Egeland (the former UN Undersecretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs) identified ‘mistrust’ as a key theme within a ‘deeply divided nation’ and called for ‘maximum pressure placed on the transitional government’ ... to ‘rebuild trust between the divided communities.’<sup>12</sup> More recently, in the wake of post-electoral violence in 2021, Mankeur Ndiaye (Head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic [MINUSCA], and the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative for CAR) called for a ‘genuine and deep reconciliation process to rebuild trust among communities.’<sup>13</sup> What we see, therefore, is that on the one hand, trust-related issues are cited as a fundamental facilitator of mass atrocities, whilst, on the other hand, policymakers stress the need to *rebuild trust* to prevent future mass atrocities. Although one can understand why policymakers focus on rebuilding

<sup>3</sup> Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005), p. 48.

<sup>4</sup> Sémelin, *Purify*, p. 140.

<sup>5</sup> Ben Kiernan, *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 600.

<sup>6</sup> United Nations, ‘Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes: A Tool for Prevention’ (2014), p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>8</sup> United Nations Commission of Inquiry, ‘The International Commission of Inquiry on the Central African Republic’, S/2014/928 (2014), pp. 25–6, 92.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>10</sup> Abdurrahim Siradağ, ‘Explaining the conflict in the Central African Republic: Causes and dynamics’, *Epiphany: Journal of Transdisciplinary Studies*, 9:3 (2016), pp. 86–103 (p. 99); Tatiana Carayannis and Louisa Lombard, ‘Concluding note on the failure and future of peacebuilding in CAR’, in Tatiana Carayannis and Louisa Lombard (eds), *Making Sense of the Central African Republic* (London: Zed Books, 2015), pp. 319–42 (p. 323); Shérzade Gatfooui, ‘Central African Republic Crisis: It Is All about Trust!’, *LSE Blogs* (27 May 2015), available at: {<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/africaatlse/2015/05/27/central-african-republic-crisis-its-all-about-trust/>}; Deiros Trinidad, ‘Central African Republic: The Invention of a Religious Conflict’, No. 67, the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies (2014), p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> Gatfooui, ‘Central African’.

<sup>12</sup> Jan Egeland, ‘We Cannot Let Down the Central African Republic Again’, *Aljazeera* (26 May 2015), available at: {<https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2015/5/26/we-cannot-let-down-the-central-african-republic-again>}.

<sup>13</sup> United Nations Press Release, ‘Top official calls upon Security Council to deploy more peacekeepers in Central African Republic, amid post-election surge in violence’, SC/14418 (21 January 2021).

trust, a deeper engagement with Trust Studies begins to illustrate that such thinking is built on misguided assumptions.

The article makes two contributions. Primarily, it sheds new light on understanding the mass atrocities in CAR by providing the first in-depth study of trust dynamics through a historical analysis of *social* and *political* trust. It argues that high levels of political and social distrust help explain why there was a coup, why it was successful, and why the discourse of threat gained traction and helped radicalize people to perpetrate atrocity crimes. Breaking this down, political distrust towards elites helps explain both the coup itself and its ultimate success. President Bozizé was viewed as increasingly untrustworthy, as he reneged on various commitments, and, as a result, he lost both internal and external support as his ability, integrity, and practices were rejected. Following the coup, social distrust helps explain why the discourse of threat took hold. When one juxtaposes both social and political distrust, the complexity of trust dynamics begins to show the magnitude of the task at hand for anyone seeking to address trust-related issues in CAR.

The second contribution is to mass atrocity prevention, as it calls on academics and policymakers to reassess the ‘rebuilding trust’ approach for four reasons. First, it assumes trust did exist, broke down, and can, in turn, be rebuilt; however, in the example of CAR, trust never existed in the manner implied. This is important because if academics and policymakers misunderstand how trust and distrust operate, the normative recommendations put forth may be at best flawed or, at worst, counterproductive.<sup>14</sup> Second, it fails to understand the multidimensional nature of distrust. The studies identified above all speak to the destructive nature of distrust, but they fail to consider the normative value of distrust.<sup>15</sup> Distrust can act as a form of protection, which seems particularly relevant when analysing what Gerlach refers to as ‘extremely violent societies’<sup>16</sup> such as CAR.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, it would be an error to think that all types of distrust could or should be eradicated. Third, such thinking embodies an overly simplistic view of the relationship between trust, distrust, and cooperation, as it proceeds on the basis that trust is *a priori* for cooperation, whereas CAR shows that cooperation can occur where trust is absent. Fourth, mainstream approaches fail to consider that external actors (the United Nations, great powers, and regional states) are viewed with distrust because they have a track record of exploitation and harm in CAR.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, there are tensions to navigate for any external actors seeking to address trust-related issues in CAR, as trust and distrust play multifaceted roles. Distrust may shape day-to-day behaviours and act as a source of protection; however, distrust in political elites can incentivize coups, which can create conditions that enable mass atrocities, especially in an environment where social distrust is entrenched and can be manipulated.

This article is structured in four parts. First, it draws on Trust Studies to lay the theoretical foundations for the study. In so doing, it highlights the contested nature of trust and distrust, the complex relationship between them, and the normative value of distrust. Shifting its focus to the case study, the second and third sections draw on Stoneman’s differentiation between ‘political trust’ (in the government) and ‘social trust’ (between individuals and groups).<sup>19</sup> Section two analyses political trust through a focus on *leadership* and *outsourcing*, while section three looks at social

<sup>14</sup>To draw a parallel, the ‘failed state’ paradigm has been heavily criticized for assuming that the states in question were once functioning states that failed and can be ‘fixed’. Critics argue that many so-called failed states never fulfilled the Weberian image of the state embodied in such accounts, and in turn they cannot be ‘fixed’ in the expected manner. In a similar vein, this article proposes that it is a mistake to think that trust existed in CAR, broke down, and can be fixed, as this fails to understand the multifaceted roles that trust and distrust play.

<sup>15</sup>Pippa Norris, *In Praise of Scepticism: Trust but Verify* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022); Karen S. Cook, Russel Hardin, and Margaret Levi, *Cooperation without Trust?* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2005); Anette Baier, ‘Trust and antitrust’, *Ethics*, 96:2 (1986), pp. 231–60.

<sup>16</sup>Christian Gerlach, *Extremely Violent Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>17</sup>Louisa Lombard and Sylvain Batianga-Kinzi, ‘Violence, popular punishment, and war in the Central African Republic’, *African Affairs*, 114:454 (2015), pp. 52–71.

<sup>18</sup>Jasmine-Kim Westendorf, *Violating Peace: Sex, Aid, and Peacekeeping* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020).

<sup>19</sup>Paul Stoneman, *This Thing Called Trust: Civil Society in Britain* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

trust by analysing *identity politics* and *witchcraft*. Finally, the conclusion reflects on the key findings whilst calling for further interdisciplinary research.

## Trust and distrust

Studies on trust can be divided into two strands. First, academics focus on trust at the *domestic* level. Historically, political theorists such as Hobbes, Descartes, Mill, Kant, and Rawls invoked the concept, even if briefly. Over time, interdisciplinary studies arose which saw trust studied in relation to organizations,<sup>20</sup> democracies,<sup>21</sup> post-communist societies,<sup>22</sup> and civil society.<sup>23</sup> These reflect the multiple contexts in which trust is deemed to be doing something of notable importance. Second, studies on trust at the *international* level tend to be rooted in the discipline of International Relations but draw on interdisciplinary research, as they analyse how trust shapes international affairs.<sup>24</sup> At first glance, one may be forgiven for assuming that CAR fits neatly into the former, but so-called fragile states are more complex. What goes on in CAR is shaped extensively by the external involvement of the UN, the French, the Russians, and regional governments, which exposes global–regional–national–local linkages.

Defining trust can be a challenging proposition, as the term remains contested. Interdisciplinary studies have provided myriad interpretations, with trust being variously described as a ‘mental or psychological state’,<sup>25</sup> a judgment,<sup>26</sup> an ‘emotional attitude’,<sup>27</sup> or a ‘a belief’,<sup>28</sup> to name just a few. For the purposes of this article, trust is defined as ‘*the expectation of no harm in contexts where betrayal is always a possibility*’.<sup>29</sup> This definition is helpful because it begins to illustrate the relationship between trust and related concepts such as vulnerability, risk, and uncertainty.<sup>30</sup> The actor[s] involved choose to trust on the basis ‘that potential trustees will do what is right’,<sup>31</sup> whilst at the same time aware that their expectations may be disappointed.

This brings us to the next key consideration, identifying the factors that people look for when deciding whether to trust others. Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman’s seminal article on trust in organizations put forward three characteristics: ‘ability’, ‘benevolence’, and ‘integrity’, the so-called ABI model (which is utilized below to discuss political trust in CAR).<sup>32</sup> They review the existing literature and acknowledge the many different dimensions of trust that are raised but argue that these can be condensed into the characteristics listed above. Ability refers to the competency of the trustee,

<sup>20</sup>Roger C. Mayer, James H. Davis, and F. David Schoorman, ‘An integrative model of organizational trust’, *Academy of Management Review*, 20:3 (1995), pp. 709–34.

<sup>21</sup>Vivian Hart, *Distrust and Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

<sup>22</sup>William Mishler and Richard Rose, ‘What are the origins of political trust? Testing institutional and cultural theories in post-communist societies’, *Comparative Political Studies*, 34:1 (2001), pp. 30–62.

<sup>23</sup>Stoneman, *This Thing*.

<sup>24</sup>Sian Troath, ‘Trusted intermediaries: Macmillan, Kennedy and their ambassadors’, *International Relations*, 36:2 (2022), pp. 262–84; Vincent Charles Keating and Lucy M. Abbott, ‘Entrusted norms: security, trust, betrayal in the Gulf Cooperation Council crisis’, *European Journal of International Relations*, 27:4 (2021), pp. 1090–113; Jun Yan Chang and Nicole Jenne, ‘Velvet fists: The paradox of defence diplomacy in Southeast Asia’, *European Journal of International Security*, 5:3 (2020), pp. 332–49; Nicholas J. Wheeler, *Trusting Enemies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Aaron M. Hoffman, ‘A conceptualization of trust in international relations’, *European Journal of International Relations*, 8:3 (2002), pp. 375–401; Nicholas Rengger, ‘The ethics of trust in world politics’, *International Affairs*, 73:3 (1997), pp. 469–87.

<sup>25</sup>Adrian Gallagher and Nick Wheeler, ‘Trust or perish? The responsibility to protect and use of force in a changing world order’, *Ethics and International Affairs*, 35:2 (2021), pp. 181–95 (p. 182).

<sup>26</sup>Mark E. Warren (ed.), *Democracy and Trust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), p. 1.

<sup>27</sup>Bernd Lahno, ‘On the emotional character of trust’, *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, 4:2 (2001), pp. 171–89 (p. 173).

<sup>28</sup>Stoneman, *This Thing*, p. 15.

<sup>29</sup>Wheeler, *Trusting Enemies*, p. 3.

<sup>30</sup>Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman, ‘An integrative model’, p. 712; Baier, ‘Trust’, p. 235; Diego Gambetta, ‘Can we trust?’, in Diego Gambetta (ed.), *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations* (Oxford: Wiley-Basil Blackwell, 1990), pp. 213–37 (pp. 218–19).

<sup>31</sup>Hoffman, ‘A conceptualization of trust in international relations’, p. 375.

<sup>32</sup>Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman, ‘An integrative model’, p. 715.

in that a trustor would only trust actor X to do task Y if the former thought the latter had the necessary skills and expertise to complete the job at hand. Benevolence refers to the perception that the trustee views the trustor as someone that will do good by the trustee, at least in relation to this specific issue. Here, we see the threat of betrayal loom large, in that there is an expectation that the trustee will not betray the trustor. The final characteristic is integrity, as the trustor will only trust the trustee if they believe that they will abide by a set of principles that they themselves align with.<sup>33</sup> The ABI model dominates the discourse, even if academics alter it as they study different aspects. For instance, Wheeler's study of interpersonal relationships sees him alter the ABI model to look at 'benevolence', 'integrity', and 'capacity' instead of 'ability'.<sup>34</sup> Stoneman's study on trust in government focuses on 'perceived intentions', 'perceived ability', and 'perceived motive'.<sup>35</sup> What we see, therefore, is that whether academics are studying interpersonal relationships at the international level (Wheeler) or trust in society and government at the domestic level (Stoneman), the underpinnings of the ABI model persist; they are discussed below within the context of political distrust, which brings us onto the issue of types of trust.

Stoneman differentiates between 'contractual' and 'paternalistic' trust and sees 'social trust' as an example of the former and 'political trust' as an example of the latter.<sup>36</sup> Everyday social interaction is very much dependent upon social trust being formed, but this goes beyond simple day-to-day activities, as social trust can play a critical role in civil war<sup>37</sup> or conflict management.<sup>38</sup> Political trust is different as this requires individuals to place their trust in elites and public institutions. The nature of these two types of trust is different. As Stoneman explains, we can have 'thick' trust, which refers to relations between humans, and 'thin' trust, which refers to trust in a government.<sup>39</sup> For example, the bonds of trust that underpin the vows made on a wedding day are thicker than the trust placed in a political party when casting a vote at the ballot box. Critically, however, as Stoneman's study shows 'trust in government has social origins'.<sup>40</sup> In other words, we should not think of social and political trust as operating in vacuums detached from one another, because the level of trust in society at large can have implications for the level of trust we have for political elites.

A further dimension, performance, must also be factored into this analysis. As Mishler and Rose explain, 'trust in political and social institutions is contingent on economic and political performance'.<sup>41</sup> This is important for so-called fragile states such as CAR, as they are often portrayed as the benchmark for underperforming governments. Therefore, it is necessary to say a few more words on the relationship between weak institutions and trust. Hutchinson and Johnson's study of capacity, trust, and legitimacy views trust as critical for regime legitimacy.<sup>42</sup> Their research on 16 African countries from 2000 to 2005 led them to conclude that 'high institutional capacity is associated with increased levels of individual trust in government across African countries'.<sup>43</sup> In so doing, they uphold Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi's view that individuals within African

<sup>33</sup>Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman, 'An integrative model', pp. 717–24.

<sup>34</sup>Wheeler, *Trusting Enemies*, p. 53.

<sup>35</sup>Stoneman, *This Thing*, p. 110.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>37</sup>Sara Kijewski and Markus Freitag, 'Civil war and the formation of social trust in Kosovo: Posttraumatic growth or war-related distress?', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 62:4 (2018), pp. 717–42.

<sup>38</sup>Florian Justwan, 'Trusting publics: Generalized social trust and the decision to pursue binding conflict management', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 61:3 (2016), pp. 590–614.

<sup>39</sup>Stoneman, *This Thing*, p. 45.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>41</sup>William Mishler and Richard Rose, 'Trust, distrust and skepticism: Popular evaluations of civil and political institutions in post-communist societies', *Journal of Politics*, 59:2 (1997): 418–51 (p. 446); Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (London: The Free Press, 1996).

<sup>42</sup>Marc L. Hutchinson and Kristin Johnson, 'Capacity to trust? Institutional capacity, conflict and political trust in Africa, 2000–2005', *Journal of Peace Research*, 48:6 (2011), pp. 737–52.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 737.

states trust governments based on performance rather than a commitment to abstract ideas.<sup>44</sup> The study has significance precisely because CAR is a yardstick for underperforming governments, which is underpinned by outsourcing, concessionary politics, and hollowing out the state.

When it comes to the relationship between trust and distrust, Lewicki, McAllister, and Bies highlight that the two concepts were traditionally viewed at opposite ends of a continuum.<sup>45</sup> From this perspective, trust and distrust do not coexist. Trust is viewed as ‘good’ and distrust as ‘bad’, with the former viewed as a prerequisite for ‘social order.’<sup>46</sup> We see this thinking again and again as trust is viewed as ‘a precondition for cooperation.’<sup>47</sup> Fukuyama goes as far as arguing ‘a nation’s well-being, as well as its ability to compete, is conditioned by a single pervasive cultural characteristic: the level of trust inherent in the society.’<sup>48</sup> Rooted in the idea that trust has an economic value, Fukuyama views high levels of trust as having ‘major [positive] consequences’, whereas a ‘decline in trust’<sup>49</sup> or ‘widespread distrust’ results in ‘transaction costs’ which create barriers to cooperation and prosperity.<sup>50</sup> Over time, revisionists have challenged this approach on two fronts. First, trust and distrust *can* coexist. For Lewicki, McAllister, and Bies, the two concepts are ‘linked’, as they define trust as ‘confident positive expectations regarding another’s conduct’ and distrust as ‘confident negative expectations regarding another’s conduct.’<sup>51</sup> Going further, Cook, Hardin, and Levi argue that societies can function perfectly well in the absence of trust.<sup>52</sup> Many mechanisms that underpin a healthy society do not actually depend on or embody trust relations. Second, the normative value of distrust comes to the fore.<sup>53</sup> This has two dimensions, in that distrust can stimulate ‘the development of improved institutions’, which in turn may ‘facilitate cooperation.’<sup>54</sup> Therefore, rather than being seen as a fundamental barrier to cooperation, distrust can facilitate it.

The normative value of distrust is captured in Benjamin Franklin’s famous quote ‘distrust and caution are the parents of security’. The statement begins to highlight that a high level of trust does not necessarily aid peace and harmony. As Baier explains, ‘exploitation and conspiracy, as much as justice and fellowship, thrive better in an atmosphere of trust.’<sup>55</sup> In ‘a moral test for trust’, Baier challenges the assumption that to trust is positive: ‘[w]hen the trust relationship itself is corrupt and perpetuates brutality, tyranny, or injustice, trusting may be silly self-exposure, and disappointing and betraying trust, including encouraged trust, may be not merely morally permissible but morally praiseworthy.’<sup>56</sup> As Baier goes on to explain, within the context of a ‘corrupt system’ it may be unwise for individuals to trust anyone with anything.<sup>57</sup> This sentiment has been reiterated in several different contexts since. In Lewicki, McAllister, and Bies’s study on the coexistence of trust and distrust, they argue that ‘unconditional trust appears to be an extremely dangerous strategy for managing social relations.’<sup>58</sup> Trust, therefore, can have ‘two faces’, in that blind trust can be harmful whilst ‘sceptical trust’ is of value.<sup>59</sup> Distrust, therefore, can act as a form of protection, and this is precisely what we see in CAR.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 738. To be clear, Hutchinson and Johnson explain that these results concur Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi’s 2005 study.

<sup>45</sup> Roy J. Lewicki, Daniel J. McAllister, and Robert J. Bies, ‘Trust and distrust: New relationships and realities’, *The Academy of Management Review*, 23:3 (1998), pp. 438–458 (pp. 440–2).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 440–1.

<sup>47</sup> Stoneman, *This Thing*, p. 17.

<sup>48</sup> Fukuyama, *Trust*, p. 7.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>51</sup> Lewicki, McAllister, and Bies, ‘Trust and distrust’, p. 439.

<sup>52</sup> Cook, Hardin, and Levi, *Cooperation without Trust?*

<sup>53</sup> Norris, *In Praise*; Cook, Hardin, and Levi; *Cooperation without Trust?*; Baier, ‘Trust and antitrust’.

<sup>54</sup> Cook, Hardin, and Levi, *Cooperation without Trust?*, p. 2.

<sup>55</sup> Baier, ‘Trust and antitrust’, pp. 231–2.

<sup>56</sup> Baier, ‘Trust and antitrust’, p. 293.

<sup>57</sup> Baier, ‘Trust and antitrust’, pp. 258–9.

<sup>58</sup> Lewicki, McAllister, and Bies, ‘Trust and distrust’, p. 451.

<sup>59</sup> Norris, *In Praise*.

## The Central African Republic

Between 2013 and 2015, CAR experienced mass atrocities unprecedented in the country's post-colonial history, yet it remains a grossly under-researched case study. For example, the *Oxford Handbook of the Responsibility to Protect* was published in 2016 and includes 12 case study chapters, none of which are on CAR, which only appears four times in this landmark text.<sup>60</sup> To give another example, the journal dedicated to the study of the Responsibility to Protect, *Global Responsibility to Protect*, has published just one article on CAR, and this was 10 years on from the Séléka uprising.<sup>61</sup> The majority of the studies on CAR have been done by anthropologists, sociologists, and African Studies experts. When explaining why the mass atrocities took place, we are told that they are a product of colonial legacies,<sup>62</sup> a historical culture of violence,<sup>63</sup> elite struggles over power,<sup>64</sup> regional dynamics,<sup>65</sup> inequality and fear,<sup>66</sup> the failures of international interventions<sup>67</sup> and peripheral neglect, outsourcing, and the uniqueness of the coup.<sup>68</sup> From a mass atrocity prevention perspective, what we see is a mosaic of factors put forward, and the purpose of this section is to shed new light on trust dynamics, a hitherto-neglected factor in analyses of CAR.

To explain why a focus on trust and distrust is necessary, let us reflect on the conclusions drawn in Carayannis and Lombard's seminal study on CAR:

while the violence was expressed using a religious idiom, it had less to do with doctrinal differences or hatred, and more to do with uncertainty, mistrust, and manipulation whose unfortunate long roots in CAR are beginning to bear fruit.<sup>69</sup>

The statement is important for three reasons. First, the authors rightly reject the mainstream portrayal that the atrocities formed part of a religious cycle of violence between the Séléka (mainly Muslim) and anti-Balaka (mainly Christian). Second, offering an alternative explanation, they ask us to consider the social conditions which facilitated the mass violence, in particular, the role that mistrust and manipulation played in creating an environment in which cracks became chasms; but again, the authors do not engage with the concepts. Third, these social conditions did not arise overnight and have long historical roots. Accordingly, this article does not focus on 2013–15 but instead analyses how political and social distrust has been constructed through pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial practices, with a predominant focus on the post-Cold War era.

<sup>60</sup>Alex J. Bellamy and Tim Dunne (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the Responsibility to Protect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>61</sup>The article in question is Nicholas Idris Erameh and Victor Ojajorotu, 'Consequentialism: Deontology theorising, armed humanitarian intervention, and the 2012–2013 Central African Republic crisis', *Global Responsibility to Protect*, 14:4 (2022), pp. 383–408.

<sup>62</sup>Stephen W. Smith, 'CAR's history: The past of a tense present', in Carayannis and Lombard (eds), *Making Sense*, pp. 17–52.

<sup>63</sup>Lombard and Batianga-Kinzi, 'Violence, popular punishment'.

<sup>64</sup>Sıradag, 'Explaining the conflict in the Central African Republic'.

<sup>65</sup>Roland Marchal, 'CAR and regional (dis)order', in Tatiana Carayannis and Louisa Lombard (eds), *Making Sense of the Central African Republic* (London: Zed Books, 2015), pp. 166–93.

<sup>66</sup>Roland Marchal, 'Being rich, being poor: Wealth and fear in the Central African Republic', in Tatiana Carayannis and Louisa Lombard (eds), *Making Sense of the Central African Republic* (London: Zed Books, 2015), pp. 53–75.

<sup>67</sup>Louisa Lombard, *State of Rebellion: Violence and Intervention in the Central African Republic* (London: Zed Books, 2016); Enrico Picco, 'From being forgotten to being ignored: International humanitarian interventions in the Central African Republic', in Carayannis and Lombard (eds), *Making Sense*, pp. 219–43.

<sup>68</sup>Tim Glawion and Lotje De Vries, 'Ruptures revoked: Why the Central African Republic's unprecedented crisis has not altered deep-seated patterns of governance', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 56:3 (2018), pp. 421–42; also Tim Glawion, *The Security Arena in Africa: Local Order-Making in the Central African Republic, Somaliland, and South Sudan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

<sup>69</sup>Carayannis and Lombard, 'A concluding note on the failure and future of peacebuilding in CAR', in Carayannis and Lombard (eds), *Making Sense*, pp. 319–41 (p. 323).

## Political distrust

CAR went from its first democratic elections (1993) to unprecedented mass atrocities (2013–15) in just two decades. To help explain this, the section focuses on individual leaders in the post–Cold War era, prior to analysing the historical practice of outsourcing and implications that stemmed from it. These provide a more informed understanding of why there was a successful coup in 2013 but also highlight the multifaceted nature of distrust, as it can act as a source of protection but also foster a rebellion.

### *Political leadership*

Stoneman explains that leaders and leadership act as a critical component of building trust in government.<sup>70</sup> Here, the characteristics of the ABI model, and variations of it, are important, as citizens judge aspects such as ability, benevolence, integrity, motives, and intent.

President Ange-Felix Patassé (born in Paoua, north-west CAR) became the first democratically elected leader of CAR, yet his record of human rights violations and corruption undermined his plea for the people of CAR to trust him. In his first term (1993–9), he had to overcome several attempted coups, as the ‘southerners’, who generally supported his predecessor President André Kolingba, rose up against the ‘northerners’, who backed Patassé. In a bid to hold onto power, Patassé made a radio appeal: ‘Central Africans ... you elected me to lead you. Trust me to re-establish peace and national unity, trust me to rebuild our country ... Together, we will triumph.’<sup>71</sup> To return to the characteristics associated with the ABI model, the appeal is grounded on a plea: if you give me a chance, I will prove my ability to unite this country, and I will not betray you. This formed part of a broader promise that he would govern with, rather than against, his critics.<sup>72</sup>

Although Patassé won a second election in 1999, his role in human rights violations and major corruption betrayed his promise of peaceful intent and, in doing so, fuelled distrust. Regarding the former, following a failed coup in 2001, there were widespread extrajudicial killings, torture, and ill treatment of civilians and soldiers suspected of supporting the coup.<sup>73</sup> Patassé is also said to have ordered the punishment of civilians, which led to Congolese rebels (supporting Patassé) conducting ‘systematic’ rape ‘against all women’ of ‘all ages’.<sup>74</sup> In other words, grave human rights violations were used in an attempt to hold onto power, but this ultimately failed. Regarding the latter, in 2005 he was tried in absentia, sentenced to 20 years, and fined five billion francs for embezzling seventy billion francs.<sup>75</sup> Notably, the money was embezzled whilst he failed to pay state employees, with salary arrears mounting up to the point where they became a key factor in the 2003 mutiny.<sup>76</sup> Reflecting on the 2005 ruling, a businessman claimed the sentence should have been more severe because Patassé had ‘betrayed the people of the CAR’.<sup>77</sup> When one considers that Patassé was the first democratically elected leader, his actions fuelled widespread distrust and undermined the hope that democracy would bring an end to elite-led violence.

If we return to the ABI model, it is evident that the ability of Patassé to govern, at least in terms of his power, was propped up by external forces. Over time, his track record of corruption and human rights violations undermined any perception of benevolence or integrity, which helped pave the way for political actors to side with Bozizé. As Mehler explains, by this point ‘getting rid of Patassé

<sup>70</sup> Stoneman, *This Thing*, p. 112.

<sup>71</sup> Louis Post-Dispatch, “‘Trust me’”, Central African Republic Chief implores nations’, *St Louis Post-Dispatch (Missouri)* (27 May 1996). Three Star Edition.

<sup>72</sup> Howard W. French, ‘Central African leader vows to govern with his critics’, *New York Times* (25 May 1996), p. 2.

<sup>73</sup> Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Report – Central African Republic* (28 May 2002).

<sup>74</sup> Picco, ‘From being forgotten to being ignored’, pp. 224–5.

<sup>75</sup> The New Humanitarian, ‘Court sentences ex-president Patassé to 20 years in jail’, 2006, available at: {<https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/fr/node/227663fbc>}.

<sup>76</sup> Reliefweb, ‘Central African Republic: Government pays salary arrears’, 2003, available at: {<https://reliefweb.int/report/central-african-republic/central-african-republic-government-pays-salary-arrears>}.

<sup>77</sup> New Humanitarian, ‘Court sentences’.



at any price was apparently the order of the day.<sup>78</sup> Bozizé seized power in 2003 and stated his goal of ‘presidential elections ... and parliamentary elections if necessary’.<sup>79</sup> Accordingly, it would appear Bozizé was trying to address the trust deficit which typically follows a coup. Within three days, the Republic of Congo’s foreign minister Rodolphe Adada proclaimed: ‘[h]e spoke of openness, of reconciliation ... we believe that the Central African Republic can trust a man who says the kind of thing that we have heard’.<sup>80</sup> To return to the ABI model, the statement begins to illustrate that external actors expressed their view that they did trust Bozizé’s motives and intentions, and therefore he should be given an opportunity. He was not just someone who had seized power, but someone who could be trusted to do the right thing.

Unfortunately for the people of CAR, Bozizé accelerated corruption and outsourcing to the point that International Crisis Group famously labelled CAR a ‘phantom state’.<sup>81</sup> The government was involved in ‘rampant corruption’ and ‘consolidated power in the hands of the President’s immediate family and associates’, which in turn is said to have led to ‘legitimate grievances’ against Bozizé.<sup>82</sup> This further undermined the government’s ability to perform, which, as discussed above, only fostered further mistrust, as citizens distrust underperforming regimes. If this was not bad enough, widespread human rights violations made things worse. In 2007, Human Rights Watch released a report entitled ‘State of Anarchy’ documenting widespread human rights violations in CAR since mid-2005.<sup>83</sup> The report drew attention to the fact that ‘the vast majority of summary executions and unlawful killings, and almost all village burnings, have been carried out by government forces, often in reprisal for rebel attacks’ and also that the ‘level of civilian fear in northern CAR is palpable’.<sup>84</sup> To return to the normative value of distrust, trusting the government in this environment would be ‘silly self-exposure’, to use Baier’s terminology.<sup>85</sup>

In what could be seen as an attempt to rebuild trust, in 2008 Bozizé requested that CAR be added to the agenda of the UN Peacebuilding Commission, which then created a fund to address ‘persistent political instability, the presences of multiple armed groups, and the limited State authority and services outside the capital, Bangui’.<sup>86</sup> At the time, the Commission focused on security sector reform and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration; however, Bozizé ‘proved reluctant to implement many of the reforms to which he had committed in the dialogue’.<sup>87</sup> For Orlin, a critical failure arose, as the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Support Office in the Central African Republic (BINUCA) could not get President Bozizé to ‘uphold his end of the bargain’, which, it is claimed, was the very same problem that the Bangui Accords faced when the United Nations Mission for the Central African Republic (MINURCA) failed to persuade President Patassé to

<sup>78</sup> Andreas Mehler, ‘Rebels and parties: The impact of armed insurgency on representation in the Central African Republic’, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 49:1 (2011), pp. 115–39 (p. 125).

<sup>79</sup> Pierre Aousseuil, ‘Stability before election says Central African Republic coup leader’, *Agence France Presse* (19 March 2003).

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> International Crisis Group, ‘Central African Republic: Anatomy of a phantom state’, *Africa Report*, N.136 (13 December 2007), available at: <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/central-african-republic-anatomy-of-a-phantom-state.pdf>}.

<sup>82</sup> Evan Cinq-Mars, ‘Too little, too late: Failing to prevent atrocities in the Central African Republic’, Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, *Occasional Paper Series* (7 November 2015), p. 6.

<sup>83</sup> Human Rights Watch, ‘State of Anarchy: Rebellion and Abuses against Civilians’ (14 September 2007), available at: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2007/09/14/state-anarchy/rebellion-and-abuses-against-civilians>}.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> Baier, ‘Trust and antitrust’, p. 293.

<sup>86</sup> United Nations Peacebuilding, ‘The Secretary-General’s Peacebuilding Fund: The Central African Republic’ (2020), pp. 1–2, available at: [https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/country\\_brief\\_car\\_20200218.pdf](https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/country_brief_car_20200218.pdf)}.

<sup>87</sup> Nathaniel Olin, ‘Pathologies of peacekeeping and peacebuilding’, in Carayannis and Lombard (eds), *Making Sense*, pp. 194–218 (p. 208); also Yuki Yoshida, ‘Understanding the 2013 coup d’état in the Central African Republic’, University of Peace, Peace and Conflict Monitor (2014), available at: [https://web.archive.org/web/20150724072812/http://www.monitor.upeace.org/innerpg.cfm?id\\_article=1026#\\_edn1](https://web.archive.org/web/20150724072812/http://www.monitor.upeace.org/innerpg.cfm?id_article=1026#_edn1)}.

implement the agreement.<sup>88</sup> Time and time again, therefore, presidents in CAR made commitments (along with other actors such as political parties, trade unions, civil society) to 'lend full support to all initiatives to promote dialogue and national reconciliation' but subsequently failed to see through these processes.<sup>89</sup> This further embedded and fostered a culture of distrust in political elites. If we define distrust as 'confident negative expectations regarding another's conduct',<sup>90</sup> both Patassé and Bozizé created a negative expectation that they would not fulfil promises made and should not, therefore, be trusted.

The downfall of Bozizé owed a lot, evidently, to his lack of integrity, because his ability to govern, like other leaders in CAR, was propped up by regional actors. If they had continued to support Bozizé, he would have remained in power. By betraying the regional powers, the last dimension of the ABI model, ability, fell apart, as he lost external support. To better understand this, let us turn to Marchal's focus on the regional dynamics and the regional distrust that emerged. For instance, the region contributed 5 billion CFA francs to a Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration programme (DDR) in CAR in 2008, though 'not even two billion of CFA francs were actually used for it'.<sup>91</sup> The integrity of Bozizé was thus a significant problem, as he was viewed as untrustworthy. Against this backdrop, individual relationships began to deteriorate. The most important was between President Bozizé and President Deby of Chad, whose power and influence within CAR led him to be seen as the 'kingmaker'.<sup>92</sup> Between 2006 and 2012, their relationship got worse, but, despite this, in 2012 Deby tried to prevent further turmoil in CAR by calling for a 'national dialogue, if not some kind of power sharing,' only for Bozizé to accept then 'renege on his commitment soon after'.<sup>93</sup> The betrayal further undermined any sense of integrity and reinforced the view that Bozizé was never committed to change. To give another example, Marchal explains that Congolese leader, Denis Sassou Nguesso, 'like many heads of state in the region, felt that Francois Bozizé never tried to convert to head of state'.<sup>94</sup> The broader issue was that this came at a time when regional elites were questioning not just Bozizé's benevolence and integrity but also his ability. The president of Gabon, Ali Bongo, 'had given up hope on Bozizé ... long before the Séléka emerged' and saw him as 'dead wood'.<sup>95</sup>

The Séléka rebellion was unprecedented. Whilst CAR had experienced many coups, this was the first time that a rebellion in the periphery had managed to take hold of the capital Bangui.<sup>96</sup> Distrust in the government played a key role in facilitating the coup, as the Séléka was made up of multiple rebel groups who cited 'the government's unmet obligations under various peace accords as well as the failure of the DDR process'.<sup>97</sup> From their perspective, if the president of CAR continued to renege on his commitment to peace, they had little incentive to uphold the status quo. Of course, a commitment to rebel in and of itself does not guarantee a successful coup, and here the distrust that Bozizé had created at the regional level helped facilitate his downfall, as President Deby supported the Séléka's advance. Even then, though, regional heads of state tried to prevent the fall of Bangui by deploying MICOPAX; meanwhile, Bozizé managed to secure the support of South Africa, which deployed 400 soldiers to bolster his defence.<sup>98</sup> Again, we see Bozizé's position being propped up by other actors. In January 2013, the Libreville Agreement was signed, which, in hindsight, was Bozizé's last chance. Speaking at the time, Margaret Vogt (then head of

<sup>88</sup> Olin, 'Pathologies', p. 208.

<sup>89</sup> Bangui Accords, 'Declaration issued by heads of state' (1997), available at: [https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/CF\\_970125\\_BanguiAccords\\_0.pdf](https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/CF_970125_BanguiAccords_0.pdf).

<sup>90</sup> Lewicki, McAllister, and Bies, 'Trust and distrust', p. 439.

<sup>91</sup> Marchal, 'CAR and regional (dis)order', p. 184.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 183.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 184.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 184–5.

<sup>96</sup> Glawion and De Vries, 'Ruptures revoked'.

<sup>97</sup> Marchal, 'CAR and regional (dis)order', p. 211.

<sup>98</sup> Marchal, 'CAR and regional (dis)order', p. 211.

the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic) told the UN Security Council that the Séléka had advanced with little resistance from the national army because of the 'depth of decay within the armed forces' and that the soldiers had 'simply dropped their weapons and melted into the bushes'.<sup>99</sup> Against this backdrop, one may be forgiven for thinking that Bozizé would seek to implement the agreement, but, instead, 'he refused to implement the agreements provisions', and 'MICOPAX [Mission for the consolidation of peace in the Central African Republic] tactically withdrew its support for Bozizé, making no effort to implement the Libreville Agreement'.<sup>100</sup> The fact that the Séléka could take over the capital in three months highlights that the last dimension of trust – ability – had fallen.

Following the post-2012 mass atrocities, the final report of the Commission of Inquiry into CAR claimed:

The only goal of successive corrupt governments was personal enrichment of the political leaders and members of their families through embezzlement of public funds, looting of public corporations, and illegal exploitation of precious minerals and other natural resources while a very large majority of the people lived in abject poverty.<sup>101</sup>

The statement is important because it underlines the historical track record of corruption in CAR, yet it also raises the problematic issue of how accurate it is to say that trust is to be *rebuilt*, in a society in which political elites have *always* been regarded as untrustworthy. When one considers the track record of lies and embezzlement, it is difficult to imagine that the citizens would ever trust political elites. Rather than proceed on the assumption that trust broke down and needs to be rebuilt, we need to better understand the deep roots of political distrust itself. The focus now shifts to the historical practice of outsourcing.

### Outsourcing

Although very little is known about CAR's pre-colonial era, it seems that high levels of distrust were common. Drawing on Christian Prioul's landmark study, Smith argues that pre-colonial CAR was 'politically, socially and economically, organised in response to the devastating impact of sustained slave raiding' and that within this era there was a 'pervasive atmosphere of distrust'.<sup>102</sup> Whilst one may question what such historical events have to do with the present day, it is important to note that historical sources of distrust can have a direct bearing on contemporary developments. In Nunn and Wantchekon's study, *Slave Trade and the Origins of Mistrust in Africa*, they combine individual-level survey data with historical data on slave shipments and find that 'individuals whose ancestors were heavily raided during the slave trade are less trusting today'.<sup>103</sup> The generational impact is put down to two things. First, stories told from one generation to the next shape societal values, beliefs, and norms. Second, the weakening of legal and political institutions fuelled mistrust in the government.<sup>104</sup> It is this latter point that is the focus here, which brings us back to the aforementioned issue that trust in governments can be based on performance rather than a commitment to specific

<sup>99</sup>United Nations Press Release, 'Agreements signed today in Libreville to halt recent rebellion in Central African Republic, provide map for political transition, Security Council told', SC/10879 (11 January 2013).

<sup>100</sup>Marchal, 'CAR and regional (dis)order', p. 211.

<sup>101</sup>United Nations Commission of Inquiry, 'The International Commission of Inquiry on the Central African Republic', S/2014/928 (2014), p. 12.

<sup>102</sup>Smith, 'CAR's history', p. 18. Lombard's study of hunting and raiding, albeit within a certain area (north-eastern CAR), adds empirical weight to such portrayals, as these practices, within a 'zone of abandonment' undoubtedly fostered a broader sense of distrust in society, as people questioned whether other people could be claimed as property. See Louisa Lombard, *Hunting Game: Raiding Politics in the Central African Republic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020), esp. pp. 13, 22, 60–87.

<sup>103</sup>Nathan Nunn and Leonard Wantchekon, 'The slave trade and the origins of mistrust in Africa', *American Economic Review*, 101:7 (2011), pp. 3221–52 (p. 3221).

<sup>104</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 3249–50.

ideals.<sup>105</sup> In CAR, outsourcing has fuelled long-term distrust in the government precisely because it has undermined its ability to perform the tasks that citizens view as the primary functions of the state.

The roots of outsourcing in CAR can be traced back to French colonialism, which was predicated on ‘neglect punctuated by outburst of arbitrary brutality’.<sup>106</sup> Looking at what was going on in Congo Free State, Paris decided to subcontract ‘1,233,000 sq km to forty private companies that were granted a thirty-year monopoly’ and, in so doing, effectively outsourced its sovereignty.<sup>107</sup> Whilst the companies and arrangements changed over time, the common thread was that there was very little real investment and the actors involved committed widespread human rights violations. As Lombard notes, the French government were ‘repeatedly made aware’ of ‘widespread murders and torture’ – which in today’s terms could constitute crimes against humanity – and would pass protection legalization but were unwilling to invest the money needed to create institutions that could oversee and enforce these laws.<sup>108</sup> If we accept the depiction of pre-colonial CAR as one made up of a ‘pervasive atmosphere of distrust’,<sup>109</sup> it seems that the French embedded and accentuated distrust through their own brutality, as well as turning a blind eye to both human rights violations perpetrated by companies and the need for institutions that could foster trust.

Post-colonial practices have further entrenched the colonial practice of outsourcing. As Smith explains ‘a pattern of outsourced governance rooted in colonial practices – “concessionary politics” – has become engrained’.<sup>110</sup> Whether a leader comes to power through a democratic vote or via a coup, the pattern of behaviour is a familiar one. Drawing a similar conclusion to the aforementioned Commission of Inquiry, in 2015 the Advisory Group went further as they linked neglect to the 2013–15 atrocities:

The successive ruling elites and their entourage never demonstrated any sense of responsibility or accountability towards the populations they were meant to administer. Poor leadership and governance and the neglect of regions must therefore be seen as the principal causes of the current conflict.<sup>111</sup>

The statement captures the sentiment expressed by the majority of academics working on CAR, as the post-colonial era embodies a business-as-usual logic. This is not unique to CAR, and many elites have maintained their position in society by stripping the state of its resources to pay those who help them hold onto power.<sup>112</sup>

To illustrate the implications of outsourcing for distrust, let us consider two examples, the judiciary and security, for these are widely considered to be central pillars of any state. Regarding the former, the final Commission of Inquiry report explains that the problem was being reported in 2009: ‘[t]he justice system is plagued by a lack of resources, severely limiting its capacity to address impunity’.<sup>113</sup> To underline what a ‘lack of resources’ means, consider that by 2014 (during the civil war), there were only three functioning prisons in the whole of CAR.<sup>114</sup> When successive leaders

<sup>105</sup>Hutchinson and Johnson, ‘Capacity to trust?’

<sup>106</sup>Lombard, *Hunting Game*, p. 9.

<sup>107</sup>Smith, ‘CAR’s history’, pp. 20–1.

<sup>108</sup>Lombard, *State of Rebellion*, p. 7.

<sup>109</sup>Smith, ‘CAR’s history’, p. 18.

<sup>110</sup>Stephen W. Smith, ‘The elite’s road to riches in a poor country’, in Carayannis and Lombard (eds), *Making Sense*, pp. 102–22 (p. 102); also Lombard, *State of Rebellion*, p. 9.

<sup>111</sup>Report of the Advisory Group of Experts, ‘Review of the United Nations Peacebuilding Architecture’, 2015.

<sup>112</sup>Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz, *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999); Chris Allen, ‘Warfare, endemic violence and state collapse in Africa’, *Review of African Political Economy*, 26:81 (1999), pp. 367–84.

<sup>113</sup>United Nations Commission of Inquiry, ‘The International Commission of Inquiry on the Central African Republic’, p. 20.

<sup>114</sup>Cinq-Mars, ‘Too little, too late’, p. 6.

fail to invest in creating a system that can enforce the law, it fuels a climate of violence, as people know they can commit even the most heinous crimes with impunity.<sup>115</sup> It also fosters distrust in the government, as people perceive that the leaders are so corrupt that they would rather spend foreign aid on themselves than protect citizens. This, of course, is accentuated by the fact that political elites are often the perpetrators of gross human rights violations themselves. This creates an environment in which grievances juxtaposed with impunity acts to incentivize coups and human rights violations.

Regarding security, the latest chapter in how outsourcing fuels distrust is unfolding in the 'security' provided by the Russian 'semi-state force' the Wagner Group.<sup>116</sup> In 2017, Touadéra's government accepted Russia's offer to broker what became known as the 2019 Khartoum Agreement, which was a peace agreement between the government and 14 armed groups. Since 2021, however, the government has waged a brutal counteroffensive with the support of Wagner and Rwandan troops to prevent another coup; yet some analysts claim that Wagner are beyond the control of the government.<sup>117</sup> Although Wagner have helped reduce the threat posed by armed groups and brought stability to certain parts of the country,<sup>118</sup> their violent methods have drawn international condemnation. In 2021, a UN special Commission of Inquiry found that 'systematic and grave human rights violations' are being carried out by all parties to the conflict, including the Wagner Group.<sup>119</sup> Echoing this finding, the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project found that civilian targeting accounts for 52 per cent of Wagner's violence in CAR. The fact that they often operate independently in CAR (as opposed to in Mali, where they work alongside state forces) has seemingly increased their level of impunity.<sup>120</sup> At the local level, there are many citizens who welcome the improved security situation that has arisen due to Wagner pushing armed groups out of certain towns.<sup>121</sup> However, there are many who tell a different story: '[t]he first time they came, I was very happy we all were – finally our suffering from armed groups will end because they're here to help the government and save us ... but eventually we realised [what] they were doing and we ran for our lives'.<sup>122</sup> When one combines such eyewitness accounts with reports that Russian disinformation campaigns are fanning 'distrust and instability',<sup>123</sup> the implications of outsourcing security to the Russians does not bode well for the future, even if it ensures regime survival in the short term.

To bring the focus on political distrust to a close, the leadership style of the political elites in the post-Cold War period, combined with long-term practices such as outsourcing, created an environment in which many citizens understandably distrusted the government. Both Patassé and Bozizé proclaimed that they could be trusted, yet both oversaw grave human rights violations and reneged on commitments to the point that they were viewed as untrustworthy. Within CAR, this

<sup>115</sup>United Nations Commission of Inquiry, 'The International Commission of Inquiry on the Central African Republic', p. 15.

<sup>116</sup>Kimberly Marten, 'Russia's use of semi-state security forces: The case of the Wagner Group', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 35:3 (2019), pp. 181–204.

<sup>117</sup>Neil Munshi and Max Seddon, 'Russian mercenaries leave a trail of destruction in the Central African Republic', *Financial Times* (22 October 2021), available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/020de965-429e-4fb9-9eed-f7e4370514b3>.

<sup>118</sup>John Lechner, 'Are Russian mercenaries bad for the Central African Republic?' *Responsible Statecraft* (11 April 2023), available at: <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2023/04/11/are-russian-mercenaries-bad-for-the-central-african-republic>.

<sup>119</sup>United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 'CAR: Experts alarmed by government's use of "Russian trainers", close contacts with UN peacekeepers' (2021), available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2021/03/car-experts-alarmed-governments-use-russian-trainers-close-contacts-un?LangID=E&NewsID=26961>.

<sup>120</sup>Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, 'Wagner Group operations in Africa' (2022), available at: <https://acleddata.com/2022/08/30/wagner-group-operations-in-africa-civilian-targeting-trends-in-the-central-african-republic-and-mali/>.

<sup>121</sup>Lechner, 'Are Russian mercenaries bad for the Central African Republic?'

<sup>122</sup>Munshi and Seddon, 'Russian mercenaries leave a trail of destruction.'

<sup>123</sup>Emman El-Badawy, Sandun Munasinghe, Audu Bulama Bukarti, and Beatrice Bianchi, 'Security, soft power and regime support: Spheres of Russian influence in Africa', Tony Blair Institute for Global Change (2023), p. 28, available at: <https://institute.global/policy/security-soft-power-and-regime-support-spheres-russian-influence-africa>.

creates an environment in which coups become more likely, as the actors involved see little incentive in continuing to engage with elites that do not uphold agreements. Furthermore, the actors involved may know that they have a reasonable chance of success, which was the case in 2013, even though the Séléka arose in the periphery rather than the capital. If we accept that ‘trust is the expectation of no harm in contexts where betrayal is always a possibility’, the expectation in CAR at the time was that the government would both betray and harm. Here, we see the multifaceted role that distrust plays, as on a day-to-day basis it can act as a form of protection but can also catalyse rebellions against elites that are viewed as untrustworthy. The role of distrust is also pivotal in explaining why the coup was successful, as regional players withdrew their support for Bozizé as he failed to uphold commitments such as the Libreville Agreement. At this point, however, it is important to recall that a successful coup is one thing and mass atrocities are another; to appreciate why a discourse of threat took hold in the aftermath of the coup, it is important to understand the long-term social trust dynamics at play.

### Social distrust

When it comes to the relationship between social distrust and mass violence, it is important to bear in mind that mass atrocities are not extraordinary societal episodes that represent a rupture in reality but are, instead, part of longer-term processes. Lombard and Batianga-Kinzi argue that the *mass* violence in CAR is rooted in everyday violent practices such as ‘popular punishment’, in which people are killed for being witches.<sup>124</sup> To link this back to the concept of trust, the point here is twofold. First, these everyday violent practices stem, in part, from distrust and therefore need to be factored into our understanding of what drives mass atrocities. Second, these practices in and of themselves also fuel distrust, which acts as a source of protection and, as a result, cannot necessarily be fixed as suggested in mainstream accounts. This section explains the perceived threats that exist in both the visible and invisible world through an exploration of identity politics and witchcraft.

### Identity politics

Within CAR there is no consensus over ‘who is Central African’. Individuals may be legally Central African, but they are still viewed as outsiders, for example, if they come from certain groups and are therefore viewed as a threat. The failure to forge a consensus over who is Central African prevents the bonds of trust being established.

To provide some overarching context, let us turn to Geschiere’s study, *The Perils of Belonging: Autochthony, Citizenship, and Exclusion in Africa and Europe*.<sup>125</sup> The study analyses the role of autochthony, ‘to be born from the soil’, in the post-Cold War era. Whereas many hoped that globalization would bring about a new liberal era of universalism, he argues ‘the return of the local’ is evident in very different contexts around the world, with questions such as ‘who belongs? and how one can prove belonging?’ coming to the fore of international relations.<sup>126</sup> The concept of autochthony is evidenced to have ancestral roots which underpin constructions of identity, as individuals and groups appeal to X and Y, which may be real or not, when creating a sense of belonging. Autochthony has been ‘especially associated with Francophone Africa’<sup>127</sup> (which of course has relevance for CAR) and is extremely powerful, as it has a perceived authenticity which derives from people feeling that they are naturally born from the soil.<sup>128</sup> The implication of this is that individuals and groups may be viewed as not belonging and, in turn, as legitimate targets of oppression and

<sup>124</sup>Lombard and Batianga-Kinzi, ‘Violence, popular punishment’.

<sup>125</sup>Peter Geschiere, *The Perils of Belonging: Autochthony, Citizenship, and Exclusion in Africa and Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

<sup>126</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 1–6.

<sup>127</sup>To be clear, Geschiere’s study exposes that this practice spread to many different parts of the world.

<sup>128</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 3.

violence, with political leaders such as Gbago of the Ivory Coast using similar thinking to inspire violence.<sup>129</sup>

Applying the concept of autochthony to the case of CAR, Collins and Vlavinou highlight that relations between Muslim minorities and non-Muslims are not determined by religion but by the question of ‘who is a Central African?’<sup>130</sup> Through a combination of archival research and interviews, the study reveals how far reaching hostility towards Muslim groups has been. Analysing newspapers between 2003 and 2018, the authors found that negative stories were linked to religion but only if the person in question happened to be Muslim. Collins and Vlavinou argue that the media routinely portray Muslims as ‘social ills’ and ‘essentialised’ to the point that ‘a typical Muslim, is always untrustworthy’.<sup>131</sup> This forms part of a broader government-led discourse of discrimination, which allows the government to regulate ‘Muslim access to the state and associated benefits, notably regarding blunt considerations of “proper” citizenship’.<sup>132</sup> Muslims face a double-edged sword, in that the discourse frames them as untrustworthy foreigners whilst government practices prevent them from securing official documents, the outcome of which is that Muslims are targeted because they are seen as foreigners. The authors detail how specific events, such as ‘two adolescents ... found dead in a Chadian Muslim’s car’ in 2011, have had societal repercussions; the family of the person who owned the car was ‘attacked and accused of witchcraft’ and ‘several mosques were destroyed, and Muslims killed’.<sup>133</sup> Simply speaking, it seems the common discourse presents Muslims as illegitimate citizens and, as a result, legitimate targets of attack. As Kilembe explains, ‘[i]n CAR, Muslims are automatically considered foreigners’ and having an ‘Arab name can lead to harassment, swindling, exclusion, and degrading treatment’.<sup>134</sup>

To better understand why this is the case, it is important to consider how French colonialism has shaped identity politics in CAR, which is evident in the language of Sango. Although few people spoke Sango when the French arrived in CAR, France promoted it to serve their own interests of aiding communication to facilitate their influence and control.<sup>135</sup> The number of people speaking Sango grew significantly as it was easy to learn, but it still had colonial linkages, and it was not until the post-colonial era that it become more popular. As Lombard describes, legally one can be Central African, but if a person cannot speak Sango, they are viewed with suspicion and their documents perceived as fake.<sup>136</sup> Here we see the role of distrust at the social and cultural level working on a day-to-day basis. Sango may have been constructed, but it appears to be a critical fault line that divides ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’ as it shapes perceptions of ‘foreignness’. For example, in interviews at local sites in 2019, Glawion, Van Der Lijn, and de Zwaan found that locals were eager to see displaced people return to the area but do not extend this welcome to ‘foreigners’, whom locals, including Muslims, defined as including non-Sango speakers.<sup>137</sup> Sango is so embedded, therefore, that those who cannot speak it are viewed as untrustworthy. Placing this within the broader context of the state, Lombard argues that ‘Sango seems more enduring a firmament of nationhood and belonging – of safety amid danger’.<sup>138</sup> If anything, it would seem that Sango speakers share a common bond of distrust against those who do not speak Sango.

<sup>129</sup> Geschiere, *The Perils of Belonging*, p. 3.

<sup>130</sup> Laura Collins and Gino Vlavinou, ‘A minority in conflict: Muslim communities, state interaction, and patterns of exclusion in the central African Republic’, *Islamic Africa*, 12:2 (2022), pp. 186–210.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

<sup>134</sup> Faouzi Kilembe, ‘Local dynamics in the Pk5 District of Bangui’, in Carayannis and Lombard (eds), *Making Sense*, pp. 76–101 (pp. 89–90).

<sup>135</sup> Lombard, *State of Rebellion*, pp. 188–9.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>137</sup> Tim Glawion, Jair Van Der Lijn, and Nikki de Zwaan, ‘Securing legitimate stability in CAR: External assumptions and local perspectives’, *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, 2019, pp. 1–19 (p. 7).

<sup>138</sup> Lombard, *State of Rebellion*, p. 189.

To return to Trust Studies and debates over the relationship between trust and distrust,<sup>139</sup> in CAR it is evident that trust and distrust exist at the same time. For instance, Bierschenk and Sardan conducted anthropological research at five sites in CAR and found that these sites were ‘far from harmonious’ but that ‘[o]pen and public confrontation between warring parties is usually avoided because the individuals involved know that they may need the cooperation of the other individual in the future.’<sup>140</sup> It would seem that the individuals involved make rational calculations that they will not confront one another because they may need each other’s help at some point in the future. They engage in cooperation, therefore, and in so doing trust that person B will fulfil Y (and vice versa), but as authors go on to explain, this does not mean the conflicts are resolved. The conflicts are ‘supressed’ and ‘shift in disguised form to other areas of their complex relationships’ which then operate ‘against a latent background of conflict.’<sup>141</sup> The picture painted therefore, is one of day-to-day activities that operate under a permanent state of suspicion. In turn, it raises questions over whether high levels of trust exist in the manner implied in attempts to rebuild trust.

It is evident that prior to the Séléka coup, the question of who belongs, and the implications of this for society as a whole, provided fertile ground for the violence that was to follow. The fact that the Séléka included a lot of ‘outsiders’ (including mercenaries from Chad and Sudan) only heightened distrust. As Carayannis and Lombard explain, ‘the failure of some among them [Séléka] to speak Sango fed the perception among people living in these places that their lives, lands, and livelihoods were being despoiled by rapacious foreigners.’<sup>142</sup> From a trust perspective, the motives and integrity of the individuals involved were questioned from the outset. Not just because of what they were doing (staging a coup) but also because of perceptions regarding who they were (non-Central Africans), even though the group did include Central Africans, some with legitimate grievances. This brings us full circle, as the concept of autochthony was then evident in the anti-Balaka movement, which led to allegations of genocide and ethnic cleansing. As Collins and Vlavonou explain, ‘former President Bozizé’s co-ethnic Gbaya, who were heavily implicated in the anti-Balaka, propagated a discourse of autochthony, making claims to be “true” Central Africans.’<sup>143</sup> This invoked a historical narrative in which non-Central Africans had to be destroyed because they could not be trusted.

### *Distrusting the invisible*

To understand CAR, one must factor in the role of invisible forces, recognized as ‘witchcraft’ and ‘sorcery’ in English. These are not unique to CAR and have been studied by anthropologists throughout Africa.<sup>144</sup> The studies address eurocentrism, economics, power relations, symbolism, morality, and, of relevance here, trust. Regarding the latter, Geschiere’s study *Witchcraft, Intimacy and Trust* documents his changing position towards witchcraft, which centres on intimacy and trust. Geschiere explains that in 1971, when conducting fieldwork among the Maka, his first encounter with these practices filled him with ‘excitement’ but over 40 years later, the ‘ugly effects’ of such practices led him to change his mind as these invisible forces are a source of ‘great unrest and fear’, which fuel violence and tear families and communities apart.<sup>145</sup> Whilst he questions whether a solution can be found, he believes that academic study can help and holds on to the fact that ‘people do manage to establish trust, even though one’s intimate relations are heavily charged with

<sup>139</sup> Cook, Hardin, and Levi, *Cooperation without Trust?*; Lewicki, McAllister, and Bies, ‘Trust and distrust’.

<sup>140</sup> Thomas Bierschenk and Jean-Pierre Olivier De Sardan, ‘Local powers and a distant state in rural Central African Republic’, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 35:3 (1997), pp. 441–68 (p. 459).

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>142</sup> Carayannis and Lombard, ‘A concluding note’, p. 320.

<sup>143</sup> Collins and Vlavonou, ‘A minority in conflict’, pp. 188, 202.

<sup>144</sup> Perter Geschiere, *The Modernity of Witchcraft* (London: University of Virginia Press, 1997); Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (eds), *Modernity and Its Malcontents*, 2nd ed. (London: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

<sup>145</sup> Peter Geschiere, *Witchcraft, Intimacy, and Trust: Africa in Comparison* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), pp. xii–xiii.



danger.<sup>146</sup> Such thinking reinforces the view that trust and distrust can operate at the same time, whilst beginning to illustrate the magnitude of the task at hand, as there is no easy solution.

From a trust perspective, the belief that invisible forces exist and that they have their own agency is problematic, because how can you trust the motives and intentions of other actors if you do not think they determine their own behaviour? To better understand this, it is first important to consider that ‘the majority of Central Africans are part of the ethnic-linguistic cluster known as the “Ubangian” peoples’ for whom ‘witchcraft is a substance housed in the human body. This substance is like a small animal.’<sup>147</sup> From this perspective, all human beings have something within them that they are not able to fully control, there is ‘hidden agency.’<sup>148</sup> This can lead to both positive and negative interpretations. Regarding the former, some believe that great leaders must have ‘cultivated and expanded their witchcraft substance.’<sup>149</sup> In other words, the individuals in question managed to gain control of this aspect of themselves, something which remains unachievable for everyday Central Africans. Regarding the latter, there is a common belief that the substance will grow, and, because the individual involved cannot control it, it poses a threat to both them and society at large.<sup>150</sup>

The cultural view of invisible forces poses a fundamental challenge to liberal attempts to rebuild trust, as it is evident that this is not a crisis in trust that can be fixed. Furthermore, any actor, whether local, the state, or external, faces a pressing dilemma. To illustrate this, let us take a real-world example. In 1991, Geschiere explained that in the village Ntdoua (Cameroon), an elderly man was ‘dragged’ to the authorities for allegedly killing ‘several villagers with his witchcraft.’<sup>151</sup> The prosecutor investigated the allegations but dismissed them due to a lack of evidence and released the old man, who was then killed by the villagers a few months later. This led to 17 young men being arrested. In a discussion with Geschiere, the new prosecutor explained the ‘dilemma’ he faced, as on one hand, he had an obligation to investigate and charge the young men if found guilty, because they cannot take the law into their own hands, but, on the other hand, ‘condemning them would also be dangerous since this would confirm the general idea that the state was inclined to protect witches.’<sup>152</sup> The example raises the question which, as of yet, has not been answered: how can the problem of witchcraft and sorcery be resolved? In large part, the failure to resolve this lies in the fact that there is no shared understanding of the problem. Within certain cultures, the problem is the existence of witches and sorcery; within other cultures, the problem is the belief in, and reaction to, the existence of witches and sorcery. Accordingly, it once again underlines the magnitude of the task at hand and requires actors to gain a more informed understanding of the complexities that surround trust at the local level.

To bring the analysis of social distrust to a close, identity politics and underlying narratives of distrust surrounding witchcraft provided fertile ground for hatred, fear, and violence to flourish in the aftermath of the 2013 coup. Everyday discourses in CAR embody narratives that reject the idea that certain groups such as Muslims and non-Sango speakers are legitimate citizens. At the same time, the belief that invisible forces shape people’s behaviour, although not unique to CAR or Africa, sees suspicion and distrust fuel violence daily. At this point, it is worth noting that ‘every single day someone is killed in CAR for having perpetrated witchcraft.’<sup>153</sup> The culmination of these factors was that CAR was susceptible to mass atrocities taking place. Whilst liberal attempts to rebuild trust may be well intentioned, a more informed understanding of the trust dynamics involved

<sup>146</sup>Ibid., p. xiii.

<sup>147</sup>Lombard, *State of Rebellion*, p. 12.

<sup>148</sup>Andrew Apter, ‘Antinga revisited: Witchcraft and the cocoa economy, 1950–1951’, in Comaroff and Comaroff (eds), *Modernity and Its Malcontents*, pp. 111–28 (p. 124).

<sup>149</sup>Lombard, *State of Rebellion*, p. 13.

<sup>150</sup>Lombard, *State of Rebellion*, p. 13.

<sup>151</sup>Geschiere, *The Modernity of Witchcraft*, p. 185.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid.

<sup>153</sup>Marchal, ‘Being rich, being poor’, p. 55.

means facing up to the fact that some trust-related issues – for example, around practices such as witchcraft – will not be solved anytime soon.

## Conclusion

Collective knowledge of mass atrocities and mass atrocity prevention has advanced significantly in the 21st century; however, it is difficult to identify a factor that is cited as often as [dis]trust yet remains so under-researched. The article paves the way for a new research agenda that brings together Trust Studies and mass atrocity prevention, primarily by highlighting the conceptual complexities and debates surrounding trust and distrust while also analysing how these concepts relate to the mass violence witnessed in CAR.

The article makes two contributions. First, it provides a more informed understanding of the mass violence that took place in CAR. The study reveals that there is widespread distrust in both political relations (in the government) and social relations (between individuals and groups). These have historical roots, as pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial practices have fuelled both. The new era of democracy did nothing to address these, as political elites further entrenched and manipulated distrust in the post-Cold War era. High levels of political and social distrust acted as key factors in enabling the mass atrocities to take place between 2013 and 2015. The former helped catalyse the coup and its success, whilst the latter was manipulated to radicalize people into perpetrating mass atrocities. Second, it argues that the mainstream commitment to ‘rebuilding trust’ is built on misguided assumptions, as trust did not exist and break down as assumed in this approach. Indeed, it would be naive to think that distrust can be eradicated, and nor should it be because (a) cooperation can occur in the absence of trust and (b) distrust has a normative value. Whilst actors should seek to address the negative side of trust dynamics, they need to hold a more informed understanding of the complexities involved, whilst also being aware that they themselves may be perceived as untrustworthy. If it is the case that CAR is dominated by people who understandably distrust the government, external actors, and ‘others’ in society, and furthermore, this distrust acts as a source of protection, it begins to show the magnitude of the task at hand for anyone seeking to address trust-related issues in CAR.

Whilst a greater focus on recent developments is beyond the scope of this article, there are widespread concerns of mass atrocities in the near future. The Early Warning Project categorizes CAR as an ongoing case of mass killing and the 16th highest-risk country for new mass killing in 2023.<sup>154</sup> Whilst the government of CAR’s relationship with the Wagner Group has gained international attention, it is also important to note that the government’s increasing authoritarianism is of serious concern.<sup>155</sup> From a trust perspective, this may exacerbate distrust in elites, thus facilitating further anti-government offensives, which often create an environment in which atrocities are perpetrated. Also, we may see government and non-government actors manipulate distrust to radicalize people into further mass violence. Ten years on from the Séléka coup, the risk of mass atrocities in CAR remains ever present.

Although the article focused on CAR, it raises observations, concerns, and questions that feed into broader debates over the causes of mass violence and mass atrocity prevention strategies. Going forward, academics and policymakers need to develop a more informed understanding of trust dynamics within the context of mass atrocities. This is no easy task and will require many different methodological and disciplinary approaches. We need to better understand the

<sup>154</sup>Early Warning Project, ‘Countries at risk for mass killings 2022–23: Early warning project statistical risk assessment results’, available at: <https://earlywarningproject.ushmm.org/>.

<sup>155</sup>Human Rights Watch, ‘Central African Republic: Closing Civic Space’, 2023, available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/04/04/central-african-republic-closing-civic-space>; Vianney Ingasso, John Lechner, and Marcel Plichta, ‘Wagner is only one piece in the Central African Republic’s messy puzzle’, *World Politics Review* (31 January 2023), available at: <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/central-african-republic-civil-war-politics-russia-touadera/?one-time-read-code=184813168070789872877>.

multifaceted roles of trust and distrust, and their relationship with related aspects such as cooperation and, finally, consider not just how to, but who can, facilitate trust creation, if indeed, this is what is required on a case-by-case basis. Only then can actors begin to build more effective mass atrocity prevention strategies, which are desperately needed as mass atrocities continue to cause immeasurable harm around the world.

**Acknowledgements.** An earlier version of this article was presented to the Trust Studies in International Relations network in December 2021 and also to the School of Politics and International Studies at the University of Leeds in February 2022. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who attended for their constructive comments. I would also like to thank Garrett. W. Brown, Nicholas J. Wheeler, and David Patrick for their feedback on earlier drafts and presentations of this paper.

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