

Effect of peace processes and diplomacy on nature and scale of violence or atrocities

Peace process interventions, including mediation, ceasefires, and local agreements, has harmful effects on violence.

Geographic region: Sub Saharan Africa, Latin America and Caribbean, Middle East and North Africa, Global

Effect size: Harmful effect ($g=-0.44$)

Confidence in study findings: Medium (9 studies with 28 effect sizes)

Short summary

Peace process interventions, including mediation, ceasefires, and local peace agreements, could reduce violence and foster sustainable peace. Mediation fosters dialogue, ceasefires provide temporary de-escalation, and local agreements can leverage indigenous practices to manage conflicts. These interventions often achieve short-term reductions in violence but can have harmful effects, such as rebel group fragmentation or selective violence. Evidence from 9 non-experimental studies across global, regional, and local contexts shows that success depends on the mechanisms used, the conflict phase, and local dynamics. Community-level and context-sensitive approaches yield more consistent outcomes in reducing the intensity of conflict.

Long summary

The intervention

Peace process interventions often include mediation, ceasefires, and local peace agreements. These aim to reduce conflict intensity and foster sustainable peace. Mediation facilitates dialogue and negotiation between conflicting parties, while ceasefires serve to de-escalate violence temporarily. Local peace agreements leverage on indigenous mechanisms to promote cooperation and prevent the recurrence of conflict. These interventions are implemented in a variety of contexts, ranging from local-level disputes to large-scale civil wars, and their duration can vary depending on the scope and scale of the conflict.

How the intervention is expected to affect this outcome

Mediation reduces violence by addressing core issues of the conflict, fostering trust, and creating platforms for dialogue. Ceasefires halt hostilities temporarily, allowing space for further negotiations or the implementation of agreements. Local peace agreements are expected to de-escalate violence at the community level by engaging local leaders and leveraging culturally relevant conflict resolution practices.

The evidence base

The cell includes: 9 impact evaluation studies, 1 systematic review, and 5 qualitative studies.

The review discusses the effects of different interventions (which include infrastructure investment) on mitigating or preventing armed violence in developing and middle-income countries.

The primary studies are set in: Mozambique (1 study), Kenya & Côte d'Ivoire (1 study), Sudan (2 studies), Philippines & Chad (1 study), Colombia (2 studies), Syria (2 studies), Myanmar (1 study), and globally (4 studies).

Evidence findings

Peace process interventions generally reduce the scale of violence by fostering dialogue, building trust, and creating temporary or lasting agreements to de-escalate conflicts. Mediation and local agreements are commonly associated with short-term reductions in violence, especially when addressing core issues or involving local actors. However, these effects can vary, as interventions sometimes lead to unintended consequences, such as increased fragmentation among rebel groups or shifts in violence to other forms or regions. The effectiveness of interventions depends on the context, the conflict phase, and the mechanisms employed.

The review evidence

The review finds that domestic actors are central to resolving armed violence, while external mediators typically play a supplementary role but can sometimes escalate conflicts.

The impact evaluation evidence

There are 9 impact evaluations. Nine study summaries are thus provided here:

DeRouen & Ishita (2018) examines the role of mediation and United Nations peacekeeping operations (UNPKOs) in civil war peace agreements, focusing on their combined effect in reducing the risk of renewed or continued violence and enhancing the duration of peace agreements. The context includes various civil war scenarios globally, with a specific case study on the peace process in Guatemala during the 1990s, where mediation and peacekeeping efforts were instrumental in ending a long-standing conflict. The research utilizes a sample of 154 civil war peace agreements signed between 1975 and 2011, sourced from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP). The study employs logit and hazard models to analyze the effects of mediation and UNPKOs on the likelihood of violence recurrence and the duration of peace agreements. The analysis includes control variables such as agreement design, democracy, and income per capita. The study finds that mediation significantly reduces the probability of renewed violence, with a negative and significant effect on the risk of recurrence. The interaction of mediation and UNPKOs also shows a negative effect on recurrence, particularly at lower levels of recurrence risk. The study is rated low confidence due to its non-experimental design and little description of the intervention.

Duursma (2021a) assessed how peace processes influence the likelihood of fragmentation within rebel groups during civil wars. The analysis builds on theories suggesting that internal rebel factionalism is often intensified by peace talks, as factions within rebel groups may hold divergent views on negotiations, peace agreements, or their implementation. Using a large dataset covering conflict dyads from 1975 to 2011, the study coded peace processes in three distinct phases: the initiation of peace talks, the signing of peace agreements, and the implementation of agreements. It then applied a logit model to analyze the probability of a rebel group splitting in relation to these phases, with data drawn from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) and the FORGE dataset to track rebel splits. The results show a statistically significant increase in the likelihood of rebel fragmentation during peace processes. Specifically, rebel groups are more likely to splinter when peace negotiations are

in progress and more likely to fragment following the signing of a peace agreement. The study is rated low confidence due to its inadequate description of the intervention.

Duursma (2021b) examines the impact of local mediation efforts in reducing violence in Darfur, Sudan. Local mediation, involving negotiations led by local leaders and intermediaries rather than formal international actors, aims to manage and de-escalate violence between armed factions in the short term. Using event data on violent incidents in Darfur from 2003 to 2018, the study applies a logistic regression model to compare the likelihood of violent incidents before and after local mediation efforts, focusing on incidents involving different intercommunal groups and militias. The analysis finds that local mediation efforts are associated with a statistically significant reduction in violence in the short term. Specifically, the likelihood of violent incidents decreases in areas where local leaders successfully negotiate truces or agreements, suggesting that local mediation can temporarily mitigate conflict intensity and improve security. The impact of local mediation varies depending on the groups involved. The study is rated medium as it is non-experimental and due to its partial description of the intervention.

Gómez Triana and Ríos (2022) analyzes the effects of Colombia's 2016 peace agreement with the FARC-EP on armed violence in the Llanos Orientales region. As mentioned in the study, while the peace agreement aimed to end conflict with FARC-EP, this region, previously dominated by the FARC-EP's Eastern Bloc, continues to experience violence due to the emergence of dissident factions and other armed groups, including post-paramilitary groups and ELN guerrillas. The study applied a binomial logit regression model to analyze the presence of armed groups across 316 municipal observations in the Llanos Orientales region from 2016 to 2020. This model assesses factors like poverty, coca cultivation, and economic resources (e.g., oil exploitation) as predictors of armed group presence. Data is sourced from monitoring organizations on conflict, economic indicators, and local mapping software (QGIS) to visualize the spatial distribution of these armed groups post-peace agreement. Findings show that poverty and coca cultivation are significant predictors of armed group presence, especially for FARC-EP dissidents, while wax palm cultivation is associated with paramilitary successor groups. Armed group presence varies by economic resources in the region. Coca cultivation strongly correlates with dissident groups, while oil exploitation aligns with the ELN's areas of influence, reflecting each group's financial strategies. The study is rated medium as it is non-experimental and due to its partial description of the intervention.

Gromes (2021) evaluates the hypothesis that military victories are more effective than peace agreements in preventing the recurrence of civil war. The authors critically examine post-conflict stability dynamics, proposing that negotiated settlements may be equally, if not more, effective in fostering enduring peace by addressing underlying governance issues. The study applies Weibull models to examine 48 civil wars ending between 1990 and 2009, assessing the effect of military victories versus peace agreements on the likelihood of conflict recurrence. It includes controls for factors such as GDP per capita, military balance, government effectiveness, and civil war fatalities. The analysis reveals that peace agreements are associated with a 77–94% decrease in recurrence risk. The study is rated medium as it is non-experimental.

Lundgren (2020) examined the causal mechanisms through which international organizations (IOs) mediate civil wars, with a focus on the Arab League and United Nations interventions in Syria during 2011-2012. The study employed a structured case comparison, analyzing the interventions by the Arab League and the UN using both quantitative and qualitative data. The study incorporates time-series analysis of fatality statistics and relies on interview data, official documents, and day-to-day reporting to trace causal mechanisms. Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression and autoregressive integrated moving average (ARIMA) time-series analysis are used to measure the interventions' effect on conflict intensity, particularly through daily fatality counts. The findings suggest that the UN's mediation strategies produced statistically significant short-term reductions in violence. However, the significance of these

reductions did not extend to long-term conflict resolution. It was also found that the UN's capacity for broad ceasefire monitoring correlated with a statistically significant reduction in conflict intensity in monitored zones. The highlights the temporary calming effect in areas with active UN monitoring. The study is rated medium as it is non-experimental.

Lundgren, Svensson and Karakus (2023) examines local ceasefire agreements as mechanisms to reduce conflict intensity in civil wars, specifically analyzing 145 ceasefires from the Syrian Civil War (2011–2019). Local ceasefires are referred to as temporary, geographically limited agreements aimed at halting hostilities in specific areas without affecting fighting elsewhere. The study combines interrupted time-series analysis and spatial panel regression to assess the effects of ceasefires on conflict intensity. The sample includes geo-referenced data on local battle-related fatalities in Syria, segmented into 540 grid cells with daily observations. The study uses data from the Syrian Revolution Martyr Database and the Uppsala Conflict Data Program to track fatalities and spatially analyze violence trends before, during, and after ceasefire periods. The results show that local ceasefires have varied immediate effects, with some agreements leading to temporary escalation and others to de-escalation. Over time, however, the de-escalatory effects of ceasefires are more consistent. The study also finds that ceasefire effects extend to neighboring areas, suggesting a spatial diffusion of de-escalation. Areas adjacent to ceasefire zones often experience reductions in violence, as evidenced by a statistically significant decrease in battle-related fatalities in these regions. The study is rated low confidence due to the inadequate description of the intervention.

Prem et al. (2022) investigates the unintended consequences of the FARC's 2014 permanent ceasefire in Colombia, focusing on the increase in selective violence against social leaders in former FARC strongholds. The study employs a triple-differences methodology, leveraging temporal variation from the ceasefire and spatial variation in FARC presence and exposure to other armed groups. Municipal-level data on killings, armed group presence, and socio-economic indicators were analyzed to measure the differential impact of the ceasefire on social leader victimization. Findings suggest that the ceasefire led to a significant increase in the assassination of social leaders in areas both previously controlled by FARC and exposed to other armed groups. These killings were not observed in areas with only FARC presence or only exposure to other groups. The increase in killings was particularly pronounced in municipalities with weak state capacity, including low judicial efficiency and high electoral risk, high land restitution claims, and proximate to military bases. The study is rated low due the the lack of description of the evaluation questions.

Ruhe (2021) examines the role of third-party mediation in reducing conflict intensity, focusing on how mediation affects monthly fatality rates in civil conflicts across Africa from 1993 to 2007. Mediation, which encourages conflicting parties to negotiate, may vary in effectiveness depending on whether core issues of the conflict are addressed during talks. The analysis uses a temporally disaggregated approach, examining monthly data on battle-related fatalities from African intrastate conflicts between 1993 and 2007. Utilizing the UCDP Georeferenced Event dataset (GED) and the Managing Intrastate Conflict dataset (MIC), the study assesses conflict intensity at the bilateral-month level, distinguishing mediation types based on whether they address main conflict incompatibilities. The results of the study suggest that mediation addressing core conflict issues leads to a significant and lasting reduction in conflict intensity, with fatalities dropping by approximately 50% on average and maintaining lower levels over time. In contrast, mediation focused on conflict behavior rather than core issues results in only temporary reductions in violence, with fatalities rebounding to pre-mediation levels within a few months. The study is rated low confidence due to the inadequate description of the evaluation question.

Confidence assessment

Overall medium: While there are 9 impact evaluations included in this cell, the findings tend to be inconsistent.

Link to review summaries

Cramer (2016)

All studies may be accessed via the EGM.

Other outcomes in the study:

Violence and atrocity prevention / Diplomatic Relations & Peaceful dispute resolution

Community and state governance / Transitions of power

Community and state governance / Government performance