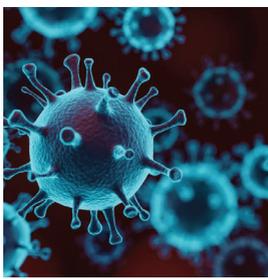
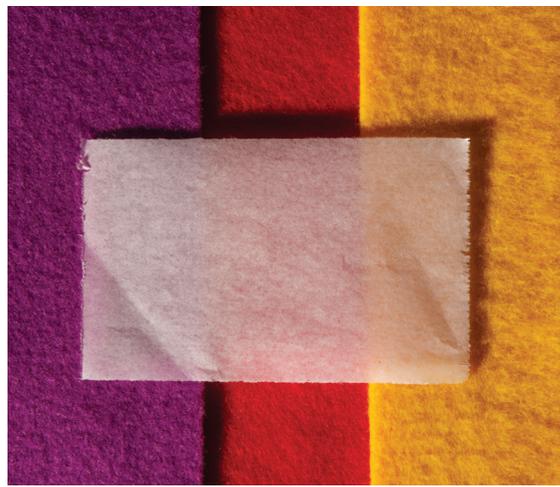




RESEARCH REPORT: COVID-19 SERIES



The Impact of Covid-19 on Peace and Transition Processes: Tracking the Trends

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This report is part of a body of work and a set of connected research projects on Covid-19, peace, and conflict. Please visit <https://www.politicalsettlements.org/covid-19/covid-19-research/> to find out more about the Political Settlement Research Programme's research projects on Covid-19. For wider resources on Covid-19, peace, and conflict, please refer to: <https://www.politicalsettlements.org/covid-19/resources/>.

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Main Findings

The research used expert surveys on a set of conflict countries, to understand how Covid-19 pandemic responses were affecting conflict and peace process dynamics.

Our main findings were as follows:

1. It could have been expected that the Covid-19 crisis would have provided an incentive to opposing groups to 'pull together' around ceasefires and peace initiatives. However, experts were pessimistic overall about the pandemic's impact on peace processes. Main causes for pessimism were the diversion of national and international actors' attention, potentially reduced donor funds, and the strategic 'gaming' of the crisis by government and non-state actors for conflict-related purposes.
2. The Covid-19 crisis, as such, is not 'causing' conflict but is playing into existing conflict fault lines and threats to peace processes.
3. The UN Secretary-General's global ceasefire call was only of limited success, with tangible, albeit short-lived, impact in Colombia, the Philippines, and Yemen. In all of these countries, those declaring ceasefires (the ELN in Colombia, the CPP-NPA in the Philippines, and the Joint Coalition Forces in Yemen) have not extended their initial ceasefires.
4. Governments seem to be more at risk of losing public support compared with armed groups or the non-armed opposition.
5. Authoritarian tendencies appear to be strengthening under the guise of Covid-19 responses, especially where there are already authoritarian governments in place. Particular worries included shrinking civil society space (for all forms of activity), and the postponement of elections.
6. The crisis-related lack of national peace processes and conflict oversight has provided an opportunity for armed campaigns, and has also resulted in an increase of local violence in, for instance, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Kenya, Libya, South Sudan, and Yemen.

7. Some peace talks that are being kept alive by moving them online, such as in Sudan and Myanmar, are facing severe challenges due to the lack of face-to-face interaction. While there is mounting pessimism about the impact of the crisis on peacemaking and existing peace processes which are often fragile, subnational or local settings are perceived with more optimism.
8. Anti-foreigner sentiments, xenophobia, and other forms of discrimination are key themes across contexts, and focus on UN staff as well as expatriates and other groups. Covid-19-related discrimination might also be directed against outsider ethnopolitical groups and is sometimes linked to conspiracy theories.
9. In some countries, the situation seems to be particularly fluid in terms of conflict risks because of the Covid-19 crisis, especially in the Central African Republic (CAR), the DRC, Libya, and in South Sudan.

Introduction

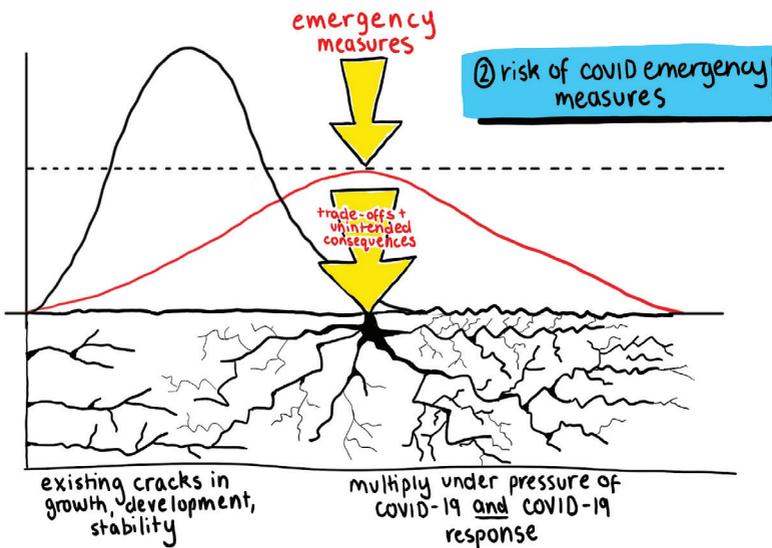
When the Covid-19 pandemic started, like many researchers and peacebuilding organisations, we anticipated a set of 'predictably unpredictable'¹ impacts on peace and conflict. We also watched with interest as the UN Secretary-General called for a global ceasefire in order to fight the pandemic. In our research practice, we re-organised our activities where possible to be conducted remotely. Concerned also about those we had worked with in the field, and realising that this was a vast resource of in-country expertise, we constructed a survey to be answered in a short amount of time, and distributed it to a number of in-country experts, working the fields of development, peacebuilding, and human rights.

This expert panel survey asked academics and peacebuilding practitioners in 21 countries with ongoing peace processes about their assessments of possible implications of the Covid-19 crisis. We received 93 responses: almost 60 per cent of these coming from in-country experts, with the remainder from country experts whom, at time of filling in the questionnaire, were out of the country (see further methodology in Annex 1). This short report presents the main findings from a qualitative analysis of these expert responses: the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on conflict trajectories; the growing pessimism and some new opportunities in peace processes; the threat of increasing xenophobia and other forms of discrimination; and perceptions about international support. The report then elaborates some recommendations for engagement in peace processes and conflict transitions.

¹ Bell, C. (2020). COVID-19 and Violent Conflict: Responding to Predictable Unpredictability. Just Security Blog. Available at: <https://www.politicalsettlements.org/2020/03/26/covid-19-and-violent-conflict-responding-to-predictable-unpredictability/> [Last Accessed 6 June 2020].

(1) Covid-19 and Conflict: a Story of Amplification of Existing Stresses

The Covid-19 crisis is having considerable influence on conflict settings and peace processes, through various direct implications such as the strengthening of authoritarian tendencies, furthering fragmentation in already fragmented places, and exacerbating an urban/rural divide. It is also having more indirect effects, such as reduced peace process supervision and oversight, reduced capacities of international missions, and a shift in public and media attention. Unsurprisingly, specific impact is strongly dependent on context and existing conflict and peace process trajectories, yet there are several observable trends across country settings.



Cartoon: Taken from Heather Marquette and Peter Evans, 2020, 'Covid-19: Social science saves lives', DFID Research and Evidence Division, Senior Research Fellow Discussion Paper, p. 4. Artist Hamsi Evans.²

² Also available at: Marquette, H. (2020). Using Graphics to Cut Through Covid's Complexity. Oxfam From Poverty to Power Blog. <https://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/using-graphics-to-explain-covids-complexity/> [Last Accessed 6 June 2020].

While a 'too early to tell' caveat applies, the expert evidence and the early trajectories of peace processes after the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis allows for some initial pivotal assessments. Overall, the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on armed conflict is clearly affecting the conflict landscape. There is considerable trepidation in some countries (Libya, Yemen, Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and South Sudan). However, the current impact is not game-changing, but rather is exacerbating some existing conflict dynamics.

In a sense, the story is one told by Marquette and Evans in their cartoon of Covid-19 pressures widening existing cracks in peace and transition processes (see cartoon above).

Strengthening of authoritarian tendencies. Where the country in question was in the middle of an 'authoritarian turn', the Covid-19 crisis has been used by governments in conflict and post-conflict situations to consolidate power, thus furthering authoritarian tendencies. Sri Lanka and the Philippines, for instance, have seen a militarisation of health responses to the virus – using armed security forces to deliver health care. In DRC, the government has used the crisis for increased repression, but even aside from national policies, official petty levels of repression and corruption – such as increased taxation – have increased the negative experience of Covid-19 measures on the ground.

Sri Lanka has seen a postponement of the parliamentary elections initially scheduled for April; there is also contemplation to postpone the general and presidential elections in CAR and the parliamentary elections in Somalia, both scheduled later this year. These postponements will have a possibly severe impact on the transition processes in those countries.

In Myanmar and South Sudan, government forces are using the crisis as a cover for increased armed operations against insurgency groups.

At the same time, contrary to the general global assessment that the response to the pandemic would often work to strengthen support for the executive, the assessments we received from conflict zones suggest the opposite. Public support for governments has decreased in most cases. Sri Lanka is a noticeable exception but perhaps reflects majority support only and the polarised ethnopolitical setting. In the DRC, Mali, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Yemen, governments appear to have responded to the crisis by a noticeable increase in political activism. But this has not been well received, and the assumption that the Covid-19 crisis might trigger a national closing of ranks behind the executive appears to be wrong.

Tightened political contestation. As a general trend, governments have used the lockdown conditions to reduce or restrict political activities. This was suggested for Israel/Palestine, Kenya, Myanmar, South Sudan, Syria, and Ukraine. By contrast, many experts reported that the political support for armed and non-armed opposition groups and movements appears mostly unchanged. However, political opponents are using the Covid-19 crisis to further their agendas rather than develop a common one, as one expert from Ukraine highlights:

“ *All sides are using COVID-19 as a pretext to push forward political agendas and demands, accusing the other of contributing to and/or hiding the scope of the epidemic. None of the parties has made a genuine effort to use the outbreak to promote CBMs [confidence-building measures] via health-related cooperation, joint monitoring, and so on. The result is a widening of the conflict divide, more time being lost, people's suffering increasing and health security deteriorating.* ”

Furthering fragmentation. In situations characterised by a fragmented conflict setting involving a multi-level (local, national, transnational, international) complex conflict system – we would call it a ‘conflict mesh’ – the crisis has also worked to accentuate the trajectory of fragmentation. In South Sudan, the pre-Covid-19 Rome ceasefire brokered by the Community of Sant’ Egidio between the transitional government and the so-called ‘hold-out groups’ in the Equatoria regions, effectively broke down after armed fighting re-occurred in late April 2020. Further fighting broke out in the Jonglei region. Moreover, the experts reported an increase of cattle raiding and inter-communal fighting in various parts of the country, which is exacerbated by the lack of human rights monitoring due to lockdown restrictions.

Urban/rural divide. In many conflict settings, the pandemic has appeared to start in or affect cities first, and as a result is perceived as an urban disease, with only limited stretch into rural areas where the majority of armed fighting occurs. This has, so far, constrained its impact on many armed groups, whom then also tend to view government attempts to respond to the pandemic with suspicion. In Mali, for instance, most Covid-19 cases during the early stages of the pandemic occurred in the capital Bamako and in the West of the country. As one respondent elaborated:

“ *The pandemic has not yet strongly affected conflict areas. If the disease were to hit the northern and central regions of Mali head-on, the situation could have an impact not only on the behaviour of the SDF but also on that of armed groups including jihadists.* ”

In South Sudan, most cases have occurred in Juba, and the political circle around the peace agreement signatory SPLM-IO (Sudan People’s Liberation Movement-in-Opposition) were especially hard hit. First Vice President Riek Machar Teny and his wife, Minister of Defence Angelina Jany Teny, both contracted the disease, along with a further eight government ministers. At the same time, case numbers in most other parts of the country remain apparently at a low level.

And yet the urban character of the pandemic has often resulted in increased rural violence. South Sudan experienced a sharp increase in inter-communal violence after the start of the Covid-19 crisis. Kenya and CAR, as well, have seen an increase in inter-communal violence in rural areas. In the case of Kenya, this is partly caused by a reduced capacity or willingness of government security forces to police fragile environments. In Nigeria, one respondent reported that 'there has been a renewed wave of attacks by the Fulani Militia against "locked" indigenous communities in Plateau and Kaduna States'. Non-state armed groups in Mali have appeared to use the pandemic to tighten their grip over the population in areas under their control, while state security forces seem to have adopted a more aggressive stance.

Amplification of pre-existing trends. As an overall trend, the Covid-19 crisis appears to amplify present stresses in conflict and post-conflict settings, rather than transform them into a different type of conflict on the one hand, or result in positive outcomes on the other. In some areas with established transitional processes, such as Nepal, there is not much substantial change. Virtually all settings see a pronounced politicisation, which is to be expected in essentially contested political spaces. This politicisation also applies to post-conflict settings such as Northern Ireland. Here, the investigations around the accountability of the Police during The Troubles has been suspended, but the recently-restored executive was able to cooperate across political divisions in order to pass Coronavirus emergency powers legislation. This legislation put in place lockdowns and health and safety measures, which was an important moment of cooperation. Echoing this optimism, two respondents on Northern Ireland and Israel reported some instances of 'cross-divide' cooperation which, while not transformative, had been positively noted.

In places with sustained processes of 'authoritarian conflict management' including, for instance, Sri Lanka and Myanmar, the government side seems to have been able to profit from the pandemic. In fragile conflict transitions in countries such as CAR, the DRC, Libya, South Sudan, or Yemen, in contrast, the crisis appears to have exacerbated the conflict dynamics that were already making peace or transition processes difficult.

(2) Covid-19 and Peace Processes: Pessimism for Transformative Cohesion but Some New 'Hooks' for Change

Pessimism as regards the impact of Covid-19 on peace processes. Perhaps most surprising was just how negative the experts surveyed perceived how Covid-19 was impacting on national peace process dynamics. Respondents were split between being pessimistic, or seeing no change in already difficult processes, or finding the situation currently too unclear to call. There were only a few scattered examples of small positive developments (discussed below). With the UN Secretary-General's ceasefire call and initially positive responses, including unilateral (often temporary) ceasefires in some of the countries we examined, it had seemed possible that Covid-19 and the sense of a common interest in ensuring health care and crisis response across armed factions could lead to a fostering of national cohesion and/or cooperation between conflict parties.

But respondents were, for the most part, pessimistic regarding the impact on the national peace process. This tallied with country reports of increased fighting, such as in Libya, but went further across a majority of country responses. Even in countries with well-established transitions such as Nepal, optimism about ongoing peacebuilding was affected given the reduced bandwidth of the government and groups, thus impacting negatively on key transition mechanisms such as the truth and reconciliation commission. In Somalia, concerns about how elections would take place and be managed were seen as having a wider conflict potential.

There were two partial exceptions, where some encouraging cooperation across conflict divides had taken place in response to Covid-19. There had been cooperation between Israel and Palestine on the closing of holy sites, and in Northern Ireland, some instances of executive common messaging between the Unionist and Republican First and Deputy First Ministers, and perhaps a civic spirit born of all being in the crisis together.

Cautious optimism for local peacemaking. In contrast, matching with the urban/rural divide over perceptions and the impact of Covid-19, experts and those responding from within local conflict areas had a much more positive and optimistic assessment of local peace processes. Respondents from CAR, Ogaden-Ethiopia, Northern Ireland, the Philippines, Nigeria, and Yemen all reported an increased faith in peacebuilding and processes at the local level.

In some areas, this optimism correlated with a suggestion that local peacemaking and local Covid-19 responses were 'pulling together', which did seem to reinforce community ties. But it is also likely to be owed to the ongoing ability to interact and manage peacemaking at the local level due to better trust, more open modalities of movement, and easier logistics of organisation.

Some evidence of remote diplomacy keeping processes alive. There were some reports of 'online diplomacy' at least enabling attempts to keep a transition process alive. For instance, one respondent reported that peace negotiations in Myanmar had been moved online, while still anticipating that the 'situation is likely to get worse' due to the crisis and the 'roadblocks' that the peace process had run into pre-Covid-19.

The 'Juba process' for Sudan has seen the introduction of 'Zoom diplomacy' with technical support provided by the European Union. Nevertheless, even here where the process has been supported to continue, it is also becoming more difficult. One of the main opposition umbrellas, the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF), experienced the breakaway of the SLM-MM (Sudanese Liberation Movement – Minni Minnawi), which now aims to form an additional party to the negotiations. Procedural issues within SRF were named as one of the reasons for the breakaway.

These developments might indicate some of the limits of 'Zoom diplomacy', a setting where the informal background chats, which traditionally play a highly significant role in such peace negotiations, are becoming more complicated and, because of the necessary use of mobile technology, more formalised.

Politics of delay. While there was pessimism related to how Covid-19 might impact on national peacemaking, there was also the suggestion that it might enable a move away from the unhelpful dynamics of 'deadline diplomacy' that has characterised convoluted transition processes. There can be a benefit to forms of political delay, which make it easier for governments and other 'track one' actors to 'muddle through'. In South Sudan, for instance, each transition deadline poses a potential crunch moment, but each moment also carries a cost in terms of faith in the process. A Covid-19-related delay may have the side-effect of enabling time to be spent on processes without a sense that peace process momentum is being lost. Yet, respondents also stressed that the impact of delays was one of the main 'known unknowns' in terms of how peace processes might play out. Respondents from CAR, Somalia, and Sri Lanka all expressed concerns about the delay of elections and the impact of this delay in-country.

(3) Xenophobia and Other Forms of Discrimination

Xenophobia emerges as a dominant theme across contexts. Representing one of the more striking common responses across contexts, there were three different dimensions to the issue of xenophobia and other forms of discrimination emerging from the pandemic: an increase in forms of racism against people perceived to be Chinese or 'Asian'; prejudices against international staff including UN staff; and scapegoating of opponents or minorities for being responsible for the spreading of the virus. Many of these may not be unique to conflict settings because the virus has been labelled a 'Chinese' or 'foreign' virus in other regions. But xenophobia and discrimination do pose some unique challenges to peacemaking in conflict zones.

Covid-19-related xenophobia potentially damaging for the reputation of international actors. International actors have often been perceived as 'bringing' the disease to countries that understand themselves not to have it. Growing mistrust among local populations as well as political elites in internationally-sponsored development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding programmes was apparent in some contexts, and may work to limit the effectiveness of external engagement. For instance, respondents reported references to Covid-19 as the 'MINUSCA virus' and other instances of anti-UN sentiments. One respondent noted that 'UN staff in the CAR are seen as being responsible for bringing the virus to the country', while another respondent referred to the '[s]tigmatisation of international staff of UN and NGOs as bringing the disease into the country' in South Sudan. The exact extent of these sentiments and their long-term impact remain unclear, but these are still concerning early warning signs that should be taken seriously, and dedicated communication strategies may need to be designed if aid delivery and peacekeeping are to retain trust and effectiveness.

Exploitation of xenophobic sentiments, especially by non-state armed groups. While the direct link between propaganda and sentiments directed against international actors requires additional investigation, it is interesting to note that respondents from Mali and Yemen see them as particularly prevalent in areas controlled by non-state armed groups. In Mali, for instance, one respondent noted an '[a]nti-UN feeling from the population, mainly where the armed groups are influent'. In Yemen, another respondent noted that the perception of international actors' [d]epends on the area; militia-controlled areas view the international community as the source of Covid-19. Other regions are open to support from the international community because they know they need assistance and are worried about Covid-19'. These two observations suggest that xenophobic and anti-UN sentiments might be linked to non-state armed propaganda, with potentially adverse effects on the delivery of development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding programmes.

Conspiracy theories and disinformation. As has been the case globally, Covid-19 and responses to it have fuelled distrust and conspiracy theories. This lack of trust appears especially prevalent in opposition areas, where governments struggle to address distrust and provide accurate information. Referring to the Libyan context, one respondent observed '[r]acial and ethnic-based propaganda by both sides, accusing the other of spreading Coronavirus through use of mercenaries and foreign fighters'. In Sri Lanka, another respondent warned of the scapegoating of religious minorities as those responsible for the spreading of the virus. Covid-19, therefore, appears to provide an opportunity for conflict parties to further entrench discrimination and marginalisation through propaganda.

Strikingly, the same conspiracy theory was noted independently of each other in four separate countries. As one respondent reported about the Nigerian context:

“ *Population perception at the local level has negatively changed, as the local population perceive that COVID-19 is an international conspiracy to cause havoc, reduce population and increase international presence at the local level.* ”

Another respondent remarked that this conspiracy is 'perceived as a plan from rich countries against the poor countries' by some in South Sudan. This plan to depopulate countries in sub-Saharan Africa was similarly noted in the DRC and Kenya. Another conspiracy theory purports that 'Western' countries are deliberately using the pandemic to sell pharmaceuticals. Again, while similar conspiracy theories abound in settled contexts, in conflict contexts, these can play into or widen existing cleavages in ways that impact on the conflict and peace process.

(4) International Support

Respondents often noted that it was just 'too early to tell' how Covid-19 was affecting international support, and what the consequences of the virus for international involvement in peace processes and peacebuilding might be. Indeed, we are in an early stage when assessing the impact, especially when considering the traditional funding cycles of bilateral and multilateral donor agencies. However, some noteworthy observations arose and deserve attention at this stage.

Concerns about a decline in funding. Experts who participated in the survey shared a common concern about the possibility that peacebuilding funding might decline as a result of the crisis. While our methodology does not allow for quantifiable assumptions, it is remarkable that almost half of the responses across most contexts reported that peacebuilding funds have already decreased or are expected to decrease. There were some cases where this was not reported, notably Mali and Northern Ireland, and in countries with little presence by Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) donors, including Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Somalia. Regardless of the actual developments in funding, these pessimistic perceptions of funding have repercussions on the atmosphere and the sentiments towards peacebuilding at a larger scale.

Unsurprisingly, the negative perceptions towards future funding coincide with growing pessimism towards the peace process as noted above (again with Mali and Nepal assessed as having a more stable outlook). Irrespective of future funding decisions by international partners, expectation management and the need to challenge an increasingly pessimistic attitude towards complex transitions out of conflict, will likely play a significant role beyond the current crisis. On a positive note, some countries also saw at least one expert note increased international support to peace processes: Afghanistan, Nigeria, the Philippines, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, and Yemen.

Risk of Covid-19 short-term responses undermining long-term processes. International support in conflict regions has already been affected by Covid-19, although not necessarily by an immediate decrease in funding. Reports from CAR and Yemen noted a reallocation of funding towards Covid-19 responses. In general, there is an expectation that funding will shift towards humanitarian crisis mitigation, which could result in a transfer from long-term into short-term funding. This does not apply to peacebuilding funding exclusively, but for other development challenges as well.

Recommendations

The Covid-19 pandemic confronts us with a highly fluid and quickly moving situation across the globe. Predictions are next to impossible, even in usually stable contexts characterised by 'normal politics', and this holds even more true when talking about conflict regions. Our recommendations are, therefore, tentative, but our research has resonance with other similar research projects and consultations,³ and we suggest that this research indicates the following recommendations.

1. **Systematically tracking the pandemic's impact on peace and conflict.** It was clear from survey responses that we are in the early stage for assessing how the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on armed conflict and peace processes will play out on the ground. Our comparative analysis indicates that the impact evolves in a highly contextualised way. The survey supports the assumption that the pandemic has a definite impact on both conflict and peace process dynamics. We understand this impact as an amplification of pre-existing stresses which reinforce a tendency to moving towards a more negative trajectory than would have been the case otherwise. Considering these preliminary results, forms of structural monitoring would be advisable, that look comparatively at Covid-19-related developments in ongoing armed conflicts and peace processes. Such monitoring should guide a carefully planned response that focuses on dealing with the mid- and long-term consequences of the current crisis on conflict transitions, by mitigating the risks and identifying and exploiting the possible opportunities it may bare.
2. **Identifying ways to deal with peace process scepticism and pessimism.** The expert responses and our comparative analysis further suggest that the UN Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire has been largely unobserved, and where somewhat observed, has now run out of steam. This disappointing outcome points towards the need to rethink how ceasefires and peace processes are approached internationally, especially in light of the growing scepticism and the concern about a decrease in international attention. There is a need for leadership and research supporting how the scepticism and pessimism over peace processes brought to the fore by the Covid-19 crisis can be countered. One option to tackle this challenge is to increase clear in-country messaging about material efforts and positive developments in peace processes.

³ See our Covid-19 compilation of resources, in particular the section on Conflict, Peace and Covid-19 Nexus: <https://www.politicalsettlements.org/covid-19/resources/> [Last Accessed 6 June 2020].

3. **Providing better guidance and standard-setting regarding the militarisation of the pandemic.** The Covid-19 crisis indicates the significant risk of further militarisation and the fostering of authoritarian regimes under the guise of required pandemic response, but with broader political motives in terms of the conflict and peace process. Some experts told us that the declaration of states of emergencies could often rely on public support (or, at least, face no significant opposition) even in countries with considerable public distrust in the government. But this had sometimes led to the military being put in charge, not just of public order but of health responses. These developments have a considerable impact on the role of the military as independent political actors in conflict situations. They can shape the conditions for conflict transitions for years to come. It might be useful for international and regional actors to articulate some type of 'good practice' statement as to when and how to use (and not use) militaries in health service delivery, including specific considerations for countries with ongoing conflict. Other good practices, such as using local community infrastructure to respond to the crisis (such as was effective in some countries during the 2014 Ebola crisis), would also be worth emphasising as an alternative to the use of militaries. A mixture of regional and local responses to this militarisation challenge can, therefore, prove useful.
4. **Supporting local conflict mitigation and relief efforts and linking these to the support for local peace initiatives.** The increasing fluidity on the ground in many conflict settings needs immediate answers. The challenge does not only concern 'politicised' armed conflict but the increase in inter-communal violence that has more oblique relationships with the main political cleavages in-country, as has been reported from CAR, Kenya, and South Sudan. Our findings suggest that lockdown measures and the increasingly difficult conditions for international monitoring (by, for instance, UN missions), and in some places reduced engagement by both armed actors and the state, such as in Kenya, have contributed to this problem. While there are certainly no quick-fixes available, attempts at monitoring and supporting local modes of conflict mitigation and negotiation appear to be urgent.

5. **Implementing strategies of 'social isolation' are primarily communal rather than individual.** The faith in local peace processes, and the widely different perceptions and experiences of Covid-19 and responses to it between different (urban and rural) communities, mean that if lockdown or other severe mitigation measures are required, these should be implemented in collaboration with if not by the affected communities, rather than as a nationalised process targeting individuals.⁴ In Palestine, for example, village-level isolation seems to have been effective. But attention then needs to be paid to how these forms of local-communal isolation strategies may inadvertently trigger existing or new intercommunal tension, such as in Palestine, where workers returning from Israel were prevented by villagers from returning to their homes.
6. **Tackling xenophobia and other forms of discrimination.** A negative attitude towards international actors and expatriates, including UN mission staff, is a serious issue in all conflict regions. This challenge has the potential to hamper international peace process and transition support for years to come. It also has the potential to hamper core aid delivery. Smart ways of countering prejudice are necessary, mainly since these arguments often replicate official statements by governments around the world about a 'foreign virus' that could be stopped by closing borders. Considering these instances and the resistance that direct counter-messaging often provokes, it appears vital to tackle prejudice by quickly furthering good practices of travel and exchange, and at least valuable information that international actors are taking to prevent their own staff from bringing infection. Finding better ways to tackle discrimination, marginalisation, and underlying disinformation campaigns within countries will be equally important. The challenge can become an immediately pressing issue when vaccination campaigns might start. Our research suggests that such campaigns are likely to be met by considerable popular distrust when international organisations are involved.

⁴ See also Alex de Waal in conversation with Alan Boswell in: The Horn. (2020). 'Episode 16: Bracing for the Post-pandemic Storm', International Crisis Group, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/horn>.

7. **Supporting countries to identify and institutionalise points of coordination between peacebuilding and Covid-19 efforts at various levels.** Coordination between crisis and conflict response mechanisms is a long-standing issue in conflict and post-conflict settings. Some duplication and coordination deficiencies might be inevitable and, in some instances, even helpful because different projects inevitably reach slightly different populations in different ways. Yet, if the interactions between different Covid-19 and conflict/peace responses are to be constructive, then – particularly given the constraints for international actors – more focus needs to be given to the 'mid-level' actors who 'multi-hat', and whom are able to move between and smoothly communicate between different levels of government and different types of responders. Peacebuilding support will require to be designed so that it is capable of reaching mid-level actors, whom often operate in relatively invisible ways.

Annex 1: Short Survey Methodology and Questionnaire

The findings in this report are based on a qualitative analysis of responses to an expert panel survey. The primary goal of this survey was to source comparative insights into the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on conflict and peace processes in a short amount of time. Experts were selected based on their familiarity with specific conflict and peace processes, and in-country work experience. Many of the selected experts were nationals of the surveyed countries and known to the Political Settlements Research Programme through previous joint projects. In selecting these experts, we aimed to achieve a fair representation of gender as well as different views from within countries. Representatives of conflict parties were deliberately excluded from the survey.

The questionnaire (see below) combined closed and open-ended questions and was completely anonymous. The survey was hosted and distributed via KoBoToolbox, a free and open-source set of tools for data collection. The questionnaire was sent to 185 experts who responded between 23 April and 8 May 2020. In total, we received 93 responses for 21 countries (a response rate of about 50 per cent). For all except four countries, we received three or more responses. 55 respondents, almost 60 per cent, filled out the survey from within the country they were reporting about. About three-quarters of respondents have a background in civil society, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), academia, and international NGOs or research organisations. About two-thirds of the respondents were male.

Ethical approval was given for the project, and in accordance with the ethics and data plans, steps taken to ensure informed consent, protection of information relating to personal data, and primacy on the safety of respondents. Data is stored securely and in compliance with European law.

Questionnaire

1. Country

Please specify which country you are reporting about. Only one country can be chosen.

Response options: Afghanistan, Central African Republic, Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Israel/Palestine, Kenya, Libya, Mali, Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria, Northern Ireland, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Somalia, South Sudan, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syria, Yemen, Other (please specify)

1.a Other: Please specify the country.

2. If you are reporting about any particular region or autonomous region within a country, please specify below. If not, please proceed.

3. Are you filling in this survey from within the country you are reporting about? (Voluntary to answer)

- Yes
 - No
-

4. Which of the following options best captures your current occupation?

- Academic
- Civil society or non-governmental actor
- Diplomat (bilateral diplomatic service)
- Other researcher
- Public servant
- Religious actor
- Staff member of an international non-governmental or research organisation
- Staff member of an international organisation (United Nations, African Union etc.)
- Other (please specify)

4.a Other: Please explain.

4.b Which topic best captures the nature of your work (or the subject you research)?

- Development
- Human rights
- Humanitarian
- Peacebuilding
- Other (please specify)

4.c Other: Please specify.

5. Please specify the gender you identify as. (Voluntary to answer)

- Female
 - Male
 - Other
-

6. Please specify your age bracket. (Voluntary to answer)

- 18-24
 - 25-34
 - 35-44
 - 45-54
 - 55-64
 - 65+
-

7. Is the COVID-19 pandemic a dominant political issue in the country you are reporting about?

Please choose the one that best applies.

- Yes, it is an absolutely predominant political topic
 - Yes, it is a major political topic
 - No, it is a minor political topic
 - No, it is not political topic
 - I don't know
-

8. Are any COVID-19-related restrictions in place in the country you are reporting about?

Please choose the one that best applies.

- Severe restrictions (formal state of emergency with robust enforced movement and living restrictions)
- Major restrictions (e.g. forms of lockdown)
- Minor restrictions (e.g. some forms of travel, loose advice on quarantine or isolation)
- No restrictions
- I don't know

8.a Where are these restrictions implemented?

Please select the box that best fits.

- Restrictions are implemented nationwide and apply evenly nationwide
- Restrictions are implemented nationwide but vary greatly on a sub-regional or local level
- Restrictions are implemented on a sub-regional or local basis
- I don't know
- Other (open please explain)

8.b If other, please explain.

9. Has a state of emergency been formally declared or new emergency legislation provided for?

- Yes
 - No
 - I don't know
-

10. Is any such emergency measure publicly demanded or supported?

- Publicly demanded
 - Publicly supported
 - Both publicly demanded and supported
 - Neither publicly demanded or supported
 - I don't know
-

11. Have conflict or peace dynamics been affected by COVID-19?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

11.a If no, why, and might this change in the future?

11.b If yes, have peace process-related activities (e.g. peace talks) increased/decreased?

- Increased
- Decreased
- Largely stayed the same
- I don't know

11.c If yes, has armed violence increased/decreased?

- Increased
 - Decreased
 - Largely stayed the same
 - I don't know
-

12. Has COVID-19 influenced the behaviour of armed non-state actors (e.g. rebels, militant groups)?

Please select all options that apply.

- Ceasefire declared
- Ceasefire requested
- Increase in political activities (e.g. campaigning)
- Decrease in political activities
- Increase in military activities (e.g. attacks, recruitment)

- Decrease in military activities
- Other behaviour (please specify, e.g. providing COVID-related relief)
- No (no change / impact)
- Not applicable (e.g. no armed non-state actors present)
- I don't know

12.a If other, please specify changes in behaviour.

13. Has COVID-19 influenced the behaviour of the government or security forces (incl. police, army)?

Please select all options that apply.

- Ceasefire declared
- Ceasefire requested
- Increase in political activities (e.g. campaigning)
- Decrease in political activities
- Increase in military activities (e.g. operations)
- Decrease in military activities
- Other behaviour (please specify, e.g. providing COVID-related relief)
- No (no change / impact)
- I don't know

13.a If other, please specify changes in behaviour.

12.b and 13.b

Open remarks. Is there anything you would like to add about changes of non-state or state actor behaviour due to COVID-19?

Please leave blank if you don't want to add anything.

14. Has public support for the national government changed due to COVID-19?

- Increased
- Decreased
- No change
- I don't know
- Other (please specify)

14.a If other, please specify.

.....

15. Has public support for any armed opposition actors against the national government changed due to COVID-19?

- Increased
- Decreased
- No change
- Not applicable (e.g. no armed opposition actors present)
- I don't know
- Other (please specify)

15.a If other, please specify.

.....

16. Has public support for any non-armed political opposition party or movement changed due to COVID-19?

- Increased
- Decreased
- No change
- I don't know
- Other (please specify)

16.a If other, please specify.

.....

17. Has the funding situation for peacebuilding in the reported country changed since the COVID-19 pandemic was declared, or is it expected to change?

- Increase in funding opportunities
- Decrease in funding opportunities
- No change
- I don't know
- Other (please specify)

17.a If other, please specify.

18. Have the prospects for peacebuilding at the national level changed due to COVID-19?

- Changed for the better
- Changed for the worse
- No change
- I don't know
- Other (please specify)

18.a If other, please specify.

19. Have the prospects for peacebuilding at the local level changed due to COVID-19?

- Changed for the better
- Changed for the worse
- No change
- I don't know
- Other (please specify)

19.a If other, please specify.

20. Has international support for the peace process changed as a result of COVID-19?

- Increased support
- Decreased support
- No change
- I don't know
- Other (please specify)

20.a If other, please specify.

.....

21. Has the population's perception of international actors / non-national staff changed as a result of COVID-19?

- Yes (please specify)
- No
- I don't know

21.a If yes, please specify.

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22. Is there anything else you would like to add?

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About Us

The Political Settlements Research Programme (PSRP) is centrally concerned with how political settlements can be made both more stable, and more inclusive of those affected by them beyond political elites. In particular, the programme examines the relationship between stability and inclusion, sometimes understood as a relationship between peace-making and justice.

The programme is addressing three broad research questions relating to political settlements:

1. How do different types of political settlements emerge, and what are the actors, institutions, resources, and practices that shape them?
2. How can political settlements be improved by internally-driven initiatives, including the impact of gender-inclusive processes and the rule of law institutions?
3. How, and with what interventions, can external actors change political settlements?

The PSRP is a research consortium, of which University of Edinburgh is the lead organisation, with partners including: Austrian Study Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution (ASPR), Conciliation Resources (CR), International IDEA, The Institute for Security Studies (ISS), The Rift Valley Institute (RVI), and the Transitional Justice Institute (TJI, Ulster University).

Find out more at: www.politicalsettlements.org

