Key Findings: Constitution-building

Political Settlements Research Programme
This research draws on the PA-X Peace Agreements Database (www.peaceagreements.org), a database of all peace agreements at any stage of the peace process from 1990 to 2018. The database is fully searchable and supports both qualitative and quantitative examination of peace agreements.

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Constitution-building

Constitution-building refers to processes for negotiating, drafting and implementing constitutions. This can be carried out as a tweaking and amending of the existing constitution, or by designing new constitutions.

In collaboration with our partner organisation International IDEA, the Political Settlements Research Programme has been working to understand how constitution-building is intertwined with peace processes.

For key PSRP publications related to constitution-building, visit our website at www.politicalsettlements.org/key-findings

Key Findings

The peace agreement itself may include a constitution, such as the Dayton Peace Agreement in Bosnia Herzegovina, which included the text of a new constitution for Bosnia in Annex 4 (see Global Constitutionalism).

Or the peace agreement can even be a constitution, such as the Interim Constitution in South Africa in 1993 (see Global Constitutionalism).

Even when a constitution is not drafted as part of the peace agreement, peace processes often require constitutional reform or constitution-building as a part of the peace process, and many peace agreements provide for constitutional reform.

However, issues of sequencing of constitution-making within peace processes vary with four main sequences (see Bell & Zulueta-Fülscher):

1. Partial peace (or ceasefire) agreements (not including transitional political arrangements) lead to a final constitution or a fundamental review of the old constitution

2. Transitional political arrangements (either in a peace agreement or a stand-alone document) lead to a final constitution
3. An interim constitution, perhaps preceded by a peace (or ceasefire) agreement, fulfils the role of a peace agreement and sets the stage for a final constitution.

4. A combination of (2) and (3), whereby transitional political arrangements are followed by an interim constitution, which precedes the final constitutional drafting stage.

Other critical questions include the type of body which is established to draft the constitution (see Zulueta-Fülscher & Bisarya), and the timing of elections and referendums (see Tierney and Ellis).

Sometimes where a peace agreement provides for territorial power-sharing, sub-state constitutions may be provided for. Our work on sub-state constitution-making noted the importance of ‘constitutional space’ as provided for in the central or federal constitution; and the substance of sub-state constitutions, including how they may protect ‘new minorities’ and account for local level governance (see Zulueta-Fülscher & Welikala).

It is important to understand and manage the ways in which constitution-making happens in an iterative process, incrementally over time, where interim arrangements can become ‘sticky’ and create pathway dependencies that are hard to break free from (see Zulueta-Fülscher, Welikala, Bisarya & Bell, and Global Constitutionalism).

The constitution may have to be tweaked or replaced to establish interim governance arrangements, which itself form mini-constitutional frameworks to govern the transition. Our research in this area sets out how countries and mediators achieve this in a peace process (see De Groof).

Constitutions implicate the inclusion of groups well beyond the armed actors, and our work on women and gender and constitution-making has shown the different issues which require to be negotiated which can particularly affect women.

Constitution-making and transitional justice are processes that have many aspects in common. Better attention to the relationship between the two can lead to better design of both (see Cats-Baril).
For more information on the Political Settlements Research Programme, visit
www.politicalsettlements.org
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