



Key Findings: Peace Processes

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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Peace Processes

Peace processes are structured attempts to resolve radical disagreement between conflict parties. PSRP examines how peace processes are designed and how they attempt to rework political settlements to form both an elite bargain capable of ending fighting, and an inclusive social contract between a government and the population. This research focuses on how conflict parties and mediators navigate the inclusion of people and agendas of change in peace processes. Central to this work are the [PA-X Peace Agreement Database](#) maintained by PSRP and the support the programme provides to peacemakers, particularly through its partner [Conciliation Resources](#).

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

Key Findings

Peace negotiations are one of the most common ways of ending conflict. Over 1800 formalised peace agreements in over 150 different peace processes have been signed between 1990 and mid-2020. These agreements have different goals, including establishing ceasefires, bringing conflict parties to the negotiation table, resolving substantive disagreement over power-sharing, or implementing previous agreements ([PA-X Peace Agreement Database](#); [Bell & Badanjak 2019](#)).

Most peace agreements signed since 1990 deal with armed conflict within states ([PA-X Peace Agreement Database](#)). Only about 17% of peace agreements deal with interstate conflict. However, given the internationalised nature of many conflicts, resolution of internal conflict often requires international agreements to underpin it. Agreements between states can play an important role in ending outside support to conflict parties within a neighboring state. These agreements also offer opportunities to strengthen the role of international normative frameworks in peace processes, for example by emphasizing human rights norms ([Nash 2019](#)).

Only just under 20% of peace agreements signed since 1990 (371 out of 1868 agreements) have provisions on women, gender or sexual violence. Many of these peace agreement references are single line and tokenistic, and only a few include a more holistic gender perspective throughout (see PSRP [key findings on 'gender'](#) for more analysis).

Peace processes are non-linear and messy. Often talks are started, break down, and restart. Multiple sequenced small steps tend to be the norm rather than one giant stride towards ending armed conflict (as visualized by PSRP's '[messy timeline](#)'). Peace processes normally include several rounds of talks, with sometimes at least 3 – but often more – ceasefires and revisions of earlier agreements between opposing factions. There were 39 ceasefires during the Bosnia conflict 1992-1995, alone.

Even comprehensive peace deals can unravel. There have been at least 11 cases since the Cold War that had to be signed and revisited when fighting re-ignited. These include Bosnia, Burundi, DRC, India, Somalia and Sudan ([PSRP infographic 2019](#)).

Recent national-level peace processes have often 'locked in' disagreement rather than resolving it. Sometimes the need to compromise pushes conflict parties to agree on superficial or institutional reforms without tackling the root causes of a conflict. Power struggles are then carried forward into the new institutions, creating a form of 'formalised political unsettlement' in which conflict parties continue bargaining ([Bell & Pospisil 2017](#); [Pospisil 2019](#)).

Inclusion makes peace more durable. There is evidence suggesting that the involvement of civil society groups, such as women's groups, in peace processes correlates with more enduring peace ([Nilsson 2012](#)). PSRP's research indicates that while framework peace negotiations focused on 'comprehensive agreement' often do have input from a wide range of actors even if they are not at the negotiating table, early stage agreements, such as ceasefires negotiated between armed actors alone, have often set the pathways for change. Similarly, implementation negotiations often narrow to armed actors. Focusing on inclusion at all stages of a peace process is important to any social contract that can help sustain the commitment to peace across peace agreement implementation 'bumps'.

Local peace processes hold both opportunities and risks for wider peacemaking. Local peace agreements serve a variety of purposes, including halting violence, building momentum for national-level peacemaking, or enabling humanitarian access ([Pospisil, Wise and Bell 2020](#); [Wise, Beaujouan, Epple and Wilson 2020](#)). These agreements can reduce violence on the ground, build trust between conflict parties, and resolve disagreements that undermine national-level peace processes. However, local peace processes risk fracturing armed groups, potentially creating new forms of local autonomy and conflict ([Wise, Forster and Bell 2019](#)).

The diversity of actors involved and the presence of potential spoilers often complicate peace agreement implementation. Continued mediation and third-party monitoring bodies can play a useful role in resolving disputes and overseeing implementation. While measuring peace and progress in implementation is inherently political and difficult, setting clear timelines and benchmarks may improve chances of successful implementation ([Molloy 2018](#)).

PSRP Key Findings Series

This is part of PSRP's Key Findings Series. Key findings from all of our research themes are available at www.politicalsettlements.org/key-findings, including gender, constitution building, power-sharing, elections, peace processes, and transitional justice.

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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



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