PRINCIPLES *for* PEACE

PRINCIPLES FOR PEACE:
LEGITIMACY IN A FRAGMENTING WORLD

Inside >
The Global Legitimacy Crisis
Security Responses
Mediating for Legitimacy
Legitimacy beyond Peace Processes
Reconstructing Multilateralism
Feedback Loops: the Peace Navigator

Case Studies on Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, Guatemala, Israel-Palestine, Philippines, Sahel, Somalia, Ukraine

Independent Publication

First Edition | 2025

ABOUT

The Principles for Peace Foundation (P4P) is an independent, Geneva-based think-and-do tank dedicated to reshaping peace and security efforts through principled pragmatism and measurable effectiveness. We work as a trusted partner to over 250 organisations and national actors, equipping them with tools, data, and strategies to make peace processes more legitimate, inclusive, and durable.

Our approach is grounded in the eight **Principles for Peace**, developed through two years of global consultations across 60 countries and an evidence review of over 700 case studies. These principles serve as a diagnostic lens and shared framework for action, forming the backbone of our in-house infrastructure for peace.

We help actors navigate complexity, test political options, and strengthen the long-term viability of peace efforts through:

Peace Navigator:
An AI-powered platform that offers real-time insights and strategic foresight on peace trajectories across 56 countries, using 40 indicators.

Participatory Periodic Reviews for Peace (PPRP):
A structured, nationally led method that helps governments and local actors assess, coordinate, and adapt peace strategies from within.

PeaceGames:
Award-winning scenario simulations that enable policymakers and stakeholders to stress-test options, anticipate trade-offs, and build adaptive strategies.

Country Accompaniment & Convening:
On-the-ground accompaniment paired with discreet, high-level convening capacity to support diplomacy and shape political outcomes.

THE PRINCIPLES

Subsidiarity: Decisions and actions are taken at the most local level possible, with higher levels of government and international organizations only stepping in when necessary.

Hybrid and Integrated Solutions: Peacemakers are open to using a variety of approaches and methods, including traditional and non-traditional approaches, to build peace.

Pluralism: Peacebuilding is inclusive and responsive to the diversity of societies and cultures. Pluralistic outcomes are necessary to address the causes and consequences of conflict.

Accountable Security: Accountable people-centred security and justice provision is required to end hostilities and reduce risk of cyclical violence. Regulatory oversight ensures that security is provided as a public good.

Enhancing Legitimacy: Building the legitimacy of governments, institutions, and processes, as well as concrete changes beyond the political level, are essential for sustainable peace.

Dignity: Peacebuilding respects the dignity of all people and is inclusive and responsive to the needs of marginalized groups.

Humility: Peacemakers approach their work with humility, recognizing that they do not have all the answers and that local communities and actors often have the best solutions.

Solidarity: Peacemakers work in solidarity with local communities and actors to build peace from the ground up.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LEGITIMACY IN A FRAGMENTING WORLD

Foreword 4
Preface 5
Executive Summary 6

1 Introduction: legitimacy in a fragmenting world 11
2.1 The security contribution to legitimacy 20
Sahel Case Study: can accountable security be promoted under military rule? 32
Ukraine case study: enhancing legitimacy as a bulwark of resilience 34
2.2 Mediating for legitimacy in a fragmented world 36
Israel-Palestine case study: Building a multi-sector coalition to support a legitimate and durable peace 45
2.3 Enhancing legitimacy beyond a peace process: the case of Colombia 47
Bangladesh case study: Indigenous rights, peace, and legitimacy in the Chittagong Hill Tracts 56
Guatemala case study: The struggle for peace and legitimacy 58
2.4 Global instability and the crisis of multilateralism: a legitimacy response 60
Bosnia and Herzegovina case study: Revitalising international support to peace and legitimacy post-Dayton 67
3 Feedback loops to enhance legitimacy: Introducing the Peace Navigator 69
Philippines case study: Piloting a Participatory Periodic Review for Peace to enhance legitimacy 88
Somalia case study: Crafting locally led, internationally supported legitimacy 90
4 Conclusion and recommendations 92

Annex: Defining legitimacy 97
References 99
Imprint & Acknowledgements 111

FOREWORD

THE TIME IS NOW

BERNARDO ARÉVALO

President of Guatemala

It gives me great pleasure to write this foreword for the first **Principles for Peace Flagship Report** with a thematic focus on legitimacy in a fragmenting world, a defining challenge of our time.

I had the privilege, together with other committed peacemakers, to be part of the International Commission on Inclusive Peace (ICIP), which was established in 2020 to lead a collective process to develop new principles, standards, and norms for peace. In January 2023 the ICIP launched The Peacemaking Covenant which distils the results of a two-year global consultation and evidence-generating process into eight Principles for Peace. The Principles provide the first common framework, designed for building effective and lasting peace.

Enhancing legitimacy – building legitimate governments, institutions, processes, and laws– is regarded as the lodestar for the eight Principles and is clearly essential for creating sustainable peace. But ending violence is often the first step towards enhancing legitimacy. Yet, just as legitimacy is vital for durable peace, and for the quality-of-life people can enjoy as violence recedes, it is complex. and takes time to build. Legitimacy requires people to have a chance to shape power structures, choose their leaders – and remove them if they fail to deliver. It requires working fairly, with integrity, to extend safety, justice, decent public services and opportunities to all people, whoever and wherever they may be. This orientation to the public good can bring about broad acceptance of a governing order and reduces risks of violent contestation that come with less legitimate institutions, systems, and approaches.

Today, as this Report illustrates, legitimacy is in sharp decline, and states and societies all over the world are fragmenting into conflict. We are also seeing how the erosion of legitimacy has hollowed out multilateral institutions and fuelled repression and impunity. Yet with dialogue and encouragement for all the parties to renounce violent methods, conflicts can be prevented and resolved. And with social mobilisation, resolute political leadership and international solidarity, momentum can be created for new social contracts to be formed, undoing the bitter legacies of violence, repression, exclusion, inequality, and injustice. Such is the story of my own country, Guatemala, where today we are making progress to heal past wounds, build legitimate institutions, extend security and justice in new ways, tackle corruption and impunity, and extend socio-economic opportunities as rapidly as possible to those who need them. Long-term progress on enhancing legitimacy also depends on how we meaningfully institutionalize, in an inclusive way, the role of all relevant groups in society in decision-making and oversight.

As we look at the increasingly volatile world, it is vital that leaders, policymakers, the private sector and members of civil society remember that positive change is achievable. I therefore commend the lessons and insights in this report, and encourage leaders, practitioners and citizens everywhere to study its findings and recommendations as we work together to enhance legitimacy in our own contexts, and in the multilateral system, in the critical years ahead.

César Bernardo Arévalo de León

President of the Republic of Guatemala

PREFACE

Placing legitimacy at the heart of peacebuilding

HIBA QASAS
Founding Executive Director,
Principles for Peace Foundation

A NEW HORIZON

As a global community, we face a moment of profound reckoning. Multiple global crises challenge the ability of international systems to prevent and resolve violent conflict. The nature of conflict is rapidly changing, while the approaches we have relied on struggle to engage effectively with the evolving complexity of modern-day wars. We live in an era of protracted violence, shifting alliances, and new dynamics of misinformation, where transactional deals often define the terms of engagement.

Amid this volatility, global military expenditures rise even as the peace and security architecture frays. Governments, multilateral institutions, and peace actors urgently need approaches that are not only adaptive but also politically relevant that can navigate complexity while addressing the central dilemma of legitimacy. History offers us a sobering lesson: time and again, from fragile democracies overturned by coups to peace agreements collapsing into relapse, the erosion of legitimacy has proven the fault line from which instability emerges.

At the Principles for Peace Foundation (P4P), we have consistently seen how legitimacy and peace are inextricably linked. Where legitimacy is cultivated through inclusive political systems, accountable security, good governance, and the delivery of public goods, societies build resilience against violent conflict. Where legitimacy erodes, instability usually follows. Legitimacy, in this sense, is not an ideal; it is the currency of sustainable peace and the most durable insurance against conflict relapse.

Building and sustaining legitimacy is not only a moral imperative. It is also a matter of enlightened self-interest and realpolitik. Societies that invest in legitimacy invest in their own security, stability, and prosperity. For international actors, legitimacy-based approaches are not a luxury – they are the only viable strategy for achieving durable outcomes in a world where transnationalism increasingly shapes global politics.

This report shares practical insights and ideas for how legitimacy can be systematically measured, built, and maintained. Drawing on data from over 700 case studies and new measurement tools, it demonstrates how interventions grounded in legitimacy can deliver measurable results. It also addresses the key dilemmas and paradoxes that practitioners, policymakers, and societies face when legitimacy is absent or contested, and offers tools for navigating those trade-offs with greater clarity and adaptability.

The path forward requires a paradigm shift: from containment to prevention, from transactional quick fixes to legitimacy-centered peacebuilding, and from rigid blueprints to adaptive, evidence-based strategies capable of course correction.

This report is an invitation to policymakers and practitioners to place legitimacy at the heart of peacebuilding, to recognize its power as both a normative compass and an imperative of realpolitik, and to act upon the evidence and tools that can make peace more sustainable.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

How can legitimacy be successfully enhanced in support of sustainable peace?

FACING UP TO THE GLOBAL LEGITIMACY CRISIS

Legitimacy plays a decisive role in shaping how societies enter into – and recover from – violent conflict. As such it is the lodestarfor sustainable and effective peacemaking. It is closely linked to another foundational Principle for Peace, Accountable Security, which plays a critical role in enabling legitimacy to grow.

Yet, globally, in recent years legitimacy has been in steep decline across nearly every metric. People's rights and freedoms, pluralistic politics and deliberative processes are all being curtailed, while censorship, repression, disinformation, and polarisation are all intensifying. As inclusion and accountability – key 'inputs' to legitimacy – fade, the tangible 'outputs' of legitimacy that improve people's lives, such as fair service delivery and access to justice, have stagnated or receded. This global legitimacy crisis fuels rising inter-group grievance, elite conflict and a drastic escalation in violent conflict, related deaths, and forced displacements.

Rising conflict and declining legitimacy are compounded by the erosion of legitimate and effective multilateralism, and the rise of power-centred and transactional diplomacy among major global and regional powers. In response, resources are being redirected in favour of containment strategiesfocused on security and crisis response, and away from building sustainable peace. Yet as data on the close relationship between stability and legitimacy underscores, reversing the global legitimacy crisis is the only path towards a secure, peaceful, and prosperous global future.

Legitimate states and societies tend to have more inclusive and accountable political systems that serve the common good and deliver public services in a fair, responsive, and effective way. They also enjoy broad acceptance of their social, economic, and political arrangements, making them more resilient to violent social and political contestation. This report therefore asks:

'How can legitimacy be successfully enhanced in support of sustainable peace?'

THE SECURITY CONTRIBUTION TO LEGITIMACY

In fragile and conflict-affected settings, during mediation processes, and when peace is emerging, security actors have a vital role to play in removing violence from the political marketplace. Their actions can encourage trust and reconciliation, strengthen inclusion and accountability, and improve outputs such as access to safety, justice, and other public goods. This report highlights examples of successful initiatives by security actors to illustrate how this crucial contribution to peace and legitimacy can be realised.

The first step in many contexts – from Bihar in India to Baghdad in Iraq – has been aligning security strategies to support political initiatives in pursuit of peace. This requires openness and support to dialogue and reconciliation with those prepared to renounce violence, combined with carefully applied pressure on conflict actors to make the transition to legitimate political roles. It also requires using force precisely, proportionally and accountably, and ensuring security operations and initiatives constructively address public concerns to restore both protection and trust in what peace has to offer.

Security actors have a vital role to play in removing violence from the political marketplace. They can encourage trust and reconciliation, strengthen inclusion and accountability, and improve access to safety, justice, and other public goods

For external stakeholders, a 'legitimacy lens' on security assistance means channelling modest support to those committed to change, while encouraging public involvement in reforms to ground change processes in broad societal ownership. In Ukraine, external supporters have worked effectively with the state and civil society to help depoliticise policing, improve the behaviour and accountability of security providers, and tackle corruption in military procurement – all vital contributions to restoring public trust. Even under military rule, as in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger sensitive support for engagement, inclusion, and accountability via local partners can still be an effective way to grow political commitment to advance people's security and build public confidence.

At every step, security actors need to keep assessing the context, their strategy and impacts inclusively – questioning assumptions, understanding risks, learning from mistakes, and modelling accountability.

MEDIATING FOR LEGITIMACY IN A FRAGMENTING WORLD

As conflicts multiply and grow more complex, peace processes and agreements grow more elusive. As the case of Sudan illustrates, a wider range of players has stepped into mediation – often engaging at cross-purposes and with little regard to norms such as impartiality and legitimacy.

To navigate fractured geopolitics and accommodate diverse and competing interests, new strategies are required to strengthen the legitimacy of mediators, peace processes and their outcomes. '

Multi-mediation' can help negotiate these challenges, and pragmatically leverage, rather than resist, a fragmented mediation landscape. This emerging perspective aligns with the Principles for Peace, which emphasise humility, integrated and hybrid solutions, and seizing opportunities to promote dignity, pluralism, and legitimacy.

Three shifts are warranted in response:

- ☐ Use mediation to build momentum for peace, but with greater emphasis on peace deals that are genuinely inclusive and locally owned. Strengthen the capacity of leaders, parties, and concerned stakeholders to negotiate and implement lasting agreements to end conflict.
- ☐ Abandon top-down templates and adopt a flexible, pragmatic, and context-sensitive approach – working with the unpredictability of contemporary conflict environments while supporting organic processes that link all levels of the peacemaking ecosystem. This requires engaging and working with local actors alongside high-profile individuals and groups who can influence processes and outcomes, using a 'middle out' strategy to foster connections between them and seize opportunities to reinforce the legitimacy of the process and its outcomes.
- ☐ Broaden engagement to:
  - **A** Develop supportive, long-term networks among political, media, and security actors, civil society, and the private sector to identify concrete entry points for engagement, grow relationships, and promote ideas and incentives among important constituencies who can drive and sustain peace.
  - **B** Sustain support across all stages of mediation, from pre-mediation to the longer-term processes of implementing agreements, bargaining for legitimacy, and dealing with short-comings and setbacks.

ENHANCING LEGITIMACY BEYOND A PEACE PROCESS

Where conflicts are brought to an end, the long and complex work of negotiating and building legitimacy often begins in earnest. In many contexts – from the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh, to post-Dayton Bosnia, to Guatemala before the inauguration of President Arévalo – initially progressive peace agreements have stalled, giving way to stagnation and frustration. Much can therefore be learnt from efforts to end conflict and build a legitimate peace in Colombia – a process which has unfolded over three decades and continues to evolve. Colombia's drive to build legitimacy was made possible by social mobilisation for peace, dignity, and inclusion. The space created for civil society, women, victims of violence, and disadvantaged populations in the peace process and its implementation has helped keep focus on legitimacy while growing support and accountability. The victim-centred approach underpinned important mechanisms for truth, justice, and non-repetition of abuses, and helped ensure that the process would tackle legitimacy deficits.

Key steps have included: rejecting violence in politics, while guaranteeing ex-militants and communities affected by violence the chance to participate in legitimate political processes; accompanying measures to shrink the drug economy with measures to grow economic alternatives for rural areas; trying to reverse unequal access to land and property; and shifting away from security strategies rooted in counterterrorism and anti-subversion towards a more accountable, human security focused approach.

International accompaniment has reinforced this process, with support for reconciliation, the elimination of political violence, and compliance monitoring. After three decades, although peace and legitimacy have strengthened in urban areas, armed groups still vie for control in many of Colombia's rural areas. In response, the government has redoubled its creative peacemaking response. 'Total Peace' efforts today seek to deescalate and end unresolved violence, via inclusive dialogue tables, and tailored and participatory 'territorial' efforts to promote peace and development. Meanwhile 'Peace with Nature' initiatives support indigenous, Afro-Colombian and peasant communities' initiatives both to resist violence over resources and conserve the natural environment.

As the only negotiated end to a conflict in almost a decade, Colombia may appear an isolated example. Yet this report profiles more than a dozen experiences where prevention, peace and security operations, mediated settlements, and efforts to strengthen state-society relations have reduced the risks of violence and improved legitimacy and social well-being. As in Guatemala and Brazil, where social mobilisation, the integrity of judicial institutions, and international solidarity have recently ensured that democratically mandated leaders could pursue legitimacy agendas, it is important to resist the 'regime protection' logic of stabilisation and invest in the social forces and institutions that can keep peace and legitimacy-building processes on track in moments of peril. In Guatemala, this has given the Arévalo administration a window of opportunity to pursue an ambitious agenda on corruption, accountability, security provision, judicial reform, and equality for marginalised groups. Another example of a state advancing towards greater legitimacy is Somalia, where efforts to address the causes of conflict and promote inclusive governance are continuing under the National Reconciliation Framework (NRF). The NRF builds on locally legitimate approaches to improving justice, security, and economic opportunity, while linking these local efforts to national initiatives. The process is supported by sensitive international support and a continuous feedback loop to enable learning and adjustment over time. In the coming years, many other contexts will require careful, patient support to resist backsliding and to step into such windows of opportunity when they arise.

It is important to resist the *regime protection* logic of stabilisation and invest in the social forces and institutions that can keep peace and legitimacy-building processes on track in moments of peril

BUILDING LEGITIMACY IN RESPONSE TO GLOBAL INSTABILITY AND THE CRISIS OF MULTILATERALISM

Declines in legitimacy in specific countries are mirrored by the crisis in multilateralism at the global level. As global and regional powers turn towards 'might is right' as their favoured organising principle, the multilateral system is struggling to respond to geopolitical competition, conflicts and related atrocities, technological risk, and climate breakdown. Disillusioned over past injustices, power imbalances, double standards, and self-seeking behaviour, many states are turning away from multilateral solutions towards asserting their interests via military capabilities and alliances in smaller blocs.

Despite this, the vast majority of states have a strong, perhaps existential, interest in restoring effective multilateral responses to conflict and other challenges. Defending multilateralism means combining principle – making renewed legitimacy the system's greatest strength, with pragmatism – picking the right moments, tactics, levels, and entry points for promoting reform, defending past gains, and promoting peace.

The first step must be to reset international relationships – building on the UN's 2024 Pact for the Future and its commitment to addressing historical injustices while renewing support for shared values that still command widespread global backing. Delivering on, and expanding commitments to enhance pluralism, transparency, and accountability in international decision-making – with greater diversity at the UN Security Council, in financial institu-

tions, and throughout multilateral structures, as well as more robust civil society engagement mechanisms – will deepen trust and strengthen institutional legitimacy.

By building consensus on technical areas, such as governance of dangerous technologies, governments can expand the common ground for collective action on urgent priorities. Where action is blocked at global level, alliances of subnational players, regional bodies, and minilateral groups, should continue taking action and exerting influence on shared priorities – keeping progress alive while limiting the disproportionate influence of states who are not yet on board.

Finally, it is vital to reinvest in effective conflict prevention and peace support operations. As relationships mend and trust returns, Member States must restore the mandate for the UN and other accountable international arrangements to lead peace operations and offer peacemaking support.

It is vital to reinvest in effective conflict prevention and peace support operations.

Enhancing effectiveness and legitimacy in multilateral peace support also requires supporting local peace efforts, focusing on people's security, prioritising community engagement, and using continuous 'feedback loops' to adapt and improve peace strategies.

FEEDBACK LOOPS TO ENHANCE LEGITIMACY: INTRODUCING THE PEACE NAVIGATOR

New approaches to measure the effectiveness and quality of peace processes and engagements in specific settings can help to enhance legitimacy and build peace. To this end, the Principles embody a new approach, offering a diagnostic tool to help navigate the complexities of this era and address the lack of legitimate, inclusive, and transformative approaches in contemporary conflict responses.

Central to this push to provide a common reference framework to strengthen coherence and accountability in peace efforts is the effective measurement of progress towards peace. P4P has therefore developed a new resource – the Peace Navigator. This tool dives below the macro level global index view and works above the micro-level approach of monitoring and evaluating specific projects and programmes. It brings together 40 indicators aligned with the Principles, covering 56 countries, with data from 2003 to 2024.

The effective measurement of progress towards peace is central.

Underscoring how a deepening global legitimacy crisis is playing out in countries covered by the Peace Navigator, the Enhancing Legitimacy Principle experienced the largest deterioration in the past two decades among the eight Principles assessed, and this decline correlates with a decline in peacefulness across these countries. The erosion of press freedoms, political rights, and access to justice for women has been particularly acute, weakening public trust and fuelling instability in many contexts.

Of the 56 countries in the Navigator, registering the biggest Enhancing Legitimacy improvements over two decades were Cote d'Ivoire, Somalia, and Kosovo. Analysis of their stories again illustrates that legitimacy thrives when efforts to improve governance directly address tangible public grievances, deliver measurable outcomes – for example delivery of public services – and build trust within communities.

Just as feedback loops are assisting Somalia's efforts to enhance legitimacy, in the Philippines, data driven analysis has been complemented by multi-stakeholder stocktaking in the form of a Participatory Periodic Review for Peace (PPRP). In the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), the PPRP has provided a model for enhancing legitimacy through structured, inclusive engagement and dialogue. By promoting responsive governance, transparency, accountability, and the active participation of marginalised groups, the PPRP is helping the region sustain and strengthen its peace process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing on such examples, this report highlights that building sustainable peace in conflict-affected and fragile settings is possible – with a renewed focus on revitalizing legitimacy. Building on these findings, the report's conclusion advances recommendations in six areas:

1 FOCUS ON LEGITIMACY

All actors must prioritize legitimacy-building as a central approach and benchmark for success if they are committed to sustainable peace – placing it at the heart of efforts to address instability and using it as a guiding framework for shaping related strategies.

2 ENSURE THAT INVESTMENTS IN SECURITY ALSO BUILD SUSTAINABLE PEACE

Security strategies must be explicitly designed to support political strategies for promoting peace; a *legitimacy lens* should guide all security assistance; and at every step, security actors need to assess the context, their strategy and impacts inclusively.

3 CREATIVE, FLEXIBLE MEDIATION FOR LEGITIMACY

Peacemakers need to increase their emphasis on: genuinely inclusive and locally owned processes and agreements; strengthening the capacity of leaders, parties and concerned stakeholders to negotiate and implement lasting peace deals; middle out' strategies that connects grassroots communities with elite decision-makers; and broadening peace efforts – both to grow peace-supporting networks across political, media, civil society, security, and private sector actors, and to sustain support across time, from pre-mediation to long-term implementation.

4 LEARN FROM HOW LEGITIMACY CHALLENGES HAVE BEEN NAVIGATED IN PRACTICE

Successful cases have combined social mobilization with strong political leadership committed to reconciliation, accountable security, inclusive institutional reforms, and the delivery of public goods. Principled national and social leaders can emulate past successes in enhancing legitimacy as they lead these processes, backed by steady and discreet international solidarity, support, and accompaniment.

5 MEASURE WHAT MATTERS – AND ADAPT IN RESPONSE

Maintaining a legitimacy lens requires consistent monitoring of legitimacy itself, and related trends in dignity, accountable security, pluralism, and the other core principles – drawing inter alia on P4P's Peace Navigator. These data tools must be linked to in-depth, qualitative analysis and fed into inclusive dialogue, review, and adaptation processes.

6 PROTECT AND ENHANCE LEGITIMATE, EFFECTIVE INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION WITH PRINCIPLE AND PRAGMATISM

Protecting and enhancing international cooperation requires pragmatic efforts to: restore shared principles and address the behaviour of those who are undermining them; strengthen pluralism, transparency, and accountability in global governance; and expand common ground for collective action - growing islands of agreement to address global challenges. It will also be vital to go beyond short-term containment to reinvest in effective and people-centered conflict prevention and peace operations.

1 INTRODUCTION

Legitimacy in a fragmenting world

Over two years, P4P's International Commission on Inclusive Peace (ICIP), together with its global Stakeholder Platform, conducted extensive research – drawing on dozens of case studies and 150 consultations in over 60 countries. This process led to the recognition of enhancing legitimacy as one of eight defining principles for peace – the lodestar and primary objective for sustainable and effective peace processes. Enhancing legitimacy sits alongside accountable security (the other foundational principle), which plays a critical role in enabling legitimacy to emerge and take root. In this report, we explain why legitimacy is essential to addressing global challenges – and explore how it can be strengthened in a rapidly fragmenting world.

For instance, one of the peace processes the Commission has reviewed is the case of Colombia. For more than three decades, Colombia has worked to unravel entrenched conflict and violence through an evolving peace policy focused on enhancing legitimacy. Despite ongoing controversies, obstacles, and the uncertainty of success, these efforts have broken new ground in expanding legitimacy in all its dimensions. Peacemaking in Colombia has encompassed efforts to reject political violence while creating new spaces for pluralism and participation in decision-making for marginalised people, victims of violence, and former militants. It has also involved introducing new mechanisms to deliver accountable, people-focused security and to restore justice. The country continues its innovative attempts to tackle illicit economies, promote rural development, and protect local cultures and the environment.

The international community must re-focus on legitimacy as a central goal, and learn from cases like Colombia that illuminate what is possible even amid profound challenges

While Colombia has shown how enhancing legitimacy can go hand in hand with significant reductions in violence, it remains an exception in today's world where many societies are confronting a deep and accelerating legitimacy crisis. To respond effectively, the international community must re-focus on legitimacy as a central goal, and learn from cases like Colombia that illuminate what is possible even amid profound challenges.

This report begins by examining the roots and dynamics of the global legitimacy crisis and its consequences for peace, stability, and governance.

A FRAGMENTING WORLD

The drastic escalation in armed conflict, related deaths, and forced displacement during the first quarter of the 21st century has generated a pervasive sense of insecurity throughout the world. From 2004–2006, an average of 27,364 people died in armed conflicts each year. From 2021 to 2023, that figure was more than eight times higher, with deaths from interstate conflict making a significant return from 2022.[1] Levels of conflict continued to rise in 2024.[2]

In just 10 years, global levels of forced displacement have nearly doubled.[3]

This disturbing trend is widely recognised as a key aspect of global 'polycrisis': in the words of the UN Secretary-General:

"Our world is in a whirlwind. We are edging towards the unimaginable – a powder keg that risks engulfing the world".[4]

Yet even as many of the world's most powerful countries recognise the dangers, the global legitimacy crisis driving these trends remains less visible.

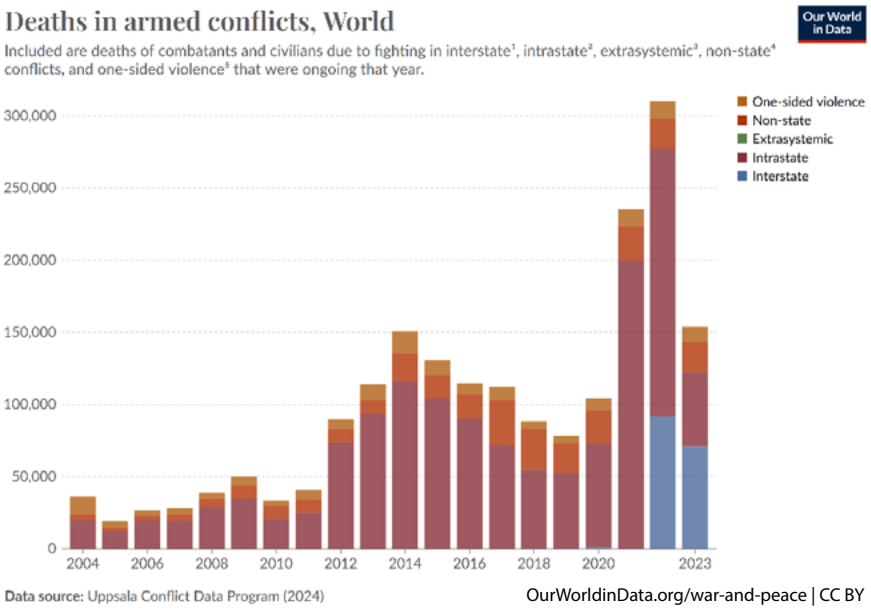


Figure 1

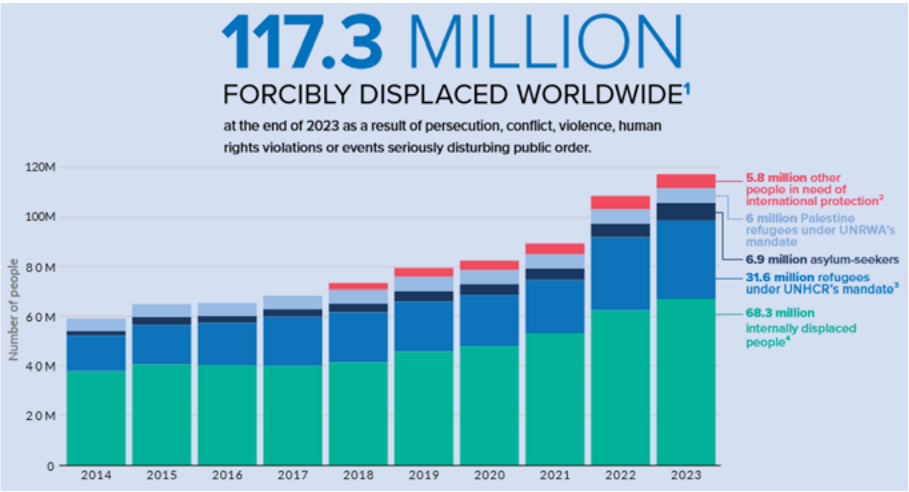


Figure 2: UNHCR, Global trends: forced displacement in 2023 (UNHCR, 2024), https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/global-trends-report-2023.pdf

UNDERSTANDING LEGITIMACY

The legitimacy of a state or political system is vital for preventing and resolving conflict and violence, and for building lasting peace. Legitimacy is not a binary condition – either present or absent – but rather exists along a spectrum. It has a range of dimensions, any of which can be strengthened or weakened over time. As illustrated in the diagram below, legitimacy in a given polity can be broken down into three interconnected dimensions:

1 **Inputs – how power holders, institutions, laws, norms, and policies are determined and shaped.**

2 **The system itself – its overall orientation and level of acceptability.**

3 **Outputs – the results the system delivers to society.**

In less legitimate systems, inputs tend to be more exclusive, patrimonial, or shaped by significant use of violence to bargain for power in the political marketplace. In contrast, more legitimate systems are characterised by greater levels of inclusion and processes that make effective use of feedback and offer more accountability.

The orientation of less legitimate systems typically serves narrow wealth or power interests, resulting in widespread contestation. In more legitimate systems, the orientation is towards common interests, increasing the likelihood of broad public acceptance.

The outputs of less legitimate systems often include coercion and repression, violent fragmentation, discrimination, inequality, marginalisation, and a failure to deliver public goods. Conversely, more legitimate systems tend to produce outputs that are fair, responsive and inclusive. These include equitable access to security, justice, dispute resolution, resources, livelihoods, services, and wealth. Such outputs also strengthen pluralism in dialogue, communication, and decision-making – enabling in turn greater inclusivity and accountability to feed back as inputs into the system.

Many of the dimensions highlighted as important in more legitimate and less legitimate systems can be mutually reinforcing. (For a more comprehensive definition see Annex – *Defining legitimacy*).

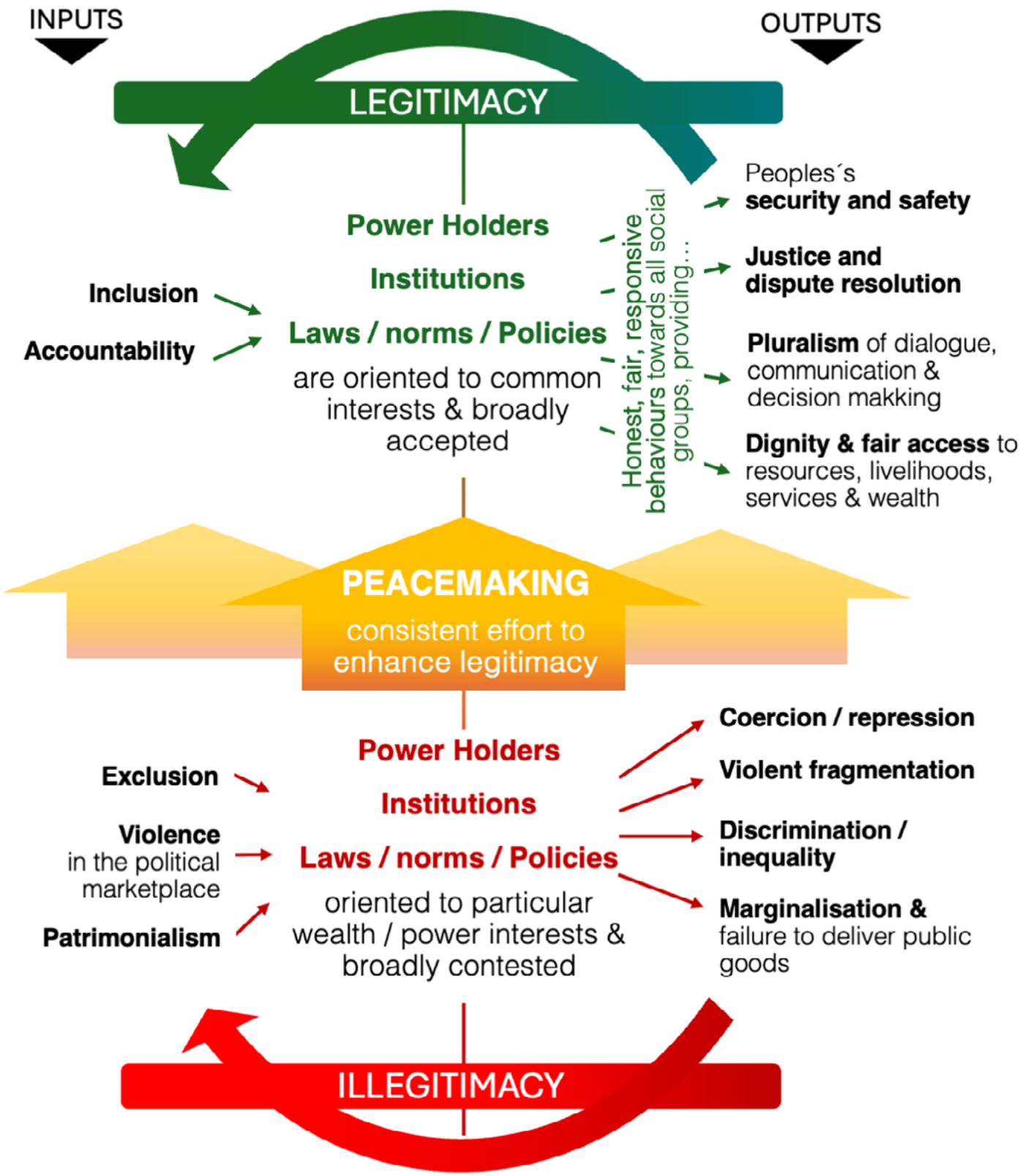


Figure 3: Conceptualising illegitimacy and legitimacy. Principles for Peace

THE GLOBAL LEGITIMACY CRISIS

In recent years, legitimacy has been declining globally and in almost every area of public life. This decline has diminished inclusive and accountable participation in political systems, and weakened outputs such as justice, fair socio-economic conditions, and diverse spaces for expression and engagement. With public aspirations unfulfilled, trust in governments and acceptance of laws, norms, and policies have also eroded. As a result, divisions have widened and conflicts have spiralled across the world.

Inclusion in shaping the system

Over the past decade, the number of people living under autocratic rule has grown significantly. Ten years ago, 48 percent of the global population lived in autocracies; today, that number has risen to 71 percent.[5]

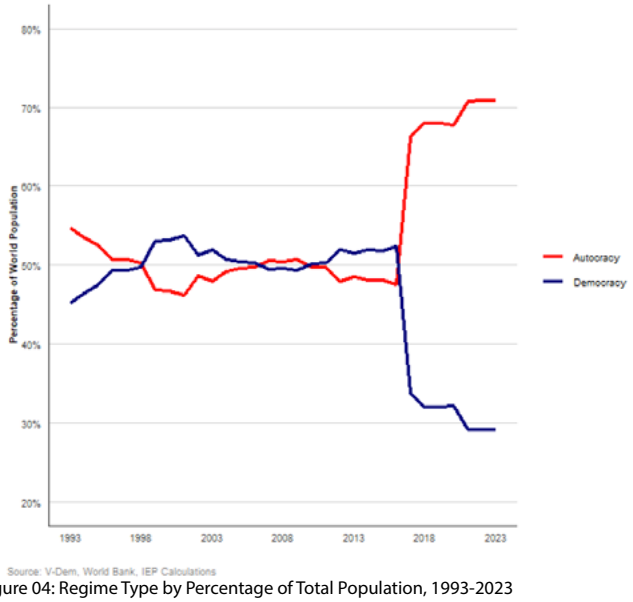


Figure 04: Regime Type by Percentage of Total Population, 1993-2023

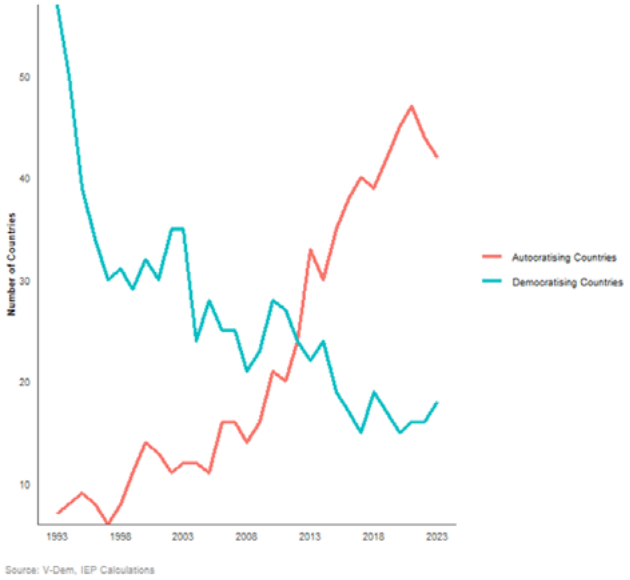


Figure 05: Autocratising vs Democratising Countries, 1993-2023

Since 2011, of 179 countries assessed, more have moved toward autocracy than toward democracy. The number of countries becoming more autocratic reached an all-time high of 47 in 2021 and remained close to this in 2023, with 42.[6] In 2023, more countries shifted towards autocracy than moved towards democracy in every region of the world.[7] The quality of elections is likewise worsening across the world,[8] with V-Dem reporting in 2023 an average 28 percent drop in its free and fair election indicator from its 2011 peak.

Inclusive models are today giving way to the politics of exclusion

As these trends show, inclusive models for determining power holders, shaping institutions, laws, norms, and policies – which were on the rise in the late 20th century – are today giving way to the politics of exclusion.

Pluralism of dialogue, communication, and decision-making

There are several deeply concerning trends affecting pluralism in dialogue, communication, and decision-making. In 2023, Freedom House reported a decrease in global freedom for the 18th consecutive year, driven largely by attacks on pluralism that undermined elections and fuelled violence.[9] Freedom of expression – including press freedom, open political discussion, and academic and cultural expression – has been one of the most diminished aspects of democracy over the past decade.[10] Restrictions on freedom of assembly have intensified, with the global average falling by 29 percent in the same period.[11] The number of countries detaining protesters has risen sharply since 2019, further stifling public discourse.[12]

Harassment of journalists and restrictions on civil society have made it increasingly challenging for citizens to engage in meaningful political dialogue. Consequently, fear of speaking out has intensified around the globe: over 52 percent of people report that most or many people in their country are afraid to express political opinions openly –up from 42 percent in 2013.[13]

From 2016 to 2023, fundamental rights were eroded in 77 percent of countries and freedom of religion also declined.[14] Furthermore, the CIVICUS Monitor reports that 118 countries now have serious civic space restrictions and just two percent of the world's people live in countries with open civic space.[15] State-sponsored censorship of social media, internet shutdowns, and the spread of mis/disinformation have all grow markedly in the past decade, further restricting political marketplaces where citizens are often presented with manipulated narratives serving authoritarian interests.[16]

Governments today are less willing to engage with society on important policy decisions. Over half of all countries have tightened restrictions on public deliberation, discussion, and debate in the past two decades. Political exclusion by social group has worsened, reaching its highest level since 1999.[17] Promoting pluralism is not only essential on its own – it is also a core Principle for Peace. The global trend of restricting pluralism not only harms people's quality of life, but also undermines representative decision-making in the public interest, and has significant implications for legitimacy.

Accountability

Alongside the rise in political exclusion, there has been a steady decline in government transparency and accountability in recent years. For example, according to the Institute for Economics and Peace's Positive Peace Index, government openness and transparency deteriorated significantly around the globe from 2013 to 2022.[18] Since 2009, 41 countries declined on this Positive Peace Index indicator, while only 24 improved.[19]

Between 2016 and 2023, the World Justice Project found a global decline in key indicators of government accountability, including constraints on government powers, openness, and regulatory enforcement. Constraints on government powers fell in 74 percent of countries covered in the Rule of Law Index, open government declined in 66 percent, and regulatory enforcement in 58 percent.[20]

Figure 06: Global Average Government Openness and Transparency Scores, 2009-2022

These deteriorations have been accompanied by a notable increase in civil society repression and a sharp decrease in press freedom, both of which play a key role in holding governments accountable. V-Dem data suggests civil society repression has risen by a third globally since its lowest point in 2011.[21] In 2019, the CIVICUS Monitor reported that human rights defenders faced prosecution in at least 36 countries; by 2023, this figure had risen to 66.[22]

The significant decline in press freedom has also undermined citizens' ability to access unbiased information, scrutinise their governments, and hold leaders to account, all crucial pillars of democratic accountability. Reporters Without Borders found that press freedom in 2023 was at its lowest level in a decade.[23] Of the five indicators that comprise the Press Freedom Index, the political indicator saw the steepest decline, driven by increasing state-sponsored censorship, harassment of journalists, and restrictions on independent media.[24] As press freedoms erode, governments become more opaque, depriving citizens of essential channels to hold leaders accountable. This loss of transparency fuels public dissatisfaction, straining the social contract and contributing to unrest.

Honesty and integrity

Integrity in governance is another area of significant decline. Since 2013, indicators related to well-functioning government and corruption have shown substantial deterioration.[25] Moreover, since 2016, the World Justice Project has identified an increase in corruption in 73 percent of the countries it covers.[26] Transparency International similarly found that only 28 out of 180 countries ranked in its Corruption Perceptions Index showed improvement over the past decade, while 34 countries experienced significant declines.[27]

A further concern relates to judicial corruption, where individuals and businesses resort to bribes or undocumented payments to influence legal decisions. Despite recent improvements, global levels of judicial corruption are now at their highest since 2016.[28] Transparency and the predictable enforcement of laws have declined in nearly 60 percent of countries in recent years.[29]

Public perceptions reflect these trends, with 65 percent of respondents to the Gallup World Poll reporting that corruption is widespread in government, up from 59 percent two decades ago.[30]

Justice and dispute resolution

The erosion of rule of law and justice mechanisms is a major factor in the global legitimacy crisis. From 2016 to 2023, the World Justice Project reported a decline in rule of law scores in 78 percent of the countries it studied, with more than seven in ten countries deteriorating in key areas such as constraints on government powers, fundamental rights, and the functioning of criminal and civil justice systems.[31] For seven consecutive years, the rule of law weakened in more countries than it improved.[32]

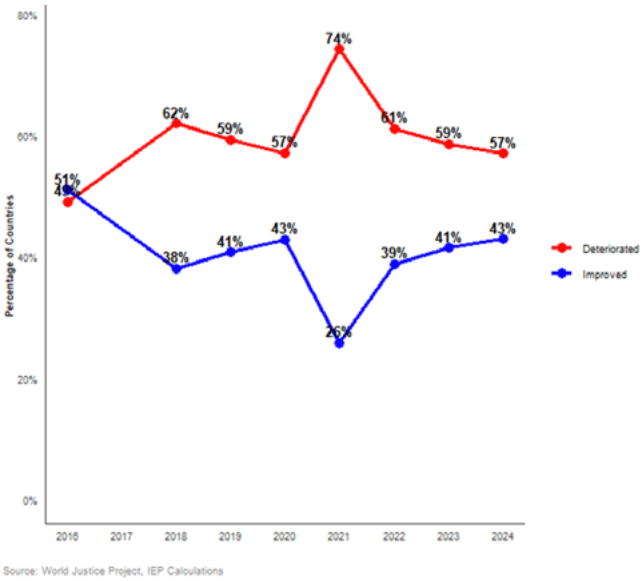


Figure 07: Percentage of Countries that have deteriorated or improved on the Rule of Law, 2016-2024

A key area of concern has been the decline in access to justice and equality before the law. Over the past decade, access to justice has receded, particularly for women, whose global access score has fallen by 16 percent.[33] This growing inequality underscores broader issues within legal systems, where certain groups encounter barriers, reinforcing perceptions of unequal treatment and further fuelling the legitimacy crisis. Judicial independence and fairness have also significantly declined. According to the

latest data, judicial independence is lower than 2013 levels in 96 countries, representing nearly 60 percent of those analysed.[34]

Fair access to resources, services, wealth, and livelihoods

A crucial aspect of legitimacy lies in a system's 'outputs' – its effectiveness in meeting people's aspirations and providing fair access to tangible dividends in their daily lives. Here again, global trends are concerning. Global poverty and inequality are stagnating. The World Bank classifies 3.5 billion (44 percent) of the world's people as 'poor', while 700 million people (8.5 percent) live in extreme poverty. Despite the urgency of tackling global inequality, global poverty reduction has "slowed to a near standstill".[35]

Fair access to resources, services, wealth, and livelihoods is also declining, with serious negative implications for legitimacy. Equality among social groups is now lower than it was 20 years ago, with 65 percent of countries reporting lower levels of social group equality compared to 2003.[36] Income inequality is also rising: the share of income held by the poorest 50 percent of the global population dropped from 8.2 percent in 2015 to 7.9 percent in 2022, while the richest ten percent continued to control over 53 percent of global income.[37] Since 2003, the GINI coefficient – a key measure of income and wealth inequality at the national level – has increased by an average of 11 percent.[38]

Over the last decade, indicators from the Positive Peace Index – including those on exclusion by socioeconomic group, equality of opportunity, and legal protection for equal treatment – significantly worsened globally, reflecting growing disparities in the ability to access resources and services.[39] The World Bank's indicator on the equity of public resource use also declined from 2010 to 2023 across the 83 countries measured, possibly illustrating the effects of more exclusionary politics and rising corruption on resource allocation.[40] The trend towards the enrichment of elites – rather than more equitable sharing of social and economic goods, such as access to resources and services – is another important factor driving the decline in legitimacy.

The trend towards enrichment of elites is another important factor driving the decline in legitimacy

People's safety and security

A core function of legitimate states and societies is the provision of safety, public order and security as public goods. This includes managing competition for power, wealth, and resources without violence, and maintaining accountable, responsive security and justice institutions that ensure public safety. Public safety and security is one area in which global trends are ambiguous. On one hand, possibly due to the effect of autocratic and repressive regimes suppressing disorder, global homicide rates have been in decline since 2004,[41] and public perceptions of safety have improved since 2008.[42] On the other hand, in a context where many dimensions of legitimacy have deteriorated, levels of armed conflict and battle-related deaths have markedly increased since the early 2000s, as noted earlier in this chapter.[43]

Acceptance of power holders, institutions, laws, norms, and policies

Increased polarisation, inter-group grievances, conflict between leaders, and declining trust in government are both symptoms and drivers of the ongoing legitimacy crisis. Since 2013, levels of trust in government, grievances between groups, and conflict between elites have all worsened.[44] With 152 countries recording at least one violent demonstration in the past year, levels of violent demonstration are today "considerably higher" than 15 years ago.[45]

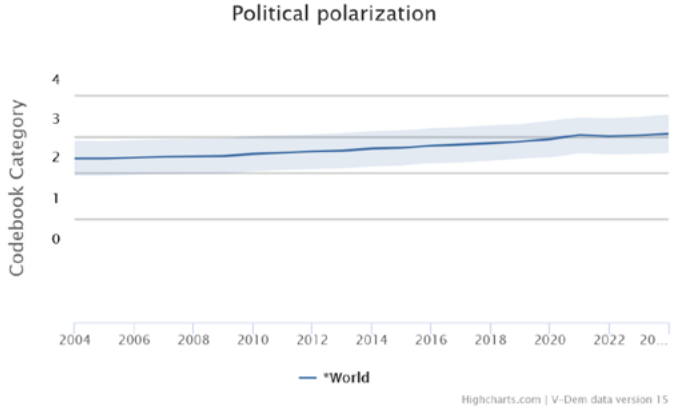


Figure 08: Global Average Political Polarization Scores, 2004-2024
Source: V-Dem

Since 2004, polarisation has steadily worsened.[46] It is often fuelled by political strategies that exploit existing grievances, deepening the divide between groups.[47] As polarisation increases, trust in institutions and governments diminishes, making it more difficult for citizens to view their governments as legitimate.

One factor contributing to polarisation is the rise of social media, driven by profit models that maximise engagement by promoting wedge issues and generating outrage. This has helped to engineer more divided societies and hastened the advance of zero-sum, identitarian, and patronage-based politics. The result is often governance that prioritises a specific in-group or constituent base over the broader public good. Repressive conditions, meanwhile, can intensify polarisation by altering group identities and widening the perceived distance between communities.[48] These trends may also be connected to a rise in misinformation,[49] which further fragments society and weakens the cooperative behaviour necessary for effective governance.

One factor contributing to polarisation is the rise of social media

Overall, these trends are indicative of a broader decline in the acceptance of leadership, institutions, laws, norms, and policies – key dimensions of legitimacy – and suggest how the wider legitimacy crisis is contributing to a rise in conflict.

Together, these dynamics illustrate the scale and complexity of the global legitimacy crisis. Few states are immune: alongside states traditionally seen as fragile, many wealthy, democratic, and peaceful countries are struggling to meet the legitimate expectations and aspirations of their populations.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEGITIMACY AND STABILITY

There is extensive evidence that legitimacy is vital for ending conflicts and building stability

All states, societies, and other actors that wish to overcome instability have a strong interest in enhancing legitimacy in all its dimensions. This is critical: alongside the outcomes of P4P's global consultations, there is extensive evidence that legitimacy is vital for ending conflicts and building stability. For example,

- Countries that rank higher on the Institute for Economics and Peace's Global Peace Index tend to perform better across a wide range of governance- and rights-related indicators, including: political democracy, voice and accountability, political constraints, separation of powers, corruption, honesty of elections, civil liberties, human rights, civic activism, internet access, and ability to express political opinion without fear.[50] More peaceful countries tend to be less corrupt, have greater respect for human rights, and offer their citizens the chance to have a greater voice and civic participation.
- According to the Positive Peace Index, these relationships are causal: countries with legitimacy-related concerns tend to experience subsequent deteriorations in their levels of peacefulness, and vice versa.[51]
- Numerous quantitative studies have identified a causal link between democracy and peace, and between democracy and lower levels of international conflict. Other studies nuance this picture, suggesting majority-rule (winner-takes-all) type democracies that do not protect minority rights have a much higher level of violence than inclusive democracies.[52]
- The governance of natural resources also plays a key role in determining whether countries remain poor and prone to conflict. In this context, both the presence of democracy and the quality of electoral processes also significantly affect how well natural resources are managed and whether governance is equitable.[53]
- The 2011 World Development Report noted that high levels of political terror in past periods increase the chances of current conflict, and that significant reductions in the number of political prisoners and extrajudicial killings reduce the chances of renewed civil war by a half or a third.[54]

The relationship between legitimacy and levels of conflict and violence is complex. Nonetheless, the overall pattern holds at the macro-level: countries with strong legitimacy consistently achieve better peace outcomes, while those with weak legitimacy sooner or later face heightened instability and conflict. The specific mechanisms at work are clearly evident in analyses of individual conflict systems and peacemaking efforts, where issues of state-society relations, governance, security, justice and service provision, horizontal equality, and the handling of inter-group relations

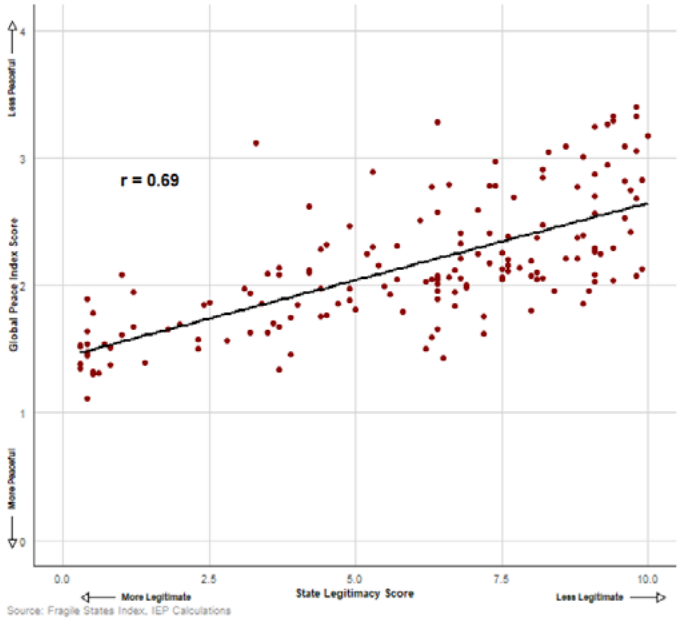


Figure 09 : Relationship between Global Peace Index (GPI) and State Legitimacy Scores

tend to feature prominently. For all these reasons, the legitimacy crisis needs to be recognised as a defining problem of our age.

CONTAINING INSECURITY – OR FACING THE LEGITIMACY CRISIS?

Despite the scale and severity of the global legitimacy crisis, and its ongoing, tragic consequences for instability, most responses to date have focused on symptoms while neglecting the roots of the problem. While enhancing legitimacy brings significant benefits for all, not least those in power, many elites perceive change as a threat to their power. In turn, reactive moves to assert control – such as closing civic space or suppressing dissent – often exacerbate the legitimacy crisis rather than resolve it. Debates surrounding today's wave of global instability tend to emphasise how much money to spend on security capacities and armaments to protect allies and deter enemies, as well as how to evade the fallout –not least by trying to stem the migration of people fleeing instability, repression, and poverty. From 1998 to 2023, global military spending more than doubled – rising by 27 percent since 2014.[55] By contrast, UN peacekeeping funding fell by more than 20 percent between 2008 and 2024.[56] As conflicts proliferated between 2010 to 2020, donors were compelled to increase humanitarian aid.[57] Yet in 2021, the share of official development assistance going to peace among member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) fell to a fifteen-year low.[58] Funding for peacemaking in fragile contexts remains very limited among non-OECD countries,[59] and deep cuts by major peace donors have continued since 2021.

In an era of neo-imperial aggression in which major powers are engaging directly and indirectly in wars of territorial acquisition, states and citizens living through instability need protection and security. Yet for investments in this area to be effective, they must be grounded in strategies that are responsive to the dynamics of each context in order to enhance legitimacy and contribute

to peace. This report therefore explores how a security approach that is accountable, inclusive, and focused on peacemaking can work in favour of lasting peace and stability. At the same time, it is vital that leaders and security actors recognise that investing more in security alone will not address the legitimacy crisis.

GETTING TO GRIPS WITH THE GLOBAL LEGITIMACY CRISIS

Beyond managing symptoms, a genuinely credible security strategy must also treat the malady. The first step in this is recognising the importance of reversing the global legitimacy crisis. One reason states, leaders, and organisations have devoted too little time and too few resources to legitimacy-enhancing efforts is uncertainty about how – and where – to start. While the global trends are alarming, the experience and trajectory in contexts such as Brazil, Colombia, Guatemala, Kosovo, Mindanao and Somalia show that efforts to find peace, defend inclusive political processes, and enhance legitimacy can, at times, prevail. For example, some of the key actions that enabled Brazil to defend its lawful, inclusive political process successfully in 2022 included:

- ☐ The electoral authority creating a fact checking body to counter disinformation
- ☐ A broad spectrum of political parties collaborating to defend democracy
- ☐ Congress resisting military pressure to weaken the integrity of voting mechanisms
- ☐ Courts upholding the law despite political pressure, acting to investigate 'digital militias', removing disinformation online, and ordering media to remove false information
- ☐ Independent observers monitoring and validating the elections process
- ☐ Ambassadors of democratic countries praising the integrity of Brazil's electoral system –despite efforts to promulgate false claims about it – and helping build international acceptance of the results
- ☐ Swift international endorsement immediately following the election as a way of deterring those contemplating military intervention
- ☐ A united front from the leaders of all branches of government and state governors condemning those rioting in support of the defeated incumbent – and their dispersal by lawful means
- ☐ Mass protests in favour of democracy
- ☐ The investigation and prosecution of abuses of power by the incumbent, barring him from public office for eight years.[60]

As we recognise the deep challenges to legitimacy and the ways they can metastasise into violent conflict in different contexts, it is equally important to redouble efforts to learn from positive outliers – successful experiences in which societies, leaders, and their international partners have come together to avert violence and reassert the structures that can peacefully mediate societal divisions and create further opportunities to work on their underlying causes.

It is vital to learn from positive outliers – successful experiences in which societies, leaders, and their international partners have come together to avertviolence and reassert the structures that can peacefully mediate societal divisions

HOW TO ADVANCE LEGITIMACY: REPORT OVERVIEW

This report not only examines the contours of the world's legitimacy crisis and calls for it to be prioritised by actors wishing to restore peace and security. It also asks, ,how can legitimacy be successfully enhanced in support of sustainable peace?' This is explored in the four thematic chapters of section 2.

2.1 In Chapter 2.1, 'The security contribution to legitimacy', we discuss how—despite the prevalence of securitised responses to instability—security actors have a critical role in steering transitions away from violence and towards politics, away from coercion and towards inclusive, fair rule of law-based systems. Depending on their objectives, behaviour and positioning, security actors have the potential to support the wider peacemaking ecosystem in restoring the social contract and building and enhancing legitimacy. This chapter identifies key moves that security actors can make to foster peace and enhance legitimacy amid the dynamics of different conflict contexts.

2.2 In Chapter 2.2, 'Mediating for legitimacy in a fragmented world', we explore how fragmentation is affecting the potential for mediation processes and actors to work towards legitimate, sustainable peace. Drawing on insights from the PeaceRep programme and touching particularly on examples from Sudan and South Sudan, we consider how innovations such as 'multimediation' are attempting to grapple with these dynamics and outline the ways in which peacemakers can continue to support the emergence and consolidation of legitimacy.

2.3 In Chapter 2.3, 'Enhancing legitimacy beyond a peace process: the case of Colombia', we discuss how legitimacy has been strengthened since the 2016 peace agreement with the FARC as part of Colombia's ongoing political transition from war to peace. While highlighting issues and challenges that remain in Colombia's ongoing search for 'Total Peace', the chapter identifies key lessons from a process that has unfolded over three decades but remains incomplete today. The chapter concludes with a reflection on persistent challenges and the way forward.

2.4 In Chapter 2.4, 'Building legitimacy in response to global instability and the crisis of multilateralism', we discuss how the legitimacy of the international system for addressing instability and other global challenges is being tested and how it might best be reinvigorated. In a more multipolar and geopolitically divided world, uncertainty looms over the ability of the multilateral system to handle the presence of conflict in different contexts. Many states are disillusioned over past injustices, power imbalances, double standards and self-seeking behaviour among dominant states. In response, this chapter considers the strategies needed to revitalise the legitimacy and effectiveness of the multilateral system—and restore its ability to respond to conflict—with principle and pragmatism.

3 In Chapter 3, the report discusses 'Feedback loops to enhance legitimacy' and unveils the Peace Navigator – a new resource to explore and understand the dynamics of legitimacy, accountable security, and the other six Principles for Peace in a focused set of 56 countries of interest over time (2003–2024). This chapter describes the rationale and methodology underpinning this resource, presents its basic parameters, and – as an illustration of the feedback loop offered by the Peace Navigator – outlines trends in legitimacy in six countries notable for either their improvement or their deterioration.

CASE STUDIES Accompanying the analysis in chapter 2 and 3, the report is enriched by case studies from 20 contexts, including Bangladesh, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Brazil, Colombia, Côte D'Ivoire, Georgia, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Israel-Palestine, Kosovo, the Philippines, the Sahel, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Timor-Leste, and Ukraine.

The report draws lessons from these challenging contexts while identifying success stories to celebrate and build on. In our concluding chapter, we draw these insights together as recommendations for peacemaking policymakers and practitioners to reverse the legitimacy crisis that is fragmenting our world.

2.1

THE SECURITY CONTRIBUTION TO LEGITIMACY

KEY MESSAGES

Security actors have a vital role to play in removing violence from the political marketplace, encouraging trust and reconciliation, strengthening inclusion and accountability, and improving access to safety, justice, and other public goods. All of these can be critical to enhancing legitimacy and for sustainable peacemaking.

Numerous examples of successful initiatives – from Colombia, Georgia, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Kenya, Northern Ireland, Timor-Leste, and elsewhere – illustrate how security actors can operationalise accountable security and enhance legitimacy principles in different contexts: conflict prevention, active conflict, confidence-building, and emerging peace settings. Most important among these are:

- **Leading and running security operations with a political and not just technical mindset:** Security efforts should prioritise political goals over technical tasks, fostering cooperation among diverse stakeholders and ensuring security operations support long-term peacemaking and reconciliation.
- **Assessing security inclusively and tailoring interventions:** Conduct inclusive assessments to understand the root causes of insecurity, involving local communities, civil society, and marginalized groups, to inform context-specific, problem-solving intervention strategies, with regular, honest progress monitoring.
- **Pushing conflict actors toward participation in legitimate political processes:** Leverage pressure and incentives to shift violent, repressive, or criminal actors toward non-violent political engagement through enhancing accountable law enforcement, building confidence between the parties, providing safe dialogue spaces, pragmatic deal-making, and offering incentives for disarmament and reintegration.
- **Using minimal force precisely, proportionately, and accountably:** When force is necessary, it should be used minimally, proportionately, and with full accountability, prioritising non-violent alternatives like negotiation and conflict de-escalation. Clear rules of engagement and transparent oversight are essential.
- **Using a 'legitimacy lens' to design and calibrate security assistance:** Security assistance should incentivise transitions and reforms towards legitimate governance. Support should focus on those committed to change, while ensuring civil society participation in promoting inclusive, accountable security sector management.
- **Helping strengthen the social contract by building safety, trust, and confidence:** Establish community security councils, engage local citizens (including women and minorities), and co-develop tailored safety plans in partnership with local authorities and security forces.
- **Adopting accountability, learning, and adaptation at scale:** Ensure accountability in the design and execution of security interventions by consistently evaluating impacts on peace, security, and legitimacy. Adapt programmes based on feedback, learning from mistakes, and involving affected communities in the process.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ACCOUNTABLE SECURITY FOR LEGITIMACY

Accountable security is fundamental for creating the conditions for sustainable peacemaking. The global consultations of the International Commission on Inclusive Peace (ICIP) and a systematic review of inputs and evidence led to its identification as one of the central Principles for Peace (P4P). To support security actors' contributions to peacemaking, P4P has since co-created – together with peace and security leaders, practitioners, and experts – a 'playbook' for security actors.[1] This chapter draws on the playbook and highlights how security actors can contribute to building legitimacy in support of sustainable peacemaking.

Security actors play important roles in shaping conflict dynamics and peacemaking processes. In many conflicts, they pursue claims over land and resources, control populations and their movement, combat opponents, and assert power and policy agendas. Their actions and operations can readily dismantle legitimacy – feeding into cycles of escalation, normalising violence and undermining inclusion, accountability, and the potential to deliver public goods. It is difficult for peace efforts to succeed when security actors play such a divisive role. At the same time – whether by protecting civilians, supporting or participating in successful peace negotiations, facilitating the delivery of aid, assisting disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of former combatants, providing security for and monitoring of elections, restoring the credibility of criminal justice systems, or adopting people-focused, accountable models for improving security conditions – security actors can make important contributions to peacemaking.

The contribution of accountable security approaches to building legitimacy and to peacemaking can be profound and wide-ranging

Security actors can help foster accountable security through proportional, less military-centred strategies that advance people's dignity and safety and address drivers of violence and insecurity. The power of political authorities and their relations with society are often shaped through the security sector, thus security actors have a critical role in promoting and protecting transitions away from violence and coercive politics towards inclusive, fair, rule-of-law-based systems – supporting the wider peacemaking ecosystem in building and enhancing legitimacy. They can help transform coercive capacity and personalised influence into acceptance of transparent and agreed-upon laws, formal and informal security provision, and local ownership and engagement in security decision-making and provision.

The potential contribution of accountable security approaches to building legitimacy and to peacemaking can be profound and wide-ranging. On the 'input' side of legitimacy, as set out in the introduction, under the right conditions security actors can create an enabling environment for inclusive, accountable laws, policies, and institutions that can gain broad acceptance, and support efforts to shift away from illegitimate and violent forms of political contestation. On the 'output' side, security actors have a responsibility to provide fair and responsive security as a public good. Only in this environment can fair access to justice, livelihoods, resources, and services blossom. Contributing to legitimacy in such ways requires long-term commitment, and there are moves in all settings that security actors can and should make to support legitimacy.

SECURITY ACTOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO LEGITIMACY IN FOUR SETTINGS

Security actors operate in four different peacemaking settings: prevention amid deterioration; active conflict; confidence-building, ceasefires, and negotiation; and emerging peace. In each setting, security actors can promote legitimacy and peace. All have common features that, if present, require a well-crafted response by security actors and other stakeholders in the peacemaking ecosystem. In each, security actors can reduce the risks of undermining peace, be constructive in helping end violence, support dialogue and mediation, and enhance the legitimacy and accountability of stabilisation and recovery processes.

Setting 1 Prevention amid deterioration

The first setting is where violence or conflict is increasing or seen as likely based on warning signs pointing to mounting grievances and divisions; escalatory rhetoric; increasingly repressive or authoritarian behaviour; or anticipated crisis trigger points (such as a hotly contested election, failed harvest, or price shock). Gaining attention, resources, and political will to tackle crisis is challenging, yet also provides opportunities to shift dynamics before violence entrenches enmity and war economies assert themselves.

In such settings, elites often prioritise consolidating power and wealth, driving corruption, repression, inequality, and exclusion. They often attempt to contain insecurity rather than tackle its causes. In these settings, security actors can play a critical role in preventing escalation and reinforcing legitimacy. However, there is a risk that their work will support polarising, illegitimate political models. The security sector may be used to advance specific interests through force, growing more abusive in the process. Informal actors such as militias, private security, or armed groups may gain influence as communities fragment into self-defence groups. Armed rebels may challenge corruption, provide protection and other services to some groups, and assert their authority, using violence to undermine governments, polarise society and provoke over-reactions, heightening the risk of escalation. Cycles of provocation and retaliation feed into security dilemmas, grouping society into opposing factions in an increasingly violent political marketplace.

If external actors intervene for their own strategic gains, prevention becomes difficult. They may back allies or address migration

and terror threats without a cohesive conflict prevention strategy. Even with a prevention mandate, external actors' roles are often unclear, poorly resourced, or unsustainable, potentially fuelling resentment and abuses.

In these settings, both domestic and external security actors can play a role in reversing abusive or corrupt security force behaviours that can undermine legitimacy and escalate violence. Rapid improvements in security approaches – as in the case study from Kenya below – can signal to the public that long-term problems and concerns can be addressed and that a constructive path away from conflict is available. Increasingly, security players also need to be ready to communicate reassuringly to the public about the response and protection they are providing, and to counteract disinformation and hateful rhetoric when doing so.

KENYA

Case Study

An inclusive and accountable security response to a deteriorating situation in Garissa, Kenya.

During the 2010s, Garissa faced a rising tide of violence. As al-Shabaab escalated attacks in response to Kenya's growing role inside Somalia, Kenyan security forces were implicated in the collective punishment of local people in their response. With local communities already alienated by harassment and marginalisation, violence risked spinning out of control. Yet, following the Garissa University College attack in 2015, public solidarity and political pressure led to the appointment of a new security coordinator from the locally dominant Ogaden Somali subclan, who commanded trust and respect across social groups. The new coordinator set about healing relations between government security agencies and communities in a non-partisan way. He clamped down on corruption and arbitrary arrest and worked with communities to restore trust and break up al-Shabaab cells. He personally drove accountability, giving out his mobile phone number and unblocking obstacles in command structures to act on tips from locals. He handed a greater role to administration police, who were closer to communities and less heavy-handed in their approach than other units. Instead of sweeping arrests and beatings, after attacks, community meetings were held to establish and address underlying issues. As the new political and security approach took hold and in combination with the communities' rejection of violence and rising confidence in authorities, trust grew, al-Shabaab cells were broken up, and attacks and killings fell sharply.[2]

To prevent violent escalation, security actors must identify risks early, advocate for resources, and deter escalation within legitimate legal frameworks. The example of UN Police in Timor-Leste highlights the importance of blocking violent actors while steering them toward dialogue and reinforcing accountability.

TIMOR-LESTE

Case Study

Blocking gang violence to protect the legitimate political process in Timor-Leste

In mid-2006, the fledgling state of Timor-Leste was on the brink of disaster. With politically connected criminal gangs perpetrating killings, house burnings, and extortion, elections scheduled for early 2007 were looking impossible. The UN Integrated Mission in East Timor (UNMIT), whose police had an ***executive mandate*** to restore order, assumed a lead role in re-establishing enough security for the elections. The head of mission established a gang taskforce (GTF), led by the UN Police (UNPOL) and involving UNMIT's political component, other UN agencies, international NGOs, and the Timor-Leste Ministry of Interior (MOI). To induce gangs to renounce violence, the GTF negotiated with gang leaders who agreed to hand over weapons and respect the elections – but then persisted with violence. At this point, UNPOL was authorised by the MOI to use reasonable force to curb gang violence while taking care to respect sovereign authority and legal process. Under presidential direction, government prosecutors issued arrest warrants against prominent gang leaders. UNPOL then swooped, seized weapons, and put the main gang leaders into preventive custody until after the elections.[3]

In prevention settings, rapid responses and security measures that contain rising violence can be critical. Yet this needs to be done carefully: by harming civilians, reinforcing violent actors, creating dependencies, or lessening incentives for reform, security interventions can undermine legitimacy and make things worse.

In prevention settings, rapid responses and security measures that contain rising violence can be critical. Yet this needs to be done carefully

While moving fast, security players must listen to diverse local perspectives and seek out all available intelligence to ascertain why violence and insecurity are occurring. By understanding both local dynamics and the bigger picture, they can draw on the wider peace ecosystem to design and deliver a balanced response that includes security, political, social, and economic measures. Do rival ethnic populations need to see their leaders resolving differences? Do external spoilers need to agree not to exploit tensions for their own purposes? Can actions be taken to stop trafficking of weapons or conflict commodities that is feeding conflict risks? Security actors should thus strongly encourage domestic elites and social leaders, as well as external players such as diplomats, politicians, and multilateral officials, to take the initiative where needed.

Setting 2 Active conflict

In active conflict settings, state, paramilitary, non-state, and criminal actors are engaged in violent confrontation, with pervasive insecurity and high levels of violent death. Peace deals or other processes for mitigating violence are absent, frozen, or have broken down. Similar dynamics to prevention settings apply, but violence and enmity are becoming entrenched, with people believing it necessary to assert their interests, and each 'side' vilifying their opponents and glorifying warfare. War economies incentivise prolonged conflict, leading toabuses against civilians, societal fragmentation, the shutdown of civic space, and cycles of rebellion. Rebels often gain support in such contexts, proving difficult to defeat militarily.

A key priority is to eliminate abusive and unaccountable security behaviours, particularly indiscriminate violence

Meanwhile the 'fog of war' complicates an understanding of the drivers and possible solutions to the conflict. With legitimacy in decline, most actors struggle to move beyond the logic of violence toward restoring a just peace. External security actors, such as peacekeepers, may contribute to protection and violence reduction but it can be difficult to arrest cycles of violence, avoid reinforcing illegitimate authorities, and focus effectively on political resolution and the restoration of legitimacy. Limited mandates, resources, and behaviours perceived as exploitative or neo-colonial can damage local perceptions and trust, and even the most successful interventions can create dependencies that later prove destabilising.

To address active conflict, security actors must reassess the conflict landscape, understanding why elites, allies, opponents, and marginalised populations are fighting. Drawing on lessons from similar contexts can highlight alternative approaches, as seen in the Iraq case study below. A key priority is to eliminate abusive and unaccountable security behaviours, particularly indiscriminate violence. Adhering to International Humanitarian Law and using accountable law enforcement approaches while taking steps to provide safe spaces for political discourse, including dissent, signals that indiscriminate violence is not a legitimate means of achieving political aims. Security actors must also limit support to partners who are unwilling to check abuses.

Success involves using force as a last resort, seeking opportunities for reconciliation, offering militants paths to non-violent participation, and signalling that all reasonable grievances are on the table for discussion.

During active conflict, it is vital to make people an improved security offer and to communicate truthfully with society about the situation

Security measures are essential for protecting civilians, services, and political processes but must be proportionate, impartial in extending protection to all, and designed to enhance people's dignity. Security actors should empower communities to address local security and other issues, and support non-security actors to maintain relief, development, and peace efforts and reinforce protection.

During active conflict, it is vital to make people an improved security offer and to communicate truthfully with society about the situation. This includes information on what peacemakers and security providers are trying to achieve, while counteracting disinformation in context-appropriate ways. As described below in the Iraq case, being 'first with the truth' involved stepping up access for journalists covering the conflict and empowering lower ranks to share what they knew with media. To counter the propaganda being broadcast from mosques controlled by armed insurgents, the coalition used loudspeakers to provide Iraqis with alternative information about ongoing efforts to improve the situation.

IRAQ

Case Study

Rethinking security approaches to curb violent chaos in Iraq

After the invasion of Iraq and subsequent policy failures that precipitated the country's descent into violent chaos, from 2006–2008 international security forces adopted a new strategy that brought violence down by 90 percent.[4] The Coalition's pivot to a better strategy was made possible by seeking critical feedback, reflecting on lessons from similar operations in the past, and addressing failures. Doing so underlined the failure of heavy firepower and clearance operations and the need to focus on protection, people and their confidence in government, respect for human rights, honest policing effective judiciary, amnesty and rehabilitation programmes, border security, and providing space for political problem-solving. It also flagged the vital importance of reconciliation with conflicting groups, regional diplomacy, and challenging state sectarianism.

Troops were trained to 'focus on the security of the Iraqi people' to allow space for reducing political divisions. [5] They were relocated to violent areas to protect and build trust with the public, who began providing insights that aided the coalition's understanding of conflict dynamics down to community level. This led to better targeting and less indiscriminate use of force while breaking up al-Qaeda cells and interdicting weaponry. Where violence was most intense and provocative, military forces had to innovate to stop the bloodshed. 'T-walls' were put up that stopped death squads and bombers entering neighbourhoods at will to perpetrate mass killings. This was controversial but it saved lives.

The new security approach was closely tied to a political strategy: the Coalition made tough choices to reconcile with former insurgents, striking deals that allowed them to help provide security. This included limiting arms supplies, supporting their future integration into security forces, monitoring their actions, and ensuring accountability. The Coalition also released and rehabilitated large numbers of arbitrarily detained suspects. Previously, it had tried to build up national security forces, even though they were involved in sectarian violence. This flawed exit strategy was replaced with efforts to prevent corrupt and sectarian groups from infiltrating security forces. Iraq's government was uncomfortable with allowing Sunnis to take on security roles and hesitant to challenge Shi'a militias, but during this period it was persuaded to take steps toward reducing sectarianism. The Coalition also communicated with the public to provide reassurance and counter disinformation, including false claims about who was behind certain atrocities.

Although the strategy had some flaws, and its gains later unravelled, it successfully brought a spiralling conflict under control, dramatically reduced violence and enabled many Iraqis to re-engage in democratic, non-violent political processes.

Effective security efforts rely on listening, learning, and adapting. Successful interventions combine conflict resolution with proactive analysis, accountability, and continuous feedback, ensuring responses evolve in real time to address the complexities of active conflict settings.

Setting 3 Confidence building, dialogue, and negotiation

Peace processes take time, and rapid transitions to lasting peace are rare. Efforts such as de-escalation, confidence building, ceasefires, dialogue, and negotiation often encounter major obstacles, including resistance to renouncing violence, struggles over power and resources, internal divisions, desire for revenge, belligerent narratives, and fears over future security, justice and accountability. Armed groups may be reluctant to compromise with former enemies, seeking to maintain control over people, land, and resources, while exploiting ceasefires to regroup or maximise benefits from peace settlements and processes like Security Sector Reform (SSR) and Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR).

Critically, in these settings:

> Security and justice issues are at the heart of questions about who holds power and how that power is managed, and usually form part of both formal peace negotiations and more informal political deals.[...] Bargains and deals between conflict elites can de-escalate major conflict, but can limit the possibility of more inclusive change, and themselves result in elite capture, other less visible forms of violence (such as domestic violence) and continued fragility.[6]

Security actors can support peacemaking by creating a stable environment, addressing grievances, and encouraging inclusive and accountable political dialogue. Dialogue between political and security elites, to build consensus for

peacemaking, is critical for successful negotiations. Security actors should adopt a collaborative, politically aware approach, aligning security measures with peacemaking goals. For example, advancing a negotiated solution may require dropping terrorist or criminal labels in exchange for improved behaviour, and avoiding attacks on militant leaders – avoiding actions that may seem beneficial from a security perspective but could fuel grievances and escalate conflict.

Political and security actors need to coordinate so that security pressure works in favour of peacemaking. When security actors position themselves in support of political progress, they can help reduce the violence of the political marketplace, enabling a more legitimate politics to emerge. Reaching an arrangement with one group can reduce the motivation of others to continuefighting. Ceasefires can build confidence for dialogue, and security actors can play a critical role in implementing confidence and security-building measures. These measures canhelp reduce violence, dispel suspicion, and generate trust, improving crisis management by promoting transparency, predictability and cooperation between opponents.

When security actors position themselves in support of political progress, they can help reduce the violence of the political marketplace, enabling a more legitimate politics to emerge

COLOMBIA

Case Study

Combining amnesty, inclusive dialogue, and security pressure to enable peace in Colombia

In Colombia, President Uribe's approach – of combining military force with political deal-making to 'buy the peace of one violent group while fighting another' – had been marred by widespread violations of human rights. When his defence minister, Juan Manuel Santos, became president, he drove forward a peace process to end the decades-long conflict with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

A crucial element of this was de-vilifying the FARC and recognising grievances on all sides.[7] Santos was also able to build on Uribe's initiative to offer guerillas a way out, including amnesty for past crimes and socioeconomic alternatives in the form of small business training and start-up grants.[8]

More than 17,000 former guerrillas entered the programme over 12 years, offering vital intelligence in the fight against the FARC, which began imploding.[9] Meanwhile, security forces supported political progress by keeping pressure on the FARC through continued fighting, but not pushing the group so much that talks broke down. The peace process was supported by de-escalatory and confidence building measures that helped to ensure trust and public confidence.[10] Victims' and women's delegations changed the conflict dynamics by pushing the FARC to atone for abuses, getting progressive provisions written into the peace deal, and 'defending the process publicly in times of crisis and demanding that the parties should not abandon the negotiating table'.[11]

Effective mediation should also draw on security and governance expertise to craft agreements on affordable, acceptable, legitimate and accountable SSR and DDR arrangements for the future. As mediators work to build trust in a variety of ways[12], peacekeepers and other security actors can do much to complement these efforts by:

- ☐ Advising on codes of conduct
- ☐ Providing safety and immunity for negotiators
- ☐ Facilitating mutual inspections, visits, aerial, or on-the-ground observations
- ☐ Accompanying joint patrols
- ☐ Helping safely implement steps towards DDR and weapons and ammunition management (for example, weapons-free and/or buffer zones)
- ☐ Facilitating exchange of prisoners/abductees or information about them; and
- ☐ Observing restrictions on troop movements, training, and the use of heavy weapons.[13]

Such contributions to peacemaking would normally be iterative, that is, going step-by-step, verifying, and then going further.

Deals to end violence are often imperfect but preferable to continued conflict. Security actors play a crucial role in supporting political and military leaders to reduce violence in the most sustainable way possible. The strongest agreements may offer concessions to end violence, but keep them to a minimum, while also including safeguards against future violence, crime, corruption, and political exclusion. They draw on inclusive dialogue, feedback, and consensus-building. As in active conflict settings, security actors help sustain peace processes by upholding the law, respecting amnesty and transitional justice provisions, and avoiding provocative actions that could torpedo progress.

BIHAR, INDIA

Case Study

Law enforcement backstopping peacemaking in Bihar, India[14]

From 2005-2010 in Bihar, India, a combination of political deal-making, law enforcement, and social investment significantly reduced violence and strengthened legitimacy. When Nitish Kumar became Chief Minister of Bihar in 2005, the state had endured generations of violence. Working closely with a dedicated police chief, he pursued a dual strategy: offering pathways out of crime while cracking down on those who refused to change.

He offered 'gangsters' a choice – transition into legitimate business or face prosecution, particularly for kidnapping and violent crimes.[15] He used existing laws to unblock court backlogs, prosecuting large numbers of firearms cases and jailing enough big players to force others to accept his deal.[16]

High-profile arrests signalled the end to impunity.[17] Kumar and his police chief promoted lawfulness and insisted that extra-judicial killings stop. To strengthen accountability, Kumar handed out ministers' phone numbers for public complaints and personally followed up. His police chief called 40 superintendents each night for an update on cases.[18] Police brutality fell and accountability rose.

To succeed, Kumar also tackled the long-standing conflict between landlord militias and Maoist insurgents by combining deal-making, technocratic policies, and effective law enforcement.[19] By addressing some landlord grievances, he undercut their reliance on violent militias that had terrorised Dalit communities.[20] With the militias weakened, the Maoists lost their justification for attacks in defence of Dalits.[21] Kumar then won over Dalit communities by expanding access to education, distributing tens of thousands of bicycles to school girls, building roads and bridges in huge numbers, and ensuring political inclusion.[22] As a result, Dalits began providing intelligence to law enforcement to fight the guerillas. As violence dropped, security forces gained time to focus on the worst offenders, further reducing impunity. Over five years, violent incidents in Bihar fell by more than half.[23]

Kumar's policies in this period did not solve all of Bihar's problems. Further institutionalisation of accountable security would be needed to prevent gains from unravelling.[24] Even if deadly attacks have consistently decreased over the past quarter century,[25] Maoist rebels remain a challenge for central Indian states such as Bihar to this day.[26] Nonetheless, this case illustrates how progress is possible when security measures are paired with efforts to craft a new political settlement and a more just social contract.

For legitimacy and sustainability of peacemaking, peace processes should involve all relevant civil society, women, private sector, and marginalised groups. They should promote inclusive security and justice governance, discourage domination by narrow interests, and ensure stringent vetting and retraining of security personnel. Security actors can encourage the adoption of elements supporting peace deal sustainability, including clear plans for confidence building, reducing ambiguity, and support for implementation, monitoring and contingency plans for managing non-compliance.

Adopting a legitimacy-focused approach at this stage lays the foundation for inclusive, accountable security governance, ensuring fair access to justice and public safety as key elements of long-term state legitimacy and peace.

Setting 4 Emerging peace

In this setting, a peace deal or cessation of hostilities can provide time and space to consolidate reductions in violence, transition from military-led to civilian-led security, pursue reconciliation, and tackle the root causes of conflict.

Such transitions, however – whether from military to civilian rule, deals-based to rules-based governance systems, or a chaotic security environment to a legal state monopoly on the use of force – tend to be highly volatile. Elites may use their position to consolidate power and wealth, perpetuating crime, corruption, abuses, marginalisation of outgroups, injustice, and weak governance. External security and stabilisation assistance can lessen incentives for meaningful reform. Elites may support peace and reform efforts only as long as their interests remain unthreatened, and even well-intentioned reformers can drift into authoritarianism if unchecked.

During the conflict, the security sector often becomes overly large, costly and militarised. It is likely implicated in abuses and accustomed to controlling politics, governance, and services. Despite their vital role in SSR, DDR, and the transition from military- to police-led security, security force leaders and personnel may be sceptical of reforms that involve restructuring, integrating former enemies or rivals, right-sizing, or payroll audits. State-

sponsored violence may be significant, while external peace and security players can feel pressure not to recognise their partners' reluctance and shortcomings.

Informal security actors[27] can be deeply problematic – for example, by reinforcing inequalities, corruption, and abuses while protecting and extorting communities, businesses, and asserting a greater governance role. They are likely to retain support if stabilisation efforts fail to protect the public and address marginalisation. Their push for influence within post-conflict structures can be destabilising – as can attempts to sideline them. However, even proscribed armed groups may hold some legitimacy – especially if seen as fair, accessible, affordable, and efficient providers of security and justice – and thus in some cases may have a role to play in ending violence and enhancing legitimacy.

As armed rebel leaders weigh their commitment to a peace deal, they may be positioning themselves among future elites or within the security sector while retaining the option of returning to violence. Lower ranks and associates, by contrast, remain highly vulnerable due to trauma, stigma, addiction, disability, and a range of health problems, and remain at risk of recidivist violence or remobilisation.

Amid these shifting dynamics, time is running out to tackle elite capture, corruption, repression and 'privilege violence' before conflict re-emerges.[29] However, peaceful and lasting change tends to come from within, driven by broad coalitions between society and reform-minded social and political leaders. This takes time. Society's ability to drive and anchor reforms depends on levels of safety, civic space, and inclusion in governance and security efforts to build the social contract. Yet such efforts can be undermined by hurried external security, stabilisation, or statebuilding assistance that entrenches corrupt, abusive, or exclusionary rule – as seen in Afghanistan after the Taliban's ouster in 2001.[30]

If external security actors prioritise short-term aims – such as counter-terrorism, counter-migration, or geopolitical rivalries – or focus narrowly on technical capacity-building, they risk ushering in a new phase of instability. Aside from offering security guarantees and working well with other players, they can make a big contribution to lasting peace by helping to build legitimacy and strengthening the social contract. Achieving this requires steering clear of reinforcing authoritarianism and corruption, nurturing security and justice institutions that are both effective and accountable, and backing efforts to extend inclusion, representation and reconciliation.

External security actors must position themselves behind locally driven change – and stay out of its way. This requires contextual understanding, patience, assiduous support to society's voice and agency, and knowing when to get behind those willing to address conflict drivers. Successful strategies focus on bringing about the 'social, political and economic conditions that conflict affected populations themselves consider necessary for peace and stability' [31] – with security actors in a supporting role rather than taking the lead. Instead of relying on external templates, these strategies should be shaped by active listening to diverse perspectives and concentrating on problems that surface 'early and often' during consultations. Bottom-up change and 'enmeshment' approaches – which foster close ties and common frameworks, approaches, and cultures between security and governance institutions over time – tend to work better than externally imposed technical approaches or diplomatic pressure.[32]

INDONESIA

Case Study

Shifting the public and institutional culture underpinning policing in Indonesia

For more than a decade before Suharto's[32] fall, the US helped cultivate 'a group of Indonesians with the ability to push their own system toward reform' via backing for the long-term engagement of the Asia Foundation and its support for local NGOs.[34] Recognising that public denunciations of corruption often coexisted with private self-enrichment, the Partnership for Governance Reform brokered an alliance between rival yet widely supported grassroots Muslim organisations. These groups launched a religiously focused, grassroots campaign to shift the culture enabling corruption. [35]

In this period, police reform was important as way to improve public trust and to prevent the military from reasserting its dominant role. To tackle police corruption, the International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP) moved beyond conventional human rights training for police and instead focused on changing police culture. Indonesian reformers developed a curriculum to shift police behaviour, methods, and ethics, while also ensuring the training was respected and reformers were elevated within police structures. This initiative also emphasised data-driven policing, allocating resources in response. The ultimate goal was to shift the police away from using beatings to extract confessions towards professional policing practices that could gain public respect. [36]

When designing security engagement in emerging peace settings, strategic patience is critical. Security institutions that were complicit in corruption, crime, injustice, and repression during the conflict phase usually do not fix issues like terrorism or drug trafficking in the post-conflict phase, nor do they make reliable partners. Avoiding support to such complicit structures may re-

quire pushing back on political pressure to 'rush to failure' and making the case for strategic patience. This is critical, because building coercive capacities or allowing them to persist, shuts down pluralism, avenues for dissent and protest, and social pressure for change – destroying legitimacy and thus undermining stability.

Shifting from a culture of privilege to equality before the law involves altering power imbalances and creating winners and losers, and it is therefore risky. When reformist political and security leaders emerge, external players need to move rapidly to support them with capacity development, training, and mentoring. Political and security leaders who effectively reduce violence and reform security structures typically hire capable people, empower them to solve problems, and enforce accountability. However, strong reformers may later shift towards exclusion and repression, as illustrated in the Georgia case study on reforming coalitions.

Effective external support avoids over-investment in any one leader, favouring broad coalitions and reinforcing society's stake in peace and security processes. Over-reliance on external assistance risks unsustainability and undermines accountability between recipients and the public. Donors, civil society, and security actors can support citizens to drive reforms by building relationships, linking diverse groups and leaders, and helping them learn from each other. [37]

Effective external support avoids over-investment in any one leader, favouring broad coalitions and reinforcing society's stake in peace and security processes.

GEORGIA

Case Study

Seizing the moment for reform in Georgia.[38]

Successfully overturning corruption can require rapid successive changes to throw an entrenched system off balance.[39] After Georgia's 2003 Rose Revolution, President Mikheil Saakashvili used his broad popular support to embark on reforms that helped stabilise the country. Georgia leapt from 133rd on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index in 2004 to 51st in 2012.[40] Corrupt traffic police were sacked en masse and new college graduates were hired. They were trained to focus on customer service and told their work was vital to building the new Georgia.[41] Training focused on police's day-to-day role,[42] with recruits warned that corruption or rudeness would get them fired. Accountability measures like video cameras, a hotline for citizen complaints, and spot-checks by plainclothes officers reinforced this.[43] Government officials were expected to act quickly, collect data, and adjust programmes until they worked.[44] The rapid changes met opposition and required overriding unions and civil service rules.[45] However, firing corrupt officials left criminals without protection. New laws led to arrests or forced criminals to flee, significantly reducing corruption and organised crime.[46] Symbolic arrests were publicised to send a clear message: the era of impunity was over.[47] While this period saw major reductions in crime and corruption, Saakashvili's leadership was also tainted by authoritarianism and scandal.[48] Today, Georgia remains far less corrupt than in 2004, but its path forward remains uncertain.

Where violence is pervasive, changing attitudes about violence and corruption is critical. Successful initiatives to reduce violence often use data to target specific areas, people and behaviours.[49] They involve collaboration between law enforcement and others who can address the specific issues at stake. For example, counselling and cognitive behaviour therapy can be useful for individuals and families affected by violence; in communities, positive investments in violent 'hotspots', work by 'violence interrupters' to deescalate spikes in violence, law enforcement engagement and deterrence can all be effective; nationally, laws and programmes to limit gun or alcohol availability, or strengthen domestic violence legislation have all succeeded in specific settings.[50]

Security actors should create systems of accountability and restore confidence by sharing clear updates on their progress. Efforts that start at community level are particularly important for strengthening accountability and the social contract. They work by strengthening 'structures of vertical and horizontal accountability that limit the power of any one part of government or society'.[51] This means ensuring space for and working with civil society and communities, and finding ways for authorities and security providers to address problems people raise – such as safety, justice, corruption, or other concerns. Moving from a corrupt, clientelist system to one that is more accountable can take decades and requires building broad societal support to make lasting institutional improvements.

Community efforts are critical to reassert non-violent social norms: no amount of troops or police can 'provide' security without society on board.[52] In many contexts, perceptions of safety and security can be improved via community security initiatives and/or community policing approaches.[53]

COLOMBIA

Case Study

Accountable security, community policing and social investments in Colombia.[54]

In Bogotá, Colombia, homicides dropped by 70 percent from 1993 to 2004.[55] Purging corrupt officers had overwhelming public support, and radical accountability measures helped a struggling state work well enough to fight violence and crime quickly. Bogotá's mayor increased the frequency of meetings to oversee police reform from monthly, to bi-weekly, weekly, and finally daily sessions. He brought violence down by focusing on all deaths including the lowest status, abandoning militarised tactics, adopting community policing, and working to regenerate slums. He also appealed to citizens to self-police their behaviour and take on the responsibilities of citizenship.

In parallel, after the election of Mayor Sergio Fajardo in 2003, the city of Medellin created a homicide statistics bureau and published monthly figures to deepen police accountability.[56] To help restore community trust and discourage violence, the mayor pushed through symbolic changes to make marginalised people feel more valued and connected.[57] Gondolas connected slums, parks were cleaned up, and there were free public concerts and Christmas lights along a dangerous stretch of river. Where bodies had been dumped, a school library and park were built. Slum land was reclaimed for a community cultural centre. Education spending soared. Based on Fajardo's actions to solve issues underpinning violence, after his four years in office Medellin had a lower murder rate than St. Louis, Baltimore, and Detroit.[58]

Community security initiatives, driven by local participation, identify causes of insecurity and develop solutions such as streetlights, safer infrastructure, arms control, and early warning systems. Such initiatives build trust and accountability, enabling reintegration, economic recovery, and local stability. Successful local examples can lead to national adoption.[59] Community policing is similar but with police taking more of a lead. 'By addressing the problems that matter to the community, problem-oriented policing gains the community's trust which helps officers get the information they need to build cases that put the most violent ring leaders in jail.[60] By backing such initiatives, security actors help reconstruct a legitimate social contract, grounded in inclusive participation, accountability, and better security and socioeconomic outcomes.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Case Study

Trust-building and representation in Northern Irish policing

The 1998 Good Friday Agreement helped achieve peace in Northern Ireland by addressing the mistrust and inequality between Catholics and Protestants. It recognised that a new police structure and measures to redress inequality would be required to gain the trust of both communities.[61] The Royal Ulster Constabulary was replaced with the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) which adopted a new name, oath and symbols. The PSNI introduced fair recruitment practices, and focused on community policing, crime prevention, order maintenance, and local participation. It was smaller but more representative of the two main communities as well as ethnic minorities, and more gender balanced. It grew trust through engagement: showing up for public meetings and community events, becoming present in areas where policing had been contested and absent, and connecting with Northern Ireland's vibrant, energetic civil society. As public confidence in the police grew, paramilitaries lost influence over policing. Tackling inequality was central to the agreement, and socio-economic support from the US, UK, and EU helped strengthen community participation via a bottom-up approach.[62]

As well as supporting inclusive security, governance, and development processes to tackle underlying drivers of crime and violent rebellion, in emerging peace settings work continues to push violent or criminal players towards lawful politics or legitimate economic activity. As illustrated by successful efforts to face down the Sicilian mafia in the 1990s, effective approaches to tackle organised crime can include intelligence, surveillance, witness protection, laws inspired by the US Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO, 1970), and asset seizure.[63]

Extending security provision can require working with local and informal mechanisms through initiatives to resolve conflict and extend access to security and justice to a wider range of the public. Engaging non-state security actors without exacerbating impunity, discrimination and gender deficits requires caution and careful risk management.[64]

In all these ways, security actors can play a vital role in reconstructing the social contract by fostering inclusive, accountable, and responsive approaches to security. To succeed, they need to model accountability and monitor progress. Are homicide rates going down? Are public perceptions of safety improving? Is public trust and confidence in the security and justice system increasing? These are critical questions to ask. Similarly, external players should audit assistance to ensure adherence to human rights and sustainability. They must also plan for a responsible, gradual exit for security interventions and assistance programmes, based on clear criteria developed with all participating partners.

POLICY TAKEAWAYS

Beyond war-fighting and deterrence, security institutions and forces need to be oriented to play meaningful roles in peacemaking. This includes conflict prevention, de-escalation, confidence building and demilitarised conflict management, peacekeeping, stabilisation, protection, DDR, and inclusive, accountable SSR processes. Across the various challenges and settings considered in this chapter our evidence and analysis point to ten key actions for security actors to contribute to peace and legitimacy:

1. **Lead and run security operations with a political rather than technical mindset, and encourage teamworking** among players with different peacemaking roles.

2. **Assess security inclusively.** Work with all relevant local actors and other experts to find out what is driving insecurity and involve local communities (men and women), civil society, and marginalised groups in the process; reassess what is and is not working in existing responses when doing so.

3. **Use these assessments to inform tailored intervention strategies** that respond to the underlying issues – prioritise problems that surface 'early and often'.

4. **Closely monitor – and require regular, honest reporting on –progress,** while keeping the focus on problem solving.

5. Consider carefully how to use your resources and leverage to **push conflict actors away from violence, repression, criminality, and corruption towards legitimate participation in politics**, the economy, and society. Tactics here may include:

   - ☐ Creatively supporting confidence building between conflicting parties.
   - ☐ Signalling openness to a way out for violent actors who are willing to renounce violence and ensuring safe dialogue is possible.
   - ☐ Being ready to support pragmatic deal making (balancing concessions with 'trip wires' to prevent capture of the political settlement by elite or criminal interests).
   - ☐ Using amnesties and incentives for disarmament and demobilisation and creating a safe context for successful reintegration of ex-combatants.
   - ☐ Upholding the law – and visibly signalling an end to impunity – with respect to those who refuse to renounce violence.

6 **Use a ‚legitimacy lens' to design and calibrate security assistance.** Incentivise transitions towards more legitimate governance, and avoid reinforcing problematic or militarised governance. Only provide technical and capacity support to those committed to reform. Always support civil society to encourage more inclusive, accountable security sector management and security provision.

7 **Use minimal force precisely, proportionally, and accountably to protect lives, and support inclusive, legitimate political processes.** Implement clear rules of engagement that prioritise non-violent measures first, including negotiation and conflict de-escalation techniques. Security forces should be trained in proportionate response, with transparent oversight mechanisms in place to monitor use of force. Partner with local and international humanitarian and development actors to coordinate interventions that address both immediate violence and underlying socioeconomic drivers.

8 **Build safety and trust inclusively**, for example through community security councils or forums where local citizens, including women and minority groups, regularly provide input on their security concerns. These councils work with local authorities and security forces to co-develop and deliver tailored safety plans, such as community policing initiatives, gun-free zones or safe zones for vulnerable groups, or rapid response mechanisms.

9 **Grow confidence** through community investments that re-establish norms of mutual trust and non-violence. Support developmental actions that practically address the issues underpinning insecurity (for example, street lights). Invest in communicating truthfully and pro-actively to grow trust and dispel misinformation using messages and channels designed to reach the whole of society – whose support is vital.

10 **Model accountability and learning at scale** in the design, management, review, and adaptation of all security interventions, assistance packages, and programmes, so that they minimise negative conflict impacts and maximise their contribution to legitimacy and lasting peace. Insist on holistic monitoring and evaluations that look beyond successful delivery of programme outputs; listen to the perspectives of affected people; keep assessing the impacts of security interventions on violence, conflict, and the issues driving them; and be prepared to adapt and improve. ce, and other public goods, thereby building sustainable peace.

Through such actions, security actors can play a critical role in enhancing legitimacy: removing violence from the political marketplace, encouraging trust and reconciliation, strengthening inclusion and accountability, and improving outputs such as access to safety, justice, and other public goods, thereby building sustainable peace.

CASE STUDY
SAHEL

Can accountable security be promoted under military rule?

KEY MESSAGES

Promoting accountable security and navigating support to local partners under military rule creates dilemmas and requires a deep understanding of context and risk. It also requires external partners to identify and build on sources of legitimacy within society. In the Sahel, lessons from the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance's (DCAF's) experiences include:

Weighing disengagement vs. engagement risks:

In volatile and authoritarian contexts, disengagement can create a void, leaving people and organisations that call for greater accountability marginalised and disempowered. Sustained and sensitive engagement on accountable security, however, can lay the groundwork for legitimacy. Risk assessment is crucial, balancing the potential to support positive change against the risks of validating militarisation.

Context-sensitive investment in accountability mechanisms:

Even if high-level democratic structures are dismantled, opportunities often exist under military rule for engagement, inclusion, and accountability at lower levels via local partners who continue to hold a degree of legitimacy. If approached sensitively, strengthening oversight networks involving civil society organisations (CSOs), media, human rights groups, and anti-corruption bodies, can still be an effective way to build accountability relationships in militarised settings. This can lead to growing public confidence, political commitment to advancing people's security, and processes for inclusion and accountability.

MILITARISATION AND REFORM DILEMMAS

Accountability deficits in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger have worsened following coups d'état between 2020–2023. In each country, militarisation has placed uniformed actors into political roles traditionally held by civilians. With state security taking precedence over civil liberties, transparency and inclusion in decision-making have declined. Amid growing insecurity, military regimes have narrowed civic space, reducing opportunities to participate in political discourse and restricting room for dissent.

External partners have had to choose between maintaining support for accountability and human rights or withdrawing altogether. Disengagement, often referred to as the‚empty chair' policy, has rarely led to positive results. Stepping away can mean abandoning those still advocating for accountability and ceding space to actors less committed to upholding human rights. Yet deciding whether and how to remain engaged is politically sensitive and complex. It requires partners to weigh the potential to positively influence a transition to civilian rule through their support for accountable security, against the risks of political

instrumentalization by military authorities.

Across the Sahel, widespread frustration with corruption and the failure to deliver public goods initially underpinned public support for military rule. Today, however, that support hangs in the balance as transitional authorities struggle to justify their use of public funds, including the imposition of new taxes. In addition to monitoring public perceptions of military rule, international partners need to assess the viability and potential of work on security sector accountability. Key considerations include identifying entry points and partners, assessing risks, and ensuring expectations are realistic – mindful of applicable lessons from other contexts.

TACKLING CORRUPTION IN BURKINA FASO

In Burkina Faso, work on sensitive political issues such as security sector corruption, misappropriation of equipment and weaponry, and lack of transparency can still have some impact. Pre-coup efforts to address these issues have continued under the military regime: the Autorité Supérieure de Contrôle de l'État et de Lutte contre la Corruption (ASCE-LC) – the government body tasked with tackling corruption – has produced a roadmap for improving financial governance in the security sector and a methodology for defence and security audits. This has influenced the transitional authority's stance on how corruption weakens the security sector, incrementally leading to visible signs of institutional change. An 'anti-corruption cell' was set up in July 2024[1], and a pact signed by leading CSOs, and state institutions affirms whistleblowers' crucial role in tackling corruption.[2]

Complementing the work with national authorities is bottom-up support for media and bloggers' associations to participate in security governance debates. This takes the form of small grants for the media, including sensitisation activities, and capacity building for media professionals.

Bottom-up support for media and bloggers' associations to participate in security governance debates is complementing the work with national authorities

CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEES IN MALI

As the earliest of the recent Sahelian coups, Mali has been a testing ground for the creative adaptation of governance and accountability work. A promising initiative has been the establishment of at least 57 Consultative Security Committees (CCS) across the country – platforms where security institutions, local administrative authorities and communities discuss security issues, identify priorities, and elevate public concerns. As civic space is shut down more generally, they provide a rare platform for exchange on issues of public concern and have led to growing trust between local government, security providers, CSOs and the public – not least women and young people.

ACCOUNTABILITY IN NIGER

Challenging military decisions or approaches can be risky, attracting public vilification – for example on social media – and administrative or judicial consequences. This trend was especially evident in Niger following the July 2023 coup d'état. The new regime – the Conseil national pour la sauvegarde de la patrie (CNSP) – systematically and openly dismantled the country's accountability structures, making clear its intent to consolidate power and weaken democratic oversight.[3]

Following the transition to military rule in Niger, DCAF shifted away from working with formal security institutions for the immediate term towards working with actors on the frontlines of oversight and accountability: civil society, human rights defenders, and journalists. Many Nigerien CSOs are defending democracy and protecting human rights through activism, media advocacy, monitoring abuses, and assisting victims. But donors' incremental withdrawal from the country, while politically understandable, can leave groups working for security sector accountability politically exposed and financially fragile.

Critical work documenting abuses has kept these issues in the national dialogue and safeguarded evidence for future investigations. A good example of this is the work of Nigerien non-governmental organisation MOJEDEC (Mouvement des Jeunes pour le Développement et l'Éducation Citoyenne), which has established a network of 64 trained community liaisons and monitors to document and address human rights violations. Collected data is presented to a consultative regional framework involving authorities, the judiciary, traditional leaders, and relevant CSOs.[4] Their reports support informed, coordinated responses from regional authorities, strengthening the collective response to human rights challenges.

Despite the constraints of military governance, taking a strategic and collaborative approach to advancing human rights and accountability has proven possible, at least locally. In maintaining this support, DCAF has prioritised consideration of the risk to partners as they manage the institutional and individual security challenges and psychological impact of their efforts.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT

Navigating support to local partners under military rule requires a deep understanding of context and risk, and a nuanced understanding of legitimacy. If the levers of a functioning democracy are shut down at top level in a military regime, there may still be avenues for inclusive civilian engagement and accountability at other levels. Elements of legitimacy – public confidence, political commitment to people's security and other public goods, and processes for inclusion and accountability – can and should be developed and encouraged. There are risks – to partners facing political and physical threats, and to accusations of 'peace-washing' repression – but the alternative is to abandon a society when international support and solidarity is arguably most needed. Disengagement also carries risks and can create a void where people and organisations supporting accountability become increasingly isolated, marginalised, and gradually disempowered.

CASE STUDY
UKRAINE

Enhancing legitimacy as a bulwark of resilience

KEY MESSAGES

- **Security sector reforms amid conflict:** Despite the ongoing war, Ukraine has pursued essential security sector reforms that have been vital in fostering greater public trust and resolve. These include efforts to address corruption in defence procurement and the extension of policing reforms.
- **Civil society's role in strengthening accountability:** Civil society has contributed hugely to the legitimacy and accountability of Ukrainian security institutions. By mobilising for reforms, including depoliticization of the police, new recruitment methods, and transparency in military procurement, civil society has worked effectively with the state and external supporters to enhance the country's resilience.
- **Future accountable security priorities:** Professional military education, transparency, media pluralism, civil society oversight and civil-military relations all remain priorities to ensure long-term trust and resilience. After the war, Ukraine will face significant challenges in creating an effective, accountable security structure, reintegrating former combatants, and reforming internal security, especially in post-occupation areas.

SECURITY SECTOR REFORMS

From 1991 to 2014, internal division, inertia, and corruption stymied reform in Ukraine – making the country more vulnerable to Russia.[1] Yet from 2014, reacting both to Russia's aggression in Crimea and the Donbas, and abuses under its former pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovych, Ukraine began a wide-reaching effort to strengthen its resilience while boosting the legitimacy and accountability of its security institutions.

Militarily, it stepped up force training, brought volunteer and irregular forces under official control, established a Non-Commissioned Officer corps, and developed capacities to protect civilians and provide for local people's needs during operations.[2] It also took strides towards reform of internal affairs and policing[3] – depoliticising and restructuring the police service, demilitarising some state security providers, revamping police recruitment, and strengthening efficiency and oversight in the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MOIA).[4]

From 2014–2022 the most successful reforms were those that strengthened Ukraine's combat capabilities and enjoyed support from the state, civil society and donors. As donors increased their engagement, they pushed for civilian control and anti-corruption measures in the military-industrial complex and defence procurement.[6] Overall, however, security reforms during that period achieved mixed results, with the

From 2014 Ukraine began a wide-reaching effort to strengthen its resilience while boosting the legitimacy and accountability of its security institutions

Ministry of Defence's (MOD's) ability to procure optimal arms and equipment for national defence affected by corruption and a lack of transparency. Russia's full-scale invasion in early 2022 further unified Ukrainian society, increasing demand for more effective security and cementing donor-government cooperation.[7]

THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Past patterns of distrust between citizens and the security sector have evolved, with civil society increasingly acting as a trusted intermediary between the public, leaders and institutions.[8] CSOs have played a vital role in making security institutions stronger and more accountable – organising and filling capacity gaps in the formal system, and helping detect and counter corruption.

Activists and CSOs engaged in anti-corruption and police reform initiatives that led to significant improvements in accountability and legitimacy.

Following the removal of former President Yanukovych in the 2014 Revolution of Dignity, civil society played a more active role.[9] Activists and CSOs engaged in anti-corruption and police reform initiatives that led to significant improvements in accountability and legitimacy. The Independent Anti-Corruption Commission (NAKO) helped improve civilian expertise in the MOD and procurement and supply for frontline troops.[10] Civil society also pushed to safeguard the armed forces' human rights and improve the military justice system.[11]

After the government disbanded the abusive police units that committed violations during the Maidan protests, CSOs pushed parliament to adopt a new police law leading to the establishment of the new 'patrol police'. Learning from experiences in Georgia and with US support, this involved de-politicisation and the rapid recruitment of well-motivated, educated and remunerated officers.[12] These officers were vetted via 'Police Commissions' and independent hiring centres with civil society and the public helping select recruits and hold the new units accountable.[13] This significantly improved police responsiveness to public needs and increased public confidence in security provision in Kyiv and other cities.[14]

These efforts helped reverse the Soviet legacy of apathy and mistrust between civil society and the state.[15] CSOs learned to balance critical and constructive engagement, and the state prioritised trust-building, growing more receptive to civil society inputs.[16] As a result, trust in Ukraine's leaders and security institutions was transformed between 2015 and 2023.[17] This has been critical for Ukraine's resilience and cohesion in face of Russia's full-scale invasion[18] – clearly contrasting with Russia's more central and inflexible decision-making in battle, political structures that discourage accurate information sharing, and pervasive corruption.

FUTURE ACCOUNTABILITY

Ukraine continues to work on security reforms despite the war.[19] Gaps in professional military education, defence sector transparency/corruption, the extension of initial policing reforms, and ongoing investment in civil-military relations, are all significant issues in need of attention and support.[20] The need for troops, and fears over forced conscription are having complex impacts.[21] Scandals and mistrust related to defence sector corruption remain a problem.[22] Priorities include pursuing defence industrial and procurement reforms, systematising civil society's policy and oversight role, and improving the consistency and quality of donor support.

If Ukraine can withstand Russia's onslaught, accountable security and legitimacy will remain important when the war ends. An affordable, effective post-war force structure will require significant efforts towards demobilisation and reintegration, and effective, accountable internal security provision – especially in areas affected by occupation. Further reforms to police and the SBU – Ukraine's internal security agency – will be essential.[23] This can be enabled by expanding media pluralism, consolidating processes for civil society consultation,[24] adopting inclusive local approaches to security provision, and working through truth, justice and accountability issues.[25]

The future will no doubt be challenging given existential threats and fears that unity and trust may dissipate in post-war Ukraine. Fortunately for Ukraine [26], pro-reform CSOs have the potential to channel public support towards reformers, help improve policies, participate in defence and policing structures, raise funds, bring in equipment, and collaborate with reform processes and international partners while retaining a critical independence.[27] Likewise, the incentives bringing together leaders, institutions, civil society and donors to collaborate for a more legitimate state capable of surviving external aggression and preparing for integration into EU and NATO structures, can help Ukraine consolidate accountable security and legitimacy in the coming decades.

Pro-reform CSOs have the potential to channel public support towards reformers, help improve policies, participate in defence and policing structures, raise funds, bring in equipment, and collaborate with reform processes and international partners.

2.2 MEDIATION

Mediating for legitimacy in a fragmented world

KEY MESSAGES

Today's conflicts are increasingly complex, marked by the breakdown of structure and authority and the influence of external actors pursuing their own interests. At the same time, mediation efforts are becoming more fragmented, with diverse actors working at cross-purposes and disregarding established norms such as impartiality and legitimacy. Peace agreements are elusive, and mediation is in crisis. To maintain legitimacy, mediators must adapt by developing strategies that can navigate fractured geopolitics effectively, while balancing the competing interests of the many actors involved.

In the face of fragmentation, new strategies are needed to strengthen the legitimacy of mediators, peace processes, and their outcomes. One proposed approach is 'multimediation', which embraces rather than resists the fragmented mediation landscape. This emerging perspective aligns with the Principles for Peace, which emphasise humility, integrated and hybrid solutions, and seizing opportunities to promote dignity, pluralism, and legitimacy. Three shifts are warranted in response:

1 **Use mediation to build momentum for peace**, but with greater emphasis on peace deals that are genuinely inclusive and owned. Strengthen the capacity of leaders, parties and concerned stakeholders to negotiate and implement lasting agreements to end conflict.

2 **Abandon top-down templates and adopt a flexible, pragmatic, and context-sensitive approach** – working with the unpredictability of contemporary conflict environments while supporting organic processes that connect all levels of the peacemaking ecosystem. **A 'middle out' strategy is key to this approach. It requires engaging local actors alongside high-profile individuals and groups who can influence processes and outcomes,** fostering connections between them, and seizing opportunities to reinforce the legitimacy of the process and its outcomes.

3 **Broaden engagement to**

- ☐ **Develop supportive, long-term networks** among political, media, and security actors, civil society, and the private sector to identify concrete entry points for engagement, grow relationships, and promote ideas and incentives among important constituencies who can drive and sustain peace.

- ☐ **Sustain support across all stages of mediation**, from pre-mediation to longer-term processes of implementing agreements, bargaining for legitimacy, and dealing with shortcomings and setbacks.

INTRODUCTION

"But there is too much going on. This is chaos. We need to harmonise this."

(Seasoned international diplomat during a Sudan dialogue meeting)

As the cases of Sudan and South Sudan exemplify (see infobox below), contemporary conflict mediation is in a structural crisis.[1] In Sudan, conflict mediation involves numerous actors and frequent meetings that sometimes create synergies and outcomes, but just as often result in overlap, competition, or other challenges, such as forum shopping and an unwillingness to settle as long as there are perceived advantages to continuing the conflict. These are common features in today's international conflict mediation efforts around the world.

While conflict mediation at the international, national, and sub-national levels has always involved multiple stakeholders and competitive behaviour, the contemporary mediation landscape has grown more crowded. It is hard to agree on one lead mediator – or even on workable frameworks for collaboration and task-sharing. Even when mediated agreements are reached, implementation proves highly challenging. This chapter discusses how mediation processes at international, regional, and national levels can contend with such fragmentation.

In today's crowded peacemaking environment, traditional lead mediators such as Norway, Switzerland, and UN envoys face increasing competition. Private organisations like the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (CHD) and Crisis Management Initiative (CMI) now populate the field alongside regional organisations such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD). Regional bilateral actors, often operating indirectly and behind closed doors, now also play a significant role in peacemaking. While mediation has always been somewhat interest-driven, the pursuit of short-term self-interest by some of these new actors – as with Egyptian and Emirati mediation in Sudan[2] – has added a new complexity.

Implementing the outcomes of mediation – ceasefires or peace agreements – once they are signed is growing harder.[3] Funding constraints and diplomatic imperatives often push peace processes and leverage parties into signing agreements that, while ostensibly designed to be inclusive and comprehensive, frequently lack real legitimacy. This has contributed to widespread implementation failures.[4] Many stakeholders see these peace processes as externally imposed instead of genuine peacemaking efforts to deliver inclusive and sustainable outcomes. Despite frequent references to localisation and national ownership, the reality is that many of these processes lack true local buy-in, undermining their long-term success.

The initial 2015 Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (ARCSS) and the 2020 Juba Peace Agreement on Sudan illustrate this challenge. These agreements were primarily driven by international and regional diplomatic agendas and only marginally reflected the needs and perspectives of affected populations. The fate of these two agreements demonstrates that peacemaking efforts without a form of 'grounded legitimacy'[5] based on the authentic acceptance and support of local peace processes and institutions, are likely to face considerable obstacles and unlikely to result in sustainable success.

INFOBOX

Mediation and resolution challenges in Sudan and South Sudan

South Sudan's political and peace talks have been fragmented and inconclusive, marked by shifting alliances, deep divisions, and stalled progress. Since gaining independence in 2011, the country has faced instability, and negotiations to resolve its conflict have been repeatedly undermined by disagreements over power-sharing. The 2018 peace agreement, which created a fragile unity government between President Salva Kiir and First Vice President Riek Machar, has largely failed to meet its goals, with extensions to the deal and few substantive achievements.

Negotiations resumed in Nairobi in May 2023, aimed at revitalising the peace deal and addressing unresolved issues, such as unifying armed forces, drafting a new constitution, and scheduling elections. However, the talks face significant obstacles, including Machar's withdrawal over concerns that the government was undermining the 2018 accord and internal divisions within Kiir's camp. Efforts to find compromises with a range of other rebel leaders adds a further layer of complexity. Despite these challenges, Kenya's mediation team pushed for a broader political agreement, emphasising constitutional reform and credible elections, but progress has been slow and uncertain. Meanwhile, South Sudan's economic crisis, worsened by the collapse of oil revenues and the war in neighbouring Sudan, further complicates the situation. With violence simmering and humanitarian needs rising, South Sudan remains at risk of falling into deeper political instability, as well as being drawn into the conflict in neighbouring Sudan.

Further north, in **Sudan**, the civil war which erupted in April 2023, has devastated the country, creating one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. The conflict stems from a power struggle between Sudan's military junta – primarily the regular Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) – and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) – rooted in the notorious Janjaweed militias from the conflict in Darfur. These two groups, once aligned, now battle for dominance. Fighting has spread nationwide from Khartoum, drawing in various ethnic and communal militias. Despite fluctuating momentum, neither side appears likely to defeat the other, and the longer the war persists, the harder it will be to reunite the fractured state.

International mediation efforts have been fragmented and ineffective, with multiple external powers, including the US, Gulf States, and the UN, each pursuing differing interests. Regional efforts, such as those from the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and back-channel talks by Egypt and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), have failed to produce a lasting ceasefire or a unified negotiation process. Divisions between Sudan's external backers, including Egypt's support for the army and UAE's backing of the RSF, further complicate the situation. External actors have complex roles, for example in both providing weapons and profiting from commodities controlled and smuggled by the warring parties.[6] A consolidated ceasefire agreement to stem the bloodshed, alleviate famine, and stabilise the country appears a distant prospect.

Despite challenges in such settings, withdrawing external support and engagement is simply not an option. In South Sudan, peace efforts continue even as benchmarks are repeatedly missed, and channels of communication are kept open in Sudan despite a fragmented and often chaotic mediation landscape. Nonetheless the search for tangible alternatives is indispensable.

This chapter begins by examining the fragmentation and challenges facing international mediation. It then explores how this affects peace mediation processes and their outcomes. Next, it critiques dominant peacemaking approaches that have hampered the development of more pragmatic mediation strategies. Using Christine Bell's concept of *multimediation*[7] – which offers a framework to help make sense of the current turbulence in peacemaking – and connecting it with the Principles for Peace approach, the chapter concludes by exploring ways to restore the legitimacy of peace processes in challenging circumstances.

Multimediation is both a pragmatic response to the realities of fragmented conflict and a recognition that all-encompassing, comprehensive peace processes may no longer be feasible. It acknowledges that conflict systems today involve numerous actors, each with varying degrees of influence, and that conflict resolution requires a constellation of mediation efforts at different levels and locations.[8] The aim is to *unwind* elements of these conflict systems, to embark together on a journey towards peace, even if the end state of that 'peace' remains uncertain or undefined.

Multimediation usefully reflects the thinking underlying the Principles for Peace – rearticulating the importance of principles such as humility, pragmatic openness to integrated and hybrid solutions, and an opportunistic approach to enhancing dignity, pluralism, and legitimacy – for mediators seeking to contribute to peace in today's more fragmented world. This chapter assesses the value of this concept in contributing to rethinking mediation in a landscape of fragmentation and competition.

THE CHANGING CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT MEDIATION

Fragmentation describes the ongoing breakdown of institutionalised systems in peacemaking that were previously more or less predictable. These conditions result from the increasing complexity of today's conflicts, where no single authority or framework can provide clear and tangible solutions, and the number of actors and stakeholders involved multiply – often without a clear indication of their *real* strength on the ground. Historically, approaches to peacemaking have relied on a coherent set of global norms and institutions, with human rights, electoral democracy, and transitional justice components. As established systems of peacemaking disintegrate – in particular, the traditional setting of formal peace negotiations between belligerents led by one chief mediator – new approaches emerge to address the seemingly chaotic and overlapping layers of global, regional, and local conflict dynamics.

In describing these developments, terms like *hybridity* and *hybrid peace* have gained prominence, emphasising the importance of combining international strategies with local realities to create solutions that are both effective and sustainable. This shift recognises that top-down approaches often fail in fragmented environments, and that peace efforts instead need to rely on contextualised, adaptable processes that integrate diverse perspectives and practices.[9] For example, local actors are essential in building trust and tailoring interventions to specific community needs. Similarly, *middle-out*' approaches engage *grass-top* actors – those who are deeply connected to local realities but with ability to influence and incentivise more powerful players. These strategies help anchor international initiatives in local contexts, strengthening their legitimacy. This blending of approaches reflects the complexity of modern peacemaking, where no single method can fully address the challenges of fractured societies recovering from conflict.

Multimediation rearticulates the importance of principles such as humility, pragmatic openness to integrated and hybrid solutions, and an opportunistic approach to enhancing dignity, pluralism, and legitimacy – for mediators seeking to contribute to peace in today's more fragmented world

Responding to today's conflicts is complicated by the fact that states, armed actors, and other stakeholders may pursue several seemingly contradictory objectives at the same time. For example, in Sudan, the US aims to leverage the UAE to stop its logistical and financial support for the RSF while at the same time concluding a US-UAE defence agreement. The UAE, in turn, is exploring alliances that contradict its clear partiality in the conflict, such as supporting Ethiopia to improve relations with the SAF in light of potential future peace talks. Such fragmentation calls for policymakers and practitioners to adopt mediation and peacemaking approaches that are as dynamic as the environments they seek to stabilise.

Fragmentation involves a breakdown of global and regional structures that once offered a semblance of stability and order, with reverberations down to the sub-national level. This results in *ungovernance* – a retreat from coordinated governance efforts towards more chaotic, unstructured forms of stakeholder engagement.[10] In peace processes, these conditions often work against the resolution of deep-rooted conflicts, leading to enduring transitions characterised by non-closure and strategic manipulation of time, space, and relationships.[11] More adaptive, flexible approaches are required to engage these fragmented conflict environments, where traditional hierarchies and power structures no longer apply.

At the international institutional level, the world is breaking into competing regional blocs – with geopolitics projected into apparently localised conflict settings. What were once seen as building blocks for stable international cooperation now frequently become sources of tension, yet nevertheless remain as preconditions for peacemaking efforts. Shifting alliances and competing interests shape a volatile environment, sometimes creating valuable hooks for engagement but also adding

difficulties for effective external mediation.

Fragmentation affects conflict mediation in multiple ways. As multilateral peace and security structures erode, a growing number of actors, state and non-state alike, are stepping into mediation roles. Each brings unique, and often conflicting, approaches to peacemaking that challenge traditional norms and established processes and open the door to a mix of innovative and competing strategies.[12]

While some degree of fragmentation can encourage creative and locally tailored solutions, excessive disintegration undermines coordination and effectiveness. Minor fragmentation can indeed allow for diverse strategies in conflict resolution to take hold,[13] but when global governance structures become overly fragmented, solution-oriented approaches become nearly impossible to apply. The result is a fractured system where conflicting priorities and a lack of cooperation challenge the long-term impact of peace initiatives. Understanding and navigating these dynamics is critical. Effective coordination among diverse actors and adaptable mediation frameworks are key to addressing fragmentation. By embracing flexibility and seizing opportunities to strengthen legitimacy, mediation efforts can become more effective and sustainable.

One effective mediation approach focuses on building the capacity of conflicting parties and other concerned stakeholders to negotiate, implement, and sustain adherence to agreements.[14] In contrast, leverage-based mediation – where external actors pressure parties into agreements – often fails by undermining the local legitimacy of a peace process.[15] This is particularly true in fragmented environments where multiple competing interests make it difficult for any single actor to enforce compliance.

In Sudan, for example, both domestic and international actors have struggled to pressure General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) into negotiations. When pressure reaches its limit – especially in a landscape with competing mediation efforts and parties still viewing violence as a viable strategy – it becomes ineffective.[16]

In such contexts it can be important to balance pressure with a focus on building capacity and trust among the parties, assisting them to form views on, negotiate and implement agreements rather than attempting to impose external solutions. A shift from reliance on external leverage to capacity-based approaches is especially important in contexts where international actors themselves are divided, each pushing for different outcomes based on their geopolitical or economic interests. This perspective can be a crucial way to strengthen the vital quality of local ownership of the conflict resolution process.

FROM ARCHITECTURE TO TURBULENCE: PEACE MEDIATION CHALLENGES

The challenge for peacemaking is not only to navigate the fragmented global landscape but also to reconceptualise what 'order' and 'governance' mean in a world where traditional structures and institutions are weakening. Even strategies emphasising greater legitimacy for local actors and promoting regional solutions – approaches that have been advocated for years – may not fully address the scope of the current problem.[17] Local and regional actors, while better positioned to understand the nuances of specific conflicts, often face severe limitations in terms of resources, capacity, and political influence, leading to inconsistent and fragmented mediation outcomes.

The African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) – designed to enable the African Union (AU) and regional bodies to collaborate on conflict resolution – has struggled to gain traction. Hampered by the same forces of fragmentation that challenge global governance more broadly,[18] APSA has been unable to check the crises in Sudan, the Tigray conflict in Ethiopia, and the Rwandan-backed instability in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). APSA's limitations highlight a wider challenge of weak institutional peace and security structures in other regions of the world. This weakness in top-down global and regional task-sharing structures and governance models underscores the need for dynamic, multifaceted mediation strategies that can accommodate the diverse and competing interests of the many actors involved.

The fluidity of the contemporary peacemaking landscape feeds a lack of coordination and harmonisation among mediators and other stakeholders. Veteran diplomats and mediators frequently lament the negative impacts of this trend, highlighting 'donor shopping', or 'forum shopping' – where conflict parties seek out mediators or funding from multiple sources – as issues leading to fragmented and disjointed peace processes.[19] Despite the widespread recognition of this persistent problem, coordination and harmonisation remain challenging.

Weakness in top-down global and regional task-sharing structures and governance models underscores the need for dynamic, multifaceted mediation strategies that can accommodate diverse and competing interests

The turbulence that comes with the proliferation of overlapping mediation initiatives and the absence of a commonly accepted lead mediator can be a major stumbling block. Traditional actors – such as international organisations, regional bodies, and long-established bilateral mediators (for example, Norway or Switzerland) – previously relied on their expertise and their capacity to persuade conflict parties to negotiate.[20] For these actors, a turbulent mediation environment erodes their ability to assert leadership and achieve coherent, long-term solutions.

Meanwhile, new players are stepping into mediation, confidently using the opportunities created by this openness. Countries such as Kenya, Malaysia, Qatar, Türkiye, and the UAE have emerged as key mediation actors. Malaysia played a pivotal role in facilitating the peace process between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), demonstrating that new mediators can navigate complex conflicts.[21] These new actors present practical challenges by competing for leadership in mediation initiatives. They also pose conceptual and normative challenges, as they often favour

exclusionary mediation approaches that prioritise certain actors while sidelining others and adopt mediation styles that are more avowedly interest-driven or openly aligned with one of the conflict parties.

These actors tend to rely on exclusive, closed-door meetings and mainly involve like-minded stakeholders in their efforts. While such practices can streamline negotiations, they often risk marginalising critical voices and undermining the legitimacy of the process.[22] This picture is further complicated by the rise of private mediation actors, including NGOs,[23] private military companies, and corporations with vested interests in conflict zones. Unlike traditional mediators, these private actors tend to prioritise business or geopolitical interests over impartial conflict resolution, often with little regard for local legitimacy.

Avoiding a rigid, preconceived approach to peacemaking in favour of a more fluid, flexible one supported by organic, multi-level processes of political and social transformation may enhance the credibility and legitimacy of any transitional endeavour

The emphasis on impartiality – a core, if elusive, tenet of traditional mediation – is being replaced by openly pragmatic, interest-driven mediation efforts. A way forward may be to rely less on established ideas of how a staged peace process should unfold – from power-sharing to security sector reform, constitution-making, and free and fair elections – and move towards an open-ended, process-focused approach. Avoiding a rigid, preconceived approach to peacemaking in favour of a more fluid, flexible one supported by organic, multi-level processes of political and social transformation may enhance the credibility and, thus, also the legitimacy of any transitional endeavour.

Likewise, there may be merit in trying to establish team-working and greater coherence between mediators with different instincts and approaches. For example, in Sudan it has been suggested that leveraging the unique strengths of European and emerging power mediators could be useful in addressing both the power play at the heart of the conflict and the deeper underlying issues, if these approaches can be effectively brought together.[24] And more broadly across the mediation field, there may be a value in promoting inclusive efforts to discuss and evolve consensus on how to improve the effectiveness of mediation practice and learning.[25]

BEYOND TOP-DOWN TEMPLATES

Observers critical of traditional peacemaking approaches highlight how rigidity often undermines their effectiveness. Practices such as 'deadline diplomacy' and inflexible timeframes, and continued reliance on rigid roadmaps and fixed implementation frameworks, have been a persistent subject of criticism, as these tools cannot adapt to the dynamic nature of conflict.[26] This is further illustrated in the case study on Bosnia and Herzegovina. Frequently, peace processes are overloaded with overambitious expectations and unrealistic timeframes where a well-mediated and well-designed process is needed to resolve deep-seated societal tensions and grievances, which may have accumulated over decades.

Such comprehensive planning and implementation-focused approaches leverage international pressure via the UN, AU, troikas or 'groups of friends', who use diplomatic, financial, and legitimising power[27] to assert timelines for signing agreements and implementing provisions – often at the expense of fostering a more organic and legitimate process and enhancing relational dynamics between key stakeholders.

Such practices are often linked to a 'liberal peacebuilding' approach, associated with the spread of open markets and the institutionalisation of human rights norms, electoral democracy, and good governance practices. Driven largely by Western powers, their development organisations, and multilateral agencies, liberal peacebuilding rests on the assumption that peace can be engineered through the establishment of political and economic structures reflecting liberal values.[28] This model has faced growing scrutiny, particularly in the context of the 'local turn,' which argues for more context-sensitive, bottom-up approaches to peacebuilding. As 'local turn' advocates argue, the universal application of liberal peacebuilding fails to account for the unique cultural, historical, and political contexts of conflict-affected societies.

The idea of simply addressing these root causes with a comprehensive peace agreement and detailed roadmap for transition that will then resolve an armed conflict usually proves elusive

Two other overarching components of mainstream peacebuilding are the quest for harmonised approaches, and the idea that it is possible to stage peace processes in a planned, sequential way towards a pre-designated end state. Harmonisation involves streamlining and coordinating peace support efforts. In peace mediation and negotiations, this means agreement on a lead mediator – typically a state, a coalition of states, or an international organisation – who then seeks to gather the conflicting parties around a joint negotiation table to focus on drafting an agreement.[30] Under this model, it is assumed that all parties can be aligned within a single framework that will guide the peace process from initiation to implementation.

Peace plans often evolve around identifying perceived root causes of conflict and aiming to resolve them through a comprehensive programme for societal transformation, which relies on various measures ranging from constitution-making to economic support. The idea of simply addressing these root causes with a comprehensive peace agreement and detailed roadmap for transition that will then resolve an armed conflict usually proves elusive. In *figure 9*, blue lines indicate progress, and red lines setbacks, in the trajectory of formal agreements in peace processes from 1990-2023: as this data from the PA-X database illustrates, peace processes never work out as planned.

Implementation of agreements in peace processes has always been a problematic aspect of mediation. Typically, the implementation phase involves a transitional government,

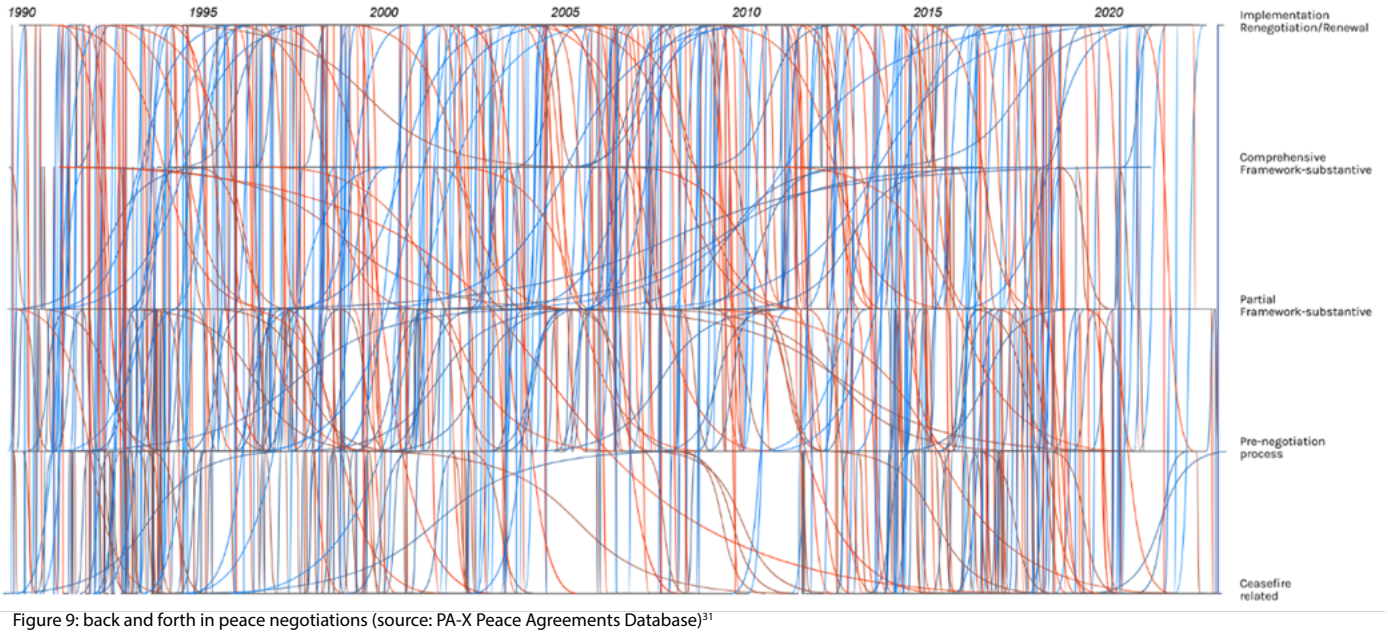


Figure 9: back and forth in peace negotiations (source: PA-X Peace Agreements Database)[31]

often established through a power-sharing arrangement between the conflicting parties. These governments are tasked with executing the agreed-upon programme during the transition. However, such arrangements face significant challenges and rarely achieve their intended outcomes. A major reason for this failure lies in the structural incompatibilities of power-sharing governments. Rather than fostering genuine peace, such governments perpetuate the conflict through political means, and entrench elite interests. The situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, nearly 30 years after the Dayton Agreement, illustrates this issue – see Bosnia case study. Powersharing arrangements often lead to a 'formalised political unsettlement',[32] where the intended turn to normal politics never occurs and the peace process stagnates.

Initially based on the experience of seasoned diplomats and international organisations, these approaches became institutionalised and more routine over time, a process William Easterly has called the 'tyranny of experts' (who wield rigid, technocratic solutions with little regard for complex local realities).[33]

Some of the loyalty to these approaches may stem from well-intentioned motives. In many contexts there are few clear alternatives to applying pressure on conflict parties to stop violence while doing further work to create incentives for sustainable progress. Additionally, traditional mediators often argue that integrating plans to address conflict drivers into mediation processes and peace settlements – while not a complete solution – can at least lay a foundation and provide a window of opportunity for continued negotiations before conflict returns.

Nonetheless, these practices are increasingly unsustainable in the face of evolving global dynamics. Critical peacebuilding research has questioned the practice of imposing a one-size-fits-all framework that neglects sensitivity to local contexts and existing power imbalances.[34] Despite these critiques, however, there has been a reluctance to confront the limitations of existing peacemaking approaches.

The technical dimension of implementation also diverts attention from the need for political and societal transformation, as underlined by the emphasis on legitimacy and pluralism in the Principles for Peace.[35] Although the specific tasks outlined in peace agreements are important, they can overshadow the complex processes necessary to move societies from conflict to peace and grow the social contract. Peace requires not just the fulfilment of agreements, but a deeper transformation in state-society relations[36], in how societies govern themselves, and in how individuals relate to one another, emphasising the need for shifts in governance practices, collective mindsets, and societal relations. Achieving this change requires much more than the mechanical execution of pre-negotiated tasks.

In some cases, an event-driven focus can lead to s uccessful outcomes, assuming the conditions play out favourably or are 'ripe' for resolution.[37] However, such situations are rare. More often, these approaches falter because they neglect foundational elements like building relations of trust, growing legitimacy and helping create institutions that can sustain the process in environments where trust is lacking. For peacemaking to succeed, there needs to be a shift toward strategies that emphasise the process itself, ensuring the relationships and structures necessary for long-term stability are adequately addressed.[38]

For peacemaking to succeed, there needs to be a shift toward strategies that emphasise the process itself, ensuring the relationships and structures necessary for long-term stability are adequately addressed.

Likewise, it is vital to recognise that 'Peacebuilding [and] peacemaking are much more integrated than people think':[39] peace agreements are thus *the starting line, not the finish line*; and the passage of any society through dialogue, ceasefires, mediation, conflict resolution and peace consolidation – however bumpy and unpredictable – involves negotiation and bargaining processes at every step.

This requires continual, adaptable support from mediation actors and elsewhere in the peacemaking ecosystem.[40]

NAVIGATING THROUGH TURBULENCE: MULTIMEDIATION

The shortcomings of traditional peacemaking methods highlight the need to rethink established paradigms and develop a more flexible, pragmatic, and context-sensitive approach. This approach should recognise the limitations of top-down planning and emphasise the importance of supporting organic, bottom-up and middle-out processes of political and social transformation. One suggestion is to focus on *multimediation*, an approach that invites us to explore pragmatic pathways that leverage, rather than resist, the current multiplicity of mediation efforts that characterise most contemporary settings. Multimediation[41] is not a recipe; rather, it explores potential configurations that eschew the need for over-coordination and harmonisation under a single umbrella with a sole lead mediator.

In fragmented peace processes, similar but different initiatives operate in parallel and impact one another in unpredictable ways. Planning, designing, or sequencing the effects of these interactions is difficult due to their complex and non-linear nature.[42] Within the fragmented global and regional conflict landscapes, at least four mediation types can be identified as relevant to multimediation (see Infobox below).

INFOBOX

Four distinct mediation types relevant to multimediation

LOCALISED DISAGGREGATED MEDIATION takes place around highly specific, interest-based issues, or between smaller communities around prevalent conflict. In Sudan, negotiations have revolved around securing humanitarian aid deliveries along specific border crossings, or facilitating access to and repair of critical infrastructure, such as the oil pipeline from South Sudan to Port Sudan. Such mediation tends to be pragmatic, focusing on immediate, tangible outcomes. One example of this was the 2021 Pieri peace process in Jonglei, South Sudan, which brought together more than 500 representatives from three communities. The Pieri peace agreement succeeded in reducing inter-communal violence for some time. Such localised negotiations often succeed in contexts where broader peace processes falter, addressing immediate concerns and building community-level trust. However, their impact is often limited to localised outcomes and lacks broader national or regional coherence.

DISAGGREGATED 'MEDIATION CONSTELLATIONS'.

In such processes, mediation efforts are issue-specific and may involve broader cross-border or humanitarian concerns. These constellations often operate independently but can overlap or compete. For example, in Syria, the Russian-led Astana peace talks to establish 'de-escalation zones' involving Turkey and Iran, was a highly political and contested process, reflecting the broader geopolitical competition in the region. The negotiations around grain exports in Ukraine's Black Sea highlight how practical results can be achieved in fragmented mediation environments, even when further agreements on ceasefires remain elusive. Although limited, this demonstrates that peace mediation efforts in protracted situations can still result in breakthroughs on focused issues despite fragmentation.

ONE-SIDED PRE-PROCESS MEDIATION.

This type of mediation often occurs behind the scenes, with actors pursuing clear self-interests. Countries such as Egypt, Russia, and the UAE have emerged as key players in this space, alongside traditional mediation actors. For example, the UAE has engaged in mediation efforts in Sudan and Yemen, often tied to its broader military and economic goals in the region.[43] The UAE's involvement is notable for its opacity, as much of its mediation occurs away from public scrutiny. These mediations often serve to strengthen regional alliances and create spheres of influence rather than focusing on conflict resolution, challenging notions of neutrality in mediation.

GLOBALISED PEACE-CONFLICT MULTIMEDIATION.

The fourth form of mediation combines traditional Track One diplomacy with broader, multi-stakeholder initiatives. The Jeddah peace process for Sudan, led by the US and Saudi Arabia, is a prime example. Initially launched in Saudi Arabia, the process was later transferred to Geneva with support from Switzerland, making it more inclusive by incorporating women's groups and civil society actors. This multimediation approach also includes convening meetings and coordinating between various mediation efforts, as seen in the UN's role in Sudan, where different mediation initiatives are being harmonised at the headquarters level.

In addition to understanding these types of mediation and their implications, a multimediation perspective conceptualises peace processes differently. It sees mediation not as a prescriptive effort to follow a fixed roadmap, but as an unfolding process. Identifying these different modes of mediation embraces fluidity, adaptation, and the unpredictable nature of contemporary conflict environments. While it is impossible to design or sequence mediation efforts systematically, some insights and guidance can be derived from past and ongoing initiatives.

Process over plan.

Multimediation prioritises creating opportunities rather than following a rigid plan. Instead of fixed sequences, mediators prepare for critical junctures where opportunities may arise. Processes are always interconnected, even if they are not always harmonised. In Colombia, alongside the formal termination of conflict by warring factions at the negotiating table, conflict transformation has been driven *by society at large* in *a radically different approach that balances the power asymmetry between the negotiating table and other deliberation and decision-making processes*.[44] While it is impossible to predict when and how elements of the process might fall into place, mediators must remain open to possibilities as they unfold. Flexibility in decision-making becomes essential.

Flexibility in decision-making becomes essential.

Principled pragmatism.

In the absence of predictable roadmaps, process design gives way to pragmatic decision-making that responds to dynamics and outcomes as they unfold. Allegedly clear goals turn into moving targets, especially in complex contexts like Sudan, where the role of civilian and democratic actors remains ambiguous due to fragmentation within those groups. Mediation efforts led by the AU and IGAD, involving many private mediators and multiple Sudanese stakeholders, must therefore remain flexible. Shared principles among mediators can enhance the legitimacy of the overall effort, yet determining which principles should guide mediation remains a challenge.

Agency and inclusivity.

The multiplicity and competition among mediation efforts can create new avenues for actors who might otherwise be marginalised. Inclusive negotiations, while often criticised for their tokenism, may become more substantive in the fragmented landscape of multimediation. For example, during US-led talks on Sudan in Geneva, a women's group initially included in the margins was thrust into a central role when the SAF and the RSF did not attend. This unexpected shift gave more space to voices that might otherwise have been sidelined, illustrating how the proliferation of mediation forums can open new possibilities for inclusive participation.

Patient work for synergies.

Multimediation requires patience in the search for synergies between efforts at various levels. Not every action will immediately achieve broader impact. Not all synergies can be planned. Rather than becoming stuck in path dependencies, mediators must remain open to the development of opportunities as processes evolve. Critical junctures often reshape the relevance of activities and redefine the process, necessitating a flexible approach.

Nonetheless, it is possible to support connections, relationships and synergies that can prove impactful when moments of opportunity arise. This is best achieved through support for networks that link stakeholders from different processes, and grassroots players with influencers from other sectors and at other levels. Such networks can encourage engagement by actors affected by instability, for example from the security, media and private sectors, to align with the interests and efforts of those who can drive and sustain peace in practice. By building relationships across divides, introducing new ideas, and helping stakeholders to adopt them, such networks can become quietly catalytic.[45]

Embracing flexibility, new forms of agency, relationship-building, and sensible decision-making – can be a productive evolution of conflict mediation and peacemaking

The absence of predictable structure in multimediation is uncomfortable for peacemakers accustomed to well-defined framworks. Yet abandoning rigid trajectories that often prove unhelpful – and embracing flexibility, new forms of agency, relationship-building, and sensible decision-making – can be a productive evolution of conflict mediation and peacemaking.

CONCLUSION: MULTIMEDIATION AND PRINCIPLES FOR PEACE

The landscape of international conflict mediation is undergoing profound changes, and with it, approaches to peace processes must also evolve. Most stakeholders acknowledge that less rigid planning and more emphasis on fluid, process-driven approaches are necessary. While successes in turbulent mediation contexts currently seem scarce, examples of effective processes do exist and offer critical insights into navigating chaotic environments. As seen in cases like South Sudan's Pieri peace process, Ukraine's grain corridor negotiations, or the Stockholm agreement to reopen the Yemeni port of Hodeidah,[46] mediation efforts focused on reducing civilian suffering and ending violence at the earliest opportunity can make a significant difference, even within a complex, multipolar world.

Mediation efforts focused on reducing civilian suffering and ending violence at the earliest opportunity can make a significant difference, even within a complex, multipolar world.

Whether termed *multimediation* or otherwise, legitimacy in mediation comes from the legitimacy of the mediator(s) themselves, of the process and of the outcomes – all of

which can be enhanced through transparency, willingness to embrace competition between multiple efforts, and openness towards process and the agency of the multiple stakeholders involved. This shift recognises that synergies arise not from top-down harmonisation, but from allowing diverse actors to contribute creatively to a shared goal.

Multimediation approaches reflect the Principles for Peace in a number of ways. The shift away from external templates loudly echoes the humility principle, as well as the presentation of the Principles themselves as an ethos to be adapted in context rather than a prescription.[47] The Principles likewise call for shifts from a focus on diplomacy and negotiated settlements to a widened, longer term, inclusive approach to building legitimacy, and from inclusion as representation to a more creative effort to build pluralism and diversity creatively through the life of a peacemaking and peacebuilding process.[48] Multimediation also takes forward the Principle of embracing integrated and hybrid solutions – embedding the solution to conflict and violence in a given context's norms and institutions with flexibility, adaptation and continuous learning.[49]

Both approaches likewise recognise the need for going beyond the rigidity and limited ownership of many past peace deals towards patient support for the emergence of a more grounded legitimacy. Focusing pragmatically on the mediation process – rather than overly fixating on signing agreements and enforcing rigid implementation timelines – has emerged as a crucial factor in cultivating legitimate peace transitions. By embracing the diversity of mediation efforts, greater legitimacy and ownership can be achieved among local stakeholders, and innovation can emerge through diverse perspectives, thereby fostering more sustainable transition outcomes.

In this way, legitimacy is built incrementally, both during the process of negotiation and through sustained support to the long process of bargaining for more legitimate, less violent political and governance structures that lies ahead. This requires striving to ensure mediation and peacemaking are more mutually reinforcing, creating stronger local foundations that ground elite bargaining. By broadening peace constituencies and improving local security and economic conditions, mediation progress can be strengthened and demonstrate peace dividends for people whose support and buy-in is needed to sustain peace.

In all these ways, a flexible approach – informed by multimediation and the learning and ethos distilled in the Principles for Peace – offers a promising path towards making contemporary peace mediation more effective and inclusive.

CASE STUDY

ISRAEL-PALESTINE

Building a multi-sector coalition to support a legitimate and durable peace

KEY MESSAGES

In the aftermath of October 7 and amidst a devastating war, the legitimacy of peace processes in the Israeli-Palestinian context has reached a historic low. Yet pathways to peace remain possible – if anchored in local leadership, societal inclusion, and international alignment. The Uniting for a Shared Future (USF) initiative demonstrates how principled, multi-level engagement can help rebuild credibility and chart a more legitimate course forward:

- **Rebuilding legitimacy through strategic inclusion:** In a context of deep political fragmentation and societal trauma, legitimacy must be rebuilt across geopolitical, political, and societal domains. A peace process that reflects local agency, inclusive representation, and societal needs can re-establish trust and ownership across communities.
- **Working through multi-sector coalitions:** USF brings together influential leaders across politics, civil society, business, media, and diplomacy who may not share every view but agree on a common purpose. This *grass-tops* coalition enables collaboration across divides and injects pragmatism into a context historically shaped by maximalist positions and binary narratives.
- **Enabling legitimacy in the absence of formal negotiations:** By building informal channels, promoting joint action, and aligning sector-specific efforts under a shared framework, USF creates political space where none exists formally. This approach allows for adaptive, cross-sector coordination that lays the groundwork for a future political solution.
- **Bridging the local–international gap:** USF provides international partners with grounded insight into societal dynamics and emerging opportunities, helping them recalibrate engagement strategies in ways that align with local legitimacy. This two-way feedback loop strengthens local ownership while enhancing the credibility of international support.

1. THE EROSION OF LEGITIMACY IN THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONTEXT

Peace processes between Israelis and Palestinians have long struggled with recurrent outbreaks of violence, lack of trust, competing national narratives, maximalist ideologies, and a persistent failure to deliver tangible results. These challenges – compounded by the events of 7 October 2023 and what has followed – have further eroded the legitimacy of peace processes, and even the idea of peace itself. As trust in institutions and political leadership has crumbled, both societies are left disillusioned and distrustful of existing mechanisms and actors and with heightened fears and enmity of each other.

On the Israeli side, prolonged political instability, erosion of social cohesion, the rising influence of ethno-nationalist narratives, and disagreements over the balance of power between the government and key judicial and security institutions have all contributed to declining public trust in formal institutions and leadership. As a divided nation, much of the focus is on internal divisions, lessening the prospects for

fruitful negotiations with Palestinians. On the Palestinian side, long-standing fragmentation between governing factions, the effects of Israel's military occupation, shrinking civic space, and the absence of democratic elections have weakened the credibility and legitimacy of political institutions. Most Palestinians feel unrepresented by their governing elites. Across both societies, confidence in international mediation is weak, with international actors generally seen as disengaged, biased, or ineffective.

October 7, 2023, and the devastating war that followed marks another significant inflection point. Over 1,200 Israelis were killed and more than 250 were taken hostage. Subsequent Israeli military operations have led to the deaths of over 60,000 Palestinians, including over 17,000 children, displacing over 90% of the Gazan population and damaging more than 66% of its infrastructure.[1] In the West Bank, settlers' violence has reached an all-time high. These events have deeply traumatised both communities, and increased polarisation in the region and internationally. The collapse of Israel's deterrence strategy, the ongoing humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza, and the heightened sense of existential threat have all underscored the urgency of advancing credible political alternatives.

2. RESTORING LEGITIMACY THROUGH PRINCIPLED, MULTI-LEVEL ENGAGEMENT

Against this backdrop, it is important to consider legitimacy in relation to three interlinked domains: 1) geopolitical, with a process that is locally led but internationally and regionally supported 2) political, with the development of inclusive frameworks capable of transcending fragmentation and rebuilding representative authority, and 3) societal, to restore trust and constructive dialogue across deeply polarised communities.

In recognition of these imperatives, the Principles for Peace Foundation (P4P) has helped establish the Uniting for a Shared Future (USF) initiative. Launched in March 2024, USF brings together a coalition of Israeli and Palestinian leaders from Israel, the West Bank, Gaza and the diaspora from political, diplomatic, business, civil society, and media sectors, as well as international supporters. It seeks to support a coordinated, cross-sectoral approach to peace that is both principled and pragmatic, grounded in local leadership but connected to international and regional processes.

3. USF AS A MULTIMEDIATION MODEL

Rather than relying on a single mediator or top-down blueprint, USF draws on the concept of multi-mediation, working flexibly and creatively across political, economic, and public opinion tracks to foster a conducive environment for a political solution. By engaging "grasstops" leaders – individuals with influence, power, and incentives to act across sectors – USF works to broaden the peacebuilding constituency in both communities beyond traditional peace actors. Members are not brought in by idealism alone, but by the recognition that the current trajectory is unsustainable, and that charting a new path is in their own strategic interest. United by a set of 5 common principles for ending the conflict identified by its founding members,[2] USF works as a broad tent rather than trying to impose unanimity on every position. This allows it to foster collaboration and engagement between a wide range of actors while ensuring a minimum common denominator.

As well as providing space for dialogue among its members, USF also facilitates joint action between Israelis and Palestinians across diverse sectors of society, as well as coordinated policy engagement with international actors. While each member operates within their own constituencies and spheres of influence, the platform ensures a common direction of travel – allowing for strategic alignment across separate lanes of work. Joint initiatives, beyond pursuing their immediate objectives, also strengthen personal and professional relationships across the Israeli-Palestinian divide – laying the groundwork for meaningful and sustained cooperation.

In a context where formal peace negotiations remain absent or stalled, this "grass-tops" approach offers a promising avenue for rebuilding legitimacy and anchoring peace efforts in societal realities. When business leaders advocate for a political settlement to ensure economic stability, or when security officials publicly recognize the limits of deterrence, they speak not as neutral brokers, but as credible stakeholders with constituencies, influence, and skin in the game. This approach allows USF to leverage entry points previously absent from peace efforts, expanding both the reach and impact of its work.

This allows USF to:

- ☐ Establish informal channels of communication across cross-sectorial networks when official institutions and peace processes are stalled, polarized, or non-existent
- ☐ Engage actors not traditionally involved in peacebuilding, but with significant influence within their fields;
- ☐ Embed the effort in the mainstream public, that was often marginalised in formal peace processes;
- ☐ Serve as a platform for strategic coordination – creating a more conducive environment for a political solution, even in the absence of formal negotiations.

USF operates as both an internal platform and a sounding board – providing regional and international actors with grounded insight into local realities and emerging opportunities. By enabling feedback loops between grass roots dynamics and international diplomacy, the platform can help international partners adapt their strategies and interventions to reflect the needs and aspirations of local actors. This both supports local ownership and enhances the credibility and legitimacy of international engagement.

In the wake of October 7 and amidst the ongoing war on Gaza, the prospects for formal and comprehensive peace negotiations remain uncertain. Yet the need for legitimate, inclusive, and pragmatic pathways to peace has never been greater. In response USF provides a model for linking leaders across different sectors, fostering societal engagement and reconnecting international diplomacy with local realities – all grounded in a shared set of principles for a legitimate and lasting end to decades of mistrust and violence.

2.3 ENHANCING LEGITIMACY BEYOND A PEACE PROCESS

The case of Colombia

KEY MESSAGES

How was legitimacy strengthened as part of Colombia's political transition from war to peace? And what lessons can be learnt from a process that has unfolded over three decades, but remains incomplete today? Some of the key elements of success in enhancing legitimacy in the Colombian experience have been:

- **Mobilizing society** for peace, dignity, and inclusion, and **creating spaces for participation** by civil society, women, indigenous, Afro-Colombian communities, and victims in the peace process, its implementation, and decision-making spaces.
- **Placing victims at the centre** – via legal changes and in the peace process – which showed the will to tackle conflict drivers and heal wounds, expanded public support for peace, and led to important mechanisms for truth, justice, and non-repetition of abuses.
- **Readiness to address legitimacy deficits** such as unequal access to land, political exclusion, and illicit economies. For example:
  - Forging peace deals with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and other guerrillas that have rejected violence in politics, while **guaranteeing ex-militants and affected communities the chance to participate** in legitimate political processes.
  - **Pursuing holistic efforts to tackle the drug economy**, including crop substitution, rural development, and economic alternatives, alongside anti-trafficking and anti-corruption measures.
  - **Shifting from anti-terrorist and anti-subversive security logics towards a more accountable, human security focused approach**, via police and military reforms, measures to protect societal leaders, and ongoing efforts to dismantle armed groups.
  - **Correcting land concentration** and the lack of access to property for rural people via the ComprehensiveRural Reform.
- **Adopting a 'territorial' approach**, building on locally developed, multi-stakeholder models for inclusive and accountable sustainable development in rural territories affected by violence. These initiatives enhance legitimacy by **encouraging inclusive and accountable inputs, and demonstrating state capacity and will to provide public goods and services, including justice and security**, in a responsive way.
- **Establishing dialogue tables to de-escalate unresolved violence** in affected territories with the participation of marginalised groups (the 'Total Peace' approach).
- **Promoting environmental conservation and protecting the rights and cultures of marginalised indigenous, Afro-Colombian, and peasant communities** to tackle violence over natural resources, illegal mining, and deforestation (under the banner of 'Peace with Nature').
- **Establishing mechanisms for international accompaniment** and support for reconciliation, the elimination of political violence and compliance with the peace agreement.

Despite significant divisions and challenges to progress, fulfilling peace commitments in all these ways has been central to growing the state's legitimacy, consolidating peace, and creating viable conditions for negotiation with other armed actors.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses how legitimacy has been strengthened and broadened as part of efforts to consolidate Colombia's political transition from war to peace, considering what lessons can be learnt, what challenges remain, and ideas for moving forward.

For P4P, legitimacy is defined as a multi-dimensional concept, iNcluding *inputs* (inclusion, accountability), the *system itself* (its orientation towards public goods[1] and its broad acceptance), and *outputs* (fair delivery of access to a range of public goods). The signing and implementation of a peace agreement are an opportunity to enhance legitimacy at local, state, and national levels.[2]

If well implemented, peace processes can be an engine for trust, cooperation, cohesion, and respect for plurality

Even relatively comprehensive and ambitious peace agreements cannot guarantee legitimacy; rather, they open messy, complex windows and processes for moving towards it. An agreement between the state and an armed group may not end a conflict; instead, it represents a series of commitments to resolve it, for example by renouncing political violence, sharing or redistributing power, and consolidating a state monopoly on the use of force while reducing other forms of coercive power. Beyond the redistribution of power between the actors involved, peace processes are an opportunity to chart a path toward legitimacy, inclusive and constructive state-society relations, improved state engagement in contested territories, greater accountability and acceptable regulatory frameworks, improved living conditions, and better public services, including security and justice. If well implemented, peace processes can therefore be an engine for trust, cooperation, cohesion, and respect for plurality.

In the face of social, political, and economic challenges, peace also requires a sustained social and political commitment to implement what has been agreed, strengthening the legitimacy of state authority in the face of contestation by other actors. External actors can help not only by facilitating the signing of agreements, but also by ensuring agreements that reinforce legitimacy and reduce the coercive power of violent actors, while maintaining ongoing support for implementation and monitoring.

In Colombia, beyond the signing of peace agreements with armed actors, the evolving peace agenda is a historic opportunity to strengthen the social contract, building on the vision of the 1991 Political Constitution. Four key milestones in this process of consolidating the rule of law, democracy, peace and cohesion have been:

- **The 1991 Political Constitution of Colombia,**
- **The 2011 Victims and Land Restitution Law,**
- **The 2016 Final Peace Agreement (AF) with the FARC[3], and**
- **The Total Peace policy of the current government of President Gustavo Petro (2022–2026).[4]**

Together, they represent a unique opportunity to strengthen the formal and normative foundations of the state and its legitimacy in the eyes of citizens at local, state, and national levels.

This chapter first briefly outlines how Colombia's conflict landscape evolved from the mid-20th century until 2010. It then considers the politics of peace in Colombia from 2010, and especially after the AF of 2016, and how this has reshaped legitimacy and the social contract. It explores key challenges and how – via inclusive negotiation and effective implementation – the relationship between state and society can be invigorated, and legitimate political authority consolidated despite the coercive authority of violent actors. Since mid-2022, in addition to implementing the AF, and in the context of the Total Peace policy, the government has opened nine negotiation tables with various armed actors and is exploring multiple options to consolidate political agreements and strengthen social contracts in order to make peace irreversible. The chapter concludes by exploring both emerging lessons from these processes and the challenges ahead.

COLOMBIA'S CONFLICT AND PEACEMAKING HISTORY

Following a cycle of violence in the mid-20th century (*La Violencia*), a national agreement known as the National Front was signed in 1958. In this pact, Colombia's two main political parties (Liberal and Conservative) removed the coup leader General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla from power, pacified the country after years of partisan wars and made a deal that would enable them to alternate power until 1974. While it quelled La Violencia, it set the stage for future conflicts by excluding other emerging political forces. Inspired by successful revolutions as in Cuba or Nicaragua in the bipolar framework of the Cold War, many of these groups organised themselves into revolutionary guerrillas.

In the 1980s and 1990s, following a growing social mobilisation for peace, human rights, and democratisation, the first peace agreements were signed with various guerrilla groups. These limited agreements demobilised rebel combatants, reincorporated them into society, and facilitated their political participation (for example, in Congress). Although they led to some democratic opening and power-sharing, these agreements failed to address structural conflict drivers, lacked citizen participation, and conceded full impunity for serious violations.

Promulgation of the 1991 Political Constitution marked a significant evolution. This established the normative basis for a pluralistic state oriented towards the rule of law, peace, human rights, and multiculturalism. It was developed with the participation of some demobilised guerrillas, but mainly resulted from broad social mobilisation for peace and democracy, rather than deals between the state and armed actors.

The country's main guerrillas, such as the National Liberation Army (ELN) and the FARC, as well as paramilitary groups and drug cartels, did not join this process of change and renewed their violence against the state and/or society. Between 1990 and 2010, conflict and related casualties escalated significantly.

The country was divided into two major zones. The first was an integrated urban and mountainous centre, where 90 percent of

the population is concentrated and where the state was able to progressively develop the constitutional mandate. The second zone was comprised of peripheral rural and border areas, including the Colombian Amazon basin. These territories are home to only about ten percent of the population but occupy two thirds of the national territory. Here, state presence and authority have historically been weak and local elites, guerrillas, paramilitaries, or criminal groups have been able to exercise control over the people, economy, land, and resources.

In these territories, non-state armed actors have used violence to impose coercive social and political orders,[5] and regulated both legal and illegal economies, including drug trafficking and illegal mining – often through complex webs of power, alliances, and corruption involving links to national political elites. In the power struggle between the state and other armed actors, peasants, indigenous people, and Afro-Colombians were caught in the crossfire, suffering massive human rights violations.

To confront this reality, President Álvaro Uribe (2002–2010) instituted the Democratic Security Policy. With US support through Plan Colombia, the state adopted a strategy for confronting armed rebels and criminals. This securitised approach, however, did not succeed in reducing violence in the peripheral rural territories, where the conflict shifted, festered, and intensified.

During these years, when peace was in focus, it was pursued via short-term deal making and military demobilisation of paramilitary groups.

While this slightly boosted state legitimacy, in practice, paramilitaries, local and regional elites, congressmen, and members of the security forces enjoyed collusive relationships – exerting significant influence in rural areas, and some influence on national politics (a phenomenon known as 'parapolitics').[6]

During these years, when peace was in focus, it was pursued via short-term deal making and military demobilisation of paramilitary groups.

Meanwhile, the ELN, FARC guerrillas, and leading armed groups retreated to rearguard areas. In these territories they posed less of a threat to the state, but the political economy of drugs, illicit extraction, and violence intensified.[7] The state's Democratic Security Policy stabilised Colombia's Andean territories, major cities, and the routes between them, but failed to consolidate peace or ameliorate the situation elsewhere.

Horrific violations occurred on all sides.[8] As the new millennium began, victimisation increased significantly, including forced displacement, confinement of the population, forced recruitment of minors, and homicides, among others. Official data speak of more than nine million victims.[9] Between 1995 and 2018, there were at least 450,664 homicides related to the armed conflict.[10] In what has been described as a 'war on society',[11] 90 percent of the conflict's victims were civilians, especially from peasant and ethnic minority backgrounds.[12] A paradigmatic case was that of the „false positives," referring to a series of extrajudicial executions from 2002 to 2008. These were mainly committed by members of the armed forces, who presented civilians (some of them minors) as guerrillas killed in combat in order to obtain benefits, such as permits and economic incentives.[13]

Although the Democratic Security Policy and Plan Colombia strengthened the rule of law in some regions with broad social support, it also weakened it in others – failing to consolidate state authority *vis-à-vis* other de facto authorities. In some territories, the legitimacy gap widened significantly, with illegal armed actors exerting coercive, social, and political control and the state failing to establish equal protection for – and legitimacy among – citizens.

A PLATFORM FOR CHANGE: INNOVATIVE PEACE POLICIES IN COLOMBIA

Colombia thus has a long history of negotiations between the state and armed actors, and much can be learnt from reflection on its peace processes.[14] Until the AF in 2016, previous peace agreements were limited in scope with little ambition to address conflict drivers, particularly in peripheral and rural areas. Signed in Havana, the AF was a turning point in thinking about and carrying out peace processes in Colombia. The AF, the 2011 Victims and Land Restitution Law, and the 1991 Constitution symbolise shared commitment to, and a roadmap for, lasting peace, social equity, and inclusive democracy.

The AF is part of an emerging peace policy that has broadened and strengthened state legitimacy through various innovative measures. The idea is that sustainable peace is more likely to be achieved by generating legitimate political authority and institutions that people recognise – especially in the territories most affected by violence and the ongoing coercive power of rebel, criminal, and corrupt actors.

While the AF and the 1991 Constitution are important foundations for legitimising the state and creating an enabling environment for peace, lasting peace cannot depend solely on pacts between state elites and rebel or criminal actors. Such pacts must be a step towards effective institutions that generate constructive and trusting relations between state and society, social cohesion, and respect for pluralism.[15] This mutual and continuous commitment between state andsociety to co-create legitimate political authority is critical to making peace more sustainable. Yet this is a long-term process, whose success is not yet assured. Over 30 years after the enactment of the Constitution and nine years after the signing of the AF, peace still seems far off, with many challenges ahead, especially in peripheral and rural regions.

A key feature of social mobilisation in Colombia has been the sustained role of organised civil society, strongly backed by international donors, to support peace, democracy, and rights.[16] This built on the political opportunity created by the 1991 Constitution and significantly helped shape a peace-oriented political agenda – often in tension with a conception of peace centred on traditional security and military victory – and one of the most developed peace infrastructures in the world.[17] Since 2010, Colombia's approach to peace has evolved significantly, incorporating many of society's demands and moving well

beyond the previously dominant military-security framework.

President Juan Manuel Santos (2010 – 2018) took office with a discourse that continued Uribe's aggressive counter-insurgency security policies. However, while the military and police continued to weaken illegal armed actors, he adopted a carrot-and-stick approach and embraced a peace policy that prioritised political dialogue. It was under Santos' leadership that the Victims and Land Restitution Law was enacted in 2011, and the AF was negotiated and signed with the FARC in 2016.[18]

Together with the current government's Total Peace policy, these milestones have established a renewed policy approach in which peace becomes an independent priority, not subordinate to military and security aims, and inseparable from the commitment to expand state legitimacy. The sections below unpack the most relevant elements of this new approach.[19]

THE CENTRALITY OF VICTIMS IN PEACE

One transformative step was placing victims at the centre of Colombia's political life and political negotiations with armed actors. Traditionally, the victims of conflict had little voice and were left in the background as peace processes brokered deals between the state and armed actors. There were no justice mechanisms to repair harms and punish perpetrators.

The Victims and Land Restitution Law, and then the AF, reversed this paradigm.[20] The law marked the first formal recognition of state responsibility for human rights violations in the conflict, and for atrocities perpetrated by other actors. Brought about by social pressure and mobilisation, the law provided for reparations to victims and restitution of land. With its focus on land disputes in rural areas, it explicitly put on the table one of the main causes of violence in Colombia. In combining victims and land, it focused the political agenda on addressing both the conflict's drivers and the resulting social wounds.

The AF expanded this commitment to victims and consolidated their centrality in peacemaking by creating the Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Guarantees of Non-Repetition. This novel transitional justice structure combines judicial and extrajudicial mechanisms to guarantee victims' rights. One of its prominent components, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace,[21] is a court that not only pursues perpetrators of serious crimes, but also promotes reconciliation through accountability, restorative sentences, and guarantees of non-repetition. The Commission for the Clarification of the Truth[22] and the Unit for the Search for Missing Persons[23] are also key players. The former has sought to document and make known the truth about events during the conflict, while the latter searches for the tens of thousands of disappeared.

Victims' participation in the peace negotiations was a further innovation.[24] Consultations involving victims' organisations influenced the peace agenda, ensuring that their demands for truth, justice, and reparations were heard and addressed. This direct inclusion significantly helped legitimise the process, draw a line under political violence, restore justice and encourage accountability by perpetrators of violence, and lay the foundations for reconciliation and social cohesion.

ADDRESSING THE LEGITIMACY DEFICITS UNDERPINNING THE CONFLICT

Another innovative element of the peace agenda has been attention to the structural issues underpinning decades of conflict. Whereas previous peace agreements focused primarily on demobilisation and disarmament, in recent years unequal access to land, political exclusion, and illicit economies have been directly in focus – legitimacy deficits that must be addressed to build a durable peace.

Comprehensive Rural Reform under the AF is perhaps the most ambitious initiative. It tackles one of the historical causes of the conflict: land concentration and the lack of peasant access to property. The reform aims to change the social and economic structure of rural areas through land distribution programmes, sustainable rural development, the creation of a cadastre and rural property registry, and the creation of social and economic infrastructure, such as rural public goods and services. Although its implementation has been slow and faces resistance, it is key to sustaining peace and consolidating state authority throughout the national territory in the face of other armed actors' coercive power.

Direct inclusion of victims significantly helped legitimise the process, draw a line under political violence, restore justice and encourage accountability by perpetrators of violence, laying foundations for reconciliation and social cohesion

Regarding political participation and democratic quality, the AF went beyond demobilising the FARC by moving to integrate them into the political system with guarantees that ex-combatants could become legal political actors. The AF also created 16 special electoral districts to ensure communities and victims in the territories most affected by violence could have effective and direct congressional representation. The AF proposes to eliminate from Colombian political life any justification of political violence as a mechanism for social transformation, and to consolidate the legitimacy of the state, its institutions and its monopoly on violence.

The AF also addressed drug trafficking, a central driver of Colombia's violence. Historically, the problem had been tackled via fumigation and forced crop substitution – disproportionately affecting small farmers in peripheral areas – and through large-scale police operations against cartels. With the AF, an ambitious programme of voluntary substitution of illicit crops, especially coca leaf, was designed for small farmers in areas affected by violence. The FARC undertook to abandon coca cultivation and collaborate in state efforts to fight it. Other measures included tackling white-collar corruption and money laundering, accompaniment of crop substitution with rural development and economic alternatives for peasant communities, and more balanced use of state capacities and international cooperation against drug trafficking.

TERRITORIAL PEACE APPROACH

Another AF innovation was the territorial approach – a tailored response to the territorial and sub-national dynamics of the conflict and peacemaking. Civil society had been promoting territorial peace processes since the mid-1990s, not least through Peace and Development Programmes (PDPs) or Campesinos Reserves Zones (ZRC). PDPs in Colombia are regional initiatives driven by pluralistic alliances (churches, businesses, social or community organisations, and the international community). They promote sustainable development in territories affected by armed conflict and poverty via active community participation and collaboration with the state.

The first such programme, the Middle Magdalena Peace and Development Programme (PDPMM), was initiated in 1995.[25] It focused on extending participatory and inclusive state-society interaction, public goods, and environmental protection. The model was replicated in what became a Network of Development and Peace Programmes, resulting in 19 initiatives in Colombian regions affected by armed violence.[26]

Taking up society's demand for a locally driven and territorial approach to peace, the AF recognised that conflict came about – and affected the country – differently in different regions.[27] Eschewing conventional, centralised, and homogeneous models, the 2016 agreement accepted the need to respond to local realities, in particular through Territorially Focused Development Programmes,[28] which improve infrastructure and services in rural areas with a strong voice for communities in project planning and implementation.

The aim of these policies has been to build peace and legitimacy from below, involving communities in decision-making and then ensuring benefits, including justice and security, reach marginalised areas in a context-specific and responsive way

Agrarian reforms included in the agreement reinforced this approach. Land redistribution, access to credit, and the provision of technical assistance are fundamental to improving the quality of life of rural communities, while respecting cultural diversity and indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities' rights. ZRCs promoted under the peace agreement used land-use planning to create protected areas for the benefit of the peasant economy, communities, and ecosystems and to defend territories from extractive economic dynamics while preserving biodiversity and forests.

Overall, the aim of these policies has been to build peace and legitimacy from below, involving communities in decision-making and then ensuring benefits, including justice and security, reach marginalised areas in a context-specific and responsive way. If it can deliver on these outputs, the state may succeed in winning greater acceptance in the eyes of citizens.

INCLUSION, SOCIAL PARTICIPATION, AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Strengthening social inclusion and participation in Colombia has been a key axis of the emerging peace policy. The AF not only sought to end the armed conflict, but also to lay the foundations for sustainable peace through a comprehensive framework that included historically marginalised sectors. Inclusion has been realised by creating spaces for participation by civil society, women, indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, as well as victims in public deliberation and policy design, including the AF's negotiation and implementation.

Although challenges remain, this approach embedded a focus on pluralism and legitimacy from the outset of the peace process, establishing a framework for women, peasants, and other excluded groups to have a greater say in decisions affecting their lives, and thus advancing equitable democracy in Colombia.

During the peace process, the first important element for strengthening inclusion was the broad popular and territorial consultations held throughout the country. These spaces for participation allowed local communities and affected sectors to influence the negotiations, enriching their content and strengthening their legitimacy.[29]

A second element – assisted by the global Women, Peace and Security agenda – was the adoption of a gender focus and the AF's emphasis on women's rights.[30] This strengthened the AF's responsiveness to the gender-related and strategic needs of all those involved in the armed conflict, including combatants, victims, women, children, and society at large. The AF recognised the conflict's differentiated impacts on women and on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) people, including sexual and gender-based violence. A gender sub-commission, created by the government and the FARC with the support of Norway and other international actors, helped integrate over 100 women's rights commitments into the peace agreement and guarantee their participation in all aspects of its implementation. These addressed, for example, justice for and prevention of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), socioeconomic empowerment of and access to land for women, and a gender-specific approach to the reintegration of ex-combatants.

These spaces for participation allowed local communities and affected sectors to influence the negotiations, enriching their content and strengthening their legitimacy

The third step in strengthening inclusion was the AF's Ethnic Chapter. This was directly negotiated between indigenous and Afro-Colombian representatives, the government, and the FARC. It recognised the rights of indigenous, Afro-Colombian, Palenquero, Raizal, and Roma communities, addressed the conflict's disproportionate impacts on them, and provided for their participation in the agreement's implementation. Commitments to consultations, protection of ancestral territories, reparations and development, an approach informed by ethnicity and gender, and support for their justice systems all reflect the intent to build a pluralistic peace with respect for

these communities' autonomy and cultural diversity.

The Ethnic Chapter of the AF was a historic achievement – embracing Colombia's cultural diversity, establishing a framework for addressing long-standing structural inequalities, recognising the central role of ethnic peoples in the reconciliation process and in the construction of a more equitable and pluralistic country.

Although the country still faces challenges in terms of meaningful and equitable participation, especially in rural areas, through these measures the AF established a legal and political framework to ensure that excluded groups have a greater influence on the decisions that affect their lives.

LAW ENFORCEMENT AND RULE OF LAW REFORMS

The AF also included provisions for reforming the security forces, recognising that peace cannot be sustained without a profound transformation of law enforcement and security institutions. For decades, security forces were oriented towards counterinsurgency, leading to human rights violations and the militarisation of conflict resolution.

Since the mid-1990s, Colombia has significantly strengthened its security forces and now boasts one of the strongest armies in Latin America. The contribution of the AF included correcting certain biases in the analysis of threats and challenges deriving from anti-subversive and anti-terrorist logics and proposing a shift towards a more accountable human security approach. Reform measures included creating the National Commission for Security Guarantees; protecting social leaders, human rights defenders, and environmental defenders; and reforming the armed forces and police to protect citizens' rights, prevent violence, and respect international law.

From a security perspective, the AF also prioritised dismantling illegal armed groups and the unlawful market forces that sustain them, including via intelligence mechanisms and international cooperation. Although the power of such groups and the strength of illegal economies have made this process challenging, security reforms remain fundamental to moving beyond coercive models of authority, sustaining peace, and enhancing legitimacy in Colombia.

VERIFICATION MECHANISMS AND INTERNATIONAL ACCOMPANIMENT

One of the great challenges in Colombia is state failure to fulfil agreements made with society.[31] This situation generates distrust among armed actors and in society about elites' willingness to forgo privileges and undertake reforms. This distrust permeated the AF negotiations and engendered an entire chapter on implementation guarantees. The AF was thus the first Colombian peace agreement to include concrete mechanisms to ensure its correct implementation. These provide continuous monitoring, verification, and evaluation, significantly advancing the peace process transparency and sustainability.

The AF included a detailed framework of legal and constitutional reforms, creating a regulatory structure to implement the agreed provisions. During implementation, the government introduced more than 100 regulatory changes, including five partial constitutional reforms, establishing a robust legal framework. Several government agencies were created to lead aspects of the process, from demobilisation and reintegration of combatants to oversight of land reforms and rural development. Participation committees and other bodies were established to ensure greater inclusion and representation of diverse groups.

The AF developed national and international verification and monitoring mechanisms led by state and non-state actors. A UN Special Political Mission,[32] created to oversee and verify the agreement's implementation, has helped legitimise the process internationally and resolve disputes. Beyond the UN, several countries and international organisations supported the AF's implementation, providing funding, tech-nical and political assistance. Their support and accompaniment shored up the stability and sustainabil-ity of the process in a complex cotext, while enabling the promotion of international normative frameworks (including the WPS agenda), thus strengthening peace and legitimacy hand-in-hand with allies in Colombian society.

Such mechanisms promote compliance with the AF, the rejection of political violence and a culture of peace and reconciliation. Colombia's process thus stands as an interesting example of how a locally-led and legitimate process can be accompanied and guaranteed by international actors and strengthened with reference to global normative frameworks.

TOTAL PEACE POLICY

One process helping to sustain peace in Colombia was the transition of government between President Iván Duque (2018–2022; a conservative politician supported by the forces most opposed to the peace process) and President Gustavo Petro (2022–2026; a progressive, left-wing politician and former M-19 guerrilla member). The peaceful transition of government – transferring power between antagonistic forces in a framework of extreme polarisation – affirmed the solidity of the state and its institutions.

The Total Peace policy – one of President Petro's signature policies – represents an evolution in Colombia's peace agenda. Whereas previous processes focused on negotiating with a single armed group, Total Peace seeks to involve all armed actors in the country, including guerrillas such as the ELN, dissident groups, urban criminal gangs, and paramilitary and drug trafficking entities.

This policy recognises the complexity and fragmentation of the conflict and the need to address multiple causes of violence comprehensively, from drug trafficking to poverty and social exclusion. By broadening the negotiation spectrum, Total Peace aims to de-escalate violence simultaneously throughout the territory, offering political and judicial solutions for the different actors at the negotiation table.[33]

A key innovation is its focus on territorial participation. Through dialogue tables in the most affected territories, the aim is for local communities – historically marginalised and affected by violence – to play an active role in territorial transformations and the partial agreements that may be reached, as well as in their subsequent implementation.

TAKING STOCK OF AN INCOMPLETE PROCESS: CHALLENGES THAT REMAIN

Even in the most peaceful societies, enhancing legitimacy is always a work-in-progress, and Colombia's efforts remain incomplete. AF implementation and the Total Peace policy have faced numerous difficulties, testing the legitimacy of the state and its ability to establish effective political authority throughout the territory. Significant challenges include:

- **Polarisation and populism.** Polarisation around the peace process has made national consensus elusive. Charismatic and populist political leaders, such as former President Uribe, have sharply criticised the AF over the concessions it offers to rebels. This has complicated the agreement's implementation under successive governments and undermined its legitimacy in certain sectors of society. The rise of President Petro, another charismatic leader, has intensified polarisation, making it difficult to consolidate peace as state policy.

- **Mistrust between armed actors and the state.** Despite progress, deep mistrust persists between ex-combatants and the state over unfulfilled promises, slow implementation, and persistent violence. This has undermined confidence in the peace process, both among affected communities and the actors involved.

- **Persistent insecurity in peripheral territories and the humanitarian crisis.** Despite the FARC's disarmament, in many rural and peripheral regions violence has not significantly decreased. FARC dissidents, the ELN, criminal gangs, and other armed groups continue to generate armed conflict and exercise coercive control over the population, contesting state authority and fuelling humanitarian crisis. Rising numbers of assassinations of social and women's leaders, rights defenders, and ex-combatants have weakened confidence in the peace process and state security provision.[34]

- **Illegal economies and drug trafficking.** Drug trafficking continues to fuel violence, finance illegal armed groups, and erode legitimacy by corrupting officials and civil society actors. Efforts to eradicate coca crops and combat drug trafficking have so far failed to reduce the area under cultivation significantly. Lack of viable economic alternatives to coca cultivation for rural communities has perpetuated dependence on illicit economies. This challenge underscores the need for a comprehensive security policy that goes beyond forced eradication with emphasis on rural development, crop substitution, and sustainable economic opportunities. Yet comprehensively tackling drugs requires a regional and global response that is not solely in Colombia's hands.

- **Slow implementation of land and structural reforms.** The Comprehensive Rural Reform aimed to correct unequal access to land – a key conflict driver. Yet implementation has been extremely slow due to lack of money, resistance from powerful players, and corruption.[35] In many rural areas, poor infrastructure and limited state provision of basic services reinforce the control of armed groups. Implementation delays have frustrated peasant communities, who see little tangible change in their living conditions. This undermines legitimacy at local level and may lead to local capture of state or international institutions and programmes.

- **Transitional justice and truth.** Although the truth, justice, and reparation system has made remarkable progress, implementation has been slow and controversial. Land restitution has advanced slowly amid persistent violence in rural areas, where illegal armed groups remain strong. Restorative sanctions under the Special Jurisdiction for Peace are seen as insufficient by many victims of serious crimes. Individual and collective reparations for victims are beyond the state's fiscal means. Despite progress by the Truth Commission, it remains unclear whether it can drive concrete actions that promote reconciliation and guarantee non-repetition.

- **Peace investments and their use.** Peacemaking requires significant resources, but budget constraints and corruption hamper the state's ability to address conflict drivers, especially in areas such as land restitution, rural development, and the reincorporation of ex-combatants. Challenging the corruption and clientelism that undermine efforts to consolidate lasting peace, and ensuring transparency in the allocation of funds, are essential to further reforms, improve living conditions, and build public approval.

- **Translating inclusion into influence.** Although social participation and inclusion have significantly increased, many consultative processes have had limited impact on public policies and budgetary allocations, causing frustration in communities. Translating inclusion into impact on decision-making and budget allocation significantly contributes to legitimacy.

- **Territorial conflicts, Total Peace challenges, and 'Peace with Nature.'** Despite progress in territorial peace, conflicts over natural resources, expansion of illegal mining, extractive access to land, and deforestation continue to fuel tensions and put communities at risk in regions with little state presence. This affects social cohesion and people's trust in the state, and armed actors exploit the tensions to justify and build support for rebellion and criminality. Advancing peace from the ground up in such areas is not easy, given state weakness, mutual mistrust, and the strength and control of illegal actors. Given armed actors' diverse interests and agendas, negotiating stable agreements with them is challenging, especially in the case of criminal organisations lacking incentives to change or demobilise. Faced with this reality, President Petro's government has developed the concept of Peace with Nature, a new policy direction for achieving territorial peace in Colombia via the protection of biodiversity and social cohesion in indigenous, peasant, and Afro-Colombian communities. This approach

implies not only environmental conservation, but also the recognition and respect for the territorial rights and cultures of marginalised indigenous, peasant, and Afro-Colombian communities who protect forests and nature. This approach aims to bring together peacemaking, environmental justice, and an equitable and sustainable use of natural resources. While this new approach is welcome, it is likely to face similar challenges to those outlined above.

While serious, these challenges are not yet fatal to the peace process. However, they underscore the need to persist with and extend a comprehensive approach that includes security, development, and legitimacy to ensure lasting peace.

CONCLUSION

Legitimate state authority in Colombia has historically been contested by armed actors instituting alternative governance in some areas. At times, these actors have filled the governing gaps and legitimacy deficits left by the state, offering through coercion certain levels of security and access to resources to the people within the areas they control. However, this coercive authority generates armed contestation and serious abuses, making enhancing legitimacy not just an option, but essential for progress.

In response, Colombia's emerging peace policy has gone well beyond negotiating an exit to violence by armed actors backed by accountable security and justice approaches. Peacemaking in Colombia has been a complex, ambitious process, facing extraordinary challenges on a path marked by significant milestones, such as the 1991 Political Constitution, the 2011 Victims and Land Restitution Law, and the 2016 Final Peace Agreement – all landmark commitments to build a state and society based on the rule of law, equality, and pluralism. It has aimed to strengthen relations between the state and the populations most affected by violence, recognising that the success of a peace process depends not just on an absence of violence, but also on the promotion of social cohesion, construction of the social contract, the development of trust between state and society, and effective government action to improve the lives of citizens. Key innovations to consolidate peace and enhance legitimacy in Colombia have been:

- The critical role of **societal mobilisation for peace, dignity, and inclusive, pluralistic politics**, which helped create the constitutional framing for subsequent peace policies and anchor the country's iterative efforts to go further in its innovative peace, reform, and state-building processes. In turn, the peace process built on this and deepened the foundations for sustained peace by **creating spaces for participation by civil society, women, indigenous, and Afro-Colombian communities, as well as victims – in both peace agreement implementation and in spaces of public deliberation and policy design.**
- **Placing victims at the centre**, via legal changes and in the peace process, simultaneously signalled willingness to understand and tackle conflict drivers and heal wounds, which helped create a stronger public constituency for peace. This has led to important **mechanisms for establishing truth and justice and guaranteeing non-repetition** of abuses.
- **Addressing legitimacy deficits** to achieve durable peace, which stands in contrast to previous peace processes. Despite some foot dragging, factors such as **unequal access to land, political exclusion**, and illicit economies have been in focus. For example:
  - The Comprehensive Rural Reform includes a raft of **measures to correct land concentration** and the lack of peasant access to property.
  - The peace deal with the FARC rejected violence in politics, while **guaranteeing former militants – and violence-affected communities – the chance to play a role in the legitimate politics** of the country.
  - **Holistic efforts to tackle the drug economy**, including crop substitution, rural development, economic alternatives, and action against white-collar corruption, money laundering, and international trafficking.
  - Shifting **from anti-terrorist and anti-subversive security logics to adopt a more accountable, human security focused approach** via police and military reforms, measures to protect societal leaders, and continued efforts to dismantle paramilitary and drug-trafficking groups.
- Adopting **a territorial approach: locally developed, multi-stakeholder models for inclusive and accountable sustainable development in violent rural territories.** These initiatives enhance legitimacy by encouraging inclusive and accountable inputs and demon-

strating the state's willingness and capability to provide public goods and services, including justice and security, in a context-specific and responsive way – and, through these outputs, potentially gaining public acceptance.

- This has gone further under President Petro's **Total Peace approach of establishing dialogue tables to de-escalate violence in conflict-affected territories**. These engage marginalised groups while pursuing political and judicial solutions with armed actors.
- Amid persistent violence over natural resources, illegal mining, and deforestation, the concept of **Peace with Nature** promotes environmental conservation and the rights and cultures of marginalised indigenous, peasant, and Afro-Colombian communities.
- **Mechanisms for international accompaniment and support** promote peace, reconciliation and AF implementation, and discourage political violence.

All these innovations have value, and their collective impact has exceeded the sum of their parts. A particular strength has been the inclusion of the most marginalised and victimised communities and territories – consolidating the promise of the 1991 Political Constitution throughout the country.

The drive to enhance legitimacy has focused on multiple dimensions of legitimacy: input legitimacy, through inclusion and accountability; system legitimacy, by aligning institutions with the common good; and output legitimacy, by ensuring fairer distribution of public goods – including security, justice, and basic services – even to the most marginalised and victimised areas. By fulfilling peace commitments, the state has been able to increase legitimacy, consolidate peace, and create viable conditions for negotiation with other armed actors.

Ultimately, Colombia's pursuit of peace is an ongoing journey that requires adaptability, dedication, and a steadfast focus on enhancing legitimacy while building on the progress and setbacks to date

However, the road ahead remains challenging. Implementation of structural reform is moving slowly, hampered by a lack of resources, corruption, and resistance from powerful sectors. Illegal economies, especially drug trafficking, continue to finance violence and undermine state authority. Meanwhile, the fragmentation of armed actors and the persistence of violence in peripheral regions erode community confidence in peace.

In this context, the Total Peace policy promoted by the current government seeks to address this complexity, negotiating with multiple armed actors, from guerrillas to criminal gangs, and building a peace that includes all sectors of society. This ambitious plan faces significant criticism and multiple challenges which call into question the sustainability of Colombia's innovative peace process.

In a polarised Colombian and global context, populist leadership and socio-political division jeopardise Colombia's change processes and the broad consensus needed for their integration into the fabric of the Colombian state. Ultimately, Colombia's pursuit of peace is an ongoing journey that requires adaptability, dedication, and a steadfast focus on enhancing legitimacy while building on the progress and setbacks to date.

CASE STUDY

BANGLADESH

Indigenous rights, peace, and legitimacy in the Chittagong Hill Tracts

KEY MESSAGES

- **Gradual demilitarisation and confidence-building:** To implement the 1997 Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord and address ongoing tensions, a phased demilitarisation process, starting with confidence-building measures and community dialogues, is crucial. This could help foster trust between Indigenous communities and the military, create the conditions for further demilitarisation, and contribute to a return to sustained stability and prosperity in Bangladesh as a whole.
- **Protecting Indigenous rights and identity:** Confidence in peace can be built through legal and policy measures to safeguard the culture, language, and ancestral lands of Indigenous communities in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). This includes offering reparations for land dispossession and ensuring representation in national decision-making structures to foster greater inclusion and intercommunal trust.

Tensions in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) emerged following Bangladeshi independence in 1971, yet their roots extend to British colonial rule. In the 1860s, the British gave limited autonomy to CHT's tribes, recognised tribal chiefs, permitted policing by Indigenous officers, and granted the area certain rights under the CHT Regulations.[1]

CHT communities opposed the religious partition of India and Pakistan[2], and attempted to join India. The region, however, was included in Pakistan, whose government was uninterested in addressing the challenges faced by the people living there.[3] From 1957, the Pakistani government moved to industrialise CHT with its Kaptai Dam development, raising tensions by displacing 100,000 people and appropriating 5,400 acres of arable land.[4] In 1958, the government briefly recognised CHT as a *tribal territory*, but dropped this a year later – permitting little political autonomy for CHT residents.[5]

Hopes for CHT's autonomy were revived when Bangladesh parted from Pakistan in 1971, only to be dashed when the 1972 Constitution failed to recognise non-Bengali communities as citizens.[6] A political party representing CHT constituents, the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti (PCJSS), then called for autonomy, a special legislative body, recognition of tribal chiefs, constitutional protection for the CHT Regulation, and a ban on Bengali settlements in CHT.[7] In 1977, after Bangladesh's government dismissed these demands, the PCJSS's armed wing, the Shanti Bahini, launched an insurgency.

Indigenous communities resented exploitation of land and forest resources, the denial of their cultural identity, and demographic shifts under state *Bengalisation* policies – which were underpinning land seizures, displacement, and insecurity.[8] Regional powers also contributed to tensions, with India arming and training the Shanti Bahini, and Pakistan and China backing Bangladesh.

Despite Indian support, internal divisions, weak leadership within Indigenous communities, and concurrent separatist movements in Assam led to calls for a ceasefire in the late 1990s. This culminated in the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord in 1997. The treaty greatly reduced violence between Indigenous guerrillas and security forces,[9] but threats to peace, rights, and equality persist to this day. These include militarisation, limited political representation, and the state's reluctance to recognise Indigenous identity in the Constitution.

LOCAL PERCEPTIONS OF A STAGNANT PEACE

To explore the legacy of conflict in CHT, interviews were conducted in August 2024 with forty-five CHT residents. Eighty per cent of interviewees described experiences of harassment, discrimination and threats targeting Indigenous people, including by the military. Indigenous people in CHT are frequently threatened with abuse, labelled *terrorists*, and arbitrarily arrested and mistreated. Eight respondents described their lands and villages being set ablaze, causing deaths and forced displacement of residents.[10]

Responses were differentiated by age: those over forty lived through turbulent decades before the 1997 Peace Accord. During these years, Bengali settlers seized Indigenous lands, backed by the Ershad regime's resettlement policy (1982-1990). Respondents recalled harassment and beatings at the hands of the military in this period.

Perceptions of the CHT Peace Accord were mixed. At the time, it was favoured by the ruling Awami League but criticised by their opponents, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).[11] The Accord also caused divisions among tribal groups, leading to violent power struggles. This surge in 'internal terrorism' intensified mistrust, and many of the Accord's key provisions went unfulfilled. Unimplemented provisions included legal reforms to preserve CHT's tribal identity; transfer of powers to local authorities; managing land, forests, and the environment; returning land to Indigenous owners; withdrawing military camps; and revoking non-residents' land leases.[12]

Limited implementation of the CHT Peace Accord reflects state fears that ceding autonomy to the CHT Regional Council risks undermining central control.[13] This is important to nationalists and many Bengali settlers, who fear that indigenous empowerment could foster secessionist sentiment or demands for autonomy elsewhere. Discriminatory views within the security establishment contribute to delays, with many security officials favouring strict control in CHT.[14] Within CHT there are tensions between competing regional ethnic parties and Bengali settlers, and the government is wary of opposition from either side.[15] These factors perpetuate the militarisation and divisions over land that continue to trouble CHT.

BUILDING LEGITIMACY TO TACKLE INSTABILITY IN CHT

To fulfil the human rights, administrative, and autonomy provisions of the CHT Peace Accord, Bangladeshi authorities should embrace a comprehensive approach. This should include a transparent demilitarisation process alongside constructive confidence-building measures, such as community dialogue and peace initiatives to repair the relationship between the military and Indigenous people.[16] Amid the 2023 re-emergence of the Kuki-Chin National Army (KNA) and other militant groups, rapid demilitarisation is unrealistic. However, a structured, three-phase process for demilitarisation could be feasible.

In phase one, the government should initiate confidence-building measures by facilitating community dialogues led by neutral parties, with civil society support, to create spaces for Indigenous communities while addressing insurgency threats.[17] Phase two would focus on demilitarisation in areas where insurgent activity has decreased, with clear timetables for troop withdrawal under the oversight of local peace committees; at the same time participatory community security and development processes involving community leaders could foster trust and cooperation.[18] Phase three would further reduce military presence in CHT and transfer security responsibilities to local governance structures or community police.[19]

Beyond demilitarisation, the cultural identity, ancestral lands, and heritage of the Indigenous communities in CHT require safeguarding. The government often refers to these communities as *ethnic minorities* rather than *Indigenous*, downplaying ethnic distinctions that challenge its narrative of unity and homogeneity. Addressing Indigenous grievances could help build unity in diversity.

To move forward, authorities should pursue laws, policies and projects to protect Indigenous languages and culture,[20] and establish a transitional justice process to provide justice and reparations for families affected by land dispossession and military violence.[21] A comprehensive rehabilitation programme would build trust by improving access to housing, education, healthcare, and livelihoods for communities in CHT. A political dimension would facilitate greater inclusion and representation of CHT communities in the national discourse and in formal decision-making structures. To realise such a vision for ending the troubles in CHT, pragmatic governmental and security leaders, indigenous leaders who can mobilise community support, as well as international donors and civil society partners should work together in a broad coalition.

After more than 15 years of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's rule, and with the violent state backlash to mounting public protests feeding into wider unrest, Hasina was forced to resign in August 2024.[22] Bangladesh now has an opportunity to reconcile a fractured political landscape, address the deep-rooted grievances that have fuelled unrest, strengthen the accountability of security institutions, and become more representative of all sectors of society, particularly Indigenous communities. Such an approach to enhancing the legitimacy of the government in CHT could unburden security forces, promote socio-economic development, and reduce tensions that have historically impeded security and social cohesion, ultimately fostering a more stable and inclusive society in Bangladesh as a whole.[23]

CASE STUDY

GUATEMALA

The struggle for peace and legitimacy

KEY MESSAGES

- When peace processes stagnate, they can be re-energised by peacemaking leadership backed by wide social mobilisation and international support: Guatemala's 1996 Peace Agreement lacked enforceable mechanisms, allowing elites to maintain control and perpetuate inequality. Guatemala's grassroots organisations have been pivotal in advocating for peace, challenging systemic corruption, ensuring elite acceptance of the election results, and countering attempts to prevent the inauguration of peace campaigner President Arévalo.
- **Delivering an ambitious legitimacy agenda:** The Arévalo administration's ambitious agenda on corruption, accountability, security provision, judicial reform, and equality for marginalised groups seeks to advance multiple dimensions of legitimacy. To overcome vested interests, it will need to combine creative deal-making, delivery for a broad support base, and the institutionalisation of indigenous rights and civil society's role in decision-making and oversight.

GUATEMALA'S LEGACIES OF INEQUALITY AND VIOLENCE

As one of few countries to have strengthened its legitimacy in recent years, Guatemala is an important source of learning and inspiration. Guatemala's history of inequality, stemming from colonial legacies and foreign corporate influence, set the stage for the civil war. A leftist government in the early 1950s attempted reforms, but a 1954 CIA-backed coup replaced it with a military dictatorship that curtailed these efforts. After a failed revolt by military officers against corruption and US influence, civil war ignited in 1960, bringing with it insurgent groups like the *Movimiento Revolucionario 13 Noviembre* (Revolutionary Movement 13th November, or MR-13) and a violent government crackdown. Decades of foreign-backed counterinsurgency involving massacres and scorched earth campaigns left deep scars. Guatemalan security forces were responsible for the vast majority of atrocities in a war that claimed over 200,000 lives, most of them Indigenous Maya.[1]

AN END TO WAR – AND AN IMPERFECT PEACE

In the Esquipulas II Accord of 1987, Central American governments recognised the internal conflicts driving regional instability and proposed measures to promote national reconciliation and democratisation. After the Guatemalan National Reconciliation Commission was established, a succession of national dialogues and peace agreements during the 1990s culminated in the 1996 Accord for a Firm and Lasting Peace. This accord between the Guatemalan government and the *Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatelmalteca* (Guatemalan National Revolutionary Party) ended a 36-year civil war. It drew together past peace accords, set out key concepts underpinning peace, and defined roles for a National Reconciliation Commission, Civil Society Assembly, the UN, and other 'friends' of the peace process.

Initially hailed as a powerful step toward peace, the agreement lacked mechanisms for long-term enforcement because the requisite laws were never passed. As a result, elites and conservative parties dominated decision-making, exploiting the accord for their own agendas and competing for control.[2] This weakened state institutions and perpetuated the status quo. Inequality – a legacy of colonial structures, government corruption, and structural discrimination against Indigenous people – remained entrenched. Civil society, although influential during the peace negotiations, lacked the capacity to sustain its involvement in the longer-term. Corruption, violence, unmet basic needs, and low social development eroded public trust in government, leaving Guatemalans disillusioned.

SOCIETAL PRESSURE AND NEW BEGINNINGS

Civil society and grassroots organisations have played an important role in advocating for structural changes and building consensus around peace-oriented policies and solutions in Guatemalan society. Their initiatives and advocacy have driven much of the progress made since the Peace Accord, culminating in the inauguration of President Bernardo Arévalo de Leon. During his election campaign Arévalo pledged *to fight corruption by democratic means: fortifying institutions, respecting the rule of law, and engaging all of Guatemalan society*. This reignited the confrontation between social forces and reactionary interests, setting off a chain of opposition – from the attorney general to conservative members of congress – that nearly prevented him from taking office. Thanks, however, to national protests and advocacy led by Indigenous authorities, international support and the threat of sanctions, and a ruling by the Constitutional Court of Guatemala, president-elect Arévalo was inaugurated in January 2024.

Stability in Guatemala remains tied to the establishment of legitimate state institutions capable of bridging the gap between state and society. Arévalo's administration has articulated an agenda for tackling deep-seated corruption, security and justice sector reform, inequality, and other longstanding challenges. On security and justice, priorities include improving police conduct, fighting organized crime and drug trafficking, reinforcing judicial integrity and independence, and promoting transitional justice. Economically, work is underway to reduce poverty and extend education and social welfare programmes in rural areas. Indigenous rights and representation were key to Arévalo's platform, and the administration is actively engaging indigenous peoples in dialogue processes from the local to national level.

Since inauguration, Arévalo's party, Semilla, has promoted an inclusive multi-stakeholder process that would enshrine peace commitments.[3] Despite the pressing need to make progress in these areas, resistance from politico-criminal groups stil encroaching into the justice system makes each step challenging. To overcome this, the administration must strike a delicate balance between creative deal-making and maintaining a broad base of support, while rolling out policies that incrementally resolve deep-seated structural problems. Longer-term sustainable progress on legitimacy will also require them to institutionalise and embrace the role of civil society in decision-making and oversight.

2.4

GLOBAL INSTABILITY AND THE CRISIS OF MULTILATERALISM:

A legitimacy response

KEY MESSAGES

The multilateral system is struggling to handle intersecting crises of geopolitical competition, conflict, technological risk, and climate breakdown. Many states are disillusioned because of power imbalances, hypocrisy, and self-seeking behaviour among dominant states, as major and regional powers increasingly prioritise national interests over global public goods. This puts the world on the cusp of a new 'might-is-right' era, in which power and capital appear free to disregard the international law-based order, redraw boundaries, plunder resources, and dictate the fate of entire populations.

These destabilising trends are enabling atrocities and prompting many states to reinforce military capabilities and self-help measures. Reversing the multilateral system's legitimacy crisis requires:

- **Principled pragmatism:** It is unrealistic to aspire to progress at moments when 'strongmen' are ascendant and multilateral norms and systems are under assault. A progressive strategy to revitalise cooperation and safeguard peaceful, productive co-existence requires protecting what works, adapting where needed, and evolving to meet new circumstances. This involves a focus on preserving legitimacy, including: careful timing to avoid negative counter-reactions; quiet work to advance agreed reforms and promote peace at local, national and regional levels; coalitions of the willing in multilateral networks to exert collective pressure for common goals; and continued funding for multilateralism from those who still value it.
- **Resetting relationships to restore shared principles:** To preserve an international law-based order, states need to work together to restore shared principles and address the behaviour of those who are undermining them. Building the case for recognising and eliminating hypocrisy and exceptionalism, acknowledging inequality, and correcting past governance models will be crucial for resetting relationships and fostering buy-in to the future arrangements.
- **Pluralism, transparency and accountable decision-making:** International decision-making structures, including the UN Security Council and financial institutions, require reform to ensure broader representation, transparency, and inclusivity. Expanding civil society's role in these processes and promoting greater geographical, gender, and racial diversity at leadership levels can strengthen legitimacy and accountability in global governance.
- **Expanding common ground and collective action on urgent priorities:** Progress can sometimes be made by building consensus on technical areas (for example, governance of dangerous technologies, or resource management) to pave the way for potentially more politically challenging cooperation. Addressing complex issues like climate change and conflict resolution requires creativity in creating and then expanding islands of agreement.
- **Reinvesting in effective conflict prevention and peace operations:** Member States must, over time, restore the mandate for the UN and other accountable international arrangements to lead peace operations and offer peacemaking support. Enhancing effectiveness and legitimacy in multilateral peace support operations also requires supporting local peace efforts, focusing on people's security, prioritising community engagement and using continuous, two-way feedback ('feedback loops') to adapt and improve peace strategies.

Wherever collective progress can be made to advance these priorities, it may help restore trust and faith in the international system and maintain legitimacy in the face of global instability.

INTRODUCTION

The current era of global fragmentation is underpinned by a profound legitimacy crisis, characterised by the assertion of autocratic state power, declining freedoms, rampant disinformation, polarisation, nationalism, and rising economic inequality. As it struggles to answer these challenges, and those posed by climate breakdown and rapid technological change, the legitimacy of the multilateral system is itself crumbling. While its primary mandate is to maintain international peace and security, it has consistently failed to prevent or resolve conflicts in countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Libya, Sudan, Ukraine, and Yemen, among others. This dysfunction is generally ascribed to increased rivalry and polarisation among states, not least between the permanent members of the UN Security Council.[1] The world is teetering on the brink of a new imperial era, where 'might is right' threatens to become the organising principle of international relations once again.

The international multilateral system, with its indispensable role in promoting peace and security and tackling global crises, risks being splintered by these developments. The more states, multinational corporations, and other interest groups lose faith in the system's ability to govern the global commons (e.g. oceans, space) fairly and effectively, the more they will embrace alternative means to protect and pursue their interests. Many states in Asia, Europe, and elsewhere are increasing their defence budgets, preferring containment to conflict prevention and centring security in their foreign, economic, and other policies. Concepts like total defence, hybrid warfare, de-coupling of supply chains, and economic security have taken centre stage in national foreign policies. Many states now invest more in their own security communities than in strengthening the multilateral system.

This chapter asks what paths exist for revitalising the multilateral system, including the UN and its related bodies such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), and for reconstructing a functional international peace and security ecosystem. It first explores factors undermining the legitimacy of the international system. It then discusses the extent to which shared values still offer a basis for restoring trust and highlights the problem of self-seeking and transactional state behaviours. It recommends revitalising the legitimacy of global cooperation via a principled but pragmatic approach that includes: resetting relationships around shared principles; deepening pluralism, transparency, and accountable decision-making; pushing for collective action on urgent priorities; and reinvesting in effective conflict prevention and peace operations.

CHALLENGES TO THE EXISTING WORLD ORDER

The international multilateral system is currently facing a legitimacy crisis for several reasons. The most prominent source of pressure is the hostility of major and regional powers to the current international order, intensifying global and regional competition under the 'might is right' principle, and the way states react to this fractious landscape. A second source of pressure relates to the limited openness of multilateral systems to inclusion and accountability, both in general and in those institutions established to respond to conflict in particular. A third source is the inability of the existing system to cope with the multiple crises facing humanity, including climate change, inequality and under-development, new technologies including artificial intelligence, and an increase in conflict and insecurity. Together, these challenges and their implications are disrupting and reordering international relations, splintering the international system, and gravely aggravating the dangers posed by global instability and conflict. Since stability and cohesion are essential for enabling collective responses to these complex, multifaceted challenges, urgent work is needed to rebuild the trust and cooperation needed to maintain international peace and security and tackle shared and pressing problems.

THE PERILS OF INTENSIFYING RIVALRY IN AN INTERCONNECTED WORLD

For decades, the multilateral system has been dependably championed by liberal, democratic powers in Europe, North America, and other likeminded states (e.g. Japan, Australia). With new divisions, expansionist ambitions, and hostility to liberal tenets emerging among these allies, the fate of this system designed to maintain stability through institutions, alliances, and rules, is increasingly in doubt.

The more states, multinational corporations, and other interest groups lose faith in the system's ability to govern the global commons fairly and effectively, the more they will embrace alternative means to protect and pursue their interests

After centuries of European – and then American – ascendancy, countries such as China, India, and Russia are keen to overturn Western dominance. China, the primary engine of global growth, is the world's second largest economy;[2] the fifth, India is ascending the ranks.[3] The grouping of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) represent 35 percent of the global economy and rising with new members and partners, against the Group of Seven's (G7) 30 percent.[4] Despite their size and economic power, China, India, and others in the Global South often express frustration about being sidelined from decision-making in the global macro-economic system.

Long feeling dominated by the Global North, BRICS members are calling for an equal political and economic say in global institutions,[5] and developing their own complementary systems. A new development bank, contingency reserve arrangements, a SWIFT-like cross-border payment system, and trading among members in their own currencies have emerged[6] – restructuring the global economic and financial system currently dominated by the G7 and others. The rise of China and groups like the BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation has brought greater multipolarity, shifting the major bases of power: one centres on China and the BRICS, a second on the US and the Americas, and a third around the EU and its sphere of influence.[7]

While NATO remains an important Euro-Atlantic alliance, its

members are increasingly in disagreement and its future is uncertain. Members of other blocs also have mixed allegiances: some states in the BRICS, like China and India, align in opposing American hegemony, but remain sub-regional rivals. Meanwhile, despite their economic grievances against the US, several BRICS members also have close ideological and security ties to the US and Europe.

Beyond these power centres, other states, regional powers, and blocs protect and pursue their own interests. These include Africa through the African Union (AU – now a member of the Group of 20), the Pacific Forum, Türkiye, plus Middle Eastern and Arabian Gulf States. Global corporations also wield significant power in their sectors, and non-governmental organisations can influence the global system in their areas of interest.

Interdependence between economies and interconnected systems has reached new heights, spanning energy, finance, trade, food, and information networks that transcend national borders and geographic regions

Interdependence between economies and interconnected systems has reached new heights, spanning energy, finance, trade, food, and information networks that transcend national borders and geographic regions. The influence of these systems can be hard to discern until they are disrupted, as seen in the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, and how this has impacted on Ukraine's grain exports and fertiliser production, the 2021 blockage of the Suez Canal, or the sabotage of undersea telecommunications cables.

Interdependency can prevent or mitigate crises: China may be cautious to go to war with Taiwan because its economy (and domestic stability) depends on imports and exports with the rest of the world – especially the US, Europe, and Japan. Yet – as current events in Gaza, Sudan, and Ukraine illustrate – strategic decisions can be driven by reasoning that defies the logic of enlightened national self-interest. Intensifying rivalries increase the risk that a mistake or misunderstanding could set off a chain of events leading to war, as happened at the onset of the First World War.

CHALLENGES TO INTERNATIONAL CONFLICT RESPONSE MECHANISMS

Competition and aggression – especially involving major powers – affect the whole system, forcing states to take sides, and reinforcing alliances that deepen polarisation. International cooperation, in the UN Security Council or the G20, becomes harder. Historically, major global order transitions have brought insecurity not unlike the tension, competition, and mistrust seen today. There are now more violent conflicts underway than at any point since the Second World War.[9] The eight-fold rise in deaths from armed conflict over the past two decades[10] highlights both a proliferation and intensification of conflict and a failure in the multilateral system's response.

The UN's primary purpose was 'sav[ing] succeeding generations from the scourge of war'.[11] So far, the UN system and international diplomacy has prevented another world war. But escalation of Russia's war in Ukraine, including the risk of nuclear weapons use, and the US president's stated ambition to take control of Gaza, Canada, Greenland and Panama, have brought the multilateral system closer to collapse than at any point since the Second World War. The system appears toothless in the face of violations of international law in contexts such as DRC, Ethiopia, Israel/Palestine, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. Consensus about equal accountability under international law is fracturing, with polarisation between those who support or oppose international legal accountability for leaders who violate international humanitarian law.

Pushes for the UN to depart from the DRC, Iraq, Mali, Sudan, and Somalia,[12] rejections of UNRWA and the UN Secretary-General by Israel, and Israeli attacks on the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)[13] and the failure of many powerful 'western' states to fully condemn these actions all serve to illustrate a disturbing trend. Forced to forsake its leading role in mediation and conflict prevention, the UN has been largely relegated to a humanitarian function and is struggling to uphold its mandate.

Beyond the UN, failure to mobilise in support of legitimate peace processes and actors, have undermined stabilisation efforts in many settings in recent decades. Increasing fragmentation of intrastate conflicts and the geopolitical mechanisms to resolve them is challenging the methods and approaches of all actors involved in mediation and peacemaking (see Chapter 2.2 on 'Mediating for legitimacy in a fragmented world').[14] Declining donor willingness to pay for peacekeeping and peacebuilding[15] despite strong evidence that prevention is more cost-effective than response, is further compounding the erosion of effective multilateral conflict responses.

LIMITED INCLUSION AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The legitimacy of the current multilateral system is also undermined by states' dwindling commitment to upholding shared rules and advancing the common good, coupled with limited openness, representativeness, pluralistic participation, and responsiveness in global institutions. Despite lofty aspirations to improve the security and well-being of the world's people and ecosystems, the system is dominated by the interests of key states and the elites that hold greatest sway within them. Many states in the Global South see the multilateral system as serving the interest of wealthy, powerful states, whose hold on leading roles at the UNSC and other UN institutions (and international financial institutions like the World Bank and IMF) undermines trust and credibility. Recent moves to diversify representation in peace, security and other mechanisms have been piecemeal and insufficient.[16] With nationalism, patrimonialism and autocracy on the rise, the gap between states' commitments to the proclaimed values and approaches of the multilateral system, and their actual policies and observable actions, is rapidly widening.

When states behave questionably, structural weaknesses in facilitating bottom-up participation and accountability limit the UN's ability to push back. The lack of downward accountability, in an increasingly authoritarian community of states, helps explain why those democratic states that retain strong influence in mul-

tilateral institutions are reluctant to share power more equitably within global governance structures.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND UNSUSTAINABILITY

Human civilisation faces the challenge of balancing economic and energy consumption, population growth, and the material limits of our ecosystems.[17] The global economic model – based on cheap labour, technological progress, and resource exploitation – has led to an unequal distribution of benefits and costs, revealing its long-term unsustainability, particularly in light of the climate crisis. The environmental crisis increases conflict risks over resources such as energy, land, and water,[18] and though the transition to a net-zero future is essential, it too comes with political, social, and security risks.

Global tensions persist in UN-facilitated climate change meetings – Conferences of Parties (COPs) – especially across the Global South. Here, frustration and resentment over the Global North's unsustainable consumption connects to unresolved grievances over historical legacies, and their impacts on development in the Global South. As trust in international processes further erodes, short-term, self-interested actions are accelerating climate change and environmental degradation.

NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND GLOBAL INEQUALITY

Rapid technological advances, including artificial intelligence, have reshaped information generation and communication, with major implications for global interconnectedness, social cohesion, stability, and international relations.[19] The shift to an information economy has widened global divisions, as a limited number of countries control key technologies, leading to heightened inequality, competition and resistance to multilateral regulation.[20] This has increased volatility in global production and financial systems, as seen in the 2008 financial crisis.

As noted in the UN Secretary-General's New Agenda for Peace, and the Global Digital Compact adopted as part of the Pact for the Future, these developments affect international peace and security. New threats, such as cyber-attacks and digital manipulation, highlight the need for coordinated, hybrid defence strategies across government, private sectors, and the public. Additionally, technologies such as automated weapons and social media's profit-driven model are undermining political stability, contributing to the active spread of disinformation, populism and nationalism while weakening pluralism and open discourse. However, with investment and careful, accountable management, the accessibility of new technologies may also hold potential for a more inclusive and pluralistic political landscape.

Emerging threats such as environmental degradation and technological change have both dramatic local impacts, and present civilisational if not existential challenges whose management requires global cooperation. However, instead of inspiring greater global cooperation, so far these developments are increasing global inequality and competition. Successfully managing these challenges requires reversing this trend and restoring the legitimacy of multilateral arrangements for effective crisis response and governance of the global commons.

RESTORING LEGITIMACY: RESETTING VALUES OR ADDRESSING SUBVERSIVE BEHAVIOUR?

Compared to the preceding eras, the second half of the 20th century was a period of unprecedented global peace and prosperity. It gave birth to, and was sustained by, the creation of the UN system, with its responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. For the first time in human history, a rules-based multilateral system emerged to govern the world cooperatively.

Although competition, conflict, climate change, and new technologies are putting this system under pressure, they have not yet led to widespread outright rejection of the values on which it is based. The cornerstones of the post-war international system are the UN Charter, international humanitarian law, and international human rights law. Together they create a framework of norms and values for an international law-based order that recognises the equality and sovereignty of states, determines the limits of permissible state behaviour, and maintains international peace and security. Norms such as the peaceful resolution of disputes, and the illegality of the use of force to pursue a state's interest (except in self-defence), form the basis of International Law.

The vast majority of states (including China, Europe and the US) and their societies share an interest in a strong multilateral system that can help to maintain international peace and security and govern the global commons. The adoption of the Pact for the Future suggests a degree of residual allegiance to and willingness to reaffirm the shared values underpinning the international multilateral system. Support for an international law-based order and multilateral system appears to extend well beyond a handful of liberal democracies.

Despite such rhetoric, as seen in wars throughout the Middle East, North Africa, Ukraine and beyond, powerful states in the international system are acting in ways that question their commitment to shared norms and values. States that are opting to use violence for short-term gain are damaging multilateralism, but they remain a minority.

Meanwhile, many countries in the Global North that helped establish the multilateral order are shifting attention from UN institutions to pursue their own interests or concentrate on regional defence, as currently seen in Europe. Similarly, China, Russia, and others are investing in groups in which they predominate. All these states still pursue and maintain roles in the UN system in customary ways, while opportunistically wielding power in other forums such as the G7, BRICS, and the G20 to shape the future world order.

These trends risk undermining the global multilateral system. Despite this, most states still recognise the need for a global framework for cooperation: the 2024 Summit of the Future – the most serious recent reflection by UN member states about how the multilateral system can meet future challenges – focused on reforming and improving it, not on replacing it with something new, or revisiting its fundamental principles or values.[21]

Although many powerful states are positioning themselves to defend their economic and security interests via instruments of

hard power and transactional dealmaking, many do not prefer competition and conflict to peace and cooperation. They are concerned about the collective ability of the multilateral system to maintain peace and manage cooperation. The challenge is to harness their concerns, to protect what is essential, to adapt to new circumstances, and to evolve or innovate to meet emerging challenges – which requires reversing the mistrust caused by self-interested state behaviours, and restoring trust and confidence in cooperative arrangements that enable collective action.

REBUILDING LEGITIMATE INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Ultimately, all states share a strong interest in avoiding the 'poor, nasty, brutish and short' existence that the collapse of the multilateral order would bring.[22] Encouraging states to recommit to shared values – in word and deed – will require the development of effective cooperative and collective frameworks and mechanisms to check self-seeking behaviours that undermine peace, security, climate action, and sustainable development. The most pressing global challenges – including unsustainability, aggression, technological risk and the global legitimacy crisis – all demand confronting self-seeking behaviours and revitalising collective action in the common interest. Progress can be achieved through:

- ☐ Principled pragmatism
- ☐ Resetting relationships around shared principles
- ☐ Pluralism, transparency and accountable decision-making
- ☐ Expanding common ground and collective action on urgent priorities
- ☐ Reinvesting in effective conflict prevention and peace operations

PRINCIPLED PRAGMATISM

With strongmen actively assaulting multilateral norms and institutions, bold, progressive policy initiatives could trigger counter-reactions that do further damage. Effectively protecting central elements of the multilateral system requires combining principle with pragmatism. The core principle should be a focus on revitalising the legitimacy of the system – both in terms of inclusive, accountable inputs and the effective delivery of outputs, including sustaining peace and effectively managing other global challenges and crises. Pragmatism requires careful timing to avoid provoking negative counter-reactions until moments of opportunity arise for tackling problems and pursuing needed reforms; quiet work in the interim to advance agreed reforms and promote peace at local, national, and regional levels; consensus building in multilateral networks to exert collective pressure for common goals; and that those who still value multilateralism keep funding it.

RESETTING RELATIONSHIPS AROUND SHARED PRINCIPLES

Even if international agreement on shared values has not fundamentally collapsed, long-term investment and attention is needed to realign shared values around an international law-based global order. To achieve this, all sides must work to reset relationships. A key area of focus here is shifting the behaviour of those states that are undermining shared rules and preventing such behaviour from becoming the new normal. While this work is urgent, it requires tact, diplomacy, coalitions of the willing, dialogue, and the careful exertion of influence and pressure among like-minded stakeholders.

The most pressing global challenges – including unsustainability, aggression, technological risk and the global legitimacy crisis – all demand confronting self-seeking behaviours and revitalising collective action in the common interest

Historical legacies of inequality, power imbalances, and climate injustice have shaped the current international order and continue to cause great harm and risk. Just as the Pact for the Future recognises the need to redress historical injustices, particularly against Africa, a deeper reset in relationships and a recommitment to shared aims can only succeed if the future multilateral system evolves to address past failures. The Pact confirms baseline values, provides a road map and sets out some immediate priorities, though many aspects will require further negotiations and refinement. Restoring trust requires investment in spaces for dialogue on how states can work together in their long-term collective and self-interest to restore trust, find agreement, and promote solidarity.

PLURALISM, TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABLE DECISION-MAKING

Deficits in representation and inclusion reflect the dominance of multilateral institutions by historically powerful states and undermine the system's legitimacy. Tackling this requires changes in both structure and decision-making processes, as discussed intensively at the 2024 Summit of the Future. Almost everyone, including permanent members, recognises that the UN Security Council's current composition and working methods are undermining trust. The Pact for the Future thus includes a commitment to make the Security Council more representative, inclusive, transparent, efficient, democratic, and accountable.[23] The Pact also stresses greater representation for under-represented regions in global institutions, calls for an end to the monopoly on senior posts in the UN by any state or group of states, and promotes more representative decision-making in international financial institutions.[24] A recent development illustrates some progress, with AU membership of the G20 providing the bloc with a greater voice on global issues.

Another priority is the system for financial contributions. This currently creates the potential for undue influence by a few states whose high gross domestic product means that they contribute a 'disproportionate' share of the UN's total budget. It will be important to review options for how GDP can still be used to determine a country's financial contributions to the UN without giving extra power and influence.

Strengthening meaningful participation in decision-making by a range of non-state actors can also add to the multilateral system's legitimacy. By providing evidence, analysis, and advocacy in areas such as environmental protection, human rights, and social justice, civil society has a critical role to play in ensuring the multilateral system factors in the concerns of 'we the people' and makes better informed decisions. UN bodies like the Security Council and the Peacebuilding Commission should more routinely seek written and oral input from local and international civil society and other experts, and engage with scientific and other academic research, to ensure their decisions are based on the best available evidence and analysis. The review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture in 2025 and similar processes provide opportunities to ensure these bodies become more people-centred, evidence-based, and legitimate.[25]

EXPANDING COMMON GROUND AND COLLECTIVE ACTION ON URGENT PRIORITIES

As well as working on restoring trust, participation, and accountability, urgent action is needed in several areas including ending wars, negotiating humanitarian access, scaling up efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, and reducing emissions to achieve the Paris climate goals. If there is disagreement on how the international community should act collectively on a certain issue, then there is very little the UN alone can achieve. For example, if there is disagreement among UN member states about the desired course of action of the UN in Sudan or Libya, then a UN envoy or political mission can do little to resolve the conflict.

Progress on issues such as the International Financial Architecture and the Global Digital Compact illustrates the potential to identify and advance on specific themes. Progress on some technical areas, such as climate change response or the governance of artificial intelligence and other technologies, can pave the way towards evidence-based cooperation on more politically challenging peace and security issues. For example, one urgent step forward would be tackling nuclear dimensions of emerging technological risks with 'commitments to avoid cyberattacks on nuclear command and control systems' and limiting the role of artificial intelligence in these systems.[26] Progress in such areas can under some conditions be a basis for extending cooperation elsewhere.

The world requires multilateral institutions that are empowered and capable to play an effective role in 'saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war'. A new commitment to prevention, to counter the current emphasis on containment or militarisation, is required

Few global challenges are more pressing than tackling the unsustainability of current models of economic growth and management and its impact on the global ecosystem. Legitimacy in global governance requires tackling systemic inequality and promoting an economic model that prioritises shared development between countries and puts long-term human and environmental well-being at the forefront. The Pact for the Future rightly calls for a rethink in how sustainable development is measured, including feedback loops that go beyond economic metrics to consider broader drivers of peace and legitimacy. The next round of global sustainable development goals from 2030 should look at ways to discourage economic activity that harms the environment and other common goods – and incentivise economic activity that favours peace, sustainability, and equality within and between states.

Where progress is elusive, advancing collective action will depend on creativity. States can shift from global forums to building momentum with smaller regional or minilateral groupings to take action on urgent issues,[27] before bringing their models to a wider range of like-minded states for broader implementation. A further route for maintaining progress is via parliaments, local governments, and cities. National parliaments can be a channel for advancing policy initiatives on core issues, and promoting their implementation, despite the increasing global trends towards autocratic leadership – as well as expanding the breadth and legitimacy of local ownership of global priorities. C40 cities – a global network of city mayors working with civil society and the public – is spearheading innovative solutions on climate and inequalities.

REINVESTING IN EFFECTIVE CONFLICT PREVENTION AND PEACE OPERATIONS

While the development of regional institutions and capacities for preventing and responding to conflict aligns with the subsidiarity principle, the world requires multilateral institutions that are empowered and capable to play an effective role in 'sav[ing] succeeding generations from the scourge of war' – complemented by peacemaking institutions and civil society at other levels.

A new commitment to prevention, to counter the current emphasis on containment or militarisation, is required. To enable this, states must create the space for the UN Secretary-General, international representatives (such as Special Envoys and Resident Coordinators), and key UN institutions to reclaim leading roles. This includes supporting them with the funding and experienced senior staff they need to succeed. Building on the legitimacy that this would afford, states and the UN itself need to lean into the fundamentals of international law and high standards of evidence to navigate polarised perspectives, condemning violations by all parties without double standards. The UN and leading peace support partners must actively work to establish pathways to end violence, protect conflict-affected groups, and equitably resolve conflicts. This requires reinvesting in mandates to support peace and security via appropriate

institutions with the patience required to weather setbacks and achieve long-term results.

Ultimately, restoring an effective legal order and functioning multilateral arrangements must result in improvements in the security and well-being of the people and ecosystems they rely on. International peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding efforts can be state-centric, top-down, and aloof – abuses by peacekeepers are all too frequent, and there are risks if peacekeeping veers away from impartiality towards combating rebels and protecting regimes with legitimacy deficits. Legitimacy is an important lens for improving the effectiveness of peace support interventions at multiple levels; through their emphasis on solidarity, subsidiarity, accountable security and dignity, an essential message of the Principles for Peace is that the multilateral system should serve the interests of the people, not only their governments.

Thus, accountability mechanisms and other legitimacy-enhancing elements need to be central and integral to all efforts to build state capacity. A focus on legitimacy and accountability can ensure that the public and civil society can shape, co-own, and give feedback on the strategies, objectives, and plans of peace operations and national objectives. UN-led peace operations and programmes need to develop the necessary engagement tools to enable them to become more people-centred.

Improvements partly depend on greater inclusion of people's perspectives in the debates shaping international peace support mandates and managing their performance. The Pact for the Future calls for a review of UN peace operations. This is an opportunity to go beyond a focus on state capacity to concentrate on enhancing legitimacy, helping communities and societies sustain peace by improving support to local and national processes. The Principles for Peace can be an important starting point for such a re-imagining of future UN peace operations via better community engagement, accountable security and increased agency for local stakeholders.

The Principles for Peace highlight the importance of feedback loops, not only to monitor intended objectives, but also to consider whether peace support is fostering a legitimate, sustainable peace. Such monitoring, combined with processes for reflection and adaptation, should give peace and security actors the ability to adapt and improve their efforts.[28] Monitoring and adaptive capacity must be inclusive and participatory, not only for the sake of effectiveness, but because this builds trust, shared ownership of peace processes, and legitimacy.

CONCLUSION

The legitimacy of the multilateral system, and its primary role in preventing and managing international peace and security, is under enormous pressure. Effectively defending multilateralism means combining principle – making renewed legitimacy the system's greatest strength – with pragmatism – picking the right moments, tactics, levels and entry points for promoting reform, protecting past gains, and promoting adaptation and evolution.

Revitalising the system's legitimacy begins with re-affirming its underpinning values, while being ready to revisit paradigms that have generated past grievances and inequalities. To reverse the perception that the system can work only for the powerful, it will be vital to reform the way international institutions are constituted and managed to make them more pluralistic and representative.

Creatively unlocking collective action and progress in specific areas can include establishing islands of progress or coalitions of the willing – on certain themes, or between clusters of partners – and then building on the momentum and goodwill achieved. This can be complemented by regional and minilateral groups, or networks of sub-national actors, taking action and exerting influence on shared priorities – keeping progress alive while limiting the disproportionate influence of states who are not yet on board.

If trust and representativeness can be maintained through these steps, it should be used to strengthen international conflict responses and peacemaking. Renewed consensus for sustainable peace needs to be matched by improvements to multilateral peace initiatives and operations, to ensure they are more people-centred, accountable, and are properly resourced with the expertise and funds required to protect and promote security and well-being in these challenging times.

CASE STUDY

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Revitalising international support to peace and legitimacy post-Dayton

KEY MESSAGES

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) needs to revisit its imperfect political settlement and renew efforts to reinvigorate peaceful, democratic change, including through:

- **Enhancing legitimacy and pluralism:** Emerging social movements, inclusive dialogue, and grassroots initiatives are needed to empower citizens, address critical issues, and promote local decision-making. This involves fostering civic agency, engaging youth, and strengthening the role of women in politics and peace processes.
- **Inclusive reform and representation:** Promoting a functional, sustainable peace in BiH by involving marginalised groups (for example, women, youth, Roma, LGBTQI+) in constitutional reforms and policymaking, ensuring civil society's active role in research, analysis, and advocacy, and fostering conflict-sensitive media to enable informed public debate.
- **International and regional cooperation:** Strengthening efforts to promote unity among international partners and regional collaboration to support BiH's integration, counteract isolation, and deter destabilising actions.

The Bosnian War (1992-1995) ended with the signing of the General Framework Agreement for Peace in BiH ('Dayton Accords'), but its legacy continues to touch every aspect of Bosnian society. The Dayton Accords relied on a power-sharing formula, favouring elite decision makers, to bring an end to the violent conflict. However, they left many grievances, social and psychological challenges, and legitimacy deficits unaddressed. These underpin polarisation, out-migration, and stagnation in the country to this day.[1]

Signed by the presidents of Croatia, Serbia, and BiH, the Dayton Accords divided the country's political institutions and geography in line with the interests of the three parties. An interim constitution was hastily attached as an annex but has not been reformed since. The power-sharing structures the agreement created have served to entrench patronage, clientelism and inter-ethnic segregation and division.[2]

The three intervening decades have cemented hierarchies and divisions while preventing BiH from investing in the future, and reforming or dealing with the past. Today, 'there is a common feeling of being stuck with a constitution that was not drafted in an inclusive, locally led process and that does not meet the challenges of the day.'[3] This has clear effects. Profound political, judicial, and socio-economic disenfranchisement disempowers the young, and pushes too many to emigrate.[4] Political and civic space is polarised by self-interested, populist politicians who claim to be championing people's rights while perpetuating ethno-nationalism.[5] This results in divisive politics along ethno-political lines, and separatist ambitions within Republika Srpska in particular.[6] In this context, public authorities are unable to agree fundamental reforms advancing sustainable development and EU integration.

Compared with its Western Balkan neighbours, BiH has relatively high levels of unemployment,[7] insecurity,[8] corruption,[9] fear over expressing political opinion,[10] under-representation of women in politics,[11] and threats to women who do participate.[12] Given these seemingly intractable problems, secessionist rhetoric has fuelled fears over the country's possible fragmentation and a potential return to conflict.[13]

The international community still provides BiH with significant support: after more than 25 years of peacekeeping and monitoring missions, a High Representative (HR) still maintains executive powers of last resort, and foreign judges preside over the Constitutional Court.[14] While international engagement halted the war and contained the immediate violence, many Bosnians see it as overstepping, overstaying, underinvesting in inclusive, locally led initiatives, and excluding them from meaningful decision-making and economic growth.[15] Although many external actors support moves toward more legitimate governance and state-society relations, the risks of reopening old wounds loom large.[16] As a result, alongside inter-ethnic divides, a profound distrust of both national politics and international intervention is palpable within Bosnian society.[17] Given these challenges, the P4P provide a lens for enhancing the quality and outcomes of peacemaking in BiH. Increasing legitimacy through a focus on other Principles for Peace like pluralism and subsidiarity are all important priorities for the country to move beyond the legacies of war and enable Bosnian citizens to identify and pursue their own destiny in earnest.[18]

The Western Balkans is a 'vibrant space of social and political contestation' where 'grassroots civil society and social movements' have the potential to overcome elite state capture.[19] BiH has already seen important assertions of civic agency and has a vibrant labour movement, as well as highly innovative local efforts to build inclusive politics, economics and social action.[20] Supporting social movements focused on critical issues such as environmental protection or femicide have opened avenues to contest power and bargain with elites.[21] Reinvigorating democratic and peaceful change in such ways can be an important complement to gradualist and elite-focused reforms under the EU integration agenda.

Peace efforts should focus on fostering inclusive dialogue on areas such as education, culture, and the environment.[22] In addition, discussions on reforms – including if and when negotiations open on reforming BiH's constitution – and support for civil society in research, analysis and advocacy, would benefit from explicit roles for women, young people, Roma, and LGBTQI+ people. Such efforts may enable civil society to secure greater representation, enhancing legitimacy, pluralism, and accountability through more locally driven processes. Strengthening the role of women in politics and peace, while challenging harmful gender norms, is particularly vital.

Support for reviewing a post-Dayton political settlement can be complemented by a wider approach to growing legitimacy via pluralism. This approach would include a focus on supporting emerging social movements, enabling them to evolve into influential political parties. It should also include support for consultations with local communities on development, governance, and peace, alongside promoting unbiased media to ensure public understanding and accountability. Efforts to reverse apathy should include engaging youth in reform.

Supporting communication to the wider public through free, conflict-sensitive media platforms could likewise foster more informed and plural public debate

Supporting communication to the wider public through free, conflict-sensitive media platforms could likewise foster more informed and plural public debate. Finally, long-term support for civil society and media, combined with measures to combat corruption, crime, disinformation, and media illiteracy, is essential.

To make progress within BiH, international partners themselves need to agree a more coherent approach and promote regional collaboration to counteract the country's isolation and deter aggressive actions that could further undermine stability.

3
FEEDBACK LOOPS TO ENHANCE LEGITIMACY

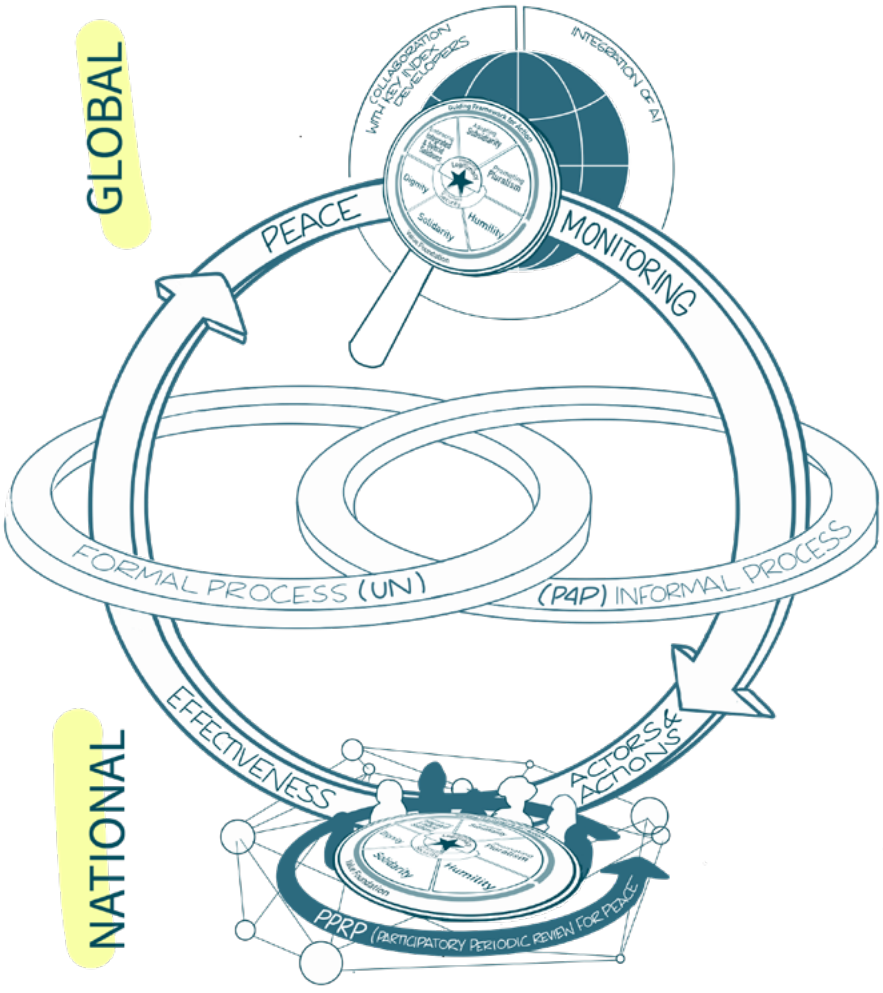
Introducing the Principles for Peace Indicators and the Peace Navigator

INTRODUCTION

The eight Principles for Peace provide a comprehensive and actionable framework for achieving sustainable peace, serving as a shared reference point to guide and improve policies and outcomes across all phases of peacemaking processes. These Principles function as both a diagnostic and implementation tool, equipping peace actors to navigate the complexities of contemporary conflict and address persistent gaps in legitimacy, inclusivity, and transformative approaches. Central to strengthening coherence and accountability in peace efforts is the ability to measure progress toward peace effectively.

To operationalize this, Principles for Peace, in collaboration with the Institute for Economics and Peace, has developed the Peace Navigator – a robust tool for systematically measuring and evaluating peacemaking through the lens of the eight Principles. The Navigator enables stakeholders to track country-level trends, identify risks and opportunities, and support evidence-based decision-making in peacebuilding and peacemaking.

This chapter begins by outlining how the Peace Navigator addresses critical gaps in peace measurement. It then examines key data trends, with a particular focus on legitimacy across the countries included in the analysis, and highlights the trajectories of three countries that have demonstrated marked improvement over time, as well as three cases of significant deterioration. These case studies provide strategic insights to inform future peace efforts in these and other contexts.



Graphic 1 Illustration Mechanisms

THE PEACE NAVIGATOR

The Peace Navigator is an AI powered platform developed by P4P to monitor and analyze country-level trends in peace, conflict, and socio-economic factors. It is designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the evolving nature of peace processes in specific regions, using the eight Principles for Peace as its analytical foundation.

Methodologically, the Peace Navigator operates as the first tier of a three-tiered Feedback Loop. Tier 1 – the Principles for Peace Indicators – captures long-term, country-level trends in peace and conflict dynamics using quantitative data. Tiers 2 and 3, which have been developed in parallel, incorporate qualitative analysis of meso- and micro-level peace actor activities and stakeholder perceptions, respectively, to provide a more granular and participatory assessment of peace processes. Tier 2 and 3 data is included in the Navigator through an AI powered system, accessible by users through a virtual assistant included in the online platform.

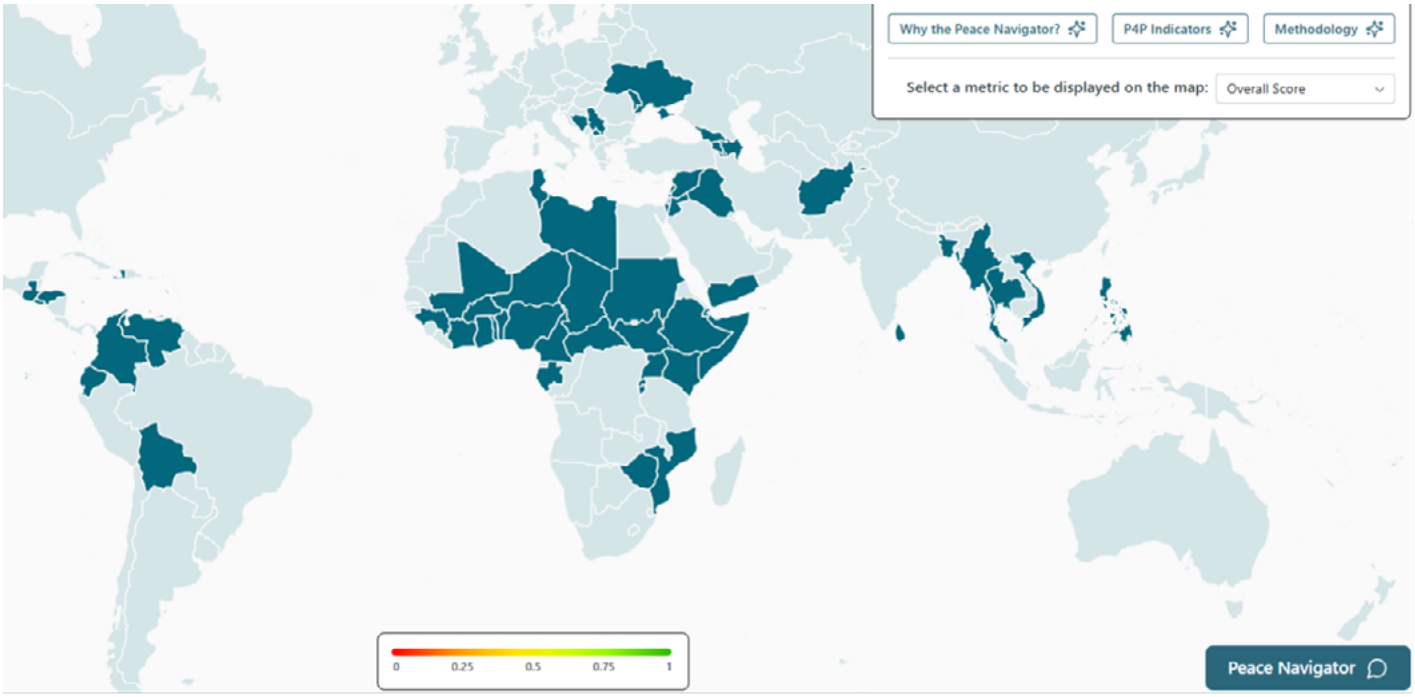
The Navigator integrates existing indicators, selected for their global coverage and relevance, and qualitative analysis to offer data-driven insights that identify areas for enhancing the effectiveness of peacebuilding strategies. Each indicator is mapped to one of the eight Principles for Peace, and the framework currently covers more than 20 years (2003–2024). The indicators are scored on a scale where higher values indicate stronger contributions to peace. These scores are aggregated to produce Principle Scores, which are used to track within-country changes over time.

The methodology is grounded in an inclusive, participatory, and academically robust process, ensuring that the selected indicators reflect both global standards and local realities

The Peace Navigator's approach is distinct in that it does not provide an overall country score or global ranking. Instead, it enables peace actors, policymakers, and donors to identify specific trends, risks, and opportunities within individual country contexts. This supports more responsive and adaptive peace interventions and positions the Navigator as a tool for evidence-based course correction and strategic decision-making.

The methodology is grounded in an inclusive, participatory, and academically robust process, ensuring that the selected indicators reflect both global standards and local realities. The indicators are intended to be used alongside qualitative analysis, with future iterations integrating more local and stakeholder-driven data as part of the broader Feedback Loop.

The Navigator includes 56 countries that are either currently in, emerging from, or at risk of conflict, and that have sufficient data available to warrant their inclusion (see Table 01).



Graphic 2 Peace Navigator

TABLE 1

THE 40 PEACE NAVIGATOR INDICATORS

PRINCIPLE	INDICATOR	SOURCE	LATEST YEAR
Dignity (6 Indicators)	Women Peace and Security Index	GIWPS	2023
	Standard of Living	Gallup Analytics	2024
	Sexual Orientation	Gallup Analytics	2024
	Freedom of Religion	V-Dem	2024
	Socio-Economic Barriers	Quality of Government and BTI	2023
	Freedom in Your Life	Gallup Analytics	2023
Solidarity (6 Indicators)	Social Group Equality	V-Dem	2024
	Polarisation of Society	V-Dem	2024
	GINI Index	World Bank	2024
	Racial/Ethnic Minorities	Gallup Analytics	2024
	Trust in Neighbourhood	World Values Survey	2023
	International Cooperation	Quality of Government and BTI	2023
Humility (5 Indicators)	Engaged Society	V-Dem	2024
	Voice and Accountability	World Bank	2023
	Respect Counterarguments	V-Dem	2024
	International Autonomy	V-Dem	2024
	Treated With Respect	Gallup Analytics	2024
Enhancing Legitimacy (9 Indicators)	Corruption in Government	Gallup Analytics	2023
	Political Rights	Freedom House	2024
	Confidence in National Government	Gallup Analytics	2023
	Press Freedom Index	Reporters Without Borders	2024
	Factionalized Elites	Fund for Peace	2023
	Rule of Law - Estimate	World Bank	2023
	Access to Public Services	V-Dem	2024
	Access to Justice - Women	V-Dem	2024
	Performance Legitimation	V-Dem	2024
Accountable Security (5 Indicators)	Deaths from Conflict	UCDP	2024
	Human Rights	Fragile States Index	2023
	Homicide Rate	UNODC	2023
	Confidence in Institutions	Gallup Analytics	2023
	Women Feel Safe Walking Alone	Gallup Analytics	2024

PRINCIPLE	INDICATOR	SOURCE	LATEST YEAR
Promoting Pluralism (6 Indicators)	Equal Access Index	V-Dem	2024
	Women Political Empowerment Index	V-Dem	2024
	Migrant Acceptance Index	Gallup	2023
	Group Grievance	Fragile States Index	2023
	Exclusion by Social Group Index	V-Dem	2024
	Political Pluralism and Participation	Freedom House	2024
Adopting Subsidiarity and Hybrid Solutions (3 Indicators)	Civil society participation Index	V-Dem	2024
	Vertical Accountability Index	V-Dem	2024
	Local Democracy	International IDEA	2023

All the countries included in the Navigator rank in the bottom half of the Global Peace Index (GPI) and are similarly ranked in other comparable indices. The Navigator countries represent a wide variety of contexts, regions, and government types, ensuring that the insights derived from the data are diverse and applicable to a broad range of situations.

TABLE 2
PEACE NAVIGATOR COUNTRIES & REGIONS[6]

East Asia & Pacific					
Myanmar	Philippines	Thailand	Viet Nam		
Europe & Central Asia					
Armenia	Azerbaijan	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Georgia	Kosovo	
Moldova	Serbia	Ukraine			
Latin America & Caribbean					
Bolivia	Colombia	Ecuador	El Salvador	Guatemala	Haiti
Honduras	Venezuela				
Middle East & North Africa					
Djibouti	Iraq	Israel	Jordan	Lebanon	Libya
Occupied Palestinian Territories		Syria	Tunisia	Yemen	
South Asia					
Afghanistan	Bangladesh	Sri Lanka			
Sub-Saharan Africa					
Benin	Burkina Faso	Burundi	Cameroon	Central African Republic	
Chad	Côte d'Ivoire	Ethiopia	Gabon	Ghana	Guinea
Kenya	Mali	Mozambique	Niger	Nigeria	Rwanda
Somalia	South Sudan	Sudan	Togo	Uganda	Zimbabwe

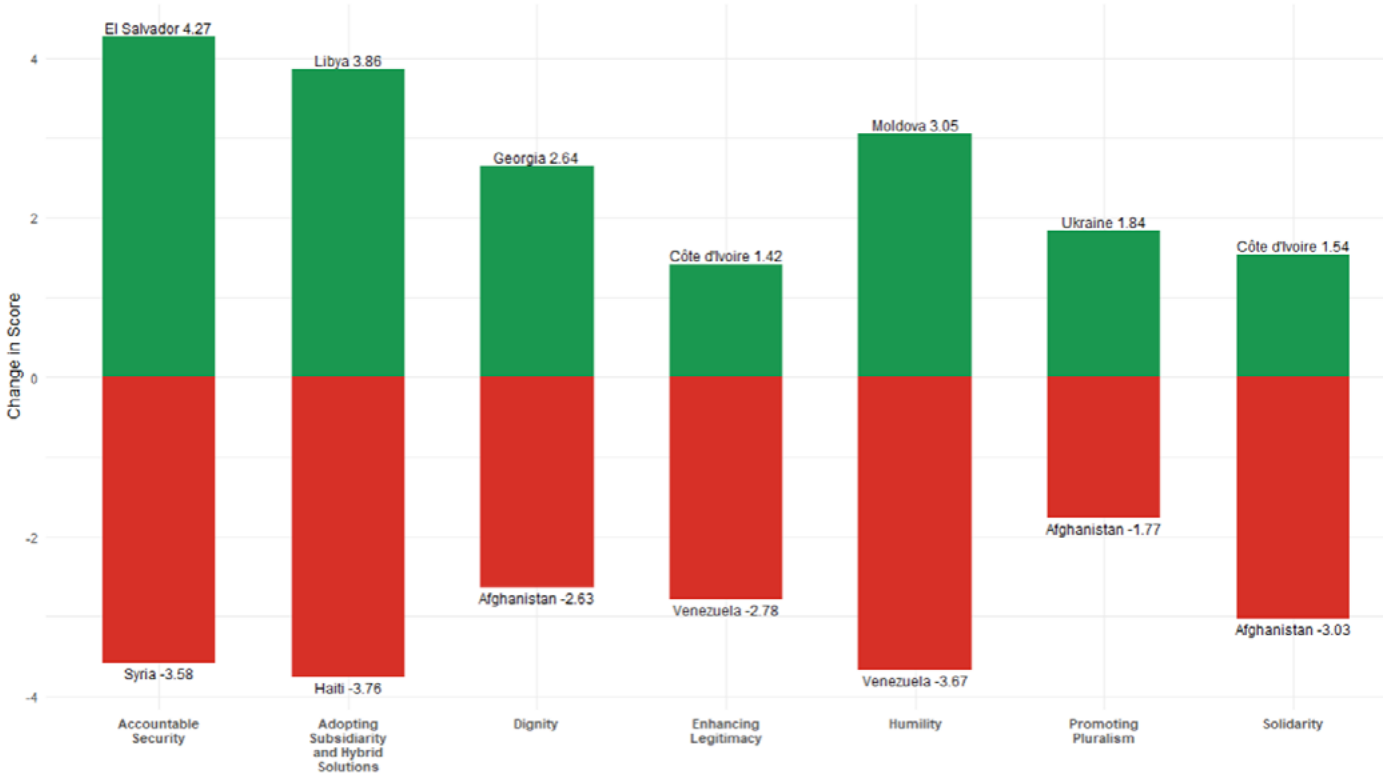
PEACE NAVIGATOR TRENDS

Figure 11 displays the most improved and most deteriorated Navigator countries for each principle, 2003–2024. No single country showed the greatest improvement on more than one principle, while Afghanistan remains the worst performing country across three of the Principles. At the end of the chapter, the three most improved and three most deteriorated countries on the Enhancing Legitimacy principle are discussed in greater depth.

Figure 11

MOST IMPROVED AND MOST DETERIORATED PEACE NAVIGATOR COUNTRIES PER PRINCIPLE, 2003-2024

Afghanistan remains the worst performing country across three of the Principles.

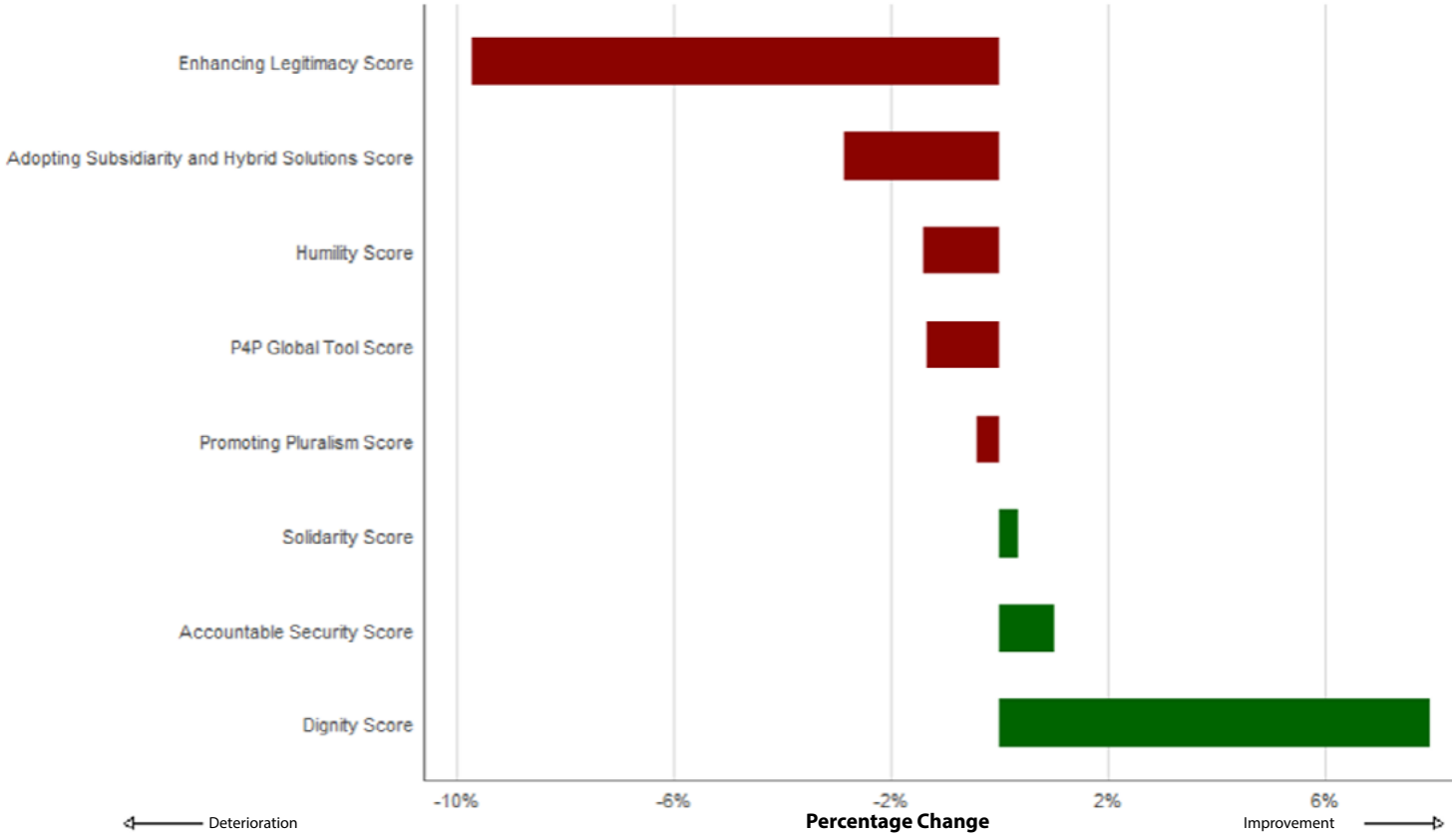


The Enhancing Legitimacy Principle experienced the largest deterioration among the eight Principles assessed in the Navigator and across the 56 countries included. The average score for this principle improved steadily from 2003, peaking in 2010. However, following this peak, the score declined by 11 percent by 2024. Overall, from 2003 to 2024, the average Enhancing Legitimacy score decreased by nearly 10 percent.

While half of the Enhancing Legitimacy indicators showed some improvement, these gains were outweighed by significant declines in the remaining indicators, underscoring the fragility of legitimacy in many contexts.

FIGURE 12

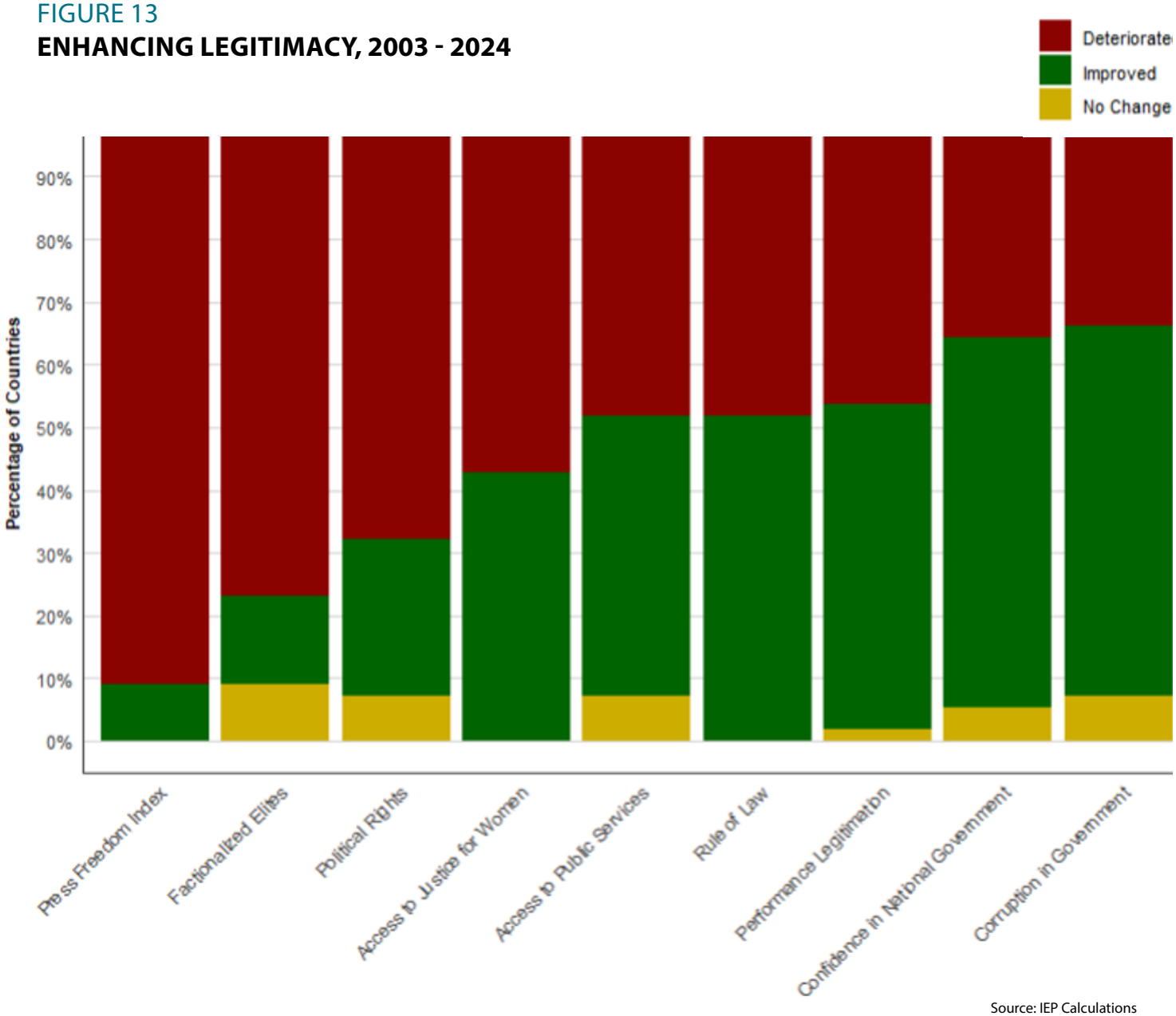
PERCENTAGE CHANGE ACROSS NAVIGATOR COUNTRIES BY PRINCIPLE, 2003-2024



Source: IEP Calculations

The Enhancing Legitimacy Principle began to decline in 2011 after consecutive improvements since 2003. In total, 38 of the 56 Navigator countries experienced a decline in their Enhancing Legitimacy score over the past two decades. The deteriorations in legitimacy indicators varied across country contexts, but commonalities emerged among those that experienced declines: more than half are classified as being in conflict, 12 have undergone coups or coup attempts, and 22 have experienced significant increases in group grievances – all factors that undermine state legitimacy.

FIGURE 13
ENHANCING LEGITIMACY, 2003 - 2024



Source: IEP Calculations

The data highlights increasingly restricted freedoms and rights as central to the erosion of legitimacy. The Press Freedom Index, Factionalized Elites, Political Rights, and Access to Justice for Women indicators – all vital for peacemaking – showed the most significant declines across the 56 Navigator countries. Additionally, governments in these countries have, on average, failed to meet basic citizen needs, as evidenced by a decline of over six percent in Access to Public Services during the same period.

Across the 9 Enhancing Legitimacy indicators, the Press Freedom Index saw the largest decline, with the average score across the 56 countries falling by almost 25 percent since 2003. Nearly every country was affected: 51 of the 56 recorded deteriorations in press freedoms. Political Rights also weakened sharply, with a 25 percent decline on average and 39 countries deteriorating over the same period. Access-based indicators also suffered: Access to Justice for Women fell by 22 percent, with 32 countries worsening, while Access to Public Services saw an even deeper drop of 47 percent, with 27 countries deteriorating.

Other Enhancing Legitimacy indicators showed mixed results. Confidence in National Government improved in 33 countries, with an average gain of 7 percent, while Corruption in Government rose by nearly 24 percent, with 33 countries recording improvements. Performance Legitimation also showed a modest increase of 9 percent, improving in 29 countries, while Rule of Law registered only a 1.4 percent increase.

By contrast, Factionalized Elites deteriorated, with the average score worsening by 8 percent and 44 of 56 countries experiencing greater elite division – making it one of the most pervasive negative shifts in legitimacy alongside press freedoms and political rights.

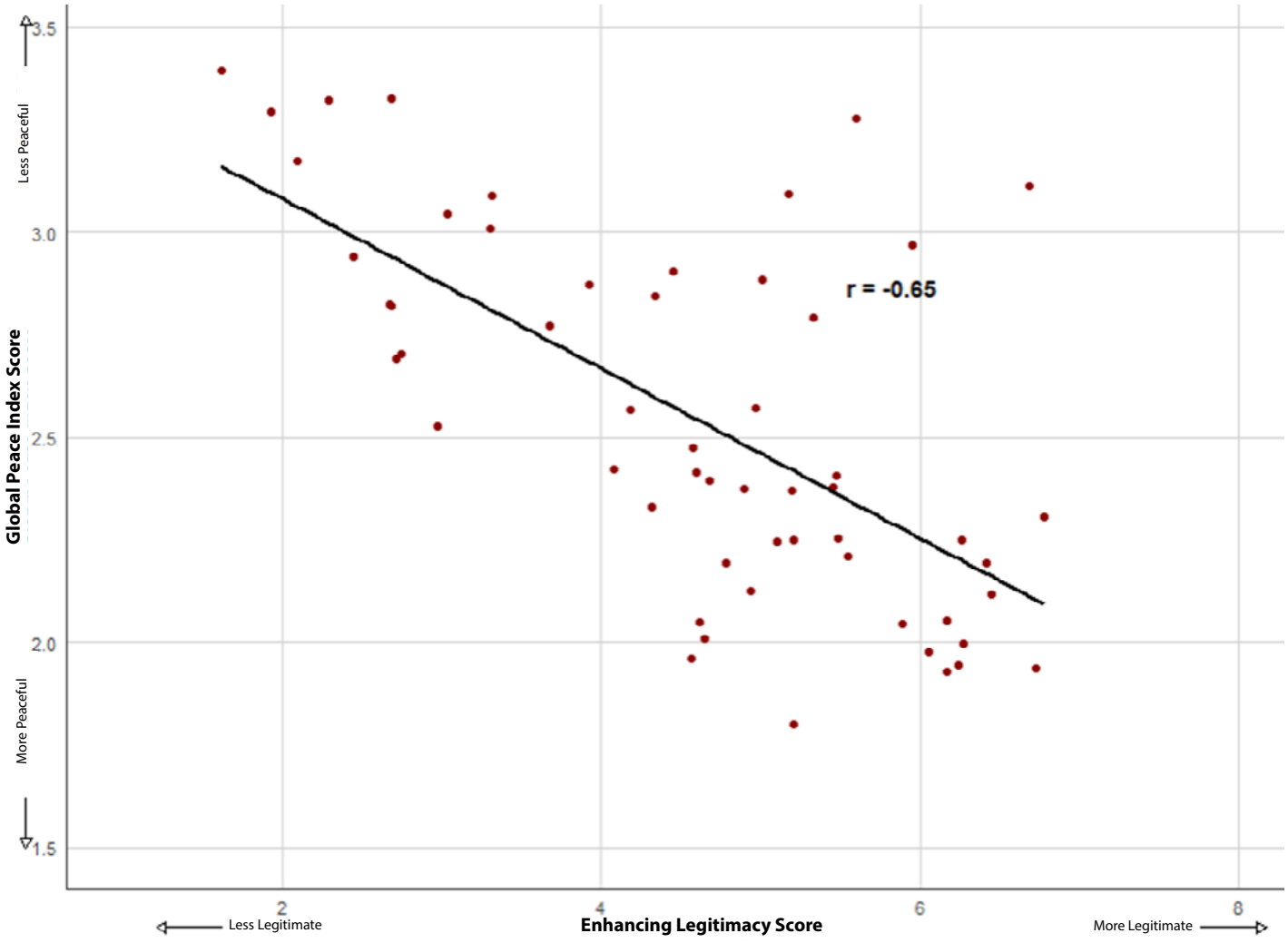
LEGITIMACY AND PEACE IN NAVIGATOR COUNTRIES

The Introduction notes the robust relationship between legitimacy and peace (see section 1). This relationship is evident among the 56 Navigator countries, which are either currently in conflict or have a history of instability. The correlation (r = -0.65) between Navigator countries' performance on the Global Peace Index and the Enhancing Legitimacy Principle underscores the importance of strengthening legitimacy for fostering peace in both global and Navigator contexts.

FIGURE 14

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GLOBAL PEACE INDEX (GPI) SCORES AND ENHANCING LEGITIMACY PRINCIPLE ACROSS NAVIGATOR COUNTRIES

Enhancing Legitimacy has a negative statistical correlation with the Global Peace Index, reinforcing the evidence that increasing legitimacy can lead to more stable and peaceful societies (see also section 1 – Introduction).



Source: IEP Calculations

LEGITIMACY AND OTHER PRINCIPLES FOR PEACE

Navigator data also illustrates the interconnected, mutually reinforcing relationships between legitimacy and other Principles for Peace, with correlations ranging between 0.6 and 0.9. All Principles are interconnected – some more so than others. Even those not highly correlated with Enhancing Legitimacy, such as Accountable Security (r = 0.62), have a moderate relationship, suggesting that improvements in security measures that are transparent, responsive, and accountable can reinforce legitimacy. Navigator countries in conflict are almost 72 percent more likely to record a deterioration in Enhancing Legitimacy scores since 2003 than those not in conflict.

Enhancing Legitimacy also has a statistical relationship (0.60) with the Adopting Subsidiarity and Hybrid Solutions Principle, highlighting the importance of decentralizing decision-making and adopting hybrid governance approaches. Hybrid solutions – collaborations between state and non-state actors – bolster legitimacy by including a broader range of voices in governance processes.

The strongest statistical relationship is between Enhancing Legitimacy and Promoting Pluralism (r = 0.8). Governments that foster inclusivity, accountability, and an enabling environment for the expression of diverse opinions enjoy higher legitimacy. Promoting pluralism ensures that governments represent a wide spectrum of society, including minority groups, improving the quality of decision making while strengthening perceptions of legitimacy.

The correlation between Dignity and Enhancing Legitimacy (r = 0.56) highlights the importance of treating citizens with respect and ensuring equitable access to justice and services. Governments that uphold dignity through fair treatment and protection of human rights are more likely to command public confidence.

Solidarity also has a correlation with Enhancing Legitimacy (r = 0.56), as high levels of solidarity contribute to perceptions of government legitimacy by promoting inclusivity and collective well-being.

Finally, the strong correlation between Humility and Enhancing Legitimacy (r = 0.73) underscores the importance of a government's ability to engage with empathy and listen to its citizens. When citizens feel heard and valued, legitimacy is reinforced, as the government is perceived to act in the interest of the people.

PROFILING POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE OUTLIERS

This section examines the Enhancing Legitimacy scores of six Navigator countries since 2003 – three that recorded the greatest improvements and three that experienced the greatest declines. This analysis provides context for the Navigator findings and explores their broader implications.

Biggest improvements	Biggest deteriorations
Cote d'Ivoire	Afghanistan
Somalia	Libya
Kosovo	Venezuela

THREE LARGEST IMPROVEMENTS IN LEGITIMACY

Of the 56 Navigator countries, the three most improved on the Enhancing Legitimacy Principle were Côte d'Ivoire, Somalia and Kosovo. Despite being at different stages in their peace processes, all three have made significant strides in strengthening legitimacy over the past two decades, each recording a score increase of more than 20 percent. Improvements were observed across indicators such as Factionalized Elites, Press Freedom, Access to Public Services, Confidence in National Government, and Political Rights, reflecting progress in both 'input' and 'output' legitimacy.

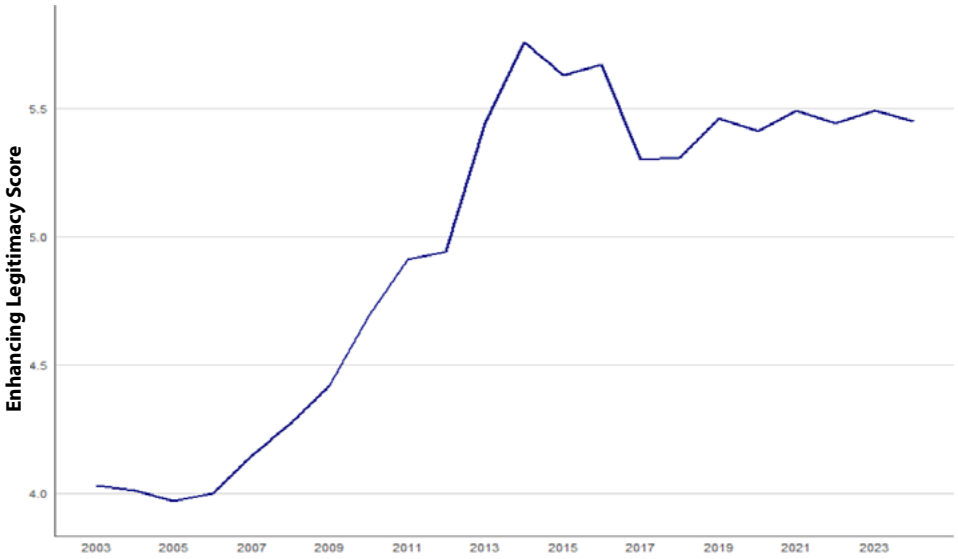
Côte d'Ivoire

From 2003 to 2024, Côte d'Ivoire recorded a 35 percent improvement in its Enhancing Legitimacy score. This progress was primarily driven by substantial gains in Confidence in National Government and Corruption in Government, both of which more than doubled over the period. The trajectory of legitimacy in Côte d'Ivoire reflects the country's emergence from two civil wars, with the most recent conflict ending in 2011.

FIGURE 15

ENHANCING LEGITIMACY IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE, 2003-2024

Legitimacy continues to strengthen in Côte d'Ivoire since the second civil war of 2011.

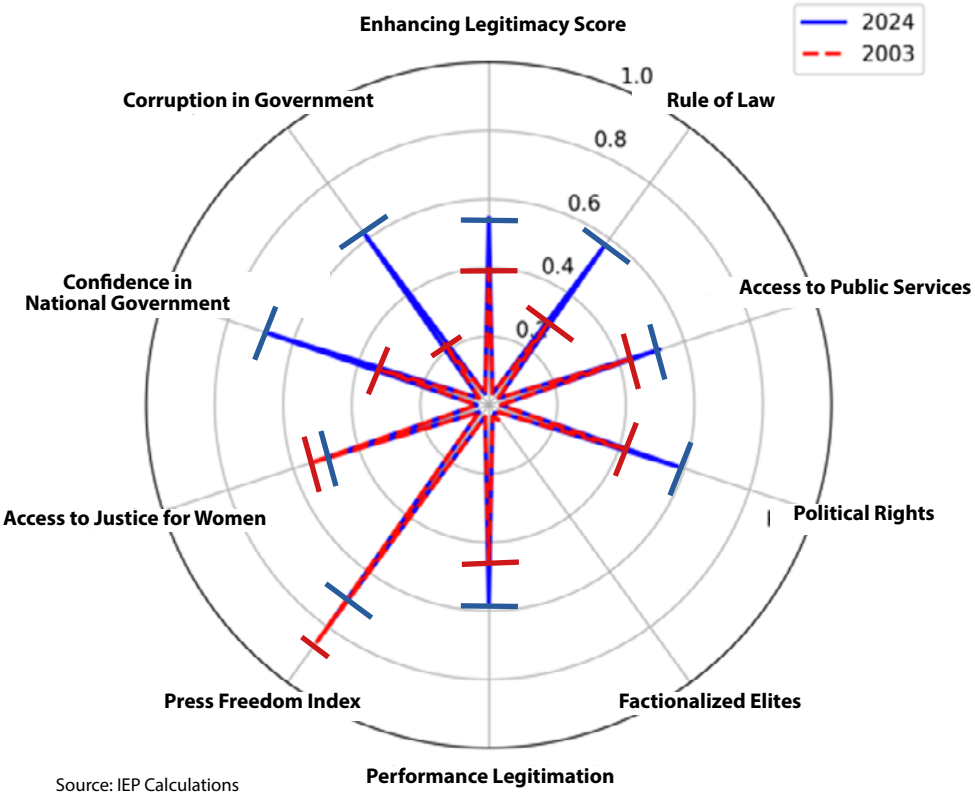


Source: IEP Calculations

FIGURE 16

ENHANCING LEGITIMACY IN CÔTE D'IVOIRE, 2003-2024

Since 2003, Côte d'Ivoire has recorded the largest improvements in Corruption in Government and Confidence in National Government indicators.



Source: IEP Calculations

A sharp increase in legitimacy is evident in the early 2010s, coinciding with the restoration of state authority and the implementation of reforms aimed at rebuilding institutions. Improvements in perceptions of corruption were particularly notable, more than doubling, supported by moderate gains across most other Enhancing Legitimacy indicators. However, the period between 2011 and 2014 saw a slight decline in press freedom, with the Press Freedom Index dropping by four percent, indicating a marginal setback amid broader progress.

Since 2011, Côte d'Ivoire has made further advances in strengthening its institutions. The Rule of Law indicator improved by 70 percent, and Political Rights by 40 percent, reflecting efforts to strengthen civil liberties, increase trust in institutions, and enhance governance transparency. These gains were achieved despite periodic setbacks, such as the violence and unrest during the 2020 election period, which underscored the fragility of progress and the ongoing need to consolidate democratic norms.

In 2024, approximately one-third of Ivorian respondents expressed confidence that corruption was absent in government, more than double the 12 percent recorded in 2003. This shift highlights growing public confidence in the state's ability to curb corruption, even as broader governance challenges remain.

Since the 2011 conflict, the government has maintained efforts to combat corruption, implementing key reforms to increase transparency and accountability. These measures include mandating asset declarations by senior officials, enhancing accountability with a dedicated economic and financial crimes section in the judiciary, and introducing a decree to tackle money laundering.

While Côte d'Ivoire's progress in enhancing legitimacy is significant, there remains opportunity for further strengthening legitimacy regarding access to justice and consistently upholding the rule of law. Although conditions for the press have improved since the end of the 2011 civil war, challenges remain. Journalists have continued to encounter intimidation and sporadic violence from security forces, including arrests, detentions, and physical assaults while reporting on protests and unrest, particularly during politically sensitive periods.

Somalia

Somalia's Enhancing Legitimacy score rose by more than 60 percent between 2003 and 2024, from 0.191 to 0.310. In absolute terms, this increase gave second largest improvement in this Principle over the period. The gains were driven by significant improvements in Access to Justice for Women, Access to Public Services, Performance Legitimation, Political Rights and the Press Freedoms Index, each of which increased by more than 100 percent during this period. However, these improvements are relative to a very low baseline, reflecting the country's emergence from the most acute phase of civil war in the early 2000s.

The upward trend began in the early 2010s, coinciding with the establishment of the Federal Government of Somalia and the withdrawal of al-Shabaab from Mogadishu in 2011. The new federal structure aimed to stabilize the country by fostering consensus between the central government and newly defined federal member states. Since 2012, the national government has prioritized the creation of a more cohesive political space, balancing clan dynamics and alliances while countering the persistent threat posed by al-Shabaab.

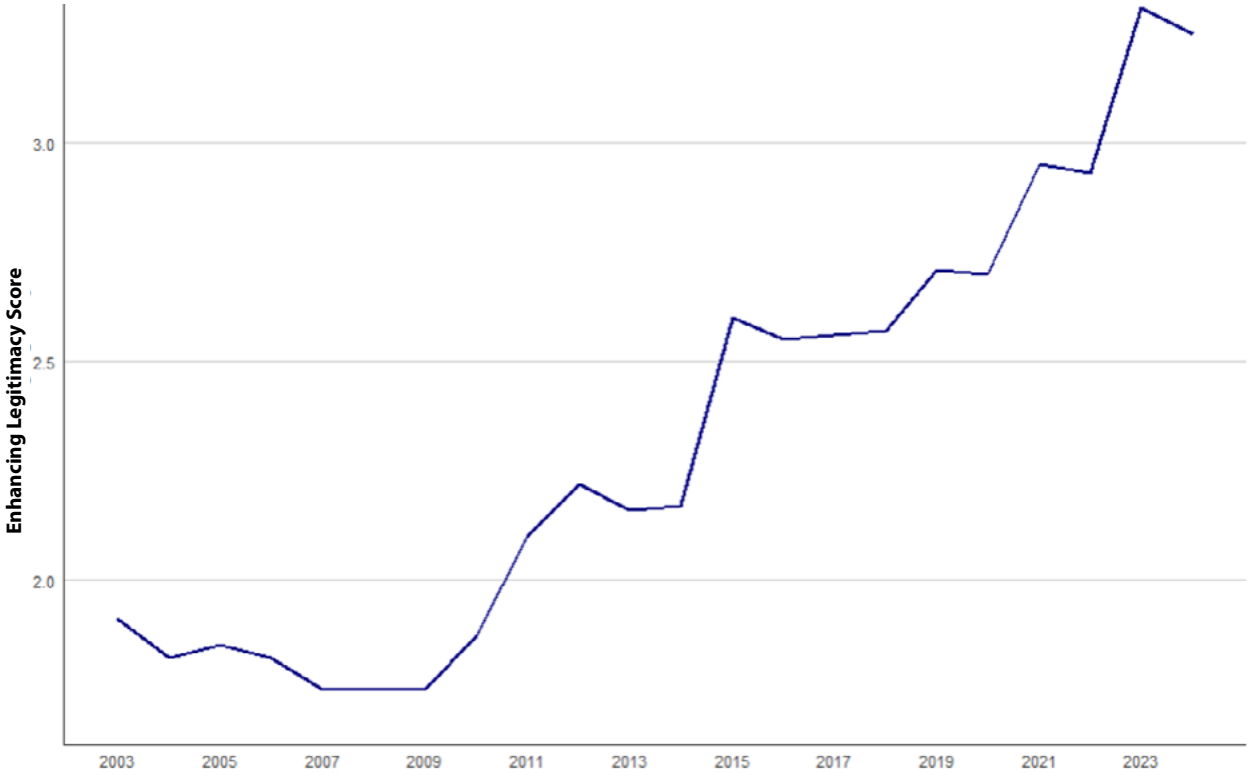
Despite these improvements, the data for 2024 indicate that Somalia's legitimacy remains structurally constrained. The Rule of Law score continues to register at the lowest possible level, signaling persistent challenges in judicial independence, legal access, and enforcement. Press Freedom and Political Rights scores also remain low, highlighting ongoing deficits in input legitimacy and the inclusiveness of political processes. While the Confidence in National Government indicator has shown improvement, with 79 percent of Somalis expressing confidence in 2024 (up from 61 percent in 2003), perceptions of corruption remain entrenched, with only 47 percent believing there is no corruption in government – down from 58 percent in 2003. Such survey data should be interpreted with caution, as concerns about anonymity and potential retribution may influence respondents' willingness to provide critical feedback.

Overall, while the trajectory of the Enhancing Legitimacy score reflects a recovery from a low baseline, the persistence of weak rule of law, limited press freedom, and ongoing corruption constrains the consolidation of legitimacy and exposes the political settlement to continued risk from both internal and external challengers 'For further discussion see the Somalia cas 'For further discussion see the Somalia case study below.

FIGURE 17

ENHANCING LEGITIMACY SCORE IN SOMALIA, 2003-2024

Somalia's Enhancing Legitimacy more than doubled since 2010, reaching its highest level in 2023.

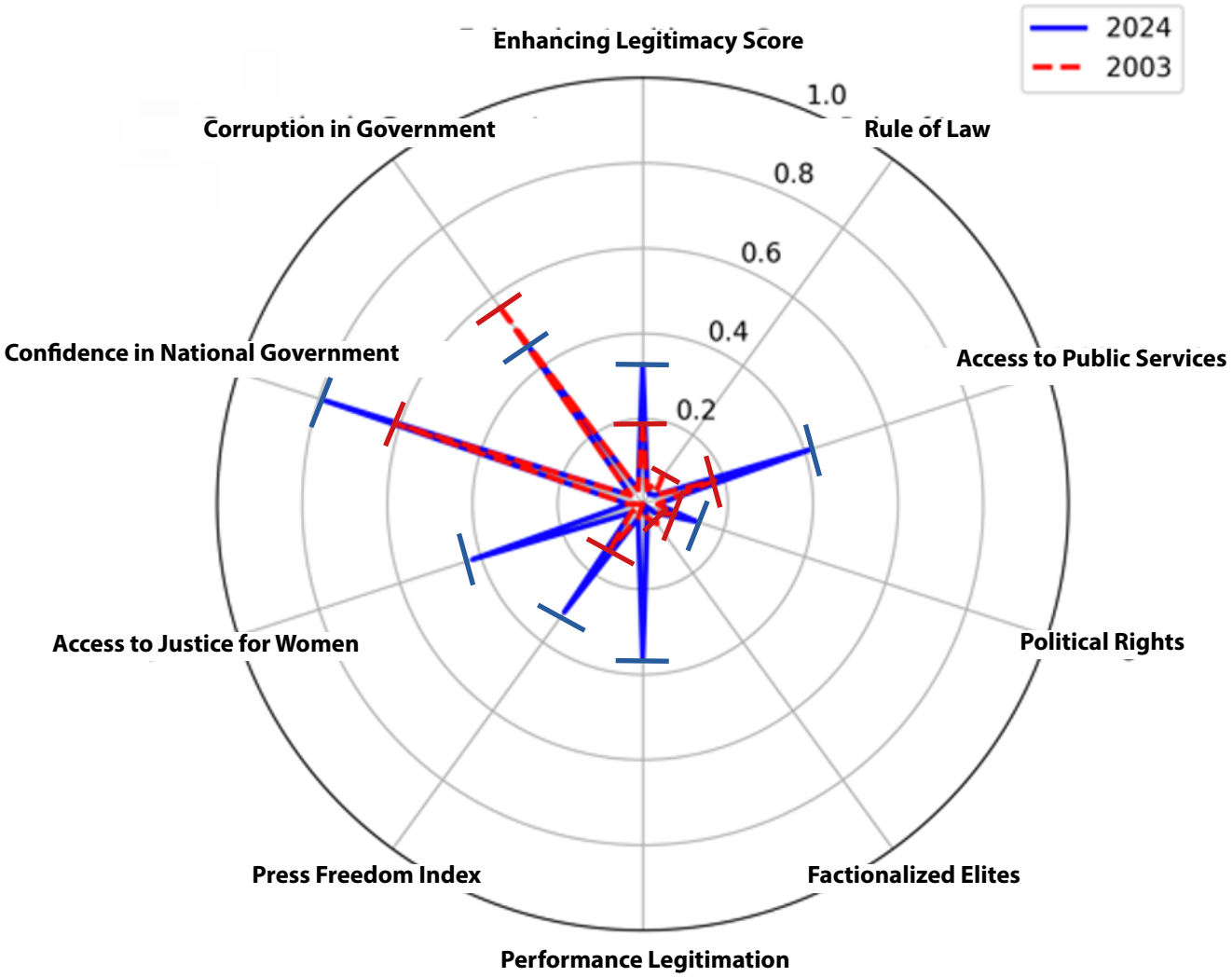


Source: IEP Calculations

FIGURE 18

ENHANCING LEGITIMACY INDICATORS IN SOMALIA, 2003 VS 2024

Since 2003, Somalia has recorded the largest improvements in Access to Justice for Women, Press Freedom, and Political Rights



Source: IEP Calculations

Kosovo

Kosovo's Enhancing Legitimacy score rose by more than 20 percent from 2003 to 2024, with improvements recorded on most of the Principle's indicators. The most notable gain was in Political Rights, which improved by 63 percent. Rule of Law improved by around 25 percent. The Corruption in Government indicator had a sixfold increase over this period, with 36 percent of respondents in 2024 believing that corruption is not widespread, compared to just six percent in the early 2000s.

FIGURE 19

ENHANCING LEGITIMACY IN KOSOVO, 2003-2024

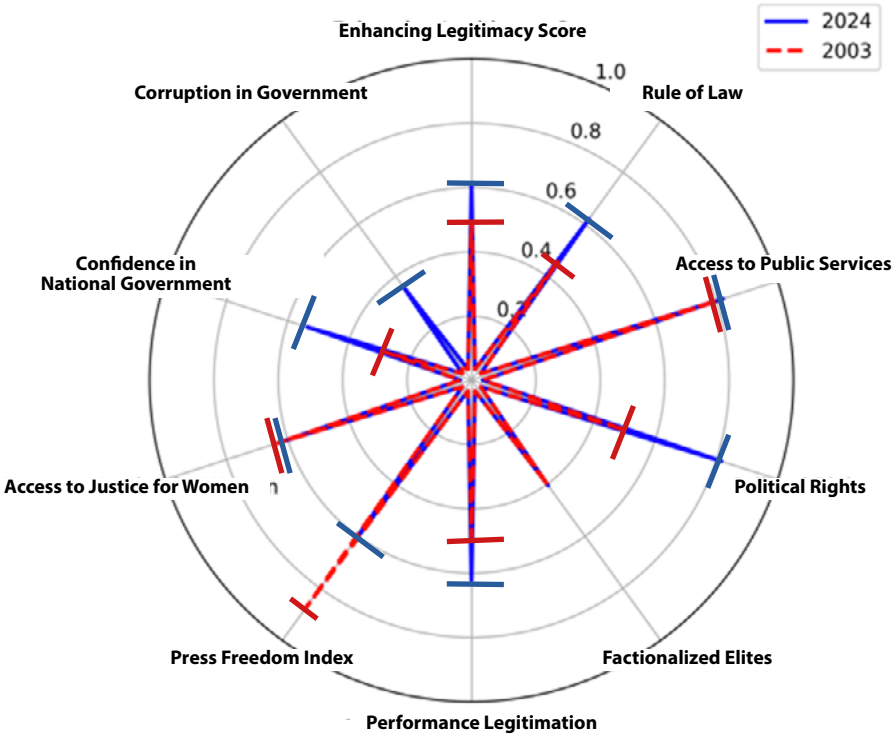
Kosovo's Enhancing Legitimacy score has risen significantly over two decades despite some initial challenges following its declaration of independence in 2008.

Source: IEP Calculations

FIGURE 20

ENHANCING LEGITIMACY INDICATORS IN KOSOVO, 2003 VS 2024

Kosovo recorded the largest improvement on the Political Rights and Corruption in Government indicators over the past two decades.



Source: IEP Calculations

In the early to mid-2000s, Kosovo's Enhancing Legitimacy score improved rapidly. However, following the declaration of independence in 2008, the score declined, primarily due to a sharp drop in the Corruption in Government indicator, which reached its lowest point in 2009 and 2010, with only two percent of respondents perceiving corruption as not widespread. Confidence in National Government also fluctuated in the years after independence, eventually reaching its lowest level during the COVID-19 pandemic, dropping to just 13 percent in 2020, a 53 percent decline from the early 2000s baseline. This decline was influenced by significant political events, including the indictment and resignation of Kosovo's president in 2020.

By 2024, Kosovo's Enhancing Legitimacy score remains near its historical peak, despite a slight decrease from 2023. Notable improvements have been recorded in Access to Public Services (up 2.5 percent since 2003, though stable since the mid-2000s) and the Press Freedom Index. However, press freedoms continue to fluctuate, and the indicator shows an overall 28 percent decline since 2003, with ongoing concerns about the politicization of public broadcasters and the impact of ethnic divisions on media coverage and access to information. These dynamics continue to constrain the independence of the media sector.

Kosovo performs strongly on the Political Rights indicator, which has improved by 63 percent over the past two decades. The country is recognized for credible and well-administered elections, political pluralism, and broad public participation in the political process. Following the decline in 2020, Confidence in National Government rebounded, with 57 percent of respondents in 2024 indicating confidence in their government, the highest level recorded since 2003.

Despite these improvements, Corruption in Government remains a significant issue: only 36% percent of Kosovars in 2024 believe corruption is not widespread within the government, up from just six percent in 2003, but still among the lowest confidence levels across the Enhancing Legitimacy indicators. While the overall trend in Enhancing Legitimacy is positive, further progress will depend on sustained efforts to curb corruption, reinforce the rule of law, and ensure equal access to justice for all citizens.

THREE LARGEST DETERIORATIONS IN LEGITIMACY

Of the 56 Navigator countries, Venezuela, Afghanistan, and Lebanon recorded the sharpest declines in the Enhancing Legitimacy Score (2003–2024) due to deep institutional erosion, governance failures, and recurring crises.

Venezuela: Legitimacy declined with the collapse of judicial independence, transparency, and press freedom; escalating corruption; weakened service delivery; and growing centralization of power that undermined institutional checks.

Afghanistan: Chronic conflict, corruption, weak rule of law, and the 2021 Taliban takeover dismantled recognized governance structures, excluded large parts of society, and eroded trust in state institutions.

Lebanon: Persistent political paralysis, economic collapse, corruption, and failure to deliver basic services fueled public disillusionment, with non-state actors increasingly filling governance gaps.

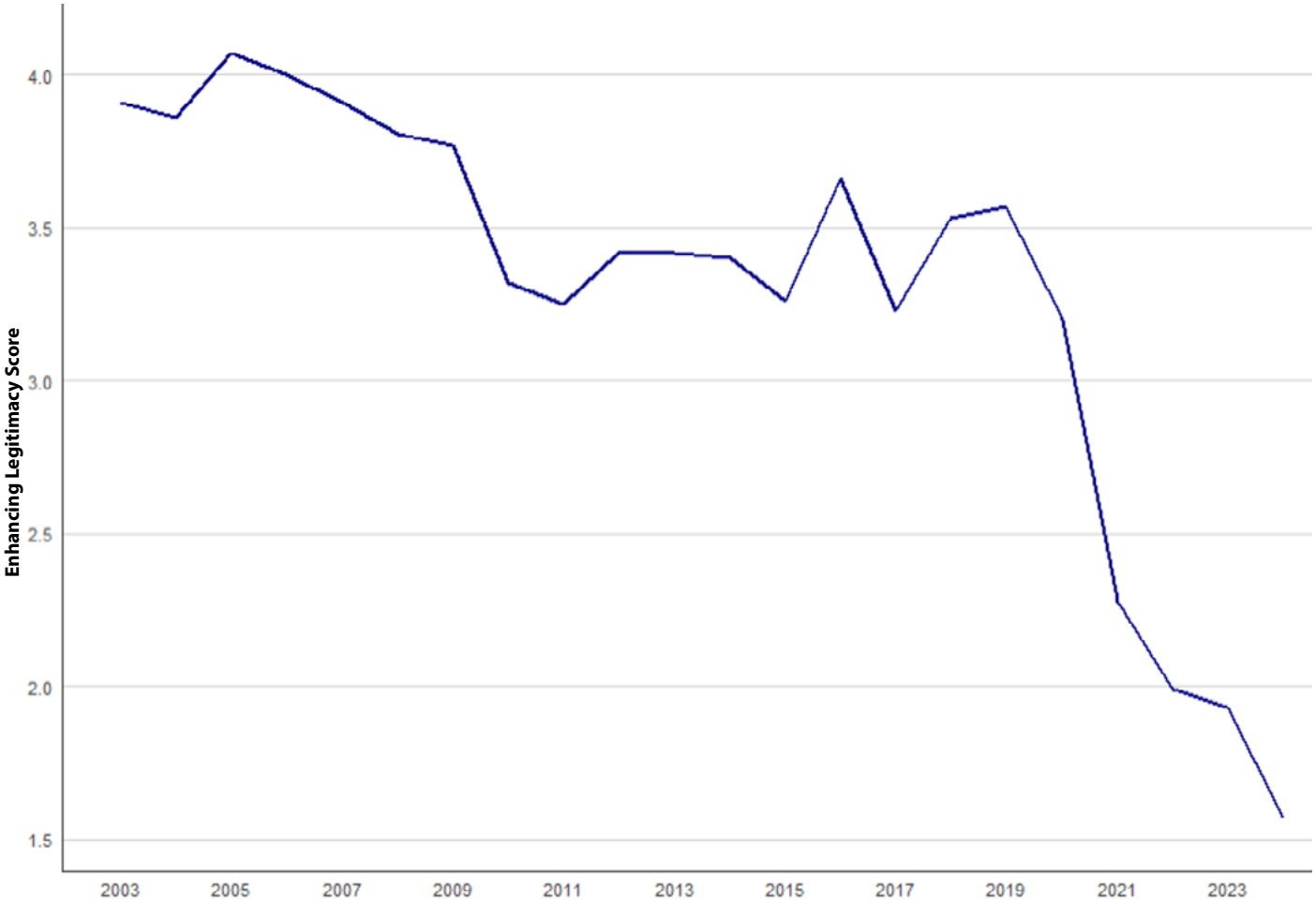
Afghanistan

Afghanistan has experienced severe security crises over the past two decades, resulting in a 60 percent decline in its Enhancing Legitimacy score, the largest drop among all Navigator countries. Every Enhancing Legitimacy indicator except one deteriorated during this period. Minor fluctuations occurred until 2019, after which the score plummeted, with the decline sharply accelerating following the Taliban's takeover in 2021.

FIGURE 21

ENHANCING LEGITIMACY IN AFGHANISTAN, 2003–2024

Afghanistan's Enhancing Legitimacy score plummeted following the Taliban takeover in 2021.



Source: IEP Calculations

The most significant driver of this decline has been the collapse of Access to Justice for Women, which has recorded the lowest possible score of zero since 2022. The Taliban's consolidation of power has resulted in the systematic exclusion of women from public life: women are barred from working in most sectors, attending secondary school and university, traveling without a male relative, and participating in public discourse. These restrictions have eliminated formal avenues for women to seek justice or participate in governance.

The only indicator to show improvement since the early 2000s is Corruption in Government, with 42 percent of Afghans in 2024 reporting that corruption is not widespread, compared to just 17 percent two decades ago. While survey responses may be influenced by fear of retribution, available reports suggest the Taliban have reduced bribery and extortion in some public services, particularly at customs and road checkpoints. This improvement may also reflect a reaction to the ousting of the former US-backed government, which the Taliban had long criticized for corruption. However, other forms of corruption – including diversion of public funds, lack of access to government information, and abuse of official power – persist.

Confidence in national government remains low. In 2008, 61 percent of Afghans expressed confidence in the national government, but by 2024, this figure had dropped to just 14 percent. This sustained lack of trust further constrains the legitimacy of the current authorities.

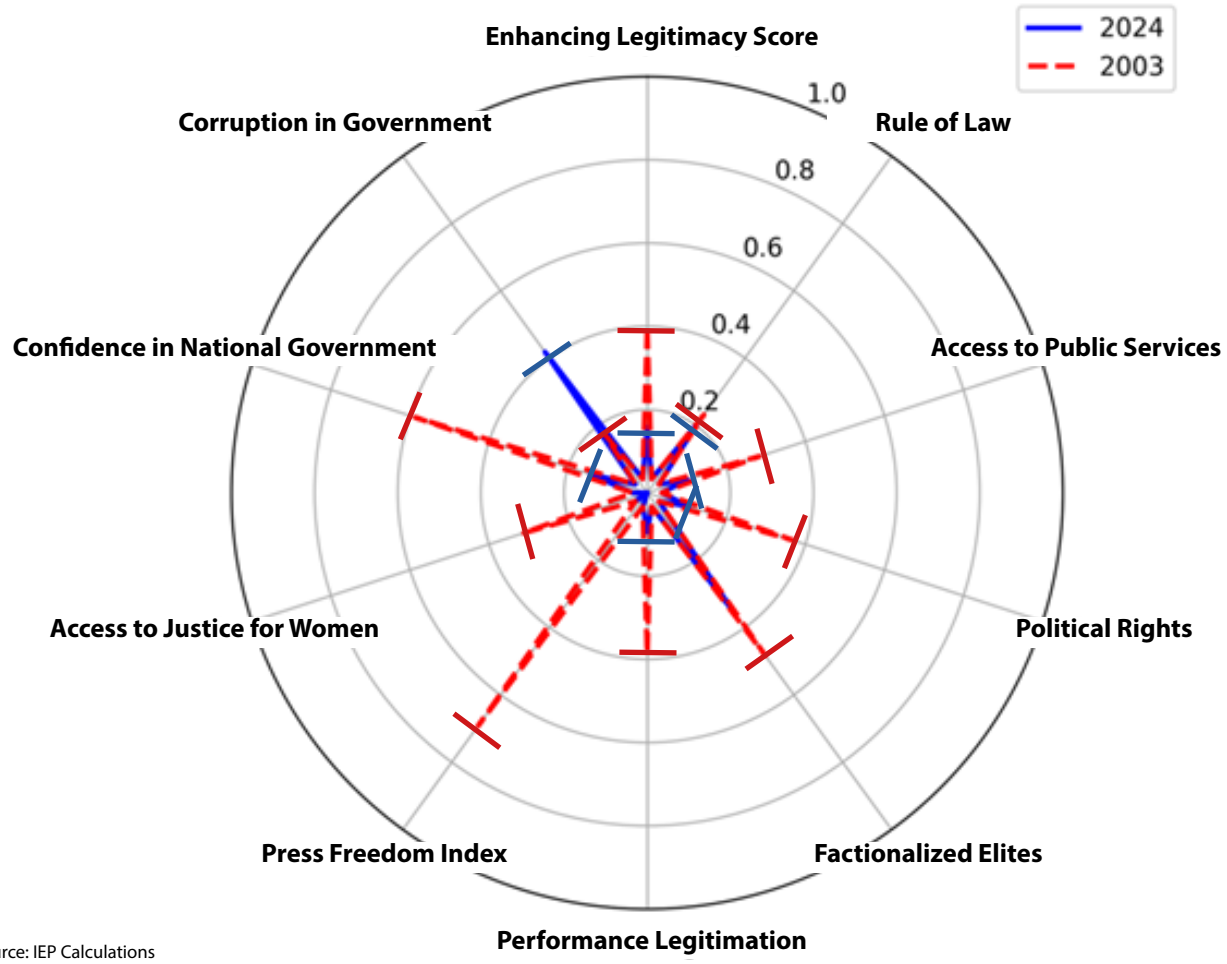
Afghanistan's Rule of Law indicator remains extremely weak. The legal system has deteriorated further under the Taliban, with judges appointed under the previous government replaced by religious clerics. Reports of summary executions, forced disappearances, and intimidation of legal professionals continue, reinforcing the perception of arbitrary rule and undermining any prospect of legal redress.

Political Rights have also dropped by more than 70 percent since 2003. The Taliban's intolerance for political opposition and lack of transparency in governance have further eroded trust and legitimacy. In the absence of efforts to rebuild public trust through transparent governance, open political processes, and inclusive decision-making, the prospects for long-term stability remain limited.

FIGURE 22

ENHANCING LEGITIMACY INDICATORS IN AFGHANISTAN, 2003 VS 2024

By 2024, Afghanistan has experienced the sharpest declines in Press Freedom, Political Rights, Performance Legitimation, and Confidence in National Government.



Source: IEP Calculations

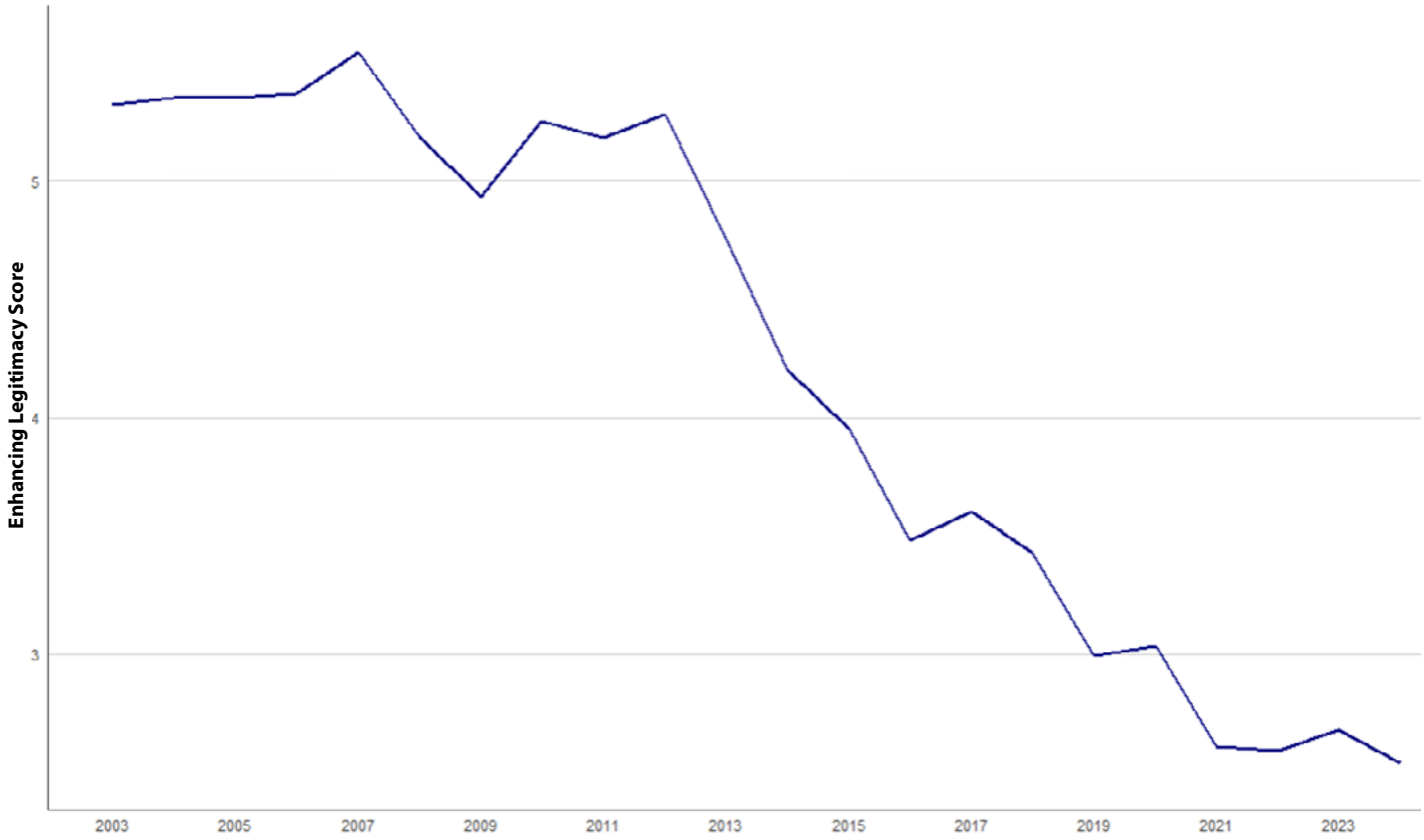
Venezuela

Venezuela has recorded the second largest decline in Enhancing Legitimacy among Navigator countries, with its score falling by over 52 percent from 2003 to 2024. All but one indicator dropped by more than a third since 2003, and the decline has been especially pronounced since 2012, with particularly sharp deteriorations in Access to Public Services (-79 percent), Rule of Law (-74 percent), and Political Rights (-78 percent). This trajectory reflects the country's protracted crisis, marked by authoritarian consolidation, political unrest, economic collapse, and persistent shortages of essential goods such as food, medicine, and electricity. As of 2024, more than 7.89 million people – over a quarter of the population – have left Venezuela, making this one of the world's largest external displacement crises.

FIGURE 23

ENHANCING LEGITIMACY IN VENEZUELA, 2003–2024

Venezuela's Enhancing Legitimacy score has fallen significantly, driven by ongoing political and socio-economic crises since 2012.



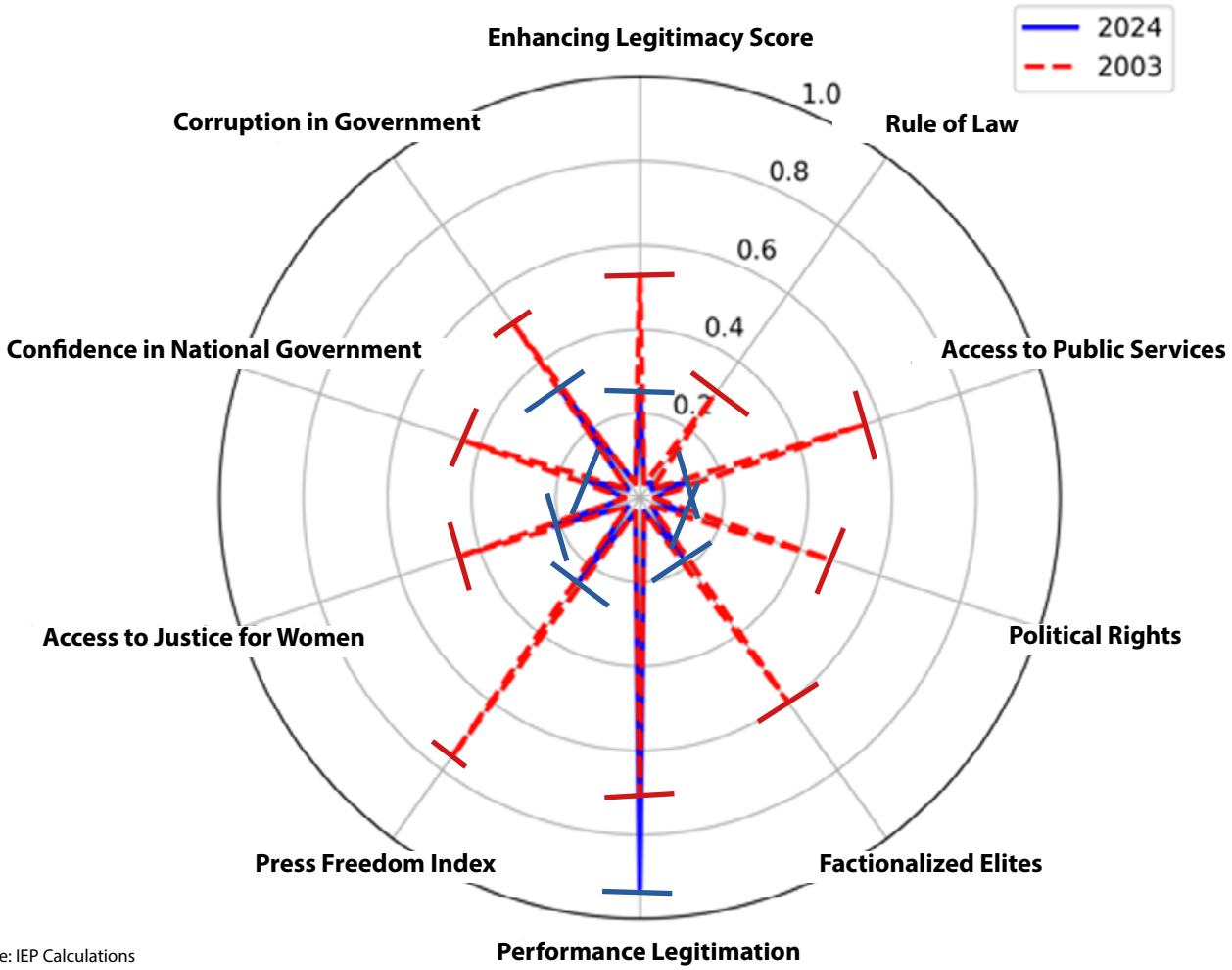
Source: IEP Calculations

The sharpest drop in Enhancing Legitimacy after 2012 was driven by the collapse of Access to Public Services, which fell from 0.48 in 2012 to just 0.12 in 2024. The ongoing crisis has severely undermined the delivery of healthcare, water and sanitation, education, and access to basic goods. Rule of Law and Political Rights indicators have also experienced major declines, falling by over 80 percent and 78 percent respectively between 2012 and 2024. These trends reflect the weakening of institutions, the consolidation of executive control, and the marginalization of independent oversight.

FIGURE 24

ENHANCING LEGITIMACY INDICATORS IN VENEZUELA, 2003 VS 2024

By 2024, Venezuela has seen the steepest declines in Access to Justice for Women, Press Freedom, and Political Rights, with only Corruption in Government showing improvement.



Source: IEP Calculations

By 2024, Venezuela's performance across all Enhancing Legitimacy indicators remains poor. Confidence in the national government has collapsed to just 13 percent, down from over 43 percent in 2003, and only 32 percent of respondents report an absence of corruption—both figures have declined in at least six of the past ten years. The most recent elections have not been recognized as free or fair, and the government has continued to use flawed electoral processes and institutional control to maintain power. International pressure and support for the opposition have not shifted the balance of power or incentivized meaningful reforms.

The ongoing crisis is evident in the persistent erosion of legitimacy. Rebuilding legitimacy would require a shift toward more inclusive political processes, transparent governance, and equitable service delivery. However, the current power dynamics and institutional constraints continue to raise the cost of such reforms for those in control, limiting prospects for rapid improvement.

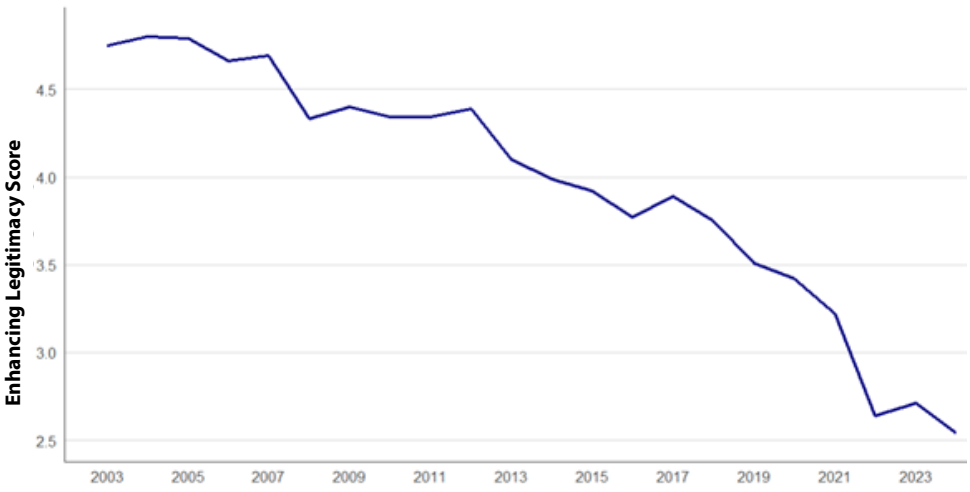
Lebanon

Lebanon has recorded the third largest decline in Enhancing Legitimacy among Navigator countries, with its score falling by over 46 percent from 2003 to 2024. The decline has been across nearly all indicators, reflecting deep political gridlock, economic collapse, and state institutions' worsening inability to deliver services or maintain public trust.

FIGURE 25

ENHANCING LEGITIMACY IN LEBANON, 2003-2024

Lebanon's Enhancing Legitimacy score has steadily declined since 2003, falling by more than 60 percent amid political paralysis, economic crisis, and institutional fragmentation.



Behind this downward trajectory, Confidence in National Government collapsed completely, falling from 31 percent in 2003 to zero after 2021. Performance Legitimation also deteriorated sharply, dropping to zero by 2022. Press Freedom declined by more than 60 percent, while the Rule of Law weakened by over 23 percent, falling from 0.61 to below 0.47 by 2015.

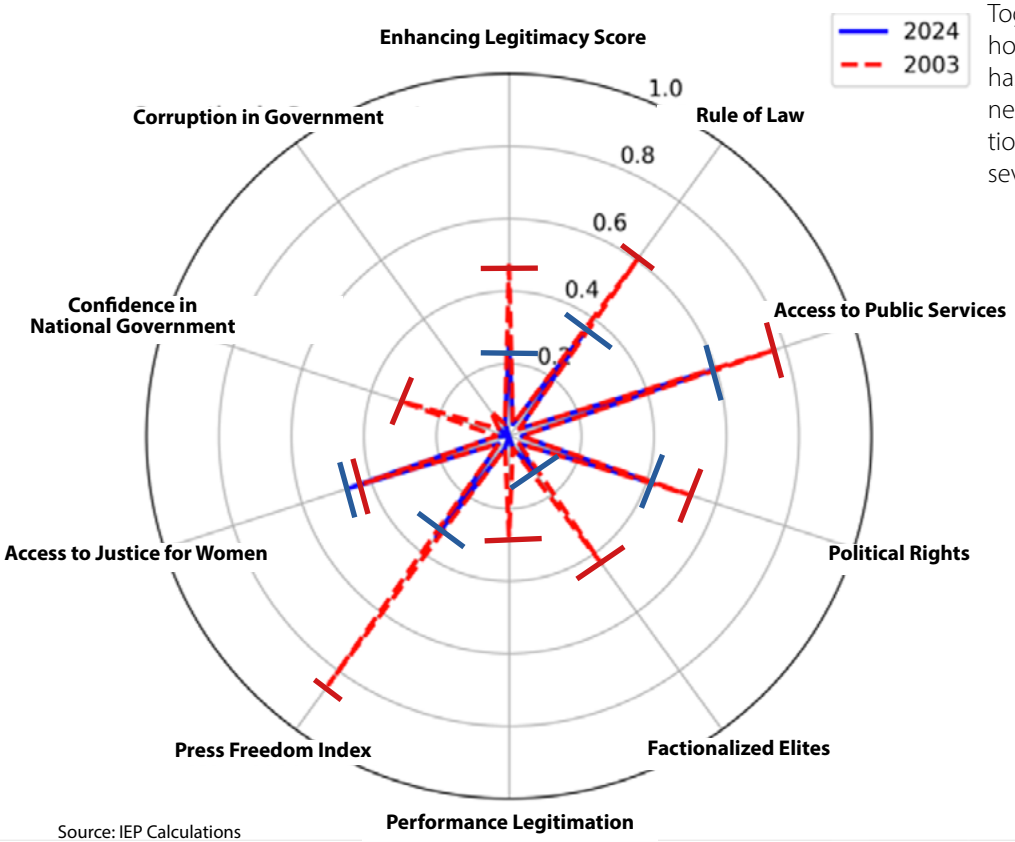
Access to Public Services fell by nearly 25 percent, and Political Rights dropped by around 21 percent. Perceptions of Corruption in Government remained persistently poor, at times registering a score of zero, underscoring entrenched governance failures. Factionalized Elites worsened by almost 75 percent, reflecting deepening sectarian divides.

The only modest gain was in Access to Justice for Women, which rose by about 12 percent. Together, these results underscore how Lebanon's protracted crisis has undermined legitimacy on nearly every front, leaving institutions weakened and public trust severely eroded.

FIGURE 26

ENHANCING LEGITIMACY INDICATORS IN LEBANON, 2003 VS 2024

By 2024, Lebanon has experienced declines across nearly all Enhancing Legitimacy indicators, with the steepest drops in Press Freedom, Political Rights, Performance Legitimation, Confidence in National Government, Performance Legitimation and Factionalised Elite.



Source: IEP Calculations

Elections are widely regarded as compromised by sectarian divisions and elite capture, while institutional paralysis and clientelism continue to block meaningful reform. International engagement has so far failed to shift domestic power dynamics or incentivize transparency and accountability.

Lebanon's crisis is reflected in the decline of nearly every Enhancing Legitimacy indicator. Political Rights have fallen by around 21 percent since 2003, driven by repeated election delays, parliamentary paralysis, and the dominance of sectarian power-sharing arrangements that limit genuine political competition. Access to Public Services has dropped nearly 23 percent, reflecting the collapse of the electricity sector, chronic fuel shortages, and the erosion of public healthcare and education systems. Press Freedom has declined by more than 50 percent since 2021, as political elites consolidate control over media outlets and journalists face growing harassment in the aftermath of mass protests. Performance Legitimation has collapsed entirely, underscoring the failure of state institutions to deliver stability or essential goods following the 2019 financial crisis and the 2020 Beirut port explosion.

Together, these trends highlight how institutional gridlock, elite capture, and systemic corruption have steadily eroded Lebanon's legitimacy. Rebuilding trust will require reforms that break with sectarian patronage systems and deliver equitable services, but entrenched political interests make meaningful change costly and unlikely in the near term.

CONCLUSION

The decline in Enhancing Legitimacy scores across many of the 56 Peace Navigator countries underscores how a deepening global legitimacy crisis is manifesting in countries at risk of, experiencing, or recovering from conflict. Over the past two decades, the erosion of press freedoms, political rights, and access to justice for women has been particularly acute, weakening public trust and increasing instability in many contexts.

The Principles for Peace Indicator data, which spans 2003 to 2024, reveals long-term dynamics and trends in national peace processes. Complementing this, the AI-powered system within the Peace Navigator integrates micro- and meso-level data to deliver real-time, context-specific analysis of emerging developments. This approach goes beyond traditional monitoring and evaluation at the policy or program level and offers a more nuanced alternative to broad composite index rankings. It captures critical dimensions of peace process quality and underscores the need to address the underlying drivers identified by the Principles for Peace. By connecting these indicators with in-depth, country-level analysis and participatory consultations, stakeholders are better equipped to identify and respond to evolving legitimacy challenges that may otherwise go unnoticed.

The progress observed in Côte d'Ivoire, Somalia and Kosovo demonstrates that legitimacy can be enhanced through targeted improvements that address specific societal needs and challenges. In Somalia, legitimacy was strengthened by the establishment of a federal government focused on stability, national consensus, and rebuilding public trust after prolonged conflict. Côte d'Ivoire's gains were driven by anti-corruption measures, improved access to justice, and efforts to strengthen institutional transparency, alongside the reconstruction of governance frameworks following two civil wars. In Kosovo, advancements were achieved through credible elections, increased political participation, and targeted improvements in public services, collectively fostering greater confidence in government institutions. These cases illustrate that legitimacy is reinforced when governance reforms address public grievances, deliver measurable outcomes, and build trust within communities.

In this sense, analysis of Peace Navigator data further underlines the point that peacemaking requires a sustained focus on building long-term legitimacy, rather than relying on securitized responses or short-term fixes. It also reflects the idea that fostering legitimacy in peace processes requires moving beyond narrow power-sharing or electoral frameworks toward a more holistic approach. Strengthening accountability mechanisms, addressing societal grievances, and delivering tangible outcomes are critical steps toward rebuilding trust. Drawing on the experiences of the most improved countries and adapting strategies to local contexts can help governments restore public confidence and lay the groundwork for durable peace.

CASE STUDY

PHILIPPINES

Piloting a Participatory Periodic Review for Peace to enhance legitimacy

KEY MESSAGES

- Legitimacy is essential for sustaining peace in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), where historical grievances and diverse community aspirations intersect.
- The Participatory Periodic Review for Peace (PPRP) offers a model for enhancing legitimacy through structured, inclusive engagement and dialogue. By promoting transparency, accountability, and the active participation of marginalised groups, the PPRP supports the region's transition toward sustainable peace.
- Its initiatives, such as fostering business sector engagement, empowering Indigenous Peoples, and collaborating with academia, provide concrete steps for ensuring governance grows more inclusive and responsive.

In the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), legitimate governance and lasting peace depend on inclusive participation from all sectors. This includes government, civil society, Indigenous communities, businesses, and academia, which must all be involved in shaping the peace process. Broad-based participation is crucial for ensuring that institutions are credible and reflect the diverse needs of the people of the Bangsamoro region.

The peace process in Mindanao sought to address a conflict rooted in a long history of social and economic marginalisation of Muslim communities, disputes over land and resources, and a failure to establish inclusive governance. The peace process reached a pivotal moment with the 2014 signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB), which established semi-autonomous governance in BARMM. The CAB's implementation has been supported by a transitional government and civil society organisations that have played a key role in shaping the peace framework.

However, current challenges – including a rise in violence in some parts of BARMM, and the need to redouble engagement in the peace process among younger generations, the business sector, and Indigenous peoples – threaten the sustainability of peace. Amid ongoing petitions to postpone the first regional elections by one year, there is a need for renewed intervention to prevent setback, such as delays in disarmament and decommissioning of combatant, and to support former combatants and their communities.

In response, P4P, in a consortium with InciteGov, Initiatives for International Dialogue (IID), and the Gaston Z. Ortigas Institute for Peace (GZO), developed the Participatory Periodic Review for Peace (PPRP). This tool engages stakeholders in assessing the peace agreement's implementation, creating feedback loops with government institutions, and fostering dialogue to ensure mutual accountability. Through regular forums, the PPRP brings together civil society, the business sector, government officials, and other actors to review progress, share insights, and strengthen trust.

KEY PPRP ACHIEVEMENTS

- **Engaging the business community:** Involvement of the business community is crucial for both regional economic development and national support for the peace process. In 2024, the consortium initiated dialogues with national business groups including the Makati Business Club (MBC) and the Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP) to explore how they can contribute to the peace process. Discussions highlighted the need for targeted economic zones and policies to boost women's participation in economic development. Participants formed a working group to continue these discussions and facilitate meetings with BARMM officials.
- **Empowering Indigenous Peoples:** Indigenous Peoples (IP) face significant challenges in BARMM regarding representation and rights, particularly ahead of the 2025 elections. The P4P consortium stressed the need for a transparent IP representative selection process and stronger political representation for IP communities. Advocacy for amendments to the IP Code bill and support for IP self-determination were identified as key actions. Efforts also aim to increase IP political representation, possibly through a dedicated IP political party.
- **Enlisting academia for peacemaking:** A ground-breaking meeting with university leaders in June 2024 focused on the academic community's role in peacemaking. Participating institutions identified key initiatives, such as researching transitional justice, studying the BARMM block grant, and creating a Bangsamoro Youth Bloc for the 2025 elections. These initiatives aim to mobilise young voters and influence policy through research and evidence-based insights. The meeting emphasised the need to include marginalised educational institutions and communities in peace efforts.

CONCLUSION

Legitimacy is essential for sustaining peace in BARMM, where historical grievances and diverse community aspirations intersect. The PPRP offers a model for enhancing legitimacy through structured, inclusive engagement and dialogue. By promoting transparency, accountability, and active participation by marginalised groups, the PPRP supports BARMM's transition toward sustainable peace. Its initiatives, such as fostering business sector engagement, empowering Indigenous Peoples, and collaborating with academia, provide concrete steps for ensuring governance responds to all stakeholders' needs. Continued partnerships and support will be crucial for sustaining these efforts over time.

CASE STUDY

SOMALIA

Crafting locally led, internationally supported legitimacy

KEY MESSAGES

Somalia's National Reconciliation Framework (NRF), aligned with the Principles for Peace (P4P), offers a comprehensive roadmap to confront the causes of conflict and promote inclusive and legitimate governance. Lessons from P4P's experiences accompanying the NRF suggest:

- **Focusing on legitimacy and local governance:** Somalia's path to lasting peace requires legitimate, inclusive institutions that address local needs, especially justice, security, and economic opportunities. Locally led Somali governance initiatives offer valuable models for community engagement and service delivery.
- **Accompanying local leadership with flexibility and cultural sensitivity:** The NRF calls for a flexible, culturally sensitive approach to peacemaking, integrating local and national reconciliation efforts. International partners must abandon pre-conceived templates, support Somali-led solutions, and adapt to local realities.
- **Feedback and adaptation:** Continuous feedback and collaboration between Somali communities, authorities, and external partners are crucial for adapting strategies and ensuring the NRF's success. Monitoring and adjusting strategies based on past experiences and challenges is key to strengthening legitimacy and sustainable peace.

Establishing stable institutions and lasting peace in Somalia is a complex process, and legitimacy at all levels of governance is a fundamental component. Since the central government's collapse in 1991, Somalia has endured over three decades of civil conflict. While local reconciliation efforts have succeeded in some areas, this has not resulted in the stable political structures with recognised authority necessary to govern effectively across Somalia as a whole. Stalled dialogue between Somalia and Somaliland, discussions around state- and national-level elections, and negotiations over constitutional reform and power-sharing all exacerbate political tensions and clan rivalries. Vested interests and disagreements over reforms hamper efforts to establish a stable central government and legitimate federal system.

The international community's role in supporting Somalia's statebuilding and reconciliation process is crucial. Past stabilisation efforts often struggled to build sustained trust and legitimacy in federal governance, and security in some areas liberated from non-state armed groups has lapsed due to the lack of coordinated support after military operations. Some external stabilisation strategies have imposed governance models that are disconnected from Somali realities, neglecting local customs, clan structures, and the swift justice mechanisms that armed groups provided.

THE NATIONAL RECONCILIATION FRAMEWORK

Somalia stands at a pivotal moment in its reconciliation journey, facing the dual challenge of healing long-standing divisions while forging a cohesive, inclusive national identity, aligned with the government's vision of a nation at peace with itself. In this context, the Ministry of Interior, Federal Affairs, and Reconciliation (MoIFAR) made a strategic decision to anchor its efforts in the Principles for Peace (P4P) during the finalization of the National Reconciliation Framework (NRF).

Launched in 2024, the NRF is a comprehensive policy initiative developed over five years of extensive consultations with federal institutions, member states, civil society, and international partners. Recognizing the strong alignment between the NRF's methodology and the P4P, MoIFAR adopted the Principles for Peace as a reference benchmark, making Somalia the first country in the region to formally integrate the P4P into national policy.

Over the past three decades, Somali-led local and regional governance systems have emerged in the absence of a strong central government, often succeeding where top-down approaches have fallen short. These homegrown models have provided security and basic governance in many communities. In Southwest State, for instance, the Ministry of Interior, Local Governments, and Reconciliation (MoILGR) established Local Councils in Eelberde, Burhkaba, and Walween districts. These councils promote community engagement, strengthen local governance, and support reconciliation by enhancing accountability and service delivery through active citizen participation.

The NRF builds on these local experiences and offers a strategic roadmap for reconciliation and inclusive governance at the national level. It integrates community-driven models within a broader national vision and addresses a wide spectrum of priorities, from political and social reconciliation to emerging challenges such as climate change and transitional justice. Its implementation presents a vital opportunity to address legitimacy gaps and advance sustainable peace across Somalia.

MEASURING PROGRESS – THE ROAD AHEAD

Strengthening legitimacy in Somalia is essential for achieving sustainable peace. This requires more than delivering services or conducting elections: it involves building public trust in institutions that are inclusive, accountable, and responsive to people's needs. The National Reconciliation Framework (NRF), aligned with the Principles for Peace, provides a critical opportunity to achieve this, but its success will hinge on the ability to measure progress, adapt in real time, and institutionalize feedback loops between communities, authorities, and partners.

The NRF's core pillars, legitimacy, pluralism, accountable security, resonate with Somali values and traditions. However, principles such as trust, justice, and inclusion have been deeply eroded by decades of conflict, marginalization, and external impositions. Restoring these values requires a continuous process of reflection, learning, and course correction.

To this end, the Ministry of Interior, Federal Affairs, and Reconciliation (MoIFAR) is developing a methodology to track the implementation of the NRF, including capacity-building initiatives and community-level dissemination workshops. In July 2024, MoIFAR and its partners convened federal and member state representatives, civil society, and international actors in a peace game simulation co-designed with P4P. This collaborative exercise served to test strategies, surface risks, reflect on missteps, and refine implementation plans based on collective learning.

These kinds of adaptive approaches, rooted in real-time data and local feedback, are essential. Formalizing feedback loops between communities and institutions can help identify emerging grievances, prevent unintended harm, and improve the relevance and legitimacy of reconciliation efforts. They also allow Somali authorities and their partners to shift away from rigid, top-down templates toward responsive governance rooted in local realities.

The NRF implementation strategy includes mechanisms to operationalize this feedback culture. Looking ahead, the 2026 national elections will be a critical test of the NRF's effectiveness in fostering inclusive political processes and rebuilding institutional legitimacy. To ensure success, it is vital to sustain and scale up efforts that create trust at all levels—through inclusive dialogue, timely delivery of justice and services, and meaningful representation across clan, gender, and generational lines.

At this critical juncture, international partners have a responsibility to align their support with Somalia's locally led strategies. This includes investing in mechanisms for measuring progress, supporting adaptive learning, and helping institutionalize feedback loops that place Somali citizens at the center of reconciliation and governance.

4

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

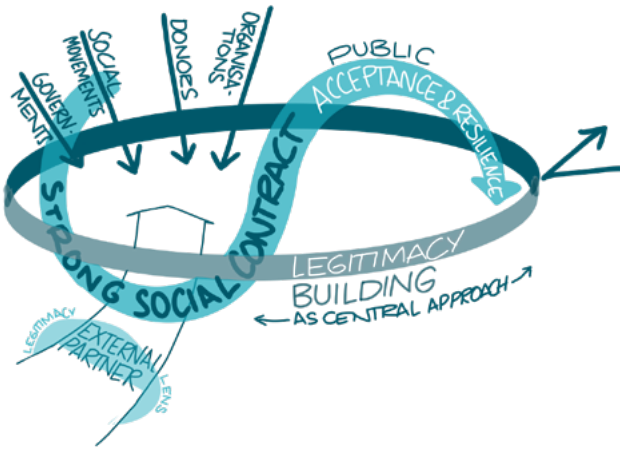
This report highlights the deep and pervasive worldwide legitimacy crisis, characterised by rising autocratic state power, declining civil and political freedoms, rampant disinformation, deepening polarisation, and increasing socio-economic inequality around the world. This crisis underpins higher levels of inter-group grievance and elite conflict, and is driving a dramatic escalation in armed conflict, related deaths, and forced displacements. These challenges are compounded by the erosion of legitimate and effective multilateralism, and the rise of zero-sum and strongman diplomacy among major global and regional powers. Faced with such volatility, many governments are ramping up containment strategies, increasing defence spending and turning away from investments in peacemaking.

Data and research illustrate the close relationship between legitimacy and stability. Only by arresting and reversing the current trends can the world hope to reverse the process of fragmentation and secure a more peaceful, prosperous global future. This report therefore addresses a critical question: 'How can legitimacy be meaningfully enhanced in support of sustainable peace?'

The report's thematic chapters and case studies demonstrate the central role of legitimacy in shaping both the onset and resolution of conflict. Although legitimacy is complex, contested, and context-specific, the findings of the report point to six broad recommendations to inform and guide policymakers and practitioners seeking to address today's most urgent peacemaking challenges.

1 FOCUS ON LEGITIMACY

Legitimate states and societies tend to have strong social contracts – more inclusive and accountable political systems, oriented to common interests and delivering public goods – including fair access to effective security, justice, livelihoods, resources, and services. This results in broader public acceptance of the system and greater resilience to violent social and political contestation. The power to create these conditions lies primarily in the hands of governments, political elites across the spectrum, powerful individuals and organisations, and with society at large, whose interaction with elites plays a critical role in driving positive change.



All actors must prioritise legitimacy-building as a central approach and benchmark for success if they are committed to sustainable peace. This includes governments at all levels, civil society organisations and social movements, donors, development agencies, security actors, multilateral agencies, peacemakers, peacebuilders, and peace support operations.

External partners should adopt a 'legitimacy lens' – placing it at the heart of efforts to address instability and using it as a guiding framework for shaping related strategies in defence and security, foreign policy, trade and investment, development, humanitarian response, and migration management. They should avoid providing support that undermines legitimacy and instead get behind processes that can encourage it to emerge and take root – whether led by authorities, civil society or the private sector.

2 ENSURE THAT INVESTMENTS IN SECURITY *ALSO* BUILD SUSTAINABLE PEACE

Defence and security investments are rising rapidly. To work in favour of long-term peace and stability they must not just deter and protect against external threats, but also support peacemaking and enhancing legitimacy.

***Security* strategies must be explicitly designed to support *political* strategies for promoting peace**. This involves openness and support to dialogue and reconciliation with those prepared to renounce violence, combined with carefully applied pressure on conflict actors to transition away from violence into legitimate political roles. To build public trust and legitimacy, use of force should be limited, precise, proportionate, and accountable, reinforcing the rule of law and addressing public concerns rather than feeding into cycles of enmity and vengeance.

A *legitimacy lens* should guide all security assistance. This means providing flexible support to those committed to change while encouraging broad societal involvement in the process. Reforms must be grounded in inclusive public ownership, and support should not be given to actors with an interest in reinforcing repression, exclusion and corruption, and obstructing reform. **At every step, security actors need to assess the context, their strategy and impacts inclusively** – questioning assumptions, understanding risks, learning from mistakes, and modelling accountability.

3 CREATIVE, FLEXIBLE MEDIATION FOR LEGITIMACY

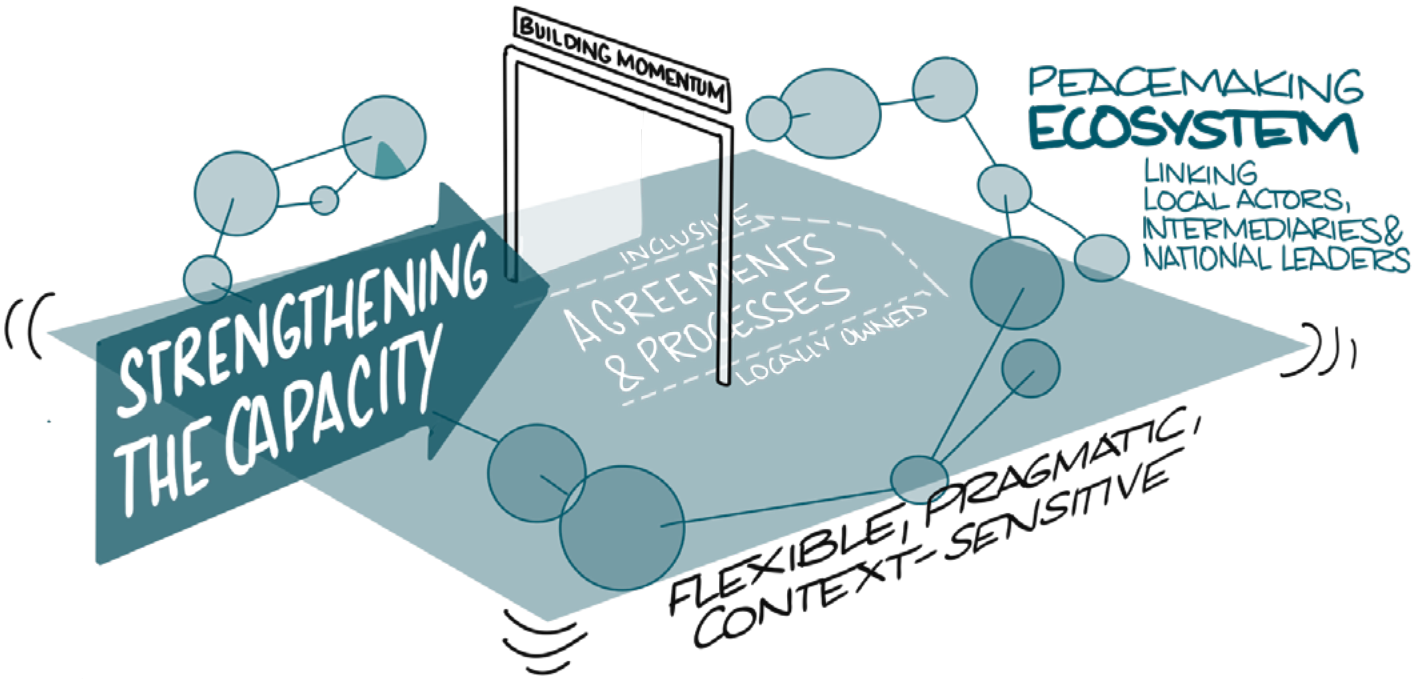
In today's fragmented conflict and mediation landscape, **conflict resolution is getting much harder. To continue to promote legitimacy, mediators need to adapt.** Mediation strategies informed by the Principles for Peace – emphasising humility, integrated and hybrid solutions, and seizing opportunities to enhance dignity, pluralism, and legitimacy – can help navigate fractured geopolitics and accommodate diverse and competing interests. This report identifies **three ways in which peacemakers can adapt and support legitimacy**.

First, giving up is not an option. Peacemakers should **focus on building momentum for peace** by promoting agreements and processes that are genuinely inclusive and locally owned. This requires strengthening the **capacity of leaders, parties and concerned stakeholders to negotiate and implement lasting peace deals**.

Second, they should abandon top-down templates for resolving conflict and embrace flexible, pragmatic, and context-sensitive approaches. Today's unpredictable conflicts call for mediation efforts that engage **all levels of the peacemaking ecosystem** – linking local actors, intermediaries (*grasstops*), and national leaders, and seizing opportunities to build the legitimacy of the process and its outcomes. **A 'middle out' strategy that connects grassroots communities with elite decision-makers can help inject legitimacy and new ideas into the peace process, while building broader public support and participation.**

Third, peacemakers must be ready to **broaden their engagement**. In specific cases this can involve **developing supportive, long-term networks among political, media, civil society, security, and private sector actors.** Such networks can cultivate relationships, generate ideas, and create incentives to support peace-positive outcomes among important constituencies who can drive and sustain peace in practice. In addition, they need to lengthen the time horizon for engagement. **Effective mediation requires sustained support through every phase** – from pre-mediation to long-term implementation, including addressing setbacks and reinforcing legitimacy over time.

These approaches – drawn from new research on peace processes, 'multimediation' and expert reflection – should be tested and refined in the coming years to improve mediation practice and strengthen the wider peacemaking ecosystem.



4 LEARN FROM HOW LEGITIMACY CHALLENGES HAVE BEEN NAVIGATED IN PRACTICE

The long work of negotiating and building legitimacy usually only starts when the violence ends. Too often, promising peace deals are neglected or overtaken by events, leading to stagnation or backsliding. However, **Colombia's experience suggests there are other ways to move forward.** In Colombia, sustained and creative efforts to end the conflict and build a legitimate peace were made possible through broad **social mobilisation for peace, dignity and inclusion**. This created space to advance legitimacy and involve marginalised voices in shaping the peace. Key steps to legitimacy included: **rejecting political violence, enabling ex-militants and conflict-affected communities to participate** in political life, **shrinking the drug economy while encouraging economic alternatives** for rural areas, **expanding access to land for peasant communities**, and **shifting away from security strategies rooted in counterterrorism and anti-subversion towards a more accountable approach to public safety.** International accompaniment reinforced this process, with support for ending political violence, reconciliation, and compliance monitoring.

Colombia is not an isolated case. This report profiles more than a dozen other examples where prevention, peace and security operations, mediated settlements, and efforts to strengthen state-society relations have successfully addressed violence while improving legitimacy and social well-being.

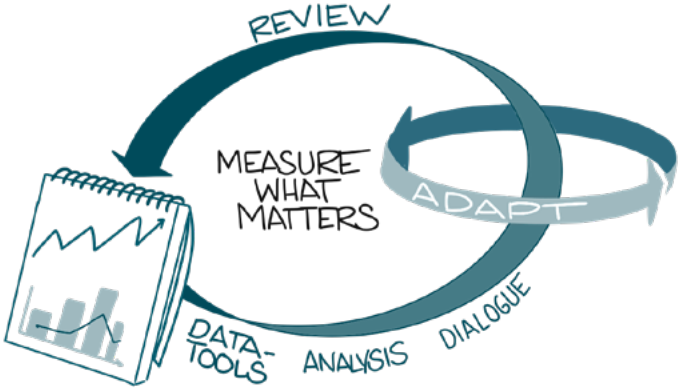
Ultimately, long-term peace and stability will depend on whether states, societies and international stakeholders can resist increasing militarisation and the *regime protection* logic of stabilisation. Instead, they must invest in the social forces, peace and prevention strategies, and institutions that can keep legitimacy building processes on track in moments of peril. Our case studies show that **successful outcomes typically combine social mobilisation with strong political leadership committed to reconciliation, accountable security, inclusive institutional reforms, and the delivery of public goods. While these changes must be led from within, they often require principled national leadership and discreet, steady international solidarity, support, and accompaniment to succeed.**

5 MEASURE WHAT MATTERS – AND ADAPT IN RESPONSE

All stakeholders who want prevention and peacemaking efforts to succeed must prioritise measuring the quality and effectiveness of peace efforts. To this end, the Principles for Peace provide a new framework for doing so – a diagnostic tool designed to help navigate the lack of legitimate, inclusive, and transformative approaches in contemporary conflict responses. **Maintaining a legitimacy lens requires consistent monitoring of legitimacy itself, and related trends in dignity, accountable security, pluralism, and the other core principles** that support sustainable reductions in conflict and violence.

This means going beyond global indices or narrow project-level evaluations and instead measuring progress at a middle level that captures broader patterns without losing local nuance. **An example of this approach is provided by P4P's Peace Navigator**, a new resource bringing together 40 indicators aligned with the Principles in 56 countries, enabling trend analysis from 2003 to 2024.

Tracking such trends in key peace-related metrics can support authorities, civil society, and external partners to identify what is and isn't working. To be effective, these **data tools must be linked to in-depth, qualitative analysis and fed into inclusive dialogue, review, and adaptation processes**. Examples include the Periodic Review for Peace that P4P helped facilitate in the Philippines, Somalia's National Reconciliation Framework process, Fragility Assessments and New Deal Compact development, and the National Prevention Strategy development and review promoted by the UN Secretary-General.



6 PROTECT AND ENHANCE LEGITIMATE, EFFECTIVE INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION WITH PRINCIPLE AND PRAGMATISM

Declines in legitimacy in specific contexts are mirrored by the global crisis in multilateralism, which is struggling to respond to power-centred and transactional diplomacy, geopolitical competition, double standards, complex conflicts and related atrocities, and climate breakdown.

Both authoritarianism and *might is right* politics give way sooner or later to instability and remain inadequate foundations for the stable and peaceful ordering of international relations. Most **states have a strong, perhaps existential, interest in opposing the current strongman approach, and reconstructing a legitimate and effective multilateral system** based on shared principles.

Legitimacy can be enhanced at the global and regional level by ensuring that the international system is shaped by pluralistic, inclusive inputs and is held accountable, while delivering outputs effectively to manage global challenges. Analysing multilateralism with a peace and legitimacy lens underscores four urgent priorities.

The first is to **reaffirm a commitment to shared principles-approached with pragmatism.** To preserve an international law-based order, the majority of states need to work together to **restore the centrality of shared principles and address the behaviour of those who are undermining them.** This also means confronting hypocrisy and exceptionalism, acknowledging global inequalities, and correcting past governance failures. These steps will be crucial for resetting relationships, rebuilding trust, and fostering buy-in to the future multilateral system.

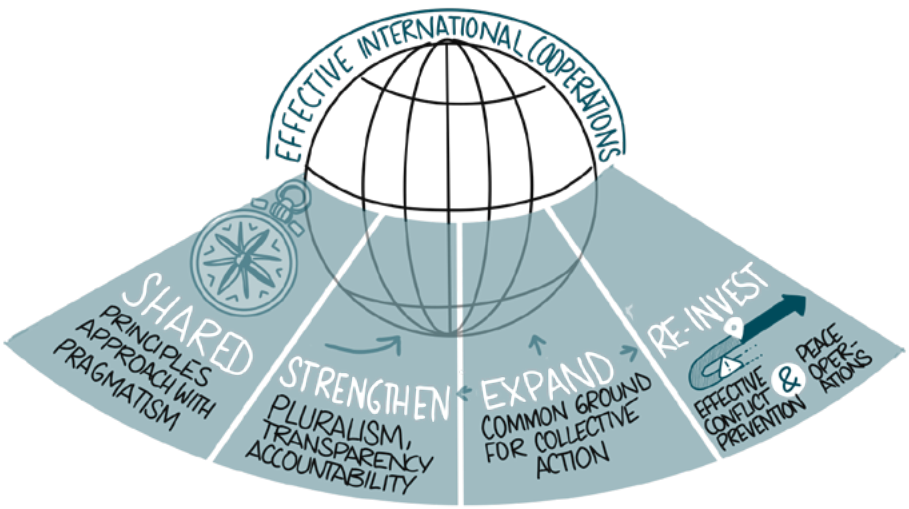
The second priority is to **strengthen pluralism, transparency, and accountability in global governance.** International decision-making structures, including the UN Security Council and Bretton Woods financial institutions, require fundamental reform to ensure broader representation, transparency, and inclusivity. Expanding the role of civil society in these structures and promoting greater geographical, gender, and racial diversity at leadership levels can also strengthen legitimacy and accountability in global governance.

The third priority is to **expand common ground for collective action**. Building consensus on technical issues such as governance of emerging technologies can under some conditions pave the way for cooperation on more politically sensitive global challenges. Addressing complex issues initially among like-minded actors, or within minilateral groups, and expanding islands of agreement from local to regional to global levels requires creativity and strategic patience.

A fourth priority is to **go beyond short-term containment and reinvest in effective conflict prevention and peace operations**. Over time, governments must work to restore the mandate of the UN and other international arrangements to lead peace operations and provide peacemaking support. Enhancing effectiveness in multilateral peace operations also requires meaningful support for local peace efforts, a focus on people-centred security, active community engagement, and the use of feedback loops to adapt and improve peace outcomes. Wherever multilateral progress can be made to advance these priorities, it may help restore trust and faith in the outputs that the international system can deliver.

Effectively defending multilateralism today means combining renewed legitimacy as the system's greatest strength with a pragmatic approach. In turbulent times, it will be vital to **pick the right moments, tactics, levels, and entry points for reform** – defending past achievements, advancing peace, and avoiding negative counter-reactions.

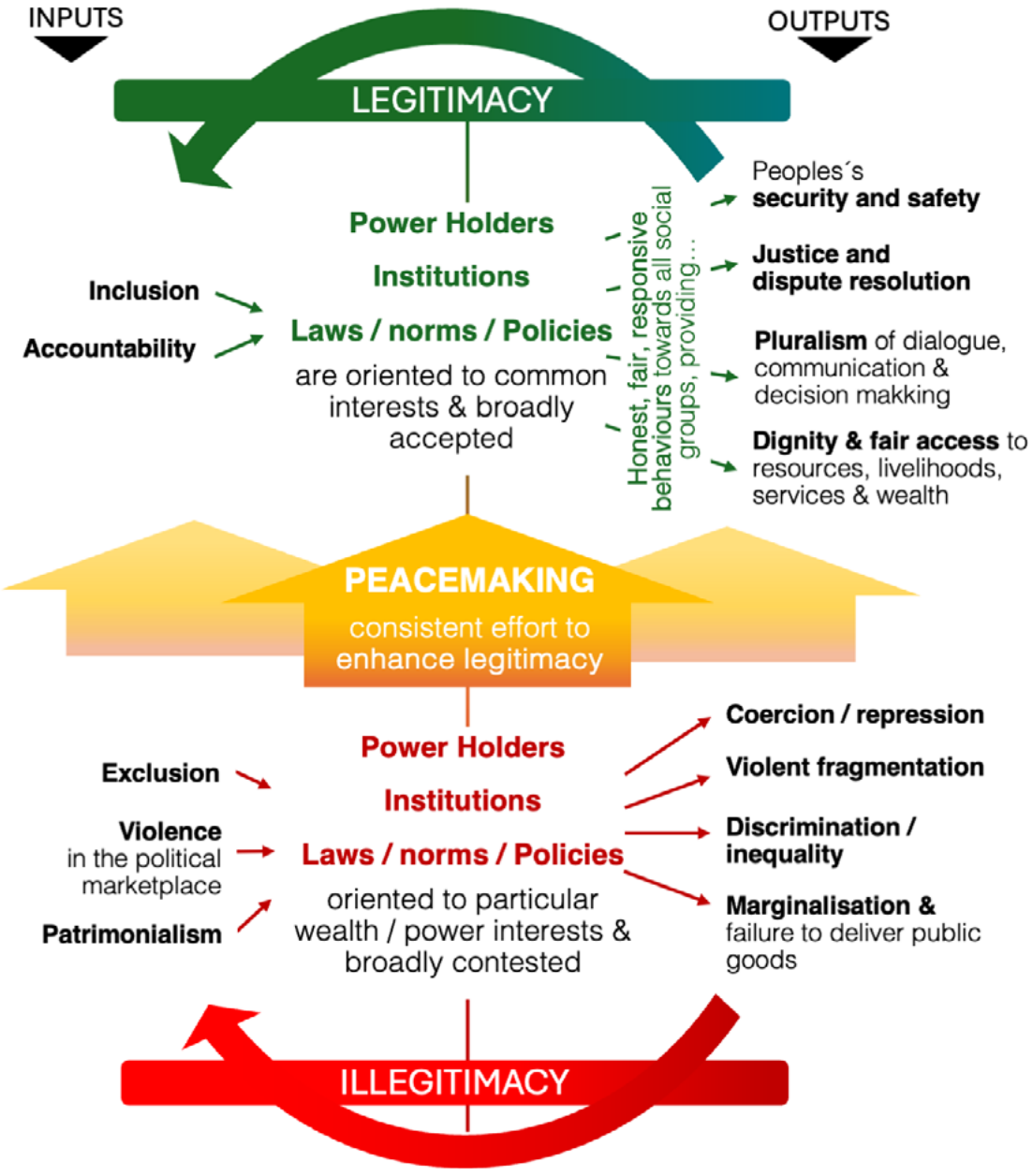
As this report highlights, in challenging times **it is not only possible to stay focused on legitimacy from local to global levels and across different conflict settings – it is also essential for navigating instability and rebuilding sustainable peace for future generations.**



ANNEX

DEFINING LEGITIMACY

Legitimacy is a complex concept, and how it should be defined and measured is a contested issue in political and scholarly circles.[i] Yet the global consultations and extensive evidence reviews that led to the adoption of the P4P underline the importance of enhancing legitimacy for preventing and resolving conflict and violence, and building lasting peace.



i Wiesner C and Harfst P, 'Conceptualizing legitimacy: What to learn from the controversies related to an "essentially contested concept"' Front. Polit. Sci. 4:867756. (2022) doi: 10.3389/fpos.2022.867756

All contexts have their own specificities, with a range of factors and relationships combining to shape their risks and patterns of peace and conflict. In each context, different aspects of state-society institutions, practices, norms and behaviours will be seen as defining legitimacy by and for the stakeholders relevant to that context (although their own conceptions, attitudes and preferences about legitimacy may also reflect issues such as fear, habit, expectation of rewards and so on). While respecting that legitimacy can beneficially be defined in context specific ways in any given setting, and that public and stakeholder expectations and perceptions of the grounds for broad acceptance are mutable and subjective, nonetheless, there are a range of dimensions of legitimacy that play an important role in shaping peace and conflict dynamics.

As illustrated in the above diagram, the dimensions of legitimacy can be considered as related to the **'inputs'** to a given state or political system, the orientation and broad acceptability of **the system itself,** and the **'outputs'** from the system.

In less legitimate systems, the **inputs** that determine and shape power holders, institutions, laws, norms and policies would tend to be more exclusive, patrimonial, or characterised by significant use of violence to bargain for power in the political marketplace. In more legitimate systems, the inputs shaping power holders, institutions, laws, norms and policies would be characterised by greater levels of inclusion and processes that make greater use of feedback and offer more accountability.

In less legitimate systems, the characteristic inputs would tend towards orienting **the system itself** (i.e. its power holders, institutions, laws, norms and policies) towards particular wealth or power interests. Such systems tend to be more contested. In more legitimate systems, greater inclusiveness and accountability orients the system towards common interests and the system is likely to achieve broader acceptance.

In less legitimate systems, the orientation towards particular wealth/power interests and its broadly contested nature would lend itself towards **outputs** such as coercion and repression, violent fragmentation, discrimination, inequality, marginalisation and the failure to deliver public goods. In more legitimate systems, the inclusivity and accountability of inputs, orientation towards common interests and broader acceptability underpin delivery of more honest, fair and responsive outputs for all social groups, including fair access to security, justice, dispute resolution, as well as resources, livelihoods, services and wealth. Such outputs also strengthen the pluralism of dialogue, communication and decision-making, enabling in turn greater inclusivity and accountability to feed back into the 'input' side of the system.

As suggested by the arrows in the diagram, many of the dimensions highlighted as important in more legitimate and less legitimate systems can be mutually reinforcing. For example, inclusive decision making lessens violent disputes, but also helps orient the system towards providing important goods, including public safety. Safety helps provide an enabling environment for pluralistic expression and communication – an output that is almost inseparable from inclusive and accountable inputs into the system.

Applying this concept of legitimacy in research, policy and practice necessitates considering the quality of processes for inputting into and shaping leadership, institutions, laws and norms, how the system is oriented and how this manifests in its outputs, including: the policies it pursues; the quality, integrity and equitability of their delivery in practice; the political, security, social, environmental and cultural outcomes that result; how these are in turn perceived by the stakeholders affected; and whether this results in the broad acceptance of the system. The qualities and capacities of the system, the laws, policies and practices adopted by it, their real world effects and public and stakeholder experiences and perceptions of all of these would likewise be relevant to the holistic measurement and analysis of legitimacy.

Some states may lay strong claims to legitimacy internally, while relying for their public acceptance on how effectively they deter and defend against external enemies. In some cases, states may claim legitimacy among their citizens by successfully pursuing aggressive, exploitative international policies and trading in conflict commodities. In other cases, contribution to international public goods may be a significant element of a state's overall claim to legitimacy. Such outputs – and the international dimensions of legitimacy – should also be considered when analysing legitimacy. Thus, the legitimacy claims of, for example, liberal democracies should also take into account the implications of their foreign policies.

Defining legitimacy in this way marks a shift away from binary conceptions of a state or society as either 'legitimate' or 'illegitimate', towards a pragmatic concern for all the dimensions of legitimacy that matter for exiting conflict and advancing durable peace. A single indicator, such as whether elections are free and fair, may be useful in suggesting whether inputs to the system are inclusive. Yet states that lack free, fair elections at times adopt other practices for achieving feedback and responsiveness at other levels and in other ways; and they may excel in other dimensions of legitimacy. The shape and quality of such states' legitimacy may be distinct, but it is not wholly absent. Rather than a concept defined and measured reductively, on a simple binary scale or on dual axes, legitimacy can more usefully be conceptualised multi-dimensionally – perhaps as a many-pointed star whose points may each glow fainter or brighter, and expand or contract, over time.

Conceptualising legitimacy in this way should help to make it clear that all countries have areas where their legitimacy remains incomplete, or work in progress, and that this can affect their risks of entering into or exiting from episodes of violence and conflict.

REFERENCES

1. INTRODUCTION: LEGITIMACY IN A FRAGMENTING WORLD

[1] Our world in Data, https://ourworldindata.org/ accessed 15 April 2025.

[2] Euronews, "Conflicts surged across the world in 2024, data suggests", 2 Jan 2025, https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2025/01/02/conflicts-surged-across-the-world-in-2024-data-suggests

[3] UNHCR, Global trends: forced displacement in 2023 (UNHCR, 2024), https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2024-06/global-trends-report-2023.pdf.

[4] UN Secretary General, "Secretary-General's remarks at the Opening of the General Debate of the Seventy-ninth Session of the General Assembly", 24 Sept 2024, https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2024-09-24/secretary-generals-remarks-the-opening-of-the-general-debate-of-the-seventy-ninth-session-of-the-general-assembly-trilingual-delivered-scroll-down-for-all-english-and.

[5] V-Dem Institute, Democracy Report 2024: Democracy Winning and Losing at the Ballot, (University of Gothenburg, 2024), 6. See also "Six countries descended into closed autocracies in just the last two years: Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Chad, Guinea, Haiti, and Turkmenistan. This is another reminder of how the present global wave of autocratization is affecting autocracies. It is not only, or perhaps not even mainly, about 'democratic backsliding'. A significant portion of changes for the worse in the world comes from autocracies becoming more autocratic. The number of electoral autocracies has been growing markedly in numbers over the past 50 years, from 36 in 1973 to peak at 65 in 2012, and we count 55 in 2023. Much of this upward trend is explained by many closed autocracies liberalizing in the 1980s and 1990s and starting to hold multiparty elections. Some became democracies, but many stalled as electoral autocracies, for example, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Mozambique, Pakistan, and Uganda." 12.

[6] V-Dem Institute, Democracy Report , 19.

[7] V-Dem Institute, Democracy Report, 21.

[8] "Bangladesh, Egypt, and Venezuela are examples of countries where the last held elections were significantly less free and fair than before." V-Dem Institute, Democracy Report, 16.

[9] Yana Gorokhovskaia and Cathryn Grothe, Freedom in the World 2024 (Freedom House, 2024), 2, https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/FIW_2024_DigitalBooklet.pdf.

[10] "Freedom of Expression remains the worst affected aspect of democracy and is deteriorating in 35 countries in 2023 (right panel), while improving in only eleven.… Ten years ago, only eleven countries were limiting freedom of expression, while twelve were expanding it." V-Dem Institute, Democracy Report, 15. See also Institute for Economics & Peace, Positive Peace Report 2024: Analysing the Factors That Build, Predict and Sustain Peace (IEP, March 2024), 2, 13 for an analysis of the significant deterioration in press freedom.

[11] V-Dem Institute Freedom of Peaceful Assembly Indicator, IEP Calculations

[12] CIVICUS Monitor, Rights Reversed: A Downward Shift in Civic Space (CIVICUS, 2024), 9, https://monitor.civicus.org/rights-reversed-2019-to-2023/

[13] Gallup Question: "In your opinion, how many people in this country, if any, are afraid to openly express their political views?" Aggregate of answers "Most are afraid" and "Many are afraid".`

[14] "Human rights declined in 3 out of 4 countries since the global rule of law recession began. Between 2016 and 2023, people lost fundamental rights in 77 percent of countries. Freedom of assembly and association, freedom of opinion and expression, and freedom of religion all declined widely." World Justice Project, Rule of Law Index 2023: Insights (WJP, 2023) https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/insights (Accessed 15 April 2025)

[15] CIVICUS, 2024 State of Civil Society Report (CIVICUS, 2024), 8, https://www.civicus.org/documents/reports-and-publications/SOCS/2024/state-of-civil-society-report-2024_en.pdf.

[16] V-Dem Institute, Democracy Report, 44–45.

[17] V-Dem Indicator "Exclusion by Socio-Economic Group", IEP Calculations

[18] IEP, Positive Peace Report 2024, 13.

[19] IEP, Positive Peace Report 2024

[20] World Justice Project, Rule of Law Index 2023: Insights, 43.

[21] V-Dem Indicator CSO repression, IEP Calculations

[22] CIVICUS, Rights reversed: a downward shift in civic space (CIVICUS, 2024), 11.

[23] Reporters without Borders, 2024 World Press Freedom Index – Journalism under Political Pressure (Reporters Without Borders, 2024), https://rsf.org/en/2024-world-press-freedom-index-journalism-under-political-pressure.

[24] Reporters without Borders, 2024 World Press Freedom Index.

[25] IEP, Positive Peace Report 2024, 3.

[26] World Justice Project, Rule of Law Index, 43.

[27] Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index 2023: Highlights and Insights, https://www.transparency.org/en/news/cpi-2023-highlights-insights-corruption-injustice, accessed 15 April 2025.

[28] V-Dem Judicial Corruption Decision indicator, IEP Calculations.

[29] V-Dem Transparent Laws with Predictable Enforcement Indicator, IEP Calculations.

[30] Gallup World Poll question "Is corruption widespread throughout the government in this country, or not?", IEP Calculations.

[31] World Justice Project, Rule of Law Index, 11, 46ff.

[32] World Justice Project, Rule of Law Index, 11.

[33] V-Dem Access to Justice for Women Indicator, IEP Calculations.

[34] Global State of Democracy Indices Judicial Independence Indicator, IEP Calculations

[35] World Bank, Poverty, Prosperity and Planet: Pathways out of the Polycrisis, (World Bank Group, 2024), xxiii-xxiv.

[36] V-Dem Social Group Equality in Respect for Civil Liberties Indicator, IEP Calculations

[37] Our world in Data, https://ourworldindata.org/ accessed 1 Oct 2024, citing World Inequality database data.

[38] World Bank (GINI index), IEP Calculations.

[39] IEP, Positive Peace Report, 8, 13, citing V-Dem on exclusion by socio economic group, and Freedom House on equality of opportunity and law to support equal treatment of population segments.

[40] World Bank Group, 'CPIA equity of public resource use rating (1=low to 6=high)', (CPIA database), https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IQ.CPA.PRES.XQ?end=2023&start=2005&view=chart Accessed 1 Oct 2024.

[41] Gianluca Boo and Gergely Hideg, Broken Ambitions: The Global Struggle to Halve Violent Deaths by 2030, (Small Arms Survey/Security Assessment in North Africa, 2024), 4.

[42] Institute for Economics & Peace, Global Peace Index 2024: Measuring Peace in a Complex World, (IEP, June 2024), 3, 30.

[43] IEP, Global Peace Index 2024 (IEP, June 2024), 31; Boo and Hideg, Broken Ambitions, 4.

[44] IEP, Positive Peace Report 2024, 2.

[45] IEP, Global Peace Index 2024, 11.

[46] V-Dem defines the "polarization of society" indicator as the level of differences of opinions on major political issues in a given society – specifically the extent to which these differences in opinions result in major clashes of views and polarisation or, alternatively, whether there is general agreement on the general direction this society should develop. 0 = serious polarization, 4 = no polarization. V-Dem Institute, V-Dem Codebook: V14, (V-Dem Institute, 2024), 346.

[47] Jennifer McCoy and Murat Somer, "Toward a Theory of Pernicious Polarization and How It Harms Democracies: Comparative Evidence and Possible Remedies." The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 681, no. 1 (January 1, 2019): 234–71. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716218818782.

[48] Elizabeth R. Nugent, "The Psychology of Repression and Polarization." World Politics 72, no. 2 (April 2020): 291–334. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887120000015.

[49] "Some of the countries in which this domain deteriorated most in the past decade are Brazil, Venezuela, the United States, Yemen, Poland and Türkiye." IEP, Positive Peace Report 2024, 2.

[50] Institute for Economics and Peace, Structures of Peace: Identifying What Leads to Peaceful Societies (IEP, 2011).

[51] IEP, Positive Peace Report 2024

[52] See for example Thania Paffenholz, Underdevelopment and Armed Conflict: Making Sense of the Debates (Conference Paper, 2008).

[53] "[We] investigated whether elections improved economic policy. Our results were encouraging. We found solid evidence that elections disciplined governments into improving important aspects of economic policy. Now… we distinguished between elections which were clean and those which were badly conducted. It turned out to matter. The disciplining effect of elections only worked when they were fair…. Corruption of the electoral process leads to worse economic policies." Paul Collier, The Plundered Planet, (Allen Lane, 2010), 58.

[54] World Bank, World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security and Development (World Bank, 2011), 10.

[55] Rising from $1,139.82 billion in 1998 to $2,393 billion in 2023 (at constant 2021 prices and exchange rates): SIPRI, SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, https://milex.sipri.org/sipri, (accessed 16 April 2025).

[56] IEP, Positive Peace Index, 29.

[57] "Between 2010–2020, total ODA increased by 54 percent, while humanitarian aid increased by 161 percent" OECD, Peace and Official Development Assistance, (OECD, 2023), 14.

[58] "In 2021, DAC members' spending on peace across all ODA-recipient countries fell to 9.6% of total ODA (USD 15.27 billion) – a 15-year record low in the share of overall ODA dedicated to peace. Additionally, DAC members' peace ODA in fragile contexts fell to 10.8% of their total ODA in 2021 (USD 5.27 billion) – a 15-year record low in both the volume and share of overall ODA dedicated to peace." OECD, Peace and Official Development Assistance, 14. Since this report was published, OECD DAC members' conflict, peace and security spending fell further in 2022.

[59] "In 2021, non-DAC providers allocated only 1.03% of their total ODA to objectives related to peacebuilding in fragile contexts – which contrasts with the 10.8% allocated by DAC donors." OECD, Peace and Official Development Assistance, 16. This data does not include China and India.

[60] V-Dem Institute, 36ff.

[61] See Christine Bell, "Multimediation: Adapting in Response to Fragmentation", in Still Time to Talk: Adaptation and Innovation in Peace Mediation, ed. Teresa Whitfield, (Conciliation Resources, 2024), 27–30.

2.1. THE SECURITY CONTRIBUTION TO LEGITIMACY

[1] Security actors includes people and organisations involved in the provision, management, and oversight of security. This includes security sector providers (for example, armed forces, law enforcement, intelligence services), and security sector management (for example, executive ministries and security sector overseers (such as parliament, legislature, and civil society organisations)). It can also include informal or non-state groups that play a role in security provision and/or governance, or aspire to do so.

[2] Larry Attree and Abigail Watson, How Guns Fall Silent - Analysing Examples of Relative Success in Integrated Stabilisation (Saferworld, May 2022); Larry Attree et al., Inside Kenya's war on terror: breaking the cycle of violence in Garissa, (Saferworld, 2017).

[3] See Harinder Singh, Enforcing UN Mandates against Illegally Armed Groups: East Timor (n.p., n.d.), copy supplied by author.

[4] Attree and Watson, How Guns Fall Silent, 13–15, 20–22.

[5] Attree and Watson, How Guns Fall Silent, 14.

[6] UK Stabilisation Unit, The UK Government's Approach to Stabilisation: a Guide for Policymakers and Practitioners (2018), 18, 21.

[7] Attree and Watson, How Guns Fall Silent, 28.

[8] Attree and Watson, How Guns Fall Silent, 29, 34.

[9] Rachel Kleinfeld, A Savage Order: How the World's Deadliest Countries Can Forge a Path to Security (Vintage, 2018), 232.

[10] Attree and Watson, How Guns Fall Silent, 19.

[11] Attree and Watson, How Guns Fall Silent, 28.

[12] For example, communication to build trust and prevent incidents/escalation, exchanging information on force locations and agreements on maximum force numbers, movements, activities and areas of control, respecting local cultures/traditional authorities including burials, refraining from propaganda, and ensuring humanitarian access.

[13] See: Concordis International, Consultation Report, Juba (March/April 2009), Annexes 1–3; Berghof Foundation, Security Arrangements Before, During and After Negotiations A Strategic Framework (2012).

[14] This case study draws in particular on Kleinfeld, A Savage Order, 189–216.

[15] Kleinfeld, A Savage Order, 189–190.

[16] Kleinfeld, A Savage Order 191.

[17] Kleinfeld, A Savage Order, 216.

[18] Kleinfeld, A Savage Order, 203.

[19] Kleinfeld, A Savage Order, 194.

[20] Kleinfeld, A Savage Order, 195.

[21] Kleinfeld, A Savage Order, 196.

[22] Kleinfeld, A Savage Order, 216.

[23] Kleinfeld, A Savage Order, 197.

[24] See Rachel Kleinfeld and Rushda Majeed, Fighting Insurgency With Politics: The Case of Bihar (Carnegie Endowment, 2016), Epilogue. https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2016/06/fighting-insurgency-with-politics-the-case-of-bihar?lang=en (accessed 31 March 2025).

[25] See "Datasheet: India", South Asia Terrorism Portal, https://www.satp.org/datasheet-terrorist-attack/fatalities/india (accessed 1 April 2025).

[26] "Maoist Insurgency: Assessment- 2023", South Asia Terrorism Portal, https://www.satp.org/terrorism-assessment/india-maoistinsurgency (accessed 1 April 2025).

[27] Such as "anti-crime groups, religious police, ethnic/clan militias, political party militias, civil defence forces, informal commercial security groups, formal commercial security groups, state-approved civil guarding, local government security structures, customary policing and courts, and restorative justice committees" Mark Sedra, A People-Centred Approach to Security – seeking conceptual clarity to guide UN policy development (FBA, UNDP), 31.

[27] Sedra, A People-Centred Approach to Security, 32.

[28] See Larry Attree and Jordan Street, No Shortcuts to Security: Learning From Responses to Armed Conflicts Involving Proscribed Groups (Saferworld, 2022), 7–13.

[29] "Highly partisan, factionalised societies whose economic and political elites have exorbitant privilege compared to the rest of the citizenry. To maintain that privilege and impunity, they often rely on campaign contributions from criminal groups, hire muscle to help win elections, and tend to politicise the security sector so that these favoured violent groups are not jailed. Security sectors are simultaneously deprofessionalised, with budgets and promotions dependent on political favour and patronage rather than merit.… As citizens stop trusting the government to protect them, they may turn to vigilante groups and criminals for protection, or look to insurgents to change the structure of power. Meanwhile, those benefitting from the status quo may begin to employ private security firms or rely on para-state forces and extrajudicial killings to eliminate 'undesirables'.…'Privilege Violence'… stems not from a state that is weak, overwhelmed and unable to fight violence – but from a power structure that allows or even enables violence against some citizens as the price for maintaining extreme privilege." In Rachel Kleinfeld, 'Privilege Violence': Why Polarized Democracies Yield Violence, (Carnegie 2017)

[30] See for example Hesta Groenewald, "Hammering The Bread and the Nail" –
Lessons from Counter-terrorism, Stabilisation and Statebuilding in Afghanistan, (Saferworld, 2016).

[31] Interpeace, Rethinking Stability: Key Findings and Actionable Recommendations,
(Interpeace, Atlantic Council, November 2022), 14.

[32] See Rachel Kleinfeld, Advancing the Rule of Law Abroad –
Next Generation Reform, (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012).

[33] Indonesia's second President, Suharto, was a military officer who imposed military-authoritarian rule over Indonesia for over three decades before resigning in 1998 in the face of nationwide unrest.

[34] Kleinfeld, Advancing the Rule of Law Abroad, 161.

[35] Kleinfeld, Advancing the Rule of Law Abroad, 173.

[36] Kleinfeld, Advancing the Rule of Law Abroad, 171–172.

[37] Kleinfeld, A Savage Order, 272-273. See also Interpeace, Rethinking Stability, 16.

[38] This case study is drawn from Kleinfeld, A Savage Order, 198–216.

[39] Kleinfeld, A Savage Order, 198.

[40] See Transparency International, Corruption Perceptions Index, https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2023, (accessed 31 March 2025).

[41] Kleinfeld, A Savage Order, 198.

[42] Kleinfeld, A Savage Order, 200.

[43] Kleinfeld, A Savage Order, 201.

[44] Kleinfeld, A Savage Order, 213.

[45] Kleinfeld, A Savage Order, 202.

[46] Kleinfeld, A Savage Order, 200.

[47] Kleinfeld, A Savage Order, 216.

[48] See, for example, RFE/RL, 'Jailed Former Georgian President Saakashvili Gets Additional 9 Years In Prison', 12 Mar 2025, https://www.rferl.org/a/saakashvili-georgia-trial-ivanishvili-court/33344999.html.

[49] "Cities like Palmira in Colombia, Pelotas in Brazil, and many others around the world have achieved upwards of a 60 percent reduction in violence rates by combining localized action, targeted investments, and the smart use of data" Pathfinders/Center on International Cooperation, Beyond the Battlefields: Practical Strategies to Halving Global Violence in our Homes, Streets, and Communities (CIC, 2024), 8, 11.

[50] For further examples at different levels in different countries and their impacts see Pathfinders/Center on International Cooperation, Beyond the Battlefields, 14–15.

[51] "No matter how badly it appears that equipment, buildings, and other material goods are needed, they are secondary to real reform. […] But if the power structures and relationships and fixed, the handcuffs will come" Kleinfeld, Advancing the Rule of Law Abroad, 213.

[52] Kleinfeld, A Savage Order, 161.

[53] See also Sedra, A People-Centred Approach to Security, 22, which emphasises the emergence of concepts regarding people-centred security, community security and citizen security which seek to engage people in the construction of security, trust and improved state-society relations, and which describes also how human rights, gender and youth inclusion run across all such approaches and their assessment.

[54] This case study is drawn from Kleinfeld, A Savage Order, 180, 202, 203, 214–6.

[55] Kleinfeld, A Savage Order, 202.

[56] Kleinfeld, A Savage Order, 203.

[57] See Kleinfeld, A Savage Order, 214–16.

[58] Kleinfeld, A Savage Order, 180.

[59] See Will Bennett, Larry Attree et al., Community security handbook (Saferworld, 2014); Sedra, A People-Centred Approach to Security, 27, argues that connecting state-centric development to community development models requires: "facilitation of dialogue between the state and a broadly representative group of civil society actors; the development of a reservoir of local knowledge to facilitate contextualized programming; and the deployment of an effective outreach campaign for the general population".

[60] Kleinfeld, A Savage Order, 147.

[61] Attree and Watson, How Guns Fall Silent, 18.

[62] Attree and Watson, How Guns Fall Silent, 30.

[63] See Kleinfeld, A Savage Order, 134–7, 210, 214–16, 224–234.

[64] UK Stabilisation Unit, The UK Government's Approach to Stabilisation, 67.

CASE STUDY SAHEL: CAN ACCOUNTABLE SECURITY BE PROMOTED UNDER MILITARY RULE?

[1] https://www.asce-lc.bf/message-commun-des-structures-et-organisations-anti-corruption-a-loccasion-de-la-journee-internationale-de-la-lutte-contre-la-corruption/ (Accessed 27 March 2025)

[2] https://www.asce-lc.bf/message-commun-des-structures-et-organisations-anti-corruption-a-loccasion-de-la-journee-internationale-de-la-lutte-contre-la-corruption/ (Accessed 27 March 2025)

[3] This included the National Assembly, the National Human Rights Commission, the Mediator of the Republic, the High Authority to Combat Corruption and Related Offences, and the Council of State – all disbanded.

[4] Since July 2023, MOJEDEC has documented and reported 200 cases of human rights violations, 75 cases of gender-based violence and 212 security incidents.

CASE STUDY UKRAINE: ENHANCING LEGITIMACY AS A BULWARK OF RESILIENCE

[1] Polina Beliakova and Sarah Detzner, Security Sector Governance and Reform in Ukraine, PeaceRep Ukraine report. (Conflict and Civicness Research Group, London School of Economics, 2023), 13.

[2] Beliakova and Detzner, Security Sector Governance, 21.

[3] Beliakova and Detzner, Security Sector Governance; see also Julia Soldatiuk-Westerveld, Bob Deen and Ate Lucien van Steenbergen, Work in Progress: Ukraine's State-Civil Partnership to Reform the Security Sector, (Clingendael, 2023), 35; and Rosario Puglisi, A People's Army, Civil Society as a Security Actor in post-Maidan Ukraine. (Istituto Affari Internazionale, 2015), 11–12.

[4] Soldatiuk-Westerveld et al., Work in Progress, 39–40.

[5] Beliakova and Detzner, Security Sector Governance, 19.

[6] Beliakova and Detzner, Security Sector Governance, 25.

[7] Beliakova and Detzner, Security Sector Governance, 31.

[8] Soldatiuk-Westerveld et al., Work in Progress, 1, 10; roles played by civil society in Ukraine have included service delivery, research, analysis, monitoring, advocacy, public information and awareness raising, public representation, inputs to consultations, policy and legislation development, and articulating needs to donors.

[9] Soldatiuk-Westerveld et al., Work in Progress, 2, 12.

2.2. ENHANCING LEGITIMACY BEYOND A PEACE PROCESS: THE CASE OF COLOMBIA

[1] See Matt Waldman, Peacemaking in Trouble – Expert Perspectives on Flaws, Deficiencies and Potential in the Field of Peace Mediation, (Harvard Kennedy School, 2024), 3.

[2] See for example, Elfadil Ibrahim, "Unlikely Foes: Egypt and the UAE's Hidden Battle for Sudan" Responsible Statecraft, 29 Jan 2025.

[3] Cf. "People think they're at the finishing line… It's the starting line." Waldman, Peacemaking in Trouble, 18–19.

[4] See also "don't impose solutions", Waldman, Peacemaking in Trouble, 9–15; and "when external parties pressured or imposed an outcome or particular sequencing approach that was not in alignment with the parties' shared interests, the results were often disastrous." Govinda Clayton et al., eds., Ceasefires: Stopping the Violence and Negotiating Peace, (Georgetown UP, 2025), 296.

[5] "Legitimacy can be said to be grounded when the system of governance and authority is well-connected with local realities, that is, when it is connected with people's understanding and experience of the fundamental underpinnings of social order and well-being and engaged with their collective sense of their own needs and their shared sources of meaning." Kevin Clements, Traditional, Charismatic and Grounded Legitimacy, (GTZ, 2022); See also OECD DAC, The State's Legitimacy in Fragile Situations: Unpacking Complexity. (OECD DAC, 2010).

[6] United Nations, Final report of the Panel of Experts on the Sudan, (S/2024/65) (15 January 2024); Human Rights Watch, Fanning the Flames: Sudanese Warring Parties' Access To New Foreign-Made Weapons and Equipment, Background Briefing, (September 2024); Declan Walsh and Christophe Koettl, "How a U.S. Ally Uses Aid as a Cover in War" New York Times, 29 September 2024; Marc Ummel and Yvan Schulz, On the Trail of African Gold: Quantifying Production and Trade to Combat Illicit Flows, (SWISSAID, May 2024).

[7] Christine Bell, "Multimediation: Adapting in Response to Fragmentation." Accord 30, (Conciliation Resources, 2024): 27–30.

[8] Cf. "the favoured approach is not centralised and top down but of forging connections between approaches at multiple levels, including the local – while still getting at the elite level." Waldman, Peacemaking in Trouble, 12.

[9] See for example Oliver P. Richmond and Audra Mitchell, eds., Hybrid Forms of Peace: From Everyday Agency to Post-Liberalism. (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

[10] Deval Desai and Andrew Lang, "Introduction: Global Un-Governance." Transnational Legal Theory 11, no.3 (2020): 219–243.

[11] Jan Pospisil, "The Ungovernance of Peace: Transitional Processes in Contemporary Conflictscapes." Transnational Legal Theory 11, no.3 (2020): 329–352.

[12] Mateja Peter, "Global Fragmentation and Collective Security Instruments: Weakening the Liberal International Order from Within." Politics and Governance 12, (2024): 7357.

[13] Frank Biermann, Philipp Pattberg, Harro van Asselt, and Fariborz Zelli, "The fragmentation of global governance architectures: A framework for analysis." Global Environmental Politics 9, no. 4 (2009): 14–40.

[14] See also Govinda Clayton, Pause for thought: contemporary ceasefire politics, Background Paper, (CHD/Oslo Forum, Jan 2025), 4, 11–12; Clayton et al., eds., Ceasefires: Stopping the Violence and Negotiating Peace, 295; Waldman, Peacemaking in Trouble, 15.

[15] Allard Duursma, "African Solutions to African Challenges: The Role of Legitimacy in Mediating Civil Wars in Africa." International Organization 74, no. 2 (2020): 295–330. See also Waldman, Peacemaking in Trouble, 9–15; Clayton et al., eds., Ceasefires: Stopping the Violence and Negotiating Peace, 296.

[16] This is particularly likely at a time when 'the international system provides conflict actors with the resources that enables them to avoid the types of peace negotiations that were prevalent in the 1990s': Roger Mac Ginty, What works? Effectiveness in Mediation and Peacemaking. A policy brief. (Durham University, 2024), 3.

[17] Oliver P. Richmond and Roger Mac Ginty, "Where now for the critique of the liberal peace?" Cooperation and Conflict 50, no. 2 (2015): 171–189.

[18] Timothy Murithi, The African Union: Pan-Africanism, Peacebuilding and Development. (Routledge, 2017).

[19] Sara Hellmüller, Julia Palmiano Federer and Mathias Zeller, The Role of Norms in International Peace Mediation (Swisspeace and NOREF, 2015).

[20] I. William Zartman, "The Timing of Peace Initiatives: Hurting Stalemates and Ripe Moments" in Tetsuro Iji and Sinisa Vukovic eds., Revisiting the "Ripeness" Debate (Routledge, 2023), 85–97.

[21] Ishak Mastura, "Geopolitical Games and Malaysian Mediation in the Philippines." Jindal Journal of International Affairs 1, no. 1 (2011): 3–16.

[22] Bell, "Multimediation: Adapting in Response to Fragmentation." 27–30.

[23] For the NGO realm, see Julia Palmiano Federer, NGOs Mediating Peace: Promoting Inclusion in Myanmar's Nationwide Ceasefire Negotiations. (Springer Nature, 2024).

[24] Bernardo Mariani and Moritz Ehrmann, Mediating Peace in a Fragmented World Order - The Roles of European Mediators.

Austrian Forum for Peace Working Paper, No. 1/2025, (Austrian Centre for Peace, 2025), 23–24. See also Roger Mac Ginty, Helping Established and New Peacemakers Work Together (Durham University, 2024), 4; and Waldman, Peacemaking in Trouble, [21]: "mediators could play a greater role in orchestrating or mobilising a wide range of mediation actors to enhance coherence or achieve a suitable division of labour, as happened in Libya."

[25] See the call for a change process in this area in Waldman, Peacemaking in Trouble, 10.

[26] Alex De Waal et al., South Sudan: The Politics of Delay. Conflict Research Programme and Political Settlements Research Programme Memo, 3. (London School of Economics and Political Science, 2019).

[27] Necla Tschirgi, Post-conflict Peacebuilding Revisited: Achievements, Limitations, Challenges. (International Peace Academy, 2004).

[28] Roland Paris, At War's End: Building Peace After Civil Conflict (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[29] Roger Mac Ginty and Oliver Richmond, "The Local Turn in Peacebuilding: A Critical Agenda for Peace." Third World Quarterly 34, no. 5 (2013): 763–783.

[30] Kristian Herbolzheimer, Innovations in the Colombian peace process. NOREF Report. (NOREF, 2016).

[31] See the 'messy peace processes' visualisation prepared by the PA-X peace agreement database, https://pax.peaceagreements.org/visualizations/messy-peace-processes/. Credits: Tobias Kauer for original visualisation design & Tomas Vancisin for v2 updates at PeaceRep (University of Edinburgh).

[32] Christine Bell and Jan Pospisil, "Navigating Inclusion in Transitions from Conflict: The Formalised Political Unsettlement." Journal of International Development 29, no. 5 (2017): 576–593.

[33] William Easterly, The Tyranny of Experts: Economists, Dictators, and the Forgotten Rights of the Poor. (Basic Books, 2013).

[34] Oliver P. Richmond, "Beyond Local Ownership in the Architecture of International Peacebuilding." Ethnopolitics 11 no. 4 (2012): 354–375; Roger Mac Ginty, International Peacebuilding and Local Resistance: Hybrid Forms of Peace. (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

[35] See for example, "In how peacemaking is conceived: from a primary focus on diplomacy and negotiated settlements… to… a longer term, dynamic, adaptive process that requires broader inclusivity, sustained engagement to building and maintaining legitimacy, and responsibility sharing to promote the common good." Principles for Peace, The Peacemaking Covenant (P4P, 2023), 8.

[36] Mary Kaldor and Henry Radice, "Introduction: Civicness in conflict." Journal of Civil Society 18 no.2 (2022): 125–141.

[37] Zartman, "The timing of peace initiatives", 85–97.

[38] Cf. Mac Ginty, What works? 1; Waldman, Peacemaking in Trouble, 9–10, 14–15.

[39] Waldman, Peacemaking in Trouble, 18–19

[40] See Roger Mac Ginty, How can Peacemaking and Peacebuilding Work Better Together? (Durham University, 2024).

[41] Bell,"Multimediation: Adapting in Response to Fragmentation." 27–30.

[42] Bell, "Multimediation: Adapting in Response to Fragmentation." 27–30.

[43] Long Ding, Long, "The Evolving Roles of the Gulf States in the Horn of Africa." Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies 18, no. 1 (2024): 1–14.

[44] Kristian Herbolzheimer, Innovations in the Colombian peace process. NOREF Report. (NOREF, 2016).

[45] Mac Ginty, What works? 1.

[46] See United Nations Mission to support the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA), Stockholm Agreement, https://unmha.unmissions.org/stockholm-agreement, (accessed 2 April 2025).

[47] Cf Principles for Peace, The Peacemaking Covenant, 7.

[48] Principles for Peace, The Peacemaking Covenant, 8–9.

[49] Principles for Peace, The Peacemaking Covenant, 38–40.

[50] See Mac Ginty, How can Peacemaking and Peacebuilding Work Better Together? and Waldman, Peacemaking in Trouble, 12.

CASE STUDY ISRAEL-PALESTINE: BUILDING A MULTI-SECTOR COALITION TO SUPPORT A LEGITIMATE AND DURABLE PEACE

[1] UNOSAT. https://unosat.org/products/3984#:~:text=According%20to%20satellite%20imagery%20analysis,a%20total%20of%20163%2C778%20structures.

[2] I.e. Mutual recognition of the right to independence, self-determination, and statehood for both peoples; dignity and equality for all; security and safety for all; agency and inclusion in decision-making; rebuilding trust through healing.

2.3. ENHANCING LEGITIMACY BEYOND A PEACE PROCESS: THE CASE OF COLOMBIA

[1] See 'Introduction' and 'defining legitimacy' sections.

[2] Borja Paladini-Adell, "From a Divisive Peace Agreement to a Legitimate Peace in Colombia." https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474466288-006. In Local Legitimacy and International Peacebuilding. Oliver P. Richmond and Roger Mac Ginty eds. (Edinburgh University Press, 2020). https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474466288

[3] Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace, November 2016. https://peacemaker.un.org/node/9804

[4] Colombia, Law 2272 of 2022. Law defining the Total Peace policy. www.funcionpublica.gov.co/eva/gestornormativo/norma.php?i=197883

[5] See for example: Idler, Annette. Borderland Battles: Violence, Crime, and Governance at the Edges of Colombia's War. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019; Idler, Annette; Paladini Adell, Borja. 'When peace implies engaging the "terrorist"', in Researching Terrorism, Peace and Conflict Studies, (Routledge, 2015). Arjona, Ana. 'Institutions, Civilian Resistance, and Wartime Social Order: A Process-driven Natural Experiment in the Colombian Civil War'. Latin American Politics and Society. Vol. 58, No. 3 (2016). 99-122.

[6] León Valencia Agudelo, ed. Parapolítica. Historia del Mayor Asalto a la Democracia en Colombia. (Planeta, 2024).

[7] https://elpais.com/america-colombia/2024-10-18/colombia-bate-su-record-de-cultivos-de-coca-por-tercer-ano-consecutivo-con-25300-hectareas-en-2023.html

UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Monitoring of Territories with Coca Cultivation. (UNODC, 2023) Executive Summary. www.unodc.org/rocol/uploads/res/noticias/colombia/monitoreo-de-territorios-con-presencia-de-cultivos-de-coca-2023_html/Resumen_ejecutivo_2023_07112024_BAJA.pdf

[8] Hernando Gómez Buendía, Carlos Vicente de Roux and Mark André Franche, El Conflicto, Callejón con Salida. Informe Nacional de Desarrollo Humano 2003. (United Nations Development Programme, 2003) http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12010/13541.

[9] Government of Colombia, Single Register of Victims. Victims Unit. www.unidadvictimas.gov.co/registro-unico-de-victimas-ruv/

[10] According to data systematised by the Truth Commission, https://web.comisiondelaverdad.co/actualidad/noticias/principales-cifras-comision-de-la-verdad-informe-final

[11] See Commission for the Clarification of the Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition, Report of Findings and Recommendations, 35. https://www.comisiondelaverdad.co/hallazgos-y-recomendaciones-1

[12] https://comisiondelaverdad.co/analitica-de-datos-informacion-y-recursos#c1

[13] According to estimates by the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP), at least 6,402 people - many of them minors - were victims of these crimes against humanity, although it is presumed that the real figure could be higher, due to unreported or unrecorded cases. https://www.jep.gov.co/macrocasos/caso03

[14] Eduardo Pizarro, ed., Changing the Future. History of the Peace Processes in Colombia (1981-2016). (Debate, 2017). Paladini-Adell, Borja et al, (2022). 'The ongoing quest for peace in Colombia. Case study for the Principles for Peace Initiative'. Geneva: Principles for Peace and Berghof Foundation.

[15] Alexander Ramsbotham and Achim Wennmann, eds., "Legitimacy and peace processes. From coercion to consent." Accord 25 (Conciliation Resources, 2014); Erin McCandless et al., Forging Resilient Social Contracts (FES, New School, UNDP, 2018).

[16] Mauricio Garcia-Durán S.J., Movimiento por la paz en Colombia. 1978-2003 (CINEP, 2003). https://issuu.com/cinepppp/docs/completo_movimiento_por_la_paz_colombia

[17] Christine Bell, Catherine O'Rourke and Sissela Matzner, A Chronology of Colombian Peace Processes and Peace Agreements. Political Settlements Research Programme. Briefing Paper. (University of Edinburgh, 2015); Borja Paladini-Adell, "From Peace-building and Human Development Coalitions to Peace Infrastructure in Colombia." In Barbara Unger, Stina Lundström, Katrin Planta and Beatrix Austin eds., Peace Infrastructures - Assessing Concept and Practice. Berghof Handbook Dialogue Series no. 10 (Berghof Foundation, 2012).

[18] Final Agreement for Ending the Conflict and Building a Stable and Lasting Peace, November 2016. https://peacemaker.un.org/node/9804

[19] Also see: Kristian Herzbolheimer, Innovations in the Colombian peace process. (NOREF, 2016) https://www.c-r.org/resource/innovations-colombian-peace-process

[20] See: Isabel Bramsen and Lisa Strömbom, "Inclusivity in Practice: Patchworks of Inclusion at Multiple Tracks in the Colombian Peace Process." Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding (2024): 1-21 https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2024.2380955

[21] www.jep.gov.co

[22] www.comisiondelaverdad.co

[23] https://unidadbusqueda.gov.co

[24] Roddy Brett, "Victim-Centred Peacemaking: The Colombian Experience." Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding 16, no. 4 (2022): 475–497. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2022.2104437

[25] https://desarrollo-alternativo.org/documentos/CINEP.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com

[26] https://redprodepaz.org.co

For example, Borja Paladini-Adell, "The International Community Meets the Local Community." In Virginia M. Bouvier, ed., Colombia. Building Peace in a Time of War. (United States Institute of Peace (USIP), 2012).

[27] Virginia M. Bouvier, Harbingers of Hope: Peace Initiatives in Colombia. (USIP, 2006). www.usip.org/publications/2006/08/harbingers-hope-peace-initiatives-colombia

[28] https://centralpdet.renovacionterritorio.gov.co/conoce-los-pdet/

[29] María Lucia Lacorazza. Lessons From the Havana Peace Process on Civil Society Participation. (Institute for Integrated Transitions, 2022). https://ifit-transitions.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Lecciones-del-Proceso-de-paz-de-La-Habana-sobre-participación-de-la-sociedad-civil.pdf

[30] Hilde Salvesen and Dag Nylander, Towards an inclusive peace: Women and the gender approach in the Colombian peace process. (NOREF, 2017). https://noref.no/publication-documents/towards-an-inclusive-peace-women-and-the-gender-approach-in-the-colombian-peace-process/Salvesen_Nylander_Towards-an-inclusive-peace_July2017_final.pdf

[31] Silvana Valentina Pellegrino Velásquez, Failing to comply: an ethnography of the Auto 004 paperwork. (Universidad de los Andes, 2017). http://hdl.handle.net/1992/61273

[32] https://colombia.unmissions.org/en

[33] International Crisis Group, Colombia: Is „Total Peace" Back on Track? (ICG, 2023). www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/andes/colombia/colombia-total-peace-back-track

[34] UN Verification Mission in Colombia, Reports to the UN Secretary General. https://colombia.unmissions.org/en

[35] Borja Paladini-Adell, "Pathways and Obstacles in Colombia's Quest for Peace." In Karlos Pérez de Armiño, ed., European Union Support for Colombia's Peace Process. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-24797-2_3

CASE STUDY BANGLADESH: INDIGENOUS RIGHTS, PEACE AND LEGITIMACY IN THE CHITTAGONG HILL TRACTS

[1] Ahsanul Mahbub Zubair, Ethnic Conflict in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). (ResearchGate, 2023) https://www.researchgate.net/publication/368894610_Ethnic_Conflict_in_Chittagong_Hill_Tracts_CHT

[2] See Anwar Hossain, "The Bengali Settlement and Minority Groups Integration in Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh: An Anthropological Understanding." Jagannath University Journal of Social Sciences 3, no. 1-2 (2015): 97–110.

[3] Amena Mohsin, The Politics of Nationalism: The Case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh. (University Press Limited, 1997).

[4] Syed Serajul Islam, "The Insurgency Movement in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh: Internal and External Dimensions." Journal of Third World Studies 20, no. 2 (2003): 137–160. https://www.jstor.org/stable/45194171

[5] Zubair, Ethnic Conflict, 5.

[6] Hana Shams Ahmed, "The Politics of Indigeneity and the Jumma struggle for land and recognition." The Daily Star, 27 September 2019. https://www.thedailystar.net/star-weekend/longform/news/the-politics-indigeneity-and-the-jumma-struggle-land-and-recognition-1805566

[7] Mizanur Rahman Shelley, ed., The Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh: The Untold Story. (Centre for Development Research, Bangladesh, 1992) cited in M S Siddiqui, CHT Problem – History of crisis and attempts to resolve. (WMO Conflict Insight, 13 March 2024). https://worldmediation.org/cht-problem-history-of-crisis-and-attempts-to-resolve/

[8] Islam, "The Insurgency Movement in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh: Internal and External Dimensions."

[9] Muhammad Kazim Nur Sohad and Mohammad Yaqub, The New Paradigm of Conflict: A Study on the Changing Dynamics of Peace and Conflict in CHT, Bangladesh. (n.d.) https://iis.fisipol.ugm.ac.id/wp-content/uploads/sites/720/2020/01/GOSOUTH19-THE-NEW-PARADIGM-OF-CONFLICT-Muhammad-Kazim-Nur-Sohad-and-Mohammad-Yaqub-converted.pdf

[10] Seventy percent were male, and 30 percent were female. Forty-three respondents identified as Chakma, one as Garo, and one as Marma. Selected through snowball sampling, participants engaged in semi-structured interviews to share their experiences. Amid an ongoing national political crisis, many opted to remain anonymous. The interviews were facilitated by Indigenous community members who helped build trust with participants, encouraging them to engage openly.

[11] Forced Migration Review, The Fragility of Peace in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh - Forced Migration Review. August 27, 2024. https://www.fmreview.org/feeny/

[12] John Tripura, "CHT Accord: 22 years of promises not kept." The Daily Star, 2 December 2019. https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/human-rights/news/cht-accord-22-years-promises-not-kept-1834357 Survey respondents corroborated the consequences of these unimplemented provisions.

[13] Lt. Col. M. A. H Siddiqui, "Full Implementation of CHT Peace Accord - Challenges and Impediments in the Process." NDC Journal 17, no.1 (2018): 174-193. https://ndcjournal.ndc.gov.bd/ndcj/index.php/ndcj/article/view/232/210

[14] Amnesty International, "Bangladesh: Fully implement rights provisions of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord." Amnesty International, 11 December 2020. https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa13/3407/2020/en/

[15] Amena Mohsin, The Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh: On the Difficult Road to Peace. (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2003).

[16] CHT Commission, Life is not ours: Land and Human Rights in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh. (1991), 96.

[17] Amnesty International, "Bangladesh: Fully implement rights provisions of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord".

[18] Siddiqui, "Full Implementation of CHT Peace Accord - Challenges and Impediments in the Process."

[19] Siddiqui, "Full Implementation of CHT Peace Accord - Challenges and Impediments in the Process."

[20] International Labour Standards Department, Indigenous & Tribal Peoples' Rights in Practice. (International Labour Organisation, 2009), 36, 40. https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_norm/@normes/documents/publication/wcms_106474.pdf.

[21] Willem Van Schendel, "The Invention of the 'Jumma': State Formation and Ethnicity in Southeastern Bangladesh." Modern Asian Studies 26, no. 1 (1992): 126–128. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Willem-Van-Schendel/publication/231991145_The_Invention_of_the_'Jummas'_State_Formation_and_Ethnicity_in_Southeastern_Bangladesh/links/561e3a1408aef097132b348f/The-Invention-of-the-Jummas-State-Formation-and-Ethnicity-in-Southeastern-Bangladesh.pdf

[22] Tazreena Sajjad, "Bangladesh's protests explained: What led to PM's ouster and the challenges that lie ahead," The Conversation, 6 August 2024. https://theconversation.com/bangladeshs-protests-explained-what-led-to-pms-ouster-and-the-challenges-that-lie-ahead-236190

[23] Rubén Cuéllar, Social Cohesion and Democracy. (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2009), 3. https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/chapters/the-role-of-the-european-union-in-democracy-building/eu-democracy-building-discussion-paper-27.pdf.

CASE STUDY GUATEMALA'S STRUGGLE FOR PEACE AND LEGITIMACY

[1] United Nations, "UN and Guatemala Peace Process." https://www.un.org/en/yearbook/un-and-guatemala-peace-process

[2] B. Arévalo de Leon, "Conciliation/Reconciliation: the uncertain path to a peaceful coexistence in Guatemala," 18, 22.

[3] Council on Foreign Relations, "Guatemala chose a new pro-reform President: Can he stem corruption and migration?" 28 August 2023, http://www.cfr.org/blog. See also Council on Foreign Relations, "Latin America's demographic opportunity plus Arévalo's first four months" 28 May 2024, http://www.cfr.org/blog

2.4. GLOBAL INSTABILITY AND THE CRISIS OF MULTILATERALISM: A LEGITIMACY RESPONSE

[1] Richard Gowan, "The UN, an Organization Close to Breaking Point?" Le Monde diplomatique (July 2024). https://mondediplo.com/2024/07/06un

[2] China is 2nd measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP) but first if measured by Purchasing Power Parity (PPP). Edie Purdie, "Tracking GDP in PPP terms shows rapid rise of China and India." World Bank Blogs, October 16, 2019. https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/opendata/tracking-gdp-ppp-terms-shows-rapid-rise-china-and-india. See also Micah McCarthy, "How China's economy compares to the US's after the latest results." Newsweek, 16 July 2024. https://www.newsweek.com/china-us-economies-compared-1925603

[3] India is third if measured by PPP. Purdie, "Tracking GDP"

[4] Measured in PPP. When measured by GDP the G7 represents 43% of the global economy versus the BRICS' 30%. In 2023 the BRICS expanded to nine countries, and Kenya, Turkey and Saudi Arabia may also join. see Stewart Patrick, BRICS Expansion, the G20, and the Future of World Order. (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2024). https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2024/10/brics-summit-emerging-middle-powers-g7-g20?lang=en

[5] Cedric de Coning, BRICS and the West: Don't believe the Cold War hype. (Global Observatory, 2023). https://theglobalobservatory.org/2023/08/brics-and-the-west-dont-believe-the-cold-war-hype/

[6] Gustavo de Carvalho, "Reflections after the BRICS Summit: What lies ahead." Post on X (formerly Twitter), October 26, 2024, 11:37am @gb_decarvalho. https://x.com/gb_decarvalho/status/1850124637495070933?s=46&t=XTIHT8H-NBYrxrpoNcsKtQ

[7] Mark Leonard, The Age of Unpeace: How Connectivity Causes Conflict. (Bantam Press, 2021).

[8] See Christopher Clark, The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914 (Penguin, 2012).

[9] Siri Aas Rustad, Conflict Trends: A Global Overview, 1946–2023. PRIO Paper. (PRIO, 2024). https://www.prio.org/publications/14006.

[10] See introduction.

[11] See Dan Schreiber and Celine Giuliani, "Reimagining Global Governance Legitimacy," LinkedIn, November 13, 2024. https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/reimagining-global-governance-legitimacy-dan-schreiber-fts7e/

[12] Eugene Chen, A New Vision for Peace Operations (Center on International Cooperation, 2024). https://cic.nyu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/A-New-Vision-for-Peace-Operations-October-2024.pdf (accessed 2 April 2025).

[13] See UN Security Council, "Security Council Press Statement on Attack against United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon," SC/15897, November 13, 2024. https://press.un.org/en/2024/sc15897.doc.htm (accessed 2 April 2025)

[14] See also Christine Bell, "'Multimediation': adapting in response to fragmentation," in Teresa Whitfield, ed., Still time to talk: adaptation and innovation in peace mediation (Conciliation Resources, 2024), 27–30.

[15] Peacekeeping funding fell more than 20% in the 2008-2024 period. Institute for Economics & Peace, Global Peace Index 2024: Measuring Peace in a Complex World (IEP, June 2024), 29. And the share of OECD countries' ODA going to peace fell to a 15 year low in 2021, (compounded by further dramatic cuts to aid in recent months and years). OECD, Peace and Official Development Assistance, (OECD, 2023), 14.

[16] See for example, Larry Attree, Celia McKeon and Konstantin Bärwaldt, "The International Security Echo-Chamber: Getting Civil Society Into the Room," Just Security, July 31, 2019, https://www.justsecurity.org/65243/the-international-security-echo-chamber-getting-civil-society-into-the-room/ (accessed 2 April 2025).

[17] Johan Rockström et al., "Planetary boundaries: Guiding human development on a changing planet." Science 347, 1259855 (2015). Available at: https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.1259855

[18] Dan Smith et al., Environment of Peace. (SIPRI, 2022). https://www.sipri.org/research/peace-and-development/environment-peace

[19] Ioana Puscas, AI and International Security. (UNIDIR, 2023). https://unidir.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/UNIDIR_AI-international-security_understanding_risks_paving_the_path_for_confidence_building_measures.pdf

[20] For example, thus far the US has resisted international governance of the internet and related technologies. See also Leonard, The Age of Unpeace

[21] There were policy papers on future generations, managing global emergencies, meaningful youth engagement, economic policy beyond growth, a global digital compact, reform of the international financial system, managing outer space, information integrity, a new agenda for peace, transforming education, and on UN system innovation. These explored reform options, but none considered the system's collapse or replacement – or the overhaul of its fundamental values. The most sensitive aspect of the Pact for the Future, on UN Security Council reform, reviewed the composition and working methods of the Council. None of the diplomats negotiating the Pact questioned the international system's underlying principles or values, such as the sovereignty and equality of states or the imperative to maintain international peace and security.

[22] Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan: Or the Matter, Forme, and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiastical and Civil, I.XIII.9.

[23] United Nations, Pact for the Future, Global Digital Compact and Declaration on Future Generations. Summit of the Future Outcome Documents, September 2024. Action 39.

[24] See Schreiber and Giuliani, "Reimagining Global Governance Legitimacy"

[25] Cedric de Coning, Ingvild Brox Brodtkorb, Thor Olav Iversen and Jenny Lorentzen. Improving the impact of the UN Peacebuild-

ing Commission and enhancing the synergy of the Peacebuilding Architecture. Input Paper for the 2025 (Twenty-year) Review of the UN Peacebuilding Architecture. (NUPI, 2024). https://www.nupi.no/en/publications/cristin-pub/improving-the-impact-of-the-un-peacebuilding-commission-and-enhancing-the-synergy-of-the-peacebuilding-architecture-input-paper-for-the-2025.

[26] Better Order Project, Towards a better security order, (Quincy Institute, 2024), 4.

[27]Such as the G7 and G20, as well a range of regional and sub-regional organisations like the AU, the EU and in Africa sub-regional organisations like ECOWAS and SADC, or others such as the Lake Chad Basin Commission or the Liptako-Gourma Authority.

[28] Cedric de Coning, "Adaptive Peacebuilding." International Affairs 94, no. 2 (2018): 301–317. https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iix251.

CASE STUDY REVITALISING INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT TO PEACE AND LEGITIMACY IN POST-DAYTON BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

[1] Principles for Peace. Summary Messages International Commission on Inclusive Peace (ICIP) Visit to Bosnia & Herzegovina, 1.

[2] Principles for Peace. Summary Messages, 1.

[3] Principles for Peace. Summary Messages, 1.

[4] Jasmin Hasić and Ylatko Dizdarević, Stakeholder Consultation Report: Bosnia and Herzegovina, 17–18. Cf. UNFPA, Promente, and IPSOS, Survey on Youth Emigration in Bosnia and Hercegovina: A Research Report (August 2021), which documents motivations to escape socio-political insecurity, un/underemployment, lack of learning opportunities, and youth policies/services/security initiatives.

[5] Principles for Peace, Summary Messages ICIP Visit to Bosnia & Herzegovina, 1.

[6] International Crisis Group, Bosnia and Herzegovina: Deterring Disintegration,27 January 2022. https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/balkans/bosnia-and-herzegovina/bosnia-and-herzegovina-deterring-disintegration.

[7] Across the region, survey respondents see unemployment as the top challenge facing young people. Regional Cooperation Council, Balkan Barometer 2021 Public Opinion Analytical Report (RCC, 2021), 31. Cf. UNDP, Youth Unemployment in Bosnia and Herzegovina: How Much Rejection Can You Take? (UNDP, 2012); UNFPA, Promente, and IPSOS, Survey on Youth Emigration in Bosnia and Hercegovina (2021).

[8] International Republican Institute, Western Balkans Poll Shows Strong Support for EU, (IRI, 2020). Similarly, according to Balkan Barometer 2021, half the region's people feel insecure, with people in BiH being the most insecure. Regional Cooperation Council, Balkan Barometer 2021 Public Opinion Analytical Report (RCC, 2021), 15. A regional high of 58% of people feel threatened by firearms in their neighbourhood in BiH. (Balkan Barometer 2021, 39).

[9] Transparency International, Global Corruption Index (2012 – 2020). BiH dropped roughly 40 places down Transparency International's global corruption rankings in the period 2012 – 2020.

[10] International Republican Institute, Western Balkans Poll, 2020.

[11] European Commission, Bosnia and Herzegovina 2021 Report. According to this assessment, in BiH just 3.7% of mayors were women: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/bosnia-and-herzegovina-report-2021_en

[12] Council of Europe, Violence against Women in Politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Council of Europe, 2019). 60% of women in politics in BiH have experienced a form of violence in politics.

[13] Patrick Wintour, "Bosnia Is in Danger of Breaking Up, Warns EU's Top Official in the State," The Guardian, November 2, 2021, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/nov/02/bosnia-is-in-danger-of-breaking-up-warns-eus-top-official-in-the-state. See also International Crisis Group, Grappling with Bosnia's Dual Crises, November 9, 2021. In 2021, International High Representative Christian Schmidt warned the UN that BiH is in imminent danger of breaking apart, with the 'very real' prospect of a return to conflict amid 'the greatest existential threat of the post-war period'.

[14] International Crisis Group, Bosnia and Herzegovina: Deterring Disintegration, 29.

[15] Hasić and Dizdarević, Stakeholder Consultation Report: Bosnia and Herzegovina, 11. Cf. Stipe Prlić et al., "Here Is What Bosnia Needs," Peacenet / Daniel Serwer Blog, November 7, 2021; Jasmin Mujanović, Hunger and Fury: The Crisis of Democracy in the Western Balkans (Hurst, 2018), 49; Daniel Kanin, "What Will Trigger the Next Balkan Conflict? – OpEd," Eurasia Review, October 22, 2021.

[16] Principles for Peace. Summary Messages, 1, Hasic, Jasmin, and Ylatko Dizdarevic. Stakeholder Consultation Report: Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2.

[17] Principles for Peace. Summary Messages, 1, Hasic, Jasmin, and Ylatko Dizdarevic. Stakeholder Consultation Report: Bosnia and Herzegovina, 6, 10, 11.

[18] Hasić and Dizdarević, Stakeholder Consultation Report: Bosnia and Herzegovina, 3.

[19] Hasić and Dizdarević, Stakeholder Consultation Report: Bosnia and Herzegovina, 113, 140.

[20] Hasić and Dizdarević, Stakeholder Consultation Report: Bosnia and Herzegovina, 113, 140; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), "Thousands of Bosnian Coal Miners Protest Against Lower Wages," November 23, 2021.

[21]In many contexts, challenging the interests of elites too rapidly or directly predictably triggers renewed violence – as happened with the assassination of the reformist Serbian leader Zoran Đinđić by reactionary interests in 2003.

[22] Cf. International Crisis Group, Grappling with Bosnia's Dual Crises, November 9, 2021, 32. 'In exchange for putting breakaway plans on hold, Western powers should offer to support an internationally sponsored process, involving the Republika Srpska, to redefine the Bosnian state and revise the constitution after next year's elections.'

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT & IMPRINT

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was made possible by generous support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark and the Federal Foreign Office of Germany. Contributors to this report included Larry Attree, Cedric de Coning (NUPI), Borja Paladini-Adell, Jan Pospisil (Peacerep), Anne Bennett (DCAF), and Briahna Tandoh (IEP), with Raisa Rahman, Augusta Nannerini, Danielle Levi, Elio Azar, and Antonia Salathé. The report was prepared under the direction and management of Hiba Qasas, Keith Krause, Peter Bachelor, and Roberto Paganini. The report was edited and coordinated by Larry Attree and Farrah Hawana with editorial support from Eliza Urwin and Robert Parker. Invaluable feedback was provided on draft versions by Jago Salmon, Timothy Sisk, Roger Mac Ginty, Aoife McCullough, Niloy Biswas, Jama Egal, and Luisito Montalbo.

FLAGSHIP REPORT 2025
PRINCIPLES FOR PEACE

Publisher

Principles for Peace Foundation
Maison de la Paix
2 Chemin Eugène-Rigot
CP 1672
1211 Geneva 1
Switzerland

principlesforpeace.org

info@principlesforpeace.org

Office Mailing Addresss
Chemin Eugène-Rigot 2A
CP 1672
1211 Geneva 1
Switzerland

Responsible for Editorial Content:
Larry Attree, Senior Adviser, Keith Krause, Chief Policy Adviser,
and Peter Bachelor, Director of Partnerships, Principles for Peace

Contributors and Editorial Team: Contributors: Larry Attree, Cedric de Coning (NUPI), Farrah Hawana, Borja Paladini-Adell, Jan Pospisil (Peacerep), Anne Bennett (DCAF), and Briahna Tandoh (IEP), with Raisa Rahman, Augusta Nannerini, Danielle Levi, Elio Azar, and Antonia Salathé. Direction and project management: Hiba Qasas, Keith Krause, Peter Bachelor and Roberto Paganini. Invaluable feedback was provided on draft versions by Eliza Urwin, Jago Salmon, Timothy Sisk, Roger Mac Ginty, Aoife McCullough and Niloy Biswas.

Copy Editing and Coordination:

Farrah Hawana; Robert Parker

Design Concept & Layout, Illustration:

Yasmine Cordes www.Sketchworks.de

Date of Publication: September 2025 | 1st Edition

Funding Partners: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark and the Federal Foreign Office of Germany

Download:
This publication is also available as a free PDF
at principlesforpeace.org/publications/

Principles for Peace is a Swiss foundation pursuing a purpose of public interest.
We are registered under the Federal Supervisory Authority for Foundations.
Our audited financial statements can be found on our website.

PRINCIPLES *for* PEACE

PRINCIPLES FOR PEACE | MAISON DE LA PAIX | 2 CHEMIN EUGÈNE-RIGOT | CH-1202 GENEVA | SWITZERLAND
INFO@PRINCIPLESFORPEACE.ORG
WWW.PRINCIPLESFORPEACE.ORG