



## Learning from Failure: How to Prevent Civil War Recurrence

### Executive summary

A third of civil wars recur within five years of a peace accord, and ninety per cent of the civil wars in the first decade of the 21st century occurred in countries that had experienced a previous conflict. Funded by the United States Institute of Peace, the Learning from Failure project explored how to prevent the resumption of large-scale conflict-related violence after the conclusion of a peace accord. Deploying a variety of methods to investigate peace processes worldwide, we found that conflict recurrence can be prevented through:

- carefully designed and implemented peace accords;
- mediation that is perceived as legitimate and neutral;
- provisions for the inclusion of women in post-conflict societies.

This is because they create multi-level coalitions committed to maintaining and implementing the accord. They build on pre-existing networks and context-specific mechanisms to provide early warning for localised tensions and devise context-appropriate adaptive actions.

Testing these findings on a larger set of agreements beyond protracted peace processes, we observe that UN-led mediation and provisions for the inclusion of women in post-conflict societies help prevent civil war recurrence more generally. In other words, the presence of both conditions in the negotiation and implementation of 'first agreements', too, contributes to preventing a subsequent relapse into violence.

### Policy recommendations

1. Our analysis established that the provisions included peace agreements have an important impact on ending civil war recurrence and seem to outweigh contextual factors. Therefore, conflict recurrence can be prevented through carefully designed and managed war-to-peace transitions that address the needs of the warring parties and the conflict-affected societies.
2. The inclusion of women in post-conflict society should be prioritised. Such provisions limit the risk of recurrence by making the needs and experiences of previously marginalised groups visible, on the basis of which they can then be acknowledged and addressed. This helps foster broader ownership of the peace process and its aftermath, thereby increasing its sustainability.
3. Relationships and interactions between different actors at the local, state, and international levels are crucial in nurturing peace and preventing civil war recurrence. Practitioners can nurture peace by fostering multiple flexible and cooperative relationships between actors invested in building peace, particularly a wide range of diverse stakeholders at the local level.
4. Leveraging these relationships, practitioners can prevent civil war recurrence by responding to locally specific challenges with swift and incremental adaptive action in cooperation with local actors, reflecting their needs and strengthening their capacity over time to ensure the sustainability of locally

owned processes of conflict prevention in the aftermath of civil wars.

### About the research

Research has given considerably less attention to the prevention of conflict recurrence than to the onset, incidence, and duration of civil violence. Moreover, the limited existing evidence on conflict recurrence is inconclusive and cumulatively contradictory. The Learning from Failure project focused on answering an overarching question: How can the resumption of widespread conflict-related violence after a peace accord be prevented? We developed an innovative Multi-Stage Mixed Methods Approach to generate hypotheses and test them through original empirical data and carefully sequenced methodologies, including supervised machine learning, regression analysis, survival analysis, congruence analysis, and elite interviews with negotiators, mediators, case study experts, and practitioners. We examined evidence from large-scale datasets of global peace agreements, as well as from fourteen peace processes that experienced conflict relapses but ultimately ended violence through a negotiated settlement: Aceh, Angola, Bougainville, Burundi, Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, Madagascar, Mali, Myanmar, Sierra Leone and the four conflicts between the Philippines government and the Moro National Liberation Front, the National Democratic Front, the Cordillera People's Liberation Army, and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front.

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