



Focus #7: Case Studies

Lessons from the preceding issue briefs are highlighted in case studies around the world.

Prevention

The peaceful overthrow of Sudan's longtime autocrat Omar al-Bashir, in 2019, highlights non-violent resistance and crosscutting cleavages. Despite the country's ethnic divisions, which had spawned multiple civil wars since the 1950s, pro-democracy campaigners successfully forged a crosscutting movement. They expressed clear demands and then engaged in sustained peaceful protests, sparking some violent retaliation but ultimately persuading the state's security services to switch sides (Zunes, 2019). The U.S. government previously had backed Sudanese rebels diplomatically or militarily in civil wars that had killed millions – in Darfur, South Kordofan, Blue Nile, and the country's south – on the assumption that rebellion was the only path to liberation. However, the revolution of 2019 demonstrated that nonviolent resistance sometimes can achieve more, and at lower human cost, even in an ethnically divided society confronting a ruthless autocrat.

The neighboring country of South Sudan illustrates how technological innovation can address rumors to prevent violence. An international NGO, the Sentinel Project, sponsored a local initiative called Hagiga Wahid ("One Truth"), enabling residents to submit by text message rumors of inter-group violence (Green, 2020). Local authorities and community representatives then investigate, and if a rumor is disproved, a correction is immediately texted to subscribers. However, if a rumor is confirmed, the group first contacts local officials to implement mitigation measures, and only then informs subscribers.

Key Points

- Prevention strategies are illustrated in three recent cases: the peaceful overthrow of Sudan's longtime dictator; a text-based project to address rumors of violence in South Sudan; and inter-ethnic peace committees in Nigeria.
- Peace processes and constitutional design challenges are explored in four cases: Northern Ireland, where confidential negotiations facilitated a peace deal; Lebanon and Burundi, where constitutions struggled to reduce the salience of ethnic identity; and Nepal, where power-sharing had to be expanded to avert resurgent war.
- Peacebuilding failure is exemplified by three cases – Angola, Mozambique, and Colombia – where inadequate reintegration of former rebels led to resurgent fighting.

Nigeria demonstrates the potential of inter-ethnic peace committees to prevent violence via joint inquiry and in-group policing. In the country's central plateau, farmers and herders sporadically compete violently over scarce land, and in 2018 this caused 1,800 deaths in just six months. Volunteers responded by forming inter-ethnic patrols, which mediated local disputes before they could escalate, and apprehended alleged perpetrators to avert cycles of revenge attacks (Bearak, 2018).

Peace Processes and Constitutional Design

Northern Ireland highlights confidential mediation, third-party security guarantees, and power-sharing. The violence between Catholics pursuing secession from the United Kingdom, and Protestants opposing it, reached a stalemate in the early 1970s, creating ripeness for negotiations. Confidential mediation then enabled the insurgents' representative in 1993 to accept a compromise behind closed doors that he previously had rejected in public. The United States also helped overcome mutual distrust by serving as a third-party guarantor to forge the 1998 Good Friday peace agreement, which utilized power-sharing to further alleviate fear (Clarke and Paul, 2014).

Lebanon illuminates the challenge of designing constitutions for conflict management. The country's electoral system had included both power-sharing quotas for legislative seats, and centripetal multi-sectarian voting districts to incentivize politicians to campaign across sect lines. However, this latter provision eventually caused grievance among Christians who resented that elections for "their" seats could be swayed by Muslim voters. Accordingly, Christian legislators joined with similarly upset Shiites in a parliamentary committee, voting to eliminate the centripetal mechanism (Wood, 2013). This underscores how power-sharing may reinforce the salience of separate identities, thereby hindering other constitutional efforts to forge a unified national identity.

Burundi's 2005 constitution, which helped end a genocidal civil war, combined power-sharing quotas with a requirement that political parties run multi-ethnic lists of candidates. The latter provision reduced the ethnic nature of parties, so that political competition could focus more on crosscutting issues (Kuperman, 2015b). However, in 2018, the ruling party spearheaded a constitutional reform eliminating some power-sharing provisions without adding centripetal ones, so ethnic politics may yet resurge (McCulloch and Vandeginste, 2019).

Nepal provides lessons about peace processes, spoilers, and constitutional design. A 2006 deal to end a ten-year civil war was based on transitional power-sharing between ethnic minority political parties and Maoist rebels, who together were to rule by consensus. However, the deal excluded the ethnic majority Madhesi, who reacted by launching their own rebellion. These new spoilers were mollified by amending the constitution to increase Madhesi representation and then transition to majority rule (Falch and Miklian, 2008). Nepal demonstrates how peace talks sometimes are expedited by including only the most powerful factions, but this may create need for more inclusive participation at a later stage.

Peacebuilding

Angola shows that quick post-war elections can be especially dangerous, and underscores the need for transitional power-sharing, security guarantees, and strategies to address spoilers (Stedman, 1997). The country's civil war erupted in 1975 and killed tens of thousands prior to a 1991 peace deal. However, when the former rebels lost the first election in 1992, they refused to accept the outcome. The United States failed to coerce these spoilers and instead pressured the government to appease them. When that misguided U.S. effort failed, violence reignited, killing more Angolans in the 10 years after the election than the 17 years of preceding war.

Mozambique illustrates how such election fragility may persist if former rebels are insufficiently reintegrated. The country's war ignited in 1977 and ostensibly ended in 1992, when the government and rebels signed a peace agreement. However, in 2009, when the ex-rebel candidate garnered only 16 percent of the presidential vote, he resumed fighting (Allison, 2014). The new violence was far less deadly, killing only dozens, but compelled the government to negotiate, which boosted the ex-rebels at the polls. This underscores that peacebuilding must provide former combatants better opportunities in civil society than they perceive in returning to war.

Colombia highlights many peacebuilding lessons, including about security guarantees and transitional justice. The country's civil war persisted for half a century and killed more than 200,000. In 2016, the main rebel group signed a peace agreement, earning Colombia's president the Nobel Peace Prize. However, in the absence of a third-party guarantor, the government reneged on its pledges to provide infrastructure and security in rebel areas, and 500 community activists were killed, reigniting local grievances. The peace deal also failed to provide substantial power-sharing, so when the ex-rebels lost elections, they perceived more to gain from resuming violence. The country's new president compounded this problem by prematurely calling to revoke amnesty and prosecute former rebels. By 2019, more than 40 percent of the ex-rebels had remobilized, and the renewed fighting had displaced over 200,000 civilians (Casey, 2019).