Special Issue

Triangulating Peace: How Adversaries Build Sustainable Peace through Negotiated Settlements[1]

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How do adversaries build sustainable peace through negotiated settlements? The last few decades of conflict resolution efforts across the globe have provided us with an extensive body of knowledge and experience on pathways out of protracted and seemingly unsolvable armed conflicts. In this study, we set out to discuss more precisely how this transformation can come about. We do so by exploring three important turning points on the path from war to peace: the opening of negotiations, the reaching of peace agreements, and the establishment of durable peace. We depart from a triangular model of conflict resolution, which suggests that there are three dimensions to all conflicts, each of which must be transformed or managed to achieve sustainable peace: the conflict issues at stake, the parties' violent conflict behavior, and their contentious conflict attitudes. Illustrative examples from twelve cases of conflict resolution are provided. The primary intended audience for this study is peace practitioners who are struggling to address and resolve protracted civil wars.

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Introduction

When people are in the midst of a protracted war, they commonly see the armed conflict as everlasting and never-ending. Yet, all wars do end at some point, and former enemies live together in some kind of peace. In this study, we set out to discuss more precisely *how*. Specifically, this study aims to address the overarching question of how adversaries build sustainable peace through negotiated settlements. We do so by exploring three important turning points on the path from war to peace: the opening of negotiations, the reaching of peace agreements, and the establishment of durable peace. We examine these turning points with illustrative examples from twelve cases of conflict resolution that have had movement along this spectrum. In this respect, the conflict resolution attempts all "worked," but with variations in outcomes. In some cases, the conflict parties signed peace agreements that ended the war. In other cases, the parties signed peace agreements but some conflict issues remained unresolved, violence resurfaced, or perceptions of fear, injustice, and insecurity continued to be widespread. In other words, the agreement did not fully resolve the armed conflict or result in a sustainable peace. In yet other situations, the main protagonists at the peace talks are still trying to resolve the conflict or have returned to the armed struggle. This study seeks to illustrate why negotiations resolved some conflicts fully or partially and in other cases they did not.

The primary intended audience for this study is local, national, or international practitioners who are struggling to address and resolve protracted civil wars. While it is something of a truism that all armed conflicts are unique and display a particular combination of challenges and opportunities, we believe that research over the last few decades has produced some general insights into peacemaking that are worthy of consideration (e.g., Zartman 1995; Crocker et. al. 1999; Stedman et. al. 2002; Wallensteen 2019). While this article highlights some of that research, it does not present a review of the state of the art in the field of conflict resolution. For this purpose, we recommend consulting one of many comprehensive overviews on the subject (e.g., Zartman and Vuković 2023). Nor does this article provide any novel or original empirical findings. Instead, we primarily seek to address the gap between research findings on the one hand, and policy and practice on the other.

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Along several other scholarly contributions (e.g., Greig and Diehl 2012; Vuković 2014), this study conceptualizes negotiation outcomes at different stages of the peacemaking process. Following Vuković (2014), we suggest a three-fold outcome measurement: getting the parties to commit to a process, signing a formal agreement, and ensuring the endurance of that agreement. By illustrating that most real-world cases of peacemaking have experienced progress in some respect and at some stage of the process—while also experiencing setbacks and challenges that may undermine or reverse previous gains—the discussion can contribute to the debate on reconceptualizing "success" in the study of peacemaking (Palmiano Federer et al. 2025). In line with Höglund and Söderberg Kovacs (2010), we believe that by employing a more nuanced tool of analysis, we gain both a sharper and more accurate analysis of realities on the ground and a more pragmatic way to prioritize post-war resources and support. Our analytical point of departure is a triangular model of conflict resolution, suggesting that there are three dimensions to conflicts that each must be transformed or managed to establish sustainable peace. We explore the extent to which the peace negotiations were able to address these three dimensions of conflict—the conflict issues at stake, the violent conflict behavior, and the parties with their contentious conflict attitudes—and explore *how* changes in these three dimensions were brought about.

This article is structured as follows. First, we present the core analytical lens through which we explore these cases: a model of conflict resolution grounded in conflict theory. In the second and main part, we present a summary of the findings from the comparative analysis of the twelve cases. This section is divided into three main parts: getting to the table, reaching an agreement, and establishing sustainable peace. The final section presents our conclusions together with some thoughts on how these historical insights are applicable and relevant to contemporary conflict patterns and peacemaking practice.

Analytical Point of Departure: Triangulating Peace

While this article primarily provides illustrations from a range of case studies, the analysis is guided by an understanding of conflict resolution grounded in conflict theory. In his seminal work, Johan Galtung (1969) depicts social conflicts as consisting of three key elements: conflict issues, conflict behavior, and conflict attitudes. Together, these three components make up the cornerstones of the "conflict triangle." According to Galtung, the conflict issues are essentially what the conflict is all about—the incompatible claims of the conflict parties, whether a disputed claim over who should hold government power in a state

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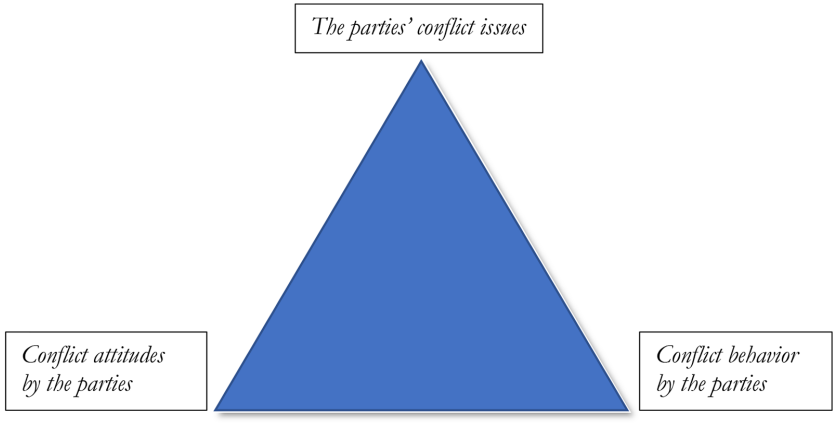
or disagreement over who should have territorial control over a piece of land. The second component, conflict behavior, refers to the many ways that the parties to the conflict pursue these issues, ranging from violent to nonviolent strategies or a combination of the two. The third and last component, conflict attitudes, is meant to capture the psychological states or conditions—feelings, emotions, perceptions—that develop between the parties during the course of the conflict. According to Galtung (1969), these three components interact and reinforce each other in dynamic escalatory or de-escalatory processes.

Subsequent academic contributions have suggested various adjustments and revisions to this approach, while often retaining the core idea that conflicts are multidimensional and a thorough conflict analysis should reflect this complexity. In line with some researchers (e.g., Wallensteen 2019), we place greater emphasis on analyzing these aspects from the point of view of the primary parties to the conflict at the expense of a broader social analysis of the conflict dynamics at work.

According to Wallensteen, conflict resolution efforts should reflect this complexity by assuring that "the conflicting parties enter into an agreement that solves their central incompatibilities, accept each other's continued existence as parties, and cease all violent action against each other" (Wallensteen 2019: 8). We use this conceptual lens for analyzing the conflict resolution models used in our selected cases. We ask if and how the conflict resolution model addressed the parties' conflict issues, conflict behavior, and conflict attitudes. In doing so, we are also inspired by the work of Höglund and Söderberg Kovacs (2010), who suggest that the quality of peace in a society can be analyzed based on the three key

Figure 1
The Conflict Triangle adopted from Galtung (1969).



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dimensions of Galtung's conflict triangle, using its core components as guiding indicators of the relative absence or presence of peace in post-war societies.

What are the implications of this reasoning for the peace process? When it comes to the conflict issues at hand, the parties need to find ways to agree on how to accommodate seemingly incompatible claims through institutional or procedural arrangements. They must find ways to resolve or live with the conflict issues. The parties can resolve their differences either by dividing contested resources or sharing control over such resources. Consequently, different forms of mechanisms for sharing political, military, governmental, or economic power, or for dividing land or resources, can be used to settle conflicts. When parties cannot agree on how to resolve a conflict, they may instead agree on procedural mechanisms that allow for parties to manage disagreement, such as holding elections or referendums.

The parties also need to end direct, physical violence as a means to pursue their political objectives. This includes the establishment of various transitional security arrangements (such as temporary or local ceasefires, joint patrols, and humanitarian corridors) for the purpose of decreasing violence and building trust, and eventually procedures for final security arrangements, including the disarmament and demobilization of armed groups and individuals as well as demilitarization of society at large. It is important to note that while violent behavior may cease to exist between the primary parties, it may transform and manifest in other ways. The ceasing of large-scale violence between the primary parties does not necessarily mean that all violence ends. Research has demonstrated that violence may continue but in other constellations, including criminal violence and gender-based violence.

In contrast to interstate conflicts, where parties can withdraw from their contentious relationship after the war's end, parties in civil wars need to continue to live side-by-side—to accept each other's continued existence as parties. The mutual recognition of armed non-state groups that have challenged the state's legitimacy and governments that view such groups as terrorists or criminals is fundamental to conflict resolution. For this reason, many peace agreements include various forms of transitional justice, accountability mechanisms, and reconciliation efforts. Focusing on the parties requires attention not only to changes between parties but also within parties—including the transformation of armed actors into political parties—as well as to the role of civil society.

Methodological Approach

This article presents a summary of the findings from an extensive comparative case study that was conducted as a part of a larger research

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project (Palmiano Federer et al. 2025). Nine cases were the same for all studies: Guatemala–URNG 1996, Bangladesh–JSS/SB 1997, Philippines–MNLF 1996, Northern Ireland–PIRA 1998, Angola–UNITA 2002, Sudan–SPLM/A 2005, France–FNL 1962, Colombia–FARC 2016, and South Africa–ANC 1993.[2] For the purpose of our study, we also selected three additional cases: the peace process in Sri Lanka between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the early 2000s, the ongoing peace talks in Thailand between the government and the non-state armed movement in the deep south of the country, and the most recent peace agreement in the Philippines between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in 2014.

While all twelve cases involve negotiation processes, their outcomes differ. In Northern Ireland, Angola, Colombia, and South Africa, the negotiated settlements are generally considered to have resolved the conflicts at stake, resulting in some kind of durable peace settlement. The peace agreement with the MILF, although more recent, is also looking promising. In Guatemala, Bangladesh, Sudan, France/Algeria, and Philippines/MNLF, the parties also signed peace agreements but the outcomes were less stable, either due to shortcomings in the agreements' implementation or the emergence of new conflict issues or renewed violence. In Sri Lanka, the peace negotiations broke down and the parties went back to the armed struggle and the LTTE was eventually militarily defeated. In Thailand, the parties have initiated negotiations, but these have not yet yielded any result in terms of a peace agreement. In this study, we leverage these differences, as well as within-case differences over time, to identify trends and patterns on the road to peace.

The cases also demonstrate considerable variation in the type of resolution reached, for example, how the issues, behaviors, and parties were addressed, and in how a solution was reached, including mediation approaches and the design of negotiation processes. This variation was leveraged in our study for analytical purposes. Using a comparative approach, this study examined the conditions associated with the transformation toward peace at three phases of peace negotiations: coming to the table, at the table, and after reaching a peace settlement. For the empirical analysis, we primarily drew on secondary sources and material by academic experts on these cases. In some cases, news sources from major media outlets and organizational reports were also used. While the full study included an analysis of the twelve cases and a comparative analysis, this article presents only the main findings with illustrative examples from the cases.

Getting to the Table: Why Parties Initiate Peace Negotiations

In this section, we discuss why the parties in our cases initiated peace negotiations. The key question is: How do conflict resolution processes

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come about? There is a substantial field of research on the conditions for "getting to the table." Previous research has long recognized that there are certain moments in the dynamics of conflicts that are more conducive than others for incentivizing warring parties to consider alternatives to armed conflict. There is a rich debate on what this ripeness entails, how it can be recognized, and what implications this provides for would-be third party peacemakers (e.g., Zartman 1985; Haass 1988; Kleiboer 1994; Mitchell 1995; Pruitt 1997; Greig 2001; Vuković 2021). What were the enabling structural conditions in the cases under study? Based on the comparative analysis, we identified three key factors that stood out across the cases: mutually hurting stalemates, regional shifts beyond a conflict country, and leadership changes.

Realizing the Limits of Violent Conflict Behavior. Peace agreements are never the first priority of conflict parties. As long as both parties believe that they will be able to achieve their wartime objectives through military means, they are unlikely to commit to a negotiated process to resolve the conflict. In order to seriously consider an alternative path, the parties need to conclude that it is no longer feasible to reach their goals through the use of arms. Furthermore, they need to perceive the current stalemate as unsustainable, with potentially higher costs down the road. Such a situation, what Zartman (1995) calls a "mutually hurting stalemate," is a structural condition that incentivizes parties to move an armed conflict toward a negotiated settlement. The first step for seeking a negotiated settlement stems from the parties' perceived inability to make progress through their current conflict behavior alone, and not a change of heart regarding the most optimal means to reach their wartime objectives. The textbook example of a mutually hurting stalemate occurs when both parties have used the maximum of their capabilities without reaching their desired results. This peak of conflict intensity provides the parties with strong incentives to seek a negotiated settlement.

The Sri Lankan case is an illustrative case in point. The parties experienced a mutually hurting stalemate that explains the opening of the negotiations in 2002 and the parties' willingness to agree to the ceasefire agreement in 2003. The military successes of the LTTE demonstrated their capabilities and helped to convince the government of Sri Lanka about the necessity to try to find a negotiated solution. Being stuck in a costly stalemate in which neither side could prevail, the two sides became open to the idea of negotiations (Salter 2015). Many other cases in our study, however, do not fit this scenario. In Northern Ireland, the parties' perception of the futility of the armed struggle grew gradually, and the peak of the violence occurred long before the negotiations started in earnest. The case of Colombia is also illustrative of

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this delayed trajectory. But unlike the case of Northern Ireland, the Colombian conflict parties agreed to come to the table before the public at large—especially those living in urban areas largely unaffected by the conflict—was ready for this shift. Still, in both cases, the war fatigue accumulated by decades of violence provided the structural conditions needed for the parties to consider an alternative pathway.

Our study also shows that a mutually hurting stalemate is not necessarily driven by military dynamics alone. Most conflict parties also experience other types of costs associated with the conflict. For the government of Sudan, the costs were predominantly associated with being an international pariah state. Likewise, in Guatemala, the business elites wanted to repair their reputation, which was damaged through years of brutal counterinsurgency and human rights violations. This incentivized them to pressure the government to seek a political accommodation with the insurgents. Sometimes the parties come to the negotiation table primarily due to pressure from a powerful third party. For example, in Bangladesh, there was pressure from India on both parties to seek the negotiations that eventually resulted in the 1997 peace agreement (Adnan 2008).

But external pressure alone is not a long-term strategy. In some of the most sustainable negotiation processes that we studied, the parties realized that prolonged conflict would almost certainly bring even greater costs to bear. This mutual perception helped the parties remain committed to the negotiation process even in the face of severe challenges and backlashes. In the negotiations between the government of the Philippines and the MILF, representatives from both parties noted a gradual realization by their negotiation teams that it was "now or never." While the MILF constituted by far the largest insurgency in Mindanao at the start of the negotiations and during subsequent decades of peace talks, there was a growing perception within the group that its days were numbered. More extremist Islamist groups, some with transnational connections, were actively recruiting young soldiers from the ranks of the MILF. Most MILF leaders had spent nearly 40 years in the bush at the time of the final peace talks and were unlikely to survive a return to full-scale warfare. Likewise, the government was eager to strike a deal with the only remaining Moro insurgency group with broad-based legitimacy that was not listed as a terrorist organization and could constitute a key ally in dealing with the proliferation of more radical factions in the region (Söderberg Kovacs, Höglund, and Jiménez 2021).

Importantly, the mutually hurting stalemate also needs to be maintained over time. Several of our cases demonstrated that changing circumstances on the ground undermined the parties' perceptions. This can have detrimental consequences for the negotiation process or its

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aftermath. For example, while the military stalemate on the ground in Sri Lanka pressed the government and the LTTE to come to the negotiation table and eventually sign a ceasefire agreement in 2003, the mutual perception of ripeness soon vanished due to a gradual shift in the parties' military capabilities. The government was able to strengthen its forces—thanks in no small measure to increasing support from its eastern allies—while the insurgents grew weaker, at least partly due to an internal split in the movement and the international proscription of the LTTE as a terrorist organization (Sørbø et al. 2011).

Finally, there are not only push factors behind the opening of peace negotiations. Mutually enticing opportunities can also play a role. For example, in the Northern Ireland peace process, EU integration opened the door to a future where regional economic development was prioritized and national borders were made less relevant. Similarly, the willingness of external countries (such as European countries, Japan, and the U.S.) to provide increasing support to Sri Lanka if the conflict parties agreed on a negotiated settlement provided a powerful and tantalizing carrot motivating the parties to engage in negotiations in 2002 (Sørbø et al. 2011).

De-escalation of Regional Conflict Dynamics. Shifting regional dynamics was another catalyst for the initiation of peace negotiations in the cases we studied. Changing relationships between neighboring countries can provide the context needed to open up space for a peace process in a conflict linked to regional conflict dynamics. Regional and global political rivalries often are reflected in countries' support of different sides in civil wars. In several of the cases we studied, both governments and non-state armed groups received support from regional neighbors, which was established through ethnic or religious kinship ties, historical legacies, or economic or strategic links.

Notably, several of the armed conflicts included in this study were strongly affected by Cold War dynamics. When the Soviet Union fell, it opened up possibilities for resolving several protracted armed conflicts around the globe, contributing to the peak in peace agreements signed in the early 1990s. In South Africa, the end of the Cold War fundamentally changed the power dynamics. The ANC lost the support from the Soviet Union on which it had relied, and the government could no longer use the threat of communism to mobilize against the anti-apartheid movement. Perhaps even more important was the emergence of independent neighboring states under Black majority rule across Southern Africa—Namibia, Zimbabwe, Angola, and Mozambique—which reinforced the government's perception that time was running out for white minority governments in the region (e.g., Ohlson and Stedman 1994; Ohlson 1998).

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In Sudan, closer collaboration between the countries in the Horn of Africa, organized by the intergovernmental organization IGAD, undermined the external backing that both parties had previously received from regional neighbors. Similarly, the changing relationship between Bangladesh and India paved the way for the start of the peace process in the Chittagong Hills Tract region. The government under the Bangladesh Awami League (BAL) had closer ties with the Indian government and less baggage in terms of historical animosity, which helped to improve the interstate relationship (Adnan 2008). In Colombia, the development of improved relationships between the government and some of the neighboring leftist governments that supported the FARC—notably Cuba, Venezuela, and Ecuador—was key to the opening of constructive pre-negotiations between the conflict parties in 2011 (Gamboa 2018).

Leadership Changes within the Parties. A third key structural condition for the onset of peace talks in our cases was change in the leadership of the conflict parties. Governments that go to war against armed opposition groups often have great difficulties in reversing their wartime policies. The decision to initiate political negotiations often requires a power shift in domestic politics. It is easier for new parties or new leaders to de-link the government from previous commitments and carry out important policy shifts. General de Gaulle in France defied all expectations when soon after coming to power, he broke with the hawkish line against the Algerian guerillas, opening up negotiations and holding a referendum on the status of the territory (Arnold 1995). Similarly, when Tony Blair replaced John Mayor as the UK's prime minister, the peace process in Northern Ireland was reinvigorated. Blair made the settlement of the conflict one of his key priorities. As a pro-European politician, he was much more open to anchoring a potential settlement in a larger EU framework. As leader of the Labour Party, Blair also had closer ideological connections to the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) in Northern Ireland. John Hume, then the leader of the SDLP, was for his part instrumental in the formulation of a new political discourse within the republican movement (de Chastelain 1999). In Colombia, it was the election of President Santos in 2010 that laid the ground for the government's policy shift in regard to negotiations with the FARC (Ortiz 2021). In Sudan, a key factor in the initiation of negotiations was the split between al-Bashir and the radical Islamists in December 1999, which allowed al-Bashir political space to shift the government's policy toward the South and enter into negotiations with SPLM/A (Rolandsen 2011).

Leadership changes in non-state armed groups are generally less frequent than government changes. However, when they occur, they also can play a key role in the onset of peace talks. For example, the

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coming to power of Chairman Murad in 2003 is generally considered key to understanding MILF's increasing pragmatism and its commitment toward a negotiated solution (e.g., Taya 2007). In Colombia, the emergence of Timochenko as leader of the FARC in 2011 has been seen as important for understanding the group's willingness to pursue a negotiated solution (e.g., Gutiérrez 2020).

Getting to an Agreement: Why Parties Reach Agreements

In this section, we take a closer look at some of the micro-dynamics at work at the negotiation table. The key guiding question is: Why do negotiating parties sometimes reach peace agreements while at other times they do not? What were the modalities or mechanisms that appear to have worked well in terms of moving the process forward toward a settlement? There is an extensive body of research exploring the conditions under which parties in armed conflict resolve their issues through negotiation (e.g., Wallensteen and Svensson 2014; Zartman and Vuković 2023). In our study, we identified three factors, drawn from this literature, which appeared particularly important across the cases in "getting to an agreement": an inclusive negotiation process, the presence of trust-building mechanisms, and a sequencing that prioritizes the resolution of issues prior to agreeing on a permanent ceasefire.

Inclusive Negotiation Processes. It has been well established in the literature that the inclusion of a broader set of actors in the negotiation process, not least from civil society, is a crucial factor for bringing about sustainable peace agreements (e.g., Lanz 2011; Nilsson 2012; Paffenholz 2014; Palmiano Federer 2023). In the cases we studied, civil society actors were often able to bring important issues to the table that were not prioritized by the main parties and in this way, their inclusion improved the quality of the agreements reached. For example, in Guatemala, civil society actors ensured that issues pertaining to human rights violations and accountability were brought to the table (Sieder and Wilson 1997). In Colombia, civil society actors initiated the invitation of victims' delegations to meet with the negotiating parties in Havana in preparation for the peace process agreement on victims of conflict (Brett 2022). Women's organizations were also essential in shaping both the gender balance in the party delegations and the formation of a gender subcommittee whose specific purpose was to ensure a gender perspective on the content of the peace agreements (Phelan and True 2022). Civil society actors were occasionally also able to reinvigorate stalled negotiation processes through the organizing of more informal meeting spaces. This was the case during the critical impasse in the negotiation process in the Philippines between the government and the MILF after the breakdown of the 2008 agreement.

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The inclusion of non-warring actors can also increase the legitimacy of both the process and the agreement among the population at large and help with strategic communication to the public at critical moments of the process. In both Northern Ireland and South Africa, the negotiation processes include the countries' major political parties. Their inclusion is based on the idea that if the negotiation forums were broadly representative of the political spectrum at large, this would increase the legitimacy and acceptance of the process among the population. This was at least partly a reflection of the fact that the negotiations in both countries involved constitutional issues. As such, it was considered critical to have as many as possible on board and included in the decision-making.

Another, yet interrelated, issue concerns intransigent actors with the power to spoil an agreement (e.g., Stedman 1997). By bringing such actors on board, the negotiation processes generally appear to become more resilient to attempts at counter-mobilization. For example, one of the major concerns in the peace process in South Africa was the resistance to a deal from actors who feared being left out or marginalized in a post-apartheid state under ANC-led majority rule. This included actors from the white far right, the Conservative Party (CP), and Black "homeland" leaders on the one hand, and the Pan-African Congress (PAC) and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) on the other. Some of these actors also held the violent capital needed to undermine any peace deal reached. As such, the government and the ANC worked tirelessly to bring as many of these critics as possible into the negotiations. Although costly and time-consuming, it may have been a precondition for getting a peace deal on the table (e.g., Friedman and Atkinson 1994). In contrast, the Bengali-speaking settler community in Bangladesh, representing around half of the region's population, was excluded from the Chittagong Hill Tract (CHT) peace negotiations in the mid-1990s. That their concerns were not addressed can partly explain why this community actively mobilized against the peace settlement once it was announced. Their exclusion probably also contributed to the negative public opinion of the peace deal held by the majority Bengali community outside the CHT region (e.g., Yasmin 2014; Chakma 2018).

But the principle of inclusivity also has clear boundaries, which has been highlighted in more recent scholarly work demonstrating the limits and risks associated with inclusion as the prevailing norm (Hellmüller 2022; Palmiano Federer 2023). In Algeria, the exclusion of the most radical French settlers was critical in opening up the possibility for an agreement. The settlers' movement, through its armed wing, had discredited itself through its participation in a coup attempt and terrorist attacks in France (Connelly 2003). In Guatemala, extensive civil society

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consultations increased the legitimacy of the negotiation process. But it also created blurred accountability for decision-making. For example, an ambitious reform program of socioeconomic structures was agreed on, but there were no actors on board with enough political clout to implement it, which created considerable frustration down the road (Lund 2003). In some negotiation processes in our study, the parties found ways to balance the potential dilemma between efficacy and legitimacy (Jarstad and Sisk 2008). For example, the negotiation process in South Africa was able both to optimize the advantages of an elite-driven process and assure broad-based representation around the table. The ANC and the NP met in bilateral forums at key strategic moments to agree on critical principles or to break impasses but convened broad-based multiparty forums to discuss and deliberate, and eventually decide on, the major constitutional issues at stake. In addition, the decision-making principle during the multiparty forums was "sufficient consensus," which required the support of a majority of the majority community and a majority of the minority community to reach agreement. Essentially, this required unity between the ANC and the NP to move the process forward (Friedman and Atkinson 1994). In a similar fashion, the All-Party Forum in Northern Ireland, which provided for a wide representation of both civil society actors and political parties, also proceeded on the basis of sufficient consensus. In this way, not everyone at the table had to agree to everything, and the process insulated itself from veto players on both sides (de Chastelain 1999).

Inclusivity is not only a question of gaining a seat at the table, but also a matter of meaningful influence over the process (e.g., Paffenholz et al. 2016). In the South African process, many efforts were made for all parties to feel that their voice mattered, such as the use of a rotating chairmanship during sessions of the multiparty talks. In addition, the NP and the ANC made sure that each delegation achieved small wins at the table, in an attempt to build trust for more difficult concessions (Friedman and Atkinson 1994). In the peace process in Colombia, the meaningful participation of women at the negotiation table was a key guiding principle. This was reflected not only in the decision to involve women from all strata of society in the negotiation process but also by explicitly including in the accord—as a means of addressing society's structural inequalities—both a gender perspective and specific gender provisions relating to women's rights and women's participation (Phelan and True 2022).

Trust-building Mechanisms. Protracted civil wars are, by definition, associated with high levels of mistrust between the parties. For this reason, research has emphasized the importance of building trust between

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the conflict parties in negotiations (e.g., Kelman 2005; Kydd 2006; Allen 2022). This was strongly reflected in the findings from our comparative analysis. In cases where the negotiations failed to make progress or collapsed altogether, the parties were not able to overcome their inherent mutual mistrust. In contrast, in those cases where the peace talks eventually resulted in an agreement, the design of the process generally contributed to a gradual increase in trust between the parties over time, in spite of occasional backlash and crises.

One way to build trust is with the help of a third-party mediator (Kelman 2005). In the peace process between the government of the Philippines and the MILF, the Malaysian government's role as a facilitator has been recognized by both sides as critical to the trust-building between the parties that eventually resulted in the signing of the 2014 agreement. Malaysia entered the negotiation process at a time when the relationship between the parties was at an all-time low after the abandonment of the peace talks by both parties. In addition to acting as the host of the talks, the Malaysian facilitator acted as a go-between and played an important role in resolving misunderstandings and identifying ways forward (Abubakar and Askandar 2019). In Northern Ireland, U.S. Senator George Mitchell—who gained the trust of the parties and had deep local knowledge about the context of the dispute—played a key role in chairing the negotiation forum. Acting in his own personal capacity, his only leverage over the parties was the looming threat of his withdrawal (de Chastelain 1999). But trusted mediators are usually not enough to get the parties to reach agreement; usually it is necessary for mediators to put pressure on parties and use their leverage to compel them to make costly concessions. In Northern Ireland, other actors played roles that complemented Mitchell's involvement. For example, U.S. President Bill Clinton, who has Irish family roots and is connected to the Irish American community, was important in convincing the IRA to pursue the negotiations (de Chastelain 1999). This confirms that mediators do not need to be unbiased in order for them to play a constructive role (e.g., Touval 1975; Svensson 2007).

But trust can also be built by the parties themselves (Mitchell 2000). In our study, we have seen that this usually happens when the parties are ready to take costly conciliatory measures and actions—concrete steps that clearly signal they are ready to challenge internal opposition for the sake of reaching a peace deal. For example, in South Africa, the peace process was impacted by several difficult crises. One such incident was the Boipatong massacre in June 1992, when a group of unknown perpetrators—but widely suspected to be IFP supporters backed up by national security forces—attacked a hostel with ANC supporters. As a result of the violence that surged, the ANC withdrew from

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the multiparty negotiations and the relationship between the negotiating parties turned sour. Inside the ANC, there was massive opposition against continued negotiations. It was not until the NP agreed to release all remaining political prisoners, fence off a number of IFP hostels, and outlaw the carrying of so-called traditional weapons often used by IFP supporters, that bilateral talks between the parties could continue. This was seen as a major concession by the NP and restored trust between the parties (Höglund 2008). Trust can also be built by acts of reconciliation, which carry important and deep symbolic meaning. In several of our cases, gestures of goodwill were important in communicating to the wider public a change of political direction and in preparing them for a future settlement. ANC leader Nelson Mandela made numerous such symbolic gestures and statements throughout the negotiation process in South Africa to alleviate the widespread fears among the white minority population about Black majority rule.

But one of the most important aspects of trust-building is forward-looking rather than backward-looking. Trust-building in this sense has less to do with dealing with the past and more with how to manage the future by establishing institutions that guarantee both parties' political influence and security in the post-agreement period. In several of the more successful negotiations in our study, the parties agreed to the establishment of various forms of power-sharing institutions (e.g., Hartzell and Hoddie 2007). For example, in 1993 the ANC in South Africa agreed to adopt the so-called sunset clause, which guaranteed the NP political influence during a transitional period, notwithstanding the results of the upcoming general elections in April 1994 that were widely expected to bring about Black majority rule (Friedman and Atkinson 1994). We'll return to the issue of institutional political guarantees in the next part on establishing sustainable peace.

Resolve Issues Before Establishing a Permanent Ceasefire. One important element of process design has to do with timing and sequencing. This is a factor often highlighted in previous research (e.g., Pinfari 2012). Several of the negotiation processes stretched out over several years. Designing solutions to complex conflict issues, getting sufficient numbers of actors on board, and engaging in broad-based consultations requires patience and endurance. For this reason, negotiations often have to be structured in a phased manner, allowing for partial agreements to be made that are contingent on reaching an overall settlement (Nilsson 2008).

The negotiation process in Guatemala is an archetypical example of such a gradual process toward a final comprehensive settlement, in which the settlement was not reached in one go, but through the signing

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of partial peace agreements that addressed some of the issues on which the parties had disagreed. But many of the other peace processes followed a similar pattern. As noted, peace talks can take considerable time to implement. Therefore, negotiations that have been successful in reaching comprehensive peace deals have often included elements of time pressure to create and maintain a sense of urgency. Northern Ireland is an illustrative example, where the use of deadlines set by the British prime minister and enforced by Mitchell created the incentives needed to press the parties to make the final concessions required for a comprehensive peace deal (Bloomfield 1998).

One of the most important sequencing questions in almost all negotiations concerns when and how the parties should cease their violent conflict behavior. This often has turned out to be one of the most difficult aspects of peace talks (Clayton et al. 2025). Governments almost invariably demand an end to violence (and sometimes demobilization) as a precondition for negotiations. But the findings from the cases suggest that this is rarely a helpful demand. In the Colombian peace process leading up to the 2016 agreement, the parties decided early on that an agreement on the cessation of hostilities would come last in the negotiation process. This was in sharp contrast to previous negotiation attempts in the country, and contrary to the position of previous Colombian governments, who had often insisted on a permanent ceasefire as a precondition for peace talks. In the Northern Ireland peace process, decommission was one of the key stumbling points. The innovative formula eventually established for dealing with this issue was the so-called Mitchell principles. The Mitchell principles established a code of conduct according to which the parties committed themselves to refrain from acts of political violence during the process but were not required to disarm. Only parties that agreed to comply with these rules were allowed at the table. In this way, the process could move forward without stipulating a full-scale decommission as a precondition for the talks. The Mitchell principles illustrate an innovative way to address the sequencing dilemma (de Chastelain 1999).

We did not see a full-scale demobilization before a settlement was reached in any of the cases in our study. Thus, this appears to be an unrealistic demand. But various forms of transitional security arrangements—such as temporary ceasefires—can serve to build trust between the parties and create the space needed to negotiate substantial issues (e.g., Sticher 2022). For example, in the Colombian peace talks, the FARC issued multiple temporary unilateral ceasefires in an attempt to signal its continued commitment to the negotiation process. In the peace talks in Thailand in 2013, in spite of the Barisan Revolusi Nasional (BRN) insisting that it was not ready to lay down its arms permanently

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until there was a comprehensive solution to the conflict, the government and the Muslim separatists announced a bilateral ceasefire during the month of Ramadan. This was an important signal to demonstrate that the spokespersons at the table had control over their combatants and hence the legitimacy to negotiate on their behalf.

Establishing Sustainable Peace Beyond Agreements

In this section, we look more closely at some of the factors that may explain why and how negotiated settlements can contribute to a more or less durable peace beyond agreements. The key guiding question is: Why do some peace agreements last while others do not? This is a question to which significant attention has been paid in the academic literature on civil war conflict resolution. While most of the early studies in this field focused primarily on explaining the recurrence of violence (e.g., Walter 1997; Hartzell and Hoddie 2003; Fortna 2004; Nilsson 2008), subsequent research has paid greater attention to explaining variations in peace accord implementation (e.g., Jarstad and Nilsson 2008; Joshi, Melander, and Quinn 2017; Mac Ginty, Joshi, and Lee 2019; Molloy and Bell 2019; Karreth et al. 2023) and the quality of the peace that emerges (e.g., Wallensteen 2015; Davenport, Melander, and Regan 2018; Caplan 2019).

In line with previous research, our comparative analysis identified two overarching clusters of explanations and four factors that help us to understand why some peace agreements last and others do not. The first cluster of explanations relates to the terms of the settlement, especially those concerning institutional guarantees of political inclusion and guarantees for new minorities. The second set of explanations relates to political developments on the ground in the post-settlement period, notably the degree of unity across the political aisle over time and the empowerment of autonomies.

Institutional Guarantees for Political Inclusion. One important research finding that has found support in multiple studies is that agreements are more likely to lead to durable peace if they provide for institutional guarantees (e.g., Hartzell and Hoddie 2003). The nature of such guarantees may differ and can include stipulations regarding the distribution of political, military, and economic power. This was true also in our cases. A core component of the negotiated settlements that resulted in more sustainable peace was the establishment of institutional arrangements that paved the way for broad-based political representation and access to power. This provided groups that previously had been marginalized in society with a new sense of influence over their own political destiny and was a powerful motivator for a permanent shift of strategy away from violence and toward more peaceful forms of mobilization.

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In contrast, in those cases where the peace agreements did not result in sustainable peace, such institutional arrangements were generally either too weak, nonexistent, or never fully implemented.

The creation of the Northern Ireland Assembly (often referred to as Stormont because of its location in the Stormont Estate area of Belfast) in the Good Friday Agreement provided for a new way to govern the contested territory through a devolved regional legislature. Stormont appoints the government of Northern Ireland and has the power to legislate in a range of areas that are not explicitly reserved for the UK Parliament. It is unicameral with 90 members elected through an electoral system with a single transferable vote form of proportional representation. When members of government are appointed, it is done through a system of power sharing that assures that both Unionists and Nationalists are granted ministerial posts. There are also power-sharing principles built into the decision-making structure that require some decisions to have cross-community support (de Chastelain 1999).

Such institutional structures can also be more transitional in character. The MILF-led Bangsamoro Transitional Authority in the Philippines, which was inaugurated in 2019 to rule through the transitional period until the holding of regional elections, builds on the principles of transitional power sharing. The parliament has 80 seats in total, with 41 seats appointed by the MILF and 39 seats appointed by the central government. In addition, there are seats reserved for the minority populations and women. After the implementation of the agreement and the holding of regional elections, half of the seats will be allocated on the basis of proportional representation, and the other half through geographical reorientation from all parts of the region. The minority populations in the region will still have reserved seats allocated to them, but the MILF will not (Söderberg Kovacs, Höglund, and Jiménez 2021).

Many of the agreements that resulted in sustainable peace also included explicit provisions for the transformation of armed groups into political parties, a process well-known to contribute to more durable peace (Söderberg Kovacs 2007). In Angola, the peace agreements allowed for the transformation of UNITA from an armed movement into a political party with the right to run in elections. In the short term, this assured the armed movement that the decommissioning would not result in their eradication. In the long term, it provided a genuine platform for political influence and power (e.g., Vines and Oruitemeka 2008; Fabricius 2022). In Guatemala, the establishment of an ideologically like-minded oppositional political party that was able to gain at least some electoral support in 1995 helped to convince the URNG about the feasibility of a peace settlement. However, the rebel movement's own attempt to transform into a political party a few years later was less

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successful, due to a weak organizational structure and a divided leadership (Allison 2016). In Colombia, the agreement also included provisions for the transformation of the FARC into a political party with the right to compete in elections, a long-term objective of the guerrillas. But already from the outset of the transition, intraparty tensions emerged over the party's electoral strategy and party ideology, eventually resulting in the fragmentation of the party leadership following the party's meager results in the 2018 elections (Gutiérrez 2022).

Guarantees for New Minorities. Related to the institutional guarantees for political inclusion discussed above, peace settlements often transform society and create new configurations of power. In territorially bound conflicts that are resolved through some form of autonomy arrangement or independence, new minorities inevitably emerge from the settlement. The status of these new minorities is often one of the most controversial issues discussed during peace negotiations and is a frequent source of fear, insecurity, and renewed violence in the post-agreement period. Findings from the case studies indicate that when negotiations are able to address and alleviate some of these concerns through the establishment of minority guarantees—such as those bearing on political influence, language, or religion—the agreement is more likely to result in sustainable peace.

In Northern Ireland, the Protestant community feared that it would become a minority absorbed into a larger Catholic-dominated Ireland. This was one of the key issues that had to be addressed in the negotiations. The Good Friday Agreement addressed these concerns through the establishment of various elaborated guarantees for the minority population, within a larger democratic framework. For example, an integral component of the accord was the protection of the minority community in certain areas of decision-making and the strengthening of human rights more generally. In other cases, the peace agreement did not acknowledge or address these concerns and did not include any specific guarantees for the new minorities, leading to sustained or increased fears and insecurity in the post-settlement era. In Algeria, for example, the future for the European settlers in an independent Algeria was one of the most difficult issues in the negotiations leading up to the Evian Accords. The atrocities against Algerians committed by groups associated with the settlers' movement had deepened the polarized conflict attitudes between the different communities. The guarantees that were eventually granted in the peace deal for the European settlers were not perceived as strong enough to convince them to remain in the country, and over a million people fled to France in the post-agreement period (Connelly 2003).

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Unity Across the Political Aisle. Research findings have shown that agreements with the potential to alleviate the structural uncertainty between the parties are more likely to hold (Walter 1997). The parties' incentives to remain committed to the agreement can change during the implementation, not only because of devious motives (Richmond 1998), but also because of mistrust and lack of information as to whether the other parties are still committed to the deal. Regime change can be a major obstacle to the long-term commitment of the government side to a negotiation process and an important factor explaining why governments sometimes renege on previous concessions or promises to implement a peace agreement. This has been a frequent and recurring theme in several of the peace processes under study that took place in countries with repeated elections. In order for peace to be sustainable, there needs to be mechanisms in place to ensure unity across the political aisle over time regarding the fundamentals of a peace settlement.

Bangladesh is a case in point, where the negotiations between the government and the armed opposition continued on and off during several different government administrations. Immediately after the signing of the Chittagong Hill Tract Agreement in 1997, the sitting government slowed down its commitment to implement the accords. This was at least partly due to the fear of losing political support and electoral votes among the majority Bengali community, many of whom opposed the peace deal over the CHT. One of the most vocal critics was the opposition party at the time, who was subsequently able to use the peace agreement as a way to mobilize votes for the upcoming elections. When the opposition came to power four years later, the government's commitment to the accord was effectively halted, and the peace agreement was never implemented (Shapan 2008).

Referendums also played an important role in several of the peace processes under study. Two different types of referendums have been prevalent. First, referendums have been used as conflict resolution mechanisms to decide the outcome of particularly thorny core conflict issues. Notable examples are the votes for independence in both Algeria and South Sudan, and the demarcation of the Muslim autonomous region in the Philippines. The extent to which this type of referendum is a useful mechanism depends on the makeup of the eligible electorate. Second, referendums have been used to vote on peace agreements. In the Northern Ireland peace process, referendums were held in both Northern Ireland and in Ireland, but not in the UK (Bloomfield 1998). In Colombia, a referendum was held in October 2016 to ratify the final peace agreement between the government and the FARC. The vote was strongly politicized; one of the most prominent campaigners for the "no"

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vote was former President Uribe (Tellez 2019). By a small margin, the population voted against approving the agreement.

Empowered Autonomies. The new political structures and institutions created as part of a peace agreement also need to be granted sufficient political and economic influence in the post-agreement period to realize the objectives of self-rule. One important finding from the case studies is that settlements in territorial conflicts that provide for genuine self-determination through the establishment of regional or local autonomous institutions with sufficient economic and political power to address and resolve the conflict issues at stake are more likely to contribute to sustainable peace. For example, the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland stipulated a considerable transfer of political power from London to Belfast to realize the aspiration of self-determination. Although the agreement did not resolve all conflict issues, it created a set of autonomous political institutions with the mandate to address the concerns and aspirations of the parties. There was also a built-in mechanism for managing future aspirations of unification with Ireland. In doing so, the agreement empowered the institutions with the necessary preconditions for establishing a peaceful outcome down the road (Bloomfield 1998).

In contrast, while the autonomy arrangements stipulated in the 1996 agreement in the Philippines formally addressed the concerns of the Moro population, the solution was inherently weak in terms of what

Table 1
Triangulating Peace: Summary of the Findings

Resolve conflict issues
- *Provide institutional guarantees for political inclusion*
- *Include guarantees for new minorities*
- *Empower autonomies*

Transform conflict attitudes
- *Stimulate leadership changes*
- *Design inclusive negotiation processes*
- *Build trust between the parties at the table*
- *Maintain political unity across the aisle*

Cease violent conflict behavior
- *Establish and maintain a mutually hurting stalemate*
- *De-escalate regional conflict dynamics*
- *Sequence the cessation of violence after political concessions*

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the new region could actually deliver. Without substantial fiscal autonomy and with a continued reliance on the federal government for the distribution of resources to the region, the negotiated solution could not deliver on the underlying aspiration of Moro self-determination. This lack of independent wealth-generating mechanisms also contributed to the systematic corruption that came to characterize the autonomous region. It also made the sustainability of the peace agreements directly dependent on the personal relationship between the new governor of the region, MNLF leader Nur Misuari, and the country's president at the time, who had negotiated the peace deal (e.g., Bertrand 2000; Abubakar 2004; Buendia 2005).

Concluding Remarks

The findings from our study confirm that the different dimensions of conflict are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Much like escalatory processes are characterized by negative spiraling dynamics when it comes to conflict issues, conflict behavior and conflict attitudes often manifest through a proliferation or fragmentation of armed actors, polarizing and hardened conflict attitudes, heavier conflict tactics, and a multiplication of conflict issues—so can de-escalatory processes that reverse these dynamics help parties move from war toward peace.

However, all three dimensions are not equally important at all stages of the path from war to peace. We find a certain sequence of events in the successful cases in terms of *when* and *how* they have addressed the three dimensions. Analyzing the sequencing of successful cases can help to shed light on how transformative processes are initiated and maintained, which in turn has important implications for potential support for peace processes. Acknowledging the risk of simplifying complex processes, we can still detect some general trajectories.

First, in terms of getting to the table, processes toward sustainable peace invariably do not start until the parties have realized the futility or limits of armed means. Subsequently—and often related to this realization—conflict parties carried out important intra-party changes or reforms, resulting in key policy shifts. These changes were almost always preceded by changes in the party leadership. In most cases of protracted armed conflicts there are also important regional dynamics at work. In several of our cases, the parties were able either to take advantage of exogenously generated changes (such as the end of the Cold War) or deliberately and actively improve neighborly relationships in such a way that it reinforced, amplified, or triggered a mutually hurting stalemate. One way this was accomplished was by reducing or ending external support and inflow of resources to a non-state armed group or

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removing opportunities for profitable cross-border illegal activities and military safe havens in neighboring countries.

Second, in terms of getting to an agreement, our findings clearly show the value of embracing inclusion in the peace process. While the pre-negotiation phase usually benefits from secrecy to facilitate the building of trust between the adversaries and to explore options, in all our successful cases the conflict parties later broadened the negotiation process to include additional actors, such as civil society organizations or political parties. While these actors may not be offered a seat at the table, mechanisms should be established to ensure transparency, information gathering, and consultative forums. This in turn enables a comprehensive approach to the resolution of the conflict issues, with better potential to address broad-based societal concerns and grievances. The most successful negotiation processes took several years before arriving at a comprehensive peace agreement. But they were all carefully designed, with a pre-identified and limited agenda and with several distinct phases, often building on several partial peace agreements along the way. In order for this to work, the process included various mechanisms aimed at keeping up the momentum and ensuring a sense of urgency. The parties also continued military activities in parallel to the negotiation process. While temporary ceasefires often are used as important conciliatory gestures, a permanent ceasefire is negotiated most usefully as part of the final agreement. While third parties played an important role in driving the negotiations forward in many of the cases, our comparative analysis showed that they are not necessary for getting to an agreement. However, in some cases third parties are able to provide an important added value to the process, be it in the form of providing confidence-building measures or security gurantees when trust is low between the parties or by using their leverage to change the asymmetrical power balance between the parties.

Third, in order to establish sustainable peace, efforts should be made to institutionalize the newly built trust between the conflict parties through the creation of new institutions and constitutional reforms with the potential to carry this trust forward and into the future. In the most successful cases, the peace agreements have included the establishment of institutions aimed at broad-based political representation. Such arrangements can be transitional or permanent. We also find that autonomy solutions that do not provide the preconditions for self-determination and self-governance are less likely to resolve the contentious issues at stake in the long run. Many forms of autonomy arrangements also give rise to new minority formations. Based on this study, we find it essential that the establishment of such new and decentralized political entities include sufficient minority guarantees.

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Moreover, while most conflict resolution mechanisms discussed in this study benefit from political openness and democratic governance, electoral competition and referendums also have the potential to undermine a fragile peace accord. In such contexts, our findings point to the usefulness of considering active measures for the strengthening of unity across the political aisle around the negotiated settlement.

Finally, while all three dimensions are necessary, our analysis points to the instrumental role that intra-party transformation has for the long-term ability to achieve sustainable peace. Hence, when considering where to begin the journey toward sustainable peace, leadership changes and major policy shifts inside the main parties to the conflict seem to be the most relevant points of departure to initiate change toward a negotiated settlement of the conflict. It is when there are new leaders in place or new governments elected, that processes start to move on the other dimensions of the conflict triangle and open up the potential for ending violent behavior and resolving issues.

What can these findings from past cases tell us about the prospects for conflict resolution today? Some cautions are as valid now as they were then. For example, there is no "golden formula" for negotiated settlements that works in the absence of the parties' political interest in settling their dispute (Cho and Landau 2023). There are also many new developments that shape the prospects and challenges of peacemaking in our era, notably the declining influence of the traditional powerholders in the West and the rise of multipolarity (e.g., Morjé Howard and Stark 2018), international proscriptions of non-state armed groups (e.g., Haspeslagh 2021), and changing international norms regarding, for example, liberal peacebuilding (e.g., Hellmüller 2022; Piccolino 2023). For all these reasons, we agree with the necessity to rethink peacemaking practices continually (e.g., Turner and Wählisch 2021; Zartman and Vuković 2023). Notwithstanding these challenges, by recognizing and highlighting consistent patterns and trends across a range of cases arising from different contexts and with diverse issues, we believe that this empirical overview of past cases provides valuable insights on the fundamentals of resolving armed conflicts that can help practitioners on the ground better understand how adversaries build peace through negotiated settlements.

Notes

1. We appreciate support from the Swedish Research Council (2021-03247 and 2020-01796). The views expressed in this publication are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views or policies of any affiliated institutions or funding bodies.

2. For summaries of these nine cases, see the appendix to the introduction to this special issue at https://doi.org/10.1162/ngtn_e_00022. The conflict summaries are based on

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reports from various universities conducted as part of the original research project, "Why It Worked: A Research-Driven Model for Conflict Resolution." Comprehensive cases will be published for classroom use by the Negotiation and Conflict Resolution Collaboratory at the Center for Public Leadership at Harvard Kennedy School.

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