



## How to Prevent Civil War Recurrence

### Executive summary

How to prevent the recurrence of civil war remains an urgent question because one-third of intra-state conflicts recur within five years of a peace accord.

Funded by the United States Institute of Peace, we investigated peace processes worldwide and found that conflict recurrence can be prevented through:

- carefully designed and implemented peace accords;
- mediation that is both perceived as legitimate and impartial, and able to leverage diplomatic, financial, and military resources to assist the implementation of peace accords (historically under United Nations leadership);
- measures to include women in post-conflict societies.

Together, United Nations (UN) leadership and provisions for the inclusion of women in post-conflict societies reduce the probability of conflict recurrence by 37 percent, outweighing geopolitical, demographic, and other contextual factors.

This is because these components of peace processes can help create multi-level coalitions committed to maintaining and implementing peace accords. Such coalitions for peace build on pre-existing networks and context-specific mechanisms to make the needs and experiences of previously marginalised groups visible, acknowledging and addressing them in peace agreements; to foster broader understanding and ownership of the peace

process; and to provide early warning for localised tensions and devise context-appropriate adaptive responses.

### Policy recommendations

1. Practitioners need to carefully design and manage war-to-peace transitions to identify and address the needs of both warring parties and of broader conflict-affected societies, monitoring and accommodating their evolution over time.
2. Mediators who are perceived as legitimate and impartial, and who are able to catalyse multi-level coalitions for peace, should exercise decisive leadership over peace negotiations and peace processes. The UN has been historically able to accomplish this role most effectively.
3. Mediators and negotiators should prioritise the inclusion of women in post-conflict society. This can be accomplished by incorporating in peace agreements provisions to ensure the participation of women in economic, social and legal initiatives. It can also be facilitated by the allocation of financial and diplomatic resources after the conclusion of a peace settlement.
4. 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, state, and international levels. Leveraging these relationships, practitioners can prevent

civil war recurrence by responding to locally specific challenges with swift and incremental adaptive actions 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.

## About the research

The *Learning from Failure* project explored 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 Framework 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.

## Find out more

- *Mechanisms for Dialogue: A Means to Prevent Civil War Recurrence*, United States Institute of Peace, 2022, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/11/>

[mechanisms-dialogue-contribution-preventing-civil-war-recurrence](#)

- *Key Takeaways from the 'Learning from Failure: How to Prevent Civil War Recurrence' roundtable*, Foreign Policy Centre, 2024, <https://fpc.org.uk/key-takeaways-from-learning-from-failure-how-to-prevent-civil-war-recurrence-roundtable/>
- The Multi-Stage Mixed Methods Framework, *International Political Science Review*, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1177/01925121241293109>
- *Women Negotiating Inclusive Peace*, Podcast for Gender Action for Peace and Security, 2025, <https://open.spotify.com/episode/1rL1mo8er7XM6SavbEV0JB>

## Contact

**Dr Giuditta Fontana**, Associate Professor in International Security, Department of Political Science and International Studies, University of Birmingham,  
e: [g.fontana@bham.ac.uk](mailto:g.fontana@bham.ac.uk)

**Dr Argyro Kartsonaki**, Researcher, Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg  
e: [kartsonaki@ifsh.de](mailto:kartsonaki@ifsh.de)

**Professor Natascha S. Neudorfer**, Professor of Political Economy, Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf  
e: [natascha.neudorfer@hhu.de](mailto:natascha.neudorfer@hhu.de)

**Professor Stefan Wolff**, Professor of International Security, Department of Political Science and International Studies, University of Birmingham  
e: [s.wolff@bham.ac.uk](mailto:s.wolff@bham.ac.uk)

We advance  
**We activate**  

---

birmingham.ac.uk