

EPI Peacebuilding Review

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Academic scholarship on peacebuilding has increased in recent years.¹ However, researchers understand little about which types of peacebuilding activities reduce violence. This review: (1) develops a typology of efforts to foster peace, which I refer to as *modalities of peacebuilding* and (2) summarizes peacebuilding scholarship to evaluate the evidence for which modalities reduce violence. I also identify knowledge gaps regarding the kinds of peacebuilding interventions that scholars have not thoroughly evaluated and highlight the geographic areas of the world that remain understudied. Most of our understanding of peacebuilding's influence on violence comes from peacekeeping scholarship. Researchers can conduct additional studies on other modalities, especially disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR), peace education, post-conflict safety measures, and social cohesion building. Studies that pay particular attention to causal inference should be prioritized as this kind of approach allows for us to understand the influence of peacebuilding on violence. While there are numerous studies of peacebuilding interventions that utilize experimental approaches, very few of these studies pay specific attention to conflict-related violence as the outcome of interest. Most regional studies focus on Africa. Future work should expand beyond this region and explore peacebuilding modalities in other regions such as Latin America, Asia and Eastern Europe, which are fairly underrepresented in peacebuilding scholarship.

¹This includes studies that are development initiatives or other kinds of interventions that have peacebuilding components embedded in the intervention.

A Breadth of Academic Debate

Scholars do not agree on the kinds of activities peacebuilding includes. Some scholars limit the concept to interventions in post-conflict societies aimed at preventing the recurrence of war. For the purposes of this review, however, I use the term peacebuilding to delineate the broadest possible category of efforts specifically designed to limit violence and promote peace. As defined here, peacebuilding disproportionately occurs in post-conflict or conflict-affected settings. However, peacebuilding is not limited to these settings or points in time.

Scholars have produced numerous reviews of the peacebuilding literature. Most of these reviews have focused on debates in the literature regarding hybrid, local, and top-down approaches to peacebuilding (Autesserre 2017; Campbell, Chandler and Sabaratnam 2011; Leonardsson and Rudd 2015; Mac Ginty 2013). Many studies included in these reviews critique the literature. Few studies systematically assessed what scholarship can tell us about whether and how peacebuilding reduces conflict-related violence. One notable exception is Aila Matanock's (2020) chapter on "Experiments in Post-Conflict Contexts" in *Advances in Experimental Political Science*, edited by James Druckman and Donald P. Green. In her review, Matanock summarizes key findings and methodological innovations in conflict studies that use experiments. However, her chapter does not specifically focus on peacebuilding and it does not explicitly explore violence as the outcome of interest.

Several notable reviews evaluate the efficacy of peacekeeping, one specific kind of peacebuilding activity, in reducing violence. These reviews explore whether peacekeeping helps to (1) prevent a resurgence of conflict and (2) prevent violence against civilians. The emerging consensus indicates that peacekeeping largely prevents the resurgence of violence and reduces violence against civilians (Di Salvatore and Ruggeri 2017; Fortna and Howard 2008; Walter, Howard and Fortna 2021). Researchers understand much about the efficacy of peacekeeping. However, little is known about how effective peacekeeping is relative to other forms of peacebuilding.

There has been a large increase in peacebuilding scholarship. Despite the emergence of this vast literature, no scholar has attempted a broad review of the efficacy of the different peacebuilding activities. This gap is not entirely surprising. For decades, scholars have debated the definition of peace and which aspects of peace deserve the most attention in conflict/peace studies (Davenport, Melander and Regan 2018). For example, Galtung’s (1969) seminal essay on “Violence, peace, and peace research,” divides peace into *negative* and *positive* peace. Galtung defined negative peace as the absence of conflict-related physical violence, and positive peace as a much broader concept including, but not limited to, access to justice, general well-being, and access to equal opportunities in life. Debates such as these have led to innovative empirical advances that consider individual-level experiences of both positive and negative peace, such as the Everyday Peace Indicators Firchow (2018). Rather than debate the efficacy of different peacebuilding actions, scholars have focused much of the academic debate on the different aspects of peace.

Second, many scholars have debated what the primary focus, purpose, and goals of peacebuilding should be (Lederach 1997). Some scholars, have treated violence reduction as a secondary, rather than the primary, goal of peacebuilding interventions. For example, experimental work that aims to influence individuals and communities has centered on the reduction of “structural violence” and the increase in social justice (i.e. employment, political equality, quality of life, tolerance) rather than the conduct of physical violence or attitudes that promote physical violence (Ditlmann, Samii and Zeitzoff 2017). Third, little consensus exists in the literature on which activities constitute peacebuilding (Mross, Fiedler and Grävingholt 2022). This lack of consensus is further complicated different conceptions of peacebuilding that practitioners have as well (Barnett et al. 2007). Lastly, reviews of peacebuilding scholarship are separated based on the specific kind of peacebuilding activity, such as peacekeeping as discussed above. This has contributed to in-depth summaries of literature by peacebuilding type, rather than comparative reviews of different kinds of peacebuilding activities.

Several policy-oriented initiatives are worth noting as well. In particular, the Center on International Cooperation at New York University has engaged in a series of data collection efforts under their “Data for Peacebuilding and Prevention” initiative. They collected information on United Nations Senior Leadership, created a mapping tool that identifies current organizations involved in peacebuilding data generation, and developed a “Peacebuilding Architecture Review Matrix,” which contains information regarding the papers used in the 2020 UN peacebuilding architecture review.

Despite the large literature on peacebuilding, scholars have not summarized what we know and do not know about *peacebuilding’s* effect on conflict-related *violence*. Such a review requires a careful examination of sources that pay particular attention to qualitatively or quantitatively estimating how peacebuilding affects violence. Additionally, this kind of exercise requires the development of a typology of peacebuilding activities and a comparison of the relative effectiveness of these activities to one another. From a policy perspective, having a clear understanding of which peacebuilding tools are effective relative to each other is critical as it provides a rationale for which tools should be used in different circumstances.

Scope Conditions

This study has several scope conditions. First, the dependent variable of interest includes politically motivated violence that is directly related to a specific conflict or war. In particular, I focus on studies that capture one of three outcomes of interest: conflict recurrence, battle-related deaths, and violence against civilians. I focus on the effect of peacebuilding on physical violence for three reasons. First, peacebuilding initiatives are often designed to reduce physical violence. Second, we lack knowledge about the effect of peacebuilding on violence across studies. Lastly, from a theoretical perspective, if conflict-related violence persists, it is very unlikely that any markets of longer-term, positive peace will improve such as access to water and access to justice.

A wide range of peacebuilding activities are listed in the peacebuilding modalities be-

low. However, the majority of modalities covered are designed to address conflict-related violence. In practice, this means that they are usually deployed early in the peace process (i.e. mediation, power-sharing, peacekeeping, etc.), often while a conflict is still ongoing or has just ended. However, these peacebuilding modalities can also take place in areas of the world that are not explicitly considered post-conflict or post-war settings.

Non-violent peacebuilding-related activities are prioritized in the review. Crucially, military interventions, i.e., security guarantees, weapons transfers and other direct military support in an ongoing conflict, are excluded from the review. The goal of this review is to explore the effectiveness of non-violent and impartial peacebuilding interventions. Although peacekeepers often carry arms, they adhere to the three principles of peacekeeping (impartiality, consent of the warring actors, and non-use of force) that clearly differentiate peacekeeping from third-party military intervention (Howard 2019). Conversely, the power of third-party military intervention is derived precisely from the ability of armed actors to use force to compel one or more parties to the conflict to end violent activity (Howard 2019). For third-party intervention to be effective, the intervening actor must support one side in the conflict (Walter 1997). This distinction fundamentally transforms the role of international intervention into war fighting instead of peacebuilding. In this review, therefore, I focus on impartial interventions whose central purpose is to promote peace. Traditional state-led military operations in support of one or another party in a conflict are outside of the scope of this review.

Lastly, I limit the studies in this review to those that pay particular attention to causal inference. Most of the studies included try to grapple with causality by using statistical methods that rule out alternative explanations and confounding factors, employing quasi-experimental and experimental designs, as well as careful case selection that tests a causal claim. Although a large and rich body of literature focuses on more critical arguments of peacebuilding, much of this work falls beyond the scope of this review precisely because this

review aims to understand the *effect* of peacebuilding on violence.²

The Modalities of Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding includes many different activities.³ Little academic consensus exists about which specific activities constitute peacebuilding. Consequently, researchers find it difficult to identify how effective these activities are at curbing violence. To address these issues, I develop a list of 15 different modalities of peacebuilding.

The list of peacebuilding modalities focuses on actions that peacebuilders engage in. It then groups those activities and presents them thematically. In developing the typology, I consulted Barnett et al. (2007) and Mross, Fiedler and Grävingholt (2022). Each of the 15 categories captures a different aspect of the practical, applied activities that international peacebuilders conduct. These peacebuilding modalities represent the fewest number of categories possible while prioritizing conceptual distinction. Previous work that develops modalities or typologies of peacebuilding interventions tends to focus on the broader, theoretical goals to categorize peacebuilding, rather than on the practical activities that peacebuilders engage in.⁴

For the purposes of this review, peacebuilding refers to “external interventions that aim to prevent the eruption or return of armed conflict” (Barnett et al. 2007). These interventions can have varying goals, ranging from immediate cessation of conflict to deeper

²For an excellent review of critical peacebuilding scholarship, with a particular focus on the “local turn” in peacebuilding, please see Leonardsson and Rudd (2015). For a broad overview of peacebuilding scholarship see Mac Ginty (2013) and for an overview of peacebuilding’s evolution from a practitioner and academic perspective see Chetail and Jütersonke (2015). For a thorough review of peacebuilding interventions specific to the environment, see Johnson, Rodríguez and Hoyos (2021).

³Barnett et al. (2007) identify approximately 29 different kinds of peacebuilding activities.

⁴For example, Matanock (2020) categorizes interventions into two broad categories: peace consolidation (the establishment of a deeper peace, often through institutional and societal reform) and peace stabilization (the mitigation of violence, usually toward the end of conflict).

peace consolidation efforts that focus on socioeconomic development, for example. The underlying commonality across these different activities, however, is the goal of preventing a resurgence of violence (Campbell 2018). This definition allows for a focus on a multitude of different peace-related activities, including peacemaking and peacekeeping. As noted in the scope conditions section, military interventions, the enforcement of no-fly zones, and arms transfers outside of peacekeeping interventions are not included.

While these modalities are conceptually distinct, in practice, many peacebuilding interventions involve several different peace modalities simultaneously. For example, Mvukiyehe and Samii (2021) explore the role of peacekeeping, as well as development, education, rule of law and community dialogue on a series of peacebuilding related outcomes within the context of one intervention. It is possible for a single intervention to be included in multiple categories. Table 1, Table 2, Table 3 and Table 4 list the modalities, provide a brief description of the actions that they include and provide real world examples of these activities.

I describe 15 broad modalities of peacebuilding below:

Table 1: Peacebuilding Modality Descriptions and Examples

Peacebuilding Modalities		
Modality Type	Description of Activities	Examples
<i>Peacekeeping</i>	Activities to secure and maintain a ceasefire or peace agreement	United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS); NATO Mission Iraq (NMI)
<i>Mediation</i>	Third party efforts to encourage disputing parties to reach a ceasefire or peace agreement	Camp David Mediation (United States mediation in dispute between Egypt and Israel that established the Camp David Accords, 1978); Dayton Accords Mediation (United States, United Kingdom, European Union mediation to end war in former Yugoslavia, 1995)
<i>Socioeconomic Development</i>	Infrastructure, monetary assistance, repatriation and return	Community driven development (CDD) programs as popularized by the World Bank; International support for voluntary repatriation such as the 2016 UN High Commission on Refugees' efforts to repatriate Afghans from Pakistan to Afghanistan ^a

^aSee Blair and Wright's working paper: <https://www.jointdatacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Blair.pdf>

Methodology and Data Collection

I used the following procedure to identify the studies included in this review. First, I searched for the words “peacebuilding” or “peace” in Google Scholar in conjunction with the following terms: “effectiveness,” “violence,” “peace,” “data,” “experiment,” “randomized,” “survey,” “poll,” “observation,” and “variable.”

Next, I reviewed the abstracts of the studies from the first 10 pages of Google Scholar results for each term pair. Studies were included if the abstracts confirmed that they focused on one of the peacebuilding modalities, focused on conflict-related violence and focused on causal inference. Studies with higher citation counts and studies published more recently were also prioritized.

Finally, for each modality, I identified one or several “linchpin” sources. The linchpin sources refer to those that are key sources that focus on the study of the modality of interest and subsequent academic conversation tends to engage with. Potential linchpin sources were identified using Connected Papers, which presents network graphs of related bodies of scholarship to key sources of interest. I also relied on my own subject matter expertise and citation counts to help discern which source is a key source for the modality of interest. Additional relevant sources, beyond the initial Google Scholar searches, were identified for each peacebuilding type from the relevant linchpin network graph from Connected Papers.

Key “Linchpin” Sources

- The modalities and relevant linchpin studies are as follows:
 - **Peacekeeping:** Doyle and Sambanis (2006), Fortna (2008), Hultman, Kathman and Shannon (2014)
 - **Mediation:** Beardsley (2008)
 - **Socioeconomic Development:** Paluck (2009)

Table 2: Peacebuilding Modality Descriptions and Examples

Peacebuilding Modalities		
Modality Type	Description of Activities	Examples
<i>Governance Reform</i>	Power-sharing, expansion of rights, quotas, re-writing constitution, technical/policy support, rule of law reform	Kenya's (2008) power-sharing agreement to establish a "Grand Coalition" between the two main political parties; Public Law and International Policy Group's assistance in establishing a transitional government and drafting a new constitution in Syria (2025) ^a
<i>Humanitarian Relief</i>	Immediate material aid: food, medical assistance	Establishment of food distribution channels in conflict-affected and disaster-affected communities by World Central Kitchen; medical assistance as distributed by Doctors Without Borders
<i>Security Sector Reform (SSR)</i>	Re-training, changes to the composition of security forces, community policing initiatives	Re-training of the Armed Forces of Liberia by the United States military after the Second Liberian Civil War (2003); community policing programs that prioritize community information exchanges (Blair et al. 2021)
<i>Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR)</i>	Interventions that target former combatants aimed at disarming, demobilizing and reintegrating them into society: often include job training, cash for guns programs, etc.	DDR process in Sierra Leone after the Lomé Agreement was signed (1999) which prioritized identifying and seizing weapons from ex-combatants in exchange for access to resources such as job training
<i>Election Support</i>	Monitoring, assistance, observation of elections to ensure fairness and prevent election related violence	the Carter Center's election monitoring in over 124 elections around the world

^a<https://www.publicinternationalawandpolicygroup.org/middle-east-north-africa>

Table 3: Peacebuilding Modality Descriptions

Peacebuilding Modalities		
Modality Type	Description of Activities	Examples
<i>Truth, Reconciliation and Justice</i>	Justice or reconciliation processes that are focused on helping society to establish a common narrative of the events that occurred during war or allow victims to achieve justice or reparations of some kind (includes truth and reconciliation commissions)	the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa when apartheid officially ended (1996); the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Korea that was re-launched in 2020
<i>Peace Education</i>	Education initiatives that teach communities, school children or groups of individuals about non-violent methods of dispute resolution and conflict management	International Institute on Peace Education's community-based institutes in areas such as Mindanao, Philippines (2007) and Colombia (2007)
<i>Post-Conflict Safety Measures</i>	De-mining, small arms and light weapons removal, early warning systems	Organization of American States' (OAS) mine neutralization programs throughout post-conflict countries in Latin America; the African Union's (AU) Continental Early Warning System
<i>Civil-Society Building</i>	Interventions that focus on strengthening civil-society, especially civil-society organizations and media outlets	Beyond Conflict's 2018 program in Nigeria that included disseminating a peace promoting soap opera over radio ^a ; the civil society-United Nations Peacebuilding Dialogue which brings civil society organizations together to discuss peacebuilding

^a<https://beyondconflictint.org/international-peacebuilding/>

Table 4: Peacebuilding Modality Descriptions

Peacebuilding Modalities		
Modality Type	Description of Activities	Examples
<i>Social Cohesion Building</i>	Efforts to improve social cohesion or inter-group relations; often focused on individuals and local communities; can include activities like cross-community interactions	Catholic Relief Services programming in Mali which organized farmers into cooperatives ^a ; UN-sponsored cross-community dialogue program in Côte d'Ivoire Smidt (2020)
<i>Naming and Shaming</i>	Public efforts to expose human rights violations or violations of the terms of a peace agreement; often carried out by international non-governmental organizations	Human Rights Watch's annual reports; Amnesty International's reporting on violations of rights by country
<i>Sanctions</i>	Punishments, often economic, for bad behavior or violation of a peace agreement	UN Security Council Sanctions regimes in Eritrea/Ethiopia and Sierra Leone; Sanctions levied on Russia after the 2022 invasion of Ukraine by key actors in international politics including but not limited to the U.S., the E.U., Japan and prominent multi-national corporations ^b

^a<https://www.cts.org/where-we-work/africa/mali#section-improving-household-income>

^b<https://www.reuters.com/graphics/UKRAINE-CRISIS/SANCTIONS/byvrijenzmve/>

- **Governance Reform:** Matanock (2017*b*), Blattman, Hartman and Blair (2014), Blair (2019), Blair, Karim and Morse (2019)
- **Humanitarian Relief:** Wood and Molino (2016)
- **Security Sector Reform (SSR):** Jackson (2011), Schroeder and Chappuis (2014), Karim and Gorman (2016)
- **Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR):** Gilligan, Mvukiyehe and Samii (2013)
- **Election Support:** Daxecker (2012), Hyde and Marinov (2014)
- **Truth, Justice and Reconciliation:** Samii (2013), Druckman and Wagner (2019)
- **Peace Education:** Finkel, Horowitz and Rojo-Mendoza (2012)
- **Post-Conflict Safety Measures:** Mvukiyehe and Samii (2017)
- **Civil-Society Building:** Pouligny (2005)
- **Social Cohesion Building:** Gilligan, Pasquale and Samii (2014)
- **Naming and Shaming:** Hafner-Burton (2008)
- **Sanctions:** Matanock and Lichtenheld (2022)

Causal Inference and the Study of Peacebuilding

If we are interested in identifying the effect of international peacebuilding on violence, we need to ensure that the only factor that could contribute to the level of violence is international peacebuilding. Otherwise, there are other factors, or confounding variables, are also captured within the measured effect. If confounding variables are present, and we are unable to isolate the effect of international peacebuilding on violence, our estimates are inaccurate. It is possible that say another factor, such as socioeconomic status of the country, is what has contributed to a decrease in violence, rather than international peacebuilding.

We need to isolate the effect of international peacebuilding to isolate its effect on violence. As noted above, it is difficult to isolate the effect of one factor at a time. In order to address this issue of causal inference, we would ideally randomly assign “treatment” or international peacebuilding to some cases and not others to see what the effect of international peacebuilding is on the outcome of interest. The random assignment of international peacebuilding allows for each subject, or case, to have an equally likely chance to be assigned treatment. This allows for us to control for other confounding factors that could otherwise influence the outcome of interest, violence in our case.

In practice however, it can be difficult to randomly assign peacebuilding. The processes that determine which cases are given an international peacebuilding intervention are not random. For example, in order for a UN Peacekeeping Operation to occur, UN Security Council Resolution must be voted on and passed by the security Council. In practice, a peacekeeping operation of this kind can only be established if no vetoes are used by the Permanent Five Members of the Security Council and there are enough votes in favor of starting the operation among non permanent members. The ways that states vote is the product of many different factors such as domestic political concerns, the foreign policy priorities of the state, etc. Consequently, in real life, all cases do not often have an equal chance of being exposed to UN peacekeeping.

Many scholars of international peacebuilding have contended with this issue by using quasi-experimental methods to try to isolate the effect of international peacebuilding on violence. The studies included in this review use several different approaches to try to capture the causal effect of international peacebuilding on violence.

Studies that use statistical regression models tend to control for possible confounding factors. However, in order to isolate the effect of international peacebuilding, we need to control for all possible confounding factors. This can be incredibly difficult as there are not always measures available to control for all confounding factors. Additionally, while we can make educated guesses of the possible confounding factors that could otherwise

contribute to changes in the level of violence, it is difficult if not impossible to know all of the confounding factors. While regression analysis is a powerful tool, particularly in highlighting larger trends, it is often difficult to identify the causal effect of international peacebuilding using this approach.

Matching is another approach that is commonly used to study peacebuilding. Through matching, the scholar is able to account for confounding variables and only compare cases to one another that are similar enough on the confounding factors- such that the only factor that differs from one case to the other is exposure to international peacebuilding. While this is a strong tool, it is still a difficult one to use, as it suffers again from the issue of identifying relevant confounding variables.

Instrumental variables design, difference in differences (or fixed effects) design and natural experiments are perhaps the most reliable of the quasi-experimental approaches used in the studies included in this review.⁵ Instrumental variables design finds an instrumental variable, a third variable that only effects the outcome through the treatment. For example, exogenous rotations on the UN Security Council among African members of the Security Council will contribute to differences in exposure to peacekeeping (Carnegie and Mikulaschek 2020). These rotations change the extent to which peacekeepers are present in different operations, but the amount of violence within a given operation is not a function of changing rotations on the Security Council. Rotations on the Security Council then is considered an instrumental variable that influences the treatment (level of peacekeeping exposure), but does not influence the outcome of interest (conflict-related violence).

Difference in differences (fixed effects) design compares treatment (those exposed to international peacebuilding) and control groups (those not exposed to international peacebuilding) over time. This allows for us to identify the effect of international peacebuilding through the comparison between both the treatment and control groups. Natural experi-

⁵Regression discontinuity is another quasi-experimental design that is used frequently in Political Science scholarship. However, none of the studies collected for this review use this method.

ments refer to designs in which the treatment of interest is applied “as if random” in the world. A classic example of natural experiments includes the Vietnam War draft in the United States, in which those eligible for the draft were selected based on a random lottery. Here, exposure to fighting in war was “as if random” because members of the military were selected via a random lottery to fight in the war.

Randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and lab in the field experiments allow for direct randomization of exposure to the treatment. They are the two designs that mirror the ideal design described above. However, none of the studies included in this review use these approaches. Generally, participants in a study are randomly assigned exposure to international peacebuilding. In an RCT this is done in the field, or real world, and in a lab in the field experiment this is done in a more controlled, lab environment in the field setting of interest.

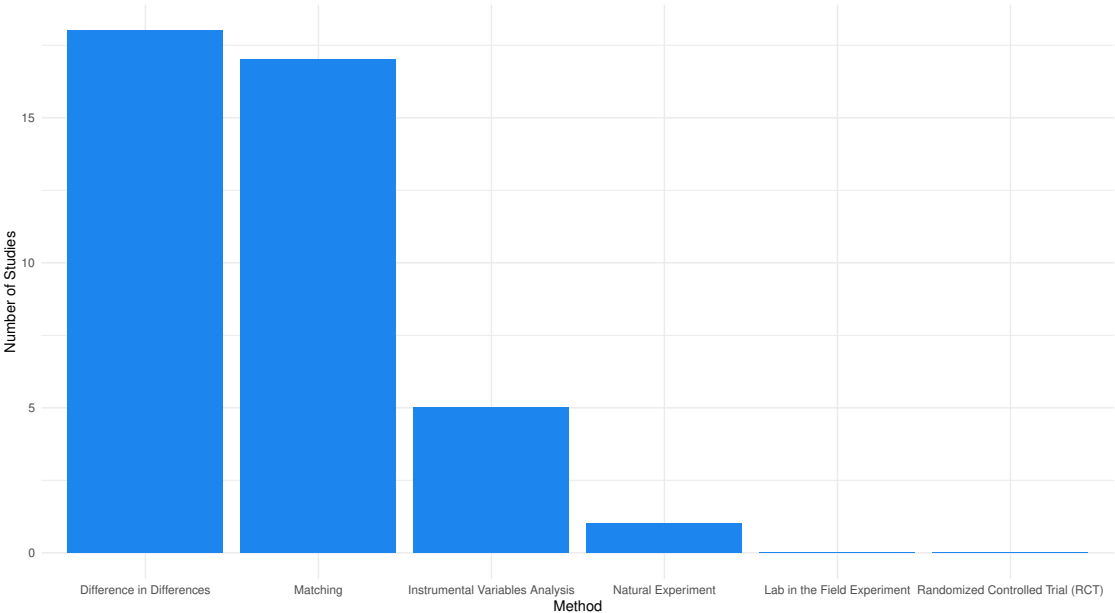


Figure 1: (Quasi) Experimental Methods

The majority of studies included in this review, approximately 58% of the studies, use quasi-experimental methods. Figure 1 displays the distribution of studies included in the review that use experimental or quasi-experimental methods. Among the studies that do employ these approaches, difference in differences (fixed effects) designs and matching are

most common. The use of these methods allows for more confidence to be had in the results of the review. Specifically, we can be more certain than not that the review is close to capturing the effect of international peacebuilding on violence.

General Results

70 studies are included in the review. Most of these studies rely on some form of regression analysis on quantitative cross-national data. The studies do not include any randomized controlled trials (RCTs) because studies that use this method and otherwise meet the inclusion criteria do not assess the effect conflict-related violence specifically. For example, Blair, Karim and Morse (2019) explore a security sector reform (SSR) intervention called “confidence patrols” in which well trained police officers of the newly reformed Liberian National Police participated in community dialogue, patrols, community trainings and extracurricular soccer matches with local communities. Community exposure to confidence patrols was randomized. However, the authors do not measure the effect of confidence patrols on war-related violence. Their focus is on local attitudes, approval of the state, and dependence on police as a method of local dispute resolution. Figure 2 indicates that the majority of studies included in the review are cross-national studies, meaning that they draw from data across a variety of different countries and cases. In terms of regional representation, the majority of studies focus on African countries. Figure 3 display the results by outcome of interest, i.e. the type of conflict-related violence captured in each study. Conflict recurrence and violence against civilians are the most common outcomes across studies.

The majority of studies in the sample (76%) demonstrate evidence that peacebuilding reduces violence. Only one study found that peacebuilding intervention was correlated with an increase in violence. 26% of the studies demonstrate that exposure to peacebuilding had mixed effects on the reduction of violence. In these studies either there is no statistically significant effect on violence, or under some conditions, peacebuilding is associated with an increase or a decrease in violence.

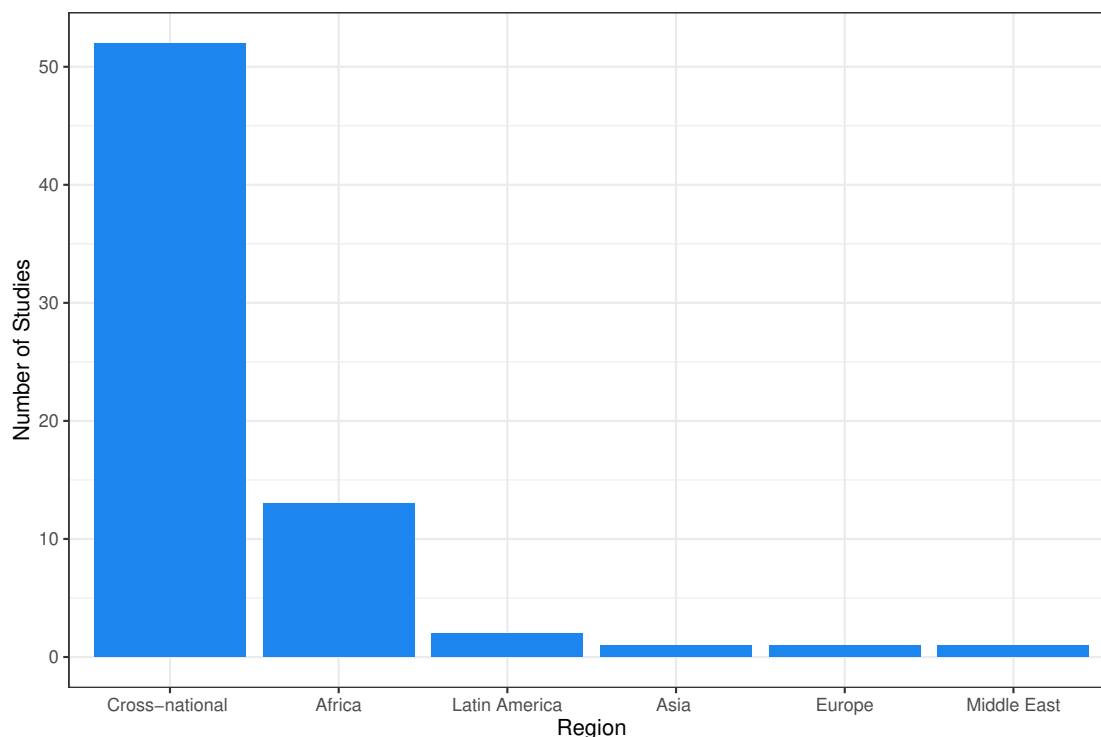


Figure 2: Regions Across Studies

Figure 4 demonstrates the number of studies included in the review by peacebuilding modality type. Peacekeeping and governance reform are the modalities with the most studies included in the review. Figure 5 plots each modality type by year of publication. According to this figure, peacebuilding studies have increased over time. Additionally, studies include an increasing number of different modalities over time.

Table 5 summarizes the average effect of each modality. Peacekeeping is the most common peacebuilding modality across studies (39 studies, approximately 56% of all studies). Governance reform has the second largest number of studies (19 studies, approximately 27% of all studies included). No other modality was included in more than four studies (6% in total).⁶

⁶All other modalities either have no studies captured in the review, or have relatively few studies captured in their category, none reaching above single digits.

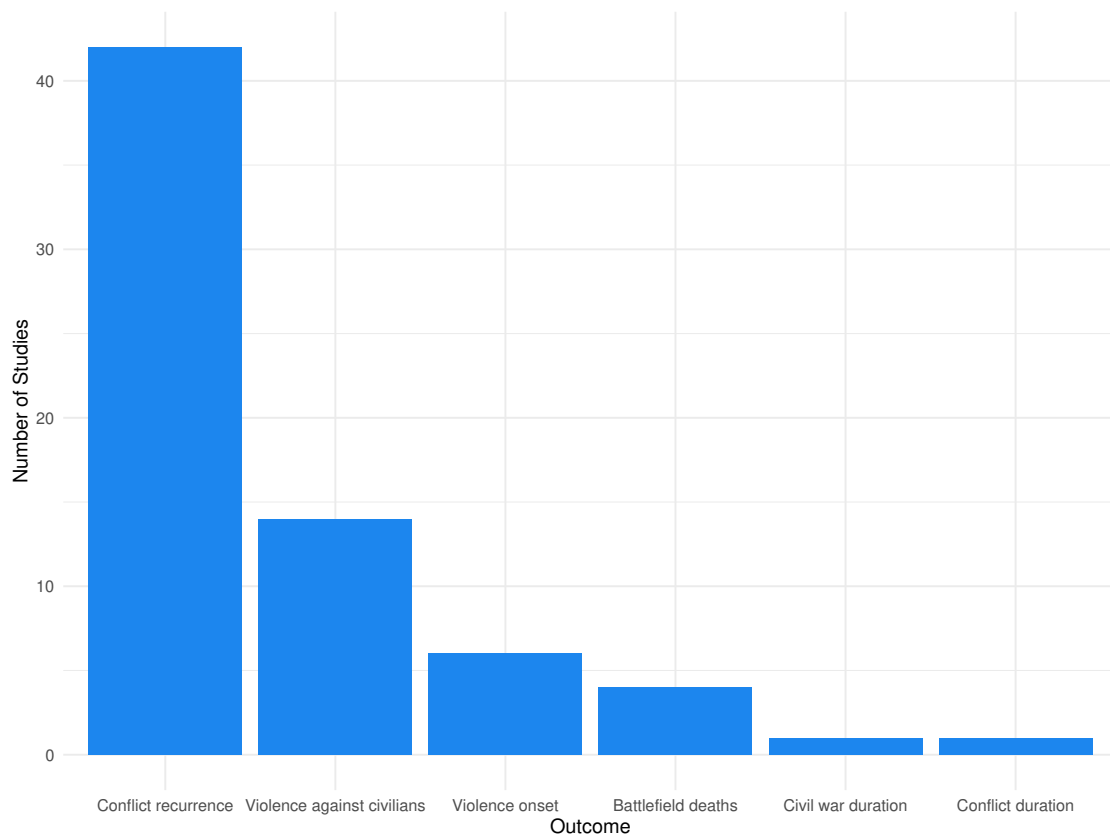


Figure 3: Outcomes Across Studies

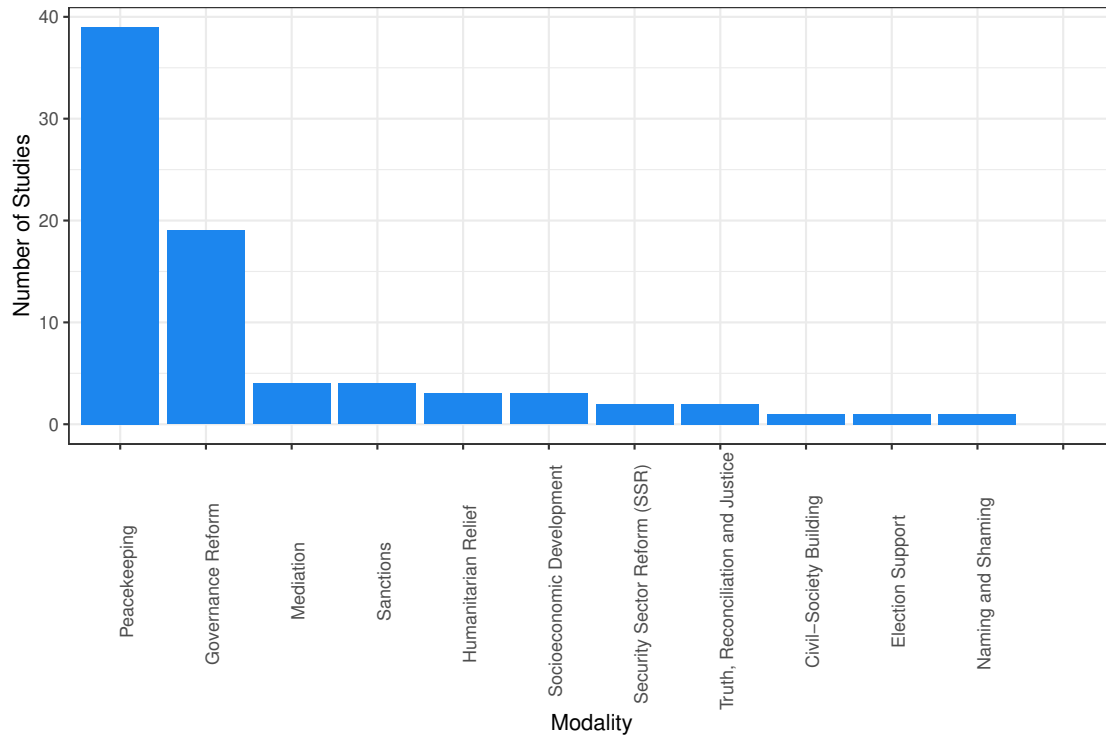


Figure 4: Number of Studies by Peace Modality

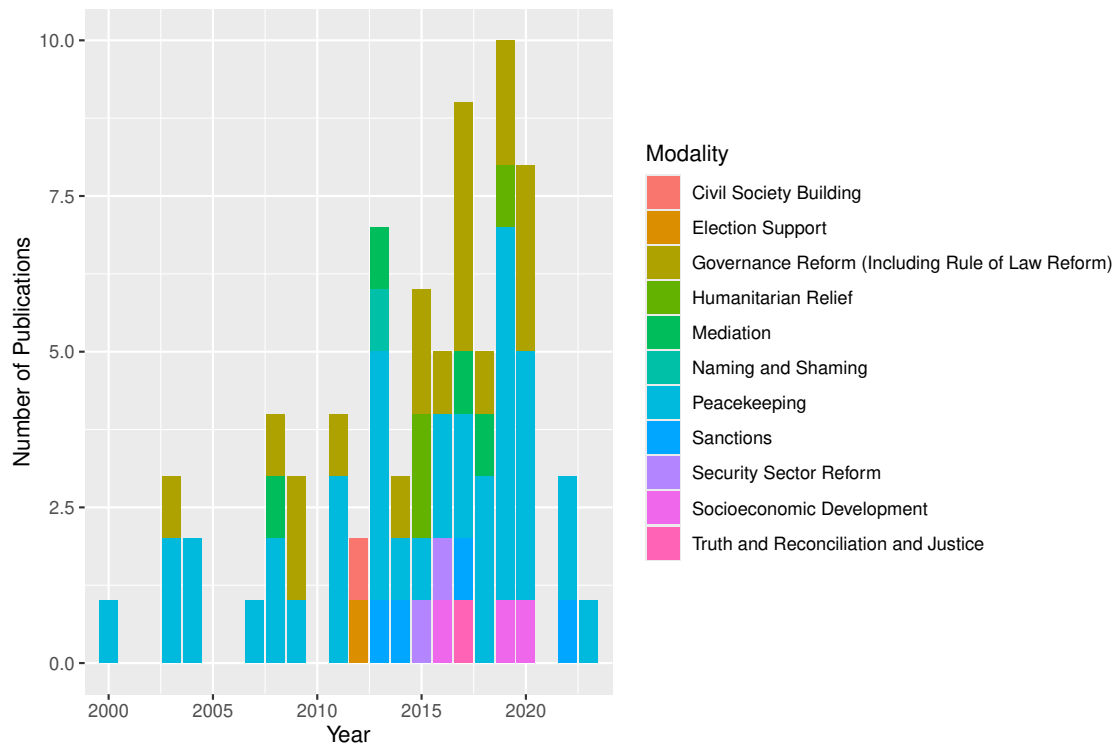


Figure 5: Publications by Peacebuilding Modality and Year

Table 5: Results by Peace Modality

N = 70 studies; 80 peacebuilding instances captured⁷		
Peacebuilding Type	% of Total Studies	Average Effect⁸
Peacekeeping	56% (39/70)	—
Governance Reform	27% (19/70)	—
Sanctions	6% (4/70)	~
Mediation	6% (4/70)	—
Socioeconomic Development	4% (3/70)	~
Humanitarian Relief	4% (3/70)	+
Truth, Reconciliation and Justice	3% (2/70)	—
Security Sector Reform (SSR)	3% (2/70)	—
Election Support	1% (1/70)	—
Civil-Society Building	1% (1/70)	—
Naming and Shaming	1% (1/70)	~
Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR)	0% (0/70)	n/a
Peace Education	0% (0/70)	n/a
Post-Conflict Safety Measures	0% (0/70)	n/a
Social Cohesion Building	0% (0/70)	n/a

There are no studies that met the selection criteria for this review for four modalities: disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR), peace education, post-conflict safety measures, and social cohesion building. These results are not entirely surprising since the reduction of conflict-related violence is a secondary goal for most of these modalities. For example, Humphreys and Weinstein (2007) explore whether DDR programming in Sierra Leone was successful. Their study has been widely cited, largely because Humphreys and Weinstein were able to conduct surveys with ex-combatants who experienced DDR programming. The study, however, does not assess the effect of DDR on conflict-related physical violence. Instead it focuses on ex-combatant reintegration into the community, links to violent

organizations, approval of democracy, and employment status. Although it can be assumed that violence decreases through the intervention, especially through its hypothesized effect on reducing ex-combatants' links to violent organizations, conflict-related violence is not a direct outcome of interest in this study.

Many studies simply assume the downstream effects of these kinds of outcomes on a reduction in conflict-related violence, but do not explicitly measure changes in physical violence. For example, Blattman, Jamison and Sheridan (2017) explore the effect of promoting dialogue, using a cash transfers and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) program in post-conflict Liberia among criminally engaged men. Although the results, particularly for the CBT treatment, indicate a reduction in antisocial behavior, crime, and violence, the study does not capture how the intervention affects conflict-related violence. The violence captured in the study reflects instances such as the perpetration of domestic abuse and local disputes.⁹

Humanitarian relief is the only peacebuilding category where adverse effects on violence are reported. The distribution of resources through international peacebuilding complicates the dynamics of war, which emerges as a specific theme across the studies. In particular, research indicates that humanitarian relief increases the duration of civil wars (Narang 2014, 2015), leads to more military deaths (Findley et al. 2023), and results in increased rebel-perpetrated violence against civilians (Wood and Sullivan 2015). Wood and Sullivan's (2015) study highlights one of the possible mechanisms through which aid relates to increased violence: attackers may target beneficiaries of aid as strategic efforts of intimidation or forms of retaliation, especially when they perceive the aid as benefiting the government (and its supporters). It is difficult to draw definitive conclusions about the effect of aid on violence however, as there are only three studies included in the data for this modality.

Peacekeeping also has the most studies that report mixed results (approximately 14

⁹It is understandable however that a study of an intervention such as this is focused on violence that is not directly tied to the conflict, as the target of the intervention was criminally engaged men.

studies). Studies of peacekeeping that explore local levels of violence tend to yield mixed results in comparison to their cross-national counterparts. The ability of UN peacekeeping to curb local violence against civilians is associated with the extent to which there are local power asymmetries (Di Salvatore 2020). Likewise, local peacekeeping does not necessarily protect civilians from all forms of violence. Studies show that it can curb rebel violence, but it does not necessarily prevent government perpetrated violence against civilians (Fjelde, Hultman and Nilsson 2019). Perhaps most puzzling across studies is that UN peacekeeping troop presence is found to be associated with a decrease in violence (Kathman and Benson 2019), whereas police (Haass and Ansorg 2018) and observer presence (Hultman, Kathman and Shannon 2013, 2014; Kathman and Wood 2016) are associated with upticks in violence.

Results by Type of Peacebuilding

In the following section I further describe the the peacebuilding literature included in the review and I analyze the characteristics and findings for each peacebuilding modality. This section pays particular attention to the substantive effect of the intervention on violence. The results reported are statistically significant at the conventional 95% p-value level unless otherwise noted.

Peacekeeping

The majority of research reviewed suggests that peacekeeping is associated with a reduction in conflict-related violence. Twenty-four of the thirty-nine studies (62% of peacekeeping studies) in this review indicate that peacekeeping, particularly United Nations peacekeeping, decreases violence.

Most studies of peacekeeping that met the criteria for inclusion in this review explore its effects on conflict recurrence (20/39 or 52%). Violence against civilians is the second most frequently captured dependent variable among peacekeeping studies (13/29 or 33%).

Early systematic research on peacekeeping found that peacekeeping reduces violence and conflict recurrence during inter-state war (Fortna 2003*a*, 2004) and intra-state war (Fortna 2003*a,b*; Quinn, Mason and Gurses 2007). Some studies find that multidimensional missions, those that go beyond traditional peacekeeping and include peacebuilding activities such as “extensive civilian functions, including economic reconstruction, institutional reform, and election oversight” (Doyle and Sambanis (2000), pg. 791) are especially effective in reducing conflict recurrence.¹⁰

Doyle and Sambanis (2000) argue that this is due to the narrow scope of traditional peace operations, which did not often include reforms that would strengthen state capacity in the long run. Fortna (2003*a*) finds a fairly large effect of multidimensional peacekeeping, with its presence reducing the likelihood of conflict recurrence in civil wars by 97%. Contrary to Doyle and Sambanis’ (2000) expectations, however, Fortna (2003*a*) also finds a comparatively large effect of traditional peacekeeping on the recurrence of conflicts in civil war, with the likelihood reduced to approximately 98%. The effect of peacekeeping on the recurrence of civil wars is even greater than the effect of peacekeeping on the recurrence of interstate wars, as the odds of conflict recurrence is reduced to 90% in interstate war. Fortna’s main conclusion is that any peacekeeping—whether traditional, multidimensional, or an observer mission—often reduces the risk of conflict recurrence.

Military Force is Not Why Peacekeeping is Effective:

Although the pacifying effect of peacekeeping missions is promising, the causal logic behind why peacekeeping is effective is still a matter of debate. Howard (2008) presents one of the few qualitative studies included in the review that presents an argument that highlights the conditions under which peacekeeping is effective. She pays particular attention to isolating a causal logic of success across 10 UN peacekeeping operations. Howard finds that

¹⁰Many of the studies that explore the peacebuilding function of peacekeepers are excluded from the review because they do not directly capture the effect of the intervention on conflict-related violence. Some notable examples include Smidt (2020) and Mvukiyehe and Samii (2017).

operations are more successful when their personnel engage in active learning on the ground and adapt to local knowledge pertaining to the operation. This suggests that local conditions, particularly means of communication with locals, need to exist so that peacekeepers can obtain information about the situation on the ground. Crucially, peacekeepers must be willing and able to adjust their tactics based on this information.

In later work, Howard (2019) explores how peacekeepers can convince belligerents to end their violence. In particular, she examines mechanisms of coercion, persuasion, and inducement. Howard finds that peacekeepers often lack the power to leverage military coercion. Even in cases where they have the opportunity, they frequently choose not to use military coercion. Instead, peacekeepers often maintain peace through persuasion and inducement.

Contemporary quantitative studies provide further evidence that the effectiveness of peacekeeping does not stem primarily from military coercion. For example, Matanock and Lichtenheld (2022) uses a statistical matching approach to show that conditional incentives, which provide resources to individuals and threaten to withdraw them in the absence of compliance, more effectively curb violence than military coercion by peacekeepers. In conflicts where conditional peacekeeping incentives are implemented, researchers observe an 80% reduction in the risk of renewed violence. These findings are also corroborated at the local level. In a study of local peacekeeping in Sudan, Phayal (2019) finds that increased peacekeeping deployment is associated with a reduction in violence against civilians. However, a reduction in one-sided violence is not associated with increased peacekeeper capacity (measured as higher troop-contributing country spending on the military per capita). The author concludes that these findings further support the claim that peacekeepers are effective not through military deterrence but rather through their capacity to engage in monitoring and reporting.

Peacekeeping Reduces Violence Against Civilians:

The peacebuilding literature also provides evidence that the deployment of UN peacekeepers reduces violence against civilians (Haass and Ansorg 2018; Hultman, Kathman and

Shannon 2013; Kathman and Wood 2016; Phayal 2019). For example, Hultman, Kathman and Shannon (2013) find that, absent peacekeeping troop deployment “the expected number of civilians killed in a given month is approximately 106. When the number of UN military troops increases to 8,000, the expected value of civilian deaths decreases to 1.79” (p. 885). This is approximately a 98% reduction in civilian deaths. UN military deployment also pacifies the number of battle-related deaths, though to a lesser extent. Hultman, Kathman and Shannon (2014) find that if 10,000 UN peacekeeping troops are deployed to a given conflict affected area, this is associated with a 73% reduction in the number of battlefield deaths.

More recent studies that leverage quasi-experimental methods also find that increased peacekeeping deployment is associated with fewer civilian deaths. This provides more support for the finding that increased exposure to peacekeeping in fact *causes* lowers the rates of violence against civilians. Carnegie and Mikulaschek (2020), for example, use African member state rotations on the UN Security Council as an instrument for peacekeeping deployment size. When an African member state, in the same region as the state in question, is on the Security Council, the number of peacekeepers deployed is higher by 603 people on average. For “every 100 additional peacekeepers deployed as a function of the rotation of Council seats are associated with an average of five fewer civilian casualties per month and per country” (pg. 825). When an African state is president of the Security Council, about 864 additional peacekeepers are deployed on average, and for every 100 additional peacekeepers deployed this way, there are 3 fewer civilian deaths during that month on average.

However, there are four caveats to the general finding that peacekeeping is associated with a reduction in violence against civilians. First, several studies that identify which actors perpetrate violence against civilians find that peacekeeping is effective in reducing violence against civilians perpetrated by *rebel groups*, but not violence against civilians that is perpetrated by state actors (Fjelde, Hultman and Nilsson 2019; Phayal and Prins 2020). Increasing the number of peacekeepers deployed in a given area from zero to 3,000 reduces the odds of

violence against civilians perpetrated by rebels by almost half (Fjelde, Hultman and Nilsson 2019). However, this same increase in the number of peacekeepers does not significantly decrease state perpetrated violence against civilians. If anything, Phayal and Prins (2020) find that increase peacekeeping exposure increases government-perpetrated violence against civilians, although the effect is not statistically significant.

Second, the literature suggests that the composition of peacekeeping forces, particularly the degree of diversity among peacekeepers (Bove and Ruggeri 2016) and between peacekeepers and the local population (Bove and Ruggeri 2019), influences the level of violence against civilians. Increased diversity in peacekeeping forces is associated with less violence against civilians (Bove and Ruggeri 2016). Per month, the average amount of fractionalization or polarization in UN missions is associated with a reduction in civilian deaths by 10% (Bove and Ruggeri 2016). In contrast, greater diversity between peacekeepers and locals is associated with an increase in violence against civilians (Bove and Ruggeri 2019). This suggests that differences in spoken language between peacekeepers and locals undermines local peacekeeping success. Bove and Ruggeri (2019) also find that the greater the economic disparity between the host state and the states in which the peacekeepers are based, the lower the levels of civilian casualties. For example, at the eightieth percentile of GDP distance, ten civilian casualties are expected, compared to 60 at the first percentile.

Third, unlike troop deployments, findings regarding the effectiveness of police and observer deployments vary. Some studies find null effects and others suggest increases in violence. Several studies find an association between increased observer deployment and a rise in violence against civilians (Haass and Ansorg 2018; Hultman, Kathman and Shannon 2014; Kathman and Wood 2016). These results are especially puzzling, since observers and police participate in some of the key activities that others have found to be especially important in curbing violence, such as reporting and monitoring (Phayal 2019). It is possible, however, that these studies could not adequately control for the selection effects that determine why observers are deployed in some conflicts and not others. It is possible, for example, that

observers are more frequently sent to conflicts where the risk of escalation is already high.

Lastly, the extent to which peacekeepers can effectively curb violence against civilians likely depends on the dynamics of the conflict. This is consistent with some of Howard's (2008) findings and with Doyle and Sambanis' (2000) argument that local capacities influence the extent to which international intervention is needed to curb conflict recurrence. More specifically, in a study focused on Sierra Leone Di Salvatore (2020) finds that low ethnic polarization among belligerents is associated with increased violence against civilians, despite the presence of peacekeepers.

Peacekeeping is Associated with Limiting the Physical Spread of Conflict

Unlike the scholarship on other peacebuilding modalities, studies of peacekeeping have also considered the effect of peacekeepers on limiting the geographic spread of violence. Beardsley and Gleditsch (2015) find that the deployment of UN troops limits the spread of conflict from one geographic area to another. They find that the estimated probability of conflict containment with 5,000 deployed troops is around 50%. If the number of troops deployed reached approximately 20,000, the probability of conflict containment is approximately 70%. However, there are suggestive results that the deployment of UN police officers is associated with conflict displacement, i.e. the movement conflict to a nearby area, rather than conflict containment. However, the results related to the deployment of UN troops are largely consistent with Beardsley (2011), which finds that there is a 70% reduction in the expected risk of violent conflict occurring in a neighboring state when there is a peacekeeping operation deployed.

A longstanding question in peacekeeping scholarship concerns where peacekeepers go (to which kinds of conflict they are sent) and where they tend to be deployed sub-nationally. Not surprisingly, the literature finds that peacekeepers tend to deploy to conflicts with especially high levels of violence and areas within those states that are especially heavily impacted by violence (Fortna and Howard 2008; Walter, Howard and Fortna 2021). This suggests that peacekeepers are especially effective at curbing violence early on. Costalli (2014) corroborates

this finding sub-nationally. Although he finds that peacekeepers were deployed to the hardest hit areas in Bosnia, their presence did not consistently curb subsequent violence. Costalli found no association between the deployment of peacekeeping troops to a region and a reduction in subsequent violence in Bosnia.¹¹ This finding raises a larger question regarding the degree of deployment timing and whether peacekeepers can “keep peace” to the same extent at all times during their deployment.

In regard to the timing of deployment, Hansen, Nemeth and Mauslein (2020) find that the local deployment of peacekeepers actually increases the risk of terrorism in the short term, but reduces the risk of terrorism in the long term. The introduction of a new peacekeeping operation leads to an increase in the probability that terrorist attacks occur, ranging anywhere from a 68% chance to a 124% chance. However, each additional month that a peacekeeping operation is deployed, the probability of a terrorist attack occurring is reduced by 67%, which amounts to a 22% decrease over a 33-month period (i.e., one standard deviation). This suggests that longer missions are perhaps better equipped to create long-term physical stability and dis-incentivize certain kinds of violence that disproportionately hurt civilians.

Sequencing of Peacekeeping Relative to Other Modalities of Peace

Beardsley (2013) compares and contrasts the different peace-related roles played by the UN in different contexts around the world. He finds that the UN’s early use of sanctions and diplomacy in the peace process helps reduce conflict recurrence. However, if the UN does not deploy peacekeepers afterwards, conflict tends to reoccur. Similarly, DeRouen Jr and Chowdhury (2018) find that in conflicts in which the United Nations is deployed both as a mediator and for peacekeeping purposes, these conflicts tend to experience less violence than they otherwise would.

Kathman, Benson and Diehl (2023) present the only peacekeeping study reviewed that

¹¹However, a point of caution is that Costalli focuses specifically on the UN Peace Operation in Bosnia, a case that is largely an example of peacekeeping failure (Howard 2008).

explicitly finds that peacekeeping exposure exacerbates violence. They find that the more UN Security Council Resolutions that are passed pertaining to a particular conflict, the more violence against civilians there tends to be. They argue that UN Security Council Resolutions serve as a signaling mechanism and indication that there *might* be a peacekeeping operation deployed in the future. According to their predicted counts of one-sided violence, “when no resolution has passed in a given conflict month, the model estimates that just under thirty civilians would be targeted or killed by the combatants in the following month. However, when the UNSC passes a resolution targeting an ongoing civil conflict, the belligerent parties respond by killing 64 civilians... These killings increase by over 115 percent, a very substantial escalation of violence against civilians” [Kathman, Benson and Diehl (2023)pg.9]. While there is a robust literature on the unintended effects of peacekeeping, i.e. local economic dependence on the operation, sexual exploitation and abuse, etc., the unintended effects of peacekeeping on conflict-related violence remains underexplored. However, Kathman, Benson and Diehl’s (2023) study provides a promising avenue forward.

A Focus on United Nations Peacekeeping:

One significant limitation of this review is that most studies of peacekeeping focus exclusively on the effectiveness of United Nations peacekeeping missions. Only one study that explores the effect of the UN versus regional peacekeeping met the criteria for inclusion in this review. Bara and Hultman (2020) explore the effects of UN and non-UN peacekeeping on violence against civilians and find that both are equally effective at reducing government violence (the UN coefficient is negative 0.232 compared to negative 0.292 for regional peacekeeping). They find that the deployment of UN troops and police in particular is especially effective at reducing violence against civilians that is perpetrated by non-state actors/rebel groups. The deployment of UN observers, on the other hand, is associated with an increase in both government and rebel-sponsored violence. However, regional observers do seem to decrease rebel-sponsored violence against civilians in some models.¹²

¹²The authors use matching as a robustness check. The matching coefficients do not differ drastically

Governance Reform

Governance reform is the modality with the second largest number of studies after peacekeeping. In addition to peacekeeping, this modality has the highest number of mixed results, with approximately six studies producing mixed or null findings. Governance reform encompasses a multitude of different kinds of activity. Among the studies collected for this review, the majority focus on governance reforms that emerge from peace agreements, often power-sharing provisions. This broad conceptualization of governance reform probably contributes to the high number of studies that encompass mixed or null effects, as many of the interventions are the same in that they represent some kind of governance reform, but they tend to differ in the specific kind of governance reform employed. Governance reform generally seems to have a calming effect on violence. Approximately 12 of the 19 studies (63%) that capture this modality indicate that governance reform contributes to an overall reduction in violence.

Peace Agreements, the Source of Post-Conflict Reform

In post-conflict settings, peace agreements contain newly negotiated provisions which tend to include the terms of governance reform. This can include provisions such as electoral reform, power-sharing arrangements, rule-of-law reform, military reform, etc. Consequently, studies that focus on the negotiation, signing, and implementation of peace agreements are also included under the governance reform modality.

A long-standing debate in the scholarship concerns the extent to which negotiated settlements are actually associated with reducing conflict recurrence. Studying this is complicated by the fact that conflicts that end in agreements are likely different from those that do not end in an agreement. It is possible that agreements might be more likely in conflicts where the underlying issues are simply easier to resolve. If so, agreements might not be a cause of peace, but a reflection of the severity of the conflict and the interest of the warring actors

from their non-matched counterparts (see Figure 8 on page 361 in Bara and Hultman (2020)).

in negotiating. Conversely, agreements may occur only when military victory is impossible, leaving both sides with the military power to restart the conflict at a later time.

Scholars have found that outright military victory by one side or another are associated with lower conflict recurrence than negotiated settlements (Hartzell 2009; Quinn, Mason and Gurses 2007). For example, Caplan and Hoeffler (2017) find that negotiated settlements are more likely fall apart than wars that end in direct military victory. Conflict recurrence is 276% more likely if a peace settlement took place compared to if there was an outright military victory. This effect dissipates if peacekeepers are deployed in support of the settlement. These results are not surprising if we consider conflict as a form of bargaining. In a decisive military victory, the victor is able to determine unilaterally the governance of the country. However, in situations in which the conflict ends in a negotiated settlement, there is still uncertainty over whether the other side will abide by the terms of the agreement and not strike just when the opposite side has put down their weapons. This is sometimes called the “commitment problem” because parties have assuring the other side that they will not return to war.

Although these are discouraging results for peace agreements, Badran (2014) and Nilsson (2008) assert that not all peace agreements are created the same and that different agreements have different implications for reducing violence. Nilsson (2008) takes into account that *who* among warring actors is included in the peace agreement, particularly whether all warring actors are included or only some. Although Nilsson finds that “if an agreement excludes one or more rebel groups, the risk of post-settlement violence involving signatories or non-signatories increases by 84%” (pg. 489). Upon further analysis, she is able to determine that these results are largely driven by excluded groups. Nilsson finds that signatories to peace agreements are less likely to continue to engage in fighting, and while excluded groups are still likely to engage in fighting, their violence does not often undermine peace among the signatories. This result suggests the importance of getting *all* warring actors involved in peace agreement negotiations.

Peace Agreement Variation, Governance Reform Variation and Conflict Reduction

Badran (2014) explores the construction of peace agreements and finds that peace agreements with more structural and procedural provisions and those that address more post-conflict issues (i.e. “(1) social consolidation of peace, (2) rebuilding of trust, (3) prevention of the resumption of violence, (4) redrawing of perimeters of political interaction; and (5) dealing with urgent concerns” pg. 197),¹³ are associated with a reduction conflict recurrence. An ideal agreement, i.e. one that covers more areas of interest, yields a fairly large effect. Badran calculates the marginal effect of increases in the strength of the peace agreement that range from an indecisive outcome (no agreement) to an ideal agreement (with all categories covered). An ideal agreement reduces the predicted conflict hazard ratio by 96%. This improvement is substantial compared to an agreement with only one provision, which reduces the risk of conflict by 16.4%.¹⁴ Nevertheless, Badran finds that even a moderately weak agreement still reduces the risk of conflict by approximately 80%. Badran also compares the results of a peace agreement passing to different outcomes of the conflict over time. According to these calculations, if peace agreements hold through the fourth year of implementation, the chances of recurrence approaches zero, similar to that of a decisive military victory.¹⁵ In summary, the literature strongly suggests that all peace agreements are not created equal. The specific content of the agreements and the length of time that they are upheld play major roles in how effective they are at reducing the risk of conflict recurrence.

In addition to research on peace agreements, scholars have also explored the effects of rule-of-law reform, political reform, and freedom of the press reform on peace. Walter (2015), argues that these kinds of reforms improve government accountability and significantly reduce conflict recurrence. She finds for both rule-of-law reform and political reform that the

¹³Badran (2014) conducted a common factor analysis on the provisions of the peace agreement to determine the broad thematic areas of interest of the peace provisions.

¹⁴See Figure 1 on page 212 of Badran (2014).

¹⁵See Figure 2 on page 213 of Badran (2014).

odds of conflict recurrence in states that experience improvements in either factor is 100 times less than that of states that have not implemented reforms. Notably, Walter did not find any statistically significant effects for improvements in freedom of press.

The argument that reforms must constrain the government in order to promote peace extends to power-sharing arrangements as well. For example, Gates et al. (2016) finds that inclusive (shared-broad participation across groups in governance) and dispersive (participation in governance at the sub-national level) power-sharing are not associated with a reduction in conflict. Instead, more limited agreements, those that protect minority rights and constrain the powers included in power-sharing are associated with a reduction of both conflict onset and recurrence. For example, “a 1-unit increase in the constraining power-sharing index (e.g., from 21.5 to 20.5 or from 0 to 1) is associated with a 29% reduction in the probability of conflict onset,” (pg. 523).

Bormann et al. (2019) continue with this kind of work and explore inclusive versus dispersive power-sharing. Inclusive power-sharing includes grand coalitions and a mutual veto. Dispersive power-sharing includes power-sharing over several areas: “(1) the powers allocated to subnational governments, (2) whether subnational governments are directly elected, and (3) the representation of subnational constituencies in the upper house of the national legislature” (pg. 89).¹⁶ They find that inclusive power-sharing arrangements associate with a higher likelihood of in-fighting (conflict) among coalition members. Conversely, dispersive agreements do not show a statistically significant increase or decrease in conflict, whether in-fighting or ethnic conflict more broadly. In particular, regional autonomy that groups not involved in power-sharing arrangements receive associates with a decrease in ethnic conflict.

Governance Reform Implementation

Although substantial variation exists in the types of governance reform in peace agreements, the extent to which these reforms are implemented and the implications of differing degrees of implementation for violence is a different question. Unsurprisingly, scholars agree

¹⁶They focus on inclusive versus dispersive based on Lijphart (1969).

that increased implementation is associated with a reduction in violence. This extends to broad implementation (Joshi and Quinn 2017), as well as to particular types of provisions such as liberal peace provisions (Mac Ginty, Joshi and Lee 2019) and electoral reform (Keels 2018).

Joshi and Quinn (2017) find that the greater the extent of implementation of a peace agreement, the lower the probability of conflict recurrence. Greater implementation allows the peacebuilding process to begin to take root among the formerly warring actors, and it helps to normalize *political relations* among the formerly warring actors. The level of implementation is statistically significant in determining the length of time since the last bout of conflict. Substantively, “an accord that is 80 percent implemented, for instance, will produce a peace spell roughly two and a half times longer than an accord that is only 40 percent implemented (on average)” (pg. 884).

Mac Ginty, Joshi and Lee (2019) take this general intuition one step further and explore whether the implementation of liberal peace provisions, those that promote liberal democracy and economics, are associated with less conflict. Indeed, they find support for this assertion. For agreements where 75% of the liberal provisions were implemented, the likelihood of recurrence is two times less likely than an agreement with 20% of the liberal peace provisions implemented. Among cases where there is a lower implementation rate (i.e. around 20%), the introduction of a UN Peace Operation often reduces the odds that a conflict recurrence will not occur.

The importance of electoral reform implementation is another theme that emerges from the literature. Keels (2018) finds that the greater the extent of electoral reform implementation, the lower the likelihood of conflict recurrence. In particular, civil war recurrence risk is reduced by 85% if there is *any* electoral reform that is implemented. If most electoral reform is implemented, this value increases to 96.6%. If electoral reform is *fully* implemented, the risk of a return to civil war is nearly nonexistent, at 99.4%.

These consistent findings on the importance of implementation raise the question of why

some agreements are more fully implemented than others. If full implementation is more likely in conflicts in which the underlying conflict dynamics are less severe, full implementation might be an indicator that the conditions were ripe for peace, rather than a cause of peace itself.

Joshi, Melander and Quinn (2017) explore the extent to which there are accommodations for belligerents in peace agreements. In particular, they look at the establishment of transitional power-sharing, amnesty of belligerents, and the release of prisoners as stated within the peace agreement. They find that when there is increased electoral accommodation, the probability of conflict recurrence declines. This is true regardless of whether or not elections occur. For example, for countries 6 years into a post-war period, without accommodation, but with elections, the chance of conflict recurrence is near 80%. In contrast, in cases where accommodation is provided (whether or not elections are held), the chance that the conflict reoccurs is around 10%.

Ottmann (2020) find similar results. They explore personalized power-sharing (which grants elites access to state resources) versus structural power-sharing (which limits the resources given to elites). Personalized power-sharing, another form of elite accommodation, is associated with a statistically significant decrease in the number of battle deaths. Conversely, structural power-sharing is associated with an at times, statistically significant increase in battle deaths. Per the substantive results, if “the number of rebel-held portfolios” increases from zero to two (i.e. the mean value in the sample), then that “already reduces the monthly fatality count by eight to an average of about 19 battle-deaths. If the number of rebel portfolios is further increased by its standard deviation to six positions, we see an average effect of only ten fatalities per month,” (pg. 626). Conversely, for structural power-sharing, among those conflicts with two structural arrangements, the battle deaths count increases drastically from 30 to 76.

These findings may provide some clarity as to why there is an association between the implementation of liberal peace provisions and the reduction of violence Mac Ginty, Joshi

and Lee (2019). A key caveat, is that in order for elections to occur, or democratic reforms to occur, and not result in more disputes among elites, there needs to be accommodations made for elites.

The Complicated Promise of Power-Sharing

Several studies find that power-sharing is associated with a lower likelihood of conflict recurrence. Notably, Hartzell and Hoddie (2003) find that each additional power-sharing provision (among political power-sharing, military, economic, and territorial power-sharing), is associated with a 53% reduction in the likelihood that civil war will reoccur. Later studies corroborate these findings. For example, Mattes and Savun (2009) assert that power-sharing provisions reduce belligerents' fears about laying down their arms. They find, that relative to other kinds of power-sharing (i.e. military and territorial power-sharing), political power-sharing in particular reduces the odds that conflict will reoccur: with each additional political power-sharing provision, the odds of the peace breaking down are reduced by approximately 29%. Matanock (2017a) finds that for conflicts where there is a peace agreement that has power-sharing provisions stating that rebels can participate in elections, there is an 80% reduction in the likelihood that conflict will occur again.

While the potential of power-sharing to reduce violence is promising, not all kinds of power-sharing provisions equally contribute to violence reduction. For example, Ottmann and Vüllers (2015) explore different kinds of power-sharing (political, military, economic and territorial) and their effect on conflict recurrence. They explore both the effect of offers of different kinds of power-sharing and the implementation of power-sharing once an agreement is accepted. They find that offers of military, territorial and economic power-sharing are associated with a decrease in conflict recurrence, while promises of political power-sharing have no effect.¹⁷ With respect to implementation, the implementation of military power-

¹⁷It must be noted however, that in the third model on their Table 6, which takes into account all forms of power-sharing which includes both promises and implementation, political power-sharing is statistically significant and associated with an *increase* in conflict.

sharing is the only kind of power-sharing that is associated with a statistically significant decrease in conflict.

Similarly, Johnson (2021) finds that political, constitutional power-sharing arrangements (those that ensure that there will be some representation by the relevant parties in government) are associated with a decrease in conflict. Johnson states, “in the baseline category of settlements that include no power-sharing provisions, the predicted probability of dyadic conflict termination is 58.25%. Changing the value of transitional power-sharing from 0 to 1 causes this probability to fall to just 21.7%, while on the other hand, changing the value of constitutional provisions from 0 to 1 causes the likelihood to increase to a striking 94.43%,” (pg. 742). Here, political, transitional power-sharing (reforms that guarantee coalition building, but these coalitions expire at the end of the transitional governance period) contributed to a statistically significant increase in the likelihood of conflict continuing between warring actors.

Sanctions

Four studies included in the review evaluate the effectiveness of sanctions on reducing conflict related violence. The studies yield no consistent findings as to whether or not sanctions can reduce violence. Several studies of the effect of sanctions on conflict related violence report no effect. The literature suggests that sanctions are most effective when used in tandem with peacekeeping. In particular, they can be an effective in incentivizing warring actors to abide by the terms of an agreement. However, the literature does not provide strong evidence that sanctions are effective at producing a large-scale reduction in conflict related violence.

As discussed in the peacekeeping section above, Matanock and Lichtenheld (2022) find that when conditional incentives (i.e. sanctions) are placed on warring actors as part of a United Nations Peacekeeping Operation, the length of the post-conflict peace period decreases. Beardsley (2013) also finds that sanctions can be an effective tool the UN can use to continue to quell violence. However, he finds that the promise of sanctions applies only

in the short term. After five years or so, the risk of conflict recurrence is above 50% when sanctions are applied. However, in the face of a peacekeeping operation along with sanctions, the odds of conflict recurrence is just under 50% after 5 years.

Krain produced a series of papers exploring the effects of different kinds of sanctions on large-scale violence against civilians, specifically genocide. Krain (2014) finds that diplomatic sanctions do not decrease in the lethality of genocide or politicide. In a second paper, Krain (2017) finds that economic sanctions also fail to significantly reduce the severity of genocide or politicide. These null effects suggest that sanctions do not have strong effects on large-scale violence against civilians or political opponents.

Mediation

Four studies that address the relationship between mediation and conflict related violence met the criteria for inclusion in this review. None of the studies find strong evidence that mediation reduces violence. However, mediation might be effective in the short term and certain qualities of the mediator likely influence whether or not mediation is successful.

Beardsley (2013) explores the effectiveness of UN mediation, particularly diplomatic engagement. During the first five years post-conflict, he finds that UN diplomatic engagement is effective in preventing conflicts from relapsing. However, these results tend to dissipate at the 10 year mark. DeRouen Jr and Chowdhury (2018) report a similar result, showing that the simultaneous employment of UN peacekeeping and UN mediation contributes to a reduction in violent conflict.

Gurses, Rost and McLeod (2008) find that the presence of mediators helps to reduce incidents of conflict recurrence, while mediated agreements and superpower mediation are associated with an increase in conflict. They find that mediated agreements nearly double the probability of civil war recurrence. The involvement of superpower mediators increase the probability of conflict recurrence by a similar amount. Conversely, the involvement of non-superpower mediators leads to a decrease in conflict resumption by 75%. This sobering

and perhaps contradicting finding raises further questions regarding the conditions under which mediation may be effective.

Reid (2017) provides one possible answer: the qualities of the mediator likely matter in determining whether mediation contributes to an increase in violence or a reduction in violence. She explores the capability (i.e. the economic resources of the mediator) and credibility (i.e. the mediators' ties to the particular area and knowledge of the region) of mediators. She finds that increased capability of the mediator leads to short-term successes, i.e. fewer instances of conflict recurrence, and that credibility leverage contributes to fewer instances of conflict recurrence in the long term. In particular, "in terms of hazard ratios, mediation with credibility leverage decreases the likelihood of conflict recurrence by approximately 45 percent" (pg. 1420). This mixed effect points to the qualities of mediators as especially important in determining whether violence is reduced.

Socioeconomic Development

Socioeconomic development can include a wide variety of activities. Consequently, there are no broad themes across studies, as many do not cover the same kind of intervention. However, most studies in this category do not directly list violence reduction as a primary goal of the intervention. Out of the eight socioeconomic development studies consulted for this review, three explicitly analyze the influence of this kind of intervention on violence. Most of the studies in this modality are focused on evaluating whether different socioeconomic interventions improve social cohesion, which is assumed to but not empirically proven to lead to less physical violence. Future studies of socioeconomic development as a peacebuilding tool should capture the downstream effects of interventions on levels of violence. Across the three socioeconomic development studies included in the review, researchers present largely mixed findings.

Weintraub (2016) finds that areas of Colombia that were exposed to a cash transfer program suffered from higher levels of insurgent violence. He argues that the distribution

of cash *during* the civil war incentivized people to share information with the government, which contributed to a loss of territory for insurgents. To deter information sharing and reclaim lost territory, the rebels then engaged in increased violence. He uses a difference-in-differences design along with matching to explore these dynamics. In particular, the presence of the cash-transfer program is associated with an increase in rebel (FARC) civilian killings by 160% and a 250% increase in rebel (FARC) perpetrated indiscriminate violence.

Also focusing on Colombia, Graser et al. (2020) conducted one of the few systematic qualitative studies included in the review. They study the Integrated Rural Reform (land reform along with resources to communities to carry out such reform) and use semi-structured interviews with experts from “rural development stakeholders in different sectors” (p. 1) and participatory observation in the Caquetá region. They find that the physical security improved in the area following the land reform. Despite this, relevant stakeholders express concern about the implementation rate, claiming that the land reform has not happened quickly enough and that the strengthening of government institutions to support reforms is insufficient.

Lastly, Schwartz’s (2019) case study of refugee return in Burundi further highlights the how local realities complicate socioeconomic development. She finds that the return of refugees is associated with an increase in local violence, largely because individuals in conflict-affected settings tend to form new divisions between those who left during the conflict and those who remained. Especially in situations in which authorities grant returnees economic and development resources to encourage repatriation, locals who stayed may feel aggrieved, and this division will deepen. This further contributes to the incitement of violence.

Humanitarian Relief

The literature on the effects of humanitarian relief on conflict related physical violence is sobering. It is the only modality of peace that multiple studies suggest may actually increase violence. These effects pose important implications for violence reduction and the duration

of conflicts.

Narang (2015) explores whether humanitarian aid expenditures directed to conflict affected areas are associated with an increase in the length of conflict. He finds that increasing humanitarian aid is associated with an 8.7% increase in the conflict continuing rather than resolving. Narang argues that the introduction of aid into conflict environments helps rebels mobilize and provides resources to rebels to help obtain recruits. Aid, especially aid that is difficult to observe, introduces additional uncertainty to the conflict actors about the other side's relative capabilities.

Wood and Sullivan (2015) explore humanitarian aid delivery in conflict-affected settings in Africa and the prevalence of rebel versus state violence against civilians. They find that increased humanitarian aid delivery is associated with an increase in rebel violence specifically, while state violence remains unaffected. Wood and Sullivan estimate that units that received at least half the sample's maximum value of aid, resulted in approximately a 25% increase in rebel-led attacks against civilians. They argue that rebel violence against civilians increases because aid provides opportunities for rebels to engage in looting and aid can undermine the control of rebels over civilians, thus creating incentives for rebels to engage in more violence as they try to reassert control.

Although not as more promising than the results from Wood and Sullivan (2015) and Narang (2015), Lyall (2019) evaluation of a large international humanitarian aid program in Afghanistan finds only mixed results on reducing violence. Using a quasi-experiment¹⁸ Lyall finds that humanitarian aid is associated with a 23% decrease in the number of attacks against the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).¹⁹ Unfortunately, Lyall found that the reduction in violence did not extend to Afghan forces or to civilians.

In sum, of the few studies that have attempted to systematically assess the impact

¹⁸He uses the as-if-random exposure to the aid program, as a function of bureaucratic delays in delivery as a natural experiment.

¹⁹This effect appears to be especially true in rural areas, see Figure 3 on page 916 in Lyall (2019)

of humanitarian aid on violence, the results suggest that higher levels of humanitarian aid increase the duration of conflicts (Narang 2015) and the level of rebel-led violence against civilians (Wood and Sullivan 2015). Although Lyall (2019) finds some more optimistic effects, the main violence reduction effects accrue only to international military forces. It appears as if the introduction of humanitarian aid alters conflict dynamics, such that the state is able to solidify control and rebels are left in a precarious situation, which, according to these studies can prove to be deleterious for civilians. The explanation of how humanitarian aid during conflict may influence the dynamics among warring actors is similar to the explanation proposed by Weintraub (2016) regarding socioeconomic development.

Truth, Reconciliation and Justice

Two studies of truth, reconciliation, and justice peacebuilding modalities are included in this review. Loyle and Appel (2017) provide the most comprehensive study of the two. They use a cross national data set to compare the effect of different kinds of justice provisions on the probability of conflict recurrence. In particular, Loyle and Appel explore reparations, amnesty, comprehensive trials, opposition trials, exile and purges of political and military collaborators of the previous regime. The authors find that justice processes that address underlying grievances (i.e. those that attempt to reduce incentives for mobilization and recruitment), particularly reparations, comprehensive trials and amnesty are associated with a lower likelihood of conflict recurrence. Loyle and Appel report large substantive effects on the probability of recurrence of grievance-reducing justice processes. Governments that provide reparation are 72% less likely to experience a recurrence of conflict and states that implement amnesty are 35% less likely.²⁰ Because there were no examples of conflict recurrence

²⁰They do find evidence that comprehensive trials also lead to a substantial decrease, however, there are only 10 observations that are included in the analysis for this variable. Consequently, trials need further exploration as a possible violence reducing peacebuilding mechanism.

following a truth commission, the size of its effect on recurrence could not be estimated..²¹

Joshi, Melander and Quinn (2017) are reviewed above in the governance reform section. However, two of the key peace agreement provisions identified in the study are provisions for the amnesty of belligerents and the release of prisoners. This study is mentioned in this section again because there are justice provisions included. They largely find that peace agreements that are more accommodating to formerly warring actors are associated with a reduction in conflict recurrence. 6 years post-conflict, when accommodations are provided, the change of conflict recurrence is about 10%, compared to a 80% chance of conflict recurrence with elections 6 years after conflict and no accommodations.

Security Sector Reform (SSR)

Only two SSR studies met the criteria for this review. Although scholarship in this area has grown recently, most of the studies on SSR that were explored for this review do not directly assess the effect of SSR on conflict-related violence. Consequently, additional studies are needed in the future to determine the effect of SSR on violence.

One of the reasons for a dearth of scholarship on SSR and conflict related violence is that historically there were very few cross-national data sources on the topic. However, each of the studies reviewed below introduces a new data source that is likely to be useful for future studies and exploration.

Both studies find that SSR is effective at reducing violence. In the first study, Joshi, Quinn and Regan (2015) introduce the Peace Accords Matrix Implementation Dataset (PAM-ID). They focus on security sector reform (SSR) provisions and find that the greater the implementation of SSR (even at a minimum of 25%) is associated with a decrease in the odds of conflict resurgence. For example, among signatories to the agreement, approximately 8 years after the signing of a peace agreement, the rate of conflict recurrence is approximately

²¹It is possible that there are numerous selection effects at work here, i.e. truth commissions are only likely to occur in cases that are already fairly stable post-conflict situations.

30%, even when an SSR is only 25% implemented, compared to .8 (80%) when no SSRs have been implemented. This conflict-reducing effect is true among signatories and non-signatories alike.

In particular, SSR reforms can include both reforms focused on the military and the police. Ansorg, Haass and Strasheim (2016) introduces the Police Reform in Peace Agreements (PRPA) dataset and explores the association of these provisions with conflict recurrence. At the time of Ansorg's writing, there were not many quantitative studies of police reform, rather the majority of studies that explored this aspect of the peace process were qualitative in nature. The presence of political police reform ("addressing human rights standards, composition and accountability structures" pg. 598) in particular is associated with a lower likelihood of conflict recurrence (as opposed to technical police reform, "changes in the training and equipping of officers" pg. 598). Ansorg argues that this is likely due to political police reform being a more credible signal, compared to technical police reform.

Election Support

Only one study concerning election support met the criteria for inclusion in this review. Brancati and Snyder (2013) explore the timing of elections and civil war onset. They find that holding elections too soon after conflict ends can have deleterious effects for civil war recurrence. Using statistical matching to minimize selection effects, they estimate that holding elections immediately after conflict ends is associated with about a 60% chance of civil war recurrence, regardless of whether the first elections are national or sub-national elections. Waiting approximately five years to hold elections is associated with only a 40% chance of a civil war recurrence.

Brancati and Snyder identify several mediating effects, however, including decisive military victories, military demobilization prior to the first election, and the deployment of peacekeeping forces. For example, for conflicts ending in clear military victory, even if elections are held only one year after the civil war ends, the probability of a new civil war

arising decreases by 40%. UN peacekeeping also has a large influence on national elections specifically (not all elections). UN peacekeeping is associated with a 60% decrease in the probability of a new civil war arising if national elections are held one year after the conflict ends.

Civil-Society Building

One study included in the review captures the effect of civil-society building on violence. Nilsson (2012) explores whether the inclusion of civil-society actors in peace negotiations is associated with less conflict resurgence. She finds that the inclusion of civil-society actors in negotiations contributes to a 64% reduction in the risk that any of the parties that signed the peace agreement engages in violence (compared to 50% if any agreement is signed at all). Although this is promising, additional research is needed to determine whether the effect of civil society building is effective in reducing violence. However, it is understandable that studies that capture this modality do not often explore its effect on violence reduction outright, as many civil-society building interventions are primarily concerned with strengthening organizations such as radio broadcasting and civil-society organizations. If there is an effect of these kinds of interventions on violence, they are likely to be indirect or downstream effects, as violence reduction is often a secondary concern of these interventions.

Naming and Shaming

One naming and shaming study is included in the review. Naming and shaming refers to policies designed to publicly identify and censure states, organizations, or individuals for behavior that violates international norms and laws. The objective of naming and shaming is to leverage reputational damage to pressure the criticized entity into altering its conduct.

Beardsley (2013) examines the effectiveness of a variety of different UN activities at reducing the risk of conflict recurrence, including what he calls “condemnation,” which is equivalent to naming and shaming. Beardsley finds that regardless of whether peacekeepers

are or are not deployed to a conflict where actors are condemned, there is no statistically significant effect of naming and shaming on the probability the conflict will reoccur. Needless to say, the effects of naming and shaming on conflict-related violence requires much more exploration. Although scholars have produced numerous studies of this peacebuilding modality very few directly explore the ability of naming and shaming to actually reduce conflict related violence.

Key Takeaways

Priority Areas

Table 5 shows that the distribution of scholarly attention to understand the effectiveness of peacebuilding has been extremely uneven. With the exception of peacekeeping, all other peacebuilding modalities require additional research. Although there are large literatures on several of these modalities, these studies have not focused on evaluating their effects on conflict-related violence.

Security sector reform (SSR), election support, truth, reconciliation and justice, civil-society building and naming and shaming can benefit from additional research, as there are very few studies on these important topics included in the review. Of particular concern, however, are the modalities that did not have any studies included in the review: disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR), peace education, post-conflict safety measures and social cohesion building.

Figure 2 shows the number of publications by the geographic region. By far, the majority of studies, 74%, are cross-national. Much of the quantitative research regarding war and conflict has been cross-national in nature, as there are a large number of thorough, robust cross-national datasets that allow for the study of this topic. Africa is the region that is represented most in the studies. This is unsurprising, as many civil wars in recent history have taken place on the continent.

Cross-national studies are invaluable to our broad understanding of peacebuilding. However, studies that use sub-national data and pay particular attention to causal inference through the use methods like natural experiments and difference-in-differences design should be used to help explore the causal effect of peacebuilding with more confidence. One promising step in this direction is the increased use of matching in the peacekeeping literature. While it is an imperfect approach, the increased use of matching is indicative of a deep interest in addressing the issue of nonrandom assignment of peacebuilding interventions which is a pervasive methodological issue in the study of conflict and peace (Matanock 2020).

Sequencing

A fruitful avenue of exploration is the sequencing of different kinds of interventions, led by different actors at different times during the post-conflict period. For example, Reid (2017) finds that states that especially economically powerful states are strong mediators, particularly for helping to secure an initial agreement. Conversely, skilled mediators, those that have long-standing negotiation skills for example, are better suited at helping to maintain a peace that endures (after an initial agreement has been determined). Reid (2017) raises the question of whether there should be a “hand off” among different actors at different points in the peace process. Beardsley (2013) also finds that the UN has the potential to succeed in establishing peace in the short term, particularly through diplomacy. However, if this initial effort is not reinforced by a robust peacekeeping effort, then there is a high likelihood that long-term peace will be compromised. This further raises the question of sequencing with respect to peacebuilding initiatives, especially during the negotiation and mediation stages in the peace process.

Coordination Across Modalities

Several studies suggested that coordination across different kinds of peacebuilding modalities is critical to violence reduction. For example, there is a long-standing theoretical and

empirical debate about whether holding elections and conducting democratization efforts at the same time will contribute to long-lasting peace. However, Brancati and Snyder (2013) suggest that the possible adverse effects of elections on conflict recurrence can be overcome by additional peacebuilding measures, namely: peacekeeping, power-sharing and a robust DDR effort that are implemented at the same time as elections.

Peacekeeping is a particularly promising modality that otherwise curbs some of the negative externalities of other peacebuilding modalities. For example, Caplan and Hoeffler (2017) find that only when peacekeepers are deployed in support of a negotiated settlement do the pacifying effects of peacekeeping hold. In the absence of a negotiated settlement, the effect of peacekeeping is null. Similarly, DeRouen Jr and Chowdhury (2018) find that the use of UN mediation and UN peacekeeping, perhaps after mediation has helped to reach an agreement, is especially effective in preventing recurrence of conflicts. Beardsley's (2013) findings suggest that there is a temporal aspect to this effect as well: peacekeeping might ensure a longer-term peace, especially after a successful UN-led mediation effort (i.e. the source of short term successes). Likewise, Mac Ginty, Joshi and Lee (2019) find that peacekeeping in areas with lower levels of liberal peace agreement implementation also helps to curb violence.

Exploring the extent to which different combinations of peacebuilding help to enhance the effects of one of the modalities or curb unintended consequences is especially important in understanding the reduction of violence. This is especially crucial for modalities that have negative externalities, such as socioeconomic development and humanitarian aid. Wood and Sullivan (2015) explicitly call for greater coordination between peacebuilding organizations to try to reduce the negative externalities of aid delivery.

The Cost of Peacebuilding

Evaluating the effectiveness of peacebuilding must also reckon with its monetary costs. If peacebuilding is only effective at enormous financial expense, peacebuilders will need to

consider whether those resources should be spent elsewhere to improve human welfare more effectively.

Determining the financial costs of some peacebuilding modalities is difficult, as different peacebuilding activities often fall under the same expenditure category when examining unilateral and multilateral spending reports. Additionally, with the exception of peacekeeping and humanitarian relief, most studies do not estimate the number of battle deaths or civilian lives that are averted through peacebuilding. Instead, most studies reviewed above focus on the effect of peacebuilding on the probability of conflict recurrence. Because the number of people who would have died in the averted conflict is not estimated, it is difficult to use these studies to estimate the cost per-life saved. Despite this, I explore how much some of the modalities cost, relative to their effectiveness.

In general, world spending on peacebuilding activities has decreased for some time. An OECD report from October 2023 notes that organizations have spent less money on peace and conflict prevention. In 2021, spending from the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) on peacebuilding fell to 9.6% of the Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget, to 15.27 billion USD (OECD). This trend is likely to continue and become worse, as the peacebuilding and development communities grapple with U.S. withdrawal of aid and cuts to institutions such as USAID.

Nevertheless, some peacebuilding modalities continue to require comparatively large budgets. United Nations peacekeeping in particular, is an especially expensive mode of peacebuilding. Using simulations, Hegre et al. (2019) have shown that if the UN spent 200 billion USD on peacekeeping operations with robust mandates, the UN could save approximately 115,000 lives over a 13-year period. Although this is an impressive effect by any measure, it suggests that the cost of saving a life through peacekeeping is approximately 1.3 million USD. Relying on such an expensive peacebuilding modality is likely to prove increasingly difficult, especially in an era in which the U.S. its involvement in multilateral institutions, but is especially concerned with its disproportionate funding of institutions like

the United Nations (Council on Foreign Relations 2025). At more than a million dollars per head, peacekeeping might not be the most cost-effective path forward to preventing death.

Above I identified several peacebuilding modalities that appear to have a large conflict reducing effect, but cost much less than peacekeeping. Mediation and targeted sanctions usually entail relatively modest financial costs, although the political costs to the actors who employ them can be greater.²² The promise of mediators with experience in the region can potentially help to reduce conflict recurrence by 45% (Reid 2017). Under the assumption that some form of assistance is given to actors after many peace agreements are signed, placing explicit conditions on such resources can be especially cost-effective and crucial in getting elites to continue to abide by the terms of the agreement.

The literature reviewed also finds that governance and security sector reforms (SSR) can have a major effect on reducing conflict related violence. The inclusion of certain reform provisions in peace agreements can reduce violence, although the largest effects require that these provisions be successfully implemented, which can require substantial funding. For example, it is estimated that the 2016 Colombian Peace Accords will require between 41 and 42 billion USD through 2031 (Washington Office on Latin America) to fully implement. According to the Colombian Truth Commission, approximately 450,000 lives were lost during the civil war.²³ If the cost of full implementation is divided by the number of lives lost, this is approximately 93,000 USD per life lost during the war.

If we take the case of SSR, if 8 years after the signing of a peace agreement, just 25% of SSR provisions in the agreement are implemented, the rate of conflict recurrence is reduced by about 50% compared to agreements where no SSR implementation has occurred (Joshi, Quinn and Regan 2015). This suggests that at even low levels of implementation, SSR can have large implications for long-term stability. However, according to a 2015 Geneva Centre for Democratic Control of the Armed Forces (DCAF) report, between 2006 and 2012,

²²The conflict reducing effects mentioned here do not extend to large-scale violence and politicide (Krain 2014, 2017).

²³ff

50 million USD (21% of the UN Peacebuilding Fund budget) was spent on SSR activities (Keane and Ommundsen 2015). The report also takes into account unilateral SSR support in the case of Liberia. The authors find that the United States spent approximately 95 million USD, throughout the course of its retraining of the Armed Forces of Liberia. During the Liberian civil wars approximately 250,000 lives were lost. The conflict ended in 2003, approximately 22 years ago. If we divided the total amount spent by the United States on SSR by the total number of lives lost, that is approximately 380 USD spent per life lost, for an intervention that has seemed to reduce the possibility of a coup or civil war recurrence for over twenty years.

Prior to the second Trump administration and the consequent USAID cuts, emergency, humanitarian aid spending increased in recent years. Between 2010 and 2020, humanitarian aid spending increased by 161%. In 2021, humanitarian aid spending represented 15% of the ODA budget for a total of 23.65 billion USD (OECD). However, the future of emergency aid spending is stark, as the world continues to experience a lack of interest in multilateralism and the United States continues to withdraw from previous aid obligations.

All of these numbers are fairly large and yield perhaps questionable payoffs in some instances. However, the total amount of money spent on peacebuilding pales in comparison to the overall cost of conflict. According to Vision of Humanity, the amount of money spent on war in 2016 was 13.6 trillion USD, compared to the 45 billion USD spent on peacebuilding in the same year (Vision of Humanity).

Certainly, the appeasement of elites, or at the very least their feeling as if the terms of ending conflict benefit them in some way, is important. However, the institutionalization of such reforms is also important, likely because this ensures that the reforms last, are more likely to be implemented, and because they provide a check on the government, particularly (Johnson 2021; Mac Ginty, Joshi and Lee 2019).

Peacebuilding and The Fundamental Problem of Causal Inference

This literature review assesses the effect of international peacebuilding on violence according to systematic academic studies. However, it is difficult to assess the directionality of this relationship. Specifically, it is difficult to determine whether peacebuilding influences levels of violence, or whether levels of peacebuilding influence peacebuilding. In practice, areas that have higher levels of violence might be the areas that are more likely to be exposed to peacebuilding. In order to rule out the possibility that other factors, or alternative explanations (as opposed to peacebuilding itself), contribute to levels of violence and to make sure that peacebuilding influences levels of violence and not the other way around, we need to randomly assign peacebuilding. Random assignment allows for each observation to have an equal chance of peacebuilding occurring. If we are not able randomly assign peacebuilding, through a randomized controlled trial (RCT) or a lab in the field experiment, then it is difficult to observe the direct effect of peacebuilding on levels of violence.

As can be seen in Figure 1 however, none of the studies in this review are RCTs or lab in the field experiments. However, approximately 58% of the studies included engage in quasi-experimental methods. This means that these studies took particular care to use different statistical approaches to simulate processes that allow us to observe the direct effect of peacebuilding on violence. While not perfect, these methods are fairly sophisticated and robust.

Very few studies of peacebuilding randomize peacebuilding exposure. Those studies that do randomize peacebuilding exposure do not often measure the level of violence as the outcome of interest. Instead they often focus on individual attitudes about violence or attitudes toward ethnic minorities.

Many ethical concerns surround the randomization of peacebuilding that have presumably contributed to very few peacebuilding studies randomizing peacebuilding. These ethical concerns are especially acute if peacebuilding saves lives. If, for example, several communities are randomly assigned to peacebuilding and the peacebuilding program is demonstrated

to save lives, this implies that, merely by chance of randomization, some lives were lost that otherwise could have been saved. This makes randomization of peacebuilding very difficult and calls for careful ethical care to be taken if randomization of peacebuilding were to occur.

Conclusion

Above I presented a new typology of peacebuilding encompassing approximately fifteen different modalities. I reviewed existing the literature for studies evaluating the effectiveness of each of these modalities at reducing conflict related violence. The most important finding of this exercise is that scholarship on peacebuilding and conflict-related violence is sparse. Almost 80 percent of the studies I identified concentrate on just two modalities – peacekeeping and governance reform. I found no studies at all that systematically evaluated the effectiveness of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR), peace education, post-conflict safety measures, and social-cohesion building on conflict related violence.

Although peacekeeping appears to be an especially promising avenue to prevent conflict recurrence, reduce battle deaths and prevent violence against civilians, it is expensive. Governance reform, particularly certain forms of power-sharing and the implementation of peace agreement provisions, are conducive to mitigating conflict recurrence as well. However, the implementation of such reforms is also fairly expensive. In an era of decreasing resources available for peacebuilding the need for more research on what works to prevent conflict related violence has never been greater.

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APPENDIX: EPI Peacebuilding Review

Priscilla Torres

March 2025

1 List of Sources by Peace Modality

1.1 Governance Reform

- Matanock (2017)
- Mattes and Savun (2009)
- Bormann et al. (2019)
- Hartzell and Hoddie (2003)
- Ohmura (2011)
- Badran (2014)
- Walter (2015)
- Graser et al. (2020)
- Johnson (2021)
- Hartzell (2009)
- Mac Ginty, Joshi and Lee (2019)

- Caplan and Hoeffler (2017)
- Joshi, Melander and Quinn (2017)
- Keels (2018)
- Gates et al. (2016)
- Nilsson (2008)
- Ottmann and Vüllers (2015)
- Ottmann (2020)
- Joshi and Quinn (2017)

1.2 Peacekeeping

- Carnegie and Mikulaschek (2020)
- Bove and Ruggeri (2016)
- Doyle and Sambanis (2000)
- Gilligan, Sergenti et al. (2008)
- Ruggeri, Dorussen and Gizelis (2017)
- Haass and Ansorg (2018)
- Fortna (2004*a*)
- Quinn, Mason and Gurses (2007)
- Hultman, Kathman and Shannon (2013)
- Hultman, Kathman and Shannon (2016)

- Ohmura (2011)
- Fortna (2004*b*)
- Hultman, Kathman and Shannon (2014)
- Joshi (2013)
- Fjelde, Hultman and Nilsson (2019)
- Kathman, Benson and Diehl (2023)
- Hansen, Nemeth and Mauslein (2020)
- Bara and Hultman (2020)
- Beardsley and Gleditsch (2015)
- Beardsley (2011)
- Melander (2009)
- Phayal (2019)
- Phayal and Prins (2020)
- David Mason et al. (2011)
- Narang and Liu (2022)
- Bove and Ruggeri (2019)
- Di Salvatore (2020)
- Kathman and Benson (2019)
- Costalli (2014)
- Beardsley (2013)

- Mac Ginty, Joshi and Lee (2019)
- Caplan and Hoeffler (2017)
- Fortna (2003*b*)
- DeRouen Jr and Chowdhury (2018)
- Matanock and Lichtenheld (2022)
- Kathman and Wood (2016)
- Howard (2008)
- Howard (2019)
- Fortna (2003*a*)

1.3 Election Support

- Brancati and Snyder (2013)

1.4 Civil Society Building

- Nilsson (2012)

1.5 Truth, Justice and Reconciliation

- Loyle and Appel (2017)
- Joshi, Melander and Quinn (2017)

1.6 Sanctions

- Beardsley (2013)
- Matanock and Lichtenheld (2022)

- Krain (2014)
- Krain (2017)

1.7 Mediation

- Beardsley (2013)
- Gurses, Rost and McLeod (2008)
- Reid (2017)
- DeRouen Jr and Chowdhury (2018)

1.8 Naming and shaming

- Beardsley (2013)

1.9 Socioeconomic Development

- Schwartz (2019)
- Graser et al. (2020)
- Weintraub (2016)

1.10 Security Sector Reform (SSR)

- Joshi, Quinn and Regan (2015)
- Ansorg, Haass and Strasheim (2016)

1.11 Humanitarian Relief

- Lyall (2019)

- Narang (2015)
- Wood and Sullivan (2015)

2 Additional Descriptive Statistics

2.1 Results by Type of Peacebuilding: Percentages

Results by Type of Peacebuilding (N = 70; 80 peacebuilding instances captured) ¹				
Peacebuilding Type	% of Total Studies	Violence Reduction	Violence Increase	Mixed Results
Peacekeeping	56% (39/70)	62% (24/39)	3% (1/39)	36% (14/39)
Dialogue	0% (0/70)	—	—	—
Socioeconomic Development	4% (3/70)	67% (2/3)	33% (1/3)	—
Governance Reform	27% (19/70)	63% (12/19)	21% (1/19)	32% (6/19)
Humanitarian Relief	4% (3/70)	67% (2/3)	—	33% (1/3)
Security Sector Reform (SSR)	3% (2/70)	100% (2/2)	—	—
Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR)	0% (0/70)	—	—	—
Election Support	1% (1/70)	100% (1/1)	—	—
Truth, Reconciliation and Justice	3% (2/70)	100% (2/2)	—	—
Peace Education	0% (0/70)	—	—	—

Results by Type of Peacebuilding (N = 70; 80 peacebuilding instances captured) ²				
Peacebuilding Type	% of Total Studies	Violence Reduction	Violence Increase	Mixed Results
Post-Conflict Safety Measures	0% (0/70)	—	—	—
Civil-Society Building	1% (1/70)	100% (1/1)	—	—
Social Cohesion Building	0% (0/70)	—	—	—
Naming and Shaming	1% (1/70)	—	—	100% (1/1)
Sanctions	6% (4/70)	50% (2/4)	—	50% (2/4)
Mediation	6% (4/70)	75% (3/4)	25% (1/4)	—

3 Additional Figures

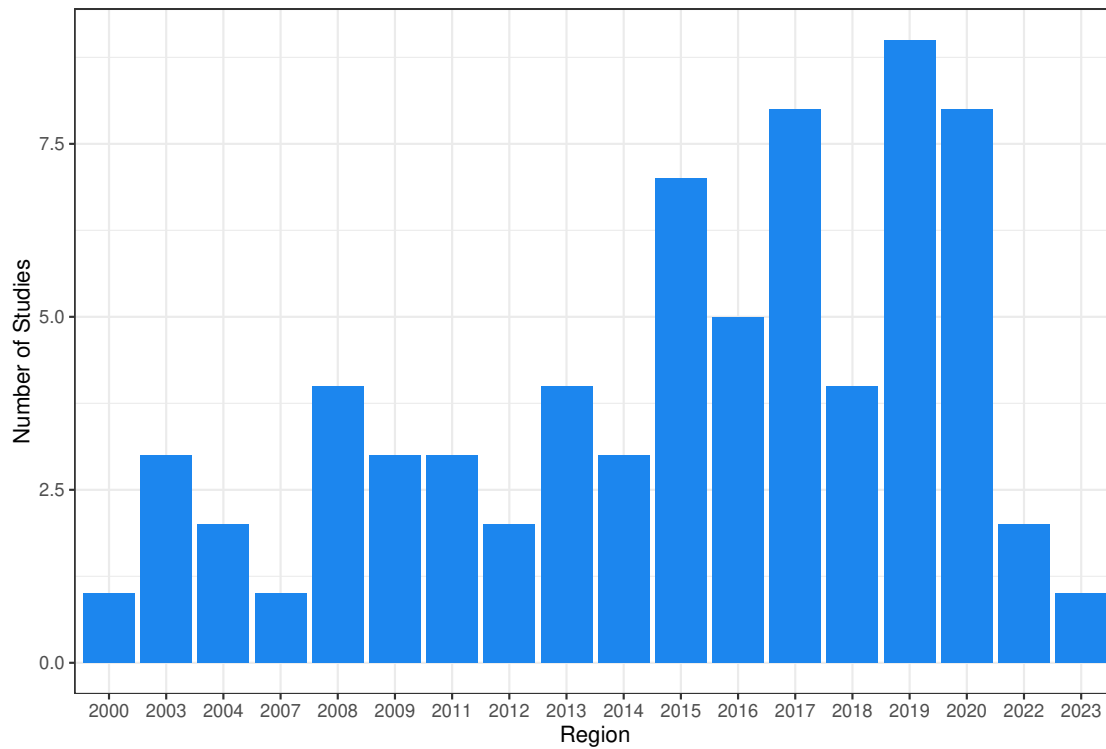


Figure 1: Studies Published by Year

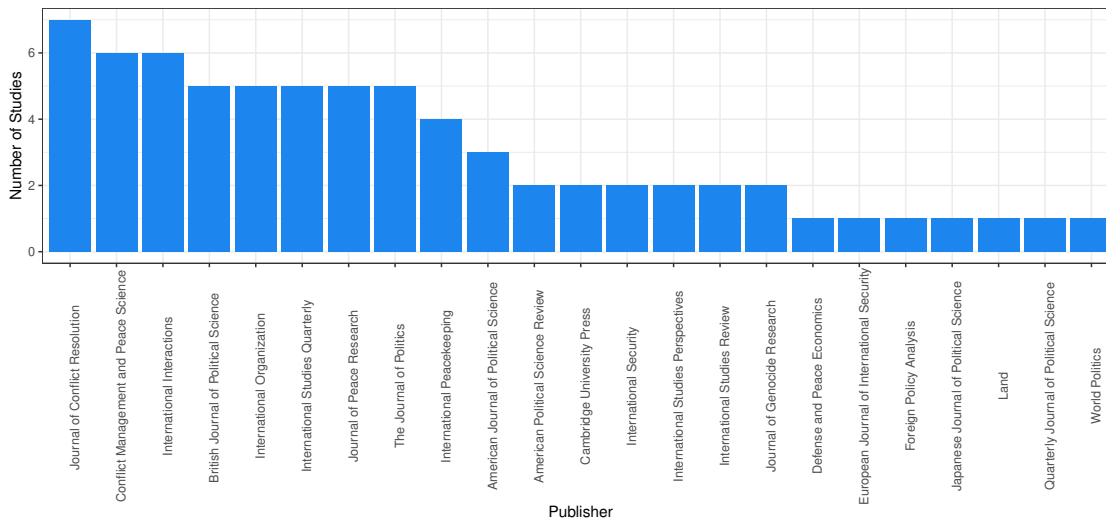


Figure 2: Publication Outlet

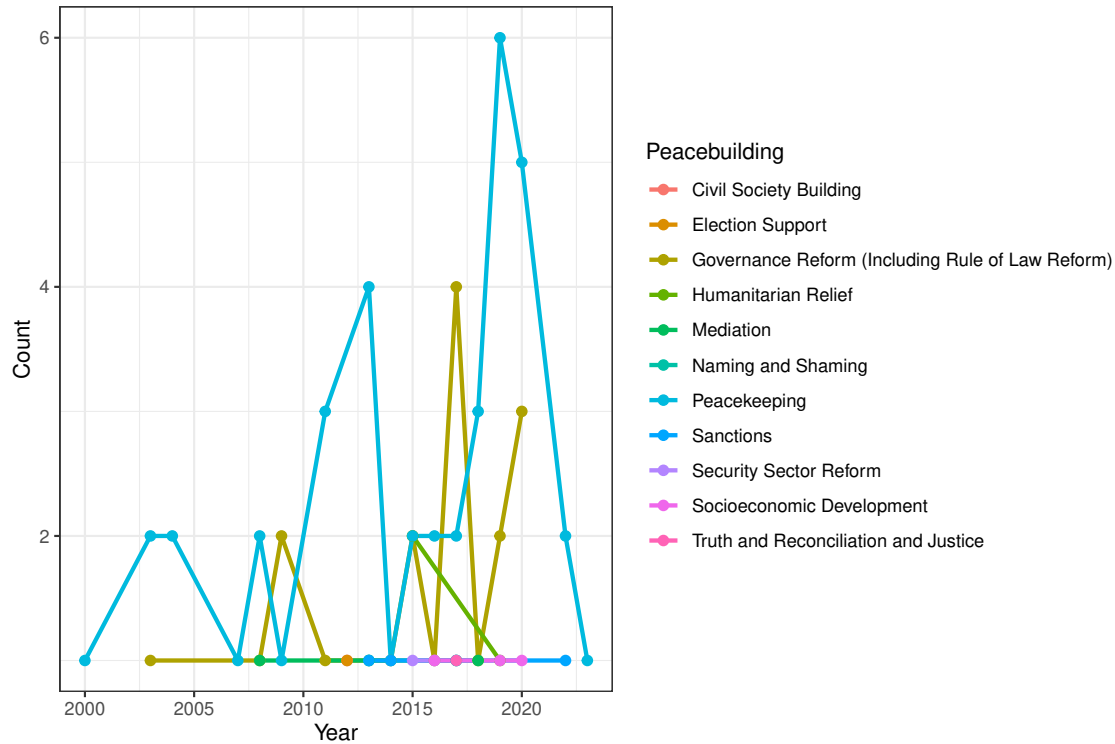


Figure 3: Modality by Year of Publication

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