Over the last decade, armed conflict databases have become ever-more sophisticated and popular among academic researchers and policymakers. This box presents a brief synopsis of analysis based on data from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) regarding the relationship between civil society inclusion in peace agreements and the durability of peace.

Is peace more likely to prevail if the agreement includes civil society actors? This box summarises research findings from an analysis of 83 signed peace agreements from 40 different civil wars between a government and one or more rebel groups between 1989 and 2004. Texts of peace agreements were derived from the UCDP. The study shows that the inclusion of civil society in peace agreements significantly increases the chances that peace will last.

Broadly speaking, arguments regarding the value of including civil society in peace agreements fall into two camps: pro – to garner broad support for the peace process; and con – that increasing the number of actors complicates negotiations. The research focused on whether the inclusion of civil society in peace accords affected the conflict behaviour of the conflict parties following the peace agreement. Civil society was conceived as the range of voluntary organisations in society: for instance, religious associations, women’s organisations, human rights groups and trade unions. Civil society groups were considered to be included in a peace agreement when, based on the text of the peace agreement, they had a role in drafting the agreement, or the agreement stipulated that they were to participate in the subsequent peace process. Durability was understood in terms of the number of years following the signing of a peace agreement that the conflict parties did not engage in armed conflict – defined as more than 25 observed battle-related deaths in a year.

Analysis of the 83 peace agreements from the UCDP database showed that one-third (28) included civil society in some way, while two-thirds (55) did not. Notably, in the peace agreements where civil society actors were included, the involvement could be more or less extensive; sometimes the actor had a more prominent role by participating in the formal negotiations and in other cases the agreement merely called for the involvement of civil society. The analysis also showed that of the 28 peace agreements that involved civil society actors, 22 also included one or more political party – for example in Burundi, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Guatemala and Mexico. Peace settlements that involved civil society but did not involve political parties included the Mindanao Final Agreement (1996) and the Bougainville Peace Agreement in Papua New Guinea (2001).

In terms of durability, the results show that if civil society is included in a peace agreement the risk of peace breaking down between the signatories is reduced by 64 per cent. This finding suggests an important role for civil society in peace processes: we may expect that if actors from civil society are allowed a place at the negotiation table, or are stipulated to play a role in the implementation of an agreement, the post-agreement peace among the signatories stands a better chance of lasting. Even if other factors that can explain why peace prevails are taken into account, such as the level of economic development or the intensity and duration of conflicts, civil society inclusion still plays a significant role. This research also invites further investigation to unpack the relationship more closely, for example by differentiating between civil society actors, roles and levels of engagement, and establishing specifically why inclusion affects durability in some cases, and why it does not in others.

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