Peace Agreements and the Political Integration of Armed Groups

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JOINT BRIEF SERIES: THE POLITICAL DYNAMICS OF DDR

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Introduction

The transformation of armed actors to political parties has become a central component of many peace processes aimed at ending civil wars. These processes are beneficial from a peacebuilding perspective, as groups and communities that have previously been marginalized or excluded gain a legitimate voice and representation in formal political institutions.[1] In addition, as noted in the recently updated Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS) module 2.20 on the Politics of DDR, armed groups may be reluctant to disarm and demobilize unless they are granted tangible indications that their political grievances will be addressed.[2] The IDDRS therefore recommends that the United Nations (UN) should provide support for 'rebel-to-party transformations' already at the time of the peace negotiations. This notion is generally supported by scholarly research, which has shown that peace agreements are not merely 'scraps

of paper' and that their content can affect whether peace lasts or war resumes.[3] But how and why does the content of the peace agreement matter for whether or not non-state armed groups become political parties? This is the key question addressed in this research brief.

The findings and examples presented here draw on several of the main author's research publications.[4] We present data primarily from the recently updated Rebel-to-Party (RtP) dataset.[5] This integrated dataset allows us to descriptively map out both the frequency and scope of various peace agreement provisions and the occurrence of rebel-to-party transformations. We also present some case study illustrations. Increased knowledge about the various linkages between the content of peace agreements and the occurrence of rebel-to-party transformations is imperative if we are to understand more about how domestic and international peace mediators and facilitators can and should support the political integration of armed groups in negotiated peace settlements.

What is the pattern and trend of rebel-to-party transformations?

What do we mean by a 'rebel-to-party transformation' in the context of a civil war peace agreement? For the research presented in this brief, we assume that the essence of the transformation from armed non-state organization to political party lies both in the change of the means of political struggle (from bullets to ballots) and in the arena where that struggle takes place (within or outside the legal constitutional framework of politics). In other words, the group must both have abandoned the armed struggle and must have continued to seek political influence through active participation within the political system in order to be considered to have transformed into a political party.

When applied to real-world cases, however, there are many grey zones. For example, some rebel groups-turned-parties, or individuals or factions belonging to the same group, may still continue to use violence in some form, such as election-related violence. Groups may also experience a drawn-out process of disarmament and demobilization while simultaneously engaging in formal politics. Another challenge in the context of post-war states is the minimal threshold for being considered a political party. Many parties are poorly institutionalized and lack resources. This is especially true for opposition parties.[6] Finally, some armed groups were political parties to begin with, or operated as political parties while pursuing armed struggle. For the research presented in this brief, we have employed a definition of 'rebel-to-party transformations' that attempts to correspond to these diverse realities as much as possible. As long as an identifiable part of the armed group commits to and actively engages in a demilitarization process and officially registers as a political party and thereby announces its intention to (or its continuing to) participate in elections (national or local), it is considered a rebel-to-party transformation. It is worth noting that this research brief only discusses the transformations of non-state armed groups that are signatories to peace agreements and excludes a large number of other cases, not least the many militant groups who engage in party politics after military victories or coups.

What is the pattern and trend of rebel-to-party transformations?

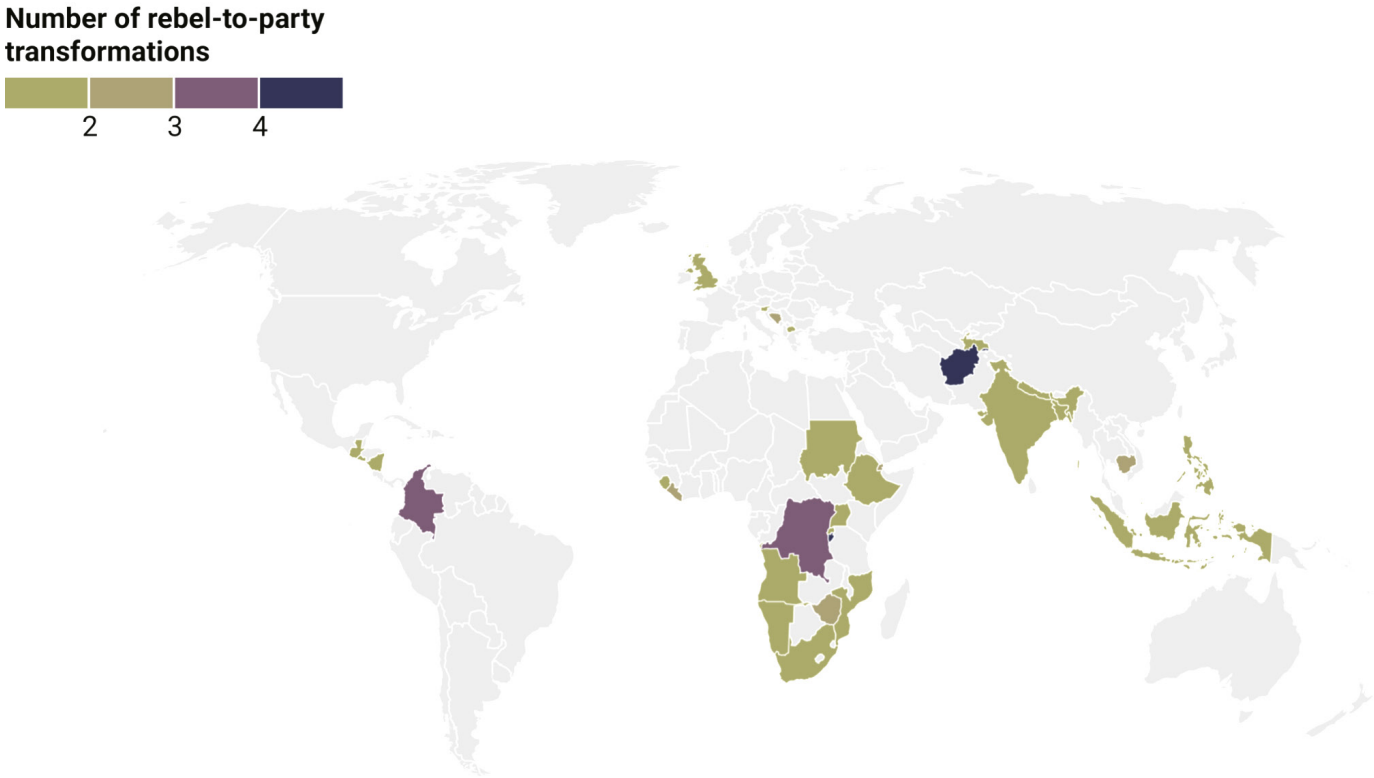
Based on the criteria presented above, how many armed groups have transformed into political parties? In our research, we found that over one-third of all insurgent groups subsequently continue to pursue their goals within the legal political system in their respective countries. During the 1975–2018 time period, there were a total of 122 non-state armed groups who signed peace agreements in civil wars. Of these groups, 47 (38.5 per cent) subsequently became political parties or continued to operate as political parties. This shows that rebel-to-party transformations are not a marginal or exceptional phenomena in contemporary peacemaking.

What is the trend across time and space? The political

integration of former armed groups has become considerably more common since the end of the Cold War. This is not so surprising. It was not until that point that peacemaking emerged as a more accepted way of ending armed conflicts. From the 1990s and onwards, there have been more negotiated settlements between warring parties than in any period after the end of World War II.[7] The first two decades of peacemaking after the end of superpower rivalry also became known for its generally optimistic view on the peacebuilding potential of liberal institution-building in post-war settings across the world.[8] This is probably reflected in the increasing numbers of rebel-to-party transformations during this period.

Figure 1 shows the geographic distribution of rebel-to-party transformations among signatories of peace agreements. As follows from this figure, armed groups have been politically integrated as a result of peace processes in a large number of countries across the globe. In fact, the number of rebel-to-party transformations by region tracks relatively closely to the geographical distribution of peace agreements. In other words, although Africa

Figure 1. Number of armed groups per country that have made 'rebel-to-party transformations' after signing peace agreements, 1975–2018.



is overrepresented in absolute terms, this is because more peace agreements have been signed in that region during this time period. Meanwhile, the low number in the Middle East mirrors the general lack of negotiated settlements there.

We also know that former militant groups have emerged as political parties, or have continued to operate as such, following both civil wars fought to gain control over government power and secessionist conflicts fought to gain control over territory. While the case of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone is an example of the former, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in the Philippines illustrates the latter. In addition, in light of the significant increase in religiously defined armed conflicts in recent years, it is worth noting that there are several examples of armed groups that framed their wartime political grievances in religious terms that have been incorporated in constitutional politics: for example, in Afghanistan, Indonesia and Tajikistan. [9]

Based on our data, we also find that rebel-to-party transformations are more commonplace in more democratic states than in autocracies. This makes sense, as former rebel groups have stronger incentives to participate in party politics if they believe that they can gain influence through this arena. However, there are some cases where rebel groups have been politically integrated in what were, at the time, autocratic or one-party states: for example, the Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy (FRUD) in Djibouti and the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) in Tajikistan. In these two cases, the peace agreements included explicit so-called 'rebel-to-party' provisions, discussed in more detailed

Table 1. Rebel-to-party transformations following intrastate peace agreements (1975–2018)[10].

Country	Armed group	PA year	Political party name(s)
Afghanistan	Unity Party	1993	Afghanistan Islamic Unity Party
Afghanistan	Islamic Party of Afghanistan	2016*	Islamic Party Gulbuddin (HIG), Islamic Party Khalid Farooqi (HIA)
Afghanistan	National Islamic Front of Afghanistan	1992	National Islamic Front (NIFA)
Afghanistan	Movement of the Islamic Revolution/ Uprising of Afghanistan	1992	Islamic Movement of Afghanistan
Afghanistan	Islamic Union for the Freedom of Afghanistan	1992	Organization for the Islamic Call of Afghanistan
Angola	National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA)	2002*	National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA)
Bangladesh	People's Solidarity Association/Peace Force (JSS/SB)	1997	Chittagong Hill Tracts United People's Party (PCJSS)
Bosnia-Herzegovina	Croatian Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina	1994	Croat Democrat Party (HDZ)
Bosnia-Herzegovina	Serbian Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina	1995	Serb Democratic Party (SDS)
Burundi	National Council for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD)	2000*	National Council for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD)
Burundi	National Council for the Defense of Democracy/Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD)	2003*	National Council for the Defense of Democracy/Forces for the Defense of Democracy (CNDD-FDD)
Burundi	National Liberation Front (Frolina)	2004*	FROLINA-Abanyamuryango
Burundi	Party for the Liberation of the Hutu People (Palipehutu)	2000*	PALIPE-Agakiza

Burundi	Party for the Liberation of the Hutu People/Forces for National Liberation (Palipehutu-FNL)	2008*	National Forces of Liberation (FNL)
Cambodia (Kampuchea)	Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF)	1991*	Buddhist Liberal Democratic Party (BLDP)
Cambodia (Kampuchea)	United National Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia (FUNCINPEC)	1991*	United National Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful and Cooperative Cambodia (FUNCINPEC)
Colombia	People's Liberation Army (EPL)	1991*	Esperanza, Paz y Libertad (EPL)
Colombia	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)	2016*	Common Alternative Revolutionary Force (FARC)
Colombia	19 April Movement (M-19)	1990	Democratic Alliance M-19 (AD/M-19)
Congo, Democratic Republic of (Zaire)	Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD)	2003	Congolese Rally for Democracy (RCD)
Congo, Democratic Republic of (Zaire)	Movement for the Liberation of Congo (MLC)	2003	Movement for the Liberation of Congo (MLC)
Congo, Democratic Republic of (Zaire)	National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP)	2009*	National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP)
Djibouti	Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy (FRUD)	1994*	Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy (FRUD)
Djibouti	Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy – Combatant (FRUD-C)	2001*	Republican Alliance for Democracy (ARD)
El Salvador	Farabundo Marti Front for National Liberation (FMLN)	1994*	Farabundo Marti Front for National Liberation (FMLN)
Ethiopia	Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF)	2018	Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF)
Guatemala	Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG)	1996*	Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity – Broad Left Movement (URNG – MAIZ)
India	Tripura National Volunteers (TNV)	1988	Tripura National Volunteers (TNV)
Indonesia	Free Aceh Movement (GAM)	2005*	Aceh Party
Liberia	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD)	2003	Progressive Democratic Party (PRODEM)
Liberia	National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL)	1996*	National Patriotic Party (NPP)
Mozambique	Mozambican National Resistance (Renamo)	1992*	Mozambique National Resistance (Renamo)
Namibia	South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO)	1978	South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO)
North Macedonia	National Liberation Army (UCK)	2001	Democratic Union for Integration (DUI)
Nepal	Communist Party of Nepal/Maoist (CPN-M)	2011	Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M)
Nicaragua	Counterrevolutionaries (Contras)	1990*	Nicaraguan Democratic Force (FDN)
Philippines	Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)	2014	United Bangsamoro Justice Party (UBJP)
Rwanda	Rwandan Patriotic Front (FPR)	1993*	Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF)
Sierra Leone	Revolutionary United Front (RUF)	2000*	Revolutionary United Front-Party (RUF-P)
South Africa	African National Congress (ANC)	1993	African National Congress (ANC)
Sudan	Sudanese People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A)	2005	Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM)
Tajikistan	United Tajik Opposition (UTO)	1997*	Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP), Democratic Party of Tajikistan (DTP)
Uganda	National Resistance Army (NRA)	1985	National Resistance Movement (NRM)
United Kingdom	Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA)	1998	Sinn Féin
Yugoslavia	Republic of Slovenia	1991	Social Democrats (SD)
Zimbabwe (Rhodesia)	Patriotic Front (PF)	1979	Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU/PF)
Zimbabwe (Rhodesia)	Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU)	1975	Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU)

Peace agreement provisions and rebel-to-party transformations

What kind of peace agreements did these armed groups that transformed into political parties sign? The relationship between peace agreement provisions and rebel-to-party transformations is driven by complex and case-specific circumstances. Nonetheless, some interesting descriptive patterns can be identified. First, as evident from Table 2, almost half (48.9 per cent) of the armed groups which later transformed into political parties signed at least one peace agreement that included specific so-called 'rebel-to-party' provisions. This suggests that these provisions are worth some extra attention. Rebel-to-party provisions are passages in the text of the agreement that formally and explicitly recognize the right of a non-state armed group to act as a legal political party or participate as such in elections. But the exact formulations of these provisions vary depending on the circumstances of the conflict.

Table 2. Peace agreement provisions and rebel-to-party transformations.[11]

The rebel group signed at least one peace agreement with:	RtP groups	Non-RtP groups	All groups
Rebel-to-party provisions	48.9%	12.0%	26.2%
Provisions for elections	74.5%	36.0%	50.8%
DDR provisions	68.1%	52.0%	58.2%
Provisions for integration in an interim government	51.1%	21.3%	32.8%
Provisions for integration in the government	48.9%	29.3%	36.9%
Provisions for integration into the civil service	19.1%	20.0%	19.7%
Provisions for integration into the army	53.2%	44.0%	47.5%
Provisions for power-sharing in government	38.3%	28.0%	32.0%
Provisions for amnesty	53.2%	46.7%	49.2%
Third-party involvement	78.7%	80.0%	79.5%
Total number of armed groups	47	75	122

Source: UCDP Peace Agreement Dataset, v.19.1; Rebel-to-Party (RtP) Dataset.

Sometimes, these provisions are very limited in terms of their wording. For example, one of the four agreements that together made up the Paris Peace Accords that aimed to end the armed conflict in Cambodia in 1991, stated that '[p]olitical parties may be formed by any group of five thousand registered voters'.[12] This opened the door for all warring factions that were signatories to the agreement to be included in the power-sharing body known as the Supreme National Council (SNC), including the group known as the Khmer Rouge, or the Party of Democratic Kampuchea (PDK). Similarly, in the case of the peace agreement between the government of Indonesia and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM), the agreement stipulated that the government should facilitate the establishment of Aceh-based political parties that 'meet national criteria', and that it should create 'the political and legal conditions for the establishment of local political parties in Aceh in consultation with Parliament'.[13] In practice, this allowed GAM to transform into Aceh Party and subsequently participate in local elections.

How many peace agreements contain such explicit provisions regarding the right of non-state armed groups to contest elections as political parties or (re)enter party politics? Of the 324 peace agreements signed in intrastate armed conflicts during the time period, 43 (13.3 per cent) included explicit rebel-to-party provisions.[16] Figure 2 illustrates changes in the annual number of peace agreements and rebel-to-party provisions from 1975 through 2018. From this figure we can see that there were no peace agreements with rebel-to-party provisions before 1990. Such agreements are exclusively a product of the post–Cold War period.

While such provisions have been included in peace agreements across the globe, we have seen almost twice as many agreements with such provisions in Africa compared to other regions. Several armed groups have also signed more than one such agreement. The RUF in Sierra Leone is an illustra-

REBEL-TO-PARTY PROVISION IN THE LOMÉ PEACE AGREEMENT OF 1999

Article III of the Lomé agreement, entitled 'Transformation of the RUF into a Political Party', reads:

1. The Government of Sierra Leone shall accord every facility to the RUF to transform itself into a political party and enter the mainstream of the democratic process. To that end: 2. Immediately upon the signing of the present Agreement, the RUF shall commence to organize itself to function as a political movement, with the rights, privileges and duties accorded to all political parties in Sierra Leone.

Within a period of thirty days, following the signing of the present Agreement, the necessary legal steps shall be taken by the Government of Sierra Leone to enable the RUF to register as a political party. 4. The Parties shall approach the International Community with a view to mobilizing resources for the purpose of enabling the RUF to function as a political party. These resources may include but shall not be limited to: (i) setting up a trust fund; (ii) training for RUF membership in party organization and functions; and (iii) providing any other assistance necessary for achieving the goals of this section.[14]

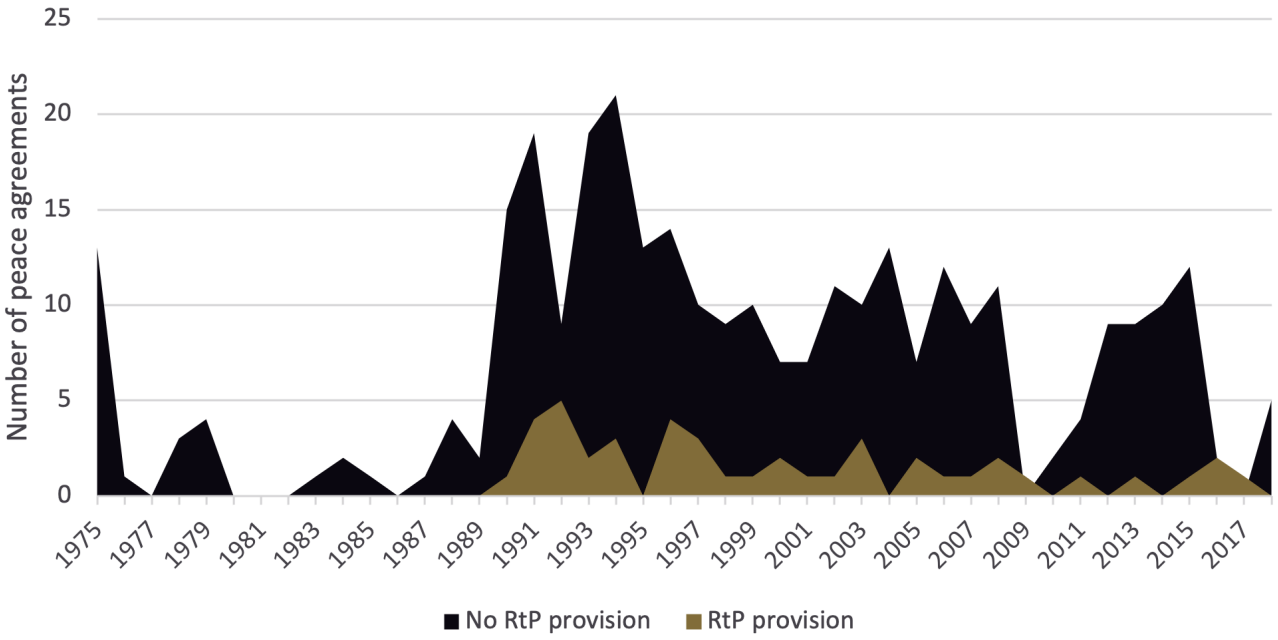


Figure 2. Number of intrastate peace agreements with and without Rebel-to-Party (RtP) provisions, 1975–2018. Source: UCDP Peace Agreement Dataset version 19.1.

tive case in point. In some cases, the armed group first signed a peace process agreement and later a comprehensive agreement, both of which included rebel-to-party provisions. This was, for example, the case both with the Farabundo Marti Front for National Liberation (FMLN) in El Salvador and Renamo in Mozambique.

But while such provisions may facilitate the transformation, they appear to be neither necessary nor sufficient. For example, there are armed groups that sign agreements with rebel-to-party provisions that never become political parties. The Khmer Rouge in Cambodia is a case in point. When the group's nominal leader Khieu Samphan arrived in the capital of Phnom Penh to open the first party headquarters after the signing of the agreement, he was met with violent demonstrators who attacked him and ransacked the party office. The event was widely believed to have been orchestrated by the regime and became the turning point in the group's attitude towards the peace process. Although the group's successor party, the National Unity of Cambodia Party (NUCP), was formally announced a year later, it failed to meet the deadline for election registration and soon thereafter the group resumed the armed struggle.

In addition, far from all peace agreements are fully implemented, which has implications for their ability to deliver the expected outcomes.[15] The Lomé peace agreement is one such case. While the agreement provided the RUF with generous terms for its political integration, most provisions were never implemented, as the group reengaged in violence. It was not until after the group had been effectively defeated militarily that it registered as a political party and opened its first political office. With most of its leadership in prison and facing considerable stigma among the population, members struggled to undertake the necessary changes to transform their shattered military organization into a viable political party. While a couple of international donors did provide limited support, most of the financial and technical assistance that had been promised never materialized.

There are also many armed groups that become political parties without having signed peace agreements that include specific rebel-to-party provisions. For example, with the exception of GAM in Indonesia, no separatist armed groups have signed agreements with rebel-to-party provisions. It is reasonable to assume that in separatist contexts, the groups are primarily concerned with securing political rights and influence through self-determination. The MILF in the Philippines is an illustrative case. While the Comprehensive Peace Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CPA) stipulated the establishment of a new autonomous region for Muslim self-governance in parts of Mindanao and an interim transitional government led by the MILF, the accord included no specific rebel-to-party provisions. Furthermore, many armed groups have a long history of political engagement or originated as political parties to begin with. Some also continued to exist alongside the armed struggle, such as the case of Sinn Féin in Northern Ireland.

This brings us to the relevance of other peace agreement provisions. As is evident from Table 2, former armed groups that become political parties are more likely than other groups to have signed peace agreements containing other provisions that could also contribute to supporting the group's political integration in the post-war period: for example, the holding of elections, DDR, political power sharing, amnesty and military integration into the national army. These other provisions are many times more important than explicit rebel-to-party provisions.

Conclusions and Implications

The research findings presented in this brief highlight several important implications for policy and practice concerned with supporting the political

reintegration of armed groups through civil war peace processes. Three things in particular are worth highlighting.

First, more than one-third of all non-state armed signatories in past decades have transformed into political parties. This is encouraging, as research has identified such processes of political integration as conducive to peace. But the increase in both peace agreements and rebel-to-party transformations in the 1990s and onwards was strongly driven by liberal interventionist norms that may be in decline. In particular, the increasing reliance on the designation of armed groups as terrorist organisations poses serious obstacles to the political reintegration of armed groups via negotiated peace settlements.

Second, the research presented in this brief confirms that the content of peace agreements matters. The findings show that former armed groups that become political parties are more likely than other groups to sign peace agreements containing a range of different provisions that together hold the potential to support the group's political integration in the post-war period. These include provisions regarding elections, political power sharing, DDR, amnesty and military integration. The findings also highlight the important role that is sometimes played by specific rebel-to-party provisions. Mediators and facilitators should consider the specific combination of peace agreement provisions that can reinforce each other to support the political reintegration of specific armed groups in both the short and the long terms. Such an analysis should be based on a careful and realistic needs assessment of existing political and electoral rights, security guarantees, available political space, financial means and capacity gaps.

Third, the data show that the overwhelming majority of peace agreements have included third-party involvement in the form of mediators or signatories to the agreements. This points to the important role that third parties can play in ensuring the political integration of non-state armed groups. These armed group turned political parties are also responsible for the implementation of peace agreements and for shaping the conditions for establishing both sustainable peace and democratic governance in fragile post-war contexts. As such, the key international actors involved in these peace processes ought to invest time in establishing useful channels of communication and relationships with the actors already at the negotiation table.

Endnotes

[1] E.g., Peter Wallensteen. 2019. Understanding Conflict Resolution. London: Sage Publications.

[2] See IDDRS 2.20, p. 12.

[3] Virigina Page Fortna. 2003. 'Scraps of paper? Agreements and the durability of peace.' International Organization 57(2): 337–372.

[4] E.g., Mimmi Söderberg Kovacs. 2007. From Rebellion to Politics: The Transformation of Rebel Groups to Political Parties in Civil War Peace Processes. Unpublished PhD thesis, Uppsala University; Mimmi Söderberg Kovacs and Sophia Hatz. 2016. 'Rebel-to-party transformations in civil war peace processes 1975–2011,' Democratization 23(6): 990–1008; Mimmi Söderberg Kovacs. 2021. 'The legacy of a revolution that never happened: The post-war trajectory of RUFP in Sierra Leone,' Government and Opposition 56(2): 1–15. Mimmi Söderberg Kovacs, Kristine Höglund and Mélida Jimenez. 2021. 'Autonomous peace? The Bangsamoro region in the Philippines beyond the 2014 Agreement,' Journal of Peacebuilding and Development 16(1): 55–69.

[5] The Rebel-to-Party (RtP) dataset builds on the Peace Agreement dataset version 19.0 at the Uppsala Conflict Data Programme (UCDP). See Therese Pettersson and Magnus Öberg. 2020. 'Organized violence, 1989–2019.' Journal of Peace Research 57(4): 597–613. In some rare cases, the coding for 'rebel-to-party provisions' differs between the Peace Agreement dataset and the RtP dataset. The latter also includes information on rebel-to-party transformations during the same time period. For more information, see Söderberg Kovacs and Hatz 2016.

[6] E.g., Adrienne Le Bas. 2011. From Protest to Parties: Party-Building and Democratization in Africa. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[7] Peter Wallensteen. 2019.

[8] E.g., Anna Jarstad and Timothy Sisk (eds.). 2008. From War to Democracy: Dilemmas of Peacebuilding, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

[9] Dino Krause and Mimmi Söderberg Kovacs. Forthcoming. 'The political integration of Islamist armed groups: A viable path to peace and democracy?' in John Ishiyama and Gyda Sindre (eds.), How Former Rebels impact on Stability, Governance and Democracy: From Guns to Governing. London: Routledge.

[10] The table lists the year of the last (most recent) peace agreement signed by the group. We use a star (*) to indicate if this agreement or a previous peace agreement signed by the group within the same overall peace process (such as a peace process agreement leading up to a comprehensive agreement) included rebel-to-party provisions. The political party name is the group's first known successor party name (there may be more than one). We have generally stated only the English translation of the group names, with some well-known exceptions (e.g. Sinn Feín).

[11] 'RtP groups' are non-state armed signatories that later became political parties, while 'non-RtP groups' are those that did not.

[12] https://peacemaker.un.org/cambodiaparisagreement91

[13] https://peacemaker.un.org/indonesia-memorandumaceh2005

[14] https://peacemaker.un.org/sierraleone-lome-agreement99

[15] Madhav Joshi and Jason Michael Quinn. 2017. 'Implementing the peace: The aggregate implementation of comprehensive peace agreements and peace duration after intrastate armed conflict.' British Journal of Political Science 47(4): 869–892.

[16] https://peacemaker.un.org/philippines-comprehensiveagreement2014

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The Folke Bernadotte Academy (FBA) is the Swedish government agency for peace, security and development. FBA has since 2005 supported research primarily through its international Research Working Groups. These are composed of well-merited scholars from universities and research institutes worldwide who conduct scientific research on issues related to FBA's areas of expertise.

The Politics After War (PAW) is a research network for collaborative activities and knowledge sharing among researchers interested in dynamics of party politics, political mobilisation, state-society relations and the state in post-civil war contexts.

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