

PEACEWORKS



From the Street to the Peace Table

NONVIOLENT MOBILIZATION DURING INTRASTATE PEACE PROCESSES

By Véronique Dudouet



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ABOUT THE REPORT

Through an analysis of six peace processes in Liberia, Basque Country/Spain, Kosovo, Aceh/Indonesia, Guatemala, and Nepal, this report develops a typology of grassroots movements that emerge during armed conflicts and identifies the strategic choices made by those movements to influence peace processes. Research and interviews for this study were conducted while the author was a Jennings Randolph Senior Fellow at USIP.

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Cover photo: Demonstrators march in San Sebastian, in Spain's Basque Country, in support of Basque independence on October 3, 2015, after the detention of the top leaders of the Basque armed group ETA on September 23 in France. (Photo by Alvaro Barrientos/AP)

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Summary



In countries caught up in armed civil conflict, social movements can use strategic nonviolent action to pressure armed belligerents to participate in peace dialogues and, under favorable circumstances, may themselves become key dialogue interlocutors influencing the content of peace talks. Six past peace processes, in Liberia, Basque Country/Spain, Kosovo, Aceh/Indonesia, Guatemala, and Nepal, shed light on the various types of grassroots movements that may emerge during an armed conflict and mobilize for peace, for maximal political change, or to advance the social claims of marginalized communities.

Even when nonviolent social movements are successful in winning direct participation in negotiations, however, that does not necessarily translate into sustainable agreements that address all conflict drivers, nor does it ensure that such agreements will be effectively implemented. Hence it is crucial for nonviolent activists to combine various modes of engagement and mobilization beyond claiming a place at the negotiation table, including forms of civil resistance organized from below.

For that reason, the report examines not only the types of social movements that may emerge during armed conflicts but also the different strategies those movements may adopt at different junctures to influence the peace process, including participation, representation, consultation, or mass protest action, and the various factors that empower or constrain individual activists in their attempts to gain a voice at the negotiation table or to apply pressure to negotiating parties.

The report concludes with key recommendations for social movements to prepare themselves for effective engagement during peace processes and for third-party mediators to ensure that their interventions “do no harm.” Once grassroots movements are considered to be stakeholders in conflicts and peacemaking agents in their own right, they can have greater influence over the sustainability of conflict transformation and societal change.



Indonesian women protest during a rally in Banda Aceh on April 21, 2003, to demand a referendum on Aceh independence and the release of Muhammad Nazar, chief of the Aceh Referendum Information Centre. (Photo by Tarmizy Harva/Reuters)

Introduction

Six past peace processes—in Liberia, Basque Country/Spain, Kosovo, Aceh/Indonesia, Guatemala, and Nepal—shed light on the various types of grassroots movements that may emerge during an armed conflict and mobilize for peace, for maximalist change, or to advance identity and social claims articulated by marginalized communities. (The term “maximalist change” is used here to denote change associated with a radical macropolitical objective, such as regime change or self-determination.) The strategic choices made by those movements to influence the course and content of peace processes varied from participation, representation, and consultation to mass protest action. As well, a wide range of factors empowered or constrained activists in their attempts to gain a voice at the negotiation table or to apply external pressure on negotiating parties. An assessment of the impact of mobilization strategies on the quality of the

resulting peace underscores the importance of legitimate representation of nonviolent movements at the negotiation table.

In the past decade, support for inclusive societal participation in peacebuilding processes has become a global policy imperative, as emphasized in various international guidelines, from UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 2419 on women and youth to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. This normative turn has been accompanied by growing policymaker and practitioner interest in the role of civil society during peace processes and postwar transitions—a distinct change from the previous emphasis on elite-led power deals. Though civic activism often plays an instrumental role in pressuring conflicting parties to negotiate a peaceful political transition, little

Table 1. Self-Declared Objectives of Social Movements

Peace Movements Antiwar resistance or mobilization for peace	Pro-change Maximalist Movements Democratic transition, national self-determination, or resistance to foreign occupation	Pro-change Sectorial Movements Social justice and equal rights for specific segments of society (e.g., women, youth, victims, minorities)
Liberia Mass Action for Peace campaign by Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET)	Kosovo Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK)	Guatemala Mutual Support Group (GAM) National Association of Guatemalan Widows (CONAVIGUA)
Basque Country/Spain Gesto por la Paz (Gesture for Peace) Elkarri/Lokarri	Aceh/Indonesia Aceh Referendum Information Centre (SIRA)	Nepal Madhesi movement

is known about the bottom-up contributions of grassroots movements that emerge during armed conflict and mobilize nonviolently—against or alongside warring parties—in pursuit of pro-peace or pro-change agendas, or of their strategies during the course of formal peace processes.

Drawing on both sources in the literature and key informant interviews, this report traces the evolution of six distinct nonviolent movements during armed civil conflicts since the 1990s.¹ The selected cases represent a wide spectrum of pro-peace, pro-change

maximalist, and sectorial movements (two cases of each type); the strategies employed by such social movements during peace processes similarly cover a wide range. From these data it is possible to adduce a fine-grained comparison of the range of factors influencing the trajectories of grassroots movements during peace processes. Finally, the report briefly considers how social movements may contribute to the effectiveness of peace processes and the quality of their outcomes in respect to achieving a durable peace, followed by recommendations for those engaged in ongoing and future peace processes.

Typology of Mass Movements during Armed Conflicts



Although many nonviolent movements have helped spur peaceful transitions of power, including the color revolutions of the early 2000s and the Arab Spring uprisings in Tunisia, mass social movements that operate in the difficult contexts of civil war are gaining increasing attention from peace practitioners.

The reasons for this fresh interest are numerous. In intra-state armed conflicts, most media and policy attention is focused on the primary warring parties, the government, and one or several nonstate armed groups. In the field of conflict resolution, this narrow focus on parties that use violence and coercion to maintain or restore order, to oppress and repress, or to pursue their claims and seek redress for their grievances might be pragmatically justified for the purpose of reaching short-term stability through power-sharing agreements. However, the history of peace processes attests that bargains among elites rarely lead to a sustainable peace. Moreover, a dichotomic portrayal of civil war dynamics tends to overlook the multiplicity of actors and interests across state and society contributing to forwarding or ending the conflict, including grassroots social movements.

The following discussion explores these movements in all their diversity and clusters them into three main categories: peace movements, maximalist movements, and sectorial movements. These movements often have overlapping memberships and hence should not be regarded as neatly delineated, mutually exclusive categories. The organization in table 1 is based on two main criteria, namely, the self-declared goals pursued by the movements (pro-peace versus pro-change) and the

movements' relationship with other conflicting parties, especially armed opposition groups. Each subtype of social movement is illustrated with two cases, which provide the empirical material used in the analysis later in the report. First, however, some definitions are in order.

The term *social movement*, also called popular or civic movement, is used here to denote a large group of individuals organized around shared goals and a unifying identity and mobilizing jointly in pursuit of these goals. Social movements are often structured as umbrella coalitions that bring together a wide range of distinct entities, from formal organizations such as think tanks and advocacy NGOs to informal entities such as membership-based organizations, associations, and loosely affiliated groups. For example, the US civil rights movement was advanced by multiple individuals and organizations that shared the collective aim of gaining equal rights for Black people in the United States.

One salient feature of many social movements is their grassroots origin, in the sense that they include and seek to empower those directly affected by injustice. Through bottom-up self-organization, grassroots movements encourage community members to take responsibility for their own empowerment and emancipation, and to take action toward achieving those goals. The core members of such grassroots movements are “the people” themselves, rather than elites, technocrats, or NGOs claiming to represent the people's interests.²

Social movements are most visible through their campaigns, which typically entail a series of planned,

endurable, collective, and coordinated actions focused on reaching a specific objective. *Nonviolent campaigns* are waged through the strategy of civil resistance, which I have characterized elsewhere as the use of various strategically sequenced nonviolent tactics such as “strikes, boycotts, marches, demonstrations, noncooperation, self-organizing and constructive resistance to fight perceived injustice without the threat or use of violence.”³ Nonviolent tactics may be both legal and illegal but are usually extra-institutional, in the sense that they operate outside the bounds of conventional political channels, bypassing or violating the routine conflict resolution procedures of a political system.⁴ Nonviolent social movements do not engage in violent activities, even though civil resistance campaigns are sometimes marred by episodes of peripheral violence such as rioting.⁵

While nonviolent social movements have been extensively researched and categorized according to their mission, origin, forms of organizing, tactics, or political environment, grassroots movements that are active during armed conflict and that mobilize around issues directly related to the conflict are less well understood. A few recent studies have started to explore the role of civil resistance in armed conflict.⁶ Most of these examine the role of civil resistance at the local level as opposed to national-level, mass campaigns. Also, these studies primarily focus on civilian agency by communities opposed to the violence of armed groups and seeking simply to stay alive rather than pursuing macropolitical objectives.⁷ Of interest here is national-level campaigns that pursue conflict transformation as their central goal, aiming either to bring an end to the war or to mitigate the root causes of war, such as political oppression, socioeconomic injustice, and other forms of structural inequality. Their objectives may be seen as either reformative or revolutionary, based on the intensity and scale of change they pursue.

The activities of nonviolent social movements operating in contexts of armed conflicts typically are overshadowed by the primary parties contending for state power and a monopoly on the use of legitimate force: government actors

and their armed challengers. Political parties beyond the incumbent government represent another constituent group of actors who may or may not be involved in conflict settlement efforts. Thus, grassroots nonviolent movements may frequently interact with other parties to a conflict, whether through hostile or violent antagonism, pacts of nonaggression, or alliance building for common goals. Such relationships are highly contingent on the nature, genesis, and objectives of the social movements.

Finally, often overlooked counterparts to grassroots social campaigns seeking peace are countermovements that emerge during a civil war and mobilize against a peaceful or transformative agenda. Examples include pro–status quo conservative groups that take to the streets to denounce a peace process or to promote a hard-security approach to the conflict, such as the groups that mobilized against the Havana Peace Accord in Colombia. As demonstrated by the failed peace referendum in 2006, which forced negotiators to go back to the table and modify the agreement, such movements play a crucial role in peace processes and should not be excluded from voicing their preferences as exclusion may turn them into spoilers hindering progress toward a sustainable peace. These countermovements were not considered in the empirical research that is the basis of this report.

PEACE MOVEMENTS

Peace movements, sometimes also called antiwar movements, have been most studied in the context of interstate conflicts during the Cold War era, such as the opposition of US domestic groups to the Vietnam War or the transnational antinuclear movement. But intrastate armed conflicts also see many groups forming and mobilizing across society in the name of peace. These groups are often led by women, religious actors, or human rights defenders or by social groups that either suffer disproportionately from the violence (such as ethnic minorities) or anticipate the peace dividends expected to flow from a resolution of the conflict (such as the business community). Hence the membership of peace movements often extends across multiple sectors of society, unified in a

Peace movements emerge and mobilize in opposition to the violence caused by both state and nonstate armed forces. . . . Members of peace movements may find themselves under attack and denigrated by all parties to the conflict, accused of siding with the complainer's opponents.

common goal of a peaceful settlement, although the groups may disagree on the content of the peace agreement and the strategies to achieve it. In majority-minority conflicts, the term “peace movement” is sometimes also used to characterize the mobilization by members of the majority group to oppose war (e.g., anti-conscription campaigns) and seek a negotiated solution with separatist groups (e.g., the Israeli and Turkish peace movements). Mobilizing for peace tends to reach a peak either in reaction to violent episodes, such as a gruesome insurgency attack or a brutal retaliation campaign by the state (e.g., the Helmand Peace March in Afghanistan), or when opportunities for peace seem most tangible, such as during a referendum to validate a peace accord (e.g., the peace processes in Northern Ireland and Colombia).

Peace movements emerge and mobilize in opposition to the violence caused by both state and nonstate armed forces. Hence they tend to see themselves as a nonpartisan third force, even though the sympathies of individual activists may lean toward one side or the other. Accordingly, members of peace movements may find themselves under attack and denigrated by all parties to the conflict, accused of siding with the complainer's opponents. It is incredibly challenging to claim a nonpartisan space in polarized, violent societies.

Case Study: Mass Action for Peace in Liberia

One of the most remarkable campaigns for peace during the Second Liberian Civil War (1999–2003) was the Mass Action for Peace, which brought together Muslim and Christian women, who used various nonviolent tactics to pressure the warring parties to end the war. The war opposed President Charles Taylor and his military allies, who had assumed control of Liberia in 1989 during the main First Civil War, to various disgruntled militias, which coalesced around two rebel groups, the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the

Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL). By 2002, more than 200,000 people had been killed and many more displaced. This situation led to the formation of the Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET), which initiated the Mass Action for Peace campaign, building on years of civil society activism for human rights, peace, and democracy in the country.

Attracting more than five thousand members from all over the country, including refugee camps, and claiming to represent ordinary Liberians, WIPNET was a truly grassroots organization. It included women from all social, religious, ethnic, and political backgrounds, united in their common identities as sisters, mothers, daughters, and wives. Refusing to take sides in the conflict, they had as their primary objective convincing the government and the rebel groups to end the war. Activists garbed in symbolic white clothing used collective decision-making to organize large-scale marches, sit-ins, and protest assemblies in Monrovia as a way of pressuring the parties to negotiate a peace accord. The campaign intensified once the negotiations started and had a significant impact on their successful conclusion.⁸

Case Study: Civic Mobilization for Peace in Basque Country/Spain

For forty years, the Basque Country's pursuit of independence from Spain has been marked by political violence and acute polarization, but also by citizen activism for dialogue and peace. The “Basque peace movement” refers to the network of organizations that has sprung up since the 1980s to confront the violence generated by the conflict between the Basque leftist and separatist group ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna) and the Spanish authorities. Although the conflict initially coalesced under the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco, who ruled the country from 1939 to 1975, it continued after Spain's democratic transition, fueled by the “dirty war” waged by

state-sponsored death squads during the 1980s. In this context, a grassroots social movement rejecting violence from all conflict sides and demanding respect for human rights emerged around the organization *Gesto por la Paz* (Gesture for Peace) in 1986. The silent street demonstrations it organized in the towns and neighborhoods of the Basque Country after every death related to the violent conflict drew thousands of participants. The aim of *Gesto por la Paz* was to give public expression to the desire for peace among the “silent majority” of Basque society and to reclaim the mobilization space monopolized by the nationalist left sympathetic with ETA actions by promoting a new framing of Basque collective identity.

The other pillar of the peace movement was the popular organization *Elkarri*, which emerged in 1991 out of the social networks of environment activists and defined itself as “a social movement for dialogue and agreement in the Basque Country.”⁹ It aimed to complement *Gesto por la Paz*’s focus on denouncing violence by promoting multiparty dialogue to resolve the political conflict over the status of the Basque Country. Its main tactic was to launch public petition campaigns calling for a peace and reconciliation process. Both organizations expressed the peace movement’s opposition to all forms of violence and its inclusive vision of society.¹⁰

PRO-CHANGE MAXIMALIST MOVEMENTS

Most research on contemporary civil resistance focuses on pro-change maximalist campaigns, or those pursuing radical macropolitical objectives such as regime change, self-determination, or resistance to foreign occupation.¹¹ The goals of such maximalist campaigns can be defined either negatively (e.g., ending authoritarianism, oppression, inequality, injustice, or occupation) or positively (e.g., implementing democracy, civil liberties, a transition to civilian rule, freedom, and independence). Beyond these grand objectives, the composite elements of pro-change movements may have more specific demands, but they rally behind an overarching demand when engaging in joint campaigns.

In the context of intrastate armed conflict, peace processes are of signal importance for pro-change movements since they represent the most tangible opportunity for a new political settlement to come about, including a transition or redistribution of power, a major restructuring of governance systems, or a redefinition of state-society relations. Many war-to-peace transitions have indeed coincided with democratic transitions (e.g., in South Africa, Nepal, El Salvador, and Sierra Leone), and a number of peace agreements have granted self-determination demands through outward independence (e.g., in South Sudan and Timor-Leste) or advanced forms of self-governance (e.g., in Northern Ireland, Aceh, and Mindanao).

In contrast to peace movements, in civil war contexts pro-change maximalist movements often mobilize alongside armed groups with which they may share common aspirations, such as overthrowing an authoritarian government or seeking self-determination. Relying on members and supporters from similar social constituencies, and with some similarity in ideological framing, they may move naturally to forge tactical or strategic alliances with one another in support of a common goal. Some movements may even have limited autonomous agency and may be perceived by the government and rebels alike as a mere support base for or a nonviolent flank of the armed opposition. For example, during the civil war in El Salvador, each of the five fronts of the guerrilla insurgency Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) had an underground party structure, an army, and mass organization. Likewise, in South Africa, the African National Congress (ANC) became an integral part of the broad-based coalition of anti-apartheid organizations under the umbrella name Mass Democratic Movement during the 1980s. Nonviolent movements may predate the formation of armed groups, coexist with them, or outlive them by sustaining their mobilization in the aftermath of the signing of a peace agreement, either to demand its full implementation or to pursue a greater level of change than limited power-sharing deals may offer.

Case Study: Peaceful Struggle against Serbian Domination in Kosovo

The Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) formed in 1989 in response to the suppression of Kosovo's political autonomy by the Serbian regime and the increasing oppression of Kosovo Albanians. Structured as a mass-based national organization supported by thousands of members in Kosovo and the diaspora, under the leadership of Ibrahim Rugova it played a central role in initiating and coordinating peaceful resistance and self-defense against Serbian aggression until the NATO military intervention in 1999. Despite internal diversity of preferences, the LDK represented the Kosovo Albanian movement in asserting Kosovo's right to self-determination, up to and including independence, while striving to avoid war and to guarantee the rights of all ethnic groups in Kosovo. It developed a wide range of nonviolent collective actions, including subtle protest actions such as lighting candles and noisemaking during curfews and wearing armbands and other symbols, but also more dramatic tactics such as tax avoidance and military draft resistance. It was also well-known for responding to the closing of Albanian schools and institutions by organizing parallel systems of education, health care, and political governance, both in Kosovo and in exile.

However, after 1992 the LDK leadership put an end to more confrontational forms of nonviolent protest such as mass-based demonstrations and focused instead on maintaining the movement's own structures at home while lobbying for international support, to the frustration of many activists, who wanted a continuation of active nonviolent resistance. The movement was successful in gaining international attention as Kosovo was no longer seen as an "internal affair" of Serbia, but that recognition was not channeled into diplomatic support for independence. From 1997 on, the LDK lost its monopoly as sole representative of the Kosovo people when students started defying demonstration bans by mounting marches and rallies to reclaim university buildings and the right to education, while at the same time, increasing Serbian police violence and civilian massacres led to the emergence of

a guerrilla organization, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA). In the eyes of many Kosovo Albanians, civil resistance became viewed as a tactical phase preparing favorable conditions for armed struggle, which in turn became an inevitable response to Serbian atrocities and, for many activists, a necessary strategy for liberation. Or rather, because nonviolent resistance had not been active enough, it "opened up the space for violent resistance."¹²

Case Study: Student-led Mobilization for Self-determination in Aceh/Indonesia

The nonviolent movement for self-determination in Aceh emerged in the context of democratic opening in Indonesia, accompanied by the referendum for independence in Timor-Leste, which ignited hopes and aspirations for greater autonomy for the northern Sumatra province of Aceh from Indonesia.

The student-led campaign for a referendum on independence formed amid a broader upsurge in nonviolent mobilization for human rights, justice, peace, and democratic reform, in which women, religious leaders, and intellectuals across the province took an active role. The maximalist call for sovereignty through self-determination gathered momentum in early 1999 when a coalition of over one hundred student organizations formed the Aceh Referendum Information Center (SIRA) to coordinate their actions around the "right for people to choose freely their future destiny."¹³ SIRA quickly became the rallying force behind a mass movement for the right to hold a referendum on independence, fueled by the lack of accountability for human rights violations committed by Indonesian troops and the perceived failure by the international community to act on these atrocities. The peak of the campaign was reached in late 1999 with mass protests, electoral boycotts, and general strikes. On November 8, 1999, SIRA organized a rally attended by one million Acehnese (one-fourth of the population), testament to the great coordination capacity, mobilization power, and legitimacy of the movement at the time. Along with human rights advocacy groups, the SIRA campaign is also credited with capturing international attention and sympathy for

the plight of Aceh, raising concern that Indonesia might disintegrate just as the Western Balkans had.¹⁴

SIRA claimed an independent social space between the repressive state security forces and the violent insurrection led by the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) since 1976. Because of their shared goals and overlapping memberships, SIRA was treated as the “civilian branch” of the more militarized GAM by the state, and as a result, its members were severely repressed, with several leaders imprisoned, tortured, and sometimes killed by the military.¹⁵

PRO-CHANGE SECTORIAL MOVEMENTS

The third and final category of grassroots movements examined here comprises sectorial movements. The main factor distinguishing sectorial from revolutionary (i.e., maximalist) movements is the scale or depth of the change they pursue. Whereas maximalist movements seek a complete overhaul of the political system, sectorial movements seek to change certain policies of the state. More precisely, they mobilize around specific reformist claims linked to the identity of their participants. Common examples include women’s groups demanding gender equality or denouncing gender-based violence, labor unions mobilizing for workers’ rights, peasant associations seeking land reform, religious or ethnic minority groups pursuing socioeconomic and cultural rights for their community, or youth groups focusing on issues most affecting their daily lives, from job security and education to claiming political space in gerontocratic societies.

When they arise around group-based social claims, sectorial movements can become key drivers of broader campaigns and movements for peace or change. Hence they tend to play distinctive roles within peace movements or during nonviolent revolutions by representing and mobilizing a particular constituency and by contributing to the nonviolent “repertoire of contention” through their specific sociocultural, artistic, or symbolic skill sets. For example, young people are often at the forefront of artist collectives, which bring creative

energy to nonviolent campaigns, and women have led the way in mobilizing gender narratives in pursuit of peace and justice (e.g., Women in Black in Israel and the former Yugoslavia). This last example—women’s activism for truth, justice, and accountability—evokes the crucial role of human rights groups in nonviolent movements during armed conflict. While other sectorial groups pursue claims that often are part of the root causes of the conflict, human rights groups draw attention to its most severe consequences: human rights abuses and violent crimes perpetrated by military actors engaged in the war. Peace processes also represent key mobilization opportunities for sectorial movements, either to demand the representation of their constituencies at the negotiation table or to influence the contents and outcomes of the talks on the specific issues they most care about.

Sectorial movements also often forge connections with armed opposition groups that (allegedly) uphold their grievances and claims as part of the groups’ broader emancipatory agenda around, for example, feminist insurgency rhetoric or economic and cultural rights for historically marginalized communities. These movements might see themselves as a third force unaffiliated with either side of the conflict and mobilizing for claims neglected by the parties. But they might also side with the conflict party that they see as better representing their interests, at the risk of becoming instrumentalized for mobilization purposes, by offering armed movements the opportunity for grassroots engagement and recruitment.

Case Study: Maya Indigenous Popular Movement in Guatemala

The civil war in Guatemala lasted from 1960 to 1996. Although primarily fought between the state and a Marxist-Leninist guerrilla front, Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG), it had a strong ethnic dimension as the conflict was rooted in the structural discriminations against the ethnic majority by the white and Ladino oligarchy, and most victims of state repression and genocidal policies were Maya indigenous

civilians. The conflict gave rise to popular organizations made up of trade unions, campesino (peasant) associations, cooperatives, and indigenous people's organizations, allied with urban groupings such as church groups, human rights organizations, and student movements. At the forefront of the popular movements were countrywide organizations established by campesinos in the 1980s, including the Mutual Support Group (GAM) and the National Coordination of Widows of Guatemala (CONAVIGUA). Their goals encompassed claims for justice and accountability, land rights, and social, cultural, and identity rights for the indigenous majority. The word "peace" was not part of the vocabulary of these pro-change movements because it had a strong pro-status quo connotation; the only organizations that used the term in their name were ideologically closer to the establishment.

Because of the high level of state repression, activists engaged in low-risk activities until the mid-1980s, through symbolic actions such as street theater, institutional action such as litigation, and community organizing to educate the public on its rights. The limited political liberalization that occurred in the mid-1980s opened up space for public mobilization. GAM organized weekly mass marches to denounce human rights violations, while the CONAVIGUA widows carried out protest actions to denounce the disappearance of their husbands. Prompted by the increasing militarization of society, they also launched campaigns against forced recruitment and for the right to conscientious objection. Popular organizations were ideologically divided between those with closer links to the leftist guerrillas and those that pursued alternative visions of politics along gender- or identity-based dimensions. Campesino and Maya groups operated in close relationship with some URNG factions and bore the brunt of violent state counterinsurgency policies on the ground of their alleged alliance with what the state considered terrorists.¹⁶

Case Study: Madhesi Movement for Federalism and Ethnic Equality in Nepal

Nepal has a long history of social and political mass mobilization, including two peaceful revolutions in 1990 and 2006 that effectively restored multiparty democracy. While these movements were largely "led by middle-class urbanites in pursuit of political power," they relied heavily on the mobilization of marginalized communities seeking broader social and economic change and struggling against the domination of high-caste Hindus, Brahmin, and Chhetri, who together make up 30 percent of the population.¹⁷ Four constituencies have been at the forefront of social movements for structural reforms: women, Dalits (low caste), Janajati (indigenous peoples), and the Madhesi (people of Indian ancestry residing in the southern Terai plains). A key demand of the Janajati and the Madhesi has been the federal restructuring of the state as a guarantee of regional autonomy. Strategies adopted by marginalized groups since 1990 have gone from lobbying and party politics to nationwide strikes and acts of outright rebellion. However, until 2006 their cause was largely subsumed under the inclusive political and social agenda developed by the Maoist insurgency during the ten-year "people's war" to attract sympathy from all marginalized sectors of Nepali society.

In April 2006, Maoist combatants joined forces with opposition parties and civil society groupings to launch a countrywide People's Movement. Along with other sectors of society, Madhesi activists joined the peaceful struggle, mobilizing in daily rallies and demonstrations across the country for nineteen days until King Gyanendra restored the parliament and initiated a formal peace process.¹⁸ It was not until 2007 that the Madhesi carried out their first autonomous protest campaign to pressure elites to incorporate their demands into the reform agenda. Since then, the movement has focused its efforts on promoting a federal system in the new Nepali constitution to address the socio-cultural rights of the Madhesi community.

Civic Mobilization Strategies during Formal Peace Processes

A peace process is understood here as the conduct of formal, track 1 (i.e., top-level) bilateral or multilateral political negotiations on substantive conflict issues, with or without the assistance of third parties, to end an armed conflict. In contrast to more inclusive dialogue formats, such as national dialogues or constituent assemblies, peace negotiations usually take place in confidential settings (often abroad) between the main power contenders and conflict protagonists, namely, representatives of the state, armed opposition groups, and sometimes other political parties. Communication channels with noncombatants and nonstate actors are primarily unidirectional, moving from the top down, and aim to inform the broader public on the progress of the talks. Confidentiality is often seen as critical to the success of negotiations by allowing parties to make critical concessions out of public scrutiny.¹⁹

Though nonviolent grassroots movements often contribute actively to bringing about transitions to peace and democracy through bottom-up civil resistance, they are rarely invited to play a meaningful role during political negotiations. They can, however, engage in various mobilization strategies to influence the course of interparty negotiations and forward their own interests. The strategic choices made by nonviolent movements can be described under four main mechanisms of influence: direct participation, indirect representation, consultation, and mass protest action.

DIRECT PARTICIPATION

Direct participation is often seen as the primary way for individuals or groups to take part in negotiation processes, even though participation does not automatically

translate into meaningful influence or power. Indeed, inclusive dialogue processes do not always lead to more inclusive outcomes. For instance, the leverage civil society representatives may hold at the table may be conditioned by the “quality” of their inclusion in decision-making—whether it is real or cosmetic.²⁰

There are two alternative strategies for nonviolent movements to achieve direct representation at the negotiation table. First, movement leaders may be invited to join one or the other delegation, especially if they have a dual affiliation or are closely associated with one of the primary conflict parties. Second, civil society groups may be invited to send their own distinct delegation, unaffiliated with other participating bodies, to peace talks, or to send independent observers. Such delegations’ social legitimacy and their ability to represent grassroots movements hinge on the selection process and on whether they are mandated from above (by the parties) or below (by their communities).

Only one of the six peace movements discussed here was allowed to participate in peace talks in its own right, the LDK, during the Rambouillet talks on the future of Kosovo. The LDK delegation was represented in equal numbers with the KLA armed faction and hence had significant power to influence the course of the talks.

Equality at the Table: Kosovo’s Rambouillet Negotiations (1999)

In early 1999, peace talks spearheaded by a tripartite (United States, Russia, and European Union) Contact Group were held in France with the aim of de-escalating



Kosovo Liberation Army leader Hashim Thaci (right) and KLA general commander Agim Ceku attend a memorial ceremony for ethnic Albanian leader Fehmi Agani in Pristina on August 6, 1999. Thaci led the Kosovo Albanian delegation at the February 1999 Rambouillet International Peace Conference. (Photo by Lefteris Pitarakis/AP)

violence and preventing the ethnic cleansing of Kosovo Albanians by Serbian security forces and negotiating the status of Kosovo. The Rambouillet International Peace Conference on Kosovo, convened on February 6–23, with a follow-up round of talks on March 15–18, ended unsuccessfully when Serbia refused to sign the agreement. This process, perceived as a diktat by Serbia but as a diplomatic victory by Kosovo, paved the way for NATO military intervention against Serbia's military and paramilitary troops in March–June 1999.

Although the Rambouillet process is often considered an example of failed negotiations under biased international mediation (as argued, for instance, by former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger), one of its most remarkable features was the composition of and dynamics within the Kosovo delegation. Of the seventeen delegates selected

by the mediators to represent Kosovo Albanians, five were members of the KLA (headed by Hashim Thaci), five were members of the LDK (headed by Ibrahim Rugova), four were from an LDK splinter party close to the KLA, and three were independent civil society figures. According to two former negotiators, the most intense negotiations in the run-up to the Rambouillet meeting and during the conference were not those that took place between the conflicting parties—the two delegations faced each other only once at the table—but those among Kosovo Albanians. Despite their acute political rivalry and strategic disagreement over strategy—armed versus nonviolent resistance—the LDK and KLA delegations managed to forge a consensual position on the substantive issues at stake. For example, they drafted a joint document outlining key nonnegotiable principles that would keep open the door to independence. According to one former negotiator,

even though the LDK's peaceful resistance approach had been outflanked by the guerrilla insurgency strategy on the ground, a key element of this balanced representation in the negotiations was their "mutual need for each other. Violent actors did not have the experience and capacity to negotiate. On the other side nonviolent actors did not have the trigger to end the war. . . . Once you get to that balance, progress can be made." However, the failure to produce an acceptable agreement for the Serbian delegation resulted in military escalation and the subsequent NATO intervention, which forced Serbia to withdraw its forces in June 1999, while Kosovo was placed under the authority of the UN until its status could be resolved.

While the Rambouillet process in Kosovo enabled representatives from a nonviolent popular movement to achieve meaningful participation in a formal peace process, the other cases reviewed here present a contrasting picture: social movement leaders and their constituencies were sidelined during exclusive negotiations. The Aceh/Indonesia and the Basque Country/Spain negotiations provide two informative examples of exclusion from representation.

Exclusionary negotiations: Aceh/Indonesia (2000–03)

In Aceh, mass mobilization by the student-led SIRA group paved the way for the opening of a dialogue channel between GAM and the government, leading to a joint "humanitarian pause" in May 2000. The ceasefire was followed in December 2002 by a Cessation of Hostilities Agreement. Throughout the negotiations, civil society groups, including SIRA, were excluded from the dialogue, which was restricted to the two main violent protagonists, allegedly because of the narrow security focus of the talks. According to one interviewee, a former activist,

The logic of the humanitarian pause was that GAM would negotiate safe zones, a ceasefire . . . and then we would be directly involved in the talks on broader issues. But this didn't happen. When we

asked for a seat at the negotiation, we were told, "Don't worry about that, there will be a track 2 process for you," which we thought was an excuse to exclude us from the talks. We wanted peace at all costs, so we accepted our exclusion from the track 1 channel if it would bring peace.

The hopes for a second stage, an "all-inclusive dialogue" in which SIRA militants could participate and raise their demand for a referendum, vanished when the talks ended with the Indonesian government declaring a "military emergency" in May 2003.

Exclusionary negotiations: Basque Country, 2006

In the Basque Country, emerging signs of an upcoming peace process with the Spanish government in 2006 prompted Elkarri activists to transform their movement into a new network-based structure, called Lokarri, that was tasked with promoting civil society participation in the peace process. A dialogue channel between the ETA and the Socialist government of José Luis Zapatero was indeed established, but secretly, in Switzerland, which prevented Basque society from monitoring and assessing its progress. Another discreet dialogue channel was opened among all political parties but also without societal participation. Thus, although society had played a key role in creating the conditions for peace and dialogue, when the moment of truth came, it was sidelined. As Lokarri's director said afterward,

This situation reflects an outdated model of peace negotiations whose protagonists are exclusively a government and an armed group locked in a conflict of mutual destruction. Bilateral negotiations in 2006 were marked by belligerence and a lack of transparency—and failure.²¹

Notable in both the Aceh case and the Basque Country case was the failure of talks from which civil society peace groups had been excluded. Such exclusion does not make failure inevitable, but it does seem to increase the likelihood that negotiations fail.

At a worldwide gathering of Acehnese people in Stavanger, Norway, in July 2002, insurgency leaders agreed to abide by the will of the Acehnese people and made a few concessions to popular preferences by embracing the democratic ideal of a referendum on self-determination.

INDIRECT REPRESENTATION

Whereas participation denotes direct involvement, *representation* means that one's issues and concerns are interpreted and negotiated by someone else on one's behalf. Though indirect representation might on the surface appear to be a weaker choice than direct participation at the negotiation table, in postwar political settlements, genuine representation of non-elites' interests and grievances by political parties or negotiation teams may lead to more inclusive outcomes than the token participation of appointed members of marginalized constituencies.²² As the Swiss Mediation Support Project puts it, "If the two people talking together are heads of states who are legitimate representatives of their respective people, such an exclusive process may be more effective and democratic than a very inclusive process with hundreds of people who have no decision-making power and no strong constituencies."²³

Grassroots movements might therefore opt for indirect representation of their interests by a primary party to the conflict that they believe can legitimately represent their interest, rather than claiming a space for themselves at the table. In so doing, civil society peace movements might find themselves in alliance with the armed opposition. Many armed groups define themselves as liberatory or revolutionary movements mandated to carry out the will of the disenfranchised majority in negotiations with the government; popular movements may endorse these claims of representation if they see the negotiators as legitimate representatives of their interests. For example, during the multiparty negotiations in South Africa, the ANC represented the weight of all social organizations and trade unions associated with the Mass Democratic Movement. The Aceh case offers illustrations of how civil society peace movements may achieve part of their substantive agenda by seeking representation through armed groups that have a place at the negotiation table.

Legitimacy of Representation Claims in Aceh: The Helsinki Negotiations (2005)

Though SIRA and other pro-referendum activists were excluded from the 2000–01 negotiations, several channels of communication were established during the follow-up peace process to ensure that the voice and interests of the nonviolent movement would be truly represented through the armed rebellion (GAM) at the negotiation table. At a worldwide gathering of Acehnese people in Stavanger, Norway, in July 2002, insurgency leaders agreed to abide by the will of the Acehnese people and made a few concessions to popular preferences by embracing the democratic ideal of a referendum on self-determination and agreeing to a democratic system of government (departing from the insurgency's previous aspiration to form an Islamic state), which led to the formation of a government in exile. The student movement also forced GAM to rally behind the call for a referendum. As one policy paper put it, "For the first time in the history of the contemporary resistance, GAM was linking up with mass elements in civil society—representing a major threat to local business and government elites."²⁴

Then, in 2005, a six-month formal negotiation process took place in Helsinki between GAM and the Indonesian government, away from public scrutiny. The Finnish mediator, Martti Ahtisaari, insisted that the process be discreet, which he saw as "spoiler management" strategy to prevent eventual provocation attempts by hard-liners on sensitive issues; the acceptance of discretion by the conflict parties would also be a sign of their commitment.²⁵ To legitimize their claim of representing Acehnese society, GAM negotiators were induced to attend several meetings with civil society groups, which demanded the right to be informed of and consulted on the substance of the negotiations. SIRA activists also took a prominent part in these meetings, which were organized in Sweden

and Kuala Lumpur. The meetings took place between successive negotiation rounds and resulted in the integration of substantive civil society proposals into GAM's negotiation agenda. Intense discussions occurred over the demand for a referendum, which SIRA activists complained was not being considered in draft agreements, but the GAM negotiators reassured them that a status of self-government would not preclude a future referendum. Moreover, several members of the GAM delegation were civil society (including SIRA) activists themselves, though negotiating with a "GAM hat."²⁶ A memorandum of understanding for a peace accord was signed on August 15, 2005, between GAM and the government of Indonesia that granted Aceh special autonomy rights and stipulated the removal of non-Aceh native troops from the province in exchange for GAM's disarmament and dismantling.

Other examples of representative alliances between a conflict party and social movements can be found in the case studies. For instance, during the pre-negotiation phase in Guatemala (1990), the armed leftist guerrilla organization URNG consulted various civil society entities, including indigenous popular organizations, to generate an inclusive peace process agenda.²⁷ Analysts have argued that this process had a strong influence on the shifting perceptions of the peace process by the guerrillas.²⁸ However, this strategy works only in a climate of trust and if preestablished sympathies exist between grassroots movements and elites or armed groups mandated to negotiate in their name. As well, there must be regular communication channels for the parties to engage with one another throughout the peace process.

CONSULTATION

An alternative to either direct participation or indirect representation through a specific delegation, *consultation* allows civil society proposals to be channeled to the negotiation table without being mediated by one of the primary parties. Consultation bodies established during peace processes might be official or informal, binding or nonbinding, mandated by the parties (or third parties) or self-organized. Civil society consultation formats are

deemed most effective if they combine multiple agenda transfer strategies (e.g., handing over of reports to negotiators or mediators, having direct exchanges with them) and if they include binding feedback loops and monitoring mechanisms to ensure that issues and concerns raised by the participants will subsequently make their way to the negotiation table and be integrated into any codified outcomes.²⁹

The Guatemala peace process and, again, the Basque Country negotiations with Spain offer two examples illustrating the diversity of consultation approaches that have enabled grassroots movements for peace or human rights to influence the course of peace processes—with or without a formal mandate granted by state institutions or mediators.

Formal consultation channel: Guatemala's Civil Society Assembly (1994–96)

During the Guatemala peace process, which was initiated in 1990 but produced results only from 1994 onward, civil society did not participate directly in the various rounds of formal peace talks that resulted into a series of agreements culminating in the 1996 Accord for a Firm and Lasting Peace. Instead, various strategies were used by popular organizations to channel their grievances and proposals to the parties, the most prominent of these being the Civil Society Assembly (ASC), convened in 1994–95. Mayan indigenous organizations represented one of ten sectoral groupings, alongside women's groups, human rights groups, trade unions, business associations, media, and research centers. The ASC was mandated to present nonbinding proposals to the UN mediator, Jean Arnault, and to the two contending parties while the government and the URNG were holding direct negotiations. The ASC served as a parallel negotiation forum for the discussion of substantive conflicting issues (democratization and human rights, demilitarization of society, indigenous rights, constitutional reform, socioeconomic reform, the agrarian situation, resettlement of the displaced population) and the formulation of consensual recommendations to be transmitted to the decision makers. It was even



The Basque flag adorns the cap of a demonstrator at an independence rally in San Sebastian, in Spain's Basque Country, on August 3, 2014. (Photo by Markel Redondo/New York Times).

granted veto power to accept or reject the outcome of the negotiations.³⁰ The ASC thus symbolized a new style of relationship between popular movements and the state, more collaborative and less confrontational.³¹

In terms of outcome, the ASC greatly influenced the peace talks and the wider public debate over the conflict's root causes and solutions. For instance, most recommendations made by the indigenous movement on attaining political, cultural, and economic rights were incorporated into the March 1995 accord. However, the real impact of the ASC on the resulting agreement is a matter of debate, with one expert arguing that its role was rather to discuss and endorse the agreements reached in the track 1 negotiations, thereby serving as a legitimizing tool, especially as none of its recommendations were binding on the conflicting parties.³² At the end of 1996, the ASC unanimously endorsed the substantive

accords reached by the parties, but two years later the main constitutional reforms proposed in the peace accord were defeated in a popular referendum.

Informal Consultative Channel: Basque Country's Inclusive Social Forum for Peace (2013–18)

Throughout its existence, the social movement Lokarri (like its predecessor Elkarri) sought to combine mass-based peace activism with dialogue facilitation, by conducting back-channel political dialogue and by organizing its own consultation spaces. The latter role materialized most concretely when Lokarri spearheaded a Social Forum for Peace in March 2013, which was attended by seven hundred participants. Taking place several months after the declaration of a permanent ceasefire by the ETA, this forum aimed to channel the support of the majority of Basque citizens for a peace process into concrete proposals to pressure the parties

WIPNET members staged a sit-in outside the mediation venue in Accra during the entire two-month negotiation period. . . . Their leader, Leymah Gbowee, even threatened to take off her clothes, an act that would have brought shame to the men and prevented guards from removing the women.

into talks.³³ It also embodied civil society's desire to no longer be a spectator to the peace process but a key player in defining and constructing peace in the Basque Country. Unlike official consultative bodies or national dialogue processes, the Social Forum for Peace had no direct mandate from state institutions and did not seek to become a formal arena itself but rather aimed to pressure the state and political parties to initiate formal talks. After some five hundred groups and citizens submitted topics for forum discussions, ranging from disarmament and demobilization to the reintegration of prisoners, human rights, memory, and reconciliation, the organizers worked with political parties and international experts to develop and publish twelve recommendations.

Several follow-up forums were held in the following years, and the Permanent Social Forum was founded in June 2016 as an umbrella body comprising seventeen Basque civil society organizations, with the aim of advocating for implementation of the forum recommendations. Many recommendations were in fact adopted as policy priorities by political parties and the ETA itself. In the absence of a dialogue with the Basque government, but in active dialogue with Basque society, the armed group organized its own process of arms decommissioning and dissolution, respectively in 2017 and 2018, with direct participation from peace activists who accompanied this process.³⁴ The forum continues to promote the remaining recommendations to support a just, comprehensive, and inclusive peace settlement.

MASS PROTEST ACTION

Finally, grassroots movements might choose to stay away from the negotiations and instead seek to influence the course of the talks by pressuring or enticing the parties through extra-institutional methods of civil resistance or *mass protest action*. The best-known cases of mass campaigns co-occurring with formal peace

negotiations are protest movements opposing the negotiations, either because they believed that one should not “talk to terrorists” or because they opposed the substance of the talks, especially in contexts of acute social, political, or ethnic polarization. The example of Sinhala nationalists who mobilized in opposition to peace talks with Tamil armed insurgents in Sri Lanka has been well documented. Demonstrations were organized by Buddhist organizations, such as the National Movement Against Terrorism, that viewed negotiations with separatists as a betrayal of the country that would lead to a division of the island. These protests, which became more frequent and louder than the demonstrations in support of the peace process, eventually contributed to the return to war.³⁵ (This is an important reminder that civil resistance strategies are not limited to pro-peace groups.) In the cases analyzed here, where mass movements arose to demand peace, social justice, regime change, or self-determination, the extent to which they sustained their nonviolent direct action during the course of peace processes, instead of—or alongside—participation, representation, or consultation strategies, varied.

Civil Resistance: Liberia's Mass Action for Peace during the Accra Negotiations (2003)

The Accra negotiations that ended the Liberian civil war were highly inclusive: they were attended by the government, the two major rebel groups, all political parties, and several civil society groups, including women from the Mano River Women Peace Network (MARWOPNET). But the most influential impact of Liberian women came from the nonviolent actions carried out by WIPNET's Mass Action for Peace. What is particularly interesting about this example is that the women did not protest to demand women's participation in the talks, intentionally deciding to stay out of the discussions to influence their course through civil resistance. Having spent months protesting about the war in Monrovia, WIPNET organized separate

meetings with President Charles Taylor and one of the rebel groups, LURD, in April 2003, urging them to attend peace talks. Once the negotiations started in Ghana, WIPNET raised money to send a delegation to Accra to continue applying nonviolent pressure on the warring parties. WIPNET members staged a sit-in outside the mediation venue in Accra during the entire two-month negotiation period, having mobilized Liberian refugee women from camps in Ghana to also attend. One day they took the drastic measure of blocking the conference center to prevent anyone from leaving until a settlement was reached. Their leader, Leymah Gbowee, even threatened to take off her clothes, an act that would have brought shame to the men and prevented guards from removing the women. This action is, in hindsight, seen as a defining symbolic moment in the negotiations.³⁶ The Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement, signed in August 2003, resulted in a cessation of fighting (with some early violations), a return to security, peaceful elections in 2005, and a significant degree of democratization.

Civil Resistance: Nepal's Mass Protests during the Constitutional Negotiations (2006–15)

During the April 2006 peaceful protest movement that initiated a formal peace process to end the decade-long civil war, Madhesi groups from the marginalized Terai region started asserting their autonomous agenda and reclaiming their distinct identity, as wall paintings started appearing on the main streets of Kathmandu declaring “Speak with pride that you are Madhesi: not a foreign fugitive, but a son of the soil.”³⁷ During the six-month peace negotiations between the Maoists and mainstream political parties, there were few expressions of street activism, as high hope was placed in negotiators to address the plight of all marginalized groups. The Comprehensive Peace Accord signed on November 1, 2006, embraced some of their demands by declaring that the state would be restructured in order to end all forms of discrimination based on caste, ethnicity, gender, and region.

The Madhesi's grievances resurfaced during the post-agreement constitutional negotiations. The day

after the Interim Constitution was announced in January 2007, a massive unarmed uprising took place in the Terai plains, protesting its failure to recognize some of the main Madhesi demands—regional autonomy and federalization. Tens of thousands of people joined the protests and a general strike was enforced, accompanied by hunger strikes and symbolic cultural actions. Markets, educational institutions, and industries in the regions were shut down and the highway linking India and Kathmandu Valley was closed for several days. More than forty people were killed, most of them by government security forces, who severely repressed the movement. The protests were depicted in Nepali media as violent riots, but an interviewed activist dismissed this label as biased reporting by the pro–status quo oligarchy.³⁸ This twenty-one-day-long movement, also referred to as the “Third People's Movement” (after 1990 and 2006) or the “Madhesi Awakening,” came to an end after the Interim Constitution was amended to introduce a clause on federalism. Following a second Madhesi movement in February 2008, the government also introduced measures to ensure an “inclusive proportional representation of . . . minority communities in all state bodies,” including the Constituent Assembly.

A third wave of Madhesi protests emerged in the wake of the promulgation of the Nepali Constitution in 2015, which failed to materialize many prior commitments to inclusive state restructuring. A watershed moment in the struggle was a two-million-people human chain across the east-west highways of Nepal under the slogan #notmyconstitution. However, the movement was met with severe repression, resulting in the death of fifty people, and was opposed by an elite-led counter-mobilization resisting inclusive change, and it progressively faded out and demobilized after a few months.³⁹



Besides the Madhesi movement in Nepal, the level of sustained extra-institutional action during the formal peace talks examined here was quite uneven.

Table 2. Mobilization Strategies for Influencing a Formal Peace Process

Channel of Influence	Example(s)	Opportunity	Risk
Participation	Rambouillet talks, Kosovo (1999)	Direct inclusion in decision-making process possible.	Risk of “façade” inclusion while powerholders or opposition elites remain firmly in control of the peace/reform agenda.
Representation	Helsinki talks, Aceh (2005)	Demands are forwarded by strategic allies at the table.	Movement becomes overshadowed by the party supporting group’s interests in the talks (non-binding representation mandate).
Consultation	Formal: Civil Society Assembly in Guatemala talks (1994–96) Informal: Basque Social Forum for Peace (2013–18)	Offers autonomous space for movements to formulate concrete proposals on the process or content of the talks.	Transfer strategies from consultative bodies to the formal table are not always spelled out or followed through.
Mass protest action	Mass Action for Peace during Liberia talks (2003) Madhesi mass action during constitutional talks in Nepal (2006–15)	External pressure on negotiators can exert meaningful influence over decision-making.	Mass action can provoke counter-mobilization or backlash (e.g., repression) by pro–status quo elites; civil resistance alone rarely produces sustainable change.

Guatemala also exhibited a high level of activity: indigenous activists remained mobilized throughout the peace process. Mass protests against an attempted self-coup in 1993 were a decisive turning point in the democratic transition, and the progressive content of the indigenous rights accord was also strongly influenced by protest marches organized by Maya organizations in 1994 and 1996, in parallel with their representation in the ASC.⁴⁰ This period was also marked by campaigns of civil disobedience throughout the country to protest against a new increase in forced recruitments into militias in 1992 and to demand the dissolution of the militias.

In Aceh, nonviolent activism also continued during the peace process, but slowly decreased during the Geneva negotiations in 2001–03, and had faded away by the time of the 2005 Helsinki process. After the December 2004 tsunami, which devastated the province and killed

168,000 Acehnese, civil society efforts were redirected toward humanitarian and reconstruction priorities.

During the 2006 peace negotiations in Spain, the Basque peace movement was not visible on the streets, with the exception of world café–style citizen forums to discuss the future of the Basque Country.⁴¹ Instead, the civic protest space became polarized between pro-independence demonstrations and Spanish right-wing groups opposing the talks. Finally, the Kosovo self-determination movement LDK had a “no-demonstration” policy in place when the Rambouillet negotiations took place, and hence no civil resistance activism was visible on the ground.

Table 2 summarizes the main advantages and challenges associated with each of the four mobilization strategies just described.

Factors Influencing Mobilization Strategies



If the six cases considered in this report are broadly representative of the roles and trajectories of social movements during peace processes, the following assertions can be made: (1) Though these movements contribute actively to bringing about transitions to peace and democracy through bottom-up people power, members are rarely invited to participate meaningfully in formal peace talks. Instead, the groups often use a combination of consultation and mass protest strategies to influence the course of negotiations from the outside. (2) With the notable exception of peace movements, the autonomous agency of social movements is often downplayed by other conflict stakeholders and third parties alike, inducing the movements to channel their preferences through one or the other party. The cases presented allow a tentative identification of the various factors influencing the strategic choices made by nonviolent activists—or imposed on them by the armed conflict protagonists or by third-party actors—and how these factors might also influence the course and outcome of peace negotiations.

ATTRIBUTES AND STRATEGIES OF SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

First and foremost, movements themselves bear most of the responsibility for the choices they make during peace processes, and for the consequences of those choices. Such group-specific factors cluster around three main attributes, which are primarily located at the meso level of group dynamics, complemented by a few insights into microlevel decision-making and the experiences of key individuals such as movement leaders and bridge builders.

Expertise, Experience, Legacy, and Preparedness

An important factor in enhancing peace movements' credibility and acceptability as negotiation parties in their own right during a peace process was their legacy of mobilization and experienced leadership. In Kosovo, interviewees described the LDK as a mass-based movement that had succeeded in establishing branches throughout the province and among the diaspora worldwide; it also enjoyed a centralized structure and a clear-cut leadership, including parallel governmental bodies in Kosovo and abroad. Thanks to its proactive diplomatic engagement with and advocacy of Western governments, the LDK could rely on a strong network of international allies, which facilitated the acceptance of LDK leaders as legitimate negotiators in Rambouillet. Despite the rapid rise of the militant KLA organization in the late 1990s, its fighters “could not nullify ten years of peaceful struggle,” and the LDK retained a high level of popular legitimacy and control over the population.⁴² In addition to its collective strength, the peace movement also relied on the personal expertise of its leaders, which earned them a seat at the table. For example, Edita Tahiri, who served as minister of foreign affairs (1991–2000) in the LDK's parallel government in Kosovo, put her conflict resolution expertise at the service of the Kosovo delegation in Rambouillet. She had established a research center in 1995 that conducted analyses of failed and successful peace processes around the world, and she referred to lessons learned from these cases (such as the Oslo process in the Israel-Palestine conflict) when discussing consensus positions with other delegates.⁴³

Conversely, in contexts where social movements were perceived as having limited expertise to contribute to the peace process, they became excluded from the negotiation table. In Aceh, as a former international staffer involved in the Aceh Monitoring Mission said bluntly, “CSOs were not at the table because they were maybe less prominent or knowledgeable than they present[ed] themselves.” Accordingly, they “had not studied the 2001 special autonomy law, which they fully ignored,” and hence could not use it as a bargaining position. As a result, “they were striving for . . . independence but could not contribute to it.”⁴⁴ Although this harsh assessment was made in the aftermath of the 2005 peace accord, it echoes the views of a mediator who commented on his Aceh engagement in 2000–03:

Given the long history of military restricted areas, civil society was weak. . . . There were confident and competent technocrats within the administration, who knew the law inside and out. But they did not relate well with activists. . . . If [SIRA] had engaged more constructively with these technocrats on the autonomy plan . . . if they had read the law, they could have used it as a platform for the future, and taken the reins after the tsunami.⁴⁵

Another example comes from Nepal, based on personal anecdotes during my own involvement in supporting multiparty dialogues on security sector reform in 2008–12. According to security experts from various political parties, Madhesi representatives were rarely invited to consultation workshops because they did not have dedicated think tanks and hence were insufficiently informed about the content of planned reforms.⁴⁶

Strategic pragmatism

In addition to possessing experience, legacy, and technical expertise, grassroots social organizations are more likely to be taken seriously at the negotiation table when they demonstrate a readiness to compromise and are pragmatic in their formulation of goals and priorities. Peace movements are particularly appreciated for their ability to formulate clear and consensual objectives. In the Basque Country, Elkarri (and later Lokarri) had a

short agenda around three demands, seen as the main conditions for peace: ending violence; legalizing the political parties and social actors which were banned under terrorism proscription; and enabling civil society participation in a peace process. All parties in the Basque Parliament agreed to these three conditions, which made it easier to engage with them.⁴⁷

In Liberia, WIPNET also formulated three fundamental objectives conducive to peace, asking the government and rebel forces to (1) declare an unconditional ceasefire, (2) engage in peace talks between the belligerents, and (3) request international mediation support.⁴⁸

While having clear and concise demands works in favor of peace movements, it might turn out to be counterproductive for pro-change campaigns. In Aceh, the SIRA movement focused on the single goal of a pro-independence referendum. The fact that “they were not very subtle about their demand,” combined with their mass-based rallies, which faced fierce repression, gave them the reputation of being “radicals,” which allegedly alienated local elites and partly explains the reluctance of mediators to engage with them or participate in their activities.⁴⁹ Once the prospect of independence was off the table in the Helsinki process, the unwillingness of SIRA leaders to adapt their agenda meant “there was nothing to discuss with them . . . and it became risky to engage with them.”⁵⁰ This single-minded course also contributed to the movement’s decline. “Gradually they started to lose supporters. . . . They should have paused to rethink their strategy at the time, think about the new reality, how to move ahead, and tactically revisit their position.”⁵¹

In Kosovo, had the LDK been able to compromise on its demand for independence by articulating a broader set of demands deemed acceptable by Serbia, negotiations might have come about much earlier, with a higher chance of success, hence avoiding the bloody war of 1999.⁵² In Guatemala, a former mediator felt that social organizations such as indigenous groups represented in the ASC might have gone too far in their transformative



Members of Liberia's Women in Peacebuilding Network, started by Nobel Peace Prize winner Leymah Gbowee, sing and play music as part of their daily activism for peace, on the eve of presidential elections in Monrovia on October 10, 2011. (Photo by Rebecca Blackwell/AP)

agenda, with the consequence that the sectorial agreements provoked a significant countermobilization by sectors that had a stake in the socioeconomic status quo.⁵³

Alliance Building across Civil Society

A third factor influencing the roles of social movements during peace processes is their readiness and ability to forge alliances with other social forces in order to mobilize effectively during negotiations. A recent study found that coordination between elite-based and mass-based civil society actors positively influences the progress and success of peace processes.⁵⁴ This was also observed across the case studies analyzed for this research. In Guatemala, indigenous Maya organizations engaged actively in coalition building with other sectorial groups during the early 1990s, which positively influenced the establishment of the ASC. Various social sectors expressed solidarity with one another by

engaging in joint campaigns, and prominent activists often had memberships across several organizations with overlapping missions.⁵⁵ Together, they formed a coalition of movements bound together through coordinating structures and united behind common goals, practices, discourse, and identities as non-elite civil actors. Within this broader coalition, Maya organizations coalesced around several umbrella indigenous organizations. The most prominent of these, the Coordination of Organizations of the Maya People of Guatemala (COPMAGUA), representing 150 indigenous groups, was formed in late 1994 as a way to present a unified pro-Maya agenda to the ongoing peace negotiations.⁵⁶

In Liberia, women from the Mass Action for Peace campaign also benefited from their close contact with the women's network MARWOPNET, which had been granted observer status during the 2003 negotiations. With an ally

at the table, WIPNET members could be briefed regularly about the proceedings inside the mediation room and adapt their civil resistance tactics accordingly.⁵⁷

Elsewhere, social movements failed to unite, with negative consequences for their ability to influence the course of peace processes. Nepal presents a contrasting case: the 2006 pro-democracy movement rallied citizens from all geographic, ideological, social, economic, and ethnic strands of life, binding them together for a common purpose, but this solidarity did not materialize in alliance building between marginalized sectors during the political transition. Instead, “each movement focused on its own priorities rather than identifying a point of convergence to carry out a united struggle.”⁵⁸ Their failure to join forces to pressure lawmakers to abide by the spirit of the peace accord after 2006 undoubtedly impeded efforts to influence the constitution-making process in a more inclusive way.

In the Basque Country, the plurality of the peace movement—stretching from the perceived partisanship of prisoner support groups to the ethical standing of Gesto por la Paz, the political engagement of Elkarri, and the single-mindedness of victim groups—was a strength, but also an impediment when it came to rallying with one voice during and after the 2006 talks.

Finally, despite the strong solidarity among popular movements in Guatemala, the effectiveness of the ASC was impeded by deep divisions and mistrust between them and representatives of the private sector, but also by disagreements among indigenous, human rights, peasant, and women organizations over strategies and priorities. The public rejection of constitutional reform in the 1999 referendum, with a turnout of only 17 percent of the voting-age population, demonstrated both the inability of indigenous organizations to mobilize a broad public constituency for change and the ability of pro-status quo forces and the business class to mount an effective countermobilization and disinformation campaign to prevent structural reforms.⁵⁹

RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER CONFLICT PARTIES

Social movements’ scope for action and influence during peace processes is also substantially shaped and conditioned by their relationships with the main negotiating parties, usually the government and armed groups. As noted by Darren Kew and Anthony Wanis-St. John, “Civil society groups may win themselves seats at the table through their ingenuity or utility, but access to the table is invariably controlled by the more powerful parties who dominate the state, society, and the instruments of violence at odds in the conflict.”⁶⁰ While activists can sometimes act as bridge builders with the government or armed groups through their own agency, the main belligerents play a large role in shaping movements’ behavior and the margins of action during peace processes.

Several interviewed activists recalled their efforts to reach out across the conflict divide through, as one put it, “critical-constructive engagement with all conflict parties in order to ‘keep a safe space’ for an autonomous civil society voice.”⁶¹ In Liberia, according to a report from the Inclusive Peace and Transition Initiative, “Women activists were widely respected as advocates for peace, giving them agency in an otherwise patriarchal society. . . . The armed parties, some of whom they had known for a long time, listened to them.”⁶² In the Basque Country, the peace organization Lokarri was able to build trustful relations with all political parties after 2011 by portraying itself as a small, nonthreatening movement that did not have its own agenda and was not competing for power and influence, and hence could be relied on for its impartial engagement. At the same time, Lokarri became caught between two incompatible roles, mobilizing through street activism and public advocacy for change while at the same time discreetly facilitating dialogue between the parties. “It was hard to campaign and give interviews as leader of a social movement, and at the same time work behind the scenes to facilitate dialogue. The roles were mixed,” Lokarri’s founder said in an interview.⁶³

In the Basque Country, the peace organization Lokarri was able to build trustful relations with all political parties after 2011 by portraying itself as a small, nonthreatening movement that did not have its own agenda and was not competing for power and influence.

Armed Opposition: From Rivalry to Complementarity

Preexisting ties between grassroots movements and rebel groups often influence the mobilization trajectories and strategic choices of nonviolent activists. These relations played out differently across the cases, according to the feelings of sympathy or animosity between them. In maximalist struggles, armed and unarmed segments of pro-change opposition groups operate in the same social space, and power struggles and rivalry between them might reduce the scope for social movements' involvement in a peace process.

In Aceh, "GAM [rebels] did not want to lose power to SIRA" or to prominent civil society figures such as religious leaders. Hence, according to Rodd McGibbon, they actively blocked attempts to form an inclusive coalition across the province, the Aceh People's Congress, to discuss Aceh's political future, and later, as Shane Barter has written, "opposed the participation of . . . leaders of Acehnese civil society in the negotiation process" in order to claim the sole political legitimacy to speak on behalf of Aceh.⁶⁴ For other observers, however, SIRA was "utilized" by GAM, a relationship made possible by the ideological closeness and overlapping affiliation of their members.⁶⁵ Many rebel negotiators were in fact former student or civil society activists who were brought on board by GAM leaders to enhance their own legitimacy at the table. The armed movement has also been suspected of killing fellow activists who were seen as contesting their claim to represent Acehnese society.

At the other end of the spectrum, armed and nonviolent movements in Kosovo effectively complemented each other in building pressure for negotiations and international intervention. According to a former civil society negotiator, "Both sides needed each other: without nonviolent

action there would be no credibility on the Kosovo side; our capacity to act nonviolently became rewarded [through the Rambouillet negotiations], but it only happened when a catalytic violent movement captured the attention of world powers."⁶⁶ The LDK and the KLA engaged in extensive negotiations prior to the Rambouillet talks and agreed on a policy of full consensus between them on the content of the talks. According to two interviewees, some negotiators also proactively acted as bridge builders between the armed and unarmed factions of the Kosovo delegation to show a united front against Serbia. They capitalized on their trustful relations with both sides and their personal credibility (such as a "patriotic" family lineage) to formulate consensual positions.

Government: Between Repression and Elite Co-optation

State repression can severely weaken nonviolent movements during armed conflict, which also affects the movements' ability to sustain mobilization ahead of peace negotiations. In Aceh, for instance, the cycle of violent polarization between GAM and state forces resulted in a closing of the space for peaceful protests. "Thanks to our tactics and massive mobilization, we got close to independence," one former activist and negotiator said. "But when civilians became targeted, shot, tortured, we . . . lost the momentum."⁶⁷ The movement became reduced to a handful of hard-headed activists, and the Indonesian government used this opportunity to frame the conflict purely as a military confrontation with armed rebels. Several interviewees felt that, ironically, "Jakarta was more scared of the civilian movement than of GAM"; "They preferred to deal with GAM than SIRA"; "It was easier to go public with the rebellion." This view is also shared by analysts asserting that because civil society leaders were openly calling out the atrocities of the Indonesian state, the government vehemently opposed civil society involvement in the peace negotiations.

During the 2006 peace process in the Basque Country, the Spanish government was also uncomfortable with peace movements mobilizing on the streets and expressly asked them to stop campaigning during negotiations, even to express their support for the talks. Civic mobilization for peace was put on hold, with the tragic consequence that “all the mobilization space was occupied by the ‘no to dialogue’ constituency,” whose voice dominated the media.⁶⁸

Finally, the case of Nepal provides an example of elite appropriation of civil resistance gains during peace negotiations. The “people power” revolution was made possible by a tactical partnership between marginalized and privileged groups against the monarchy. However, social elites, represented by mainstream political parties during the 2006 peace process, were able to dominate the bargaining space and assert themselves as the new rulers (alongside the Maoists), while Madhesi and other marginalized communities seeking broader social and economic change failed to claim a seat at the negotiation table.⁶⁹

INTERACTIONS WITH THIRD-PARTY MEDIATORS

External mediators involved in peace processes often have ambivalent relationships with grassroots movements. In the name of inclusivity, third-party actors may share a normative commitment to or strategic interest in elevating the voices of marginalized groups at the negotiation table. But the processes described in this report illustrate the concrete dilemmas faced by mediators when direct engagement with poorly understood social movements runs counter to the belligerent parties’ interest in an expedient political deal.

Nonviolent movements have the best chances of influencing peace negotiations at the table (Kosovo) or by applying outside pressure (Liberia) when they can rely on empathic mediators as a result of long-standing relationships and engagement or shared interest. In Kosovo, the US diplomat Christopher Hill (who was then serving

as US ambassador to Macedonia) carried out intense shuttle diplomacy between the LDK, the KLA, and civil society leaders in an attempt to promote unity among the splintered Kosovo Albanians prior to their participation in the Rambouillet negotiations. His effort to reconcile the positions of the armed and peaceful factions of the liberation struggle was facilitated by long-standing relations between the US State Department and the LDK that had existed throughout the 1990s, as testified by numerous US declarations in support of Kosovo’s right to self-determination.⁷⁰ Another example comes from the 2003 peace negotiations in Liberia, where the Nigerian mediator Abdulsalami Abubakar was very supportive of women’s movements. According to activists’ testimonies, he listened carefully to their ideas and encouraged them to engage with the negotiators. The women’s network MARWOPNET had an observer status at the talks. Activists from Mass Action for Peace were offered a similar role, but they felt they could more effectively apply nonviolent pressure from outside, and they did not want to compete with their sisters in representing the women of Liberia.⁷¹

Other cases demonstrate the challenges faced by private diplomacy actors invited by governments to facilitate talks with an armed opposition, but without a mandate to engage nonviolent activist groups. In Aceh, a former student leader interviewed for this research highlighted the stark contrast between the prominence of nonviolent activists who led the self-determination struggle in 1998–99 and their minor role in the 2000–02 and 2005 peace processes. According to him, third-party mediators were partly to blame for this dramatic shift, and for the rise to prominence of armed rebels. He cited the example of a local opinion poll conducted in 1999 on the issue of who would represent the Acehnese in peace talks with the Indonesian government: nine of the ten most cited personalities were from civil society, while only one was from GAM. Yet, he continued,

When the Henry Dunant Center came to Aceh in 2000, they . . . identified GAM as the most crucial group to bring about peace. This [narrow perspective]

created a different dynamic on the ground, [one] that contributed to weakening student-led and human rights groups, by making GAM dominant. This trend continued until the [2005] Helsinki Agreement, and fostered a polarization between those working alongside the armed groups and those working against them. More and more, GAM became the single entity representing the whole society.⁷²

Several factors contributed to this progressive marginalization of the nonviolent movement in Aceh, according to various sources. Activists and experts partly blame the lack of contextual knowledge of external intervenors, who adopted a binary vision of the conflict and failed to “learn about the complexities and fragmentation of Acehnese society.”⁷³ According to the mediators’ own analysis—and they do acknowledge that they “inadvertently increased GAM’s legitimacy through the negotiation process”—they were expressly asked by the Indonesian president not to talk to civil society during the ceasefire talks in 2000–02.⁷⁴ To “avoid being co-opted into supporting a strong movement toward a referendum,” Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue staff felt that engaging with nonviolent activists would “place the organization in a vulnerable position and compromise its neutrality.”⁷⁵ Instead, the mediators opted for an incremental peace process, whereby biparty talks over security matters would be followed by an all-inclusive dialogue on political arrangements, as a way to loosen GAM’s monopoly on political representation for the Acehnese. However, by refraining from using their influence to force belligerents to engage with civil society early on, they missed the chance to promote an inclusive process, as the second phase of political talks never materialized.⁷⁶ Later, during the Helsinki peace process, consultation channels with civil society organizations (including SIRA) were facilitated not by the Finnish mediators but by the Swedish Olof Palme Center, whose staff were keen to reconnect the Sweden-based GAM negotiators with local realities in Aceh.⁷⁷

Other case studies reveal similar, if perhaps less dramatic, patterns of misunderstanding or uneasiness among mediators vis-à-vis popular movements. In the Basque Country,

the secret communication channel established between the ETA and the government prevented external scrutiny and involvement by civil society, which was a necessary step to build trust between both parties. However, an interviewee bitterly recalls the “one-way communication channel” established by the third-party mediators, who regularly consulted civil society activists to rely on local knowledge and expertise but “never shared information on their own activities.”⁷⁸ Furthermore, an interviewed former mediator in the Guatemala peace process shared his suspicions that up to 90 percent of the ASC was “led and controlled” by the URNG guerrillas—hence mistrusting their autonomous agency at the table.⁷⁹ Finally, civil society organizations mobilizing during the 2006–08 peace process in Nepal, including those leading protests and advocacy for marginalized groups, received various types of technical and diplomatic support from outside. Ironically, international support undermined the legitimacy of these grassroots movements among social and political elites and led to a new wave of restrictions on international support for civil society and peacebuilding efforts in Nepal.⁸⁰

Besides the role of third-party mediators, international factors affect the strategies and influence of nonviolent movements during peace processes, such as broader regional or global policy trends benefiting or constraining pro-peace or pro-change movements. For example, national liberation movements in Kosovo and Timor-Leste benefited from a favorable geopolitical environment, while the pro-independence campaign in Aceh could not rally international support for its plight for a referendum on self-determination. Moreover, in contrast to the worldwide praise of Liberian women’s nonviolent campaign, the peace movement in the Basque Country failed to generate global sympathy as a result of the Spanish state’s relentless efforts to portray the Basque conflict as a purely internal affair. Guatemalan Maya activists also made headlines worldwide and earned a Nobel Peace Prize in 1992, in the midst of a wave of indigenous movements on the American continent, while the Madhesi movement in Nepal could not benefit from such a pan-regional solidarity network.

Nonviolent Social Movements' Impact on a Sustainable Peace



The six peace processes in Liberia, Basque Country/Spain, Kosovo, Aceh/Indonesia, Guatemala, and Nepal shed light on the various types of nonviolent grassroots movements that emerge during an armed conflict and mobilize for peace, for maximalist change, or to advance social or identity claims articulated by marginalized communities, and the strategic choices made by those movements to participate in or influence the course and content of peace processes negotiated between the government and nonstate armed actors. These mobilization strategies had differential effects on the quality of the resulting peace, ranging from achievement of goals and a subsequent settled peace to exclusion from participation and denial of the peace movements' agenda, which sometimes meant continued conflict. Although no firm correlation can be drawn between strategy and result, for many other conditioning factors also play roles, certain relationships can be adduced from the case studies.

Comprehensive peace accords (Liberia, Aceh). In Liberia and Aceh, peace processes resulted in comprehensive peace agreements that addressed the core demands of the social movements. In Liberia, women leading Mass Action for Peace opted to apply extra-institutional pressure on the warring parties through nonviolent resistance methods, but they benefited from the presence of strategic allies at the negotiation table and an empathic mediator, and gained visibility and impact thanks to their clear messaging, straightforward goals, daring tactics, and ability to gain the trust of all parties. The 2003 Accra Peace Agreement that concluded the Second Liberian Civil War addressed

the core demands of Mass Action for Peace, ushering in an era of peace, stability, and democracy. Women's groups successfully advocated for reforms and independent bodies—such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Governance Reform Commission, and the Human Rights Commission. These were unprecedented in Liberia's many past peace agreements, which had been negotiated exclusively by armed parties.⁸¹

In Aceh, nonviolent activists were excluded from the failed 2000–03 peace process and had limited direct influence during the Helsinki negotiations in 2005 because their voices and interests were represented at the table through the armed liberation movement, with which they entertained ambivalent relations of alliance and rivalry. Even though their role and contributions were downplayed by the warring parties and mediators alike, the resulting agreement is considered a comprehensive political settlement addressing all major demands of the Acehnese people around political and economic self-governance, human rights, and transitional justice, even though their implementation remains incompletely realized.

Post-agreement hindrances (Guatemala, Nepal). In Guatemala, indigenous movements (with women at the forefront) were successful in mobilizing cross-sectorial support for an inclusive consultative body, which greatly influenced the content of the 1996 peace accord, while applying parallel pressure on the talks through sustained nonviolent action. However, the failure of sectorial groups to gain support from segments of the private sector and conservative groups contributed

to the failed referendum on constitutional reform in 1999. As a result, the most progressive elements of the peace agreement were never implemented, in particular the provisions addressing exclusion and land rights that had been forwarded by civil society.

In Nepal, there was undoubtedly a causal link between the participatory nature of the 2006 people's movement and the transformational agenda of the peace accord; and later between the 2007 Madhesi nonviolent protests and the promise of a federal system in the Interim Constitution. The movement's success in influencing the content of the 2015 constitution was more limited, largely because of the weaker representation of Madhesi parties in the second constituent assembly but also because the movement failed to build strategic coalitions with other marginalized sectors and was unsuccessful in gaining powerful allies among social elites.

Political settlement without a peace accord (Kosovo, Basque Country). The peace negotiations in Kosovo (1999) and the Basque Country (2006–07) did not result in comprehensive political settlements as no peace agreements were signed by the parties. The end of violence was achieved instead through unilateral action by the armed protagonists themselves (in the Basque conflict) or by international forces (in Kosovo). From the perspective of civil society agency, contrasting trends can be observed between these two approaches to war termination. The Basque peace activists were excluded from the 2006 negotiations owing to the secretive and top-down nature of the talks, but they later became direct protagonists in the disarmament of the ETA, thanks to their ability to translate their peace agenda into a pragmatic, unifying message and to gain the trust of all political and armed parties.

LDK activists in Kosovo, by contrast, were granted direct participation at the negotiation table thanks to their long-standing legacy of civic activism and their successful international advocacy; but the talks were unsuccessful, in part because the Kosovo and Serbian

delegations both failed to put forward pragmatic negotiating positions that would facilitate a compromise. As a result of the failed negotiations, the peaceful pro-independence movement became a passive spectator to a foreign military intervention launched in its name before it was sidelined by former KLA rebels in postwar autonomous institutions.



There is an obvious difficulty in attributing successful peace process outcomes to specific mobilization strategies. Neither direct participation at the table (as in Kosovo) nor binding consultation mandates during peace negotiations (as in Guatemala) offer social movements any sufficient guarantee that their key demands will be effectively addressed and implemented. Grassroots activists and external actors advising parties on inclusive peace processes should therefore try to combine various modes of engagement and mobilization beyond claiming a space at the bargaining table, including by applying sustained pressure to the negotiating parties through extra-institutional civil resistance strategies “from below.”

These different outcomes also imply that whatever channels of influence social movements choose or are granted, their success is ultimately conditioned by a similar set of factors, such as the movements' past experience, legacy, and social legitimacy; their ability to formulate pragmatic demands and to build broad societal alliances without becoming instrumentalized by counterelites; their constructive interactions with warring parties; their recognition by external mediators as autonomous parties in their own right; and their readiness to proactively seize opportunities that might arise in the global policy environment. These tentative conclusions concerning the greater or lesser success of nonviolent peace movements and their ability to affect conflict transformation and societal change remain to be confirmed in larger comparative studies.

Recommendations for Ongoing and Future Peace Processes



Insofar as the results of the various nonviolent strategies to influence the content and outcome of peace talks are not predictable, creative thinking is required to design more inclusive forms of peace processes that take social movements seriously, without necessarily broadening the size of the table. Based on the factors of effective mobilization examined earlier, a few suggestions can be offered to grassroots social movements to enhance their influence during ongoing and future peace processes and for third-party mediators to improve their effectiveness and inclusivity mandate.

Certain recommendations can be adduced for social movements mobilizing for peace or change in Myanmar, South Sudan, Syria, or Yemen, places where few grassroots activists have been included so far as direct protagonists in ongoing peace talks.

Leverage expertise, legacy, and preparedness.

Nonviolent movements for peace or change can exert meaningful influence during formal peace processes, but doing so requires careful planning. Well in advance of any intervention, nonviolent movements should carefully assess the merits and risks of various mobilization strategies and be prepared to take action during different tracks of engagement, sequentially or simultaneously, if they deem it advantageous. For instance, they could map out alternative scenarios for action, including applying extra-institutional pressure from the street, establishing consultation or representation channels with the warring parties, quiet lobbying or public advocacy with mediators and other peace support actors, and direct participation in peace talks. In anticipation of

future opportunities to sit at the negotiation table, they also need to agree on criteria to select their delegates. Those persons should ideally be experts in the issues under negotiation and have sufficient internal legitimacy to represent the movement as a whole.

Build capacity for strategic pragmatism. To increase movements' acceptability as conflict parties in their own right, movement leaders need to be able to formulate concrete and negotiable demands. While peace movements tend to convey their antiwar aspirations through unifying messages that appeal to broad segments of society, they do not always succeed in putting forward concrete reform agendas for democratic change. Pro-change movements, for their part, may be perceived as overly radical in their demands and are sometimes disinclined to negotiate if they equate it with selling out. In both cases, developing dialogue and negotiation skills can help activists craft a pragmatic agenda that combines key principles and positions on which compromise is possible. These skills make them better equipped for strategic engagement with their potential allies and opponents. For example, the training manual *Synergizing Nonviolent Action and Peacebuilding*, developed by the US Institute of Peace in 2018, provides dedicated modules on negotiation and mediation for nonviolent activists.⁸² Early engagement and outreach to international mediators and peace support NGOs can also help social movements become familiar with the logic of negotiation and develop channels of communication that can be utilized later for relaying information to and from the peacemaking table.



Madhesi leaders and supporters in Kathmandu, Nepal, observe a moment of silence on November 23, 2015, for people killed during weeks of protests in South Nepal following ratification the country's constitution in September. (Photo by Niranjana Shrestha/AP)

Build alliances across civil society. Given the plurality of grassroots movements operating in any conflict context, nonviolent activists should seek opportunities to develop relationships across the whole constellation of pro-peace and pro-change groups. For example, sectorial movements often comprise marginalized individuals with long histories of and capacity for ongoing organizing, and can become useful allies to increase mobilization and legitimacy during attempts to influence the course of peace processes. In some contexts, political and social elites, such as powerful opposition parties, can also become tactical allies in pursuit of human rights, justice, or freedom. Internationally sponsored workshops and conferences can help improve coordination efforts across civil society and opposition groups with the goal of maximizing their impact at the table (through participation), around the table (through consultation and representation), or beyond the table (through civil resistance).

Engage other conflict parties. Finally, nonviolent movements should seek opportunities for regular dialogue with the main warring parties from the state and armed opposition alike, not only to express their grievances and demands but also to (re-)assert their autonomous agency and showcase the substantive contributions they can bring to a peace process. Outside formal negotiation arenas, they should identify possible societal bridge builders, or insider mediators, who can establish and maintain discreet communication channels with armed groups as well as with state institutions. These mediators may include trusted individuals with privileged access to the conflicting parties, such as through kinship, identity, ideological proximity, or business relations.



Third-party mediators in intrastate conflict settlements share responsibility for making sure that grassroots social movements are able to contribute meaningfully to the peace process. A few lessons learned can be offered for mediation support actors, whether detailed by foreign governments, international organizations, or NGOs, to ensure that their interventions create a space at the table for nonviolent social groups and their agendas. Indeed, grassroots movements should be regarded as conflict stakeholders and peacemaking agents in their own right.

Identify the nonviolent movements that should be involved. When preparing interventions, third-party mediators should carefully analyze the social and political dynamics in-country, including at the subnational level, in order to dissect the various components of civil society and identify which grassroots movements should be involved, directly or indirectly, in a peace process. Mediators should strive to carefully map the range of social movements mobilizing for peace or for change, including also countermovements opposing peace or change, and analyze their aspirations, organizational features, networks of alliances, and modes of action. Guiding questions supporting such analytical enquiry could include the following: Which formal or informal social movements are explicitly mobilizing around the conflict (i.e., taking a position for or against peace and dialogue, advancing key demands to be addressed through a peace process, addressing the main root causes of violence)? What indicators can be used to measure their level of social support (e.g., size of membership-based organizations, mobilization capacity, popularity of social leaders in opinion polls and media)? What relations do they have with armed actors, and do the armed groups consider the social movements their “civilian front,” allies, or competitors? Can movements be used as a channel to access armed groups? Which individual leaders possess the right mix of popular legitimacy and pragmatism to engage effectively in negotiations? Which local experts and external support actors (e.g., transnational trainers and solidarity groups that may have already conducted

extensive movement network analysis) can support such a mapping exercise? This in-country analysis is essential to avoid unintentionally disempowering movements through biased or selective engagement.

Create space for movement engagement. Governments inclined to negotiate superficial power-sharing deals rather than commit to a real distribution of power may prefer to negotiate with armed groups rather than with grassroots social movements. Mediators have considerable agency with respect to the conflicts they intervene in, and their decisions on process design help determine the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. Therefore, they should not only focus on social groups’ decision-making efficacy and expediency as the main criteria for selecting which groups to invite to the table, they should also bear in mind the long-term consequences of their actions. Restricting access to armed actors, for example, might incentivize other aggrieved groups to adopt violent strategies as a way to gain a seat at the table, while inclusive outreach to nonviolent social movements offers better prospects for a peaceful postwar society. With this understanding in mind, third-party actors should not accept restrictive mediation mandates that limit the range of actors they may engage with, and they should ensure that multitrack channels of communication with civil society, channels that reach well beyond urban elites and NGOs, are built into peace process architectures.

Capitalize on civil resistance campaigns. Mediators should inform themselves of the dynamics of civil resistance by pro-peace or pro-change social movements and how to utilize mass action strategically to support a sustainable political settlement. This requires a careful assessment of the added value of mass action driven from below and an awareness of how to capitalize on nonviolent campaigns during deadlocks or setbacks in the negotiations—for example, by activating popular pressure for peace or change—and how to use the combined pressure of grassroots movements and external action to keep the peace process moving forward.

Notes

1. Interviews were mainly conducted remotely (by phone or Skype) and have been anonymized.
2. This definition is inspired by Mary Joyce, “Watering the Grassroots: A Strategy for Social Movement Support,” Transparency and Accountability Initiative, July 2015, www.transparency-initiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/watering_the_grassroots.pdf.
3. Véronique Dudouet, “Powering to Peace: Integrated Civil Resistance and Peacebuilding Strategies,” Special Report 1, International Center on Nonviolent Conflict, 2017, 5, www.nonviolent-conflict.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICNC-Special-Report-Civil-Resistance-and-Peacebuilding.pdf.
4. Kurt Schock, *Unarmed Insurrections: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).
5. The sometimes blurred boundaries with armed groups will be mentioned below. For a comprehensive and nuanced review of the violent/nonviolent action dichotomy, see Benjamin S. Case, “Riots as Civil Resistance: Rethinking the Dynamics of ‘Nonviolent’ Struggle,” *Journal of Resistance Studies* 4, no. 1 (2018): 9–44.
6. Maia Hallward, Juan Masullo, and Cécile Mouly, “Civil Resistance in Armed Conflict: Leveraging Nonviolent Action to Navigate War, Oppose Violence and Confront Oppression,” *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 12, no. 3 (2017): 1–9.
7. Ana Arjona, “Civilian Resistance to Rebel Governance,” in *Rebel Governance in Civil War*, ed. Ana Arjona, Nelson Kasfir, and Zachariah Mampilly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 180–202; Juan Masullo, *The Power of Staying Put: Nonviolent Resistance against Armed Groups in Colombia* (Washington, DC: International Center on Nonviolent Conflict, 2015); and Oliver Kaplan, *Resisting War: How Communities Protect Themselves* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
8. Janel B. Galvanek and James Suah Shilue, “Working Tirelessly for Peace and Equality: Civil Resistance and Peacebuilding in Liberia,” International Center on Nonviolent Conflict, May 2021, www.nonviolent-conflict.org/resource/working-tirelessly-for-peace-and-equality-civil-resistance-and-peacebuilding-in-liberia-sr; Franzisca Zanker, “Legitimate Representation: Civil Society Actors in Peace Negotiations Revisited,” *International Negotiation* 19, no. 1 (2014): 62–88; and Suzanne Ghais, “Inclusivity and Peacemaking in Internal Armed Conflict” (PhD diss., American University, 2016).
9. Interview with founding member of Elkarrri, January 2020.
10. Paul Rios, “Limits and Challenges of Public Mobilisation for Peace in the Basque Country,” *Peace in Progress*, no. 5 (November 2010), www.icip-perlapau.cat/e-review/issue-5-november-2010/limits-and-challenges-public-mobilisation-peace-basque-country.htm; Paul Rios, “Basque Country: Experiences of the Social Forum to Invigorate Peace,” *Accord* 25 (April 2014): 40–43, www.c-r.org/accord/legitimacy-and-peace-processes/national-dialogue-and-legitimate-change/basque-country; Egoitz Gago Anton, “The Analysis of the Framing Processes of the Basque Peace Movement: The Way Lokarri and Gesto por la Paz Changed Society,” ICIP Working Paper no. 1, International Catalan Institute for Peace, 2012, <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=5535099>; and Maria J. Funes, “Social Responses to Political Violence in the Basque Country: Peace Movements and Their Audience,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 42, no. 4 (1998): 493–510.
11. The various iterations of the Nonviolent and Violent Campaigns and Outcomes dataset have catalogued hundreds of maximalist nonviolent resistance campaigns around the globe from 1900 to 2013. See the website at www.du.edu/korbel/sie/research/chenow_navco_data.html.
12. Interviews with Kosovo civil society negotiator, January 2020. See also Howard Clark, *Civil Resistance in Kosovo* (London: Pluto Press, 2000).
13. Interview with former youth activist, September 2019.
14. Interview with former female activist, August 2019.
15. See Stephen Zunes, Jesse Laird, and Michael Beer, “Aceh: Struggle for Self-Determination (1998–2001),” International Center on Nonviolent Conflict, June 2010, www.nonviolent-conflict.org/aceh-struggle-self-determination-1998-2001; Elizabeth F. Drexler, *Aceh, Indonesia: Securing the Insecure State* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); and Shane Barter, *Neither Wolf, nor Lamb: Embracing Civil Society in the Aceh Conflict* (Bangkok: Forum Asia, 2004).
16. See Enrique Alvarez and Tania Palencia Prado, “Guatemala’s Peace Process: Context, Analysis and Evaluation,” *Accord* 13 (2012): 38–43, www.c-r.org/accord/public-participation/guatemalas-peace-process-context-analysis-and-evaluation; Manuela Nilsson, “Civil Society Actors in Peace Negotiations in Central America,” *Journal of Civil Society* 14, no. 2 (2018): 135–52; Roddy Brett, *Social Movements, Indigenous Politics and Democratization in Guatemala, 1985–1996* (Boston: Brill, 2008); and Véronique Dudouet,

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17. See Subindra Bogati and Ches Thurber, "From the Hills to the Streets to the Table: Civil Resistance and Peacebuilding in Nepal," International Center on Nonviolent Conflict, April 2021, www.nonviolent-conflict.org/resource/from-the-hills-to-the-streets-to-the-table-rl.
 18. See Mukta S. Tamang, "Social Movements and Inclusive Peace in Nepal," *Accord* 26 (March 2017): 97–106, www.c-r.org/accord/nepal/social-movements-and-inclusive-peace-nepal; Deepak Thapa and Alexander Ramsbotham, "More Forward than Back?: Next Steps for Peace in Nepal," *Accord* 26 (March 2017): 133–36, www.c-r.org/accord/nepal/conclusion-more-forward-back-next-steps-peace-nepal; D. B. Subedi and Prakash Bhattarai, "The April Uprising: How a Nonviolent Struggle Explains the Transformation of Armed Conflict in Nepal," *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 12, no. 3 (2017): 85–97; and Balkrishna Mabuhang, "From Peace Settlement to Political Settlement: State Restructuring and Inclusive Measures for Marginalised Groups in Nepal," IPS Paper no. 10, Berghof Foundation, November 2015, www.berghof-foundation.org/library/from-peace-settlement-to-political-settlement-state-restructuring-and-inclusive-measures-for-marginalised-groups-in-nepal.
 19. For example, the United Nations Guidelines for Effective Mediation assert that "the integrity of the mediation process, security and confidentiality are important elements in cultivating the consent of the parties" (United Nations, "Guidelines," 8, <https://peacemaker.un.org/guidance-effective-mediation>).
 20. Thania Paffenholz, "Civil Society and Peace Negotiations: Beyond the Inclusion-Exclusion Dichotomy," *Negotiation Journal* 30, no. 1 (2014): 69–91; and Véronique Dudouet and Stina Lundström, "Post-war Political Settlements: From Participatory Transition Processes to Inclusive State-building and Governance," Berghof Foundation, October 2016, www.berghof-foundation.org/library/post-war-political-settlements-from-participatory-transition-processes-to-inclusive-state-building-and-governance.
 21. Quoted in Rios, "Basque Country," 41.
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In countries caught up in armed civil conflict, social movements can use strategic nonviolent action to pressure armed belligerents to participate in peace dialogues and, under favorable circumstances, may themselves become key dialogue interlocutors influencing the content of peace talks. Six past peace processes, in Liberia, Basque Country/Spain, Kosovo, Aceh/Indonesia, Guatemala, and Nepal, shed light on the various types of grassroots movements that may emerge during an armed conflict and mobilize for peace, for maximal political change, or to advance the social claims of marginalized communities. Among the key findings is that once grassroots movements are considered to be stakeholders in conflicts and peacemaking agents in their own right, they can have greater influence over the sustainability of conflict transformation and societal change.

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