
The USIP Learning Agenda: An Evidence Review

Party Viability Factors in Peace Negotiations

Erin Rebecca Bloom
Senior Director, Metropolitan Group

Lisa K. Dicker
Lecturer on Law and Clinical Instructor, Harvard Law School

MARCH 2023



UNITED STATES
INSTITUTE OF PEACE
Making Peace Possible

2301 Constitution Avenue, NW | Washington, DC 20037

Introduction

Party viability factors refer to the characteristics and competencies that make a party more or less likely to be effective in negotiating a successful resolution to a conflict. To achieve such a resolution, a party must both make concessions themselves and induce concessions from the other party or parties in order to come to an agreement. Moreover, for the negotiated resolution to be successful, each party must be willing and able to implement the commitments it made. Thus, a viable negotiating party must have the characteristics and competencies that could lead to such an outcome.¹

The US Institute of Peace (USIP) conceived this evidence review to address a perceived gap in the academic literature and practitioner thinking on negotiations. Much time, attention, and debate has been dedicated to the critical elements of process design, conflict ripeness, and agreement sequencing. However, there has been little discussion around which characteristics of the parties themselves make negotiations more or less likely to succeed.

For the review, we first surveyed the available literature on peace negotiations, which found that party viability factors are indeed a notable gap. Then, to help fill this gap in documentation, we conducted interviews to capture the reflections and insights of practitioners and analysts, as well as case studies to examine the application of such insights in practice. Based on this evidence review, we developed a Theory of Change for party viability factors, which is as follows:

If a party maintains (1) authority, (2) legitimacy, (3) capacity, (4) necessity, and (5) confidence, then it will be more likely to make concessions and induce concessions from other parties, thus increasing the likelihood of a negotiated settlement. A party that maintains a degree of some or all of authority, legitimacy, capacity, and necessity is more likely to contribute to a successful negotiated settlement—aided by both the actual presence of such factors and the confidence of other parties to the negotiation (specifically opposing negotiating parties) that the party has these factors and thus is a viable negotiating partner. Further, the inclusion of parties that cannot maintain these five viability factors may reduce the likelihood of a negotiated settlement.

1. For the purposes of this review, “party” refers to the parties directly engaged in negotiation and who would be the signatories of an agreement—as opposed to mediators, facilitators, international supporters of the process or of particular parties, or other third-party actors. Often, parties directly engaged in negotiation are engaged in hostilities, but as this evidence review illustrates, parties may also be nonbelligerent, such as domestic political or civil society groups. We extend our sincere thanks to Noura Abahsain and Brooke Davies for their contributions to our research and their support in conducting interviews.

Importantly, however, the party viability factors should not be considered determinative of a successful peace process, but rather indicative of whether the party itself is a viable negotiating party. For example, even if all parties involved are viable, if the conflict is not ripe, the peace negotiations or implementation of an agreement may still fail. (Note that we did not examine the intersection of party viability factors and other critical factors, such as conflict ripeness or content of the peace agreement.)

Additionally, the party viability factors should not be read as binary factors required for viability, but rather qualities that a party may hold to various degrees on a sliding scale. In other words, a party may be “more viable” or “less viable,” depending on how strongly it holds some or all of the viability factors. Moreover, this strength is not stagnant; the evidence review revealed that parties can gain or lose strength in these factors over time.

This evidence review has produced a number of possibilities for further research and analysis by experts, academics, and practitioners. In particular, more study is needed on the degree of importance each viability factor has at various stages of the peace process, tipping points that may determine when a party becomes viable or loses viability, and how viability factors may intersect and impact the status of other factors.

The following sections set forth (1) the methodology for the evidence review, (2) the review of available literature and identification of gaps in the literature on party viability factors, (3) the revised Theory of Change with five identified party viability factors and their initial set of indicators, and (4) recommendations for further research and evidence development and recommendations for practitioners and participants in negotiation processes.

Methodology

USIP identified the following core research question for this evidence review: What are the necessary viability factors for negotiation parties? Viability factors related to peace negotiations are perceived to be crucial to understand for both practitioners and those who study peace negotiations, but they remain under-researched. Based on this perception and USIP’s preliminary Theory of Change,² we examined the available literature, thinking, and best practices known to practitioners and experts in order to determine and assess the potential factors that impact the viability of parties to peace negotiations.

2. USIP’s preliminary proposed Theory of Change was as follows: “If a party maintains (1) authority, (2) legitimacy, and (3) continuity, then it will be more likely to make concessions and induce concessions from other parties, thus increasing the likelihood of a negotiated settlement. Negotiation may not be an appropriate tool if these factors cannot be maintained among parties. Further, the inclusion of parties that cannot maintain these factors may reduce the likelihood of a political settlement.”

The evidence review included the following:

1. A **literature review** of the available research, analysis, and reportage on peace negotiations. We focused on existing literature and academic works (see Appendix I for a list of the most relevant works; over 200 books, reports, and articles were reviewed). The intent was not only to assess and, ultimately, confirm the research gap on the question of party viability factors, but also to review literature focused on other key issues pertaining to peace negotiations for what incidental insights they might provide on party viability.
2. An **initial round of interviews** with experts, practitioners, and academics (see Appendix II for a list of the interviewees). The aim was to test the proposed Theory of Change and its factors and indicators against the interviewees' collective experience and expertise. We solicited critiques and input on the Theory of Change, including if there were any factors the interviewees believed should be included, or, alternatively, factors that they deemed unnecessary or unimportant. To promote candor, we agreed that no information in the resulting paper would be attributed to specific interviewees. Therefore, analyses and insights from the interviews have been incorporated throughout this paper without specific attribution.
3. An **examination of case studies** for available evidence or assessments of the parties themselves and how the presence or absence of relevant factors contributed to their ultimate successes or failures.
4. An **iterative revision process of the Theory of Change** based on our findings from the above activities. We refined the definitions of the identified party viability factors and developed their indicators through **subsequent interviews and roundtables** with practitioners and analysts. We also continued to examine case studies and available literature as the Theory of Change developed and shifted, in order to continuously confirm our findings and align them with patterns present in actual peace negotiation contexts.

As such, our evidence review examines what evidence exists (or does not) in literature on party viability and captures the undocumented knowledge of practitioners and analysts, supported by case study examples.

Note that, in our analysis of party viability factors, we did not employ a value-based view of the success of peace agreements, but rather viewed a peace agreement as successful if its provisions were largely implemented and if it succeeded in resolving the conflict the peace agreement sought to address. For example, a peace agreement that did not result in a democracy was viewed the same as a peace agreement that did result in a democracy so long as the provisions were largely implemented and the peace agreement resolved the specific conflict at issue. Additionally, we determined the start of peace negotiations to be when initial meetings began between the parties—including meetings regarding preliminary issues and confidence-building measures such as detainee exchanges and temporary cessations of hostilities—and the

end of negotiations to be when signatories began implementing the provisions of an enacted peace agreement.

Literature Review

Although USIP conceived this evidence review to address a perceived gap in the academic literature and practitioner thinking on party viability factors in peace negotiations, it was important to confirm that a gap did indeed exist and to identify the size of the gap. There is, of course, a significant amount of literature covering various aspects of the viability and effectiveness of peace negotiations and agreements. However, we found that the vast majority of academic and practitioner thinking in the field tends to focus on the viability of the process or the agreement itself rather than the parties and their characteristics and competencies.

Available literature on the viability of the peace process falls into three general categories: (1) the viability of the status and timeline of the conflict itself, which has been most notably covered by I. William Zartman’s conception of “ripeness” and hurting stalemates; (2) the viability of the process itself, whether determined by its structure and composition or the investment and commitment of international actors and peacekeepers; and (3) the viability of the final agreement and whether the terms of the agreement are sufficient to keep the peace once implemented.³ Party viability, meanwhile, remains an underobserved and underanalyzed aspect of peace making; literature in this area largely focuses on the degree to which armed groups should or could be relied upon during a peace process and on advice for parties engaging in negotiations.

Specifically, our review of existing literature on peace negotiations, as just categorized, was done to both (1) glean any thinking on party viability that may be incidentally or cursorily discussed under the umbrella of more commonly discussed peace negotiation elements, and (2) determine the size of the gap in literature about party viability and demonstrate why interviews and case studies were primarily relied upon to identify party viability factors and revise the initial Theory of Change. Through this literature review, we also aimed to identify remaining gaps that can be addressed with further research and analysis.

VIABILITY OF THE CONFLICT

It is well understood that peace processes cannot be imposed on a conflict that is not ready, or ripe, for negotiations. The parties must reach a point in the conflict where negotiations are preferable to continued war, which depends on a number of ever-shifting factors. The literature

3. The subsections here are not meant to be comprehensive discussions about the topics in each category; they have only been included to summarize key points and demonstrate that the available literature does not *directly* explore the issue of party viability.

on this topic broadly focuses on the nature of the conflict itself and how it impacts the likelihood of a negotiated peace, as well as on the timing of the conflict.

Nature and Characteristics of the Conflict

According to practitioners and academics, numerous factors impact the length of a conflict and the feasibility of a negotiated settlement, relating to the nature and characteristics of the conflict itself. For instance, Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham (2013) finds that civil wars with multiple rebel groups are likely to last much longer than those with fewer than three groups. This follows logically, as more groups with diverse interests will create the need for a more complex settlement to satisfy enough interests across the table. The strength of the rebel group or groups themselves is also a determinative factor in the length of the conflict. According to Govinda Clayton (2013), stronger rebel groups are unsurprisingly more likely to force governments to negotiate and settle with them than those that can be beaten through military strength alone. (However, Marie Olson Lounsbery and Karl DeRouen Jr. [2016] argue that stronger rebel groups are also more likely than their weaker counterparts to be willing to return to conflict after a peace agreement has been reached, thereby reducing the durability of said agreement.) Further, in analyzing the “veto strength” of groups engaged in civil war, David E. Cunningham (2006) finds that the more combatant groups there are with the power to spoil a settlement, the longer the conflict is likely to last.

Perhaps the most impactful factor in a conflict is the presence and nature of foreign military interventions. Whether and how such intervention is determinative in a conflict depends on various elements, including whether the foreign military power has intervened on behalf of a government or rebel group and to what degree.

Timing of the Peace Negotiations

I. William Zartman’s (2008) theory on conflict “ripeness” is often central to discussions on the viability of a peace process. This theory suggests that parties will only seek out a compromise or negotiated resolution to their conflict once they are blocked from achieving a satisfactory outcome via unilateral means and face a painful or costly stalemate. This “mutually hurting stalemate” is one in which neither party has the means to win the conflict outright, and a continued conflict will only result in continued harm to the belligerents on both sides. Near brushes with true catastrophe, either promised or predicted, can also contribute to the ripeness of a conflict and the willingness of parties to reach a negotiated settlement.

Also frequently discussed is the post–Cold War shift that has seen negotiated settlements gain primacy over decisive military victories. According to Patrick Meehan (2018), the Conflict Termination Dataset produced by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program shows that since 1989, the number of conflicts ending through a negotiated settlement has risen to 40 percent of conflicts, while decisive military victories has dropped to 14 percent—an inverse from the

era between World War II and the end of the Cold War, during which over 60 percent of conflicts ended in a decisive, one-sided military defeat. Likewise, the post-Cold War era has been defined almost entirely by intrastate wars as opposed to conflicts between sovereign states. With these changes, international interventionism has increased significantly: for example, between 1989 and 1994, the Security Council authorized twenty new peacekeeping operations, increasing the number of peacekeepers worldwide from 11,000 to 75,000.

As a result of these sea changes, questions have arisen about whether the timing and extensiveness of international interveners pushing belligerents toward peace negotiations and settlements before the parties themselves have exhausted their military options is appropriate. This is particularly important to consider because analyses have shown that negotiated settlements are currently less likely to result in sustained peace than one achieved through military victory. Monica Toft (2010) states that civil wars ending through negotiated settlements are more likely to recur, and more deadly when they do, than those ending with military defeat for one side. In particular, Toft finds that conflicts ending with rebel victories result in much more sustainable peace than when brought about by government victories or negotiated settlements.

With all of this in mind, scholarship on the topic of timing focuses on the wisdom or unsoundness of forcing a negotiated settlement before the parties have exhausted their military options. Namely, are international institutions and powers imposing peace negotiations on an unripe conflict? Edward Luttwak (1999), for example, argues that allowing wars to reach their “natural conclusion” increases the likelihood of durable peace and sustainable postwar reconstruction. Jeremy Weinstein (2005) argues that international actors should allow for the potential of parties to reach “autonomous recovery” without international support or force. Conversely, some believe that the solution rests in much more robust interventionism, in the form of trusteeships or full-throated peacekeeping missions (Meehan, 2018).

VIABILITY OF THE PROCESS

Process design has been a well-reviewed aspect of peace making over the years. And the inclusion or exclusion of key topics in peace negotiations has been found to be a critical component of process design. A peace agreement that does not address fundamental issues related to the conflict will be much more likely to fail upon implementation. According to Patrick Meehan (2018), the early 1990s marked a shift to more sophisticated and complicated multi-track peace processes that tend to encompass an expansive array of objectives and topics, including state building; democratization; disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR); security sector reform; transitional justice; and electoral and judicial reform. Andrew Owsiak (2012 and 2021) has robustly examined the relationship between, and interdependence of, multiple attempts to design and lead a process to resolve a conflict. Moreover, Allard Duursma (2020), Govinda Clayton (2013), Birger Heldt (2013), and numerous others have

examined the role that mediators and diplomacy play in negotiations, offering findings on how to increase the effectiveness of mediation and diplomatic efforts.

Perhaps most relevant to our evidence review are a number of studies that examined the occurrence of fragmentation during peace processes. Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham finds that the fragmentation of parties can impact the design of a peace process, but also that, conversely, process design can affect the fragmentation of parties, both intentionally and unintentionally. Engaging in bilateral negotiations with one party, conducting mediation between fragmented opposition groups, and including or excluding certain groups (in or from a process) can have significant impacts on the nature and relationships of the groups themselves.

Lastly, Barbara F. Walter (1997) finds that the number of parties to a negotiation may influence the likelihood of reaching a settlement. Walter argues that a government is less likely to make concessions in a scenario where there are multiple rebel groups, as the state would wish to avoid future challenges and demands from other groups not party to the agreement. However, there is still a lack of literature focusing on how the number of warring parties might generally affect the likelihood of reaching an agreement.

VIABILITY OF THE AGREEMENT

Discussion around the viability of agreements or settlements has become more robust in recent years, as practitioners and academics have sought to understand why durable peace agreements are so hard to achieve. According to a study by the Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue (2007), 43 percent of negotiated settlements in the post-Cold War period have collapsed and led to a resumption of conflict. Theories as to what contributes to the enduring successes or failures of a comprehensive peace agreement account for both the content of the agreement and the practical implementation of its terms.

Content of the Agreement

There are a number of theories, often conflicting, about what substantive provisions contribute to a durable peace agreement. Donald Rothchild and Philip G. Roeder (2005) argue that agreements with power-sharing provisions often fail due to the absence of an “equilibrium between the majority and minority communities,” wherein the state ends up reconsolidating power following the conclusion of the peace process. However, Caroline Hartzell and Matthew Hoddie (2003, 321) argue that it is the scope of the power-sharing agreement that impacts its viability rather than its presence or absence. They theorize that power-sharing provisions have a cumulative positive effect on agreements, stating that “the greater the number of dimensions of state power that any one group is prevented from dominating, the more secure other parties are likely to feel and as a result remain committed to the maintenance of peace.” Meanwhile, Richard Caplan and Anke Hoeffler (2017) find that agreements that included robust terms around DDR were more likely to succeed, particularly when implemented as part of

a United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operation. Conversely, Barbara F. Walter (1997) suggests that disarmament can negatively impact the belligerents' sense of security and therefore increases the likelihood of their resumption of violence.

It is noted that provisions addressing governance can also contribute to the success of a comprehensive peace agreement. According to Walter (2015, 1245), peace agreements that include strong government accountability measures, such as protection of the press and rule of law, are more likely to last, stating that “the more accountable the government is to a wide range of people, the easier it will be to credibly commit to share power and reform, and the fewer incentives groups will have to return to violence.”

Implementation of the Agreement

It goes without saying that an agreement is only as effective as its implementation, which influences and is influenced in turn by the validity of the agreement. Madhav Joshi and Jason Michael Quinn (2015) theorize that the implementation of a comprehensive peace agreement is itself a form of “strategic peacebuilding,” as “an integrated collection of parallel and reinforcing processes aimed at promoting reconciliation between warring groups.” They argue that successful implementation efforts normalize political relationships between belligerent groups, encourage credible and transparent commitments, and address the root causes of the conflict. The implementation of a peace agreement also offers the opportunity to bring in additional groups and parties that are not signatories. While this coalition expansion might initially generate discord and derailment, Joshi and Quinn assert that the continuing successful implementation of a peace agreement will gradually become a more attractive option to reticent outside groups. Virginia Fortna, as referenced by DeRouen, Lea, and Wallensteen (2009, 372), similarly argues that specific, iterative implementation processes create a stronger likelihood for success, as “more incentives to renege are reduced through higher costs, uncertainty about intentions is decreased through specificity, and measures are established to control abrogation.”

Jean Arnault (2006, 4) states that weaknesses in agreements themselves that lead to implementation failings (and thus unsuccessful agreements) fall into three typologies: (1) an overestimation of the implementation capabilities of the parties, in terms of “either the scope of the commitments they have undertaken or the timing of their implementation”; (2) political constraints and weaknesses having unintended spoiler effects on implementation; and (3) vital concerns being left unresolved by the end of the implementation process.

Unsurprisingly, significant attention has been paid to the international community's role in implementing peace agreements. The role of UN peacekeeping missions, as well as regional peacekeeping missions, has been thoroughly analyzed and strongly debated throughout the years, especially as the UN has taken on increasingly robust missions with greater deployments. Patrick Meehan (2018) theorizes that the trend in UN peacekeeping missions “reflects a

growing focus on stabilization and conflict management, rather than more ambitious efforts at conflict resolution and post-conflict transformation.” Studies done on the impact international peacekeeping has on the durability of a peace agreement reveal mixed results. Virginia Fortna (2004 and 2008) finds that UN peacekeeping operations reduced the likelihood of conflict recurrence by up to 50 percent. However, Barbara F. Walter (1997) does not find international peacekeeping missions to be determinative in the length of a spell of peace. However, research by Lisa Hultman, Jacob Kathman, and Megan Shannon (2013) found that peacekeeping missions resulted in substantially fewer civilians being targeted by violence.

VIABILITY OF THE PARTIES

For all the robust literature on the viability and efficacy of peace processes, there is remarkably little reporting on party viability factors that may or may not impact parties’ success at the negotiating table. What attention has been paid to party composition and qualities tends to focus on issues of fragmentation and cohesion and on how parties should engage in negotiations.

Fragmentation and Cohesion

The viability of a party can be immediately apparent on the basis of its cohesion and unity. Conversely, there are few visible signs of a nonviable party beyond fragmentation and misaligned views on critical points. Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham (2013, 662) defines the fragmentation of opposition movements as “multiple factions operating at the same time and in pursuit of a common goal.” She finds that the more fragmented an opposition movement is, the more it is susceptible to bargaining breakdowns and, eventually, a return to conflict. She attributes this to several factors, including the inability or unwillingness of opposition factions to share information with each other about their resources, capabilities, or reversion point (the point at which they are willing to abandon negotiations and return to active conflict). Diverging reversion points have caused a number of peace processes and settlements to break down, such as when the Sudanese Justice and Equality Movement split in 2004, with multiple factions refusing to agree to the proposed settlement with the state.

Cunningham (2014, 241) also points out that opposition movements with significant fracturing will shed doubt on whether their commitments are credible: “For example, the extent to which the Palestinian Liberation Organization [PLO] can exercise authority over other factions like Hamas is questionable despite the widespread recognition of the PLO as a legitimate representative of Palestinians both inside and outside Palestine at various times.” Therefore, it stands to reason that an effective opposition movement—and the negotiating party representing it—will need some amount of cohesion or coordination in order to effectively advance its interests.

As part of their discussion on rebel leadership, Cunningham and Katherine Sawyer (2019) hypothesize that rebel leaders selected through legitimate processes—including but not

limited to democratic elections—will be stronger negotiators. They surmise that the leaders’ legitimate selection is evidence of cohesion among the groups they are chosen to represent.

Skillful Engagement in Negotiations

A significant amount of literature focuses on how parties can skillfully engage in negotiations. In *Getting to Yes*—which is not centered on peace negotiations but rather negotiations generally—Roger Fisher and William Ury (1991) offer advice on how to pursue good outcomes by using interest-based negotiations rather than positional bargaining. Relatedly, David Lax and James Sebenius (2006) describe how negotiators can sequence the issues negotiated and who they negotiate with to achieve better resolutions. Roger Fisher, Andrea Kupfer Schneider, Elizabeth Borgwardt, and Brian Ganson (1997) set forth a systematic approach to gaining influence in international negotiations, including peace negotiations. These are but a few examples of the literature available to parties in search of advice. But, notably, the literature does not include any direct discussion of party viability. Rather, it seeks to enhance the effectiveness of parties engaged in the negotiation process. The literature does, however, indicate that there is a great need to build the capacity of parties for negotiation.

Gaps in the Literature Related to Party Viability

As indicated above, there is a wealth of literature focused on the elements that make peace processes and agreements more or less likely to succeed, but parties themselves have been insufficiently studied for factors that might make them more or less viable, all else being equal. It goes without saying that a negotiation process will require more than just an effective negotiating party to succeed, but it is also true that a nonviable party may derail an otherwise promising negotiation process. The design and implementation of a peace process and resulting agreement are undeniably vital in ensuring the success of a peace negotiation, and viable parties in and of themselves will likely struggle to succeed in cases where process design is insufficient. However, party viability is a necessary element of a successful negotiation and can be the difference between failure and success in an otherwise well-designed process. With this in mind, we reviewed the factors impacting the viability of parties themselves.

Theory of Change

OVERVIEW

The following Theory of Change represents the summary findings from this evidence review. The Theory of Change delineates the party viability factors as revealed through our literature review and our subsequent interviews and case studies.

If a party maintains (1) authority, (2) legitimacy, (3) capacity, (4) necessity, and (5) confidence, then it will be more likely to make concessions and induce concessions from other parties, thus increasing the likelihood of a negotiated settlement. A party that maintains a degree of some or all of authority, legitimacy, capacity, and necessity is more likely to contribute to a successful negotiated settlement—aided by both the actual presence of such factors and the confidence of other parties to the negotiation (specifically opposing negotiating parties) that the party has these factors and thus is a viable negotiating partner. Further, the inclusion of parties that cannot maintain these five viability factors may reduce the likelihood of a negotiated settlement.

Of course, the party viability factors should not be considered determinative of the success of a peace process, but rather indicative of whether the party itself is a viable negotiating party. For example, even if all parties involved are viable, if the conflict is not ripe, the peace negotiations or implementation of an agreement may still fail. (Note that we did not examine the intersection of party viability factors and other factors, such as conflict ripeness or content of the peace agreement.)

For the purposes of the evidence review and this paper, we define each factor as follows:⁴

1. **Authority:** The measure of the jurisdiction, mandate, leverage, or otherwise-defined control a party exercises over key areas relevant to a peace negotiation; namely, the party should maintain the power or authorization to (1) participate in the negotiations, (2) commit to a negotiated settlement, and (3) ensure that the terms are implemented following the finalization of the agreement.
2. **Legitimacy:** The measure of whether a negotiating party has credibility among its purported constituency and is able to negotiate on behalf of their interests, and whether the constituency will accept and abide by a settlement brokered by the party. Legitimacy can take several forms, including (1) demographic or representative legitimacy, (2) platform legitimacy, or (3) legitimacy developed through consistency and successful efforts.
3. **Capacity:** The measure of a party's ability to productively and effectively negotiate. Capacity can be examined through subfactors such as the (1) technical negotiation capability of a party; (2) continuity of a party as a stable entity; or (3) extent that a party platform is defined, positive, and flexible.
4. **Necessity:** The measure of whether a party's commitment to an agreement is required to reach a negotiated settlement and ultimately end the conflict. For instance, if a party

4. The definitions of these terms may differ from those used in other fields, such as governance. The definitions here were formulated specifically for the context of party viability in peace negotiations, as discussed with interviewees.

were to walk away from the negotiating table, would it maintain the ability to satisfy its interests via other means, up to and including continuing or restarting the conflict?

5. **Confidence:** The measure of the degree to which other parties to the negotiation, in particular opposing parties, view the party at issue as a viable negotiating partner. Namely, do the other parties believe the party in question will be able to not only make commitments at the negotiating table but also deliver on those commitments? This measure will likely be based on the same indicators used for the four above factors, as this confidence will be informed by perceptions of the party's authority, legitimacy, capacity, and/or necessity.

These five party viability factors should not be read as binary factors required for viability, but rather qualities that a party may hold to various degrees on a sliding scale. A party may be “more viable” or “less viable” depending on how strongly it holds the viability factors. Moreover, this strength is not stagnant; the evidence review revealed that parties can gain or lose strength in these factors over time. Moreover, although more research and evidence is needed, it appears that parties can lack some of the party viability factors nearly entirely and still be successful. Note, however, that the evidence review did not reveal any examples of a party being successful without it having authority or confidence, indicating that these factors may be required for a party to be considered viable. These dynamics are discussed further below and in the paper's concluding sections.

Finally, there may be reasons for peace process designers and supporters to engage parties who are not largely viable—for example, to ensure the representation of certain groups or to build and support a party to promote certain rights or values. The Theory of Change was not established to infer that parties without strong viability factors should never be included in peace negotiations, but rather to help peace process designers and supporters be aware of (and realistic in evaluating) the viability of the parties they are including and promoting—so that they can design the process and leverage their support of a party accordingly.

AUTHORITY TO COMMIT TO AGREEMENTS AND IMPLEMENT THE TERMS

A viable negotiating party should have the authority to both commit to a negotiated settlement and ensure that the terms are implemented following the finalization of the agreement. For a party to have authority, three subfactors are required to be present: (1) the authority to negotiate, (2) the authority to commit to an agreement, and (3) the authority to implement the terms of an agreement.

Authority to Negotiate

For this viability factor, a party requires credible authority to negotiate on behalf of a constituency to the conflict. This may include legal authority to negotiate, as granted by a state or an

international governing body; clear designated authority by an entity such as a coalition; functional control of territory; or control or influence over armed belligerents. The party should be able to implement a cohesive negotiation strategy, make concessions, compromise with other parties in their coalition or with other parties to the negotiation, manage internal conflicts, and engage in confidence-building measures, such as entering into subagreements.

In any coalition or unity party scenario, the ability to effectively manage internal disagreements and conflicts and coordinate among various stakeholders will be a key indicator of the party's authority to represent the positions of their constituency. For example, according to several of our interviewees, during the 2006 Sudan peace process, the Sudanese government took advantage of the weak cohesiveness of multiple rebel factions in the Darfur opposition in order to encourage and, in some cases, engineer spoiler factions within the opposition groups.

Authority to Commit to Agreements

To have full authority to commit (or not commit) to agreements, a party must be able to (1) make and agree to concessions and compromises on agendas, draft text, interim agreements, and individual matters throughout the negotiating process; (2) commit to plans and settlements on behalf of a constituency; and (3) leave or halt the negotiations if the party is not satisfied with the compromises on the table. A signature alone does not equal an ability to commit to agreements. The peace agreement in 2018 in the Central African Republic boasted numerous signatories, but according to our interviewees, the party representatives at the negotiating table did not appear to have the authority to commit on behalf of their constituencies, including their groups' leadership and rank-and-file members. As a result, many parties who were allegedly signatories defected from the agreement.

A party's ability to communicate and coordinate with its purported constituency is also crucial. For example, a party must actively represent the interests of its constituency in order to commit to the terms of a ceasefire or prisoner exchange; further, its assent to an agreement must represent the commitment of those on the ground. As indicated by several interviewees, in Burundi during the 2016–2021 peace process, a lack of communication and coordination with parties' constituencies resulted numerous times in a failure of the parties to hold the authority to commit to agreements. Repeatedly, rebel parties in Burundi split when the negotiators for the parties reached agreements that certain factions disagreed with, thus continuing the conflict.

Authority to Implement an Agreement

To have full authority to implement agreements, a party should have the ability to follow through on the individual commitments made in the agreements. For instance, can the party agree to and then enact a temporary ceasefire, a detainee exchange, the ceasing of protests,

or humanitarian access? If not, can the party influence or direct those people who can? A party's capacity to coordinate and communicate with local actors, coalition members, and international allies will also impact its ability to implement the terms of an agreement. As such, the level of communication and coordination is as important to assess as the degree of force or territorial control when determining whether the terms of any negotiated interim or final agreements can be successfully implemented.

Perhaps counterintuitively, authority to implement does not need to be inherent in the party itself if the party's relationship to supporters is extremely strong and highly unlikely to collapse. For example, today, the Venezuelan US-backed opposition is still reliant on its international backers for leverage, both in the negotiations and potential implementation. But the Venezuelan government sees the US leverage as sufficiently valid and continues to parlay with opposition leader Juan Guaidó and his party.

Perhaps surprisingly, it may be difficult to assess the extent of a government party's authority to implement an agreement. One reason is that the actors and institutions designated with the authority to negotiate and commit on behalf of the government may not be the same ones required to implement the agreement. For example, in Sri Lanka in the late 1990s, the Sri Lankan government and Tamil parties (except the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam) reached a peace agreement in the form of a constitutional amendment proposal. However, the proposed amendments failed to receive the requisite two-thirds majority vote from the Sri Lankan Parliament, and thus the peace agreement failed to be implemented. Another reason is that the nature of a government is constantly evolving. Strong examples of this challenge are the United States' withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran and the Colombian government's internal impasses on the implementation of its 2016 peace agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia (FARC).

For all three subfactors, a party's authority can be assessed by observing indicators such as the following:

1. Does the party have explicit, objective authority to negotiate (either legal or practical)?
2. Does the party have the capacity and ability to manage its coalition and the positions it represents?
3. Does the party have the ability to compromise, make concessions, and engage in confidence-building measures?
4. Does the party have effective channels of communication and coordination with coalition members, local actors, and/or international allies?

The Syrian Opposition Coalition (SOC) and its various iterations throughout the Syrian peace process serve as a useful example of how authority may present itself in a negotiating party. As recounted by several interviewees, in 2013, nearly two dozen states, including the European Union, France, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United States, recognized the SOC as

the legitimate representative of the Syrian opposition—a recognition that has stayed largely steady in the years since. However, the coalition, mostly a political entity, has had limited and inconsistent support from the opposition armed groups. While the Free Syrian Army gave early support to the SOC, the Al-Nusra Front and multiple other armed groups publicly rejected the creation of the coalition. Likewise, the SOC did not include the primary Kurdish alliance, the Syrian Democratic Forces, which at various times controlled the largest proportion of opposition-controlled territory. While the SOC has maintained broad international recognition as the representative authority of the Syrian opposition, this lack of armed and territorial control or alliance has limited the party’s ability to negotiate and commit to interim agreements, ceasefires, or confidence-building measures and to compel the armed opposition groups to implement any agreements that have been reached with the government of President Bashar al-Assad. The 2017 Astana ceasefire negotiations, in fact, entirely sidestepped the SOC, with the Assad government instead negotiating directly with several key armed groups—a striking condemnation of the SOC’s authority to negotiate on behalf of those controlling territory on the ground.

LEGITIMACY TO CREDIBLY REPRESENT THE PARTY’S PURPORTED CONSTITUENCY

The legitimacy factor can be measured by assessing the extent to which a negotiating party has credibility among its purported constituency and can negotiate on behalf of its interests. This largely determines whether the eventual negotiated settlement will be seen as legitimate by the represented population. Overall legitimacy can comprise a variety of subfactors, such as (1) demographic or representative legitimacy, (2) platform legitimacy, and (3) legitimacy developed through consistency and successful efforts. To hold this viability factor, a party should likely have one or more of these subfactors.

Demographic or Representative Legitimacy

One of the most overt subfactors of legitimacy is the demographic or representative makeup of the negotiating party. Does the party reflect the constituency it purports to act on behalf of? If the party intends to represent an ethnic, religious, or geographic population, does the membership of the party reflect that population? If the party is a coalition, is it demographically proportionate to the population it is speaking for? Likewise, does it represent the various subgroups of the population, such as women, youth, academics, and legal professionals?

One indicator of representative legitimacy is how, and with what effectiveness, a party communicates and coordinates with its purported constituency. Other telling indicators include whether or not the constituents abide by interim agreements or agreements on individual matters reached by the party, reactions by the constituents in the media and social media, whether or not the party comprises elected representatives of the constituency,

protests or other indicators of civil unrest by the constituency, communications from the constituency to the party, surveys within the constituency, and broad or significant participation of the constituency in town halls and other consultation events held by the party.

Note that representative legitimacy is not guaranteed by parties having members of the interested constituency. If, despite the party's demographic makeup, the constituency views the party as illegitimate or a proxy for outside influencers, the party will lose credibility, and its negotiating ability will be diminished. For instance, the Palestinian Authority (PA) is viewed as a proxy for international influencers, not to mention the Israeli government itself. Without this legitimacy, the PA has been unable to bargain effectively with the Israeli government, as it is reasonably assumed to be unable to carry through on any commitments without the buy-in of its constituency.

Demographic or representative legitimacy may be difficult to fully achieve, in particular in circumstances where a coalition has diverging positions on which demographics and populations should or could be included. Throughout the Syrian peace process, the SOC has included representatives from various political groups, women's groups, regions, religious identities, and other demographics, but not from the primary Kurdish alliance, the Syrian Democratic Forces. While the SOC does have some individual Kurdish members, the coalition's exclusion of major Kurdish groups diminishes its demographic and representative legitimacy, given that it purports in negotiations to represent "the Syrian Opposition." Turkey, one of the SOC's primary international supporters, is a key reason why the Syrian Democratic Forces cannot be part of the SOC, but regardless of the reasons, the Kurdish group's absence cuts against the demographic and representative legitimacy of the SOC.

Platform Legitimacy

If a party does not demographically represent its constituency, legitimacy can still be developed through the platform and positions the negotiating party represents. A party can hold platform legitimacy if the platform reflects the positions and interests of the constituency. Once again, it is important to observe the channels of communication and feedback that the negotiating party uses to incorporate the groups of its constituency and their interests. Channels of communication vary depending on the nature of the party but can include, for example, town halls, consultations, social media, newsletters, individual conversations, and command structures. The regularity and structured means of communications may indicate how responsive the negotiating party is to the shifting interests and positions of its constituency and how much influence the party has over these interests and positions. Public opinion can be measured through polling and media coverage, the elasticity of the party's relationship with local actors, and the presence of antagonistic actors or spoilers within the party's constituency.

The presence of international support and confidence might increase a negotiating party's legitimacy, but it can also be a delegitimizing element if the international backers' interests are

prioritized over the constituency's interests, or they prop up or elevate parties that lack the foundation of an actual constituency. It may be important to study how closely the platforms and positions of the negotiating party and its international backers are aligned.

Legitimacy of Effort

The legitimacy of effort factor can be measured by evaluating the extent to which a party is persistent, effective, and consistent in achieving material gains in negotiations that align with the positions and interests of its constituency. This may be the most difficult subfactor to assess, as legitimacy of effort and a party's ultimate success can easily be conflated or mistaken for each other; and legitimacy of effort can lead to success, which in turn, can lead to increased legitimacy of effort. However, it is important to assess it, because persistent, effective, and continuous gains on behalf of a constituency can significantly increase a party's legitimacy over time. Nothing lends itself to legitimacy quite like successful efforts. And, conversely, the longer a negotiating party engages in talks without achieving any material gains, the harder it will be to maintain legitimacy among its constituency. Meanwhile, a party that has experience and a proven track record will be seen as more legitimate. Some indicators of this subfactor may be the party's ability to understand and respond to proposals, to internally develop and determine a negotiating strategy, and to manage internal disagreements and differences of positions to come to a common consensus.

When examining a negotiating party for legitimacy, it may be helpful to consider the following questions:

1. Does the party demographically represent its constituency?
2. Does the party regularly communicate with its constituency?
3. Does the constituency believe the party represents them?
4. If the party has functional territorial control, does the party represent the interests of that territory's population?
5. To what degree does the party have international support and assistance?
 - a. Is international support amplifying a party's platform (positive indicator) or shaping or creating it (negative indicator)?
6. Is the party making gains toward its interests through the conflict and/or negotiations?

In Yemen, long before President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi's departure from power in April 2022, the government of Hadi likely did not meet the viability factor of legitimacy. While the government was perhaps legally legitimate,⁵ the legitimacy factor focuses on the connection

5. There is ample literature on what qualifies as legal legitimacy, but legal legitimacy is not included as a subfactor of the party viability factor of "legitimacy" because the evidence reviewed did not identify legal legitimacy as impacting viability in a practical way.

between the party and a constituency. Hadi's government had a limited connection with the Yemeni people, given it had little territory and Hadi had been in exile in Saudi Arabia since 2015 and rarely appeared in public. Moreover, according to several of our interviewees, many argued that the interests of Hadi's government came to represent the interests of Saudi Arabia rather than its own constituency (the population of Yemen) and that his government would cease to exist in practice and in platform if Saudi Arabia stopped supporting it. Indeed, this assessment was further bolstered when Hadi stepped down, ceding his power to an eight-member Presidential Leadership Council, which many speculate was done at the behest of Riyadh. Conversely, the Southern Transitional Council, an administration established by separatists in southern Yemen, likely does meet the indicators of legitimacy. The self-styled government holds most of the four southern governorates, represents—and often achieves—the interests of its constituency in both governance of the region and in peace negotiations, and is supported but not controlled by the United Arab Emirates.

CAPACITY OF THE PARTY TO NEGOTIATE

Capacity can be measured by assessing the extent to which the party can productively and effectively negotiate. A party that lacks the capacity to negotiate may be unable to broker agreements or be unable or unwilling to implement the agreements. Capacity can be measured through examining three subfactors: (1) the technical negotiation capability of the party; (2) the continuity of the party as a stable entity; and (3) the presence of a party platform that is defined, positive, and flexible. To hold this viability factor, a party should have competence in each subfactor to at least some degree.

Technical Negotiation Capability

The technical capability of the party to engage effectively includes (1) the party's technical skills in negotiation, (2) the party's understanding of the technical issues being negotiated, and (3) the party's technical capability to implement its individual commitments in an agreement. A party's technical skills can include its ability to identify its own interests and those of its constituency, generate options and draft proposals, assess and respond to proposals, set up internal decision-making mechanisms to consider concessions or otherwise changing positions, and engage with nonparty actors such as mediators. Lacking technical negotiations skills can drastically diminish a party's viability. For instance, if a party has not adequately defined its own interests, it may defect from agreements when the party realizes the agreements are not *actually* satisfactory. Moreover, if a party is unable to identify the interests of its constituency, even if the party commits to an agreement, its constituency may defect because its interests have not been represented.

A party's capability to understand the technical issues being negotiated is also crucial. For example, if a party does not know what DDR is, what the options for structuring DDR are, or how DDR is implemented, the party is unlikely to be able to effectively negotiate on the

topic of DDR. This challenge may be overcome through the use of informed advisers, but this use will not increase the party's technical capability.

Finally, to be a viable negotiating party, the party should have the technical capability to implement its commitments in an agreement. This differs from the viability factor of "authority to implement" because that factor focuses on the party's ability to follow through on commitments due to the party's positioning, not due to its technical skills, knowledge, competence, and experience. For instance, a party may have the authority to commit to and implement an agreement if the party is to be part of a power-sharing government. However, if the party lacks the capability to perform governing duties due to limited skills and so on, the agreement is likely to fail in implementation. Technical capacity may also impact a party's legitimacy among its constituency, as legitimacy can be influenced by the party's perceived technical abilities to follow through on its commitments; however, legitimacy can certainly exist with or without actual technical capacity.

As relayed by some of our interviewees, during Iraq's 2005 constitutional negotiations, most parties outside of the Kurdish Alliance lacked capacity because they did not fully understand all the technical issues being negotiated. Indeed, it seems that most parties did not fully understand the governance structures being proposed by the Kurdish Alliance (which had support from the United States). The Kurdish Alliance tabled draft provisions for a federal system, and other parties agreed to these provisions without grasping what that system would look like in practice and what the impacts would be.

Continuity of the Party as a Stable Entity

Continuity is assured if the party can remain a stable entity during the negotiation and implementation of agreements. While a party's individual members and its platform may evolve and change, a party can still have continuity if it is cohesive and stable overall—meaning that other parties can rely upon its continued existence and effectiveness in negotiating and implementing agreements. In this way, continuity is a subfactor of capacity because a party needs to have the capacity to carry out the institutional and internal decision-making required to maintain continuity.

Although turnover and membership shifts are to be expected over the life span of a negotiation, particularly among coalition parties, membership stability and cohesiveness are important factors to look for. Rebel coalitions encounter significant challenges in trying to remain coherent and aligned throughout the life cycle of a negotiation process. According to several interviewees, in the Central African Republic, for example, a proposed negotiated settlement between the government and rebel factions ultimately failed in 2019 due to infighting among the rebel groups over the terms of the settlement, rather than between the opposition groups and the government.

Indicators of continuity can include whether the leadership has stayed essentially unchanged and/or whether leadership changes have been predictable and in line with the

principles of the party (for example, a rotating chairperson position in a coalition, promotions through the ranks, and voting); whether there is predictable turnover and the new leadership largely continues the negotiating platform and abides by existing commitments (for example, a newly elected government maintains an existing interim agreement); whether the party can withstand and address internal disagreements and factions without members and groups regularly defecting; and whether prominent and influential actors within the party are consistently present and aligned with each other.

Additionally, steady and consistent international support can also be an indicator of a party's long-term continuity, in terms of optics as well as the material and technical support that will develop the party's capacity to negotiate. However, as already noted, undue international influence can help prop up parties long past their ability to effectively negotiate and can create uncertainty around a party's continuity if a change in international support would cause the party to collapse. An international backer's support can also be seen as inconsistent or unreliable, such as Germany's support throughout the Sudan peace process, according to our interviewees.

The Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF), a coalition of armed opposition groups, is an example of a party with strong capacity to negotiate; it has developed strong technical capabilities, continuity, and a platform with defined, positive, and flexible content. As a coalition over the last decade, the SRF has weathered membership changes (factions leaving and joining the coalition) and maintained overall consistency, developed strong internal decision-making mechanisms, established a joint leadership structure with a rotating chairperson position, successfully navigated internal differences in numerous rounds of negotiations and iterations of peace processes, and developed and negotiated a robust platform with affirmative objectives. Additionally, the SRF's skilled, trained, and experienced negotiators have remained largely consistent throughout multiple rounds of negotiations and iterations of peace processes.

Defined, Positive, and Flexible Platform Content

To effectively negotiate, a party's platform content needs to be defined, positive, and flexible. Of course, a party must have a platform before it can shape its content. For a government that is negotiating, the platform may simply be a return to the status quo, whereas for opposition parties or civil society parties, the platform is often more complex. For instance, an opposition party's initial platform may be the removal of the country's current government/leadership, but without defining the subsequent desired outcomes, the party will have little ability to negotiate. Similarly, if a civil society party's initial platform is limited to wanting to represent women's interests in negotiations, the party will not actually be able to negotiate unless they have gone on to define the asks.

A viable party's platform also needs to be centered on positive objectives, not only on negative ones. For instance, while coalitions can be formed around the need to oust a leader or government, they must have positive objectives in common that will inform their collective

negotiating agenda, such as a new form of governance, transitional arrangements, institutional reforms, justice, and so forth. A negotiating coalition that has little in common apart from a common enemy or negative objectives will struggle to make concessions and come collectively to agreements at the negotiating table. It may also experience internal fragmentation, defection, or collapse. In the Intra-Burundi Dialogue, which ran from 2016 through 2021, myriad political opposition groups, civil society organizations, and influential stakeholders who opposed the now late President Pierre Nkurunziza failed to develop any other coherent shared positions. Thus, they were ineffective as a negotiating party—lacking the ability to make concessions or present proposals.

Lastly, a viable party's negotiating objectives must be flexible and adjust in response to expected changes on the ground. A party's ability to absorb and withstand such changes and to make concessions throughout a negotiation process is critical to maintaining stability. Notably, an ideological platform or a platform based on negative objectives can be rigid and difficult to adapt and develop. This inflexibility makes it difficult for a party to render concessions without collapsing internally and thus negatively impacts the party's viability.

When examining a party's capacity to negotiate, it may be helpful to consider the following questions:

1. Is the party able to identify its own interests and that of its constituency?
2. Does the party have the practical skills to draft proposals, leverage criteria, and assess proposals, among other negotiation activities?
3. Does the party fully understand the issues being negotiated?
4. Does the party fully understand the provisions being proposed in the agreement and what impact those provisions will have when implemented?
5. Is the party actually capable of implementing its duties and responsibilities articulated in the agreement?
6. Does the party have a largely stable and cohesive membership?
7. Does the party have clear internal structures and decision-making mechanisms?
8. Has the party maintained consistent international support?
9. Does the party have a defined platform?
10. If the party is a coalition, do the members share affirmative objectives, not just negative objectives?
11. Does the party have the ability and mechanisms to adapt and develop its platform?

NECESSITY OF A NEGOTIATING PARTY TO RESOLVE THE CONFLICT

A party is necessary to resolving a conflict when its commitment to an agreement is required to reach a negotiated settlement, to enact a negotiated settlement, or both.

Likely the strongest indicator of a party's necessity is whether the party has a feasible alternative to negotiations—meaning that if the party walks away from the table, it can effectively satisfy its interests or objectives through (1) continuing the conflict, (2) other nonviolent actions, or (3) becoming a spoiler to the negotiations. An alternative is particularly strong if it would negatively impact the other parties to the peace negotiations.

It may seem counterintuitive that an indicator of a party's viability is its ability to be a spoiler to the negotiations. But it makes sense in some cases. For example, the Assad government in Syria is a necessary party to the intra-Syrian peace process because a resolution to the conflict cannot be reached without the government's agreement. However, to date, the Assad government has also largely acted as a spoiler in the negotiations because its alternative to negotiations is so strong; the government can continue to make gains in the conflict with the support of its international allies—namely, Russia and Iran. A party can be viable even if it is not yet committed to a resolution of the conflict. This commitment is more appropriately an indicator of the ripeness of the conflict for negotiations, rather than the viability of the party.

A party may also demonstrate necessity if its presence is needed to ensure successful negotiations between other parties at the table. For example, if the party holds strong relational and social power, it may be needed to influence other parties' willingness to make concessions and reach agreements. This particular form of necessity is most often associated with parties that have prominent individual leaders or religious or historical significance.

In addition to, or separate from, the other forms of necessity, a party may be necessary if its input on provisions and commitments in a proposed agreement is required for implementation later. This is a more complex form of necessity because many parties are generally needed for implementation but may not be relevant as negotiating parties. For instance, international guarantors, the UN, domestic civil society groups, and local governments may be needed for implementation, and their sign-on or at least buy-in to the agreement could also be needed. However, they would not have to act as negotiating parties. To hold this viability factor, the party must be necessary to both achieve acceptable negotiation outcomes and to successfully implement an agreement (in other words, its absence would render the agreement ineffective). In the case of Libya, Khalifa Haftar of the Libyan National Army demonstrated his necessity by announcing that he had a "popular mandate" to govern the country and by dismissing the UN-brokered 2015 agreement and the UN-backed government as irrelevant and illegitimate—a move that could not be easily ignored or disregarded due to Haftar's significant control of arms and territory.

To determine if a party is necessary to achieve a successful resolution to the conflict, the following questions can be considered:

1. Would violence continue without the agreement of the party?
2. Does the party have a strong alternative to negotiations?

3. Would the peace agreement, cessation of hostilities, or power transition be incomplete or ineffective without the party?
4. Is the party necessary to implement the agreement? If so, is the party's substantive input on the agreement's provisions and commitments necessary to ensure that it will be implemented?

According to one of our interviewees, Burma's armed forces (or Tatmadaw) have routinely and systematically avoided multilateral negotiations with multiple ethnic armed groups, in favor of negotiating bilateral ceasefires. The 2015 Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, for example, was signed only by the armed groups that the Myanmar government wished to invite, and even then, seven of the fifteen groups refused to sign due to perceived unfairness in the process and the agreement. The armed forces officially violated the agreement after the 2021 coup d'état, but even before that there were significant geographic regions where various nonsignatory armed groups held sufficient military and administrative control to continue the conflict.

CONFIDENCE THAT THE PARTY IS A VIABLE NEGOTIATING PARTY

Finally, and perhaps most critically, when assessing all of the above factors, attention should be paid to whether other parties have confidence that the party in question is a viable negotiating party. In other words, does the opposing party believe that it is in its interest to negotiate with the party and that the party can deliver on its commitments? This assessment will most likely be based on the same indicators discussed above: namely, the party in question must be seen as having authority, legitimacy, capacity, and/or necessity or it may not be taken seriously as a negotiating party. Absent this confidence in a party's viability, the opposing parties will have no incentive to make concessions or come to agreements with the party.

The following questions can assist in assessing whether or not a party meets the viability factor of confidence:

1. Do the opposing negotiating parties feel incentivized or compelled to make concessions to the party?
2. Do the opposing negotiating parties believe the party can come to agreements and deliver on them?
3. Would the opposing negotiating parties be concerned if the party refused to participate in negotiations or left the negotiations?
4. Have the opposing negotiating parties demonstrated a willingness to make real concessions to the party?

For instance, Israel tends to negotiate with Hamas rather than the PA or the PLO because Israel lacks confidence that the two entities are viable negotiating parties. In particular, Israel

seems to lack confidence that the PA and PLO have the authority to come to and implement agreements that are necessary to reach a resolution to the conflict. Instead, Israel seems to have confidence that Hamas is a viable negotiating partner, and, therefore, the country is more likely to seek agreements and exchange concessions with Hamas.

An example of a miscalculation of confidence is found in Yemen. Despite initially participating in Yemen's 2013 National Dialogue Conference (NDC), the Houthi separatists' coalition eventually rejected the negotiated agreement, which proposed federalizing the country and did not sufficiently address the Houthis' desired government reforms. The remaining NDC parties and the international community did not have confidence that the Houthis were a viable negotiating party or that the Houthis' approval was necessary to the agreement. Thus, they did not view the Houthis as a viable party to whom concessions should be made. The remaining parties proceeded with the signing of the final document, installing Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi as the new president of Yemen. However, despite being deemed unnecessary to keeping the peace, within a year of the NDC document being signed, Houthi forces seized control of the capital Sana'a and ousted Hadi and the parliament. Though the other NDC parties' assessment of the Houthis was inaccurate, at the time of negotiations the parties' lack of confidence rendered the Houthis an ineffective party.

Recommendations and Applications

This evidence review was designed and executed to identify, confirm, and define a perceived gap in peace negotiation literature around party viability factors. We uncovered enough evidence to revise USIP's proposed Theory of Change and refine its factors and indicators, but we acknowledge that this review is only the first step in addressing this gap and developing this area of research.

Rather than conclude with our ultimate findings, which would be a simple restatement of the Theory of Change introduced at the beginning of this paper, we instead offer a series of recommendations: one set for academics, experts, and researchers who might be conducting further research; and another set for practitioners and parties who might find the Theory of Change immediately useful.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND PRODUCTION OF EVIDENCE

The available evidence was sufficient to inform the revised Theory of Change, identify the party viability factors, develop both subfactors and initial indicators, and make preliminary recommendations for practitioners who engage with the Theory of Change. However, further research and evidence are needed to fully understand the party viability factors. The answers to three pressing questions would be most useful to practitioners.

Question 1: Do party viability factors occupy greater or lesser levels of importance at various stages of the peace process?

This evidence review focused on identifying party viability factors; however, over the course of the research, an unresolved question arose as to whether the importance of particular viability factors may increase or decrease during the arc of a peace process. Indeed, while the evidence review revealed that a party's viability factors can evolve or diminish over time, it remains uncertain whether the relative importance of specific viability factors may shift.

Many interviewees contemplated this question, but no consensus was reached. For example, some interviewees posited that the capacity factor is less important at the beginning of peace negotiations because it can be built over time and is most needed as parties are drafting, discussing, and signing agreements. However, other interviewees asserted that capacity is critical at the beginning because if a party lacks capacity, other parties may quickly lose confidence in that party as a viable negotiating partner and refuse to make concessions or even engage with the party. Similarly, some interviewees said that the legitimacy factor is critical at the opening of across-the-table negotiations and during the exchange of proposals, whereas others found legitimacy less important until an agreement is nearing completion and implementation, and it is more critical to represent actual interests on the ground. The evidence review's case studies also did not clearly reveal whether certain party viability factors hold more weight at different stages of the peace process.

During this evidence review, answering this question was made more difficult by the absence of a common lexicon on the party viability factors. When writers, interviewees, or reports on negotiations use terms such as *capacity* or *legitimacy*, they may mean a variety of different things. But the broadly applicable definitions of party viability factors we have developed for peace negotiations may help inform targeted research on the relative importance of certain factors at different times. We recommend conducting this research so that practitioners, supporters, and advisers of peace negotiations can leverage their resources to strengthen the individual viability factors of the parties at the most opportune times.

Question 2: Are there identifiable tipping points for when a factor may become determinative of a party's viability?

Given that the strength of a factor may wax or wane throughout a peace process, it is clear that a party's viability should be viewed on a spectrum; the question of whether a party has a particular viability factor on the whole cannot be answered with a simple "yes" or "no." It is unclear, however, where precisely the tipping points are when considering whether a party substantially holds a viability factor or is overall "viable" or "not viable." Note, though, that the evidence review does indicate that a party is not viable if it does not hold authority and confidence; as many interviewees noted, if a party cannot commit to and implement agreements, negotiations will be

ineffective; and if other parties lack confidence that the party in question is viable, they will have limited incentive to make concessions to or reach agreements with them. However, this finding should be examined further, particularly because many interviewees struggled to identify how you know when a party is not viable, and many examples given were retroactive examinations (for example, “The agreement was not implemented by [X] side of the conflict, and so the party lacked authority to commit to and implement an agreement on behalf of that side.”).

The current evidence is insufficient to determine the relative importance of the other three viability factors (legitimacy, capacity, and necessity) at different stages of a negotiation process, nor if this relative importance is *shaped by* elements such as the stage of the peace process, the type and scale of the conflict, and/or the structure of the peace process. Our interviews and case studies did yield examples where a party may be viable but lack one or several of the other three factors. For example, the Assad government in Syria seems to be a viable negotiating party despite only holding four of the five viability factors (it appears to lack legitimacy). But this area needs further research and evidence.

Question 3: To what degree, if any, can a viability factor be expected to influence or impact the relative strength of another factor?

Finally, a party’s weakness in one viability factor may subsequently cause a diminishment of its strength in another viability factor. For instance, if a party’s continuity falters through repeated fracturing, then, in turn, the party’s legitimacy with its constituency will likely also diminish. Conversely, a party’s growing strength in one viability factor may then increase its strength in another factor. For example, if a party builds its legitimacy with its constituency through increasing the connections between them, making gains toward their interests, and effectively leveraging appropriate international support, then the party’s authority to commit to and implement agreements will likely also strengthen. While this reasoning around interconnectedness tracks logically and was considered by many interviewees, because the current literature on peace negotiations does not directly apply the lens of party viability factors, we were not able to clearly delineate the parameters of this interconnectedness. Yet, undoubtedly, the interconnected nature of the party viability factors complicates the process of identifying, distinguishing, and assessing their various indicators; further work should be done to define indicators for each party viability factor and how they overlap, as well as to track the indicators over time to assess how the party viability factors impact each other.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTITIONERS ENGAGING WITH THE THEORY OF CHANGE

Despite how much is still unknown about party viability factors—and how much research is still required—the findings of this evidence review should be immediately useful for

practitioners and participants engaging in peace negotiations. We have synthesized these findings below in the hopes that they may help parties to increase their viability and their potential to reach a successful negotiated solution to their conflict.

Party viability factors should not be viewed as binary (in other words, fully present or absent) or stagnant. It bears repeating that not all party viability factors are necessary for a party to be viable, and the factors do not have to be fully “present” or “absent.” The Theory of Change factors are qualities that a party may hold to various degrees on a sliding scale, and, therefore, a party may be “more viable” or “less viable” depending on how strongly it holds some or all of the factors.

Additionally, a party’s strength in each factor may wax and wane over the duration of a conflict and peace process, as the viability factors are continuously impacted by circumstances and events. Therefore, practitioners should continuously reassess a party’s strengths and challenges. A party that was viable at the beginning of the negotiation process may be substantially less viable years later, while a nonviable party could become viable over time.

Practitioners should evaluate parties based on the specific factors impacting viability and then take appropriate steps to address any weaknesses in those factors. The party viability factors identified in this evidence review constitute a framework to assess the overall viability of parties. The hope is that by identifying and naming the required factors for viability, parties and practitioners may improve or increase their strength in the factors where they are lacking. Interviewees lamented that advisers and negotiators often mislabel the reasons why a party is ineffective in negotiations, thus leading to ineffective remedies. For example, if a party is unable to implement agreements reached through confidence-building measures, practitioners may assume that the party lacks the *authority* to implement, when in fact it could be that the party lacks (1) the technical negotiating *capacity* to understand the terms of the agreement in order to appropriately implement them or (2) the required level of *legitimacy* with its constituency, which then, in turn, does not recognize the agreements. Each of these challenges would call for different solutions and measures in order to increase the viability of the party.

Practitioners and parties should consider viability factors to be within their ability to address and improve. For instance, they can take steps to increase legitimacy through constituent relationship building or to improve capacity with technical assistance and training. By correctly identifying their shortcomings or deficits in each factor, parties will be empowered to enhance their viability and increase their likelihood for success.

Party viability alone is not determinative of whether a party or other group should be included in negotiations. Practitioners engaging the Theory of Change should not conclude that parties without the viability factors should never take part in peace negotiations. There may be reasons for peace process designers and supporters to engage parties who do not hold the viability factors, such as to ensure the representation of certain groups or to build and back a party to promote certain rights or values. For example, many civil society groups or

women's coalitions may not hold the party viability factors, but their inclusion in the peace process may serve key purposes. In other instances, a nonviable party may be included because they are a proxy party representing the interests of a third-party country.

Knowing that a party is not viable but is instead being included in the negotiations for other reasons is a critical distinction, as it should be considered when deciding how to effectively engage the party in the process as whole and in relation to the viable negotiating parties that are present. Designers and supporters of the peace process should be aware of, and be realistic in evaluating, the viability of the parties they are including and promoting and then design the process and leverage their support of a party accordingly.

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Appendix II: Interviews

Zaid Al-Ali, senior program officer in constitution building in Africa and West Asia at the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)

Select relevant negotiation experience: *Iraqi peace building, constitution, and parliamentary reform processes; Sudanese interim constitutional negotiations and transition*

Anonymous US foreign service officer

Select relevant negotiation experience: *Intra-Syrian peace process; Israel/Palestine negotiations; Iraqi peace building*

Mohamed El Ghannam, judge on Egypt's Supreme Judicial Council, previously a principal political adviser to the United Nations Support Mission in Libya and a senior political officer for the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan

Beka Feathers, consultant at Political Development Consulting, previously a conflict adviser at the US Department of State

Select relevant negotiation experience: *Direct legal and technical support to the Yemen National Dialogue Conference*

Daniel Fullerton, international cooperation specialist for East Africa at the US Agency for International Development, previously counsel at the Public International Law & Policy Group

Select relevant negotiation experience: *Adviser to parties engaged in Sudanese peace negotiations (including serving as the primary legal adviser in the Sudanese peace talks and leading the drafting and final legal review of the Juba Agreement for Peace in Sudan); Sudanese interim constitutional negotiations and transition; Egyptian constitutional negotiations; Sri Lankan peace building*

Jason Gelbort, founder and executive director of Upland Advisors and a lecturer in law for the University of Chicago Law School

Select relevant negotiation experience: *Over ten years as an embedded negotiations and constitutional adviser on multiple Burmese ethnic nationality organizations' ceasefire and peace negotiations efforts*

Kenny Gluck, adjunct professor of international and public affairs at Columbia University, previously a deputy special representative of the UN secretary-general (in the Central African Republic) and a deputy special envoy of the UN secretary-general (in Yemen)

Select relevant negotiation experience: *UN deputy special envoy to the Yemen peace process; chief of staff of the African Union/UN joint mediation for Darfur*

Vasu Gounden, founder and executive director of the African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes

Select relevant negotiation experience: *Expert adviser to the South African National Peace Secretariat during peace negotiations in the early 1990s; mediator for discord over the first and second democratic elections in the KwaZulu-Natal Province; mediator for international conflicts on behalf of South Africa; mediation support and/or preparation of parties for peace negotiations in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Palestine, and Sri Lanka, among others*

Kelsey Jost-Creegan, staff attorney, EarthRights International

Select relevant negotiation experience: *Extensive human and environment rights work in conflict and postconflict regions in Colombia and Honduras, including peace-building efforts, accountability efforts, and compensation for harms*

Hind Kabawat, deputy head of the Syrian Negotiation Commission's Geneva office and member of the Syrian Opposition's negotiation delegation; and director of the Interfaith Peacebuilding Program at George Mason University's Center for World Religions, Diplomacy, and Conflict Resolution

Select relevant negotiation experience: *Syrian Opposition member and participant in all eight rounds of Geneva peace talks on Syria; founder of Tastakal, an organization promoting the voices of women in peace making; and educator on dialogue and negotiations*

Elizabeth McClintock, adjunct assistant professor of international negotiations at The Fletcher School at Tufts University and executive director of the Bridgeway Group

Select relevant negotiation experience: *Over twenty-five years of experience advising parties in conflicts and peace negotiations and international mediation efforts, including in Burundi, Timor-Leste, and Liberia, among others*

Alise Mofrej, member of the Syrian Negotiations Commission and head of the detainees file and delegate to the Syrian Constitution Committee for the Syrian Negotiations Commission

Select relevant negotiation experience: *Negotiator for the Syrian Opposition in various iterations and levels of the Geneva peace talks on Syria*

Laurie Nathan, director of the Practice of Mediation and Mediation Program at the University of Notre Dame's Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies; previously a senior mediation adviser to the United Nations and a member of the UN Academic Advisory Council on Mediation

Select relevant negotiation experience: *One of the designers of the peace process mediation units of the African Union and African subregional bodies; adviser on mediation issues for the African Union, the Economic Community of West African States, the European Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the Southern African Development Community, and the United Nations, as well as for the governments of Germany, Mozambique, South Africa, Swaziland, Switzerland, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom*

Sasha Pippenger, special assistant to the UN Envoy to Syria; previously a special assistant to the deputy special representative of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic

Select relevant negotiation experience: *Adviser to the UN Envoy on the Syrian peace process; mediation team member for negotiations in the Central African Republic; mediation adviser on the Burundi peace process; consultant to the UN special adviser for the Yemen National Dialogue Conference.*

Christina Sheetz, vice president of Public International Law & Policy Group

Select relevant negotiation experience: *Direct legal and technical support to the Syrian Opposition coalition in the intra-Syrian peace process; adviser to parties in the Sudanese transitional negotiations; adviser to the Sudan Revolutionary Front, Sudan Call, and other civilian opposition groups in the Sudan interim constitutional negotiations; adviser to Sudanese opposition/rebel parties during various iterations of the peace process, including the Sudanese Peace Talks in Juba; adviser to parties on peace-building efforts in Burma*

Meghan Stewart, peace process adviser at the US Department of State (speaking in her personal capacity)

Select relevant negotiation experience: *Direct legal and technical support to the Sudan Revolutionary Front in multiple rounds of peace negotiations; direct advising support to Sri Lankan peace negotiations*

Robin Wettlaufer, representative of Canada to the Palestinian Authority; previously Canada's special representative and head of political affairs for Syria (speaking in her personal capacity)

Select relevant negotiation experience: *Negotiation advising and support on behalf of the Canadian government to parties and conveners in the intra-Syrian peace process; Israel/Palestine negotiations; and Darfur, Two Areas, and Sudanese government peace negotiations, including on the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur*

Teresa Whitfield, director of the Policy and Mediation Division of the United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs; previously a senior adviser to the president of the International Crisis Group

Select relevant negotiation experience: *Extensive mediation and support to mediators in peace processes*

FOCUS GROUP WITH DEPARTMENT OF STATE'S BUREAU OF CONFLICT AND STABILIZATION OPERATIONS' NEGOTIATIONS SUPPORT UNIT

Aimee Breslow, peace process adviser at the US Department of State

Select relevant negotiation experience: *Postconflict transitions and constitutional processes; engagement of women, youth, and minority groups in processes*

Ariel Eckblad, deputy assistant secretary of the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations at the US Department of State

Select relevant negotiation experience: *Development of US foreign policy related to conflict and stabilization operations in Congress and the US Department of State*

Meghan Stewart, peace process adviser at the US Department of State (speaking in her personal capacity)

Select relevant negotiation experience: *Direct legal and technical support to the Sudan Revolutionary Front in multiple rounds of peace negotiations; direct advising support to Sri Lankan peace negotiations*

Tyler Jess Thompson, peace process adviser at the US Department of State; formerly a senior expert on negotiations and peace process support with the US Institute of Peace

Select relevant negotiation experience: *Over a decade directly advising governments and nongovernmental groups on ceasefire negotiation and drafting, peace negotiations, postconflict constitution drafting, transitional governance and legislation, civil society outreach and collaboration, engagement with international organizations, rule of law, and atrocity prevention (including in Egypt, Syria, and Venezuela)*

FOCUS GROUP WITH DUKE UNIVERSITY'S CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT'S DEVLAB & EXPERTS AT THE UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE

