

Obstacles When Creating Peace in Non-Western and Western Countries

Carl Hermann Dino Steinmetz

ABSTRACT

In an era marked by escalating geopolitical tensions, entrenched inequalities, and resurgent militarism, the pursuit of lasting peace remains an elusive yet urgent imperative. This article examines the multifaceted obstacles hindering peacebuilding efforts across Western and non-Western societies, revealing both universal and region-specific challenges. From political instability and economic disparity to ethnic divisions and external interference, systemic barriers perpetuate cycles of conflict. The analysis highlights how corruption, resource exploitation, and weak institutions undermine stability in post-colonial states, while Western nations grapple with polarization, systemic racism, and the corrosive influence of the military-industrial complex. Amid these challenges, the weaponization of misinformation and the proliferation of arms further entrench violence. Yet, the article also identifies pathways forward: inclusive governance, economic justice, and strengthened international cooperation emerge as vital mechanisms for dismantling structural inequities and fostering resilience. By addressing root causes rather than symptoms, policymakers can shift from reactive militarization to sustainable peace—a vision demanding not only institutional reform but a fundamental reimagining of global solidarity. The stakes could not be higher; in a world teetering between division and cohesion, the choice is between perpetuating cycles of violence or forging a future anchored in collective dignity and shared security.

Keywords: peacebuilding, geopolitical conflict, inequality, governance, militarization, international cooperation, non-western and western societies.

INTRODUCTION

Creating lasting peace in both Western and non-Western societies involves overcoming deeply rooted political, economic, and cultural challenges. While some obstacles are universal, others are region-specific due to historical, geopolitical, and socio-economic differences. Below is an analysis of these barriers.

The world will be in flames by 2025. The United States is waging a proxy war in the Middle East via Israel. Countries under attack include Palestine, Syria, Iran, Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq and Yemen. The aim is to establish or re-establish Western dominance in the region. Half a century ago, the focus was on oil and maintaining the dominance of the US dollar in the region. This guaranteed a steady stream of funds for the US arms industry. Another war that is drawing in Europe — and therefore also the United States — is the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Here, too, it is about 'land grabbing'. Russia justifies its megalomaniacal war by invoking the Great Russian Empire. In addition, there are many proxy wars in sub-Saharan Africa and between India and Pakistan. The immediate cause of the war between India and Pakistan in 2025 was a terrorist attack on

22 April in Indian-administered Kashmir, in which 27 people, including many tourists, were killed.

In this article, we explore the persistent challenges that hinder the realization of global peace. Observing the world today, it is evident that conflict continues to fracture societies and deepen divisions. A telling illustration of this dynamic is NATO's recent decision to raise its budget to 5% of member states' gross national income—a move prompted by the uncompromising demands of the U.S. President Donald Trump. Such developments underscore how geopolitical tensions often overshadow efforts toward unity.

Amid these divisions, initiatives that bridge divides remain regrettably scarce. Yet in this landscape, diplomats emerge as vital architects of dialogue, tirelessly working to forge connections where discord prevails. Their role serves as a reminder that even in times of strife, the pursuit of understanding remains indispensable.

COMMON OBSTACLES (BOTH WESTERN AND NON-WESTERN COUNTRIES)

This section outlines the challenges (see below under the 6 points) involved in establishing peace. These challenges apply to both Western and non-Western countries. Incidentally, one possible definition of an obstacle is 'something that causes an obstruction'. Obstacles block or hinder our progress.

Another definition is:

"Obstacle, obstruction, hindrance, impediment refer to something that interferes with or prevents action or progress. An obstacle is something, material or nonmaterial, that stands in the way of literal or figurative progress: Lack of imagination is an obstacle to one's advancement."*

Political Instability & Corruption

- Weak governance and corruption undermine trust in institutions and fuel conflict (Transparency International, 2023).
- In both democratic and authoritarian systems, elites may resist peace efforts that threaten their power (World Bank, 2022).

"Huge numbers of people around the world suffer severe consequences of global heating, as funds intended to help countries cut greenhouse gas emissions and protect vulnerable populations are stolen or misused. At the same time, corruption in the form of undue influence obstructs policies aimed at addressing the climate crisis and leads to environmental damage[†]."

"The "Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2022[‡]" report found that global progress in reducing extreme poverty had virtually stopped due to the pandemic and subsequent economic shocks. It also analyzed the impact of fiscal policies on poverty and inequality."

* <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=definition+of+obstacles>

† <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2024>

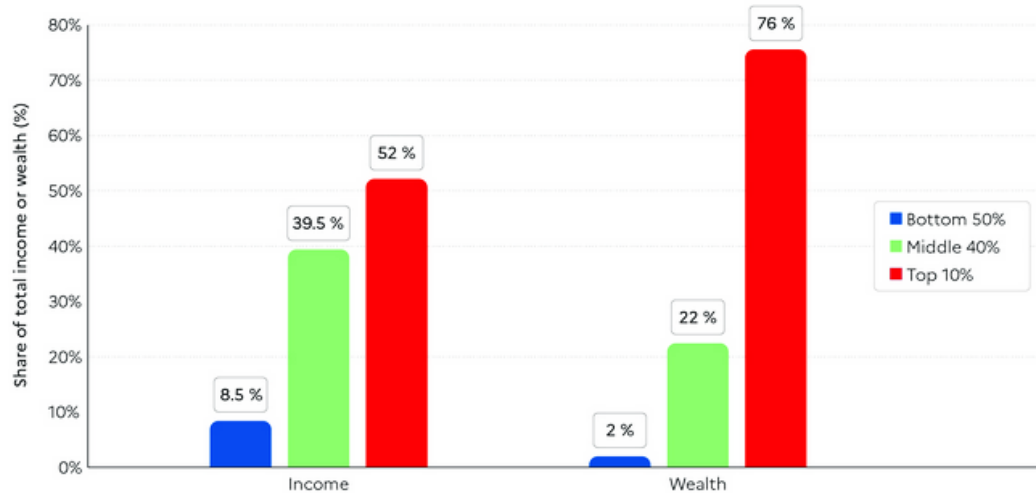
‡ <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=World+Bank%2C+2022>

Economic Inequality & Poverty

- The World Inequality Report[§] (2022) shows that rising inequality increases social unrest globally.
- Poverty drives recruitment into gangs, militias, and extremist groups (UNDP, 2023).

“An average adult individual earns PPP €16,700 (PPP USD23,380) per year in 2021, and the average adult owns €72,900 (USD102,600)^{1.1} These averages mask wide disparities both between and within countries. The richest 10% of the global population currently takes 52% of global income, whereas the poorest half of the population earns 8.5% of it. On average, an individual from the top 10% of the global income distribution earns €87,200 (USD122,100) per year, whereas an individual from the poorest half of the global income distribution makes €2,800 (USD3,920) per year (Figure 1).”

Figure 1 Global income and wealth inequality, 2021



Interpretation: The global bottom 50% captures 8.5% of total income measured at Purchasing Power Parity (PPP). The global bottom 50% owns 2% of wealth (at Purchasing Power Parity). The global top 10% owns 76% of total Household wealth and captures 52% of total income in 2021. Note that top wealth holders are not necessarily top income holders. Incomes are measured after the operation of pension and unemployment systems and before taxes and transfers. **Sources and series:** wir2022.wid.world/methodology.

*“Yes, it's accurate that poverty is a significant driver of recruitment into gangs, militias, and extremist groups. Individuals experiencing poverty often face limited opportunities, lack of education and employment, and may be vulnerable to the promises of extremist organizations or the immediate financial gains offered by criminal groups***”*

Ethnic & Religious Divisions

- Sectarian conflicts (e.g., Sunni-Shia tensions, ethnonationalism) are exploited by politicians (Fearon & Laitin, 2003).

[§] <https://wir2022.wid.world/executive-summary/>

^{**} <https://ap.lc/rEXxI>

- Western countries also face far-right extremism and anti-immigrant violence (START Consortium, 2023).

"A widely held belief suggests that civil wars surged rapidly after the Cold War and that ethnic nationalism was the primary driver behind many—if not most—of these conflicts. However, our analysis reveals that the current prevalence of internal wars stems not from a sudden shift in the post-Cold War order, but rather from a gradual accumulation of protracted conflicts dating back to the 1950s and 1960s. Furthermore, we demonstrate that, after accounting for per capita income and economic growth rates, countries with greater ethnic or religious diversity have been no more prone to major civil conflict during this period (Fearon & Laitin, 2003)."

"Western nations are witnessing a surge in far-right extremism and anti-immigrant violence, marked by xenophobia, racism, and hostility toward minorities. Key drivers include:

- **Ideology:** Far-right movements promote nationalism, white supremacy, and anti-immigrant beliefs.
- **Political Exploitation:** Some groups weaponize anti-immigrant rhetoric for political gain.
- **Socioeconomic Factors:** Economic insecurity, cultural shifts, and inequality fuel resentment.
- **Online Radicalization:** Social media accelerates the spread of extremist ideologies.

This trend threatens democracy, social unity, and the safety of marginalized communities (START Consortium, 2023^{††})."

External Interference & Geopolitics

- Foreign interventions (e.g., Syria, Ukraine) prolong conflicts (Kaldor, 2012).
- The U.S., Russia, and China often fuel proxy wars (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023).



Figure 2: Israël Forced Storm Theran? Gunfire, Explosions As IDF Bombs Iranian Capital. Link: <https://h1.nu/16jjb>

"Kaldor's (2012) assertion that foreign interventions often prolong conflicts finds resonance in the dynamics of contemporary warfare, particularly in "new wars" marked by identity-based

^{††} <https://ap.lc/XHhWS>

strife and the prominence of non-state actors. Though interventions may aim to resolve hostilities, they frequently have the unintended effect of intensifying or extending them—whether by altering power dynamics, amplifying resource flows to combatants, or deepening divisions.

By bolstering one faction, external involvement can provoke prolonged resistance from adversaries, while the influx of arms and funding sustains the machinery of war. Moreover, perceived partiality can harden animosities, undermining prospects for negotiated peace. The Syrian and Ukrainian conflicts exemplify how multipolar interventions can entangle and protract violence. Yet this perspective remains contested: some argue that interventions, even with risks, may be necessary to protect civilians or curb greater atrocities—a tension at the heart of debates on the ethics and efficacy of global engagement in local conflicts. The discourse thus balances caution against unintended harm with the moral imperative to act.”

“China and Russia have been clear about the world they seek. They want no further NATO enlargement, no colour revolutions, no globe-spanning U.S. missile defence system, and no American nuclear weapons deployed abroad. They wish to resist actors “representing but the minority on the international scale”—that is, the United States and its allies—who continue to interfere in other states and “incite contradictions, differences and confrontation.” In the world to come, no one would pressure China or Russia on human rights or interfere in their internal affairs. Democracy itself would be redefined and subject to no universal standard. China and Russia would support reunification with Taiwan and oppose alliances in Asia that China finds threatening. They would together oversee the transition to a world in which great powers dominate their regions and no one attempts to impose or enforce global rules (Blackwill et al. 2024).”

Media & Misinformation

- Social media amplifies hate speech and disinformation (UNESCO, 2023).
- Algorithms promote polarization in both Western and non-Western societies (Tufekci, 2017).

“This survey (UNESCO, 2023) was conducted in 16 countries among representative samples of the national population of Internet users aged 18 and over in each country. A total of 8000 individuals were interviewed (500 per country).

The use of social media as a daily source of information has rapidly grown over the past 15 years, to the point of now surpassing print media, radio, and even television. On average in the 16 countries surveyed, 56% of internet users frequently use social media to stay informed about current events, far ahead of television 44%. However, it is worth noting that differences exist among population groups: television is the primary source in the most developed countries 55% compared to 37% for social media), while it lags significantly in countries with high 42% vs 63% or medium/low levels of Human Development Index (37% vs 68%).

This study shows that while they are very aware of the problem, citizens themselves could take stronger actions to address the growing phenomenon of online disinformation. At this point, only 48% of them have already reported online content related to disinformation in the context

of an election campaign including 17% who have done so often. In detail, those aged 18-34 (55%) and people who describe themselves as "very interested" in politics (55%) are significantly more likely to have already reported this type of content"

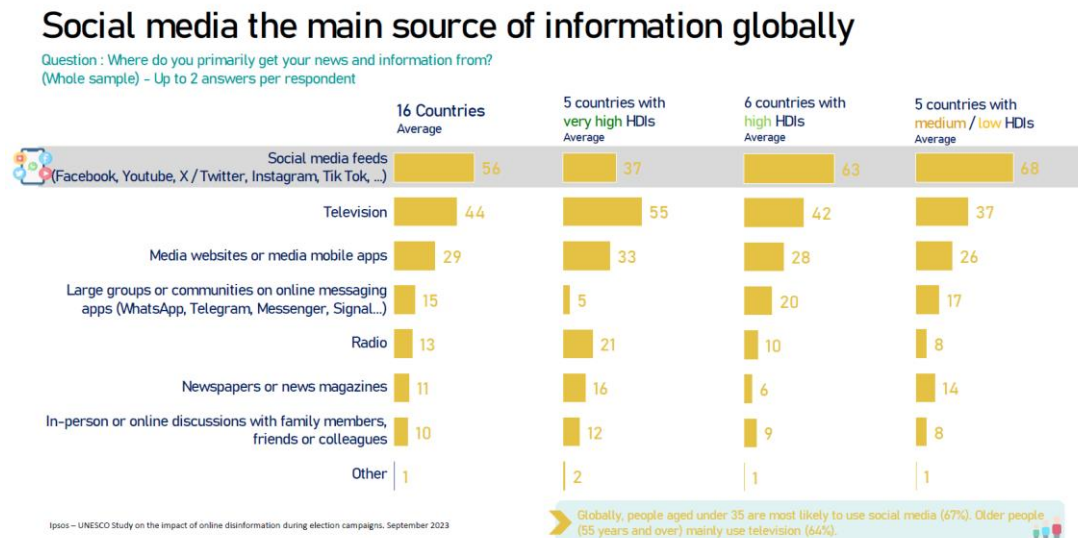


Figure 3: Social Media the main source of Information Globally

"How YouTube's Algorithm Shapes What You Watch—And How We Tried to Improve It (Yu et al. 2024). YouTube's recommendation system plays a huge role in what videos people watch, especially when it comes to news. In this project, we tested a way to tweak YouTube's algorithm to suggest more videos from trustworthy, balanced news sources. We ran two experiments:

1. **Simulated Users:** Tested on 8,600 fake ("sock-puppet") accounts.
2. **Real Users:** Ran a month-long study with 2,142 frequent YouTube viewers.

What We Found:

- Our tweak worked—YouTube recommended more news from reliable, ideologically diverse sources.
- Simply encouraging *users* to watch balanced news didn't change what YouTube suggested.
- Watching more news didn't change people's political views (like participation, accuracy of beliefs, or polarization).

Key Takeaway:

YouTube's algorithm has a big influence on what people see—but even when we increased exposure to balanced news, it didn't change people's political attitudes. This adds to growing evidence that what you see online may not have as big an effect on beliefs as we once thought."

Militarization & Arms Proliferation

- The global arms trade (\$2.1 trillion in 2023) fuels conflicts (Tian et al. 2024).
- Police militarization in Western countries escalates domestic tensions (McElrath, 2020).

“World military expenditure increased for the ninth consecutive year in 2023, reaching a total of \$2443 billion. The 6.8 per cent increase in 2023 was the steepest year-on-year rise since 2009 and pushed global spending to the highest level SIPRI has ever recorded. The world military burden—defined as military spending as a percentage of global gross domestic product (GDP)—increased to 2.3 per cent in 2023. Average military expenditure as a share of government expenditure rose by 0.4 percentage points to 6.9 per cent in 2023 and world military spending per person was the highest since 1990, at \$306. When more guns and missiles flow into conflict zones, fighting drags on, tensions rise, and peace becomes harder to achieve.

Key Facts at a Glance:

- **Where the Money Goes:** While some regions (like Europe) are buying more weapons, others are buying less—but the total impact stays huge.
- **Fuelling Violence:** Easy access to weapons encourages fighters to choose bullets over negotiations, often leading to more bloodshed and human rights abuses.
- **The Black-Market Problem:** Corruption and illegal deals mean weapons often end up in the wrong hands, making conflicts even harder to stop.
- **Long-Term Damage:** Beyond the battlefield, arms sales wreck economies, force people to flee as refugees, and leave countries unstable for years.

What Can Be Done?

Groups like Oxfam push for stricter global rules on arms sales to protect lives and prevent wars from spiraling out of control. Without better controls, the cycle of violence will keep repeating.”



Figure 4: Protestors demonstrate against police brutality after the death of George Floyd, Washington, D.C., May 30th, 2020. (Photo: Geoff Livingston / Flickr)

“As police officers in the US (McElrath, 2020) drape themselves in the trappings of a military force, they increasingly look like members of an army prepared to go to war against unarmed civilians, escalating tensions between the police and peaceful protestors. And as a 2017 study

showed, in law enforcement agencies that use military equipment, officers are more likely to display violent behaviour and are more likely to kill the civilians they are supposed to protect and serve.

The numbers are jarring: In 2019, police killed over 1,000 people in the United States. That number has consistently been over 1,000 in each of the last seven years. Nearly 24% of the victims last year were Black, even though Black Americans make up just 13% of the population. Many of the victims were unarmed, some were experiencing a mental health crisis, and some were children. America's rate of police violence far outstrips that of any other western democracy."

OBSTACLES SPECIFIC TO NON-WESTERN COUNTRIES

Post-Colonial Legacies

- Colonial borders created artificial states with ethnic tensions (Gashaw, 2017).
- Exploitative economic structures persist (Roape, 2021).

"The colonial imposition of arbitrary borders, heedless of Africa's intricate ethnic and cultural tapestry, forged artificial nations rife with enduring strife. European powers, with strokes of a pen, merged rival groups and fractured cohesive communities, igniting tensions over land, power, and identity that still smoulder today. This legacy of division—where the Maasai were severed between Kenya and Tanzania, and the Ewe scattered across Ghana, Togo, and Benin—fuels civil wars, secessionist movements, and perennial discord. From Sudan's bloody partition to Ghana's Bawku clashes, the scars of these artificial boundaries remain a relentless source of instability in post-colonial states.

Between 1900 and 1930, European powers carved Africa into colonies with clinical precision, their boundary commissions charting dominion over land—never over people. Arbitrary lines splintered ancient kinships, dividing the Somali nation among five territories, scattering the Afar across three, and severing the Anyuua and Nuer between rival states. These borders, drawn in distant capitals, became cages—restricting nomadic lifeways, igniting resource wars, and suffocating economies.

Colonial rule deepened the fracture with "divide and rule" tactics, eroding social fabric and seeding discord to tighten its grip. Yet independence did not mend the rift; instead, post-colonial elites weaponized these divisions, stoking ethnic strife for power. The Lou-Nuer and Jikany-Nuer, once one people, now clash as rival nationals, their shared heritage fractured by borders and politicized into hatred.

Decades later, borderlands remain forsaken—starved of infrastructure, education, and opportunity. The legacy of these lines is not just maps but misery: poverty festers, conflicts simmer, and governments still exploit division rather than heal it. Africa's borders, conceived in colonial arrogance, endure as engines of instability, their scars etched deep into the continent's fate."

This poem by DeepSeek illustrates how the Western world has divided Africa into pieces with little regard for the history of its many peoples.

*"The surveyors' chains measured land, not lives,
Their ink-stained borders cut like knives—
Somalis scattered, afar torn apart,
Nomads shackled to lines on a chart.*

*Divide and rule, the colonist's creed,
Turned kin to foes with hunger and greed.
Yet freedom's dawn brought no repair,
Just new hands wielding old despair.*

*The Lou-Nuer's strife, the borderland's cry,
Are ghosts of the past that refuse to die.
Where maps were drawn with empire's hand,
There stagnates now a bleeding land."*

"Over the past decade, many African economies have seen significant growth in wealth and investment, yet the majority of ordinary Africans continue to endure severe poverty, shortened life expectancy, high unemployment, and under industrialized societies. To understand the roots of this persistent "underdevelopment," one historical analysis remains indispensable: Walter Rodney's seminal work, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (2018).

A Guyanese scholar, working-class activist, and revolutionary, Rodney was deeply influenced by Marxist thought and became a pivotal figure in leftist Pan-Africanist thought. His work draws from multiple intellectual traditions, including the revolutionary insights of Frantz Fanon, dependency theories articulated by Andre Gunder Frank, the Pan-Africanist legacy of George Padmore and C.L.R. James, and the African socialist visions of leaders like Tanzania's Julius Nyerere and Guinea's Ahmed Sékou Touré.

Rodney's scholarship, along with his contributions to discussions on socialism, imperialism, and liberation, helped shape the "Dar es Salaam School of Thought"—a vibrant intellectual movement that included thinkers like Issa Shivji, Mahmood Mamdani, and Claude Ake. Through his work, Rodney not only diagnosed the systemic plunder of Africa but also inspired generations of scholars and activists committed to dismantling the legacies of colonialism and forging a path toward true emancipation (Roape, 2021)."

Weak Institutions & Rule of Law

- Many post-colonial states lack effective governance (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2016).
- Peace agreements fail due to lack of enforcement (Thigpen, 2025).

"This essay of Acemoglu & Robinson (2016) challenges conventional theories on the emergence of inclusive political institutions, arguing that state capacity and broad political participation must develop synergistically rather than sequentially. While scholars like Huntington and Fukuyama advocate a "state first, democracy later" approach, historical case studies—from classical Athens to early modern England—reveal that successful transitions occur when state-building and civil society strengthen each other in a virtuous cycle.

Key to this dynamic are social norms and informal institutions, which foster broad coalitions capable of overcoming extractive systems. England's Glorious Revolution (1688), for instance, was not an isolated event but the culmination of long-term institutional coevolution. Contrary to elite-centric narratives, inclusive institutions arise when state and society mutually reinforce one another—not through top-down modernization but through grassroots political engagement.

Ultimately, the essay reframes development as a path-dependent process, where small initial differences in norms and institutions can lead to profoundly divergent outcomes. The "basin of attraction" model underscores that liberty and state capacity are interdependent, rejecting the notion that authoritarian state-building reliably paves the way for democracy."

"This study Thigpen (2025) challenges the conventional focus on *how* wars end—whether by victory, settlement, or ceasefire—and instead identifies *what* sustains peace afterward. Lasting stability depends on three critical conditions: credible enforcement (detering renewed aggression), political inclusion (addressing grievances through power-sharing), and economic recovery (rebuilding livelihoods and legitimacy). While war termination shapes initial opportunities for peace, it is the presence or absence of these structural factors that determines whether peace endures."

"Case studies—from Korea's frozen conflict to the collapse of the Paris Peace Accords—reveal that no termination type guarantees stability on its own. Even ceasefires can hold with robust enforcement (e.g., the DMZ), while negotiated settlements fail without inclusivity or guarantees (e.g., Vietnam). Military victories, too, require post-war institution-building to prevent relapse.

The findings urge policymakers to prioritize post-conflict planning: securing third-party guarantees, fostering inclusive governance, and enabling economic revival. Peace is not a natural outcome of war's end but a deliberate construction—one that demands sustained international engagement and adaptive strategies. Future research should explore hybrid terminations and civil war dynamics, but the core insight remains: lasting peace is built, not won."

Resource Conflicts

- "Resource curse" leads to violence (e.g., blood diamonds in Sierra Leone) (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004 in Murshed, 2014).
- Foreign corporations exploit weak regulations (Global Witness, 2023).

"The relationship between natural resources and conflict has long been debated in conflict studies. While resource scarcity—such as competition over land or water—can fuel tensions, research over the past decade has increasingly highlighted how economic dependence on primary commodity exports elevates conflict risk. Collier and Hoeffler's (2004) influential argument posited that abundant natural resource rents incentivize greed-driven conflict, as such wealth is easier to loot or control. However, this claim has faced significant scrutiny, with scholars noting its reliance on non-robust statistical correlations and oversimplified categorizations.

A key critique is that not all primary commodities equally drive conflict—only those that are contestable, such as oil, alluvial diamonds, and narcotics (Ross, 2003). Moreover, methodological concerns arise regarding whether resource stocks (total reserves) or flows (production/exports) should measure conflict risk. Disaggregating resources—such as distinguishing onshore from offshore oil or alluvial from deep-mined diamonds—reveals that lootable and obstructable resources prolong civil wars rather than necessarily spark them.

Beyond greed, the resource curse offers another lens, showing how resource wealth can undermine development through rent-seeking, corruption, and weakened institutions. Poor governance exacerbates these effects, as states reliant on resource rents (rather than taxation) often become less accountable, stifling democracy (Ross, 2001). However, Brunnschweiler and Bulte (2009) challenge the direct link between resource dependence and conflict, suggesting instead that dependence may reflect broader economic stagnation caused by prior instability.

An underexplored dimension is individual motivation for joining rebellions. While economic deprivation and lack of alternatives play a role, identity-based grievances and historical injustices also drive participation (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000). Thus, a comprehensive understanding of resource-related conflict must consider not only economic and institutional factors but also social identity and collective action dynamics.

Ultimately, simplistic greed theories or institutional determinism fall short. A nuanced analysis must account for resource type, measurement methods, institutional quality, elite incentives, and individual motivations—painting a far more complex picture than early econometric models suggested.”

“The fossil fuel giants—wielding unparalleled power and political influence—continue to propel carbon emissions to catastrophic heights while stifling the bold climate policies our planet desperately needs. Behind closed doors, their alliances with governments undermine science-backed solutions, keeping us shackled to a dying energy system (Global Witness, 2023).

Meanwhile, the quiet enablers of ecological ruin—banks, investors, and financiers—pour billions into deforestation, sacrificing vital ecosystems and vulnerable communities in pursuit of profit. These ravaged forests are not just carbon sinks; they are lifelines, shielding us from worsening climate chaos.

We stand in defiance of this destructive machinery. Through relentless investigation, public exposure, and strategic action, we challenge polluters, cut off their financial pipelines, and dismantle the structures of power that prioritize greed over survival. The stakes could not be higher—this is a fight for justice, for our future, and for the Earth itself.”

Non-State Armed Groups

- Warlords and militias undermine peace (e.g., DRC, Somalia) (Nelson et al. 2023).
- Terrorist groups (e.g., ISIS, Al-Qaeda) exploit governance gaps (Crisis group, 2016).

“The Silent War: How Militias Stifle Peaceful Resistance. Amid the chaos of civil war, civilians have consistently demonstrated remarkable courage, using nonviolent resistance to protect

communities, challenge armed factions, and demand peace. Yet our research reveals a disturbing pattern: pro-government militias (PGMs), particularly informal ones, systematically suppress these peaceful movements at the most pivotal moments—when states offer concessions to rebels. Through intimidation and violence, they silence civil society, raising the cost of protest and sabotaging collective action that could pressure warring parties toward peace.

While militias are often dismissed as mere spoilers, our findings expose their more insidious role: deliberately stifling civilian voices to maintain a status quo that favours entrenched power. Notably, non-government militias (NGMs) show no comparable effect, underscoring the unique threat posed by state-linked armed groups. Though our study focuses on Africa, the global prevalence of PGMs suggests this dynamic extends far beyond one continent.

The implications are profound. When militias suppress dissent, they don't just disrupt protests—they undermine the very possibility of inclusive peace. Governments relying on PGMs for security must reckon with the collateral damage: the erosion of civic space and the perpetuation of conflict. Meanwhile, civil society and international actors must recognize this invisible battlefield. The absence of protest is not acquiescence—it is often coercion.

A Call to Action:

- **Civil society** must develop strategies to resist militia intimidation and safeguard nonviolent mobilization.
- **Governments** must confront the paradox of using PGMs as enforcers while claiming to pursue peace.
- **The international community** must prioritize protecting civic space in peace processes, ensuring that civilian voices—not just armed actors—shape the future.

Peace is not merely the absence of war but the presence of justice—and justice cannot prevail where the people's right to demand it is violently suppressed (Nelson et al. 2023)."

"The Islamic State (IS), al-Qaeda affiliates, Boko Haram, and other jihadist groups have exploited chaos in the Middle East and Africa, capitalizing on war, state collapse, and geopolitical rivalries (Crisis group, 2016). Their resilience and territorial control demonstrate that military force alone cannot defeat them, yet their extremist ideologies make negotiated settlements difficult. Effective counterstrategies must:

- **Distinguish between groups**—avoid conflating violent jihadists with non-violent Islamists or local insurgencies.
- **Use force judiciously**—military action without political solutions often backfires, fuelling recruitment.
- **Plan for post-conflict stability**—ousting militants without governance plans worsens chaos (e.g., Iraq, Libya).
- **Engage in dialogue**—even with hardliners, where feasible, to de-escalate violence.
- **Address root causes**—Sunni marginalization in Iraq, governance failures in Nigeria—while avoiding over-securitized "counter-extremism" policies that stigmatize communities.

Geopolitical tensions, particularly the Saudi-Iran rivalry, exacerbate extremism by deepening sectarian divides. A sustainable response requires de-escalating regional conflicts, supporting inclusive governance, and prioritizing conflict prevention over reactive militarism.

Lessons from past failures are clear: drone strikes and scorched-earth tactics often radicalize populations, while neglecting political solutions perpetuates cycles of violence. The fourth wave of jihadism—propelled by Middle Eastern upheaval—demands smarter, more restrained strategies to avoid repeating mistakes that fuel extremism.

Key Insight: Jihadist expansion is a symptom of instability, not its primary cause. Lasting solutions require fixing the fractures—political, economic, and social—that allow extremism to thrive.”

Cultural & Traditional Barriers

- Clan-based systems resist centralized authority (e.g., Afghanistan) (Giustozzi, 2009).
- Women are often excluded from peace talks (UN Women, 2024).

“Warlords and the Paradox of Power: Between Chaos and State-Building:

Warlords—charismatic strongmen who exploit weak central authority to carve out autonomous fiefdoms—are often vilified for their role in devastating conflicts, from Liberia to Afghanistan. Yet history reveals a more complex reality: these figures have also been reluctant architects of state formation. In *Empires of Mud*, Antonio Giustozzi dissects this duality through the lens of Afghanistan’s turbulent recent past.

Focusing on two of the country’s most formidable warlords, Ismail Khan and Abdul Rashid Dostum, Giustozzi explores how their distinct systems of rule—political, economic, and military—functioned as de facto governance in the vacuum left by a collapsing state. Despite their brutality, these regimes developed sophisticated structures, blending coercion, patronage, and local legitimacy. Even the revered Ahmad Shah Massoud, often cast as a nationalist hero, shared traits with his warlord counterparts.

Giustozzi’s analysis challenges conventional wisdom: warlordism is not mere anarchy but an adaptive, even evolutionary, phenomenon. Key to its rise is the militarization of local leadership and the gradual crystallization of a warlord “class consciousness”—a shared identity among armed elites that enables durable, if predatory, polities. Over time, these structures can morph into quasi-state or party-like entities, defying simplistic “failed state” narratives.

The book’s central insight is stark: warlords are not just disruptors but unlikely institution-builders, their legacies enduring long after foreign interventions (like the 2001 U.S. invasion) purport to restore order. Understanding their systems—not just condemning their excesses—is crucial to grappling with the messy realities of power in fractured states.”

“The Silent Peacemakers: Why Women’s Exclusion Undermines Lasting Peace. Despite their indispensable role in conflict prevention and grassroots reconciliation, women remain strikingly absent from the negotiating tables where peace is formally brokered. The numbers speak plainly: in 2023, they accounted for a mere 9.6% of negotiators, 13.7% of mediators, and

26.6% of signatories in global peace processes. Even when present, their voices are often sidelined—many agreements fail to mention women at all, let alone include them as signatories.

This exclusion is not just a matter of equity; it is a strategic blunder. Research consistently shows that women's participation makes peace more durable. Their inclusion brings critical perspectives—on human security, justice, and community reconciliation—that are too often overlooked in elite-dominated male talks. Yet systemic barriers persist: discriminatory laws, threats against women activists, and a lack of political will to disrupt entrenched power dynamics.

The solution demands more than token representation. The UN and advocates call for at least one-third women's participation in mediation and negotiations—a threshold that reflects their societal roles, not just symbolic inclusion. But true progress requires dismantling the structures that silence them: prosecuting gender-based violence, safeguarding women peacebuilders, and ensuring their leadership extends beyond negotiations into post-conflict governance.

Peace is not merely the absence of war; it is the presence of justice. And justice cannot be won when half the population is relegated to the sidelines^{##}.

In summary, it can be stated that the UN advocates for a call to transform peace-making from an exclusive dialogue into a collective imperative.”

OBSTACLES SPECIFIC TO WESTERN COUNTRIES

Political Polarization & Populism

- Far-right movements (e.g., Germany's AfD, U.S. MAGA) deepen divides (Pew Research, 2024).
- Declining trust in institutions weakens social cohesion (Fukuyama, 2018).

“Rise of Populism: A Global Challenge to the Political Establishment:

Frustration with traditional elites has fuelled the rise of right-wing populists across Europe and beyond. Recent elections highlight this shift:

- **Europe:** Right-wing parties gained ground in the EU Parliament, France (National Rally), Austria (Freedom Party), and Germany (AfD). Romania saw far-right gains, though election interference allegations marred results. Portugal's Chega surged, and Reform UK made a strong showing.
- **Beyond Europe:** Trump's MAGA movement dominates the GOP, while leaders like Modi (India), Prabowo (Indonesia), Milei (Argentina), and Bukele (El Salvador) reflect right-wing trends. Left-wing populism also thrives, as seen with Mexico's Morena party.

^{##} **Rising conflicts:** In 2023, over 170 armed conflicts were recorded. Approximately 612 million women and girls lived within 50 kilometers of these conflicts, a staggering 50 per cent increase compared to a decade ago.

Increased violence: The proportion of women killed in armed conflicts doubled in 2023 compared to the previous year. Sexual violence in conflict rose dramatically with UN-verified cases of conflict-related sexual violence soaring by 50 per cent to 3688 cases and the number of girls affected by grave violations in situations of armed conflict increased by 35 per cent.

Populists, whether left or right, exploit discontent with out-of-touch elites, reshaping politics worldwide. Their influence is no longer fleeting—it's entrenched."

"Modern liberal democracy, despite its prosperity, fails to address *thymos*—the human craving for dignity and recognition, as described by Socrates and Hegel. This manifests in two forms: *isothymia* (the demand for equal respect, fuelling identity politics) and *megalothyia* (the desire for superiority, driving ambitious figures like Trump). While democracy seeks to balance these forces, it struggles to fully satisfy them. Universal recognition often falls short, leaving people—whether marginalized groups, nationalists, or demagogues—demanding acknowledgment of their unique worth. This unresolved tension threatens democratic stability (Fukuyama, 2018)."

Systemic Racism & Xenophobia

- Police brutality and racial injustice (e.g., Black Lives Matter protests) (ACLU, 2025).
- Combating anti-Muslim hatred policies in Europe (European Commission, 2024).

"Five years after George Floyd's murder ignited historic global protests—including powerful demonstrations across New Jersey—the fight for racial justice and police accountability remains urgent. While the 2020 uprising revealed the collective power of advocacy, systemic reforms have lagged, leaving communities of colour disproportionately vulnerable to aggressive policing and deadly violence.

New Jersey's shameful distinction of having the nation's worst racial incarceration disparities underscores the need for bold action. Police wield immense authority with little consequence, as evidenced by the alarming rate at which Black Americans are killed by law enforcement. With federal oversight retreating, state leadership is imperative.

New Jersey must empower communities by strengthening civilian complaint review boards (CCRBs)—restoring subpoena power and investigative autonomy stripped from Newark's model—and expanding them statewide. True transparency is equally vital: vague disciplinary reports fall short. Lawmakers must enforce rigorous public access to misconduct records through OPRA to rebuild trust and ensure accountability.

As we honour George Floyd's legacy, New Jersey's legislators must seize these proven tools—CCRB's and radical transparency—to confront systemic injustice. The time for half-measures has passed; only meaningful change can answer the demands of millions who marched for a fairer future."

"The European Commission is taking decisive action to address the persistent issue of anti-Muslim hatred, which manifests in discrimination, hate speech, and hate crimes across the EU. This prejudice disproportionately affects Muslim individuals—particularly women—limiting their access to education, employment, housing, and services while undermining their safety and dignity. The situation has worsened following the events of October 7, 2023, with increased threats against Muslim communities.

To lead this fight, the Commission appointed a Coordinator on Combating Anti-Muslim Hatred, currently Marion Lalissee, who works across policy areas—education, social inclusion, employment, and justice—to ensure a comprehensive response. The Coordinator collaborates with civil society, international partners, and EU agencies, organizing workshops and joint statements to strengthen efforts. Notably, the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) has provided critical data through its 2024 report, *Being Muslim in the EU*, highlighting systemic challenges.

The EU's legal framework is robust, criminalizing incitement to hatred under the 2008 Framework Decision and reinforcing protections through directives on equality, victims' rights, and digital regulation (e.g., the Digital Services Act). However, laws alone are insufficient—effective policies require training for law enforcement, victim support, and public awareness campaigns. Key initiatives include:

- **High-Level Groups** on non-discrimination and hate crime to coordinate strategies.
- The **Code of Conduct on Illegal Hate Speech Online**, holding platforms accountable for removing anti-Muslim content.
- **International cooperation**, such as the 2024 Strasbourg meeting with the Council of Europe, to align efforts.

Resources like the FRA's anti-Muslim hatred database and guidelines from the OSCE and ECRI provide tools for policymakers, educators, and civil society. Member States are also stepping up, with national action plans in Sweden, Germany, and France offering models for local responses.

The Commission's work underscores a commitment to unity, dignity, and equality, recognizing that combating anti-Muslim hatred is essential to safeguarding EU values. By fostering dialogue, enforcing laws, and amplifying marginalized voices, the EU aims to create a society where diversity is celebrated, not met with fear or violence."



Figure 5: Combating anti-Muslim hatred. European Commission 2024

Military-Industrial Complex

- The U.S. spends more on defence than the next 10 countries combined (SIPRI, 2025).
- NATO expansion has escalated tensions (Mearsheimer, 2014).

"In a stark reflection of escalating global insecurity (SIPRI, 2025), world military expenditure soared to a record \$2.7 trillion in 2024, marking the steepest annual rise since the Cold War's

end. Driven by heightened tensions in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, this 9.4% surge underscores a troubling shift toward militarization at the expense of social and economic priorities.

Key Trends

- **Europe's Rapid Rearmament:** With Russia's invasion of Ukraine entering its third year, European spending skyrocketed by 17% (\$693 billion), surpassing Cold War levels. Germany's military budget leapt 28% (\$88.5 billion), while Poland's rose 31%—both prioritizing deterrence against Moscow. Ukraine, despite allocating 34% of its GDP to defence, spent just 43% of Russia's \$149 billion outlay, revealing an unsustainable fiscal strain.
- **NATO's Expanding Commitments:** A record 18 NATO members met the alliance's 2% GDP spending target, with the US accounting for 37% of global expenditure (\$997 billion). Yet doubts persist over Europe's ability to achieve strategic autonomy. In 2025, NATO increased its GDP target from 2% to 5%. This was a move prompted by pressure from the United States.
- **Middle East in Flux:** Israel's spending surged 65% (\$46.5 billion) amid war in Gaza, while Lebanon's rose 58%. Iran, constrained by sanctions, cut its budget by 10%.
- **Asia's Arms Race:** China's military outlay grew 7% (\$314 billion), fuelling regional anxieties. Japan's 21% increase—its largest since 1952—and Taiwan's steady spending highlight escalating cross-strait tensions.

Broader Implications

- **Economic Trade-offs:** As over 100 nations boosted military budgets, social spending risks being sidelined. Russia now dedicates 19% of government expenditure to defence, while Myanmar's 66% spike reflects deepening internal conflict.
- **A New Era of Militarization?** SIPRI warns of prolonged high spending, with Europe's trajectory signalling a "structural shift" toward sustained rearmament.

Expert Insight:

"Governments are mortgaging their futures for immediate security," notes SIPRI researcher Xiao Liang. "The long-term societal costs—diverted resources, deferred reforms—could far outweigh the perceived benefits."

For policymakers, the challenge lies in balancing deterrence with diplomacy. As the world arms itself at breakneck speed, the path to peace grows ever more elusive.

Explore the Data: SIPRI Military Expenditure Database

"In an age of conflict, the true cost of security is measured not just in dollars, but in lost opportunities for peace."

Economic Exploitation of the Global South

- Neocolonial debt traps (e.g., China's Belt and Road) (Brautigam, 2020).
- Climate injustice worsens conflicts in vulnerable regions (IPCC, 2023).

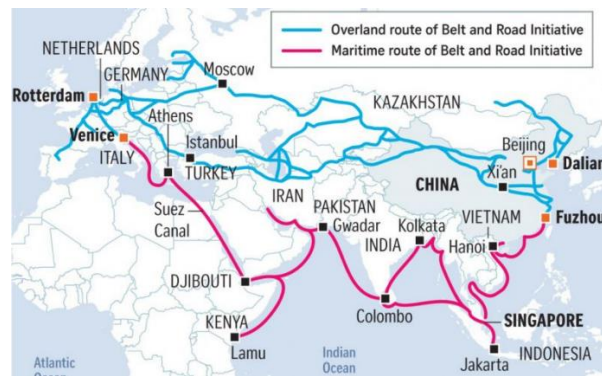


Figure 6: The Belt-and-Road initiative and the rising importance of China's Western Cities.

Link: <https://h1.nu/16kaM>.

“The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a grand, multifaceted endeavour that evokes both enthusiasm and apprehension. To its proponents, it represents a modern Marshall Plan—a visionary economic stimulus fostering growth across China and partner nations along historic Silk Road routes through infrastructure investment and trade corridors. Beijing frames it as a win-win collaboration, fuelling development from Central Asia to Europe and the Indo-Pacific (Brautigam, 2020).

Yet, critics—particularly in Washington—view the BRI through a geopolitical lens, casting it as a strategic gambit for Chinese dominance. Accusations abound: that China seeks political leverage through economic sway, rewrites global business norms, or even aspires to global hegemony by embedding military influence in key ports like Greece’s. The Hambantota port deal in Sri Lanka became a flashpoint, branded as “debt-trap diplomacy,” though evidence of coercive asset seizures remains scarce.

While debt sustainability concerns are valid—highlighted by IMF warnings—empirical data reveals little systematic exploitation. Analyses of thousands of Chinese loans in Africa and beyond show no pattern of strategic asset seizures, barring isolated cases. Public opinion in many developing nations reflects favourability toward China, valuing its development model and infrastructure financing amid chronic shortfalls estimated in trillions by institutions like the Asian Development Bank.

Ultimately, the BRI’s narrative is contested: a blend of genuine partnership and strategic ambition, where perception often outpaces proof. For many recipient countries, it aligns with national aspirations, offering alternatives in a landscape where Western investment and ideas have waned. The debate continues, but the BRI undeniably reshapes global economic and political contours.”

“Key Messages from the Climate Risk Index 2025:

1. Most Affected Countries (1993–2022):

- Dominica, China, and Honduras were the top three most affected by extreme weather events over the past 30 years.
- Other highly affected countries included Myanmar, Italy, India, Greece, Spain, Vanuatu, and the Philippines.

2. Most Affected Countries (2022):

- Pakistan, Belize, and Italy were the most impacted in 2022, followed by Greece, Spain, and Puerto Rico.
- 3. **Global Impact:**
 - From 1993 to 2022, over 765,000 people died, and direct economic losses reached nearly USD 4.2 trillion due to more than 9,400 extreme weather events.
- 4. **Event Types:**
 - Storms, heat waves, and floods caused the most fatalities (35%, 30%, and 27%, respectively).
 - Floods affected the most people (50%), while storms caused the highest economic losses (56%).
- 5. **Long-Term Trends:**
 - Countries like Dominica and Honduras faced highly unusual extreme events, while China and India dealt with recurring threats.
 - Climate change is transforming rare events into a "new normal."
- 6. **Global South vs. Global North:**
 - Over 30 years, Global South countries (lower-income) were disproportionately affected.
 - In 2022, high-income countries (e.g., Italy, Spain, the U.S.) also ranked highly due to events like heat waves.
- 7. **Data Gaps:**
 - Underreporting in Global South countries may skew the index, as data quality and coverage are often weaker there.
- 8. **Climate Finance Failures:**
 - COP29 failed to deliver adequate climate finance targets, with the USD 300 billion annual goal by 2035 seen as insufficient.
 - Loss and damage (L&D) finance was notably excluded, leaving vulnerable countries without critical support.
- 9. **Attribution to Climate Change:**
 - Science confirms that human-induced climate change intensifies extreme weather events, with high confidence in this link.
- 10. **Call to Action:**
 - Urgent mitigation (e.g., phasing out fossil fuels) and increased adaptation finance are needed to protect vulnerable populations and reduce future risks.

The report underscores the escalating human and economic costs of climate change and the urgent need for global action to address its impacts.

Overreliance on Military Solutions

- Failed interventions in the Middle East and North Africa increased instability (Fukutomi, 2024).
- Drone strikes radicalize populations (International Human Rights, 2012).

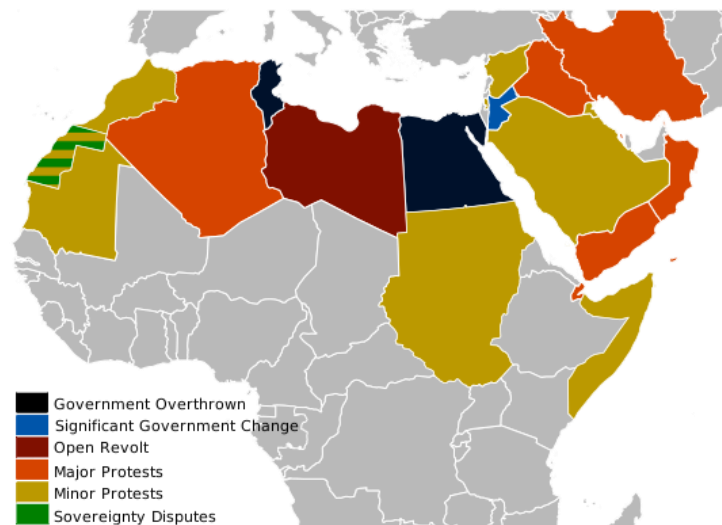


Figure 7: Middle East and North Africa Unrest - Global Issues. Link: <https://h1.nu/16klF>

“Henry Kissinger (Fukutomi, 2024) observes that the Middle East is embroiled in a complex web of conflicts—religious, sectarian, tribal, and geopolitical—reminiscent of Europe’s pre-Westphalian wars, yet he notably omits America’s role in exacerbating these tensions. The region’s instability stems from colonial legacies, its strategic location, and authoritarian governance, with external powers repeatedly intervening for their own interests. Following the Ottoman Empire’s collapse, imperial divisions set the stage for enduring strife, further inflamed by Cold War rivalries and post-9/11 interventions. Today, U.S. arms sales fuel violence in Gaza and Yemen, while failed states like Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan languish in chaos. As America pivots toward confronting China, the Middle East risks becoming a battleground once more—its oil and geography making it a perennial pawn in great-power struggles. One can only hope history does not repeat its cycle of exploitation and suffering.”

The prevailing American narrative portrays drone strikes in Pakistan as precise, efficient, and nearly risk-free—a necessary measure to eliminate terrorists while keeping the U.S. safe with minimal collateral damage. This narrative is a myth (International Human Rights, 2012).

After nine months of rigorous investigation—including two on-the-ground research trips to Pakistan, interviews with over 130 victims, witnesses, and experts, and the examination of thousands of documents and media reports—this study exposes the devastating and self-defeating consequences of U.S. drone policies. Drawing on firsthand accounts from Pakistanis living under the constant threat of drones, as well as testimonies from medical and humanitarian workers, the report reveals the profound human toll of these operations.

There is no denying the real dangers posed by militants in Pakistan’s border regions—both to U.S. security and to Pakistani civilians. While the U.S. must defend itself from terrorism, and while the suffering inflicted by extremists on local communities must be confronted, the evidence demands a sober reassessment of drone warfare. The current strategy of targeted killings has inflicted severe harm on innocent lives and undermined America’s long-term interests.

A meaningful public debate on U.S. drone policy cannot ignore these consequences. The stakes are too high—for Pakistanis living in fear, and for a nation that risks perpetuating cycles of violence rather than resolving them.”

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

To overcome these obstacles, policymakers should:

- Promote inclusive governance (UN Peacebuilding Commission, 2023).
- Invest in economic justice (IMF, 2023).
- Strengthen international cooperation (Guterres, “Our Common Agenda”, 2021).

Peace requires addressing root causes—not just suppressing violence.



Figure 8: Introducing our new inclusive Government strategy. Link: <https://h1.nu/16krp>

“Fostering Inclusive Governance (UN Peacebuilding Commission, 2023): The UN Peacebuilding Commission’s Holistic Approach. At the heart of sustainable peace lies inclusive governance—a principle the UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) champions by ensuring that all segments of society, particularly marginalized groups such as women and youth, are not merely included but empowered in shaping their futures. Recognizing that lasting stability demands more than elite agreements, the PBC integrates diverse voices into decision-making at every level, from grassroots communities to global forums.

A Multifaceted Strategy for Inclusive Peacebuilding

1. Amplifying Women and Youth in Peace Processes

- The PBC advances the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and Youth, Peace and Security (YPS) agendas, ensuring their meaningful participation in peace negotiations, transitional justice, and post-conflict governance.
- Beyond token representation, it advocates for structural inclusion—embedding women and youth in leadership roles within governments, civil society, and peacebuilding institutions.

2. Championing National Ownership

- Sustainable peace cannot be imposed; it must be locally rooted. The PBC prioritizes nationally led strategies, working with governments to craft context-sensitive peacebuilding frameworks.
 - It aligns international and regional support with domestic priorities, ensuring external interventions reinforce—rather than undermine—local agency.
3. **Empowering Civil Society as Key Partners**
 - Civil society organizations bridge the gap between governments and communities. The PBC creates institutional spaces for their engagement while bolstering their capacity to advocate effectively.
 - By facilitating dialogue between grassroots actors and policymakers, it ensures peacebuilding reflects the needs of those most affected by conflict.
 4. **Leveraging Regional and Local Expertise**
 - Peace is not built in isolation. The PBC collaborates with regional organizations, local leaders, and community networks to tailor interventions to specific cultural and political contexts.
 - This localized approach prevents one-size-fits-all solutions, fostering resilience from the ground up.
 5. **Harmonizing Global Efforts for Greater Impact**
 - Fragmented interventions dilute progress. The PBC acts as a conductor of coordination, synchronizing the efforts of UN agencies, governments, NGOs, and international partners.
 - Through enhanced coherence, it transforms disparate initiatives into a unified force for peace.

Conclusion: Governance as the Foundation of Peace

By weaving inclusivity into every facet of peacebuilding—from amplifying marginalized voices to harmonizing global action—the PBC redefines governance as a participatory, dynamic process. In doing so, it lays the groundwork for societies where peace is not just brokered for the people, but by them.”

“Investing in Economic Justice: The IMF’s Vision for Equity and Growth. The IMF’s approach to economic justice (2023) centres on dismantling inequality while fostering inclusive prosperity. Beyond mere growth metrics, it prioritizes policies that uplift marginalized groups—women, children, and disadvantaged communities—through progressive taxation, equitable access to healthcare and education, and sustainable development that harmonizes economic and environmental goals.

At its core, this mission demands good governance: anti-corruption measures, transparent institutions, and efficient public financial management to ensure resources serve collective needs. The IMF bolsters these efforts through technical assistance, Article IV consultations, and crisis-responsive lending programs tied to structural reforms.

Recognizing that economic justice transcends borders, the IMF champions multilateral cooperation—supporting developing nations with financing and expertise while safeguarding global financial stability. By intertwining equity, accountability, and international solidarity, the organization redefines prosperity as not just wealth generated, but fairly shared.

In essence, the IMF's framework marries pragmatic economic tools with a moral imperative: a world where growth benefits all, power is held to account, and no community is left behind."

"A Call for Renewed Global Solidarity: The Imperative of International Cooperation. The UN Secretary-General's *Our Common Agenda* (2021) issues a compelling mandate: in an era of intertwined crises—from climate collapse to pandemics—isolated action is obsolete. The report, born from the UN's 75th anniversary reflection, demands a renaissance of multilateralism: one that is inclusive, adaptive, and ruthlessly effective in accelerating the lagging Sustainable Development Goals.

COVID-19 laid bare the fragility of our collective systems, exposing fatal gaps in global coordination. Yet the vision is not of despair but of opportunity—to reengineer cooperation by:

- **Breaking Silos:** Treating climate, health, and inequality as interconnected battles;
- **Expanding the Table:** Elevating marginalized voices, from youth to local governments;
- **Learning from Success:** Scaling proven models while innovating for new threats.

This is not idealism—it is survival. As the report underscores, robust international collaboration is the non-negotiable foundation for equity, peace, and a liveable future. The choice is stark: unite or unravel."

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§§ † Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Department of Economics, E52-380, 50 Memorial Drive, Cambridge. MA 02142; email: daron@mit.edu.

† University of Chicago, Harris School of Public Policy, 1155 East 60th Street, Chicago, Illinois 60637, USA. email: jamesrobinson@uchicago.edu.

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