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Pax et Bellum Journal is an open access, student-run academic journal in the field of Peace and Conflict Studies. The aim of the journal is to provide a platform for students and recent graduates to contribute to interdisciplinary peace and conflict research and to share their perspectives on a wide-ranging scope of topics related to the field. We strongly believe that the voices of students and their exceptional knowledge should and must be heard, read, and shared.

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Foreword

Welcome to the 13th edition of the Pax et Bellum Journal!

As in previous years, the Pax et Bellum Journal seeks to highlight unique perspectives to the enduring and emerging questions of peace and conflict research. To that end, the 13th edition brings together five articles that highlight the thematic, methodological, and regional breadth of the discipline. The empirical contributions range from an examination of climate-conflict dynamics in Syria and a discourse analysis of memory politics in India, over an exploration of women-led peacebuilding in Colombia and a study of customary reconciliation in Malawi, to a quantitative investigation of inclusive peace agreements and their potential for depolarisation. Taken together, the articles emphasize that the emergence and maintenance of peace is a continuous process, shaped by the actors, mechanisms, and choices that both precede and follow conflict.

Michaela Peters-Salah, a Rotary Peace Fellow and Master's student at Uppsala University, begins this year's edition by examining the vicious cycle theory through the case of the 2023 Türkiye-Syria Earthquakes. Comparing two Syrian governorates, she traces how pre-existing vulnerability to natural hazards shapes post-disaster conflict intensity, finding modest support for the theory that high vulnerability can drive armed conflict intensity through increasing civilian recruitment into rebel groups. Her article further outlines a novel framework aimed at improving the empirical understanding of the full climate-conflict cycle.

Akshita Anand, from Ghent University, investigates how victimhood is manufactured as a mobilisation tool in the discourses of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in India. Through a discourse-historical analysis of RSS vision statements and speeches, she traces how Hindu society and India are constructed as victims of elites, religious others, and colonial history with the goal of fostering religious nationalism. Her article offers a valuable contribution to the broader study of memory politics and victimhood discourse in the making of nationalist ideologies.

Aisha Erenstein, a graduate of the Master's Programme in Peace and Conflict Studies at Uppsala University, bridges research on political (de)polarisation and peace research by examining how the inclusivity of a peace process affects post-conflict depolarisation. Drawing on logistic regressions and fixed effects models, she finds that the inclusion of women and disabled people in peace agreements consistently correlates with conditions conducive to depolarisation, while results for other groups reveal more complex dynamics. Her findings raise important questions about how the design of peace processes shapes the political conditions that either heal or deepen societal divides

MacDonald Malamula Nyirenda, a Master's student at Leipzig University and Addis Ababa University, examines Malawi's transition from authoritarian rule to multi-party democracy in 1994, a process that unfolded without formal transitional justice mechanisms yet avoided post-authoritarian violence. He argues that religious actors, chiefs, and community elders served as de facto mediators, giving rise to a hybrid reconciliation model grounded in cultural legitimacy and communal truth-telling. His article offers a compelling case for broadening our understanding of transitional justice beyond formal institutional frameworks, while acknowledging the enduring challenges that informal processes alone cannot resolve.

Sarah Kathleen Mullally, a graduate of the Master's Programme in Latin American Studies at Leiden University, closes this year's issue by arguing that Colombia's landmark gender-inclusive 2016 peace agreement was the result of decades of women-led organising, rather than a top-down institutional achievement. Drawing on original interviews with key actors in the peace process, her article challenges common conceptualisations of peacebuilding as a strictly post-conflict process, highlighting the overlooked role of local women-led initiatives throughout the conflict.

This edition of the Pax et Bellum Journal would not have been possible without the dedicated contributions of our authors, reviewers, and everyone else involved in the process. We are grateful to each of them for their time, expertise, and commitment to the journal.

The *Pax et Bellum Journal* Editorial Board

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An Empirical Analysis of Climate-Conflict Cycles

The Syrian Civil War & The 2023 Earthquakes

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Abstract

In responding to calls for more empirical research on the climate-conflict nexus, this article contributes empirical findings from Syria and the 2023 Türkiye-Syria Earthquakes to assess one step of the vicious cycle theory. Specifically, it traces the cycle from natural hazard vulnerability, through the hazard impact, to the resulting change in armed conflict intensity. Through a comparison of two similar Syrian governorates, with differing levels of post-earthquake conflict intensity, I find modest support for a relationship between natural hazard vulnerability and an increase in conflict intensity. I further find support for a casual mechanism that sees high intensity impacts of the earthquake lead civilians to seek support from rebel groups, ultimately leading to increased recruitment and conflict. The similarities in the cases and the nature of earthquakes as exogenous, rapid onset events, allow for a strong research design that controls for reverse causality in the study. The article concludes by proposing a framework of analysis of rotational variables and scope conditions as a first step to creating a consistent and effective tool to empirically evaluate the climate-conflict cycle.

Key words: *Climate-Conflict Nexus, Syria, Earthquake, Vulnerability, Conflict Intensity, Rebel Groups*

Introduction

There is an increasingly dire call, from both academics and practitioners, to better understand the effects of climate hazards on armed conflict dynamics. Recent research suggests that the indirect effects of vulnerability, natural hazard impact, and armed conflict may compound to create an inescapable 'vicious cycle' (Buhaug & von Uexkull, 2021). We must, therefore, build empirical knowledge about this climate-conflict cycle to be able to help those entrapped in such spirals.

In responding to calls for more empirical research on the climate-conflict nexus (Buhaug & von Uexkull, 2021; Cappelli et al., 2024), this article contributes empirical findings from Syria and the 2023 Türkiye-Syria Earthquakes to assess the relationship between pre-hazard vulnerability and post-hazard conflict intensity; one step in vicious cycle theory. To do so, it asks the question: *Does high vulnerability to a natural hazard lead to an increase in post-hazard conflict intensity?* Through a comparison of two similar Syrian governorates, with differing levels of post-earthquake conflict intensity, I assess the relationship of natural hazard vulnerability on later increases in conflict intensity. I find modest support for the theory that higher hazard vulnerability can, in part, lead to higher intensity of conflict after the hazard's impact. The similarities in the cases and the nature of earthquakes as rapid onset events allows for a strong research design to analyze the relationship and a potential causal mechanism of the climate-conflict cycle.

This article begins with a review of previous research on this topic, outlines the theoretical expectations of this research, and then describes the research design. It goes on to conduct a case comparison and provide evidence that supports the proposed causal mechanism. The article concludes by suggesting an empirical framework to test the entire vicious cycle loop in future research.

Previous Research

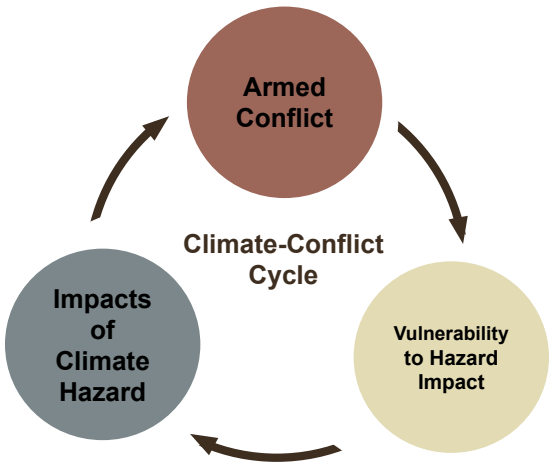
The empirical record of the last two decades has been inconsistent in demonstrating a causal link between climate change and conflict (Scheffran et al., 2012). Evidence supporting the relationship is often weak, data is difficult to capture and differences in definitions of variables vary widely between studies (Scheffran et al., 2012). In response, researchers have turned to studying the complex and indirect pathways through which climate change impacts conflict onset and dynamics (von Uexkull & Buhaug, 2021). This body of work demonstrates that climate change acts as a mediating factor of conflict outbreak and intensity by interacting with known conflict risk factors such as resource scarcity, migration, food and water access, and diminished economic outputs (Cappelli, 2024). To academics, this relationship of compounding and nonlinear variables is often called the climate-conflict nexus. For practitioners and policymakers, this research has translated into climate change being characterized as a "threat multiplier" (Goodman, 2024), in which climate change interacts with local social, political, economic, and environmental factors to exacerbate pre-existing risks and vulnerabilities to situations of insecurity and conflict (Rüttinger, 2017; Mobjörk et al., 2016).

Building on the work in climate-conflict pathways, Buhaug and von Uexkull (2021) were among the first to create an analytic framework for the climate-conflict nexus that brought together the literatures on vulnerability, climate change, and conflict. They theorized a "vicious cycle" in which conflict, climate vulnerability, and impact of natural hazards trap societies into an inescapable spiral (see figure 1). The theory argues that the socio-economic and political impacts of armed conflict, such as poverty and reduced state functionality, increase vulnerability to climate change and other environmental events. In turn, high vulnerability leads hazards to have widespread impacts on human livelihoods and security such as the destruction of infrastructure or desertification of agricultural lands. More vulnerability to climatic hazards, leads to a higher risk of intense and destructive hazard impacts. The cycle is completed as those impacts increase the likelihood of armed conflict by, for example, disrupting the economy or exacerbate patterns of marginalization in a disaster response.

Underlying the vicious cycle theory and

Figure 1

Visualization of the climate-conflict cycle, adapted from Buhaug & von Uexkull (2021, p.548)



climate-conflict pathways more generally is the relationship between vulnerability and impact. Broadly, vulnerability is the "susceptibility or predisposition to be adversely affected by a hazard" (CCVI, 2025) and has been conceptualized as the combination of sensitivity, adaptive capacity, and risks (Pearson & Newman, 2019). Vulnerability factors to both climate and conflict can include economic dependence on agriculture and natural resources, levels of development, levels of inequality or marginalization, access to technology, quality of governance, and gender, to name a few (Nagano & Sekiyama, 2023). Where present, vulnerability to a hazard's impact can be increased by both armed conflict and climate change.

Importantly, a natural hazard without vulnerability cannot become a disaster, as it would not have an impact on people or society. Environmental disasters occur where and when there is potential for socio-economic destruction as a result of the hazard's impact (Ide, 2023b). Therefore, hazards cannot impact local social, economic, or political dynamics on their own, including those of armed conflict, instead vulnerability mediates such pathways. Where vulnerability is high, the social and physical impacts of natural hazards are also higher (Choo & Yoon, 2024). In conflict-affected areas a high-intensity impact can affect conflict dynamics by emphasizing inequalities, providing opportunities for rebel advancement, and changing the opportunity costs for civilians to participate in or support rebel causes (Ide, 2023a; Barnett & Adger, 2007; Kalyvas & Kocher, 2007).

In the five years since Buhaug and von Uexkull's article, the research community has begun to contribute empirical knowledge to the vicious cycle theory (e.g. Ide, 2023b). Yet, more empirical research is needed to connect the three literatures of climate change, conflict, and vulnerability, and create a better understanding of these cycles (Cappelli et al., 2024). This article contributes to that research gap by empirically tracing one part of the vicious cycle, specifically from natural hazard vulnerability, through the hazard impact, to the resulting change in armed conflict intensity.

Hazard Vulnerability and Armed Conflict

Natural hazards are here understood as a physical event caused by geological, hydrological, or climatological processes (adapted from Chaudhary & Piracha, 2021). These events include earthquakes, droughts, floods, and extreme storms as examples. The impacts of these events on societies are shaped and intensified by vulnerability. In this research, natural hazard is used instead of disaster to emphasize the role of vulnerability in the ultimate outcome of the hazard's impact. Vulnerability to a natural hazard is de-

fined as the context-specific pre-event propensity, predisposition, and susceptibility to be adversely affected by a natural hazard (adapted from IPCC, 2023, TS.A.3; Buhaug & von Uexkull, 2021, p. 547; Cutter et al., 2008, p. 599). Vulnerability leads to physical, socio-economic, and political harm to which it is difficult to adapt or cope (ibid).

This definition serves three important theoretical functions. First, it aligns with industry standard models for assessing vulnerability by being context-specific (see DID, 2012, pp. 3-5; Cutter et al,. 2008, pp. 598-603; Chen et al., 2024, p. 5), while remaining generalizable to a variety of social and conflict settings. Secondly, it captures the dimensions of harm that are most commonly shared across the three individual literatures that this theory unites (Buhaug & von Uexkull, 2021). This ensures that the concept consistently captures the outcomes of vulnerability across each step in the cycle in a way most relevant to the theory. Finally, through the phrase "inability to adapt or cope," the concept of resilience is placed within vulnerability. Resilience differs from vulnerability in that it "is the ability of a social system to respond and recover from disasters," (Cutter et al., 2008, p. 599). This specific framing allows for the nuances of resilience to be captured within the theoretical assessment of vulnerability.

This research is specifically concerned with intensity of state-based armed conflict as the dependent variable. State-based armed conflict is defined as "a contested incompatibility that concerns government and/or territory where the use of armed force between two parties, of which at least one is the government of a state, results in at least 25 battle-related deaths in a calendar year," (Höghladh, 2025, p.28). Further, intensity is defined as a (de-)escalation in violent events and/or activities by armed actors (Ide, 2023b).

Pathways From High Vulnerability to Increased Conflict Intensity

The theorized pathways from climate vulnerability to increased conflict intensity in civil war settings tend to focus on the aims and actions of governments and rebels in relation to the vulnerability civilians experience (Ide, 2023a; Ide 2023b; Barnett & Adger, 2007). When high hazard vulnerability is converted to more immense social and physical impacts, civilians need support for recovery. In civil war contexts, the government is often unable or unwilling to provide the resources or opportunities civilians need to recover from the impact, which further entrenches their pre-existing grievances (Ide, 2023b). A lack of alternative opportunities, especially when civilians perceive the situation will not improve in the future, can reduce the opportunity cost of joining rebel groups, driving rebel recruitment (Ide, 2023a, p. 29; Barnett & Adger, 2007, p. 644).

Additionally, the costs of non-participation in rebel groups increase when the government's hazard response is ineffective and as, simultaneously, rebels promise recovery resources and integrate disaster-related grievances into their conflict-related goals (Kalyvas & Kocher, 2007, p. 188; Ide, 2023a, pp. 29-30). As people join rebel groups, the groups become more capable and empowered to act, ultimately leading to more conflict compared to what would have been expected without the hazard impact (Ide, 2023a, p. 30).

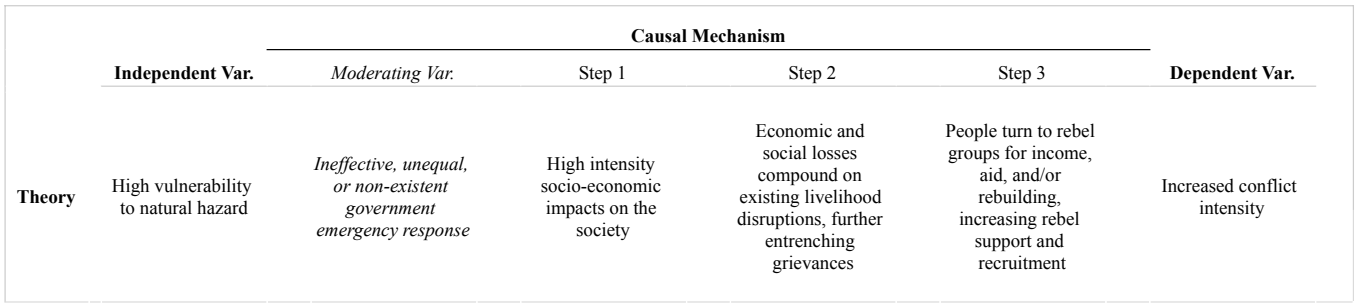
Hypothesis and Scope Conditions

Given the above theory, I expect to find that high vulnerability to a natural hazard will increase the intensity of armed conflict in the months following the hazard's impact. More specifically, I expect to find that high levels of vulnerability cause large social and economic losses as a result of a hazard event. These losses compound on existing livelihood disruptions and lead civilians to turn to rebel groups for recovery of resources and income. This in turn brings about an increase in armed conflict intensity through increased recruitment (see figure 2).

This theory applies to cases that already experience at least two of the three cycle components. The society must experience some level of climate impact, conflict, and/or vulnerability in order for the theoretical cycle to wrap around itself and trap the society within. This scope condition, however, constrains the study by

Figure 2

Proposed Causal Mechanism



creating space for confounders and potential reverse causality. Regardless of the outcome of analysis within the cycle, in this case it is armed conflict intensity, there will always be some level of the outcome measured in the independent variable of interest (i.e. increasing armed conflict gets captured in the vulnerability measures). That is the mere nature of a cycle. Nonetheless, research is warranted on these cycles and this research uses strategic research designs and measurement approaches to best manage these constraints. Finally, the theory treats all climate hazards as exogenous to human behaviour. While this underlying assumption about climate and natural hazards can be true in some cases (such as earthquakes), in other cases, this approach limits both the theory and the accuracy of any empirical findings. By focusing on earthquakes as exogenous events, I hope to build a foundation on which a more nuanced theoretical approach can be found to study endogenous events as well.

Research Design

To test the theory presented above, I employ the most-similar case study design on the conflict-related impacts of the 2023 Türkiye-Syria Earthquakes. A most-similar case comparison is one in which confounding variables are controlled through case selection similarities and causal criteria are established through finding covariation in the variables of interest (Gerring, 2007, p. 131). In this way, I make a comparison over time using the case of the Latakia Governorate, where there was a change in conflict intensity after the earthquake and a comparison over space by comparing Latakia to the

Table 1

Most-similar case comparison chart describing independent variable, dependents variable, and confounders in the cases

Most-Similar Case Comparison

	Indepdent Var.	Dependent Variable		Confounders[1]					
	Level of Pre-Earthquake Vulnerability	Conflict Deaths in previous year (Feb 7-Dec 7, 2022)	Conflict Deaths Post-Earthquake (Feb 7-Dec 7, 2023)	Experience of Conflict	Territorial Control Status	Socio-religious Diversity	Pre-Conflict Economic & Strategic Importance	Pre-Conflict IWI rating[2]	Conflict Actors Present in the Region
Latakia (inside impact zone)	?	13	106	Intra-State; Widespread; Average of 37 deaths/year in 2020-2022	Mostly controlled by Government of Syria	50% Alawite, 40% Sunni, 10% Christians	Major port city & agriculture	85.3	GoS, Opposition forces (HTS, SDF) Turkmen Militias
Rif Dimashq (outside impact zone)	?	16	38	Intra-State; Widespread; Average of 35 deaths/year in 2020-2022	Mostly controlled by Government of Syria	Majority Sunni, but highly diverse in north and west with ~10 other groups represented	Primarly argiculture land easily accessible to capital city	83.7	GoS, Opposition forces (HTS, SDF), Hezbollah (Iranian backed), Liwa Al-Areen (Russian backed), Israel, ISIL

[1] Based on Climate-Conflict-Vulnerability Index (CCVI 2024).

[2] (Smits and Steendijk 2015).

Rif Dimashq Governorate where there was little change in conflict intensity following the earthquake. These cases were chosen for having variation in the dependent variable across time (different conflict intensities before and after the earthquake) and space (one with higher conflict intensity and one with lower conflict intensity). This ensures that the impact of pre-hazard vulnerability could be assessed as a potential explanatory variable, as described by Gerring above (ibid). These cases hold constant variables that could affect both earthquake vulnerability and conflict intensity. These variables include previous experiences of conflict (Hegre et al., 2017), the presences of multiple armed groups and their levels of territorial control (Fjelde & Nilsson, 2012; Cunningham et al., 2025), socio-religious diversity as a proxy for ethnic divisions (von Uexkull et al., 2016), the strategic resources and importance of the area (Koren, 2019), and the International Wealth Index (IWI) as a proxy for socio-economic inequality (Buhaug & von Uexkull, 2021). The recency of this event has created new evidence to which the climate-conflict cycle can be applied. This is therefore an important case to study, to make use of the most modern causes and effects of the climate-conflict cycle.

The dependent variable, the level of conflict intensity, is operationalized as the change in the number of state-based conflict deaths and events that involved the Government of Syria (GoS) and a rebel group. The theory expects that rebel groups will become more active in conflict after a natural hazard occurs, therefore, I measure only violence that involves a rebel group. Using data from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP, Davies et al., 2025) the conflict numbers are compared across the two governorates in the ten months following earthquakes to the same ten-month period of the year before (i.e. February 7 to December 7 in 2022 and 2023). Additionally, this measure is supplemented with qualitative data from news and NGO reports (such as EUAA, CSIS, Levant 24, The Guardian, and The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights) on civilian impressions and experiences of the conflict and new or changing opinions of conflict actors. This ensures the operationalization captures conflict intensity as it relates to the civilians who are vulnerable to the climate-conflict nexus, and captures whether their experiences may drive them to support rebel groups after the earthquake.

I increase the validity of this measure by comparing it to the previous calendar year, rather than the exact ten months before the earthquake. This accounts for potential annual variation such as holidays (Ramadan took place at similar times in both years) and weather patterns. In a search, I did not find other events that would more significantly impact the variables found in December 2022 or January 2023. Therefore, controlling for traditions and weather is the most effective approach for achieving measurement validity. Validity is further increased by capturing only the conflict events that involved the GoS and a rebel group, which ensures alignment with the casual story that has been proposed. The use of UCDP data provides this research with high reliability. UCDP systematically and transparently collects conflict-related events and deaths annually. UCDP is a conservative representation of actual events but gives my measurements consistency while aligning to an industry standard in peace and conflict research.

To measure vulnerability to natural hazards, I built a framework that draws on and simplifies several vulnerability and risk frameworks posited by both academics and practitioners (DID, 2012; Cutter et al., 2008; Cutter et al., 2000; IPCC, 2023). In this framework, vulnerability is operationalized through a limited series of case-specific indicators that capture the potential for impact on the state and population, including four categories of Exposure of Infrastructure and Population, Capacity to React to Hazard, Emergency Response and Preparedness (Resilience), and Demographic Characteristics. Each category contains two to three subcategories (see Appendix A), which are then assessed using a vulnerability rubric to standardize the assessment of each category (see Appendix B).

Through a structured and focused comparison (George & Bennett, 2005) NGO reports, news articles, and academic articles were used to draw conclusions on the level of vulnerability in each country, civilians' conflict experiences, and track the causal mechanism. These sources have a

moderate level of reliability. The recency of the events, the low access to information in the country, and the sheer vastness of the devastation has led to some variation across reports regarding the number of people affected and in what ways they were affected by the earthquake. Triangulation was used where possible to increase reliability of data collected. As discussed above, vulnerability measurements must be context specific, and as such, the indicators used are specific to Syria and earthquakes. They also specifically capture aspects of vulnerability relevant to the actors in the causal mechanism. This close alignment to case and theory increases measurement validity but reduces generalizability of the research. Validity is also reduced through the amalgamation of individual indicators, such as reducing the many facets of hazard exposure into one category of two subcategories, which means some elements of vulnerability were likely missed in data collection. This approach balances the need to measure vulnerability with the limited scope and timeframe of this article.

In addition to the measuring the key variables of interest, I also provide inductive evidence of the causal mechanism for the positive case. I do so to strengthen confidence in the relationship between pre-hazard vulnerability and post-hazard conflict intensity and not to formally test the causal mechanism. For the proposed casual mechanism to take place I expect to find: reports from civilians and INGOs about the misused or redirected aid; NGO or expert vulnerability assessments demonstrating high intensity and long-lasting impacts of earthquake impacts on people and the economy; news reports of civilians' frustration and grievances as a results of compounding vulnerability or government inaction; and expert reports or leaders' statement that rebel groups sizes have increase and/or that they are providing new recovery support for earthquake victims. I use a combination of NGO reports about the situation in Latakia after the earthquake, and the original sources of the UCDP data to infer if each step could have taken place. Evidence of the proposed causal mechanism steps will provide more support to the theorized relationships between my independent and dependent variable but will not draw conclusions about the accuracy of this or alternative causal mechanisms.

I manage the phenomenon of reverse causality discussed above through the context-specific definition of vulnerability and by being temporally explicit. The only vulnerability being captured should be the one which applies to the specific natural hazard of interest. All other dimensions of vulnerabilities (ex. to drought, gender inequality, etc.) must remain 'as if equal' across cases and time. This minimizes the possibility of armed conflict causing vulnerability to more armed conflict becoming the input in this leg of the cycle. Additionally, the conflict intensity level must be similar across compared cases *before* vulnerability is measured. In this way, pre-existing conflict at different time intervals can be controlled as a confounder. Finally, the concept of conflict intensity as the outcome must capture only conflict levels *after* the impact and only be compared to the original conflict measurement taken before vulnerability was measured (see figure 3). These steps will help manage the confounders created by the theoretical cycle framework.

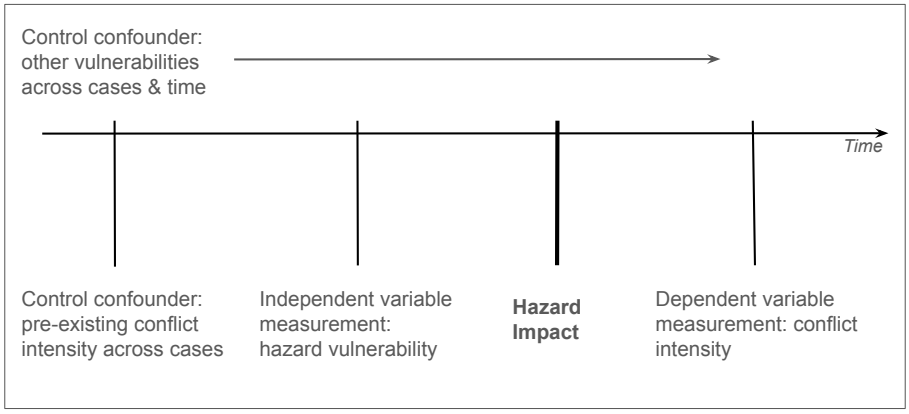
Similarly, Buhaug and von Uexkull (2021, p. 558) acknowledge that another way to manage this theoretically and empirically would be to study conflict onset, rather than changes in conflict intensity. However, they note the rarity with which new conflict outbreaks happen, making such a study harder to conduct.

Given the research design and case selection, to support my hypothesis, I expect to find higher vulnerability to the earthquake in Latakia than in Rif Dimashq before the impact, because Latakia had more intense conflict than Rif Dimashq after the earthquake. This would provide support to the theory that vulnerability to the hazard contributed to later conflict intensity. Within Latakia, I expect to find that high vulnerability to the earthquake led to higher state-based conflict involving rebel groups by tracing the causal mechanism against the observable implications above.

It is important to note that experts generally agree that natural hazards (or their vulnerability) do not have a direct causal relationship

Figure 3

Theoretical timeline of variable measurements to control confounders and manage potential reverse causality



with conflict, and that while natural hazards contribute to conflict onset or intensity, they are almost never the only or most important cause (Mach et al., 2019). To that end, my research design does not attempt to explain the entire phenomenon of conflict escalation after a natural hazard. Rather, this research aims to test the plausibility of the vicious cycles theory by assessing whether it is possible that hazard vulnerability is a contributing factor to later conflict escalation.

Case Descriptions

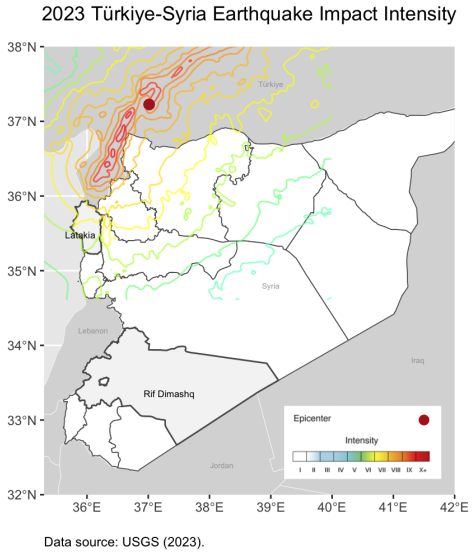
On February 6, 2023, two earthquakes occurred at the junction of Arabain, Antolian, and African tectonic plates, recording magnitudes 7.8 and 7.5 on the Richter scale (figure 4). The earthquakes caused immense devastation throughout southeastern Türkiye and northwestern Syria. Nearly one tenth of the 60,000 people who died in the earthquakes lived in Syria. 392,000 Syrian families were internally displaced (UNDP, 2023) most of whom faced harsh winter conditions without access to food, water, or shelter. It is expected to take several years for the region to fully recover from the impact (OCHA, 2023a).

Vulnerability & Conflict in Latakia

The Latakia Governorate is located in northwestern Syria on the Mediterranean Sea. Before the earthquake, it was home to approximately 1.27 million people (UNDESA, 2024), 54% of whom live in cities (EUAA, 2023a) and 35% of whom were already internally displaced or refugees (UN ESCWA, 2021). It has been a stronghold and of strategic importance to the GoS and the Assad regime throughout the civil war. Civilians in this governorate have previously shown high levels of support for the regime. The region is primarily under GoS control, though the Turkish border region is controlled by Turkish-backed opposition forces (EUAA, 2023a). To the immediate north, in the Idlib governorate, the armed group Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) has acted as the de facto government since 2017 (Kassir, 2023), leading to frequent clashes between HTS and the GoS in the border area of the two governorates. Due to the governorate's proximity to geological fault lines, areas of the governorate are measured to have a seismic hazard intensity risk of between 0.55 and 0.9 PGA, meaning perceived shaking of any high intensity earthquake could be between "very strong" to "severe" and the potential for damage is between "moderate" to "heavy" (Johnson et al., 2023). In these same areas, the civil war has led to extensive damage to infrastructure and rebuilding projects are highly unequal, mostly funded by Iranian forces in the region (EASO, 2021). Half the population faces food insecurity (Amnesty International, 2023a) and 825,000 people are considered "vulnerable" to insecurity (UN ESCWA, 2021). Given these findings, Latakia was assigned

Figure 4

Map of 2023 Türkiye-Syria Earthquake impact intensity, featuring Latakia and Rif Dimashq governorates. Map created by author, data sourced from USGS (2023)



a "very high" vulnerability rating to potential earthquake impacts at the end of 2022 (see Appendix A for the detailed vulnerability measurement, and Appendix B for the vulnerability evaluation rubric).

Due to the governorate's proximity to geological fault lines, areas of the governorate are measured to have a seismic hazard intensity risk of between 0.55 and 0.9 PGA, meaning perceived shaking of any high intensity earthquake could be between "very strong" to "severe" and the potential for damage is between "moderate" to "heavy" (Johnson et al., 2023). In these same areas, the civil war has led to extensive damage to infrastructure and rebuilding projects are highly unequal, mostly funded by Iranian forces in the region (EASO, 2021). Half the population faces food insecurity (Amnesty International, 2023a) and 825,000 people are considered "vulnerable" to insecurity (UN ESCWA, 2021). Given these findings, Latakia was assigned a "very high" vulnerability rating to potential earthquake impacts at the end of 2022 (see Appendix A for the detailed vulnerability measurement, and Appendix B for the vulnerability evaluation rubric).

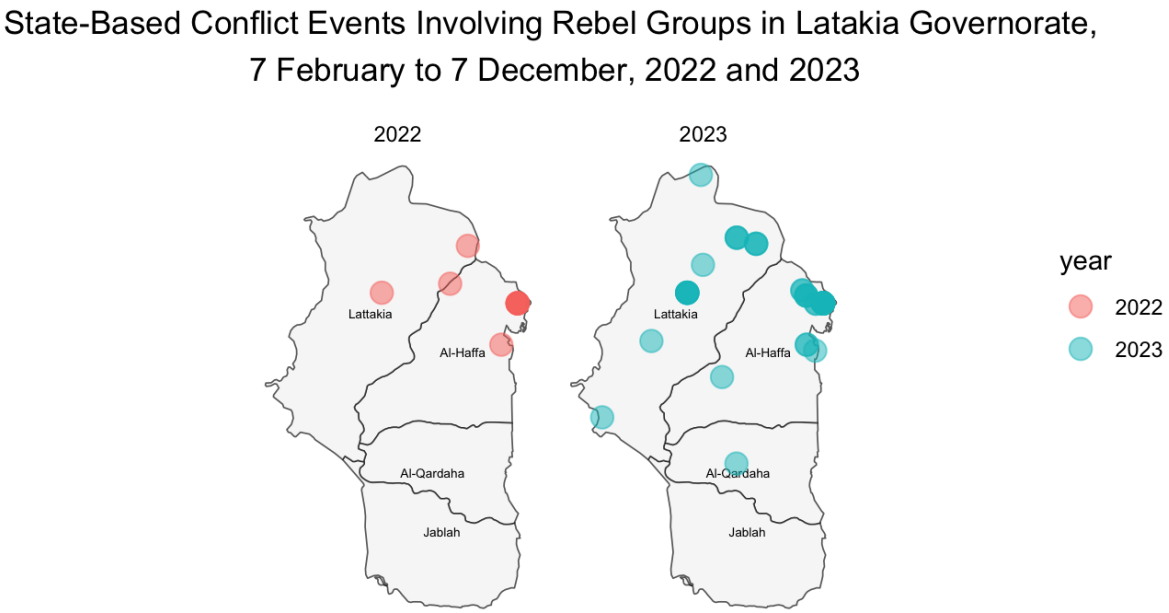
There were 13 deaths that resulted from conflict in the 10 months before the earthquake. All of these deaths resulted from battles between the GoS and HTS or their allied rebel forces (listed as "Syrian insurgents" under the UCDP dyad naming conventions). After the earthquake, conflict between these same actors lead to 106 battle deaths. This is a 715% increase in conflict-related deaths resulting from GoS and rebel groups battles in Latakia after the earthquake. It was also a 279% increase from the average of 28 deaths per year in the three years before (Davies et al. 2025). Further, the deadliness of the conflict events that took place in 2023 nearly doubled from the year before. This violence included frontline, direct attacks between HTS and GoS forces, such as heavy artillery shelling, drone attacks, gunfire by snipers, and infiltration operations. Civilians were frequently injured and killed in these events (SOHR 2023a, 2023b, 2023c).

Additionally, the EUAA (2023b) reported in their Country Guidance that most of the 2022 Latakia-based violence, including non-lethal violence, took place in the Al-Hafa district, whereas in the following year's guidance they note that violent incidents took place in Al-Hafa and Latakia districts, indicating a geographical spread of violence in the governorate (EUAA, 2024). This spread of violence is supported by the UCDP data as well (see figure 5).

Immediately following the earthquake, HTS' leader, Al-Julani, and several ministers within their de facto 'Salvation Government' in Idlib, made public appearances in response to the earthquake. They visited survivors in hospitals,

Figure 5

Maps displaying number of conflict events that involved a rebel group in Latakia in 2022 (left) and 2023 (right)



Darker coloured circles indicate a higher number of conflict events at that point. 13 events with a location precision score of more than 2 were excluded. Data source: UCDP (Davies et al., 2025)

formed an 'Emergency Response Committee' to help meet people's needs, and hosted several press conferences to create credibility and a performance of its governance abilities (Kassir, 2023). By 11 February, the appearances transitioned from being hosted on HTS-based media with a focus on Idlib, to international news (Michaelson & Tondo 2023) and a rhetoric expanded to include northwestern Syria as a whole - including Latakia. These messages intertwined disaster relief with the unification of the north under their government (Kassir, 2023; Creative Syrians 2023). In context of the Turkish president's support of the Assad regime, Jalani said, "The history of this region after the earthquake will be different to what it was before," (Michaelson & Tondo, 2023). This evidence points to the intent of HTS to expand their influence, opening up the possibility that they were using the earthquake as a mechanism to build support beyond their current area of control.

However, simultaneously, HTS were accused of blocking and diverting aid deliveries to all parts of north-western Syria, preventing civilians from accessing the little resources that were able to enter the country from abroad and building their own resource stockpiles to maintain supplies that allows them to continue to fight the GoS (Kayyali 2023; Salem 2023).

Taken together, this evidence demonstrates that there was an increase in conflict intensity between the GoS and HTS, where HTS exploited the pre-existing vulnerabilities of society to make strategic war-time advances, ultimately increasing conflict intensity and civilians' exposure to the climate-conflict nexus.

Causal Mechanism in Latakia

Given the description above, Latakia can be used to analyze the potential causal mechanism between vulnerability and conflict intensity. Again, the proposed causal mechanism is that civilians join armed groups for income and aid when the government's impact response is (really, perceived, or expected to be) ineffective. This leads to increased conflict in the area of hazard impact. In Latakia, I should find that there were intense impacts from the earthquake due to the vulnerability discussed above (Figure 2, step 1) mediated by an ineffective government response, which further entrenched grievances (step 2). I expect to then find rebel groups aiding in recovery efforts and increased support from civilians and recruitment (step 3), and finally I should find increased intensity in rebel-perpetrated conflict.

Step 1: Intense Impact, Mediated by Government Response

Empirically, nearly two thirds of the Latakia population were affected by the earthquake. 34,000 families were displaced, 63 water reservoirs were damaged (six of which were destroyed), 125 schools were damaged, and agriculture-based livelihoods were highly negatively affected by reduced capacity to distribute crops (OCHA, 2023b). The earthquake overwhelmed health care facilities, particularly in the days before international aid arrived (Ekzayez, 2023). The earthquake disrupted the regular flow of international aid by damaging the one available border crossing, killing humanitarian staff, and destroying critical humanitarian infrastructure (Marks & Lang, 2023). Ultimately, the impacts of the earthquake were widespread, long-lasting, and deeply altered hundreds of thousands of lives.

The GoS, under the Assad regime, did not seem to have the budget, capacity, or intent for their own extensive recovery interventions, even in territory under their control (UNICEF, 2023). They hampered the international aid response in several ways: they insisted that all international aid flow through Damascus and refused to open additional border crossings in northwest Syria. They later opened two additional crossings for six months but were criticised for the inadequate timeframe and for possibly diverting and obstructing aid (Marks & Lang, 2023; Amnesty International, 2023b). The GoS also nearly doubled the exchange rate on international money entering the country (IFRC, 2024). To conclude, the GoS reportedly hindered rather than improved the availability of resources for recovery immediately following the earthquake.

Step 2: Entrenching Grievances

The earthquake left families without income and destroyed social networks (IFRC, 2024). Those who were already internally displaced due to the war were displaced once again (El Deeb, 2023). Further, civilians in Latakia, who had long supported and benefited from the Assad regime, were losing trust in its leaders amid a failing economy and deteriorating living conditions. Some young men in Latakia were resisting recruitment into its military throughout 2023 and protests became more frequent in the governorate. Residents were experiencing increased war fatigue during this period, were becoming unwilling to risk their lives for the GoS and showed signs that they were ready for change (Levant 24, 2024; Haroon, 2023; Al-Meri, 2025; Arabic Post, 2023). These grievances were common across Syria even before the earthquake, however the earthquake provided further evidence of the shortfalls of the regime to people in Latakia.

Existing grievances were further exacerbated by the sense of abandonment by the international community. Where Türkiye saw immediate international response in the hours following the earthquake, Syrians waited three days or more to receive the same support for search and rescue and health care (Marks & Lang, 2023). Several sources argue that the international response in Syria failed to deliver on its duty of care (Marks & Lang, 2023; Free Press Unlimited, 2024). Ultimately, the immense impacts of the earthquake further intensified the already entrenched social and economic hardships faced by civilians (Ekzayez, 2023).

Step 3: Increasing Rebel Support and Recruitment

Since 2020, HTS has been reforming its organization to bolster its military force and improve its service provision capacity, primarily in Idlib, with ambitions to control all of Northwest Syria (Harmouch, 2024). When HTS leader Jolani publicly called for international aid and claimed the HTS intended to work with international organizations to support earthquake survivors, they did so with the intention to create credibility and transparency in the eyes of locals and gain their support (Kassir, 2023). In this way, they created opportunities for civilians to turn to them for support and resources.

Further, HTS created situations where people had little choice but to turn to them for resources. As stated above, HTS was also accused of preventing and diverting aid intended for earthquake victims (Kayyali 2023; Salem 2023). Instead, they monopolize resources such as tents for shel-

ters and other relief supplies to sell to civilians and local NGOs. An employee for the Salvation Government's Development Office stated, "the distribution mechanism is exclusive to certain people among the HTS," (Salem, 2023). By the end of February, only a small portion of supplies had been distributed to locals. This sort of coercion is a known recruitment tactic of HTS (Danish Immigration Service, 2022). As in the theory posited above, this has created a situation wherein the opportunity cost of not supporting HTS is possibly higher than it is to support them.

Notably, HTS has long had strong voluntary recruitment practices that were further enhanced in 2021. HTS provides economic incentives to all its fighters, at rates around 60 USD per month. They also provide food baskets and housing to its members (Danish Immigration Service, 2022). Such an incentive would have increased in value after the impact of the earthquake took away other opportunities for food and housing, again creating conditions that position joining HTS as an opportunity to recover from the impact. While this evidence supports the third step of the causal mechanism, it has the least inferential power and requires deeper investigation via methods such as process tracing to determine its accuracy.

Completing the Mechanism: From Rebel Recruitment to Increased Violence

Finally, the causal mechanism ends with the inference that increased support and recruitment for a rebel organization increases conflict intensity. This implies that as HTS and its allies got stronger, they attacked the GoS more often, which did seem to happen. In the ten months following the earthquake, the number of conflict events perpetrated by rebel groups, and the deadliness of those events nearly doubled from the year before. In the 2022 time period, Latakia experienced nine events causing nine deaths and in 2023 it increased to 44 events causing 89 deaths. In particular, HTS were responsible for over 50% of the rebel-perpetrated deaths following the earthquakes. This is a notable increase of violence perpetrated by HTS against GoS as they have generally not attempted military operations outside their area of control in Idlib in the previous five years (Holtz, 2023). This provides support for this step of the theory that increased recruitment at least in part led to increased violence.

Vulnerability & Conflict in Rif Dimashq

Rif Dimashq is the rural surroundings of the Syrian capital, Damascus. Located in the southwest of the country, it benefits from its undemarcated border with Damascus Governorate, and was often included in the capital's aid and development projects (NRC & Oxfam, 2020). It shares borders with other governorates in addition to Damascus, including Homs in the north and Daraa in the south. Approximately three million people lived in Rif Dimashq, two million of whom were in cities and about 55% were displaced peoples (EUAA, 2023a). While the GoS controlled most of the governorate, the regime was highly disengaged from its public administration. Rif Dimashq was highly dependent on agriculture-based income (EUAA, 2023a) and 40% of people described their access to health services as "poor" (EASO, 2021).

Rif Dimashq had a very similar vulnerability assessment as described in Latakia above, including high levels of damaged infrastructure, limited access to basic needs, and high numbers of internally displaced people. However, Rif Dimashq's earthquake risk assessment was a 0.05 - 0.2 on the PGA scale which is the equivalent of minimal damage and light shaking, due to its distance from a fault line. For this reason it was assigned a value of "Medium" in the exposure category and an overall assessment of "High."

Beyond the UCDP data, low levels of violence were present in Rif Dimashq both before and after the earthquake, with the number of non-lethal violent incidents remaining fairly consistent across the two time periods (EUAA, 2023b; EUAA, 2024). EUAA (2023b, 2024) reports that incidents of violence spread from taking place in only two districts in the 2022 time period to all districts in the governorate in 2023, however given low levels of rebel-perpetrated violence recorded by UCDP, it is unlikely this general violence can be attributed a change in rebel group influence in

the area. While grievances, related protests, and incidents of repression increased in Rif Dimashq during the-post earthquake period, it does not seem to have led to increased armed conflict in the governorate and was likely not exacerbated by earthquake impact (SNHR, 2024; Al-Homsi, 2023). Further, Rif Dimashq borders the Daraa governorate where GoS control is limited in some areas. In Daraa, anti-government armed groups, including HTS among others, caused 34 deaths in 2023 (Davies et al., 2025), and engaged in attacks on checkpoints, targeted killings and kidnappings, and IED attack (EUAA 2023b). However, this violence did not spread into Rif Dimashq after the earthquake.

Overall, the number of state-based conflict deaths involving a rebel group increased in the 2023 time period but the number of conflict events decreased. Given that the qualitative data shows there was little increase in other forms of violence, and the most significant death toll was from an IS bombing which is quite unique from the other forms of violence seen in these cases, I assess that Rif Dimashq's conflict intensity remained relatively low following the earthquake. Civilians and conflict actors in this case were mostly unaffected by the earthquake and experienced very light shaking and little to no damage (USGS, 2023), therefore the first step of the causal mechanism, conversion from hazard vulnerability to strong impact, did not take place.

Comparative Analysis

Table 2 provides a comparative overview of the findings and assessments of each case.

It shows support for the plausibility of the climate-conflict vicious cycles theory. The evidence found of the causal mechanism in this case provides further support for the theory and relationship between the variables, though it does not rule out other possible causal stories and should be tested further.

The spatial comparison of Latakia and Rif Dimashq also provides evidence that pre-hazard vulnerability may covary with increased conflict intensity. In Rif Dimashq, where pre-hazard vulnerability was lower, primarily due to its lower earthquake risk assessment, conflict intensity did not increase as much as it did in Latakia. It is highly unlikely that any violence experienced in Rif Dimashq was a result of earthquake vulnerability, while in Latakia the evidence finds support for the possibility of a climate-conflict cycle taking place. Further, it was not likely possible for the causal mechanism to take place in Rif Dimashq as it did in Latakia. In Latakia, violence became more widespread following the earthquake, demonstrating that rebels may have been using the earthquake as an opportunity to make progress on their strategic goals. However, violence in Rif Dimashq did not spread after the earthquake. While there are many reasons for this, one partial reason likely includes that the rebel groups were unable to capitalize on the earthquake to expand their sphere of influence because the impacts were not as severe.

This case comparison provides evidence that, in the context of violence between government and rebel forces, high vulnerability to a natural hazard likely led to increased conflict after the environmental shock. This lends support for my hypothesis and to the vicious cycles theory.

Table 2

See Appendix A for detailed table of indicators and data collected

Vulnerability Assessment Table

	Exposure of Infrastructure and Population	Capacity to React to Hazard	Emergency Response and Preparedness (Resilience)	Demographic Characteristics	**Total Vulnerability**
Latakia Govenorate (Inside Impact Zone)	*Very High*	*High*	*High*	*Very High*	***Very High***
Rif Dimashq Govenorate (Outside Impact Zone)	*Medium*	*High*	*High*	*Very High*	***High***

Applicability of the Framework

This empirical analysis has overcome some of the limits theorized by the original authors while also identifying new limits in the applicability and generalizability of the analysis.

Buhaug and von Uexkull (2021, p. 547) recognize the limitation of treating all hazards as exogenous events, even though their strength, duration, and impacts are often affected by human activities. The application of the earthquake in this analysis attempts to overcome this limitation. By studying a naturally exogenous event with similar ultimate impacts as endogenous hazards, I have explored the implications of the theory without concern of misrepresenting endogenous realities. In finding support for the theory, this analysis endorses future research that is inclusive of event endogeneity to better represent reality.

Yet, this empirical analysis is limited by its use of earthquakes in that it is only generalizable to rapid onset hazards (earthquakes, cyclones, tornadoes, forest fires) and not slow onset ones, in which the vulnerability grows vis-à-vis the strength of the impact of the hazard. In slow onset hazards, the causal chain has a longer timespan to take place, ultimately changing the potential outcomes and causes from what are discussed in this paper.

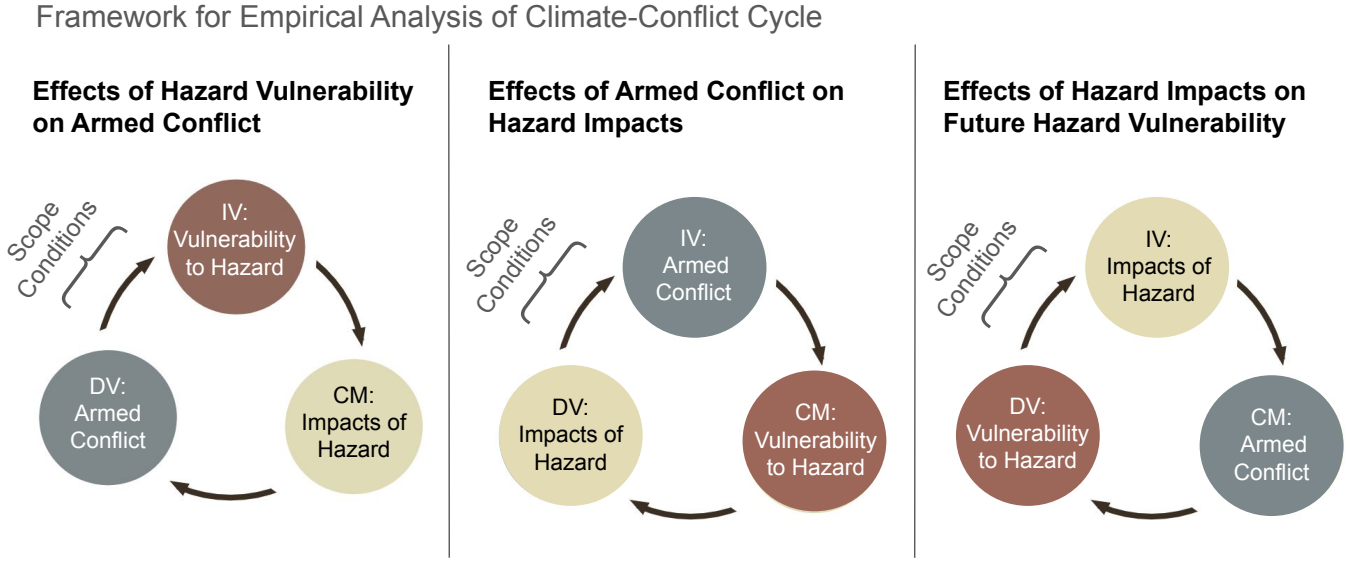
Additionally, to fit this case into the theoretical framework of a cycle, I have implicitly assumed the impact of armed conflict on vulnerability via my scope conditions, by selecting only cases that have recently experienced armed conflict. However, this assumption needs further testing to improve my evaluation of the theory. This could be done through a series of separate but simultaneous studies wherein each element of the cycle is assigned to hold the place of the independent variable, dependent variable, and causal mechanism in the same case (see figure 6). This would provide a more complete understanding of the theory.

If it is found that this approach to studying cycles is an effective method to test the climate-conflict cycle, it could answer Buhaug and von Uexkull's (2021, p. 557) call for a framework under which additional empirical cases can be analyzed.

Further, the issue of reverse causality was controlled in this analysis through two mechanisms. First, the measure of vulnerability was specific to the location and earthquake phenomenon. Resources used were as specific as possible to late 2022 and did not account for vulnerability created by the earthquake. Other types of vulnerability were held constant through case selection. Second, the temporal separation of each step in the causal mechanism analysis allowed for increased control by using data that

Figure 6

Proposed framework for an empirical analysis of the full climate-conflict cycle, wherein each element of the cycle takes on the independent variable (IV), dependent variable (DV), and causal mechanism (CM), in simultaneous studies. This ensures the assumptions made in the scope conditions are verified and confounders are controlled.



was only specific to the sequential order of the steps. This has strengthened the accuracy of this analysis. Still, concerns remain of the dependent variable affecting the independent.

Despite these mechanisms to control the direction of causality, one must consider that pre-existing conflict, rather than hazard vulnerability, led to increased conflict and that the severity of Syria's civil war was already too immense for this theory to be applicable. In September 2022, the chair of the UN COI raised concerns of Syria returning to larger-scale fighting as they faced the worst economic conditions since 2011 (Human Rights Watch, 2023) and exactly one year after the dates of this analysis the Assad regime fell to rebel forces (Hamdach, 2025). Compounded by crises in neighbouring countries and the Covid-19 pandemic, the dynamics of the war itself could be the independent variable causing an increase in conflict related deaths in 2023 across Syria. This raises the question of whether cases of civil wars should be scoped out of future research on this theory and, given the endogeneity of conflict and hazard vulnerability, whether these can be truly controlled for at all.

Conclusion

This paper has set the stage for a new and timely analysis of the climate-conflict cycle. Through the case of the 2023 Türkiye-Syria Earthquakes, it has found empirical support for the plausibility of the theory both across time and space. The findings increase the probability that high vulnerability to natural hazards is a pathway to increased armed conflict in places already experiencing state-based conflict.

Additionally, this paper has proposed a framework of analysis of rotational variables and scope conditions as a first step to creating a consistent and effective tool to empirically evaluate the climate-conflict cycle. Another research avenue this paper has opened is the possibility that there is a particular level of hazard vulnerability (perhaps related to potential hazard exposure) wherein the climate-conflict cycle will take hold. Before that point, however, the relationship between the variables is possibly not cyclic in nature. In this case, the seismic PGA rating was the indicator that likely activated the causal chain in Latakia but not Rif Dimashq. Future research must look for patterns in vulnerability to understand this conversion from a linear to cyclic relationship.

The evidence provided through this case study of the climate-conflict cycle has contributed to the early attempts to fill the empirical gap on this topic. It demonstrates that more efforts are needed to explore this phenomenon with empirical evidence so that it can be better understood. Building more knowledge on the underlying mechanisms between vulnerability, natural hazards, and armed conflict will provide academics, NGOs, and philanthropists the tools they need to help societies avoid and escape this trap.

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Victimhood and Hindutva Ideology

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh in India

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Abstract

Collective memory and victimhood as mobilisation tools for group identification have been garnering interest within studies of nationalism. Applying this to the context of religious national ideology, this paper aims to examine victimhood in the discourses of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) in India, and how it is manufactured towards Hindutva or Hindu nationalism. A discourse-historical approach to document analysis of vision statements and speeches by members of the RSS has been conducted using a post-structuralist lens to International Relations. Hindu society and India, as the key objects of victimhood, have been argued to be threatened by an elite, religious others and India's colonial past. These have been linked to an emotional appeal to convince Hindu society particularly of its integrity to Indian national identity and links the victimhood of the nation to the victimhood of its people. It has further been analysed how this appeal is driven towards a religious nationalist argument basing Hindutva at the core of Indian society through a reawakening of Hindu society itself.

Key words: *Hindutva, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Victimhood, Discourse-Historical Approach, Post-structuralism, Religious Nationalism*

Introduction

The vastly diverse ethnic, religious and linguistic backdrop of India has made it a perplexing case study in nationalism and nation-building, often defaulting to primordial explanations of inherent differences resulting from its diversity (Jaffrelot, 2013, p. 495). Language, region and tribe are integral to the diversity of Indian identity. When combined with the wide spectrum of faiths, this means that religion has often been a source of segregation and conflict. Different regions and sub-zones complicate the emergence of a unified identity due to the myriad of linguistic and cultural differences (Xaxa, 2016, p. 223). The independence struggle of the 1900s particularly saw a movement where national sentiments clashed with regional sentiments of aspirations for linguistic and cultural communities to fill the void of a unified national identity (Xaxa, 2016, p. 225). This led to the growth of a nationalism based on Hindu identity, perpetuated primarily by the organisation Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) under the name of Hindutva (Andersen & Damle, 1987, p. 72).

The paramilitary organisation RSS promotes India as a "Hindu nation", through the political ideology of Hindutva – defining the cultural identity of India through Hindu identity. For the founder, Hedgewar, a fundamental change in social attitudes in the state was necessary for a revived India, a change that would be made possible by a cadre of nationalists. A system of myths, rites and symbols are used to fuse the individual's identity to that of the larger Hindu community. The political character of Hindu nationalism derived heavily from preparation for salvation, much like European millennial movements. This organisation has formed the ideological institutional core of the Hindu nationalist movement since 1925, and has since operated on a country-wide scale (Tiwari, 1987, p. 79).

The organisation originates from the background of communal violence between the Hindu and Muslim community in the region of Nagpur. This formed the basis for their argument that Hindu communities needed to develop a more confrontational stance (Andersen & Damle, 1987, p. 72). It has often been studied how Hindu nationalists in India view Muslims as their victimisers, despite always being a majority in the country, through the memory of being a subject to cultural subordination and oppression by 'Muslim invaders'. Collective victimhood along with ingroup identity and emotions led to Hindu reactions in conflict situations to tend towards revenge rather than reconciliation (Tripathi et al., 2019, p. 32). A very large part of the history of the subcontinent has been characterised by invasions by Muslim rulers, subjecting Hindu populations to cultural and administrative subjugation. The destruction of temples and looting of temple wealth during medieval times is cemented as an experience of humiliation (Tripathi et al., 2019, p. 33).

The divide between the communities further deepened with British rule, as the empire pronounced ruptures in order to suppress resistance from either group (Tripathi et al., 2019, p. 33). For many historians, the 'Muslim other' came to be created during this period and the partition which was infamously characterised by communal violence (Tripathi et al., 2019, p. 34). Historical memories of past events feed into the emotions of the collective and thus create a victimhood of the community as a whole for the Hindus in India. These historical memories have been portrayed to thus consolidate identities and develop the image of the 'rival group' as the other (Tripathi et al., 2019, p. 35). Historical narratives have been linked to identity narratives as unpleasant memories of victimisation are used for celebratory purposes, like in the case of memorials, where ingroup solidarity is strengthened through the recollection of past sufferings (Tripathi et al., 2019, p. 36). Victimhood and its ideological manifestations outside of populism studies have been relatively under-studied, especially within the empirical case of Hindu nationalism.

While collective victimhood has been explored extensively within populist contexts of right-wing parties and as a constructive concept (Jacoby, 2015, p. 2), the purposeful manipulation of victimhood within ideology has been underdeveloped, despite victimhood featuring as a strong device within right-wing nationalist ideologies (Jacoby, 2015, p. 2). Thus, this paper attempts to investigate how the invocation of victimhood

is used to justify a particular representation of national identity through an empirical focus on the RSS in India, lending itself to the research question: *How is victimhood employed by the RSS to promote Hindutva ideology?*

The RSS in particular has been chosen as the subject of analysis as it forms the ideological core of the Hindu nationalist movement in contemporary India. Anti-colonial nationalism, as is evident in the case of the RSS, uses the logic of past injury along the lines of past victimhood and oppression that drives the aim for re-empowerment and future glory (Al-Ghazzi, 2021). As an ethno-religious nationalist group, it is the centre of the group of organisations and parties titled the 'Sangh Parivar (Family)'. Included in this family are the RSS, the Bajrang Dal, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) (Guelke, 2021, p. 1). The BJP and its leader Narendra Modi have remained in power for over a decade, continuing on the path of the 'Hinduisation' of the country. Aligning itself ideologically with Hindutva, the BJP's populism has been argued to target the minority more than the elite, thus garnering the support of the elites and the Hindu oppressive castes. Through Modi's rule, Hindu nationalism as an ideology has become deeply ingrained in Indian society, and while the analysis of the political wing could be used in exploring populist narratives, the ideological basis for their actions, as found in the RSS, have been chosen as they can offer a socio-cultural examination of the phenomenon (Guelke, 2021, p. 2).

Literature Review

Within the post-structuralist tradition, national identity forms the basis of nationalism, and the 'us' in the discourse surrounding victimhood (Armstrong & Tennenhouse, 1993, p. 51). When viewing discourse as a specific series of representations and practices that produce meanings, identities and social relations, language and its usage becomes integral to understanding key social processes (Campbell & Bleiker, 2016). Otherness, or what one is not, becomes key to defining oneself, based on identity narratives that draw from history to treat individuals as characters in a plot (Inac & Unal, 2013, p. 223). The pitting of 'us' against 'them' acts in these cases as a powerful mechanism of social and political cohesion, group identification and solidarity (Berezin, 2021, p. 239).

On the link between a lack of a 'national identity' and this perceived gap that Hindutva attempts to fill with its ideology, Varshney (1993, p. 227) has argued that Hindu nationalism has been reactionary to secessionist nationalism in Kashmir and Punjab, and secular nationalism. The vacuum created by the lack of a singular 'Indian identity' has intensified competition between nationalist projects. To Hindu nationalists, Hinduism is the source of India's identity, a Hindu being described by India as one's territorial homeland and also "holy land" (Varshney, 1993, p. 231). Building a "united" India, one that is Hindu, where those following other religions are assimilated is thus the key mission of nationalism on religious lines in the country (Varshney, 1993, p. 231). Thus, viewed as a project of fusing faith and religion into a unified whole with modern political ideology, the nation is configured as an object of worship.

In historical victimhood, the aforementioned frames of 'us' and 'them' get projected into meta-historical narratives based on temporal logic that contain "evidence" of contemporary self-victimisation. This allows the implementers of such narratives to proclaim the existence of a golden age and a past that has been snatched, thus arguing for a brighter future where the victim or the historical underdog will prevail (Al-Ghazzi, 2021). In postcolonial contexts, the narrative of overcoming national victimhood at the hands of a coloniser is at the centre of historiography, a formulation that has been adopted by nationalist groups to legitimise their actions.

Within this understanding of nationalism and the logic of perceived victimhood, memory politics can be viewed as a site of meaning-production. There exists here an implicit ideological component, i.e. the production of a pre-existent national identity. Collective memory and the act of remembrance itself are contingent upon the dynamics of the group one is a member of, and their subsequent interactions determine the

ways one constructs meaning in historical events (Malinova, 2021). Thus, sites of memories can be created, where memories are 'crystallised' and 'transmitted' from one generation to the next. The incorporation of a primordialist site of memory into nationalist discourse establishes a space to create patriotic resonance. Other than building a sense of community, these can also mark the site of collective trauma. The use of victimhood narratives has been particularly marked in populist contexts, as a way of invoking history to make self-victimising claims. By arguing that the object was wronged, targeted and injured by a wide array of actors, one seeks to regain social or political power (Malinova, 2021).

The political exploitation of historical injustice has been researched in populist movements in Central and Eastern Europe. However, according to Meijen and Vermeersch (2023, pp. 933-934), the precise discursive and narrative interactions between memory politics and victimhood, especially the logics used to bring the past into the frame of the present to then exploit it by bringing groups together, have not been extensively researched. They have researched the construction of the underdog position, by populist movements in Hungary and Poland, and how they have performed victimhood (Meijen & Vermeersch, 2023, p. 941). Thus, they have argued that victimhood is not only used by populists, but also performed, thus allowing it to be stretched and maintain the illusion of representing the underdog. It has been argued that this performance is not concerned with the actual victims or even real historical trauma, rather that it is a simplified retelling of it. If culpable agents are found, policies and ideologies can be legitimised to neglect the real underdogs and continue to claim their own 'inferiority' and 'suppression' (Meijen & Vermeersch, 2023, p. 947).

Group identification has often been studied as a way to reduce self-uncertainty, derived from membership in a social group or category. Thus societal changes that present the opportunity to a shared victimhood of those threatened by creating outgroup oppressors are contemporary methods of using victimhood narratives to foster nationalist sentiments (Rovamo & Sakki, 2023, p. 495). Arousing shared grievances allows the differentiation of a virtuous people from the egregious others, typically leftist urban elite, immigrants or other minorities. Combining historical victimhood with metaphorical borders, body politics to construct national uniqueness and homogeneity is a common facet studied (Rovamo & Sakki, 2023, p. 495).

Within the context of India, Sundar (2024), examines the trend of the dominant Hindu majority perceiving victimhood by the minority, and the systematic hurdles that are placed upon the minority under the facet of 'reparations' or 'justice'. However, the specific narratives discussed are related more directly to reparations than victimhood. As discussed in the problem formulation, it has been studied that psychologically, Hindu communities in India possess negative emotions towards Muslims in particular, due to a collective sentiment of victimhood and fraternalistic relative deprivation (Tripathi et al., 2019, p. 32). Hindutva particularly seeks to maintain religious and cultural norms against colonial onslaught by requiring absolute faith in one's own virtuous culture and the inferiority of the 'other'. Thus, Indian political nationalism has always been tied to matters of cultural preservation. Through such a presentation, it has been argued that the narrative process of Hindutva succeeded in a manipulation of common sense to equate the Indian nation to Hinduism (Sarkar, 2020, p. 219). This paper shall attempt to understand how these negative emotions have been mobilised towards a populist victimhood narrative that demands a specific vision of nationalism where Hinduism forms the basis for Indian identity and nationalism.

Power and victimisation are often embedded within normative frameworks that have been dismantled by feminist and postcolonial scholars, identifying victimisation in dominant power structures in the international order. Similarly, there has been a movement within academia to mitigate the framing of subaltern identities through their past of oppression to maintain the agency of their voices (Jacoby, 2015, p. 516). This paper conceptualises the 'victim' as an idea that takes on the characteristics of its underlying political context, and thus while it represents real people and experiences, it can be moulded to represent

ethical and political goals, as in the case of the Hindu nationalist movement in India (Jacoby, 2015, p. 517). Postcolonial Nationalism, as proposed by Zhang (2023), has been discussed as a form of political activity by right-wing actors, in this case the Hindutva movement in India, to legitimize their authoritarian, conservative and ethnonationalist projects. This conceptualisation forms the basis to the paper, exploring the production, consumption and mobilisation of narratives that base national identity on victimhood or subalternity (Zhang, 2023, p.2). Indian political nationalism has always been tied to matters of cultural preservation.

Religious Nationalism itself, the issue at the core of this paper, has been widely researched anthropologically, particularly in the Global South where the ideological claims tied with religion have been widely explored (van der Veer, 2013, p. 662). This originates from the linkage of indigenous identity with religion, as in the case of Hinduism in India and Buddhism in Sri Lanka, often leading to communalism and segregation (van der Veer, 2013, p. 662). This argument particularly requires revisiting when considering the growth of Hindu nationalist movements that have diverged into the sect that views Hinduism as a tolerant civilisation at the base of a secular state, and those that view it as a national religion (van der Veer, 2013, p. 665).

Methodology

Research Design

Case Design and Case Selection

Considering Hindu nationalism or Hindutva as the topic at hand, the research paper focuses on the case study of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). This case has been chosen in particular, as motivated in the introduction, because this organisation is the ideological parent to the current right-wing Hindu nationalist party of India, the Bharatiya Janata Party. As the research study focuses particularly on Hindutva as a political ideology, the RSS presents a representative case, as it exemplifies and concentrates the phenomena of the political ideology which is present socially and culturally in politics, academia and everyday life (Andersen & Damle, 1987). The organisation being the historical root of this ideology as it is called and propagated today, makes it the ideal case study to examine how it has been shaped and moulded by victimhood towards the mobilisation of its followers. The case study shall be critically analysed intensively using the aforementioned Discourse Historical Approach through the theoretical lens of poststructuralism.

The transferability of the results is based upon similarity. The pattern of events and the postcolonial context is important to the understanding of Hindutva, and must be factored into any other case that is observed using the results. The pattern of postcolonialism as a stable feature of the world, must be applicable to other contexts where the analysis is applied. The previous research on this topic draws from multiple fields and case studies, however, the underlying commonality is in the frames and discourses that shape victimhood as a facet to use in argumentation (Gomm, Hammersley, & Foster, 2009). Hindutva, as the second phenomenon being studied, has little impact outside the context of South Asia and South Asian diaspora, and thus cannot be extensively generalised towards other manifestations of religious nationalism, beyond basic arguments on the 'other'. Thus, while the case can be generalised towards a study of victimhood, its contextual basis in Hindutva makes the specific arguments more difficult to apply to cases beyond this case. There is, however, an intrinsic interest in the perpetuation of the applications of general victimhood theory and research towards a specific case of national relevance (Gomm, Hammersley, & Foster, 2009).

Sampling

Purposive sampling of documents has been implemented in this paper, with the researcher strategically finding articles written by the key group of interest, the RSS, through their official archives (Bryman, 2012, p. 418). The goal of this method of sampling is to choose sources most likely to give a direct answer to the research ques-

tion. Done primarily through a scan of the official website of the organisation: RSS.org. The official website has been chosen as it is a representation of the views of the organisation, as any data published there has been reviewed by the public relations team. Articles, speech transcripts, books and statements by higher-ranking members of the organisation within the last 3 years have been scanned, and the selection procedure was based on the relevance of the title towards nationalism. This time-frame has been chosen in order to counterbalance the relatively old vision statement that makes the first source. Titles and content that have been judged to contain central themes of nationalism and national identity through a scan by the author have been chosen for texts. Key words that have been scanned for within the speeches were "invader", "colonialism", "destruction", "oppression", "reawakening", "nationalism", "national identity", "patriotism", "threat", "revival" and synonyms of these words. These were based on the insights from the previous research and theoretical lens, as likely to portray victimhood frames towards nationalism. It has been acknowledged that not all the sources will cover victimhood equally, or in depth, and thus a wider net has been cast with regards to the length and quantity of data. Considering purposive sampling was used, a sample size of five documents, collectively resulting in over 40 pages of data were deemed adequate for the analysis (Bryman, 2012).

Data Collection

Two primary sets of sources have been selected for the analysis. The first is the vision and mission statement as available on the official website of the RSS. The value of this source is that it contains lengthy, highly descriptive content that highlights the RSS's perception of itself and its goal regarding Hindutva. The inherent persuasive nature as the first introduction to the group means that the organisation's arguments can be discerned clearly. The second set of sources are a compilation of five speeches, two by Mohan Bhagwat, the current chief of the group, and two by Dattatreya Hosable, the current general secretary. The value of using this source is that it contains statements by higher ranked officials of the organisation, thus based upon a valid assumption that the views presented represent that of the organisation and not an individual. Their claims hold value as they can be used to generalise the leadership's construction of nationalism. The RSS being an organisation cannot be used as a source itself, and thus as the source of the study, the views and statements of its leadership are the best way to obtain information on the organisation.

Analytical Framework

Intertextuality and Interdiscursivity

With the understanding that texts are linked to other texts, the individual pieces of data shall not be analysed separately, but rather with their connections to each other in the past and present. This has been established through their explicit references to similar topics, events or actors, allusions of a similar argument or in this case, the red thread of nationalist discourses. The link that shall be explored within the texts in particular, is the manipulation of victimhood and how it features and manifests across the texts. With the consideration of interdiscursivity, victimhood frames can appear across discourses, while victimhood itself can be discourse (Reisigl & Wodak, 2017, p. 90).

As an approach, the Discourse-Historical Approach is three-dimensional by 1) identifying the *specific contents or topics* of a specific discourse, 2) investigating the *discursive strategies* and lastly 3) examining the *linguistic means and realisations* (Reisigl & Wodak, 2017, p. 93). In order to do this, the research has been oriented towards five questions as prescribed by Reisigl and Wodak (2017, p. 94) to conduct a Discourse-Historical Approach.

1) How are persons, objects, phenomena/events, processes and actions named and referred to linguistically?

Table 1: Data Collection

Source Name	Nature
Vision Statement and Mission (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015).	Summarises the perceptions, aims and the mission of the RSS regarding nationhood and Indian identity.
Speech by Dattareya Hosabale (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2022)	Transcript of a speech by the general secretary of the RSS, given under the context of the 75th year of Indian independence. Valuable particularly in portraying the RSS's perceptions of the events surrounding Indian identity and independence.
Speech by Mohan Bhagwat (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2023)	This speech was given on the key Hindu religious holiday, Vijayadashami, and has been chosen as it touches heavily upon the controversy surrounding the building of the Ram temple in Ayhodhya.
Speech by Mohan Bhagwat (Bhagwat, 2024)	A speech given under the context of the inauguration of a controversial temple worshipping the deity Ram in Ayodhya.
Speech by Dattareya Hosabale (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2025)	This speech, given at the 100th year anniversary of the RSS, provides insight into the organisation's views on "Indianness".

2) What characteristics, qualities, and features are attributed to social actors, objects, phenomena/events and processes?

3) What arguments are employed in the discourse in question?

4) From what perspective are these nominations, attributions and arguments expressed?

5) Are the respective utterances articulated overtly, are they intensified or mitigated?

In order to specifically answer the research question, the operationalisation of narratives of victimhood has been drawn from the Theory and Previous Research section, by centering the Discourse-Historical Approach on the topic at hand. The five questions within the approach are positioned with the idea of how the past is recalled in a way that victimises the 'Hindu' or India as described by the RSS, to mobilise a target or gestate Hindu nationalism, through its usage of victimhood language and through a critical examination of the discursive strategies. This includes, but is not limited to, devices of membership categorisation, tropes such as metaphors, and stereotypical or evaluative attributions. Comparisons of and evocation of a memory of grievance or current suffering through fallacies, diminutives, tag questions, subjunctives, hesitations, vague expressions and hyperboles shall be analysed expressly (Reisigl & Wodak, 2017, p. 96).

Within the analysis, the questions fulfil individual purposes that shall lead towards an answer to the research question. The analysis shall be structured in the order of Question 1, followed by Question 2, Question 5 and Question 3 respectively. A choice has been made to not include Question 4 from Riesigl and Wodak's original approach: *From what perspective are these nominations, attributions and arguments expressed?* (Reisigl & Wodak, 2017, p. 96) within the analysis. This decision was made as the perspective of the speaker — the RSS — has been extensively discussed already within the problem formulation, but also shall be integral to the answer to Question 2, where the position of the RSS with regards to nationalism shall be addressed. The purpose of question one is to look at the discursive construction of the social actors that are later attributed with victimhood. This shall be done by analysing what general characteristics are given to particularly India and Hinduism/ Hindu society, as based on assumptions from the previous research, they are the object of religious nationalism. The questions have thus been modified and re-ordered towards the following result:

1) How are Hindu society and India named and referred to linguistically?

2) What characteristics, qualities, and features of victimhood are attributed to the aforementioned entities?

3) Is victimhood articulated overtly, is it intensified or mitigated?

4) What arguments are employed in the vic-

timhood discourse?

Question 1 shall be used to explore the general construction of Hindu society and India, as the key objects of religious nationalism. Through question 2 particular attributes of victimhood shall be explored through the discursive characterisation of social actors, objects, phenomena, event processes and actions. More concretely, this question shall be used to identify the actors and means that the RSS uses to grant victimhood to India and the Hindu society, including events and the types of victimhood that are attributed with the aforementioned actors. Question 3 shall then be used to ascertain the mode's methods of argumentation that make this victimhood persuasive and compelling towards the RSS's target audiences. This shall be done by identifying the modifications (intensifying or mitigating) in illocutionary force and thus the epistemic or deontic status of utterances. Furthermore, diminutives or augmentatives, (modal) particles, tag questions, subjunctive, hesitations, vague expressions, hyperboles, litotes, indirect speech acts (e.g. question instead of assertion), verbs of saying, feeling and thinking shall be looked out for. Question 4 shall be used to round up the discussion, as it provides the route to show how exactly victimhood, once constructed and argued for, are transposed towards the legitimation of Hindutva and religious nationalism. This question is thus very important in establishing the link between victimhood and Hindutva.

Analysis

Question 1: Linguistic Construction of Key Actors

The two key actors that are portrayed to be victims in the discourse of the RSS are Bharat/India and the Hindu society. As such, this section discusses the general construction of these actors, and the traits that later allow them to be given the characteristics of victimhood.

Bharat, i.e, India

One of the key observations is the consistent referral to the nation of India as 'Bharat'. This has been noted as an ongoing discourse surrounding the perceived colonial legacies of naming and referral. The name 'India' is connected to the colonial era of British rule, and a direct result of it, thus making Bharat, out of multiple other names that this region has been referred to as, the primary and 'correct' designation (Gauba, 2020). Bharat is referred to as a cultural empire, a nation that has existed for millennia, and as one that excelled collectively as a nation within the fields of science, commerce, arts, technology, agriculture and multiple other spheres. This process of situating "Bharat" as a 'nation', before the concept of a nation was even constructed, carries with it a primordial understanding that allows following arguments of nationalism and collective suffering to seem logical or natural. This primordial approach to nationhood and particularly the nationhood of India allows the 'integrity', 'honour' and 'history' of the entity to be something that can collectively be harmed or damaged (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2025). The country of Bharat is framed as one that has existed for millennia, glorified by its progress in various fields; science, technology, commerce, arts, agriculture, and philosophy, whose cultural empire expanded all the way to Southeast Asia for over four centuries (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2025). This brings with it the connotation of a brilliant past that can be harmed. However, it has been argued that all these achievements were mitigated by a lack of social cohesion, and dissension, which led to its subjugation under foreign powers for centuries (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2025, p. 1).

The nation here is portrayed as a victim of foreign invaders with far-reaching consequences thus amplifying the areas that have been subjected to victimhood, by illustrating the destruction of temples, and religious spaces, with the result of a demoralised "Bharatiya society", left open to rule over (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015). India is further referred to as the "Motherland" (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p. 5), "Bharatmata" (Mother Bharat) (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2025, p. 9), "Mathrabhoomi" (Earth of the Mother in Sanskrit) (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2025, p. 9), in reference to "her" subjugation to colonial

rule. The imagery of the maternal figure being threatened, with the idea of the 'masculine' in the RSS protecting the 'feminine' in the nation is thus evident here.

The specific discourse on the conflict surrounding Ayodhya is an exaggerated example of this historical anthropomorphisation, where the RSS claims a loss of national character and morale and weakness in Hindu society and pessimism and insecurity regarding the entire culture and its knowledge (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p. 11). The British colonists have been framed as those with an aim of Bharat's political, imperial and religious enslavement (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2025, p. 13). The building of the Ram temple at Ayodhya in 2022 is emotionally celebrated and legitimised by the organisation as a winning battle against the invading 'them'. What is silenced in this celebration is the violence that several "servers" of the organisation conducted at the site, prior to the long-standing court case. In 1992, an organised mob of over 75,000 identifying with Hindu nationalism stormed a mosque that stood in the site, the aftermath of which led to interreligious rioting leaving over one thousand people (a majority Muslim) dead across several Indian cities (Mehta, 2015). Indiscriminate acts of violence against Muslim minorities by the police and other authority figures have been covered up to celebrate the event and gain divine justification, as reclaiming holy land (Bhagwat, 2024, p. 2). This is further intensified by referring to values that the deity Ram represents, and tying them intrinsically to both the site and the perceived "victory" over it, (Bhagwat, 2024, p. 2) furthering the argumentative storyline of an us who have won after centuries of suffering perpetuated by *them* (Bhagwat, 2024, p. 2).

Hindu Society

Hinduism is throughout the vision statement referred to as the basis of Indian national identity, and the pillar of national consciousness, carrying the nation of Bharat, as discussed earlier, to its "pinnacle of glory" (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p. 1). Hinduism through its age-old spiritual values forms the groundwork of Indian national identity in this case (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p. 16). The ideal Hindu society or Hindu Nation is allegorised as a functional body with organs functioning in harmony, and the society itself to be 'god incarnate', thus drawing upon divine justification as its legitimation strategy (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p. 11). Thus what is evident are varying strategies of legitimation beginning even from the description of the movement. The anthropomorphisation of entities such as the "Hindu Psyche", which has been accredited with a "pristine form", especially when the latter is an abstract construction by the former (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p. 4) is key linguistically. "Hindu society" has been described to contain attributes of "self-confidence" and "denigration". Similarly, the regions of Kashmir, Assam and Nagaland have been given the ability to be "headaches" (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p. 19), "thorn(s) in the flesh", "oppressive" and "vulnerable" (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015). The three have been specifically highlighted as they present the "threat" of a growing Muslim-population, and secession. This is purposive as it allows any further discourses to attribute actions and collective characteristics to these abstract entities, including victimhood.

Thus, this primary question has allowed us to discuss the two key subjects of victimhood under the lens of the RSS, namely India and Hindu society. It has been shown that the two entities are presented not only as inherent, and natural in their existence, but also draw their brilliance and glory from historical values, tied with primordial ideas of nationhood and spiritual arguments for a religious state.

Question 2: Characteristics of victimhood

Considering the argument that victimhood has been applied primarily to India' and Hindu society (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2023, p. 2), the source of this victimhood has been identified to be threefold, with the first being the perceived elite, as represented by the government, academia and the media; the second as the Religious offender, particularly articulated as the Muslim and Christian communities in the country, and lastly the historical colonial invader,

represented by Islamic rulers and the British colonial rule.

The Elite

Firstly, the nation's integrity is attributed with erosion at the hands of the elite (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2023, p. 1). The *us*, formed by the RSS and Hindu society, are characterised as victims of divisive strategies by the *elite* under the apparent farce of secularism, secession and thought patterns that are dissonant with nativity (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2023). Academia and scholarship are shown as perpetuating a lack of national consciousness, and using their dominant position to suppress the RSS and Hindu nationalist actors. The Sangh perceives itself, as a representative of Hindu society, to be a victim of judgement and harsh misunderstanding; constantly referring to undefined "people expressing doubts about the continued survival and growth (of the RSS)" (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2023, p. 1), and "baseless canards", "unjust incarceration", "opponents" and "virulent critics" (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2023, p. 1). Within Bhagwat's 2025 speech, the "English-speaking academic elites" are vilified as those who would never understand Hindutva or the idea of a Hindu Nation due to their preconceived notions (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2025, p. 1), and societal divisions and "destructive forces" are accredited to the "Cultural Marxists" and "woke" elites accused of carrying lofty ideals, with discriminatory and deceitful interests (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2023, p. 2).

These *elite* have been characterised as the victimisers of the Bharatiya society, by controlling media and academia into creating a vicious cycle of fear, confusion and hatred. Their modus operandi has been described as taking control over the academia and media, turning these institutions against anything religious, which according to the RSS results in a vicious cycle of fear, hate and confusion. Further vague opponents in the *elite* are created and accused of forging alliances with undesirable foreign forces, in an attempt for political power. The *elite* is thus portrayed to be creating conflicts through social differences, victimising the *us* (the RSS) to have become "amnesiac" (Without fervour or blood) (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2023, p. 2).

The Religious Other

While there exists the creation of the *elite* that oppresses the us constantly, a more direct other is constructed in minority religions. Victimhood is attributed to Bharat as a result of attempted religious destabilisation, in reference to the possibility of the province of Assam gaining a Muslim-majority demographic. This has been blamed upon undefined foreign countries and agencies, thus creating a vague threat with "serious" consequences (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p. 7). Secondly, Christian missions have been accused of armed revolt to "carve out" independent Christian provinces, another activity that the RSS places blame for upon the aforementioned undefined "foreign countries and agencies" (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p. 8).

With regards to Kashmir, the Hindu population has been framed to be targeted by militants who do not face consequences due to their "privileged minority tag". Furthermore, the state of Jammu and Kashmir has been characterised as oppressive due to its "Muslim majority", and described as a 'headache for the country' ever since independence, both signifying hostility coming from within, thus presenting the other within us. The Pakistan-administered region of Kashmir is described as "Pakistan-occupied Kashmir", and characterised as a threat to Indian national sovereignty (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2022, p. 1). The "appeasement of Muslims", argues the RSS, is the "bane of our government's Kashmir policy" (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p. 8), describing Kashmir as a spoilt child ridden with subversives that weaken the nationality of Bharat and its identity. The threat is expanded to Bharat's sovereignty as the government of 1947 (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p. 8) is accused of the appeasement of the Kashmiri resistance, who are characterised to be "militants". Indian governments of the past are accused of pandering to the Muslim minority, and in doing so ignoring the wishes of the Hindu society. This has been referred to as "selfish" and "discriminatory": thus clearly appealing to a fear

of deprivation from the Hindu society, in a call to work against it (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2022, p. 2).

Even within the Hindu society, tribal Hindu minorities' systematic alienation by the rest of the country is viewed as a threat to unity and social injustice. This is perceived to be a result of the alienation leaving open the communities to Christian missionaries' conversion. (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2022, p. 9). Broadly, the us have been implied to be Hindu society, or the Hindu Nation, that is continually victimised by them, who form the religious majorities that pose a threat of conversion and domination. The implication that their subsequent domination would lead to the minority status of Hindus is particularly ironic, as it would subject the latter to the same treatment that the RSS wishes to subject other religious minorities to.

The Coloniser/ Invader

The aim of attacks from "Islam" is argued to carry the ambition to completely destroy and alienate society. The nation here is portrayed as a victim of foreign invaders who destroyed temples and religious spaces with the result of a demoralised Bharatiya society, leaving it open to rule over (Bhagwat, 2024, p. 1). Two genres of historical invaders have been identified here: the first being the Islamic rule that victimised Hindus for over 800 years, and the second being the British colonial rule. The latter has been credited with not only the oppression of the Hindu society, but also an attempt to subvert the Hindu mind itself, towards the erosion of national identity (Bhagwat, 2024, p. 1). One of the primary discourses within this argument is that of the destruction of a temple dedicated to the deity Ram in the city Ayodhya. The speech regarding the Ayodhya temple is made under the context of the Supreme Court ruling that allowed for the building of a Hindu temple at the site, which was inaugurated in 2022. Islamic empires and the British empire are most commonly in the vision statement referred to as "aliens" (Bhagwat, 2024, p. 1). The usage of this particular term dehumanises those who are characterised as invaders, making it extremely easy for audiences to harbour detestation beyond just the presentation of historical "facts" and appeals for a degradation of nationhood (Bhagwat, 2024, p. 1).

The demolition of the temple is argued to have been conducted with the sole purpose of demoralising Bharatiya society to rule over it once it has been weakened. Within discourses on Ayodhya, the building of the temple is contextualised through a four-century long struggle by the Hindus against the "Muslim invaders" with temporal logic to gain legitimacy (Bhagwat, 2024, p. 2). The speech regarding the Ayodhya temple is made under the context of the Supreme Court ruling that allowed for the building of a Hindu temple at the site, which was inaugurated in 2022.

Secondly, the West is blamed for Indian victimhood specifically through an economic perspective portraying the victimhood of the country under British colonial rule. Two different arguments have been observed to be made in tandem, the first being that colonisation destroyed the economic potential of India, and secondly that Western dominant models of economic governance are flawed at their base and the only valid one is that based on Hindu dharmic principles (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p. 17). The West is blamed for the downhill economy of the country, referring to the plunder of capital during the colonial era, as well as the pervasive dominant economic models of the GATT, IMF and the World Bank (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p. 17). Trade Union movements, guided by socialist and Marxist thinkers have been characterised as "alien", and a threat to national interests (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p. 13). Further, sources that wreak havoc on the cohesion of Indian society, including terrorism, exploitation, individualism, and totalitarianism are blamed on imitations of the West (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2023, p. 2).

In an assessment of the above information, it can be argued that the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh attributes victimhood to Hindu society, Bharat as a country and the organisation RSS itself. This is achieved through the consistent delineation of the other as opposed to oneself, as the *elite*, the West, the Invader and Religious Other are accused and perceived of to be victimising

the aforementioned actors. For the victimisation of Bharat specifically, historical victimhood has been projected into a meta-historical narrative that derives on temporal logic to prove current self-victimisation, by supposing a golden age that has been stolen from the country (Al-Ghazzi, 2021). It can thus be argued that identity narratives that borrow from historicised fiction have been used to treat the India and Hindu society, the objects, as a character in a plot, pitting the us against *them* to manufacture social cohesion and group identification (Berezin, 2021, p. 239).

Question 3: Articulation of Victimhood

Victimhood has been attributed by the RSS to India and Hindu society have been articulated overtly through highly emotional argumentation throughout the speeches and the vision statement, in an appeal towards its audience, those whose victimhood it wishes to convey. Through this, it has been observed that the RSS wishes to convince particularly the Hindu society, which it equates with India, of their own victimhood. This victimhood is intensified through the creation of an exclusive us through the usage of language, with the appeal of group identification articulated through their shared victimhood. Finally, the anthropomorphisation of India to contain features such as hurt, portrayed by her personification as "Mother India", adds to the argumentative tools that support the narrative victimhood portrayed.

Emotional Argumentation

Pathos has been implemented consistently to intensify the apparent victimhood of the Hindu society. The *elite* is mobilised against the latter, through temporal arguments depicting an era when it was considered intellectual superiority to "heap contempt" upon Hindu society, and "ruses" were used to denigrate them (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p. 11). Governments of post-independence India are similarly accused of creating a system where Muslim minorities were appeased towards the end of Hindus gaining "second-order" citizen status, thus explicitly and deliberately lowering the majority into victimhood minority. The RSS continues with this strategy as a means to recover from the "self-oblivion" that the elite government has placed the Hindu society into. The tone of this argument has been identified to be emotionally charged, with a theme of conspiracy, implying that critics of the organisation and Hindutva within academia were running ruses (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p. 7).

The term "externally induced impoverishment" has been used to dramatically describe the current economic plight of the country. The indigenous models of science and technology have been portrayed as the victim of a deliberate crushing by the West. Furthermore, a "culturally induced poverty" has been deemed to impact the psyche of the people with repeated utterances of "you are poor", "you are primitive" and "you are backward" (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p. 18). The emotional impact to an Indian reader growing up in a postcolonial context is cemented through such quotes being explicitly mentioned in the statement, having great ability to persuade a Hindu listener or reader of their own apparent victimhood. Through such a framing utilising pathos extensively, internal causes of economic issues are mitigated and erased.

Open-ended questions are particularly evident in the speech from 2023 (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2023, p. 3), in an attempt to insinuate that undefined sources were 'ravaging' the society into divisions using the example of the situation in the province of Manipur, where tensions between two ethno-religious groups resulted in horrific violence against Kuki women (Christian majority) by Meitei mobs (Hindu majority). Within this discourse, the society of Manipur is portrayed to be harmonious and society prior to this event. Open-ended questions along the lines of "who has a vested interest in besmirching an organisation like the RSS (...) into this unfortunate incident?" (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2023, p. 3), "Which foreign powers may be interested in taking advantage of such unrest and instability. . . ?" (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2023, p. 3). These questions form an intense accusation of foreign alliances in destabilising Indian unity, having the impact of pushing blame

away from those that the RSS views as its own (the Hindu society) towards a foreign undefined ill-wisher through its own portrayal of victimhood (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2023, p. 3).

Creation of an Exclusive 'Us'

Secondly, the creation of "us" as an oppressed group implicitly promotes uniqueness and gives epistemic authority to the group, moving it from what is perceived to be a top-down hierarchical society into one of balanced equal participation. Within their framing overall, it is evident the creation of an exclusive 'us' who require enlightenment over the critical 'them' that perceive Hindutva to be inferior. This is done by only attributing heightened positives with the RSS and Hindutva in the entire discourse: with vocabulary such as "unique", "dynamic" and "Powerhouse" (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p. 3).

More explicitly, this exclusive group identification is visible in the quote: "Sangh's alone has been the voice of genuine patriotic concern amidst the cacophonous, politically inspired shibboleths of undefined secularism etc." (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p. 3). The vision statement (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p. 6) states that "the sweep and amplitude of one great mind (in reference to the founder of the RSS), can be fully grasped only by minds with a like vision and imagination". There is a contradiction found within this formulation, where the opinions of academics and the *elite* are denounced but at the same time, the growth of the RSS and its relevance is argued through the apparent approval it is receiving from current intelligentsia (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p. 8). Thus, it appears as though the validation of critics, and the "world" as a whole, is extremely important to the Sangh, but at the same time anyone that criticises its ideology is denounced to possess immoral values (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p. 8). Contradictions are further observed in the vision statement in the portrayal of the RSS as a political organisation. While denouncing perceived detractors who portray the organisation as paramilitaristic with political ideological motives, they continue to argue that the political sphere is one it wishes to enhance, through a military-like disciplinary training expected of its cadres (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p. 9). The Hindu and the Hindutva, as victims of a "state-sponsored denigration", are decreed as existential threats to the polity of Bharat, using a tone of affront to emote for a nationalist ideology that protects the Hindus (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p. 6).

Having established both the victim and the victimiser, through the analysis of the first two questions, this section has demonstrated the narrative and discursive tools of persuasion used by the RSS specifically to articulate said victimhood. The first focus on emotional argumentation regarding pathos demonstrated how the elite has been mobilised through deliberate phrasing that seeks to incite indignation and anger, the emotions key to sustaining victimhood amongst the perceived victims. It has been further demonstrated that this invocation of emotion is geared towards the creation of an exclusive us, who face the opposition of the world as a whole. Finally, anthropomorphising India into a mother figure makes it possible to invoke the same emotions towards 'her' as towards Hindu society as a whole.

Question 4: Arguments Using Victimhood Towards Hindutva

The first argument derived from this portrayal of victimhood is that the existence of such an oppressive elite is viewed as a raison d'etre for the RSS and nationalism that places Hindu nationalist identity at the forefront of Indian society. The evocation of the *elite* vs *us* has been implemented through a pretension of using logos based argumentation, however what is evident is a lack of clear facts or identification, other than the *elite* and intelligentsia that continue to attack and demean the RSS and Hindu society (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p. 6). This formulation of an *elite* is manipulated towards the presentation of the organisation as the saviours of their own mission.

This perceived undermining of Hindu society is used towards an argument to promote a change

in the "psyche" of Hindus, to prevent conversions and bring previous converts back into the "fold". The agency of those who have converted to other faiths has been erased as the organisation develops a mechanism for re-conversion. Furthermore, Hindu identity is extended to the diaspora, as the aims of the organisation extend towards the preservation of Hindu values and ideals in this arena, as a link to the home country. This effectively erases diaspora from other backgrounds in their equation, prioritising the Hindu society as the only valid nationals (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p. 14). A Hindu nationalist ethos is equated to nation-building and used to justify a reach towards all social institutions, encompassing family, marriage, religion, and education (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p. 14). The specific wording that has been used is the supposition of a "Hindu Century": as a cure to the ills that plague all of the world and Indian society.

The RSS mobilises the destruction caused by colonisation to construct a national identity to base nationalism on, mobilizing the grievance that most postcolonial subjects have towards the coloniser towards an exclusive national identification system, based on primordial assumptions of who belongs to the continent. A second causal link that has been used is of social cohesion leading to national integrity, though the means of this social cohesion, and who shall be excluded in such a process have not been mentioned explicitly throughout the sources (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p. 16).

With regards to economic victimhood, the discourse is directed towards two arguments: the first being that colonisation destroyed the economic potential of India, and secondly that Western dominant models of economic governance are flawed at their base and the only valid one is that based on Hindu dharmic principles (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p. 18). The solution to the economic crisis, in India and globally, is argued to be attained through the cultural rejuvenation and re-assertion of Hindu values that separate it from the West, and views it as a necessity in the state of the world (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p. 18). Aforementioned "alien" trade union movements have been eschewed for the *Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh*, a new labour movement that is based on Hindu tenets, characterised by a strong opposition to strikes (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p. 14).

All of the aforementioned argumentation has culminated towards the view that all the historical and current grievances that have placed Hindu society at such a victimised position, must be the reason to inculcate a "righteous militancy". In doing so, the RSS advocates for an entirely changed political, social and economic culture in the country (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2015, p. 14), that would, with Hindu nationalism as the basis, restore the nation's honor and dignity and portray the "weak in society". It has been argued that the society must rid itself of their "colonial mindset" and take from the outside world only that which suits the country. Thus, it is evident, that only two options are presented, that ridding oneself of a colonial mindset can only be achieved by nationalist conservatism, and forsaking all foreign influence (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2023). The country can thus be framed as having risen from the centuries of crises towards a path of spiritual and material progress. The character in the story is thus saved and rises above its struggles. Foucauldian creations of the subject and object are evident through the evolution of discourse to constitute differences, thus linguistically constructing reality into one perceived by the RSS (Campbell & Bleiker, 2016). In this reality, not only is India, at the end of this story, powerful and avenged, they are also looked at by the crisis-ridden world to emerge with new ideas in the face of fanaticism, arrogance and hysteria from religious sectarianism (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2023).

Conclusion

This paper has addressed the manipulation of victimhood towards religious nationalism, through the research question: *How is victimhood employed by the RSS to promote Hindutva ideology?*

It has overall been concluded that Bharat/India and Hindu society have been at-

tributed with victimhood by the RSS, as both are constructed generally within the frame of possessing a glorious past. Bharat particularly is given a primordial and natural nationhood, rather than one that evolves and is constructed. Following on from this, Hindu society and Hinduism are equated with the identity of the country, forming an exclusive group identification that rests upon religious identity. This establishes the religious nationalist ideology that the group purports that bases nationhood and national cohesion upon Hindu identity and belonging. To this pre-constructed and well-defined actor, various facets of victimhood are attributed thus creating a causal relationship, where the threat to these actors poses a threat to national identity and sovereignty itself. Both Bharat and Hindu society have been portrayed throughout the sources to be exposed to threat and suppression from various angles, from the top in the form of the elite, from within itself through religious minorities and from the outside through invaders. The "elite" represent various actors including the government, academia and the West broadly who are accused of systematically demeaning anything that relates to Hinduism and its values through oppressive media, unjust bans and general sentiment. The religious other has been found in particularly the Muslim and Christian minorities who pose the threat of conversion and gaining dominance, who seek to make Hindus second order citizens in 'their own country'. Finally, the historical invaders are portrayed to have had far-reaching consequences on society, with the meta-historical narrative of a glorious past and era that has been snatched and desecrated.

This victimhood has been argued for emotionally using various persuasive tools, such as exclusive underdog positions to convince its target audience in Hindu communities in India of their own victimhood. Emotional argumentation to denounce the garbs of the perceived *elite* and *religious other* thrown at the Hindu society and India is implemented in order to create a special and exclusive ingroup identification as the oppressed based on collective memory. Creating an us who have been exposed to debasement allows for the group to feel unique in its rise and double down on collective group identity. Another technique used to articulate victimhood is the attribution of human-like features to a country, exposing it to harm and thus furthering the impact of the emotional argument that has been mentioned previously.

Finally, it has been shown how the previously established victimhood has been mobilised towards a society that is built entirely upon Hindu ideals, and for the reawakening of Hindu society. Economically, a nationalist economic approach prioritising Hindu Indigenous systems not only domestically but globally are argued to cure the entire world of its ills. Hindu cultural revival and redemption is thus placed at the forefront of Hindu nationalist ideology with a focus on bringing back Hindus into the fold, and deepening their pride in their own community, by placing their religious identity at the center of their social life through militant or peaceful means. It is campaigned to rise beyond the circumstances that place Hindu society and India into victimhood towards a nation that the RSS deems ideal and socially cohesive.

The findings overall contribute to the broader study of memory politics and victimhood discourse towards nationalist ideologies. More particularly, explorations on religious nationalism in the Indian context can benefit from this study. Further research can focus more directly upon the political wing, in the discourses that the Bharatiya Janata Party uses, for a comparative case study, or a direct discourse analysis. Further, the usage of digital media by nationalist groups as an important tool in the 21st century, can be developed towards a tangential understanding of Hindutva.

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Talking the Walk

Peace, Inclusivity and (De)Polarisation

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Abstract

Warning calls about increasing polarisation have been a mainstay of political science and political reporting in the past decade. At pernicious levels, polarisation has the capacity to erode democratic institutions or escalate into violence. However, depolarisation – the reversal of pernicious polarisation – is possible, but research on the phenomenon is in its infancy. Meanwhile, peace research in the last two decades has found a robust link between inclusivity during a peace process, and the durability of the resulting peace. To bridge these two fields, this paper combines quantitative data on inclusivity in peace agreements with data on political polarisation. A combination of logistic regressions and fixed effects models are used to explore the question: *How does the inclusivity of a peace process affect post-conflict (de)polarisation?* Some preliminary conclusions are reached based on the strongest results. The inclusion of women and disabled people in the text of a peace agreement consistently and statistically significantly correlates with a net decrease in polarisation. Less consistently statistically significant, the inclusion of families correlates with a net decrease in polarisation, and the inclusion of racial groups with a net increase in polarisation. The inclusion of refugees correlates with a statistically significant increase to the odds of depolarisation, yet simultaneously correlates with a statistically significant increase to short-term polarisation levels. Also looked at are inclusion in aggregate, and the inclusion of religious groups, civil society, social class, political parties, children, men, the elderly, and traditional leadership, but these results show no clear, consistent patterns.

Key words: *Polarisation, Depolarisation, Inclusivity, Inclusive Peace, Peace Processes, Peace Agreements, Logistic Regressions, Fixed Effects*

Introduction

Warning calls about increasing polarisation have been a mainstay of political reporting and political science in the past decade (Somer & McCoy, 2018, pp. 3–4). Fairly unique to the phenomenon is that recent warnings appear to apply globally – from Western Europe to the Horn of Africa. At high levels, polarisation can actively undermine democratic good governance and escalate into violent conflict; at its most extreme it is then referred to as 'pernicious polarisation' (Somer & McCoy, 2018, p. 5).

There is a substantial body of research analysing polarisation's causes and consequences, yet very little looks at its reversal.[1] This structural oversight creates a conception of polarisation as an inherently escalatory and irreversible phenomenon, effectively treating polarisation as the opening of Pandora's box. The impetus behind my research for this paper is challenging the fatalism implicit in this assumption. After all, de-escalation does occur: McCoy et al. (2022, pp. 1-2) found that depolarisation episodes have occurred in roughly half of the instances of pernicious polarisation globally from 1900 to 2020. The most common contexts for depolarisation episodes are during large societal shifts, with approximately a third following armed struggles (McCoy et al., 2022, pp. 14–15).

Within peace and conflict research, polarisation has also consistently been pointed to as an important driver of conflict (Esteban & Schneider, 2008, pp. 135–38; Østby, 2008). A clear parallel between the fields of political science and peace and conflict research can be seen in work on conflict recurrence. Approximately half of peace agreements break down within five years of signing (Högbladh, 2012) and estimates of conflict recurrence after the signing of a peace agreement stand at 60% (Walter, 2010, p. 1). Similarly, there appears to be a strong cyclical tendency around (re)polarisation: only 46% of depolarisation episodes are sustained in the medium term,[2] with 60% of those maintaining depolarisation in the long term (McCoy et al., 2022, p. 20). The most common contexts for sustained depolarisation are democratisation, liberalisation, and the resolution of intrastate conflict (McCoy et al., 2022, p. 21).

In the last two decades of peace and conflict research, a robust relationship has been found between the inclusivity of a peace process and the durability of the resulting peace (i.e. C. Bell & O'Rourke, 2007; Nilsson, 2012; Kew & Wanis-St. John, 2008; Krause, Krause, & Bränfors, 2018). The resulting 'inclusivity hype' resulted in inclusion becoming a cornerstone of modern peacebuilding – featuring prominently in the work of the UN, the World Bank, the OECD and other international actors (Paffenholz & Zartman, 2019).

On a theoretical level, the concept of inclusivity seems like a natural antidote to the mutual exclusivity inherent to (pernicious) polarisation. Yet, to the best of my knowledge, this theorised causal relationship between inclusivity and polarisation has never been (directly) tested before. With this project, I seek to narrow the knowledge gap by adding to knowledge on depolarisation as a specific phenomenon, further developing the understanding of polarisation within peace and conflict research, and mapping out previously unseen relationships between inclusion in peace processes and political polarisation. The guiding research question in this effort is: *How does the inclusivity of a peace process affect post-conflict (de)polarisation?*

By combining pre-existing data on peace agreements and societal polarisation from two databases, and analysing them with logistic regressions and fixed effects models, I come to a handful of conclusions. The inclusion of women and disabled people in the text of a peace agreement seems to have a robust, negative correlation with polarisation. Also consistent, but less robust, are the inclusion of families correlating with a net decrease in polarisation, and the inclusion of racial groups correlating with a net increase in polarisation. Interestingly, the inclusion of refugees correlates with a statistically significant increase in the odds of depolarisation, but also correlates with a statistically significant increase in short-term polarisation levels. Finally, no clear patterns were found relating to inclusion in aggre-

[1] Indeed, most research on it stems from the past three years, or specifically looks at the end of the Cold War.
[2] Defined by McCoy et al. (2022, p. 17) as 10 years after a depolarisation episode.

gated, and the inclusion of religious groups, civil society, social class, political parties, children, men, the elderly, and traditional leadership.

Theory

Inclusivity

Defining Inclusivity

When discussing inclusivity the context of peace and conflict research, a commonly accepted starting point is the definition in the *United Nations Guidance on Effective Mediation* (2012, pp. 11): "Inclusivity refers to the extent and manner in which the views and needs of conflict parties and other stakeholders are represented and integrated into the process and outcome of a mediation effort." The duality of looking at both process and outcome is a common thread throughout research on the subject (Cuhadar, 2020, p. 3; Cuhadar & Druckman, 2024, pp. 360–61). Process-centred inclusivity focuses on how negotiations and decision-making processes include or exclude relevant stakeholders and marginalised voices. Outcome-centric inclusivity in turn looks predominantly at formally codified outcomes, such as the distribution of rights, institutional reforms, and how representative a state is of its population(s) (Dudouet & Lundström, 2016, pp. 63–64). Ideally, inclusive negotiation processes result in inclusive governance outcomes.

Theories of Inclusivity & Peace Processes

An inclusive peace process sets the stage for an inclusive peace agreement. The central question for any peace process is who to include, and how to make sure the resulting peace lasts (Zanker, 2018; as in Cuhadar & Druckman, 2024, p. 363; similar in C. Bell & Wise, 2022, p. 399). Inclusion can foster legitimacy: in the early 2000s and 2010s, mass protests occurred to demonstrate resistance against peace processes that were seen as exclusive (Schädel & Dudouet, 2020, p. 59; similar in Dudouet & Lundström, 2016, p. 66). For legitimate inclusivity, included actors must effectively represent and advocate for vested segments of society, do so inside and outside of the negotiations, and be committed to the peace. On the other hand, inclusivity is also often met with resistance (Cuhadar, 2020, p. 2–3), can be abused or made into an empty façade (Schädel & Dudouet, 2020, p. 9).

In recent decades inclusivity has become a settled norm within international mediation circles (Hellmüller et al., 2015, p. 2–3). As a result, modern peace processes are typically designed to be inclusive of non-warring parties (NWP) – which often include, but are not limited to civil society actors (CSA) (Cuhadar, 2020, p. 2). Even so, the inclusion of NWPs[3] tends to be the exception – not the rule. Schädel and Dudouet (2020, pp. 58–59) outline four main reasons for this, along with example cases. First, the peace process simply has no mechanisms for societal participation, as with the peace process leading to the *Kabul Agreement* (2016). Second, mechanisms may be predominantly performative or sacrificed for the sake of efficiency, as with Myanmar's *National Ceasefire Agreement* (2015). Third, preconditions to inclusion set by mediators and governments result in de facto exclusion, as with the government of Mali and Salafi Jihadi armed groups for the *Algiers Accord for Peace and Reconciliation* (2015). Fourth and finally, civil society actors themselves may fail to act effectively, cohesively or be taken seriously by the parties.

It is important to recognise that for any case, there are likely multiple layers of competing interests around questions of inclusivity. The warring parties may not be interested in adding seats to the table, or see inclusivity as a means to invite actors whose support they already have. The case of Syria's Civil Society Support Room shows this particularly well. Established in 2016, it was a mechanism through which CSAs could engage with the peace negotiations and UN mediators. However, the Syrian government only considered allied actors to be civil society – which the opposition refused to accept as legitimate (Theros & Turkmani, 2022, pp. 196–98). This example

[3]Often, in this context, 'inclusivity' refers to the inclusion of CSAs. However, as this is not always the case, I will follow Nilsson and Svensson (2023) in using the broader term 'non-warring parties' when referring to inclusion in general, and civil society actors when I am specifically referring to such actors.

also highlights an important dynamic: accepting inclusivity may be seen as a sign of weakness, as norms upheld by years of proscriptive rhetoric are perceived to be undermined by recognition and an invitation to the negotiating table (Haspeslagh, 2020, pp. 519–20; Haspeslagh, 2021).

There are no theoretical limitations to who can be included as NWP, but it has been noted that in practice 'inclusivity' often translates to 'women' and 'civil society' (Haspeslagh, 2020, p. 519). There are several examples of their inclusion being extremely effective, with the work of the Mano River Women's Peace Network, or MARWOPNET, in Sierra Leone being a particularly well-known example. Even so, there is a frequent assumption that 'women' and 'civil society' are homogenous and civic-minded groups, inherently representative of very large subsets of a society – which is not necessarily the case (Von Burg, 2015). Additionally, other NWP's and their potential relationship with a peace process may get overlooked. This has the potential to create 'spoilers:' actors who undermine peace efforts because they benefit from the conflict, disagree with the terms of the peace, or seek retribution for their exclusion (Stedman, 1997, pp. 7–8, 53). To take the Colombian example, the exclusion of conservative groups and evangelical churches in negotiations resulted in them mobilizing against the agreement. These few key societal actors would go on to successfully campaign for a 'no' vote in the referendum where the agreement was to be adopted (Schädel & Dudouet, 2020, p. 59).

Prior Research on Inclusivity in Peace Processes

CSA inclusion in negotiations need not be substantial for CSA's to make substantial gains during negotiations. Notably, Bell and Kitagawa (2024, p. 16) found that peace negotiations with any civil society participation are approximately 33% more likely to result in an agreement with language addressing matters of safety, inclusion and protection for CSAs.[4] Yet, substantial inclusion tends to result in substantial gains. In their seminal paper, Wanis-St. John & Kew (2008, pp. 27–32) reached three conclusions: peace negotiations where civil society was actively engaged had more lasting peace; when negotiators were democratic actors, this effect extended to cases where the groups did not have a direct seat at the table; and most cases of negotiations with no civil society involvement experienced conflict recurrence.

Furthermore, Nilsson (2012, pp. 262–63) found that peace was more stable and durable in the long term if CSAs were included in the peace process, and even more so if both CSAs and political parties were included. Krause et al. (2018, pp. 1005–6) corroborated these findings, showing that women's participation in peace negotiations resulted in higher satisfaction with the agreement, higher implementation rates, and longer lasting peace; women's representatives signing an agreement also correlated with higher implementation rates. Through participation in peace processes, women's groups have been able to leverage politics and bargaining to advance women's rights in their states (Anderson, 2016, pp. 138–39; similar in Bell & Kitagawa, 2024, p. 16).

Yet, even with the apparent international conviction in favour of inclusivity, Bell and Kitagawa (2024, p. 9) found that in their sample of 1230 intrastate peace agreements, CSAs had participated in 10.2%, with decreasing incidence over time. Additionally, inclusion is not a silver bullet or a progress-guarantee. Bell and O'Rourke (2007, p. 305–6) highlight that despite the importance of peace processes to theories of civil society, causality is very hard to conclusively confirm. Furthermore, inclusivity cannot be a box-ticking exercise: it must be strategic and well-designed at each modality, fitting into overarching processes and their greater societal contexts to function as theorised (Cuhadar & Paffenholz, 2020, pp. 666–67; Paffenholz 2014a, p. 4; Bell & Wise 2022, p. 399).[5]

[4] It should be noted that conditional to this relationship is that pre-agreement "repression of these non-state actors is not too onerous." (Bell & Kitagawa, 2024, p. 16)

[5] Dudouet and Lundström (2016, pp. 66–67) outlined "four possible formulas to combine participatory mechanisms while sustaining the interest of elites so that they do not act as 'spoilers': incremental inclusivity; thematic multi-arena inclusivity; parallel consultation forums with built-in binding mechanisms; and informal deadlock-breaking mechanisms within inclusive formal arenas." The work of Thania Paffenholz also deals extensively with these questions (e.g. Paffenholz, 2014a, 2014b; Cuhadar & Paffenholz, 2020).

Inclusivity and Durable Peace

Signing a peace agreement does not inherently result in lasting peace afterwards. A negotiated settlement may have been reached by elite-level bargaining, failing to address the foundations and impact of a conflict on broader society (Haspeslagh, 2020, p. 519). The fundamental issue is aptly summarised as: "the incentives for violence are often certain and specific to an individual or group, while the incentives for peace are often uncertain and diffuse" (World Bank Group & United Nations 2018, p. 219 referencing World Bank, 2017b). Inclusivity during a peace process is then seen as a mechanism to bring together these diffuse incentives and actors to "effectively deal with political, social and economic exclusion as a key conflict mobilisation factor" (Schädel & Dudouet, 2020, p. 9).

Although the 'handshake moment' signals the successful culmination of negotiations and the signing of the agreement(s), it also heralds a new process: implementation. Peace agreements may include expanding access to state power, economic resources, political participation, minority empowerment, or transitional justice processes in relation to inclusivity (Paladini & Molloy, 2019, p. 33). However, the realities of implementation are incredibly complex and often impeded by continued legacies of war, meaning that the peace brokered within negotiations and codified in an agreement may not last. In fact, Dudouet and Lundström (2016, p. 67) found that violence relapses – by both excluded and included parties – are often motivated by discontentment about the implementation of inclusive governance.

'Durable peace' is typically taken as the gold standard outcome for a successful peace process, and it is generally defined through the (lack of) post-agreement violence (Cuhadar & Druckman, 2024, pp. 361–62). Fundamental to durable peace is the adherence to the principles of procedural justice: fairness, transparency, representation, and voluntary agreement (Druckman & Wagner, 2019, p. 308). Druckman and Wagner (2019, p. 307) also find that procedural justice sets up a chain that allows micro-level interactions to eventually build into macro-level institutional changes. However, states of peace and conflict are not black and white. In the grey zone exist realities such as those of formalised political unsettlement, in which the central incompatibility is translated into political and legal institutions (Bell & Pospisil, 2017).

By adopting the lens of (de)polarisation, I hope to shine a light on the spectrum of "peace beyond the absence of war" (Höglund & Söderberg Kovacs, 2010, p. 389). Chenoweth (2017, p. 134) defines 'proactive peace' as "when people within societies resolve their differences through nonviolent action." Peace processes are one form of this – but as outlined earlier in this section, proactive peace is not always maintained. A common misconception within the field of peace and conflict research is that conflict and violence are synonymous, and peace and violence mutually exclusive – yet nonviolent conflict is a prominent phenomenon, and some forms of systemic violence do not rely on bloodshed. This research effort uses political polarisation as a means of gaining insight into this 'grey zone.'

Polarisation

Defining Polarisation

Polarisation's origins are often found in its strategic use by political elites in response to (objective or subjective) marginalisation as a way to gain and maintain power, particularly relative to their opponents (Somer & McCoy, 2018, pp. 4–5). Within this framework, ideology and social distance are commonly given as key features of polarisation. However, this limits one's understanding to the contexts of specific cases. Viewing polarisation through a process-centric approach is much more helpful for understanding it conceptually. Thus, I adopt the following definition: political polarisation is a "process of simplifying politics in ways that lead toward a binary division of society into mutually antagonistic camps" (McCoy et al., 2022, pp. 4–5). The process is fundamentally relational (i.e. 'us' vs. 'them') and instrumental (usually, someone stands to benefit).

Theories of Polarisation

Warning calls about increasing polarisation, both on an international level and nationally across the globe have been a mainstay of the past decade (Somer & McCoy, 2018, pp. 3–4). Fairly unique to the phenomenon is that the warning appears to apply to both more developing and consolidated democracies (Somer & McCoy, 2018, pp. 5). Polarisation in democratic contexts is a particularly tricky issue. By design, democracy functions on there being a degree of dissent amongst constituents. However, polarisation reflects a state where dissent heightens and consolidates around 'us vs. them' dynamics with several complex knock-on effects.

In the short term, there can even be democratic 'benefits' where polarisation galvanises increased civilian political engagement, and the stabilising of party identities (LeBas, 2011, 2014, 2018; Tilly, 2004). Polarisation can also foster negative partisanship, where votes are cast in opposition to the 'other' candidate instead of in favour of 'your' candidate (Abramowitz & McCoy, 2018). That being said, the Achilles' heel of such effects lies in the systematic disadvantage of efforts to defend democracy within a polarised climate. For example: unconstitutional efforts to remove polarising political figures (Slater & Arugay, 2018), the refusal to accept election results that favour populist candidates (Stavrakakis, 2018), or the use of dismissive and polarising language to mobilise against "undemocratic others" (Somer & McCoy, 2018, p. 6). Refusal to participate in polarising discourses, results in exclusion and the loss of the aforementioned 'democratic' benefits.

The highest level of polarisation is then known as 'pernicious polarisation,' and describes a state where extreme polarisation destabilises the foundational mechanisms of democracy. This process is driven by the exploitation by political elites of three primary grievance-types (Enyedi, 2005; Lebas, 2006). Political grievances refer to voters feeling unrepresented or unheard within their political system (McCoy & Somer, 2019, p. 240). Economic grievances can take the form of income inequality, relative deprivation, or insecurity in the face of economic crises (McCoy & Somer, 2019, pp. 240-241). Cultural grievances run along religious, moral, racial lines around themes of (perceived) rights, influence or status (McCoy & Somer, 2019, p. 241; Skitka & Morgan, 2014).

The knock-on effects of polarisation tap into fundamental social, psychological and organisational dynamics, which is what makes the phenomenon so difficult to reverse (McCoy et al., 2018). Because of the fundamental human nature of these dynamics, polarisation can "become self-propagating and spiral out of control" (Somer & McCoy, 2018, pp. 7–8). As a result, phenomena like democratic backsliding or democratic decline generally coincide with episodes of pernicious polarisation. Meanwhile, near-misses of a democratic breakdown in cases like Czechoslovakia and Finland are attributed to "polarisation reversals" – and are relatively rare due to polarisation's self-reinforcing escalatory dynamics (Somer & McCoy, 2018, p. 4). Polarisation dynamics can also be weaponised, and unsurprisingly, are often considered crucial to the mechanisms of 'authoritarian takeovers' and 'legal revolutions' as well as 'pre-emptive suspensions' of democracy (Somer & McCoy, 2018, p. 4).

Prior Research on Depolarisation

Whilst the dangers of polarisation – both pernicious and standard – are very real, resorting to fatalism is not the solution. *De*-polarisation is possible, and has been found to occur in approximately half of the incidences of pernicious polarisation between 1900 and 2020 (McCoy et al., 2022, pp. 1–2). The phenomenon is severely under-studied: McCoy et al. (2022)'s paper, which is cited extensively throughout this article, is amongst the first to identify and treat depolarisation as a distinct phenomenon. Building on their operational definitions, a depolarisation episode is defined as any five-year period during which a country's level of polarisation declined substantially from pernicious levels, without re-polarizing to above pernicious levels.

Depolarisation thus refers to a specific, episodic phenomenon – not just decreases overall. McCoy et al. (2022, pp. 14–15), in identifying the episodes, also find common contexts between cases. One cluster of cases follows armed struggles, which are then grouped into episodes after

the resolution of internal state conflict (civil war, ethnic conflict, revolution), after the resolution of inter-state conflict, and after the success of an independence movement (decolonisation, post-World War I). A second cluster follows a regime change (typically democratisation) or changes within a regime (typically liberalisation within autocratic regimes). The third and final cluster refers to cases where no systemic shocks or major changes could be linked to a depolarisation episode.

McCoy et al. (2022, p. 16) also highlight four key nuances to their findings. Depolarisation episodes can follow autocratisation, although this is very rare. Additionally, although liberal democracies are the least likely regime to experience pernicious polarisation, they are not immune. Furthermore, amongst liberal democracies there were no incidences of depolarisation from pernicious levels, which is interpreted as relating to democratic erosion as a consequence of pernicious polarisation.

Theoretical Argument

Based on the theoretical framework, the central argument I posit is as follows. Pernicious polarisation is marked by the division of society into mutually exclusive, antagonistic camps, which is a prominent characteristic of pre- and during-conflict societies. Peace processes seek to end a conflict by bringing together opposing factions of a conflict. To that end, inclusive peace processes extend additional invitations to selected NWPs to participate in the process. As inclusive peace processes have been consistently found to result in more durable peace, an inclusive peace process would reasonably be expected to increase the chances of post-conflict depolarisation. In line with this, an inclusive peace process would also be expected to result in decreased yearly polarisation levels, even if the conditions for a depolarisation episode may not be met. As a peace agreement is a common output of a peace process, inclusion in a peace agreement can be a way to reflect inclusivity in the larger peace process. This causal pathway is codified in the following hypotheses:

H1: *Inclusive peace agreements will increase the chances of depolarisation occurring in the affected society post-conflict.*

H2: *Inclusive peace agreements will result in decreased polarisation levels in the affected society post-conflict.*

Research Design

Datasets

The data core of this research is found in two datasets: the *PA-X Peace Agreements Database and Dataset* (PA-X; Bell & Badanjak, 2019), and the *Varieties of Democracy* dataset (V-Dem; (Coppedge et al., 2024; Pemstein et al., 2024). PA-X is a global database and repository of peace agreements; this paper uses the v8 edition which contains agreements from 1990 until 2023. The dataset contains detailed information on peace agreements, their contents, and their circumstances allowing for both quantitative and qualitative analysis. The dataset has a global scope, uses individual agreements as the unit of analysis. For this paper, I primarily use the variables that fall under "Basic Information," "Groups," and "Gender" (C. Bell et al., 2024). The V-Dem dataset is a comprehensive, detailed compilation of evaluations on democracy and quality of governance; this paper uses v14. For this research I predominantly use the political polarisation variable for which the scope is global, the unit of analysis country-year, and the timespan covered 1900-2023.

Operationalisations

Operationalising Polarisation

The base of both polarisation operationalisations is V-Dem v14 and its political polarisation variable *v2cacamps_osp*. The variable is operationalised through country expert responses to the question "Is society polarized into antagonistic, political camps?", with answers falling on an ordinal scale ranging from "0: Not at all. Supporters of opposing political camps generally

interact in a friendly manner" to "4: Yes, to a large extent. Supporters of opposing political camps generally interact in a hostile manner" (Coppedge et al., 2021, p. 224). Responses are then aggregated across coders using the Bayesian item response theory measurement model to ensure intercoder reliability (Coppedge et al., 2021, p. 32).

Taking this as a base, I operationalise polarisation in two different ways for this study. The first is as a binary variable based on whether McCoy et al (2022)'s operational definition for a depolarisation episode is met. That operational definition is as follows: "any five-year period during which a country's level of polarization declined from pernicious levels to below-pernicious levels (by a value of at least 0.4 on the polarization scale), without repolarizing above 3.0" (McCoy et al., 2022, p. 12). To create the variable, I translated this definition[6] into an R-script, testing for interpretation accuracy with the original list of episodes.[7] The second is as a continuous variable based directly on the political polarisation scores reported in V-Dem v14 (*v2cacamps_osp*; Coppedge et al., 2021). These use the original ordinal scale ranging from 0-4, and scores are led by one year to the IV data. Practically speaking, this means data on peace agreements signed in 1995 is analysed against polarisation scores from 1996. This was done to preserve time-order within the causal mechanism, with the assumption that any inclusivity-type activity would need time to affect society on a larger scale. Additional robustness tests are then done with polarisation scores lead by two and five years to the intervention, to try and facilitate some insight into medium-term effects.[8]

Inclusivity

For the purposes of this study, I interpret inclusion as whether a group is mentioned in the text of the agreement, as recorded in the PA-X database. PA-X codes inclusion in two ways: through binary and scalar variables. They denote, respectively, whether or not group X was mentioned in the text of an agreement, and the strength of group-specific provisions. In developing this research project, both variable types were tested and there was little to no variation in the results. For the sake of simplicity, I use only the binary variables. These are aggregated to a country-year level. As such, I primarily account for outcome-based inclusivity (Cuhadar & Druckman, 2024, pp. 360–61; Dudouet & Lundström, 2016, pp. 63–64).

Based on this, I use two operationalisations for inclusivity. To begin there is inclusivity within peace agreements on an aggregate level, which indicates whether or not *any* group was included in *any* of the peace agreements within a given country-year. Then, there is inclusivity disaggregated on a group-level, which refers to whether a *specific* NWP-group type is included in the text of *any* peace agreement in a given country-year. The group types come directly from the PA-X dataset and are as follows: children/youth, disabled persons, the elderly/age, racial/ethnic/national groups, religious groups, refugees/displaced persons, social classes, women, men, families, political parties, civil society, and traditional leaders. Additionally, it should be noted that PA-X also includes data on the inclusion of migrant workers, indigenous people, LGBTI people and 'other' groups. These are excluded from the models as individually each has too few observations to be able to meaningfully analyse a group's inclusion, nor do they naturally lend themselves to merging with another group.

Control Variables

There are two levels of control variables in this study: 'main' and 'full.' The 'main' subset

[6]McCoy et al. (2022) also proposed operationalisations for medium-term (10 years) and long-term depolarisation (until end of dataset). A code applying these definitions was also applied to the latest V-Dem data, but unfortunately neither option had enough cases to allow for meaningful statistical analysis with the methods I am using. I decided developing another method of analysis just for this was beyond the scope of the project, although I encourage this as a direction for future research.

[7]The script is stickier than McCoy et al. (2022)'s approach of individual analysis was. After testing various different versions of the script with varying degrees of stickiness, I decided the deciding factor would be trying to catch as many of the original cases as possible. 104/105, with some duplicates and additional cases, was the best result.

[8]Please note that I deviate from McCoy et al. (2022)'s definition of the short, medium and long term. The short term refers to the one-year lead condition, and medium term to effects after that first year.

includes the three variables theory would indicate to be most important; the 'full' set has an additional five control variables, which are relevant but are less prominent in the literature. The reason for this distinction was to transparently allow for comparison between the effectiveness of relatively simple and more complicated equations. Generally, the models using the 'full' set are analysed throughout this paper.

Included in the 'main' set are the degree of liberal democracy, conflict duration, and end year of a conflict episode. The 'degree of liberal democracy' variable is based on the *V-Dem Liberal Democracy Index* (LDI; *v2x_libdem*), indicating to what extent a government reflects the ideals of liberal democracy, taking into account the level of electoral democracy and limitations to the exercise of executive power (Coppedge et al., 2021). The choice of this variable is theoretically informed by Kew and Wanis-St. John (2008, p. 31), who find that democratic actors are necessary for indirect participation of civil society to have an effect on peace, and by McCoy et al. (2022, pp. 16, 23) who note a sort of preventative inoculation effect where liberal democracies rarely experience pernicious polarisation. Next, the 'conflict duration variable' was created by subtracting the starting year of a given conflict, as recorded in version 24.1 of the *UCDP Dyadic Dataset*, from the year in question (Pettersson, 2024; Harbom et al., 2008; Davies et al., 2024).[9] This control variable is theoretically informed by theories of intractability, which point to duration as an important factor for the entrenchment of conflict within a society (Kriesberg, 2010, p. 486). Finally, the 'end year of a conflict episode' variable is based on v.3 of the *UCDP Conflict Termination Dataset* (Kreutz, 2010), and the variable *ependdate*, which marks "the date, as precisely as possible, when a dyad or conflict is terminated" (Kreutz, 2021, p. 6). Using this, the variable is marked 1 if any dyad or conflict active within a country ends that year. The variable is theoretically informed by McCoy et al. (2022, p. 23)'s finding that almost 75% of depolarisation episodes occur after major systemic shocks, and by the fact that peace processes almost by definition tend to take place around such systemic shocks.

The additional five variables for the 'full' set are the conflict incompatibility average, conflict intensity level, conflict recurrence, ethnic fractionalisation index score, and whether or not multiple dyads or agreements were aggregated into a single country-year. 'Incompatibility average' is based on the *UCDP Dyadic Dataset* (v24) and its *incompatibility* variable (Davies et al., 2024; Harbom et al., 2008; Pettersson, 2024). The original variable is averaged to create a scale where 1 marks if only territory-based conflicts occur in a country-year, 2 if only government-based conflicts occur in a country-year, and 1.5 if both territory and government informed the conflicts occur in a country-year. Using this variable as a control was theoretically informed by Nilsson and Svensson (2023)'s study on inclusion in peace negotiations, who also account for the central incompatibility of a conflict. 'Intensity level' is based on the *UCDP Dyadic Dataset* (v24)'s *intensity_level* variable (Davies et al., 2024; Harbom et al., 2008). The original variable is averaged in the aggregation process to provide a more generalised view on the scale of ongoing violence per country-year: the closer to 2, the more violent it was. I included this variable as a control to complement the duration variable, and to further account for underlying factors feeding into conflict intractability (Kriesberg, 2010, p. 486). 'Recurrence' is based on the *UCDP Conflict Termination Dataset* (v.3) variable *recur* (Kreutz, 2010, 2021), which I adapt to reflect whether any of the conflicts in a given country-year are recurring conflicts. The choice of variable is informed by theories of protracted conflict and intractability (Walter, 2010, p. 5; Kriesberg, 2010, p. 486), as well as McCoy et al. (2022, p. 22)'s finding that there appears to be a strong cyclical element to pernicious polarisation. 'Ethnic fractionalisation' is based on the *Historical Index of Ethnic Fractionalization (HIEF)* dataset (Drazanova, 2020), which provides a longitudinal measure of diversity within a society. The variable forms an important theoretical complement to polarisation: whereas polarisation is

[9] If there are multiple ongoing conflicts, the average duration of all ongoing conflicts in a given year is taken to provide some measure of how long a country has been in some sort of conflict at a given point in time.

a measure of how divided a society is into two groups, fractionalisation accounts for the variety of groups a person can belong to (Drazanova, 2020, p. 2–8). Finally, the variable for 'multiple agreements' is an original binary variable to gauge the impact of the aggregation process on the dataset. Simply put, if multiple peace agreements were aggregated into a country-year in the preparation of either dataset, the variable reads 1.

Analytical Methods

The analysis uses two models, corresponding with the binary and continuous forms of the dependent variable data: logistic regressions with clustered standard errors, and fixed effects models. Because of the novel combination of data and the exploratory nature of this study, I am prioritising using simpler, more standard models with the hope of providing the groundwork for more sophisticated approaches.

Logistic Regressions with Clustered Standard Errors

Logistic regressions are standard when working with binary dependent variables, and use the logit function to calculate the probability of a certain outcome. The regression is interpreted by analysing the exponentiated coefficients of the variables, particularly those with statistically significant p-values. Within this paper these models estimate how inclusivity in a peace process affects the likelihood of a country entering a depolarisation episode.

The logistic regressions are run in both bivariate and multivariate form. Clustered standard errors (SE) are used as both datasets, once aggregated to the country-year unit of analysis, are set up as panel data. Clustered standard regressions allow the model to account for the fact that observations from the same country will not be independent from each other. Failing to account for this risks inflated significance in the analysis and improving the validity of p-values.

Fixed Effects Models

The other form of the dependent variable is continuous. For the analysis of such data I use fixed effects models. This is because fixed effects models control for time-invariant variables (e.g. countries), making it easier to isolate the impact of time-varying variables. This makes them a fundamental tool in the analysis of panel data. Coefficients are used to interpret the model, prioritising those with statistical significance. As fixed effects render it impossible to meaningfully analyse the constant, it is ignored.

The models are run in both bivariate and multivariate form. The time-invariant factor that is accounted for is the country, meaning that the output of the model should show the effects of inclusion in a peace agreement text within the context of the countries it targets. It should be noted that this does build on the aforementioned assumption that the effects of a peace process will only affect countries that are the central location of the conflict. Although secondary effects should not be discounted, I consider this an acceptable loss of nuance within the exploratory scope of this research project.

Model Selection, Goodness-of-Fit, and Multicollinearity

In designing this project, 2-way fixed effects models and mixed/random effects models were also considered and then tested. Due to the consistent similarity of the results of these additional models to the one-way fixed effects, the one-way fixed effects model was concluded to capture the main patterns in the data robustly enough.

Variance Inflation Factor tests were run on the full control variation of each of the 'main' models to check for multicollinearity between key predictor variables. In summary, almost all of the variables' results ranged between 1-2. Any which exceeded the 2.5 threshold but remained below 10 were kept and considered an acceptable risk due to their theoretical relevance (James et al., 2021, p. 102; Johnston et al., 2018, pp. 1958–59). Had any exceeded 10, they would have been excluded from the analysis.

Finally, throughout the results tables included

in the paper a few indicators are included to keep an eye on model goodness-of-fit. For logistic regressions, the Akaike Information Coefficient (AIC) and log likelihood scores are included in the results tables. For the fixed effects models, the R^2 and Adjusted R^2 are included in the results tables, as well as the residual standard errors (RSE) and the F-statistic. Overall, in this paper the models with 'full controls' consistently outperform those with fewer or no controls (respectively marked with 'main' and 'base' throughout).

Ethical Considerations

For this study, I did not work directly with any human research subjects. The data sources I used are well-established or have gone through rigorous standards before their publication. Thus, it seems that the ethical risks common to peace research – like tracing sensitive information and directly or indirectly harming the subject of the research – are relatively minimal in relation to the data being used. However, Hoover Green and Cohen (2021, pp. 2–4) raise that there are still downstream risks to research subjects as well as implicit assumptions about data accuracy. For example, informed consent may have been given for the initial purpose of the data collection; yet as desk datasets such as PA-X and V-Dem are used broadly this consent may not apply to the evolutionary trajectory of how the dataset is used. That being said, I believe that this particular risk is as minimal as it can be: the peace agreements included in PA-X are all public documents and were conceived as such; V-Dem's polarisation scores comprise of expert input specifically gathered for a large-scale public-facing dataset.

Furthermore, there are ethical risks relating to the questions central to the research project and the answers it may point to. As Hoover Green and Cohen (2021, pp. 4–5) highlight, it is vital not to lose sight of the human subjects that are hidden behind the numbers and figures in quantitative research. Throughout this paper I try to be consistent in contextualising the preliminary nature of the findings and their limitations. There is simply not enough information included in the models to have conclusive findings about the effectiveness of inclusion in general, as well as the effects of the inclusion of specific groups. Additionally, in this study I measure inclusion in a peace agreement based on whether a group is explicitly mentioned in the text of an agreement. However, mention is not a guarantee of actual active participation in the broader peace process or in post-agreement decision making.

Inclusivity can never be a silver bullet to polarisation – only a tool in the toolbox. The 'inclusivity hype' has resulted in some thoughtlessly 'inclusive' programmes that ultimately backfired on a larger peace process (Cuhadar & Paffenholz, 2020, pp. 666–67; Paffenholz, 2014a, p. 4; C. Bell & Wise, 2022, p. 399). It is vital to understand that effectiveness in a peace process is always deeply context-dependent and varies significantly on a case-by-case basis.

Analysis

The following section is structured in two parts. First are the regression analyses in which inclusion in a peace agreement is evaluated against the occurrence of a depolarisation episode, beginning with inclusion on an aggregated level and subsequently disaggregated by group. Second are the regression analyses of inclusion in a peace agreement against the yearly polarisation scores of a country, again beginning with inclusion operationalised aggregately and then disaggregated on a group level.

Aggregate inclusion refers to the inclusion of any NWP in the text of any peace agreements within a given country-year, as recorded in the PA-X database. When this is disaggregated, inclusion refers to the inclusion of a given type of NWP-group – such as references to women, religious groups, or youth within the text of peace agreements for a given country-year. For example, take the case of the *Agreement for Lasting Peace through the Permanent Cessation of Hostilities Between the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)* was signed in 2022. Beyond the permanent cessation of hostilities, the agreement features detailed provisions condemning sexual and gender-based violence; violence against children, girls, women and the elderly; and supporting family reunification. Thus,

in the dataset Ethiopia in 2022 scores an affirmative (1) for the aggregated inclusion variable, as does the inclusion of children, women, the elderly and families. The inclusion of racial or religious groups is scored with a negative (0), as these are not mentioned explicitly in the text of the agreement.

Included in the results tables are multiple variations of each model. Generally, this is the 'baseline' model, which includes only the independent variable and the dependent variable; the 'main controls' model, which includes the core control variables listed in the operationalisation section; and the 'full controls' model, which includes all control variables included in the study. This is done to be able to transparently show the effect of the control variables on the relationship and the size of the N in the model. However, only the full control models are analysed in detail as these are the more scientifically sound models.

Inclusive Peace Agreements vs. Depolarisation Episodes

The logistic regression models indicate how inclusion in a peace process affects the likelihood of a country entering a depolarisation episode. The results are presented first as log odds, which is also how they are in the results tables, and then converted into an odds ratio.

Table 1 presents the results of aggregate inclusion being evaluated against the occurrence of depolarisation episodes on a country-year level in a logistic regression model. With full controls, the log odds of a depolarisation episode are 0.636 with a standard error of 1.108. This translates to an odds ratio of 1.889, meaning that the inclusion of any NWP in the text of a peace agreement increases the odds of a depolarisation episode occurring by 88.9% – a strong, positive relationship. However, it should be noted that these results do not meet standards of statistical significance.

When inclusivity is disaggregated to the group level, a more detailed picture of the impact of different groups on the occurrence of a depolarisation episode comes into view. The full results are shown in full in Table 2. The analysis of the full control models is grouped as follows: statistically significant results with a negative impact on depolarisation odds, statistically significant results with a positive impact on depolarisation odds, and results that do not pass any statistical significance thresholds.

I begin with the three variables that have statistically significant results with a negative impact on depolarisation odds – meaning that the inclusion of these groups in the text of a peace agreement would have a net positive effect on polarisation. First, inclusion of racial groups has a log odds of -3.640 with a standard error of 1.853 which is significant at the 5% level. The subsequent odds ratio is 0.026, pointing to a decrease in the odds of a depolarisation episode occurring by 97.4%. Second, the inclusion of religious groups has log odds of -8.589 with a standard error of 4.654, translating to an odds ratio of almost 0 (0.000186 to be more precise) or a near 100% decrease in the odds of a depolarisation episode happening. This model is significant at the 10% level. Thirdly, the inclusion of general civil society has a log odds of -4.372 with a standard error of 2.153, significant at the 5% level. The subsequent odds ratio of 0.013 equates to a 98.7% decrease in the odds of a depolarisation episode occurring. In summary, the inclusion of racial, religious and general civil society groups all appear to have a strong, negative relationship to the occurrence of a depolarisation episode.

Table 1 – Logistic Regression of Aggregated Inclusion vs. Depolarisation Episodes (Clustered SEs, Log Odds)

Regression Table

Variable	Depolarisation Episodes		
	Baseline	**Main Controls**	**Full Controls**
inclusion_cy_any	1.342	0.514	0.636
	(1.064)	(1.179)	(1.108)
v2x_libdem	-	-11.147***	-11.205**
	-	(3.855)	(4.546)
duration	-	0.020	0.019
	-	(0.029)	(0.037)
end_year_ep	-	1.144	0.866
	-	(0.714)	(1.040)
incompatibility_avg	-	-	0.085
	-	-	(1.152)
intensity_level	-	-	-0.390
	-	-	(0.927)
recur_any	-	-	-0.129
	-	-	(0.926)
multiple_agrmts	-	-	-0.639
	-	-	(0.788)
hief_efindex	-	-	0.840
	-	-	(1.653)
Constant	-5.088***	-3.123**	-2.567
	(1.023)	(1.269)	(3.188)
N	683	363	247
Log Likelihood	-63.178	-36.092	-32.619
Akaike Inf. Crit.	130.356	82.185	85.239

*p < 0.1, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.01

Then, there are four groups whose inclusion has statistically significant, positive impact on the odds of a depolarisation episode occurring, and a negative impact on polarisation in general. The inclusion of women has a log odds of 3.463 with a standard error of 1.939, which translates to an odds ratio of 31.913 or a roughly thirtyfold (3,091%) increase in the odds of a depolarisation episode occurring. The result is significant at the 10% level. After that, the inclusion of disabled people has a log odds of 4.173 with a standard error of 1.977 in the controlled models. The resulting odds ratio is extremely large: 64.910. This would indicate that inclusion of disabled people in the text of a peace agreement increases the odds of a depolarisation episode by approximately sixtyfold (6,391%). The inclusion of refugees has a similar result: a log odds of 4.252 with a standard error of 1.728, and a resulting odds ratio of 70.246 – an increase in the odds of a depolarisation episode occurring by approximately seventyfold (6,925%). Both the results for the inclusion of disabled people and refugees are statistically significant at 5%. Lastly,

the inclusion of families in the text of a peace agreement has a log odds of 4.244 with a standard error of 1.472, significant at the 1% level. This corresponds to an odds ratio of 69.686 or a near-seventyfold (6,869%) increase in the odds of a depolarisation episode occurring. It's notable that all of these results have extremely large odds ratios, especially for the latter three. This could be indicative of data sparsity issues, which is possible given there were little over 100 incidences of depolarisation episodes. The issue is something I try to address with the second operationalisation, where I analyse the data against yearly polarisation scores. The results should thus be interpreted cautiously, and be taken as indicative of a possible relationship between the inclusion of women, disabled people, refugees, and families and depolarisation.

Finally, the inclusion of children, social class and political parties were all found to have positive effects on the odds of a depolarisation episode, although none met statistical significance thresholds. Interestingly, the inclusion of children and social class have similar results, with the former having a log odds of 0.741 and an odds ratio of 2.098, and the latter a log odds of 0.795 with an odds ratio of 2.214. The inclusion of political parties has a very big odds ratio, although not on par with the aforementioned: it had a log odds of 3.093 with a resulting odds ratio of 22.043. Next, the inclusion of the elderly, men, and traditional leaders all have negative effects on the odds of a depolarisation episode, all without meeting statistical significance thresholds. Within this group, the inclusion of the elderly and of men have comparable results with, respectively: a log odds of -2.033 yielding an odds ratio of 0.131, and a log odds of -2.151 resulting in an odds ratio of 0.116. The inclusion of traditional leaders has a much smaller impact with a log odds of -0.173, corresponding to an odds ratio of 0.841. All of these results can be indicative of weaker positive or negative relationships between the inclusion of these groups and the occurrence of a depolarisation episode. Yet, because none meet statistical significance thresholds considerable uncertainty remains about the direction and scale of the relationships.

A Note on Model Fit

It is important to note that the results of both the models of aggregated and disaggregated inclusion variables measured against polarisation episodes consistently have very large standard errors. The consequence of this is that many will have very wide confidence intervals, often including one and thus making it impossible for the results to meet the standards of statistical significance. This is likely due to the relatively small N once all controls were added. Worth noting is that for both the aggregate and the disaggregated models, the AIC improves significantly when control variables are added. This indicates that these variables are important to the explanatory power of the model. Furthermore, the log likelihood of both sets of models gets closer to zero as controls are added, once again indicating an improving model fit.

The aim of this study is primarily exploratory work as the sub-field of depolarisation research is in its infancy. This does not erase issues of validity, but does point to this being the best possible result with the data available at the time of analysis. To that end, the next section uses an operationalisation that is less restrictive by analysing the inclusion data against 'just' the polarisation scores of the years that follow inclusion in a peace agreement. The hope is to confirm patterns and add nuance to the relationships found.

Inclusive Peace Agreements vs. Yearly Polarisation Levels

The fixed effects models control for the country of the data, and so coefficients indicate the effects directly on polarisation levels within a country over time. The yearly polarisation scores are led against the inclusion data by one, two, and five years to provide some insight into potential variability in the short- and medium-term effects of inclusion. Thus, say any NWPs are included in a peace agreement in country X in the year Y (e.g. 2000), this results in a

Table 2 – Logistic Regression of Disaggregated Inclusion vs. Depolarisation Episodes (Clustered SEs, Log Odds)

Regression Table

Variable	Depolarisation Episodes		
	Baseline	**Main Controls**	**Full Controls**
GCh_cy_any	0.272	-0.087	0.741
	(0.858)	(1.027)	(1.560)
GDis_cy_any	0.953	2.127***	4.173**
	(0.671)	(0.705)	(1.977)
GAge_cy_any	-0.978	-1.821	-2.033
	(1.024)	(1.508)	(1.482)
GRa_cy_any	-0.024	-1.229	-3.640**
	(0.672)	(0.894)	(1.853)
GRe_cy_any	-2.506***	-4.241***	-8.589*
	(0.735)	(1.398)	(4.654)
GRef_cy_any	0.841	1.760	4.252**
	(0.696)	(1.075)	(1.728)
GSoc_cy_any	-0.094	1.212	0.795
	(0.959)	(0.866)	(1.409)
GeWom_cy_any	0.579	2.313	3.463*
	(0.777)	(1.480)	(1.939)
GeMe_cy_any	-0.824	-0.669	-2.151
	(0.946)	(0.856)	(1.330)
GeFa_cyv_any	1.104	1.843	4.244***
	(0.729)	(1.223)	(1.472)
PolPar_cy_any	1.232**	1.987**	3.093
	(0.542)	(0.971)	(2.922)
Civso_cy_any	0.351	-2.408*	-4.372**
	(0.816)	(1.343)	(2.153)
Tral_cy_any	-1.644	-1.514	-0.173
	(1.155)	(1.381)	(0.775)
v2x_libdem	-	-15.004***	-22.933***
	-	(5.598)	(7.071)
duration	-	-0.008	-0.030
	-	(0.035)	(0.068)
end_year_ep	-	1.510	1.846
	-	(1.089)	(2.080)
incompatibility_avg	-	-	0.014
	-	-	(1.728)

Table 2 – Continued
Regression Table

Variable	Depolarisation Episodes		
	Baseline	**Main Controls**	**Full Controls**
intensity_level	-	-	-0.560
	-	-	(0.990)
recur_any	-	-	-2.449
	-	-	(2.147)
multiple_agrmts	-	-	-1.478
	-	-	(0.976)
hief_efindex	-	-	-3.746
	-	-	(3.693)
Constant	-4.977***	-3.128**	0.181
	(0.648)	(1.222)	(5.128)
N	683	363	247
Log Likelihood	-54.473	-26.436	-19.496
Akaike Inf. Crit.	136.947	86.872	82.992

*p < 0.1, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.01

positive value for inclusion (1) in that country-year. The model then analyses that inclusion against the polarisation scores in the years Y+1 (e.g. 2001), Y+2 (e.g. 2002) and Y+ 5 (e.g. 2005). As with the logistic regressions, only the full-control models are analysed in-text but all three variations of a model (base, main controls, full controls) are included in-table for transparency. These additional models all exclusively use the Y+1 data.

Table 3 contains the results of aggregate inclusion regressed against yearly polarisation scores. Inclusion in the aggregate appears to increase a country's polarisation scores by 0.099 with a standard error of 0.073 one year on from inclusion; increase by 0.071 with a standard error of 0.075 two years after inclusion; and increase by 0.063 with a standard error of 0.069 five years after inclusion. These results do not meet statistical significance standards. Thus, it seems that when NWPs are included in a peace agreement, generally polarisation levels in subsequent years do increase slightly – but the increase tapers off with time, and the effect remains fairly uncertain.

Next, Table 4 shows the results of the fixed effects analysis of inclusion disaggregated to the group level against yearly polarisation levels. Again, analysis is focussed on the full-control models, for which yearly polarisation levels lead inclusion variables by one, two and five years. Results are sorted by groups who had directionally consistent and consistently significant results, groups with any significant result within the three year-leads checked, groups with directionally consistent results without statistical significance, and groups with mixed results without statistical significance.

The inclusion of disabled people and women both have consistent negative effects on polarisation scores in all three year-leads being tested. The inclusion of disabled people has a coefficient of -0.224 with a standard error of 0.079 one year after inclusion, significant at 1%; -0.143 with a standard error of 0.083 two years after inclusion, significant at 10%; and -0.154 with a standard error of 0.072 five years after inclusion, significant at 5%. Along similar lines, the inclusion of women in a peace agreement text correlates to an effect of -0.125 with a standard error of 0.069 in the first year,

Table 3 – Fixed Effects Model of Aggregated Inclusion vs. Yearly Polarisation Scores
Regression Table

Variable	Polarisation Scores				
	Baseline	**Main Controls 1y**	**Full Controls 1y**	**Full Controls 2y**	**Full Controls 5y**
inclusion_cy_any	0.034	0.080	0.099	0.071	0.063
	(0.041)	(0.055)	(0.073)	(0.075)	(0.069)
v2x_libdem	-	-2.040***	-1.390**	-0.716	-0.729
	-	(0.383)	(0.566)	(0.585)	(0.534)
duration	-	0.001	-0.005	-0.003	-0.004
	-	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
end_year_ep	-	-0.151***	-0.132**	-0.205***	-0.097
	-	(0.049)	(0.063)	(0.065)	(0.060)
incompatibility_avg	-	-	0.244*	0.325**	0.124
	-	-	(0.132)	(0.137)	(0.125)
intensity_level	-	-	0.005	-0.056	-0.074
	-	-	(0.072)	(0.074)	(0.068)
recur_any	-	-	0.020	0.075	0.038
	-	-	(0.072)	(0.075)	(0.068)
multiple_agrmts	-	-	-0.038	-0.001	-0.013
	-	-	(0.050)	(0.051)	(0.047)
hief_efindex	-	-	-1.846	-1.726	-5.177***
	-	-	(1.524)	(1.576)	(1.437)
Constant	2.615***	2.886***	3.744***	3.363***	6.406***
	(0.095)	(0.117)	(1.121)	(1.159)	(1.057)
N	679	363	247	247	247
R^2	0.851	0.858	0.885	0.873	0.884
Adjusted R^2	0.828	0.829	0.851	0.834	0.849
Residual Std. Error	0.371	0.320	0.312	0.322	0.294
	(df = 586)	(df = 301)	(df = 189)	(df = 189)	(df = 189)
F-Statistic	36.405***	29.801***	25.581***	22.716***	25.195***
	(df = 92; 586)	(df = 61; 301)	(df = 57; 189)	(df = 57; 189)	(df = 57; 189)

*p < 0.1, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.01

significant at 10%; -0.176 with a standard error of 0.073 in the second year, significant at 5%; and -0.170 with a standard error of 0.063 in the fifth year, significant at 1%. These results point to strong, consistent, and negative relationships between polarisation levels and the inclusion of disabled people and the inclusion of women in the text of a peace agreement. They average out to decreasing polarisation scores by roughly 15-20%. Interestingly, the inclusion of disabled people appears to have a slow and slight decrease in scale over time; whereas the inclusion of women appears to grow slightly after the first year and then remains steady in the medium term.

Following these, the strongest results are seen with groups in which one of the year-leads has statistically significant results. I'll begin with the inclusion of racial groups and refugees, which both have significant results in the one-year lead condition. The inclusion of racial groups has a positive effect of 0.117 with a standard error of 0.070 in the first year, which is significant at the 10% level; a positive effect of 0.005 with a standard error of 0.074 in the second year; and a negative effect of -0.019 with a standard error of 0.064 in the fifth year. Subsequently, the inclusion of refugees corresponds to an increase of 0.125 with a standard error of 0.061 in the first year, which is significant at the 5% level; an increase of 0.061 with a standard error of 0.064 in the second year; and a decrease of -0.007 with a standard error of 0.055 in the fifth year. Notably, the results for both these groups seem to mirror each other: correlating with a strong increase of polarisation levels in the first year, which then tapers off in the second, and ultimately flips to a decreasing effect by the five-year lead condition.

On the other hand, the inclusion of social class and political parties both have significant results in the five-year lead condition. To start, the inclusion of social class in a peace agreement has a positive coefficient of 0.032 with a standard error of 0.088 in the first year; a positive coefficient of 0.078 with a standard error of 0.092 in the second year; and a positive coefficient of 0.171 with a standard error of 0.080 in the fifth, which is significant at the 5% level. Then, the inclusion of political parties has a positive correlation coefficient of 0.067 with a standard error of 0.071 in the first year; a negative correlation coefficient of -0.023 with a standard error of 0.075 in the second year; and a positive correlation coefficient of 0.211 with a standard error of 0.065 in the fifth year, which is significant at the 1% level. Put together, it seems that inclusion of social class generally corresponds with increasing polarisation, but that this relationship becomes more significant and bigger in the medium term. The inclusion of political parties has a less clear-cut impact: small but fluctuating impact in the shorter term, yet growing to a significant positive relationship by the medium term.

Following these, there are several groups whose correlation coefficients had a consistent direction yet were never statistically significant. These results can be used to point out a general direction of the relationship, but should be understood as still fairly uncertain. The inclusion of the elderly had a consistently positive impact on polarisation, with coefficients of 0.031 at one year after inclusion; 0.062 two years after inclusion; and 0.023 five years after inclusion. However, the inclusion of families is paired with a consistent decrease of polarisation levels with a coefficient of -0.006 in the first year; -0.032 in the second year; and -0.022 in the fifth. Somewhat comparably, the inclusion of traditional leaders has a negative correlation coefficient of -0.037 in the first year; a negative coefficient of -0.040 in the second year; and a negative coefficient of -0.023 in the fifth year.

Table 4 – Fixed Effects Model of Disaggregated Inclusion vs. Yearly Polarisation Scores
Regression Table

Variable	Polarisation Scores				
	Baseline	**Main Controls 1y**	**Full Controls 1y**	**Full Controls 2y**	**Full Controls 5y**
GCh_cy_an	0.029	0.050	0.014	-0.010	-0.008
	(0.049)	(0.061)	(0.071)	(0.074)	(0.064)
GDis_cy_any	-0.174***	-0.168**	-0.224***	-0.143*	-0.154**
	(0.060)	(0.068)	(0.079)	(0.083)	(0.072)
GAge_cy_any	0.046	0.040	0.031	0.062	0.023
	(0.063)	(0.072)	(0.086)	(0.091)	(0.079)
GRa_cy_any	0.083*	0.153***	0.117*	0.005	-0.019
	(0.045)	(0.055)	(0.070)	(0.074)	(0.064)
GRe_cy_any	-0.020	-0.096*	-0.058	0.075	0.090
	(0.046)	(0.052)	(0.063)	(0.066)	(0.057)
GRef_cy_any	0.045	0.069	0.125**	0.061	-0.007
	(0.041)	(0.051)	(0.061)	(0.064)	(0.055)
GSoc_cy_any	-0.001	-0.019	0.032	0.078	0.171**
	(0.070)	(0.075)	(0.088)	(0.092)	(0.080)
GeWom_cy_any	-0.101**	-0.098	-0.125*	-0.176**	-0.170***
	(0.049)	(0.060)	(0.069)	(0.073)	(0.063)
GeMe_cy_any	0.007	0.054	0.037	0.078	-0.053
	(0.057)	(0.062)	(0.075)	(0.079)	(0.069)
GeFa_cy_any	-0.057	-0.029	-0.006	-0.032	-0.022
	(0.046)	(0.054)	(0.065)	(0.068)	(0.059)
PolPar_cy_any	0.091*	0.057	0.067	-0.023	0.211***
	(0.054)	(0.060)	(0.071)	(0.075)	(0.065)
Civso_cy_any	0.056	-0.00005	-0.035	-0.018	0.031
	(0.038)	(0.048)	(0.057)	(0.060)	(0.052)
Tral_cy_any	0.046	0.062	-0.037	-0.040	-0.023
	(0.046)	(0.051)	(0.065)	(0.068)	(0.059)
v2x_libdem	-	-1.913***	-0.945	-0.402	-0.177
	-	(0.392)	(0.588)	(0.617)	(0.537)
duration	-	0.0003	-0.007**	-0.004	-0.006*
	-	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.003)
end_year_ep	-	-0.160***	-0.137**	-0.202***	-0.080
	-	(0.049)	(0.064)	(0.067)	(0.058)
incompatibility_avg	-	-	0.233*	0.323**	0.056
	-	-	(0.135)	(0.142)	(0.123)

Table 4 – Continued
Regression Table

Variable	Polarisation Scores				
	Baseline	**Main Controls 1y**	**Full Controls 1y**	**Full Controls 2y**	**Full Controls 5y**
intensity_level	-	-	-0.020	-0.063	-0.101
	-	-	(0.071)	(0.075)	(0.065)
recur_any	-	-	-0.007	0.043	0.003
	-	-	(0.073)	(0.076)	(0.067)
multiple_agrmts	-	-	0.014	0.052	0.020
	-	-	(0.054)	(0.057)	(0.049)
hief_efindex	-	-	-1.641	-1.796	-5.164***
	-	-	(1.500)	(1.574)	(1.369)
Constant	2.668***	2.958***	3.742***	3.549***	6.734***
	(0.095)	(0.110)	(1.111)	(1.166)	(1.014)
N	679	363	247	247	247
R^2	0.857	0.867	0.897	0.882	0.902
Adjusted R^2	0.831	0.834	0.857	0.837	0.864
Residual Std. Error	0.367	0.316	0.305	0.320	0.278
	(df = 574)	(df = 289)	(df = 177)	(df = 177)	(df = 177)
F-Statistic	33.060***	25.849***	22.385***	19.247***	23.686***
	(df = 104; 574)	(df = 73; 289)	(df = 69; 177)	(df = 69; 177)	(df = 69; 177)

*p < 0.1, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.01

Incidentally, all three groups appear to have fairly stable positive and negative impacts on polarisation, each experiencing a small bump in scale at the two-year lead condition. However, as none are statistically significant, these results should be interpreted cautiously.

Lastly, there are groups whose inclusion does not seem to have a consistent effect. This refers to the inclusion of children, religious groups, men and civil society. First, the inclusion of children corresponds with a polarisation level increase of 0.014 in the first year; a decrease of -0.010 in the second year; and a decrease of -0.008 in the fifth year after inclusion. Second, the inclusion of religious groups has a negative correlation of -0.058 in the first year; a positive correlation of 0.075 in the second year; and a positive correlation of 0.090 in the fifth. Third, the inclusion of men corresponds with an increase of 0.037 in the first year; an increase of 0.078 in the second year; but a decrease of -0.053 in the fifth year. Fourth, the inclusion of general civil society corresponds with decreasing polarisation scores by -0.035 in the first year; decreasing by -0.018 in the second year; and increasing by 0.031 in the fifth year. The highly variable results for these groups could point towards a complex, time-sensitive relationship between their inclusion and polarisation scores. However, the current data does not allow much further insight into this; and none of the results meet statistical significance standards.

A Note on Model Fit

As with the logistic regressions, the results of the fixed effects models also often have relatively large standard errors which can once again be explained by the relatively small N. Also as with the logistic regressions, I do not consider this to

be too much of an issue as these results should be taken as a preliminary mapping out of potential relationships.

Then, looking at the broader performance statistics of the models we see that the inclusion of the control variables generally improves the performance of the models. For the models using aggregated inclusion measures, the R^2 shows us that roughly 88% of the variation in the data is explained by the full control models compared to the baseline model which has an explanatory power of 85%. For the models using disaggregated operationalisations of inclusion, the R^2 statistic goes from 86% of the variation in the data being explained by the baseline model to 88-90% for the models with control variables.

The Adjusted R^2, which adjusts for complexity, yields comparable results. For models using aggregated inclusion measurements 83-85% of the variation in the data is explained by the models with full controls compared to 83% for the baseline model. Similarly, the Adjusted R^2 for the models using disaggregated inclusion variables shows 83% of the variation being explained in the baseline model to 84-86% being explained in the full control models.

Finally, the smallest RSE's are seen in the models with more controls, thus also indicating a better predictive fit. This pattern recurs across both the aggregated and disaggregated groups of models.[10]

Additional Findings: Analysing Patterns in Control Variables

There were a few patterns in the control variables which stood out across the various models. Below I highlight the overarching patterns and significant results for each variable; detailed results can be found in the results tables.

At first glance, the variable controlling for the degree of liberal democracy of a state (*v2x_libdem*) appeared to have contradictory effects. In the logistic regression models the variable had odds ratios of nearly 0 (specifically, 0.000136 for the aggregated mode and 0.0000000000110 for the disaggregated model). These results were significant at the 5% and 1% levels, respectively, and would indicate a net increasing effect on polarisation. Yet the fixed effects models indicated a broadly negative effect on polarisation levels. In the aggregated model, correlation coefficients were -1.390 in the first year, -0.716 in the second year, and -0.729 in the fifth, of which only the first year met statistical significance thresholds at 5%. In the disaggregated model, the coefficients were -0.0945 in the first year, -0.402 in the second, and -0.177 in the fifth. None of the coefficients was statistically significant. The apparent contradiction in these results can be explained by the fact that most instances of pernicious polarisation occur outside of liberal democracies (McCoy et al., 2022, p. 16). As such, liberal democracies are also less likely to undergo depolarisation episodes in general, perhaps explaining the negative effect on this operationalisation of the outcome variable. McCoy et al. (2022, p. 16) also describes the inoculation effect of liberal democracy against polarisation, which could explain the negative effect on direct polarisation scores. Interestingly, the effect seems particularly prominent in the first year.

The variable controlling for the duration of a conflict (*duration*) generally has a small, net negative effect for polarisation in a country. One model has statistically significant results, namely the disaggregated fixed effects model. In this model the coefficient for the first year is -0.007 and significant at the 5% level; for the second year was -0.004 but not statistically significant; and for the fifth year -0.006 and significant at the 10% level. The pattern of slightly bigger negative effects in the first and fifth year recurs in the aggregated model, although none of these coefficients meets statistical significance standards. Thus it would seem that the duration of a conflict has a small negative effect on polarisation levels, which may be more pronounced directly after the conflict and in the medium term. This is curious, as the bigger the duration variable, the longer the conflict has gone on – which in the literature is associated with issues of intractability and entrenchment (e.g. Kriesberg, 2010).

[10] Additional ZIF-tests were also run on all models, and showed no indications of collinearity concerns. These have been excluded from the current publication in the interest of space, but can be found in full in the original thesis.

Next, the variable accounting for whether the year of an agreement was also the end year of an episode of conflict (*end_year_ep*) has mixed results in the logistic regressions. However, in the fixed effects models a consistent pattern emerges. In the aggregated model, the correlation coefficients are -0.132 in the first year, -0.205 in the second year, and -0.097 in the fifth year; of these the first and second year-lead conditions are significant at 5% and 1% respectively. The disaggregated model parallels this, with coefficients of -0.137 in the first year, -0.202 in the second year, and -0.080 in the fifth year. As with the aggregated model, the first and second year-lead conditions are respectively significant at the 5% and 1% levels. Note that the variable was binary, where 1 indicated that the agreement and episode-end years were the same. From this, I conclude that it seems chronological proximity between an agreement being signed and the end of a conflict is particularly important for decreasing polarisation in the short term. This makes sense: if a state of conflict is the pinnacle of pernicious polarisation, the post-conflict state should be less polarised.

The type of incompatibility (*incompatibility_avg*) appears to have a mixed impact on polarisation overall. In both logistic regressions, the variable had a small, positive but not statistically significant effect on the odds of a depolarisation episode. Yet here too there is a consistent pattern in the fixed effects models' results. The aggregated model had correlation coefficients of 0.244 in the one-year lead setup, 0.325 in the two-year lead setup, and 0.124 in the five-year lead setup. The disaggregated inclusion models had correlation coefficients of 0.233 at one year; 0.323 at two years; and 0.056 at five years. For both models, the results for the one-year and two-year leads were statistically significant at the 10% and 5% levels respectively. The way this variable was set up means that a lower score indicated territory-based conflicts, and a higher score indicated government-based conflicts. Thus it seems that more government-based conflicts correlate with increased polarisation after the conflict, particularly in the short term.

Then, accounting for the historical ethnic fractionalisation (*hief_efindex*) within a country has mixed results in the logistic regressions, but a consistent pattern where the five year-lead condition was significant at the 1% level in both fixed effects models. The coefficients for the aggregated models were -1.846 in the first year; -1.726 in the second year; and -5.177 in the fifth year. The disaggregated inclusion model had regression coefficients of -1.641 in the first year; -1.796 in the second year; and -5.164 in the fifth year. It's also notable that both five year-lead coefficients are substantially larger than the short-term indicators. So it seems that, at least in the medium term, the historic diversity of a society significantly decreases polarisation levels after a conflict. This may point to a secondary inoculation-type effect, similar to that of liberal democracy.

Finally, the remaining control variables have no statistically significant results. The variable accounting for the intensity of a conflict (*intensity_level*) has a negative effect on the odds of a depolarisation episode occurring. However, in the fixed effects models it has a positive effect on polarisation levels in the first year, followed by a negative effect on polarisation levels two and five years later – perhaps pointing to some sort of 'turning point.' The variable for whether a conflict is a recurrence of a previous conflict (*recur_any*) generally has a net positive effect on polarisation. The logistic regression results have odds ratios pointing to a decrease in the odds of a depolarisation episode; the fixed effects models generally have small but positive coefficients pointing to increasing polarisation levels. This matches expectations based on prior research into conflict recurrence and intractable conflicts (e.g. Walter, 2010; David Mason et al., 2011; Loyle & Appel, 2017). Lastly, the variable controlling for whether multiple peace agreements were signed in a given country-year (*multiple_agrmts*) has very mixed results. In both logistic regressions the odds ratios indicate a decrease in the odds of a depolarisation episode. However, the fixed effects model with aggregated inclusion has consistent, negative coefficients whereas the model with disaggregated inclusion has consistent, positive coefficients. This may indicate that whether or not there are multiple agreements going into effect simply does not matter for polarisation levels on a more macroscopic level.

Analysis & Discussion

This section contains summaries of the overarching trends between and across models, as well as their implications when contextualised in theories of inclusivity, polarisation, and peace.

Cross-Model Comparison: Inclusion in the Aggregate

In the logistic regression model, the impact of aggregate inclusion on the occurrence of a depolarisation episode has an odds ratio of 1.889 or increases the odds of a depolarisation episode occurring by 88.9%. For the fixed effects model, the correlation coefficients of the aggregate inclusion variables indicate an increase in polarisation levels of 0.099 with a standard error of 0.073 one year on from inclusion; an increase of 0.071 with a standard error of 0.075 two years after inclusion; and an increase of 0.063 with a standard error of 0.069 five years after inclusion. None of the results is statistically significant.

These mixed results point towards seemingly contradictory effects: inclusion generally in the text of a peace agreement both seems to substantially contribute towards the likelihood of a depolarisation episode occurring in a country, whilst also still correlating with small increases in actual polarisation levels in a country. I think the explanation for this lies in the operational definition of a depolarisation episode, which was quite strict and identified only 123 episodes within the V-dem data. On the other hand, the polarisation levels operationalisation simply looks directly at the polarisation scores. Thus it only captures broad and likely more superficial patterns for polarisation scores – not necessarily systematic depolarisation. So, I tentatively draw the conclusion that inclusive peace agreements do not automatically decrease polarisation levels, but they may improve the chances for systemic, substantial depolarisation occurring post-conflict in a country. Further research is needed to determine the strength of this potential relationship. I suggest starting by exploring the operational area between the depolarisation episode and yearly polarisation levels.

Cross-Model Comparison: Inclusion Disaggregate

In the following sub-section I compare the key patterns in results across the logistic regression and the fixed effects model. These are grouped accordingly: results that align in net effect on polarisation and statistical significance, results that align in net effect but not fully on statistical significance, results that do not align in net effect but somewhat on statistical significance, results that are significant in only one of the models, and results where no clear broader pattern can be found.

To start, the results on the inclusion of disabled people and women are the strongest and most consistent throughout the data. In the logistic regression, both have significant and extremely large positive effects on the odds of depolarisation – indicating a net negative effect on polarisation overall. In the fixed effects models, both have statistically significant coefficients at all three year-lead conditions, and all indicate a negative effect on polarisation scores. These results are particularly notable for three reasons. The results of the fixed effects appear to confirm the results of the logistic regression – pointing to a very strong relationship, although the scales indicated by the logistic regression (of a 30-fold and 60-fold increase in odds, respectively) should still be interpreted cautiously. Regarding the inclusion of women, it aligns with prior research on the issue (e.g. Nilsson, 2012; Krause et al., 2018). Regarding the inclusion of disabled people, the results' strength is especially interesting due its nearly ubiquitous absence in prior research – and so seems a particularly promising area for future research.

Following this, the results on the inclusion of families and racial groups in the texts of peace agreements align directionally albeit not fully in terms of significance. The inclusion of families in the logistic regression model has a positive, statistically significant effect on the odds of a depolarisation episode, and so a net negative effect on polarisation overall. In the fixed effects models, inclusion of families has a consistent, negative effect on polarisation but does not meet any statistical significance standards. On the other

hand, the inclusion of racial groups in the logistic regression model has a significant, negative effect on the odds of a depolarisation episode, indicating a net positive effect on polarisation. The fixed effects models indicate that the inclusion of racial groups also has an increasing effect on polarisation in the short term, which is statistically significant one-year after inclusion. For these two groups it seems that there is a clear impact on polarisation, but the relationship may be weaker, more layered, or chronologically complex than the inclusion of disabled people and women.

Next, the results of the inclusion of refugees appear to contradict each other. In the logistic regression model the variable has a statistically significant and positive effect on depolarisation – although it should be noted that this result has an outsized scale and should be interpreted cautiously. Yet in the fixed effects model, the variable has a statistically significant positive coefficient one year after inclusion. After the first year, the effect appears to taper off and flips to a decreasing effect on polarisation by the five year-lead condition. From this I tentatively conclude that the inclusion of refugees in an agreement has a strong and sizable net negative effect on polarisation, although it may need to overcome initial resistance at first. The result is notable due to its strength, and the complex relationship established by prior research between conflict, migration patterns, the long-term stability of a country, and the relationship between refugees and politics (e.g. Carl, 2019; World Bank Group & United Nations, 2018).

There are four groups whose inclusion is significant in only one of the two models. For the logistic regressions, the inclusion of religious and civil society groups has a negative and statistically significant impact on depolarisation episode odds, yet shows no clear pattern or statistical significance in the fixed effects model. This is a particularly important avenue for future research, due to the prominence of religious and civil society peace mediation – it may be that different forms of inclusion yield different results, particularly for this group of actors (see e.g. Nilsson & Svensson, 2023). For the fixed effects model, the inclusion of social class and political parties has a significant and positive effect on polarisation at the five year lead-mark. However, both results in the logistic regression meet no statistical significance benchmarks, and the results indicate a positive effect on depolarisation – which is the opposite net effect to the fixed effects model. It's not clear why this is the case, and future research is needed to further disentangle this relationship. As with the religious and civil society groups, this would be particularly important due to the prominence of political parties in many peace negotiations.

Ultimately, we have the results of groups whose inclusion has no clear cross-dataset patterns: children, men, the elderly and traditional leaders. Whilst in the logistic regression the inclusion of children has a positive effect on depolarisation odds, and the inclusion of men has a negative effect on depolarisation odds, neither result was statistically significant. For the fixed effects model, there are also no statistically significant coefficients, and the coefficients do not point in any consistent direction. But for the inclusion of the elderly and traditional leaders, there is a consistent positive and negative respective effect on polarisation scores in the fixed effects models, albeit without statistical significance. In the logistic regression both groups have a negative effect on depolarisation odds, and do not meet statistical significance thresholds. As a result, there are no robust conclusions that can be drawn from the results of these variables.

Limitations

The primary objections to this work that I can see fall into two categories: operative and analytical. Operationally, there is an assumption of comparability that I make which can be questioned. The operationalisation of inclusivity in peace agreements only records the mention of a specific group in a peace agreement and thus does not fully account for inclusion in the negotiation process, quality of inclusion in agreement, and follow-through of inclusion in the implementation phase. Future research could use Bell and Kitagawa (2024)'s fine-grained original data, which also uses the PA-X dataset and identifies civil society signatories to agreements. Additionally, as mentioned in the research design section, for the

thesis that this paper is based on, I did tests for the 'quality of inclusion' using the PA-X's scalar inclusion variables (Erenstein, 2025). However, this yielded no meaningful variation in results. In the original thesis I also accounted for inclusion in negotiations by testing the polarisation data against Nilsson and Svensson (2023)'s Non-Warring Actors in Peacemaking dataset.

Analytically, the primary aim of this paper is exploratory research, as research on *de*-polarisation is in its infancy. Because of this I make the strategic decision to use relatively simple models, and do the brunt of robustness testing through various different combinations and permutations of the data. Included in this paper is a small sample of these tests, worked out in full. The larger set of approximately 300 tests can be found in the aforementioned thesis (Erenstein, 2025). Even so, the limiting implications are seen when the inclusion of specific group-types yields confounding results. This is likely because the data inherently treats all actors within a group-type as homogenous, despite this not being reflective of reality (see e.g. Von Burg, 2015). Furthermore, the large range in incidences of inclusion for a given group is likely to impact the quality of the results. Indeed, the inclusion of migrant workers, indigenous people, LGBTI people and 'other' groups is recorded within the PA-X dataset, yet are excluded from the models in this paper.

The main alternative explanations challenge two core assumptions in the premise of this study. There is an assumption that after a peace process occurs – codified through the presence of a peace agreement – a country is no longer in conflict. The issue with this assumption is addressed in the theoretical framework, and I try to account for it through the 'end of a conflict episode' control variable. Even so, it is impossible to reliably tell if the polarisation scores reflect those of an active conflict, a latent conflict, an unstable peace or even a robust peace. This is partially addressed through the LDI scores. Additionally, both conflict and polarisation have strong recurrence dynamics. It seems likely that these would interact, but to the best of my knowledge, this has not been previously researched. I was unable to figure out how to account for this possible interaction effect within the scope of this effort. Unpacking this would be an interesting and likely promising direction for future research into the phenomena.

Conclusion

The aim of this research is to shed some light on the grey zone of "peace beyond the absence of war" (Höglund & Söderberg Kovacs, 2010, p. 389) by starting to unpack the mechanisms behind depolarisation. This is done by combining country-year level data on inclusivity in peace agreements with data on political polarisation, from two different datasets: PA-X and V-Dem respectively. Based on this data, four different models are analysed: two logistic regressions and two fixed effects models. The logistic regressions use an operationalisation of depolarisation episodes based on the work of McCoy et al. (2022), and approach inclusivity first in aggregate and then disaggregated form. The fixed effects models use an operationalisation of polarisation levels that directly reflect the political polarisation scores attributed in V-Dem to a given country-year. As with the logistic regressions, they approach inclusivity first in aggregate and then disaggregated by group.

Some preliminary conclusions are reached based on the strongest results. The inclusion of both women and disabled people in the text of a peace agreement consistently and statistically significantly correlates with a net decrease in polarisation. The former is in line with the robust body of work on the impact of women's inclusion in peace processes; the latter is surprising because of its strength clashes with its relative absence within prior research. Less consistently statistically significant, the inclusion of families correlates with a net decrease in polarisation, and the inclusion of racial groups with a net increase in polarisation. Additionally, the inclusion of refugees correlates with a statistically significant increase to the odds of depolarisation, yet simultaneously correlates with a statistically significant increase to short-term polarisation levels. This nuance is difficult to fully address with the current models, but not surprising given the complex relationship established by prior re-

search between conflict, migration patterns, the long-term stability of a country, and the frequent politicisation of refugees. Inclusion in aggregate, and the inclusion of religious groups, civil society, social class, political parties, children, men, the elderly, and traditional leadership all had mixed results with no clear, consistent patterns to draw conclusions from.

On a policy level, these results may – and should – complicate the 'inclusivity hype.' Fundamentally, the findings reinforce the understanding that although the data may treat the groups as uniform actors, this is not reflective of reality. Women's groups will not always advocate for the same rights or reforms (Von Burg, 2015), and the inclusion of women in a peace agreement may refer to increasing access to societal good or to provisions to protect them from sexual and gender-based violence. Similarly, mentions of youth in a peace agreement may refer to justice for child soldiers but also systematic educational reforms. None is inherently 'better' than the other, but these group-level results must be understood as general, aggregated indications of potential relationships. Consequently, they are limited in what they can actually say about the nuanced qualities of these relationships – further research and case knowledge are needed to untangle their intricacies.

From the work in this paper, we cannot conclusively say that the inclusivity, or the inclusion of certain groups, during a peace process causes depolarisation or a decrease in polarisation. However, I can conclude that inclusion – under certain circumstances – clearly seems to contribute to creating the initial conditions which allow depolarisation and decreases in polarisation levels to occur. To that end, I am reminded of the words of Kew and Wanis-St. John (2008, 11): "Sustainability of peace surely rests on causes as complex and dynamic as the initiation of war does."

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Customary Pathways to Justice

Transitional Mechanisms of Reconciliation in Malawi's Post-Authoritarian Transition

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Abstract

Malawi's transition from an entrenched authoritarian regime under the Malawi Congress Party (MCP) led by Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda – the country's first president following independence – to a multi-party democracy in 1994 remains a distinctive case within African transitional justice debates. Unlike states that pursued highly institutionalised truth commissions or formal legal accountability, Malawi's transition unfolded without a truth commission, no structured public hearings, and no official reparations framework. Yet the country avoided large-scale post-authoritarian violence. This article examines how Malawians navigated the legacies of fear, repression, and collective trauma by relying on customary institutions, religious networks, and community-based mechanisms of reconciliation. Drawing on secondary literature and evidence from interviews captured in the documentary, *PAC & Malawi's 20 Years of Multi-Party Democracy (2013),* the study argues that religious actors, chiefs, and community elders served as de facto mediators and custodians of moral authority. Their actions, from the clandestine distribution of the 1992 Pastoral Letter to political mediation, reflects a model of grassroots transitional justice rooted in cultural legitimacy. With comparative insights, the article demonstrates that Malawi developed a hybrid reconciliation model grounded in dialogue and communal truth-telling. However, the absence of formal truth-seeking produced enduring challenges in civic education, memory formation, gender justice, and accountability. The paper concludes by proposing complementary mechanisms that can reinforce Malawi's hybrid reconciliation landscape.

Key words: *Malawi, Transitional Justice, Customary Justice, Reconciliation, Public Affairs Committee, Authoritarianism, Truth-Telling, African Peacebuilding*

Introduction

Malawi's political transition from a centralised one-party regime under Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda to a multi-party system in 1994 represents one of the most peaceful yet least formally structured transitions on the African continent. In contrast to South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Rwanda's *Gacaca* courts, or Sierra Leone's hybrid tribunal, Malawi undertook no national truth commission, initiated no formal programme of transitional justice, and implemented no state-led mechanism for public truth-telling or official accountability. Despite this absence, the country did not descend into cycles of revenge or destabilising political violence. Instead, reconciliation unfolded through community-driven, customary, and religious structures that had long governed social relationships and mediated everyday disputes, and which helped manage social tensions during and after the transition.

This paradox of *peace without a formal truth process* invites a deeper examination of how Malawians navigated the legacies of repression, fear, arbitrary detention, political violence, and structural inequalities. Malawi's democratic transition has attracted increasing scholarly attention. Studies of Malawi's political evolution highlight the persistence of authoritarian legacies and the hybrid character of its democratic institutions (Gondwe, 2024; Gondwe, 2025). Scholars examining Malawi's political trajectory have also noted the complex interaction between civil society activism, religious institutions, and political elites during moments of political crisis. However, despite this growing literature on Malawi's democratic development, relatively little research has examined how reconciliation and social repair unfolded in the absence of formal transitional justice mechanisms.

Existing scholarship has emphasised that transitional justice in Africa cannot be conceived solely through Western legal frameworks (Huyse, 2003; Boege, 2006). Instead, practices of truth-telling, forgiveness, and social repair often emerge through long-standing customary institutions, kinship networks, and religious bodies that command cultural legitimacy and moral authority. As such, this article asks the following research question: *How did Malawi navigate reconciliation and social repair after authoritarian rule in the absence of a formal truth and reconciliation process, and what do these mechanisms reveal about the strengths and limitations of hybrid, community-based reconciliation?*

It argues that Malawi represents a distinctive model of post-authoritarian reconciliation in which customary, religious, and community-based mechanisms substituted for formal transitional justice institutions. By integrating qualitative insights from *PAC & Malawi's 20 Years of Multi-Party Democracy* (2013) documentary alongside transitional justice scholarship, the article contributes empirically and conceptually to debates on hybrid and locally grounded peacebuilding. The analysis demonstrates that while these mechanisms fostered short-term stability and moral accountability, the absence of structured truth-seeking generated enduring challenges related to memory, civic education, and inclusive justice.

The article draws on both established academic literature and oral testimonies from the aforementioned 2013 documentary, produced by the Public Affairs Committee (PAC) and broadcast nationally by the Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) Television. The documentary features extended interviews with religious leaders and civil society figures that played central roles during Malawi's transition. These testimonies reveal how religious networks facilitated truth-telling during the Banda regime, most notably through the clandestine circulation of the 1992 Pastoral Letter, which explicitly challenged the state's repression. They also demonstrate how PAC emerged as an unofficial mediator during the transition, facilitating dialogue between the presidency, opposition movements, and civil society actors.

The article situates Malawi within broader African experiences of transitional justice. The Malawi case emerges not as an anomaly but as a distinct model of community-driven transitional justice. This model privileges social harmony and restorative practices over retributive justice, yet remains vulnerable to elite capture, patriarchal biases, and inconsistencies in rights protection.

The remainder of this article is organised as

follows: Part II draws on literature to outline the theoretical and conceptual frameworks informing customary justice in Africa, examining legal pluralism, restorative justice, and hybrid peace governance. Part III details the study's analytical framework for examining reconciliation in the context of Malawi's transition from authoritarian rule. Part IV contextualises Malawi's historical and political trajectory while integrating evidence from the PAC documentary to illustrate how religious actors shaped the transition. Part V analyses Malawi's hybrid reconciliation pathway, focusing on the role of religious mediation, customary dialogue, and community-based moral authority. While this approach contributed to peaceful political transition and social stability, it also produced enduring limitations in areas such as historical accountability, collective memory formation, and gender justice. The conclusion reflects on the implications of these findings for transitional justice theory and policy.

Literature Review

This section develops the theoretical framework that guides the analysis of Malawi's hybrid reconciliation pathway after authoritarian rule. By *hybrid reconciliation,* this article refers to an informal but durable constellation of actors that includes traditional authorities, religious institutions, and civil society organisations that collectively perform reconciliation functions typically associated with formal transitional justice mechanisms, such as truth-telling, mediation, moral accountability, and social repair (Boege, 2018; Paffenholz, 2021).

The article draws on four complementary strands of scholarship: legal pluralism, hybrid political order theory, restorative justice and positive peace theory, and the "local-turn" in peacebuilding. While restorative justice and positive peace theory provide normative insights into how reconciliation processes prioritise social repair, the article's core analytical framework rests on legal pluralism and hybrid political order theory. These approaches explain how authority and legitimacy are distributed across multiple actors in post-authoritarian societies, and how justice and reconciliation can emerge through interactions between formal institutions and community-based authorities. Rather than treating transitional justice solely as a state-led institutional process, this framework conceptualises reconciliation as a socially embedded practice shaped by legitimacy, cultural norms, and negotiated authority. This theoretical lens is particularly relevant for analysing Malawi's post-authoritarian transition, where religious institutions, customary authorities, and civic actors played central roles in mediating political tensions and facilitating dialogue.

Governance and Authority

Legal Pluralism and Justice in African Contexts

Legal pluralism provides the foundational analytical lens for this article by explaining how multiple systems of authority and justice operate simultaneously within African societies. Rather than viewing customary justice as informal or residual, contemporary scholarship conceptualises it as a durable governance reality in which customary, religious, civil society, and state institutions coexist and interact in shaping socially legitimate justice outcomes (Ubink & van Rooij, 2011; Kyed & Gravers, 2019; Boege, 2018).

This lens is particularly relevant to contexts where everyday experiences of justice are often mediated through community-embedded institutions, even when formal courts are present. Legal pluralism therefore allows reconciliation to be analysed as a negotiated social process rather than a purely legal or institutional outcome.

However, while legal pluralism provides a powerful framework for understanding how multiple systems of authority coexist, it also has important limitations. Socio-legal scholars caution that legal pluralism can risk normalising unequal power relations within communities, particularly where customary and religious institutions are shaped by patriarchal norms and elite control (Ubink and van Rooij, 2011). In such contexts, the assumption that local justice is inherently legitimate may obscure patterns of exclusion, especially affecting women and marginalised groups. Moreover,

as critical perspectives on the "local turn" suggest, privileged local practices may reproduce informal hierarchies and silence dissenting voices (Kochanski, 2020). Legal pluralism may therefore prioritise social harmony over accountability, limiting the recognition of past abuses and reinforcing a culture of silence. These limitations are particularly relevant in Malawi, where informal reconciliation mechanisms contributed to political stability, but also left significant gaps in justice, memory, and inclusion.

Hybrid Political Order and Governance

Hybrid political order theory further explains how peace and reconciliation are co-produced through overlapping authorities rather than monopolised by the state. Boege (2018) argues that in many postcolonial contexts, governance and justice emerge through hybrid arrangements in which customary authorities, religious actors, civil society, and state institutions jointly shape norms and dispute resolution processes.

Paffenholz (2021) complements this perspective by conceptualising peacebuilding as nonlinear and interactive, unfolding through repeated negotiation rather than a singular transitional moment. Together, these approaches explain how reconciliation emerges through interaction between formal and informal authorities.

Normative Approaches to Justice and Peace

Restorative Justice and Positive Peace

Within this conceptual terrain, restorative justice provides an important interpretive perspective for understanding how reconciliation processes prioritise the repair of social relationships rather than legal punishment. Restorative justice emphasises acknowledgement of harm, reintegration of offenders, and the restoration of community well-being.

These principles align closely with Galtung's (1969) concept of positive peace, which defines peace not merely as the absence of direct violence but as the presence of social justice, harmonious relationships, and transformed structures that sustain dignity. While Galtung's work predates contemporary transitional justice debates, it remains analytically valuable as a normative foundational framework for understanding why many reconciliation processes, particularly in African contexts, emphasise restoring relationships rather than imposing retributive sanctions.

Contemporary legal empowerment scholarship further demonstrates that locally grounded justice institutions often operationalise this positive-peace logic in practice by addressing harm through social repair and collective responsibility rather than incarceration or adversarial adjudication (Ubink & van Rooij, 2011). This perspective provides an analytical basis for understanding why reconciliation in Malawi prioritised community dialogue, moral acknowledgement, and social repair rather than through legal punishment or formal truth commissions.

Localised Peacebuilding in Practice

The Local Turn in Peacebuilding

The "local turn" in peacebuilding refines these foundational ideas by emphasising that sustainable peace is produced through locally meaningful practices embedded in everyday social life. Recent scholarship has moved beyond early formulations of the local turn by highlighting that local agency is neither inherently emancipatory nor static, but instead shaped by power relations, negotiation, and contestation (Ljungkvist & Jarstad, 2021).

This refinement is crucial for analysing reconciliation in Malawi, where customary authorities, faith-based institutions, and civic actors operate within historically layered systems of legitimacy. By foregrounding local legitimacy and everyday practice, the local turn translates Galtung's concept of positive peace into an empirical framework for analysing how reconciliation operates within hybrid governance settings (Ljungkvist & Jarstad, 2021; Paffenholz, 2021).

Analytical Framework

'The theoretical perspectives discussed above provide the analytical basis for examining how reconciliation unfolded during Malawi's transi-

tion from authoritarian rule. Rather than approaching transitional justice as a purely institutional or state-centred process, this article conceptualises reconciliation as a socially negotiated practice operating within legally plural and hybrid governance environments. In such contexts, authority and legitimacy are not monopolised by formal state institutions but emerge through interactions between civic, religious, customary, and political actors.

This article conceptualises reconciliation in such contexts as operating through a *legitimacy-based mediation mechanism.* In settings characterised by legal pluralism and hybrid governance, culturally legitimate actors, such as religious leaders, customary authorities, and civic intermediaries, mobilise moral authority and social trust to facilitate dialogue, reduce fear, and restore social relationships in the absence of formal institutional processes.

Therefore, this framework draws analytically from legal pluralism and hybrid political order theory, which explains how multiple systems of authority coexist and interact in shaping socially recognised justice outcomes. These approaches are particularly useful in contexts where state institutions possess limited legitimacy or institutional reach, allowing community-embedded actors to assume important mediating and peacebuilding roles. Existing scholarship on Malawi political development demonstrates that political stability has frequently depended on negotiated legitimacy, civil society activism, and religious mediation rather than exclusively formal institutional accountability (Ihonvbere, 1997; Gondwe, 2024; Gondwe, 2025). Governance assessments further reveal persistent constraints in state capacity and public trust, reinforcing the continued relevance of churches, civic organisations, and traditional leaders during periods of political tension and social repair (BTI, 2024; Gondwe, 2024).

At the normative level, the framework also engages restorative justice and positive peace theory. Restorative justice perspectives emphasise relational repair, coexistence, and reintegration rather than retributive punishment, while positive peace highlights the importance of addressing social relationships, trust and structural conditions beyond the mere absence of violence. Insights from the "local turn" and hybrid peacebuilding literature similarly support the argument that reconciliation processes often derive legitimacy from culturally embedded actors and socially recognised forms of mediation rather than externally designed institutional models (Millar, 2011; Boege, 2018; Ljungkvist and Jerstad, 2021; Paffenholz, 2021).

At the same time, this article approaches legitimacy-based mediation critically. While community-embedded reconciliation mechanisms may contribute to peaceful coexistence and political stability, they can also reproduce silences, elite bargaining, patriarchal exclusion, and limited forms of accountability. Legal pluralism and locally grounded mediation do not automatically guarantee inclusive justice, particularly where women, marginalised groups and victims of repression remain underrepresented in public narratives of reconciliation. The analytical framework therefore examines not only how reconciliation was achieved, but also what forms of justice, memory, and recognition remained unresolved within Malawi's post-authoritarian transition.

Memory, Inclusion, and Gender in Transitional Justice

While the preceding discussion explains how legitimacy-based mediation operated within legally pluralism and hybrid governance environments, the framework must also account for the unresolved tensions surrounding memory, inclusion, and justice. Transitional justice literature commonly identifies several core objectives pursued by societies emerging from authoritarian rule or violent conflict. These objectives include truth-seeking, accountability, reparations, institutional reform, and reconciliation. Figure 1 illustrates these widely recognised goals.

Figure 1
Goals of Transitional Justice

Source: Federal Judicial Center, Judiciaries Worldwide: Transitional Justice (n.d.).

Since 2011, transitional justice scholarship has increasingly recognised that justice after authoritarianism or violence may unfold through locally grounded practices rather than formal judicial mechanisms alone. Empirical research demonstrates that community perceptions of justice are often shaped by social reconciliation, dignity restoration, and acceptance rather than by legal verdicts or institutional procedure (Millar, 2011). At the same time, critical political economy perspectives caution that post-authoritarian societies may prioritise stability and survival over formal accountability, shaping how communities engage with justice and reconciliation processes (Macdonald, 2017). This body of work supports analysing Malawi's experience not as an absence of transitional justice, but as a form of *informal and hybrid transition justice* rooted in locally legitimate practices and constrained by political realities.

Memory politics constitutes a central dimension of reconciliation because the management of remembrance and silence shapes long-term social trust and democratic resilience. Contemporary scholarship highlights that dealing with painful pasts is an ongoing social process in which communities negotiate meanings of harm, responsibility, and moral repair rather than a one-time institutional intervention (Hamber, 2015; Hughes, 2018). Recent studies further demonstrate that unresolved memory contests can persist long after political transitions, producing intra-community tensions and fragmented narratives even in the absence of renewed violence (Rosato & Lundy, 2023). In Malawi's case, the absence of a formal truth commission heightens the importance of examining how memory has been socially mediated through religious discourse, community dialogue, and selective silence, processes that align with, but also complicate restorative and positive-peace frameworks.

African policy frameworks reinforce the legitimacy of analysing reconciliation through community-based and non-judicial mechanisms. The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) transitional justice study (2019) explicitly recognises that African approaches to transitional justice may include truth-seeking, reparations, institutional reform, and community-based practices, reflecting the importance of contextual legitimacy and participation. More recent African Union policy work further emphasises inclusive and participatory governance, particularly gender equality, as a prerequisite for

sustainable peace (African Union, 2023). These frameworks provide normative grounding for evaluating Malawi's reconciliation pathway not only in terms of stability, but also in relation to inclusion, voice, and long-term democratic accountability.

Gender and inclusion critiques remain essential to assessing the limits of customary and hybrid reconciliation mechanisms. Contemporary literature cautions that while community-based reconciliation can stabilise societies, it may also reproduce patriarchal norms or marginalise vulnerable groups if participation and rights protections are not actively ensured (African Union, 2023; Hughes, 2018). This critique is particularly relevant for Malawi, where customary and religious institutions have historically been male-dominated. Integrating these concerns into the analytical framework allows the article to assess reconciliation not only as a peace outcome, but also as a contested social process shaped by power, gender, and access to voice.

Theoretical Expectations

This article advances the argument that reconciliation in post-authoritarian contexts can emerge through locally legitimate mediation mechanisms even in the absence of formal transitional justice institutions. These theoretical perspectives collectively suggest that where authority is socially embedded within customary institutions, religious networks, and community organisations, processes of dialogue, moral acknowledgement, and social repair may substitute for state-led truth-seeking mechanisms.

Based on this theoretical foundation, the article presents the following hypothesis: *In post-authoritarian societies characterised by legally plural governance systems and strong community-based authority structures, reconciliation and short-term political stability are likely to emerge through hybrid and locally legitimate mechanisms than through formal state-centric transitional justice frameworks alone.* However, the same theoretical literature also anticipates a trade-off. While hybrid reconciliation mechanisms may foster peaceful political transitions and social stability, the absence of structured national truth-seeking processes is likely to generate longer-term challenges related to collective memory, civic education, gender justice, and inclusive accountability. As a result, certain experiences of repression may remain undocumented or politically marginalised (Hamber, 2015; Hughes, 2018; ACHPR, 2019; African Union, 2023; Rosato & Lundy, 2023).

The Malawian transition therefore provides a valuable empirical case for testing these theoretical expectations. By examining the mediating role of religious leaders, customary authorities, and civic actors during Malawi's transition from authoritarian rule, the article evaluates both the strengths and limitations of hybrid reconciliation mechanisms in the absence of formal transitional justice institutions.

Historical and Political Context of Malawi and the Role of Customary Mechanisms in Reconciliation

Malawi's post-independence history is deeply shaped by authoritarian governance, the instrumentalisation of customary authority, and the moral influence of religious institutions in public life. Understanding how customary pathways to justice functioned during and after the transition from authoritarianism requires situating them within this broader socio-political landscape. Malawi's transition cannot be meaningfully analysed without appreciating how history shaped structures of legitimacy, how communities understood justice, and how cultural, religious, and civic actors mobilised at critical moments in national life (Gondwe, 2024; BTI, 2024). This contextual grounding is essential for interpreting how hybrid and customary models of reconciliation contributed to Malawi's relative political stability over the past three decades.

Case Selection, Data, and Methodological Approach

Malawi is selected as a case not because it represents a model transition in institutional terms, but because it presents a critical analytical puzzle

that speaks directly to the central research question of this article: *how might reconciliation and political stability emerge in post-authoritarian societies even in the absence of formal transitional justice institutions?* Despite experiencing three decades of authoritarian repression under a one-party state, Malawi transitioned to multiparty democracy without establishing a truth commission, criminal accountability processes, or formal reparations mechanisms. Yet the transition did not result in widespread post-authoritarian violence or prolonged cycles of political retaliation.

Through the theoretical framework earlier developed, the article investigates whether legitimacy-based and community-embedded reconciliation mechanisms can play a stabilising role in post-authoritarian transitions. In particular, the Malawi case allows the study to examine how religious institutions, customary authorities, and civic organisations functioned as informal mediators of political reconciliation during and after the democratic transition.

Recent comparative scholarship identifies such cases as analytically valuable for understanding how societies navigate post-authoritarian transitions through legitimacy-based, community-embedded, and hybrid governance mechanisms rather than through formalised justice processes alone (Paffenholz, 2021; Boege, 2018). By analysing Malawi's experience, this article contributes to broader debates on transitional justice by exploring how informal reconciliation structures may complement or substitute formal mechanisms.

Methodologically, the article adopts a qualitative interpretive case study approach drawing on historical scholarship, governance reports, and testimonies from the documentary *PAC & Malawi's 20 Years of Multi-Party Democracy* (2013). The documentary is treated as a curated historical source containing retrospective accounts from religious leaders, politicians, and civic actors involved in the transition. These testimonies are analysed thematically alongside secondary literature to identify patterns of mediation, moral authority, legitimacy, and reconciliation, consistent with qualitative approaches to transitional justice research (Millar, 2011; Kusumaningrum, 2016).

While it does not claim representativeness in a statistical sense, its analytical value lies in capturing elite and intermediary perspectives that shaped national reconciliation processes. Interpretive caution is maintained by triangulating documentary narratives with scholarly literature and policy reports (Hamber, 2021; Hughes, 2018). The study relies exclusively on publicly available material; no new interviews were conducted, which reduces ethical risks associated with data collection.

This article also briefly reflects a limited comparative perspective, situating the Malawi case within broader debates on transitional justice in Africa. By contrasting Malawi's legitimacy-based and community-embedded reconciliation mechanisms with transitions that relied more heavily on formal transitional justice institutions, the article explores whether informal and hybrid reconciliation structures can produce comparable outcomes in terms of political stability and social reconciliation.

Timeline of Malawi's Authoritarianism and Transition (1964 – 1994)

Malawi's authoritarian period established the structural and psychological conditions that later shaped its reconciliation trajectory. From 1964 until 1994, Malawi was governed under a centralised and repressive state led by Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda. Governance relied on political surveillance, repression, and the instrumentalisation of customary and selected religious authorities to reinforce regime legitimacy, discourage dissent, and extend state influence into local communities (Ihonvbere, 1997, 225-228; Gondwe, 2024; BTI, 2024) While some religious institutions later became important sites of democratic resistance, particularly during the 1992 Pastoral Letter movement, elements of traditional authority structures remained closely embedded within state control and local political administration.

Prior to the transition, arbitrary detention, political disappearances, and the suppression of free expression were embedded in everyday life. State surveillance was enforced through the Malawi Young Pioneers and an extensive informant net-

work. Public criticism of the President constituted a criminal offence, and both formal and traditional courts were, at times, manipulated to silence political opponents. Such practices deeply eroded confidence in formal justice institutions and shaped popular expectations that justice would be mediated through moral and communal rather than legal channels (Gondwe, 2024).

Opening the Political Space: The 1992 Pastoral Letter

The 1992 Catholic Bishops' Pastoral Letter represents a decisive moment of moral truth-telling that helped open political space and delegitimise authoritarian rule prior to Malawi's democratic transition. Titled *Living Our Faith,* the letter acted as a catalyst for political transition by publicly criticising political repression, economic mismanagement, and human rights violations. As documented in the PAC documentary, Archbishop Tarcisius Ziyaye recalls that the letter articulated grievances long suppressed by fear, including restrictions on freedom of expression, declining education standards, and political intimidation (Public Affairs Committee, 2013).

The letter was distributed under clandestine conditions (Public Affairs Committee, 2013). Priests and nuns transported copies hidden beneath bandages and medicines in ambulances to bypass state surveillance and deliver the letter across all seven dioceses. This practice exemplifies how religious networks operationalised moral authority and social trust to overcome authoritarian restrictions and open political space – a pattern observed in other African reconciliation contexts of civic resistance and peacebuilding (Murithi, 2021; Paffenholz, 2021). While the letter primarily sparked political awakening and democratic mobilisation rather than reconciliation itself, the metaphor of the letter as "medicine", as described by Father Gamba, symbolised the breaking of fear and silence that had psychologically constrained public expression under Banda's regime.

The letter also triggered broader ecumenical mobilisation. The Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), alongside Muslim and other Christian bodies, issued supportive statements, signalling a unified moral front against authoritarian rule. Such cross-faith mobilisation expanded political space for civic engagement and challenged the regime's moral legitimacy, consistent with findings on faith-based mediation in African peace processes (Murithi, 2021).

Civic Dialogue and Mediation: Formation of the Public Affairs Committee (PAC)

The political opening generated by the 1992 Catholic Bishops' Pastoral Letter contributed directly to the emergence of broader religious and civic mobilisation against authoritarian rule. As Meinhardt and Patel (2003) observe, the pastoral intervention broke a long-standing climate of fear and demonstrated publicly that the Banda regime could be challenged through organised civic and religious action. Within this expanding political space, the formation of the Public Affairs Committee (PAC) in 1992 by religious leaders and civil society actors, among others, institutionalised interfaith and civic cooperation into a national platform for dialogue, mediation, and democratic advocacy.

As the documentary's interviews emphasise, PAC was not created by the Banda regime but emerged through collaboration among religious leaders, civil society actors and growing public demands for political transformation (Public Affairs Committee, 2013). PAC's grassroots and interfaith origins enhanced its legitimacy across political and regional divides, enabling it to function as a trusted intermediary during Malawi's transition. In this sense, PAC represented the organisational extension of the moral and political awakening initiated by the Pastoral Letter, transforming religious truth-telling into sustained civic mediation and negotiated democratic engagement.

PAC therefore occupies a central position in this article because it illustrates empirically how non-state religious and civic actors can function as legitimacy-based mediation platforms during periods of political transition. This pattern reflects broader observations in Malawi's governance literature that religious institutions have historically exercised significant indirect polit-

ical influence during periods of national crisis through pastoral guidance, mediation, and civic mobilisation (BTI, 2024).

PAC as a De Facto Transitional Justice Actor

Between 1992 and 1994, PAC functioned as a de facto transitional justice actor by facilitating dialogue, mediating political tensions, and enabling collective truth-telling during Malawi's political transition. PAC assumed this role amid growing public distrust in authoritarian institutions, escalating political tensions, and the absence of legitimate state-led mechanisms capable of mediating democratic reform peacefully. As iInterviews in the documentary reveal, PAC leaders engaged directly with the Presidential Committee on Dialogue, advocated for political reform, and mobilised civic education ahead of the referendum (Public Affairs Committee, 2013).

PAC initially pushed for immediate general elections but pragmatically accepted the referendum framework amid resistance from political elites and institutional constraints surrounding rapid constitutional change. The referendum of 14 June 1993, in which 63 per cent of voters endorsed a multiparty democracy, marked a decisive rupture with authoritarian rule. Although PAC facilitated dialogue, civic participation, and political negotiation, it did not possess the constitutional authority or institutional mandate to implement formal accountability mechanisms such as prosecutions or truth commissions. Its role therefore reflected mediation and negotiated transition rather than legal adjudication, aligning with broader scholarship showing that informal transitional processes in politically fragile contexts often priorities peaceful transition, participation, and institutional stability where formal accountability mechanisms remain politically or institutionally unfeasible (Millar, 2011; Macdonald, 2017).

Operation Bwezani (1993 - 1994)

During Operation Bwezani (1993 – 1994), the Malawi Defence Force disarmed the Malawi Young Pioneers, marking a critical turning point in Malawi's transition. Conducted with widespread community support, the operation dismantled the regime's paramilitary enforcement arm. *Operation Bwezani* illustrates a rare alignment between coercive power and community legitimacy reinforcing rather than undermining social trust (Chirambo, 2004). This episode supports broader arguments that legitimacy-based security interventions can contribute to reconciliation when they are perceived as restoring dignity and safety rather than consolidating repression (Boege, 2018; Paffenholz, 2021).

Post-Transition Governance and the Enduring Role of PAC

After the 1994 elections in which Bakili Muluzi, under the political party, the United Democratic Front (UDF) defeated Banda by a margin of 13.72 percentage points, PAC remained active in monitoring governance, advocating for constitutional reforms, and promoting political accountability. The documentary offers detailed accounts of PAC's interventions in the 2003 "Open and Third Term" debate, when attempts were made to revise the constitution to allow Bakili Muluzi a third term. Religious leaders took immense personal risks to resist these changes, including accusations of harbouring personal vendettas against political leaders. Such testimonies highlight the costs borne by moral leaders in defending democratic values (Boege, 2018; Gondwe, 2024).

In 2007, PAC again played a critical mediating role during political tensions surrounding Section 65 of the Constitution, which governed floor crossing in Malawi's Parliament, and disputes over approval of the national budget. As interviewees in the documentary explain, PAC mediated between opposition parties seeking enforcement of Section 65 against Members of Parliament who had defected from the United Democratic Front (UDF) to the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), formed by President Bingu wa Mutharika following his resignation from the UDF, and which prioritised passage of the national budget.

PAC's national conferences in 2012 and 2013, held amid political and economic crises, further illustrate its evolving role. Despite government attempts to obstruct these gatherings,

PAC proceeded, drawing participation from diverse stakeholders. These conferences generated key recommendations on governance, economic reforms, electoral processes, and constitutional gaps. Their communiques reached the President, Parliament, and international partners, reinforcing PAC's status as an institution capable of shaping national discourse. These interventions illustrate how hybrid mediation platforms can sustain political dialogue in contexts of institutional fragility (BTI, 2024; Paffenholz, 2021).

Relational Reconciliation: Customary Justice Systems as Local Foundations

Parallel to national-level mediation, customary justice mechanisms remained central to everyday reconciliation in Malawi. Chiefs and traditional authorities continued to resolve disputes involving land, inheritance, marriage, interpersonal conflict, and accusations of witchcraft. Such practices reflect relational conceptions of justice grounded in social harmony and reintegration rather than punishment (Milar, 2011; Ekpo, 2023).

Practices such as *kusasa fumbi* ("removing the dust") symbolically cleanse individuals after wrongdoing, facilitating integration. Elders mediate these processes by drawing on cultural norms and communal traditional trust. The moral authority of chiefs parallels that of religious leaders during the political transition, reinforcing the hybrid reconciliation landscape observed across many African societies (Boege, 2018; Murithi, 2021).

Hybrid Governance in Malawi's Reconciliation Landscape

Malawi's political transition produced a reconciliation landscape characterised by the coexistence of state institutions, religious organisations, civic actors, and customary authorities. Evidence from Malawi's political history and testimonies presented in the documentary indicate that reconciliation processes did not emerge through a single institutional mechanism. Instead, they developed through the interaction of multiple actors operating at different levels of society.

At a community level, customary institutions continued to play an important role in maintaining social cohesion and resolving disputes. Chiefs and traditional authorities mediated conflicts related to land, family relations, and local governance, often emphasising restoration of relationships and reintegration into community life. These practices reflected long-standing social norms that prioritise reconciliation and communal harmony rather than punitive justice. In this sense, customary justice mechanisms complemented the mediation roles played by religious organisations and civil society actors during the political transition in Malawi.

The interaction between these actors created a hybrid governance structure in which reconciliation was pursued through overlapping forms of authority. These dynamics illustrate how political transitions in some African contexts are sustained through networks of institutions that extend beyond the formal state.

At the same time, Malawi's post-transition period *did* include certain formal institutional responses to the legacy of authoritarian rule. The democratic transition was accompanied by constitutional reforms, parliamentary oversight mechanisms, and the establishment of institutions such as Malawi Human Rights Commission, established under the 1994 Constitution to monitor human rights protection (Ihonvbere, 1997; Ellet, 2008; BTI, 2024; Gondwe, 2024). However, the country did not establish a national truth commission, a specialised transitional justice tribunal, or a systemic reparations programme to address abuses committed during the Banda era. As a result, many experiences of political repression including detention, torture, and forced disappearances were never formally documented within a national truth-seeking framework.

Tensions, Limitations and Memory Gaps

While customary and hybrid mechanisms have facilitated social cohesion and political stability, they also reproduce structural inequalities and leave critical dimensions of justice unresolved. Gender inequalities remain particularly pronounced in cases involving land rights, di-

vorce, and domestic violence, where reconciliation processes may prioritise communal harmony over individual rights and, in some instances, reinforce patriarchal norms (African Union, 2023). Women's participation within customary tribunals and religious leadership structures continues to be uneven, limiting the inclusivity and representativeness of reconciliation outcomes.

Customary institutions are also vulnerable to political manipulation, a legacy rooted in Malawi's authoritarian past. During the Banda era, chiefs were incorporated into the ruling party's apparatus and deployed as instruments of political surveillance and control. Although the post-1994 period has seen greater pluralism, these institutions remain susceptible to elite capture, particularly in contexts of executive dominance and political polarisation (Gondwe, 2024). This susceptibility complicates the assumption that customary authority is inherently neutral or emancipatory, underscoring the need for safeguards that protect local justice mechanisms from partisan influence.

Perhaps the most enduring limitation of Malawi's reconciliation pathway lies in the absence of structured national truth-seeking. Without a formal truth commission or systematic documentation process, many survivors of political imprisonment, torture, and repression never publicly testified, leaving significant experiences marginalised within national memory and historical narratives. The documentary suggests that this silence was not entirely resolved after the transition, as many citizens prioritised political stability, freedom of expression, and the restoration of dignity over punitive justice mechanisms. Political and religious leaders interviewed in the documentary repeatedly emphasise that the immediate social demand during the transition was to "remove fear" and create political space for participation rather than pursue legal retribution against former regime actors (Public Affairs Committee, 2013, 0:46-0:57).

The documentary also reveals that reconciliation was pursued largely through civic dialogue, moral persuasion, and the rebuilding of social trust. In the documentary interviews, Dr Bakili Muluzi, Malawi's first democratically elected president, explains that the transition created a "window" for citizens to express frustrations and reclaim political voice after decades of fear and repression, illustrating how the transition prioritised civic opening and social healing alongside political reform (Public Affairs Committee, 2013, 10:37-11:15). Although the absence of formal accountability left unresolved questions of justice and historical recognition, these tensions were partially mitigated through community dialogue, religious mediation, and the expansion of civic freedoms. Nevertheless, scholars caution that unresolved silence and fragmented remembrance may undermine long-term reconciliation by limiting collective learning, civic education, and democratic consolidation (Hamber, 2015; Hughes, 2018; Rosato and Lundy, 2023).

This suggests that Malawi's reconciliation process was effective primarily in facilitating negotiated coexistence and political transition rather than achieving comprehensive restorative justice. Although community-embedded mechanisms helped rebuild social trust and reduce political tensions, the absence of formal accountability structures limited opportunities for public acknowledgement, survivor-centred justice, and collective historical reckoning. Reconciliation in the Malawian context therefore remained partial and uneven: successful in stabilising the transition and restoring political dialogue, yet incomplete in addressing deeper questions of historical justice and long-term memory formation.

The following section builds on this empirical foundation by analysing how these legitimacy-based and hybrid reconciliation mechanisms operated in practice and assessing their contribution to Malawi's relatively stable post-authoritarian transition.

Analysis, Discussion, and Policy Implications

Interpreting Malawi's Hybrid Reconciliation Landscape

Drawing on the study's theoretical framework, this section evaluates Malawi's reconciliation pathway through four analytical criteria: legitimacy, relational repair, mediation capacity, and memory and accountability. These criteria are

derived from the article's engagement with legal pluralism, restorative justice, positive peace, and hybrid governance theory, and they make it possible to move beyond description toward a clear analytical assessment of Malawi's post-authoritarian transition.

Malawi's reconciliation process reflects a hybrid landscape in which customary, religious, and civic mechanisms converged to address the legacies of authoritarian rule in the absence of formal transitional justice institutions. These reconciliation mechanisms, led by a network of multisectoral actors, emerged informally and organically rather than through state design, drawing its authority from cultural legitimacy and social trust rather than statutory power.

The first analytical criterion is legitimacy. Malawi's reconciliation mechanisms were effective in part because they were embedded in institutions already regarded as morally authoritative by local communities. The PAC documentary repeatedly underscores this. One early testimony, Dr Bakili Muluzi – later Malawi's first president under multiparty democracy – recalls that the bishops' publication of the 1992 Pastoral Letter "removed the fear" which characterised the late Banda era, signalled political liberalisation, and initiated Malawi's transition to multiparty democracy (Public Affairs Committee, 2013, 00:52-00:57; 01:19-01:55). Archbishop Tarcisius Ziyaye further explains that the bishops' concerns included lack of freedom of expression and association, declining educational standards, and the oppression and fear under which people lived (Public Affairs Committee, 2013, 02:01-02:40). These testimonies demonstrate that religious legitimacy functioned as a practical political resource: churches could say publicly what citizens privately knew but feared to articulate.

This legitimacy was reinforced by organisational ingenuity. Father Gamba recounts that priests and sisters collected copies of the letter and hid them beneath medicines and bandages in ambulances so that they could be distributed from north to south without detection; he concludes that the letter "proved to be a good medicine after all" (Public Affairs Committee, 2013, 03:07-03:53). This testimony is analytically important because it shows that truth-telling in Malawi was not merely rhetorical. It relied on trusted community networks capable of overcoming authoritarian surveillance. In the language of the theoretical framework, this was a legitimacy-based mechanism operating through socially embedded institutions rather than formal state channels.

The second criterion is relational repair. Malawi's transition was understood less as a process of legal closure than as the restoration of damaged relationships between citizens, communities, and the state. Chiefs' tribunals, church-led truth-telling, and PAC-facilitated dialogue treated conflict as a rupture in social harmony requiring acknowledgement, mediation, and reintegration rather than punishment alone. Customary practices such as *kusasa fumbi*, a symbolic cleansing ritual intended to "remove the dust" of wrongdoing and enabling moral renewal within the community rather than isolating guilt as an individual legal matter (Honwana, 2006; Igreja, 2018). This understanding is consistent with restorative justice traditions and Galtung's concept of positive peace, which emphasises the repair of social relationships and the transformation of structures that sustain violence (Galtung, 1969).

The third criterion is mediation capacity, referring to the ability of intermediary institutions to facilitate dialogue between political actors and society during periods of political transition. Testimony in the documentary illustrates the role of PAC as a central mediator between the state, opposition groups, and society. The Very Reverend Dr Silas Ncozana, former General Secretary of the Blantyre Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) explains that PAC was not created by the Banda regime but emerged from interfaith mobilisation and popular demand, enabling it to function as an independent and broadly trusted civic platform (Public Affairs Committee, 2013, 04:40-05:47). Composed of Protestant, Catholic, and Muslim organisations, PAC was widely regarded as a "voice of the voiceless" with broad national reach through churches and mosques (Public Affairs Committee, 2013, 05:56-06:18; 19:17-20:03). PAC's mediation role is further demonstrated

by testimony that it maintained dialogue with Banda's regime through the Presidential Committee on Dialogue and helped steer the country toward multiparty government (Public Affairs Committee, 2013, 09:32-09:44).

This includes engagement in the 1993 referendum in which 63 per cent voted for multiparty democracy (Public Affairs Committee, 2013, 11:25-12:21; 08:18-08:57). PAC's mediation role continued after democratisation. The documentary details PAC's opposition to the open and third-term constitutional amendments in 2003 and includes testimony from Reverend Father Constantine Kaswaya, former PAC Chairperson explaining that an "open term" was widely understood as a return to *life presidency* (Public Affairs Committee, 2013, 14:48-16:37). Father Kaswaya then reflects on how costly this opposition became, since his stance was interpreted as a personal attack on Bakili Muluzi even though he was defending the constitutional two-term limit (Public Affairs Committee, 2013, 16:51-17:23).

PAC also mediated political tensions surrounding Section 65 related to parliamentary defections, and national budget approval in 2007, helping to sustain dialogue during a period of institutional conflict. As interviewees explain, PAC mediated between opposition parties prioritising Section 65 which sought impeachment of Members of Parliament (MPS) who had "crossed the floor", particularly those who defected to the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) led by President Bingu wa Mutharika (Public Affairs Committee, 2013, 17:27-17:55). These moments show that PAC was not merely symbolically present; it repeatedly converted moral legitimacy into practical mediation.

The fourth criterion is memory and accountability. It is here that the limits of Malawi's pathway become most visible. While legitimacy-based mediation and relational repair contributed to stability, they did not generate a structured archive of testimony, public acknowledgement, or institutional accountability compared to formal transitional justice mechanisms. Indeed, the documentary itself indirectly demonstrates this gap. Reverend Misanjo Kansilanga explains that after the transition there was widespread joy, but also insecurity, looting, shootings, and a lack of civic education, which people did not yet have the responsibility to manage well (Public Affairs Committee, 2013, 12:38-13:19). The same sequence celebrates new freedoms and institutions such as the Human Rights Commission and Anti-Corruption Bureau (Public Affairs Committee, 2013, 13:23-14:03), but these are post-transition democratic gains rather than survivor-centred truth-seeking mechanisms. In other words, Malawi gained political openness without building a comprehensive national process for documenting detention, torture, disappearances, and political intimidation under Banda.

PAC's later conferences in 2012 and 2013 further reveal both the strength and limitation of this model. The documentary shows that PAC convened broad-based national stakeholder meetings despite government obstruction, confusion campaigns, and venue cancellations, and that these meetings produced recommendations on governance, constitutional reform, elections, and national dialogue (Public Affairs Committee, 2013, 20:03-22:20; 22:49-24:55; 25:22-28:36). These were important acts of civic mediation and agenda-setting. Yet they remained political dialogue forums rather than formal truth-seeking processes. The absence of formal truth-seeking risks marginalising victims whose experiences were never publicly recorded, particularly women and politically vulnerable groups. Reconciliation without structured truth-telling may sustain stability, but it can also obscure enduring inequalities and unresolved grievances (Lundy & McGovern, 2022; Kusumaningrum, 2016).

Taken together, these four criteria suggest that Malawi's reconciliation pathway was strongest in legitimacy, relational repair, and mediation capacity, but weaker in memory preservation and formal accountability. The Malawian case therefore supports the broader argument of this article: hybrid and community-embedded mechanisms can contribute meaningfully to post-authoritarian stabilisation, especially where formal institutions are weak or politically constrained. At the same time, the case also demonstrates that the absence of structured truth-seeking and survivor-centred accountability produces enduring deficits that informal mechanisms alone cannot resolve. Malawi's pathway was thus

effective as a stabilising reconciliation strategy, but partial as a comprehensive transitional justice process.

Malawi in Comparative African Perspective

Malawi's reconciliation trajectory, characterised by decentralised moral authority, informal mediation, and cultural legitimacy rather than state-led institutional justice, reflects a broader African pattern in which post-authoritarian and post-conflict societies rely partly on community-based and morally grounded mechanisms alongside, or instead of, formal transitional justice institutions. Comparative cases illustrate different configurations of this relationship. Rwanda institutionalised community justice through the state-led *Gacaca* courts, enabling extensive truth-telling and national documentation but also exposing reconciliation to political control and selective memory (Ingelaere, 2016; Igreja, 2018). South Africa combined moral dialogue with formal institutional design through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), producing a durable public archive of apartheid-era abuses while facing criticism over limited structural transformation (Tutu, 1999; McAuliffe, 2021). Mozambique and northern Uganda relied more heavily on customary rituals and reintegration practices that prioritised social repair and coexistence over prosecution, but often left accountability and victims' experiences insufficiently addressed (Honwana, 2006; Quinn, 2007). Malawi shares with these cases an emphasis on legitimacy, dialogue, and relational repair, yet differs in the extent to which reconciliation emerged through informal religious and civic mediation rather than through centralised institutional mechanisms. The Malawi case therefore suggests that hybrid and community-embedded reconciliation structures can contribute significantly to political stabilisation in post-authoritarian settings, while also demonstrating the limitations of informal reconciliation in preserving collective memory, ensuring inclusive accountability, and institutionalising survivor-centred truth-seeking.

Policy Implications

Building on the analysis, several policy implications emerge for Malawi's future peacebuilding and governance. These recommendations do not seek to replace Malawi's culturally grounded reconciliation pathways, but rather to strengthen and complement them in ways that enhance inclusivity, accountability, and long-term democratic resilience. Because the central contribution of this article lies in analysing Malawi's hybrid reconciliation pathway, the policy implications are presented here more concisely as practical extension of that analysis rather than as the main focus of the study.

Strengthening Collaboration Between Customary and Formal Justice Systems

Customary courts remain the primary point of access to justice for the rural majority in Malawi, particularly in disputes involving land, family relations, and minor offences. Structured collaboration between customary and formal justice systems could help harmonise culturally legitimate practices with constitutional protections, especially regarding gender equality and due process. Targeted training for chiefs and customary adjudicators in legal standards and human rights principles may reduce inconsistencies in justice outcomes while preserving accessibility and local trust. At the same time, such reforms must remain sensitive to the risk of over-formalisation, which could undermine the very legitimacy that makes customary justice effective.

Documenting Malawi's Authoritarian Past

The absence of a formal transitional justice mechanism has left significant gaps in Malawi's national memory, particularly concerning abuses committed during the Banda era. Civil society organisations, universities, and PAC are well positioned to collaborate on survivor documentation initiatives, such as oral history archives and community-based testimony projects. These efforts would strengthen civic education and reduce the risk of historical revisionism without imposing adversarial legal processes. However, it must

be acknowledged that retrospective documentation cannot fully substitute for contemporaneous truth-seeking and any may be shaped by selective memory and political sensitivities.

Strengthening Inclusivity in Peace and Justice Mechanisms

Although customary and religious institutions have played central roles in reconciliation, their leadership structures have historically been dominated by male elites. Because legitimacy-based reconciliation depends on social trust and representation, exclusion of women and marginalised groups risks weakening the perceived fairness of hybrid mediation mechanisms. As such, strengthening the representation of women, youth, and marginalised groups within PAC and customary tribunals is essential for enhancing both legitimacy and fairness. Gender-sensitive reforms, such as integrating women elders into mediation processes and adopting survivor-centred safeguards can mitigate the risk that reconciliation prioritises social harmony at the expense of individual rights. Nonetheless, such reforms must navigate entrenched social norms and face resistance at the community level.

Protecting Customary Justice from Political Capture

Malawi's history demonstrates how customary authorities can be manipulated for political purposes, particularly under authoritarian rule. Safeguards such as transparency measures, community oversight mechanisms, and clear separation from partisan politics are essential to preserving the independence of traditional leaders. While such protections cannot entirely eliminate political influence, they can reduce the risk that customary justice is instrumentalised in ways that undermine public trust.

Taken together, these policy implications point toward the need for a *holistic reconciliation framework* that honours Malawi's cultural values while strengthening formal institutions and safeguards. It is important to acknowledge, however, that Malawi's relative stability cannot be attributed solely to reconciliation mechanisms; factors such as elite compromise, regional power balance, and international engagement have also shaped outcomes. Recognising these alternative explanations reinforces the argument that culturally grounded reconciliation is a necessary but not sufficient condition for sustainable peace and democratic governance.

Conclusion

Malawi's transition from authoritarian rule to democratic governance represents a compelling example of how reconciliation can emerge organically through community-driven mechanisms rather than through formalised transitional justice structures. Drawing on testimonies from *PAC & Malawi's 20 Years of Multi-Party Democracy* (2013), this study has shown that Malawians confronted repression through moral dialogue, religious solidarity, and culturally grounded practices of truth-telling and mediation. Religious leaders, customary authorities, and civil society actors collectively formed a hybrid reconciliation infrastructure that prioritised healing, dignity, and social cohesion over retributive justice.

Analytically, Malawi stands out not because it achieved a complete or exemplary form of transitional justice, but because it demonstrates how reconciliation can be sustained in the absence of formal truth commissions, tribunals, or reparations programmes. Unlike cases such as South Africa or Rwanda, where reconciliation was anchored in state-led institutional frameworks, Malawi relied primarily on moral authority and social legitimacy. This approach proved effective in maintaining political stability and facilitating democratic transition, yet it also exposed the limits of informal reconciliation, particularly in relation to memory preservation, gender justice, and long-term accountability.

The Malawian case therefore challenges dominant transitional justice paradigms that privilege institutionalised models as prerequisites for reconciliation. At the same time, it cautions against romanticising customary or religious mechanisms as sufficient in themselves. Malawi illustrates a central tension in post-authoritarian reconciliation: culturally resonant practices can restore

social trust and prevent renewed violence, but without complementary formal mechanisms they risk leaving structural injustices and historical harms insufficiently addressed. In this sense, Malawi should be understood not as a transferable blueprint, but as an analytically instructive case that highlights the trade-offs inherent in reconciliation design.

This study also opens several avenues for future research. Comparative work could examine whether similar legitimacy-based reconciliation processes operate in other post-authoritarian contexts beyond Africa, particularly where civil war has not occurred. Further research is also needed on how hybrid reconciliation infrastructures evolve over time, including their capacity to incorporate gender-responsive reforms, youth participation, and survivor-centred documentation. Longitudinal studies could assess whether Malawi's informal reconciliation mechanisms remain resilient amid contemporary political polarisation and changing governance dynamics. Finally, more empirical attention to survivor experiences would deepen understanding of how reconciliation without formal truth-seeking is perceived by those most affected by past abuses.

In sum, Malawi's experience demonstrates that transitional justice need not always follow institutionalised templates, but it also confirms that reconciliation is most sustainable when culturally grounded mechanisms are complemented by structures that protect rights, preserve memory, and promote accountability. Recognising both the promise and the limits of Malawi's pathway contributes to broader debates on how societies confront authoritarian pasts while building inclusive and peaceful futures.

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Gender, Conflict Resolution, and Peacebuilding

Assessing the Contribution of Women to the Colombian Peace Process

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Abstract

In Colombia, women have historically been excluded from formal peace processes, yet the 2016 peace agreement signed by the Colombian Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - People's Army (FARC-EP) is widely considered as the first comprehensive peace accord in history to fully integrate a gender perspective. How did women in Colombia navigate an exclusionary political environment to shape the 2016 peace process? Drawing on original case material, including interviews with key actors in the 2012-2016 Colombian peace process, this article analyses the approach of the women's movement for peace. Engaging with academic debate on conflict resolution, women and peacebuilding, this article indicates a robust correlation between peace and local women-led initiatives to reduce inequality, thereby identifying an oversight in common conceptualisations of peacebuilding as a strictly post-conflict, post-accord process. This article illustrates the accumulation of women's political agency in Colombia, arguing that the Gender Subcommittee and the gender-inclusive peace agreement, which emerged in 2016, are the fruit of their decades-long struggle.

Key words: *Peacebuilding, Women's Movement, Conflict Resolution, Gender, Colombia*

Introduction

In November 2016, the Colombian Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - People's Army (FARC-EP) signed the Final Accord for the Termination of the Conflict and the Construction of a Stable and Durable Peace. The Agreement signified an end to the longest internal armed conflict in Latin America and hoped to initiate a new era of peace (Segura & Mechoulan, 2017). The incorporation of a gender perspective has set a precedent for future peace processes, and the Agreement has subsequently been heralded as the most gender-inclusive in the world (Phelan & True, 2022). Amidst the praise, however, it is often forgotten that the first two years of negotiations were marked by the absence of women (Gómez & Montealegre, 2021).

Women have played multiple roles throughout the armed conflict in Colombia, but it is often their status as victims that receives most attention (Bouvier, 2016, p. 6). Throughout the conflict, women have been subject to forced displacement, sexual violence, and forced labour at levels disproportionate to men (Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica, 2017; Meertens, 2001, 2019). Therefore, when President Santos announced the beginning of peace talks in 2012, Colombian women refused to be excluded as men held a monopoly over decisions that would affect their future and that of their country. Women mobilised, forged alliances, and established agendas to secure participation and ensure an agreement that acknowledged their disproportionate suffering. A growing body of scholarship identifies a positive correlation between women's participation in negotiations and the quality and durability of peace (Krause et al., 2018; O'Reilly et al., 2015; True & Rivero-Morales, 2019). However, women's efforts and actions before and during negotiations have been rarely documented or analysed against the evolving local, national, and international socio-political contexts.

With a focus on the four years of negotiations (2012-2016), this research attempts to formulate a response to the following question: *How have women contributed to peacebuilding in Colombia?* To do so, the article is structured around the following sub-questions: (1) *What impact did women's mobilisation for peace have on the creation of the Gender Subcommittee and the inclusion of a gender perspective in the Final Agreement?* (2) *What strategies did women employ to secure representation and participation in negotiations?* (3) *What was the impact of forming alliances nationwide and with the female plenipotentiaries?*

Methodology

In order to understand women's contribution to peacebuilding in Colombia and how such an inclusive peace agreement emerged from negotiations that began in the absence of women, the methodological approach consisted of an in-depth qualitative analysis of academic literature, media reports, publications from women's organisations, and international bodies. Due to the global Covid-19 pandemic, it was not possible to travel to Colombia to carry out fieldwork, which made the task of establishing contact with women's peace organisations very challenging. However, six semi-structured interviews were conducted over the Zoom Video Communications platform between February and June 2022.

Following a process of virtual networking, six participants were interviewed, including researchers for national think tanks and NGOs; Colombian female scholars; the director of a community-based peacebuilding organisation; and a member of the government's negotiating team who served as co-Chair of the Gender Subcommittee.[11] In order to capture the unique experience and expertise of each participant, the interview process involved pre-set, open-ended questions to guide the conversation. The data collected from these interviews thus provides a diverse range of academic, institutional, and societal perspectives, which collectively contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of women in the Colombian peace process. However, it must be acknowledged that the voices of Afro Colombian and Indigenous women are absent from this research. Given their disproportion-

[11]The full list of interviewees and their respective backgrounds is detailed in the appendix for this article

ate exposure to conflict and their central role in community-based peacebuilding, this represents an important limitation.

This article is divided into three parts. The first section presents a critical analysis of existing academic literature relating to conflict resolution, women, and peacebuilding. The second section is a historical reflection of women's mobilisation and advocacy for peace in Colombia. The third section consists of an analysis of the interview material to respond to the research questions outlined above. This article adds to existing research in the area in two ways. Firstly, the analysis of women's historical mobilisation for peace in Colombia produces a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that led to a more inclusive process from 2012-2016 and the production of a gender-responsive peace agreement in 2016. Secondly, through the analysis of the original interview material, a robust correlation is observed between peace and local, women-led initiatives to reduce inequality, which identifies a limitation to common conceptualisations of peacebuilding as a strictly post-conflict, post-accord process.

'Women's movement for peace', 'women's movement' and 'the movement' are used interchangeably to refer to the diverse groups of women and feminists who mobilised for peace.

Theoretical Framework

Conflict Resolution as a Vehicle for Social Change

Early conceptualisations of the transformation from war to peace equate conflict resolution to problem-solving. However, conflicts of the 20th and 21st centuries expose this approach as reductionist and overly simplistic. The roots of the problem-solving approach can be traced to Burton's (1990b) basic human needs theory, according to which conflict is the result of 'frustrated needs' and to resolve conflict, these needs must be satisfied. The formulaic, rational nature of this problem-solving framework fails to consider the cultural and personal elements which shape conflicts.

LeBaron (2002) offers a convincing argument that conflict cannot be resolved "durably nor respectfully" by focussing on problem-solving alone, as it is "insufficient to bridge cultural or worldview differences" (p. 1). Many early scholarly approaches to conflict resolution were developed in individualist Global North cultures and promote a generic practice which cannot successfully be "exported" to conflicts in collectivist societies in the Global South (Abu-Nimer, 2013, p. 171). This one-size-fits-all approach illustrates a common limitation of many conflict resolution theories: the failure to consider the socio-cultural context in which each conflict occurs. A culturally conscious approach is more likely to provide a multidimensional perspective, which would enable a deeper understanding of the roots of the conflict and how it affects communities. Abu-Nimer (2012) and Lederach (1995) both acknowledge the complexities differentiating one conflict from another and emphasise the importance of placing local cultural practices at the centre of conflict resolution. A collective consciousness of socio-cultural attitudes, traditions, and practices may offer a forecast of how conflict is likely to develop.

A more localised approach, sensitive to culture and human emotions, seems more likely to procure a peace that is satisfactory to all. Throughout conflict resolution processes, consideration should also be afforded to the effect of protracted conflict on societal cultural attitudes, where there is a risk of violence becoming an accepted cultural practice. Conflict does not occur in a vacuum between those waging war but rather has a knock-on effect that extends beyond the physical. The normalisation of violence at the individual and community level, resulting from sustained violence at national and international levels, could pose a threat to peace following a ceasefire. Extending conflict resolution processes beyond the mere cessation of violence is therefore crucial to foster broad social change.

Conflict resolution can serve to construct an improved and less unequal society, but many traditional approaches reinforce elitist practices (Burton, 1998; Doob, 1970). As conflict is often caused and sustained by underdevelopment, Azar (1990) substitutes Burton's (1990b) profile of the "necessitous man" for the victimised and marginalised, stressing that victims should

always be given the highest priority in governments' developmental policies (p. 131). Negotiation processes driven by political and military elites, which overlook affected communities, risk the production of an outcome that is neither reflective of nor accepted by society.

Women and (Post-Conflict) Peacebuilding

Dominant scholarly conceptualisations that designate peacebuilding as a post-conflict process undermine the efforts of grassroots groups, which have led peacebuilding initiatives long before the military and political elites unite at the negotiating table. Peacebuilding as a post-conflict process implies that it is contingent on an agreement. In contexts of protracted negotiations and failed agreements, this could serve to prolong human suffering from the direct effects of war. Galtung (1967) coined the term "peacebuilding" as the process of abolishing structural violence and tackling power imbalances and inequality of opportunity (p. 298). Lederach (1997) supports Harbottle's (1979) thesis, which emphasises an interrelated, coordinated, and multi-professional approach (p. 217). Peacebuilding, according to Lederach (1997), "is more than post-accord reconstruction"; it "encompasses, generates and sustains the full array of processes, approaches, and stages needed to transform conflict towards more sustainable, peaceful relationships" (p. 20). This holistic approach would prioritise victims and those most affected by conflict.

The conceptualisation of "post-conflict" peacebuilding is also problematic for women, who suffer disproportionately from the effects of war. Porter (2016) asserts that the term "post-conflict" overlooks gendered violence, which remains in a militarised culture following the official end to war (p. 210). Highlighting the "continuities of violence that blur the line between war and peace", Selimovic et al. (2012), found that most cases with little or no involvement of civil society in the peace process relapsed into conflict at a later stage (p. 112). "One stands to lose much by excluding civil society from peace processes" (Selimovic et al., 2012, p. 5). One may stand to lose much more through a failure to acknowledge that civil society is gendered. However, to reduce women's capacity for peacebuilding to their "innate peace-loving nature", or their instinctive capacity to build peace, is not only a patriarchal tendency that strips women of their recognition as subjects of political rights, but it also reinforces the idea of war as a man's issue and peace as a woman's project (Galtung, 1996, p. 40; Weber, 2006).

Much of the attention on women's contribution to peace focuses on processes occurring outside of the formal processes, which are often monopolised by men. Bell (2013) points out that, although peace initiatives are often promoted by women, it is only when the main protagonists to a conflict – primarily men – come together in a formal attempt to mediate that a formal peace process is considered to exist (p. 2). According to Paffenholz (2016), early women's involvement facilitates sustained inclusion throughout negotiations and agreement implementation (p. 8). Bell (2018) highlights a three-pronged approach to ensure that peace processes are gendered from the outset (p. 9). First, women must be involved in negotiating, reaching, and implementing the peace agreement, and all mediators must be aware of how the conflict and peace process affect women. Second, the substance of the peace agreement must adopt a gender perspective and address the needs of women and girls. Third, feminist advocacy must include a long-term commitment to sustained peace.

Statistical analysis by Krause (2018) shows a robust relationship between women signatories and the durability of peace, with agreements signed by women showing a higher number of provisions and a higher rate of implementation than those not signed by women (p. 987). Gender equality has been shown to be a strong indicator of a state's peacefulness (Hudson et al., 2012, 2009) and inequality a strong predictor of civil war onset (Caprioli, 2005; Melander, 2005). According to McWilliams (2015), there is seldom just one peace process occurring but a whole range of female-led processes, without which, lasting change is unlikely (p. 232). This multifaceted peace work, however, is rarely "noticed or recognised" (Selimovic et al., 2012, p. 11). Selimovic et al. (2012) highlight the significance of claiming space as a powerful base from which women

can set their own agendas and exert influence from outside the official negotiations. From these spaces, women can gain legitimacy and circumvent formal power structures (Selimovic et al., 2012, pp. 107-111).

Conflict resolution should not be approached as a generic formula to solve problems of personal and structural violence in any given place. Perception of local cultural and social norms must be at the heart of any attempt to address conflict and build peace, with sensitivity shown for those affected by violence of all forms. The end of conflict presents an opportunity to create positive social change by dismantling power structures that perpetuate struggle. Wars often begin at the hands of men and are considered a man's issue. This patriarchal ideology pervades theoretical approaches to conflict resolution, which fail to consider the pertinent role of women, as a heterogeneous group, in building peace. As men have taken their seats at official negotiating tables to analyse the problems created by conflict, women have been mobilising to build peace as war raged on. International standards are strengthening the position and legitimacy of women peacebuilders, although barriers remain. Through the formation of strong, intersectional alliances, women have confronted these barriers, and their contribution has proven essential to lasting peace.

History of Women's Mobilisation for Peace in Colombia

Participation in Betancur's Peace Negotiations

As the second wave of feminism was rising across Europe and North America in the 1970s, the depreciation of women in Colombia was worsening. Women became the spoils of an androcentric war, subject to sexual violence and discrimination. This provoked a quiet revolution in Colombia as women began to construct a collective identity as "subjects of social change" (Luna & Villareal, 1994, p. 171). Feminist groups emerged, placing issues such as abortion, sexuality, and domestic violence in the public arena. Simultaneously, urban and rural popular women organised against exploitation and inequality (Gómez Correal, 2011). Women linked to spaces of political participation began "a broad process of autonomous organisation within these male-dominated spaces" (Vargas, 2002, p. 307). Collectively, these groups represented the women's movement, which reacted quickly to exploit a growing global dialogue on gender equality.

The United Nations designated the period 1975-1985, the "Decade for Women", during which three objectives were outlined: 1) full gender equality and the elimination of gender discrimination; 2) the integration and full participation of women in development and 3) an increased contribution by women towards strengthening world peace (United Nations, 1976). This prompted a reflection of a woman's place in society and empowered the movement in Colombia, propelling the construction of women's networks (Álvarez, 2000, p. 30). As the international community cast an eye over the treatment of women, pressure rose on the Colombian State, which was active and complicit in their oppression.

With the ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence against Women (CEDAW) in 1981, the institutionalisation of the gender equality discourse translated pressure into legal obligations on the Colombian State. These advancements were indicative of a global reckoning that set the stage for mobilisation. The extent of resistance became evident in 1981 when women across the country united at the first Latin American Feminist Encuentro (Meeting) in Bogotá (Luna & Villareal, 1994). This served to prove Melucci's (1998) hypothesis that "the movement is present before the mobilisation becomes visible" (p. 379). The meeting exposed a movement that had been gaining traction in the home and the community as women united to generate social and political change. Empowered by international recognition of their right to equality and security, women advocated for a peaceful end to the armed conflict. The following year, El Colectivo Nacional de Mujeres (the National Women's Collective) was established to lobby before Betancur's peace talks (Chaparro-González & Martínez-Osorio, 2020, p. 27).

Betancur appointed eleven women as vice-ministers and two government ministers, marking

one of the greatest levels of women's political participation in Colombian history (Torres Mateus, 2020). This inclusionary trend extended to the negotiating table and subsequent peace agenda. In 1984, the government signed agreements with four different armed groups. Of fifty-eight signatures, four belonged to women, and the peace commissions were composed of 158 men and 17 women (Chaparro-González & Martínez-Osorio, 2020, p. 24). Women represented 7.14 per cent of all signatories of the peace agreements and 9.71 per cent of peace commission members (Villarraga, 2015). For the first time, women had been invited to participate in discussions to end a conflict of which they had long been the primary victims. This shift from total exclusion to partial inclusion was the culmination of women's mobilisation within a favourable international climate despite national adversity.

Imposing a Feminist Agenda on the 1991 Constitution

The 1985 siege of the Palace of Justice marked a breakdown of Betancur's peace process and accelerated women's mobilisation for peace (Luna & Villareal, 1994). Subsequent peace processes initiated during the Barco (1986-1990) and Gaviria (1990-1994) administrations saw a regression in terms of women's representation and none of these agreements addressed women's rights (Chaparro-González & Martínez-Osorio, 2020, pp. 28-29). Excluded from formal processes, women focused on shaping the "peace pact" presented by the National Constituent Assembly (Chaparro-González & Martínez-Osorio, 2020, p. 32).

In March 1988, the women's collective submitted a proposal entitled 'Nosotras el pueblo de Colombia' - 'We, the people of Colombia' (in the feminine) to the House of Representatives for the reform of the 1886 Constitution. The collective was composed of trade unionists, liberals, conservatives, communists, socialists, feminists, independent and social leaders, reflecting the heterogeneity of the group (Montaño & Aranda, 2006, p. 270). The proposal included labour and political rights, protection for children, and the eradication of inequality and discrimination (Morgan & Buitrago, 1992, p. 370). In response to increasing societal violence, they also proposed a "right to peace, personal security and the prohibition of torture and physical or psychological cruelties" (Morgan & Buitrago, 1992, p. 370).

The convocation of a constitutional assembly intensified networking among women and feminists, who coordinated to ensure the incorporation of their rights into the new Constitution. With only four women elected, low representation intensified the need for strategic advocacy (Luna & Villareal, 1994). In April 1991, the women of Cali published an open letter inviting women to meet to "discuss strategies" (Morgan & Buitrago, 1992, p. 378)[12]. Women from across the country responded, uniting to form the Red Nacional de Mujeres y Constituyente (the Woman and Constituent Assembly National Network) to campaign for the incorporation of CEDAW principles into the new constitution (Morgan & Buitrago, 1992). The growth of this network, from an amalgamation of ten women's groups to seventy-five, reflects the power of the movement and its capacity for harnessing support (Luna & Villareal, 1994, p. 191).

Despite exclusion from formal processes, women harnessed alternative forms of participation. Colombian women recognised the law as a powerful instrument for social change, making immense contributions to "a new political order conducive to all Colombians living in peace" ("Ha renacido la esperanza," 1991). The movement successfully carved out a space for women when the political opportunity arose. By adopting a human rights frame to present their demands, establishing strategic alliances, and harnessing the power of the media, the movement demonstrated a broad repertoire for contentious action, which prohibited the Assembly from ignoring their proposals. This process saw the birth of the Red Nacional de Mujeres (National Women's Network, hereafter RNM), of women, feminists, and non-feminist groups, united for a negotiated end to the conflict (Chaparro-González & Martínez-Osorio, 2020, p. 36).

[12] From a letter from María Ladi Londofio, Clara Eugenia Charria and Carmen Eliza Alvarez, on Si-Mujer (1991, April 19) quoted from Morgan and Buitrago (1992).

Pastrana's Peace Process and UN Resolution 1325

The cautious optimism for a new peaceful political order soon faded under the Samper administration (1994-1998). Low legitimacy due to alleged links with drug traffickers limited President Ernesto Samper's bargaining power for effective peace talks (González, 2014, p. 421). This period did, however, mark an advancement in terms of women's participation. Of seventy-five signatories to peace agreements, seven were women and the Presidential Council for Peace was composed of thirteen men and two women (Chaparro-González & Martínez-Osorio, 2020). The Mandate for Peace, Life and Freedom collected 10 million votes and galvanised marches with high levels of female participation (Rojas, 2004, p. 12). This pressure created momentum for the Pastrana-FARC peace talks in San Vicente del Caguán in January 1999.

Women's representation in the official peace process of 1999-2002 was low, but their impact beyond the negotiating table was mighty. Four women held official positions during negotiations, but the peace commissions were composed of more women than men (Chaparro-González & Martínez-Osorio, 2020). RNM succeeded in holding a Women's Forum in Caguán to declare that "without women, there will be no peace and with women, a sustainable peace can be achieved" (Martínez & González, 2001, p. 87). The forum was an opportunity to advance the gender agenda and created impetus for the formation of further networks (Paarlberg-Kvam, 2017, p. 162). Approximately 600 women attended, representing the "cultural, sectoral and regional diversity of the movement" (Díaz et al., 2001, p. i).

In this public demonstration of political agency, women asserted themselves as key actors in resolving the conflict. The movement highlighted the underlying socio-economic dynamics of the war and the need to address "ethnic, gender and generational dimensions of the conflict" (Rojas, 2004, p. 20). This surpassed common discourse of paramilitaries, drug-traffickers and terrorism. The absence of government officials reinforced the assumption of war as a man's issue, exposing low levels of state support for women's proposals. This absence did not, however, preclude the forum from public recognition. El Espectador and El Tiempo reported on the event, propelling women's "issues" and visions for peace into the public arena (Thomas, 2000; Castrillon, 2000). Four months later, the UN launched the Women Peace and Security (WPS) agenda with Resolution 1325 (Yoshida & Céspedes-Báez, 2021, p. 19).

This resolution reaffirmed the role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, and post-conflict reconstruction (United Nations Security Council, 2000). In Colombia, official negotiations were dominated by men but from the margins, women responded quickly to the WPS agenda (Rojas, 2004, p. 22). In 2001, Colombian and Swedish trade unions jointly established Iniciativa Mujeres por la Paz (the Women's Peace Initiative, IMP) "for women from various social sectors to unite to design a shared agenda for peace" (Rojas, 200, p. 212).

When peace talks collapsed, the women's movement remained steadfast in their demand for a settled negotiation. A coalition of women organised a peace rally to raise their "long-silenced voices" in a resounding 'no' to the war and to confront "the power that excludes, marginalises, and eliminates" (Rojas, 2009, p. 218; Sánchez et al., 2002, p. 104). This exposed the ever-growing political presence of the movement. Subsequently, the Constituyente Emancipatoria de Mujeres (Women's Emancipatory Constituent Assembly) was formed to secure participation in future negotiations (Rojas, 2009, p. 212). The Assembly united nearly 800 women from various regions, social classes, and ethnic groups - who together produced a "Twelve-Point Agenda for Peace" (Rojas, 2009, p. 212; Iniciativa de Mujeres Colombianas por la Paz, 2003)

Women's Resistance under Uribe

The biggest threat to advancements made by women in terms of participation, representation and the pursuit of lasting peace, was the election of Álvaro Uribe as president of the Republic in May 2002 (Jones, 2009, p. 360). The open endorsement Uribe received from the United Self-

Defence Forces of Colombia (hereafter, AUC) during his presidential campaign set the tone for an eight-year tenure of parapolitics, impunity, and widespread human rights violations ("El candidato liberal colombiano," 2002). Within a hostile national climate, the women's movement appealed to the international community, organising nationwide marches to keep their demands for peace in the public eye (Bouvier, 2016, p. 18).

In November 2003, approximately three thousand women arrived in Putumayo to denounce increased human rights violations under Uribe's 'democratic security' programme (Rojas, 2009, p. 218). This demonstration was a testament to the resilience of the movement, which continued to insist on a political solution to the conflict. In an organised act of defiance, IMP submitted a report to Congress which recommended a gender perspective in the legal framework for demobilisation and reintegration of armed groups (Rojas, 2009, p. 213). The proposal invoked international humanitarian law to support their demands. This legislative advocacy strategy, executed in combination with active mobilisation, proved effective. The final law approved by Congress included five points from the proposal, including protection for victims and witnesses of sexual aggression (Rojas, 2009, p. 213).

UN Resolutions 1325 proved fundamental to women's anti-war activism throughout Uribe's presidency. Colombian women employed these international frameworks as "mechanisms of accountability" to the state (Bouvier, 2016, p. 37). The arrival, in 2005, of Susana Villarán from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, to raise awareness of gender-based violence and discrimination, affirmed the successful reach of their advocacy. This generated increased "dialogue and coordination between women's movements across the country", who thereafter adopted a more vigorous rights discourse to demand cultural and social change (Sisma Mujer 2010, p. 31). In 2008, the Constitutional Court ordered in favour of protecting the rights of women victims of forced displacement, and declared sexual violence against women a regular, systemic, and invisible practice in the armed conflict (Sisma Mujer 2010, p. 31).

Analysis

Drawing on semi-structured interview material, this section examines how Colombian women contested their exclusion from the peace process and influenced both formal negotiations and grassroots peacebuilding initiatives.

No Peace Without Women

When peace talks began in September 2012, what was striking was the "masculine monopolisation" of negotiations (O. P. Velásquez Ocampo, personal communication, February 24, 2022). Two women were designated as negotiators for the Colombian government, and two women accompanied the FARC negotiating team as collaborators.[13] Thus, even when women were granted access, their position was subordinate to that of men. The under-representation of women sparked nationwide mobilisation among women who sought to publicise their exclusion and challenge the power dynamics that exacerbated their suffering.

With three decades' worth of activist experience behind them, the women's movement for peace had fine-tuned its organisational capabilities and had developed robust political agency. This was evident from their rapid response to the announcement of the peace negotiations. In October 2012, in contrast to the homogenous, elitist composition of the official negotiating teams, women from all sectors of Colombian society united under a common platform, Mujeres por la Paz (Women for Peace), to draft their own peace agenda (Phelan & True, 2022, p. 180). A collective commitment was expressed "to shape a society" in which women would be recognised as "subjects of rights in public and in private" (Mujeres por la Paz, 2012). The manifesto highlighted their differences and the inequalities they experienced, demonstrating their ability to develop a peace agenda acceptable to all. Mujeres por la Paz expressed their resolute commitment to build peace, in a paragraph which is worth quoting in full:

[13]Lucía Jaramillo Ayerbe, Elena Ambrosi Turbay.Tanja Nijmeijer (alias Alexandra Nariño) and Shirley Méndez.

> We reaffirm our ethical and political commitment to the construction of peace and a political end to the social and armed conflict; we declare ourselves insubordinate to the patriarchy and to capitalism and we refuse to continue to be spoken for in a patriarchal culture; we want to be party to the new social contract which will emerge from these dialogues (Mujeres por la Paz, 2012).

The movement identified the patriarchal, capitalist culture of Colombia as an aggravator of conflict and called for social change, which they identified as necessary for lasting peace. This mirrors many scholarly reflections linking sustainable conflict resolution to social and cultural transformation (Burton, 1990; Doob, 1970; Kelman, 1986; Scimecca, 1991). Mujeres por la Paz drew attention to gender-based violence beyond the battlefield; articulating the connection between organised and intrafamilial violence, emphasising that peace can only be achieved by eradicating both. By reframing the conflict from a military issue to a societal issue ingrained in Colombian culture, women activists expanded the scope of peace negotiations beyond demobilisation and ceasefire arrangements, laying the ideological foundations for the inclusion of a gender perspective in the Final Agreement.

The Women's Movement for Peace was therefore challenging the conventional methods of conflict resolution, which had repeatedly been dominated by men, and which had historically failed to foster lasting peace. These women declared themselves as "protagonists" of negotiation, peacebuilding, and decision-making processes and supported this assertion by reminding the government, the armed forces, and the people of Colombia that "problems which affect women, have implications for society as a whole" (Mujeres por la Paz, 2012). The manifesto was an articulate and comprehensive expression of women's stake in the peace process.

Employing international legal discourse, the women's movement framed peace as a right to be enjoyed by all Colombians. The movement transformed their exclusion into political leverage to secure participation in the formal process and exert pressure for a gendered peace agreement. With the endorsement of nearly 100 organisations, fourteen proposals were submitted for consideration. Through coalition-building, public contestation of their exclusion, and the articulation of a gendered peace agenda, women established themselves as legitimate political actors in the peace process and laid the foundations for representation in the formal process and the incorporation of a gender perspective within the negotiations. A strong message was conveyed to insurgents, politicians, and Colombian society: there will be no peace without women.

Penetrating the Patriarchal Peace Process

The importance of Resolution 1325 was stressed in multiple interviews as Colombian women invoked this international framework to support their claims for inclusion in negotiations and to articulate the disproportionate effect of the conflict on women. The promotion of the rights of women in conflict and post-conflict settings from the international political arena, created space for women's advocacy at local levels and the women's peace movement in Colombia claimed this space. The 2013 National Summit for Women and Peace was the culmination of sustained efforts from women's and feminist organisations and their persistent engagement with the peace process. The women of Colombia understood that there is no strength without unity, particularly when asserting their position among the political elite. The summit was a grand demonstration of this unity: a public rejection of their imposed position of subordination and an irrefutable declaration of their status as political subjects and peacebuilders (Muñoz Pallares & Ramírez Cardona, p. 2014). The summit united over four hundred people to promote women's inclusion in the peace process. UN support was "fundamental" in raising the profile and legitimising women's claim to participation (V. Samudio, personal communication, April 28, 2022).

The summit was, by all accounts, a peace process occurring parallel to formal negotiations. Women from across the country united to consolidate a common agenda (Phelan & True, 2022, p.

182). One objective was to promote dialogue among territorial, national, and international peacebuilding experiences to identify challenges and lessons learned (Muñoz Pallares & Ramírez Cardona, 2014, p. 17). This was echoed nine years later by Sergio Jaramillo Caro, who emphasised the value of learning from other peace processes (Jaramillo Caro, 2022). Having participated in official negotiations from 2012 to 2016, the former High Commissioner for Peace was speaking from hindsight. The foresight exhibited by those at the 2013 summit is, therefore, a testament to women's capacity as peacebuilders and active agents of change.

Three fundamental points were agreed upon at this summit. Firstly, the parties should not leave the negotiating table until they reach an agreement. Secondly, the presence and participation of women during every stage, and thirdly, an agenda which addressed the needs of women and how the conflict had affected them (Muñoz Pallares & Ramírez Cardona, 2014, p. 10). Women for Peace organised a demonstration in Bogotá. Over 8,000 women claimed the streets under the rallying cry "I am a woman and peace is mine" to demand inclusion in the formal dialogues ("Las mujeres maracharon", 2013). Their efforts succeeded when, in November 2013, Nigeria Rentería and María Paulina Riveros were appointed as plenipotentiaries with full negotiating power on behalf of the Colombian government. Reflecting on her appointment, Riveros explained:

> It was the women's civil society movement, which was very strong in Colombia and very prepared, that demanded that the agreement have a differential approach with respect to women. It was in response to this that the President nominated Nigeria and me. (M. P. Riveros, personal communication, June 3, 2022)

While numerically it may seem insignificant to appoint just two women among approximately twenty negotiators, this was an important victory. The negotiations, which began in 2012 and progressed into 2013, projected an image of the peace process as a patriarchal arena. It seemed that the door had closed on women's participation, but through persistent engagement and nationwide public advocacy, the women's civil society movement managed to pry this door open. Through the organisation of inclusive parallel processes such as the National Summit for Women and Peace, alongside sustained coalition-building and harnessing international support from the UN, women transformed their exclusion into political influence. This strengthened their legitimacy as peacebuilders and successfully pressured negotiators to expand women's participation within the formal peace process.

Building Alliances for a Gendered Agreement

The women's movement recognised that with female negotiators, civil society actors could gain access to official negotiations. Ellerby (2016) argues that a women-inclusive peace agreement requires institutional support for women's participation. Women peace activists formed alliances with the female delegates so that, from their position in Havana, they could cultivate political will to incorporate their demands and institutional support for their participation. Riveros reflected that her appointment was due to her "very fluid, permanent, and deep relationship with civil society" (M. P. Riveros, personal communication, June 3, 2022). This "close bond of trust" would ensure the "reflection of women's rights in each aspect of the agreement" (M. P. Riveros, personal communication, June 3, 2022). This alliance provided a platform from which the women's movement exerted pressure for greater access to negotiations.

The Gender Subcommittee resulted from this pressure and was a breakthrough as it formally guaranteed the participation of women civil society in the official peace process ("Instalan Subcomisión de Género," 2014). The objective of the subcommittee was "to include the voice of women and a gender perspective in the agreement" ("Se instaló la Subcomisión de Género," 2014). The subcommittee exemplified the transformative force of the women's movement and its capacity to influence negotiations despite initial exclusion. With support from international experts and a "very strong relationship" with

women's civil society organisations, the subcommittee established a solid conceptualisation of a gender perspective (M. P. Riveros, personal communication, June 3, 2022). Riveros emphasised that women's organisations "were a permanent source of advice to the subcommittee" (M. P. Riveros, personal communication, June 3, 2022).

From 2014 to 2016, eighteen representatives of women's organisations participated in official deliberations with the Gender Subcommittee.[14] Five delegations of victims, sixty per cent of whom were women, were also invited to participate in hearings (Céspedes-Báez & Jaramillo Ruiz, 2018, p. 98). As a result, over one hundred provisions relating to women's rights and equality were written into the final peace agreement, affirming Ellerby's argument that a women-inclusive peace agreement is possible where there is institutional support for women's participation. The subcommittee ensured the incorporation of a gender-based approach, addressing comprehensive rural reform, political participation, solutions to the problem of illicit drugs and victims of the conflict ("Los logros de la Subcomisión de Género," 2016). With the intention of reducing the imbalance of power and inequality of opportunity, these provisions address what Galtung (1969) identifies as "structural violence" (pp. 170-171). These measures aimed to weave peace into Colombian institutions and society by reducing indirect violence against women. The final agreement reflects Boutros-Ghali's (1992) conceptualisation of peacebuilding as a process of "rebuilding the institutions and infrastructures of nations torn by civil war (...) and building bonds of peaceful mutual benefit" (p. 4).

Each interviewee attributed the peace agreement and inclusion of a gender perspective to women's persistent mobilisation. When Santos announced the beginning of negotiations in 2012, the women's peace movement was "mature, organised and had accumulated allies and agency throughout the previous three decades" (V. Samudio, personal communication, April 28, 2022). This aligns closely with Bell's (2018) notion of feminist advocacy, which she defines as the long-term commitment necessary to ensure that peace processes are gendered from the outset (p. 9). The interview data suggests that the women's movement for peace had already fulfilled this dimension of Bell's framework well before formal negotiations began and it was the accumulation of this advocacy which led to a gendered peace agreement.

Building Peace in the Midst of War

In 2024, Jaramillo Caro, former High Commissioner for Peace in Colombia, proclaimed that peace comes after the agreement (FBA, 2024). This has long been the approach to conflict-resolution and echoes many scholarly understandings of peacebuilding as a "post-conflict" process (Paris, 2004). There are three main flaws with filing peacebuilding under the "post-conflict" category. Firstly, it reveals a common discrepancy between political understandings of the construction of peace and peacebuilding on the ground, which often begins long before official negotiations commence. Secondly, it undermines the revolutionary role that local communities play in peacebuilding pre-accord and thirdly, "post-conflict" peacebuilding fails to acknowledge violence beyond the battlefield, which is perpetuated by cultural attitudes and influenced by the normalisation of armed conflict.

As politicians have inferred that peacebuilding is contingent on an official agreement, women in Colombia have been actively building peace in the midst of conflict and in the absence of a treaty. San Andrés de Cuerquia (hereafter, San Andrés), a rural Andean town in the Antioquia department of Colombia, has been an epicentre of violence, where communities have long lived under the shadows of paramilitaries (Rutas del Conflicto, n.d.). Lady Acevedo, the coordinator of Paz A Bordo, a peace organisation in San Andrés, emphasised the central role of local women victims of the conflict, in building peace (L. Acevedo, personal communication, June 1, 2022). These women have united to form associations and organisations in resistance to violence. She stressed that they alone, without

[14] Including: Asociación Amanecer de Mujeres por Arauca, Red Nacional de Mujeres, Iniciativa de Mujeres por la Paz, Ruta Pacífica de Mujeres, Coordinación Nacional de Desplazados–Departamento de Mujeres, and Asociación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas, Negras e Indígenas.

institutional support, began to construct a community of peaceful coexistence: "these women organised themselves and took the reins to build peace" (L. Acevedo, personal communication, June 1, 2022). Asociación de Mujeres Creativas y Emprendedoras del Municipio de Rovira (the Association) is another women-led, independent peacebuilding initiative that promotes women's engagement in economic activities such as farming and the cultivation of coffee crops (Sanabria, 2022; Solorzano, 2020).

The interdependent relationship between social equality and peace was concisely articulated by Acevedo: "Social inequality guarantees poverty, and that which guarantees poverty, is always going to guarantee violence" (L. Acevedo, personal communication, June 1, 2022). This reinforces Galtung's (1976) conceptualisation of peacebuilding as the abolishment of structural violence and inequality. Women have engaged in processes to break this vicious cycle. Paz a Bordo organises skills-based workshops for women to learn to make bedding, curtains and clothing to sell. Acevedo explained that this is part of the peacebuilding process as it helps women become financially independent, thus reducing social inequality (L. Acevedo, personal communication, June 1, 2022).

Acevedo highlighted two elements of peacebuilding that must sustain and complement each other. The first concerns peacebuilding from the "endogenous", which she defined as "strength from within the local communities" (L. Acevedo, personal communication, June 1, 2022). The second concerns peace as a political project. Acevedo emphasised the importance of integrating the two and transforming peace from a "political issue" to a practical process (L. Acevedo, personal communication, June 1, 2022). This mirrors Lederach's (1997) approach, whereby the elites of society engage with and support grassroots and social leaders to construct peace (p. 72). Acevedo explained that in the absence of institutional support, women have developed their own understanding of peace and have united to build this vision into their communities (L. Acevedo, personal communication, June 1, 2022).

All interviewees highlighted the normalisation of violence. Acevedo remarked that, in San Andrés, "many jokes are violence-related (...) it has become anchored in our culture" (L. Acevedo, personal communication, June 1, 2022). This not only affirms Porter's (2016) assertion that gendered violence remains in a militarised culture following the official end to war (p. 210) but suggests that the conflict exacerbated gender-based violence in Colombia. "Here, a woman is beaten for the simple fact of being a woman" (L. Acevedo, personal communication, June 1, 2022). This strengthens Selimovic et al.'s (2012) assertion that understanding the interrelations of domestic violence and violence in the streets is "imperative" for substantive social change (p. 112). Culture cannot be omitted from the conflict resolution equation if peace is to be achieved at all levels of society. Riveros noted that the negotiating parties collectively "aspired to construct a culture free from gender-based violence" (M. P. Riveros, personal communication, June 3, 2022). Beyond the mere aspirational, women-led organisations such as those in rural communities in Rovira and San Andrés have been actively working to eradicate violence.

The Kroc Institute's fourth special report on the gender approach of the Colombian peace agreement found that the implementation rate of provisions with a gender focus is low (Echavarría Álvarez, 2023, p. 28; Quinn and Vásquez, 2023). The report indicates that the gender provisions are unlikely to be implemented within the 15-year timeline outlined in the framework plan for implementation (Echavarría Álvarez, 2023). These findings conflict with Krause's analysis that women's participation in peace negotiations leads to higher agreement implementation rates (Krause, 2018, p. 1006). The low levels of implementation expose a gap between peace as a political issue and what Acevedo refers to as a "practical process" (L. Acevedo, personal communication, June 1, 2022). The Kroc Institute report cites failed efforts to eradicate poverty as an example of a gender gap in the implementation of the peace accord (Echavarría Álvarez, 2023, p. 35). This is consistent with concerns expressed by the interviewees. "No hay plata, no hay plata, no hay plata" (there is no money) was repeated by the interviewees when asked of the biggest challenges to building peace and women's

sustained participation. Each stressed the importance of education and the role of young people in holding the government to account in the pursuit of a peaceful, just and equal society. Despite challenges, each interviewee expressed hope and attributed this to advances made by women in the face of adversity. "We have had enough of this violent narrative. There is no turning back now" (L. Acevedo, personal communication, June 1, 2022).

Discussion and Conclusion

The women of Colombia defy many scholarly conceptualisations of a woman's role and place in war and peace. Sexual violence, marginalisation, and discrimination were the side effects of an armed conflict that plagued Colombian society for more than fifty years. However, the violence, repression, and brutality that characterised the country were also the impetus for social mobilisation for change. An international climate that cracked open the conversation on gender equality thrust women to the front and centre of the campaign for an inclusive, negotiated settlement, which acknowledged the differentiated effects of warfare on women. This global dialogue empowered the women's movement in Colombia, which responded by building alliances and constructing a collective identity as political subjects to challenge their imposed positions of subordination and victimisation. The inclusion of women at the negotiating table during the Betancur administration was a result of their persistent activism and catalyzed their sustained demands for inclusion in the peace processes that followed.

Much of the literature on women's contribution to the Colombian peace process has glossed over the historical accumulation of women's political agency, and few have analysed the impact of women's peacebuilding efforts at the community level. Women's mobilisation for peace in Colombia did not occur in a vacuum. The consistent ability of these groups to adapt to changing national and international contexts is a testament to their political agency. Over the three decades and four peace processes that preceded the Santos-FARC negotiations, the women's peace movement consolidated its efforts to lay a strong foundation from which to challenge male monopolisation of the 2012 negotiations.

Women's contributions to peacebuilding in Colombia have thus manifested in many ways. Since the mid-1980s, women have publicly rejected the violent conflict and campaigned for a negotiated settlement to the war through the construction of strategic alliances, public marches, and national summits. By documenting and publicising human rights violations, Colombian women challenged the normalisation of violence by institutionalising peace. The women's movement in Colombia remained attentive to their expanding rights under international law, engaging in legislative advocacy to protect their rights, promote peace and appeal for change.

When the negotiations between the government and the FARC commenced in 2012, women reacted quickly to challenge the gender deficit and to prevent a peace treaty which would be characterised by gender blindness. Women of all backgrounds joined forces to express their commitment to ending the armed conflict and to publicly denounce the violence stemming from the capitalist, patriarchal structures of Colombian politics and society. The peace agenda produced by this diverse alliance of women in 2012 called for their direct participation in official negotiations and the inclusion of a gender perspective in the peace process.

The formation of alliances between diverse civil society groups of women and feminists increased the visibility of the movement which helped to garner the support of international bodies. The alliances formed locally, nationally, and internationally strengthened the credibility of their claim for inclusion. The significance of alliance-building was evident in the organisation of the National Summit for Women and Peace. The summit was a grand demonstration of unity, which contrasted starkly with an increasingly polarised Colombian society. The summit was a platform for women to publicly declare their status as political subjects and peacebuilders. Through the cumulative foundation of alliances, women's civil society organisations were able to interact with the female plenipotentiaries. The consolidation of this relationship served to legitimise their claims among the political elite and

opened an entry to direct participation in official negotiations. While the implementation of the peace agreement was beyond the scope of this research, the lack of progress since 2016 in delivering on the gender provisions of the agreement presents further questions regarding barriers to gender equality and highlights an important area for further research analysing post-accord challenges to inclusive, sustained peace.

As Colombian women have frequently been denied access to formal negotiation spaces, they have pursued alternative paths to build peace in their communities. These peacebuilding initiatives have often developed in the midst of war and as the political and military elite have convened for discussions. Women peacebuilders such as those in San Andrés de Cuerquia and Rovira undermine many scholarly and political approaches to peace which insist on placing peacebuilding on a shelf until an agreement has been reached to settle the conflict.

Contrary to repeated scholarly affirmations of women's innate ability to build peace, this research demonstrates that the role of Colombian women as peacebuilders stems from their status as subjects of political rights, from the robust political agency which they have accumulated through contentious action and their direct involvement in peacebuilding initiatives. While this research draws on interviews with women from diverse sectors of Colombian society, it does not include the voices of Afro-Colombian or Indigenous women who have experienced disproportionate and identity-specific impacts of the armed conflict (Echavarría et al., 2024). Future research should centralise the voices of Afro-Colombian and Indigenous peoples and should consider gender and ethnic experiences through an intersectional lens.

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Appendix A: An Empirical Analysis of Climate-Conflict Cycles: The Syrian Civil War & The 2023 Earthquakes by Michaela Peters-Salah

Appendix A: Table 1a

Detailed Vulnerability Data Table: Latakia Governorate (Inside Impact Zone)

Category	Sub Category	Data	Vulnerability Assessment
Exposure of Infrastructure and Population			**Very High**
	Seismic Hazard PGA Rating	Mostly level VII with some areas in the east reaching levels between VIII - IX [1]	Very High
	% of Population Living in a City	Approximately 54%[1, 2]	Very High
Capacity to React to Hazard			**High**
	Presence & Capacity of Government or Non-governmental Bodies	References to IRCS responding to other emergencies in the region in 2020.[4] Humanitarian projects in the region include access to water and shelter capacity[7], health care, economic, and social services[8]	High
	Area of Government of Control	Mostly under GoS control except for northern areas on the Turkish border. GoS only controls one border crossing, opposition forces (backed by Russia) control the rest of the area. Rebel groups have had a strong hold in Latakia for the entirety of the civil war. Coastal regions (and ports) are controlled by regime president's brother.[2, 3]	Very High

Category	Sub Category	Data	Vulnerability Assessment
Emergency Response and Preparedness (Resilience)			**High**
	Existence of Disaster Response Policies	The governorate "has remained the tributary that supplies the army and the security services under the guidance of the ruling family through a policy that has neglected tourism, agriculture, and industry and provided poor services. The regime created chaos in the trade sector, apart from the domination of militias and gangs tied to the ruling family which spread terror so that the residents had no shelter or source of livelihood except joining the security forces and the army."[11]	Very High
	Current State of Buildings and Infrastructure	Extensive damage from 2019 GoS offensive and 2020 wildfires. 2020 reports of 56 road reconstruction projects. Some Shiite dominated neighbourhoods are being rebuilt by Iranian forces.[4]	High
Demographic Characteristics			**Very High**
	Level of Household Access to Food, Shelter, Health Resources	90% of health facilities were undamaged as of 2021 but in 2021 there were several attacks on health facilitators.[3, 4] Low level of indiscriminate violence, limits some movement.[3] At least 400,000 people in need of social service supports and 825,000 are considered vulnerable.[6] Increases in food and petrol prices and degradation of agriculture land.[7] Half the population facing food insecurity.[10]	Very High

Category	Sub Category	Data	Vulnerability Assessment
	Uprooted Population Hosted in Region (refugee, IDP, etc.)	Most people don't have access to official personal documents.[3] As of 2021, 449 317 IDPs were in the governorate.[3, 6] There were 12,000 Palestinian refugees in the governorate in an unofficial camp, only partially supported by UNWRA.[5] This equate an approximate 35% (conservative estimate) uprooted people in the governorate.	Very High
	Disruption of social support networks	60-70% of Alawaite young males died or were injured in the civil war.[3] Most Christians who lived on the coast left Syria.[3] Fewer and fewer men are able to work and women are taking on more bread-winning roles in their families but face prejudices for doing so.[9]	Very High
		Overall Vulnerability	**Very High**

Appendix A: Table 1b

Detailed Vulnerability Data Table: Rif Dimashq Governorate (Outside Impact Zone)

Category	Sub Category	Data	Vulnerability Assessment
Exposure of Infrastructure and Population			**Medium**
	Seismic Hazard PGA Rating	Mostly levels II and III.[1]	Low
	% of Population Living in a City	Approximately 66%[3, 4]	Very High
Capacity to React to Hazard			**High**
	Presence & Capacity of Government or Non-governmental Bodies	Explosive ordnance limits delivery of aid. WFP, WAO operational; supporting food needs.[4] UNHCR is active in support housing. [12] Often included in Damascus governorate projects, where many NGOs are consistently present though face significant challenges in delivering services in GoS areas.[13]	High
	Area of Government of Control	Under GoS control since 2018, opposition forces were completely absent by 2020, though attacks take place occasionally.[4] Except for 55km of Northern area that was US-declared exclusion zone.[3]	Medium
Emergency Response and Preparedness (Resilience)			**High**
	Existence of Disaster Response Policies	GoS is highly disengaged from administration an functioning of the governorate.[13]	Very High
	Current State of Buildings and Infrastructure	Extensive severe damage to buildings recorded between 2016 and 2020 throughout the governorate. 44% were living in damaged buildings.[4] GoS policies were created to support rebuilding but ultimately forced people out of the area.[4] Several projects to remove debris from roads and public areas and rebuilding of schools. [6, 12]	High
Demographic Characteristics			**Very High**

Category	Sub Category	Data	Vulnerability Assessment
	Level of Household Access to Food, Shelter, Health Resources	Explosive ordnance limits mobility of people. [4] 40% describe their access to health services as 'poor.' [4] 3 Million people classified as in need.[6] Low level of indiscriminate violence, limits some movement.[3] High level of dependence agricultural-based income.[3]	Very High
	Uprooted Population Hosted in Region (refugee, IDP, etc.)	Approximately 1.73 Million IDPs. GoS offensives in the governorate and later policy changes forced migration out of the region. Approximately 55% (conservative estimate) uprooted people in the governorate.[4]	Very High
	Disruption of social support networks	"There was a high level of extrajudicial detentions and abductions perpetrated.[4] High level of Violence against Civilians in 2020-2022.[4] Highly fragile security situations for people living in cities.[14]	Very High
		Overall Vulnerability	**High**

Notes: 1. (Johnson et. al., 2023) 2. (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2024) 3. (EUAA. 2023) 4. (EASO, 2021) 5. (UNRWA, n.d.) 6. (UN ESCWA, 2022) 7. (UN Habitat, 2014) 8. (AVSI, 2024) 9. (Hourani, 2019) 10. (Amnesty International, 2023a) 11. (Hamke, 2020) 12. (UNHCR, 2022) 13. (NRC and Oxfam, 2020) 14. (Adbin, 2017)

Appendix A: Table 2

Vulnerability Rubric

	Very High	High	Medium	Low	Very Low
Seismic Hazard GPA Rating	Rating of 0.8+ in region	Rating of 0.6-0.79 in region	Rating of 0.4-0.59 in region	Rating of 0.2-0.39 in region	Rating of 0-0.19 in region
% of Population Living in a City	51% or more of the governorate's population lives in a city	30-50% of the governorate's population lives in a city	20-29% of the governorate's population lives in a city	10-19% of the governorate's population lives in a city	Less than 10% of the governorate's population lives in a city
Presence & Capacity of Government or Non-governmental Bodies	Neither the government nor NGOs are present in the governorate	NGOs are present in the governorate and willing to support following a hazard but are already over capacity or otherwise limited in their ability to delivery aid	NGOs are present and have capacity and trusted to fulfill social service needs following a hazard.	Only one NGO or Government is present and trusted to provide relief following hazards	Both government and NGOS are regularly active, collaborative, and trusted to provide relief following hazards
Area of Government of Control	Rebels and government are in active conflict over the territory in the impact zone	Rebels and government are in non-active conflict over territory	There are non-violent disputes about territory	Government or the Rebels controls all territory in the governorate	Territory is divided between government and opposition cooperatively with little to no ongoing disputes

	Very High	High	Medium	Low	Very Low
Existence of Disaster Response Policies	No national or sub-national building policies. Extensive existing damage with no plan to fix it	No formal policies at the state level but clear evidence of existing networks of support from local or international organizations	Responsible policies exist but not transparent or available	Preparedness and response policies publicly available and transparent, backed by state institutional body; relies primarily on resources externally available to state.	Preparedness and response policies publicly available and transparent, backed by state institutional body; relies primarily on resources easily accessible within the state.
Current State of Buildings and Infrastructure	No national or sub-national building policies. Extensive existing damage with no plan to fix it	No official or unofficial seismic-resistant codes or policies but buildings follow some code or policy. Extensive existing damage with ongoing reconstruction	Strong seismic-resistant policies, building codes. Evidence of new buildings not following codes. Some existing damage that is being repaired	Unofficial seismic-resistant policies, building codes that people are following. Evidence of new buildings following codes and old buildings being upgraded. Minimal existing damage that is being repaired	Strong seismic-resistant policies, building codes. Evidence of new buildings following codes and old buildings being upgraded. No existing damage due to climate or conflict.

	Very High	High	Medium	Low	Very Low
Level of Household Access to Food, Shelter, Health Resources	Reports of high level of no access to at least 1/3 of these listed essentials. Poverty rate is more than 35%	People often can not access food, shelter, and health. Poverty rate is less than 30%	People have some but intermittent access to these essential services. Poverty rate is less than 25%	People can usually access these services with some people occasional concerns. Poverty rate is lower than 20%	Minimal concerns about access to essentials. Poverty rate is less than 15%
Uprooted Population Hosted in Region (refugee, IDP, etc.)	25.01% or more of population is an uprooted person	20.01 - 25% or more of population is an uprooted person	10.01-15% or more of population is an uprooted person	5.01-10% or more of population is an uprooted person	0-5% or more of population is an uprooted person
Disruption of social support networks	Evidence of immense and indiscriminate disruption of family and community network with no rebuilding	Evidence of immense disruption of family and community network in some regions or among some ethnic groups with no rebuilding	Evidence that at least 50% of the population have lost some form of social network or community connections in social, economic, or cultural realms	Some evidence of localized nonviolent conflicts between social groups but overall regional networks are intact	Social networks and connections are thriving and supportive across ages, industries, and social groups.

Appendix B: Gender, Conflict Resolution, and Peacebuilding: Assessing the Contribution of Women to the Colombian Peace Process by Sarah Kathleen Mullally

Table 1
List of Interviewees

Name	**Profile**	**Date and Place**
Dr. Olga Patricia Velásquez Ocampo	Professor of Law at *Los Andes* University in Bogotá, Colombia; former Legal Adviser to the Ministry of Justice; expert on law and gender, transitional justice and constitutional design.	24 February 2022, Zoom
Isabela Marín Carvajal	Researcher for Colombian think tank Fundación Ideas Para la Paz (FIP); and independent consultant for conflict and gender.	28 April 2022, Zoom
Dr. Vera Samudio	Colombian lawyer and researcher for Colombian think tank *Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular/Programas Por la Paz* (CINEP/PPP). Since 2016 Dr Samudio has been accompanying the implementation of the Fifth Point of the Colombian Peace Accord: Agreements Regarding the Victims of the Conflict.	28 April 2022, Zoom
Valeria Quintana	Assistant researcher for Colombian NGO and think tank Instituto de Estudios para el Desarrollo y la Paz (INDEPAZ)	21 May 2022, Zoom
Dr. Lady Acevedo	Director of peacebuilding organisation, Corporación Paz a Bordo	1 June 2022, Zoom
Dr. María Paulina Riveros	Negotiator for the Colombian government in Havana 2014-2016, co-Chair of the Gender Sub-commission and former Deputy Attorney General of Colombia	3 June 2022, Zoom