

PROJECT SUMMARY

Public Service Provision as Peace-building: How do Autonomous Efforts Compare to Internationally Aided Interventions?

Scholars and practitioners alike have largely concluded that international efforts to build sustainable peace in post-conflict states must include a focus on building state capacity. It is not necessarily the case, however, that the twin goals of peace- and state-building are mutually reinforcing. The proposed project seeks to improve both the theory and practice of how peace is achieved in post-conflict countries by disentangling the related goals of peace- and state-building. It does so by focusing on the ability of three post-conflict states to provide public services and resolve societal grievances at the local level. It also seeks to understand how externally led peace-building interventions compare with more autonomous and domestically motivated peace processes in achieving sustainable peace and improvements in state capacity. To these ends, we propose a study that varies the “degree of aidedness” of peace- and state-building initiatives, selecting country cases that enable both a cross-national comparison (Cambodia and Laos) and an intertemporal comparison (Uganda in two distinct time periods). We further enhance our analytical leverage by focusing on outcomes at the subnational and sectoral levels, where the tangible results of peace- and state-building can be best observed.

We propose a research design that allows us to draw comparisons across towns within countries, time periods within one country, and between the three countries and two regions. Through semi-structured interviews with elites, public service providers, and local stakeholders, we will compile data on the degree of aidedness in selected sectors and localities as well as on the extent to which sustainable peace and state capacity have been realized at the local level. Overall, this methodology will enable us to shed light on the causal relationships between the “degree of aidedness,” state-building, and peace-building.

The proposed research thus supports the Minerva Initiative topic 2, “Models of societal resilience and change.” Measuring state capacity through the provision of public services allows us to examine how peace-building occurs where the state interfaces with society and how closing governance gaps at the domestic level can enhance a society’s resilience and ability to sustain peace. Local-level contestation often occurs around the provision of public services; thus, as we examine this element of state-building, we can analyze the extent to which ordinary grievances and local conflicts related to these services are routed to and resolved through official channels, a crucial measure of peace-building. In doing so, we expect to be able to build generalized findings on the advantages and drawbacks of top-down, international peace-building interventions when compared to more bottom-up, autonomous peace processes. In turn, we will deliver a series of policy implications of interest to the United States government and other agencies involved in national defense and the international peace-building endeavor.

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