

GOVERNANCE FOR PEACE

an OEF Research Policy Brief
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Governance systems that contribute to stable peace are characterized by having inclusive means of operating, participatory systems that bring the governed into the process of decision making, systems for accountability that ensure transparent and equitable operations, and enough systemic capacity that they are able to provide physical security and public goods supporting human development. When all of these elements are present, they form a mutually reinforcing virtuous cycle that reduces the risk of violence.

Policy Implications:

- ▶ Governance systems must ensure that all major groups within a polity perceive themselves as included in decisions and equally able to access resources and public goods. When systems are not inclusive, they contribute to group-based grievances that can lead to mobilization for violence.
- ▶ Participatory governance supports peace. Governance systems should provide pathways for citizens to feel that their issues and identity is represented in the decision making structure in some way. When systems are not seen as participatory in some way, their legitimacy is challenged and collective decisions may not be followed. If participation turns into identity-based factionalization leading some groups to feel excluded, then this can contribute to instability.
- ▶ Corrupt and unaccountable institutions can encourage autocratic behavior that contributes to violence. Systems for accountability that ensure that rules apply equally to all governed citizens contribute to peace. Ensuring transparency about governance decision making processes and distribution of resources is an important part of accountability.

Policy Implications, cont.

- ▶ A basic level of security and policing is necessary to prevent spoilers and aggressive actors from dominating through brute force. Governance systems that also provide effective human development – in the form of education, health care, and access to potential economic opportunities – are consistently more peaceful. When people lack opportunities and are unable to access essential public goods, they are more likely to engage in political violence.
- ▶ These different elements of governance are closely interrelated and support each other. Where governance is weak or failing, improving only one element of the four identified above is not likely to succeed. A whole of society approach is needed in which multiple good governance and peacebuilding reforms are addressed simultaneously.



Governance systems that provide social services such as education, health care, and security have been linked to increased peace. Photos from left to right: Russell Watkins, DFID; Clinton Doggett, USAID ; Ashraf Shazly/AFP/Getty Images.

RESEARCH SUMMARY

An expanding body of research confirms a direct relationship between governance and peace. “Governance” refers to all the systems, both formal and informal, that human groups use to make collective decisions and resolve disputes. The book by Cortright, Seyle, and Wall defines governance as

The system of rules and procedures used for the purpose of solving collective problems and establishing and maintaining social order. The domain of governance includes norms and policies to guide the system, protection against internal and external threats, and the provision of public goods and services. Essential elements of governance include institutions, mechanisms of compliance, and systems for cooperation and communication among social actors.

In the modern world, the dominant governance system is the state, and much of the analysis in this volume looks at what governments can do to promote peace through good governance. Civil society also plays a role in shaping relations between the state and citizens. Governance goes beyond the state, especially in the digitalized mediasphere, with an ever-multiplying panoply of civil forces often helping to hold government accountable. Non-state forms of governance are of increasing importance and can serve as a force for improving state performance and building conditions in support of peace. When governance systems work well, they reduce the likelihood that violent conflict will occur through several pathways. Violence arises when actors feel that they have no other options for preventing exploitation or abuse, or when they feel that they can use violence to seize resources or power that they can’t otherwise get.

This review of the existing research suggests that governance systems promote peace when they are **inclusive, participatory, and accountable**, and **have the capacity to provide a wide range of public goods**. In the case of inclusivity, governance systems promote peace when they ensure that all significant identity groups (whether based on ethnicity, religion, or any other criteria) feel like they are allowed to access the resources governed by the system and are able to expect basic protections for civil and human rights. When this inclusiveness is not present, there is more incentive for groups to fight to take over control of resources and more grievances that can motivate people to join violent groups.



A woman listens to local officials at a town hall meeting in Bagatelle, Dominica. Photo by Roosevelt Skerrit.

In terms of being participatory, governance systems promote peace when they are also inclusive in their structure. In the modern world, this is most often achieved through having a democratic system of some sort, and the research suggests that there is a strong link between mature democracy and peace. One reason is that participatory systems allow for a way for groups to feel included, as described. Another is that participatory systems allow for groups to feel that their voice has been heard in the decision-making process, which supports the perceived legitimacy of the governance system. When systems are not participatory, it is easy for government to be unaccountable or to be perceived as illegitimate, which can make it easier to rally violent opposition.

Governance systems promote peace when they are accountable in their operation to some understood system or structure other than personal whim. People trust governance systems more when they are predictable and are seen as being just in their decisions and structures. Achieving this accountability can often be accomplished through having participatory systems as described, as well as through having transparency around how decisions are made and funds are spent.

In addition to these three key elements that describe how governance systems function, these systems also support peace through what they do. There is a strong body of research showing that governance systems support peace when they provide a full spectrum of social services. Higher levels of spending on both education and health care have been linked to increased peace, as have higher levels of economic opportunity. GDP per capita is one of the strongest predictors of peace, and when governance systems are able to provide both economic and human development their citizens are less likely to use violence. In addition, governance systems need to have some level of security services in place to prevent spoilers and violent actors from simply taking over territory. In particular, spending on security services when those services are in the context of well-governed systems, as described, supports peace.

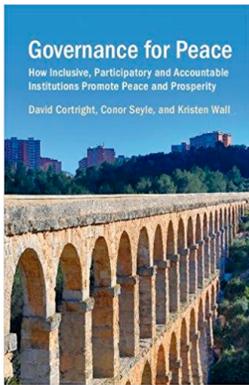
These five distinct elements of inclusiveness, participation, accountability, social service delivery, and security capacity all are closely related. In many cases, the presence of one requires or greatly facilitates the other: a critical aspect of accountability, for example, is participatory governance. Inclusiveness works best when there are robust social services to include citizens in. Because of this inter-connectedness, one issue with this research is that a well-functioning system can be described, but clear interventions that will move a country or region from a poor system to a well-functioning one are harder to identify. It's clear that programs focusing on just one aspect of governance, such as capacity, will face significant challenges in execution if the other aspects of governance are not targeted as well.

Addressing these challenges in fragile and conflict-affected countries will probably require multidimensional approaches to intervention that work simultaneously to promote different aspects of governance. International organizations working on development or stability have realized this, with organizations from the World Bank to the Catholic Relief Services developing multifaceted interventions in the areas where they work. Promoting this kind of intervention will likely require coordinated action among multiple actors working in the same contexts but focusing on overlapping issues.



Protestors in Bangkok, Thailand. Photo by Rufus Cox/Getty Images

BACKGROUND



“Governance” refers to the system of rules and procedures that people use to resolve collective disputes and distribute public goods. A growing body of research suggests that failures and weaknesses of governance are strongly associated with an increased risk of armed violence: when governance systems work well, they are able to prevent or resolve many of the problems that can give rise to conflict before violence is triggered. A recent book by OEF Research Fellows and staff, titled *“Governance for Peace: How Inclusive, Participatory and Accountable Institutions Promote Peace and Prosperity,”* reviews the current research linking peace and governance and argues that improving governance is necessary for achieving sustainable peace.

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