

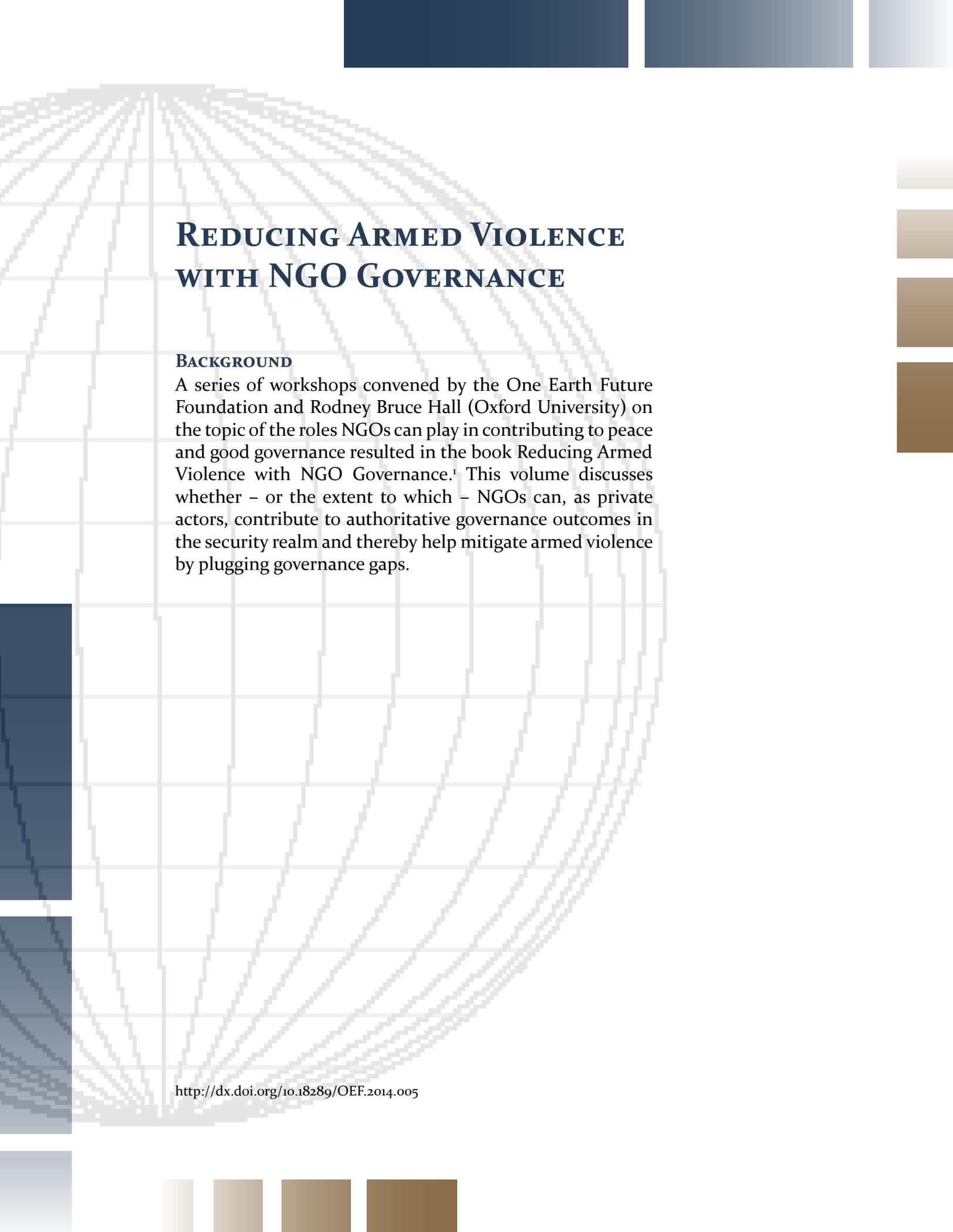


# REDUCING ARMED VIOLENCE WITH NGO GOVERNANCE



a One Earth Future  
Policy Brief

**Whether and how NGOs can, as private actors, contribute to authoritative governance outcomes in the security realm .**



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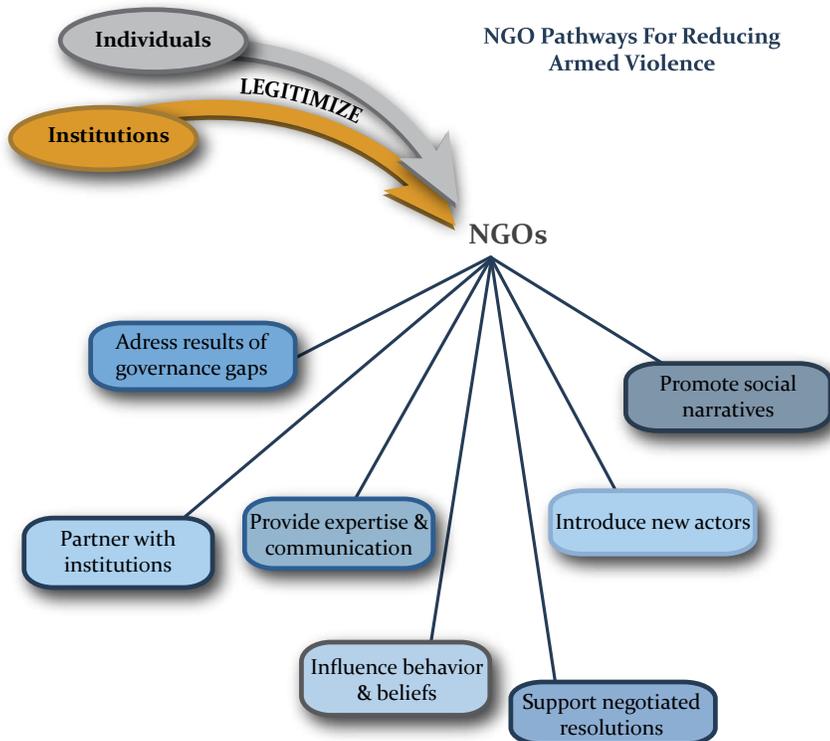
## BACKGROUND

A series of workshops convened by the One Earth Future Foundation and Rodney Bruce Hall (Oxford University) on the topic of the roles NGOs can play in contributing to peace and good governance resulted in the book *Reducing Armed Violence with NGO Governance*.<sup>1</sup> This volume discusses whether – or the extent to which – NGOs can, as private actors, contribute to authoritative governance outcomes in the security realm and thereby help mitigate armed violence by plugging governance gaps.

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## RESEARCH SUMMARY

NGOs acting in governance systems are fundamentally different from states: they have significantly different capacities and must use significantly different tools. NGOs typically lack the ability to legally use military or coercive force to accomplish their goals, and are organized to focus on specific issues rather than control territory.<sup>2</sup> As a result, [the ability of an NGO to legitimately act as an authority is contingent on institutions and individuals](#) agreeing that the NGO is the legitimate authority and choosing to abide by a decision rather than being forced to.<sup>3</sup>



One way NGOs can contribute to peace is through [addressing the results of existing governance gaps](#), such as hunger and food insecurity. By providing development aid, NGOs can directly contribute to peace, economic development, and overall human security.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, by working to [support negotiated resolutions](#) to conflicts, NGOs can participate in supporting human development: NGOs may be able to [bring new actors to the table](#) to discuss issues that would not work with states, or [promote social narratives](#) that de-legitimize violence.<sup>5</sup> In addition, NGOs can contribute directly to governance systems. In areas without extant governance systems, NGOs can directly provide governance by [partnering with other organizations](#) such as private military contractors, IGOs, and other institutions to create networks

that directly act as governance systems in ungoverned areas.<sup>6</sup> In areas where current governance systems exist but are underdeveloped or under-resourced, NGOs can support good governance by working within existing systems to [provide issue-specific expertise and targeted communication and persuasion](#) of potential spoilers to support the creation of good governance.<sup>7</sup> More generally, NGOs can work to change broad patterns of belief and social behavior in ways that generate support for good governance.<sup>8</sup>

Despite these contributions, the limits on legal ability to use coercive force places limits on the tools that NGOs can use. The ability to use force remains important in maintaining peace – Ronnie Lipschutz argues that an “abiding requirement” for peacemaking is the presence of some entity with the capacity to use military, police, or other coercive force.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Clifford Bob argues that the legal and coercive legitimacy of states is critical to effective governance in situations where there are entrenched interests who are profiting from conflict, and NGOs [must engage with states rather than attempt to create wholly independent systems of governance](#).<sup>10</sup>

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH

➤ ***NGOs require legitimacy in order to have effective impact in changing behavior.*** In the absence of the ability to coerce stakeholders to go along with the decisions of the NGOs, NGOs can only act as governors when they are acknowledged by stakeholders as the appropriate institution to make decisions. This legitimacy can arise from the contributions of an NGO being recognized by international organizations, or by agreement among local citizens that the NGO has a role to play in the local system.<sup>11</sup>

NGOs interested in supporting security governance should seek partnerships with international organizations, particularly international governmental organizations, to support perceptions of legitimacy in the global system. At the same time, to support perceptions of legitimacy in local systems, connecting the NGO to meaningful topics and issues in the local community is essential. NGOs must demonstrate an awareness of the local history and culture.<sup>12</sup> It may be particularly valuable for international NGOs to act through local agents: research reported by Amitav Acharya carried out in partnership with local NGOs in India found that when local people were asked questions by others from their same region, they gave answers that international NGOs using foreign workers did not find.<sup>13</sup>

➤ ***NGOs can support good governance for peace by directly providing public goods or supporting development.*** Governance systems should provide public goods and support human and economic development. Governance gaps lead to failures in human development and privations that can create the conditions for armed conflict. Development NGOs such as Heifer International can help “treat conflict” by providing assistance and the means for personal economic development to impoverished people.<sup>14</sup> Such support can be considered a direct contribution to human security.

NGOs specifically focused on conflict resolution are most effective when they are able to directly engage with local narratives, beliefs, and issues driving armed conflict, and in particular there is a nexus between supporting general human development and effective engagement in conflict resolution.<sup>15</sup> In addition, NGOs interested in engaging directly with conflict resolution should work to ensure that they are embedded in local understandings of why the combatants are fighting.

➤ ***NGOs can support good governance for peace by changing the behavior of existing institutions.*** The issue-specific focus of NGOs can position them to provide expert analysis and information to developing governance systems. This has been particularly visible in the drafting of legal documents: NGOs were heavily influential in shaping the final form of the Rome Statute that created the International Criminal Court because they were able to make valid arguments about relevant international law due to their issue-specific focus on topics relevant to the statute.<sup>16</sup>

NGOs interested in influencing existing governance systems should develop issue-specific expertise rather than broad agendas, and look for individuals, institutions, and processes that require issue-specific expertise relevant to their area of focus. This kind of influence can also address the requirement for military force as a

security tool: by influencing the development of legal structures, NGOs can influence governance systems that have the ability to use force.<sup>17</sup>

An additional pathway to changing behavior is changing the collective understanding of how people should behave. NGOs can serve as vectors of transmission for norms that support good governance by adapting international norms to local and specific conditions.<sup>18</sup> In doing this, it is important for the norm change to build on and modify existing local beliefs rather than being a wholly new issue. To accomplish this kind of norm change, NGOs should act through local agents and use existing beliefs to justify the new claim rather than be represented by foreign or international institutions.

 **NGOs can directly provide governance in areas of limited statehood by forming or participating in governing networks.** When other governance systems are absent, non-states actors such as drug gangs and criminal networks can and have played direct roles in providing governance. NGOs may use this as a model for providing more positive governance elements: this suggests that an NGO participating in a network that includes some way of providing physical security, dispute resolution, and human development may act directly as governors. In Brazil, public-private partnerships where NGOs have formed working partnerships with community organizations and police networks to provide governance systems have proved effective tools for removing illicit and violent governance mechanisms.<sup>19</sup>

NGOs interested in the direct provision of governance in response to limited state presence should identify state or private partners able to assist in providing physical security, work with local communities to support dispute resolution tools, and support economic development.

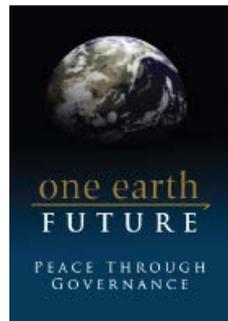
## NOTES

1. Rodney Bruce Hall (Ed.) *Reducing Armed Violence with NGO Governance* (New York: Routledge, 2013). doi:10.4324/9780203746592
2. Jeffrey French and Robert Haywood “NGOs, governance, and peace building.” In Rodney Bruce Hall (Ed.) *Reducing Armed Violence with NGO Governance* (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp 17-38 doi:10.4324/9780203746592
3. Jens Bartleson “Functional differentiation and legitimate authority,” *Ibid* pp 41-57; Rodney Bruce Hall and Christopher Lilyblad “Private authority, sociological legitimacy, and NGO governance,” *Ibid* pp 75-94.
4. Brent J. Steele “Micropolitics, NGOs, and global governance,” *Ibid*, pp 165-182.
5. Julia Amos “The non-profits of peace: Conflict resolution NGOs,” *Ibid*, pp 146-164
6. Christopher Lilyblad “Violence, authority, and governance in territories of limited statehood,” *Ibid*, pp. 183-208.
7. Vanessa Ullrich, “Casting law over power? Understanding the NGOs’ contributions to the independent prosecutor and universal jurisdiction negotiations on the International Criminal Court,” *Ibid*, pp 209-232; Eamon Aloyo “The weak persuading the powerful: norm diffusion and enforcement, without internationalization,” *Ibid*, 114-130.
8. Amitav Acharya “Transnational civil society as agents of norm diffusion,” *Ibid*, pp 97-113.
9. Ronnie D. Lipschutz “War, peace, and civil society: Can non-state actors stop intra-state violence?” *Ibid*, pp 58-74.
10. Clifford Bob “The transnational battle over gun control: Implications for NGO governance,” *Ibid*, pp 133-145
11. Hall and Lilyblad “Private authority”
12. Lipschutz “War, peace, and civil society”; Hall and Lilyblad “Private authority”
13. Acharya “Transnational civil society”
14. Steele “Micropolitics”
15. Amos “The non-profits of peace”
16. Ullrich “Casting law over power?”
17. Aloyo “The weak persuading the powerful”
18. Acharya “Transnational civil society”
19. Lilyblad “Violence, authority, and governance”

The One Earth Future Foundation was founded in 2007 with the goal of supporting research and practice in the area of peace and governance. OEF believes that a world beyond war can be achieved by the development of new and effective systems of cooperation, coordination, and decision making. We believe that business and civil society have important roles to play in filling governance gaps in partnership with states. When state, business, and civil society coordinate their efforts, they can achieve effective, equitable solutions to global problems.

As an operating foundation, we engage in research and practice that supports our overall mission. Research materials from OEF envision improved governance structures and policy options, analyze and document the performance of existing governance institutions, and provide intellectual support to the field operations of our implementation projects. Our active field projects apply our research outputs to existing governance challenges, particularly those causing threats to peace and security.

The OEF policy brief series provides distillations of research lessons into practical recommendations for policy and practice.



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