

1 Introduction

PEACEBUILDING MISSIONS CAN BRING PEACE TO WAR-TORN countries, but they seldom bring democracy. Why do countries so rarely emerge from civil wars as democracies? And what is the role of peacebuilders in both failed and successful postwar democratic transitions? These questions lie at the heart of the collective research effort presented in this volume.

The evidence for successful postwar democratic transitions is not encouraging: Since 1989, the international community has launched nineteen major peacebuilding operations (see Table 1.1). These operations were reasonably successful in securing peace but much less successful in establishing democratic regimes. Five years after the operations began, only two countries were rated “free” by Freedom House¹ and qualified as “liberal democracy”; that is, as a regime that “extends freedom, fairness, transparency, accountability, and the rule of law from the electoral process into all other major aspects of governance and interest articulation, competition, and representation.”² Also, no recent missions of significant size—including those in East Timor, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan—have resulted in the establishment of a liberal democracy.

It is unrealistic, perhaps, to expect a *liberal* democracy to emerge from the ashes of war. But even when we apply a lower and less ambitious threshold for success, such as an *electoral* democracy (that is, according to Freedom House’s definition, a regime that holds elections but provides less protection

TABLE 1.1. Major multinational peacebuilding missions after 1989:
Democratic transition outcomes.

| | <i>Year mission started</i> | <i>Freedom House score (five years after start)</i> | <i>Regime type (five years after start)</i> |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|---|
| Namibia | 1989 | 2.5 | Liberal democracy |
| Cambodia | 1992 | 6.5 | Electoral authoritarian |
| Mozambique | 1992 | 3.5 | Electoral democracy |
| Rwanda | 1993 | 6.5 | Fully closed authoritarian |
| Haiti | 1994 | 5 | Electoral democracy |
| Angola | 1995 | 6 | Fully closed authoritarian |
| Bosnia | 1996 | 4.5 | Electoral authoritarian |
| Croatia | 1996 | 2 | Liberal democracy |
| Tajikistan | 1997 | 5.5 | Electoral authoritarian |
| Central African Republic | 1998 | 6 | Electoral authoritarian |
| Democratic Republic of the Congo | 2001 | 6 | Fully closed authoritarian |
| East Timor | 1999 | 3 | Electoral democracy |
| Kosovo | 1999 | 5.5 | Electoral authoritarian |
| Sierra Leone | 1999 | 3.5 | Electoral democracy |
| Macedonia | 2001 | 3 | Electoral democracy |
| Afghanistan | 2002 | 5 | Electoral authoritarian |
| Cote d'Ivoire | 2003 | 5.5 | Electoral authoritarian |
| Liberia | 2003 | 3.5 | Electoral democracy |
| Burundi | 2004 | 4.5 | Electoral democracy |

NOTES: We define a major mission as one mandated by the United Nations or another international organization that is aimed at both maintaining peace in a postconflict situation as well as at inducing social change, with the ultimate goal of creating a stable and democratic country. We include only missions deployed for six months or longer and that count at least 500 military personnel in the field. Only when these thresholds have been met do we code a mission start, even if the mission had an earlier start date but was smaller in character or scope. Multiple simultaneous missions are collapsed into a single observation. Subsequent missions in a single country not separated by more than twelve months are also collapsed into a single observation.

SOURCES: The coding for liberal and electoral democracy is taken from Freedom House (Freedom House 2005). Coding for electoral authoritarian and fully closed authoritarian is based on the World Bank's Database of Political Institutions (Beck et al., 2001). See also endnote 4.

for civil liberties than a liberal democracy), we still find that just nine out of the nineteen countries that hosted major peacebuilding missions qualify.³ Among those governments that miss the mark, three are classified as fully authoritarian and four as electoral authoritarian—that is, ruled by autocrats who allow some form of multiparty elections that they almost certainly win by a comfortable margin.⁴ Given the vast amount of resources and hopes that are invested in liberal peacebuilding, these are sobering results.

Scholars have offered several explanations as to why postwar democracy is so difficult to establish. To start with, some scholars argue that bringing democracy to a war-torn country is simply the impossible dream born of Western hubris; it is unreasonable, they say, to expect peacebuilders to socially engineer a society capable of producing and maintaining a liberal democratic regime in a matter of years, and they point to the fact that the emergence of social structures that enabled democracies to grow in Western Europe was a process that took centuries.⁵

Other scholars take a less radical stance but maintain that democratization after war is an extraordinarily rare event because most postwar societies lack the capacities to implement and sustain the complex and costly political institutions required for democratic and accountable governance. This echoes Seymour Martin Lipset's famous "social requisites of democracy" argument, which states that low economic development and a small middle class negatively affect democratization.⁶

A third explanation focuses on the geostrategic location of a country and states that the threat of violent spillovers from adjacent countries may discourage leaders from steering a more democratic course⁷ or that support from an authoritarian leader in a neighboring country reduces the international pressure on elites for democratic reforms in a postwar country.⁸

Lastly, perhaps the most prominent strand in the peacebuilding literature centers on the cooperation problem between the warring parties and argues that the most obvious factor that hinders the emergence of democracy after war is war itself. Civil wars, especially when they are long, highly destructive, and fought between identity groups, can reduce a society's capacity for a stable and democratic peace because they create highly divided societies and elites who deeply mistrust one another.⁹ Under such circumstances, actors may lack the capacities to overcome the cooperation problem and be unable to engage in a meaningful peace process or to accept the bounded uncertainty

that comes with democratic rules. For all of these reasons, countries emerging out of war find it difficult to democratize.

And yet modern peacebuilding missions are designed precisely to address these challenges. They are launched to help domestic elites overcome the many difficulties presented by postwar democratic transitions. Peacebuilders bring tremendous resources to the table with budgets that frequently dwarf those of host governments, as we have seen in Afghanistan, Bosnia, Kosovo, and East Timor. They deploy civilian personnel who assume vital administrative functions and military personnel to guarantee security. Peacebuilders also bring economic aid, which frequently becomes the single most important source of government income. Aid is directed toward state institutions, election processes, and civil society. This assistance is usually committed over years rather than months, all of which has a tremendous impact on the economic, social, and cultural fabric of the intervened-upon society¹⁰ but has, apparently, only a weak effect on postwar democratization, as Table 1.1 shows. What explains the limited impact of external actors and their resources on postwar democratization?

Beyond the aforementioned difficulties of democratic transitions, some scholars assume that poor implementation is also at the root of mission failure. Often, time and resource constraints are thought to doom democratization efforts. The assumption is that missions with a larger footprint in terms of financing, personnel, and mandate could perhaps achieve better outcomes. Lack of coordination between peacebuilders and an inability to learn from past mistakes are also cited as potential obstacles. Critics lament that peacebuilders rarely adapt strategies to specific contexts but tend to apply a cookie-cutter approach to their democratization efforts, which prioritizes political and economic liberalization over the construction of effective political and economic institutions.¹¹

We do not discard any of these arguments, and we think that all of them encapsulate some of the aspects that explain why postwar democratic transitions rarely result in the liberal democracy that serves as the blueprint (at least in rhetoric) for all post-Cold War peacebuilding operations. However, we take issue with these existing approaches on two grounds.

First, we feel that these approaches, whether they refer to the general difficulties of postwar democratic transitions or to their faulty implementation, do not add up to a systematic explanation of the causes for success and failure of postwar democratic transitions. They may well explain success or failure in

a specific case, but none of the previously mentioned arguments is systematically associated with success or failure across a substantial number of cases.

Applying the establishment of an electoral democracy as our threshold for success, we find, for example, that some peacebuilding operations were successful in poor countries lacking domestic capacity (such as Mozambique and East Timor), whereas others failed in richer countries with higher levels of development as well as viable administrative structures (such as Bosnia and Kosovo). Some robust and highly intrusive operations failed (Afghanistan, for example), and some succeeded (East Timor). The reverse is also true, with some relatively small, unintrusive peacebuilding operations meeting success (Namibia) and others ending in failure (Tajikistan and Rwanda). Some missions brought democracy despite a long and bloody war (Mozambique), while others did not, despite relatively brief periods of hostility (Kosovo). These few examples (the list goes on) underscore that none of the factors that are thought to explain failure or success are consistently and systematically associated with a particular outcome. It is quite apparent that we lack a consistent and parsimonious explanation of postwar democratic transition.

Related to this is our second concern: We think that existing approaches to postwar democratic transitions suffer from the fact that they ignore one of the most important and consequential aspects of contemporary peacebuilding, namely that peacebuilding is an interactive process not only between former adversaries but also between peacebuilders and the victorious elites of a postwar society, and that this interaction decisively shapes the process of peacebuilding and its outcomes. By ignoring the interactive quality of peacebuilding, much of the literature seems to implicitly assume that the interests of peacebuilders and of host country governments are typically aligned and therefore assumes that the peacebuilding process is a problem of capacity and coordination rather than one of cooperation.

We part with this assumption. We are convinced that one of the major determinants of peacebuilding is indeed the differing priorities of peacebuilders and domestic elites. Put simply, domestic elites may wish to benefit from the resources—both material and symbolic—that peacebuilders have to offer. However, for various reasons, they may resist some or all of the democratic policies that peacebuilders prescribe. They may perceive a democratic opening as being risky and as endangering their security. Or they may fear that democratization endangers their formal or informal grip on political power. Predatory elites in postwar countries may be reluctant to adopt democratic

governance because this may endanger their rent-seeking strategies, and elites who rely on patronage may worry that democratic reforms may undermine their informal networks of power. In sum, domestic elites may think that adopting democracy could entail high personal and/or political costs. The higher they perceive these adoption costs to be, the less willing they will be to accept the peacebuilders' democratic prescriptions.

Peacebuilders, on the other hand, expect democratic reforms in exchange for the considerable resources they expend in a postwar country, and they may press domestic political actors to adopt these reforms. As a result, peacebuilders and domestic elites will engage in an informal bargaining process. The outcomes of peacebuilding, we argue, depend to a large extent on the outcome of the informal bargaining by which peacebuilders and domestic elites try to sort out their differences and agree (or fail to agree) on the kind of democratic peace they intend to build.

In this book, we argue that in important ways democratic peace depends on whether adopting democracy is in the interest of domestic elites. While this is likely also true for peace alone, it is even more essential to an understanding of democratic outcomes in peacebuilding cases. Democracy, unlike simple peace, requires the active cooperation and participation of domestic elites. Moreover, because democracy is a long-term process built around regular, periodic elections and the construction of self-sustaining, participatory institutions such as political parties and legislatures, it offers many opportunities for elites to go back on an initial commitment to democracy, to undermine democratic institutions, or to withdraw from the process.

Finally, democracy requires local actors to build trust in one another and the political institutions they are building. External guarantors may be important in the early years, but over the long term democracy cannot survive without at least an instrumental commitment to democratic rules of the game by domestic elites themselves. Depending on their circumstances at the time of peace, domestic elites stand to lose or gain in various ways by committing to democratic politics, and the stakes may be considerable. In addition, domestic elites have varying degrees of power and will to resist, ignore, or otherwise subvert the democratic peacebuilding agenda.

This book advances an understanding of the peacebuilding process that emphasizes the interests and preferences of both peacebuilders and domestic elites. Our focus on the interaction between peacebuilders and domestic elites is not intended to replace existing theories of postwar democratic transitions.