



PEACEBUILDING AND RESILIENCE

HOW SOCIETY RESPONDS TO VIOLENCE

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UNITED STATES
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ABOUT THE REPORT

Based on research and a series of working group meetings hosted by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), this report explores the concept of resilience in the context of peacebuilding and conflict-affected states and how socioecological systems respond to violence.

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Cover photo: Teenage schoolchildren protesting gun violence march in a festival parade in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala. Photo by Paul Liebhardt/Getty Images.

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Summary

- Resilience refers to a socioecological system's (community, society, state) response to violence and capacity to both maintain peace in the event of a violent shock or long-term stressor and resist the pernicious impacts of violence on societal norms and relationships.
- Considerable research has been done on societal resilience and resistance to hegemonic threats, which can inform how the peacebuilding field thinks about resilience to violence.
- Increasingly, researchers and practitioners are exploring together how social systems respond to violent conflict, creating a rich foundation for understanding their resilience.
- Resilience is an attribute of a social system to respond to long-term stressors or shock and has neither a negative nor a positive quality. Societies can be resilient to violence, and systems of violence can be resilient to positive change.
- Responses to violence—adaptation, absorption, and transformation—can differ in scale and approach. The peacebuilding field focuses on transformation, when perhaps absorption and adaptation may be more realistic.
- A resilient response to violence involves actors that self-organize and learn within the system and institutions and norms (a regime) that support absorption, adaptation, and transformation.
- A crucial aspect of resilience is response diversity, or the ability of a system to respond in different ways to a violent shock or stressors, which increases the odds that a successful response will emerge.
- Resilience is not the same as invulnerability; even highly resilient social systems can be propelled into violence as a result of severe stress or an overwhelming shock.
- Supporting a society to become more resilient could play a key role in preventing conflict and achieving a more sustainable postconflict recovery.

Introduction

Colleagues in the fields of humanitarian and development assistance have long been using the concept of resilience to better integrate their work and to make it more sustainable by ensuring that communities that have experienced a natural or man-made disaster are equipped to withstand possible future shocks. With emphasis on the strength and capabilities of local communities, prevention planning and early warning, and future risk and community response, the concept is also gaining sway in the peacebuilding community. Researchers and practitioners in the fields of peacebuilding and conflict resolution have begun to work together to test the concept's utility for their work.¹

The sense is growing that strengthening a society's capacity to overcome violent shock and communal stressors could play a key role in preventing conflict and achieving a more sustainable postconflict recovery. Resilience helps focus attention on the positive attributes and capacities of communities, thus helping outside actors become more driven by community-led efforts than by their own institutional capacities and perspectives. It puts human agency at the center of efforts to manage social tensions and conflict, which, in turn, creates new pathways for communities to learn. Taking a systems approach—relationships and feedback loops—to solving complex societal problems also allows for better measurement of causality and impact. The concept's recent adoption by the peacebuilding field provides an opportunity for critical evaluation and scrutiny: can its application, in analysis and implementation, fundamentally change peacebuilding practices?

This report draws on recent research on societal and state resilience and the findings of a literature review on the concept's utility in the peacebuilding field. The United States Institute of Peace (USIP) also hosted a series of working group meetings with academics, practitioners, and policymakers from the conflict resolution field to explore their perspectives on incorporating resilience into practice.

Resilience: Societal Response to Stressors and Shocks

Resilience, as a term, connotes flexibility and adaptability. As a concept, resilience has proven equally flexible and adaptable in its use by various professional fields. For example, the disciplines of engineering, psychology, sociology, and ecology have interpreted and used resilience thinking to yield new insights, approaches, and measurements. Yet each has defined resilience quite differently. In the field of engineering, resilience means maintaining the status quo or experiencing a shock and returning to an original state. In the field of psychology, resilience means having personality traits that allow an individual to respond effectively to stress and catastrophic events—that is, resilience is an innate attribute of an individual or system.

Ecologists study the resilience of complex, adaptive systems, and it is this conceptualization that has the most promise in its applicability to socioecological systems and violence because it captures the interaction among and between the structures of a system and the actors and communities within it (see table 1, socioecological community). An ecosystem consists of a community of species inhabiting and interacting with each other and with the environmental basin it inhabits; the unique qualities of the external environment (clear water or turbid water; prairie or tundra) structure that basin. The interaction between the community and the environmental structure constitutes the ecosystem's regime; it is affected by the types of interactions within a community of species (ecosystem) but also by changes in the basin's structure (see table 1, regime). In the case of a shock or long-term stressor, community (species) interactions or constellations might change, or the shock or long-term stressor might affect the structural elements

Resilience is characterized by a system's response to a shock or long-term stressors.

of the basin, tipping the ecosystem into a different basin or environmental state. The distinctive interactions between the ecosystem and the basin's structure constitute a regime.²

Resilience is characterized by a system's (ecological or socioecological) response to a shock or long-term stressors in order to maintain the same regime (see table 1, resilience). A system can be drawn to multiple residual or latent states, called *basins of attraction* (see table 1, multiple attractors). These are alternate states that a socioecological system is predisposed or attracted to within a larger stability landscape. The analogy of a ball and basin for a regime is useful for explaining the flexibility and endurance, or resilience, of certain regimes and how rapidly regime shifts can occur. Any socioecological system (group, neighborhood, or government) inhabiting a shallow basin—one without deep, broad parameters—can easily tip into another existing basin of attraction when experiencing a shock or long-term stressor. The new interactions of a community with a different set of structural factors (basin) represents a regime shift (see table 1, regime shift). Analysts were surprised by the rapid fall of the Soviet Union and the communist regime but had long acknowledged the existence of long-term stressors (demographics, ethnic separatism, exposure to the West with détente, a growing educated class) that were eroding the contours of communism's socioecological system and the rapid emergence of new and latent basins of attraction, such as ethnic nationalism, democratization, and authoritarianism (see table 1, stability landscape).

Based on resilience, the field of ecology is shifting from controlling disturbance (shocks and stressors) to shoring up the ability of an ecosystem for self-repair, which requires both species and response diversity. Different species ensure that important functions in a healthy ecosystem are maintained (for example, decomposers, predators). However, most important for resilience is response diversity, or the ability of different species to respond in different ways to a shock, which increases the odds that a successful response or set of behaviors will emerge. Thus, adaptation, transformation, and self-organization are the central attributes of a complex system's approach to resilience.³

The peacebuilding community has found in complex systems a useful body of theory for understanding violence and complex emergencies.⁴ Scholars have developed systemic perspectives on chronic violence, sectarian conflict, and political violence.⁵ It is important to note here that resilience, from a systems perspective, is normatively neutral—a point that will be explored later in greater depth. A violent or authoritarian system can be just as resilient as a peaceful one. Because the ideas of violence and peace are not normatively neutral, this report will refer to a resilient nonviolent system as positive and a resilient violent system as negative. Drawing on theory and concepts from the study of resilience in socioecological systems, and adopting a peacebuilding (positive) perspective, this report defines a resilient system as one that is able to absorb, adapt, or transform itself through self-organization and learning to maintain its basic function (peace) in response to violent shocks and long-term stressors buffeting the system. The resilience of a peaceful socioecosystem is also the product of its regime—the structure and variables that shape the contours of the basin (societal structures), and the system's interactions with it, and which are characterized by nonviolence.

Long-Term Stressors

Absorption and *adaptation* involve the ability of actors to resist and adapt to various threats to or within the ecosystem. *Transformation* involves the capacity of actors to bring about a regime shift in which the ecosystem moves from one regime to another (for example, from authoritarian to democratic or civil peace to civil war). This definition accounts for the imperfect peace that often

Table 1. Key Terms and Concepts

Socioecological System Terms	Definition ¹	Analogy in Conflict Studies
Multiple attractors (states) and alternative system regimes	The alternative regimes that a complex system can tend toward. Perturbations can bring a system over a threshold that defines a given regime and causes the system to be attracted to a contrasting regime.	<p>The alternative regimes that a complex social system can tend toward; for example, from (a) peaceful coexistence, to (b) intergroup conflict, to (c) systemic violence and oppression, to (d) a failed state/society that are defined by characteristic behaviors and maintained by mutually reinforced processes and feedbacks.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> The Soviet Union's fall was rapid because of the emergence of other, alternate regimes, such as Russian nationalism and liberal democracy, that societal actors were attracted to.</p>
Regime (basins of attraction)	The characteristic behavior of a system, maintained by mutually reinforced processes or feedbacks. These behaviors have threshold levels beyond which the system enters a new regime.	<p>The contours, dimensions, and thresholds that define one of the alternative regimes of a social system on a peace-to-violence spectrum. Tolerance and coexistence, intergroup violence, or state-sponsored killings are behaviors that mark the boundaries of these separate, alternative system regimes.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> According to Tani Adams, relationships in Guatemala are structured by a regime of chronic violence, where violence is reproduced at every level of the system.²</p>
Regime shift	A change in a system regime from one regime or basin of attraction to another. A sharp shift that stands out from normal fluctuations.	<p>(A) A change in a societal system from one regime or pattern of behavior to another. (B) The regime shift can be caused by long-term stressors that erode the system's resilience and can push the societal system into a new stability basin, such as from peaceful coexistence to inter-group violence. (C) An intense shock can also push a system to a new regime.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> The shock of the invasion of Iraq resulted in a regime shift in Baghdad, where the system moved from a multiethnic polity to a patchwork of ethnic enclaves.³</p>
Resilience	The capacity of a system to absorb disturbance and reorganize while undergoing change so as to still retain essentially the same function, structure, identity, and feedbacks.	<p>The capacity of a social system to mitigate or recover from a violent shock or long-term stressors to maintain peaceful function.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> In the aftermath of widespread election violence in 2007, Kenya forced changes in political structures (devolution) and societal behavior (civil society action) to prevent another violent election shock.⁴</p>
Shocks	A sudden perturbation of large magnitude of a system.	<p>A violent event.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Varshney identified the destruction of the Babri Mosque in India as a shock to Hindu-Muslim relations that triggered countrywide ethnic riots.⁵</p>

Socioecological System Terms	Definition ¹	Analogy in Conflict Studies
Socioecological community	Individuals in a community interact to determine community structure. Following perturbations, the community, if it has resilience, returns to the same configuration, while large perturbations may induce a shift to another configuration. The community perspective requires the existence of alternative stable states. Because communities have some level of resistance to change, they will stay in their domain of attraction (or stable state) until the perturbation is large enough to force the community into another regime.	<p>A community that experiences violent conflict and learns from and adapts to the experience in order to preserve its social and political relationships and the structural factors that define that community.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> After World War II, the socioecological communities of France and Germany recreated relations within and between their communities and created new institutions to structure these new relationship patterns that emphasized negotiation and dialogue and created the basis for a new socioecological community—a unified Europe.⁶</p>
Stability landscape	The extent of the possible states of system space in which alternate regimes are embedded.	<p>A “peaceful society” stability landscape would be defined as the absence of armed internal conflict (e.g., civil war, insurgency, counterinsurgency, violent state repression). Across this landscape are alternative regimes (valleys) representing varying degrees of “peace” defined by variation in the control variables important to maintaining a peaceful society: effective borders, basic security, government services, legitimacy/acceptability of government, social tolerance, a functioning economy, etc. The contours of these regimes differ based on the values associated with the different variables. For example, more “democratic, inclusive” regimes and more “authoritarian, unfair but still peaceful” regimes can exist within this broader landscape. The value of these control variables will experience change over time, and this will impact the shape (e.g., depth, width, aperture) of the regimes in a stability landscape.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> The intervention in Kosovo resulted in a system that was between regimes, partially progressive liberal and partially war economy.⁷</p>
Stressors	A sustained perturbation of a system that causes gradual change over time.	<p>An ethnic group within a society receives favored treatment by the state over time, which results in increasing ethnic mistrust and declining confidence in the state.</p> <p><i>Example:</i> Varshney identified the erosive power of slow processes on communal peace in the cities of Ahmedabab and Surat, where politicians in the Congress Party stopped mobilizing and organizing members across ethnic lines. This slow deterioration in ethnic association resulted in urban riots in these two cities.⁸</p>

1. Carl Folke, Stephen R. Carpenter, Brian Walker, Martin Scheffer, Terry Chapen, and Johan Rockström, “Resilience Thinking: Integrating Resilience, Adaptability and Transformability,” *Ecology and Society* 15, no. 4 (2010): art. 20.
2. Tani Marilena Adams, *Chronic Violence and Non-conventional Armed Actors: A Systemic Approach* (Oslo: Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre, 2014), 7.
3. Ami Carpenter, *Community Resilience to Sectarian Violence in Baghdad*, Peace Psychology Book Series (New York: Springer, 2014), 13.
4. Brian Kennedy and Lauren Bieniek, *Moving Forward with Constitutional Reform in Kenya: A Report of the CSIS Africa Program* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2010), 7.
5. Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 142.
6. Valerie Rosoux, “Is Reconciliation Negotiable?” *International Negotiation* 18, no. 3 (2013): 471–93.
7. Gëzim Visoka, “Three Levels of Hybridisation Practices in Post-conflict Kosovo,” *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 7, no. 2 (2012): 23–36.
8. Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life*, 220–37.

exists in fragile states and communities, allowing for both positive and negative adaptations and transformations to take place. Although major shocks to the system (for example, rebellions, coup d'états, invasions) are obvious threats to a peaceful order, the movement of slow variables over time (for example, erosion of rights, dissolving associational bonds, accumulating grievances) are equally important to understanding what causes regime shifts (see table 1, stressors).

In a comparative study of three pairs of cities in India—some experienced riots and others did not—Ashutosh Varshney notes the erosive power of slow processes on communal peace. Certain cities, such as Ahmedabad and Surat, approached national independence as examples of institutionalized peace systems but, over decades, experienced increased ethnic rioting as the nature of their communal relationships changed. Politicians, interested in acquiring greater personal power, captured the Congress Party and stopped engaging the party's mass organization through mobilization and organizational work: "The more the party prospered in power, the more its civic vigor weakened." Another political party, Bharatiya Janata (BJP), continued to mobilize citizens and civic life in many of these cities, but sought primarily to establish relations between Hindu castes and not between Hindu and Muslim groups. Thus, the BJP reinforced intra-ethnic bonding, contributing to the higher rates of ethnic rioting in those communities experiencing the slow, degenerative effects to their interethnic associational life.⁶

The World Bank's Development Report 2011 recognizes the interplay of internal and external stressors on conflict dynamics.⁷ The legacies of violence and trauma felt by a domestic population can be exacerbated by external support for violent actors within a country. Other examples of how internal and external "slow" processes can interact and push a societal regime from peace to violence include global economic downturns that increase group inequalities in a country or transnational terrorist recruitments that manipulate local grievances.

Violent Shocks

Other authors have outlined the impact of a violent event or shock on socioecological systems that, at regime equilibrium, are characterized by generally peaceful interaction among societal groups (see table 1, shocks). Beatrice Pouligny describes from a community perspective the impact of individual trauma on a system's *social ecology*. Violence both destroys and transforms relationship networks. It tears down the trust that is essential for collective action and allegiance to political leaders. Identity groups forge new solidarities with armed groups and gangs for self-protection or to advance group interests.⁸ Yet violence also transforms social identities in ways that are not always destructive: the status of youth and women changes as a result of the leadership roles they assumed during the violence, which can create new opportunities but also family and social tensions. In these ways, violent shock changes group perceptions and behavior, breaking down the normative function and cooperative structure of nonviolent regimes.

Based on an analysis of the response of Baghdad communities to rising sectarian violence, Ami Carpenter describes from a systemic viewpoint how the norms and structure of a nonviolent regime break down. First is a shift in psychological perspectives: the blaming of others for negative experiences, the interpretation of ambiguous behavior as threatening, the diminishing of inhibitions against aggressive behavior, reduced empathy, zero-sum thinking, and the deindividuation and dehumanization of the Other.⁹ Once these changed psychological perceptions take hold, group dynamics change. Groups see their safety and identity in zero-sum terms—"if they exist, we are not safe"—and intra-group cohesion becomes more pronounced. When social groups more tightly bond, they can develop contentious group goals and feel empowered through a strong sense of intergroup righteousness and justice to aggressively pursue those

goals.¹⁰ Predation, fear, violence, and war signify a systemic shift from nonviolence to violence. The breakdown in intergroup cooperation is confirmed by Monty Marshall in a large N study of the most fragile states—partial democracies with high group factionalism.¹¹ Marshall’s study shows that when a social system has been exposed to prolonged social conflict or incidents of violence, individuals will leave a cooperative core or groups favoring noncoercive political action. This changes norms and behaviors, such as deference to authority or the adoption of individual self-defense strategies, which buttress emerging regimes of authoritarianism or social atomization, respectively. Regimes that are resilient to violence, on the other hand, have certain characteristics that provide buffer capacity: “Organizations, resources, and community processes are set up in ways that build and increase the collective capacity for learning, adaptation and self-organization.”¹²

Between chronic violence and stable peace, socioecological systems are situated along a spectrum of equilibria regimes (for example, factionalism; systematic discrimination; discrete, localized violence; high levels of criminal violence). The ability of a social system to absorb or adapt to a violent shock and maintain its identity and function peacefully is dependent on where it falls on that violence-to-peace spectrum. Resilience capacity is also highly relational to the size of the violent shock and the tenacity of long-term stressors. Analysis of resilience needs to focus on both sides of the correlation—that is, at what magnitude of violence or stress does a socioecological system stop being resilient?

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Case Studies in the Resilience of Socioecological Systems

Societal resilience varies, of course, with context and with capacity. The examples in the discussion that follows are grouped by type: absorption, adaptation, and transformation.

Absorption

Nepal. How socioecological systems respond to violence can have both positive and negative features and depends on both the scale of the shock or stressor and the ability of a regime to foster adaptation and learning. At the community level, Nightingale and Sharma studied the resilience of Nepal’s Community Forest User Groups (CFUGs) amid the violent conflict of the decade-long Maoist insurgency. They define resilience as “the ability of CFUGs to respond to conflict conditions, to negotiate difficulties, and to return to regular functioning after a period of pressure.”¹³ The authors conclude that both the institutional design and community self-organization and agency, expressed through strategies and tactics adopted by the user groups, contributed to resilience, with the latter being the more decisive factor.

Control and capture of development resources fueled the insurgency and was an important variable in the struggle for economic and political control in many local areas. In areas they controlled, the Maoists sought to destroy symbols of the state, rendering development programs such as the community forestry program a potential target. The income generated from the program was attractive to insurgents or corrupt army officials. For the government army, the forest also hid insurgent forces and thus represented a security concern. The community forestry program became a central element of the local struggle for survival for many communities, who found themselves host to the armies of one side of the conflict or the other or simultaneously caught between them.

By the start of the insurgency, the program was an established success and a model for community conservation and development that supported hundreds of thousands of households.

The authors find that several characteristics of the program's institutional structure helped enable community resilience. First, legal ownership and control over the forests was vested with community user groups, thus giving villagers a compelling stake in the program with an economically valuable asset. User groups were formal and inclusive, bringing in marginalized groups (for example, women, Dalits, tribal groups). Their meetings were bound by clear rules and held regularly; and decisions, especially related to income and expenditures, were made transparently and by consensus and noted in written records. Critically, the user groups were constituted as community institutions, not arms of the state, giving villagers an independent and impartial identity in the conflict. These design characteristics produced mutually reinforcing feedbacks among economic empowerment, transparent governance, community competence, social cohesion, and a conflict-impartial identity.

Vulnerable, less resilient communities were those that were structurally compromised in some way, either through corruption or the lack of transparency and inclusiveness of their decision making. Such groups were often undermined by their own members. They lacked the moral authority to negotiate effectively, particularly with the Maoists, who could exploit grievances rooted in social exclusion. These groups were forced to compromise more with armed groups that reduced their resilience. Recovery during the postconflict period for such groups was much more difficult.¹⁴

Within this overall framework, many user groups were able to resist armed groups through self-organization, adaptation, and the creative and flexible use of resources. First, user groups successfully engaged both the insurgents and the army in dialogue about respecting their autonomy and operations. Members cited the negotiation skills and self-confidence gained through the community forestry program as being beneficial in this dialogue. Among the other common tactics, groups changed the location and timing of meetings to maintain privacy and inclusivity. In some instances, decision-making processes were changed to include all group members to ensure full consensus, limiting the potential for debilitating internal grievances to develop. Although the groups were forced to pay donations to the Maoists, they successfully negotiated these payments downward from what others were forced to pay. In one instance, groups of CFUGs organized collectively to pay a significantly lower tax to the Maoists.¹⁵ To travel and maintain access to their forests, user groups developed systems of identification cards they used with both the insurgents and the army. In some circumstances, groups mandated that members deliberately travel in politically and socially mixed groupings; if stopped, they could assert a neutral identity and draw on the various social or political linkages represented in the group. Some groups even thinned their forests, stockpiling the wood for future use, to reduce the security risk that a thick forest might represent to the army, which was wary of insurgent ambushes.

All these actions reflect the CFUGs' ability to learn and adapt to extraordinary pressures. The community was able to absorb the shocks and stresses and maintain its structure and core function as a source of development and livelihood amid the changing conflict around them—a demonstration of absorptive resilience. Although groups were sometimes forced to give up some of the control over their resources to maintain autonomy and the space to operate, they fared better than other local economic actors and development projects, which were often taken over by insurgents.

Iraq. Unfortunately, many social systems have been unable to weather a violent shock—not necessarily because of a lack of capacity to maintain peace, but instead because of the magnitude of the shock. In some instances, simmering tensions among communities have been unleashed by a transformative event.

The U.S. invasion of Iraq is a vivid example of a shock that not only removed a political regime but also sent repercussions throughout a society and overwhelmed capacities in many areas to maintain local peace. Although Saddam Hussein maintained a brutal regime that privileged Sunni elements of the country's sectarian divide, Baghdad nevertheless had the capacity to function as a multiethnic center for commerce and culture for centuries. As noted earlier, Ami Carpenter provides compelling case studies of communities in Baghdad that countered the pressures of sectarian polarization and conflict escalation by adapting to the changes brought on by the conflict. Despite the adaptive capacity of some of these communities, she maintains that Baghdad as a whole demonstrates how failure to absorb a shock can often lead to transformation. In 2006, Baghdad changed from an integrated whole, marked by sectarian coexistence, to a patchwork of ethnic enclaves. The city remained intact as a center of people and commerce, but its inability to completely absorb the intensity and duration of violent shock fundamentally changed its identity as a multiethnic polity.¹⁶

Adaptation

Kenya. Kenya's response to the aftermath of the 2007 elections provides an example of how violence forced political structures and societal behavior to change to maintain a peaceful regime. The widespread ethnic violence that followed the contested election resulted in 1,500 deaths and the displacement of a half million people. The electoral violence quickly overwhelmed the country's capacity to manage the conflict. However, Kenyan civil society at local and national levels responded quickly to intervene in multiple areas to stop the killing and prevent further cycles of violence. Former United Nations secretary-general Kofi Annan headed the diplomatic effort that eventually forged a political agreement between the elected president and his main electoral rival and led to the National Accord and Reconciliation Act of 2008. The accord established a unity government and mandated a constitutional reform process to address the underlying drivers of the violence, which were centered around the distribution of power among Kenya's ethnic groups.

Kenya's constitution of 1969 underwent several rounds of reform in the postcolonial era, but the fundamental grievances of Kenya's major ethnic groups were never resolved. The political system was highly centralized, largely run by a powerful executive presidency. The electoral system encouraged mobilization along ethnic lines, not across them. The financial system reinforced the corrupt and divisive tendencies of the political and electoral systems and perpetuated significant inequalities across ethnic groups. The 2007 postelection violence was rooted in these grievances; to address them, reforms were instituted to devolve governing power down to the local level. The reforms included the creation of directly elected county councils as a new level of democratic local government; an upper house of the legislature to strengthen this branch of government in relation to the executive; constitutional limitations on the size of the cabinet to reduce the potential for patronage; mechanisms to increase citizen participation in governance through means that enhanced the autonomy of some smaller ethnic groups; and the transfer of major public finance functions from the executive to the legislature.¹⁷

Collective action networks comprising key elites and civil society groups that helped quell the electoral violence also helped shepherd the constitutional reform process through to a successful referendum, despite controversy and political resistance. Adaptive capacity helped these networks to shift their attention from managing direct violence to supporting structural reforms to address the root political causes of violence. Although the general elections of 2013 were largely peaceful, conflicts over tribal access to political power, land, and water are still of

The electoral system encouraged mobilization along ethnic lines, not across them.

great concern, as is the growing problem of public corruption. Meanwhile, the devolution of central power, which helped address conflict in 2007 at the national level when Kenya's political parties struggled violently for control of the structure and assets of the national government, is now seen as a possible driver of conflict at the local level. With government resources now devolved to counties and municipalities, political and tribal violence may have simply been pushed to that level. It is a healthy reminder of the persistence of different types of conflict within systems and the ongoing need to strengthen resilience capacities.

Guatemala. A perverse resilience in Guatemala is a reminder of the nonlinearity of post-conflict transitions where, despite the emergence of communities and institutions that promote peace, the overall identity of a regime—that of violence—stays the same, as violent actors and systems also adapt. A decades-long civil war in Guatemala that killed two hundred thousand people finally came to an end in 1996 with the Guatemalan Peace Accords. The accords helped usher a regime shift within the conflict landscape, but the adaptive resilience of key sections of society (for example, the military, militias, gangs), external shocks (deportation by the United States of gang members), and long-running social stressors (such as social exclusion, crime, corruption, high poverty and inequality, weak state) have created a situation in which violence levels today are higher than they were during the war.

Two models are helpful in understanding the changes that have occurred in Guatemalan society. One is Tani Adams's model of chronic violence, a self-reproducing system with effects that can be traced across the full *arc of human development*—from the maternal-child bond of early life to the attitudes and behaviors underpinning the citizenship practices necessary for a democracy.¹⁸ The other is John Bailey's notion of a *security trap*, a negative equilibrium in which violence, criminality, and corruption have penetrated the security complex, state administration, and elements of politics and civil society, ultimately eroding the democratic regime.¹⁹ Both models acknowledge the multigenerational legacies of structural and direct violence from the precolonial era and the increasingly hybrid nature of violence spanning the criminal, political, and social realms.

In Bailey's security trap, the corrosive effects of crime, violence, and corruption dominate and overpower any corrective efforts by civil society and government. The trap may have existed to some degree during the war, but it deepened during the postwar period, fueled by the surge in drug trafficking through Central America. Already affected by high poverty, inequality, social polarization, and a weak state (with the exception of the army), Guatemala was unequipped to handle the influx of sophisticated urban gangs, violence, public corruption, and the breakdown of law and order that accompanied increased drug trafficking. Gang violence was markedly exacerbated by the influx of deported gang members from the United States. Levels of both organized and ordinary crime exploded. Lack of citizen security and ineffective or heavy-handed policing led to a rise in vigilantism in some areas. In other areas, communities entered into protective alliances with local gangs. Public corruption in the police, judiciary, and political system increased. The rise in both public and private forms of illegality, informality, and corruption has fed growing public distrust in formal law and the legitimacy of the democratic regime—hallmarks of the security trap and current state of affairs in Guatemala.

Adams's model of chronic violence puts the widespread social violence plaguing states like Guatemala in the context of the role that unaddressed trauma has on human development and functioning. The capacity for violence is passed on to younger generations, when children experience and are habituated to violence (criminal, gang, domestic) at an early age. This has profound implications for the future and all levels of the social system: "Traumatization in

childhood in particular contributes to a higher incidence of lifelong physical and mental illness and destructive behavior. Left untreated, it affects all aspects of human behavior, undermines how individuals see themselves in relation to others—including the capacity of parents to raise their children constructively, and the cohesion and functioning of communities—and enables more violent social patterns to take root and become normalized, stimulating further polarization and conflict.”²⁰ Unbroken links between the violence of the past and present create reinforcing feedback loops that undermine the ability of a societal system to make a peaceful regime shift while violent actors learn and adapt.

Transformation

Transitions from armed societal violence to peace or from authoritarian systems to democratic regimes are examples of transformative regime shifts where community and systemic responses to the shock or long-term stress of violence drive changes in characteristic behaviors and the regime’s feedback loops. When they occur, they deservedly garner overwhelming attention and consideration in the peacebuilding field and by others struggling to find peace. The examples of South Africa and Northern Ireland are cases in point. The high relapse rate of civil conflicts requires caution in ascribing finality to any transition.²¹ For example, Mozambique, long heralded as the African peacebuilding success of the 1990s, is currently experiencing renewed armed violence against the state despite two decades of strong economic growth and democratic elections deemed largely credible by the international community. Countries like Guatemala and El Salvador benefited from transformative peace accords but today suffer from levels of social violence that are higher than during their civil wars. A systems perspective does not see these cases as an indication of backsliding but rather as the resilience of conflict systems to regenerate in new ways if the structures, institutions, and actors responsible for deepening the basins of peaceful regimes are unable to thrive over those that seek to use violence to pursue their interests.

Countries like Guatemala and El Salvador benefited from transformative peace accords but today suffer from levels of social violence that are higher than during their civil wars.

France and Germany. A system demonstrates transformational resilience when actors within the system or structural conditions outside it bring about a regime shift. The reconciliation of France and Germany after World War II represents a violence-to-peace regime shift and demonstrates the complex interplay and feedback between structural changes driven by external factors and changes to the socioecological system driven by actors within. Valerie Rosoux’s parsing of the different forms of reconciliation between France and Germany underlines these mutually reinforcing processes.²² After the war, the governments of France and Germany established “structural and institutional mechanisms to reduce the general perception of the threat and to resolve any possible disagreement” that might reignite hostilities. One mechanism—an economic union for coal and steel—established joint institutions to drive economic and political interdependence, while cultural exchanges and informal and formal political, economic, and education consultations reinforced new patterns of interrelating based on negotiation. Rosoux notes that, in this case, and in reconciliation processes in general, structural shifts, based on negotiated peace settlements and the interests of the political elite, often occur first. Transformations in relationships (the community perspective)—the psychological shifts in attitudes and beliefs about the Other—take longer, but can, as in this case, be moved along by shifts in structural factors. The establishment of multiple, layered negotiations and high levels of people-to-people exchanges between the two countries restructured relationships with and psychological perceptions of the Other that have led to reconciliation and regime transformation. Rosoux points out the centrality of negotiated processes to transformation and notes that reconciliation attempts that are not

negotiated—government- or internationally-driven reconciliation programs—fail because they result in resistance to an imposed model and undermine the agency of socioecological communities to define their postviolence relationships and structures.

India. A regime shift causes the basic nature of a system to change for the better, as in the case of French-German relations, or for the worse, as in some of the cases covered by Varshney's seminal study of ethnic conflict and peace in India.²³ The slow change in variables over time usually proves decisive in bringing about regime shifts. Varshney undertook comparisons of cities where sectarian violence was endemic and where peace was maintained. Controlling for other factors, he determined that interethnic civic ties were a central factor in demonstrating resilience to violence. First, regular contact and social familiarity between Hindu and Muslim communities enabled communication. This allowed for organizations to emerge (for example, peace committees) from the bottom up to manage crises. Such groups "policed neighborhoods, killed rumors, provided information to local administration, and facilitated communication between communities in times of tension." Second, associational civil society relationships organized around business (small and large), trade unionism, politics, and social and educational interests. When interethnic, these bridging ties provided a foundation that would hold up against polarization and provocations. The state could play an important role in preventing ethnic violence, but it was not determinative; it was the nature of civic relations that determined whether the local authorities and police could manage ethnic shocks or stressors, not the other way around. Endemic ethnic rioting in India occurred where there was a nexus between politicians and criminals who could manipulate the potential for violence. Politicians who could benefit from exploiting tensions would not do so in the face of strong interethnic civic ties (or were unsuccessful when they tried). These ties ultimately constrained politicians' strategic behavior.²⁴

The Gujarati textile cities of Ahmedabad and Surat are the best example of how a regime shift is brought about over time. These cities were the base of Gandhi's movement and where the social and political organizations he built prior to India's independence were strongest. Their symbolic significance made them targets of sectarian agitation. Nevertheless, at a time when Hindu-Muslim rioting was increasing across the country, these cities had long periods of unbroken peace. Small flashes of violence did not become citywide conflagrations as elsewhere. These cities endured as "institutionalized peace systems" for several decades.²⁵

The cornerstones of intercommunal civic life in these cities were social and educational organizations, the Congress Party, textile trade unions, and the business associations that Gandhi helped found in the 1920s. All were committed to Hindu-Muslim unity and engaged both communities in their organization and activity implementation. Even if the participation of Hindus and Muslims was unbalanced numerically in certain organizations, Varshney documents that the ideological commitment to communal peace was strong enough for them to be effective at keeping the peace.²⁶ Whenever violence occurred, or had the potential to occur, these institutions mobilized for prevention or to check its spread.

However, both cities eventually succumbed to ethnic polarization and Hindu-Muslim rioting—Ahmedabad after 1969 and Surat following the shockwaves of the Babri mosque destruction by Hindu militants. The transformation of these peace systems was the result of slowly changing variables that eroded the quotidian and associational civic ties between Hindus and Muslims. None of these institutions was spared. The state-level Congress Party, which had for decades provided leadership for communal peace, was hollowed out over time. Its unchallenged success in government allowed it to become a patronage machine, where opportunistic politicians who were far less committed to Gandhi's ideology, especially that

of Hindu-Muslim unity, increasingly made up party ranks. The party's weakness helped open space for the Hindu nationalist BJP, which deliberately exploited ethnic tensions. Social organizations such as schools and social enterprises, traditionally financed through charity fundraising and member campaigns, were sapped of their drive and integrity when successive Congress governments showered them with state financial support. Hindu nationalist social organizations (and others) rose in their place. Economic forces shaped by immigration and industrialization had perhaps the greatest impact on civic life. These factors eroded the traditional civic ties between Hindus and Muslims, resulting in ethnically separated work spaces and residential communities. The impact of this growing communal separation on business associations and trade unions—bastions of intercommunalism in the past—was devastating; membership declined substantially, particularly among Muslims and lower-caste Hindus.²⁷

The virtuous feedbacks among intercommunal civic ties, integrated civic institutions, and violence prevention initiatives eventually broke down and were replaced by vicious cycles of polarization, alienation, and tit-for-tat violence that neither the state nor the old civic institutions could contain. Tellingly, when riots erupted in Surat after the 1992 Babri mosque destruction, the Old City section was spared. This part of the city had been able to maintain interethnic ties through its business associations, which mobilized their membership to keep the peace.

***Resilience to violence
is not the same as
invulnerability.***

Resilience to violence is not the same as invulnerability. Even resilient social systems, such as those in Ahmedabad and Surat, can be propelled into less desirable regimes, or basins of attraction, as a result of persistent and severe stress or, in the case of Iraq, an overwhelming shock. Thus, resilience is highly correlated to the intensity and duration of the shock or stressor. These case studies also illustrate that a regime's resilience to violence depends on the ability of actors within a socioecological system to adapt and learn and on the nature of the system's structure, which can impede or enable adaptation and learning. For example, in Nepal, less resilient communities were structurally compromised by corruption, which thrives in opacity and undermines effective, collective decision making based on a clear assessment of the situation. In the case of French-German reconciliation, formal, structured negotiations and exchanges transformed psychological perceptions of the Other, which, in turn, deepened the structural contours of a regime (basin) of coexistence and integration. The resilience of emerging nonviolent regimes is also affected by the attractiveness and latent, persistent regimes of violence, which explains the high relapse rates of civil conflicts, the phenomena of negative peace, the ability of different types of violence to mutate, and the existence of societies that are neither at peace, nor at war.

Socioecological Systems: Resistance, Neutrality, and Redundancy

If resilience in a peacebuilding context is about the ability of communities to withstand various forms of external pressure on their integrity and functioning, and still survive or thrive, then literature on the evolution of the state-society relationship and the impact of international interventions on society provides interesting insights. Social scientists have done extensive research on how societies have responded to disruption (for example, societal-state negotiation, class resistance), using terms that correspond to resilience, such as resistance, mediated states, and hybridity.²⁸ A key insight from the literature is that resilience is normatively neutral.

When faced with attempts to shape or alter their existence, subaltern (ordinary or powerless) classes in a society use everyday resistance to confront state authority. James Scott, in

his observation of peasant life in a Malaysian village, describes the ordinary weapons peasants used to resist the introduction of large combines: pilfering, foot dragging, sabotage, and feigned ignorance. To openly and collectively confront the state is suicidal; self-marginalization, while not heroic, has historically been highly effective.²⁹ This type of resistance, which maintains the outward appearances of conformity and does not directly threaten the state, reflects, from a systems perspective, a socioecological system deeply embedded in a basin of attraction. History is littered with the failed efforts of states to reform the underclasses; the tenacity of their resistance is largely due to the absence of alternative regimes historically (latent regimes) and the depth of their interrelationships (not mediated by other institutions or actors). Resistance then is a regime with a “deep basin” and high threshold for regime shift, exhibiting a high degree of resilience. In fact, deep societal resistance can erode or controvert the source of shock or stress; it can contribute to the overthrow of the state regime. In Poland, everyday worker resistance to the Soviet political order coalesced into a successful nonviolent civil resistance movement, namely Solidarity.

Hybridity, where international peacebuilding and statebuilding efforts interact with local forces to produce hybrid forms of peace and governance, also describes a form of nonviolent social resistance. In this context, as seen in Kosovo, peacebuilding interventions face a continuous struggle in which local agents are resilient and employ tactical participation and resistance in their interaction with larger, international hegemonic forces: tax avoidance, engagement with illicit economies, electoral boycotts, and nonparticipation in peacebuilding projects.³⁰ This struggle does not controvert the shock or stressor but interacts with it to form a hybridized regime that is neither liberal nor traditional but rather a mix of both.

Violent, oppressive socioecological systems can also be resilient in many of the same ways as peaceful ones, employing similar capacities and strategies to maintain their regimes of predation and violence. The authoritarian political regimes headed by Central Asian leaders have remained resilient to several social uprisings in recent years: the revolution in Kyrgyzstan that led to the ousting of President Kurmanbek Bakiyev in April 2010; the interethnic riots in southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010; the violence in Tajikistan’s Pamir mountains in July 2012; the clashes between police and demonstrators in western Kazakhstan in December 2011; and a series of explosions and shootings ascribed to radical Islamist organizations in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The sources of their resilience are the same as democratic or progressive regimes: a social contract with the people (for example, in Central Asia, the tacit agreement that if society remains self-regulated, the state will not resort to employing detention, torture, and abuse) and congruence between state institutions (informal, negotiated, and fluid power agreements with local leaders and institutions).³¹ This underlines that resilience is an attribute of a social system to respond to long-term stressors or shock and is neither a negative nor a positive quality. That is, resilience is normatively neutral. Understanding this requires a consciousness about attributing moral value to an individual or group’s agency and response to a dominant hegemony. Is one group’s resilience another group’s rebellion?

Systems thinking also affirms an emerging tenet of peacebuilding: inclusivity secures more durable peace. In a study on women’s participation in the Northern Ireland Peace Process, Monica McWilliams finds that engaging more actors in the peace process, especially those most affected by the war, increased buy-in for peace and societal cohesion.³² However, response redundancy was also critical.³³ While politicians negotiated a new political order, the women of Northern Ireland elevated social issues to the negotiation table, specifically community-based peace initiatives for young people, particularly young fighters reintegrating

***Is one group’s resilience
another group’s rebellion?***

Resilience is the maintenance of the social contract and the ability to reconcile citizen and state expectations.

with their communities. Different groups and individuals approach peace in different ways, thereby increasing the odds that some form of peace will stick. Inclusivity also ensures redundancy so that failures at different localities or levels might be counteracted with a resilience response elsewhere within the social system.

Resilience of States and Societies, Communities, and Individuals

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the resilience of a state depends on its ability to absorb, adapt, or transform in response to a shock or long-term stressors and retain agreement between the state and society on their respective and mutual roles and responsibilities. In other words, resilience is the maintenance of the social contract and the ability to reconcile citizen and state expectations of that contract in the midst of sudden change or long-term stressors. There are several constituent factors of a social contract, all of which must be managed through political processes to achieve resilience: the expectations that society has of the state; the ability of the state to ensure basic provisions (for example, security, services); and the determination of leaders to manage state resources and capacity in ways that meet societal expectations. The OECD notes that the resilience of a state is often hard to assess because these factors are multiple and interactive.³⁴ While the OECD notes that the state-society relationship is critical to resilience, it focuses primarily on the technical capacity of the state—only one particular variable that defines a socioecological regime. The other variables that shape the basin—the nature of state-society interactions and relations—are also crucial for assessing resilience. How societies hold together (horizontal relationships) during shocks and the ability of the state to create the conditions for societal convergence are other factors that would create a broader systems' understanding of state fragility.³⁵

In her assessment of the sectarian conflict in Baghdad, Ami Carpenter identified a two-part framework for conflict resilience, consisting of both system and community perspectives: regime characteristics—“the strengths and abilities of a regime that enable a socioecological system to respond adaptively to change” and community competence—“the ability of a system to modify or change characteristics or behavior to cope better with actual or anticipated stresses.” The regime characteristics that allowed Iraqi communities to be resilient to sectarian violence included the following:³⁶

- *Political and social structures*: salient norms, social institutions and networks, and the political system. For example, state actors, like police and district officials, were often viewed as irrelevant to Baghdad neighborhoods, while tribes, and their ties to al-Qaeda, played a large role in Shia-dominated neighborhoods and enabled al-Qaeda to infiltrate urban areas.
- *Economic resources*: economic resources to sustain community well-being, capacity to adapt to the changing environment through access to diversified economic assets, and proximity to strategically important economic assets (transportation hubs, trade routes, infrastructure). Carpenter finds that, in the case of Baghdad neighborhoods, access to diverse economic assets was not as much of a factor as trade networks with rural tribes that transmitted al-Qaeda into urban neighborhoods.
- *Information and communication*: sources of information, spaces for sharing information, and interpretation of events by and communicative ability of leaders. Carpenter finds that leadership structures that articulated narratives of inclusion and belonging were a significant factor in enabling communities to resist the entry of sectarian groups.

- *Social capital*: sense of community, citizen participation, and community attachment that enable people to work together for a common purpose. Carpenter finds that neighborhoods in Baghdad had significant cross-cutting ties between Shia and Sunni, but these deteriorated rapidly when communities and leaders did not intentionally nurture them through a violent shock.³⁷

When citizens had the capacities to self-organize, their communities were able to resist sectarian groups. Carpenter calls this organized action community competence (a shared belief in the collective power to achieve desired results), which has both psychological and behavioral components. The psychological aspects of resilience included collective efficacy—or the willingness of neighbors to intervene on behalf of the common good based on a belief of their own agency and inward orientation—a perspective on community security that motivates residents to protect neighborhood boundaries (as opposed to competitive strategies against perceived adversaries that would lead to a spiral of attacks and counterattacks).³⁸ The behavioral components of community competence that Carpenter identifies were the specific strategies communities adopted in the face of sectarian violence:

- Organizing nonsectarian security groups that in resilient neighborhoods had an inward defensive orientation; they patrolled borders and did not organize attacks outside the neighborhood.
- Preventing neighborhood security groups from adopting sectarian identities that were exclusionary and challenged state authority.
- Advocating violence prevention by third-party actors who do not take sides but advocate an alternative way—nonviolence.³⁹

An underlying theme of Carpenter’s work is “the relationship of resilience to brittleness, which highlights that flexibility is often a key quality of resilience,” whereas rigidity or hardening of perspectives occurs as conflict escalates, especially in relation to how groups or individuals begin to perceive the other.⁴⁰ Group changes, such as evaluating interactions with the Other in zero-sum terms, are driven by a cognitive and emotional stiffening (for example, dehumanization, reduced empathy, deindividuation) as a result of exposure to violence. For example, during the Rwanda genocide, Hutus dehumanized the Tutsis, referring to them as *inyenzi*, or cockroaches, making it easier to commit atrocities against them.

Marshall Wallace and Mary Anderson’s comparative case study of bright spots—communities that should have succumbed to violence due to proximity or characteristics (for example, demography, economic status) shared with warring neighbors but did not—identifies a set of common capacities and strategies that enabled these “ecosystems” to opt out of war. Their analysis studied collective action; communities that were resilient to violence analyzed, strategized, and responded using inclusive and transparent processes. There was no denial or prevarication. These communities conducted a collective calculation of the costs of violence versus nonviolence, developed options, adopted a pragmatic nonwar identity that resonated with their culture and history, and communicated group values that distanced them from war and violence. This nonwar narrative supported a set of activities that maintained their nonwar status, such as the establishment of an early warning system, the organization of community activities based on relative risk, the establishment of community cohesion in the face of threat, the effort to keep community life normal, and the emphasis on security measures that maintained community solidarity and survival. According to Wallace and Anderson, the key factor in a community’s capacity to opt out of war was the existence of legitimate leadership. Leaders who had already established extensive networks in the community, regularly engaged with residents, and valued

Interventions that focus on violence reduction are not enough.

brainstorming and problem solving with community members were critical to resisting war.⁴¹ Whereas Carpenter's work highlights both ecosystem (the ball) and regime (the ball and the basin) resilience, Wallace and Anderson provide deep insights into how community ecosystems self-organize, adapt, and learn in response to violence.

Throughout their lifetimes, individuals develop and evolve through formative relationships at different levels of a social system: family and friends; local institutions, such as schools and churches; and state institutions and national identity groups, such as political parties and ethnic affiliations. Yet, what if violence is produced and reproduced throughout a social ecosystem from the micro to the macro levels? When violence is a facet of everyday life, a person's ability to develop relationships throughout the system is disrupted. Family members cannot bond when one or more members experiences trauma from violence. Little trust or cohesion exists to engage in political activities, and civic relations decline. Looking at the impacts of chronic violence from a multidisciplinary perspective, Tani Adams suggests that interventions that focus on violence reduction are not enough. Human security programs that guarantee access to jobs, education, and so on without fear of violence or intimidation are too limited. The field of peacebuilding needs to focus on strengthening the capacity of socioecological systems for self-repair. This means supporting, amid violence, individuals' and communities' abilities to generate and replicate creative mechanisms for living together that establish reciprocal cycles of healing and thriving. Human development, not just human security, is crucial to systemic transformation.⁴²

Resilience and Peacebuilding

Approaching peacebuilding with the intent to support and sustain resilience capacities offers the potential for fundamental change by shifting the focus, changing the level of intervention, and bridging communities of practice.

Shifting the Focus

The conceptualization of resilience as the adaptation of socioecological systems to violent shock is increasingly resonating with the peacebuilding field because of its explanatory power for why and how the field must evolve. The experiences of the last decade of war have exposed the chronic weaknesses of international intervention models that used institutional capacities, rather than the realities of those communities affected by conflict, to drive programming, largely overlooking the complex interplay of community risk and capacity. Resilience thinking provides an important heuristic shift. It refocuses attention on the positive attributes of communities (systems) and the microdynamics of local conflict, potentially making outside interveners more demand driven than supply driven.⁴³

Resilience also refocuses attention on human agency, recognizing that conflict-affected societies are in a constant state of flux and embrace various adaptive strategies in preventing and managing violence. This approach not only opens space for engaging with local communities, it makes them the focal point. Anderson and Wallace conducted a study of the tactics of so-called nonwar communities. Their thesis is that traditional conflict prevention efforts are rooted in bringing something external to bear on the conflict and that these efforts often discount the existing capacities people are already using to prevent violence and achieve peace. Some communities will always make a conscious decision not to engage in violent conflict. Those communities examined in the study took the same three steps: they assessed what the cost of war would be to their communities, they calculated their options, and they chose a nonwar identity.⁴⁴ Anderson

and Wallace's communities demonstrate the powerful effects of local prevention strategies amid the firestorm of violence. A more systematic analysis of community resilience could lead to evidence-based prevention strategies and programming and more fine-tuned approaches: For example, how specifically are communities resilient in different contexts of violence? That is, why is a community resilient to violent extremism but not to electoral violence? Which system capacities are relevant to responding to specific types of violence that preserve a system's peaceful function and identity?

Changing the Level of Intervention

After the intervention experiences of the past decade, there is a new openness among intervenors in conflict-affected and fragile states to societal dynamics and complexities and to the unintended consequences of international interventions. Rob Ricigliano promotes systems analyses and system-level theories of change as a way to move beyond project-based peacebuilding interventions, which never add up to “peace writ large” or, from a resilience perspective, a regime transformation from conflict and violence to peace and nonviolence. Systems thinking brings the larger system into focus, allowing practitioners to explore the interactive dynamism of different parts of the system and how those parts are elements of a larger whole.⁴⁵ Interpeace recently experimented with a resilience approach in Guatemala, organizing inclusive community groups in eleven regional departments and identifying and building on successful community-driven, socioeconomic strategies for combatting chronic violence (which, in Guatemala, stem from the pernicious ties among corruption, crime, and political power). During the April 2015 political crisis in Guatemala, which was a result of the uncovering of government corruption, Interpeace community groups held meetings to review the effectiveness of citizen response to the crisis, forming a broad-based social movement on transforming the regime.⁴⁶ In this sense, sustainability, the holy grail of peacebuilding practitioners, is the cumulative effect of multiple resiliencies of a social system. Bringing the entire societal system into focus in this way moves the peacebuilding field away from its current emphasis on discrete conflict problems and project-based responses. The key question becomes what intervention or accumulation of interventions will tip the conflict system to a nonviolent system that is improving over time; this requires a systems-level, not a project-level, theory of change.⁴⁷

Bridging Communities of Practice

Increasingly, fields related to peacebuilding are incorporating resilience thinking and approaches into their work. Humanitarian, development, and security programs are closely examining which capacities and strategies protect societies and communities from natural and man-made disasters and what helps them rebound. Interestingly, consensus is growing in these fields that social cohesion, collective action, and conflict management—the core of peacebuilding work—are critical to disaster and development resilience, suggesting that resilience offers avenues for both collaboration and integration. A key aspect of societal resilience to humanitarian shock is collective action and decision making and adaptive mechanisms that seek to protect all members of a society. Dialogue, strategic listening, and conflict resolution ease the effects of natural disasters and support a more rapid recovery at the community level. That is, they make a community more resilient. A recent Mercy Corps research study of food security in the Horn of Africa found that strengthening, institutionalizing, and bringing together informal and formal conflict management systems directly affected a community's ability to more effectively manage the impact of a drought.⁴⁸

Similarly, development programs have begun to incorporate efforts to build social cohesion and trust to counterbalance long-term stressors and economic shocks and the effects of state and societal fragility. In a World Bank multicountry study, social groups identified convergence as the key to a country's overall development. Convergence across society and between the society and government occurs when groups see the collective utility in working together rather than competing and when agreed-on norms for their interaction exist. In this way, the development process should be seen as facilitating the cumulative effects of convergence in society and strengthening trusted frameworks for group collaboration.⁴⁹

In the context of nonviolent action against repressive states, resilience “refers to the capacity of contentious actors to continue to mobilize collective action despite the actions of opponents aimed at constraining and inhibiting their activities. This concept emphasizes the iterative interactions between challengers and opponents over time.” It is closely related to the idea of leverage, which refers to the ability of the same actors to “mobilize the withdrawal of support from opponents or invoke pressure against them through the networks upon which opponents depend for their power.”⁵⁰ Oliver Kaplan, in a study on community response to violent groups in Syria and Colombia, finds that with community collective action, civilians could convince some members of armed groups of the importance of nonviolence, sowing disunity among them. The key to a norm shift was citizen collective action; strong social systems changed armed groups' behavior and perspectives where individual resistance often failed. This suggests that coalitions and factions within armed groups were attracted to a regime of nonviolence when they encountered it in meetings with the community; these factions ingested nonviolence in ways that disrupted the armed group's regime of violence.⁵¹ The idea that communities have leverage and can mobilize defections within armed groups establishes an important link between peacebuilding and nonviolent civil resistance and calls for an increased emphasis in the peacebuilding field on nonviolent social movement and network formation.

A critical capacity of resilient communities is self-organizing for security and protection, but in particular ways. Carpenter, analyzing communities that did not engage in sectarian violence following the fall of Baghdad, recognizes a common approach: inward orientation. Community security groups in resilient communities limited their activities to defense, protecting community members and assets and refraining from taking the fight outward.⁵² Nonwar communities, which Marshall and Wallace studied, also engaged actively in their own security: co-opting and confronting armed groups and negotiating with them.⁵³ The importance of a community's capacity to cope with violence has drawn the attention of the peacekeeping community. Over the last decade, civilian protection mandates have become an increasingly common aspect of UN peacekeeping operations, and more attention is now being paid to how to enhance the resilience of communities. Communities are the first line of defense for populations facing violence, notwithstanding the limitations that peacekeeping missions face in addressing the structural conditions feeding violent conflict. Research is helping document the many strategies that communities employ in different threat circumstances, develop typologies of self-protection measures, and understand the ways in which external support can help or harm.⁵⁴

Challenges

Several challenges exist in applying the resilience concept to peacebuilding. Like social capital, resilience is normatively neutral in that it is the measure of the absorptive capacity of socio-ecological systems along a spectrum from violence to peace. Some sources of resilience in a system—such as community coping mechanisms involving illicit economies and relationships

The idea that communities have leverage and can mobilize defections within armed groups establishes an important link between peacebuilding and nonviolent civil resistance.

with armed actors—may contradict national and international rule of law and prove challenging for international peacebuilding actors to tolerate or ignore. Furthermore, within any social system, there are equilibrium trade-offs regarding acceptable violence. In certain socioecological systems, women are forced into interclan marriages to ensure broader social peace, but these marriages have high percentages of domestic violence. There are also equilibrium trade-offs among microsystems, such as peace and governance. For example, in Kenya, in Wajir Province, the state decided not to extend its influence and institutions and allowed tribal groups to govern to maintain peace.⁵⁵ These equilibria trade-offs are not necessarily bad but often reflect the state of a system's transition. Some trade-offs may be uncomfortable to outsiders but acceptable to a society looking at the prospects of violence or greater levels of violence. These compromises, however, if not addressed over the long term, become stressors or tipping points (where the system changes from a regime of peace to one of violence) or nodes of vulnerability to shock.

Although resilience may prove to be a unifying framework for cooperation among various actors, it can also support business as usual. At issue is whether resilience thinking is simply the latest new packaging for established peacebuilding practice. Recent resilience assessments and dialogues led by Interpeace and USIP in violence-affected communities indicate that the equivalency framing offered by resilience (looking at gain versus loss) is certainly powerful and engages and empowers communities weary of a focus on conflict dynamics and vulnerability and risk. Like redesigning and reframing a house, the new framing opened new vistas. A resilience focus also increases community cognizance of their individual but comparable everyday resistances to violent actors and the potential for collective action. This moves peacebuilding from a focus on discrete conflict problems and the application of multiple, narrow solutions to a focus on harnessing the dynamics of socioecological systems and relationships and community capacity. Resilience also has the potential to steer intervenors away from the impulse to simplify conflict dynamics in order to “projectize” the problem, ignoring the dynamic equilibrium and ecology of socioecological systems. The peacebuilding field may recognize that a focus on resilience is an antidote to many of the breakdowns of recent, large-scale interventions. However, without making basic structural reforms to the field or engaging local personnel and structures, resilience practice is subject to the same constraints as peacebuilding in general and therefore to the same implementation challenges. Similarly, without careful delineations, such as a clearly articulated theory of change and distinct practice for resilience, any conflict management method (for example, dialogue, mediation, negotiation) could be placed under resilience.

Part of the appeal of resilience for the peacebuilding field is that the concept appears intuitively obvious and easy to implement. Instead of heavy-handed, protracted, and costly interventions, conflict prevention and recovery becomes a matter of activating latent or supporting functioning capacity in a community. The emphasis, however, on community response and responsibility could provide a convenient justification for international disengagement from the long-term investments of political capital and capacity building that conflict-affected societies require—already a significant international response.

Operationalization

In January and February 2015, USIP conducted a series of working group meetings on resilience with peacebuilding practitioners. A central concern was whether resilience in practice looked any different from peacebuilding in practice. Was resilience a concept du jour or a new way to sell standard practice? Or, does resilience fundamentally alter the way we intervene to resolve violent conflict?

Does resilience fundamentally alter the way we intervene to resolve violent conflict?

Adaptive Governance

Those who manage an ecosystem recognize that building the resilience of complex, dynamic systems requires adaptive governance and resilience thinking.⁵⁶ This involves using frameworks and approaches for collaboration and collective action that bring together various actors on multiple levels to shape and implement a change agenda. Such processes work best when they focus on experimentation and learning, drawing on data and experience from formal and informal knowledge systems and on social memory in all parts of the system. They stimulate wide-ranging creative experimentation that feeds back into the collective search for solutions. These processes recognize the roles of individuals, relationships, and networks. Leadership is critical in providing a vision, building trust, and shaping meaning. Bridging organizations play a crucial role in making new network connections and resolving differences that impede processes. Adaptive governance has the capacity to respond to change and even to transform systems to new regimes when a crisis creates opportunity.

Does the peacebuilding field have an analog of adaptive governance in its toolkit? Certainly not at the level of the international system. Hopes that the UN Peacebuilding Architecture would provide a framework for nimble and creative collective action have yet to bear fruit. The country-level processes that have emerged under the framework of the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States have so far proven unable to overcome the long-standing limitations of the aid-recipient relationship.

Nevertheless, the peacebuilding community has collaborative action approaches in its toolkit. Fisher began with the simple problem-solving workshop that has been embedded in many peacebuilding processes.⁵⁷ Conceptually, Lederach's idea of *process structures* that bring webs of leaders and actors together in the iterative search for transformational solutions to conflict has provided a vision and template for many in the field.⁵⁸ For several decades, peacebuilding and development practitioners have experimented with multilevel dialogue and vision-planning initiatives to build consensus around frameworks for collective action. The movement for more participatory and inclusive peace processes has brought in new actors from civil society to highlight root causes of crisis and advocate forgotten and marginalized groups.⁵⁹ However, all of these approaches and tools in practice have suffered from a common set of shortcomings. They tend to support episodic, time-bound, and centrally managed efforts that end with the peace agreement and do not extend into long-standing governance processes. Can the obstacles to embedding these efforts be overcome?

System Approaches and Strategies

Some are experimenting with more flexible and adaptive approaches that recognize the need to build systemic resilience to violence from within country systems. One such approach, used by the UN Development Programme (UNDP) Infrastructures of Peace (IfP) initiative, helps strengthen a kind of bridging organization that it refers to as insider mediators.⁶⁰

Recent developments at UNDP illustrate how elements of resilience thinking have taken hold. Although not using a systems approach explicitly, IfP recognizes that a set of structures, processes, and relationships work together to manage conflict. Vulnerable societies are often characterized by rolling turbulence and multiple, overlapping crises, with mainly endogenous causes but also international links. IfP grew out of a recognition that UNDP's traditional response to conflict was rigid, using technical assistance tools that were sectoral rather than focusing on building capacity for experimentation, learning, and innovation. In fast-moving,

dynamic situations, the response must be embedded within the system, and there must be capacity to activate mediators laterally across humanitarian, conflict, and development contexts.

The IFP approach focuses on political transitions and realizes that the critical moments around regime shifts are when certain engagements are most apt to get a society to a new equilibrium state. Strategic accompaniment is the preferred *modus operandi*. The focus is therefore on domestic leadership and institutions that are prepositioned in the role of intermediaries (inside mediators) who can help communities and societies manage the shocks and stressors that threaten peace and promote positive social cohesion. These institutions are the blood vessels, and the individuals are the white blood cells that respond in crisis. This is another way of saying the focus is on the absorptive, adaptive, and transformative capacities of these societies to be resilient to violence and promote social cohesion. This has forced UNDP to identify—under conditions of rapid change—these inside mediators (individual and institutional) and how they are organized and linked with key actors in a crisis in order to understand the nodes and networks embedded in the complex system.

Social Movements, Adaptability, and Challenges to the Aid System

Supporting and expanding on such promising experiments requires the international community to face up to some thorny questions. Does the current system that funds, implements, and evaluates peacebuilding encourage flexible, timely, and creative multilevel crisis prevention and response? We are not yet there. The system remains largely structured around rigid, projectized agendas and deliverables set by top-down actors and delivered by downstream implementing organizations. This is a largely unidirectional process of communication that is a far cry from the ideal of networked learning and experimentation at the heart of adaptive governance.

The projectization of complex social change processes, often with power issues at their core, has long bedeviled the international aid system. New thinking is beginning to emerge from a corner of the peacebuilding community that has to date operated largely outside this system. Social movements exhibit many of the characteristics sought in adaptive systems. Collective action is the central objective. The movements adopt a systemic lens on the problems they seek to address. Their goals are change oriented and directed at power systems. They involve multilevel webs of actors and individuals that take on novel organizational forms that are fit to purpose. Experimentation and learning are not just ideals; they are central to survival.⁶¹

The international community faces many challenges in supporting movements that are fluid and often leaderless. The movements' tactics are often confrontational and can have an impact on stability. Their need for flexibility to change course and tactics, and sometimes objectives, does not sit comfortably within a project log frame. Movements require both financial and in-kind or knowledge-based support. Recent dialogue between peacebuilding or social movement actors and the donor community may shed light on how we make the international system more supportive of flexible and adaptive approaches.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Using a socioecological lens can help us focus on processes of complex social change and violence, which have implications for the peacebuilding field.

Peacebuilding, as a field, focuses primarily on transformation—changing the norms, behaviors, and structures of a regime of violence—and less on system adaptation and absorption. From a socioecological perspective, this has important implications.

Transformative approaches, which may have noble intentions, do have negative effects.

- Peacebuilders have to accept that some regime variables cannot be changed (such as deepening or broadening the basin of socioecological systems or changing the stability landscape).
- The absorption and adaptation approaches may be more relevant to the conflict situation and regime type, recognizing that each approach has consequences (that is, equilibrium trade-offs, such as accepting violence against women in Afghanistan in exchange for stability between tribes or accepting a status quo that preserves a system's conflict dynamics) and there may be disagreement among different groups experiencing or striving for different resilience responses.
- Transformative resilience is built on the foundation of a system's absorptive and adaptive capacities. Peacebuilding practitioners at all levels can recognize the contribution that investments in absorption and adaptation make to potential transformation.

Transformative approaches, which may have noble intentions, do have negative effects:

- Regimes of violence can be highly resilient to positive change. This suggests that an equal focus is needed on eroding the resilience of violent regimes and on creating a peace regime (for example, manipulate factions in authoritarian regimes, create awareness of patterns of organized violence using social media, reject fear through humor as a form of civil resistance).
- A common outcome of transformation, as seen in Kosovo, Bosnia, and Afghanistan, is a socioecological system in partial transition or caught between emergent and latent regimes (hybridization). The peacebuilding field needs to more systematically assess how regime transformations are completed and how to manage partial regimes to prevent backsliding.

The peacebuilding field focuses primarily on the risk of violent shocks; slow processes remain hidden and less understood. Resilience thinking requires an understanding of slow variables that, over time, can create critical thresholds and trigger regime shifts.

- The field should build on conflict research that is beginning to identify which variables drive slow processes and the magnitude of their role in system transformations.
- The field should increasingly use regular public opinion polling to help signal rising stressors or the erosion of social cohesion, which can help actors at multiple levels shape effective responses.
- Other ways of monitoring slowly changing variables can be rooted in specialized networks established to regularly collect and disseminate qualitative and quantitative data on social conditions. The Philippine Social Weather Stations have done this for more than thirty years.
- Resilience requires response diversity, especially to counter the deterioration of slow variables (for example, that threaten social cohesion) or to help anticipate (provide early warning) and mitigate the impact of system shocks. Nonviolent resistance scholars understand the importance of redundancy to the resilience of social movements. International actors can strengthen a system's response frequency and diversity by supporting a disparate, vibrant, and networked civil society.

Transformative approaches require positive feedback loops among the actors and relationships that constitute a socioecological system and the structural factors that shape its contours. Often peacebuilding projects focus on actors and relationships (through dialogue

and mediation) or structural factors (through addressing issues related to the police, courts, and education systems) without establishing mutually reinforcing processes.

- The ability and roles of international actors and institutions in shaping the political, social, and economic rules and norms so as to reshape or entirely transform the stability landscape should be explored.
- There should be a greater emphasis on peacebuilding approaches that mediate the space between socioecological systems (for example, actors and relationships) and structures (for example, institutions and norms) to ensure that institutional reforms incorporate approaches to change perceptions and attitudes and actor-oriented programs incorporate ways to engage with and change structural factors.
- The lessons learned from civil resistance movements in withdrawing popular support from oppressive governments to invoke pressure against them should be integrated into peacebuilding. Such approaches institute mutually reinforcing, iterative processes that reshape societal perceptions and actions, reorganize relationships within a socioecological system by transforming dispersed networks into organized civil resistance movements, and erode oppressive structures in order to adapt and transform regimes of violence.
- The parallels between nonviolent civil resistance and community resilience to nonviolent actors, which have the attributes of resilient socioecological systems, should also be explored: maintain diversity and redundancy, manage connectivity and feedbacks, encourage learning, broaden participation, and establish dispersed governance and leadership capacities throughout the system.
- Longitudinal research should be conducted on the role of movements in transformative resilience (regime shifts) and the role of international inputs over time to understand the increase in or erosion of a movement's effectiveness.

Resilience to hegemonic power may have important lessons. Collective resistance is an effective absorptive response to an external shock or stressor. Can lessons from civil resistance and social movements be incorporated into peacebuilding to ensure that everyday resistances to violent groups are harnessed for collective action? How do we broaden the peacebuilding focus on individuals, groups, and sectors to identifying latent or emergent peace systems or regimes that can be reinforced or expanded?

Notes

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22. Valerie Rosoux, “Is Reconciliation Negotiable?” *International Negotiation* 18, no. 3 (2013): 471–93.
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28. The work of scholars such as James Scott, who examined peasant rebellions and the historic struggle between the weak and the powerful in various historical contexts; and Joel Migdal, author of the state-in-society approach to state theory, is relevant. In these literatures, the interaction of modern state and traditional social forces, often with the former attempting to assert its hegemony over the latter, is the interface of a process of social negotiation that sees communities resisting, struggling, adapting, or perishing in their

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The sense is growing that strengthening a society's capacity to overcome violent shock and communal stressors could play a key role in preventing conflict and achieving a more sustainable postconflict recovery. Thus, researchers and practitioners in the fields of peacebuilding and conflict resolution have begun to work together to test the concept of resilience. This report defines the concept and, using a socioecological lens, examines its potential application in peacebuilding practice. Case studies are explored to identify the challenges and opportunities in changing a regime of violence to a regime of peace. The analysis shows that for a successful transformation to occur, peacebuilding approaches need to focus on building a socioecological system's capacity to absorb and adapt to violence and mitigate the effects of slow, long-term stressors.

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