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Five Years After Pathways: Evolving Research on Inequality, Grievance, and Inclusion

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This paper examines the evolution of research since the publication of the UN-WB Pathways for Peace report with particular focus on the relatively new dimensions of "inequality, exclusion and a sense of justice" highlighted in Chapter IV on "Why People Fight".

In 2018, the UN and World Bank co-authored *Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict.* One of the most important insights from Pathways was the finding that "Exclusion from access to power, opportunity, services, and security creates fertile ground for mobilizing group grievances to violence, especially in areas with weak state capacity or legitimacy or in the context of human rights abuses" (p. xviii). These findings built on an emerging body of research that reasserted the crucial importance of grievances about inequality and exclusion, and by extension, the fundamentally political character of conflict, after a decade increasingly dominated by "greed" or "opportunity" based explanations.[1] *Pathways* identified specific ways in which states and other actors could seek to avert violence, including through more inclusive policies. Five years later, emerging academic research has affirmed the central findings on the importance of inequality-based grievances in explaining contemporary armed conflict and has held up broad social inclusion as a vitally important policy response to violence.

Inequality, Exclusion and Grievances

In the five years since *Pathways* was published, academic research has continued to add nuance and rigor to discussions of the linkages between inequality, exclusion and grievance and conflict. This body of literature has shifted away from broader cross-national studies to focus on identifying the individual-level perceptions and interpersonal interactions that drive conflict through surveys (Dyrstad & Hillesund, 2020; Koos, 2018; Must & Rustad, 2019) and hyper-localized data that doesn't rely on traditional political boundaries, such as analysis of local differences in night-time lighting (Lessmann & Steinkraus, 2019) and the geographical dispersion of resource deposits (Basedau & Roy, 2020). The literature has expanded to examine a range of political violence beyond civil war, including terrorism (Ghatak, 2018; Hansen et al., 2020) and riots (Abbs, 2021). Perhaps most importantly, emerging literature reflects a clear trend towards specifying causal mechanisms, that is, searching for consistent, concrete explanations of why and how inequality and exclusion may lead to the outbreak of conflict (Bartusevičius & Gleditsch, 2019; Forsberg & Olsson, 2021; Germann & Sambanis, 2021).

Understanding Grievances as an Explanation for Conflict

The findings of this evolving body of work have continued to reinforce the core argument of the *Pathways* report on the causal pathways from horizontal, or group-based, inequality and exclusion, to the formation of collective grievances, to the outbreak of conflict. Evidence suggests that broad social (vertical) economic inequalities are only weakly linked to conflict: Krieger and Meierrieks (2019) find evidence from global data over the last three decades that income inequality leads to increases in domestic terrorism. Focusing on Colombia, Holmes et al. (2018) find that municipal-level economic inequalities were not strong predictors of violence. Tollefsen

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[1] See, for example: Buhaug, Cederman & Gleditsch, 2014; Cederman, Gleditsch & Buhaug, 2013; Nepal, Bohara & Gawande, 2011; Østby, 2013. For examples of previous multilateral reports, see the 2011 WDR on Conflict, Security and Development.

(2020) uses Afrobarometer survey data to show that poverty is linked to violence, but only indirectly, when it overlaps with weak state institutions and group grievances. However, new research reaffirms the central importance of group-based (horizontal) economic and political inequalities as key predictors of violence (Abbs, 2021; Hillesund et al., 2018; Lessmann & Steinkraus, 2019). Political exclusion, as an extreme manifestation of political inequalities, is an especially serious indicator of potential future violence (Basedau & Roy, 2020; Hansen et al., 2020).

Emerging research has also provided new insights into established findings linking inequalities and violence. Renewing focus on the 'conflict trap', which hypothesizes the mutually reinforcing relationship between poverty and conflict, research has shown that long-running conflicts generate substantially higher levels of horizontal inequalities after conflict, laying the potential sparks for future rounds of violence (Dahlum et al., 2019; Ujunwa et al., 2021). Likewise, Forsberg and Olsson (2021) compare the different possible mechanisms linking gender inequality to conflict in India, showing evidence that the link is likely explained by a surplus of men available for recruitment in more gender-unequal societies and reduced investments in and opportunities for women in society, which hinders communities' ability to reduce conflict peacefully.

Furthermore, research has made progress demonstrating the crucial role of grievances in connecting inequalities to conflict. In essence, the formation of grievances is the process of politicizing inequality by assigning targeted culpability. These understandings of who is responsible for the (perceived) marginalization of a group serve as the narrative frames that animate rebellious collective action (Mosinger, 2018). This understanding of conflict affirms the crucial importance of collective perceptions of inequality. Must and Rustad's (2019) findings keenly illustrate the difference: they demonstrate that while regional inequality in Tanzania remained relatively constant for decades, violence only broke out after failed promises of extractive-financed development allowed local political elites to make these inequalities politically salient.

However, research shows that not all kinds of group grievances are equally likely to be transformed into conflict. Dyrstad and Hillesund (2020) demonstrate that social grievances are far weaker predictors of violence than economic or political issues. However, research on resilient social contracts illustrates that while social grievances don't directly lead to violence, they nonetheless prevent the emergence of a consolidated peace in long-running conflicts in Bosnia and South Africa (Belloni & Ramović, 2020; Ndinga-Kanga et al., 2020). Studies of economic grievance have continued to largely focus on conflicts around extractive economies, with variable findings: Koos (2018) finds that oil-related grievances drive attitudes supporting anti-state violence in the Niger Delta. Strong evidence suggests that the uneven spatial distribution of natural resources drives cross-ethnic inequalities and rent-seeking behavior, increasing the risk of civil conflict (Farzanegan et al., 2018; Lessmann & Steinkraus, 2019). Meanwhile, Basedau and Roy (2020) find that extractive-related grievances are significantly less important that grievances related to political exclusion.

Land-based grievances in particular have been shown to be a persistent and challenging source of conflict across the world, as reflected in studies from Ethiopia (Bekele et al., 2022), Colombia (Saffon & Sanchez, 2019), Brazil (Albertus et al., 2018) and East Timor (Almeida, 2021). More broadly, Ghatak and Karakaya (2021) find that collective territorial-based grievances, such as when an ethnic group seeks increased autonomy or independence for a homeland within an existing state, are especially likely to generate conventional armed conflict because these grievances generate more committed recruits. Germann and Sambanis (2021) argue that in conflicts revolving around territorial claims by ethnic groups, losses of territorial autonomy are especially likely to generate nonviolent separatist claims, while political exclusion is more likely to generate nonviolent separatist claims that escalate into violence.

Connecting Grievances to Conflict

Recent work has also focused on investigating variables that mediate the link between grievance and conflict. One crucial mediating variable is how states respond to civilian demands for social change: violent repression from the state significantly increases the likelihood that nonviolent demands for social change are transformed into violent conflict. Lindemann and Wimmer (2018) show that from a database of 58 cases of politically and economically marginalized minority ethnic groups across the world, indiscriminate state violence in reaction to popular protest was the flashpoint that sparked political violence. Similarly, Matesan (2020) found that state repression was the key variable in transforming violent rhetoric into action among Islamist groups in the Middle East. At the same time, Bartusevičius and Gleditsch (2019) argue that the state often does not need to resort to violence to repress dissent: the broad expansion of mass communication technologies (internet, TV, radio) gives states an enormous propaganda advantage to make armed resistance almost unthinkable.

Additionally, exogenous shocks from outside the state can spark the transformation of grievances into violent conflict. Refugee inflows may trigger violence either because they increase the resources and leverage of their co-ethnics in receiving countries (Rüegger, 2019) or because they intensify local competitions for resources and political power (Bartusevičius & Gleditsch, 2019). A crucial direction of future research is the role of climate-related disaster in generating armed conflict in highly unequal countries (Ide et al., 2020).

Inclusion: A Response to Exclusion and Inequality

A key response that the *Pathways for Peace* report offered to counteract the link between inequality, exclusion, grievance and violence was broad-based social inclusion (as opposed to intra-elite inclusion), through influencing the incentive of actors, reforming state institutions, and addressing the structural causes of inequality and exclusion in order to reallocate power and resources towards marginalized identity groups. Building on the 2013 World Bank report, *Pathways* defined inclusion as "the process of improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of people, disadvantaged on the basis of their identity, to take part in society" (p. 96). In the five years since the publication of *Pathways*, there has been an explosion of attention to the topic of inclusion in the peacebuilding literature. Peacebuilding scholars argue that inclusion is "having a

moment" (Hendrix, 2020) or refer to the current "inclusion hype" (Paffenholz & Zartman, 2019), reflecting the emergence of inclusion as a fundamental norm within peacebuilding (Turner, 2020; van Santen, 2021).

New research has further consolidated our understanding of the causal logic linking inclusion to peace. First, inclusion builds legitimacy by providing key actors and groups with the opportunity to participate in decision-making (Hirblinger & Landau, 2021; Jewett, 2019). Actors who are included in a peacebuilding and/or state-building efforts are more committed to its success and less likely to attempt to undermine it (Ghais, 2022). Inclusion creates platforms for actors to negotiate and resolve conflict in times of crisis (McCandless, 2020). Furthermore, inclusion can create deeper and more sustained justice by offering marginalized groups the opportunity to generate institutional responses to address structural causes of inequality (Turner, 2020; Zahar & McCandless, 2020). Overall, the scholarly consensus continues to affirm that greater political, economic and social inclusion is likely to generate more enduring peace (Bakiner, 2019; Ghais, 2022; Hirblinger & Landau, 2021; Zahar & McCandless, 2020).

Identity Group-based Inclusion Approaches

Through 2018, the majority of academic research on inclusion focused on examining the impact of bringing civil society actors to the negotiation table, often focusing on particular identity groups such as women and youth (Hellmüller, 2019). Over the last five years, that work has continued to demonstrate the vital importance of including historically marginalized populations and has begun to expand towards under-recognized communities such as LGBTQ people and people with disabilities.

Research on the central necessity of including women and building transversal gender focuses in peacebuilding efforts continues to be the strongest issue area in this body of work. Research systematically shows that women's participation and inclusion in peace processes creates more gender-inclusive agreements (True & Riveros-Morales, 2019), improves women's political rights (Reid, 2021), and ultimately leads to more durable peace, both because women's participation in peace deals create more commitments for inclusive policies and because mobilized women's groups are a vitally powerful resource for peacebuilding (Krause et al., 2018). Women have systematically found ways to open spaces for inclusion at all stages of the peacebuilding process (Dayal & Christien, 2020; Krause & Olsson, 2022). Nevertheless, women continue to be extremely underrepresented in high-level peace negotiations (Aggestam & Svensson, 2018).

While a robust literature exists on the importance of youth inclusion in peacebuilding, there is not the same degree of systematic evidence of its impact. Grizelj's (2019) research on youth participation in the Myanmar peace process argues that youth inclusion is vital to enduring peace, but that young people face strong obstacles to collective organizing because of differences across race and class identities. Cabanes Ragandang and Podder's (2022) work in Mindanao suggests that these obstacles can be at least partially overcome through inter-generational collaboration and concerted efforts to build young people's social and technical skills in a peacebuilding process. Lederach (2020) argues that such inter-generational processes facilitate the formation

of enduring pro-peace identities. The increasing visibility for youth inclusion afforded by the Youth, Peace and Security agenda has created the potential to more systematically include youth and youth issues in the peacebuilding process (Berents & Mollica, 2022).

Likewise, queer and feminist scholars have pushed the mainstream peacebuilding to critically engage with LGBTQ inclusion and queer theory. Queer and non-binary people are among the most consistently excluded and victimized people during civil conflict (Hagen et al., 2021). Nevertheless, queer issues are extremely understudied in the peacebuilding field (Bateman, 2019). A new generation of queer theorists have been especially incisive in noting the cis- and hetero-normative assumptions baked into mainstream gender inclusion frameworks such as the WPS agenda (Edenborg, 2021; Hagen, 2018; Jayakumar, 2022). Furthermore, although war is an extreme generator of disability in society (Palmer et al., 2019), issues of disability accessibility are marginalized within the mainstream inclusion discourse. Disability scholars have pushed the field to ensure that inclusion research and practice is itself accessible to disabled people (Biel Portero & Bolaños Enríquez, 2018; Francis, 2019).

The issue of inclusion for minority ethnic, racial or religious groups has received consistent attention within the peacebuilding literature, but almost exclusively in cases in which these identities were the driving issue behind the conflict. The longstanding solution to address racial or ethnic marginalization in such cases has been some form of formalized power-sharing (Sisk, 2022). Contemporary peacebuilding literature has nuanced this discussion in several ways. First, scholars explored the challenging problem of "exclusion amid inclusion" in traditional approaches to power-sharing, in which non-dominant ethnic groups who don't gain access to power-sharing mechanisms are subject to further marginalization. This literature generally advises for formal acknowledgements of and protections for minority identity groups within subnational power-sharing arrangements (Agarin & McCulloch, 2020; Wise, 2018).

Furthermore, the literature has begun to consider the necessity of including marginalized ethnic groups in peacebuilding contexts in which ethnic divides are not the central fault line of the conflict. This conversation has been dynamized by the efforts of Indigenous and Afro-Colombian movements to break into the 2016 peace negotiations (Góngora-Mera, 2019; Koopman, 2020; Rodríguez Iglesias & Rosen, 2023). More broadly, research accompanying indigenous movements and other grassroots ethnic movements have argued that more than mere 'seats at the table', these movements are demanding a radical restructuring of peacebuilding approaches built on indigenous and subaltern cosmovisions (i.e., worldviews) (Randazzo, 2021; Rodríguez Iglesias, 2020).

Dilemmas in Advancing Long-term and Short-term inclusion

While literature on the importance of the inclusion of specific identity groups has continued to be robust, the literature has also evolved to consider some practical and process-oriented questions about inclusion such as: who gets a seat at the table? How can national or international actors foster effective, durable inclusion?

Hendrix (2020) finds that the political utility of inclusion is in its ambiguity and baseline benign connotations: ex ante, it is difficult to argue against the value of being inclusive in peacebuilding efforts. However, in practice, inclusion requires political decisions about who has access to power (Hendrix, 2020; Hirblinger & Landau, 2021). As Ghais (2022) notes, there is a vast range of actors and interest groups who might seek a voice in building peace, and little clarity on how to decide who should be included. This creates a fundamental tension between inclusion and efficiency: the more people with a seat at the table, the more challenging that effective decision-making becomes (Dudouet et al., 2018). Inclusion also potentially involves related trade-offs between peace and justice, as the political inclusion of excluded groups may itself spark violent responses of elites who view inclusion as a threat (Nieto-Matiz, 2019; Tellez, 2021).

 Recent literature also explores the inclusion of 'extremists' or radical actors with the power to use or incite violence to 'spoil' peace and the degree to which inclusion is more likely to reward or contain extremist actors and their ideologies. Ghais (2019) argues that the exclusion of armed actors from negotiations prolongs conflict while inclusion tends to moderate the demands of armed groups. However, Hellmüller (2019) illustrates potential complexities: if negotiations mostly involve dividing pay-offs and spoils, every actor with a capability for violence is incentivized to fight their way in; furthermore, inclusion doesn't necessarily moderate armed group demands as violence can be used to strengthen bargaining positions. Ross (2019) challenges the assumption that armed groups must be included in peace processes, illustrating cases in which armed groups were successfully excluded from peace processes in favor of related political parties. Similar questions can be raised about the inclusion of the private sector which may have enormous leverage and the potential to be contribute to peace (Rettberg, 2019). However, the extent of their commitment to inclusive peace and social change is extremely variable (Bull & Aguilar-Støen, 2019; Cuhadar, 2019).

 'Social', 'whole-of-society' and 'relational' approaches to inclusive peacebuilding are three emerging frameworks for targeting approaches to inclusion. Van Santen's (2021) social approach to inclusion argues that mediators should build detailed analysis of the contexts of conflict zones in order to understand which groups hold strong local social legitimacy, regardless of how they fit into liberal conceptions of inclusion. The whole-of-society approach likewise asks peacebuilders to "work within the fabric" of local society in order to understand which specific actors bring strategic advantages and priority issues to the table (Martin et al., 2018). Hirblinger and Landau's (2021) relational approach asks peacemakers to build a deep understanding of the "web of relationships" that structure the conflict in order to understand which voices are needed to repair those relationships.

The literature is less developed on the second key question of how to foster or create effective, durable inclusion. Inclusion is an incredible challenge because it implies a redistribution of power and resources in society and thus incentivizes powerful actors to mobilize against it. At the same time, international mediators' powers are very limited relative to the huge ambitions of inclusive peace, preferencing short-term peacemaking (Hirblinger & Landau, 2021) and, according to one case study of SSR in Mali, their own political interests (Jayasundara-Smits, 2018) over the complex and difficult work of long-term inclusion.

As a result, some studies have found that efforts in support of inclusion are frequently reduced to a 'photo-op', or quantity-over-quality exercise that fails to translate into meaningful power shifts within society (Dudouet et al., 2018; Hirblinger & Landau, 2021). Even where inclusion does effectively create access to decision-making opportunities for marginalized people, inclusion "cannot indefinitely substitute for…meeting the expectations of citizens" (Zahar and McCandless 2020, 133), reflecting the central challenge of translating inclusive processes into enduring social change that addresses core inequalities within a society (Marín Carvajal & Álvarez-Vanegas, 2019; M. Nilsson, 2018).

The inclusive peacebuilding literature has taken responses to the question of how to create effective inclusion in three directions: in the capacities of international actors to channel inclusive outcomes, in the design of state-based inclusion policies, and in the ability of domestic civil society to build power and assert its place in peacebuilding. First, peacebuilding work continues to explore the levers available to international actors in favor of greater inclusivity. Reflecting the ongoing hesitancy of international actors to overstep in domestic politics, researchers have stressed softer strategies, including ways to persuade the conflict parties of the political and international legitimacy benefits of embracing inclusionary norms while building the political capacity and networks of key civil society organizations to increase the negotiation capabilities (Dudouet, 2021; Dudouet et al., 2018; Hirblinger & Landau, 2021).

Second, peacebuilding research continues to refine our understanding of how to design state policy levers to address social grievances. Referendums are perhaps the most direct way to generate broad participation in a peace process, and therefore potentially extremely powerful tools to generate broad legitimacy. However, they risk sparking further politicization and competition and are generally unable to resolve more challenging peacebuilding questions such as divisions of territory (Amaral, 2022; Collin, 2019). Research on power-sharing illustrates the broad diversity of power-sharing mechanisms available (restructured elections, guarantees of seats in the legislature or shared control executive branch and government bureaucracy, subnational territorial autonomy, human rights guarantees) (Sisk, 2022), and is generally optimistic about the ability of formal power-sharing mechanisms to reduce conflict (Bormann et al., 2019; Cederman et al., 2022).

Farzanegan et al. (2018) find that decentralization policies can significantly mitigate the conflict risks generated by economic grievances linked to extractive economies. Building on research from Eastern Ukraine, Martin et al. (2018) find some evidence to support the value of decentralization in addressing relevant political grievances but warn that decentralization can further entrench political polarization. A final crucial policy tool to address issues of inclusivity is redistribution, through land reform, welfare, universal basic income, progressive taxation and similar mechanisms. Krieger and Meierrieks (2019) find that redistribution can be effective in reducing violence related to economic inequality; however, Sumarto's (2020) study of cash transfers programs in Indonesia illustrate how redistributive policies themselves can generate conflict if their design and implementation don't account for existing social tensions. Similarly, land reforms such as formalization of land tenure and land redistribution are effective conflict mitigation

tools, but prone to sparking violent backlash from threatened rural elites (Albertus, 2020; Keels & Mason, 2019)

Finally, a dynamic body of research is emerging to investigate the ways in which social movements use tactics of civil resistance and mass mobilization to win seats at the table, force elite actors to reckon with their political claims and ensure their implementation. This group of scholars draws on long-running academic findings on social movements and civil resistance to specifically examine how marginalized groups generate bottom-up pressure for inclusive peacebuilding. Dudouet (2021) creates a typology of peace movements, illustrating how social movements have found ways to be effective across a range of different kinds of conflicts. Her work builds on in-depth studies from Galvanek and Shilue (2021) and Bogati and Thurber (2021) examining how grassroots movements fought for inclusion in the peace negotiation and implementation processes in Liberia and Nepal, to contend with complex challenges and failures in both peace processes. Research on successful movements for inclusive peacebuilding have illustrated the range of entry points into elite negotiations available to movements (Phelan & True, 2022), the discursive strategies movements use to persuade elites (Céspedes-Báez & Jaramillo Ruiz, 2018), the internal 'movement infrastructure' that drives their capacity and effectiveness (Rodríguez Iglesias & Rosen, 2022) and the necessity of coordination across organizations and issue groups in order to generate powerful mobilization (D. Nilsson et al., 2020).

Fundamentally, international intervention, state policy or civil society mobilization alone face serious challenges in creating meaningful power shifts. However, peacebuilding research demonstrates that these strategies in combination can be powerful drivers towards more inclusive, peaceful societies (Dudouet, 2021; Duque-Salazar et al., 2022; Jewett, 2019). The body of research that culminated in the 2018 *Pathways for Peace* publication effectively demonstrated the vital necessity of comprehensive inclusion to respond to violence conflict. As a new generation of academic research moves beyond questions of the significance of inclusion, future research is needed on how to achieve impacts on inclusion outcomes and in ways that reduce the likelihood of violent conflict, including through efforts to more closely link strategic policy design, international support, and social mobilization.

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