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### A globalised practice of local peace agreements

**Citation for published version:**

Bell, C, Wise, L, Beaujouan, J, Epple, T, Forster, R & Wilson, R 2021, A globalised practice of local peace agreements. in C Bell, J Pospisil & L Wise (eds), *Local Peace Processes*. British Academy, London, pp. 7-14. <https://doi.org/10.5871/conflict/9780856726682.001>

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.5871/conflict/9780856726682.001](https://doi.org/10.5871/conflict/9780856726682.001)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

**Published In:**

Local Peace Processes

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# Local Peace Processes

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September 2021

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# Acknowledgements

This publication follows a series of Joint Analysis Workshops on Local Peace Processes undertaken in 2019 and 2020. The workshops were organised by the Political Settlements Research Programme (PSRP) through the Austrian Study Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution (ASPR), the University of Edinburgh, and British Academy, and were funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

These workshops offered a range of interdisciplinary and geographical perspectives, and brought together academics, policymakers, officials and practitioners, some of whom are represented in the following contributions. The editors are hugely grateful to all those who participated in, shared their experiences with, and contributed intellectually to the workshops that underpin this publication, including those who served as presenters, commentators, facilitators, and notetakers.

The Academy is grateful to the editors of this publication Professor Christine Bell FBA, Dr Jan Pospisil (ASPR) and Laura Wise (PSRP), and to Dr Harriet Cornell (PSRP) for all their work and support during the workshops and publication process.

The Academy is grateful for the support and comments offered by Christina Moorhouse and Georgina Fitzgibbon.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and are not necessarily endorsed by the British Academy but are commended as contributing to the public debate.

This is an output for the Political Settlement Research Programme ([www.politicalsettlements.org](http://www.politicalsettlements.org)) funded by UK Aid from the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) for the benefit of developing countries. The information and views set out in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of FCDO. Neither FCDO nor any person acting on their behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained therein.



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# A globalised practice of local peace agreements

*Christine Bell, Laura Wise,  
Juline Beaujouan, Tim Epple,  
Robert Forster and Robert Wilson*

## Introduction

In recent years, the difficulties and failures of national level peace processes have prompted increased attention on ‘the local’ as a space of conflict resolution. In this introduction, we draw on an attempt to collect, categorise and archive local peace agreements across the globe – the PA-X Local Database<sup>1</sup> – to frame the discussion that unwinds through the subsequent case studies.

Any process of archiving, classifying or coding peace agreements involves definitions and boundary decisions as to what a peace agreement comprises. In our experience, this process pushes theoretical questioning of the phenomenon in question. We therefore use this dialectic between categorisation and questioning of the category of ‘local peace agreements’ to explore what comprises a ‘local agreement’ and further understand the relationship to ‘the national’ and the ‘global’.

We suggest that the boundary dilemmas of the term ‘local peace agreement’ point to: the ways in which nested conflict operates; the role that local agreements can play in unwinding it; and the need for a better account of peace processes as multi-level between local, national and international levels of conflict. We point to a paradoxically ‘globalised practice of local agreement-making’. Both the existence of local peacemaking, and the impossibility of delimiting what is merely ‘local’ about it, themselves point to a need for a new political imaginary for peace processes,<sup>2</sup> which would go beyond the idea that it is about brokering elite pacts reached in a comprehensive peace agreement. In a sense, given that local agreement practices have existed for centuries, the turn to the local can also be understood as something that has become more visible once the gaze is moved from the ‘nation state’ as the focus of conflict solutions. As the pieces in this collection illustrate, contemporary local peacebuilding practice emerges from a complex mix of long-standing local justice practices, distinct local peacebuilding initiatives, and the ongoing initiatives of local actors to deal with relationships between armed groups and inter-communal strife.

1 PA-X Local Peace Agreement Database <https://www.peaceagreements.org/lsearch> (this forms part of our broader peace agreement data).

2 Craig Browne and Paula Diehl (2019) ‘Conceptualising the Political Imaginary: An Introduction to the Special Issue’, *Social Epistemology*, Vol.33 No.5, pp. 393-397.



### PA-X Local Peace Agreement Database<sup>3</sup>

PA-X Local is an open-access database of written local peace agreements from across a global set of conflict-affected contexts.

- Contains 318 agreements spanning the time period between 1991 and mid-2021
- Local peace agreements are recorded from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Burundi, Central African Republic, Croatia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Lebanon, Libya, Mali, Nepal, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Yemen, although this is not an exhaustive list of contexts where the practice occurs.
- Agreements are coded for properties such as geolocation, type of participant, and link to national process, and prominent localised issues that feature in the texts, such as the use of rituals and prayer in the peace process, listing of local grievances, cattle rustling, and removal of ‘social cover’ (form of impunity) from individuals.

### What is a ‘local agreement’?

A number of different elements might frame an agreement as ‘more local than national’. The following working definition can be woven around agreements that seem peculiarly ‘local’ in nature, to provide a starting point in understanding their relationship to national peace processes.

Local agreements may be formally documented, but are often informally documented or even unwritten. They relate to a geographic area smaller than the entire conflict zone, and involve at least some local actors, whether in an immediate village, neighbourhood, municipality, city or specified military zone. Their aim is to mitigate or end conflict in that area by addressing local conflict drivers and actors.<sup>4</sup>

Yet, classifying agreements as ‘local’ quickly demonstrates difficulties with each element of this definition, pointing to the need to understand these elements as cumulative. Applying each element of the definition quickly reveals fuzzy lines between local conflict, actor and conflict resolution process, and national, transnational or even international actors, conflicts and processes. Fuzzy lines also exist between local agreements enabling a project of peace, local agreements enabling a project of war, and local agreements which aim to resolve issues unrelated to armed conflict altogether.

Unpacking the elements of this definition with examples may deconstruct it, but, we suggest, reveals the need for new frames of analysis for peace processes.

<sup>3</sup> For more about the process of developing the PA-X Local Peace Agreement Database, see ‘About PA-X Local’, Political Settlements Research Programme, available at <https://www.peaceagreements.org/files/About%20PA-X%20Local%20-%20final.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Derived from Christine Bell, Monalisa Adhikari, Sanja Badanjak, Juline Beaujouan, Margherita Distrotti, Tim Epple, Robert Forster, Robert Wilson, and Laura Wise (2020), PA-X Local Peace Agreements Database and Dataset, Version 1. [www.peaceagreements.org/search](http://www.peaceagreements.org/search)

## Local agreements can be documented or undocumented

Local agreements are often produced in written form, but they can also be agreed and disseminated orally. The PA-X Local Agreement Database is the most comprehensive public collection that exists; however, a full census of the practice is impossible for a range of reasons: the very local and often informal ways in which these agreements are signed and distributed (which include through newspaper articles setting out their terms, and even via social media platforms); the fact that they are often negotiated in minority languages that are not understood by external researchers; the fact that oral agreements may have an equal or superior authority to written ones. It can also be difficult to distinguish ‘local peace agreements’ from forms of local justice practice,<sup>5</sup> as the contribution in this collection from Feiras Kheirallah and Aya Alsafadi on tribal justice systems in Jordan illustrates; or from other more general local development projects in which local development and peacebuilding are understood to go hand-in-hand. The accounts and texts of local agreements that can be readily accessed are owed to someone historically deciding to research and record the phenomenon as interesting and a relevant part of the peace agreement landscape.<sup>6</sup> While our data appears to reflect an increase in local agreements over time, increased internet access means that it has become easier for local communities to co-draft and circulate agreements via websites and social media so that they exist in written form, meaning we may have more ‘texts’ rather than more agreements. Moreover, a deeper dig into the history of peacemaking in conflicts as diverse as South Sudan and Bosnia illustrates that local agreement-making has always existed in parallel with national peace agreement efforts.<sup>7</sup>

There is also reason to believe that written agreements may not be as important in the local context as in the national context. For example, in his reflection on local peace agreement practices in South Sudan in this collection, Martin Ochaya Lino Agwella explains that agreement often takes different forms than written: ‘handshakes, rituals, prayer, exchange of property’ all are important ways of consolidating agreement. This observation resonates with written reports of inter-communal agreements in other African and Middle Eastern contexts;<sup>8</sup> for example, a report of an USAID-CMM-funded local peacemaking initiative in northeastern Kenya noted that elders were reluctant to be involved in written agreements, not just due to ‘the aural culture of pastoralists but also from the mistrust some elders had of being manipulated by interests from outside through the signing of papers’.<sup>9</sup>

Where a written text of a local agreement does exist, the nature of the text sometimes suggests a different relationship between oral and written text than with national peace agreements. In national processes, lawyers, the language of commitment, implementation mechanisms and international signatories are characteristic in documents that read as part-constitution, part-contract. In contrast, many local agreements appear to be a ‘minute or note’ of what was agreed orally, rather than a set of binding commitments. The text operates as much as a set of common acknowledgements of grievances, recompense, and restoring of relationships as an attempt to ‘contract into’ peace settlement terms: it is the fact of the meeting having

5 See for example, Somalia/Puntland, Ramada Peace Agreement, 04/12/2005 <https://www.peaceagreements.org/view/1852/>; South Sudan, Misseriyya and Dinka Ngok Conference, Conference Agreement, Kadugli 13/01/2011 <https://www.peaceagreements.org/view/1671>

6 See for example, local agreements printed in: Interpeace, *The Search for Peace: Community-based Peace Processes in South-Central Somalia*, [https://www.interpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/07/2008\\_SomSC\\_Interpeace\\_CRD\\_Community\\_Based\\_Peace\\_Processes\\_EN.pdf](https://www.interpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/07/2008_SomSC_Interpeace_CRD_Community_Based_Peace_Processes_EN.pdf)

7 See for example Mark Bradbury, John Ryle, Michael Medley and Kwesi Sansculotte-Greenidge (2006), *Local Peace Processes in Sudan: A Baseline Study*. Rift Valley Institute. Available at: <https://riftvalley.net/publication/local-peace-processes-sudan>

8 Between 1990 and mid-2021, 142 Local Peace Agreements in the PA-X Local Database from the Central African Republic, Kenya, Libya, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria and Yemen contained references to ritual, religion, and prayer, including scripture (Quranic, from the Hadith, Biblical) and invocations of God. See further PA-X Local search ‘Ritual or Prayer’ category: <https://edin.ac/3qfHBAs> (search conducted on 12th August 2021).

9 Centre for Peace and Applied Research (2011) ‘PACT Peace Program II: Reflecting on Peace Practice at the Kenya-Somalia Border’. A consolidated report of action research, pp. 9. (on file with authors).

taken place with agreement reached that matters, rather than delimiting a set of actionable commitments to institutionalise peace. While Western cultures often view binding legal agreements as achieving a unity between actual agreement and written form, other legal cultures often view the written text as secondary to the actual agreement, forming merely a note of a process which itself constitutes its own success.<sup>10</sup> In their contribution to this collection, for example, Farhat Ullah and Nizar Ahmad highlight the decision-making process behind whether or not local peace agreements are written or undocumented, and how that relates to compliance through Pakhtun notions of collective trust.

### **Local agreements deal with local geographies, sometimes of just a few miles**

Geographically local peace agreements are often understood as confined to a small locale. Some are indeed startlingly local: they focus beneath the entire conflict region, and address conflict sub-regions limited to towns, districts, or military zones that may only encompass a few square kilometres. For example, a 2014 ceasefire signed in Hodeidah, Yemen, limited the terms of the agreement to an area between two buildings that were strategically important.<sup>11</sup> However, national peace processes, particularly in secessionist disputes, often focus settlement terms on the sub-national region in which the violence is centred. How local then is local?

We suggest that the geography of distinctively local agreements relates not just to the geographical size of the area, but also to its scale of attempted political settlement: is it a local one, or does it attempt a new national political settlement? A form of distinction can therefore be drawn between local agreements, and peace agreements that address a sub-state conflict region understood to threaten the national state. Peace agreements in Indonesia focusing on Aceh, or in the United Kingdom focusing on Northern Ireland, while focused on sub-state entities, involved political settlements understood as ‘national’ because they focused on the relationship between the centre and its periphery, in ways that implicated the national political settlement at least in part. While these agreements also provided for the internal relationships within the sub-state region in a form of sub-state localised settlement, they typically involved the state recognising and accommodating sub-state claims to be a distinctive political community, in return for restoration of the state’s legitimacy and monopoly on the use of force across the territory as a whole.

Yet, despite our attempted distinction, the line between local and national agreements remains fuzzy. Some forms of centre–periphery agreement have a more distinctively local flavour to their content than others. The conflicts with indigenous peoples such as the Adivasi in India or the Zapatistas in Mexico, for example, have seen peace agreements which focus on the conflict between periphery and centre, but with content that ‘feels’ more similar to local agreements. While these conflicts have involved state/non-state negotiations, the settlement terms have often had few implications for the national political settlement. The groups are both too peripheral and ‘micro’ to destabilise the state, while the ‘constitutional space’<sup>12</sup> available within the national constitutional framework for provision of autonomy means there is no real need to reconfigure the state’s political settlement to provide for territorial devolution.

10 Interestingly, analysis of different Israeli and Palestinian interpretations of the Oslo Accords put emphasis on the different cultural approaches of the parties to the text, see Tamara Cofman Wittes (ed.) (2005), *How Israelis and Palestinians Negotiate: A cross-cultural analysis of the Oslo Peace Process* (Washington: United States Institute of Peace).

11 Up until this agreement, the local resistance Tihami group had maintained a strong presence in the area, controlling strategically important buildings around a hotel which had been the site of the specific conflict and thus became the focus the agreement refers to. See ‘Agreement to Cease Fire between the Tihami Movement in Harah al-Yemen and Ansar Allah’, 24/10/2014, <https://www.peaceagreements.org/viewmasterdocument/2006>

12 S. Molloy (2017), *Sub-State Constitutions in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings: Workshop Report*. International IDEA, <https://www.politicalsettlements.org/publications-database/sub-state-constitutions-in-fragile-and-conflict-affected-settings-workshop-report/>

The Indian constitutional framework, for example, contemplates asymmetrical devolution of powers as normal. However, these new local political settlements still implicate ‘the national’ because they must reach an accommodation between indigenous (local) and settler (national) populations at the local level, and also provide economically for the sub-state region. These agreements often involve formulas for tribal/non-tribal forms of power-sharing in the local government and legislature, as part of the provision for autonomy.

### Local agreements as involving local actors

Local agreements are negotiated primarily by local leaders. Yet, examination of actual agreements again reveals both that local leaders often reach agreements with national actors, and that their own status cannot be delimited as fully local or fully national. Local leaders may represent branches of larger organisations, such as tribes within larger, ethnic groups or battalions within the military.<sup>13</sup> Local leaders may technically be ‘state actors’ such as mayors, governors, and military unit commanders, albeit operating in devolved contexts. However, these local-level state actors can have opaque or unclear connections to their central state counterparts. Their relationship may be of subordination, cooperation, command, or competition with national-level actors. Indeed, relationships can be fluid and contingent, fluctuating between all of these possibilities, because no simple hierarchical structuring of the national–local relationship pertains, and state institutions are dysfunctional or have limited geographic reach. Hierarchical loyalty and cohesion may be in place in some moments and not in others.

Sometimes, local agreements are negotiated directly between the central state and local armed actors, and will be local because they focus on dampening conflict in particular areas only – for example, forms of local ceasefire or demobilisation agreement. These local agreements retain the ‘feel’ of more inter-communal agreements in the types of concern they address. Negotiations between the central state and local actors are often pursued as part of a state strategy of picking off minor groups, or ‘rolling out’ a peace process to more marginalised communities, in an attempt to extend ceasefires beyond the main armed groups. These agreements see the state address very local agendas that are often quite different from what are understood as the main conflict drivers. For example in Nepal, after the comprehensive peace agreement was signed, in part to enable safe elections, 21 micro agreements were signed with often small-scale armed groups, many of whom were very local in their reach and concerns.<sup>14</sup> Local peace processes can also bypass the state entirely, or count the state as merely one of a number of armed actors with which civic groups need to reach agreement to protect local communities from violence, as outlined by Annette Idler’s contribution to this collection on local peace initiatives in rural Colombia.

Often more than one type of local agreement and process is going on. The case of Syria shows the complexity of different localised processes, and how these can co-exist in one conflict space, with the nature of local agreements mutating over time as different external actors also become engaged.<sup>15</sup>

13 R. Turkmani, M. Kaldor, W. Elhamwi, J. Ayo and N. Hariri (2014), ‘Hungry for Peace: Positives and Pitfalls of Local Truces and Ceasefires in Syria’, London: London School of Economics and Madani, November 2014, available at [www.lse.ac.uk](http://www.lse.ac.uk), pp. 5.

14 See agreements from 2007 to 2010 between the Government of Nepal and multiple armed groups, including the Liberation Tigers of Terai Eelam (LTTE), the Kirant Janawadi Workers Party, and the Madheshi Virus Killer Party. Available at PA-X Local, <https://edin.ac/3ltkUFk>

15 See further, Juline Beaujouan (2020), *PA-X Local: Note on Local Peace Processes in the Syrian Conflict*, Political Settlements Research Programme, Available at: <https://www.peaceagreements.org/publication/58>

## Local agreements as focused on local disputes

Local agreements often have a different subject-matter to national agreements: they attempt to address local drivers and manifestations of conflict in ways that are tied to the peace priorities of the communities concerned. Helping to distinguish local agreements from national, is the idea that ‘local’ agreements are those which deal with the ‘everyday circumstances of the local’ and intercommunal relationships. A quick foray into PA-X Local illustrates localised content relating to disputes over land usage, inter-communal movement and migration, cattle-rustling, water rights and access, and very closely inter-communal, kinship or even familial feuds. The agreements have a close communal texture: many are short in length, and they often deal with the fabric of what causes local conflict. Jérémie Mapatano and Irene Bahati illustrate in their discussion of the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) the diversity of issues that different grassroots initiatives have attempted to address, including the differences between traditional, customary conflict issues, and local deals attempting to address political conflicts, some of which are transnational or cross-border in nature.

The sense of a local agreement as not just local in geography but addressing a distinctively local dispute, helps to distinguish agreements that focus on particular locales but are part of national negotiations and peace processes, from local agreements in the sense our definition tries to capture. In December 2018, for example, the United Nations mediated three agreements in Yemen: the ‘Hodeidah’ agreement providing for a ceasefire regarding the port so as to facilitate delivery of humanitarian supplies; a similar agreement specifically focused on conflict in Taiz, a key southern city that had been intensely contested among local leaders and military units with complex and varying military, political and religious affiliations; and a third prisoner exchange agreement.<sup>16</sup> Although clearly local in geography, both the Hodeidah and Taiz agreements attempted to provide immediate relief and form an initial confidence building measure in what was hoped was a move towards a wider political agreement. These national-actor agreements relating to a limited locale point to the ways in which national conflict and attempts to end it can become very locally focused.

However, when we turn to Libya, and inter-group agreements over Tripoli, these are often at once national and local, because the locale is of national significance as the capital city and keenly fought over, while the national conflict is highly factionalised requiring a host of micro-level agreements between different armed groups and areas of control. In his chapter on Libya, Christopher Thornton explores these interactions between local and national conflicts through the relationships and power bases of particular tribes and militias. He paints a picture of how the significance of particular areas and settlements constantly shifts.

Conversely, sometimes local agreements refer to the national peace process even when the forms of violence they address are relatively unconnected to the conflict the national process was designed to address. National peace processes and the idea that a national conflict resolution process can foster other peace initiatives can provide an opportunity to local actors seeking to address forms of violence that go beyond ‘the conflict’ as traditionally understood.<sup>17</sup>

16 Yemen, 13/12/2018, Stockholm Agreement, <https://www.peaceagreements.org/viewmasterdocument/2121>; Yemen, 13/12/2018, Agreement on the City of Hodeidah and Ports of Hodeidah, Salif, and Ras Isa (Hodeidah Agreement), <https://www.peaceagreements.org/viewmasterdocument/2120>; Yemen, 13/12/2018, Statement of Understanding on Taiz, <https://www.peaceagreements.org/viewmasterdocument/2122>

17 See for example the Philippines/Mindanao, 31/12/2017, Meranao Peace Declaration in the City of Marawi. Available at <https://www.peaceagreements.org/viewmasterdocument/2061>



## Local agreements as involving different forms of mediation

Local agreements often rely on distinctive forms of local brokerage by individuals with little formal role in the national process – international or domestic actors who have local relationships, networks and trust. These are often not the ‘usual suspects’ of the ‘Track I’ mediation world and may work somewhat ‘under the radar’, moving between armed groups and key constituencies (elders, women, youth, business). There have been some suggestions that women may be more involved in mediating local agreements than national ones, although there has been little concrete documentation of women’s mediation roles and some evidence of talks being ‘taken over’ by local male leaders when they come close to brokering solutions.<sup>18</sup> However, the role of ‘middle range’ negotiators, now increasingly recognised as important in national processes, is critical in local processes where they are often the key generators.<sup>19</sup> We have very little systematic information about these middle range actors: who they are, what other power they hold in communities, and how they bridge between groups, or when, why and how they access international support.

However, local agreements often have forms of international mediation: there is increasing evidence of peace processes and indeed international organisations, embracing local peace processes as a ‘bottom up’ approach to national conflict. In some contexts the justification of involvement will be in terms of the failure of the national peace process, while in others, it will be in terms of the need to support the national peace process through a patchwork of local deals. In the CAR, the large number of armed groups led the UN Mission to focus on local agreement-making as a key strategy for national peace.<sup>20</sup> Following earlier work by InterPeace in South-Central Somalia, recently the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia supported the development of local peacemaking into a regional inter-clan political settlement which aimed to build to regional (sub-state) peacemaking which could form a parallel ‘bottom up’ process to the stalled ‘top down’ state-building attempted at the level of the central state.<sup>21</sup>

## Concluding remarks

In conclusion, we suggest that local peace agreements are globalised in three main ways. First, local agreements can be understood as a global practice of peacemaking taking place in differentiated context-specific localities. Comprehending the distinctiveness of local agreement-making as spatial, conceptual, and textural – as Annika Björkdahl explores in her contribution to this collection – enables some delimitation of a common type of local agreement within a wider system of peace processes. Attempts to bolt down distinctiveness fail, not because local agreements are not distinctive – they are – but because the deeply nested nature of different levels of conflict means local actors, conflicts and resolution processes cannot be completely disentangled.<sup>22</sup> As Roger Mac Ginty states in this collection’s conclusion,

18 See for example women’s efforts to negotiate a local ceasefire in Zabadani, Syria. Hanan Tabbara and Garrett Rubin (2018), ‘Women on the Frontlines of Conflict Resolution: Community Voices from Syria, Iraq and Yemen’, *UN Women*, pp. 7-10 <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2018/8/women-on-the-frontlines-of-conflict-resolution>

19 J. Pospisil, L. Wise and C. Bell (2020), *Untangling Conflict: Local Peace Agreements in Contemporary Armed Violence* (ASPR Report No. 5). Stadtschlaining, Austria: Austrian Study Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution, pp. 12-18. <https://www.politicalsettlements.org/publications-database/untangling-conflict-local-peace-agreements-in-contemporary-armed-violence/> See also Lederach’s concept of ‘middle-range leadership’ in conflict resolution. J.P. Lederach (1997), *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*. (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press), pp. 41.

20 ‘UN Support to Local Mediation, Challenges and Opportunities’, 17 November 2020, <https://peacemaker.un.org/node/3612>; see also Robert Muggah (2018), ‘The U.N. Can’t Bring Peace to the Central African Republic’, *Foreign Policy*, [https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/UN%20Support%20to%20Local%20Mediation\\_Challenges%20and%20Opportunities\\_0.pdf](https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/UN%20Support%20to%20Local%20Mediation_Challenges%20and%20Opportunities_0.pdf)

21 See, for example, ‘UN Welcomes signing of power sharing deal in central Somalia, 8 December 2017’, Xinhuanet, at [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-12/08/c\\_136811767.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-12/08/c_136811767.htm)

22 For theories of nested conflicts, see Maire Dugan (1996), ‘A Nested Theory of Conflict’, *A Leadership Journal: Women in Leadership - Sharing the Vision* Vol.1 No.1 pp. 9-20; Erin Jenne (2015), *Nested Security: Lessons in Conflict Management from the League of Nations and the European Union* (Ithaca / London: Cornell University Press).

‘local peace agreements do not exist in isolation: they are part of a series of wider social, economic, political and cultural systems. While this is messy, stretches across categories, and defies neat categorisation, it is accurate.’ The local agreement practice captured by PA-X Local and the case studies elucidated in this volume point, paradoxically, to a globalised practice of local agreement-making constituted by the global persistence of diverse local processes, operating with different types of actor in different spaces, to address nested levels of conflict.

Second, local agreements involve local actors with transnational, and even with global ambitions. The concept of ‘local’ has for some time been recognised as not just a geographic or spatial term but one of symbolic social capital. As Sally Engle Merry captures, the term *local* signifies a lack of mobility, wealth, education, and cosmopolitanism, as well as recalcitrant particularity, whereas *global* encompasses the ability to move across borders, to adopt universal moral frameworks, and to share in the affluence, education, and cosmopolitan awareness of elites from other parts of the world.<sup>23</sup>

However, as Engle Merry also points out, local actors are often in practice transnational actors with capacity to move outwith and beyond the state. As regards local agreements, their transnational dimensions are clearly visible along borders with wider geopolitical significance: local pro-peace and pro-conflict constituencies move across those borders to neighbouring allies to operate with transnational capacity and relationships that can heighten their national significance.

Third, local agreements are globalised through the increased recognition and involvement of international actors in practices of local agreement mediation, with the UN Mediation Unit of the Department of Political and Peacekeeping Affairs recently producing guidance on the issue.<sup>24</sup> What is interesting in the current international move to embrace the local, is that it recognises the failure of elite ‘national-level’ actors to demonstrate a vision or capacity to effect a national level conflict resolution. The move marks a diversification of who international actors broker with, in a move that responds to peace process failures to be inclusive or achieve peace. National actors, often isolated in capital cities, from this viewpoint are merely the ‘dominant local’, whose attractiveness as peace process partners for international actors depends on their capacity to deliver the rule of law, statebuilding and stability.

We suggest that our documentation of local agreements and the difficulty of delimiting the precise sense in which they are ‘local’ points to an understanding of national conflict as itself operating as ‘a complex conflict system’ of intertwined local, national and often transnational or international conflicts. This reality needs a new political imaginary to support the resolution of intra-state conflict, that is, a ‘collective structure that organises the imagination and the symbolism of the political’<sup>25</sup> that could replace the imaginary that seeks an elite pact between national armed actors codified in a comprehensive peace agreement, as Jan Pospisil returns to in this collection’s conclusion. The persistence of local peace processes to support, disrupt, or bypass and ‘exempt’ local communities from national conflict, points to both the need for this new political imaginary and its actualisation in ways that we hope this collection contributes to.

23 Sally Engle Merry (2006), ‘Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle’, *American Anthropologist* Vol. 108, No. 1, pp. 38-51.

24 UNDP/PA (2020) ‘UN Support to Local Mediation: Challenges and Opportunities’, <https://peacemaker.un.org/node/3615>

25 Browne and Diehl, ‘Conceptualising the Political Imaginary’, pp. 393.

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Published September 2021

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ISBN 978-0-85672-668-2

To cite this report:  
British Academy (2021), *Local Peace Processes*,  
The British Academy, London

DOI [doi.org/10.5871/conflict/9780856726682.001](https://doi.org/10.5871/conflict/9780856726682.001)

Cover image by Christine Jerian via Getty Images

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