

Please cite as: Karreth, Johannes, Jaroslav Tir, Jason Quinn, and Madhav Joshi. 2023. "Civil War Mediation in the Shadow of IGOs: The Path to Comprehensive Peace Agreements." Forthcoming in the *Journal of Peace Research*.

Civil War Mediation in the Shadow of IGOs: The Path to Comprehensive Peace Agreements

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Abstract: Recent research shows that comprehensive peace agreements (CPAs) are effective in ending civil wars and improving post-conflict conditions, but CPAs emerge in only a fraction of civil wars. This study provides systematic evidence about the origins of CPAs and the role of international actors in facilitating their signing. We argue that mediation is more likely to be successful and that CPAs are more likely to emerge in those civil war countries that are members in a higher number of IGOs with high economic leverage. Using their financial and institutional leverage, these IGOs can help the combatants overcome the credible commitment problems associated with entering into mediation, and with making sufficient concessions and compromises to reach and sign a CPA. Analyzing all intrastate armed conflicts from 1989 to 2011, we find that a conflict country's memberships in IGOs with high economic leverage increase the odds of (1) mediation occurring and (2) mediation subsequently leading to the signing of CPAs. This finding is robust to common sources of spurious relationships between international institutions and the behavior of conflict parties. Participating in IGOs with high economic leverage carries important positive consequences for civil war management and enhances the impact of mediation on getting conflict parties to sign CPAs.

Acknowledgements

Timothy Passmore provided research assistance.

Author contributions

The authors contributed as follows: JK, JQ, MJ, and JT conceptualized the study; JK compiled quantitative data and conducted data analysis; JK and JT conducted case research; JK, MJ, JQ, and JT wrote the article.

Funding

This work was supported by CARTSS at the University of Colorado Boulder and the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame.

Replication data

Replication data and supporting information for this article can be found at <https://www.prio.org/JPR/Datasets/> and <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/jkarreth>. All analyses were conducted using R version 4.3.0.

The occurrence and success of third-party mediation efforts vary widely across intrastate conflicts. About one half of all conflicts between 1989-2011 experienced mediation (Greig and Regan 2008; Melin and Svensson 2009; DeRouen, Bercovitch, and Pospieszna 2011), but fewer than one-fifth ended with comprehensive peace agreements (CPAs).¹ To explain this variation, this study treats mediation and mediation success (defined here as the signing of a CPA) as parts of one trajectory. Considering the multiple opportunities for conflict management to fail, successful mediation depends on keeping combatants moving along the path toward peace. We argue that a key explanation for why some of these efforts succeed and others fail depends on a country's international institutional environment. Certain international governmental organizations (IGOs), we argue, are effective at using their economic leverage (Karreth 2018) to encourage mediation efforts and incentivize conflict parties to make credible commitments (Tir and Karreth 2018) down the path toward comprehensive peace agreements.

These IGOs have a higher degree of institutional and economic leverage over member states than other IGOs, based on notable financial resources and mandates relating to economic growth, trade, investment and financial flows (e.g. the World Bank, IMF, regional development banks).² For these IGOs to successfully achieve their mandates, peace and stability in member countries is crucial. Thus, IGOs with high economic leverage have a clear self-interest to use their resources to help end civil wars in member states. With influence in the background, rather than direct mediation, these IGOs can distinctly shape the behavior of the conflict parties and conflict resolution strategies. Their ability and will to offer economic incentives to settle conflicts — or deny those benefits in the case of non-compliance or continued fighting — can help resolve the thorny credible commitment problem (Walter 1999; 2009). The prospects of resolving this commitment problem have important upstream effects on mediation and the signing of CPAs.

Most CPAs emerge with the help of third-party mediation. Yet, while mediators can help craft nuanced agreements and propose acceptable solutions to complex problems, they usually lack tangible resources great enough to incentivize governments and rebels to negotiate and remain committed through the process. These developments are, we argue, much more likely when rebel-government bargaining is taking place in countries that are extensively involved with IGOs with high economic leverage. Through their credible but conditional offer of material resources — conditional on whether the combatants are working toward conflict resolution and abiding by promises made — these IGOs create bargaining environments with tangible incentives for combatants to keep promises. By ameliorating the credible commitment problem, this increases the combatants' interest to engage in mediation, make compromises, and sign a CPA. In civil war states with few IGO memberships, these incentives are much weaker, decreasing the chances of mediation and CPAs. Thus, while IGOs typically do not directly mediate conflicts or help draft CPAs, memberships in IGOs with high economic leverage represent a key but understudied type of third-party influence on civil war management.

We test our hypotheses that civil war states' memberships in IGOs with high economic leverage increase the odds of mediation attempts and CPA signing with multiple data sources on intrastate armed conflicts between 1989 and 2011. We find important conflict management benefits of membership in IGOs with high economic leverage, with key implications for research and practice on civil war peace processes. First, the study integrates international influences into the conditions

¹ See Table A1 for the full list.

² See the Research design section for the operational definition and Table A2 for details.

under which *comprehensive* peace agreements in particular are developed and signed. This is an important step forward because CPAs have been shown to be more effective compared to partial peace agreements in creating lasting peace and other positive outcomes. Second, with respect to third-party civil war management, our approach and theoretical emphasis on the institutional frameworks and leverage of IGOs introduces a novel and impactful factor influencing mediation occurrence and success. This facilitates a greater understanding of how the international institutional environment can help rebels and governments to overcome the credible commitment problem and incentivize them to partake in mediation efforts that lead to the signing of CPAs.

CPAs, third parties, and mediation

Among a variety of arrangements aimed at ending civil wars, CPAs are unique because they tackle *multiple* issues around ending conflicts and transitioning to peace (Joshi, Quinn, and Regan 2015). Their provisions deal with the resolution of grievances, electoral reforms, power and resource sharing, autonomy, disarmament, military reform, and many other topics. CPAs usually subsume earlier agreements from the negotiation phase and are followed by wide-ranging implementation processes. Benefits of CPAs are well documented, including low conflict recurrence (Joshi and Quinn 2016), longer periods of peace (Joshi, Quinn, and Regan 2015), more peaceful elections (Joshi, Melander, and Quinn 2017), and fewer subsequent challenges to governments from armed groups (Quinn, Joshi, and Melander 2019). Compared to partial peace agreements or ceasefires, CPAs have the biggest impact on post-conflict outcomes (cf. Karreth, Quinn, Joshi, and Tir 2023) and are the most difficult to negotiate — hence most important to understand.

Third-party mediation can assist the parties in overcoming key challenges along the way, but mediation alone is rarely sufficient for concluding CPAs. DeRouen, Bercovitch, and Pospieszna (2011, 666) find that only 15% of 460 mediation episodes between 1945 and 2004 led to an eventual full agreement. And though repeated mediation is typically needed to reach peace deals, that alone does not automatically translate into a successful outcome in the long term (Beardsley 2008; Clayton and Gleditsch 2014; Reid 2017). Nevertheless, (repeat) mediation can facilitate concessions and assist actors with asymmetric concessions by providing some political cover (Wiegand, Rowland, and Keels 2021).

But such findings leave open questions. For one, Lundgren (2017, 613) argues that more research should focus on ‘the determinants of IO mediation effectiveness [...] partly because prior research has not adequately captured the institutional heterogeneity of peace-brokering IOs.’ Lundgren’s general approach of focusing on explicit, direct mediation by IGOs is consistent with most studies of third-party engagement in civil war peace processes. We maintain, however, that focusing *only* on explicit, direct IGO mediation overlooks the ability of other IGOs with ties to the conflict state to support mediation from behind the scenes, regardless of who the actual mediator is. Combatants accepting mediation and signing a CPA may depend in large part on indirect support and pressure from IGOs, rather than on their observable direct mediation engagement. We therefore examine the larger *contextual* relationships of a civil war country with specifically IGOs with high economic leverage. We expect these to play a constructive role in a peace process, as critical contextual factors can incentivize conflict parties to respond positively to mediation.

Theoretical framework and expectations

In line with standard bargaining models of civil wars, we posit that resolving the credible commitment problem (Walter 1999; 2009) is critical to developing and signing CPAs. The literature suggests that (repeated) mediation helps the combating rebels and governments acquire credible information and identify a solution space (see, e.g. Svensson 2007; Wiegand, Rowland, and Keels 2021). Our argument thus focuses on who can provide tangible incentives that help overcome the credible commitment problem. Because rebels and governments can be considered forward-looking actors, the prospects of credible commitment problem resolution will have upstream effects, increasing the chances that they accept mediation and make concessions necessary to reach a CPA. As detailed below, governments and rebels are more likely to enter third-party mediation and conclude CPAs the more the civil war country is involved with IGOs that command high economic leverage over their member states.

Civil war management is typically not a core mission of IGOs with a primarily economic mandate and leverage. But all such IGOs have a self-interest in ending armed conflicts in member states because violent conflicts threaten their missions. As an example, the World Bank's current strategy for fragile and conflict settings notes that '[conflict] settings tend to have lower implementation capacity [...] There have been times when risks materialize, prompting the WBG to pull back or shy away from further risk, which is not always consistent with the WBG's role in tackling the most important development challenges.' (World Bank Group 2020, 9-10). They will therefore be motivated to help resolve the conflict in member states and create the most optimal condition for the organization: peace. But, lacking peacekeeping forces or mediator teams and with mostly economic mandates that preclude them from overtly political interference, IGOs with high economic leverage are unlikely to manage the conflict directly. Rather, they will use their considerable tangible (often financial) resources conditionally, structuring the government-rebel bargaining interactions to make peace a feasible and more desirable alternative to continued fighting. Because the missions of these IGOs are long-term if not permanent, they have a lasting interest in post-conflict peace in the member country. They will provide promised rewards (e.g. development aid, grants, or market access) and deny benefits should agreements fail in the future. These enduring interests and resources both distinguish IGOs with high economic leverage from other third-party actors such as other IGOs or third-party countries and decrease the chance of combatants renegeing on a CPA in the future. This is key for helping overcome the credible commitment problem.

IGOs and member governments

IGOs with high economic leverage have unique features relevant to domestic conflict management. They provide important material resources to member states, and they are structured in such ways that they do not need member state consent for each organizational decision, including suspending operations. In the case of a civil war, these IGOs typically reduce substantially or halt their involvement with the conflict-affected member country (Campbell and Spilker 2022). This creates a sizable problem for the civil war state because it loses access to notable resources such as lucrative market and investment access or development aid (Balla and Reinhardt 2008; Swedlund 2017; Karreth et al. 2023). The future provision and denial of these resources is a potent tool to incentivize member governments to pursue and, later, maintain its commitment to peace.

Importantly, it is the IGO and not the member government that makes decisions regarding the disbursement and denial of resources. These decisions are typically at a technical level, different from suspending a member or designing a more lenient loan. For those major decisions, the literature has shown that powerful member states can push their interests onto IGOs. But this does not apply to the more technical decisions in the focus of our argument, which leave IGOs no discretion to cater to the interests of powerful member states. IGOs with high economic leverage can therefore credibly deter a government that may, in the future, contemplate renegeing on the terms of an eventual peace deal or other commitments made to the rebels. By signaling that the government will face notable material costs should it eventually renege (and receive lucrative resources should it work toward peace), IGOs with high economic leverage can help the government commit more credibly to upholding the agreement over the long run. Increasing the expectation that the signatories will abide by the agreement terms in the long run is key to overcoming the credible commitment problem. With well-founded expectations that a CPA can be reached and sustained in the future, combatants will be increasingly interested in participating in mediation efforts, and do so sincerely by making compromises needed to reach a deal. This comports with the logic that reducing concerns about being challenged in the future lowers barriers to government participation in mediation (Keels and Greig 2019).

IGOs and rebels

IGOs with high economic leverage can also impact the rebels, though less directly. Compared to governments, rebels are often at a strategic disadvantage in fighting a civil war. Governments usually have access to resources that rebels can hardly procure: police forces, the military, fiscal authority, diplomatic channels, and others. This asymmetry yields some inherent advantages for the government and serious hurdles for rebels to win a conflict. The odds of a rebel victory are only about one in ten (Sullivan and Karreth 2015, 275, 280). Precisely for this reason, IGOs can exercise leverage over rebels and steer them toward mediation and eventually a CPA. IGOs may be agnostic about who wins the conflict but are concerned about conflict-related fragility affecting their policy intervention. Therefore, even weak rebels can view IGOs as pushing governments toward peace — which helps persuade the rebels to also engage in negotiation rather than fight to survive.

Even if an agreement is reached, rebels are unable to hold the government to its word. The key benefit to the rebels is that IGO involvement acts as a constraining counterweight against the government, increasing its willingness to make, and follow through, on the concessions made to the rebels. IGOs can also cease to use their economic leverage over the government as a punishment for rebel non-compliance or non-cooperation. If the rebels try and take advantage of the situation by overplaying their hand, instead of pursuing peace, the IGO can loosen or release the constraints on the government that are needed for successful bargaining, thereby weakening the rebels' position. This returns the rebels to an unfavorable asymmetrical bargaining situation where their path to government concessions is a costly and highly uncertain fight. The rebels face IGO-induced constraints of their own precisely because the advantages they gain through IGO constraints on the government could be suspended. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda, for example, benefited from some initial outside support but has long become isolated. LRA leadership has clearly signaled that it has little interest in compromising and pursuing a full settlement with the government (Maier, Rees Smith, and Shakya 2013). Consequences for the LRA's strategy included

international isolation and condemnation, life in continually impoverished areas, and an inability to score a military victory against the government. Meanwhile, the government of Uganda has been a top recipient of international aid efforts. Even if a rebel group could force a government into making big concessions without IGO involvement, the rebels are still left with the problem that the government may not comply in the long run. The familiar commitment problem is particularly disadvantageous to the rebels (Walter 1999; 2009), which in turn elevates the impact of IGOs with high economic leverage.

IGOs with high economic leverage can also influence the rebels via the promise of future benefits beyond the private goods supplied to the rebels during the DDR process. By signaling that conflict settlement and peace will bring benefits such as development assistance or infrastructure investments to the rebel territories, these IGOs can offer the rebels a tangible reason to compromise and honor the conflict settlement. The rebels' failure to do so would forgo promised benefits and leave money on the table. Rebels have good reason to trust the signals from IGOs since IGOs renegeing on their promises would endanger the peace and stability necessary for them to achieve their institutional missions.

CPAs represent a revision of the status quo against which the rebels fought in the first place. Rebels are thus better off with a CPA, *ceteris paribus*, and should accordingly be careful not to undermine its chances — if IGO involvement makes it more likely that a CPA will be signed in the first place. Jo and Bryant (2013), Jo (2015), and Fazal and Konaev (2019) corroborate this assertion. Some rebel groups are particularly likely to comply with the laws of war relating to violence against civilians and human rights. Two of the reported drivers of this behavior stand out: the expectation of future benefits for the rebel group and a link to an influential external actor that is concerned about such practices. This corresponds to our argument about the indirect impact of IGOs on rebels operating in member states. A state's participation in IGOs with high economic leverage implies that settling the conflict is the optimal strategy for both the government and the rebels.

IGOs and mediation success

Although mediator help in managing civil wars is indispensable, mediation also faces structural limits. Mediation is mostly a tool for managing complexity, providing credible information, getting conflict actors to talk to one another, and identifying possibilities for compromise. Mediators can offer their goodwill, patience, and expertise to keep talks going. At the same time, mediators often lack sizeable tangible resources to effectively pressure governments and rebels to talk to one another in good faith, make concessions, overcome credible commitment problems, and agree to CPAs. Reid (2017) shows that such 'capability leverage', if present, can indeed be instrumental in leading to mediation success in the short term. For long-term success in mediation, however, Reid shows that 'credibility leverage' is more important.

IGOs with high economic leverage have a unique potential to supplant mediation efforts with their tangible, credible, and conditional promises. They can selectively provide and deny benefits such as aid and development resources or access to lucrative international markets, depending on whether the member governments (and rebels) are taking steps toward conflict resolution and, eventually, sustaining peace. The expectation of long-run IGO involvement after conflict suggests a resolution to the credible commitment problem. That is, a civil war state's membership in these IGOs helps overcome the key resource-related shortcomings of mediation. IGOs' role therefore

connects well to Reid's model of mediator leverage: even high-capability mediators will eventually have to turn their attention elsewhere, but IGOs with high economic leverage engage in the longer term.

Mediators likewise fill in the gap left by IGOs with high economic leverage. Due to their distinct purpose, these IGOs rarely mediate conflicts themselves or help the rebels and governments identify a solution space. Instead, they can incentivize parties to accept mediation, compromises, and proposed CPAs, by solving the credible commitment problem. Mediators help iron out the details related to contentious issues and other stipulations for a transition to peace. This may well take several mediation attempts. Continued pressure and promises that IGOs can provide through their leverage as the combatants are meeting over time and over mediation attempts is important from this angle as well, considering evidence (from interstate conflicts) that multiple mediation attempts are often necessary for effective dispute resolution (Böhmelt 2013). As a consequence, we expect CPAs to be more likely to be signed after multiple mediation attempts or longer time periods with mediation activities — if IGO memberships provide the relevant incentives.

IGOs with high economic leverage have the tools and motivation to keep conflict parties on the negotiation pathway, making a CPA more likely. Our logic also helps explain why mediators would be interested in getting involved repeatedly in civil wars specifically in states with memberships in a larger number of IGOs with high economic leverage. Mediation is not costless but requires an investment of resources and reputation (Bercovitch and Schneider 2000; Melin, Gartner, and Bercovitch 2013; Reid 2017). This suggests that a notable portion of mediator attention would go to conflicts where mediators can rely on the backing of other third parties to help with incentivizing conflict parties to pursue, agree to, and uphold a settlement. Keels and Greig (2019) also imply that mediation is more likely to be accepted (and occur) in the absence of conditions typically creating commitment problems. Particular IGOs can, via their institutional and resource-based leverage, pressure member governments and rebels toward accepting mediator assistance and taking it seriously. These IGOs' pressure is important in pushing the member government to put forth enough concessions to keep mediated talks going and overcome impasses. Similarly, these IGOs can signal future assistance to rebel areas and make the rebels more willing to engage in mediated talks and compromise. This creates more favorable conditions for mediators, increasing both their interest in the conflict and their chances of being successful in terms of developing a CPA and getting rebels and governments to sign it.

Case illustration: Ivory Coast

The logic of IGO influence on civil war management, mediation, and the eventual signing of a CPA can be illustrated along the development of the 2002-07 conflict in Ivory Coast.³ In 2000, highly contested elections exacerbated north-south regional, ethnic, and religious cleavages. A key controversy was the political exclusion of a quarter of the country's population in the north. Organized violence started in September 2002, when soldiers from the north rebelled. Several rebel organizations emerged, most notably Guillaume Soro's Patriotic Movement of Côte d'Ivoire (MPCI, later known as the Forces Nouvelles de Côte d'Ivoire, FNCI). As the civil war unfolded, the rebels seized the northern half of the country.

³Figure A10 in the SI suggests that Ivory Coast is, overall, a typical case along the control variables used in this study.

With 8 memberships in IGOs with high economic leverage in 2002, the country's relationship with such IGOs was extensive, almost two standard deviations above the sample mean in this study. For example, prior to the conflict, Ivory Coast had arranged 22 World Bank adjustment loans and 9 IMF programs, mostly meant to help with recovery from an economic decline due to falling cocoa and coffee prices. By 1994, Ivory Coast received US\$1.7 billion worth of aid inflows, half of it through multilateral organizations (Berg, Guillaumont, Amprou, and Pegatiena 2001, 367). Both the country and IGOs therefore had important stakes in maintaining their relationship. Our theory posits that IGOs act on their self-interest to help end civil wars in member countries even though their primary missions are to promote economic growth and trade. In the case of Ivory Coast, the membership in such a high number of IGOs and the IGOs' resulting stakes should incentivize the government and rebels to pursue (repeated) mediation and a CPA.

Reacting to the growing conflict, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS, an IGO with high economic leverage) called for an end to the hostilities and threatened a variety of sanctions against the country. This pressure resulted in the Ivorian government changing its stance of not negotiating with the rebels. It participated in mediated ceasefire talks at an emergency summit in Accra in September 2002. The rebels signed a ceasefire agreement quickly, illustrating our argument that rebels are sensitive to the value of IGOs' leverage over the government. It took additional pressure from ECOWAS to get President Gbagbo's government to sign it (Kode 2016, 10-11). Although Gbagbo's initial refusal to negotiate and sign the agreement can be seen as attempting to go against IGOs' preferences, MPCCI's signing of the agreement meant that the government risked looking highly uncooperative to IGOs, further alienating them and their resources. The economic leverage of IGOs thus made a (positive) difference in conflict management.

Turning the ceasefire into a comprehensive conflict-ending agreement, however, took substantial effort and time. The two sides had opposing demands regarding governance, territorial structure, the military, voting rights, and other issues. But much like our theory suggests, and unlike in many other conflicts, the government and rebels continued to participate in mediation efforts. Additional talks were held in Lomé, Abidjan, Dakar, and, more successfully, in Linas-Marcoussis (LM) in January 2003. The LM agreement called for a national unity government and set the stage for the 2004 UN Operation in Côte d'Ivoire, UNOCI. Implementing the LM agreement proved difficult, however, with occasional peace process suspensions and firefights taking place (UN Security Council various years, June 2004: 2-3 (§6-9)). Despite these difficulties, mediation efforts continued, for example in Accra in 2004 and Pretoria in 2005 (UN Security Council various years, March 2005: 1 (§3)).

By March 2007, repeated mediation attempts bore fruit in form of the Ouagadougou Political Agreement (OPA), a comprehensive peace agreement. Quickly following the OPA, the Gbagbo government instituted executive power-sharing, a buffer zone was dismantled, Soro's MPCCI disarmed, and government administration returned to the north. Gbagbo declared the war over and the UN heralded the agreement as a 'real turning point for [the] Ivorian peace process' (UN Security Council 2007a). During that time, UNOCI took on multiple roles, but was less central in negotiating the peace agreement (Novosseloff 2018, 13) — highlighting our emphasis on the importance of other international incentives for mediation and CPA signing.

Contributing to the persistence and ultimate success of mediation efforts, two additional IGOs with high economic leverage, the World Bank and IMF, used their institutional power to provide and deny economic resources to incentivize the government and rebels to resolve the conflict despite setbacks. Both IGOs suspended their programs with the 2002 outbreak of violence, a move

followed by other donors. But the IGOs also worked toward returning the country to stability so that their work could resume. For example, the Bank and IMF supported the LM agreement by announcing financial assistance ‘in such areas as the demobilization and reintegration of disarmed combatants, the resettlement and reintegration of internally displaced persons, the reconstruction of communities affected by war, and the restoration of basic services for the people [...]’ (UN Security Council [various years](#), March 2003: 21 (§83)). Additionally, budgetary support to the government would be provided.

Beyond offering positive rewards that would facilitate implementing the LM agreement, the IGOs also clarified that aid was conditional on the government delivering on its part of the agreement: ‘The Ivorian authorities have been encouraged to [...] permit a resumption of budgetary and development assistance. In that regard, progress in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and strengthened coordination within the Government would promote the concerted international effort to aid Côte d’Ivoire’ (UN Security Council [various years](#), June 2004: 14 (§57)). Accordingly, the stalled peace process led to the suspension of promised World Bank disbursements (UN Security Council [various years](#), August 2004: 9 (§36)), which hurt Ivory Coast’s economic recovery (UN Security Council [various years](#), March 2005: 14). With such moves, the IGOs highlighted the contrast between the costs of fighting versus the rewards of peace, with the goal of getting the member country back on track toward conflict resolution. That goal is apparent from the fact that the World Bank continued to play a central role in the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) process during negotiation impasses, participating in weekly meetings with other interested parties. It promised US\$85 million worth of funds (far more than any other entity) available for 2005-08 — but ‘pending the completion of ongoing negotiations’ (UN General Assembly [2005](#), 46). And the provision of an IMF ‘post-conflict programme [...] remain[ed] conditional on the implementation of a successful [DDR] programme and the restoration of public administration and security’ (UN Security Council [various years](#), January 2006: 13).

That the promises of IGO-based rewards were *conditional* on progress in conflict resolution is critically important. This serves as a potent deterrent not to renege on the agreed-upon terms in the future and is key to resolving the credible commitment problem. Without the resolution of this problem, a peace deal is unlikely to be signed in present time and honored in the future. Through their repeated but conditional promises of aid, the World Bank and IMF demonstrated to the combatants that obtaining IGO resources required resolving the conflict. Knowing that the other side faced the same incentive structure toward conflict resolution allowed each conflict party to trust the other to uphold its end of the bargain. This helped resolve the credible commitment problem and paved the way toward the OPA. Following the agreement, the IGOs honored their promises. The IMF disbursed the first installment of emergency post-conflict assistance program worth US\$60 million in early August 2007; the World Bank followed suit (UN Security Council [2007b](#)).

IGOs also had an indirect but critically important impact on the rebels. As the structurally weaker civil war actor, MPCFI/FN depended on IGOs to (continue to) constrain the government and assure that it keep its word. The rebels thus could not afford to risk alienating IGOs. We find little evidence that the rebels overplayed their hand by going directly against the preferences of IGOs with high economic leverage. To the contrary, the rebels were the first to sign a ceasefire agreement on October 17, 2002 and continued to participate in various rounds of mediated talks (UN Security Council [various years](#), March 2003: 3-4 (§12)). And even after problems with implementing the LM agreement, there is little evidence that the rebels attempted to take over the remainder of

the country or increased their political demands. Furthermore, when the government indicated its willingness to pursue the OPA and meet the rebels' main goal of executive power-sharing, the rebels signed the agreement, started to disarm, and allowed the government administration to return to the north — something the IMF explicitly demanded (UN Security Council [various years](#), January 2006: 11-13). Sources note the important role of financial support from international institutions to get both sides, including the rebels, to commit to the OPA (Handy and Charles [2008](#), 662). The staying power of the MPCFI/FN as a political organization also illustrates that rebels and opposition groups indeed have an interest in maintaining a relationship with IGOs during conflict and post-conflict phases because they will directly benefit from IGO-based resources in the future.

Finally, we note that other IGOs provided resources of their own once signs of stability emerged. The cumulative effect of the number of memberships suggests that there is a greater total sum of resources that can be deployed to incentivize conflict resolution. The cumulative value of these resources emphasizes the material contrast between continued fighting versus pursuing peace all the more and serves as a potent deterrent against renegeing on a peace agreement. Even when the political crisis after the 2010 presidential election led to political violence, concerted efforts by key IGOs with economic leverage and other actors helped end the most violent episode of the crisis and establish relative political stability (Tir and Karreth [2018](#), pp. 165-182).

Summary and hypotheses

Reflecting this cumulative effect seen in Ivory Coast, we argue that the impact of IGOs is strongest when the civil war state is a member of a larger number of IGOs with high economic leverage. Our argument emphasizes the importance of material incentives. These resources at stake increase with the number of relevant IGOs engaged in a conflict country, where each IGO provides its own resources pending conflict resolution. As the discussion of Ivory Coast illustrates, IGOs tend to follow each other's lead, acting in unison and raising the material stakes of conflict resolution. The chasm between receiving IGO rewards for working for peace versus suffering costs for non-compliance is much larger when the civil war state is a member of a greater number of IGOs commanding high economic leverage. The size of this chasm is directly related to the size of the deterrent not to renege on promises made, providing more leverage for overcoming the credible commitment problem. Our argument generates the following hypotheses:

H1: Domestic armed conflicts in countries with more memberships in IGOs with high economic leverage are more likely to experience mediation than conflicts occurring in countries with fewer memberships in such IGOs.

H2: Domestic armed conflicts experiencing more mediation are more likely to end in comprehensive peace agreements. This positive relationship is more pronounced in countries with more — as opposed to fewer — memberships in IGOs with high economic leverage.

Research design

We examine these hypotheses in quantitative analyses of a new compilation of data sources covering all domestic armed conflicts 1989-2011. We identify all incidents of domestic armed conflicts

in the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset v.4-2015 (Gleditsch, Wallensteen, Eriksson, Sollenberg, and Strand 2002; Pettersson and Wallensteen 2015) that are also coded in either the Civil War Mediation (CWM; DeRouen, Bercovitch, and Pospieszna 2011) or Managing Intrastate Low-Intensity Armed Conflict (MILC; Melander, Möller, and Öberg 2009) mediation datasets. This produces a sample of up to 178 domestic armed conflicts.

Outcome variables

We analyze the occurrence of mediation (H1) and CPA signing (H2). For variation in mediation occurrences, we study mediation events in a given conflict-year or the overall count of years with mediation events throughout the life span of the conflict. Of 934 conflict-years covered by existing data sources on mediation, our data sources (CWM and MILC) record mediation events for about one-third of years. Collapsed to the conflict level, over one half of the conflicts received no mediation during any conflict-year, 20 conflicts experienced one year with mediation, and the remaining 75 conflicts experienced two or more conflict-years with mediation events. The data sources for mediation make the years 1989–2011 the time period for analyses.

For mediation events leading to CPAs, we code a binary indicator for a CPA being signed based on the Peace Accords Matrix Implementation Dataset (Joshi, Quinn, and Regan 2015). From this source, we identify 33 CPAs that were concluded between conflict parties in our sample of conflicts (Table A1). Only about 18 % of all conflicts (and one-third of conflicts receiving mediation) end in CPAs. Only 4 conflicts ended in CPAs without prior mediation events logged in our data. Because mediation events are a key covariate, all samples cover the years 1989-2011.

Empirical strategy

For H1, we fit probit regression models to conflict-year data, where the occurrence of mediation in a given year is the outcome of interest in an event-history framework accounting for time. Because the main variation of interest is between conflicts, we estimate a second set of negative binomial regressions at the level of the conflict, where the cumulative count of conflict years with mediation is the outcome of interest (mean = 2.2, standard deviation = 3.3). For H2, comparing conflicts that end in CPAs to those that do not, we estimate probit regressions at the level of the conflict.

Key explanatory variables

IGOs with high economic leverage are formal intergovernmental organizations with two key feature groups: they distribute tangible benefits to member states and have centralized administrative structures that can act without the immediate need for consent of all member states. Relevant institutional features include financial authority and formal independence. Tangible benefits give these IGOs economic leverage over member states, across one or more of the following issue areas: trade, currency coordination, economic development, investment, production, and natural resource extraction. This definition and coding of memberships follow Karreth (2018). The more such IGOs a country belongs to, the greater are the costs and benefits from (not) settling a conflict for the government and rebels. We count a conflict country's number of memberships in these IGOs in a given year using data from Pevehouse, Nordstrom, McManus, and Jamison (2020). We focus on IGO memberships (and not on other IGOs that might also provide resources to non-members)

because IGO support for members is more predictable and long-term than other aid — a key point of our argument.

Across analyses, conflict countries' memberships in these IGOs center at a mean and median of 5, with the standard deviation of 1.5. IGOs with high economic leverage are listed in the SI (Table A2). We also probe our argument about the importance of economic leverage by comparing the role specifically of IGOs with high economic leverage to that of highly structured IGOs (Tir and Karreth 2018). This variable also accounts for the possibilities that IGOs simply proxy for mediator interest or diplomatic ties (Wiegand, Rowland, and Keels 2021). Including this control variable ensures that effects associated with IGOs with high economic leverage explicitly capture the logic of our argument.

Mediation history indicates conflict resolution interest in a particular conflict from mediators and at least some combatant interest to find a solution. To measure past mediation of a conflict, we log-transform the count of the number of prior conflict years with mediation compiled from the CWM and MILC data. For the conflict-year analyses of H1, this is the running count of years with mediation up to the year prior to the current observation year. For the conflict-level analyses, this is the count of years with mediation until the year prior to the one in which a peace agreement was formed.

Control variables. We use a set of control variables to capture other known influences on mediation and CPA signing.⁴ These controls capture characteristics of the conflict including battle deaths, a key variable capturing mediator interest (e.g. Greig and Regan 2008; DeRouen, Bercovitch, and Pospieszna 2011); the degree of international economic integration (to isolate the economic leverage of IGOs from broader economic (inter)dependence); other third-party involvement (to capture direct pressures toward CPA signing); and foreign policy alignment with the United States (to capture broader international influences). To account for the scenarios where rebels might be less sensitive to IGO influence because they pursue separatist aims, we also control for territorial conflicts. More information on control variables is shown in the SI (Table A3).

The independent effect of IGOs with high economic leverage

We address the common concern about a spurious relationship between international institutions and state behavior in several ways. For our research questions, this critique would suggest that states with a higher propensity to accept mediation and to sign CPAs are more likely to be admitted to IGOs with high economic leverage — rather than IGO memberships facilitating mediation and CPA signing. First, there is little theoretical reason to believe that the IGOs under consideration screen members based on willingness to accept mediation or sign CPAs, considering that this willingness is not directly observable *ex ante*. Second, we do not see any screening behavior with regard to an observable feature: domestic armed conflict. Countries experiencing such conflicts show about the same distribution of IGO memberships compared to countries never experiencing violence during the time period under investigation (Figure A5). Third, there are no notable temporal patterns in the distribution of IGO memberships that might mask temporal trends in mediation or CPA signing during our period of interest (Figure A6). Fourth, we show that IGO memberships are not a clear function of other covariates (Figure A9).⁵ If any of the covariates were a confounder,

⁴To facilitate estimation and interpretation, we mean-standardize continuous control variables and transform right-skewed variables using the natural logarithm.

⁵The highest correlation coefficient is 0.5 for the democracy index, commonly considered moderate.

controlling for it can eliminate at least some of the bias in regression analyses of the relationship between IGO memberships and mediation or CPA signing, respectively. Fifth, our findings below do not change depending on whether these controls are included, mitigating concerns over (a) confounding or (b) post-treatment bias. Sixth, we instrument for IGOs with high economic leverage in a robustness test and find similar results (Table I and discussion below). Lastly, we see no evidence for an underlying joint cause of accepting mediation and joining IGOs, such as a desire to ‘buy into’ the liberal international order. If joining IGOs and seeking mediation were both a function of such an underlying cause, we would expect to see a relationship between memberships in *any* types of IGOs and mediation, not just those with high economic leverage. That is not the case.

Findings and discussion

H1: IGO memberships and mediation attempts

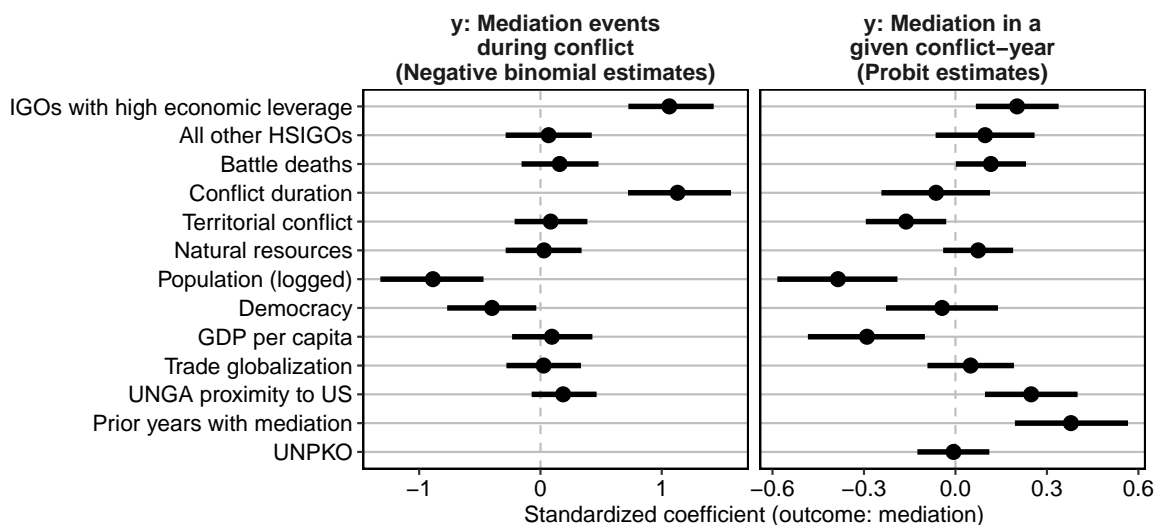
Consistent with H1, conflicts in countries with more memberships in IGOs with high economic leverage are more likely to experience (more) mediation attempts. A country ranking in the top third of memberships in IGOs with high economic leverage is about 15 percentage points more likely to see mediation in a given year compared to a country participating in the bottom third. This estimated difference is robust to the inclusion of different control variables (Figure 1 and Table A8). For an otherwise typical conflict country in the bottom third of memberships, the average chance of a mediation attempt in a typical conflict year are only 15%. For a country in the middle third (the average across conflict countries during our time period of interest), the chances of a mediation attempt are 22%. And this probability increases to 35% for a country in the top third of memberships. As expected, mediation is path-dependent: mediation in a given year is more likely in countries experiencing mediation in a prior year. However, the strong relationship between prior mediation and current mediation does not attenuate the higher propensity of mediation to occur in conflict countries with more memberships in IGOs with high economic leverage.

This finding is consistent across the conflict-year and conflict-level units of analysis. During the full life span of a conflict, mediation occurs in more years when a conflict country is a member of more IGOs with high economic leverage. Our model predicts that a conflict in a country in the bottom third of memberships experience no mediation. A conflict in a country in the middle third of memberships is estimated to experience 1–2 years with mediation. In the top third of memberships, the country is estimated to experience more than five years with mediation. Considering that more than half of the 185 conflicts in our data receive no observed mediation at all and the right skew of that variable, the difference between 0 and one or more years with mediation events are substantively meaningful.

The results are robust to multiple imputation for missing variables; see Tables A9 and A11 in the SI. Systematic model selection based on posterior probabilities (Bayesian model averaging) indicates that countries’ participation in IGOs with high economic leverage is a robust predictor of mediation, even in comparison to a larger number of other possible explanatory variables (Figure A1).

Instrumenting IGOs. In addition to showing that memberships in IGOs with high economic leverage are not associated with factors that might explain mediation, Table I reports an instrumental variable regression with the log-transformed count of conflict-years with mediation as the

Figure 1: Evidence on H1: Determinants of mediation, across levels of analysis used in this study. Each dot shows standardized coefficients for each explanatory variable: on the left, based on negative binomial regressions of mediation events during the conflict; on the right, based on event-history probit estimates of mediation in a given conflict year. Coefficients are standardized to facilitate comparison across explanatory variables. Full results shown in Tables A10 (left) and A8 (right) in the SI.



Standardized coefficients show the predicted difference in $g(y)$ given a one-standard deviation difference in the explanatory variable. Whiskers show 95% confidence intervals based on standard errors clustered by region.

outcome (akin to Table A12). Results are similar to these OLS estimates. As an instrument for IGO memberships for a given country, we use the average count of IGO memberships of all other countries in that country’s region (as defined by the World Bank’s World Development Indicators), excluding the count of the given country. This is a feasible instrument because IGO memberships in other countries in the region are plausibly independent of any events occurring in the conflict country. But because some IGOs with high economic leverage operate only in some regions, regional memberships strongly predict a country’s memberships: the estimated instrument is strong (first-stage $F = 102$). Therefore, the only plausible path for an association between the regional IGO measure and mediation in a conflict country is through that country’s participation in IGOs.

Other predictors. Our analyses show that only IGOs with high economic leverage exhibit a relationship with mediation. Other highly structured IGOs that do not possess specifically economic leverage (cf. Tir and Karreth 2018) are not associated with mediation; neither are other IGOs with less formal structures. Conflicts see less mediation in later conflict years, possibly reflecting mediation fatigue, though longer conflicts see more mediation *cumulatively*. Territorial conflicts see less mediation, and conflicts in countries with oil, diamonds, or drug production see more mediation. Countries with larger populations and with wealthier economies are less likely to experience mediation. This might indicate a propensity of such countries to decline outside interference in domestic conflicts. The peacekeeping literature reports a similar finding (Fortna 2004; Walter 2009; Stojek and Tir 2015). Affinity with the US correlates with more mediation, possibly indicating that mediation is also driven by broader international interests in the country. Finally,

Table 1: Evidence on H1: Instrumental variable estimates of total mediation years (logged), 1989–2011. Unit of analysis: conflict.

	Model 1
IGOs with high economic leverage before conflict	0.314* (0.057)
All other HSIGOs before conflict	0.022 (0.043)
Battle deaths throughout conflict (logged)	0.004 (0.002)
Conflict duration (years logged)	0.355* (0.107)
Territorial conflict	0.066 (0.176)
Natural resources	0.115 (0.143)
Population before conflict (logged)	−0.217* (0.047)
Democracy before conflict	−0.296* (0.109)
GDP per capita before conflict (logged)	0.022 (0.091)
Trade globalization before conflict	0.018 (0.069)
UNGA proximity to US before conflict	0.196* (0.081)
Intercept	1.407 (1.335)
R^2	0.479
Observations	145

Standard errors, clustered by region, in parentheses.

* $p < 0.05$.

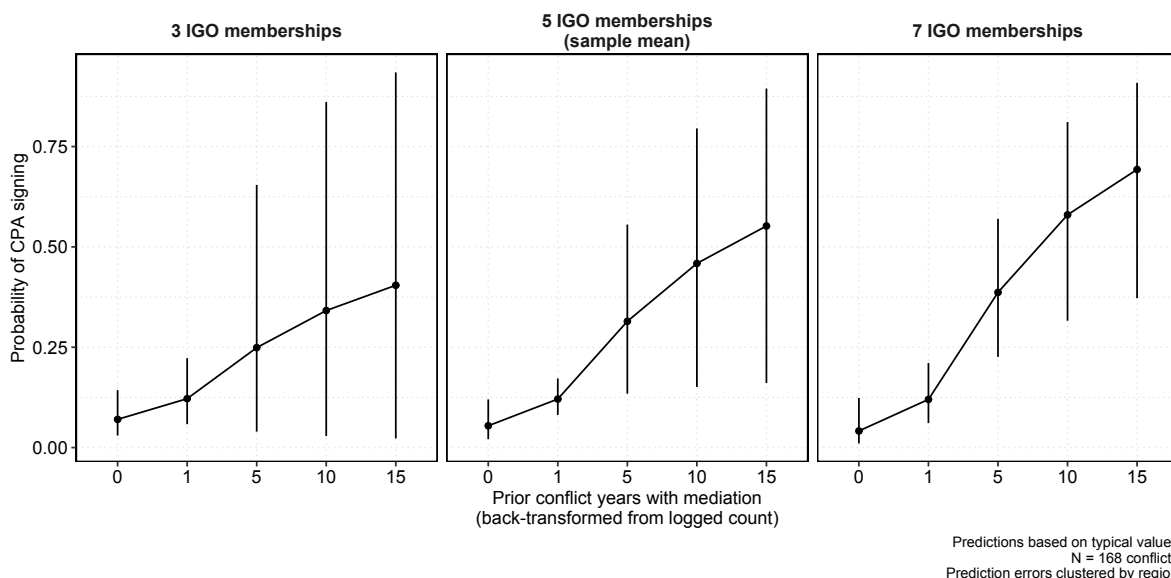
trade globalization shows no association with mediation.

H2: IGO memberships and CPAs

H2 implies that a positive impact of repeat mediation on CPA signing is more likely in countries with more memberships in IGOs with high economic leverage. Estimating an interaction term between IGO memberships and prior mediation attempts shows a positive effect of prior mediation on the odds of CPA signing only at high levels of IGO memberships in the conflict country. Figure 2 displays the probability of signing a CPA for conflicts in countries with different levels of

involvement in IGOs with high economic leverage and across the range of mediation activity.⁶ In a country in the bottom third of IGO memberships, we find no statistical relationship between mediation efforts and CPA signings; the probability of CPA signing is statistically indistinguishable across the number of mediation years and the confidence intervals overlap. But for a conflict in a country in the top third of memberships (7), more mediation attempts are indeed associated with substantially higher probabilities of CPA signing, rising to over 50 % after 10 years with mediation and statistically different from the probability of CPA signing after fewer mediation years. These findings are consistent with H2.

Figure 2: IGOs with high economic leverage, prior mediation, and estimated probability of CPA signing in a typical conflict. Reflecting H2, each panel shows the relationship between mediation and the probability of CPA signing at a different level of IGO memberships. Dots and whiskers represent point estimates and 83.4% confidence intervals; estimates based on Table A15.



This finding is again robust to multiply imputing missing data (Table A16 and Figure A3). We also show that there is little evidence for a joint, endogenous process, whereby a joint common cause leads to both mediation and CPA signing. Estimating mediation and CPA signing jointly in a bivariate probit model shows little change in substantive effects. Prior mediation shows a positive relationship with CPA signing only for countries in the top third of IGO memberships (Table A17 and Figure A4). Lastly, similar to the use of Bayesian model averaging in tests of H1, we find that variable importance measures rank the interaction of mediation and IGO memberships highly across the space of possible model specifications. Estimates for other control variables vary across specifications and significance thresholds, but some models suggest that CPAs tended to be signed at higher rates in more democratic countries and those with smaller populations. The lack of consistent trends, though, raises the question whether other factors beyond IGOs may explain when CPAs are signed.

⁶We follow best practices from Mize (2019), instead of evaluating coefficients.

Conclusion

This study seeks to explain why some conflicts see more mediation attempts than others and, subsequently, some conflicts end in CPAs while most do not. IGOs with high economic leverage are key, yet understudied external actors that can help explain these varying outcomes. These IGOs support conflict management efforts indirectly by conditionally providing material incentives to conflict parties that help them overcome credible commitment problems. Accordingly, we find that IGO memberships are robustly associated with mediation events. Further, a conflict country's participation in IGOs with high economic leverage increases the prospects for mediation success. Mediation is a crucial component behind recent trends toward a higher rate of conflicts ending in peace agreements. But our findings uncover that mediation is only effective, and increasingly so, in countries with more memberships in IGOs with high economic leverage. Incentive structures derived from IGOs with high economic leverage reduce commitment problems that ordinarily block the path to CPAs.

These findings have substantial implications for conflict management practices. Mediators are more likely to be successful in countries where incentives set by IGOs can supplant mediation efforts. Given that resources for mediation, and also resources and opportunities for domestic negotiations of peace agreements, are limited, this is an important indication for where such resources will be most effective.

For scholarly work on conflict resolution, our study illustrates the benefits of studying mediation and mediation success (defined here as the signing of a CPA) as parts of one trajectory. Considering the multiple opportunities for conflict management to fail, we identify factors that keep combatants on the path toward peace, especially IGOs commanding high economic leverage; they are a key external actor distinct from other third parties. Our findings comport well with a recent literature on the role of external actors for conflict termination and prevention (e.g. Beardsley, Cunningham, and White 2017; Sawyer, Cunningham, and Reed 2017; Breslawski and Cunningham 2019). Our study also adds to growing evidence that IGOs have impacts well beyond their original mandates, initially framed as a 'pathology' (Barnett and Finnemore 1999) but documented in a variety of contexts (Johnson 2014). However, this influence of IGOs beyond their core mandate need not always be negative (Tir and Karreth 2018). Lastly, our emphasize on institutional structures and the resulting leverage supplants other recent work on the role of IGOs in domestic political contention (Beardsley, Cunningham, and White 2017; Sawyer, Cunningham, and Reed 2017; White, Cunningham, and Beardsley 2018; von Borzyskowski and Vabulas 2019). It also provides additional opportunities for examining how institutional structures can be linked to concrete mediation behavior and outcomes. A further testable implication of our general argument is whether the prospects of support from third parties such as IGOs with high economic leverage also help conflict parties overcome hurdles further down the conflict management pathway as well, ranging from the implementation of CPAs to their longer-term stability.

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