

Franziska Zanker: The Legitimisation of Peace Negotiations: a Role for Civil Society?

Abstract

Questioning a theoretical jump made in current literature from civil society participation in negotiations to legitimacy in order to explain the impact on peace sustainability, the thesis seeks to unpack the very concept of legitimacy. The work considers the question of how peace negotiations are made more legitimate through the inclusion of civil society in an empirically and methodologically abductive manner. This entails both the answering of what the constitutive components of a legitimisation process are and why they may be occurring. On the basis of a heuristic model for legitimate peace negotiations, drawn from contemporary theories on legitimacy, two case studies are considered: the Liberian peace negotiations in 2003 and the Kenyan National Dialogue and Reconciliation in 2008.

Using rich empirical data from over 100 interviews and 12 focus groups with market women, teachers and youth, collected during extensive fieldwork in Liberia and Kenya, an especially adapted form of comprehensive process-tracing is applied to the case studies. Applying the method of comprehensive process-tracing, permitting both a constitutive and a causal analysis, the components that together constitute the legitimisation process are singled out. In addition, the reasons why these come to be are traced causally. The biggest finding is that civil society is not exclusively responsible for ensuring the legitimisation of peace negotiations. Other so-called guarantors of legitimacy also play a role – including international mediators - in addition to individualised form of participation for the conflict-affected population. On the basis of the empirical analysis, a theory of legitimate peace negotiations is developed. According to this, a legitimisation process is made up of outcome and participation-based characteristics, where civil society actors play a crucial but not exclusive role. Moreover, the legitimisation takes place simultaneously at the negotiations and in a public arena. The research has repercussions for the debates on civil society, representation, local ownership and emancipatory peacebuilding.