



Civic Network Research: A New Methodology for Conducting Ethical and Policy-relevant Peace and Conflict Research

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Key Findings

- ▶ This policy brief outlines the concept of 'Civic Network Research' as it has been developed by the Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform (PeaceRep) research programme. Civic Network Research is one of PeaceRep's main methodological approaches next to its peace analytics and data-driven work. The brief is aimed at leadership of academic institutions and policymakers as well as funders of policy-relevant peace and conflict research.
- ▶ Undertaking academic research in contexts marked by conflict and fragility presents distinctive methodological, ethical, and practical challenges that set it apart from undertaking research in more stable settings, including in relation to confronting asymmetrical power relations between researchers, gathering evidence and publishing research safely, navigating political complexity, and translating research.
- ▶ Civic Network Research helps tackle these challenges, producing granular evidence bases and high-quality research which draw on the unique insights of civic actors experiencing the conflict and their specialist knowledge. 'Civic actors' here refers to individuals and groups who are concerned about the public good and who try to overcome sectarian divides.
- ▶ By building international partnerships that support civic actors seeking peace and justice-oriented policy outcomes, the Civic Network Research approach aims at linking the knowledge generation process to the world of policy, practice and conflict transformation.
- ▶ Civic Network Research is a way of generating knowledge about authoritarian and conflict-affected settings by working with civic actors that are engaged – in one form or another – in activity that, either implicitly or explicitly, constructs social contract-based alternatives to situations of intractable war and conflict. Research produced in partnership with such actors aims to both deliver high-quality knowledge about war and conflict while also supporting activities that are seeding alternatives to violence.
- ▶ The practice of Civic Network Research utilises a mix of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies that aim to develop a more holistic and multi-sided account of how everyday life endures in situations of violent and authoritarian fragility.

- ▶ Civic networks can take diverse forms in different contexts, including informal collaborations and networks, formally contracted partnerships, and actively constructed local researcher networks.
- ▶ This policy brief provides short case studies of PeaceRep's civic networks, research outputs, and qualitative outcomes in Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, and Ukraine.

Recommendations

In addition to promoting cutting-edge scientific research, research institutions and funders are often interested in ensuring research is having real-world impact. As this brief shows, the Civic Network Research approach offers both, combining scientific rigour with real-world relevance. Supporting Civic Network Research means that research institutions and funders will have to adapt existing norms and practices along the entire research funding cycle: from research strategy; funding and commissioning; ethics and risk management; quality control; to sustainability and translation into practice. The detailed recommendations can be found at the end of the document.

Research Strategy

- ▶ **Demand equitable partnerships and project co-leadership.** Equity in knowledge production should be a necessary condition for receiving research funding, and should be one of the key technical proposal review criteria when funders score research project bids.
- ▶ **Allow funding applicants to fully budget for equitable and safe research,** including for in-country researchers' secure communications, emergency support, insurance, and psychosocial care.
- ▶ **Schedule enough time between the publication of research Calls for Proposals and bid submission deadlines.** Research consortia between institutions in high-income countries and those in conflict-affected settings should have sufficient time to connect and write bids on an eye-to-eye level.

Research Ethics and Risk Management

- ▶ **Treat ethics approval as dynamic and revisable.** Rather than defaulting to institutional templates designed for stable environments, research ethics committees and institutional frameworks at universities must adapt to the relational, dynamic, and politically exposed conditions under which this research takes place.
- ▶ **Ensure relevant expertise in ethics review.** Where possible, ethics committees should include members with experience conducting research in conflict-affected or authoritarian contexts.
- ▶ **Recognise relational risk alongside individual risk.** The risks associated with conducting research in conflict-affected countries must be treated as a shared responsibility rather than an individual or institutional liability. Ethics review should explicitly consider the risks borne by in-country civic collaborators, including surveillance exposure, reputational harm, and long-term political risk.
- ▶ **Avoid hard security models when possible.** If possible, researchers traveling to conflict-affected countries to collaborate with civic actors should explore alternatives to the hard security measures taken by some journalists and aid workers who sometimes have to rely on flak jackets, armoured cars, and strict movement protocols and curfews.

Research Quality Control

- ▶ **Build flexibility into delivery timelines and authorship requirements.** Research in conflict-affected environments will never get perfect results and research institutions and funders must be comfortable with that fact.
- ▶ **Adapt monitoring, evaluation and learning requirements.** Funders should combine accountability to their own donors, tax payers, and oversight boards with accountability to communities and civic researchers in conflict-affected countries, and measure societal impact in addition to scientific outcomes.

- ▶ **Avoid over-bureaucratisation.** Reporting, documentation, and data-storage requirements can risk exposing civic actors to harm and create significant opportunity costs in terms of research that could otherwise be conducted. Research institutions and funders should minimise these requirements.

Research Sustainability and Translation into Practice

- ▶ **Translate and socialise research in conflict-affected countries.** Civic researchers not only generate knowledge but also have the right to define how it is interpreted, framed, and disseminated.
- ▶ **Maintain and leverage sustained relationships for impact in policy and practice.** Funders should support, financially and practically, sustained relationships between civic researchers and policymakers to maximise impact.
- ▶ **Support post-project sustainability of civic networks.** Funders should assist their grantees in exploring alternative funding streams and to put in place sustainability measures that allow networks to continue to exist post-grant, even if only in a minimal way.

Introduction

Effective peacebuilding and conflict resolution approaches depend on accurate, relevant, and ethically generated knowledge about the fragile environments in which they are engaging. Yet many dominant research and mediation approaches continue to rely on outdated assumptions that tend to privilege elite perspectives, seeing conflict resolution as primarily a bargain among warring elites, and overlook the civic actors who sustain non-violent practices even in conditions of war and authoritarianism. This policy brief draws on the experience of the PeaceRep programme (as well as previous large-scale, funded research programmes) to identify the potential for what we call 'Civic Network Research' to enhance our knowledge and understanding of the nature of conflict and its resolution. It offers research grounded in the normative purpose of supporting sustainable peace and justice outcomes, while also delivering rigorous and policy-relevant research in fragile, conflict-affected settings.

The practice of Civic Network Research utilises a mix of methodologies that aim to develop a more holistic and multi-sided account of how everyday life endures in situations of intractable violent and authoritarian fragility. By working with activist-experts that are both highly knowledgeable – indeed, knowing far more about the dynamics on the ground than is possible for outside experts – and want better, more inclusive outcomes for their communities, the approach of Civic Network Research deliberately and, we argue, productively, disrupts the distinction between practitioner and scholars. It can be seen as a type of action research, which recognises that those studying conflict will tend to be motivated by aspirations for peace and justice – and seeks to deliver ecosystems of research-policy-practice interchange to translate these goals into reality.

Members of the PeaceRep consortium have developed this methodology in practice, primarily through the work of teams researching specific conflict sites (Iraq, Myanmar, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, and Ukraine). We also organised two workshops, in Istanbul, 2024, and in Amman, 2025. The Istanbul workshop aimed to map the methods used across the programme and formulate them into a defined approach to peace and conflict research. The Amman workshop shared key findings from different country teams as part of an effort to identify synergies as the PeaceRep programme concluded. This policy brief draws together the key results from these activities.

This brief is aimed at leadership of academic institutions and policymakers, including but not exclusively the UK Government as the funder of the PeaceRep programme, as well as other funders of policy-relevant peace and conflict research more widely. We would suggest reading this policy brief alongside the academic working paper on our Civic Network Research methodology ("Civic Network Research: a methodology for undertaking research in authoritarian and conflict impacted settings") addressed to the conflict and peace studies research community. Civic Network Research is one of PeaceRep's main methodological approaches next to its peace analytics and data-driven work (see, for example, Bell 2024).

The policy brief is structured into three parts. The first part identifies key challenges of undertaking research in fragile and conflict-affected contexts and how these can be addressed through Civic Network Research design and strategies. The second part addresses examples of the implementation of Civic Network Research from the PeaceRep programme. The third part outlines recommendations for institutions on the basis of our experience of undertaking Civic Network Research.

Part 1 – Challenges and Research Strategies

The specific challenges of conducting research in conflict sites

Undertaking academic research in contexts marked by conflict and fragility presents distinctive methodological, ethical, and practical challenges that set it apart from undertaking research in more stable settings. Above all, these are situations of heightened risk to personal security of both researchers and research participants, including physical dangers from active fighting and bombardment to issues such as violent crime.

Conflict-affected settings are also by definition rapidly evolving, fluid environments, where situations and risks can evolve suddenly and in unexpected directions. Such environments also shape the type of research that it is possible to undertake, where for example lack of accurate census data creates uncertainty around the demographic profile of the population, or even when such data exists, insecurity may make undertaking surveys challenging, placing clear limits on the ability to make claims to representativeness and posing a need for other forms of data capture.

All researchers undertaking peace and conflict research in the field will be familiar with these dynamics. Peace and conflict research is in this sense less about achieving “ideal” research designs than about transparently managing its many limitations and challenges. When researchers from the PeaceRep programme met in Istanbul in June 2024, we discussed these challenges in a hive mind workshop format, listing out a number of different issues that teams working across the programme had themselves encountered.

The issues raised through these discussions included:

- ▶ **Acquiring knowledge.** Because of the difficulties of undertaking research in conflict-affected countries, there is a tendency to rely on media reports, which usually focus on violent incidents or the behaviour of elites, interviews in urban centres, and on inherited assumptions from past research conducted in different contexts. Researchers may privilege ‘scientific’ research (published in journals) over tacit knowledge (acquired through lived experience). The challenge is how to combine both so as to provide a substantive evidence base for conflict mitigation.

- ▶ **Ethical challenges.** These include the problems of how to avoid putting research subjects at greater risk of harm as a result of participating in the research; how to build partnerships between institutions and researchers from donor countries and those from aid recipient ones which are as equitable as possible given the structural political economy they are operating within; the fact that academic institutions in donor countries tend to prioritise de-risking over equity when contracting external partners; as well as challenges related to data protection legislation and the need for subjects to give informed consent.
- ▶ **Economic inequalities and power disparities.** Conflict-affected settings are often – though not always – environments marked by the persistence of economic underdevelopment. Researchers and institutions from the wealthy states – and from more secure positions within those institutions – that tend to fund this research are therefore often materially privileged vis-à-vis the settings they are investigating. This generates power inequalities which intersect with the political economies created by donor funding itself and have to be confronted and navigated with care and respect by researchers. Such inequalities may be expressed, for example, in the asymmetrical power present in knowledge production and questions of authorship over research. It is therefore important to challenge the extractive research model and to promote and preserve intellectual sovereignty of those living in conflict-affected settings.
- ▶ **Data gaps and reliability issues.** This is often a critical challenge in conflict environments where information quality may be poor and a lack of reliable census and macroeconomic data creates knowledge gaps, especially when drilling down from a national to local level.
- ▶ **Political complexity and politically exposed individuals and groups.** Undertaking policy relevant research which supports decision-makers to make more informed, evidence-based policies, can run into challenges in complex terrains where bad faith actors and politically exposed individuals may seek to influence or even manipulate research and evidence bases.

- ▶ **Questions of linguistic and cultural translation and understanding.** The risk of making missteps in linguistic and cultural translation from one context to another is a key challenge of researching diverse, multilingual global contexts, and then distilling findings and analyses into predominantly English – and sometimes paywalled – publications, whether in the form of reports or academic papers.
- ▶ **Perceptions of un-stated agendas and lack of independence from policymakers and donors.** Where funding is provided by governmental actors, there is a need to navigate sensitivities in how policymakers will be engaged with findings and address any misperception that funded researchers and institutions lack genuine independence – or alternatively that researchers can change the policies of their donors.
- ▶ **Challenges associated with secure and safe publication, as well as impact and engagement around findings.** There is a risk that findings may be misused – for example, taken up in a distorted form for propaganda purposes – or that any form of publication, even with anonymisation, may still be dangerous. Impact and dissemination activity, for example engaging key policymakers with findings, may also further attenuate these risks.
- ▶ **Practical and logistical challenges including navigating contracting between large and often slow-moving institutional bureaucracies and international partners.** Academic researchers will often express frustration with navigating complex institutional bureaucracies that, while vital for legal compliance, can sometimes prioritise contractual de-risking or simply create very long delays in processing payments to the detriment of international partners who, in some cases, face economic precarity. When engaging conflict environments, these logistical and bureaucratic challenges can reinforce structural inequalities already present in the relationship between institutions in donor countries and partners in fragile contexts.
- ▶ **Risks of physical and psychological harm to researchers, including in-country partners, and research subjects.** These risks will be heightened for groups with particular characteristics such as race and ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, etc, that place them in a position of greater vulnerability vis-à-vis other groups. This forms another component of the ethical challenges that we discussed above (see bullet point #2).

There is no methodology or research design that can do away with all of these challenges and problems – many of which are structurally present in countries experiencing intractable conflict.

However, our argument is that the methodology of Civic Network Research, based on developing closer and more equitable partnerships, can mitigate these problems and confront many of these challenges head on.

Our starting principle is that many of these issues are best addressed when time and energy has been put into sustaining longer-term research partnerships with those working on the ground to address intractable conflicts. This long-term commitment to research-policy-practice sustainability allows research teams within donor countries to establish relationships based on trust, respect and shared accountability. This consciously blurs the distinction between practitioner and researcher in a productive and, we would argue, intellectually necessary way, because those who are working in different civic organisations or everyday informal initiatives to address the drivers of conflict or support sustainable peace projects, accumulate knowledge bases that offer unique expertise on their environment. Working alongside these individuals and groups to gather data and draft papers is a route to achieving – not sacrificing – high quality, evidence based research in such contexts.

The concept of Civic Network Research as a response to these challenges

The type of knowledge we set out to generate about violent conflict can have a powerful impact on how peacemaking paradigms are constructed. If our lens is focused purely on the warring parties and their spokespeople, then this can shape the evidence that we choose to gather, and the resulting arguments around the causes and drivers of conflict. In peacebuilding, such a focus can lead to an emphasis on inter-elite bargains as a route to conflict resolution at the expense of studying the broader sociological landscape shaping the patterns of predation and war-making that drive conflicts – as well as, crucially, the 'shoots of opportunity' that can enable peace and justice transformations.

Our approach of Civic Network Research is motivated by the assumption that an alternative focus and lens can support a better approach to conflict resolution, one that is able to support more sustainable and justice-based outcomes that target the structural causes of conflict.

(a) Definition of civiness and its relationship to Civic Network Research

The term 'civiness' is different from the term 'civil society'. Participants at the Istanbul workshop noted that nowadays the term civil society in practice tends to refer to non-governmental organisations (NGOs), who are usually organised and professional, and often politicised and influenced by donors, sometimes even funded or founded by the warring factions themselves. By contrast, the term civiness, which has been elaborated during the PeaceRep programme, refers to people and groups who are concerned about the public good and who try to overcome sectarian divides, and who act as if there were a social contract between the state and its citizens (Kaldor and Radice 2022).

Civiness is about a logic of political authority, based on an implicit social contract, that contrasts with other logics such as those based on money (oligarchy, crony capitalism or the political marketplace) or polarising ideologies (racism, ethnic nationalism or religious sectarianism). Civiness includes, of course, peace, feminist, and human rights activists. But it also includes a range of individuals and groups who act in civic ways; doctors who treat patients regardless of ethnicity; journalists who try to expose corruption or other truths; teachers who try to instil civic values; civil servants who try to act in the public good.

Civic networks are composed of civic actors. Throughout the Istanbul workshop a number of participants emphasised the gender aspects of civiness – while political leaders and armed groups tend to be predominantly male, this is not the case for civic actors. As a result, emphasising the importance of gender inclusion can be an important way of ensuring the engagement of civic actors. Civic networks can take diverse forms in different contexts. The idea of civic networks is not based on a formula or template but a specific outcome of activist-scholar collaboration.

Broadly, in our projects, we find three main approaches:

- ▶ *Informal collaborations and networks.* These involve connections in-country that are not based on formally contracted research partnerships. They are often accumulated over time by the researchers and research teams. A key argument from both workshops is that researcher 'embeddedness' within such informal in-country networks is crucial to developing high quality research.

- ▶ *Formally contracted partners.* These are individuals or institutions that are formally contracted to undertake research by the programme. The management of these relationships can often be problematic, requiring complex processes of legal compliance, risk management and ethical review.
- ▶ *Actively constructed local researcher networks.* In some cases, PeaceRep's teams created local researcher networks where civic-activist experts on their localities were brought into a formalised network to provide data on their local conditions, usually in the form of surveys or interviews.

International collaboration across research teams has contributed to the development of different forms of Civic Network Research. For example, the Ukraine team designed the research project, *Mapping Ukraine's Democratic Space* (see Darkovich et al 2025), drawing on a method that had originally been developed by the *Mapping Syria* research project (LSE Syria team ND). Related mapping approaches were also adapted in Sudan through the *Mapping Medania* research (Makawi and Benson-Strohmayer 2025), which traced civic resistance, everyday practices of civiness, and democratic aspirations across multiple regions under conditions of authoritarianism and war. In these projects local research networks made up of activists, or individuals engaged in their community in one form or another, were formally established by the research teams. The aim was to capture insights on local conditions from experts who knew their local communities and were selected to participate in the network on the basis of an assessment of their capacity to offer non-partisan assessment of these conditions and recognising the importance of gender participation and other forms of inclusion. In Syria, the project covered 60 districts and in Ukraine it covered 40 territorial communities. The Sudan research covered trade unions, women's groups, professional unions, diaspora networks, and professional syndicates. This cross-fertilisation of research design between teams illustrated the general approach that aims to share expertise across diverse international contexts.

(b) What we mean by Civic Network Research

Civic Network Research is a way of generating knowledge about authoritarian and conflict-affected settings by working with civic individuals and groups that are engaged – in one form or another – in activity that, either implicitly or explicitly, constructs social contract-based alternatives to situations of intractable war and conflict. Research produced in partnership with such actors aims to both deliver high quality knowledge about war and conflict while also supporting activities that are seeding alternatives to violence.

The method of working with civic networks originated in the post-Cold War period. Kaldor's theory of 'new wars' (Kaldor 2012) came out of the experience of working with peace and human rights groups in the Balkans and post-Soviet space. These groups and networks had a different understanding to the prevalent view in the west that saw the conflicts as being about 'ancient rivalries' amongst ethnic groups that were suppressed in the communist period and 'bubbled up to the surface' (a metaphor often used) after the end of the Cold War. In contrast to this dominant view, activists on the ground saw the mobilisation of ethnonationalist ideology as a way for powerholders to maintain their dominance in the new transition by diverting democratic demands into an ethnic sectarianism-cum-authoritarianism. Collaborating with Western activists or researchers was a way of getting this alternative understanding to reach a wider international audience. Similar dynamics were evident in Africa's 1990s wars, including: Somalia, Southern Sudan, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Liberia among them. Civic actors in these conflicts framed these wars less in terms of ethnicity and more around predation and resource control.

These cases illustrate how a Civic Network Research methodology concerns how theories and concepts are formulated. Research is always, by its nature, partial. We can only ever capture in knowledge segments, or particular layers, of the world around us. What we choose to study is very much predicated on pre-existing theories or shared agreements about how we analyse specific phenomena. Most research begins with inherited theories derived from an initial literature search and those inherited theories can easily shape the way we conduct research. Collaboration with civic actors constitutes an inductive method of developing theory. It is about building a theory out of empirical knowledge rather than starting with an argument derived from an initial literature search and then "testing" it.

As civic actors that are embedded in their local community know more about it than any external researcher can hope to learn, drawing on these knowledge bases can play a crucial role in developing high quality research. Fundamentally, a civic network methodology involves an iterative partnership both in framing the research, the questions to be asked and the propositions to be tested, and in identifying the relevant evidence and the nature of evidence gathering. The term 'intellectual sovereignty' introduced to PeaceRep by our Ukrainian colleagues is about the centrality of the voices of those who experience firsthand the impacts of war and conflict.

What is crucial to this overall approach to undertaking research is a need to strike a balance between supporting democratic and rights-based goals while not being drawn into partisanship in already polarised and fragmented contexts. To maintain this balance, researchers need to be mindful of what Michael L. Frazer calls 'inconvenient evidence' (Frazer 2023), a term he developed from Max Weber, and how this can sometimes be the most important and interesting data captured. It is the role of such evidence that is critical to supporting the policy-making process – and, as one colleague in the Istanbul workshop (2024) argued, activists are, contrary to stereotypes, often themselves prioritising 'getting the facts right' above all else. This is what makes this type of knowledge generation particularly attractive to the policy-making community – it is oriented to rights-based democratic outcomes while also offering the granular, data-based insights into the context that are vital to render such visions of transformation grounded, practical and realisable.

The Civic Network Research approach involves the use of both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. It is not a linear process of establishing a hypothesis and testing it. Rather, testable propositions derive from discussions, interviews, participatory action, and documentary evidence and are then revised and reconceptualised in the light of further evidence gathering and so on. Indeed, evidence gathering and theory building are not separate activities. Quantitative data may be gleaned from existing institutions such as the United Nations or the World Health Organization, for example. Violence indicators gathered by institutions such as the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) and Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) may be relevant despite caveats about underlying assumptions and the reliability of such numbers in conflict-affected situations. PeaceRep's PA-X Peace Agreement Database is another example of a highly complementary data source that can be, and has been, used in Civic Network Research. Where more formalised civic networks exist, as in Ukraine or Syria, it is possible to conduct surveys, which may offer a useful corrective, or triangulation point, to other data.

Equally, qualitative data from interviews, statements, discussions, speeches or workshops involving not just civic actors but a range of different roles and positions are needed to confirm, contradict or revise evolving theories or propositions. This feedback loop through discussion is critical at every stage of the lifecycle of the research process. It also creates forums where policymakers can engage in dialogue around the formulation, application and key conclusions of the research.

(c) Assuming a global lens: moving away from language around 'local' researchers

How we frame research partnerships can be important to achieving the goals of equity and accuracy in detailing the nature of a relationship. In PeaceRep, we have sought to move away from the language of 'local' researchers because of the implication that somehow our international partners in conflict-affected contexts, whether institutions or individuals, are not themselves engaged with global issues. While a question of equity, this is also equally, and perhaps even more importantly, about accuracy. It is simply not true that our partners working in our case study countries are not constantly engaged with and analysing global forces and processes. On the contrary, their experience and knowledge of such global-local interactions are revealing of global complexity and the shifting patterns of authoritarianism.

At the Amman workshop (2025), a key theme, for example, was the way that regional or global powers exercised influence through security, financial or political relationships with warring parties. More often than not, such powers tend to enforce predatory peace logics, act as spoilers of peace, or prevent the removal of authoritarian regimes. For instance, in Myanmar, China and Russia reinforce each other's positions to ensure the military junta stays in power. In Ukraine, China provides assistance to Russia's continued occupation of the country, while the United States has also pivoted strongly towards Russian positions – though maintains, at the time of writing, a degree of footing within the Ukrainian camp. This points to the need for complementary or integrated research, to weave a thread through the country studies in the PeaceRep program and study the behavioral pattern of regional and global powers – the usual suspects, so to speak – interfering in countries in conflict. As these geopolitical players rarely act alone, they can tend to reinforce one another's core interests.

Part 2 – Implementation: Civic Network Research in Practice

How Civic Network Research delivers both research quality and policy impact

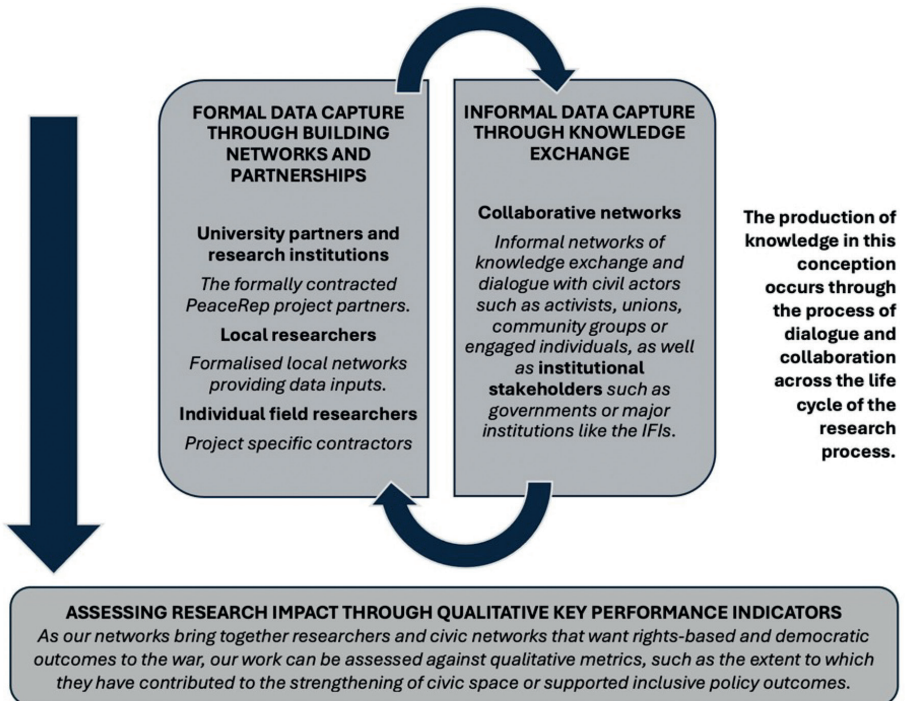
Civic Network Research is fundamentally a process of inquiry through collaborative research networks. As we outlined above, there is not one single form of research design. Rather, a variety of social research methods may be utilised as part of a common framework or practice based on building sustained international collaborations with civic networks. In PeaceRep, we have found it useful to distinguish between (a) formalised networks usually involving contracts between institutional partners/researchers and (b) our role in developing international ecosystems for knowledge exchange and discussion, for example, through inviting colleagues external to the programme to share their research at conferences, online discussions or networking events, or by participating in externally organised events and engaging key stakeholders. In our approach, the practice of knowledge exchange and collaboration is not something that comes 'at the end' of the research process, where all the results are finalised and are then simply presented. But instead, knowledge exchange and impact activity occurs at every stage of the lifecycle of the research.

We elaborate this approach to the production of knowledge in Figure 1. The production of knowledge in this conception of the research process involves continual dialogue with broader networks, making possible the testing of arguments and hypotheses with both practitioners and researchers at each stage of the research process. In the Civic Network Research approach, impact and dissemination is critical. The researchers drawn into the network and project are invariably involved in doing the work they are doing because they care about the hardships encountered in conflict sites and want their scholarship to contribute to a better and more sophisticated understanding of these events and processes that can identify pathways for peace and justice.

Funders of peace and conflict research will also tend to be putting resources into this work in order to inform better public policy making that is more attuned to the granular realities on the ground – and therefore able to contribute more successful policy making that is able to overcome situations of intractable violence. Taken together, we argue that these concerns point to the need to reframe how research outcomes are understood. While in some projects, we may be satisfied with achieving scientific excellence in the type of research we have undertaken for the PeaceRep programme, we have also aimed to achieve substantive outcomes that are measurable in the societies that we are studying.

This means that rights-based and inclusive 'results' from the research, such as examples of strengthening civic space, can be a key performance indicator for assessing programme metrics and outcomes. Here we provide some examples from PeaceRep of how civic networks were built and qualitative outcomes achieved through this approach to research.

Figure 1: Conceptualising the role of formal data capture and informal networks in the research process.



How to establish a formalised local Civic Network: examples from Syria and Ukraine

(a) Syria: a network of local researchers to address chronic data gaps and poor information quality in a situation of intractable conflict

In Syria, our in-country fieldwork is based in building a trusted network of civic actors and local researchers from diverse disciplines, identities, and professional backgrounds, distributed across Syrian regions governed by different de facto authorities. Many of these relationships were established as a consequence of participation in pro-democracy activities. Establishing and sustaining this network has depended on three mutually reinforcing approaches:

- ▶ Investing in the capacity of our in-country researchers through tailored trainings on research design, qualitative and quantitative methods, and data collection and analysis in conflict-affected environments. These trainings are adapted to rapidly shifting security conditions.
- ▶ Recognising the positionalities and lived experiences of our researchers as analytical assets within a structured feedback loop. Therefore, the researchers' contextual insights inform the iterative refinement of our surveys, interview guides, terminologies, and the selection of key informant interviews.
- ▶ Prioritising the researchers' safety and data confidentiality, by applying clear protocols for risk assessment, secure communication, informed consent, anonymisation, and careful data handling, ensuring that participation does not expose researchers or respondents to harm.

This participatory model has enabled us to facilitate informed discussions with local communities, generate timely and evidence-based reporting, and integrate grounded local knowledge with academic tools, thus producing actionable recommendations at both local and macro policy levels.

(b) Ukraine: establishing a civic network under conditions of all-out-war

In Ukraine, the establishment of a local civic network took place in a context shaped by a decade of decentralisation reform (a package of fiscal and administrative reforms from 2015 to empower local governance), traditions of local civic mobilisation not dissimilar to the Syrian case, and the acute governance shock produced by Russia's full-scale invasion (see Cooper et al forthcoming). Rather than constructing a network from scratch, the Kyiv School of Economics PeaceRep team built upon pre-existing civic, volunteer, and municipal ecosystems that were rapidly repurposed after February 2022 to support crisis response, service delivery, and community self-organisation (Darkovich et al 2025). This approach reflected a core assumption of Civic Network Research: namely, that locally embedded actors possess forms of contextual and relational knowledge that are indispensable for producing policy-relevant evidence in conflict-affected settings.

The network was established through a structured and transparent sampling strategy. The team randomly selected 40 hromadas (municipalities, the basic administrative level in Ukraine), stratified by population size and settlement type (cities, urban-type settlements, and villages). Within each hromada, an initial pool of five to six potential participants was identified, consisting of local researchers, activists, and volunteers. Selection criteria required at least three years of residence in the hromada prior to the full-scale invasion and sustained experience of civic or volunteer engagement since its onset.

To safeguard the independence and civic character of the network, the team relied on institutionalised democratic NGO networks, such as election monitoring, environmental, and anti-corruption organisations, to verify candidates and avoid the inclusion of government-organised NGOs, as similar phenomena are frequent in Belarus and Russia and post-Soviet countries. From each local pool, three key informants were selected to ensure diversity by gender, age, and type of civic experience, resulting in a core network of 120 informants. Recruitment proved particularly challenging in small rural hromadas; these gaps were addressed by mobilising educational and civic education centres, which are present in most Ukrainian hromadas and function as trusted local intermediaries.

The network was sustained across three survey waves (2022 -2025), with minor adjustments to account for wartime displacement or deaths. Replacement informants were drawn from the pre-selected local pools to maintain internal coherence. Response rates and long-term engagement were supported through modest financial compensation, regular online meetings to collectively discuss and validate findings, and in-depth interviews that enabled participants to articulate local challenges and concerns.

This process resulted in a number of analytical reports, illustrating how a decentralised civic network can function simultaneously as a research infrastructure and a conduit for translating civic knowledge into policy-relevant evidence under conditions of war.

Delivering research for qualitative impact: examples of PeaceRep's Civic Network Research

(a) Syria: Promoting the role of private sector in peacebuilding and recovery

PeaceRep's research identified mechanisms that empower micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in Syria to reduce poverty and contribute to peacebuilding and social cohesion at the local level through system-wide interventions. It provided policy-makers with practical recommendations to activate these mechanisms using a holistic approach that engages international organizations, the business community, civil society actors, and local authorities. The project also contributed to evidence-based discussions on the role of the private sector in Syria. This work was already started prior to the fall of Assad and has provided vital intellectual and data-based resources for policy-makers to assess the needs of MSMEs, the potential to revive cross value chains and maximise their economic and social benefits, in the context of Syria's new political transition.

Key findings from the research:

- ▶ Business registration is costly and influenced by cronyism; tax collection lacks transparency; judicial systems are inefficient; pricing policies cause shortages; MSMEs receive limited support.
- ▶ Electricity and transportation issues disrupt production; financial services and sanctions restrict credit and investment; market access is hindered by high costs and narcotics trade.
- ▶ Fragmentation disrupts trade; skilled labour shortages push workers to illegal activities; civil society creates demand but offers limited MSME support.
- ▶ MSMEs shift to online models but rely on traditional practices; informal collaboration is more effective than formal; cronyism and monopolies distort markets.
- ▶ MSMEs reduce poverty through job creation and charity; crossline business fosters trust and supports peacebuilding.

- ▶ Empowering MSMEs in Syria requires rebuilding trust with authorities, improving energy and financial access, supporting local market integration, fostering inclusivity, and promoting cooperative and remote work models.

Examples of impact and policy engagement through the research process:

- ▶ Developed the concept of civic engagement for the private sector in Syria, which was prominently discussed at the Brussels VIII Syria Conference.
- ▶ Findings from the report were utilised for Syria's private sector dialogue organized by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Italy and Belgium. Building on the success of the report, UNDP will support the next phase focused on crossline value chains.
- ▶ International organizations, including USAID and German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ), expressed strong interest and held meetings with the project team to discuss the findings.
- ▶ A bilateral policy team participated in discussions on the private sector, offering strong support for the next phases.
- ▶ Engaged key interlocutors in the Syrian political transition process following the fall of Assad and provided a data and conceptual resource for the newly emerging civic space in Syria.

(b) Ukraine: Providing evidence, data and analysis on the Ukrainian economy, supporting policy-making innovation and transformation especially through the Ukraine Recovery Conference process

The PeaceRep team provided evidence and analysis on the evolving political economy of the Russo-Ukrainian War focusing largely but not exclusively on the transformative effects this has had on state-market relations in Ukraine. The project started from the organising hypothesis that Ukraine needs to avoid a situation in which state central authority and predatory political economies develop, that see the state and society become an object of rentier and kleptocratic claims. To avoid this, a policy of 'military Keynesianism' was proposed, requiring growing state-capacities to steward the war economy and offsetting falling private demand with government spending in the war effort.

This work has engaged policy-makers with a diverse range of data, highlighting the role that the state has played in supporting markets through the war and the potential for industrial policy innovations.

Key findings:

- ▶ Identified the risk that the Ukrainian government was contemplating an experiment based on deregulation and steep tax reductions in the context of the full-scale invasion. We pointed to relevant historical examples based on high levels of state intervention, supporting the efforts of key stakeholders to adjust policies to the needs of Ukraine's national defence.
- ▶ Illustrated the under capacity in the Ukrainian industrial economy and the potential for 'localisation' policies to support domestic industry from the war to a future recovery.
- ▶ Evidenced how the state was providing a critical lifeline for the private sector through public procurement and expanding the public sector payroll (especially armed forces personnel).
- ▶ Provided an evidence-based assessment of the balance of power between the Russian and Ukrainian political economies and their relative strengths and vulnerabilities on the eve of the transition to negotiations. Highlighted Russian economic weakness at close of 2025.

Impact:

- ▶ Supported the policy development frameworks of the Ukraine Recovery Conferences in 2023 (London), 2024 (Berlin) and 2025 (Rome) with official (London) and semi-official side events (Berlin and Rome) engaging key global stakeholders including the European Union (EU) Commission, governments of Germany, Ukraine, Italy and the United Kingdom, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the International Monetary Fund and World Bank.

- ▶ The Government of Ukraine adopted 'localisation' proposals outlined in PeaceRep's research in their Made in Ukraine industrial strategy in early 2024. The research supported Ukraine's development of these proposals through PeaceRep partner Ukraine Industry Expertise and Chief Executive Officer Volodymyr Vlasniuk. PeaceRep also supported UK Government thinking in this area. The UK Government was one of the first western states to give fulsome support for these policies.
- ▶ Localisation industrial policies in states with EU membership aspirations have long been controversial. PeaceRep engaged closely with the European Commission Ukraine Service regarding how their policies towards accession countries can be better calibrated to recognise their specific developmental needs as relatively underdeveloped states on the periphery of the European Single Market. PeaceRep research played a role in tilting the balance away from the EU's previously strong critique of localisation policies put forward by Kyiv prior to February 2022.
- ▶ Supported the policymaking process around the December 2025 Ukraine financing crisis by way of a high-level briefing session with politicians in the Ukraine working group of the Social Democratic Party the day prior to the EU agreement.

(c) Sudan and South Sudan: Generating evidence on revenue and warmaking, state(un) building, and peacemaking

The PeaceRep team has examined the history of revenue and rule in both Sudans. This research illustrates how successive authoritarian regimes - particularly in northern Sudan - have fragmented the state through predatory and transactional revenue-raising practices operating within each country and through their integration into the international system. Rather than consolidating public authority around the provision of public goods, both states have developed extractive political economies characterised by extortion and coercive resource mobilisation.

This research drew on an in-country network of researchers in both Sudans, most notably the Bridge Network in South Sudan which is now one of South Sudan's only independent South Sudanese-led research organisations. This network not only contributed data to PeaceRep research, but also generated its own ethical, practical, and political reflections on the challenges of conducting research under conditions of war, including the 2021 *Researching in Conflict* paper (Awany 2021) produced during the Conflict Research Programme, which informed later PeaceRep approaches to Civic Network Research.

Key findings:

- ▶ The research demonstrates that peace agreements in the Sudans and other conflict-affected countries have frequently embedded authoritarian patterns of rule by stabilising existing revenue and coercive structures. Negotiated settlements have tended to reward belligerents for territorial control without addressing the fiscal mechanisms through which violence is financed. As a result, peace processes have often conferred domestic and international legitimacy on armed actors while leaving intact the underlying 'how and why' of war. These findings were generated through a mixed-methods approach, including sustained Civic Network Research conducted under conditions of conflict, which required relational, adaptive, and ethically grounded research practices to manage risk, access constraints, and political exposure.

Impact:

- ▶ PeaceRep has developed and elaborated the concept of 'predatory peace' (Benson 2025) as an explanatory mechanism for how peace agreements can enable continued extraction by rewarding warring belligerents, alongside the concept of the 'revenue complex' (Benson 2024) to describe the durable fiscal infrastructures sustaining predatory rule in the Sudans and other conflict-affected countries, with implications for how peace agreements are designed and assessed globally. These concepts have gained traction through engagement with media such as BBC and Al Jazeera, participation in various fora including FCDO, the UN General Assembly and other international institutions, various universities and think tanks, as well as Sudanese-led civic initiatives.

(d) Somalia: Promoting a better understanding of the Galkaio agreement and local peacemaking in Somalia

This project began as a study of the conditions that led to the establishment of a local peace agreement that took place as part of Somalia's 'statebuilding' programme. This work has continued to develop an understanding of the post-agreement peace. In 2017, a significant peace agreement was signed in Galkayo, following two to three years of recurring violence and negotiations. The agreement took place within the early years of the broader statebuilding process in Somalia, following Somalia's international recognition (2012).

Galkayo is a divided city, located at the border of two of Somalia's Federal Member States (FMS), two major clan families (Darod and Hawiye) and three powerful sub-clans. The 2017 Agreement was an example of successful Somali activism and peacemaking alongside appropriate support from regional and international stakeholders. The agreement included experimentation with sequencing, linking and moving between (governance) levels in order to ensure the viability and sustainability of the process. It contributes to the literature on mediating multi-level conflicts by focusing analysis on the role played by external mediators, demonstrating the importance of who mediates and how while providing insight into dynamic conflict mediation environments.

Key findings:

- ▶ Analysis of the Galkayo agreement contributes to the understanding of 'local' agreements vis-a-vis national reconciliation processes, reflecting a strong current in policy and academic circles. The agreement-making process required sensitivity to national and local contexts and included a strong Somali identity among the international actors. The agreement re-established social relations and encouraged economic investment across a significant border area where a long-standing ceasefire (20+ years) had previously been in place. Although the 2017 agreement represents a major development in Somalia's political evolution, it remains incomplete and unfinished due to the lack of subsequent inter-clan agreements and the lack of enforcement of agreement principles.

Impact:

- ▶ Engagement with FCDO country teams was regular across the life cycle of the research process. This work has also been presented publicly at an online LSE event and has engaged donors and experts through invitations to review the research findings and outputs, specifically the Swedish Embassy and the Rift Valley Institute.
- ▶ The findings of the Galkayo Agreement study have informed government and peacebuilding actors in Colombia through the work of LSE's partner, the Civic Engagement Project.

Part 3 – Policy Recommendations

Researchers, universities, funders, and civic groups all have a role to play in promoting the adoption of Civic Network Research methods and more equitable knowledge production more generally. Our focus in this policy brief is on peace and conflict research funders and research institutions in high-income countries because of their unique position and leverage in the research ecosystem. In addition to promoting cutting-edge scientific research, funders are often interested in ensuring research is having real-world impact. As this policy brief has shown, the civic network approach offers both, combining scientific rigour with real-world relevance. Civic research networks require investment over long time horizons and can be relatively expensive to establish and manage. The cost of conducting this kind of research varies depending on the chosen research models and level of network formalisation, as described above, but typically requires the kind of funding that universities and other non-academic research institutions are unable to generate on their own. That is why funders have a critical role to play in promoting this robust and equitable research model. Universities and think tanks, too, have a central position in the research ecosystem and the ethics and logics that sustain it as institutional knowledge producers.

To adopt and operationalise the key civic research principles of trust, reciprocity, risk-sharing, and intellectual sovereignty, funders and research institutions need to support flexible and responsive research models. Supporting Civic Network Research means that research institutions and funders, be they governmental, philanthropic, or otherwise, will have to adapt existing norms and practices along the entire research funding cycle, from research strategy; funding and commissioning; ethics and risk management; quality control; to sustainability and translation into practice:

(a) Research strategy

- ▶ **Promote and preserve the intellectual sovereignty of researchers in conflict-affected countries.** Rather than being an afterthought or purely a consideration of research ethics and risk, research institutions and funders should sensitise their staff on the importance of ensuring equitable knowledge production and ownership and ensure these considerations are incorporated into long-term research planning. Ultimately, research strategy should spell out specific ways in which intellectual sovereignty is to be supported across peace and conflict research portfolios, and how progress against this target can be measured. Institutional policies should acknowledge that civic researchers are co-producers of knowledge, shaping research questions, access, interpretation, and ethical judgement.

Using their funding as leverage, research funders have the opportunity to shift the sector from extractive research models to ones in which researchers from conflict-affected countries own their research. Funding Civic Network Research might seem costly at a time when Official Development Assistance (ODA) and other research funding is being cut, but the intellectual sovereignty is not just a normative imperative, it is a precondition for better knowledge and impact.

- ▶ **Jointly formulate research strategy with researchers based in conflict-affected countries.** When soliciting future research priorities from experts, funders in high-income countries should go beyond engagement with academics at home institutions and invite in-country civic actors and researchers with lived experience of conflict and peacemaking to share their research priorities. Their priorities should directly inform the formulation of research strategy, from the selection of project goals, topics, methodologies, to geographic foci. When involving these international partners, additional context-specific civic outcomes of research might be proposed, for example in relation to knowledge and network creation, or in support of rights-based and democratic public policy goals.
- ▶ **Plan long-term research portfolios that have multi-annual funding certainty.** Research institutions should recognise that Civic Network Research requires extended periods of trust-building and relational engagement. Research governance frameworks should allow for adaptive research designs, ethical pauses, and gaps in data where these reflect responsible risk management rather than methodological weakness. Civic Network Research requires a long-term time horizon and funding certainty that builds on sustained relationships and shared accountability and risk. Civic actors, researchers, and their institutions in conflict-affected countries often lack core institutional and unearmarked funding which makes them particularly vulnerable to fluctuations in annual research budgets. In many cases, this funding uncertainty does not only directly impact researchers' livelihoods, but can also impact their safety and security and ability to relocate in case violence breaks out where they live.

(b) Research funding and commissioning

- ▶ **Demand equitable partnerships and project co-leadership.** Equity in knowledge production should be a necessary condition for receiving research funding, and should be one of the key technical proposal review criteria when funders score research project bids. Research proposals should include clear attribution frameworks with flexibility to adapt these arrangements as conditions change. Funders should critically review sub-contracting arrangements and interrogate the equity of relationships proposed to them. When designing Calls for Proposals, particularly when using ODA funds, research funders should make it mandatory for applicant consortia of organisations to include institutions or researchers based in, or from, conflict-affected and ODA-recipient countries. Funders should demand that research proposals are developed jointly rather than by an institution in a high-income country that picks research sub-contractors to carry out the work and assume the associated risks. Research funders wield considerable power and influence and could use their unique position to shape knowledge production and research project design.
- ▶ **Allow funding applicants to fully budget for equitable and safe research.** In countries with active armed conflict, civic researchers are required to spend portions of their income on personal safety, having to purchase burner phones, Virtual Private Networks, multiple SIM cards, tickets for emergency travel, and official documents. While these expenses tend to be budgeted for researchers visiting from high-income countries, they are rarely factored in as personal expenses required for civic researchers' survival. Research institutions and funders should support research budgets and governance frameworks that support civic collaborators, including through secure communications, emergency support, insurance, and psychosocial care where appropriate - and not just focus on evacuation protocols for visiting researchers.

- ▶ **Schedule enough time between the publication of research Calls for Proposals and bid submission deadlines.** Too often, the time allowed for interested parties to submit research project bids in response to Calls for Proposals is short. These short timelines put considerable pressure on interested parties and benefits those with insider knowledge of donor funding cycles and those with in-house bid writing expertise and capacities. In practice, therefore, institutions in high-income countries are often in a much better position to write winning bids under intense time pressure. As a result, when timelines are short, actors in conflict-affected countries often get relegated into sub-contractor positions and have very little influence on research goals and methodologies. Ensuring enough time is granted for research consortia to connect and write bids on an eye-to-eye level is critical.

(c) Research ethics and risk management

- ▶ **Treat ethics approval as dynamic and revisable.** Research ethics committees and institutional frameworks at universities must adapt to the relational, dynamic, and politically exposed conditions under which this research takes place. Ethics committees should permit context-appropriate data handling, anonymisation, and secure communication practices rather than defaulting to institutional templates designed for stable environments. Where written or fixed consent models increase risks to research participants, ethics committees should allow for verbal, staged, collective, or renegotiated consent when appropriate, recognising refusal or withdrawal as ethical outcomes rather than procedural failures. Committees should also expect that consent procedures, risk assessments, and data practices may need to be renegotiated as political, territorial, or security conditions change during fieldwork. Mechanisms should be in place to allow researchers to pause, adapt, or suspend research without penalty where ethical conditions deteriorate.
- ▶ **Ensure relevant expertise in ethics review.** Where possible, ethics committees should include members with experience conducting research in conflict-affected or authoritarian contexts, or consult external advisors, to ensure reviews are grounded in the realities of fieldwork rather than abstract compliance norms.

- ▶ **Recognise relational risk alongside individual risk.** The risks associated with conducting research in conflict-affected countries must be treated as a shared responsibility rather than an individual or institutional liability. In research institutions, ethics review should explicitly consider the relational risks borne by in-country civic researchers and collaborators, including surveillance exposure, reputational harm, and long-term political risk. Review processes should move beyond a narrow focus on principal investigator liability and assess how research relationships may shift the risk environment for civic actors over time. Risk management should include flexible timelines, collaborative decision-making structures, and material provisions for safety and care, as explained above. Safeguarding, financial, reputational, and delivery risks and their mitigations should not only be focused on the funder and implementer, but consider a wider range of research stakeholders, including research participants. Funders, research institutions, and civic researchers should adopt an approach of relational risk where they assume shared responsibility for those most exposed to risk on the ground.
- ▶ **Avoid hard security models when possible.** Researchers traveling to conflict-affected countries to collaborate with civic actors should explore alternatives to the hard security measures taken by journalists and humanitarian workers who sometimes have to rely on flak jackets, armoured cars, and strict movement protocols and curfews. The alternative approach consists of regular communication, taking an extremely low profile, being very well prepared and informed, and avoiding areas where international organisations insist on hard security.

(d) Research quality control

- ▶ **Build flexibility into delivery timelines and authorship requirements.** Research in conflict-affected environments will never get perfect results and research institutions and funders must be comfortable with that fact. In active conflict zones, project deadlines can become proverbial moving targets, as the field researchers or subjects of study themselves become targets on the run from persecution. Demands for data accumulation, rapid publication, or field presence can discourage researchers from listening to signals that suggest it is time to step back. Research institutions and funders must make space for ethical pause, where nothing is produced, but trust is preserved.

This means recognising that the absence of data can itself be evidence of responsible, high-stakes decision-making. Further, while the goal of Civic Network Research is to promote first authorship of civic researchers in conflict-affected countries, in some instances, funders must remain flexible when it comes to authorship. For instance, in the case of Myanmar, the best researchers and analysts are often left out because they are required to maintain a low profile for personal safety reasons. Funders should allow research outputs to be published anonymously, and to allow for some research to remain unpublished, while ensuring enough research is widely translated and shared in the spirit of producing knowledge for the public good.

- ▶ **Adapt monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) requirements.** The overarching goal should be for research funders to combine accountability to their own donors, tax payers, and oversight boards with accountability to communities and civic researchers in conflict-affected countries. This change requires a different approach to monitoring, evaluating, and communicating the results of research – including in languages other than English. The understanding of expected outcomes of research, and how these are measured, needs to be reframed. In addition to achieving scientific excellence, funders should support substantive outcomes that are measurable in the societies that are being studied. This means that rights-based and inclusive 'results' from the research, such as more inclusive policy-making or a strengthening of in-country civic spaces and networks, can be key performance indicators for assessing research projects. MEL frameworks need to be tailored to each project and geographic region, while drawing on comparative MEL 'good practice' and helping a project understand how it delivers on trust, reciprocity, risk-sharing, and intellectual sovereignty.

- ▶ **Avoid over-bureaucratisation.** Reporting, documentation, and data-storage requirements can risk exposing civic actors to harm and create significant opportunity costs in terms of research that could otherwise be conducted. Research institutions and funders should therefore only ask for reporting that is absolutely necessary and minimise the reporting burden. Researchers and their host institutions in conflict-affected countries often lack the administrative research support that institutions in high-income countries can draw on. Funder reporting requirements, such as detailed information about participation at events, can compromise personal safety. In certain contexts, gender parity or ethnic minority inclusion in project participation and data collection can be difficult to achieve. In peace time, funder requirements around gender parity or inclusion are often easier to fulfil and can benefit minority participation, but during times of active conflict, they can become an impediment to research.

(e) Research sustainability and translation into practice

- ▶ **Translate and socialise research in conflict-affected countries.** Civic researchers not only generate knowledge but also have the right to define how it is interpreted, framed, and disseminated. Failing to translate research concepts, linguistically and conceptually, into accessible civic terms often replicates the very hierarchies that civic-centred research seeks to dismantle. For example, understandings of civiness require culturally resonant framing (e.g. *medania* in Arabic) to be meaningful in a concrete context. Translation, in this sense, is not a technical task as such; it is a political and ethical commitment to accessibility and ownership. Research conducted with civic networks should be made accessible to those networks. Funders and universities should support translation and dissemination strategies, including policy briefs, civic-facing outputs, and open-access publication where possible, rather than prioritising paywalled academic outputs alone.

- ▶ **Maintain and leverage sustained relationships for impact in policy and practice.** By default, the Civic Network Research aims to change the conditions in conflict-affected countries. Civic researchers in these countries have an immediate need to advance evidence-based peace and conflict practice to improve the day-to-day lives of their communities affected by violence. Funders should support, financially and practically, sustained relationships between civic researchers and policymakers. Relationships that are built over time and are based on trust and reciprocity have a bigger chance to positively contribute to conflict resolution and inclusive development. Funders, and the consumers of evidence, should take the time to seriously engage with the research findings and jointly strategise with researchers how to best pitch their research for it to land in policy circles as well as in local communities. Engagement with policy and practice teams should happen across the research life cycle during the formulation of research goals, implementation, and dissemination. When funders are based in countries with strict visa regimes, they should consider supporting evidence socialisation events in countries with more liberal visa regimes to allow researchers from conflict-affected countries to participate. Too often, civic researchers are excluded from presenting the studies they themselves have led or contributed to because their visa applications are denied.
- ▶ **Support post-project sustainability of civic networks.** The end of research projects in conflict-affected countries is often associated with a loss of in-country civic and research support and capacity. Funders should assist their grantees in exploring alternative funding streams and put in place sustainability measures that allow networks to continue to exist post-grant, even if only in a minimal way. In some cases, reducing dependency on one funder and diversifying the funding base for civic networks may assist sustainability. Funders could tap into their own donor networks to either provide bridge funding until a new grant is secured, or to encourage other funders to come together to build on a project's legacy and existing civic research networks.

For a full exploration of the publications that utilise the methodology of Civic Network Research please see the PeaceRep website: <https://peacerep.org/publications-database/>

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About Us

PeaceRep is a research consortium based at Edinburgh Law School. Our research is rethinking peace and transition processes in the light of changing conflict dynamics, changing demands of inclusion, and changes in patterns of global intervention in conflict and peace/mediation/transition management processes.

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