

Successful Peacemaking: Effective Tactics, Peacemaker Motivations, and the Influence of Religion in Conflict Resolution

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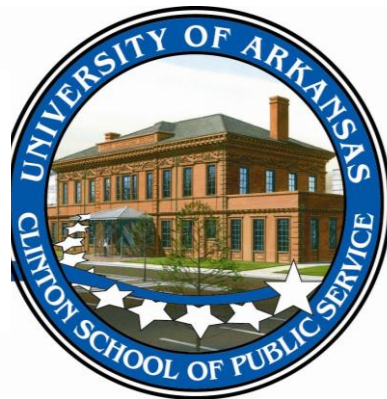
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Summary

Most of what we know about peacemaking is derived from research on large inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations with peacekeeping missions across the world. Other than extensive studies on a handful of the field's most famous names—Nelson Mandela, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and Malala Yousafzai, for instance—there is little work that focuses on individual peacemakers. What do those individual people working at the grassroots of conflict resolution think about peacemaking? What motivates them and what makes them successful? To address this gap, we analyzed survey data from 95 international peacemakers on their most effective strategies, greatest successes, motivations, commitment, and views on religion's role in peacemaking. Through this analysis, three key findings emerged:

1. Peacemakers most often find success through connecting with people in conflict areas
2. Peacemakers working in both religious and secular conflicts see religion as valuable for conflict resolution
3. Peacemakers' level of commitment to conflict resolution is influenced by their motivations

1. Peacemakers most often find success through connecting with people in conflict areas

Peacemakers say dialogue is their most effective strategy

The survey results indicate that peacemakers see dialogue as the most effective peacemaking strategy, followed by empathy, capacity building, and education. It was no surprise that our peacemakers placed dialogue at the top of the list—this method is supported by a large body of peacemaking research and is used by both individuals and large organizations worldwide. It is worth pointed out though, that our sample spoke about dialogue in a much broader way than just traditional formal mediation. As one peacemaker from Uganda noted, dialogue means, “ensuring that [the marginalized] voice is added within the policy framework...” Many peacemakers talked about the importance of “conversing with others” and “building bridges between opposing groups”, with a focus on engaging diverse stakeholders and beginning a conversation between opposing sides.

Peacemakers see relationship building as the highest form of success they can achieve

Relationship building was the highest-rated form of success for our peacemakers, followed by improving communication and building local capacity. Relationship building focuses on bringing people together, oftentimes across opposing sides, and our sample believes that fostering relationships is the most important aspect of successful peacemaking work. They tell us empathy is key to this process; “reducing a sense of otherness” and “seeing equality in our relationships with people” despite differences is necessary for connecting with others on a human level.



2. Those working in both religious and secular conflicts see religion as valuable for conflict resolution

Engaging conflict from a religious perspective is an important tool

While religion is often seen as a source of conflict, our peacemakers say engaging in conflict resolution from a religious perspective is an important tool that contributes to their success. In fact, individuals working in conflicts with a strong and visible religious aspect are more likely to see religion as a potential tool for resolution than as a cause of the conflict. Even those working in secular conflicts believe that religion is a potential solution in their work. One peacemaker in Sierra Leone told us religious organizations are simply more trustworthy than major international organizations,

“I am influenced by confidence and hope in ordinary people and religious leaders. The UN and other organizations disappoint people; they do not deliver...religious leaders, churches, and mosques did not flee in Sierra Leone during the war. They remained behind to inspire us that all was not lost”

Although peacemakers using religious tactics in their work are less confident in their current success (perhaps out of modesty or due to working in very intense conflicts), confidence in their future success is very high.

Use of religious tactics predicts a strong belief in future success

In fact, use of religious tactics is the single greatest predictor of peacemakers' belief in their future success. One peacemaker from Uganda spoke about how religious peacemaking tactics yielded past success, as well as his hope for future success, remarking:

“I have encountered quite a number of genuine reconciliation moments that have endured over time. I have also seen would-be religious adversaries deciding to work together for the good of their communities”

3. Peacemakers' level of commitment to conflict resolution is influenced by their motivations

Our peacemakers were motivated most often by a sense of calling

Individual motivations to do peacemaking work are often complex; we know from previous research that motivation plays a key role in peacemaker success. Our peacemakers were motivated most often by a sense of calling, followed by feelings of shared humanity, personal connection to the conflict, and a larger sense that war is wrong. For some, this calling was more secular—rooted in a deep connection with their communities and a sense of shared humanity. As one peacemaker from India noted:

“The problems faced by most of the people in our region are the same; all farmers regardless of faith...suffer great losses due to climate change”

Still others felt a kind of providential calling to engage in peacemaking in order to carry out God's will for their lives and for humanity. As one peacemaker working in the Columbian revolutionary conflict remarked:

“My personal understanding of what it means to be a Christian is that I am to be a servant to others, to stand for justice and challenge the system of oppression”

Internal motivation leads to greater commitment

Peacemaking is a demanding field of work and many peacemakers suffer from mental and physical exhaustion or become discouraged during their time in the field. This can lead to long periods of burnout or leaving the field entirely. Interestingly, our data shows that those who are internally motivated to engage in peacemaking—by a religious calling or a sense of duty—are significantly more committed to their work than those who engage because of an external factor, like a personal connection to the conflict. Being born in and living in the area of conflict also strengthens peacemakers' commitment to continue their work, as does past peacemaking success.

Technical Appendix

This study examined self-reported survey data collected from 166 international peacemakers on their most effective strategies, greatest successes, sources of motivation, views on religion's role in the conflict and in peacemaking, and several other factors related to their peacemaking work.

Information about the conflicts themselves, such as the level of casualties or existing peace accords, were found using the Militarized Interstate Disputes database and internet searches. All other data were taken directly from the peacemakers' survey responses. Of the total participants, 95 were considered "high priority"—defined as working on the ground in conflict zones or traveling there periodically. These high priority peacemakers are the focus of this report.

Multivariate regression analysis was used to better understand the variables that influence peacemakers' level of commitment to conflict resolution. Results indicate that an intrinsic religious motivation (feeling called by God to peacemaking work) significantly predicts greater commitment, as does insider status (being born in and living in the area of conflict) and believing that one's efforts to date have been successful (current success). Table 1 below shows the full regression results. An academic paper discussing these and other results was presented at the International Studies Association annual conference in March, 2016 and is available from the lead author, Dr. Rebecca A. Glazier (raglazier@ualr.edu), upon request.

Table 1. *Peacemaker Commitment Regression Model*

Independent Variables	Coefficient	Standard Error
Insider*	0.048	0.140
Conflict Intensity	0.290	0.262
Current Success*	0.258	0.056
Future Success*	0.170	0.049
Intrinsic Religious*	0.112	0.023
Length in Peacemaking*	-0.301	0.086
Male	-0.344	0.236
Christian*	-0.592	0.195
Uses Religious Tactics*	-0.733	0.203
Constant	4.738	0.883

N=328; imputations=10; adjusted r²=0.30; *p < 0.05