

From Wars of the Weak to Strong Peace: The Prospects for Legitimate Rule and State-Building in Weak and War-Torn States — Towards a Conceptual Framework

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Arguably, an important aspect of current insecurities is that many intra-state armed conflicts end in a ‘no war, no peace’-situation. While civil war may be seen as terminated when large-scale killings end, populations may continue to suffer from violence, oppression, poverty, etc. Aspects concerning the quality of the peace are largely unexplored in previous research. So far, it has mainly been concerned with explaining the duration of peace, defined as the absence of war, without taking quality-related characteristics of peace into account. This paper focuses the quality of peace. It departs from a critique of the classical Galtungian distinction between ‘negative peace’, meaning the absence of organized, armed violence (a ‘bad’ thing), and ‘positive peace’, meaning the presence of ‘good’ things, such as justice, fairness and dignity in human interactions.

Critique has been directed against both concepts. Negative peace is criticized for being too narrow, e.g., not doing something about structural violence implies high risk for war recurrence. Positive peace, on the other hand, is criticized for ‘conceptual stretching’, raising unrealistic hopes and making the concept methodologically problematic in terms of research. Both perspectives are also criticized for putting too much weight on structure, while largely ignoring agency

Similarly, contemporary peace efforts tend to include a huge range of tasks beyond holding organised violence at bay, such as the pursuit of democracy, good governance and institution-building; justice, reconciliation and human rights; poverty reduction, socio-economic development and environmental sustainability. Much of this problematique is linked to structural and contextual conditions with more or less parametric characteristics.

We reduce the myriad explanatory variables that may cause strong peace to occur; instead offering something more operationalizable, in terms of research needs, policy making and practitioners’ toolboxes. This paper suggests a theoretical/conceptual framework that emphasizes the role of agency. People, not structures, make war and peace. Specifically, the framework proposes one dependent variable, *Strong Peace*, that aspires to both Freedom from Fear (physical and organisational security) and Freedom from Want (acceptable levels of socio-economic and political well-being). In operational terms, the concepts draws on two major works: Holsti’s (1996) notions of vertical and horizontal legitimacy, as presented in *The State, War and the State of War* and Buzan’s (1991) notion of the three pillars of the state in *People, States and Fear. An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*.